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THE MANY LIVES OF INSTITUTIONS

A Framework for Studying Institutional Affect

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One morning in late 2017, Liberal MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes—a Canadian woman of Caribbean descent—prepares for an important magazine shoot in the bathroom of her office building on Parliament Hill. “I was excited. I was joy personified”, she later recalled in a public tweet (Omar, 2017). The joyful moment was interrupted when two blonde women entered the room: their conversation falling abruptly into silence, one of the women quickly entered the stalls, the other placed her wallet down at a noticeable distance from Caesar-Chavannes and quipped: “Don’t steal my wallet, ok?” “My smile, joy and excitement vanished”, Caesar-Chavannes says; “I was just joking”, the blonde woman replied. Earlier that same morning, the building security detail did not open the door for Caesar-Chavannes to enter, despite her having worked in the building for a year and having been a parliamentarian for two years. Reminiscent of what Sara Ahmed describes as the “stopping” of bodies that are “not extended by the skin of the social” (2007, p. 161), Caesar-Chavannes was later told that she would require a pass to re-enter the building, otherwise she would have to wait in line. All the while, “white men in suits” (Omar, 2017) would routinely pass through the door, welcomed and uninterrupted. These embodied and affective dynamics at the micro-level of social interaction sit in tension with the professed values and visions of the Canadian House of Commons (2009), and the postures of respect and inclusiveness that are encouraged by parliamentary mission statements.

Some may be tempted to reduce such dynamics to the operation of individual prejudice, for which the individuals in question require remedial education. Yet this perspective risks overlooking the critical role played by *institutions* in shaping, enabling, and preserving entire ecologies of affect and habituated behaviours that reflect and reproduce inequalities of power and privilege. The discrimination experienced by Caesar-Chavannes as well as BIPoC communities more generally is closely tied to the operation of many modern institutions that intersect to

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preserve race-based privileges, white supremacy, and white cultural hegemony.¹ At a local level, the racist conduct of white parliamentarians and personnel on Parliament Hill, and the burdens carried by non-white parliamentarians, cannot be separated out from the norms, practices, and infrastructures that are particular to this institution. The affective and embodied dynamics that emerge in and through different institutional settings, and the power relations these dynamics index, constitute what we call the “many lives” of institutions, which operate alongside (and often in tension with) an institution’s idealised self-image.

Modern institutions and their power structures have remarkable affective aspects, yet these are rarely theorised explicitly. In part, this is because social and institutional actors have been widely theorised as disembodied subjects who are mainly driven by rational self-interest (Gatens, 1998; Jennings, 1993), as opposed to actors with complex desires and attachments that play a key role in processes of institutional creation and continuity. Furthermore, many institutions are successful at upholding the fiction that they work only as their formal rules and procedures prescribe, disavowing their strong reliance on informal and embodied practices for their maintenance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). At the same time, however, a number of institutions have discovered the strategic relevance and value of this largely invisible “second life”. This is evident in the explicit efforts made by many institutions to engineer affective atmospheres and to inculcate particular affects in their employees, for innocuous as well as suspect ends (see Neckel & Sauerborn, 2023, this volume). To examine such conscious efforts of affective governance on the part of institutional administrators alongside the unequal and insidious effects of modern institutions on different communities of people, our analysis foregrounds affective modes of living in and with institutions. This perspective is particularly apt for exploring mechanisms of exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation that can be subtle and diffuse and which in many cases are long sensed and felt before they are explicitly articulated. By drawing attention not only to how institutions perform their work but also to the myriad ways in which they embed, preserve, and perpetuate asymmetries of social power and privilege, the focus on affect further refines an understanding of how institutions ensure their stability and longevity, and an understanding of why many institutional reforms fail to deliver positive social and institutional change.

To be able to capture such dynamics in more systematic ways, we propose an analytic framework that centres the concept of “institutional affect”. Institutional affect embeds an understanding of affect as inherently relational and as a key

1 Social institutions are deeply interconnected (Gatens & Mackinnon, 1998, xiii). Racialised, gendered and other routines of social interaction which develop in one institutional sphere (e.g., the family, the school) tend to carry over into other institutions (e.g., the labour market, the law) and are reinforced by the norms governing those institutions. Racial and sexual difference represent two key forms of difference that pervade and structure all institutional settings in Western modernity (see Pateman, 1988; Mills, 1997). Many of the chapters in this volume touch on the interconnectedness between different institutions and the affective dynamics this intersection engenders.

conduit for power to operate and exert its effects (Röttger-Rössler & Slaby, 2018; Seyfert, 2012; Slaby, 2019; Slaby & von Scheve, 2019). On this relational view, relations of affecting and being affected are fundamental to the dynamic constitution and reconstitution of social actors and domains. This perspective takes into account a Foucauldian understanding of power as productive and treats affective relations as intersubjective and intercorporeal phenomena that can serve to produce and reproduce relations of social domination (Celermajer, Churcher, Gatens, & Hush, 2019; Mühlhoff, 2018; Protevi, 2009; Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019).

By emphasising *institutional* affect, we draw attention to affective phenomena such as affective dispositions, emotional attachments, atmospheres, and bodily postures that are tied to the entire cluster of relations, material constellations, and normative and discursive practices in an institutional setting. This conceptual framework recognises that the affective comportment and experiences of institutional actors always emerge against the backdrop of social and material configurations and are tied to fields of social meaning and power. Our perspective considers affect and emotion to be ubiquitous in institutional settings but acknowledges the localised and situated character of institutional affect. In this sense, it is well placed to capture the embodied dynamics of institutional life at particular times and places.

As part of our analysis, we identify multiple sites of conflict and contestation within key social institutions, and the power struggles these contestations track. In doing so, we aim to show that these institutions not only have “second lives” but “many lives” which are marked by affective frictions and tensions of various kinds.² Of course it is important to recognise that many institutions provide important resources and benefits—both material and affective—and are vital to social support systems of various kinds, for instance, hospitals, psychiatric wards, homeless shelters, or disability homes (Biehl, 2013; Desjarlais, 1997; Livingston, 2012; Zoanni, 2019). While we are indebted to such scholarship, it has not only shown little interest in explicitly theorising the ways in which affect and emotion are shaped by institutional arrangements, it has also rarely accounted for unequal power dynamics in that process. We are therefore particularly interested in exposing whom institutional affect tends to serve, and how it does so. As we discuss below, and as various chapters in this volume point out, affective dynamics in institutional settings tend to overwhelmingly serve and benefit those actors whose needs, interests, and attachments have played a primary role in shaping the evolution of mainstream institutions (chiefly, the needs, interests, and attachments of elite white males). By analysing divergent experiences of institutional life among differently situated actors, we not only seek to analytically capture the role of affective phenomena in sustaining different institutions and unfair

2 The notion of institutions having a “hidden life” has been helpfully developed by feminist institutionalists (see, e.g., Chappell & Waylen, 2013; also Krook & Mackay, 2011). This scholarship attends to how informal rules and practices pertaining to gender can constitute a parallel institutional reality within the formally codified “official” institution.

structural advantage but also affects that threaten the *status quo*—for example, feelings of disengagement and hostility vis-à-vis institutional arrangements.

Rooted in a Spinozist and Deleuzian philosophy of affect, our framework investigates institutions as “affective arrangements”, that is, as coordinated ensembles of heterogeneous elements—including tools and technologies, material layouts, discourses, imaginaries, and much else—that conjoin various actors into a dynamic web of affectivity (Seyfert, 2011, 2012; Slaby, Mühlhoff, & Wüschner, 2019). Construing institutions as affective arrangements allows us to consider all these different elements and their interactions, which often coalesce to produce a prevailing affective tone or texture that is specific to a given institutional setting. This perspective implies that certain affects do not merely happen to unfold within the confines of certain institutions. Rather, institutions actively shape, maintain, and modulate affective tonalities and the affective repertoires of actors who fall under their purview. Framing the affectivity of institutional actors as a consequence of their embeddedness within complex and dynamic constellations of different bodies, spaces, discourses, imaginaries, and infrastructures marks a deliberate shift away from psychological or mentalistic approaches. In contrast to a methodological individualist stance, affective arrangements replace the individual “psyche” as the locus for studies of affect. While we assume individual actors and their capacities are a key part of affective arrangements and can be derivatively individuated and thematised, we do not take them to be prior to, or more foundational than, those arrangements in which they are embedded.

