Epilogue – Towards an Experience Ecology of Relational Emotions

By Richard Ek

In the introduction we addressed service work in general and the emotional labour concept in particular, with the assumption that emotion management and emotion display is not limited to the front-desk or service employee. Rather, as indicated, "it is a process that permeates and characterises the service encounter and its physical environment, its servicescape, in its entirety".

From this suggestion I would like to address three implications that are in need of more scholarly attention. The first is that *also the consumer*, as a customer, tourist, client, guest or whatever, conducts emotion management and emotion display. The second implication is that these two processes of emotional management and emotional display (the service personnel's and the customers') are preferably apprehended and discussed *as relational* in character. This means that they mutually shape and enhance each other in an interaction with a particular set of politics and poetics that craves more analytic concern. The third implication is that the poetics and politics of relational emotion management and emotion display need to be situated in their *spatial context*.

The third implication in turn addresses a call for a more sensitive attendance towards this relational spatiality through its ontological register. This is of course a very ambitious task, and here I can only offer a distilled picture of the work pertaining to the cultural circuit of capitalism conducted by Nigel Thrift as analytical spine. While the different implications addressed above are attended to in different ways in the individual papers, I would like to use this postscript to paint a distilled picture of what could perhaps be referred to as experience ecology for relational emotion management and emotion display.

Experience Ecology for Relational Emotion Management and Display

Taking a political approach, Nigel Thrift (2005a: 6–8) argues that the cultural economy of contemporary capitalism can be divided into three areas of approach: the *cultural circuit of capitalism*, new *spatial forms of corporate related practices* and new forms of *commodity and commodity relations*. For me, all these three areas of approach enlighten the experience ecology that relational emotion management and emotional display should be situated in.

The first approach, the cultural circuit of capitalism, was introduced in the 1960s. This cultural circuit is a self-organising assemblage of knowledge production and diffusion, primarily among the business elite (Thrift 2001). The chief

components in this assemblage include business schools, management consultants and management gurus (Thrift 1998a). Particularly characteristic of this institution, and the management discourses that are articulated and spread in this amalgam, is the ambition to deal and cope with complexity through reflexivity (Thrift 1998b & 1999). Through this ambition, "soft" aspects like knowledge, creativity and innovation become key concepts (as was stated at the end of the introduction). In this situation people become the primary resource, which means that this human resource consequently needs to meet new requirements and managerial expectations. This leads us to the second area of approach, namely new spatial forms of corporate-related practices.

A soft capitalism that rests on creativity, knowledge, tacit skills etc., needs willing subjects. More explicitly, the business organisation is in need of willing and willed subjects (Thrift 1998a). The managed body has to do more (work harder) but at the same time be passionate about it and not only invest cognitive skills in the work. In addition, the managed body has to become more adaptable (through constant learning) and participative in order to be sensitive to the social dynamics of the organisation (Thrift 2001). The managed body, and particularly the bodies of the personnel, becomes performing bodies as attempts to engineer "fast" subjects are unfolded in tandem with attempts to produce new spaces of intensity and plasticity. These fast subject positions become engineered through spaces of visualisation, circulation and embodiment (Thrift 2000a).

These spaces of pastoral subjectification and performative recitation of norms (Butler 1993) do not create agent-less drones. Nevertheless, they are products of intentional circumstances, reflected in practices such as therapeutic models, a management ethos that predicts openness and fluidity and organisational work forms like teams and projects. In order to underpin this openness and capacity for renewability, inspirational practices like events, performances and playfulness are used as management technologies (Thrift 2000b), together with more representational technologies such as corporate storytelling and iconographic uses of signs and spaces (Thrift 2001; Boje 2008).[1]

These new spatial forms of corporate-related practices do not only limit themselves to the spatialities of the organisation bodies, but apply to the organisational spatiality as a whole. Among all the dimensions that can be considered here, Thrift stresses in different writings that the background is usually more or less taken for granted. Clearly, computing is now much more common in the organisational environment, with the consequence that surfaces and all kinds of software-driven devices (Thrift & French 2002; Thrift 2003) give a new texture to everyday life. New information ecology increasingly forms a background of cause and effect, thus creating all kind of densities and intensities and blurring ontological as well as ontic orderings and distinctions (Thrift 2004a & 2004b). Societal interaction becomes embedded in a more active object environment and an informed materiality that is continuously mediated and articulated, sensed and represented

(Thrift 2005b). As kinetic, ubiquitous surfaces, these environments influence our understanding of movement and time (Thrift 2004c).

