

Concepts as Methodology

A Plea for Arrangement Thinking in the Study of Affect

Jan Slaby, Rainer Mühlhoff & Philipp Wüschner

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Abstract. By way of an exemplary elucidation we sketch a proposal on how the development and refinement of concepts can serve as a cross-disciplinary methodology in the study of affect and emotion. We focus on the working concept of an *affective arrangement* which we characterize both historically and systematically and also with help of examples from recent affect research. Thereby, we provide materials for a view on the nature of conceptual practice in qualitative inquiry with broad application across the humanities, cultural studies and the social sciences.

Introduction

‘Work on the concept’ is a key component in all scholarly and scientific work, regardless of whether it takes place in the humanities or in the sciences, in cultural studies, ethnography, sociology or the arts. By ‘work on the concept’ we mean the creation, development, and continuous refinement of contentful yet concise concepts that are capable of opening up perspectives on segments of reality and furthering understanding by aiding a robust yet open-textured grasp of how phenomena hang together systematically. We understand concepts in a pragmatist key as *action schemata* that function as dynamic templates for thinking and understanding, informing observation, trained judgment, experimental and technical practices of all kinds and persuasions. What we will work toward here is a more reflective and self-conscious understanding of how well-made *working concepts* inform and actively drive ongoing research – and intellectual activity more broadly – across a significant spectrum of approaches dealing with affect and emotion.

Researchers and scholars across the sciences and the humanities share a widespread sense for the importance of concepts. But several misconceptions about concepts hamper a clear understanding. Sometimes, concepts get conflated with terminology. This raises what we call the ‘myth of definition’: namely, the assumption that substantive concepts have a simple and stable definition that might be stated in a few sentences and will then settle most controversial issues surrounding the concept in question. A nuisance that accompanies the myth of definition is that concepts for which such a concise definition cannot be easily provided might be disqualified from learned discourse. Concomitant to the first myth is a second myth, to which contemporary philosophers are particularly prone to succumb: the ‘myth of precision’. Here, the idea is that concept must be capable of a precise and unambiguous elucidation that legislates most or all instances of their application in terms of adequacy. Even where issues of vagueness have been accommodated, the logic behind this second myth is that concepts can be detached from their situations of application, as if there was a neutral vantage point from which one could specify concept and object independently from one another and compare them in an aspect by aspect manner. This is a remnant of Cartesian-style representationalism. As we will illustrate in the present chapter, a different framing for issues involving precision and ambiguities is required, in order to distinguish reasonable requests for clarity and conciseness from excessive acts of policing conceptual practice.

A third myth is the conflation of concepts with words of natural language (the ‘myth of concepts as words’). The assumption is that what a concept amounts to is the meaning of a word of common use, where everyday linguistic practice is the decisive authority for specifying a concept’s content. While it is true that ordinary language is a central resource, playing field and consolidating factor for conceptual understanding, it is not true that it holds in store self-standing and normatively binding elucidations of all possible concepts, nor that the development or clarification of concepts can be decisively arbitrated with recourse to established linguistic usage. Everyday linguistic practice works as a sustaining backdrop, a formative milieu that in part enables, informs and aids, but does not determine conceptual practice, let alone exhaustively.

All three myths underestimate the extent to which those concepts that are contentful enough to be of more than auxiliary use in the sciences and in academic scholarship are a matter of creative invention and deliberate crafting, both in response to an object domain and grounded in the practical and theoretical situation of the researchers or scholars working with them. As the history of science and historical scholarship in general amply illustrate, *de facto* intellectual practice speaks massively in favor of this latter perspective. Concepts prove changeable, are subject to much inventive development, often in surprising, unanticipated ways, and undergo a lot in the way of historical change and semantic drift, not in irregular ways but by answering to significant new developments in their domains of application. Moreover, concepts are tied up in complex ways with the articulative and judgmental capacities of concept users, and thus with these individuals’ particular learning histories and skillsets. Concepts are in this regard a matter of *Urteilkraft* (powers of judgment), and this gives them an irreducibly qualitative and even personal note.¹