As an analytic category, affective arrangement helps to bring into view the many different ways in which affect permeates institutional settings and conditions the behaviour of institutional actors. Institutional affect manifests at multiple levels of institutional life: for example, at the level of overarching affective tonalities that characterise particular institutions within the same sector (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.), at the level of affective atmospheres that are specific to local sites (such as the classroom or doctor’s waiting room), and at the level of situated, affective encounters and behaviours among institutional actors (e.g., teachers and students; doctors and patients). Our analytic framework draws connections between these different levels and foregrounds three key modalities of institutional affect: *materialities*, *actors*, and *imaginaries*.³ We acknowledge that employing materialities as a distinct category from actors and imaginaries is somewhat contentious, given that many theorists (ourselves included) treat actors and imaginaries as material phenomena. Our choice to retain this distinction is motivated by a desire to spotlight the underappreciated role of built infrastructures in shaping and inflecting institutional affect.

In what follows, we draw together key insights from affect theory, critical phenomenology, social philosophy, and other fields in order to illuminate these three dimensions and their interrelations. Moreover, through paying close

3 For a valuable and complementary account that highlights the conjoined influence of affect, imaginaries, and embodiment on processes of institutional creation, maintenance, and change, see Celermajer et al. (2019).

attention to the intricacies of institutional subject positions in relation to wider power structures and inequalities, this chapter offers both an analytical and a critical perspective on the many lives of institutions.

Analysing Institutions as Affective Arrangements

Whilst sociologists, political theorists, and cultural anthropologists treat institutions as central to social, cultural, and political life, there is no singular, agreed upon definition of an institution in the existing literature (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Boltanski, 2011, ch. 3). In its most basic usage, the term “institution” refers to a consolidated pattern of shared, stable, and recurring activity (Goodin, 1996). This encompasses everything from greeting rituals, children’s games, marriage ceremonies, and language to paying taxes, obeying traffic signs, and voting in government elections. The co-ordination and stabilisation of these collective activities relies on set classifications and clusters of norms and rules, as well as material artefacts, technologies, and infrastructures (e.g., federal offices, courts of law, churches, schools, and prisons). The broad scope of phenomena that are considered as institutions points to a basic dimension of the human condition: humans build and shape their environments (as well as themselves) through praxis and lay down norms and standards that pertain to others, their various doings, and to the materials involved in these activities. In an anthropological sense, then, *everything* resulting from such shared and recurring activity possesses an institutional character because it will be instituted in ways that become normatively significant: something that subsequent practice draws and relies upon. Many definitions of institutions single out particular aspects or dimensions of this broad process of instituting. Helpful for appreciating the world-shaping capacities of institutions are accounts that frame institutions as authorities that issue classifications: institutions are assigned the task of “stating the whatness of what is” and “saying and determining what matters” (Boltanski, 2011, p. 75; also Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Douglas, 1986, pp. 91–109). This enables institutions to produce and mediate shared realities among a plurality of social actors and to introduce a semblance of stability and predictability into social life. Importantly, the world-shaping capacities of institutional praxis encompass people’s bodily habits, skills, and dispositions. Institutions emerge from these embodied, habituated phenomena and serve to regulate them in turn (Hodgson, 2006).

Our analysis of institutional affect homes in on three features that we take to be common to many modern institutions. We do not view these features as determinate properties but rather as broad-ranging phenomena that can help to reveal the complexities and contestations which make up the many lives of institutions.⁴ The first key feature is that of a guiding idea, which we broadly construe as the

4 This characterization of institutions is inspired by the French jurist Maurice Hauriou (1929/1965). However, we deviate from his approach in that we construe guiding ideas, actors, and agencies in a looser fashion and do not view them as elements of a definition in a strict sense.

professed mission of a given institution: that “for the sake of which” the institution presumably exists or claims to exist. The second feature is a group of actors that either serve, benefit from, or are otherwise affected by the institution. Institutional actors can include official functionaries or role bearers, clients, service recipients or target demographics of an institution (here we speak of “addressees”). The third feature comprises materially implemented agencies that are required to realise the institution’s operations (e.g., specific establishments and facilities with their various infrastructural arrangements, equipment, and resources).

Guiding ideas are usually contested and undergo frequent change (Hauriou, 1929/1965). This is so in at least two ways: First, the putative meaning of guiding ideas such as “legality”, “education”, “civic self-determination”, or “health” is subject to interpretive quarrels and can vary considerably across different contexts and social locations. Second, an institution’s expressed mission can run up against its *de facto* purpose or function. For example, while one might agree that the guiding idea of schools is to provide a quality standard of education for all students regardless of their socio-economic privilege, many high schools often help ensure and cement class privilege by disproportionately benefitting members of a comparatively well-resourced demographic (Cesay & Slaby, 2021; Wellgraf, 2021). Thus, whilst educational institutions may elicit the praise and gratitude of some, they garner the mistrust and resentment of others. Similar tensions are manifest in the practice of law and medicine, in civil government, in state bureaucracies, and in many other institutional spheres.

Institutional actors cover a wide range of individuals from official functionaries or role-bearers to a much harder-to-pin-down class of individuals who are affected positively or adversely by the institution’s operations (“addressees”). Any given institutional arrangement will involve and impact various actors and groups of actors differently, thereby giving rise to contrasting affective experiences. These experiential differences often track inequalities of social power and privilege: empirical studies show with depressing consistency that experiences of a courtroom, a hospital, a police station, or a classroom can vary dramatically according to one’s race, gender, sexuality, class, and other vectors of social (dis) advantage (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004; Shange, 2019; Taylor, 2019).

Agencies enable, implement, and stabilise an institution’s operations. Agencies can include professional divisions (e.g., law enforcement) but also concrete facilities like school buildings, law courts, hospitals, and their material scaffoldings. These scaffoldings often involve complex layers of infrastructure: old buildings from bygone times are still inscribed with different functions, norms, and sensibilities, such as hierarchy and dependency. New liberal democratic institutional ideals, such as equal access, are often unevenly pasted onto such places. In this sense, institutional materialities are more like patchy palimpsests that can fray and result in friction. In many institutional sectors, digital technologies are the latest addition to the infrastructural arrangement of their facilities, and their implementation often creates tensions among actors and changes institutional practice in complicated ways (see Zenker, Sureau, Götzelmann, 2023, this volume).

To bring into view the full scope and range of institutional affect, we analyse institutions as “affective arrangements”. This framing marks a significant shift from many classical approaches to institutions with their purely rationalist and structuralist leanings. In our reading, institutions comprise human and non-human, material and discursive, natural and technical elements that coalesce into a local layout with a characteristic affective style, tone, and rhythm (Slaby, Mühlhoff, & Wüschner, 2019). Institutional arrangements represent demarcated domains where a mode of affectedness, an affective texture, or a characteristic atmosphere or social “feel” prevails. School classrooms with their vivid interaction dynamics between teacher and students as well as among students; courtrooms whose rules and procedures carefully police affective expression and instil a powerful sense of authority; offices of federal bureaucracy that strike a monotonous note: all of these examples can productively be analysed as affective arrangements. These are local formations in which affective relationality has stabilised into a characteristic pattern of affecting and being affected.

Thinking of institutions as affective arrangements opens up a multi-scalar perspective on institutions, spotlighting localised material settings as well as broader discursive and symbolic frameworks. Accordingly, it allows for and requires various degrees of zooming in and out to bring relevant dimensions and patterns into focus. Studies of corporate workplaces can, for instance, focus on the minutiae of office spaces and situated interactive practice at specific sites but also consider the broader symbolic and imaginative purchase of managerial styles and corporate philosophies (Gregg, 2011; Liu, 2004; Mühlhoff, 2018; Mühlhoff & Slaby, 2018).

Affective arrangements can be stable and relatively permanent, yet also versatile, open-ended, and capable of change. Like affective arrangements, institutions have multiple temporalities. Different historical trajectories and developmental timelines converge and sediment in their structures, allowing for fine-grained genealogical analyses. This temporal dimension becomes particularly evident when different timelines collide: rapid technological progress and new technologies may fail to be readily accommodated by old buildings and under-resourced facilities (Calkins, 2021a), as well as by institutional actors who are unable or unwilling to change their practice.

