

# Relational Affect

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## ABSTRACT:

Philosophers of emotion tend to construe affective phenomena as individual mental states with intentional content. Against this broad consensus, I propose an account of affectivity as relational dynamics between individuals within social domains. ‘Relational affects’ are not individual feeling states but affective interactions in relational scenes, either between two or more interactants or between an agent and aspects of her material environment. In spelling out this proposal, I draw on recent work in cultural ‘affect studies’ and bring it in conversation with approaches to emotional intentionality in philosophy. In particular, I transpose the normative-pragmatic approach to emotional intentionality developed by Bennett W. Helm into a transpersonal framework. This reorientation helps to make visible micro-dynamics of affect in social settings that often have problematic political implications. I use the contemporary white-collar workplace as an exemplary domain to illustrate this.

Keywords: affect, emotion, intentionality, relationality, domains of practice, Bennett W. Helm

## **1. Introduction**

Philosophers of emotion have not paid much attention to work on affect in cultural studies. Cultural ‘affect theory’ broadly continues the tradition of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze in that it construes affectivity as a pre-personal, dynamic relationality between bodies of various kinds (for an overview: Gregg & Seigworth 2010). With this orientation, it operates at some remove from the contemporary philosophical view that affectivity is chiefly a matter of individual experiential states with intentional content (e.g., Goldie 2000; Helm 2001; Roberts 2003). Conceptually, cultural affect theory foregrounds movement, intensity, change – and the impacts, forces and energies of situated dynamic relatedness instead of representational or evaluative contents of categorical emotions. Methodologically, the best work in affect theory draws on in-depth case studies of the affective dynamics in specific sites of everyday life, such as the home, the workplace, the domain of consumption, the venues of entertainment or the arenas and artifacts of mass media (to name just a few exemplary areas). These domains, practices and tools receive little attention from philosophers of emotion, who instead favor more purified examples – usually cases in which an individual faces a

paradigmatic emotion-eliciting scenario, such as a dangerous, offensive or shame-inducing situation stripped of most contextual detail. In the present paper, I explore the possibility of bringing the philosophy of emotion and cultural affect studies closer together. The focal issue is the dynamic situatedness of both affect and emotion in what I call ‘social domains of practice’. An important requirement for the success of this endeavor is a working concept of affect that can be brought to productive uses in both affect studies and in the philosophy of emotion.

Accordingly, I will develop an understanding of affect that is initially geared to some of the salient trends in cultural theory, and then show how this notion can not only inform, but importantly advance philosophical analyses of human emotionality. Affect, on the present understanding, is a relational dynamic between individuals and in situations – a dynamic that is prior to individual experience, even, in a sense, prior to the individual subject as such. I propose to view affect as an intra-active dynamic unfolding in – and variously framed and channeled by – social ‘domains of practice’. Only derivatively, and often only partially, does relational affect then become manifest in episodes of an *individual subject’s* emotional experience. Still, this dynamic and relational notion of affect can help address issues in the philosophy of emotion. For example, it can help explore the possibility that an individual’s emotional dispositions are the complex products of the situated dynamics of relational affect. To a significant and widely underestimated extent, an individual’s emotional repertoire might be enmeshed, even in constitutive ways, with the sustained affective dynamics prevalent in certain socio-cultural domains (such as a company, a sports club, a scientific discipline, or an online community, etc.). Relatedly, the concept of relational affect can be used to explicate the domain-specific *rationality* of emotion, both in terms of a general account of ‘emotional reason’ (Helm 2001) and in terms of detailed analyses of the ‘machinic arrangements’ of transpersonal dynamics in specific domains. One central stepping stone for this endeavor is the explication of how situated affective dynamics contribute to realizing what philosophers thematize under the rubric of emotional or affective *intentionality*. For these purposes, I will

in part draw on work by philosopher of emotion Bennett W. Helm, whose approach is highly illuminating but needs to be substantively altered in order to be applicable to relational affect.

The perspective on affect and emotion to be developed in this paper has a number of potential merits. It is capable of addressing the complex dialectic between individual emotionality and situated, transpersonal affectivity, resulting in a balanced view on the extent to which emotion and affect are ‘original’ to individual subjects, and to what extent they might, in the first instance, be more a matter of pre- or transpersonal dynamics. The account furthermore counters the implicit tendency, in much of the philosophy of emotion, to crudely abstract intentional content out of the situated temporal dynamics of real-life affectivity. The present approach foregrounds the situatedness of affect in social places and spaces, with a particular focus on the ways people exert normalizing influences over one another in present scenes of intra-action, in line with the (often informal and fluid) operating rules of social domains. As a case example, I will discuss relational affect in the corporate workplace.

## **2. What it is and why it is controversial: affect in the light of recent critiques**

As cultural affect theory might not be very familiar to readers from philosophy, let me begin with a brief discussion of some focal issues in this area – in particular some points that have of late been subject to critical debate. First of all, it is not surprising, given the huge scope of the cultural ‘turn to affect’ (Clough & Halley 2007), its various legacies and genealogical threads, and also given the contestedness of most characterizations of affective phenomena in general, that a consensus understanding – let alone definition – of affect is hard to come by.<sup>1</sup> However, I can tentatively sketch some part of the cluster of ideas that cultural affect theory is oriented toward. To begin with, affect is here not from the outset sorted into categorical types of the usual well-known emotions (such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, envy, guilt and so

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<sup>1</sup> Helpful acknowledgment of why this is so, combined with encompassing chartings of much of the relevant terrain is found in Blackman (2012) and in Wetherell (2012). Besides these two recent formidable monographs on cultural affect theory, there are a number of useful anthologies and collections. Here, I have found Gregg & Seigworth (2010) particularly illuminating, but see also Clough & Halley (2007) and Blackman & Venn (2010). Good exemplars of affect theory at work and at its best, but not containing much in the way of overview, are Ahmed (2004 & 2010) and Berlant (2012). See also Brennan (2004), Steward (2007), Cvetkovitch (2012) and Seyfert (2012).

on) – which means that we do not deal here with the standard understanding, prevalent particularly in psychology, that the affective is a specific assortment of clearly demarcated mental states. Instead, affect is construed as a dynamic and forceful processuality that traverses in and between bodies of various kinds, not yet consolidated into clearly bounded and thus nameable sequences.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, affect is here construed as what partly or wholly escapes the capture of reflective consciousness, at least initially. This furthermore implies a certain distance from language and signification, in the sense that affect tends to outrun or undermine at least the more conventional attempts at capturing it in words (although the relationship of affect and language is ultimately a much more complex one).<sup>3</sup> An important strand of affect theory – the one that will be taken up here – frames affect moreover in terms of a *constitutive relationality* between bodies and bodies and objects, in the sense that these dynamic relations are taken to be ontologically prior to the entities related (see Mühlhoff 2014 for elaboration). While the relationality thesis originates in the work of Spinoza, with later resonances in Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze & Guattari, a more recent empirical inspiration for relational accounts of affect comes from work on infant-caregiver attachment in developmental psychology (e.g., Stern 2010; Reddy 2008). However, affect theorists give their own interpretive spin on the – often vigorously contested – constructs and claims from these empirical fields.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, and not surprisingly given the overall interests of social and cultural theory, affect is often conceptualized with regard to complex social dynamics, such as interaction rituals, crowd behavior, shared media practices and in general the immersion of people into places, their resonant attachments to – or dissonant distancing from – nations, communities, groups, institutions and so on. Obviously, this initial sketch is tentative and partial. In order to elaborate it further, I will now loop in some recent critiques of the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> See Campbell (1997) and Ratcliffe (2008) for philosophical considerations that likewise direct the focus away from categorical emotion types and to modes of feelings that are initially nameless so that they might easily escape the purview of theorists.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship of affect and language is beyond the scope of this paper; see Riley (2005) for a notable attempt that aligns with some of the intuitions outlined here.

<sup>4</sup> A careful assessment of both the relational or transindividual understanding of affect and of the practice of borrowing concepts, insights and ideas from various scientific disciplines and paradigms is again provided by Blackwell (2012). An insightful proponent of a relational understanding of emotion is sociologist Ian Burkitt (Burkitt 2014; see also Wetherell 2012, esp. ch. 4; and Parkinson et al. 2005).

turn to affect, as this gives me the chance to single out some critical issues that have been in the focus of debate and that will occupy us in the remainder of the paper.

