

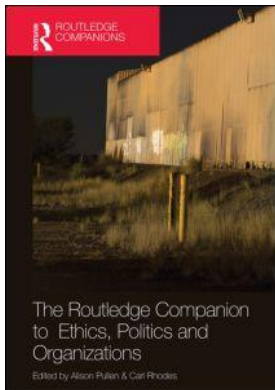
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An ethics of difference

The contribution of Bracha Ettinger to management and organization studies

Kate Kenny and Marianna Fotaki

Conventional approaches to ethics within business and management scholarship are lacking, and authors have recently called for new theoretical developments. For some critics, business ethics as a topic of research has merely ensured that the interests of powerful stakeholders are maintained (Jones, 2003; Roberts, 2003). Others argue that it represents an attempt to eradicate differences between people in workplaces, creating homogeneous organizations (ten Bos, 2003). In response to this, critical organizational scholars have lately begun to examine ethics in new ways.

One approach, relevant to this chapter, involves seeing ethics as a site of negotiation within organizations, a practice of struggle involving the variable construction of ethical subjectivities (Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 40). The question that connects these varying perspectives is: how can we 'live (and work) together in a world beset by difference?' (Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 40). Engaging with this problematic, some scholars examine how it is possible to construct one's subjectivity differentially, even within organizational and institutional contexts that demand sameness and homogeneity (e.g. ten Bos, 2003). Related to this issue of one's own difference, is the problem of engaging with the difference of the others that one encounters at work, which is a second focus of such studies (e.g. Jones, 2003). Various authors have embarked on a number of theoretical avenues in order to explore these issues, drawing for example on the work of Jacques Lacan (Jones and Spicer, 2005), Michel Foucault (Chan and Garrick, 2002) and Emmanuel Lévinas (Jones, 2003; Rhodes, 2009). All of these works share a concern with what Rhodes and Wray-Bliss term an 'ethics of difference' (2013: 43), whether this refers to processes of subjective identification in the context of contemporary organization, or to the issue of engagement with a different other. Rhodes and Wray-Bliss note that such an ethics of difference represents an approach in which oppression and privilege are critiqued, in favour of an emphasis on 'respect for and co-existence of difference and diversity' (2013: 45). This perspective has emerged from poststructural and feminist thinking in the humanities and social sciences.

While providing a number of insightful contributions, some problems and questions remain within such critical approaches to the topic of organizational ethics. These relate to an omission of questions of the body, a tendency to focus on the negative and oppressive aspects of subjectivity,

and an overall blindness to the feminine, both theoretically and empirically. In this chapter, we aim to build upon this body of work, but retain an attentiveness to these three lacunae. Specifically, we take up the challenge proposed in recent debates on corporeal ethics within organization studies (Pullen and Rhodes, 2010), and extend existing theoretical perspectives to encompass Bracha Ettinger's ideas on matrixial trans-subjectivity (2006a). The major novelty of her work is the conception of the co-emerging of partial subject (the mother and the baby) with the matrixial borderspace, or 'I and unknown non-I' where the emerging subjectivity is that of an encounter rather than lack or split. Ettinger conceptualizes this space as both symbolic and material. As we shall show, the matrixial denoting connectivity, inclusivity and compassion, presents us with a new ethical proposition for organizations, as it proposes the idea of co-habitation and joint relational space. Ettinger's work provides a fruitful new direction for the study of corporeal ethics within organization theory. The idea of corporeal ethics draws on Diprose's (2002) notion of an ethics grounded in embodied experience, and has lately been proposed as a useful approach for organization studies (Pullen and Rhodes, 2010). We use this notion to develop further the concepts of difference and otherness, which are central issues to organizational ethics, and we propose ways in which these can be dealt with to overcome negativity.

Our chapter progresses as follows. First, we briefly review the existing works on ethics, embodiment and materiality in organizations in order to position our contribution. We then ground Ettinger's ideas with brief reference to the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva as their disciplinary successor, before proceeding with a full exposition of the relevance of her thinking for the purpose of our study. To illustrate these ideas, we deploy a running example throughout – the question of gender and the workplace. The chapter concludes by outlining multiple implications of this approach for rethinking questions of difference, and gender, in the context of corporeal organizational ethics.