In this paper, we do not want to dwell at length on these general issues. We do not aspire to provide a theory of concepts, or engage with the many different approaches to the nature of concepts in philosophy. Favoring a pragmatist approach in a broadly Aristotelian lineage, we understand concepts as dynamic tools for thinking, as intellectual *action schemata*.² In line with this, we adhere to the methodological maxim of *practical elucidation* of an exemplary instance – case-based understanding instead of generalization.³ Thus, we single out an example of what we deem a productive working concept in interdisciplinary affect research and develop it in detail. This serves a double purpose. For one, we illustrate in a concrete case much of what we mean by the phrase ‘concepts as methodology’. Furthermore, we contribute directly to an understanding of relational affect, which has the advantage of closing the gap between reflection on methodology and content-based inquiry within affect studies. Our choice of example is the concept of an *affective arrangement* – a working concept that we have adapted for our purposes from a precursor notion in continental philosophy, the concept of *agencement* in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). With this concept we aim to elucidate those complex socio-material settings in which a heightened affective intensity and affective relationality between actors, material conditions and equipmental set-up ensues, countering the assumption that affect is always and necessarily a matter of what individuals feel or experience. We think that ‘affective arrangement’ can be the linchpin of a productive perspective on affect across a number of fields and disciplines (Slaby, Mühlhoff, & Wüschner 2017).

There is another advantage that this choice of example provides. Concepts themselves can be understood as *agencements*, and thus as arrangements not entirely unlike, in general structure, what we mean when we speak of *affective arrangements*: concatenations of heterogeneous components – usually other concepts – unified by a dynamic mode of composition into a characteristic formation. Accordingly, we assume that the same principles that govern the concept of an affective arrangement also apply to issues pertaining to concepts in general.

Arrangement thinking – a style of thought we introduce below – not only works in affect and emotion research, but provides an angle for understanding working concepts and their methodological employment. Ideally, then, the following is a dual elucidation: of concepts as a methodological device in qualitative affect research on the one hand, and of relational affect and affective arrangements on the other hand.

Working concepts

In philosophy, contrasting approaches to concepts are a central fault line between analytic and continental philosophy. Pragmatism comes closest to a common ground between these traditions, and we indeed adhere to a non-orthodox pragmatist outlook on concepts. On this view, concepts are not pre-given entities (as Platonists or intuitionists would have it), but dynamic constructs that need to be made and re-made by concept-users in response to the practical purposes of a given situation of inquiry. Concepts are not representations of pre-existing reality, but action schemata operative in normatively accountable relations to the world – regardless of whether these relations are predominantly cognitive, practical, rhetorical, aesthetic or otherwise. One might gloss this point by saying that, strictly speaking, *there are no concepts* (in the sense of discrete *entities*), but just *conceptual capacities* on part of intellectually competent agents (cf. Rouse 2015 for a related point). Yet, at the same time such capacities are beholden to historical legacies of use practices and established articulations (codified, for example, in handbooks, compendia or theoretical manifestos). Important precursors in this pragmatist, enactivist, operationalist and dynamic-historical legacy of understanding concepts are Aristotle (both in his notion of ‘practical wisdom’ or *phronesis* and in his own ‘philosophical lexicon’, i.e. book Delta of his *Metaphysics*), Kant with his *Critique of Judgment* (especially his idea of reflective – as opposed to determinative – judgments), Nietzsche – with his knack for conceptual invention and creativity and also his thorough genealogical critique of established ideas –, and also the later Wittgenstein with his insistence on rules as not existing outside communal practices of rule-following.⁴ In the more narrowly continental strands of the philosophical tradition, an influential articulation of an understanding of concepts – echoing several impulses from the authors and traditions just mentioned – is Deleuze’s and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy* (1994; esp. ch. 1). These authors likewise develop a dynamic, enactive and constructivist approach to concepts, but they emphasize the aspect of a concise dynamic formation of elements – stressing the self-standing character of concepts as ‘intensive’ ideational complexes that are rooted in both, a historical trajectory of conceptual development and the concrete articulative capacities and postural orientation of philosophers or theorists (cf. Schmidgen 2015).

Before we dip into our case-based exposition, a few remarks on what we mean specifically by the expression *working concept* are in order. In line with the theoretical lineage just sketched, we understand concepts as dynamic templates for articulation – formations of significant elements that can be put to use in intellectual practice, for instance as schemata for ordering and framing reality in specific ways. For a simple example to start with, one might tentatively compare a well-crafted concept to a fire escape plan: It does not purport to give a precise representation of the surroundings (like a map would), but provides a coherent instruction on *how to act* when it matters (and also – contrary to the fire escape plan – also specify *when* it matters). A fire escape plan does not only *show* escape-routes but highlights them, renders them salient. It does not represent the world, but articulates – dynamically *prescribes* – a possible event (i.e., an act of escape). As such dynamic templates, concepts actually *do the primal work* within qualitative inquiry. Much like artistic concepts – for example, different shots in cinema (close-ups, long shots, jump-cuts etc.) – they are not only ways to look at things, but also ways to *make things seen*. Concepts enable and facilitate this making-present

by way of *intensifying* elements and characteristics of a given domain, just like a camera shot intensifies aspects of what is visible so as to contribute to the constitution of a filmic scene as a coherent arrangement of moving images.⁵

