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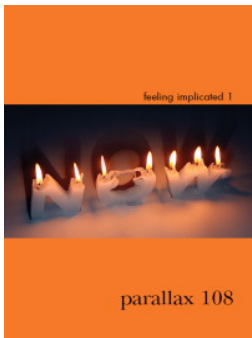
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Feeling Implicated: An Introduction

Michael Rothberg

In 2021, South Carolina adopted a budget bill prohibiting the use of state funds by schools to ‘inculcate’ the idea that ‘an individual, by virtue of his race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex’ or that ‘an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his race or sex’.¹ In August of the same year, the Alabama Board of Education passed a resolution opposing ‘concepts that impute [...] the need to feel guilt or anguish to persons solely because of their race or sex’.² As even casual observers of United States politics know, these are not isolated examples, but part of a large, organised campaign. Since the beginning of 2021, forty-four states have introduced legislation meant to restrict the teaching of ‘critical race theory’ and limit the way teachers can discuss racism and sexism, among other topics. As of April 2023, eighteen states had enacted such restrictions. Most of the bills and resolutions that have been proposed include nearly identical language targeting the alleged tenets of critical pedagogy on race and gender. As Stephen Cucharo indicates in his insightful reflection on the anti-Critical Race Theory movement in this issue, these state bills derive their impetus – and often their particular formulations – from then-President Donald Trump’s 2020 Executive Order 13950. Although that order is no longer in effect, its impact lives on in state-level bills. These bills are, of course, not really about critical race theory – an approach developed among legal scholars and not present in elementary or high school education – nor even about a broader movement such as critical race studies, which has some purchase in humanities and social science disciplines at the university level. At stake in these restrictive efforts is, rather, the question of how we transmit knowledge about US history and society, and especially how we think about the nation’s founding forms of historical violence and its contemporary forms of inequality. What is clear is that a high-stakes public struggle is taking place in the contemporary United States not only about how we should understand historical and political responsibility, but also, as these various pieces of legislation suggest, about how we should *feel* about that responsibility. As the anti-CRT campaign illustrates, attitudes and feelings are at the centre of political conflicts about accountability for injustice in the present.

While the anti-CRT campaign is clearly driven by well-financed conservative political organisations, at least some of its success derives from real difficulties in conceptualising the questions of historical and political responsibility conservative activists have provocatively raised and in understanding how to negotiate the ‘feelings’ of guilt and shame (however authentic) evoked in this

wave of legislation. The urgency of developing new frameworks to address these kinds of problems extends beyond the particularities of the current controversies surrounding US schools. Indeed, this struggle over the conceptualisation of responsibility for injustices – and the affects associated with it – is limited neither to the United States nor to questions of race and gender. As the essays collected in this two-part special issue suggest, the intersecting domains of responsibility and affect visible in anti-CRT efforts play out around the world in relation to numerous urgent concerns, from the climate emergency to the plight of migrants and refugees at nation-state borders. Attending to what it means to ‘feel implicated’ in injustice is thus a necessary component of understanding the political debates of the present and of forging new visions of solidarity that grapple with the difficult questions raised by traumatic histories and structures of domination. The essays in *Feeling Implicated: Affect, Responsibility, Solidarity* – comprising this special issue as well as the one that will follow it – take up the pressing need to conceptualise historical and political responsibility and make sense of the affective dynamics of struggles about such responsibility; they help develop new conceptual tools for clarifying dilemmas of injustice and alternative routes for tackling them.

Feeling Implicated – which I have edited together with Stefano Bellin, Jennifer Noji, and Arielle Stambler – joins a wave of work over the last two decades addressing indirect forms of participation in injustice and links that work to ongoing discussions in what became known during the same period as affect theory. The collection thus focuses on grey zones of responsibility and complicated structures of emotion and feeling – and especially on what we can learn by tracking their interplay. Although contributors draw from a range of theoretical resources – including work on complicity, the beneficiary, settler colonialism, the Anthropocene, citizenship, critical race studies, and more – one common reference point is the approach to historical and political responsibility I offered in my book *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (2019).³ In *The Implicated Subject*, I developed a new framework for thinking about histories of violence and structures of inequality. I proposed the category of the ‘implicated subject’ to describe those who cannot be termed perpetrators or held legally accountable in a criminal justice system, but who nonetheless participate indirectly in various forms of injustice. Implicated subjects are those who enable, perpetuate, benefit from, and inherit responsibility for histories in which they did not personally perpetrate violence and for unjust structures that they did not inaugurate and do not control. Such a focus complements scholarship on the most visible perpetrators of violence and on direct agents of exploitation by shedding light on the everyday practices of ordinary citizens and the underlying structural relations that enable various kinds of harm. It demonstrates how implication can illuminate a range of injustices: from genocide, white supremacy, and settler colonialism to climate crisis, exploitation of workers, and sexual violence.