Ethics and organizations: subjectivity

Before describing the relevance of Ettinger's work, it is important to examine existing theoretical approaches to the topic of organizational ethics in more depth. As noted above, the ethics of difference and otherness are key ideas. This deals with the question of whether ethics is possible in contexts, such as workplaces, in which difference between subjects necessarily prevails. Scholars examine the ways in which ethical subjectivities emerge as subjects enact these differences (see Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 46–47), and have adopted a number of perspectives to do so.

Ethical subjectivities and ethical difference

To date, Foucault's work has been influential (Chan and Garrick, 2002; Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 43). Foucault shows us how people come to identify with, and be subjected to, different dominant discourses, which can lead to the categorization and separation out of subjects (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Drawing on the example of gender in the workplace, this approach has been influential in understanding how discourses of gender operate. While not explicitly articulated in terms of ethics, feminist organization scholars have implicitly engaged with the idea of ethical subjectivity. Many have drawn on the Foucauldian notion that implicitly gendered discourses proliferate in organizations, and encourage the production of docile, self-disciplining bodies (Trethewey, 1999). The idea is to highlight the ways in which particular discourses or 'scripts' subjectify both males and females by offering an ideal embodied identity

that one must strive for (Holmer Nadesan and Trethewey, 2000: 224). Among other insights, such studies share an attention to gendered forms of power, and how these operate to discipline working women through their bodily performances. It must be noted that while this work is invaluable, there is as yet little theorization around potential forms of resistance, a critique that has been levelled at other Foucauldian studies in organizational scholarship (Newton, 1998). While some work in this area has been carried out (see Alvesson et al., 2008, for an overview) there remains a dearth of theoretical exploration into how and why such identification takes place (Bardon and Josserand, 2011). Feminist readings of Foucault have addressed some of these issues (Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Harstock, 1990; Sawicki, 1991) but these are not well known in organization studies.

Recently, scholars have aimed to further our understanding of subjectification to discourse through an engagement with Lacan's ideas on desire and identification (Jones and Spicer, 2005; Roberts, 2005). What such studies show us, is that the psyche must not be overlooked in considerations of how people come to be subjected and position themselves in relation to forms of power and authority in society, Lacan's 'Big Other' (Jones and Spicer, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2008). Such insights have important implications for organizational ethics of difference (see Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013). Notwithstanding their merits, however, it is important to examine how such an approach risks reinforcing gendered flows of power. We do so by returning to the example of gender in organizations. Commentators have pointed to a legacy of sexism within psychoanalytic social theory, and note the problems that can be inherited when inherently phallogocentric theoretical approaches are used to study organizations (Fotaki, 2010; Kenny, 2009). Fotaki and Harding (2013), for example, summarize feminist readings of Lacan's Seminar XX on sexuality and propose an alternative analysis of his work. In their drawing on the discourse of the hysteric (also inspired by Lacan's Seminar XVII on the four discourses), Fotaki and Harding puncture the fantasies of using Lacan's work to establish new certainties and signifiers inspired by the male anatomy. They put forward an argument for conceptual bisexuality as a new politics of gender in organizations and point out the comic and precarious phallic symbols upon which paramount claims to power, authority and knowledge are being made, in their endeavour to disrupt dominant organizational discourses. Rather than diagnosing desire and lack in others, they suggest, it may become possible for scholars to explore their own passions, lack and fallibility and through such elaborations seek to bring about changes in the symbolic.

A third theoretical approach of note has been to draw on Lévinas's ideas to understand the question of difference in the context of workplace ethics. Here, the focus shifts slightly to examine the issue of the self in interaction with others. What Lévinas shows us is how we can approach our engagements with another subject, even with the recognition that this other is quite distinct from me (Jones, 2003). For example, Rhodes (2009) draws on Lévinas's distinction between the *saying* and the *said* alongside Jacques Derrida's discussions of responsibility and undecidability in order to consider the ethics of the discursive construction of organizational research, as a form of representing the Other. Returning again to the example of gender in the workplace, other novel approaches have been proposed by scholars re-engaging with a Lévinasian perspective in order to highlight the role of the body within organization ethics. Noting an absence of the body in understandings of organizational ethics, Pullen and Rhodes (2010) draw on his work to explore the issue of embodiment and embodied subjects. They suggest that gendered positions are imposed upon people in contemporary workplaces, and use the analogy of a mask to describe the embodied nature of this process. Returning to Lévinas, they note the ethical possibilities inherent to the face-to-face encounter, when a subject is confronted with another whose difference is total. In the context of organizations, however, Pullen and Rhodes point