In an effort to stress the (re-)arranging, and creative power that concepts unfold within an open discourse, one could also compare their ways of working to a successful or “viral” *hashtag* in social media. A hashtag not only binds together discursive elements (texts, tweets, comments) and non-discursive elements (affects, experience, desires) but also makes complex phenomena, for instance social justice issues, addressable in a concise way. And just like hashtags, concepts are never safe from misappropriation, bifurcation or bold bias. In relation to the theme of affect, the example of the hashtag also indicates that concepts are not only the lens *through* which an affective scene can be made specifically visible and debatable. At the same time concepts *themselves* may become the target or carrier of affects as they may catch attention, circulate virally and become detached from their original field of inquiry, potentially inspiring further articulations in other fields. Yet, this comes with the inherent danger of ‘superficiality’ in that a viral, trending, possibly politicized concept is sometimes perceived as a silver bullet or turns into a universal plane for projection, putatively resolving a long standing issue but without actually expanding on it. The hashtag example highlights the ambivalence or oscillation of focal concepts between their concise, gripping, reality-illuminating efficacy (in the best case) and their potential to turn into a mere catchphrase, a piece of jargon, an empty abstraction mindlessly reproduced without contact to the original insights that had inspired the creation of the concept (in the worst case).

With the adjective ‘working’ we therefore not only aim to indicate the provisional character of the concepts in question, i.e. that they might be coarse-grained and open-textured initially, expected to be refined during the course of inquiry. We also assume that concepts themselves *do work* – they create realities and affects, they circulate and travel to the degree that they can become independent of the original scholarly scope of their invention, for better – when they aspire insightful articulations elsewhere –, or for worse, when they degenerate into jargon. This is also why working concepts have to be understood as operating on a plane that is a level up from specific domains of inquiry. Working concepts are generic templates for articulation and understanding – framing devices that are adaptable to a range of different domains and subject matters and capable of different kinds of uptake and case-based specification. They delineate and render salient strategies for framing and embellishing reality while excluding other possible strategies for doing so. We call them *operative templates for articulation*, where ‘articulation’ refers to a range of different activities of sense-making, spanning forms of verbal description, ways of meaningfully dealing with artifacts, modes of artistic practice and various expressive and aesthetic activities of other kinds (cf. Rouse 2015). Yet, on a pragmatist and enactivist perspective, working concepts cannot be completely generic and formal, on pain of losing any specific content. As we will show below, a contentful concept has both a particular history and is embedded within a specific context, it is rooted in a domain. A concept’s genealogy inspires present articulations and provides resources for further work with, and ‘on’, the concept. In all instances there is an intricate balance between a concept’s rootedness in its formative historical trajectory and its openness and versatility with regard to novel elaborations and adaptations. Viewed as such partially domain- and theory-independent devices, working concepts are indeed prone to *travel* through different object domains and fields of inquiry – at times through quite diverse landscapes, which won’t leave the concept itself unchanged. Thus, concepts in intellectual practice are what Mieke Bal calls *traveling concepts* – a notion she puts forth as a methodological orientation for the humanities and cultural studies: “They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically

dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ” (Bal 2002, 24).

In keeping with this orientation, our exemplary elucidation of the concept of an affective arrangement will do both: chart a historical trajectory as well as zoom into different areas of elaboration. We will draw on precursor concepts in the work of other theorists and elucidate neighboring concepts, but we will also craft the concept itself into a specific and – in its present guise – unprecedented concise formation of significance. Inextricable from the characterization of the concept itself comes the illustration of a particular perspective, style of thought or ‘optic’ that we will call *arrangement thinking*. This is a characteristic of at least those working concepts that reach a certain focality, i.e., those that have enough content and specificity to be suited as anchors of an effective epistemic formation, providing those who work with the concept with a characteristic ‘gaze’ and intellectual posture in approaching and working with their respective subject matter. Such a posture combines a trained theoretical receptivity with a set of practical skills for crafting and framing one’s materials, down to the minutiae of technical operations within the process of inquiry. This helps to bring further attention to the fact that working concepts are inextricable from a complex learned capacity for judgment – understood as a form of ‘practical wisdom’ or *phronesis* – on part of competent scholars sharing an intellectual outlook.