Analysing institutions as affective arrangements also helps shed light on the alluring qualities of many institutions, which often deploy a complex of symbolic and discursive strategies to recruit actors for various ends (Castoriadis, 1975/1987; Seyfert, 2011). Consider, for instance, Masco’s chilling account (2019) of US security and military institutions mobilising scenarios of imminent existential threat over decades to affectively recruit the US public in support of continuous militarisation (see Ameling, Irat, & Harders, 2023, this volume for a case from Turkey). Where Masco’s case highlights the stability and permanence of an affective arrangement that supports militarisation, the cases assembled in this volume also underline the versatility and open-endedness of affective arrangements and their capacity for change. Attending to institutional affect in

particular opens a critical optic on dominant institutional modes of affecting and how those affected can push back on and affect the institution in turn. This push-back does not always align with democratic and progressive values, which opens a rich empirical field of study into how institutions affectively recruit actors and are countered by various bottom-up affectivities.

Modalities of Institutional Affect

Institutional affect encompasses a broad range of affective phenomena, including affective tonalities or atmospheres that typically pertain to institutions as a whole or to a specific institutional setting, as well as the affective attachments, postures, and practices of institutional actors. In what follows, we outline three main modalities that shape institutional affect: *materialities*, comprising institutional spaces, objects, technologies, and situated practices; *actors*, comprising raced, sexed, and other differently embodied actors who are embedded in particular institutional roles, and who inhabit, enact, and reproduce—but may also challenge and resist—institutional structures; and *imaginaries*, comprising the guiding images, symbols, and narratives that govern a particular institution and which draw on and interact with broader social and cultural imaginaries.

The following discussion focuses on contrasting and competing affects that are bound up with institutional materialities, the roles and positions of institutional actors, as well as with institutional imaginaries, and the inequalities of social power and privilege these affective dynamics track.

Institutional Materialities

Institutions rely on being sedimented in a range of material environments to ensure their stability and longevity (Boltanski, 2011). The institutional norms, procedures, and rules that serve to regulate affective dynamics among institutional actors are often supported and reinforced by objects, technologies, and spatial settings. Materialities of this kind contribute to affective atmospheres in institutions that influence the bodily comportment of institutional actors. For example, the rule that only a qualified judge can preside over court hearings, and the normative expectation that plaintiffs, defendants, and their legal representatives show this figure due respect and deference, is supported by a characteristic spatial arrangement and architecture that elevates the judge on a pedestal and situates them in the centre of the room. This spatial layout and purposeful positioning of different actors in relation to one another establish a unique configuration of affectivity that acts upon persons entering the space (Bens, 2022).

In this way, material infrastructures can convey messages about the status of different institutional actors and addressees: for example, who is welcome and who is not; who has the right to dwell in particular spaces and who does not. Consider the now ubiquitous armrests on benches in railway stations or notorious

cases of banks erecting metal spikes around their branch doorways—designs used to deter homeless persons from seeking shelter and sleeping at these sites. Or think of the minimalist designs used in both public park and prison furniture: hardy stainless steel benches and tables are easy to clean and are firmly screwed into the ground, communicating both a sense of efficiency and mistrust in their users, who need to be prevented from misusing and stealing them (Tieu, Fauq, & Lentini, 2020, p. 142). These examples underscore that institutional materialities are not neutral and innocuous but are inscribed with affordances, meanings, values, and normativities that differentially target forms of behaviour, thereby selectively inviting or repelling certain subjects.

Drawing attention to the importance of materiality for everyday institutional life in this way resonates with scholarship on science and technology, which argues that the workings of power only become discernible when material constellations are equally taken into consideration (cf., Anand, 2011; von Schnitzler, 2013). Bruno Latour (1996) narrates the social prerogatives of “the Berlin key”, a technology used in Berlin apartment buildings that forces users to lock the door at night. This technology is inscribed with norms, rules, and assumptions about its users that in turn have affective consequences: a paternalism towards the users suggesting they might not be trusted to lock the door, and a distrust of bypassers, who need to be held back from loitering and stealing. Technologies such as the now-outdated Berlin key are powerful in that they force users to comply with their moral ideals, and this compliance becomes habituated and eventually taken for granted. Other examples include speed bumps that help to ensure speed limits are followed, or the famous low overpasses on Long Island that let private cars pass but not public double-decker buses (Latour, 1996; Pinch, 2010; Winner, 1986). Or think of the pre-paid water and electricity metres installed in many low-income countries, a technology that presupposes that their clients are untrustworthy and will default on their monthly payments (Anand, 2011; von Schnitzler, 2013). Such examples emphasise that politics is not only made through public, discursive, and juridicopolitical processes but rather also through the much less visible technopolitical terrain. They also help to spotlight how norms, affordances, rules, standards, and prescriptions are inscribed and delegated to material artefacts and eventually become taken for granted and invisible to regular users (Akrich, 1992; Bennett, 2010; Boltanski, 2011). Building on this scholarship, our interest in this volume is in exploring the myriad affects and emotions that inscribed institutional materialities animate—both in compliance with the institution and in opposition to it (see Calkins & Ertl, 2023, this volume; Churcher, 2023, this volume; Zenker et al., 2023, this volume).

It is easy to underestimate how these material elements of the architecture, interior design, furniture, and the overall spatial layout of institutional settings contribute to institutional affect. Many institutional spaces seem to have such a profound ordinariness and blandness about them that dwelling in these spaces is far from exciting, intense, or noteworthy. And yet, far from leaving actors unaffected, the designed inconspicuousness of many institutional spaces is one way in

which institutions both exert and hide their power, and contribute to sustaining consequential and problematic modes of affective and practical comportment that are largely taken for granted. The material arrangements that are characteristic of particular institutions create atmospheres through which institutions affectively recruit individuals to abide by institutional rules, often in ways that bypass conscious, reflective scrutiny. This enables institutional actors to become habituated to procedures or conditions that can be ineffective, cumbersome, or even unjust and cruel. Consider immigration officers sitting in their office buildings, staring at shelves with case files or the same digital forms on their computers all day. This work arrangement—the bureaucratic procedures, the formalised and routinised setting of activities, and many more mundane elements—are conducive to creating an unmoved and distanced comportment among such actors. This is significant when we consider the power granted to indifferent bureaucrats to seal the fate of individuals and entire families. A horrifying example of how institutional affect can be embodied is the Nazi bureaucrat, who sat calmly at their desk, mildly bored with endless forms and lists, while executing genocidal orders (Arendt, 1964). The ordinariness of many institutional arrangements and their sedimentation in material surroundings, to which stereotypical institutional agents and their affective demeanour contribute in a dreary feedback loop, might deflect serious attention, critical reflection, or heartfelt concern from institutional operations.

Institutions are also repositories of the past insofar as their spatial and operational arrangements “keep things in place” (Ahmed, 2007). Their material architectures and infrastructures, in particular, tend to be intransigent and resistant to abrupt changes, spatially reproducing and stabilising relationships of power and inequality (Ahmed, 2007, p. 160). The neo-gothic style of Caesar-Chavannes’ workplace on Parliament Hill is a permanent reminder of the historical relationship between Canada and Great Britain and embeds strong Christian values in its design: large windows and sky-high ceilings evoke closeness to God and conjure affects of sublimity and greatness. But inscribed into the materiality of this building are not only imperial Christian affects, but also a colonial legacy: Britain secured its sovereignty over Canadian territory via this post, and the Canadian government brutally fought indigenous rights demonstrations at this spot. The affective weight and dissonance that are evoked by the accreted histories that have sedimented in buildings and infrastructures are likely to be keenly felt by black or indigenous persons working in such surroundings (Calkins, 2021a).

Material set-ups that seem ordinary and inconspicuous or appropriate and beneficial to some institutional actors may, then, seem intimidating, threatening, and marginalising to others. The anthropologist Savannah Shange describes a conflict about the door policy of a San Francisco public school: while parents of mostly white, affluent students demanded that the school’s doors be locked, presumably to prevent potential shooters from entering the premises, for black students and their families, this proposal prompted dread. This is because the school was seen as one of few publically accessible places that black students could

use to shelter from police patrols, which tended to target kids of colour in the neighbourhood (Shange, 2019). This underlines the importance of considering the materialities and spatialities of institutions from multiple vantage points.