The implicated subject is thus an umbrella term that groups together various forms of historical and political responsibility: it names the varied, but often

overlapping historical experiences of being an enabler, beneficiary, and perpetrator of – or successor to – histories and actualities of violence, domination, and exploitation. The theory of implication recognises that, although these ‘roles’ are most often deeply embedded in individual lives and collectivities, the various genres of implication name subject positions, not essential identities. That recognition implies that our individual and collective relation to injustice can shift over time and that we can occupy multiple subject positions simultaneously. Thus, many people occupy positions of what I call ‘complex implication’ – a technical term meant to evoke the coexistence for particular subjects of lines of connection to both scenarios of perpetration and experiences of victimisation.⁴ Those scenarios and experiences can in turn unfold in a synchronic present or in relation to a diachronic history; often the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of implication interact and overlap, and sometimes they even blur, as in the perpetuation of settler colonialism, for example. The emphasis in the theory on complexity, contingency, blurring, and historical change in no way suggests that relations of implication are thin, fragile, or easily subject to individual, voluntaristic dislodging, however. To the contrary, even in their complexity and context-specificity, implicated subjects serve as what the philosopher Simona Forti calls ‘transmission belts’ of domination. That is, implicated subjects are entangled in – and play critical roles in – the powerful structures of inequality and deep histories of violence that define our contemporaneity. Such entanglements cannot be wished away by the good intentions of individual subjects. Yet, complexity and contingency cannot be denied either: they provide potential openings for transformation.

The current special issue starts from the hypothesis that the possibility of transforming structures of violence and inequality will require grappling with the problem of affect. Structures of affect, feeling, emotion, and mood play key roles in solidifying systems and maintaining the hold of the past on the present; without taking account of affect, we cannot understand how such structures and histories persist. Yet, simultaneously, affective life constitutes a pool of resources that inspires and accompanies resistance to embedded forms of power. This volume explores the way those who occupy implicated subject positions are linked to structures and histories through various forms of affective entanglement that we name – in shorthand – ‘feeling implicated’. Like the ‘implicated subject’, ‘feeling implicated’ is another umbrella concept; it groups together the heterogeneous affective states that accompany conscious or unconscious implication – guilt, shame, resentment, and denial, for instance – but also ‘positive’ affects like love and solidarity. Yet, there is no one-to-one relation between states of implication and states of affect: beneficiaries may feel guilty or resentful; successors may feel shame or pride. The ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ nature of an affect does not predict its relation to injustice; love, for instance, may lead to collective violence or subtend non-violent resistance. Even an apparent lack of affect – ‘bourgeois coldness’ or masculine ‘hardness’ – might also serve as a register of the affect accompanying implication.⁵ The relation between affect and implication is thus

overdetermined, but not less critical for it; understanding the stakes of ‘feeling implicated’ requires working at multiple levels: incorporating insights from affect theory, history, and critiques of political economy as well as close readings of texts and documents that can register and reflect on what it feels like to be implicated in injustice. Understanding the affects that accompany injustice is crucial both for mapping the workings of domination and violence and for conceptualising the possibilities of resistance, solidarity, and fundamental transformation.

Affect Theory for Implicated Subjects

What resources do theories of affect offer to the project of understanding implication and implicated subjects? Like theories of political responsibility, theories of affect do not converge on a single account of their central term. Nor do we attempt to impose a particular definition or set of definitions on our usage of affect in this project. Yet some sense of how affect theory can productively supplement accounts of implication – and vice versa – is worth exploring.

Contemporary affect theory in the theoretical humanities has multiple sources but among the most salient are a rediscovery of the work of the psychologist Silvan Tompkins by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and a development of a strand of thinking that leads from the philosopher Baruch Spinoza through Gilles Deleuze and on to contemporary Deleuzian thinkers (including Brian Massumi and many others since then).⁶ Numerous feminist and queer thinkers – not least Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Teresa Brennan in addition to Sedgwick – have also been among the most influential proponents of a turn toward (some form of) affect.⁷ Some of these approaches also draw on or contribute to Marxist theory, in particular Raymond Williams’s suggestive but brief reflections on what he calls the ‘structure of feeling’, a tendency we find in Berlant as well as Jonathan Flatley.⁸ Beyond Williams’s influence, we can also find an updated theory of labour under the heading ‘affective’ or ‘immaterial’ labour developed in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri along with Patricia Clough and others.⁹ At the same time, further strands of work on the history and anthropology of emotions draw attention to the historical and cultural specificity of affect and caution against the risk of universalising approaches.¹⁰ My goal here, however, is not to provide a complete genealogy or choose sides among alternate versions of affect theory (which, in any case, extend far beyond what I can address), but rather to pick out the strands from these diverse approaches that have helped me illuminate problems of implication and political responsibility.¹¹

Implication involves the entanglement of individual and collective subjects with large scale structures and histories; affect in its different guises can be useful for thinking about implication, I hypothesise, because it serves as a connecting ligament between different scales and types of phenomena (subjects, on the one hand, structures and histories, on the other) while

simultaneously exerting a transformative force on the elements it connects. As Massumi puts it, ‘affect overflows the individual, tying its capacities to its relational entanglement with others and the outside’.¹² Affect’s ‘power-to’, in Massumi’s terms, is the source of its transformational energy, but under the wrong conditions that energy can be captured in the interests of domination, or what he calls ‘power-over’.¹³