As we have stressed, conceptual practice across wide swathes of academic and scientific fields already heeds the points and principles we discuss in this chapter. Yet, this is often not acknowledged and not reflected upon, and also not respected enough as a self-standing intellectual practice with its own merits and pitfalls – as something in need of cultivation and, at times, protection, for instance against ill-advised attempts to establish quantification-based methods in all corners of the academy. What we provide here is meant to be an exemplary account rendering explicit some of what is implicit in day-to-day conceptual practice across a variety of fields of inquiry into affect and emotion. We do this in the hope that working concepts, with all their tentativeness and incompleteness, may become veritable ingredients in the toolbox of interdisciplinary qualitative inquiry and important signposts at the intersection of empirical and theoretical work on relational affect.⁶

Affective arrangement: Basic characterization

The concept we chose to be our exemplary case is that of an *affective arrangement* – a working concept whose operative purpose is to help provide as much concreteness as possible to the understanding of affect as relational, situated and ‘transindividual’, in critical distinction to individualistic and mentalistic perspectives (cf. Slaby, Mühlhoff & Wüschner 2017). The concept of an affective arrangement bridges instantaneously elements from a relational theory of affect with a number of local domains of inquiry, as it brings the specific concatenations of elements and materials into focus as part of which relational affect unfolds locally. In each case, relational affect transpires as part of layouts that operate as dynamic formations, comprising, for instance, persons, things, artifacts, spaces, discourse, behaviors and expressions in a characteristic ‘intensive’ mode of composition. The concept of an affective arrangement not only *refers* to heterogeneous ensembles of materials, but makes them conceivable as such dynamic ensembles in the first place.

Often, affective arrangements bring multiple human actors into a coordinated conjunction, so that these actors’ mutual affecting and being-affected is the central dimension of the arrangement. The concept does neither pertain merely to socio-material settings nor to affective relations in isolation – but rather to *both* in their mutually formative combination. The concept – and the concomitant ‘arrangement thinking’ as the characteristic skillset, style of thought and optic this concept engenders – can help researchers come to terms with ongoing affective relationality in socio-material domains, in particular where actors with different positions, histories, roles, dispositions or habits engage and interact. Examples –

randomly amassed – are corporate offices high on teamwork and ‘affective labor’, public events of sports or entertainment, street protests, religious or ceremonious rituals, many social gatherings of other kinds and also the interactive spaces of contemporary networked media. The concept can facilitate micro-analyses of such settings as it furthers both a perspective on the entities that coalesce locally to engender relational affect, and also the overall affective tonality or affective atmosphere that prevails in these locales.⁷

As stated above, a substantive working concept is not merely a novel designator for creating new domains of examples for a pre-existing theory. Rather, it must be able to arrange theoretical elements and examples in a characteristic manner. A concept in this robust sense also inevitably suggests a critical de-emphasizing of alternative conceptual options – in the case at hand for instance a sidelining of notions such as emotional contagion, collective emotions or affective atmospheres (these might still be invoked but only as auxiliary elements of affective arrangements). Accordingly a given concept’s history or ‘travelogue’ is of particular importance – both constructively and critically. In the case at hand, the concept of affective arrangements is inspired by Deleuze’s and Guattari’s influential notion of *agencement* (Deleuze & Guattari 1983; 1986; 1987; see also Buchanan 2015; Nail 2017). Another, related precursor concept is Foucault’s ‘dispositif’ (Foucault 1980), which stresses materiality, historicity and visibility in the unfolding of power relations but does not place particular emphasis on affect. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ‘agencement’ refers to local concatenations of diverse materials that actively run through a characteristic routine. Thus, their concept combines an understanding of affect with a notion of distributed *agency* in the sense of a performative sequence jointly enacted by a heterogeneous bundle of contributing elements. In line with this, we understand affective arrangements as comprising agency – both human and non-human – in inextricable entanglement with relations of affecting and being affected among their elements.

