constantly in the classroom, and I believe that it is a central issue for us to deal with when we try to understand the role of affect in teaching and learning. I feel that our goal is not to avoid conflict, but to find ways to learn from it. In writing this response I have constantly tried to reword my sentences, seeking to control the affects I spin into existence for my reader, seeking to be provocative but not insulting. This is another policing aspect of liberated desire I feel important yet finally am not able to control nor neatly theorize.

George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

Works Cited


Desire and Immanence:
The Difficulties of Post-Dualist Thought

Daniel Smith

Christa Albrecht-Crane’s "An Affirmative Theory of Desire" makes a significant contribution to the emerging body of work in rhetoric and composition that argues for the importance of affect in our field. There are, I suspect, rhetoricians and compositionists who disagree with these arguments supporting affect as a legitimate, if not crucial, area of research and pedagogy. Moreover, there are some who see this move toward affect as deeply problematic, if not pernicious.1 The questions, concerns, and doubts motivating the uncertainty about and opposition to affect need to be raised and certainly deserve to be addressed. However, because I am among those who support the idea that it’s important for us to explore and understand affect and its pertinence for our work as teacher-scholars, my
response to Albrecht-Crane is that of a sympathetic ally and constructive critic. Indeed, in that spirit, I want to take her up on her offer to view her essay as an invitation for critical examination and commentary. In so doing, as readers of Albrecht-Crane's article will surely recognize, I will distill and focus on parts of her essay that are not representative of her project as a whole. As I hope will become evident, I have taken this tack because I observe in Albrecht-Crane's essay a tension that I think the article itself invites us to highlight.

Albrecht-Crane situates her conception of affect within a theory of desire that seeks to move beyond three limiting factors that unduly restrict pedagogical theory and practice. First, she wants to take us beyond desire's reduction to sexuality/eroticism. Second, she eschews a psychoanalytic understanding of desire as a function of “lack,” a radical absence or negativity constitutive of our very existence that drives us to fill an ineradicable void within ourselves. And finally, she wants to leave behind a “subject-centered” understanding of desire in which the concept is territorialized by the subject—that is, by the “I.” Released from its sexual, negative ontologic, and subjective tethers, desire is (re)conceived by Albrecht-Crane as an aleatory social energy of movement, connectivity, change, and creativity—“molecular” forces that permeate “what we do and who we are to the extent that it underwrites and enables existence as such” (566). The molecular forces of desire circulate within and yet “outside” social systems, which, in contrast to desire, are characterized as “molar”—that is, as structured formations of organization, order, and regularity.

This contrast, however, does not mark a binary relation between desire and social determination; the two, rather, are coextensive but irreducible to one another. Social determinations operate, for Albrecht-Crane, through a harnessing and ordering of “desire into forms that give rise to the social organizations that sustain a particular society” (578; emphasis added). At the same time, even though desire’s molecular processes operate in a manner that has the potential to undermine and disrupt the ordering and regulating dynamics that compose forms of social organization, desire does not exist apart from the forms of organization that emerge from and compose social determinations. Indeed, one might say that one of the functions of forms of social organization—if not the primary function, according to Albrecht-Crane—is to respond to and manage the variability, creativity, and unpredictability of desire, even as they depend upon it for their dynamism. For Albrecht-Crane, to speak of any form of social organization—and its concomitant mechanisms of
order, regularity, and determination—is to presuppose the energies of desire (and their creative/destructive dynamics) and vice versa. Within this conceptual framework, then, desire and social organization are heterogeneously operating but mutually immanent dimensions of social existence that cannot be understood apart from one another. What Albrecht-Crane’s essay invites us to do is pay more attention to the molecular processes that operate “outside” and yet within the molar forms of social determination that have been the focus of much of our research and pedagogy. Among these forms of social determination is the subject as an ordered and regulated social form.