It is now time to attend to the third area of approach – the new forms of commodity and commodity relations. To Thrift (2005a: 7–8), this is a development that pivots on the consumption of the new commodity forms that are unfolded, such as the ubiquity of brands and the animation and vitalisation of commodities (material, non-material, material-and-immaterial, more-than-material and so on) intended to produce affect (see also Molotch 2003; Lury 2004; Miller 2009). The tendency here is intensification, or extensification, in order to produce commodification in registers so far downgraded in capitalistic mechanisms (Thrift 2006). These tendencies are perhaps best captured in management discourse through the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999) on the experience economy and the need for business to arrange, design and create experiences for and with an increasingly active consumer.[2]

When consumer practices become imagined as experience creation and as something more than an instrumental exchange or interaction, a new, but still commercial, poetics of the service encounter is unfolded. This tendency has paved the way for immanent management recipes on value and an all-encompassing service dominant logic within service marketing literature (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Prahalad & Krishnan 2008). Value is increasingly expected to arise not from what is but from a realm of potentiality (Thrift 2006) and consumers' investment in the act of consumption.

Here, the full consumer register must be played upon. In particular, the spectrum of non-cognitive processes, of forethought, has to be mobilised through new business models and management engineering. Forethought is no longer understood as a substrate but as a vivacious performative situational element. As a consequence, what counts as production and consumption, as well as products and services, is restructured.[3] Attention is paid to affect, since consumption is increasingly understood as not only an emotional but also an affective field that is possible to reach through an activation of space (Thrift 2006).

This is not the place to make a long re-capitulation of affect or the increased interest in these questions that makes some voices claim a contemporary affective turn (Clough 2008). Basic definitions and a suggestion as to how affect can be related to feelings and emotion will have to suffice. Affect can be described as a culturally unfiltered self-referential state of being (Thrift 2008: 221). It can be seen as "the stuff of our being and not the semiotic material that enables us to understand our being" (Dewsbury 2009: 21). It can also be imagined as an "experiential force and a material thing that exists as a relational experience and a phenomenological realm in a noninterpretative and impersonal manner" (Dewsbury 2009: 20).

These definitions refer to the perhaps more dominant approach towards affect outlined by Thrift (2004d: 63–64), and are based on the works of Spinoza and the

interpretation of Spinoza's work by Deleuze (1988, 1990) and Massumi (2002).[4] Affect is a form of usually indirect and non-reflective thinking, its own kind of intelligence and consequently a capacity of interaction, a force of emergence. Affect is therefore a transpersonal capacity, a force in and between bodies. The body (not necessarily a human body) can both affect and be affected. Affect is inherently relational (Anderson 2006). In Steve Pile's review, affect is non-cognitive, pre-reflexive, pre-conscious and pre-human, and, following this, representations of affect can never represent affect itself (Pile 2010).[5]

What becomes problematic for Pile (and I agree with this objection) is Thrift's insistent remarks that affect can be manipulated. To Thrift (2006), capitalism to a greater extent uses the whole bio-political field, a microbiopolitics of the subliminal, including affect (non-cognitive dimensions of embodiment and instinct, the 0.8–1.5 seconds of little space of time, the blink between action and performance) (Thrift 2000c, 2004d). Business corporations become increasingly affective, with more and more advanced affective techniques that appeal to the heart, passion, imagination and emotions (Thrift 2008: 244-246), while cities are concentrations of manipulations of affect for political gain through new political registers (Thrift 2004d, see also Connolly 2002 and Protevi 2009).[6] To return to Pile (2010: 17), he is critical of the assumption that affect, as a non-representational object, can be grasped, made intelligible, represented, i.e. known, and the same time consciously and deliberately engineered. It is clear that we need to be concerned about and examine the ontology of affect and how it relates to feelings and emotions.