Some substantive critiques of cultural affect theory have appeared in recent years (see Hemmings 2005, Papoulias & Callard 2010, Leys 2011, and in part also Wetherell 2012). Critics have objected that affect theorists offered an exaggerated, one-sided, uncritical, naively science-friendly view of affect. Notably, the very theoretical option to be pursued in the present article – using cultural affect theory in order to complexify, expand and situate a philosophical understanding of affective intentionality – is effectively ruled out, at least as far as one particularly prominent voice among the critics is concerned. Acclaimed historian of science Ruth Leys, in her 2011 article *The Turn to Affect: A Critique*, equates the culturalists' construal of affect with a resolutely *non-intentional* understanding of emotional phenomena.<sup>5</sup> According to the view Leys takes to be dominant in affect theory, 'affect is a matter of autonomic responses that are held to occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition and to be rooted in the body' (Leys 2011: 443). Is the present endeavor thus doomed from the outset? To see why this is decidedly *not* so, we need to get clear on what it is that these skeptical scholars take issue with, and assess to what extent their objections are warranted.

I begin with a brief discussion of Leys' critique, before I note another focal point from the critical responses. There are important issues to be learned here, but the critics – and notably Leys – tend to overplay the problematic aspects. On the other hand, they say little that is nuanced enough about the strengths and potentials of the turn to affect. Most strikingly, the critics have so far aimed mostly at a number of fairly easy targets: authors that, despite the initial prominence of their writings on affect, have for the most part ceased to be representative of what is at the center of cultural affect theory today.

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<sup>5</sup> Leys' 2011 article is an outgrowth of her earlier monograph *From Guilt to Shame – Auschwitz and After* (2007), in which she provides a thorough critical discussion of then-recent literature on shame. It is here where Leys develops in detail her argument against the alleged anti-intentionalism of cultural affect theory. This might explain in part her selective focus on only a few of the affect theorists and the exclusion of many others. In any case, I will argue in the following that it is quite a stretch to frame this select thread as standing in for the recent turn to affect in its entirety.

Leys directs her critique at the ‘general turn to affect, particularly the turn to the neurosciences of emotion, that has recently taken place in the humanities and social sciences’ (Leys 2011, 434). Leys here opts to put work in the recently trending *neuro-humanities* that touches on emotion together under the same umbrella with cultural theory’s turn to affect. This is noteworthy, because with this decision, some of the by now widely shared opposition to over-enthusiastic but conceptually and methodologically flawed neuro-humanities<sup>6</sup> can be leveled against the cultural turn to affect at large.<sup>7</sup> Of course, Leys will let her move look like an obvious one to make – as she picks as targets of her critique authors that do indeed find inspiration in the affective neurosciences. Her choice falls on authors such as Brian Massumi, William Connolly, Nigel Thrift and, particularly telling, self-declared neuro-historian Daniel Lord Smail (see Smail 2008). The inclusion of Smail is telling because one would not normally think of Smail when asked about representatives of the turn to affect. Rather, Smail belongs with those *general* neuro-enthusiasts for whom affect is just one among various areas in which work from the neurosciences is said to ‘inspire’, ‘transform’ or even ‘revolutionize’ the humanities (to some extent, this is true of Connolly as well).<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Leys gives no consideration whatsoever to a quite different legacy in cultural affect theory, namely post-Marxist British cultural studies – the trajectory that reaches roughly from Raymond Williams via Stuart Hall to Lawrence Grossberg, with resonances and affiliations to scholars around the globe, among them the Australians Meaghan Morris, Elspeth Probyn, Melissa Gregg (see Gregg 2006; Gregg & Seigworth 2010). No mention likewise of recent highly productive work in feminist and post-colonial cultural studies that focuses on affect, i.e. scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant or

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<sup>6</sup> The literature critical of this trend is by now rampant, just a few exemplary works are the volumes by Ortega & Vidal (2010); Choudhury & Slaby (2012) and De Vos & Pluth (2015). See also Rose & Abi-Rached (2013) for an encompassing genealogical charting of the neuro-trend at large.

<sup>7</sup> Papoulias & Callard (2010) have chosen a similar strategy in their critique of the turn to affect, focusing on the problematic of selective and methodologically naïve borrowings from science into the humanities. They cite Nigel Thrift’s programmatic claim, made in 2004, that ‘distance from biology is no longer seen as a prime marker of social and cultural theory’ (Thrift 2004: 59), and take this as signaling the general gist of cultural affect theory. Authors they level their critique against are by and large the same as those targeted by Leys.

<sup>8</sup> For a recent critique of Smail (among others) that has much bite in revealing the larger stakes of this part of the neuro-plus-X-movement, see Stadler (2014).

Beverly Skeggs.<sup>9</sup> In all these authors, neuroscience, or even science as such, play marginal roles at best when it comes to the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the relevant understanding of affect. And it is far from true that the shared upshot of these authors' understandings of affect is a version of anti-intentionalism. In other words: Leys takes the *wrong guys* – indeed, she targets mostly male authors despite the huge number of female voices in affect studies – to be representative of the overall turn to affect.<sup>10</sup> I find this tragic, because in the eyes of casual observers, affect theory has been dealt a significant blow by Leys' forceful and prominently placed intervention.<sup>11</sup>

Let us get clear on the central point of controversy.<sup>12</sup> Leys singles out one particular genealogical trajectory that has led into present-day affect theory, and this legacy, she contends, rallies around the notion of the non-intentional, non-significatory nature of affect. What is correct is that cultural affect theory usually does not start out from emotional episodes whose intentional directedness is clear-cut: not from the usual case of fear in face of the neighbor's barking dog, not from sadness about a particular loss nor from a bout of anger about an offensive remark. Likewise, cultural affect theorists do not operate with the notion of an individual affective episode's cognitive or representational content. Instead, they look at the initially nameless affects of social relatedness, at the affective dynamics involved in media use, at the subtle affective workings of place (like the home, the cityscape or the corporate office), or at the diverse affective significances of everyday objects – to name just a few exemplary domains. These orientations toward situated, relational, complexly embodied and often object- or place-inherent affectivity by no means amount to the claim that affect as such

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<sup>9</sup> It wouldn't even be much of a stretch to include Judith Butler here, as several of her post-9/11 writings involves a focus on particular structures of affect that mark a conspicuous social relationality: i.e. the affective patterns of public grief and grievability, or the more general relationality of intimate attachment and of shared vulnerability (see, e.g., Butler 2004 & 2009).

<sup>10</sup> The lone exception to this surprisingly masculine lineup is Eve Sedgwick, leading author of a seminal paper on shame and a famed Sylvan Tomkins reader, publications that, according to some, first ignited cultural theory's turn to affect in the mid-1990s (see Sedgwick & Frank 1995a & 1995b).

<sup>11</sup> In addition, with her focus on this group of highly visible authors, Leys not only misrepresents affect theory but also contributes to the dominance of that small bunch of older, white, male and (with the exception of Massumi) academically privileged figures that contribute – whether wittingly or not – to marginalizing relevant work by less known and less prestigiously endowed academics, many of them female.

<sup>12</sup> As most of the rest of this paper is about a way to bring a culturalist understanding of affect to bear on philosophical accounts of affective intentionality and emotional rationality, I can keep things brief here.

is non-intentional, although standard understandings of intentionality as individual mental directedness or mental representation certainly get challenged here. What cultural affect theory does is leave behind the confines of cognitivist, individualist and narrowly mentalist (or psychologist) construals of affective intentionality. It frees the analysis of meaning-making in social domains and practices from the bottleneck of individual cognitive, let alone reflectively self-conscious processes. Implicit in most and explicit in many accounts of affect are rich materials for construing affect's meaningfulness and world-involvingness in ways that can substantively enhance and expand existing work on emotional intentionality.<sup>13</sup> The following sections of this paper will elaborate one possible way of how this may look like in detail.