Albrecht-Crane deploys a Deleuzean understanding of affect to explore and understand the immanence and irreducibility of desire and forms of social organization and the place of subjectivity, agency, learning, and teaching within that immanent disjunctiveness. Affects are, in other words, neither reducible to the molecularity of desire nor to molar emotions experienced by the I-form, but they are, nevertheless, inextricably connected to both. That is, for Albrecht-Crane, affects function as the threshold between the aleatory processes of desire and the socially coded forms they take as the emotional life of the “I.” Affects therefore designate liminal circuits, or vectors of transduction, that connect molecular energies of desire and the molar subject. The effects of this connection can be felt by bodies—a somatic “prehension” rather than a cognitive apprehension—in a manner that does not operate at the level of representation or signification and that can undermine and disrupt the mechanisms of ordering and regulating that forms the organization of the “I.” Thus, via affects, the subject is connected to and affected by what Deleuze and Guattari call intensities—forces “outside” of and other than the self-form (or any other form of social organization and determination, for that matter), which have the potential to expose subjects to the disorganizing and disordering forces of desire. The nonrepresentational dimension of the connection between desire and subjectivity indicate that affects need not do their work at the level of meaning or cognitive understanding. Its “felt” dimension points out, moreover, that the body plays a fundamental role in the operation of affects and the effects they have the potential to produce.

Albrecht-Crane’s conception of affect has serious implications for how we think about and practice pedagogy, including pedagogies that seek to engender political resistance and social change. Like other scholars working on affect in rhetoric and composition, Albrecht-Crane’s essay sheds light on a dimension of teaching and learning that has been
virtually ignored not only within our field but also, more generally, in Western institutions of teaching and learning. This lacuna is unsurprising within Western culture, which more often than not has demonized, irrationalized, feminized, marginalized and otherwise minimized or denied our status as feeling, passionate, and embodied animals. What sets Albrecht-Crane’s attempt to attend to affect apart from most others in rhetoric and composition is her effort to move away from the Cartesian logic that informs much of the work on affect in our field.

That is to say, even though many of us in rhetoric and composition have relinquished the idea of a self-constituting, sovereign subject in favor of conceiving of the subject as “socially constructed,” we still place a tremendous emphasis on the conscious mind. Even though we now attend to how a multiplicity of social forces that constitute subjectivity, we are nevertheless still “Cartesians” to the extent that our social constructivist perspective is concerned with how these forces constitute what subjects consciously perceive, know, think, believe, value, and choose. The primacy of the social has thus displaced the sovereign subject, but the way we conceive of how the social constitutes subjects is still framed by a Cartesian model, one that valorizes consciousness. This is especially evident in composition pedagogies that seek to teach a radicalized version of civic virtue by focusing on cultivating students’ critical consciousness, teaching them how to do social analysis and critique so that they may function as critical citizens. The conscious mind and its capacities is the primary locus of empowerment, agency, and personal and social change in critical pedagogy’s model of citizenship training.

Recent work on affect in our field is a challenge to the Cartesian paradigm inasmuch as the primacy of consciousness, knowledge, and cognitive capacities is brought into question. As important as this turn to affect is, however (and it is important and should continue to be developed), Albrecht-Crane’s essay shows that more can be done with the concept. Unlike Albrecht-Crane’s project, virtually all of the scholarship on affect in rhetoric and composition makes the concept synonymous with emotion. She shows us that this a problem insofar as reducing affect to emotion focuses on what is consciously experienced by the self—that is, experienced by the “I.” In other words, as Albrecht-Crane points out, I experience anger, happiness, pride, shame, fear, hate, ambivalence, and so on because I perceive some phenomenon or event that evokes an affective response that I feel, become aware of, and understand as having
significance for me. By attending to emotional dynamics the Cartesian focus on knowledge and cognitive capacities is disrupted; but when affect is reduced to emotion we remain unduly tied to this rationalist paradigm insofar as the consciously perceiving "I" is still privileged. In short, the conscious subject of knowledge (I think, therefore I am) is replaced by or complemented with the conscious subject of emotion (I feel, therefore I am). There's a shift or expansion of perspective, but the privileged status of the consciousness remains relatively undisturbed.

