

The social potency of affect: Identification and power in the immanent structuring of practice

Mark Thompson and Hugh Willmott

Abstract

We address the centrality of affect in structuring social practices, including those of organizing and managing. Social practices, it is argued, are contingent upon actors' affectively charged involvement in immanent, yet indeterminate social relations. To understand this generative involvement, we commend a temporally-sensitive, critically-oriented theoretical framework, grounded in an affect-based ontology of practice. We demonstrate the relevance and credibility of this proposal through an analysis of the interactions of Board members in a UK consulting company.

Keywords

Affect, conflict, emotion in organisations, identity, motivation, ontology, organisational theory, practice

Introduction

The significance of affect, including emotion, is rarely registered or appreciated in practice-theoretic analyses of the social world (e.g. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Where practice is acknowledged to be affectively charged (e.g. Lok and de Rond, 2013), the possibility that 'affect affects' practices is 'seen but unnoticed' (Garfinkel, 1967). Affect is pervasive, yet it remains largely unthematized in social and organizational analysis. In this paper, we seek to demonstrate and draw out the critical and empirical implications of paying direct attention to affect in accounting for the social structuring of practice(s). We are especially interested in

the unfolding relationship between affect and the ‘basic grammar(s) within which possible objects are constituted’, and which ‘mediates any kind of contact with reality’ (Bhaskar and Laclau, 1998: 9). This grammar, which Laclau also terms ‘discourse’, is conceived to be ‘largely unconscious...so the task of the discourse analyst is to explore the immanent grammars which underlie all kinds of meaningful intervention’ (Laclau, 1998: 9).

Specifically, we seek to disclose the *affectively-driven* operation of ‘unconscious... immanent grammars’, or discourses – such as those enacted by directors of an IT consultancy that we analyse later. In addressing affect’s significance in the (re)production of mundane organizational work, we engage an analytical framework developed by the ‘Essex school’ of discourse analysis. Initiated by Laclau (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), the Essex school is distinguishable from other schools of discourse analysis in its (postfoundationalist) conception of the ‘structural undecidability’ (Laclau, 1995: 93) of the social. In this view, ‘ontic’ social relations and schemas which may appear superficially settled and permanent are actually constituted provisionally, and moment by moment, from their unfolding relationship with the ‘ontological’: an invisible but limitless ‘open universe’ of possibility comprised of ‘immanent grammars’. A major research challenge associated with this approach is to disclose how this ‘ontological’ register is significant in shaping the ‘ontic’ register – an analytic challenge that faces all social scientific research endeavours which presume the influence and significance of invisible ‘structures’ (e.g. social and psychoanalytical) upon empirically observable ‘actions’.

Our analysis deploys Glynos and Howarth’s (2007, 2008) *Logics of critical explanation* (hereafter *Logics*) in which the ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological’ registers are juxtaposed dialectically (Laclau, 2000: 58). Our study thus adds to a nascent body of work in which *Logics* has informed empirical analysis (e.g. Wagenaar, 2011; West, 2011; Glynos, Klimecki and Willmott, 2012; in press; Glynos, Speed and West, 2014). The *Logics* framework facilitates

consideration of what may be happening in each of these registers, and guides analysis of the possible socially generative relationship between the two: a relationship which animates Laclau's 'structural undecidability'. At the heart of the ontological-ontic dialectic is actors' ongoing affective identification with practices, and their associated behaviour in reproducing, defending, or challenging these, which constitutes this undecidable 'trace of contingency within the structure' (Laclau, 1993: 535). For researchers who reject the assumptions of empirical realism but do not subscribe to some version of critical realism, attending to this 'trace' of ontological contingency is an important analytical undertaking. While the various ontic manifestations of power, for example, are more or less identifiable to the researcher (Lukes, 1974), their ontological contingency is, at best, only partially acknowledged; social configurations thus may appear more self-evident and stable than really they are.

An affect-based ontology of practice, guided by a Laclauian framework, is directly attentive to the presence and significance of the underlying ontological contingency of power relations. The framework shows how social relations are immanently conditioned by actors' affective states and associated identifications and dis-identifications – and thus attends to the mutually constitutive, and analytically revealing, relationship between affect and power in organisational practice. In the following section of the paper, we locate our analysis primarily within practice-based studies and research on affect. Next, we outline the *Logics* approach (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, 2008) in which an affective ontology is combined with an attentiveness to unfolding power relations in organisational practice. Notably, the framework incorporates psychoanalytic insights to disclose the potency of affectively-charged fantasies in the animation of social practices. In the third section, we illustrate and elaborate this insight through an analysis of two episodes drawn from a study of Board interactions in an IT consulting firm, *Associates*. We conclude that an affect-based ontology of practice holds potentially radical implications for social/organizational theoretical

development. Most broadly, it highlights shortcomings in forms of social and organizational analysis that are solely attentive to the *ontic* register. We will show instead how a central focus on the generative tension between *ontic and ontological* registers allows researchers to better appreciate and address the socially productive significance of the ‘politics of affect’.

Locating and orienting our research

The literature addressing aspects of affect is extensive, so we rely here upon a number of recent reviews, the most salient of which, for our purposes, are Brief and Weiss (2002); Fineman (1993); Elfenbein (2007); Schmidt and Gibson (2010); Simpson and Marshall (2010); and Voronov and Vince (2012). The assessment is that, as a consequence of the dominance of variants of rationalism, affect has generally tended to be marginalized in social scientific analysis, including management and organization studies (for recent discussions, see Collins and Munro, 2010; Hynes, 2013). In this inauspicious context, the challenge is to appreciate how, as Barbalet (2001: 187, emphasis added) puts it, with regard to the study of emotion as a form of affect,

Emotion, as movement, is in that sense both external to the subject who experiences it and integral to their being as a consequence of their being moved by the feeling.

Emotion has a source outside of the self in its relations with others and is internally experienced as a function of active being. It is through the subject's active exchanges with others, through interaction, that emotional experience is both stimulated in the actor and orientating of their conduct.

Our approach to the study of affect is consistent with Barbalet's conception of emotion as ‘movement’ that is experienced by actors as ‘a function of active being’ but is stimulated by ‘relations with others’ and, crucially, is ‘orienting of their conduct’. Accordingly, it is appropriate to locate our study of affect within approaches that comprise the ‘practice turn’

(for reviews, see Corradi et al. 2008; Nicolini (2012); see also Gherardi, 2009; Jansson, 2013; King, 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Briefly, we distinguish core contributions to the practice canon by reference to their central commitment: first, to a process-based ontology of continual ‘becoming’ (Thompson, 2011; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002); and second, to an epistemology that, by addressing the evolving accountability of practice (Rouse, 2001), attends to how behaviours, actions, and understandings of social acceptability (and thus contestability) are context-driven and become intelligible to selves and others ‘in flight’. As noted by Wetherell and others (e.g. Stenner, 2009; Walkerdine, 2009), practice ‘offers the best, bare bones, synthesising rubric for research on affect’ (Wetherell, 2012: 11), where ‘analyses of affective practices...will take as their subject how these practices are situated and connected’ (Wetherell, 2012: 13). As we shall show, our intersubjective (rather than subjective) conception of affect is similarly intertwined and relational, and so invites a view of practice as a medium and outcome of relations of *power*.