The terms mobilised in the ‘affective turn’ do not remain stable, and the theorists mentioned above do not always use them in consistent ways, but there are a few key distinctions that are useful to set out up front.¹⁴ In particular, the terms affect, emotion, and feeling can be understood as evoking related but distinct phenomena. In a short, but helpful essay on this triad, Eric Shouse summarises the difference in this way: ‘[f]eelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*’.¹⁵ While feelings and emotions possess relatively everyday meanings (which nonetheless require unpacking), the notion of affect as ‘prepersonal’ constitutes one of the non-common-sense signatures of contemporary theoretical discourse. Derived especially from the Spinoza-Deleuze tradition, this focus on affect as prepersonal involves an attempt to account for that which by definition eludes capture and categorisation. Not just anything that eludes categorisation, of course, but specifically the dynamic encounters that point to ‘a body’s *capacity* to affect and to be affected’.¹⁶ As Patricia Clough summarises this approach, ‘[a]ffect constitutes a nonlinear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracted, but always with “a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder”’.¹⁷ Jan Slaby and Rainer Mühlhoff describe Brian Massumi’s development of Deleuzian thinking in similar terms: ‘Massumi tries to evoke, express, and hold on to an affective intensity that transpires *before* world, subject, experience, solidify into enduring formations’.¹⁸ In this understanding of affect as intensity, affect is ‘preconscious, non-human, rife with vital forces (“the virtual”), intensive, at times wild and ecstatic’, and troubles what Slaby and Mühlhoff understand as the ‘fixtures of humanist inquiry: [affect works] against representation, normativity, the subject, intentionality, critique, disciplinary standards of scholarship, and much else’.¹⁹ Because affect is – for those committed to this line of inquiry – the term most obviously in opposition to the received frameworks of critical theory, it tends to orient the field in a way that emotion and feeling do not. Indeed, for many theorists, affect seems to displace the centrality of emotion and feeling in their more conventional understandings.

In contrast to this theoretical tendency, the theory of implication does not seek to do away with all of those ‘fixtures’ – and indeed holds on to the significance of the subject and critique as well as emotion and feeling. Yet, the Spinoza-inspired approach nevertheless offers some important insights for our project. In particular, Spinoza’s commitment to ‘substance monism’, ‘relational ontology’, and ‘immanent causality’ proves useful for theorising implication. In Slaby and Mühlhoff’s account, Spinoza’s relational, immanent ontology eliminates the ‘external observer’s position’ and implies that there

are ‘only *involved* articulations from within substance’.²⁰ For Spinoza, we are always already entangled and implicated within dynamic networks of entities – a useful grounding for thinking implication. Within the singular substance posited by Spinoza, affect takes two forms: *affectio*, which involves the differentiation of that substance into different modes, and *affectus*, the modulation of relations of power that result from the dynamic interrelations of the different modes.²¹ Thus, while Spinoza-inspired work on affect seeks to grasp that which is prepersonal and eludes categorisation as pure intensity, it also provides a framework for thinking about how that non-subjective intensity shapes what we come to understand as relations of power between distinct (but changing) entities. Affect is, in Massumi’s terms, ‘a power concept through and through’, according to which ‘*the political becomes directly felt*’.²² The Spinozan approach to affect helps set the stage for thinking about implication insofar as it offers us a world that is at once utterly entangled, significantly differentiated according to relations of power, and subject to transformation and change.

Beyond the Spinoza-Deleuze approach (albeit often still inspired by or in dialogue with it), other thinkers offer more explicitly historical accounts of affect, emotion, and feeling that contribute to an understanding of how affect (broadly understood) functions in relation to political responsibility. Axiomatic here is Lauren Berlant’s insight that ‘the present is perceived, first, affectively’.²³ In other words, affect plays an analogous, anticipatory role in relation to temporality as it does in relation to subjectivity and other key categories of social analysis (the prepersonal, ‘pre-categorical’ dimension discussed above). Berlant argues that before we are able to characterise and confront ‘an epoch on which we can look back’, affect encodes an incipient experience of historicity.²⁴ Although incipient, this felt historicity is not merely idiosyncratic or individualist, but rather collective: ‘affective responses may be said significantly to exemplify shared *historical* time.’²⁵ The notion of affect as fundamental to a shared, emergent mode of historical cognition derives from Williams’s notion of the ‘structure of feeling’. Williams sought to get back behind the ‘finished products’ that social analysis usually presumes in order to illuminate ‘a social experience which is still *in process*’, just as later affect theorists seek to access intensities that have not yet settled into individuated categories.²⁶ For Williams, ‘emergent or pre-emergent’ changes in social life ‘do not have to await definition, classification or rationalisation before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action’.²⁷ The affinity with the Spinozan line of affect theory is visible here in the attempt to track that which precedes or eludes categorisation, but Williams’s particular concatenation of feeling and structure comes closer to describing the work of mediation that I see affect performing in the context of implication.²⁸ In Jonathan Flatley’s words, Williams’s approach to affect ‘enables us to describe those structures that mediate between the social and the personal that are more ephemeral and transitory than set ideologies or institutions’.²⁹ Implication does not solely concern ideology or affect, to be sure; it also, and perhaps above all, concerns material relations of power and

privilege in the present as well as historical inheritances of advantage and disadvantage. Yet, the presumption of this project is that affect and ideology – as well as their intrinsic connection – are terrains that produce and reproduce injustices and inequalities or, in other words, relations of implication.