Institutional Actors

The foregoing examples make clear that institutional materialities convey certain attitudes towards those who engage with them and profoundly influence the comportment and demeanour of institutional actors. Analysing institutions as affective arrangements spotlights how institutional materialities work in conjunction with other elements that position actors, human and also non-human, in dynamic relations of affecting and being affected. In this section, we consider how the affective attachments, experiences, and practices of institutional actors play critical roles in stabilising and maintaining institutional arrangements, as well as power structures within them. We do not aspire to be exhaustive in our account of this dynamic (for the example of non-human actors like plants, see Calkins & Ertl, 2023, this volume) but seek to highlight the most important coordinates of affective subjectivation in institutions. Institutionally mediated modes of affective subjectivation are noticeably inflected by dynamics of social power and privilege that feed into the “many lives” or “shadow realities” of institutions (von Scheve & Slaby, 2022). At the same time, the attachments, experiences, relations, and practices of institutional actors will nearly always reveal tensions and conflicts that can give rise to critique and resistance in a reformist or abolitionist spirit.

We approach the broad class of institutional actors here by focusing predominantly on institutional role-bearers or functionaries, that is, individuals who occupy designated institutional positions to perform official institutional tasks. Institutional role-bearers are those who are deeply embedded in, and routinely interact with, institutional materialities and infrastructures. We devote less attention to a wider and equally important class of actors that are regularly addressed, served, or “targeted” by institutions, namely what one might call “addressees” or “target demographics” (for instance, patients and relatives of patients in hospitals, pupils and their parents in schools, prisoners, customers, or service recipients in economic or federal institutions, etc.). While these latter actors often bear the brunt of institutional dysfunction and will likely be key among those who push for institutional change or even for an institution’s abolition, we assume that official role-bearers are more centrally involved in shaping, epitomising, and perpetuating the affective lives of institutions.

Official institutional roles come with powers and prerogatives that shape the affective demeanour of their bearers in characteristic ways. For example, school teachers and university lecturers are granted the authority to grade students and conduct examinations; doctors can make treatment decisions and give directives to nurses; judges can sentence; federal bureaucrats can make or shape policy decisions; and so on. Actors who enjoy power and authority in virtue of their institutional position also usually benefit from a degree of occupational

prestige and status. Positional prerogatives and economies of professional esteem tend to engender common affective demeanours and postures among powerful role-bearers within institutions, including a pronounced sense of authority, self-confidence, self-worth, ease, and entitlement (which might slide into arrogance, boastfulness, or presumptuousness). Yet, as the following analysis elaborates, and as Caesar-Chavannes' experience illustrates in stark terms, professional seniority is no guarantee that one's presence will elicit recognition and respect if one's body is marked as deviant against the institutional backdrop in question.

Affective subjectivation does not only occur by way of institutions endowing actors with particular powers, prerogatives, and status; it also occurs in and through institutional mandates or requirements ("feeling rules") that actors display a particular affective demeanour (Hochschild, 1983). Institutions explicitly or implicitly mandate certain ranges of comportment in line with their operations, guiding ideas, and rationales, as well as for specific institutional roles. For example, postures of affability and helpfulness are required of employees in the service sector; police officers and security personnel are expected to exhibit a certain degree of toughness and authority; and courtroom judges are required to be impartial and emotionally detached.

Notably, the feeling rules that are specific to particular institutions or institutional roles often intersect and interact with those that attach to gendered, raced, and other types of bodies. For example, female judges may be perceived as less capable of impartiality or detachment than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the uptake or rejection of institutional feeling rules will tend to incur different costs depending on one's embodied identity. It is typical for women who adopt direct and authoritative postures in line with institutional mandates to be denigrated as aggressive or unfriendly whilst their male colleagues remain immune from such criticism. The politics of institutional affect in relation to gender, race, and other markers of group difference can also be witnessed in what Ahmed identifies as the "happiness duty" (2012, p. 156) that is imposed on actors by many institutions; a duty which is readily and easily fulfilled by those whom the institution has evolved to serve (namely, elite white males), and who benefit from the institutional *status quo*. Those who suffer institutional disadvantage and who transgress this duty are often dismissed as "killjoys".

Collective expectations with respect to the kinds of affective postures that ought to be displayed (and ought not to be displayed) in a given institutional space can feed into collective perceptions of the types of persons that ought to occupy that space and those that are out of place. Many scientific institutions, for instance, demand a style of emotional detachment marked as "masculine" to satisfy demands of objectivity and aim to foster excitement, diligence, and a willingness to sacrifice for the pursuit of science itself, whilst devaluing "feminine types" of affect that include care, love, and nurturance (Calkins, 2021b; Herzig, 2005; Subramaniam, 2014; see Churcher, 2023, this volume).

In sum, institutional actors embody an institution not just in terms of their commitment to its operative goals and in fulfilling functional tasks but also in

terms of their engagement in a whole cluster of affective practices. In enacting and sanctioning certain affective displays, modes of etiquette, and styles of self-presentation in line with institutional norms and requirements, institutional actors contribute to the prevailing affective tone or atmosphere of an institution, thereby adding directly to the broader affective formations that can come to be characteristic of an institution or even an entire institutional sector. The proverbial bureaucrat can come across as about as boring and unremarkable as the office he occupies, while the energetic vibe of a start-up is as much a matter of the bustling open-space office floor as it is of the beaming, energised employees roaming it.

Institutional requirements pertaining to affective conduct and demeanour are often backed by tangible sanctions. These sanctions can be formalised, explicit, and openly talked about (e.g., in mandatory feedback sessions with hierarchical superiors). Yet a good amount of affective policing by institutions and by institutional representatives is unofficial, tacit, and informal; a matter of routine chatter and hints, gestures, and glances in everyday interaction (Slaby, 2016) that might push actors further into complicity with institutional logics, even against their better judgement (on complicity, see Knowles, 2021; Kohpeiß, 2023, this volume). Those informal modes of institutional sanctioning stand in a continuum with regular conduct in all sorts of social settings, but the range of acceptable conduct in institutional contexts is usually narrower, the monitoring more relentless, and the stakes for deviating actors usually higher.

Institutional positions are not only associated with particular affective postures and practices but also come with specific pressures and stressors—some of which are officially acknowledged by the institution and some of which are not. High workloads, near-permanent availability, and coping with mission creep are supposed to be dealt with as a matter of course (Gregg, 2011). These pressures and stressors are those which institutions (explicitly or implicitly) require their occupants to shoulder and absorb. It might even be required and expected that agents ensure that they *do not show* in any way how stressful and burdensome their institutional position actually is. Moreover, institutions and their privileged representatives create additional pressures and stressors for those whose bodies are marked out as deviant and which are not always explicitly acknowledged and addressed. Those around whom institutional norms have evolved tend to experience comfort and ease in institutional settings. On the other hand, immense affective burdens are placed on those who do not fit the “somatic norm” (Puwar, 2004) of the institution in question.

The position-specific affectivity of institutional actors helps us to flesh out the motif we use in the title of this introduction chapter: the assumption that institutions may have “many lives”. Institutional role-bearers inhabit an institution’s structures, help perform the institution’s operations, embody its ethos, live its guiding idea, and represent the institution to its addressees and the surrounding public. Thereby, actors and their situated affectivity give life to an institution. Institutional actors can vitalise an institution in different, sometimes contradictory ways. Their affective and practical investment in the institution can help

to sustain multiple institutional realities. In a range of cases, it is the proper, textbook-style enactment of a typical institutional role that will—wittingly or unwittingly—contribute to an affective shadow reality within the institution. A teacher might radiate a sense of scholarly diligence and pedagogical impartiality very much in line with their official institutional mandate. Yet for struggling students who are not familiar with or habituated to the unwritten rules and bourgeois etiquette of a more elitist type of high school (like the German Gymnasium or the French Lycée), this pedagogical demeanour may be experienced as alien, hostile, and intimidating rather than inspiring and uplifting. Students who disengage or mock the teacher in question are likely to draw the ire of the embarrassed educator and find themselves the target of disciplinary measures. Examples like this show that institutional actors can be part of multiple consequential affective relations with the addressees of their institution. These affective relations are always part of wider institutional fields that span various material set-ups and draw substantively on cultural imaginaries. For instance, in Germany, teachers often anchor a classroom assemblage and a Gymnasium dispositive that is saturated with a long, varied, and contested history of *Bildung* that oscillates between a celebrated humanistic and meritocratic ideal on the one hand, and a troublesome track record of class dominance and an ethnonationalist orientation with severely racist consequences on the other hand (Cesay & Slaby, 2021; Maatz, Lütjohann, & Fleig, 2023, this volume).