The focus of our study is upon an ‘immanent logic of practice’ (Chia and MacKay, 2007: 219, italics omitted) whereby ‘unconscious social forces shape and direct human intentions and actions’ (Chia and MacKay, 2007: 232). This conception of practice owes much to the immanence of Heidegger’s *Dasein* (which includes affective disposition as a core component) in attending to how, unconsciously, ‘cultural transmissions, socialization, institutionalization, disciplinary regimes, etc., play a crucial role in shaping an actor’s *modus operandi*’ (Chia and MacKay, 2007: 232, original italics). We depart, however, from Chia and Mackay (2001) in our focus on the ‘psychosocial texture’ (Wetherell, 2012: 2) of this immanent logic, entailing a more encompassing conception of affect as ‘a philosophy of force, becoming, potential, encounter and difference’ that has ‘influence, intensity and impact’ (Wetherell, 2012: 3), where affect is defined as ‘embodied meaning-making’ (Wetherell, 2012: 4). Our study is also distinguishable from ‘psychological’ approaches to

affect, in which affective states (specific moods and emotions) tend to be abstracted from their social context.

In focusing on the psychosocial texture of this immanent logic of practice, our study has much in common with research located within the NW quadrant of Sieben and Wettergren's (2010) 'mapping' of affect studies. This quadrant combines the critical, post-functional aim of *politicising*, rather than maintaining, existing relations, with a *local/emergent* approach that seeks to surface and illuminate dynamics of practice without being methodologically preoccupied with replicability or generalizability. The overriding concern of scholarship in this quadrant is with exploring the linkages between the 'power-knowledge connection' and the 'embodiment' of emotion (Sieben, 2007: 572).

Logics as a conceptual framework

Social, political, and fantasmatic logics

In addressing the tricky issue of researching and conveying the social situatedness of others' affective states - a challenge which is perhaps most obvious in the study of 'atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009) - we deploy Glynos and Howarth's (2008) *Logics* framework. In *Logics*, a focus on discourse, in the ontic register, is combined with a (Lacanian) attentiveness to affective dynamics in the ontological register (Fotaki et al., 2012; see also Žižek, 1989; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Cederström and Spicer, 2013). Consistent with an affect-based ontology, Glynos and Howarth argue that the reproduction or transformation of social practices arises from the operation of three interweaving *logics*: social, political and fantasmatic.

Social logics rationalize and reproduce the status quo. *Political logics*, in contrast, operate to establish new practices as well as to transform practices in the face of the naturalizing effects of prevailing social logics. Most importantly for our analysis, *fantasmatic*

logics provide the motivational force for processes of reproduction and transformation through affective identification with, and investment in, particular grammars/discourse. In supplying the psychosocial texture animating actors' affective motivations, fantasmatic logics frame and mediate actors' identification, and resulting mode (or immanent logic) of engagement, with unfolding practice.

Fantasmatic logics mediate actors' mode of engagement

Unlike other framings of affective self-identification, such as those devised by Bourdieu (e.g. 1977) and Giddens (e.g. 1984), the *Logics* framework's affect-based ontology of practice (see Kemp, 2010; Thompson, 2012) accords central importance to the operation of this third, fantasmatic, logic. This approach involves a shift from examining specific (ontic) 'practices' towards a focal attentiveness to actors' (ontological) *mode of engagement*: how actors reproduce or challenge social relations as they become affectively invested in, or distanced from, those relations (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008).

In theorising the mode of engagement, Glynos and Howarth (2007) adopt a Lacanian view of fantasmatic logics as deriving from libidinally *felt* motivation directed towards *jouissance*: a form of enjoyment-in-anticipation, the object of which can never be obtained: 'jouissance does not exist, it is impossible, but it produces a number of traumatic effects' (Žižek, 1989: 164). These 'effects' manifest via fantasy: actors' subscription to identifications that 'paper over' the contingency of social life (Lok and Willmott, 2013), and distract/compensate for the (traumatic) unattainability of *jouissance*. In short, in accounting for the 'grip' of identity on the 'vector' of possible identifications (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008: 11; see also Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008) fantasy mediates between affective motivation and socio-political reality, via the mode of engagement (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008: 8; see also Frosh, 2002). Subjects' willingness to conform with ideologies and

identities with which they are confronted is understood to depend on the extent to which *jouissance* associated with fantasies encourages them to disregard their underlying contingency/unattainability. To the extent that this occurs, ‘domination...differs from [mere] authority and oppression in that agents are complicit in their acceptance of structures and practices that from the critic’s point of view can be judged illegitimate or unjust’ (Glynos, 2010: 323) – leading potentially to self-exploitation (e.g. Costas and Fleming, 2009).

Using dimensions of the Logics to study psychosocial configurations

Drawing together the discussion of *Logics*, the horizontal dimension in Figure 1 is concerned with how ‘fantasmatic dynamics’ mediate ‘*ethical and ideological forms of subjectivity*’ (Ekman, 2013: 1161, original italics), and the vertical dimension addresses the social ‘consequences’ of this unfolding process in terms of maintaining and/or transforming social practices. Taking each in turn, the horizontal (‘naturalization’) axis addresses the differential ways in which actors experience and address contingency: ‘the ideological logic involves a subject struggling with competing hyper-intense fantasies, whereas the ethical logic involves a subject struggling with her or his tendency to fantasize at all’ (Glynos, 2008: 291, in Ekman, 2013: 1165) because s/he recognises the underlying contingency/contestability of these identifications, and thus resists ‘buying in’ to them.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Turning to the vertical (‘contestation’) axis, at the ‘social’ pole, practices are reproduced with the minimum of contestation. At the ‘political’ pole however, practices are in the process of being instituted or challenged. As will become evident, the strongest affinities are between the ethical-political (disinvestment-challenge) poles, and also between

the ideological-social (investment-acquiescence) poles. Of direct relevance for analysis that has an emancipatory intent, as exemplified by *Logics*, the ethical pole underscores the ontological contingency of local (ontic) practices that may otherwise appear ideologically self-evident or normative, and it thereby provides the conditions of possibility of critique. It particularly invites (political) consideration of forms of self-regulation, in the form of the affective vulnerabilities to which subjects become exposed through their participation in fantasmatic logics, to the extent that identify with, and thus replicate, ontic practices.

Applying the logics

Having the benefit of, but also departing from, previous attempts to operationalize the *Logics* framework (e.g. Clarke, 2011; Ekman, 2013; Holtzman, 2013), we now demonstrate its relevance for the empirical study of affect in the social structuring of practice. Consideration of the naturalization and contestation dimensions together can, we will suggest, illuminate the mediating operation of (affectively-felt) *fantasmatic logics* on both *social logics* (reproduction) and *political logics* (institution/transformation) (see Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Working round Figure 2, *subjects'* fantasmatic identifications can obscure the contingency of social life (left side of Figure 2); or, to the extent that people are less affectively invested in, and therefore less dependent upon these identifications, there is greater openness to, and awareness of, the underlying contingency/contestability of social relations (right side of Figure 2). In this regard, actors are more favourably placed to act in ways that challenge those relations, or they are *actively* quiescent in their reproduction (they don't 'buy in', but they don't challenge, either). Conversely, to the extent that subjects are

affectively invested in, and subject to, fantasmatic identifications, awareness of the contingency/contestability of normative relations of power is less likely, and so there is a greater propensity passively to reproduce those relations. Alternatively, actors may attempt to supplant established relations with another set of relations in which they are affectively invested.