Affect can serve as a point of access to the question of why unjust structures maintain their hold on subjects and why traumatic historical legacies linger beyond the conclusion of violent conflict. This affective work converges with the work of ideology, as Flatley helpfully summarises: '[i]f the function of ideology is to narrate our relation to a social order so as to make our daily experience of that order meaningful and manageable, then structure of feeling would be the term to describe the mediating structure – one just as socially produced as ideology – that facilitates and shapes our affective attachment to different objects in the social order'.³⁰ Flatley's insight about the parallel – indeed, mutually reinforcing – functioning of ideology and affect leads to a further useful concept. Bringing Williams into dialogue with the notion of cognitive mapping developed first by Kevin Lynch and later, in a more Marxist vein, by Fredric Jameson, Flatley calls for an approach based on 'affective mapping'.³¹ Like cognitive maps for Lynch and Jameson, affective maps involve 'the pictures we all carry around with us' as we attempt to navigate complex social landscapes – up to and including the spaces of global capitalism.³² Under ordinary circumstances, we use such maps simply to get around, but they also contain political potential: 'without an affective map, the most basic political acts – the distinction of friend from foe, danger from safety, despair-inducing from interest-enhancing experiences – become impossible'.³³ In thinking affect together with implication, the concept of the affective map – like that of the structure of feeling or Berlant's insights about the essential historicity of affect – proves useful: not only because it enables political action, but also because it helps uncover the affective work propping up dominant relations; such affective work needs to be understood before those relations can be transformed. As Flatley writes, '[o]ur most enduring and basic social formations – patriarchy, say, or capitalism itself – can only be enduring to the extent that they are woven into our emotional lives in the most fundamental way'.³⁴ The fact that such social formations – which self-evidently produce disadvantage as well as advantage – are 'woven into our emotional lives' suggests how affect functions as a vector of implication: we are often invested – and thus implicated – in structures and histories that we may consciously reject. Even if – and perhaps specifically *because* – affect often eludes consciousness, as the Spinoza-Deleuze school and psychoanalytic approaches teach us, it nevertheless functions to facilitate our participation in injustice just as it can motivate our resistance to those injustices.

As Flatley's productive appropriation of cognitive mapping for the purposes of affective mapping suggests, the social and political relevance of affect cannot stop with prepersonal and non-conscious phenomena. As powerful and persistent as these are, non-conscious affective phenomena exist in a feedback loop with more conscious, self-reflexive, and discursively rendered emotions

and feelings. To understand implication and the political struggles around it we need to take into account the way subjects become conscious of and respond to affective states, while recognising that consciousness is always partial and that such responses remain driven in part by unconscious and pre-personal processes. What Cvetkovich calls the ‘public life of feelings’ involves the interplay of affect, emotion, and feeling: as the anti-CRT campaign exemplifies, the public life of feelings today prominently includes struggle over what it means to ‘feel implicated’.³⁵

From Affect back to Implication

There are clearly, then, many invaluable resources for thinking about affect, emotion, and feeling in relation to implication. And yet, work that explicitly tackles that problem (using whatever vocabulary) is a much smaller subset of work in affect theory. As Sean Grattan explains, with reference to Sara Ahmed and José Muñoz, affect often ‘functions as a way of theorising minoritarian positions’.³⁶ We find a related tendency in some of the major contributions of Lauren Berlant, whose thinking – as I have indicated – is crucial to this project. Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* remains one of the most incisive attempts to map out the historical and political entailments of affect and offers essential insights that help advance thinking on implication. *Cruel Optimism* is dedicated to understanding a contemporary moment defined by the ‘fraying’ of what Berlant calls ‘fantasies of the good life’ – fantasies that include ‘upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy’.³⁷ The ‘attrition’ of these fantasies leads to a paradoxical situation in which the more subjects hew to a normative vision of human flourishing the less attainable such a vision becomes. This self-cancelling paradox – which in a further twist Berlant asserts may feel necessary to the subject’s survival – defines the eponymous category of ‘cruel optimism’: ‘an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfactions they offer’.³⁸ There appear to be both structural and historically specific dimensions to cruel optimism. ‘Optimism’ is, in Berlant’s terms, a structural relation of attachment, which is to say a fundamental dimension of subjectivity. Under certain, specific conditions, however, such attachment becomes cruel (i.e. self-subverting).