out that the forcing of gendered masks onto subjects effectively prevents any opportunity for such an ethical relation to develop (2010: 234), because these effectively cover the body and remove the possibility for a face-to-face encounter that forms the bedrock of an ethical relation. Lévinas's work is drawn upon to describe how it prevents the moment of awareness of the unique, incomparable and yet ultimately unknowable nature of the other, which represents a necessary condition for such a relation to form. Having detailed this problem, Pullen and Rhodes (2010) call for scholars to explore new ways of theorizing the removal or lessening of such gendered masks. Drawing on Diprose's (2002) notion of intercorporeal generosity, they propose a renewed attention to the intersection between power and affectivity in the context of organizational ethics and its relation to gender, encapsulated in the concept of 'corporeal ethics'.

In summary, a number of avenues have developed in relation to an 'ethics of difference' within organization studies. Some explore the possibility for an ethical engagement with others, even in the face of differences, yet other researchers examine the discursive and subjective reproduction of such difference. What all of these studies share is an interest in, or an implicit engagement with, questions of difference and otherness as important concepts in understanding organizational ethics.

Ethics of difference in organization studies: some limitations

We have illustrated these approaches with examples relating to gender and the workplace. However, some issues and problems remain. First, beyond exceptions such as those mentioned above (Pullen and Rhodes, 2010), the body tends to be omitted from such discussions, with the issue of embodied ethics only recently emerging (Hancock and Tyler, 2000; Pullen and Rhodes, 2010). This reflects a wider rejection of the body within management and organization research; even recent studies in which the 'body is brought back in' and the issue of materiality arises (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) tend to focus upon the techno-administrative use of bodies in organizations that are a product of discourse, rather than with what Grosz call a 'lived body' (Styhre, 2004: 102). In many such works the body is seen as discursively constructed, while its materiality and how it impacts on gendering of the organization is often missed. The sexuatedness of language is also omitted from these analyses though some notable exceptions that address this issue by drawing on the embodied ethics of Luce Irigaray do exist (Fotaki et al., 2014). Second, the historical focus on the subjectivation of workplace 'selves' to dominant discourses that are typically painted as oppressive has led to an emphasis on the negative aspects of ethical construction of subjectivity, offering few possibilities to theorize beyond the Hegelian master-slave template of intersubjective relations, and therefore to develop new understandings of resistance or change (Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 42). Third, although approaches have to date drawn on a varied and eclectic range of sources, a notable blind spot in relation to the feminine remains within even the critical study of business ethics. This takes three forms: the neglect of any empirical focus on issues of gender and sexuality (Dunne et al., 2008: 273), a theoretical unwillingness to engage with feminist writers and philosophers despite the fact that this discipline has long engaged with questions of ethics (Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 48) and finally an inherent sexism within resulting theories for example psychoanalytic ones that emphasize the centrality of the phallus (Fotaki, 2010; 2013; Fotaki and Harding, 2013; Kenny, 2009). In this chapter, we continue the project at hand and ask how we might deepen our understanding of an organizational ethics of difference. In so doing we keep the above points at the forefront of our approach – the body, resistance and the feminine. We begin by introducing Bracha Ettinger's work.

Bracha Ettinger and ethics

Background

Despite some relatively brief but provocative mentions (Fotaki et al., 2012; Harding et al., 2013), Ettinger has not yet been drawn upon in management and organization theory. In this, she joins with other female feminist writers whose work remains all but unknown. There has of late been a shift in attitude with scholars drawing increasingly on the work of de Beauvoir, Kristeva, Cixous, Butler and Irigaray (Fotaki, 2010, 2013; Höpfl, 2000, Höpfl and Kostera, 2003; Kenny 2010, 2012; Marshall, 2000; Phillips et al., 2014; Tyler and Cohen, 2009; Vachhani, 2012), although too often the influence of such ideas remains on the periphery of organizational research.