To Clive Barnett (2008: 188), affect is doubly located in the relational in-between of interaction fields, metaphorically *below* the level of consciousness and *before* the realm of intentional action. Affect comes before "doing" and "knowing". These layers of ontology are perhaps most evident in the separation between affect, feelings and emotions. Emotions are everyday understandings of affect (Thrift 2008: 221), affect is unqualified intensity, while emotion is qualified intensity (Massumi 2002: 28). Pile (2010: 9) summarises this ontological map of prior, below, and beyond (affect is prior to emotions, below cognition and beyond reflectivity and humanness [situated in the realm of bare life]) as a three tiered cake of mind-body, in which the first tier is the non-cognitive – affect – below, behind and beyond cognition, the second tier is the pre-cognitive – feelings – not yet expressed or conceptualised but made into conscious and personal responses to transpersonal affect and the third tier is the cognitive – emotions – expressed feelings that are socially constructed through language and other kinds of sign systems. The problem is, of course, that since affect is unknowable the basic ontological tier cannot be represented (that is, ontologically fixated in any sense). Even if it could be situated as the foundation or requirement of feelings and emotions, it is not possible to articulate the nature of this foundation, requirement or influence. Pile definitely has a point here, so we need to articulate a new view of affect, feelings and emotions in order to address their presence in experience

ecology and the relational emotion management and display phenomena situated within.

Instead, I suggest that the cartography of affect, feelings and emotions can be regarded as a palimpsest, following Crang's geographical vision of the urban landscape (Crang 1996). It is still tiered cake ontology, but the tiers no longer have a causal function through a one-sided direction of forces (from affect and then "forward" in time and topography). Affect is here no longer isolated and impossible to make knowable or represent, because affect is here topologically related to feelings and emotions, and in that sense, graspable and tangible, possible to represent and understand.

This is perhaps an unorthodox view of affect, but it fits with our purpose of directing analytical focus to emotional labour in an experience-filled economy that is increasingly unfolded through ever more inventive and creative (mainly commercial) approaches and actions along the entire emotional register of societal interaction (see for example George 2008). Thrift's and other scholars' takes on affect help us to pay attention to a spatial context that includes the ephemeral, artefacts, technology and the mundane in the context of emotional labour, at the same time as the content of what is social and social interaction is not taken for granted. This is what I have called the experience ecology of relational emotion management and display.

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Notes

1   I am well aware of the literature based on Foucault's work on governmentality and bio-power and the fact that it fits well into this analysis, but I choose not to include this strand of work in the reasoning in a systematic way.

2   See also Boswijk et al 2007; Gilmore & Pine 2007; Hjort & Kostera 2007; Klingmann 2007; Sundbo & Darmer 2008.

3   This has also developed into an "identity crisis" in service marketing, as the former distinction between goods and services no longer holds, not even in a superficial way (Grönroos 2001; Lovelock & Gummesson 2004; Gummesson 2007).

4   The second approach conceives affect as a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct as an outer lining from phenomenological, hermeneutic and social interactionism approaches. The third approach is based on the notion of libidinal and sexual drive in Freudian

and psychoanalytic meaning. The fourth and last approach to affect is what Thrift called Darwinian affect, which discusses the universality and specificity of expressions of emotions involving the face, the voice and body postures and movement (Thrift 2004d: 63-64). Later, Thrift (2006: 223-225) identified five schools of thought relating to affect: the Darwinian approach, the James-Lange theory, Tomkin's distinction between drives and affect, Deleuze's work and the psychosocial school of thought.

5   Affect is consequently of special concern in Non-representational theory, an investigative approach that questions the scholarly emphasis on the representational realm in the social sciences and humanities. Besides stressing affect and sensation, Non-representational theory or geographies further stress the vitality of the everyday flow and the philosophies of becoming, the anti-biographical and pre-individual, practices, things, experimentation (also in the research process and research outcome, see McCormack 2002) and a view of space as the concreteness and materiality of the situation rather than a transcendental or metaphoric take on space (Thrift 2008: 5-16, see also Cadman 2009). The most important articles on affect from the Non-representational geographies literature not taken into consideration here include Dewsbury (2003), McCormack (2002, 2003, 2007), Anderson (2004, 2005) and Harrison (2007).

6   Thrift uses Agamben's (1998) notion of 'bare life' to conceptualise this bio-political domain of half a second and manages to elucidate the connection between the bio-politics of modern totalitarianism and the society of consumerism and hedonism, to some degree apparent in Agamben's work through his reading of Debord and Heidegger.

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