Yet, while optimistic attachments to structures that produce harm might suggest what I would call subjects’ ‘implication’ in those structures, Berlant’s focus is different. Berlant certainly attends to the kinds of status difference – ‘class, gender, race, and nation’ – that align with the problem of implication, but they are especially interested in the ways that the ‘fraying’ of the post-World War II social order cuts across those categories as well: ‘no longer is precarity delegated to the poor or the *sans-papiers*’; rather, it becomes a widely shared condition.³⁹ *Cruel Optimism* is thus an attempt to think the specificities of location within the generalised conditions of ‘crisis ordinariness’, a situation in which the ‘conditions of ordinary life in the contemporary world even of relative wealth, as in the United States, are conditions of the

attrition or wearing out of the subject'.⁴⁰ Berlant's important project focuses on how subjects both 'suffer' and 'survive' in the impasse of a fraying social order defined by generalised precarity. The framework of implication takes a different tack: it directs attention to how some subjects help the *social order itself* to survive – and *actually derive profit from it* – even as it fails to produce the good life for the many that it claims to enable (including, at times, those subjects who support it). The shift from 'cruel optimism' to 'feeling implicated' involves, then, a shift of emphasis from the 'wearing out of the subject' by the 'conditions of everyday life' to the reproduction of those conditions by implicated subjects who benefit from and perpetuate its small- and large-scale forms of violence.⁴¹ To be sure, in the face of a globally warming planet, even beneficiaries and perpetuators of the current capitalist order are involved in a doomed, self-subverting project; yet, as the planet careens toward catastrophe, some subjects remain more advantageously situated for the ride than others. That is no less true for the beneficiaries and perpetuators of the overlapping structures of racial injustice. Such implicated subjects are our primary focus here.

Many questions naturally remain about how to coordinate the actions and inactions of implicated subjects with the functioning of large-scale structures and the unfolding of macro-historical developments. In this collection, we seek to advance the theory of implication by focusing intently on both the subjective and material sides of the relationship. On the one hand, affective states such as love, anger, shame, guilt, denial, and fear play significant roles in facilitating complicity and implication and thus help anchor diverse forms of domination. On the other hand, attempts to contest injustice through acts of small- and large-scale resistance and the forging of solidarities also derive from an affective substratum, one that includes many of the same emotions that accompany implication.

Against the backdrop of these subjective and material forces, I distinguish for analytical purposes between three levels at which affect plays a role in forging, consolidating, and contesting implication. At the first level, affect can function as a *vector of implication*, the very stuff of which implication is made. Nation-states, for example, feed on 'positive' affects to mobilise their citizenry for acts of war or domestic forms of 'cleansing' (such as anti-immigrant campaigns). Thus, a seemingly innocuous affect like love of country – domestic patriotism or the 'long-distance nationalism' (Benedict Anderson) of diasporic groups – can serve as a vector of implication by facilitating consent to state violence.⁴² Relatedly, what Berg and Ramos-Zayas call 'racialised affect' serves to produce and reproduce the 'disciplinary functions of racialisation' while simultaneously consolidating empowered positions of privilege.⁴³

At the second level, affect marks the *conscious or unconscious recognition that one is implicated* in injustice. Here, affect is not an immediate vector of implication but rather a mediated response to a preexisting mode of implication. Such a mediated response might take the form of a resistance to acknowledging

implication, and that resistance might eventuate in forms of resentment or rage that lead to second-order violence, thus helping reproduce the original structure or extending it into new contexts. The anti-CRT bills with which I started (and which frame Cucharó's essay in this issue) exemplify such scenarios in which racist structures are perpetuated and intensified through an affectively charged feedback loop.⁴⁴

Yet, a dawning recognition of one's implication can also lead to a self-reflexive grappling with the conditions of violence and injustice. In the latter cases, there is the possibility of opening onto a third level. At this third level, affect can motivate the *turn against implication* and serve as the *impetus for constructing solidarities* that contest the subject's own complicity in structures of oppression. Starting from the position of implicated subjects necessarily complicates the question of solidarity, which – especially on the left – is often thought about in terms of sameness.⁴⁵ Taking implication seriously requires, in contrast, a notion of *differentiated solidarity* that begins with the premise that the subjects involved in struggle are differentially situated in social space.⁴⁶ Such differential positioning often produces feelings of discomfort; indeed, one of the lessons of attention to implication is that we need to 'make solidarity uneasy', to adapt the terms of the historian David Roediger.⁴⁷ Viewed from the vantage point of implicated subjects, then, solidarity is a complex emotion that uneasily combines feelings of attachment and discomfort. All of the contributions to our double special issue take up this third level at which implication and affect open onto visions of solidarity – at least, potentially. How could they not? Solidarity is the horizon from which we hope to contest injustice. But that contestation is indelibly marked, all of the essays make clear, by the complexity and unevenness of relations of power.