We propose that Ettinger's work can usefully contribute to this area, in particular to understandings of ethics. Her ideas hold some promise, in relation to the issues presented above having to do with difference and otherness. Ettinger's work is ideally placed to address the question of difference; it yields fruitful insights into the hurt and pain that can be inflicted when priority and privilege is bestowed upon certain subject positions and denied to others relating to sexuality (Harding et al., 2011), race (hooks, 1989) or gender and their intersections (Harding et al., 2013: 59–60). She engages with and speaks to French poststructuralist psychoanalysts including Hélène Cixous,¹ Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva and is considered by many to be among their disciplinary successors. Specifically, she builds upon their ideas as well as those of Freud, Lacan, Lévinas, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard amongst others (Giffney et al., 2009), in order to develop a post-phallic theorization of subjectivity. Like Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) and Kristeva (1991) she is preoccupied with the female body as the site of pre-symbolic signification. Her ideas resonate with other organization scholars who have for example drawn upon Kristeva's idea of abjection to understand the work of organizations (Höpfl, 2000; Phillips and Rippin, 2010), and Irigaray's work on woman's absence in thinking about leadership, and the representation of femaleness in management textbooks (see Oseen 1997; Kenny and Bell, 2011) and organization theory (Vachhani, 2012; Fotaki, 2013). However, unlike Irigaray she does not propose the womb as contrast to male phallic signifiers but rather offers her conception of the matrixial borderspace as a site of connectivity between male and female. Although Ettinger departs from a number of these concepts, her ideas hold considerable promise for organization studies. Specifically, because she emphasizes symbiosis and ways of living with the difference, she does not propose to replace the Freudian and Lacanian phallic metaphors with the matrixial ones but indicates ways in which they might coexist with each other.

Ettinger's theorization of human subjectivity presents us with a novel understanding of gender and sexuality as always connected to the maternal (female, care and life-giving) via the matrixial borderspace. This could have potential implications for re-theorizing the body and gender identity, and organizational identity more generally. Of more specific interest for this chapter is her compassionate and inclusive matrixial as an ethical proposition for rethinking embodied difference and otherness in organizations. We now turn to examining specific ideas and conceptual developments of Bracha Ettinger's work concerned with (a) the other as within; (b) co-emergence; (c) relational space; and (d) compassion.

Key concepts

The other as within

A psychoanalyst, clinical psychologist, artist and philosopher, Ettinger argues, among other things, that the maternal has been largely overlooked as a fruitful lens by which we might view relations

between subjects. This is a mistake; much can be learned about how we engage with others by focusing upon relations between the caring adult and the infant. For Ettinger, the maternal is key. Maternal subjectivity is an experience that contains a ‘feminine-matrixial connectivity’ that depends upon, and fuels, particular experiences of affective encounters with an other (Ettinger, 2010: 1). She describes a primal affective impulse, or ‘fascinace and awe’ that arises here, and argues that the emergence of this affect counters psychic, and psychoanalytic, tendencies towards abjection. In such encounters, the other in question becomes specific, and the subject is compelled to do what it can to care for it.

The experience relies upon an opening up of the self, or ‘self-fragilization’, in which the ‘boundaries of the subject (are opened) to trans-subjective inspirations’. This ‘fragilizing’ process is central to enabling an encounter with the other that does not attempt to dominate and oppress the other, as might otherwise occur: it is ‘precisely the self-fragilizing transsubject that can contact the vulnerability in the other without retraumatizing (him or her)’ (Ettinger, 2010: 6). This encounter therefore taps into and relates to ‘plural, partial and shared unconscious, trauma, fantasy and desire’ (Ettinger, 2006a: 64) without this ‘nonconscious matrixial stratum of subjectivization’ (ibid.: 63) being specific to women only. As Lyotard (1995: 28) puts it in describing Ettinger’s work: ‘I would say that if there *is* a feminine – and a feminine there *is*, it does not allow the line of the division of the sexes’ (italics in the original).