Before I move on to the constructive argument, it is important to appreciate one other critical objection to cultural affect theory. Especially feminist scholar Clare Hemmings (2005, 551) has pointed to the problematic of letting affect appear in an overly positive light. A refrain often heard in the earlier writings of the 'turn to affect' was that affect signals difference, transformation, the vital energies of becoming, imaginative future-orientedness and that it also stands for new and enthralling forms of scholarship in the crisis-riddled humanities. This tenor is notorious in the above-mentioned group of Massumi, Connolly, Thrift et al. Often, this is then contrasted with the alleged backwardness or uninventiveness of earlier paradigms in social theory, such as deconstruction, discourse theory, social constructionism or the alleged 'paranoid stance' of critical theory.<sup>14</sup> I think that Hemmings is correct in pointing out that this is a skewed and one-sided picture, as affect is in fact equally implicated in stabilizing and lubricating problematic conditions. The very same affects that

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<sup>13</sup> An explicit and methodologically reflective engagement with the intentionality question in affect theory is provided by Lisa Blackman (2012), whose book is in part framed as an attempt to make good on Ruth Leys' call for a 'genealogy of the anti-intentional' (Blackman 2012: xii). To Blackman it is clear that the entire point of studying various phenomena at the margins or outside of standard intentional attitudes – such as hypnotic suggestion, mimesis, voice hearing, affect contagion or other forms of psychic or para-psychic transmission – is to enrich and complexify the ways in which people are in touch with the world and with one another. This comes nowhere near an attempt to dismiss or leave behind intentionalism.

<sup>14</sup> Rhetorically over-charged opposition to poststructuralism or to language- or discourse theoretic approaches in general is a theme uniting several early proponents of the turn to affect, most notoriously Massumi (1996 & 2002) and Sedgwick & Frank (1995a). Wetherell puts this tendency in perspective (2012: 19-21).

might be catalysts of change and guarantors of difference can and do also work, as Hemmings contents

as a central mechanism of social reproduction in the most glaring ways. The delights of consumerism, feelings of belonging attending fundamentalism or fascism, to suggest just several contexts, are affective responses that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order (Hemmings 2005: 551)

Likewise, there is reason to suspect that the pleasures of affective transformation, the celebrated new potentials opening up in the vital intensities of affect, are often a prerogative of those already in a position of privilege: ‘only for certain subjects can affect be thought of as attaching in an open way; others are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer’ (Hemmings 2005: 561).<sup>15</sup>

But again, to assume that this fundamental ambivalence in the workings of affect was not recognized and critically interrogated by the majority of affect theorists would be a gross misperception. It is exactly the point of much of the best work in this field that affect functions as a subtle but powerful stabilizer of social demarcations, as markers of inclusion and exclusion, and as a shrewd mechanism of keeping subjects attached to oppressive or otherwise pathological conditions (again, Ahmed 2004; Gregg 2011; Berlant 2012, also in part Butler 2009). An important motivation for the present endeavor lies exactly here: To make visible and analyze with sufficient precision the power of relational affect to implicate individuals and populations in the workings of social domains even if that runs counter to their avowed interests or is in other ways detrimental to their well-being or flourishing.

### **3. Relational affect: some examples**

In this section, I will pre-theoretically sketch three example scenarios of relational affect: affect-rich dyadic encounters in situations of dialogue, affective dynamics in agitated crowds, and the immersive affective relatedness enabled by interactive social media. While not yet

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<sup>15</sup> With this, Hemmings points to both gender- and race-based forms of affective marking and stigmatization. A prominent theme in the writings of Frantz Fanon (1952), for instance, are the ways in which affect demarcates and places bodies according to racist social hierarchies, often invisible from the vantage point of hegemonic discourse. See also Lorde (1984) and Ahmed (2004, esp. ch. 2).

fully developed and theorized, these examples help us get more of an intuitive grip on what the concept of relational affect is getting at, bringing to attention a number of points that will be relevant in what follows. Collaterally, this section serves to bring the present endeavor into loose contact with phenomenological work on affectivity, especially with efforts to bring phenomenology back into the philosophy of mind and moral psychology (e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Ratcliffe 2008; Colombetti 2013).

Relational affect transpires in scenes of animated mutuality between two people interacting dialogically in a particular setting. Relational affect inheres these dyadic encounters in the form of an enthralling interplay of gaze, gesture, posture, movement rhythm, tone and pitch of voice, and so on, through which an immersive sphere of relatedness is established and then jointly lived-through. One might speak here of an *affective atmosphere*, buzzing with forces and tendencies and charged with meaning (Anderson 2009; Schmitz et al. 2011). Phenomenologist Joel Krueger has captured this tangible sense of a shared experiential field by introducing the concept of ‘we-space’: a dynamic, forceful realm enacted jointly by two or more interactants, in existence only for the time the interaction lasts (Krueger 2011; see also Fuchs 2013; Fuchs & Koch 2014).

Take the example of a lively conversation between two friends. Both partners jointly live through a scene that can be quite captivating and that might possess a unique character insofar as a shared experience of this particular kind won’t happen if other people were present or if the surroundings were different. To see this, consider what happens when such a scene of engaged dialogue is suddenly interrupted, for example when another person steps in unexpectedly. What was a unique scene of intensive togetherness a moment ago immediately breaks down. In case the newcomer is welcome and adequately disposed, his stepping in might lead to a novel scene of affective connection. But the outsider’s entrance could as well result in a scene of ‘broken sociality’, where the affective energy of the interaction quickly wanes, giving way to a routine, distant, matter-of-factual conversation. Or, yet another possibility: an awkward, cumbersome, strenuous connection might ensue – a situation of mutual irritation and dissonance that has its own affective intensity and captivating force so that you might feel noticeably relieved once the conversation is over. Even irritating,

awkward encounters grip and enthrall and they even bind us together – they put us under a sort of spell, albeit in a draining, energy-consuming way. Many scenes of everyday interpersonal interaction have at their core such a gripping, tangible relationality; such shared zones of immersive relatedness are routinely set up and jointly lived-through.<sup>16</sup>

My second example – in some ways probably even more readily evident than the first one – are the conspicuous affective dynamics in groups or crowds, such as those unfolding in protests, riots, parties or events of mass entertainment. It has often been described how a crowd can work itself into a collective frenzy, a mass panic or collective rage or aggression, so that individuals, even if disposed quite differently prior to entering the crowd, are likely to be swayed into rolling with the dominant ‘wave’ of affect.<sup>17</sup> As in the case of an dialogical encounter before, the experience here is one of encompassing immersion into an energetic sphere or field of force, so that it can seem as if one’s limbs are moved not through one’s own initiative but by the crowd’s collective dynamic. Of course, there are also forms of discordance and a-synchrony, where an individual is exactly not drawn-in by the surrounding frenzy but left with a marked feeling of disconnection. But complexities and special cases aside, it is clear that engaged, active collectives are capable of exerting a forceful affective pull on individuals. Descriptions in terms of energy and intensity seem adequate, also those that focus on rhythmic coordination and bodily entrainment.<sup>18</sup> Similar to the case of the affect-intensive dialogue, a multi-modal sphere of energetic relatedness is set up and jointly enacted by the crowd members. Most conspicuous on part of the individuals involved in these mass dynamics is the feeling of being gripped, literally carried away, of being ‘operated’ from

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<sup>16</sup> Importantly, this does not mean that in these scenes both interactants will necessarily have exactly similar experiences. The joint relational scenes in question allow for individual ways of being-in-relation, for individual ways of resonating affectively, although both will still have a marked sense of ‘being in this together’. Thanks to Rainer Mühlhoff for alerting me to this, see Mühlhoff (2015) for elaboration.

<sup>17</sup> It would be worthwhile to re-read some of the classics of crowd psychology and mass sociology, such as Gustave LeBon, Gabriel Tarde and also Sigmund Freud’s work on group psychology – in these authors, a remarkable descriptive proficiency and sense for phenomenological detail is fused with often unabashed elitist prejudice, establishing the long-lasting images of crowds as raucous, wild, degenerate, suggestible and thus politically dangerous. See Blackman (2012: ch. 2) for a thoughtful contemporary take on parts of this literature.