Although these different levels linking affect and implication are, in practice, entangled with each other, distinguishing between them can provide analytical clarity and allow us to perceive their dynamic relation. Indeed, it is the dynamics of affect – the dynamic or propulsive nature of affect itself – that lies at the core of this special issue. The distinction between different levels at which affect and implication intersect serves as the starting point for an investigation of how subjects are moved across these levels and thus reproduce forms of violence, begin to turn against them, or remain 'stuck' in a position of helplessness or despair. Attuned to the dynamics of affect, most of the essays collected here zero in on the most ambiguous zone: the second level at which subjects recognise – either reflexively or in less conscious modes – their implication in structures of domination. Thus, while affect sometimes does appear as a vector of implication here, the central action often takes place at level two, and the central questions concern what will become of subjects' sometimes spontaneous, sometimes unconscious, sometimes self-reflexive responses to 'feeling implicated', and what the chances will be that those responses can lead to durable, collective solidarities.

This first issue of *Feeling Implicated* is organised around two large areas of concern: the intersection of affect and implication with structures of racism and colonialism; and the prevalence of feelings of implication in response to ongoing climate crisis. Our second special issue will return to issues of race and colonialism – especially as they manifest themselves in militarised border regimes – but it will also explore how works of art and culture seek to provoke readers and spectators to recognise and respond to their own implication in violent structures (something we also see in Craps’s contribution to this issue).

Racism/colonialism and climate crisis, our focus in the first issue, are realms in which different sets of powerful affects emerge in response to different, yet intertwined, political scenarios, each of which prominently includes large masses of implicated subjects. Conscious and unconscious responses to ‘feeling implicated’ in structural racism and settler colonialism can produce a gamut of reactions ranging from guilt and shame to resentment and anger (among others). The affects and emotions prompted in implicated subjects by climate crisis have an overlapping but distinct palate involving grief, guilt, and – perhaps more than anything else – denial. The presumption of the essays collected here is never that becoming conscious of implication will lead straightforwardly to transformations of the conditions that produce injustice and threaten human and more-than-human life on this planet, yet each of these essays also seeks to make visible some of the conditions of possibility for such transformation. The essays offer no simple recipe for change, but among the sites of potential they explore are the refusal of purity politics (Shotwell); the reimagination of kinship (Mihai); the radical decentring of the human (Craps and Mihai); and the embrace of uncomfortable affinities across groups (Adebayo, Cucharó, and Shotwell).

This issue opens with an incisive autocritical essay by Sakiru Adebayo. Adebayo uses his own situation as an African immigrant in Canada to open up a wide-ranging reflection on the way subjects – even racialised subjects – occupy cross-cutting relations of power. The combination of privilege and precarity Adebayo locates in his own experience as a recently arrived faculty member at a university that occupies Indigenous land leads to important insights about complex implication and the ambivalent affects associated with it. Starting from autobiography allows Adebayo to reveal the intersection of settler colonialism in a local and national context with global structures of capitalism and imperialism. Adebayo’s self-reflexive method, inspired in part by the feminist politics of location, allows him to map what he calls ‘geographies of implication’ which situate him in complex ways: simultaneously as a racialised immigrant marked by a long history of empire and as a beneficiary and perpetuator of a similarly long settler colonial project. For Adebayo, affect is closely linked to cognition: his essay traces a journey in which his deepening knowledge of Canadian history – its dispossession of

Indigenous peoples, its racist immigration policies, and its imperial entanglements – produces feelings of discomfort that propel the author toward a ‘shock of self-revelation’ and a precarious but no less necessary form of differentiated solidarity.

In a nuanced analysis of the anti-Critical Race Theory movement in the United States, Steve Cucharo organises his investigation around one of the most common vernacular tropes that evokes what it means to ‘feel implicated’, at least in the contemporary US: the notion of ‘white guilt’. ‘White guilt’ is a particular racialised affect that finds itself denigrated on all sides: while the right rejects guilt feelings about racism as a weak, liberal response that misrepresents the ‘greatness’ of American democracy, the left tends to view it as a privatised, anti-political response to material inequities. Cucharo takes a different tack and proposes that we view ‘white guilt’ as a ‘complex cultural phenomenon’ that lends itself to multiple and even contradictory articulations of varying political valence. Deploying a vocabulary derived from Melanie Klein, Cucharo distinguishes between ‘paranoid-schizoid’ and ‘depressive’ modes of guilt. The paranoid-schizoid mode tends toward the splitting of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ subjects; it frees the white subject from responsibility, detaches affect from history, and vitiates any attempt at reconciliation or reparation. The depressive mode, in contrast, facilitates the perception of ambivalences; it acknowledges the subject’s situatedness in history and points toward the need for repair. Yet, Cucharo does not simply offer a binary between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ways of feeling implicated (which would, after all, repeat the structure of the paranoid-schizoid mode). He is, in fact, sympathetic to the left critique of ‘white guilt’ as potentially captured by a privatised, neoliberal politics of individual feeling and self-transformation, but he goes a step further. The depressive mode is not itself an answer to the problems of structural racism, he argues; rather, it opens up the possibility of *politicising* guilt, of mobilising that feeling of implication as part of a collective project of transformation and repair. Rather than blocking all possibility of meaningful action, guilt can function as an emotion that opens toward the ‘third level’ of solidarity sketched above.