Co-emergence

In relation to ethics, a matrixial-inspired sense of compassion and awe can engender what Ettinger terms ‘proto-ethical paths to freedom-with-resistance’, that is, a resistance ‘impregnated by and built upon compassion, awe and fascinace’, which is fundamentally different to one that is ‘impregnated by fear, disgust and rage’. Elaborating on the ethical relation implied in this matrixial position, Ettinger notes that rather than involving a struggle against an ‘outside instance’, in contrast it begins with a struggle against one’s own ‘narcissistic self’, something that can only be achieved by processes of ‘self-fragilisation’ inspired by the affects emerging from the matrixial encounter. Ettinger describes this as ‘an enigmatic call: the *Hineni*: “here I am” without the *aiecha*: “where are you?”, a non-sacrificial modus of response’. In this way, she deviates from the traditional, Hegelian focus on difference between autonomous subjects which has, as noted above, been prevalent within organizational ethics.

Since her focus is not on the opposition between, but rather the coexistence of the subject in togetherness and with the other, she proposes links in place of autonomy that a singular idea of (the phallic) subjectivity denotes. Her idea of the subject co-emerging as part-subjects through the encounter with an unknown other presents us with a compelling ethical proposition that connects Lévinasian responsibility for the other with the feminist thought of the other defined as ‘becoming together’. In other words Ettinger convinces us that the ‘I’ is never complete without the ‘other’ that the ‘I’ discerns as ‘non-I’ but still without knowing each other, co-emerge and cohabit a joint space with fusion and without rejection (Ettinger, 2006a: 65). The joint space is best captured by a metaphor of the intrauterine life, hence the term ‘matrixial borderspace’.

Relational space

For Ettinger, the affects emerging from the matrixial relation act to counterbalance impulses of aggression and exclusion: ‘compassion and awe balance disgust, rage, jealousy and envy, and also fear. Fascinace balances distrust’ (Ettinger, 2010: 19). In the analytic relation, the emergence of these affects can help to contain destructive feelings, and this can be extended into the social. Ettinger restitutes the womb at the symbolic and imaginary level by equating it with life-giving

rather than death, and the common association of the womb with the intrauterine enclosure and the site of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny) present in the works of the fathers of psychoanalysis namely, Freud and Lacan (see Kristeva, 1991, discussion of the uncanny in Freud, 1919). But her intention is not to antagonize Freud or Lacan by exposing and counteracting their arguments. This would merely lead to an inverse logic of confirming the position of the feminine as a negative non-phallus (with phallus being the positive). Her aim is rather to introduce the matrixial as an encompassing parallel to the phallic universe, as a second consciousness-determining structure (Shail, 2007). In the words of Griselda Pollock, in the preface to her major oeuvre: ‘the matrixial surfs beneath/beside the phallic’ (Pollock in Ettinger, 2006a: 6) offering a ‘different subjectivizing stratum to the phallus’ (Ettinger, 2006a: 48).

The quality of the matrixial is that it accounts for co-dependence and offers a space for linking, thus making relations and ‘being with’ the unknown other possible. The concept of relationality captures how the social becomes inscribed in the psyche in the context of a social practice that can be best defined as an ethics of care (for the self and the other). Hence in relationality, individual subjectivity is reaffirmed through interdependency that makes care relations possible. This may ‘lay the psychic foundations for our capacities for ethics: hospitality and compassion for the other in their otherness’ (Pollock, 2008: 10).

Compassion

This compassion suffuses the matrixial. As Ettinger (2010: 1) puts it: ‘the infant meets the maternal subject via its own *primary affective compassion*. I view the effect of primary compassion as a primal psychic access to the other. It arises before, after and also alongside abjection.’ Compassion signals contact and connection with the other but also the self: ‘the compassion and respect toward the intimate non-I(s) . . . unconsciously nourishes the trans-subjective dimension of the individual subject and revives their primary compassion and awe’ (Ettinger, 2010: 3). Compassion as a primitive beauty (com-passion) counteracts fragility, trauma and death, instead expressing desire, life and passion associated with the matrixial.

In summary, the ability to connect with the child as the other in ‘bare life’ has significance for ethical engagement. Herein lies the ethical potential for this approach; intersubjectivity is viewed as an encounter that takes place at ‘shared borderspaces’ between subjects that are only ever partial in nature and ultimately unknown to each other. As Pollock notes, this promises a rethinking of ethical relations, given the ‘strange, foreign, irreducible elements of otherness’ that mark our encounters (Pollock in Ettinger, 2006a: 7). We next describe the implications of this work for organization studies.