In order to function as a working concept for the study of affect, and especially as a notion capable of rendering salient the specificity of *affective relations*, it is important to construe the concept of an affective arrangement in a sufficiently open-textured manner. Historical precursor concepts, parallel notions and systematic approaches – also those by Deleuze and Guattari themselves – should best be viewed as inspirations and orientations, short of providing theoretical strictures or mandating particular articulations. A key aspect of the concept is the idea that an affective arrangement is a *fragmentary, open-textured* formation – a tangle of pieces, where the pieces keep their distinctness and autonomy no matter how densely they are enmeshed. Still, the concept only finds application when there is a characteristic ‘intensive’ mode of relatedness that holds the elements together, a *specific* mode of affecting and being affected. In such a dynamic interplay, the elements sustain a local sphere of affective intensity and thereby both initiate and give shape to characteristic affective relations and agentive routines. In view of this dynamic openness and heterogeneity, formations analyzed as affective arrangements often cannot be sharply demarcated from their surroundings. Yet, there will likely be a sensible difference between inside and an outside, marked by thresholds of intensity. Moreover, affective arrangements are understood as *performatively open-ended*, i.e. as capable of expanding into their surroundings by incorporating new elements.

Examples and focal dimensions

In line with the practical and local orientation of arrangement thinking, we will now present three brief examples from recent work on affect in which the conceptual perspective of the affective arrangement has found application. The cases are such that a particular domain of study has inspired further articulations and conceptual development at the ground level of

research. Each will emphasize a particular dimension of affective arrangements, but it is not assumed that all these dimensions must appear together in a single case.

An intuitive example are contemporary work environments such as open-floor corporate offices with their dense communication and interaction routines among co-workers in a spatial set-up, wired-up by networked media and interactive workflow technologies (cf. Slaby, Mühlhoff, & Wüschner 2017). Crucial in modern office workplaces where *affective labor* is paramount is both the momentary creation of a specific working atmosphere – an affective style of moment-to-moment interaction and engagement among the co-workers –, and the longer-term habituation and cultivation of affective dispositions (Mühlhoff 2019) and agentive routines (think of a veteran employee going at it in routine absorption contrasted with a novice staggering around the office insecurely). The affective arrangement is a dynamic formation that modulates individual dispositions and harnesses energies and potentialities, often to the benefit of the overall set-up of the company or institution. There is an element of self-organization as local interaction patterns and intra-active routines emerge in part spontaneously, but also a dimension of deliberate design that draws its techniques from long legacies of group dynamics research, organizational psychology, ergonomics or human factors research (among much else). Conceptual elaboration in these settings might suggest further notions capable of characterizing the dense mutual modulation of affectivity, behavior and habit in close-knit workplace interaction, for instance concepts such as *affective resonance*, *affective disposition*, *immersive power* or *mind invasion* (cf. Mühlhoff & Schütz 2017; Mühlhoff & Slaby 2018; Slaby 2016).

Significant political events and movements might be approached fruitfully through the lens of the affective arrangement. Recent qualitative work on the street protests during the revolutionary uprisings in Egypt in 2011 make use of the concept to bring the particular affective atmosphere, texture and temporality – and their various enabling conditions – of the movement into focus. The protests at issue are those on the Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo on the 18 memorable days of the square's occupation in early 2011 (cf. Ayata & Harders 2018). In interviews, activists speak of a palpable intensity and energy unfolding during the protests, and many of the participants describe their time on the square during those days as transformative, life changing experiences. Approaching the dynamics on the square as a complex of interlocking affective arrangements – in addition to being a matter of collective emotions such as anger, fear or enthusiasm – provides a fruitful angle on the heterogeneity of contributing factors (material, bodily, architectural, practical, discursive, medial, imaginary etc.), on the uniqueness of certain transformative moments, but also on the tensions and differences among the participants or participant factions. Arrangement thinking lets researchers look at the Tahrir square as a material-discursive site imbued with the sedimented traces of previous struggles, movements, epochs and balances of power that weigh into the particular affective texture of the 2011 uprisings. As a conceptual guide for qualitative research, the optic of arrangement thinking is capable of combining – not merging – individual experiential perspectives, gleaned from narrative interviews with activists, with fine-grained descriptions of the affective dynamics on the square. A socio-political *event* on the world-historical scale is thereby dissected into a confluence of enabling factors without imposing a reductive explanation. It is noteworthy that the political event itself can become the focus of arrangement thinking, as epitomized in the concept of “Midan moment”, coined by Ayata and Harders to bring to attention the unique temporality of the exceptional situation of protest, including its manifest transformative force, as experienced by those actively involved at the scene (see Ayata & Harders 2018).