<sup>18</sup> Collins (2004), working in the tradition of Durkheim and Goffman, is a good choice for an encompassing sociological approach to the emotional dimension of interaction rituals. See also the contributions in von Scheve & Salmela (2014).

without by the force of the collective as such. Sometimes, one might reflectively ‘catch oneself’ in the midst of such an experience, and then one might discover that one’s individual perspective is still intact and clearly separate from the surrounding frenzy, all the while one still relishes in one’s lustful abandon within the collective dynamic. There is a sweetness, a pleasurable sense of letting go, of abandoning oneself to the rush and energy of the crowd. What comes to the fore here – and will occupy us below – is an element of active *disowning* that is often experienced as satisfying: for a few moments at least, the putative boundaries of the self seem to become porous, one’s standing attitudes and orientations no longer hold sway, and we are driven into feelings, thoughts, expressions and acts that are alien to what we are normally and individually inclined to feel, think or do.

Related experiences of ecstatic (and not so ecstatic) abandon characterize my third example. Consider the immersive indulgence and absorption into the ‘feel spaces’ of electronic media. For a long time basically monopolized by television – the ubiquitous attractor in living rooms and kitchens around the globe – this type of human-to-tool affective coupling is now increasingly moving over to networked electronic devices. There is a conspicuous ‘magnetism’ that our various mobile devices exert (Gregg 2011, xi); likewise, surfing the internet or even checking e-mails often comes with an element of hedonic satisfaction that anchors addictive tendencies in what might literally be billions of users worldwide. While the particularly deep immersion and experience of flow that is the hallmark of gaming might not be a regular feature of many other electronic media practices, there is a notable affective dimension even to routine practices such as checking e-mail or browsing news sites. I cannot even begin to do justice to the many ways to engage with digital networked media, so I restrict myself to a few remarks on just one area of online activity.

Social networking sites such as Facebook enable, institute and ‘machinate’ particular ways of affective engagement. What we see here is a mesmerizing affective pull that certain leisure technologies exert, engendering attention, affect and activity that is then channeled in particular pre-arranged ways thanks to the networking site’s architectures, consisting of items such as profile pages, like buttons, walls, groups, poke functions, friends lists, VIP sections and so on. This is a good example of how technological design – the operative architecture

and user surfaces of networking technology – directly engages, enhances and focuses affectivity. Compared to the previous examples, the user experience here is a different type of affective relationality: an immersive engagement, a flow-like absorption within the interactional spaces set up by the social technology. Like buttons, poke functions, friends’ lists and other such features implement arrangements of potential mattering that makes it easy for users to succumb to and indulge in certain focused pleasures of socialization.<sup>19</sup> These online platforms enhance affective tendencies and inclinations by providing a smoothly functioning, intuitive framework that routinely rewards and, over time, habituates the regular user.<sup>20</sup> Channeled, machinated, intensified affect is part and parcel of the user experience. And while there usually is an element of juicy immersion and abandon on the surface, which is instrumental in tying the user’s attention to the site and its functions, the relational affective experience engendered by the sites is highly complex. Users have to juggle various demands, for instance customized publicity in line with the protocols of specific sub-cultures, the quest for social capital in the form of friends and contacts that need specific ways of attention, regular messaging, joking or shaming, disgust displays or intentional disregard. Affective involvement with social networking sites amounts to its very own forms of industriousness or ‘affective labor’,<sup>21</sup> often quite unremarkable and bordering on boring, especially when compared with the much more intensive forms of relational affect such as those transpiring in agitated crowds or high-pitch interaction rituals (see Gregg 2008). The point for present purposes is to note the ubiquity of forms of materially and technologically enframed relational

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<sup>19</sup> I propose to analyze these dynamic design features of the networking sites in terms of what Foucault has called ‘diagrams’: roughly, dynamic materialized maps that directly enter into, enframe and modulate the bodies that are in sustained contact with them. This is where the machinic and the organic intertwine, so that human bodies are literally ‘played’ by material settings and the technologies implemented in them. This seems to me crucial for the workings of relational affect in social domains. Obviously, this is not a strict Foucault-reading but a heuristic borrowing; a helpful source is Deleuze (1988); see also Buchanan (2015) for a clarification of the Deleuzian concept of ‘machinic arrangement’.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, all this is not meant in a technological determinist sense – as especially gaming, the internet and social networking have made newly clear, how the famed ‘user’ in fact operates and appropriates the tools at her disposal is a highly specific matter in need of concrete, domain- and time-specific analysis (cf. de Certeau 1984). My preparatory remarks here have to be taken as a rough ‘formal indication’.

<sup>21</sup> A remarkably early critical analysis of the free affective labor involved in online activities is Terranova (2000).

affectivity, in which experiential immediacy is intimately entangled with sophisticated arrangements of artifacts and their elaborate designs, set-ups and operating surfaces.

### **3. Relational Affect – steps towards a theory**

#### **3.1 Taking inspiration: Bennett Helm’s theory of felt evaluations**

These brief sketches of examples and the previous remarks on cultural theory’s understanding of affect have marked out a vast and complex landscape of phenomena – myriads of affective experiences and interactional practices, and they have pointed to some of their often quite sophisticated technological enablers and enhancers. When we now move on to a theoretical proposal, this can seem like the crude imposition of conceptual order that is so dreaded by affect theorists – an operation that the free-spirited Massumi has memorably demonized by calling it ‘capture’ (Massumi 2002, 10). But what is the point of doing philosophy if not to capture, compress, and also modulate significant portions of reality by means of a limited number of – hopefully illuminating – concepts? In any case, this is what I will now attempt to do, certainly not taking my conceptualization for the last word on the affective and interactional realities that I thereby hope to clarify.

In what follows, I take inspiration from the normativist, inferentialist approach to individual emotions developed by philosopher Bennett W. Helm and then transpose some aspects of this framework to relational affect (see Helm 2001, 2002; 2009 & 2010). In the course of doing so, significant differences between mine and Helm’s account will become evident.

Helm shares his theoretical starting point with the main thread of contemporary analytical philosophy of emotion. How to account for the presumably unique nature of emotional intentionality? Part of this task is to reconcile the emotions’ intentionality with the hedonic, bodily, physiological, passive and, at times, unruly and erratic nature of situated emotional experience.<sup>22</sup> Here is his solution in brief: Helm construes emotions such as fear,

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<sup>22</sup> There is a massive amount of literature on this. Discussions of the intentionality of emotion in analytical philosophy began with Anthony Kenny’s seminal work (1963), then received a renewed focus in the

anger, pride, sadness, shame – the commonly acknowledged categorical emotion types – as temporally extended projectible *patterns* of coherently related felt evaluations. Viewed in isolation, felt evaluations are relatively simple situational feelings of pleasure and pain experienced in response to a certain object, person or situation. What determines whether such a felt evaluation is an instance of fear, or of sadness, or of anger or of some other emotion type, is the overall pattern into which they systematically coalesce. So, for example, whether my feeling bad or adversely *towards something*, is an instance of *fear*, depends on that feeling's position in a temporally extended systematic pattern of adequately related felt evaluations with the same focus.<sup>23</sup> This requires feeling acutely *pained* by the danger that the dreaded object presents, feeling relief when the feared object has passed us by, feeling grateful toward a friend who helped avert the danger, hopeful that the danger might not recur – and so on, where all these situational feelings are themselves felt evaluations. All these individual felt evaluations get their identities as instances of specific emotion types from their respective position in such systematic patterns. Accordingly, felt evaluations, the 'import' or value of objects and situations and a person's cares and concerns are co-constitutively related in a non-vicious circle of mutual referrals. None of these elements has priority over the others, each element depends constitutively on the others. No feeling is intelligible without the value it responds to and the concern it is based on. Nothing is valuable unless it is responded to systematically by feelings in the light of fitting concerns. Nothing is a person's concern if it is not systematically manifest in her felt responses to valuable objects.<sup>24</sup>

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cognitivist proposal of Robert Solomon (1976) and a more encompassing treatment with de Sousa's (1987) influential work on the rationality of emotion. More specifically on the challenge of bringing the intentionality and the phenomenality of emotion together in an 'organic' account are the works by Goldie (2000), Roberts (2003), Döring (2007) and Ratcliffe (2008). Some of the phenomenological strands of this, particularly with regard to the lived body's role in the intentionality of emotion, are insightfully developed by Colombetti (2013). A more naturalistic endeavor that nevertheless runs partly parallel to these other texts is Jesse Prinz' work on embodied appraisal (2004). A good recent analytical introduction into most of the prevalent issues is Deonna & Teroni (2012). A valuable anthology including many other important authors besides the one's here mentioned is Goldie (2009).