At the same time, however, I want to suggest that Albrecht-Crane's essay (inadvertently) invites its readers to remain within the ambit of the Cartesian legacy when she equates subjectivity with the conscious "I." This equation operates throughout much of her essay but is particularly evident when she discusses agency: "Compositionists tend to assume that agency operates at the level of subjectivity, at the level of some sort of self-conscious activity involving our selves." And she adds, "What I am trying to consider through theorizing affect in this essay is to disarticulate the notion that subjects possess and consciously execute agency and instead to suggest that agency is also enabled and performed in quite non-subjective ways" (586, 587). I will take up the issue of agency specifically below. What I want to point out now is that in equating subjectivity with consciousness Albrecht-Crane risks perpetuating part of the Cartesian legacy that her project simultaneously challenges. Her reduction of subjectivity to the "I" effectively brackets out any consideration of the unconscious and pre-reflective dynamics of our embodied existence from the problematic of subjectivity, a move emblematic of rationalist thought. This would explain why Albrecht-Crane describes agency that is not consciously directed and enacted as "non-subjective." It also provides insight into why she claims that agency qua "affective resistance emerges at the moment that the subject begins to dissolve" (585). She also makes a sharp distinction between "subject production" and "affective production," observing that the "language and logic of subjectivity simply do not apply [to the latter]" (587).

Perhaps more importantly, in being so quick to make a such solid distinction between the subjective and non-subjective, Albrecht-Crane also risks perpetuating modern philosophy's—very useful but ultimately limiting—dualistic conception of subject and world. Letting the problematic of subjectivity be defined by modern philosophy's dualistic logic has the consequence of limiting how we understand, and thus can re-understand, subjectivity and agency and their connectedness to, effectiveness through, and continuity with the world. More precisely, when subjec-
tivity is reduced to the cogito—and whatever is outside the cognitive-affective processes, experiences, and choices of that "I" is thus designated as non-subjective—what’s at work is a dualistic logic that Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of desire strives to move beyond.\textsuperscript{5}

This problem of dualism is not simply a question of fidelity to the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. For part of what is taking place in their work is the ongoing and difficult task of developing a mode of thought and analysis seeks to "escape" the gravitational pull, if you will, of dualistic thought and the unexamined processes of reification that make it possible.\textsuperscript{6} One of the common expressions of dualism can be observed in a longstanding intellectual tradition territorialized by a rigid distinction between the subject and the world it inhabits. The difficulty of the task of forging an alternative to this tradition lies in thinking beyond this distinction without, at the same time, dissolving it. The task, in effect, is to develop a post-dualist mode of thought, one that offers a conceptually novel theory of the "and" that functions simultaneously to distinguish and connect subject and world in a complex and post-dualistic way. As it is typically articulated in rhetoric and composition, social constructivism does some of this work vis-à-vis subject and world in that the subject is understood as being constituted through its interactions with the world. However, as fruitful as this constructivist perspective is, to the extent that the constitutive relation between subject and world is conceptualized as one in which a being acts and is acted upon by something ultimately (that is, ontologically) separate from it, the dualism between subject and world remains firmly intact and the continuity or immanence of subject and world is examined and questioned at only one level. In other words, the connectivity and continuity marked by the and is theorized (secondarily) through the logic of separation and discontinuity that is also marked by the and, a separation and discontinuity that is taken to be ontologically primary. This same dualistic logic operates in most theories of intersubjectivity. But we may ask: Aren’t such distinctions, in fact, real? And thus, mustn’t they be attended to? The answer, of course, is yes, they are quite real, and it behooves us not to forget that reality. But the other question we must ask is this: Can this "punctuated" or dualistic conception of a subject’s relational, interactive, and systemic existence be complemented and complexified by developing a mode of thought and analysis that understands the subject in both its immanent and disjunctive relation to the world? In short, can we theorize the and otherwise—that is, without a dualistic logic and the processes of reification that give rise to it?
For the most part, the theory of desire that Albrecht-Crane develops in her essay would have us answer the preceding question in the affirmative. Specifically, by taking up Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy Albrecht-Crane aligns herself with a paradigm of thought and analysis that asks us to conceptualize fluidly continuous but \textit{qualitatively} differentiated \textit{processes} or processual events that are coextensive with but not reducible to actual, \textit{quantitatively} distinctive \textit{things} or existents. That is, it asks us to conceptualize relations, potentials, actions, and operations that are immanent with but not reducible to “things”—whether they be subjects, objects, practices, institutions, discourses, images, technologies, ideologies, and so on. Thus, we are asked to think in an “immanently disjunctive” rather than a dualistic and reifying manner. We are asked to understand being itself in terms of mutually presupposing (\textit{and}) but heterogeneously operating dimensions of existence and action that are \textit{not} reducible to each other. For example, we would try to think in terms of: functions, capacities, and catalysts \textit{and-not} agents and actors; fields of energies, forces, relations, and attractors \textit{and-not} institutions, discourses, subjects, and practices; potentials of sociality \textit{and-not} actual social determinations and formations; metastable milieus or virtual ecologies \textit{and-not} contexts; expressions and circulations of logics and operations \textit{and-not} representations, meanings, and codes; temporality, movement, and transition-variation \textit{and-not} space, location, and states of equilibrium; indeterminate, porous, and mutable boundaries \textit{and-not} firm distinctions and borders; varying and variable patterns and rhythms \textit{and-not} enduring laws and principles; dynamics of individuation, (de)stabilization, normativization, and actualization \textit{and-not} individuals, (in)stabilities, norms, and actualities.\textsuperscript{7}