Our analysis works outwards, identifying actors' (mediating) affective *fantasmatic logics* which we link to *social* and *political logics* along the two dimensions discussed above. Within our affect-based ontology of practice, the *Logics* framework facilitates analysis of how the conversations reported in fragments of our transcript presented below develop through several identifiable, if temporary, configurations of affectively-mediated *logics*.

Research context

Shared narratives at Associates: Will, Andy, and the researcher

The site of the research is a well-established mid-sized Metropolis-based consulting company which we call *Associates* (a pseudonym). At the time of the research, conducted in 2010, the company had been undergoing internal restructuring, as well as developing new propositions and capabilities in response to the post-2008 economic downturn. Will, Andy (the names are pseudonyms), and one of the authors (hereafter 'the Researcher') were all directors of the company, and had been attending Board meetings together since 2005. Notes were taken by the Researcher (who has 20 years' immersion in *Associates*) on the interactions between Will and Andy that occurred during three monthly Board meetings (August-November 2010) from which two vignettes are presented here. Due to the shared history between Will, Andy and the Researcher, the unfolding meaning for the participants of the two episodes is only partially intelligible in the present tense. That is because, as Middleton and Brown (2005: 224) note, '[t]ime does not break for us into tiny segments. Our duration is a continuous

gnawing of the past into the present where the present is infused with a burden of the past that does not pass, does not ever escape us’.

It will be argued that Will, Andy and the Researcher are all fantasmatically invested in the preservation of self-identities that have become defined, and are reaffirmed, through their interactions. Will and the Researcher had worked for the Company since its startup days. Andy, in contrast, had gained experience working in a larger consulting organization before joining *Associates* more recently. To provide additional details of Will and Andy’s backgrounds is neither morally defensible nor practically relevant as this might allow their identification. Through our analysis of the vignettes, we show how the fantasmatic logics of the actors’ respective self-investments mediated their mode of engagement, which we examine in terms of the four dimensions of social relations (Figure 1).

In order to interpret the vignettes, it is relevant to provide some background about the self-identities of the three board members. The following terms speak to Will’s self-identity in the context of *Associates*: ‘leader’, ‘considerate’, ‘straight talking’, and ‘people person’. Those central to Andy’s self-identity include ‘leader’ but also ‘ambitious’, ‘corporate’, and ‘professional’. Finally, those describing the Researcher’s self-identity include ‘mediator’, ‘analytical’, and ‘reticent’. Taken together, Andy’s self-identifications might be collectively termed ‘managerialist’, Will’s might be termed ‘empathetic’, and the Researcher’s ‘non-committal’, in the sense that he often tried to avoid identifying with what he regarded as Will’s or Andy’s generally more dominant and rigid schemas (in *Logics* terms, it could be said that the Researcher tried semi-consciously to locate himself in the SE quadrant in Figure 2). Of course, it is to be emphasised that these are attributions of self-identity made by the Researcher, albeit that they are based upon many years of experience in interacting with Will and Andy.

In the Researcher's assessment, all three directors harboured and occasionally displayed some awareness of the others' self-identifications, which appeared to have influenced the evolution of their own respective self-identities, as well as group identity over the years, in a way that is intelligible only historically and relationally. The affective politics between Will, Andy, and the Researcher, which are evident in the vignettes, had been co-created, over time, in a manner that exemplifies the progressive 'intertwining of subjectivities' between self and others as 'we observe their gestures, facial expressions, their rising and dampening of affect and then model, intuit and re-run their intentions and psychological states' (Wetherell 2012: 88). In our analysis, we attempt to 'model, intuit and re-run' this affective relationality.

Interpreting shared narratives: Collection and analysis of data

The method of data collection was covert (Goffman, 1968; Jorgensen, 1989) so as to minimise the Researcher's influence on the 'natural' unfolding of the interactions. The questionable ethics of such covert participant observation have also been selectively defended (eg. Herrera, 1999; Lugosi, 2006; Miller 2001), with some experienced ethnographers conceding that all fieldwork relationships invariably involve some covertness (e.g. Grills, 1998). In the present study, the texts and supporting analysis were subsequently shared with relevant members of *Associates*, and consent to publication obtained. Despite this consent, which could also be portrayed as member 'validation', our analysis is, inescapably, selectively attentive to the interactions comprising the episodes. It necessarily presents a perspective-dependent version of 'the truth', but one whose frame of reference we have endeavoured to make explicit.

If Adler and Adler's (1987) advice that data collection continues until one can 'act as a native', then saturation has resulted from the Researcher's extended period of immersion in the field. Such immersion is especially valuable for analysis where close familiarity with

subjects' emotional orientations is required. Specifically, and with regard to the approach advanced here, it is vital to have an in-depth and longitudinal appreciation of the affectivity of *fantasmatic logics* in relation to the *social logics* and *political logics* enacted in the research setting. In presenting our analysis, we readily acknowledge that the empirical 'evidence' underpinning our attributions exists in the ontic, rather than ontological, register, and for this reason we have separated the two registers in our analysis of the data.

Earlier we appealed to the value of 'immersion', the *cri de coeur* of all participant researchers. In our analysis, the claims we make beg the question of how researchers can access other peoples' emotions. To address this tricky issue, we refer to Sturdy's (2003) consideration of research on emotion where he contends that 'given some cultural understanding of the immediate social context, we can necessarily offer a valid or plausible interpretation of sentiments through observation'. Sturdy further argues that 'immediate and biographical history...may provide insight into the emotional context and process' (2003: 86-7). An ability to 'read' and evaluate affect in the form of others' emotions is, on this interpretation, a basic social competency for organizational practice (as demonstrated in its breach), in which working familiarity with the discursive practice through which emotions are constituted is substituted for the more traditional concern with elusive 'inner feelings'. This methodological stance resonates strongly with the view that:

The emotionality of narrative is more than the location of certain emotion words and phrases. It includes the relationship between the words, the metaphors used... and the sense of cadence, hesitation and silences detectable in the structure of the text or presentation (tape recording, video or observations). The researcher's challenge is sensitively to 'read' the emotional form and context of the text, while accentuating what is important for the particular inquiry. In doing so, the researcher is inevitably a part of

the process, drawing upon emotion discourses ‘in their head’. Such reflexivity is a feature of emotion knowing (Fineman, 2004: 733).

In this sense, the analysis and commentary provided by the Researcher below is a response to the challenge ‘sensitively to “read” the emotional form and context of the text’ while recognising that ‘the researcher is inevitably part of the process, drawing upon emotional discourse “in their head”’. The analysis is partly a ‘confessional tale’ (Van Maanen, 1988), a form of ‘[m]ethodological reflexivity, as expressed in confessional ethnography, [which] transforms the self by converting it to a new way of thinking and acting and writing – that way being the way of introspective reflection’ (Webster, 2008: 68) that is sensitive to the ‘relationships’ to which Fineman (2004) refers.