Guilt is also central to Stef Craps’s discussion of ecocide. In this context, human-driven climate catastrophe produces what Craps calls a ‘difficult tension in the emotional realm’ in which guilt and grief uneasily coincide. Working from this tangled emotional realm (which I would situate at level two of our schema), Craps posits that art and activism can provide a ‘new emotional literacy’ that will be a necessary component of grappling with ecological crisis and a step toward ‘ecological connection and care’. There is no automatic path from art to effective action, however, as Craps’s first example, Octavia Cade’s novella *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief*, illustrates: here, the dominant affect is ‘stuckness’, an understandable response to the overwhelming nature of the climate problem, but one that allows no movement toward new modes of relation or transformation (our level three). Craps’s two other examples offer glimmers of possibility, albeit ones that ask us to radically

rethink our usual notions of politics. Chris Jordan's documentary film *Albatross* (2017) explores the devastating impact of plastic on a colony of albatrosses in the middle of the North Pacific. Jordan's response is primarily ethical: through witnessing and close attention to the fate of the albatrosses, the filmmaker models 'ecological attunement', a new way of thinking about relationality and connection across the human/non-human border. The final example takes up a radical form of action – the self-immolation of lawyer David Buckel – whose effects turn out to be subtle but powerful. If Buckel's suicide did not mobilise the public to mass action, it did, as Craps's attentive reading illuminates, ripple out in many directions in ways that suggest possible non-spectacular, 'ecocentric' modes of activism.

Mihaela Mihai's essay picks up on many of the issues address in the previous essays, including guilt, mourning, complex implication, and the dilemmas of ecological activism. Like the sensitive analysis of suicide as a mode of ecological politics in Craps's essay, Mihai focuses on the possibilities and limits of one activist intervention into climate crisis. Mihai explores the 'BirthStrikers', a British women's movement that pledges not to procreate as a way of interrupting business as usual in the face of climate emergency. Complexly implicated as women in a patriarchal political space who are also (mostly) white inhabitants of the Global North, the women of BirthStrikers turn guilt at their implication in the conditions that create climate change into a radical form of mourning: they mourn their (potential) unborn children as a way of stimulating self-reflexivity and action in the face of environmental degradation. While recognising the important tradition of women's political mourning, Mihai convincingly details how the BirthStrikers unwittingly reproduce anthropocentric, pronatalist positions that thwart the potential of their project. Mihai then seeks conceptual resources from queer, African American, Indigenous, and eco-feminist thinkers who reconfigure kin-making in ways that have the potential to enable 'more-than-human flourishing' and thus alternative approaches to climate politics. Donna Haraway's notion of 'kinnovation' – a reworking of kinship beyond the boundaries of genealogy and species – plays a particularly important role in enabling new affective modalities of grief and hope, and Emma Lietz Bilecky's essay 'Soil' plays a role in Mihai's essay that resonates powerfully with the example of Buckel in Craps's piece.

Like Adebayo, Alexis Shotwell employs a personal voice and considers what it means to be implicated in Canada's settler colonial, extractive political economy. Like Craps and Mihai, she also seeks new visions of climate politics. Her emphasis falls, however, especially on possibilities for collective action, a very different vision than, for instance, those we find in Bilecky or Buckel. Shotwell also usefully points to ways that the concept of complicity can supplement a general sense of implication in injustice. We must be able, she aptly notes, to charge those who are responsible for harms with complicity, and we must try to build forms of collective refusal that grow out of our complicities with one another. As she does in her book *Against Purity*, Shotwell

argues convincingly that political action must emerge from those who are implicated in structures and process of injustice; it is not our purity, but our impurity that gives us ‘traction’ in our efforts to work for change. Shotwell’s wide-ranging essay takes us through theories of evil, shared responsibility, repair, and much more. Above all, it asks us to think relationally and to move beyond the individual in the direction of meaningful collective mobilisation. Shotwell’s vision is not precisely optimistic: it will require a currently absent mass movement to address the scale of a climate crisis embedded in global capitalism. But her vision is not precisely pessimistic either: our necessarily compromised, imperfect state is the ground from which such mass movements must emerge. We don’t have to purify ourselves of implication in order to act.

The final essay of this first special issue reflects insightfully on the affective registers of collective political action. In a powerful response to the first issue of *Feeling Implicated*, Jonathan Flatley argues that feelings of implication may do more to reproduce structures of domination than to offer paths toward resistance. Drawing on examples from the arena of labour and labour organising, Flatley illustrates how status hierarchies within the working class can produce feelings of implication that lead some workers to consolidate their positions of relative privilege, even if it means sacrificing the collective power that would result from solidarity across tiers (and races) of workers. Inspired by Heidegger’s concept of *Stimmung* [mood], Flatley’s essay then takes up a diversity of ‘moods’ that cluster around experiences of exploitation and injustice, and considers the affective conditions under which collective action can emerge. While he sees a line running from feelings of guilt to an individualised sense of responsibility that impedes collective formation, he finds more hope in feelings of shame and anger. A suggestive example from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* reveals how collective shame at witnessing radical dispossession can be transformed into anger and into the creation of a new, politicised ‘we’. Leaving us with the image of a crowd that “feel[s] so good!”, Flatley invites us to think further about the continuities – and discontinuities – between implication, affect, and urgent political struggle.