Another way in which an institutional shadow reality can be established is via the involvement of actors in two or more conflicting institutional logics. A typical example is the simultaneity of economic pressures—in the form of profit orientation, efficiency mandates, scarce resources, and so forth—and a guiding idea that is itself uneconomic, such as health or education (see Calkins, 2021c, for a case on cost-efficiency in humanitarianism). In a landscape of fiscal austerity, institutional actors often have to adjudicate between conflicting orientations in their own person. Teachers and nurses, for example, can be required to compensate for their understaffed, poorly equipped workplaces by putting in extra hours or working with the kind of maximal efficiency that jeopardises their commitment to an ethos of care, attentiveness, and patience. Where institutional actors are asked to compensate for structural flaws, they are often faced with a choice: heroically rise above their mandate to compensate for structural deficiencies or resort to business-as-usual in order to safeguard their personal well-being (see Kohpeiß, 2023, this volume). Resorting to the former, such actors' self-exploitation might keep what basically are defunct institutions viable and thus prevent a serious reckoning with structural issues. Resorting to the latter can exacerbate existing tensions between institutional actors and their addressees, particularly those addressees already suffering the effects of institutional marginalisation to a disproportionate degree. As a consequence of structural failings and their affective bearing on institutional actors, the most disadvantaged members of society may find themselves subject to extra-disciplinary and punitive measures and thus further alienated from the institution in question (Protevi, 2022; Shange, 2019; Wellgraf, 2021).

Institutional actors are able to reflect upon and critically negotiate position-specific ambivalence. Affective tensions deserve scrutiny because they flag moments that can prompt such critical engagement. However, part of the habituating potency of institutional affect is the power of affective arrangements to lure individuals into position-specific orientations that come to be experienced as normal, and even as pleasurable (Slaby et al., 2019). To the extent that that is the case, a motivation to critically reflect upon one's institutional position might be less likely to arise.

In light of this, we can revisit the opening example of Caesar-Chavannes' experience at Parliament Hill. Despite her immense success in rising to such a high institutional status as member of parliament and later even serving as parliamentary secretary (House of Commons, n.d.), Caesar-Chavannes became a target of racist acts from other institutional actors (fellow MPs, security personnel, administrative staffers) that marked out her presence as deviant and misfitting and hindered her effortless passage through a space that should be welcoming. These habitual, quotidian responses to blackness reflect the operations of a racist cultural imaginary and a distributed enactment of institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2007; Fanon, 2008; Guenther, 2019; Roediger, 1991; Sullivan, 2006). As an affective arrangement, parliament operates as a *dispositif* that disposes white bodies to perpetuate cultures of white supremacy and to act as gate-keepers of the institutional status quo. Usually, these myriad acts of racist abjection come naturally to the habituated institutional agents and will often seem unnoticeable, miniscule, or negligible to their perpetrators. To individuals who are the targets of such entrenched institutional racism, the institution and its paramount actors can become an insidiously hostile formation that offers little respite (Rankine, 2014; see also Palmer, 2017).

This helps us connect the analytic dimension of institutional *actors* with our third proposed dimension of institutional affect: institutional *imaginaries*. Over and over, actors get drawn into habits of feeling, judgement, and behaviour that manifest, enact, and perpetuate long-standing imaginaries (e.g., racist, classist, and patriarchal imaginaries). These imaginaries are the focus of the following section and will complete our analytic framework for studying institutional affect.

Institutional Imaginaries

Analysing institutions as affective arrangements means attending to their symbolic and discursive aspects and how these serve as mediating forces in processes of affective subjectivation among institutional actors. For their very existence and governing force, institutions depend on what Castoriadis (1975/1987) and others have called an "imaginary".⁵ Socially shared significations such as images,

5 See James (2002) for a detailed overview of theories that position the imaginary as an individual capacity and those that treat it primarily as a social phenomenon.

narratives, metaphors, and symbols play a pivotal role in grounding affective investments in, and conformance to, institutional orders and their guiding ideas and are produced and reproduced in many ways—including (and especially) via media such as advertisements, pop music, school books, academic texts, novels, and films (see Lehmann, 2023, this volume). Take for instance the heterosexual family unit: in the North-Atlantic and increasingly beyond, this institution (and the capitalist markets it sustains) depends for its maintenance on affective relations of love and attachment that are mediated by the widespread circulation of images framing motherhood and domestic life as the ultimate fulfilment and reward for women (Bottici, 2022; Federici, 2004; Illouz, 1997).

The significations that comprise any given imaginary confer differential value, status, and meaning on particular social subjects and practices and ground strong affective attachments to social and institutional arrangements that emerge from this distribution of value and meaning (Gatens, 1996; Patalano, 2007). Social imaginary significations are not ontologically prior to those actors whose subjectivity and attachments they serve to shape; rather, imaginaries exist in a relation of interdependence with the individuals and entities that institute them. In other words, the social imaginary is *instituting* in the sense that it helps construct social actors' sense of self and gives meaning to social practices and is *instituted* in the sense that it is created and sustained (as well as transformed by) social actors and the institutions they collectively establish.

Focusing on imaginaries helps to spotlight that it is not primarily through explicit instruction or theoretical doctrines that institutional actors typically gain a sense of what is valuable; what is appropriate behaviour, and what is owed to whom, in a given context. Rather, this understanding is carried in and structured by evocative and pervasive significations that appeal directly to the imagination (Gatens, 1996; Taylor, 2003). Among other things, shared imaginaries assist to condition a collective, pre-reflexive, and affectively charged sense of who does and does not belong in a particular institutional space in ways that give rise to habitual responses and behaviours of various kinds (Puwar, 2004). The conduct of the Parliament Hill security guard who waves through white male parliamentarians without forethought or hesitation, for example, is linked to a racial and sexual imaginary that imbues elite white men with qualities of authority and leadership and which encourage gestures of trust, respect, and deference vis-à-vis white male bodies. Collective imaginings of black bodies as criminal (Browne, 2015), untrustworthy, and as exclusively occupying service roles mean Caesar-Chavannes and those like her habitually encounter stiffened postures, conspicuous silences, and obstacles to accessing institutional spaces that are coded as white.

The cognitive and affective purchase of racist, sexist, and other social imaginaries tends to endure even when institutions like Parliament Hill attempt to “diversify” through recruiting new bodies (female bodies, black bodies) into positions of seniority and by recrafting their mission statements (see Dilger & Warstat, 2023, this volume on “affective diversity”). The careful recrafting of

an institution's self-image—for example, through inspirational stories, images, iconography, and the like—that has accompanied institutional trends towards diversification sets up a tension between the past and present: much like when new materialities are layered upon older infrastructures and their inscribed values in ways that generate friction, the imagistic re-branding of an institution as progressive often runs up against older, conservative imaginaries that are deeply sedimented in institutional norms, practices, and infrastructures and which are carried in the discursive and bodily habits of institutional actors (Ahmed, 2012; Churcher, 2022a; Kamola, 2019).

The affective undercurrents and tensions that are generated by competing institutional imaginaries are particularly apparent in many institutional fields beyond Parliament Hill. Consider the self-image showcased by many academic departments in the Anglo-American and European context. This image frames academic practice as a collective and inclusive striving for insight and clarity and encourages an atmosphere of spirited and respectful discussion that supposedly carries its practitioners above pre-existing hierarchies based on class, race, gender, and the like. But in various disciplines, especially philosophy and STEM fields, a climate of adversarial competitiveness and male intellectual elitism often prevails instead. This climate can be linked to overlapping clusters of masculine imaginaries: for example, metaphors that frame philosophical argument as “war”; narratives of scientific “discovery” that embed images of male exploration and conquest (Calkins, 2021b); and to a deeply entrenched image of the true academic scholar as a “Man of Reason” (Lloyd, 1984; Pearse, Hitchcock, & Keane, 2019). These imaginaries are instituted in and through the embodied, discursive, habitual acts of institutional actors, such as harsh adversarial tones in academic debates, or the common practice of male academics exclusively citing other men. The inflated value and salience these imaginaries invest in some bodies and voices become further engrained in material arrangements and spaces, such as male-dominated curricula or a lack of monuments on campus commemorating the achievements of non-white, non-male actors (Churcher, 2022b). To the extent that social imaginaries structure patterns of meaning that are perpetually mobilised, enacted, and supported by institutional materialities and actors means that established arrangements are likely to appear as given; as “just the way things are rather than as a result of the iteration of conventions” (Gatens, 1998, p. 3)—and as capable of having been otherwise. It is often said, for instance, that philosophy *just is* combative; that male scientists *just are* more daring, pioneering, and brilliant. These and other such comments attest to the power of materially embedded and embodied imaginaries to make those things which are constructed and contingent appear natural and universal.