Empirical material

Two episodes from the Board meetings are presented and analysed below. Each was selected for its relatively self-contained and accessible (e.g. jargon-free) nature, and both are sufficiently brief to allow their presentation within the space limitations of a journal article. Our intention in analysing the two episodes, or vignettes, is primarily to demonstrate the social potency of affect for the structuring of social practice – in this case, the mundane practice that comprise board deliberations. To this end, we apply and demonstrate the *Logics* approach to make a case for an affect-based ontology of practice. This aim is consistent with an acknowledgment that qualitative case studies ‘typically ha[ve] more relevance to theoretical generalisation, which involves “suggesting new interpretations and concepts or re-examining earlier concepts or interpretations in new and innovative ways”’ (Orum et al., 1991: 13). In our analysis of the episodes, we aspire to attain some degree of ‘naturalistic generalisability’ (Stake, 1978), at least insofar as its aspiration is to resonate with our readers’ own sensemaking.

Engaging with the empirical material

Our analysis examines two exchanges between Will and Andy (see Episodes 1 and 2). The use of a tabular format permits the exchanges to be read vertically in the form that they occurred, as well as horizontally in dialogue with our suggested configuration of *Logics*, whilst maintaining a clear separation between the two. The left hand column sets out the exchanges as they were recorded in the Researcher's field notes. The notes comprise the exchanges as they were spoken, and emotional cues that were observed [square brackets], together with observations about 'atmospheres' that were *affectively experienced by the Researcher* (round brackets). These observations take the form of single adjectives, in brackets in the left hand column of the Table for each episode, that describe how the room *felt* to the Researcher in a way that parallels others' descriptions of affective 'atmospheres' conceived *inter alia* as 'spatially discharged, quasi-objective feelings' (Böhme, 2006: 16), 'collective affects' (Anderson, 2009: 78), or contagious affect (Thrift, 2008). These observations may be casually termed 'subjective', but consistent with the conceptual framing of this paper, they are arguably inter-subjective in their embodied sociality.

The right hand column locates our analysis within the *Logics* framework: it offers 'snapshots' of the different configurations of the three *logics* through which we argue that the dialogue passes as it unfolds (these are also marked on Figure 2 as 'Will 1', 'Andy 1', etc). Finally, the analysis that follows each Episode has been written by the Researcher, and *the narrative therefore moves into the first person where it has a more confessional style*. This analytical approach, we suggest, offers a novel and promising, affect-attentive way to explicate the dynamics of everyday practices of organizing.

INSERT EPISODE 1 HERE

Episode 1: Organizational structure

When interpreted within the *Logics* framework, the above episode is seen to move through several psychosocial articulations. In the first, '*Regard of contingency: knowing challenge (invocation of political logic)*', there is a configuration of political and ethical dimensions (recalling Figure 2) as Andy introduces the notion of stronger governance structures. This is an innovation that the Researcher believes Andy anticipates will be difficult, since it challenges the status quo (political logic). It invokes a long-standing difference, where Andy seeks more formality, and Will seeks informality. 'Company Handbook' is therefore a loaded phrase; its invocation creates a tension in the room that the Researcher believes was strongly felt by all who were present. Such a tension is intelligible as an 'intention movement' (Stern, 2004). Such movements are

not completed relational moves but mere beginnings of recognisable affective patterns. These seem like the moments preceding lightning strikes when sophisticated still photography shows threads of electrical connection beginning to manifest with the tallest objects in the field, before the strike completes the connection (Wetherell, 2012: 87).

Andy's introduction of the 'Company Handbook' [Andy 1] immediately invokes a historically-inflected, affective positioning: a specific configuration of power relations over which Andy has discursive mastery. Fantasmatically, the Researcher's everyday, operational reading of Andy is that he is invested in a more corporate self-image in which 'moral' signifiers like governance structures make him feel confident/in control, whereas Will is invested in the reverse – and the apparent bipolarity of this dynamic may be exacerbated by the Researcher's (felt and perceived) passivity. In turn, it may be that the Researcher is

invested fantasmatically in the notion of being a ‘moderate’ in relation to Will and Andy’s ‘excessive posturing’. For all three, these characterisations are historically-forged and evident in occasional tacit acknowledgements of mutual difference, and this tripartite ‘shape’ colours the way in which each board member is motivated to react, and experience the immanent structuring of their practices. When interpreted within the *Logics* framework, the motivations of each board member are seen to arise from their respective pursuit of *jouissance*: each wishes to ‘feel good’: secure, and confident, about their positioning within the tripartite dynamic that routinely impedes and subverts this possibility. Re-visiting this sequence, and the ‘tense’ note in brackets, is to reconstitute a keen relationality: a viscerally-experienced patterning of mutual insecurity: of discursive move and counter-move in which the Researcher often occupied the position of despairing bystander.

In the second articulation, *‘Regard of contingency: attempt to reproduce status quo (invocation of social logic)’*, a single sound [Will 1] from Will is sufficient to convey rich meaning to the Researcher and Andy: his noncommittal ‘Mmmmmm’ response indicates that he is listening, that Andy may have a point (i.e. that Will’s own position may be contingent) but he does not agree anyway (attempt to reproduce status quo). Fantasmatically, Will appears emotionally invested in a ‘straight-talking’ and ‘reasonable’ self-image, which pits him against Andy’s bid to position the Company Handbook as a self-evidently obvious improvement (in Will’s view, such structures are poor substitutes for ‘getting in a room and sorting things out face to face’) – motivating him to invoke a social logic (reproduction of existing relations).

All three directors are highly sensitive to topics, such as the Handbook, which are emblematic of, and so immediately trigger, an historically-embedded conflict: the psychodynamics of their/our interaction are bound up in the ‘tinderbox’ of our mutual discursive patterning. In this articulation, Will’s positioning combines social and ethical

dimensions of the *Logics*, where he is ‘ethically aware’ of Andy’s discursive move, but is reserving his position for now. Will’s ‘Mmmmmm’ indicates that he is feeling frustrated at the direction this conversation may be about to take – at the likely effect that his ‘regard of contingency’ is likely to have on Andy in a moment’s time – even as he utters the sound.

In the third articulation - *Disregard of contingency: semi-conscious identification/challenge (defence of political logic)* - Will’s noncommittal response ignites feelings of frustration and hostility in Andy (and a similarly frustrated sense of ‘been-here-before’ in the Researcher – as indicated by the margin note ‘aarrgghhh’). Andy moves to a political/ideological configuration of dimensions, since fantasmatically his self-image seems bound up with his role as professional innovator, with experience of professional best practice, gained prior to joining *Associates*, that neither Will nor the Researcher possess (whilst allowing that this may be a partial reflection of a certain insecurity on the Researcher’s part). In the terms used here, it appears to the Researcher that the notion of being professionally ‘in control’ is a source of *jouissance* for Andy. Reflection on this encounter usually reconstitutes feelings of sympathy that the Researcher felt at the time for Andy, because he often appeared less aware of these dynamics than Will. That is to say, he seemed to operate more often than Will towards the ‘ideological’ pole of the ‘naturalization’ axis – with an attendant vulnerability when the contingency of schemas with which he identified came under challenge.