Implications of Ettinger’s work

Organizational ethics

We propose a lens for organization studies that draws on Bracha Ettinger’s work on intersubjectivity. Using our recurrent example of gender and workplaces, we illustrate how it has potential for enabling a rethinking of ethics in the context of contemporary organizations. Importantly, for Ettinger the experience of the maternal–matrixial is not limited to the parent–infant encounter. While the subject loses the memory of it as time passes, its traces remain inscribed within the psyche. They contain the potential to ‘nourish the I’ throughout the subject’s life (2010: 3). For this reason, these ideas have important implications for understandings of ethics in the social (Pollock in Ettinger, 2006a) and organizational ethics particularly (Harding et al., 2013: 59). In the context of this chapter, it adds to current understandings of the ethics of difference.

On gender: addressing the 'feminine as blind spot'

In relation to gender, Ettinger contrasts her concept of the woman-as-feminine from others such as Lévinas and Lacan in parts of his work, who perceive it as a necessarily sacrificial position that is destined for suffering. This perspective is based on an assumption that woman stands for absolute Otherness, beyond symbolization. In contrast, for Ettinger, in the language of the matrixial, the feminine–maternal is anchored in the ‘connecting potentiality of Eros’, that is, the bond of mother to infant. Rather than an absence, woman is conceived of as an ‘almost-Other’ and ‘partial-subject’, that oscillates between appearance and absence, as a result of such connection. This, she argues, ‘infiltrates Ethics’ with an idea of a feminine that is primarily grounded in the experience of ‘being alive in giving life’ (2006a: 101), as opposed to absence and otherness as negativity. Otherness and difference thus become potent and productive.

Ettinger takes further the idea of ethical responsibility for the other by theorizing it through the prism of the feminine body and in so doing she overcomes the restricted position that both Lévinas and Lacan have assigned it to, namely, as the untheorizable other par excellence. By proposing the notion of the compassionate matrixial she reconsiders the concept of the other as trauma to the self that Lévinas could never fully negotiate. This return to the body via the matrixial also has powerful implications for theorizing organizations and organizing. It addresses the systematic or sustained critique of language and/or discourse in organizational analysis from a feminist perspective by disrupting the gendered and sexuated aspects of language that pervade research on organizations. It contributes to emergent work on the complexities of the body in organizational spaces, issues that have only begun to be addressed by organizational scholars (Sinclair, 2005; Swan, 2005; Tyler and Cohen, 2009). Finally, the resonance of Ettinger’s ideas exceeds traditional gender boundaries. It redefines the nature of human subjectivity as extending beyond the experience of being a self-contained autonomous individual, a position that is normalized in what Ettinger calls phallic logic (Hollway, 2011).

This limitation to autonomous self-sufficiency of the subject has wider political implications. It puts in question the neoliberal project of the impermeable individualized subject by bringing in the idea of human injuriousness. In so doing this approach establishes the subject as a relational and interdependent being. As Judith Butler (2009) puts it: it is the acknowledgement of our shared precarity and injurability as humans that enables us to be affected by the vulnerability of others. Ettinger takes the question of precarious relationality further by elevating it to an ethical position as she demonstrates that there is no subjectivity without relationality and no relationality without the other. She therefore departs from the Lévinasian call for responsiveness towards the other and our responsibility for the other as an encounter that calls for a specific action, since the other already co-habits and coexists with the I. The fact that human lives are mutually and already implicated in one another establishes the principle of equality and connectedness.

On theory: away from phallus and toward the matrixial

Ettinger breaks with both the Freudian–Lacanian paradigm and the intersubjective as a field of communication, in her rethinking desire and the unconscious through ‘the matrixial borderspace’. She argues that the struggle and the limitations imposed on understanding the formation of subjectivity lie in the reliance of psychoanalytic theory on the Freudian concept of the unconscious. This, she notes, privileges the phallus as signifier of the dynamic between lack and desire, supporting the model of repression based on the castration complex and its male perspective (Ettinger, 2006b: 218). This perspective highlights how aggression and sexuality are repressed in contemporary society and should be reinstated and brought to the fore, for example

in analysis. However, for Ettinger, today it is affects such as ‘compassion, awe and fascinace’ that are, in fact, silenced and denied and this has influenced the denigration of the maternal position, instilling something of a phallogocentric worldview in its place. Ettinger proposes instead a more compassionate intra-subjective conception of subjectivity that incorporates the concepts of the maternal within the self, and trans-subjective extending beyond individual experience.