Progressive institutional imaginaries that fail to be accompanied by substantive shifts in the infrastructures, procedures, practices, and postures in which these imaginaries are embedded can readily give rise to feelings of confusion, resentment, disenchantment, frustration, and betrayal among those

who are encouraged to affectively invest in the institution and its guiding values, yet who continue to be disadvantaged within it. By contrast, for privileged social subjects, core social institutions in late liberal societies provide a safe and comfortable dwelling place. White bodies, for example, usually do not get highly stressed while navigating institutional space. The absence of trouble, obstacles, and constraints overall characterises white modes of being in an institution (Ahmed, 2007, p. 156). Not getting stressed is one of many affective markers of privilege vis-à-vis an institution and is reflective of the conjoined influence of materialities, imaginaries, and relational dynamics working in one's favour. Among those who tend to be advantaged by, and who sit comfortably within, institutional arrangements, evocative imaginaries can perform effective work in eliciting investments of faith and trust in institutional orders. Against this backdrop, complaints against those actors and institutions, and calls for institutional reform or abolition, are likely to attract strong, visceral reactions of puzzlement, anger, resentment, and defensiveness (see Dilger & Warstat, 2023, this volume; Stumpfögger, Müller, Tran, & Willamowski, 2023, this volume). Such reactions serve, in many instances, to stymie further action from being taken.

When the interplay of institutional imaginaries, materialities, and differently positioned actors in the creation of institutional affect is left out of consideration, scholarship on institutions misses a great deal about the mechanisms that condition exclusion and inclusion, and about the persistence and inertia of institutional routines that perpetuate inequalities of power and privilege.

Institutions and Their “Many Lives”: A Critical Outlook

The framework of institutional affect developed here can help to unpack the many elements that converge to produce affective formations in institutional settings. What our framework suggests is that atmospheres, moods, and other affective phenomena are produced and sustained by a large assembly of spaces and materials; actors and orientations, dispositions and practices; as well as the images, narratives, and other significations that make up institutional imaginaries. Whilst the three modes of institutional affect we have highlighted in this chapter, namely, materialities, actors, and imaginaries, overlap and are deeply entangled, each on its own provides a useful access point to analyse affective dynamics that permeate institutional life.

Attending to institutional specificity is central to the study of institutional affect. The affective arrangements that have emerged in particular institutions vary historically and contextually (see Churcher, 2023, this volume). Among other things, this variance is reflected in the guiding ideas of institutions and the material elements that prop them up. It is also reflected in the comportment of institutional actors: their emotion repertoires, their affective displays, and their capacities for emotional reflexivity. Accordingly, the study of institutional affect requires local expertise and the willingness of researchers to immerse themselves

in institutional life for long periods. Many of the chapters collected in this volume provide examples of this kind of immersive scholarship.

Besides the emphasis on affective arrangements and their pervasiveness in institutions, our approach foregrounds plurality among institutional actors. The background, social status, lived experiences, and skill sets of such actors are among those things that will bear on their experience of institutional life, as will their positioning and endowment within the institution. Some actors will be more powerful, privileged, and better endowed within and by the institution than others; some will get access to resources more readily and be better served by the institution than others. Accordingly, one's *being in* the institution will vary according to one's positionality. Differences in status, prestige, and power will be tied to specific and often contrasting affective experiences. It is easy for some people, especially privileged actors, to overlook or underestimate this internal plurality; yet the same building, the same office, the same consultation room, courtroom, or classroom can give rise to disparate lived realities. Our approach gives pride of place to multi-perspectivity; to the many lives of institutions as lived by differently situated actors.

It is crucial to accommodate this plurality analytically. This can be done by following differently positioned actors on their course through the institution, and by comparing their daily routines, practices, and affective lives against the official self-image and guiding ideas showcased by the institution in question. Doing so requires attention to detail and the readiness to listen to marginal actors; to be attuned to both what is said and what is done but also to what might remain unsaid due to fear of sanctions, shame, or embarrassment. It is also advisable for scholars to focus on ongoing conflicts over institutional rules and practices. Where unease emerges, where actors clash, where tensions surface, the study of institutional affect finds valuable entry points. To conclude, we hint at some of the ways in which institutional actors can intervene critically in the affective arrangements that prevail in institutional environments. The anxiety and alienation that many actors tend to experience in institutions that have not evolved to serve them can lead to withdrawal and retreat; but when worked through, such affects may also provide a critical source of epistemic insight and practical motivation to enact change.

Affect itself can be a tool for instigating change. Affective performances and displays that refuse dominant institutional norms and logics—for example, showing disaffection where affection is expected; expressing anger where polite deference is the norm; and so on—can perform powerful work in “breaking frame” and placing habituated practices under scrutiny (Ahmed, 2017; Berlant, 2022; Yao, 2021). A detachment from hegemonic orders of feeling might even take the form of individual acts of “targeted alienation”, whereby individuals effect an estrangement from cherished humanistic ideals which enable many institutions to maintain exploitative work structures (see Kohpeiß, 2023, this volume). Yet because such forms of embodied, practical resistance are not open to many individual actors without significant consequence and penalty, institutional

counter-affectivities must often be practised collectively. Insurgent institutional actors get together to create sheltering niches beyond the reach of institutional oversight. In these interstitial spaces, these actors cultivate oppositional sentiments that anticipate and lay the ground for alternative institutional orders to emerge; orders that are more inclusive, just, and more liveable. At the same time, counter-affectivities require just as much scrutiny as institutional affect, because they are also cultivated and harnessed by anti-democratic and anti-liberal movements (see Jessen, Kählert, & Lörke, 2023, this volume).

Performative efforts to defy institutional norms and “break frame” can also take place through subverting established material arrangements. The affective technique of “glitching” arrangements that embed patriarchal, racist, and other pernicious logics has the capacity to generate surprise, dissonance, irritation, and other affects that can prompt incumbent actors to critically reflect on the specificity and contingency of established norms and practices (see Gorke & Rocktäschel, 2023, this volume). Interventions targeting the materialities that enable and scaffold institutional life might include the deliberate manipulation of infrastructures, the evasion of surveillance, or the construction of alternative material arrangements and infrastructures that bypass and short-circuit institutional restrictions (Anand, 2011; Simone, 2004; von Schnitzler, 2013). Other interventions can directly target institutional imaginaries through mobilising counter-imaginaries that subvert the meaning of dominant symbols and catch-phrases and which create moments of humorous relief or productive ambivalence. Such imaginaries furnish actors with a new stock of images and narratives around which to orient themselves and which work to channel collective affects and desires in new directions. Often, new imaginary representations do not need to be invented *ex nihilo* but can draw on already existing insurrectionary imaginaries (Hush, 2019, p. 145; Medina, 2012). Direct challenges to dominant imaginaries come in the form of centring and instituting the counter-images, narratives, metaphors, and other imaginary significations that have been developed by marginalised groups. These counter-significations carry and honour the histories, experiences, values, and attachments of these groups, and may work to subvert dominant plot lines, forms, and genres (Glissant, 1990; hooks, 1989; McKittrick, 2021; Wynter, 1971; see Churcher, 2023, this volume; Lehmann, 2023, this volume; Maatz et al., 2023, this volume).

These different forms of critical engagement can come together when actors attempt to take over parts of an established institutional framework or even begin to build alternative institutions. This is the case, for example, when actors salvage the opportunities that social media affords them to produce their own “para-journalistic” content, contributing to what amounts to an increasingly powerful alternative to legacy news outlets (see Lünenborg & Medeiros, 2023, this volume). Similar developments, in various stages of maturity and with different degrees of success, can be observed in the sphere of art (Gorke & Rocktäschel, 2023, this volume), in education, and in the field of healthcare and well-being (see Stumpfögger et al., 2023, this volume).