It should be noted that because each “side” of these immanently disjunctive formulations is equally real their order is reversible. Potentials of sociality \textit{and-not} actual social determinations and formations, for instance, can be rendered as actual social determinations \textit{and-not} potentials of sociality, without signaling any change in their equal \textit{ontological} status. However, I have presented them in the manner above to highlight the \textit{conceptual} priority a post-dualist mode of thought asks us to grant to the connectivity and continuity marked by the \textit{and-not}. Conceptually prioritizing “fluid” and process-oriented concepts can help us to think beyond the limitations of the modern-dualistic incarnations of more familiar concepts, while enabling us to keep (and re-understand) them as part of our conceptual and analytical repertoire. Hence, we would seek to conceptualize worlds and the elements they subsume from a processual
perspective—that is, as dynamically continuous, but nevertheless qualitatively differentiated, events and—not distinct, quantitatively differentiated things or phenomena. Post-dualist thought is, then, an effort to understand and analyze the material conditions of existence and action—and the relational, interactive, and systemic nature of those conditions—through a mode of thought that attenuates the force and effectivity of processes of reification and dualism. The aim of such thought is to enable a better attention to the fluidity and complexity of human existence and social life, while nevertheless remaining intimately connected to, and concerned about, the specific situations, lives, and needs of actual, concrete individuals and collectivities.

As I suggested above, (re)thinking in this manner is a difficult task (one courageously undertaken by Albrecht-Crane). Such thinking is counterintuitive because it asks us to ascribe a relatively autonomous existence and effectivity to “dynamics” (potentials, relations, capacities, operations, activities, for example) that we tend to think of as belonging to or expressions of actual “things” and their actions and interactions. Thus, we are being asked to set aside what seems self-evidentially true and to grapple with ontology and ontological questions, something Kenneth Burke taught us the value of decades ago but that seems to have fallen somewhat out of favor in our field. In short, the task of “escaping” from dualistic thinking and its concomitant material conditions involves understanding and learning to think (and live) beyond the ontological assumptions that substant and organize much of our social theory and analysis—not to mention our curricula, our pedagogies, and our everyday lives. However, it would be an act of hubris to expect that because we become aware of and know how historical “traditions” limit our thought and action in the present that we can simply choose to remove, and thus be free from, those limits. In other words, processes of reification and their dualistic effects do not “go away” because we become aware of and consciously try to avoid them. These processes are woven into the very fabric of our language, our thinking, and our ways of life. I think this explains why Albrecht-Crane’s essay exhibits a dualistic tendency, despite its thought-provoking deployment of Deleuze and Guattari’s “post-dualist” theory of desire.

We saw this tendency exhibited in the dualistic disjunction she makes between subjective and non-subjective modes of agency, the latter of which, for Albrecht-Crane, corresponds with the dissolution of subjectivity. But this dichotomous formulation has its roots in a more fundamental dualism in her essay: one between liberation and determination. This
creates a tension with the post-dualist logic also at work in her project. Albrecht-Crane explains that her call for the “liberation of desire/affect” should not be taken “in the spirit of a liberal politics of transcending repressed subjectivities” (566). Nevertheless, in her essay we see this “spirit” of liberation transposed from the subject onto desire and affect. In other words, the liberal humanist (or perhaps quasi-Romantic) idea/ideal of free, undetermined existence and action is transferred from subjects to desire and affect.