The Researcher’s reading of Andy’s ‘sigh’, and related vocal tone in [Andy 2] is that he is aware of the significance of this particular skirmish both for his own self-esteem and for the deeply embedded power relations between him and Will (i.e. there is an air of resignation to some inevitability about their interaction). Recalling that Andy has mastery of this particular ‘grammar’, discursive closure around the signifiers of ‘good governance’ represented by the Handbook offers him the prospect of ontological security. However,

Andy's frustrated demeanour may betray an awareness that satisfaction of this 'lack' in the form of 'ontic closure' – turning this contingency into local reality - is contingent upon Will's ethical value-choice, as well as his own – in a manner recalling Žižek's comment, earlier, about the trauma associated with the unachievability of *jouissance*.

Will's response in the fourth articulation - *Disregard of contingency: semi-conscious identification/challenge (defence of social logic)* – appears to reinforce the precariousness of Andy's position. Will responds [Will 2] to Andy's sigh with a strained, terse tone of voice (both seem to strive to maintain neutral body language), betraying some semi-conscious awareness that there is more at stake than the subject of this particular exchange - an awareness which mirrors that of Andy, and certainly the Researcher's own (indeed, the three are relationally constituted). Will now justifies his position and makes clear why he disagrees with Andy ('ideological' and 'political' dimensions), as he shores up his persona as a 'people person'. He appeals to an alternative discursive grammar: 'that magic' (*Associates*' traditionally friendly culture), and thus the self-evidence of not 'throw(ing) the baby out with the bathwater'. As an observer who shares Will and Andy's historically-established affective patterning and 'embodied meaning-making' (Wetherell, 2012: 4), it is evident to the Researcher from the simmering atmosphere in the room that this skirmish has become much more about Will and Andy's 'empathetic' vs 'managerialist' positioning, than any comparatively innocuous debate regarding the relative efficacy of a Corporate Handbook.

Finally, by the fifth articulation - *Regard of contingency: knowing challenge (defence of political logic)* - the neutral body language studiously maintained by both Will and Andy slips as the (affective) atmosphere in the room becomes openly hostile. Visibly exasperated, Andy knocks back Will's challenge [Andy 3], before tailing off with a theatrical sigh of frustration. As the Researcher's notes record, the room feels 'unfriendly' – a *relationally affective* dynamic – as we appeared locked into (yet another) stalemate, and the Researcher

felt like leaving. It seems to the Researcher that Andy represents his challenge to the status quo as no more than (self evident) ‘best practice’: a ‘discursive grammar’ that denies its own contingency, in response to Will’s assertion that he is proposing to swamp people with rulebooks.

INSERT EPISODE 2 HERE

Episode 2: More sharing of client contacts

Applying the *Logics* framework this time to Episode 2, in the first articulation - *Disregard of contingency: semi-conscious identification/challenge (invocation of political logic)* - the psychodynamics of Andy and Will’s interaction again appear conditioned by their mutual fantasmatic investment in the ‘tinderbox’ of a relationally-felt rivalry. Such rivalry manifested, as usual, in a destructive compulsion towards conflict, as each pursued *jouissance* in the form of the unattainable ontological security of mastery over the other. In this exchange, Andy challenges how contacts are normally used [Andy 4] – that is, in ways that are sub-optimal from his standpoint – and conjures up a horrific fantasy of the dire consequences of maintaining the status quo, presented as normative outcome (‘political’ and ‘ideological’ dimensions of the *Logics*). Andy appears genuinely to believe that *Associates’* use of contacts is objectively sub-optimal (disregard of contingency) – rather than just one of several, equally contingent, value choices. In terms of the Researcher’s own affective involvement, his ‘been-here-before/expectant’ notes indicate a sense of expectancy of yet another re-opening of old wounds. Revisiting the empirical material, it is inconceivable to the Researcher that this affective sense was not shared by all of us, precisely because its shared nature was what lent it its intensity.

In the terms advanced here, Andy appears to be unaware of his own fantasmatic investment that underlies his proposal of ‘leveraging our contacts better’; Andy would frequently make suggestions, such as this, based upon a ‘managerial’ approach to administrative control through which, as previously noted, he appeared to gain in confidence and a sense of ascendancy. However, if Andy is relatively unaware of the ontological contingency of the ontic schema he is advancing, the Researcher is confident that he is semi-aware that raising the issue of how contacts are used touches on the historical, discursive web of relations that has built up between him and Will. Andy’s/Will’s/the Researcher’s mutual emotional investment in this web means that as a result, Andy’s suggestion is not only unlikely to go uncontested (political logic) but that, for Will, it will also stir up some horrific fantasies.

In the second articulation - *Disregard of contingency: semi-conscious identification/challenge (invocation of social logic)* - Will appears to sense an attempt in the previous articulation by Andy [Andy 4] to normalise social relations around some kind of structured communication regime (‘leveraging our contacts across the company’) over which Andy will have control. With a grim relish, Will now appears [Will 3] to ‘toy’ with Andy. This is apparent from his ‘mischievous’ tone of voice, together with his assessment that, in making his ostensibly innocuous suggestion, Andy is proposing that ‘people are just going to give up their client relationships’. This is exactly the sort of escalatory behaviour that the Researcher would occasionally tell Will or Andy was ‘a bit unnecessary’ (usually on a one to one basis, often after a disagreement between them).

Although Will probably believes in his own discursively stated position (disregard of contingency), the Researcher’s reading is that Will’s response is motivated as much by self-image as by any vigorous opposition to ‘leveraging contacts’ *per se*. Within the framework advanced here, Will is motivated in this exchange by the need to ‘paper over the cracks’ of

his own ontological contingency and to construct/reinforce his own self-image ontically (in this instance) as a ‘people person’ by ‘explaining’ to Andy how people are likely to behave ‘in reality’ (based, perhaps, on his own superior empathy: semi-conscious identification) – and casting Andy in an opposing, emotionally unintelligent, role. Fantasmatic motivation towards self-realisation as a ‘people person’ appears to inflect Will’s readiness to broaden the debate, which escalates rapidly from Andy’s suggestion about ‘working together’, to a barely disguised claim about relative empathy. Such motivation – *jouissance* – is apparent to the Researcher because there appears to be more going on than a simple discursive argument – for which Will’s pursuit of a secure self-image is the most intuitive explanation.

In response, Andy’s ‘dogged’ advancement of the need for ‘more robust pipeline management’ [Andy 5] in the third articulation - *Disregard of contingency: semi-conscious identification/challenge (defence of political logic)* – seems to be akin to a fantasmatic ‘battening down of hatches’ in response to what Andy will, in the Researcher’s view, inevitably interpret as Will’s [Will 3] implied identification of him as a bloodless managerialist whom people will not obey simply ‘because they’ve been told to’ (i.e. by Andy). Once again, Andy’s strategy is to invoke ideologically normative ‘best practice’ (see Episode 1) in the form of the ‘pipeline’, etc. (‘ideological’ and ‘social’ dimensions). Visible in Andy’s dogged adherence to the ‘grammar’ of his more structured approach to organizational management, and associated ascendancy, is once again a strength of emotion that transcends the mere (cognitive) articulation of a minor difference in position. As a participant in such exchanges, it seems to the Researcher that their fantasmatic identifications lead each party to disregard the contingency inherent in their respective positions. Such exchanges are sensed by the Researcher to contain an insecure, and perhaps distinctively masculine, posturing element that is ‘all about them’, and not necessarily about *Associates*, that triggers his own feelings of ‘hardening cynicism’.