Powerful actors already deploy institutional affect to advance their goals and purposes (see Ameling et al., 2023, this volume). When less powerful actors gain greater insight into the many parallel lives of institutions, their capacity to resist the world-shaping powers and affective allure of dominant institutions may grow. This might contribute to creating a more equal playing field. Marginalised actors might feel encouraged to take their affective responses to institutional arrangements more seriously, reflect on them and their needs, and experiment with their own innovations in the institutional landscape. It is a key purpose of this volume to foster such awareness and to help kindle and direct these creative energies, especially on part of actors and addressees of institutions whose legitimate claims and interests have been neglected before.

Volume Outline and Introduction to Chapters

The contributions to this volume build on and deepen previous scholarship by developing a perspective on institutional affect as dynamic phenomena situated within and modulated by institutional arrangements. They offer a fuller understanding of the myriad ways in which institutions engender, frame, encase and condition affective dynamics, affective interactions, and repertoires of emotion, which still too often are unexamined. This volume considers how a focus on affect and emotion can shed light on a great diversity of dynamics and operations in contemporary institutional life—only some of which figure in conventional accounts of institutions. Firmly grounded in interdisciplinary social theory on affect and emotion, the contributors bring their expertise in this area to bear on various dimensions of contemporary institutional life and cover a wide range of topics and empirical fields, for example, the academy, education, theatre, psychosocial care, charismatic leadership, botany, literature, and journalism. In this regard, many of the contributions provide a springboard for critical comparisons of localised affective dynamics within particular institutional contexts.

To do justice to the broad range of institutions and organisations that figure in contemporary social life, and also to cover the breadth and variety of affect and emotion at play in institutional settings, this volume has had to cover a lot of ground. To manage this material, we have organised the chapter contributions into four groups that each address a complex of subtopics clustered around a common guiding theme.

Part I—Politics, Publics, and Corporate Power

The first thematic part sets the stage for the volume by addressing several key institutions that are situated at different positions on the same institutional spectrum. Capitalist corporations, citizenship, authoritarian statehood, and journalism differ markedly from one another, yet their practices of affective governance reveal striking commonalities. All the chapters in Part I focus on how these institutions actively produce and modulate affectivity as part of their design and maintenance.

Some of the chapters invoke the notion of an “affective institution”, for example, by showing that a legally codified institution such as citizenship has an affective “shadow” that crucially conditions belonging in modern nation-states (Ayata, 2023, this volume), or by making the case that affect and emotion are an integral but routinely disavowed aspect of journalism (Lünenborg & Medeiros, 2023, this volume). Relatedly, the chapters in Part I point to a number of affective practices that are deployed by institutional actors, some of which have become central ingredients in the toolbox of contemporary affective politics.

Part I begins with a chapter that shows how corporations actively seek to fabricate emotional orientations and affective skills among their members. “Fabricated Feelings: Institutions, Organizations, and Emotion Repertoires” (Chapter 2) by sociologists Sigward Neckel and Elgen Sauerborn elucidates the concept of an emotion repertoire, defined as a shared set of affective and emotional dispositions pertaining to a collective of actors. Neckel and Sauerborn use the example of corporate mindfulness programs to explore how emotion repertoires have become the target of focused interventions in corporate governance.

Chapter 3 by political theorist Bilgin Ayata expounds the notion of “affective citizenship”. This chapter sketches the informal dimensions of modern citizenship policies centred on demands for particular feelings and desires that signal allegiance to the nation-state. A paradigmatic instance of a shadow institution, affective citizenship captures the differential regime of belonging that sorts individuals into legitimate citizens entitled to the full privileges of citizenship, and mere “technical” citizens whose belonging to the political community is perpetually questioned. Whilst the concept spotlights affective techniques of political exclusion and inclusion and informal modes of “governing by affect”, Ayata also shows that “affective citizenship” offers potential for a richer understanding of political recognition and belonging that takes stock of the embeddedness of actors in a complex nexus of cultural practices and social bonds.

Chapter 4, “Nationalism, affective recruitment, and authoritarianism in post-coup Turkey”, brings the framework of institutional affect developed in this Introduction to bear on the affective practice of authoritarianism in contemporary Turkey. Political theorists Ricarda Ameling, bahar firat, and Cilja Harders analyse exemplary speeches and political rallies by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose public performances craft an imaginary of the New Turkey within a schema of the nation (“millet”) modelled as a historically grounded religious community. The authoritarian nation-state with its fabricated mythical core gets expounded as a paradigmatic affective institution, with the authoritarian leader assuming the role of institutional entrepreneur. The authors elucidate the process of affective recruitment, the meticulously performed attempts by charismatic leaders to win the hearts of their followers with the help of a powerful imaginary of their “chosen” nation as an affective community. The text provides striking insights into the 21st century playbook of affective nationalism.

In Chapter 5, “Under Pressure: Journalism as an Affective Institution”, communication scholars Margreth Lünenborg and Débora Medeiros outline the extent to which journalism has always relied on affect and emotion, despite its proclaimed ethos of neutrality, detachment, and fact-based objectivity. Drawing on discursive institutionalism, the authors analyse the practices and rituals that have historically established the standardised emotive pitch of mainstream news formats. Against this backdrop, they study the challenges that legacy media face in times of a rapidly evolving social media landscape. Under the label “parajournalism”, the authors analyse new media actors whose formats, styles, and modes of audience involvement have begun to transform the way people engage with the news. Not surprisingly, carefully arranged displays of affect and emotion are front and centre in these new media practices.

Part II—Bodies, Materialities, and Infrastructure

Chapters in Part II grapple with big questions, such as what does it feel like to be a body marked as female in an academic space hostile to this embodiment (see Churcher, 2023, this volume)? Can institutions discipline sensory registers and what does this mean for our understanding of institutional affect (see Calkins & Ertl, 2023, this volume)? How does digitalisation change affective and emotional dynamics in state institution (see Zenker et al., 2023, this volume)? What holds these chapters together is a concern with materiality and tangibility. Each emphasises that functioning institutions rely on materials of various kinds—be they bodies, buildings, or infrastructures that support their everyday workings. But bodies with their embodiments, buildings with their rigid structures, and infrastructures with their standards and settings all underscore a core problem with institutional materialities: stabilising and investing in them means forfeiting other options; other ways of being, organising, and working. Once established, materialities develop some recalcitrance against efforts to change them and are valuable props in support of institutional durability. Institutional materialities, such as the embodied and refined sensory registers of botanists (see Chapter 7), the spatial arrangements of universities (Chapter 8), or the particular settings of IT infrastructures (Chapter 6), are usually taken for granted and are largely invisible in everyday practices. Yet when outdated infrastructures require technical updating, this can have consequences stemming beyond the neutral and technical (see Chapter 6). For marginal actors more frequently, the intransigence and recalcitrance of institutional materialities can provoke affective responses and explicit desires for institutional reform.

Part II begins with an ethnographic chapter that takes readers deep into a process of infrastructural overhaul at a German institution—the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Chapter 6, “Digital Infrastructuring as Institutional Affect(ing) in German Migration Management”, by social and cultural anthropologists Olaz Zenker, Timm Sureau, and Thomas Götzelmann details the laborious efforts of implementing a new digital infrastructure that should facilitate the management of

applications related to migration and integration, the federal agency has outsourced parts of this labour to private IT companies that work according to logics and sentiments of efficiency. Adding this new infrastructural layer creates tensions that reach far beyond the purely technical sphere of IT programming and its troubles: digital infrastructuring creates clashes with what the authors identify as the regnant “bureaucratic sentiment” in this institution, namely, an emotional attachment to law as the ultimate source of legitimacy for managing migration processes.

Chapter 7, “Botanical discipline: The senses and more-than-human affect” by Sandra Calkins and Cornelia Ertl is an ethnographic exploration of everyday work routines at a scientific institution, namely, the Berlin Botanical Gardens and Museum. It contributes to discussions of institutional affect by considering how this institution and the epistemic culture of botany discipline the embodied sensory registers of botanists and gardeners who work intimately with plants. Bodies and their capacities here are shaped and refined in line with institutional criteria, but Calkins and Ertl argue this is not a sphere of complete control—not least due to affective dynamics that unfold between plants and people. The botanically disciplined senses of both botanists and gardeners are particularly sensitive and attuned to the wonders of plant life and can be seduced to contribute to subverting institutional discipline.

