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"The Real Affects of Change": A Review

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The twelve sculptures that make up this work point to the human costs of mergers. In visualising the affective effects of mergers, the sculptures invite us to cast a different view, one focused on how these effects are embodied by the individual worker.

Affects are positive or negative investments that we have toward people, but also ideas, things and places (Goodwin et al. 2004:418). It is through affects that we often relate to others. Affect, as emotions, are embodied because "they entail some combination of sensation, behaviour and disposition" and involve "an articulation of bodily activity and worldly social context" (Crossley 2001:45). As Ahmed puts it, "it is through the movement of emotions that the very distinction between inside and outside, or the individual and social, is effected in the first place" (Ahmed 2004:28). The title of the piece suggests that the affects usually associated with transformations in the education sector are merely superficial, and probably not representative of the experiences of those involved. Instead, here affect is reconcidered in a nuanced way, and positioned as a main effect of these transformations.

The visualisation of affect is challenging because there are no set methodologies or aesthetic precedents to guide us in this task. It is an exercise of capturing that which is not visual and only discursive up to a point, and it becomes even more complex when we attempt to capture someone else's discursive version of what they feel. Artists may resort to maps, colour, or evocative eyes in portraits, but in any case, the challenge lies not only in how affect is visualised, but also on how it is interpreted by the viewer:

> the affective dimension of art may be apprehended or felt fairly immediately, but its meaning is not so readily apparent. This may be because this aspect of art is not part of any of the key methodologies that art history deploys. Hence we have a limited vocabulary to describe artistic feeling and no seasoned experience of detecting and thinking about it (Best 2011, 7).

In *The Real Affects of Change*, visualisation is approached through a DiY aesthetic that provides a sense of immediacy, and suggests a kind of expression that is visceral and unfiltered. We could be led to think the sculptures were made by affected workers themselves, as a form of art therapy aimed to process and externalise (visualise) the affects resulting from the merger process.

So what's the use of visualising affect? Perhaps visualising the personal effects and affects of economic processes might help us confront increasingly brutal and detached economies and workplaces, in the midst of what we could refer to as a crisis of care in society. Advanced capitalism is defined by a search for profit and growth that prioritises profit before people, as a result cutting the human aspect of economic transactions out of the picture. A poignant example of this is the crisis in care provision described by Bev Skeggs (2018). The finanzialisation of everyday life, argues Skeggs, leads to profit-seeking schemes in the care system that are counter-productive to the exercise of providing care, with care workers themselves also being exploited and neglected by the system. We might ask then if the same does not apply to the education system. In the UK we have for a while now seen increased precarisation damaging the mental health of educators and researchers, as the quality of education declines. Universities offer wellbeing courses, mental health awareness days, and access to mindfulness apps; an approach to care that remains on the surface, far from questioning the structural problems that got us all on the mindfulness app in the first place.

There is a crisis of care, and it is sprawling. In this context, experiments in visualising the affects of work and of economic processes can be a first step towards visibilising, mapping, and better understanding its effects.

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