Such a conception is linked to a different affective economy, opening up a non-psychotic relation between the feminine (conceived as neither male nor female) and creativity which informs knowledge production and ethics. In aiming to develop a post-phallic theory of the psyche and compassionate relationality through developing the idea of the matrixial borderspace, her work is pertinent to understanding organizations in the twenty-first century. She dispenses with the idea of the unitary subject allowing us to challenge the phallic masculinist form of power which effaces sexual difference and difference more generally thus enacting the mastery over the domain of life.

Returning to our discussion of ethics, it could be argued that the psychoanalytically inspired theoretical approaches described above were produced in a socio-cultural context largely influenced by a Freudian paradigm, in which phallo-centric representations of intersubjective relations dominated, and in which the affective matrixial was attributed little importance. It is unsurprising therefore that the theoretical position of the feminine, under such a worldview, remains absent: a lack to be compensated for, and covered over. For this reason, perhaps existing organizational theory on ethics represents a reinforcement of the kinds of gendered masks that prevent an ethical engagement with the feminine organizational subject, discussed by Pullen and Rhodes (2010), and perhaps it is time to explore other approaches.

On organizational ethics: from negative difference to ‘being with’ an other

In considering potential theoretical avenues for exploring organizational ethics and the question of difference, the Foucauldian approach to ethics and difference described above with its emphasis on subjectivized and disciplined bodies, appears unsuitable. While valuable for showing the various ways in which power–knowledge relations operate in organizational contexts, it offers little understanding of resistance and presents an overly negative and pessimistic view. This can be argued to be traceable to a Hegelian legacy with its inherent master–slave dialectic. In contrast, Ettinger breaks with this and overcomes this issue via her theorization of difference.

This relates to a key issue of ‘consensus within difference’ within organizational ethics. Rhodes and Wray-Bliss (2013) point to a gap in existing understandings of this problematic. Despite some focus on an ethics of consensus within organization studies, that is, an engagement with ideas of dialogue and ‘being with’ another subject, studies have been few. In addition, there remains very little work that considers how this approach might intersect with an ethics of difference: how an ethical approach might be developed that incorporates both sides, where differences are bridged in order for shared worldviews, mutual respect and a genuine engagement with the other to emerge. In order to address the central question for organizational studies, of ‘how we live (and work) together in a world beset by difference?’ (Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2013: 40), such theoretical work needs to be developed. Here, Ettinger’s work provides us with directions for exploring how co-emergence can occur.

Conclusion

An ethics of organization that is based on the matrixial as described above, suggests that a different kind of ethical relation with difference is possible. Such relation emerges from opening up and

recognizing the other as part of oneself in symbolic as well as material terms. Ettinger's work provides us with the possibility of seeing how this realization could be achieved through co-emergence and compassion which materialize in the relational space enabling the coexistence of one within the other. Such an ethics predisposes us towards care for the other because, as Butler (2009) puts it, without the other there is no self; the 'I' survives because of 'you'. By giving material reality to this relation via the matrixial, Ettinger shows us how ethics might become embodied in organizational space through care for one's physical precarity and/or experienced through bodily sensations of pleasure and affect emerging from proximity in relation to other subjects. This enables us to move beyond the fearful negativity that difference and otherness evokes, with which it is traditionally associated. It also creates space for rethinking ethics with the other and in relation to the other rather than as an individualized property of selves. In summary, recognizing the predominance of certain forms of theorizing about organizational ethics, we propose a move away from these and towards an alternative that holds relationality at its centre conceived of as shared vulnerability that originates in pre-discursive materiality. The matrixial approach in which the political potentiality of affects such as fascination, awe and compassion are given primacy, enables potential for re-theorizing organizational ethics.

Note

- 1 In her artistic creativity she is closer to Cixous although Ettinger chooses visual means rather than theatre as a channel for expressing her philosophical ideas.

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