<sup>23</sup> An emotion's focus is that object or person whose value makes intelligible the emotion's specific directedness at its target object. For example, when I fear the child molester that roams my neighborhood (my fear's target), the focus of my fear may be the wellbeing of my daughter or my of my neighbor's kids. See Helm (2001: ch. 3) for a detailed explication of emotional intentionality in terms of target and focus.

<sup>24</sup> As might be gleaned from these formulations, Helm's co-constitution scenario closely resembles Charles Taylor's Heidegger-inspired approach to self-interpretation and human value (see Taylor 1985). The

So part of the elegance of Helm's account lies in the fact that it manages to do equal justice to what may seem contrary intuitions about the nature of emotions: the seemingly discordant qualities of the phenomenal character and the intentionality of emotion. On the one hand, an emotion is a momentary episode of feeling in a certain qualitative way toward something, a hedonic bodily experience, usually coming with some bodily upheaval. On the other hand, emotions often have complex intentional contents, they involve sophisticated conceptual understandings, they might respond even to fine nuances in their objects and often draw on subtle narrative scenarios as their formative back stories. The theory of felt evaluations does justice to both these dimensions. While the individual felt evaluations are salient conscious episodes with hedonic qualities, the overall systematic pattern of felt evaluations is what instantiates potentially highly complex intentional contents. The pattern in general is *disclosive* of import, so that individual feelings – that may seem mere bouts of affective upheaval if seen in isolation – can be understood as individually and episodically *responsive* to that import here and now. Commitment to the import of the emotion's focus rules the pattern – the focus' import is the overall 'point' of the pattern, so that the particular normative profile of a person's affectivity becomes intelligible. Given a person's chief concerns (say, for her family, for her career, her community, or for a type of art, etc.), it will be more or less clear, at least in broad strokes, what it is rational for her or him to feel under various circumstances now and in the future.

This talk of emotional commitments and entitlements reveals the profoundly normative character of Helm's account: as rational evaluators, we cannot just feel anything and not feel in the way we capriciously happen to be inclined to – we are normatively *bound* to feel according to our standing value commitments (which might of course change, but again in accountable ways), and other members of our social community will hold us to these evaluative patterns by way of critique and sanctioning. Helm's account – which I can only sketch in its barest outline here – is thus seamlessly geared to the social normativity of human emotion, as it makes intelligible practices of critique, sanctioning, the myriads attempts at

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Heidegger-background in Helm is evident from terms such as 'disclosure' or 'disclosive assent' (see, e.g., Helm 2001: 96).

regulation, and ubiquitous discourses that value and prize certain emotional habituations while shunning others.

### 3.2. From felt evaluation to relational affect

While I find Helm's account quite illuminating, I will now propose a transformation of it that will leave little as it is, apart from the general idea of the overall theoretical architecture, namely the co-constitutive interplay of systematic patterns and situational instances of affect. The transformation of the theory comes with a transposition of it from individual evaluative perspectives – and thus from a focus on the individual person in general – to forms of affective interaction and thus to a more general orientation towards socio-cultural patterns of intelligibility and the diagrams and mattering maps of interactive dynamics.<sup>25</sup>

I put relational affect where Helm has felt evaluations. Thus, my starting point are not individual feelings of pleasure or pain, but affective intra-actions in relational scenes, either between two or more interactants or between an agent and aspects of her material environment – relational dynamics of the kind described in the three examples above.<sup>26</sup> Now, crucially, like felt evaluations, these scenes of relational affect are clustered into systematic patterns. These patterns display meaningful internal coherence. That means that they have a point: patterns of relational affect are organized according to some principle, are oriented toward a certain operational goal or institute a type of value. Accordingly, by considering the concrete forms these patterns take, we understand what particular type of affective episode is instantiated – relationally enacted – in a given situation. We thus keep the basic logic of pattern and instance in play, but almost everything else changes: Relational affect is not

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<sup>25</sup> In his later work (e.g., 2010), Helm has altered the design of his approach, attempting to leave behind the individualist orientation of his earlier installments and moving to a social conception centered on love and friendship. As this elaboration differs fundamentally from my own approach, I omit a discussion of it in order to avoid unnecessary complexity.

<sup>26</sup> Here and elsewhere I speak of 'intra-action' instead of the more common 'interaction' in order not to be forced to assume from the outset fully bounded individuals that interact. Instead, I leave open the possibility that the interactants themselves only take shape in – or emerge out of – these relational scenes. This way of indicating a strong as opposed to a weak relational ontology – where relations have priority over the entities related – has been introduced by feminist philosopher of physics Karen Barad (2007); see Rouse (2004) for helpful elaboration. In the context of a theory of affectivity this brings issues of ontogenesis and subjectification on the agenda (see Mühlhoff 2015).

primarily a matter of the affective experience of *individual persons*. Instead, it is an intra-active dynamic that inheres in *social domains of practice*.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, it is not individual *valuing* that provides the pattern-forming rationale, but the various operating logics or normative principles prevalent in – often even constitutive of – these practical domains, which might be quite contrary to the concerns and values of the individuals implicated in them.<sup>28</sup> From this it should already be clear is that it usually won't be categorical emotion types such as fear, anger, shame, pride (etc.) that are instantiated in these domains of practice.

Instead, it will often be forms of affective coalescence, affective relatedness as such – in countless varieties – that bind individuals together and let them jointly comport themselves in ways that are conducive to the smooth operation of the domain in question.<sup>29</sup> The particular 'logic' of the domain unfolds in part in and through the affective relations and intra-active dynamics between the domain-participants, so that what the individuals feel and do is part of these transindividual dynamics. The individuals, in turn, become focal anchors, enablers and facilitators for the domain's operating principles – often, as we will see below, by exerting subtle (or not so subtle) normalizing pressures on one another in order to continue to feel and act in line with these principles.

So just as on Helm's account, the overall domain-specific patterns do impose normative demands on the particular scenes of affective relatedness. It is in virtue of its belonging to a normative pattern that a given scene is to be continued in a certain way – for example, in the manner of in-group solidarity, mutual affection and encouragement, or rather

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<sup>27</sup> I say more on my understanding of 'social domain of practice' in the next section.

<sup>28</sup> They might institute other values instead: those prevalent to – or constitutive of – the relevant domains, for example profit-making in case the domain is a company or cost-efficiency when the domain is a corporate hospital or university.

<sup>29</sup> At this point, with regard to these forceful aspects of relational affect, it would be worthwhile to explore the connections between contemporary affect theory and Spinoza's understanding of affect. Roughly, affect is for Spinoza a matter of bodies relating in such a way that they either enhance or diminish their respective powers and capacities, where these bodies themselves are understood not as stable entities but in terms of their relational efficaciousness. Applied to human intra-action, this means that relational affect either enhances or diminishes the agentive capacities of the related individuals, as when an affective encounter is mutually empowering, or when it is instead debilitating or outrightly paralyzing for those involved in it. For reasons of space, I omit a discussion of this metaphysical backstory (see Gaitens & Lloyd 1999, esp. ch. 3, for helpful elucidation). A key source in bringing Spinoza into contemporary affect theory is Deleuze (e.g., 1990).

adversity, or whether the episode will in some cases unfold as an instance of a specific emotion type such as collective fear, sadness, or anger, after all – in which case it will be jointly enacted between various people through a sequence of relational affects in a situated encounter. Accordingly, the resulting emotions would not be *individual* emotions but *collective* emotions, brought about and enacted jointly by the domain-participants.<sup>30</sup>

However, as pointed out already, categorical emotion types are not the most adequate examples here. Relational affect is often more a matter of specific modes of interaction – various ways of being- and acting-together in a situation, modes of joint or co-comportment – regardless of whether these modes of interaction assume the shape of a specific emotion type or not. The concept of ‘participatory sense-making’, productive in recent social cognition research (see, de Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007), might be applied here: meaning is enacted collectively and in line with the functioning principles and ‘mattering maps’ of the social domain in question, but not necessarily according to pre-conceived categorical types of intentional comportment.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, notions from the phenomenology of emotion – such as the recently prominent concepts ‘existential feeling’ or ‘affective atmosphere’ – might be helpful. The intra-active dynamics in a given domain are often specifically framed by an enabling background ‘structure of feeling’, which accordingly are often the target of conscious efforts in domain-design (architecture, decoration, various ‘technologies of allure’, etc.).<sup>32</sup> Participants in the domain – such as co-workers in an office, consumers in a mall or the members of a school class or a sports team – find themselves in a conspicuous atmosphere that inheres in the domain and that contributes to preparing, structuring and enabling certain

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<sup>30</sup> I cannot go into the recently much-debated issue of collective emotions here. My approach has an affinity to Hans Bernhard Schmid’s phenomenology-inspired account, as Schmid gears his proposal explicitly to the operative logic of organizations, such as companies (see, e.g., Schmid 2014). The overall debate is captured well by the contributions in von Scheve & Salmela (2014).