The final articulation - *Regard of contingency: knowing challenge (defence of social logic)*- implies that the hardening cynicism felt by the Researcher is shared (co-created?) with at least Will as he responds with a flat rebuttal. In the Researcher's assessment, it is a rebuttal underpinned by his self-identification as 'straight talking' and 'reasonable' (he can 'just tell it like it is', based on his insights as a 'people person'). The outcome is an underlining of what, from Will's point of view, is the contingency of Andy's assertion of self-evidence ('ethical' and 'political' dimensions). Temporary 'ontic closure' is achieved, with the preservation of the social logic of status quo – but at the expense of cordiality. The existing political settlement has been reproduced – for now.

What of the Researcher's own fantasmatic identifications? Building on the confessional observations offered so far, and attempting an ethical reflexivity in the SE quadrant of Figure 2, it seems to the Researcher that his own *jouissance* is bound up in some way with his ability to work within *Associates* and yet maintain his own independence: to be 'in it but not of it'. 'Squaring of the circle' is evidently as impossible for him as discursive mastery of the Other is for Will and Andy. It forms an ulterior source of motivation that prepositions him no less than theirs: in this sense, the Researcher is no more 'in control' during these exchanges than they are.

Discussion

Shifting analytical focus from 'ontic' to 'ontological' in practice studies

In analyses of practice, the significance of affect, in the form of emotions, feelings and moods, tends to be backgrounded. Even those who acknowledge the orienting role of affect in providing practice with a 'sense of direction' (Shotter, 2011: 6) rarely analyse practice from within an affectively-informed, critical ontology (see Clough, 2007). To counteract this silence, we have suggested the relevance of employing an affect-based ontology of practice

for illuminating the relational, emergent everyday qualities of ‘organizing’. Affect, we have suggested, is of central importance for understanding the animation and reproduction of practice - as illustrated by our detailed analyses of the episodes at *Associates*. These have demonstrated how affect-saturated identifications and transient social ‘settlements’ are accomplished within evolving, politically charged, social relations with social, political, ideological, and ethical dimensions along axes of naturalization and contestation.

For the directors at *Associates*, moment-by-moment articulation of their world of mutual intelligibility involves (re)production of meaningful, but precarious, ‘settlements’ between these four dimensions: in endorsements, ‘gentle testing/questioning’, outright challenges, ironic compliance with social structures, and so on. Understanding why such settlements occur, and are supplanted with others, requires engagement with an impelling dynamic between ostensibly firm ontic ‘structures’ and ontologically fluid, affectively charged ‘processes’ upon which the seeming firmness of the ontic register is contingent at all times. Unfolding ‘practice’ comprises the generative tension between ontic and ontological registers. This dynamic arises from the irreducibility of the ontological to the ontic register, or as Laclau (2000: 81) puts it, ‘there is no logical transition from an unavoidable ethical [ontological] moment...to any particular [ontic] normative order. There is an ethical investment in particular normative orders, but no normative order which is, in and of itself, ethical’.

The ethnographic challenge

A particular issue for further consideration is our proposal of a shift in analytical focus within practice studies: from studying phenomena of the ontic register, to studying subjects’ mode of engagement within the *ontological* register, before ‘working outwards’ to consider its ontic consequences. *It is actors’ mode of engagement with unfolding practices, rather than*

unfolding practices themselves, that constitutes the locus of social reproduction and/or transformation. With this shift comes a particular ethnographic challenge for ontically-oriented practice studies that address the (ontological) intentions and psychological states of others (recalling Wetherell, 2012).

Given the relational constitution of affect, researchers are likely to produce more confessional accounts of their affective intertwining with their research subjects. Subscribing to an affect-based ontology to study social practices invites the incorporation of researchers' emotions, feelings and moods into the study of organizing. Our initial attempt to deploy an affect-based ontology to venture 'ontological explanations for ontic phenomena' is at best exploratory and incomplete. Our hope is that it will stimulate the generation of better, more incisive analyses of subjects' (and researchers') modes of engagement.

The approach to the study of affect commended here involves the inductive inference of ontological phenomena from ontic data. Drawing such inferences will doubtless trouble researchers who regard such interpretive work as unacceptably subjective. Our response to this objection is that complying with its demands results in a very narrow and shallow form of social science that can make only a limited contribution to our collective self-understanding. Clearly, there are dangers of claiming that analyses of the kind presented here are authoritative, rather than engaging them critically as contributions to an on-going process of collective sense-making that has an emancipatory potential.

Towards a politics of affect

Unpacking social practices requires a critical engagement with the visceral operation of power within organisations, including actors' own complicity in reproducing the relations through which they are dominated and oppressed – a characteristic that we foregrounded in our analysis of *Associates*. A particular feature of an affect-based ontology, privileged

throughout this article, is a foregrounding of how actors' historical immersion in power relations conditions their self-identifications. Within the psychoanalytically-informed analysis advanced by *Logics* and applied here, such immersion combines with actors' pursuit of an ultimately unattainable *jouissance* to offer a (for them) compelling, often destructive motivation for behaving in the way that they do. For Will, the pursuit of *jouissance* entailed fantasmatic subscription to an identity as a 'people-person'; for Andy, it was pursuit of peer recognition as a 'professional'; for the Researcher, it was an ability to remain 'semi-detached' from (better than?) the posturing at *Associates*. All three sought to attain an elusive ontological security through subscription to fantasmatic identifications.

Since identification constitutes a form of domination to the extent that actors are affectively complicit in their own acquiescence, increased awareness of their self-identifications with social structures and practices may hold emancipatory potential (Lok and Willmott, 2013) – as well as offering some insulation from Žižek's 'traumatic effects' when fantasy is ultimately unrealised. Bringing these observations together, we suggest that an analytical attentiveness to a 'politics of affect' – the mutually constitutive and analytically revealing relationship between affect and power in organising - may be a necessary corollary for an affective ontology of practice.

Students of the politics of affect can call upon three particular strengths of the *Logics* framework as demonstrated here. *First and foremost*, there is its attentiveness to the emergent, generative dialogue between ontological and ontic registers of unfolding practice - affording what we contend is a more penetrating account of social reality informed by an appreciation of the dialectical interplay of the two registers. In placing 'contingency within the structure' at the centre of such analysis, the precariousness (and thus 'political' contestability) of practices that we routinely reproduce, modify or transform, and take to be normal, is underlined. *Second*, recognition of the underlying precariousness of prevailing

discourses in the workplace by more self-aware employees and managers may encourage greater mutual sensitivity to one another's 'affective self-investment' in particular positions, challenging entrenched political landscapes within organizations. *Third*, our *Logics* incorporates a motivational explanation for affective politics: the central role of fantasy offers a plausible account for the differential extents to which, as actors, we are disinclined to recognise the radical contingency (broader ontological instability) of ontic practices and choices in which we are implicated, a distinction that has untold significance for the transformation as well as the reproduction of social realities.