This logic of liberation is never articulated positively in Albrecht-Crane’s essay but rather negatively through a variety of formulations that valorize the absence of and freedom from forms of social determination. In her discussion of Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past, for example, she speaks of Proust’s narrator having a “de-subjectifying” affective experience, a “remembrance that escapes his confinement as a subject to the specific space and time of his present.” In her differentiation of emotion from affects, she describes the latter “as intensities, percepts, or sensations” that “exceed [the] confinement [of] one specific body.” She explains that she is attempting to work with “an understanding of affect as an unbound intensity that functions immanently as an excessive energy in those realms that exceed processes of capture, such as subject-formation” (576, 577; emphasis added). What we see here not only provides evidence of a logic of liberation as an absence of determination—and thus of a dualistic relation between the two terms—it also shows us why when Albrecht-Crane speaks of agency vis-à-vis affect and desire she must also speak of the dissolution of the subject, of an agency that is non-subjective, for subjectivity and subject-formation are often figured in her essay as modes of determination that capture, confine, and bind desire and affect. And thus subjectivity becomes something that a liberatory politics, and presumably pedagogy, must develop practices to “dissolve,” so that desire can “escape” and actualize its liberatory potentials. “In other words, it is never enough to proclaim a liberatory action to be liberatory, as long as the practice itself blocks or confines desire, in oneself or in others” (579; emphasis added).

But it’s not just subjects that confine desire, for Albrecht-Crane, inasmuch as subjects are simply one instance of processes of social determination at work, which operate “by channeling and capturing desire” (578, my emphasis). This conception of social formations and their elements as nothing more than mechanisms of capture and their determined effects corresponds with a dualistic presentation of the relation between the molecular and the molar, which departs from its
immanently disjunctive expressions in other parts of Albrecht-Crane’s essay, thus offering us a dichotomous image of the social. As Albrecht-Crane explains, “In our existence as human and social beings, we are always surrounded by lines that segment the spaces we inhabit.” “Some of these lines are affective,” she notes, while “[a]nother kind of line, functioning as a different type of process, is much more rigid” (578). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari also discuss “the principal differences between rigid segmentarity and supple segmentarity” (212). However, they also note (whereas in the section being discussed, Albrecht-Crane does not) that “it is not enough to oppose two kinds of segmentarity, because there is indeed a distinction between the two, but they are inseparable, they overlap, they are entangled. . . . If they are distinct, it is because they do not have the same terms or the same relations or the same type of multiplicity. If they are inseparable, it is because they coexist and crossover into each other. . . . [T]he two are always in presupposition” (213; emphasis added). What Deleuze and Guattari’s commentary shows us is that missing from Albrecht-Crane’s account of segmentarity is the articulation of an immanently disjunctive (and-not) relation between them. Thus, the “good guy/bad guy” characterization of desire and social organization that operates in her essay is brought into question. Positive and negative effects are generated by molar and molecular processes.

In short, within the brief parts of Albrecht-Crane’s essay discussed above we see the operation of dualistic tendencies, which diverge from Deleuze and Guattari’s point that “Every society, and every individual, are thus plied by both [types of dynamics] simultaneously: one molar, the other molecular” (213; emphasis added). This basic point, however, also informs other parts of Albrecht-Crane’s essay, thus marking again the dualist/post-dualist tension it exhibits.

The next point of tension I want to comment on concerns the notion of non-subjective agency. Albrecht-Crane invites us to think about agency in a way that moves away from seeing it simply as something that subjects have and willfully enact. Moreover, she wants to conceptualize an alternative to theories of resistance that see the subject as “the necessary condition for political agency” (586). And it is with the help of the overlapping concepts of desire and affect that Albrecht-Crane wants to offer an alternative, one that suggests “agency is also enabled and performed in quite non-subjective ways” (587). The vector of operation of this non-subjective agency consist of the “affective relations between people” (587). Non-subjective agency, in other words, involves the “process of affective production,” where the “language and logic of
subjectivity simply do not apply,” because such “language misses the movement and dynamic of affect” (587). According to Albrecht-Crane, this is the case because “Affect operates precisely as a limit-experience, as a force that exceeds and escapes the subject” (587).