<sup>31</sup> I have taken the concept of ‘mattering map’ from the work of Lawrence Grossberg (e.g., 1992: 82), see also Gregg (2006: ch. 4).

<sup>32</sup> It would be worthwhile to explore the connections between Raymond Williams’ famed notion of a ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1977), long prominent in cultural studies, and recent phenomenological work on existential feelings and affective atmospheres (as in Ratcliffe 2008). These respective bodies of work address mutual blind spots: Williams’ notion is slightly too abstract to get much descriptive traction, while the phenomenologists’ construals are often narrowly experience-based so that they fail to get a good grip on the social embeddedness, concrete machinations and political significances of their target phenomena.

modes of affective relatedness while making other such modes less likely, in ways that are often not reflectively conscious, let alone explicitly articulated (see Anderson 2009; Ratcliffe 2008; Thrift 2010).

Needless to say, a lot of detail will have to be added to this rough sketch to make it more adequate to its target phenomena. However, I hope that the overall theoretical design of the relational affect account has become clear enough: Affectivity is to an important extent a matter of socially implemented patterns of intra-actional dynamics within practical domains, in which individuals are affectively related in structured and normatively regulated ways, often regardless of – or even contrary to – what the individuals would deem significant for themselves or what they would feel if left on their own or within other such normative domains. In the following, I will focus in more detail on the ways in which domain organization imposes structure on the dynamics of relational affect, and how this in turn impacts the affective orientations and emotion repertoires of the individuals involved.

### **3.3. Relational affect and ‘domains of practice’**

A central feature of the present account is the embeddedness of single scenes of relational affect within encompassing social constellations, including the strong normative pull these social constellations exert over the concrete displays and scenes of affect. The possibility of analyzing affect in terms of this domain-specific embeddedness in normative patterns and constellations is what sets the present account apart from those approaches to affective intentionality that remain tied to the evaluative perspective of the individual person.

We can distinguish two broad dimensions of embeddedness. First, relational affect unfolds as part of ‘domains of practice’, i.e. domains in which affect works as an ongoing forceful dynamic that draws-in, captures, enthralls and binds together a number of interactants – for example, a lecture, a game of football, an artistic performance, or even just a family dinner (synchronic dimension). Second, both the domains, their concrete material and discursive arrangements and the individuals involved in them have specific formative histories of prior affective relatedness. These histories have sedimented into differentially recurring patterns or domain repertoires (diachronic dimension). In and as part of such

practical domains, various entities relate in a situational constellation, and both the layout of the domain – its specific machinic arrangement or diagram (more on that presently) – and the formative histories of the domain-components have to be considered in order to illuminate a given instance relational affect.<sup>33</sup>

I use ‘domain of practice’ as a loose umbrella term for the central organizing entity of relational affect, a term that has a wide application covering all sorts of social fields, organizations, groups and institutions with their respective material settings. The concept encompasses all those social settings and arenas where people come together and interact in more than accidental and fleeting ways. As long as there is some organization, temporal sustenance and discernible boundary, however fuzzy and shifting, between inside and outside to those interactions, the concept ‘domain of practice’ applies.<sup>34</sup> It is important, given the wide scope of that concept, to supplement it with a more specific understanding of the ways in which affect, interaction and agency are concretely prompted and channeled within these domains. A crucial feature of social domains is that their material layout in concert with prevailing discursive structures – among them explicit rules, informal codes of conduct, favored styles of interaction etc. – implement arrangements that are such as to prompt, channel, structure and sustain relational affect. Over time, these arrangements, thanks to their reliability and iterability, exert formative pressures on individuals to habituate in line with the dynamic patterns prevalent in the domain. This idea, that concrete domain-specific material arrangements operate as forceful modulators of affectivity, conduct and bodily habits, has

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<sup>33</sup> The ordering of affectivity’s situatedness into a synchronic and a diachronic dimension has been suggested by Griffiths & Scarantino (2009) in a somewhat different theoretical context.

<sup>34</sup> I am using the term ‘social domain of practice’ roughly in line with Ted Schatzki’s employment of the term ‘social formation’ in his Wittgenstein-inspired practice theory (see Schatzki 1996: 199-201). Schatzki furthermore speaks of ‘integrative practices’ (1996: 98-108) in the settings and places these practices are both located in and help constitute. Domains and practices are co-constitutively interrelated so that we cannot simply assign some spatial or material setting to pre-existing practices (Heidegger on existential spatiality is the source in the background; see Heidegger 1927: §§ 23, 24). Obviously, the focus of Schatzki’s account is practices – and thus human agency in general – and not affect. As is typical for much work in practice theory, affect comes in merely as one among various structuring dimensions of human practices (what Schatzki calls ‘teleoaffectivity’, see Schatzki 1996: 118-24). Still, there are important parallels between the design of prominent practice theoretical accounts of social life and the present approach to relational affect. Ultimately, affect theory and practice theory need to be integrated in a way that does not prematurely subordinate either affect under practice or vice versa (for a start in this direction, but with focus on categorical emotion instead of affect, see Scheer 2012; Wetherell 2012, esp. ch. 4, proposes ‘affective practices’ as a central orienting concept).

obvious affinities to Foucault's understanding of the 'diagram' of power relations implemented in the prison or the clinic, exemplified by the figure of the panopticon (Foucault 1995). What needs to be added to the abstract notion of diagram – as a reproducible relational configuration – is concrete mechanisms for its situated realization. Here I opt for using the notion of *machinic arrangement* (borrowing from Deleuze & Guattari 2004).<sup>35</sup>

For the broader theoretical purposes of the present endeavor, neither the metaphysical backgrounds these authors draw on nor very many of the details of how machinic arrangements are supposed to be implemented in practice matter very much. For the purpose of an initial theoretical sketch, we can abstract the general principle and leave it at that: social domains of practice make use of sophisticated dynamic arrangements that act as forceful conductors and channeling devices for affective energies. This can be things as banal as the background music humming in a shopping mall and the specific – often elaborately tested – arrangement of shops, products, advertising billboards and other design features in those temples of consumption (see, e.g. Thrift 2010). Likewise, what I mean by 'machinic arrangement' could be the organization of a corporate workplace into a space of dynamic affordances – the specific ways that cubicles are set up, how desks are outfitted in order to allow optimal workflow, how the architecture of the place makes certain casual interactions likely while it rules out others, but also more immaterial dimensions play a role, such as a corporate culture or a code of conduct and also more informal aspects of the specific interactional practices, styles and demeanors that employers in the firm will have to adapt to. Similar static and fluid arrangements are found in schools, in the military, and of course also in the family home, just think of contemporary 'standard outfits' of kids' rooms in suburban households. The above-mentioned example of Facebook is another case in point, as a part of the success of social network sites is the crystalline implementation of minute templates for

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<sup>35</sup> I speak of 'machinic arrangement' and not of 'machinic assemblage', which is the standard English (mis-)translation of Deleuze & Guattari's term *agencement*, in order to keep some distance from this very specific conceptual universe (see Buchanan 2015 for clarification). For present purposes, it is only the general idea that counts: domains of practice need material-discursive apparatuses in order to effectuate their functionality, in part by regularly exciting and modulating the *feeling bodies* that are in sustained contact with these domains. It is these apparatuses or arrangements, like their more abstract relational mappings (diagrams), that can be subjected to critical analysis. See Grossberg (2010) for helpful remarks in support of this perspective.