The ethnographic study of rituals is another domain where the ‘affective arrangement’ has provided useful conceptual guidance. Consider recent work on religious ceremonies at saints' shrines in Sehwan, Pakistan by the anthropologist Omar Kasmani. An arrangement optic is

here brought to bear on the multi-layered temporality of practices of devotion at holy sites, with emphasis on the complex soundscapes, on the “sonic *mise-en-scène* of affect” (Kasmani 2017). By foregrounding the local arrangement of sound, the thick sensuality and complex historicity of the audible comes into view as a powerful conveyor of affect. Practices of worship are seen as multiply layered soundscapes in which a panoply of tendencies, temporal dimensions, participant orientations, tensions and contestations coalesce at a historically charged site into a unique sonic formation: “[T]he ordinary tinkering of tea-sellers, the guttural roar of motor-cycle rickshaws, the five calls to prayer, the daily bustle of surrounding markets as well as the occasional fights, brawls and conflicts on site are as much part of an emergent yet already drifting sonic-scene as are dissonances triggered by ritual performances themselves” (Kasmani 2017). What we call arrangement thinking here entails a sensibility for the time- and site-specific complexities and ambivalences that inhere practices of worship at contested public sites. This prevents a mono-thematic approach that would foreground a focus on transcendence and view participants mainly in their role as devotees with few other stakes in their practice. Countering such readings, Kasmani emphasizes the political dimension audible at Pakistani shrines, pointing out other vital concerns besides religious ones, and discerning stirrings of a particular historical agency on part of those engaged in the rituals: “in publicly sounding allegiance to Shia figures, events and temporalities, pilgrims long for other histories, they insist on other futures. They voice a historical-emotional consciousness that critiques, interrupts, and refuses a for-granted continuity of the present” (ibid.).

Arrangement thinking: Key dimensions

As apparent in these examples, with the concept affective arrangement comes a particular thought style and a practical as well as theoretical orientation – *arrangement thinking* – that lets theorists and researchers approach affective relations in a specific manner, emphasizing certain aspects and connections while de-emphasizing others. In this section, we outline the focal elements of this orientation.

The first and most general assumption is that affect does not happen in a void: Relations of affecting and being affected are always situated, they unfold as part of local formations of elements, involving actors, materials and environmental conditions, sensory modalities, habits and patterns of practice – and much else – whose characteristics and potentials variously enter into, shape and channel the affective relations in question. The point of arrangement thinking is to bring the contributing elements and dimensions into focus in their specificity and with regard to their particular mode of composition: the particular degree and texture of organization or disorganization. This enables an understanding of a potentially wide-ranging and diverse multiplicity of elements in terms of how they coalesce locally into a concise, recognizable, potentially unique formation of affective relationality.

There is much leeway as to the forms affective arrangements may take, with regard to the elements that might figure in them and as to the types of relatedness holding them together. However, there are recurrent features that have proven useful for elucidating concrete cases. Among these are the aspect of *heterogeneous composition* (i.e., a non-unifying adherence of self-standing elements), the idea of a *polycentric tangle of relations* that nevertheless gives an impression of a *characteristic mode of relatedness*, the idea of *shifting thresholds of intensity* that provisionally demarcate the arrangement from its surroundings, and also the sense of an often (but not always) *pleasurable absorption, captivation or immersion* that an affective arrangement affords to individuals that are about to get involved with it. More globally, affective arrangements can be thought of as a combination of two contrasting registers. They combine a dimension of materiality with a dimension of expression. These dimensions are tied together but operate independently (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). When it comes to an arrangement’s intrinsic dynamics, two counteracting tendencies can be observed: a tendency

towards the consolidation – even, at times, ossification – of the arrangement into a stable pattern, and an opposing tendency towards transformation or even dissolution, with phases of relative dominance of either tendency. So there is both, relatively stable arrangements and relatively more fleeting ones, and the same agglomeration of elements might pass through successive phases of stability and destabilization. As such temporary consolidated meshworks of materials and expressions, affective arrangements might be approached as repositories and conservation devices, which points to their complex and multi-scale *historicity*. This importantly includes a sense for marginal strands of history: hidden traces and latent dimensions that could easily escape the purview of other analytical perspectives.

So over and above a general orientation toward the *situatedness* of affect (cf. Griffiths & Scarantino 2009; Slaby 2016), arrangement thinking lets researchers reckon with local meshworks, apparatuses and relational configurations, and in particular with surprising combinations of elements in one's attempts to situate a given instance of affect within an 'intensive milieu' of formative relations, both synchronically and diachronically (cf. Angerer 2017). Arrangement thinking might be considered a form of materialism, but it is a 'vital' materialism that foregrounds the dynamics, liveliness and performativity of matter (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). On this perspective, the individual subject will likewise be approached as an affective arrangement of sorts: as a shape-shifting, ecologically embedded, multiply temporal complex of elements only provisionally united by socially crafted modes of reflexivity.

