

*Moods and feelings in organisations and institutions:
Responding to the “**affective turn**” in the social sciences*

18 May, 2017, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Leicester, College Court

Registration: £35, including lunch, tea breaks, seminar materials

Brought to you by the University of Leicester, School of Business:
Management and Organization Division, and INTO Division

Organisers:

Dr. Elke Weik

Dr. John Cromby

Dr. Eda Ulus

Keynote Speakers:

Professor Emma Bell, Open University

Professor Steven D. Brown, University of Leicester

Dr. Kate Kenny, Queen's University Belfast

Professor Paul Stenner, Open University

***To Register** – Please contact the organisers:

Dr. Elke Weik, e.weik@le.ac.uk

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Speaker Abstracts:

Professor Emma Bell

The Ethics of the Hand in Craft Making

This paper focuses on the importance of the hand in understanding affective relationships to objects and humanity. By analysing how hands are used and represented in businesses that draw on discourses of craft making, (pottery, shoes and bicycles), I consider the role of the hand in contemporary craft work in reconnecting making to places and people. I propose the ethics of the hand as a way of critiquing the status and value of labour and exploring the role of materiality and physicality in contemporary work. Finally, I suggest craft work highlights the power relations that determine which hands are accorded value, thereby producing and maintaining normative, exclusionary conceptions of who is able to feel and who is worth feeling for.

Professor Steven D. Brown

Organizational Affective Atmospheres: The Social Topology of a Secure Forensic Psychiatric Unit

Organized settings are primarily experienced through what Kathleen Stewart (2011) calls 'atmospheric attunements'. Atmospheres can be understood as circulating forces that afford possibilities for thought and action (see also Borch, 2009). Drawing on the language and analytic strategies of topology, these forces can be located in respect to the regions, boundaries and vectorial spaces of free movement that they constitute. The tools for this work are provided by a reinterpretation of Kurt Lewin's (1936; 1945) account of 'life space' as the material and conceptual affordances that are actualized in lived experience. This toolkit is used to discuss material drawn from an empirical study of a medium-secure forensic unit. The physical topography of security - walls, locked doors, constraints on movement - does not prevent relations from over-spilling and extending into the community. The affective atmosphere of the unit varies through the circulation of distributed and mediated relations that cut across any straightforward distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. In this way, a concern for affect overcomes a notion of 'simple location' (cf. Whitehead, 1958). Doing time on the unit - whether as patient or staff - principally involves become attuned to fluctuations in atmosphere and being alive to their implications for expected and unexpected events.

Dr. Kate Kenny

Porous Selves: Whistleblower Retaliation, Coping Strategies and Affect

Current research on whistleblowing tends to perceive people who speak out about wrongdoing as autonomous individuals acting alone and based on a personal moral framework. How might we move beyond this, and how can theories of affect help us to do so? This presentation draws on excerpts from the forthcoming book *Constructing the Whistleblower: A Critical Psychosocial Perspective on Speaking Out in the Financial Sector*. Drawing on recently gathered empirical data, it explores how whistleblowers survive

retaliation and highlights how, even for those who emerge apparently intact at the end, this ‘self’ is fundamentally different to the person that began the process. Even so, we know that subjects appear to persist, to some degree, to tell their stories. What enables this persistence, this apparent survival that is not survival in the typical sense of the world, but a struggle that changes the subject in unpredictable ways?

Various sources of support and assistance are explored alongside the ways in which these contribute to people’s survival. Recognition offered to the whistleblower by important others is vital in helping to construct a subject position that is somewhat “liveable”; it offers a sense of comfort, in contrast to the stigmatization people often experience. Drawing on Butler’s later work on recognition, affect and emotion helps to theorize these issues. In contrast to typical accounts of ‘whistleblower support’, these sources of help are shown to be neither ‘outside’ of the whistleblower, as separate entities, nor are they ‘inside’ as for example an “inner well” of strength, but rather the whistleblower as subject is porous at the boundary, coming into being as an already-attached, multiple subject. Affective attachments to a variety of sources of help enable this struggle as subjects perform their whistleblower selves. Many such attachments were not simply to proximate, face-to-face others but encompassed virtual connections enabled by Internet technology, religious faith and attachments to people not even alive today.

Professor Paul Stenner

Affective Transformations: Liminal Hotspots

Some influential advocates of the ‘affective turn’ in academia embraced an almost euphoric fascination with affect and the emotions. It was almost as if this ‘new’ focus and mode of thought/feeling would save us from the horrors of rational, representational, discursive thought. From this perspective, affect often stood for a spontaneous, collective, asubjective and progressive *becoming-other* that promises ‘new possibilities’ that are never quite articulated (since to discursively articulate is to constrain and transform the ineffable). This stance risks appearing quaintly innocent in a world in which a) affects are routinely manipulated for political and economic ends through information technologies informed by curious combinations of big data, mood tracking, affective neuroscience, nudge ‘theory’, psychometrics, affective computing, social robotics, etc., and b) public discourse (from political rhetoric through journalism to social media usage) has taken its own distinctly affective turn towards Trumpeting ‘felt truths’, partisan hostility, hate speech, etc. We need better ways of grasping these more politically and personally problematic aspects of ‘affect’ in today’s various psychosocial settings.

To this end, in this presentation I will introduce the concept of ‘liminal hotspots’, which combines a focus on liminality with a concern for affectivity. The focus on liminality allows us to see that many of the positive, exciting, desirable features attributed to ‘affect’ by advocates of the ‘affective turn’ can be understood as characteristics of liminal occasions (occasions of passage between categories and modes of being during which these more stable forms are subject to metamorphosis). It is possible, however, to get ‘stuck’ in a kind of permanent liminality, and this possibility is greatly enhanced in social systems which demand continual change and which facilitate it with a growing repertoire of liminal-affective technologies.

Venue Details:

The venue for this event, College Court, is located on Knighton Rd, Leicester LE2 3UF:

<https://collegecourt.co.uk/>

Accommodation can be booked at College Court, or in the Leicester City Centre, approximately 15 minutes by bus to College Court.

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