interaction in the functional architecture of the sites. Here, it is immediately evident that the layout of the sites works so as to grab and keep affective attention and to enable and facilitate focused affective interactions that users will experience as rewarding. Add the more aesthetic, stylistic and attention-channeling dimensions of website design and you end up with the multi-layered machinic arrangements of the social web.<sup>36</sup>

### **3.4. Derivative Individualism: Evaluative perspectives and emotion repertoires**

Of course it still makes sense, for certain theoretical purposes, to take an individual's evaluative perspective as a reference point in analyzing relational affect. In that case, we talk about a temporal career of relatedness that has crystallized into an individual repertoire of emotions, into states and attitudes and cares and concerns that jointly make up a more or less coherent evaluative perspective on the world. This is what Bennett Helm chiefly focuses on, and it is the obvious theme of much work in the philosophy of mind, in philosophical theories of personhood, in moral psychology and ethics. One might characterize Helm's approach as an effort to elucidate the emotional *auto-constitution* of personal agents. My transposition of his framework into social domains and relational constellations focuses instead on affective *hetero-constitution*: on how organized, domain-specific affective processes contribute to the coming about of personal subjects, and about how subjects are often implicated – swayed into, possessed by – the relational unfolding of affect in particular social domains.<sup>37</sup>

The account proposed here does not deny or dismiss the standard individualistic perspective, but accords it a derivative status. The focus on individual evaluative perspectives, on the possibility of personal autonomy and potentials for self-creation (see, e.g. Helm 2001: ch. 6), and on individually sedimented repertoires of emotion, is valuable as an analytical

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<sup>36</sup> Giovanna Colombetti and Joel Krueger have recently moved the debate within the philosophy of emotion a good deal closer to these issues by discussing emotion in terms of theories of social niche construction (see Colombetti & Krueger 2015; Krueger 2014). Related themes are prominent in Griffith & Scarantino (2009), a seminal paper that has initiated the recent surge of philosophical work on situated affectivity.

<sup>37</sup> When I speak of the 'coming about of personal subjects', this is meant in the Foucaultian sense of subjectification: material-discursive arrangements create cultural niches which set up possible ways of being a person, including ways of being socially recognized as one, that might then be occupied by flesh-and-blood individuals. Ian Hacking (2002) has helped to transfer this notion into analytical philosophy, likewise recent work by Sally Haslanger (2012). Specifically *affective* subjectification by way of machinic arrangements is a prominent theme in Guattari (1995).

route into the complexities of real-life affect, agency, and valuing. But it is neither a story of origins, nor a story of explanatory priority. ‘Individualism’ should be dismissed as metaphysics, and then treated as just one analytical and methodological option among others in concrete research: useful for certain purposes, utterly inadequate for others.

Acknowledging this gives us room to analytically prioritize social domains and their complex machinic arrangements and the ‘mattering maps’ they lay down as the central organizing vector for situated relational affect. So, for example, a company, a sports club, a scientific discipline, the military, various social organizations, or even simply a family, or a circle of friends, can be taken to be the organizing plane on which affect unfolds – as a densely situated, complexly ‘machinated’ relational dynamic between individuals and between individuals and their surroundings. On that basis, then, individual affectivity, valuing, reflective self-consciousness, agency and habits can be thematized as both diachronically shaped and synchronically prompted and channeled by these social arrangements and their dynamic archives. Of course it is then a further highly relevant question to what extent and at what points in the process individuals might come to exert autonomous choice on matters of personal value and thus, potentially, in matters of their self-constitution as persons.<sup>38</sup> More pressing still, to what extent can we attribute *responsibility* to individuals for their contribution to upholding domain-specific affective regimes in their affective reactions, when it is true that they are often swayed into feeling in these ways by the machinic arrangements operative in the domain? The present account does not pre-judge these matters. All it does is call upon theorists to take the formative arrangements of social domains into account. These arrangements are factors that ontogenetically pre-date and are constitutively at least on an equal footing with putative individual capacities, attitudes and impulses. Moreover, the questions of formative autonomy, of evaluative choice, personal self-

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<sup>38</sup> This touches on several recent debates in philosophy. One is the question whether individual mentality is so deeply enmeshed with pre-existing social norms and social formations that autonomy might be completely illusory. Judith Butler’s Foucault- and Freud-inspired *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) is an exemplary contribution here, as is the responding discussion in Allen (2008). A different but loosely related strand of work is the debate on autonomy in the more liberalist mainstream of philosophical theories of personhood (see, e.g., Christman 2009; Korsgaard 2009). A valuable historical orientation leading toward several core issues is Rorty (1988).

constitution and individual responsibility cannot be settled in the abstract, but have to be concretely addressed anew in different historical, cultural and political settings.<sup>39</sup>

Against this background, it makes sense to introduce the concept ‘emotion repertoire’ in order to refer to the relatively stable, habituated formations of affect that can be attributed to individuals.<sup>40</sup> A repertoire of emotion is in the first instance an individual’s career of affectively resonating,<sup>41</sup> insofar as it has sedimented into routine ways of affective interaction that are now partly at the person’s willful disposal, partly entrenched in the form of bodily dispositions. Derivatively, one might then add the discursively stabilized emotion types prevalent in a given emotional culture, in order to acknowledge the discursive and interactional ‘readability’ of an individual’s range of affective reactions. The concept of repertoire is more plastic and malleable as the related concept of *habitus*, and less strictly co-dependent on a static notion of a social field (Bourdieu 1977). Moreover, I suggest to employ the concept of repertoire in a wide sense so that it is also applicable to domains, groups, organizations, even subcultures, perhaps even entire nations or historical epochs. This is because repertoires can be shared, transmitted, collectively worked-on, variously prized or policed, and one will encounter stunning forms of discordance up to outrightly hostile reactions once individuals or groups find themselves transposed into environments in which different emotional repertoires are dominant. Details aside, the concept of repertoire of emotion has purchase as an addition to the primary focus on relational affectivity, referencing the ‘other side’ of the polar dynamic between the fluid, processual enactments of relational

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<sup>39</sup> A quick word on the issue of responsibility: This matter is much less straightforward than the individualist mainstream has long suggested (notably, liberal neo-Stoics such as Martha Nussbaum 2001). Putting blame on individuals for what are in fact deep-rooted social ills is a long-known political strategy of which some philosophers of emotion are not innocent. The present account can hopefully bring these issues back on the agenda and offer a fresh perspective. Cash (2010) is the most explicit treatment of these questions in the context of the philosophical ‘extended mind’ debate. See Protevi (2009 & 2013) for Deleuze-inspired efforts in this direction and Gaitens & Lloyd (1999, ch. 3) for a Spinozist approach that has affinities with the present proposal.

<sup>40</sup> To my knowledge, this notion has not been widely used in the literature on emotion, let alone as a worked-out theoretical concept. Historian William Reddy employs the concept of ‘emotional regime’ that has some resonances with the concept of a repertoire (e.g. Reddy 2001, 124-26), Wetherell makes several references to repertoires (e.g. 2012, 135 & 138), as do Scheer (2012) and Griffiths and Scarantino (2009).

<sup>41</sup> For a philosophical account of affective *resonance* much in line with the present proposal, see Mühlhoff (2015).

affect and its stabilizing habituation in both individual actors or in the practical domains they are embedded in.

#### **4. Concluding example**

By way of concluding, let me illustrate some key aspects of the relational affect approach with another example. I return to a case of a dialogical intra-action in a specific setting. Assume the dialogue unfolds within a work environment, an office in a company. Here, it is particularly obvious that the scene of affective relatedness is embedded in a highly structured setting, in an environment that has been purposefully designed and technologically outfitted in order to enable specific forms of collaborative practice, interpersonal engagement and affective connectedness. Various formative histories intersect in the affective encounter; e.g., those pertaining to the material layout of the space, organizing features of the work environment, the personnel hierarchies of the company, normative demands placed on employees, the various tactics and tricks laid down in long traditions of management technique, etc. The interactants enter their encounter with their own dispositions, skills, habits of perception and feeling – they bring to bear individual formative histories, sedimented into emotion repertoires, which enable or facilitate some forms of affective relatedness while excluding (or rendering less likely) other such forms. Presumably, the company itself has, by means of constant exposition, training and silent enforcement, already contributed to shaping the emotional repertoires and intra-active habitualities of its regular employees. In this way, domains of practice in general function as agencies of subjectification, as they play important roles in inculcating emotion repertoires as well as ideologies and self-understandings that accord with them.

