Spatial ethics of affects

Miriam Tedeschi
University of Turku, Finland

Abstract
This author's reply responds to the commentaries by Collins, Conradson, Gilmartin, Jacobsen, and Shubin of my article, 'On the Ethical Dimension of Irregular Migrants' Lives: Affect, Becoming and Information'. What I suggest in this commentary and in the article has to be considered only as a starting point in developing an operationalisation of a Simondonian theory and vocabulary, which might provide further insights into the complexity of migration phenomena and beyond. In this response, in particular, I highlight how a spatial ethics of affects can be further developed to better comprehend migrants and their daily struggles.

Me:	What do you see in your future?
Zoran:	I see nothing in front of me.[1]

In the state of 'angoisse', the subject would like to solve herself by herself without relying on the collective. (Simondon, 2005: 255, my translation)

First, I wish to thank Collins, Conradson, Gilmartin, Jacobsen, and Shubin for their insightful and thought-provoking comments on my article. Although they raised many relevant questions, due to space limitations, I will not be able to reply to each and every one of them. However, I do hope that this dialogue can continue in and beyond this forum. Thus, in my response, I mainly highlight those themes that are somehow common to all commentaries, enabling me to expand on relevant concepts already introduced in my article, including ethics and its spatiality and 'affectivity', the socio-political dimension (in Simondon and beyond in the context of migration studies), and the role of anxiety (*angoisse*) in the individual–environment pair. In the remainder of this commentary, I will go through

these concepts while touching upon the commentators' main ideas, questions, and concerns. I conclude this response by highlighting how the Simondonian (simplified) theory presented in the article and applied to the irregular migration field is only the very first step in this endeavour. Thus, it needs further development in terms of both theoretical exploration and empirical application.

When I started meeting migrants considered 'irregular' in Finland – mainly ex-asylum seekers who were not allowed to stay in the country – I did not know what to expect. As a 'result-oriented' researcher, I obviously wanted to provide a clear and straightforward direction to my research. However, as an ethnographer, I knew that the research participants and the fieldwork itself guide the

Corresponding author:
Miriam Tedeschi, Department of Geography and Geology, Geography Section, University of Turku, Vesilinnantie 5, 20014 Turku, Finland.
Email: mitede@utu.fi

research(er), more than the other way around. I also knew that the most interesting findings are often the ones that come up while being totally unexpected. This was what happened to me during the fieldwork. Though I had my own research questions, in front of the sense of 'nothingness' (in a metaphorical sense, citing Shubin's (2021) expression) and despair that these people often let transpire, I somehow felt that those questions I had were meaningless, and that I was simply not able to grasp what was happening in its entirety. All in all, I felt inadequate in front of these people's troubled lives. I was probably experiencing what Shubin (2021), in his commentary on my article, keenly calls the 'worlds inaccessible to reason in migration'. Such a realisation motivated me to reconsider the research questions I initially had and to add an autoethnographic part to my ethnographic diary. There is no account of the autoethnographic work in my article; however, given the comments that I received, I have now decided to briefly bring it up here.

As naive as it may seem, the dialogues (or, more often, non-dialogues, the *affective* atmospheres permeating the spaces of our encounters) with these people *affected* me in a way that forced me to redirect my research and to pose basic philosophical questions, mostly related to who we are and where we are going, from an ethical point of view. Certainly, these questions are broad, and centuries of philosophical thought have already provided exhaustive answers. Yet, although I was aware of this fact, these were questions that I more strongly felt I needed to find a reply to. This happened as my body was struck (and 'negatively' *affected* in an ethical, Spinozan sense) by the sense of anxiety – the 'nothingness' that permeated and ruptured our encounters. In their commentary, Jacobsen and Gilmartin (2021) mention Ahmed (2000) and her ethics of affects and encounter: 'the framework of affective and ethical encounters… allows us to see not only how migrants become subject to particular state categories, but also how these encounters shape people's ways of knowing the state and each other' (Jacobsen and Gilmartin, 2021). However, they are worried that my decision of not linking the ethics with the political dimension (especially relevant in studies concerning irregular migration)

wrongly makes the ethics of affects and encounters individualised, thus missing central issues, such as '"irregularity", the state, and operations of power' (Jacobsen and Gilmartin, 2021). While I do agree with them that these dimensions are of utmost importance in migration studies, the purpose of my article is different. I started from a need that strongly emerged during the fieldwork to find a way to account for the anxiety that these persons felt while I simultaneously grappled with realising its impenetrability and inaccessibility, thus affecting me in turn. It was in this direction that I wanted to develop an alternative manner of talking about the ethics of bodies-in-space.

In this sense, I argue that there is no single way by which a researcher working on migration can be *affected*. Often, the researcher (the ethnographer, in this case) can only partially decide in advance how the encounters are redirecting and affecting her ethical direction. In my case, and in accordance with my theoretical framework that draws on Spinoza's ethics, where the affects themselves guide and redirect the individual's ethical path, I followed the need to pave a way that could return (only partially, and sadly, superficially) the affects circulating among those people and in their space. In this case, 'space', ontologically speaking, is the tautology whereby 'bodies are space, and vice versa' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2015: 45) or the interplay of the individual–environment pair (Simondon, 1992). In Simondon's words, this would mean to sink into the becoming of the individual–environment pair that opens and draws the ethical direction. Indeed, 'ethics is not about [the] right response to the other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which "we" are part' (Barad, 2008: 333).