For example, in their sedimentation of social reality, Will and Andy are seen to engage in fantasmatic appeals: to the self-evident good of 'robust structures'; to the obvious good sense of not 'swamping people with rulebooks' (Andy 2; Will 2); to the clear need to 'leverage our contacts across the company'; and to 'a robust pipeline management approach' (Andy 4; Andy 5). These appeals, we have suggested, are made in the pursuit of *political logics* (proposals for change) as well as *social logics* (maintenance of the status quo). Such practices arise from affectively-driven identifications, derived from available moral grammars. Ontically, the outcomes-in-process of Will and Andy's interactions are the result of how each rallies, ontologically, around the ideological 'standards' with which he identifies.

Thus it might have been comparatively easy for Will to endorse, at least partially or passively, Andy's appeals to 'robust structures', 'leveraged contacts', and 'pipeline management' on the grounds that ideas advanced by a fellow board member are deserving of some active discussion rather than airy or passive-aggressive dismissal. But Will would then have been complicit in concealing the radical contingency of these ideas (bottom left quadrant of 3). What makes this highly unlikely, if not impossible, is his ongoing affective commitment to constituting his self-identity as 'straight talking' and a 'people person' – a

commitment which results in him challenging the givenness of Andy's standards. It is at least arguable that a greater self-awareness of their mutual processes of subjection might have enabled both Will and Andy to reach a more empathetic accommodation - an insight of some practical potential in engendering greater mutual awareness between organisational actors.

Conclusion

We have commended and applied the framework provided by *Logics of Critical Explanation* (Glynos and Haworth, 2007; 2008) to analyse an example of the mundane organizational work of board deliberations. In doing so, our study has contributed to remedying the 'poststructuralist methodological deficit' identified by Zienkowski (2012: 504): that is, a comparative lack of methodologies for studying relationally-conceived phenomena. More specifically, we have sought to develop and apply a methodology for examining the centrality of affect in the animation of practice, with the anticipation that future studies will engage with it and build upon it.

In our empirical analysis, we proposed and applied a novel way of presenting and analysing detailed ethnographic material within a psychosocial, immanent logic of practice. We presented Episodes One and Two of the *Associates* data in tabular format that presents empirical material ('Text') in the ontic register alongside an interpretation of the configuration of social, political, and fantasmatic logics. We then offered a 'confessional' explanation of the underlying dynamics of unfolding practice in the ontological register. Our intention has been to provide an open as well as plausible analysis of the potency and politics of affect within a structured framework. Since this approach seems to offer a productive way of displaying and unpacking the ontic/ontological dialectic of practice, we welcome the further development and critical interrogation of empirical work based upon the Logics framework.

Our affect-based ontology of practice, and associated methodology, leads us to make two recommendations that have significant implications that merit careful consideration. One implication is that research that presently hinges around the structure/agency relationship, for example, should be reframed within, and oriented by, the generative dynamic between the ontic and the ontological, as theorized and illustrated here. Whilst we have pointed to some of the consequences of such a shift, we suspect that we have hardly scratched the surface. A second, and related, implication is that studies of organizational work, including research into the operation of power within organisational practice, may usefully pay closer attention to the role of affect in processes of social reproduction and transformation. In turn, such analysis holds out the prospect of deepening analysis of self-regulation, such as governmentality (e.g. Foucault, 2010) by incorporating an unfolding sensory apprehension of the immanent structuring of social and organizational practices.

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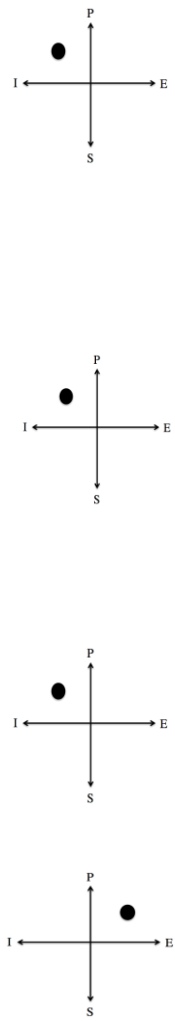
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Analysis

Episode 1: Organizational structure

Text	Configuration of social, political and fantasmatic <i>Logics</i> (cf. Fig 2)
<p>Andy (1): OK, moving onto the Company Handbook.</p> <p>(Tense)</p> <p>Will (1) [noncommittally]: Mmmmmm.</p> <p>Andy (2): [Sigh] We just don't seem to take these things seriously here. There's no way we're going to be able to get growth by competing with the likes of xxx and xxx unless we get some more robust structures in place. And this includes more operational delivery management, more detailed internal reporting procedures and business planning at manager level, and a company code of practice. We're just going to come unstuck otherwise – you'll see.</p> <p>(aarrghhhh)</p> <p>Will (2) [tersely]: I'm sorry but you know the way I feel about this. We already have perfectly good processes in place; we <i>all</i> want to carry on growing but there's no way we're going to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We're <i>not</i>... xxx, and we're just going to lose that magic if we swamp people with rulebooks.</p> <p>Andy (3): [Visibly frustrated] Clearly, I'm not proposing swamping anyone with rulebooks, Andy, it's just basic good practice. I really...[sigh].</p> <p>(unfriendly, want to leave)</p> <p>End of fragment.</p>	

Episode 2: More sharing of client contacts

Text	Configuration of Social, Political and Fantasmatic <i>Logics</i> (cf. Fig 2)
<p>Andy (4): We <i>really</i> need to think of a way of leveraging our contacts across the company better; working together properly. At the ABC supplier briefing, it was obvious that xxx and yyy had already spoken to the people in the business – and I know for a fact that Jill knows some of those people – I felt really foolish. Things are tightening up, and going forwards our ability to form and draw on these relationships will be make or break. (Been-here-before/expectant)</p> <p>Will (3): [mischievously] Mmmm. So what are you proposing? You know that we’re a vertically oriented business, really, and I don’t think there’s any way that people are just going to give up their client relationships to other people without a good reason – certainly not because they’ve been told to.</p> <p>Andy (5): That’s not what I’m suggesting, Will. [Pause]. [Doggedly]: We need to get a more robust pipeline management approach in place, preferably underpinned with a web-based application we can all use from wherever we happen to be. (Cynicism, hardening)</p> <p>Will (4): Andy, people just won’t use it. (Feels unfriendly)</p> <p>End of fragment.</p>	 <p>The figure consists of four separate coordinate systems, each with a vertical axis labeled 'P' (top) and 'S' (bottom), and a horizontal axis labeled 'I' (left) and 'E' (right). A black dot is placed in each system. In the first three systems, the dot is located in the upper-left quadrant, indicating high values for both Social (I) and Political (P) logics. In the fourth system, the dot is located in the lower-right quadrant, indicating low values for both Social (I) and Political (P) logics.</p>