Now, consider a scene of dialogical relatedness that involves a moment of marked affective connection – an instance of positive affective resonance, of ‘joyous communion’. The encounter unfolds as an episode of collegial togetherness in a setting that prizes exactly such forms of engaged collaboration and team work, including specific affective modes of interpersonal conduct, an affective style of marked enthusiasm and energetic relatedness, in

short, an ‘atmosphere of motivation and productivity’ – exactly what might make the participants later say that it ‘was such a great day at work’.

In such a scene, the intensity of affective relatedness, the joyous immersion in the dialogical encounter, the positive bodily resonance between the two partners of dialogue is an actualization and continued enactment of a currently prevalent socio-normative pattern: a specific outgrowth of the general cultural pattern that sociologists Boltanski and Chiappello have described as the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ (2005). The joyful relatedness of the co-workers is an instance of channeled, affective connection running more or less its default course. Here, relational affect is a regular design feature, an operative mode of the contemporary white-collar workplace, purposefully set up to ensure by and large domain-conducive operations. Accordingly, a given intra-affective scene takes up, re-enacts, and iterates domain-specific norms. In this way, it is a regular instance of domain operation and reproduction, keeping the firm (or the firm’s division) on track to achieve its operational goals.

Now, one might study these dense relational encounters by again taking the individual participants as focal reference points. Two perspectives might then be taken, differing in orientation but ultimately compatible with one another. Either, one might treat individuals and their emotional repertoires as already profoundly formed and habituated by their sustained and repeated enactments of affect in such practical domains. From that angle, their intra-active relatedness in such scenes of relational affect comes in view as the to-be-expected manifestation of standing dispositions and habits (diachronic perspective). But one might also chose a more situated perspective and focus on such scenes where it is not, or not so much, the enactment of prior individual repertoires but where the domain itself sways individuals into *novel* forms of affective relationality. Just think of the case where an intern, a trainee or new hire begins work in the company in question (synchronic perspective). From this vantage point, it becomes visible how individuals can be implicated in affect-mobilizing domains in ways that might run counter to their pre-existing affective orientations and habits. In these cases, there is an element of marked *disappropriation* with regard to the individual’s prior orientation, emotional repertoire or normative tendency. These affective scenes of intra-action

then exert a pull to *disown* standing attitudes – they literally draw the interactants into feeling, acting and comporting themselves even in ways that they might have previously deemed unthinkable. Gripped by the dynamic of relational affect, interactants are pervasively framed, driven along, molded and channeled by the machinic arrangement prevalent in that domain. Corporate work places are just one striking example among many possible others here – school classes, sports arenas, training grounds of the military, graduate schools, or even the good old middle-class family with its oedipal patterns of affective positioning are other examples for social domains where affect is profoundly and irresistibly molded, often in ways contrary to how individuals would feel, act and comport themselves elsewhere. Obviously, it is an intricate further question *how much* of such active disowning actually takes place, given that most individuals are relatively stable members of certain domains of practice and thus have likely been habituated in line with the affective patterns prevalent in these domains.<sup>42</sup>

Importantly, such scenes of affective relationality play a crucial role as situational forces of normalization. To a large extent it is the interacting agents themselves that act as mutual normative enforcers, keeping one another in line. From the perspective of the individuals involved, this may happen for the most part unwittingly, as habit, posture, modes of resonating and of aligning bodily with one another can exert a contagious pull without much in the way of conscious attention, let alone intentional control.<sup>43</sup> But then again, the social domains in question and the machinic arrangements operative within them are designed such that these kinds of censorious intra-actions are made more likely and might become a part of their regular process routines. There is a seamless censoriousness about relational affect. Part of the point of the present account is that we should not be misled by the fact that this contagious resonance unfolds automatic and reflexlike on part of the individuals, dyads or groups involved. The pre-conscious automaticity of relational affect does by no means imply

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<sup>42</sup> What makes me think that active disowning of standing attitudes and inclinations takes place rather frequently is that a part of contemporary life in affluent, mediatized societies is that simultaneous membership in many different domains of practice is the norm rather than the exception. Accordingly, most of us know quite well the slightly schizophrenic experience of feeling and acting in a certain way in one setting, while feeling and acting quite differently in another. I assume that this happens for the most part automatically, with little in the way of intentional ‘code switching’ (see Wetherell 2012: ch. 4; Katz 1999).

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Parkinson et al. (2005) for empirical evidence in support of this.

that we deal with primitive, pre-social, unstructured or non-intentional dynamics. The opposite of this is the case: Put in their proper contexts, both diachronic and synchronic, it becomes clear that these situated intra-active dynamics are enactments of complex, richly structured processes which for the most part have a clear point, follow a rationale, help implement a specific, often immensely sophisticated normative pattern.<sup>44</sup>

So the high-octane jubilant interaction among co-workers, their openly displayed enthusiasm and ostentative work ethic, their lustful readiness to work long hours or be constant mutual ‘inbox presences’, and the subtle normalizing effects they thereby exert on one another – all these aspects of workplace affective relationality contribute to enhancing the productivity of the company, to establishing a motivated and self-managing workforce, and to keep epoch-specific economic formation afloat; and moreover as something that is utterly normal: just the way things are. What needs to be added to this picture are the normalizing and affect-channeling effects of a plethora of productivity-enhancing apps, self-tracking and performance metrics devices, professional networking sites and other interactive machinery rampant in today’s white-collar workplace.<sup>45</sup>

## **5. Outlook**

In this paper, I have drawn on recent work in cultural theory’s ‘turn to affect’ in order to make a case for why philosophers of emotion should pay attention to the complex ways in which the material-discursive arrangements of practical domains evoke, pre-structure and modulate episodes of relational affect and, via that route, impact on individual habitualities, repertoires of emotions and engrained modes of feeling. There is a deep framing and modulating at work in many everyday scenes of relational affect – and might be easily missed when the individual and its private, ‘on-board’, reflectively accessible feelings are taken as the prime reference point in work on emotion and affect.

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<sup>44</sup> If there is one over-arching message of the cultural affect studies literature, it is this. Blackman (2012) best epitomizes it.

<sup>45</sup> Obviously, all of this is no more than initial hints. They will have to be followed up by substantive studies of contemporary corporate work conditions and their affective dimensions. Melissa Gregg’s work is exemplary for what I have in mind here (see, e.g., Gregg 2010, 2011, 2012). See also Gill & Pratt (2008).

The fact that relational affect is, thanks to its situated dynamic nature, prone to variation and stylistic deviation does not change this fundamental condition very much, all the focus on change and transformation in cultural affect studies notwithstanding. In fact, in many social domains today even presumably extravagant individual variation is not only allowed, but welcomed, even demanded ('compulsory individuality', see Skeggs 2005). So it seems that even the transformative potential of intensive affective encounters has itself been turned into a feature of the entrainment of domain-conducive norms and demands.

As (not only) the example of the affect in the workplace and the issue of compulsory individuality make clear, the relational affect perspective can help to bring the *political dimension* of emotion and affect in contemporary societies onto the agenda of the philosophy of emotion. When it is true that emotions are profoundly shaped by and implicated in the social arrangements, practices and styles of interaction that make up the life of human communities, both on local and on national or even transnational scales, then precise conceptual tools are needed to make these entanglements visible. Only then can the study of political processes be expanded to cover the micro-dynamics of everyday affect, moving in the direction of what I propose to call a 'political philosophy of mind' (see Protevi 2009).

Encompassing social modulation is a crucial feature of human affectivity that needs to be studied further. This will only happen when we relegate the still rampant individualism in the philosophical study of emotion to its proper place: it is just one among various methodologically options, useful only for select purposes, and must not be confused with genuine properties of its target domain. It is high time to move on to transpersonal, situated, strongly relational approaches to affect and emotion. As I hope to have illustrated in the present paper, an alliance between the philosophy of emotion and cultural affect studies is a promising way forward in this endeavor.

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