Work with the concept: a methodological proposal

Taken in its full complexity, 'affective arrangement' is a philosophical concept that aims at bringing out the unique constellation of a particular affect-intensive site of social life. It drives toward disclosing the operative essentials of a social domain in terms of local machinations of relational affect, giving shape to a potentially idiosyncratic, highly specific affective formation inherent in a particular place or social site at a certain time. The methodology associated with this employment of the concept is accordingly qualitative, explicative and (in part) constructivist, as a given object domain will be described from a unique and potentially even personal angle, developed and crafted with the help of various aesthetic and stylistic means, as deemed appropriate for the case at hand. It will be hard – or even impossible – to separate this sort of work with the concept from an educated perspective and capacity for judgment on part of the scholars working with it, a perspective derived from a unique learning history and experiential trajectory. More is required, it turns out, than the global orientation of 'arrangement thinking', which is an outlook comprising relatively clear-cut principles, as outlined above. What is required, over and above this general orientation, is a specific 'take' or imprint on part of the scholar or researcher – the adoption of a particular stance or posture over and above the mere application of a concept. Thereby, a scholar's – or a scholarly collective's – trained powers of judgment will not only be applied to some object or other, but have to effectively coalesce with whatever object or domain is currently studied, forming an affective arrangement of its own kind between concept users and domain of inquiry (this points to a substantive notion of an 'intellectual posture'). A central role inevitably also accrues to an involved, highly immersive style of approaching and then writing about a subject matter. Hence what we propose especially with respect to the work in *affect studies* is a qualitative, involved and personal perspective that still proceeds *conceptually*, that is, by way of crafting, proposing and critically discussing explicative concepts in close engagement with the material and in alignment with fellow scholars and researchers.

At the same time, much in the foregoing has pointed also to other aspects of empirical research methodologies. For instance, social scientists, ethnographers, or researchers of media

who approach a social domain might take up ‘affective arrangement’ as an explorative schema that guides their charting of the material layout and functional design of social spaces, domains or media platforms, focusing on those elements and their structured interplay that are presumably instrumental to the reliable production and/or continued circulation of affect. Here, what we call ‘arrangement thinking’ finds a readily workable application. The concept of affective arrangement functions as a generative template for hypotheses, research questions or initial domain descriptions. For example, the anthropological study of communal practice or interaction rituals might map out elements of the material propping and staging instrumental to the unfolding of affect during the practice’s performances – up to the drawing of empirically grounded ‘heat maps’ and interaction diagrams in intricate and fine-grained ways. In studies of the nexus of affect and media, the arrangement optic inspires a focus on the milieus and apparatuses of contemporary media and on the immersive, usually transmediated environments and practical contexts of broadcast media and networked applications. In the sociology of organizations, the design of offices and workplaces might be approached with a refined sense for those factors and local set-ups which likely play a role in realizing the predominant forms of affective interactions or affective atmospheres in these settings. Work on individual experience by means of qualitative interviews can likewise make use of the concept, as interviewees might be asked about salient elements of spatial layouts and local arrangements and about these items’ presumed roles in generating moods or atmospheres.

These empirically oriented endeavors won’t have to assume the full qualitative notion of an ‘affective arrangement’, but might highlight selected dimensions, or focus on different elements of an arrangement sequentially during the research process. Accordingly, reckoning with an affective arrangement within affect and emotion research can take the form of an orientating blueprint that is sketchy and selective initially, with details being filled in as new data emerges. The research process takes the form of moving back and forth between arrangement sketches and their correction and elaboration in the light of new material.⁸

Conclusion

In closing, we want to address a tension that might have surfaced in our chapter. As we have argued, a robust element of skill, judgment and taste is required for competent conceptual practice. This seems to point to a certain individualism, even exceptionalism with regard to the figure of the skilled scholar and her or his unique creative capacities. Yet, at the same time, we want to claim emphatically that concepts exist only as *collectively* shared, as that which successfully *travels* between domains and research contexts and thus as something essentially social. Is there a way to reconcile these requirements?