Philosopher Millicent Churcher’s “Conflicting Imaginaries in the International Academy” (Chapter 8) moves the discussion to imaginaries and affects that materialise in higher education. While discourses of equity and diversity circulate globally, in many institutions—such as the European and Australian universities under consideration here—they have not significantly changed the circumstances of many actors without access to institutional privilege or power. This chapter foregrounds tensions between competing materially embedded imaginaries in higher education and traces their unequal affective consequences. Through a close examination of conflicting imaginaries and affect in academia, this chapter addresses the question why transnational movements to reform the academy have been stalling in their efforts to create a more diverse and equitable university. Churcher argues that the imaginary itself then must become the focal point of institution reform and of making material differences for institutional actors.

Part III—Forms, Genres, and Aesthetics

The field of aesthetics, broadly construed, has immense significance for the institutional landscape of modern societies. Art institutions such as theatres, museums, galleries, and art schools occupy and shape this landscape, alongside institutional actors such as artists and art facilitators, commentators, and critics. But more central still is the role of aesthetic forms, genres, and styles in evoking, carrying, and enriching social imaginaries: socially engrained modes of perception, standards of taste and judgement, patterns of meaning-making, repertoires of forms, and aesthetic practices that all contribute to the symbolic structure of society and its complex articulation throughout the field of consolidated institutions.

From the perspective of our volume, these aesthetic forms and styles play a key role in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of institutional procedures through channelling institutional affect. The chapters contained within Part III of this volume address the interplay of aesthetic mediums and genres with the material infrastructures, procedures, and practices that characterise art institutions. All of these chapters focus particularly on the transformative power of aesthetics in the context of wider political struggles over issues such as belonging, representation, and recognition.

Chapter 9, “Genres as Imaginary Institutions”, by film scholar Hauke Lehmann sets the stage by providing an affect-theoretic elucidation of the concept of genre, in the context of Cornelius Castoriadis’ understanding of the imaginary institution of society. Film genres are studied as exemplary instances of imaginary institutions: modes of sense-making that help to establish a sense of commonality. Lehmann unpacks the complexity at work in this idea, focusing on the affective dramaturgy of films: orchestrated patterns of affective intensity that are taken up in acts of film-viewing on the part of active spectators. What Castoriadis refers to as “modes of coexistence” is fleshed out in detail by Lehmann as the aesthetic organisation of the world that genre films help to institute, offering dynamic spaces of experience as docking sites for spectators. Lehmann highlights the potential of genre films to create communities of taste either in line with, or in opposition to, prevailing social norms. In showing how such a dynamic, creative concept of genre is central to the aesthetic and imaginary dimension of social institutions, the text offers a hopeful message about the possibility of institutional transformation.

Chapter 10 continues the discussion of genre, focusing on the literary field. In “Rewriting Education: Genre and Affects of Social Mobility in Contemporary German Literature”, Germanic literature scholars Sara Maatz, Matthias Lüthjohann, and Anne Fleig explore a cluster of issues at the intersection of literary forms, educational institutions, and contemporary regimes of migration. This chapter discusses two recent literary texts that reflect the affective lives of German educational institutions, especially the tension between exclusion and inclusion in the guiding idea of *Bildung* (education) that underpins the German educational system. Under the heading “writing education”, the authors chart the emergence of the genre of autosociobiography and find in it resources for intervening in the dominant imaginary of educational institutions that have a poor track record of providing equal education in postmigrant Germany.

In Chapter 11, “Right Reading: Affective Institutionalisation and the Politics of Literature in the German New Right”, literary scholars Gesa Jessen, Matthias Kählert, and Tim Lörke offer a rare study of the cultural politics of the New Right in Germany. Focusing on a think tank and an associated publishing house, the authors chart attempts by actors from the New Right to set up counter-institutions opposing an alleged left-leaning hegemony of state-backed cultural institutions. This chapter provides insights into affective institution-building in the field of literature, with a focus on reading and canon formation.

With these efforts, a self-declared “cultural avantgarde” of the German New Right aspires to shift the parameters of mainstream culture in the hope to emulate what actors on the left managed to do in “marching through the institutions” (*Marsch durch die Institutionen*) after 1968.

Chapter 12 “Glitching as Institutional Critique” by theatre scholars Juliane Gorke and Karina Rocktäschel takes up the tradition of art-based institutional critique in a contemporary feminist vein. The text discusses two recent theatre productions as examples of aesthetic interventions into the institutional landscape of German theatre. The authors present both their case studies as instances of feminist “glitching” that deliberately distort the established arrangements of theatre performances. Such glitches are irritations that can break frames, frustrate expectations, and disrupt habitual modes of art reception. The hope is that such glitching can afford opportunities to rethink and ultimately reconfigure institutions that have become stuck in suffocating routines and exclusionary practices. Blocking the flow of institutional routine while pushing the institution forward in different ways is here presented as an affective intervention in the aesthetic sphere and beyond.

Part IV—Diversity, Care, and Critique

The chapters collected in the final part of the volume are united by a deep concern with affective dynamics that are bound up with processes of institutional transformation and resistance. Closely focused on institutional structures in the German context, each contribution exemplifies a commitment to a detailed, localised analysis of institutional affect and its power to galvanise or hinder structural change.

The first two chapters offer an insight into what happens (or, rather, what fails to happen) on the ground when established institutions are the target of diversification efforts, and when institutional actors attempt to render institutional norms and practices more responsive to racial, ethnic, and other important forms of difference. In “Affective Diversity: Conceptualizing Institutional Change in Postmigrant Societies” (Chapter 13), social and cultural anthropologist Hansjörg Dilger and theatre scholar Matthias Warstat develop the concept of “affective diversity” to analyse struggles over institutional reform in postmigrant societies, with particular reference to state-subsidised theatre and interreligious networks in urban Germany. Noting that these struggles take place against the backdrop of long-standing aspirations among European nation-states towards cultural homogeneity, Dilger and Warstat document how entrenched attachments to existing conservative structures make challenges to such structures ripe for generating “affective friction”. As both authors note, friction connotes chafing and inertia but also momentum and so is well placed to spotlight the complex of affects that present obstacles as well as opportunities for substantive institutional change.

“Working through Affects: Transforming and Challenging Psychosocial Care for Vietnamese Migrants” (Chapter 14) continues this focus on affective friction

in the context of German psychosocial carescapes. Nora Stumpfögger, Max Müller, Thi Quynh-Nhu Tran, and Edda Willamowski—an interdisciplinary team composed of anthropologists and psychologists draw on their personal and professional experience in this context to provide critical, first-hand insight into the ways in which psychosocial care in Germany fails to include the voices and expertise of Vietnamese migrant communities and to serve their particular needs. The authors develop the concept of “working through affects” to highlight the importance of recognising and negotiating tensions and irritations stemming from institutional marginalisation and positional differences. In a practical vein, their chapter opens up a discussion of how to create institutional spaces and change institutional structures in ways that would allow for such affects to be channelled towards the development of culturally sensitive approaches to psychosocial care.

Whilst the first two chapters are largely focused on how to change and improve institutions from within, the final chapter in this volume by philosopher Henrike Kohpeiß—“Targeted Alienation: Reimagining the Labour of Abolition” (Chapter 15)—reflects on the project of institutional sabotage. Taking the public school system in Germany as her focal point, Kohpeiß interrogates how educators maintain dysfunctional and exploitative work structures through their labour, which, for Kohpeiß, includes the labour of institutional critique. To avoid the continued exploitation of one’s labour, Kohpeiß argues that what needs to be abolished is the self that affectively invests in the school and its guiding ideas. For this last, Kohpeiß enjoins educators to do something that many are likely to find counterintuitive: to become more like the extractive institution they represent through refusing its humanistic ideals and refusing to continually compensate for its flaws. It is this strategy of “targeted alienation” that Kohpeiß finds most promising for abolitionist praxis.

To wrap up the volume, Spinoza scholar Moira Gatens takes a look back at her seminal work on embodiment, power, and institutions, and offers some forward-looking reflections on institutional affect.

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