I submit that Albrecht-Crane’s conception of non-subjective (affective) agency—and her understanding of the language and logic of subjectivity—can only be conceptualized as such if three dualisms are operative. At the heart of these dualisms is Albrecht-Crane’s implicit acceptance of the Cartesian cogito as the definitive model of subjectivity and the reification of consciousness that makes that model possible. The result of this reification is that the immanently disjunctive relations between (1) conscious-reflective and unconscious-pre-reflective, (2) body and mind, and (3) the “I” and the social are understood dualistically. Albrecht-Crane’s idea of non-subjective agency implicitly accepts these dualisms and the unduly limited conception of subjectivity that is their consequence. These dualisms exclude the complexity, dynamism, and perpetual porosity and mutability of embodied and socially imbricated subjectivity so ably theorized by a host of twentieth-century thinkers, most notably those working from phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and feminist perspectives. Equating a language of subjectivity subtended by a Cartesian perspective (which does indeed miss “the movement and dynamic of affect”) with the language of subjectivity is to cut oneself off from a host of conceptual and analytical possibilities.

Note, for example, that the unconscious and pre-reflective dynamics of human existence and action—all of which are intimately corporeal and affective—do not figure into Albrecht-Crane’s conception of subjectivity or agency, without which her idea of a “non-personal and intense way of experiencing the world” is difficult to understand (575; emphasis added). More precisely, one can only say that “Affect operates precisely as a limit-experience, as a force that exceeds and escapes the subject,” if one’s conception of subjectivity and experience is limited to the personal—that is, to the conscious life of the “I” (587). Consider also that “affective relations between people,” which are enabled via “bodies in their interaction[s] with each other,” can only be thought of as non-subjective if the body and subjectivity are dualistically conceptualized (587). Finally, we must bear in mind that a mode of agency that emerges from the affective relations between people (that is, socially) can only be called non-subjective unproblematically if the distinction or border between subject and world is conceived as a rigid one. It is precisely the question of where a subject begins and ends that post-dualistic thinking
renders salient and thought-provoking, a question that can be pragmatically responded to in conceptually productive and analytically illuminating ways but never conclusively answered in any final and definitive sense, for post-dualist social thought focuses on ongoing and varying processes of individuation (and thus differentiation), rather than solely on individuals—whether they be subjects, discourses, institutions, or artifacts.

This, of course, raises the question, Where is agency located, if not in individuals? Posed differently, it is the question of where agency originates, if not with the individuals who exercise it. Albrecht-Crane attempts to bring the question itself into question: “Instead of asking, who has agency,” she remarks, “one might ask, how is agency enabled?” (586). In so doing, she rightly challenges the logic of origin (and thus the metaphysics of presence that underlies it) that informs many questions of agency. As an alternative, Albrecht-Crane is proposing an event- or process-oriented theory of agency to one that is agent- or subject-centered. Stated otherwise, in the spirit of post-dualist thinking, she is asking us to explore how agency might be conceptualized as a distributed process that generates effects that can be understood in localized terms but whose sources of effectivity can be understood more productively—that is, in terms of its analytical and explanatory scope—from the perspective of dispersed networks of relational potentials. This is fertile ground for intellectual work in rhetoric and composition with respect to questions of agency. Equally important, Albrecht-Crane’s displacement of the logic of origin from questions of agency requires that we develop accounts of responsibility and accountability that are not territorialized by the conscious, willing subject. (This is not the same as saying that subjects don’t exercise conscious will; rather, it means that consciousness and self-directed action must be rethought within a more complex conception of human existence and action.)

As thought-provoking and challenging as Albrecht-Crane’s rethinking of the question of agency is, it seems to me that it is limited by the distinction she makes between questions of “who” and “how.” In other words, this distinction signals another example of the dualistic tendency operating in her essay. The question of “who,” for Albrecht-Crane, is a question of the conscious, willing subject that possesses agency, while the question of “how” is one of desire and affective processes, which means, for her, it is a non-subjective question. However, if Albrecht-Crane folded a more capacious understanding of subjectivity into her project—one that attends to subjectivity’s unconscious, corporeal, and
socially imbricated dimensions—the boundary marking the distinction between “who” and “how” would take on a quality of permeability, if not indeterminacy. Thus, one wonders if the problematic of agency would be better understood as involving the question of “how” and-not the question of “who”?