As versatile yet open-textured templates for object-oriented articulation, concepts cannot be understood independently of the conceptual capacities and powers of judgment on part of scholars or researchers that develop, employ, refine and elaborate them – capacities that are not only a product of each individual’s personal history of affective involvement in the world, but also stemming from particular histories of learning, of being embedded within traditions of scholarship and thought collectives. Accordingly, thought styles, intellectual tastes, tacit knowledge and powers of judgment (*‘Urteilkraft’*) are indispensable for devising an understanding of concepts as methodology. Yet, even as ‘grounded’ in practical capacities this way, concepts are not the property of individual scholars, nor do they ‘exist’ – if they exist at all – in the intellectual practice or orientation of a single individual. A concept derives its reality not from the status, authority or ‘unique skillset’ of the person inventing or articulating it, but from the dynamic of being received by others, by its power of explication

in the eyes – and the practices – of others, of those responding to and continuing an initial creative impulse of concept construction. Concepts are *real* in virtue of the *work they can do* on situated individuals and their practical orientations. The more ‘dynamic stability’ a concept gains in such spread-out webs of intellectual practice, the more it becomes a significant factor in its own right. Thus, one might say that a concept only exist in the plurality of its articulations, in a loose yet specific enough nexus of interrelated practices of explication, elaboration, reception, uptake, transformation, contestation and critique.

In light of this, it is a key criterion for whether a concept has indeed ‘emerged’ and gained traction that it is employed and taken up by various scholars or researchers. Conceptual practice is inevitably social, since concepts are articulative templates *collaboratively* employed within an interrelated context of intellectual practice. This does not mean that different scholars need to share a homogeneous outlook and agree on all details of a concept’s components, its structure and dynamics. What it does entail is a receptivity to the conceptual explications of others and to the style and outlook that a conceptual articulation brings with it, even where it cannot be rendered explicit in widely agreed-upon way (‘arrangement thinking’ is a case in point). There is no neutral vantage point from which conceptual articulations can be decisively arbitrated, yet there are rich intellectual practices of collaboration, discussion, critique, centered on joined endeavors of explication and conceptual development. It is thus vital – and, indeed, part of conceptual practice itself – to build, cultivate, inform and advance what Ludwik Fleck called a ‘thought collective’ (Fleck 1979).

This is one respect in which our proposal implies, besides providing a methodological reflection, also a strategic plea with respect to the societal and economic framing of academia. It is a plea for preserving an intellectual culture of scholarly independence and creative diversity amidst growing trends pushing for quantification, objective assessment, digitalization and the dismantling of interpretive inquiry in favor of big-data-driven methodologies. While a discourse of methodology has often served the purpose of policing scholarship – to the point of rooting out individual specificity as deviant and troublesome – in our case it aims at restoring a culture of intellectual accountability among a global, inclusive community of scholars and researchers.

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¹ This paragraph condenses insights from several decades of studies in STS, notably from the anthropological study of scientific research and from perspectives in the so-called ‘history and philosophy of science’, drawing

² It is shocking how little the issues we address are covered in standard texts in mainstream debates of analytic philosophy. The entry ‘concepts’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Margolis & Laurence 2014) is, for instance, totally silent on work by, to our estimate, heavy weight players in the debate on concepts such as Joseph Rouse and Mark Wilson (see esp. Wilson 2006 for a highly innovative study on the dynamics of conceptual behavior in the sciences).

³ With this orientation, our approach resembles Gary Gutting’s (2009) case studies focusing on what he calls philosophical ‘pictures’. While Gutting does not pay much attention to concepts, what he calls ‘pictures’ resembles closely our notion of concepts as anchoring an ‘optic’ or thought style, exemplified for present purposes by what we call ‘arrangement thinking’ below. Echoes to Wittgenstein’s (critical) employment of the notion of a ‘picture’ are evident, yet we focus here on the constructive, generative potentials of such pictures.

⁴ Foucault and some of his methodological followers in philosophy, such as Ian Hacking, might also be mentioned here as further stages in this ongoing lineage (see, e.g., Hacking 2002).

⁵ Here our approach overlaps with the perspective on moving images and image analysis by Schankweiler and Wüschner in the present volume.

⁶ These considerations make our approach relatable to work in social and cultural anthropology; and much of our inspiration comes from interaction with anthropologists within the *Affective Societies* initiative. It would be worth exploring the many resonances with the contribution by Stodulka, Dinkelaker and Thajib to this volume, as they sketch a proposal for bottom-up conceptual development in contexts where established categories for emotions and affect are unavailable. See also Stodulka (2017).

⁷ Several authors in the field of affect studies have suggested comparable concepts, likewise drawing on Deleuze and Foucault, see for instance Anderson (2014), who speaks of affective apparatuses, and Seyfert (2012), who has coined the term 'affektif'. Bennett (2010) and Grossberg (1992) also hint at notions resembling our proposal.

⁸ With this, our approach has obvious affinities with the 'grounded theory' methodology in sociology and with the role assigned therein to 'sensitizing concepts' (see, e.g., Bowen 2006).

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