Notes

¹ South Carolina General Assembly, “General Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2021-2022.”

² “Alabama State Board of Education Resolution Declaring the Preservation of Intellectual Freedom and Non-Discrimination in Alabama’s Public Schools.”

³ Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*.

⁴ For an elaboration of complex implication from a particular standpoint, see Sakiru Adebayo’s essay in this volume.

⁵ On ‘bourgeois coldness’, see Kohpeiß, *Bürgerliche Kälte: Affect und koloniale Subjektivität*.

On masculine ‘hardness’, see Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2.

⁶ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*; Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affective*.

⁷ Apart from work cited elsewhere, see Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*; Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.

⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

⁹ Hardt, “Affective Labor”; Ticineto Clough, “Introduction”, in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*.

¹⁰ For recent synthetic accounts that address the historical and cultural specificity of emotions, see Plamper, *The History of*

Emotions; and Flanagan, *How to Do Things with Emotions: The Morality of Anger and Shame Across Cultures*.

¹¹ Gregg and Seigworth map out eight different tendencies in affect theory in “An Inventory of Shimmers.” Seigworth and Pedwell’s follow-up edited volume *The Affect Theory Reader 2* extends this mapping considerably further.

¹² Evans and Massumi, “Affect, Power, Violence—The Political Is Not Personal.”

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Cvetkovich’s lucid keyword entry “Affect.” Flatley offers a useful ‘Glossary’ in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*.

¹⁵ Shouse, ‘Feeling, Emotion, Affect’.

¹⁶ Gregg and Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” 2. This language derives from Spinoza.

¹⁷ Clough, “Introduction,” 2. Clough is citing Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual*, one of the texts that helped inaugurate the turn to affect from a Deleuzian perspective.

¹⁸ Slaby and Mühlhoff, “Affect,” 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Evans and Massumi, “Affect, Power, Violence.”

²³ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128, 132.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁸ Spinoza-inspired theorists such as Massumi reject mediation and understand affect as *unmediated* intensity. The project of analyzing what it means to ‘feel implicated’ presupposes, in contrast, the importance of mediation. See Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*.

²⁹ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

³² *Ibid.*, 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Cvetkovich, “Affect,” 6.

³⁶ Grattan, “Affect Studies,” 337. Cathy Park Hong’s notion of ‘minor feelings’ functions precisely in this way. See Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (New York: Random House, 2021). While especially attuned to minoritarian subjects, contributors to queer theories of affect like Ahmed and José Esteban Muñoz also provide essential resources for thinking implicated affects, as can be seen in, for

example, Ahmed’s discussion of shame and nationalism or Muñoz’s conceptualization of ‘disidentification’. See Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* and Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queens of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

³⁷ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴¹ Our concept of ‘feeling implicated’ is also close, but not identical to Berlant’s notion of ‘inconvenience’, from their last book *The Inconvenience of Others*. Inconvenience marks the ‘friction of being in relation’ and ‘a feeling state that registers one’s implication in the pressures of coexistence’ (2-3). But ‘feeling implicated’ has a somewhat narrower and more accusatory valence than Berlant’s intentionally broad concept: it involves not just the ‘friction of being in relation’, but the friction of being caught up in a relation of domination – caught, that is, on the side of the dominating forces.

⁴² Anderson, “Exodus,” 314-327.

⁴³ Berg and Ramos-Zayas, “Racialized Affect: A Theoretical Proposition,” 663.

⁴⁴ Another, related example of such a second-order violence would be the notion of ‘secondary antisemitism’. Lars Rensmann provides an account of how Adorno and Frankfurt School colleagues designed ‘group experiments’ that revealed a new form of antisemitism, which they term ‘secondary antisemitism’ and which grows out of an attempt to ward off guilt about the ‘primary’ antisemitic nature of the Nazi genocide of Jews. As Rensmann writes, the Critical Theorists ‘show the role of unprocessed guilt feelings, persistent nationalistic identification, and lacking democratic responsibility in generating antisemitism after the genocide’. Secondary antisemitism is, in my terms a second level phenomenon, albeit one that draws on ‘first level’ affects and creates new forms of first-level violence. See Rensmann, *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism*, 384.

⁴⁵ For a strong argument about sameness in the construction of leftist solidarity and ‘comradship,’ see Dean, *Comrade*.

⁴⁶ In *The Implicated Subject*, I give the example of the ‘We Are Not Trayvon Martin’ campaign, in which a feeling of implication in anti-Blackness leads to a public embrace of differentiated or long-distance solidarity (2-12).

⁴⁷ Roediger, “Making Solidarity Uneasy.”

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