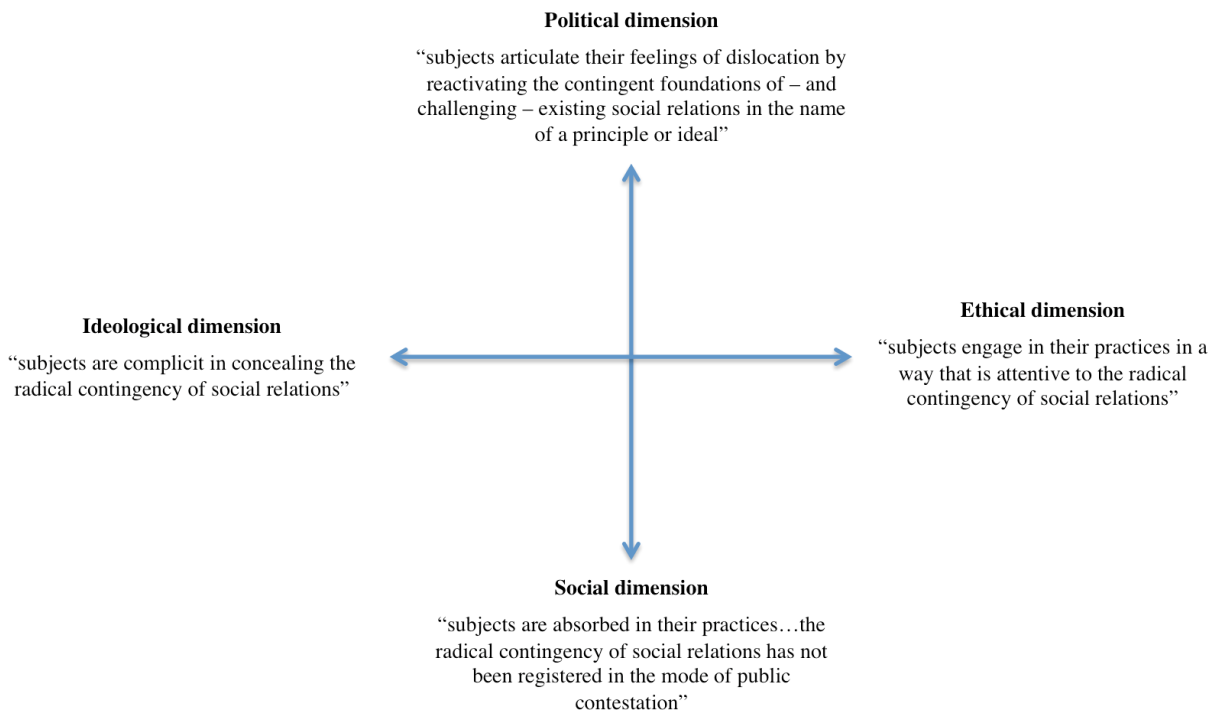
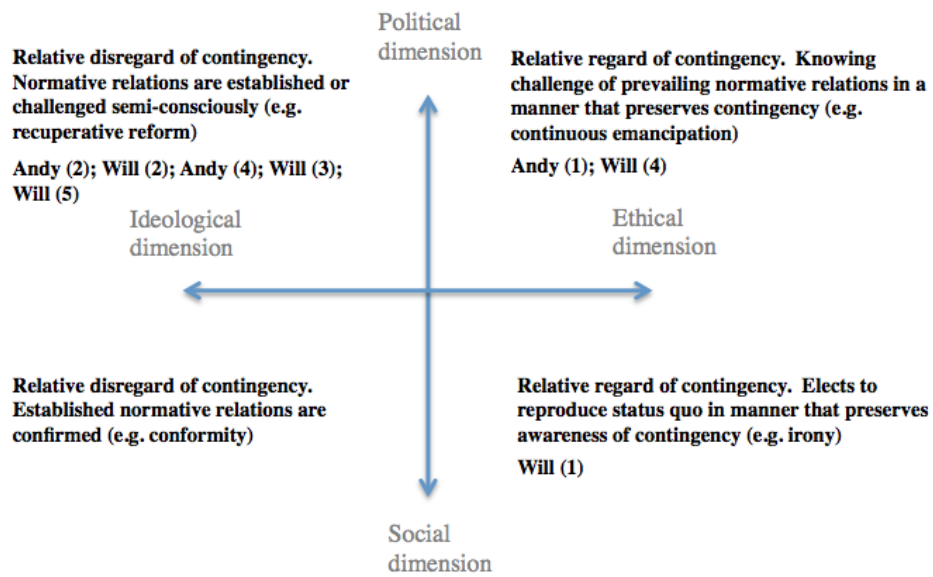


Figure 1: Four dimensions of social relations (Glynos and Howarth 2007:112), modified to include original explanatory text



Key

Social dimension: “subjects are absorbed in their practices...the radical contingency of social relations has not been registered in the mode of public contestation”

Political dimension: “subjects articulate their feelings of dislocation by reactivating the contingent foundations of – and challenging – existing social relations in the name of a principle or ideal”

Ideological dimension: “subjects are complicit in concealing the radical contingency of social relations”

Ethical dimension: “subjects engage in their practices in a way that is attentive to the radical contingency of social relations”

Figure 2: Four dimensions of social relations (Glynos and Howarth 2007:112), adapted to show empirical indicators of different configurations of *Logics*

[Please insert author biogs here – many thanks]

MARK THOMPSON (PhD Cambridge University) is Senior Lecturer in Information Systems at Cambridge Judge Business School, Visiting Professor at Surrey Business School, and Strategy Director at London-based Methods Group. His research interests include exploring the affective implications of a practice perspective on people, organisations and technology, as well as digital service innovation in the public sector. He is a regular reviewer for a broad range of journals across the organisational and information systems fields. Full details can be found on Mark's Faculty page: <http://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/faculty-research/faculty-a-z/mark-thompson/>.

HUGH WILLMOTT (PhD Manchester University; Honorary PhD, Lund University) is Professor of Management at Cass Business School Research, City University and Research Professor in Organization Studies, Cardiff Business School. He received his PhD from Manchester University and previously held professorial appointments at UMIST (now Manchester Business School) and the Judge Business School, Cambridge and visiting appointments at the Universities of Lund, Uppsala, Sydney, Innsbruck and University of Technology Sydney. He has research diverse aspects of organizations including managerial work, culture, control, corporate governance, management education, ethics, regulation and alternative organizations. He is currently Associate Editor of Academy of Management Review and was previous Associate Editor of Organization. He has also served on the editorial boards of Accounting, Organizations and Society, Critical Perspectives on Accounting, Accounting, Auditing and Accountability and a range of management and organization journals including Journal of Management Studies and Organization Studies. Full details can be found on his homepage: <https://sites.google.com/site/hughwillmottshomepage>.

Corresponding author:

Mark Thompson

Judge Business School

University of Cambridge

Trumpington Street

Cambridge

CB21AG

UK

m.thompson@jbs.cam.ac.uk

[01223 339700](tel:01223339700)

Other author(s):

Hugh Willmott

Cass Business School

106 Bunhill Row

London EC1Y 8TZ

UK

Hugh.Willmott.1@city.ac.uk

020 7040 8600