Within such a framework the subject no longer has to be understood as possessing or being the origin of agency but rather as participating and being involved within (as well as being produced by) a multiplicity of distributed and very complex agency-enabling processes. It is the relative consistency and stability, and thus repeatability, of these processes that enables a subject to seem to “have” particular capacities, or modes of agency. From this perspective, subjects might be viewed as nodes within manifold networks of relations—points at and through which such networks actualize potentials of effectivity immanent to the fields of relations that compose them. When we walk into a classroom, for example, whatever authority we “have” does not reside in us. Rather, the university, the classroom, and our very bodies (as well as the bodies of our students), coalesce and interact to operate as nodal vectors of transduction through which potentials immanent to relations of power—in which histories of individuals, groups, institutions, struggles, practices, logics, norms, discourses, and so on inhere virtually—are actualized and thus individuated, to varying degrees in ongoing and overlapping processes of potentialization-actualization, as “the authority of the teacher.” Hence, potentials of “authority” qua mode of agency are actualized through a subject (a point of continuity in a field of networks—and) but that agency is not reducible to a subject.

This ongoing (and-not) process-event of agency is affective because all actualizations of subjectivity and agency are affective. Following Benedictus de Spinoza—and Albrecht-Crane, who observes that “affect is ubiquitous” (575)—I want to claim that there is no distinction between affective agency and other modes of agency (or affective production and subject production). More specifically, for Spinoza—whose philosophy is in many ways a direct counter to Descartes’—the existence and abilities of a subject (its “agency,” including those of the “mind”) cannot be disconnected from its bodily affects, and its affects cannot be disconnected from a body’s relations with the world. It is through the “affects of the body,” Spinoza writes, that the body’s power (potentia) of acting is “increased or diminished, aided or restrained” (Ethics 164).

Given the dynamism of the body and the relational world it inhabits, affects should be understood as constantly varying activations,
intensifications, attenuations, and distributions of bodily energies and forces that are not directly subject to the command-control capacities of the conscious mind. They are corporeal dispositions and transitions—that is, modes of bodily existence in a world of relations that compose our capacities to affect and to be affected. A body is what a body can do; and what a body can do is always contingent upon past, present, and future ecologies of relations it inhabits. A body is a process of becoming. Thus, in a very important sense, for Spinoza, the body does not have a history of affects; it is the history of its affects, and this affective history shapes what bodily affects and corresponding capacities are or can be produced by a body’s relations and interactions with the world in any given context.

Affects overlap, echo, coalesce, and have varying degrees of intensity, duration, and effectivity that can be felt with varying degrees of conscious awareness, as in the case of emotions, urges, or “gut feelings.” But their primary mode of operation is on the periphery of or completely outside of conscious awareness, forming what we might call a dynamic, mutable, and non-consciously felt “existential software,” that “governs” our capacities to affect and to be affected. This existential software runs in the background, like an operating system—but one infinitely more complex, powerful, and reliable than any version of Microsoft Window. More importantly, this affective software of existence—and its operation as a governor of agency—cannot be disconnected from the world and the processual dynamics of relationality-potentiality of which I spoke above.

I offer this very brief account of a Spinozist perspective on affects not as a counter to Albrecht-Crane’s. They are entirely compatible. (Indeed, it is Spinoza—along with Nietzsche, Bergson, and Marx—that underwrites much of Deleuze and Guattari’s post-dualist efforts.) Rather, I simply want to stress the point that to theorize desire and affect one must also theorize the body, and that the body cannot be disconnected from subjectivity and agency. Moreover, following Spinoza, I want to suggest that theorizing the body is at the same time to engage questions of being, ontological questions. One such question, for instance, involves how to conceptualize the being of the body as more than just a semiotic-material complex—an organism, a “natural” thing, culturally coded with functions, meanings, and value through practices of signification.

Of course, it is not fair to ask Albrecht-Crane to have borne this burden in her essay, which already does a great deal of work. And in the spirit of fairness, I am compelled to remark once again that in distilling
and amplifying parts of Albrecht-Crane's essay I have not done justice to its richness and complexity. I stand by my opening observation: through her essay, Christa Albrecht-Crane has made a significant contribution to the field. I suspect that I am not the only one who hopes to see more from her in the future.

Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

Notes

1. See, for example, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's "The Pedagogy of Totality," in which he charges the "pedagogy of affect"—from an uninformed and unjustifiable position, I would argue—with being complicit in capitalist domination by participating in the production of "enlightened false consciousness" and by "outlaw[ing] lessons in conceptual analysis of the social totality" (5, 6).

2. Albrecht-Crane's project does more than invite us to think about something other than the forms of social organization that have been at the center of our work. In so doing, she implicitly introduces us to a version of "social constructivist" theory that posits something other than discourse and/or power as primary. In other words, within Albrecht-Crane's conceptual framework, discourse and power operate as, and at the level of, forms of social organization. And thus, rather than being seen as the primary constitutive forces of social constructivist dynamics, the "molar" operations of discourse and power need to be understood in their immanence with "molecular" processes of desire (the same would apply to other analytic foci, such as political economy or culture). Readers interested in a more extensive discussion of the potential of desire as a concept for social thought and analysis should consult the philosophical text Albrecht-Crane draws on in her essay: Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus. Anti-Oedipus' themes are also discussed by Jean-François Lyotard in Libidinal Economy. Lyotard's conception of desire is very similar to Deleuze and Guattari's. There are, however, differences, the implications of which result in divergent conclusions on a number of significant issues. For a discussion of desire vis-à-vis Foucault's conception of power, see Gilles Deleuze's essay "Desire and Pleasure."

3. To the extent that focusing on emotions and feelings involves attending to the way that these personal affects seem to short circuit or bypass the self-reflexive and command-control capacities of consciousness—and thus involves attending to aspects of subjectivity and agency that short circuit or bypass those capacities—is the extent to which the "I" is no longer the focus.

4. Although its deserves much more attention than I can give it here, I will return to the issue of the unconscious and pre-reflective aspects of our corporeal existence and their connection to consciousness and, more generally, subjectivity later. Speculating, I wonder if Albrecht-Crane's "allergy" to psychoanalytic
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thought stems not only from the “lack” ontology typically associated with it but also from its focus on the unconscious as central to understanding subjectivity.

5. This way of thinking is not limited to Deleuze and Guattari. Their thought can be understood as a variant of what has come to be known as “process philosophy.” Although it is usually associated with Alfred North Whitehead, other exponents of process-oriented thought include Gottfried Leibniz, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Henri Bergson. (A strong case can be made for understanding Spinoza and Marx as process philosophers.) The diverse positions of these thinkers is indicative of the fact that process-oriented philosophy designates an ontological perspective rather than a doctrine leading to fixed conclusions. For a basic discussion of process philosophy and its diversity see Rescher, Introduction. See also Rescher, Survey (Chapter Four, “Human Agency as Process,” may be of particular interest to rhetoricians and compositionists). For a discussion of process thought vis-à-vis poststructuralism, see Keller and Daniell. Craig Eisendrath’s At War with Time offers an interesting account of process philosophy as Western philosophy’s attempt to come to terms with the reality of “impermanence,” and how this reality might be translated into new forms of social activism.

6. The occasional emergence of dualistic thinking is evident in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly in Anti-Oedipus. My own work—indeed this essay—suffers from similar “problems.”

7. The “not” of this and-not formulation should not to be understood as a negation or “hard” disjunction between the aspects of these couplets. Rather, it is a marker of the ontological difference between them, of the difference between what Deleuze and Guattari call the actual and virtual (real but not actual) dimensions of being itself, dimensions that are nevertheless immanently unified in their difference. (Although different from Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology in several important respects, Heidegger’s understanding of the difference between Being and beings exhibits a similar logic.) It should be noted that I have tried to avoid the both/and logic often invoked by contemporary theorists in favor of the and-not, as I think the former fails to capture the complexity of the concept of ontological difference (that “is” being itself) and its implications. Stated otherwise, a logic of both/and considers phenomena, difference(s), and processual and systemic dynamics only from the perspective of what Deleuze and Guattari call the actual, and thus does not think in terms of an immanent ontology (of difference).

Works Cited