In a practical sense, the implications are at least three-fold. First, in relation to the migrants themselves, the irregularity (as part of the environmental dimension) must necessarily be considered 'in-becoming' (even though how it *becomes* was not the purpose of my article); second, the in-becoming dimension is not located 'within the bodies and minds of migrants themselves' (Jacobsen and Gilmartin, 2021), but rather, ontologically and ontogenetically, in the ever-

changing interplay (i.e. 'entanglement', see Barad, 2008) of the individual–environment pair. Third, the responsibility and accountability required of such ethics entails that the researcher be entangled in the becoming of the pair, thus shifting her ethical direction accordingly.

Therefore, I would have been a hypocrite if I had said that these encounters with migrants ethically redirected me towards the comprehension of, for instance, power asymmetries (Jacobsen and Gilmartin, 2021) or the political dimension of the phenomenon. Again, this does not mean that I was unaware of these extremely relevant dimensions. The political dimension could be built upon my article's premises in the sense that a new vocabulary could be derived to describe – with varying non-categorical words or expressions – how their becoming is influenced by the material layering on their body-in-space of various power relationships. This could counteract the political operation of caging them into predefined state-taxonomies, which use and reproduce the same fixed, dual, and static language. The renewal of the vocabulary, which is essential in going against the categorical fetishism of immigration policies (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018), can stem from and operationalise such a philosophical approach. However, what I wanted to say in the article is that these people communicated to me something else during those months, which affected my body more strongly than, for example, the political dimension of the context of the study. Furthermore, I decided not to ignore (but rather to ethically 'account for', using Barad's (2008) words) the fact that the majority of them frequently mentioned how relieved they were from their anxiety just for being able to talk with someone and to be listened to. Here, being unethical, in Spinoza's sense, would have meant diminishing these people's capacity of acting and being acted upon, whereas increasing it would be considered ethical.

At the time the research was conducted, my body felt that my ethical direction, which could 'empower' these people (even though, I am aware, in a very limited and sadly insufficient way), was to just listen to and focus on them – on the people I had in front of me – instead of the more general phenomenon of irregular migration and its implications.

However, according to Simondon, the individual dimension is always, ontologically and ontogenetically, an individual–environment dimension, whereby the individual per se does not exist, as she is never 'alone', but always spatially entangled. It is from this first basic entanglement that the social and political dimensions spring from and are then understood (in fact, they are materially layered or entangled in bodies-in-space). Thus, I decided to account for this basic individual–environment entanglement first and let the affects freely flow into my body and under my skin, even though that meant that I had to partly suffer from what these persons had experienced, as the 'nothingness' they communicated heavily sunk into my body over time.

It is in this sense that I find Shubin's (2021) commentary very relevant. To simplify his very articulate and insightful argument, he talks about the nothingness and the (im)possibility of putting this nothingness into words. Additionally, his purpose is 'to open up for discussion the idea of unity between an individual and the other that continues to trouble migration scholars, and consider the very possibility of the relation to the unknown' (Shubin, 2021). I have personally felt the impossibility of establishing a relation with the unknown (the above-mentioned sense of inadequacy) in which the anxiety that permeated these people was affectively transmitted to me. It is a nothingness that resonates well in what Simondon (2005) calls anxiety (*angoisse*): the fear of the outside, so strong that the person tries to solve it into herself without relying on the environment (which, in practical terms, we may call the 'collective' or the 'social'). As Shubin highlights, there are no words that can possibly describe this nothingness, and although poetry could grasp a small portion of it, it mostly remains unexpressed.

Shubin (2021) also expresses the concern that I try to find a way out of this in my article, whereas that is not possible: 'Unlike Tedeschi's hopeful interpretation of Simondon (2005), anxiety dividing the self offers no deliverance. The encounter with alterity leads to the destruction of the subject that, through passivity and self-effacement, accepts the otherness within'. In my article, I drew upon examples of both cases: people who managed to find ways

out and others who remained trapped into the *angoisse* loop (at least at the time when the research was conducted) (Tedeschi, 2020). If the person remains trapped in the *angoisse*, what Shubin calls the 'other' remains out of reach as the individual tries to solve the problems without relying on the (fearful) environment and, thus, the social dimension.

However, again, this is not to say that the social dimension is not relevant here. I did not focus on it in my article, as the latter can be considered the first step (i.e. the basis of the theory, or first entanglement) that must be developed into further research and empirical applications. Nevertheless, already in the first step, as mentioned above, it is never about the individual alone (or an ethics of the individual, as Jacobsen and Gilmartin highlight), but *always* about the individual–environment pair. While Simondon's thought needs to be operationalised by relying on other complementary research, and 'to be "fleshed out" with the characteristics of particular places and contexts' as Conradson (2021) correctly notes, this does not mean that the philosopher does not have a socio-political thought by himself. As Collins (2021) rightly observes, in Simondon, a very important element of the process of individuation is constituted by the social dimension, whereby individuation becomes transindividuation – that is, individuation in the society. In this sense, Collins is worried that 'a theory of individuation that emphasises the individual–environment relation but without a notion of collective possibility risks only claiming to know more but not necessarily making visible exactly those avenues where ethical action is already transformation'. While I have not explored the transindividual dimension, the latter is already ontologically and ontogenetically included in the individual–environment pair, whereby ethics is never individual, but always spatially oriented and materially rooted into the environmental dimension. Thus, the fact that the environment is always ontologically part of the individual opens up to a strong social dimension, which deserves further development. What I have done so far is putting the basis of an ontology of the individual–environment pair that might provide a different theoretical approach in migration studies, and beyond. Along with Shubin (2021), I also hope

that this can open up to 'ruptures, afflictions, misfortunes without the thought of fully grasping them, providing precise definitions and narrative subjects'. Indeed, as Simondon says, between individual and environment, there is always an ontological dephasing (a 'difference' or a disparation) such that the pair needs to move, to become, and to evolve, in order to find one's ethical direction in the process of (trans)individuation. However, this dephasing does not disappear along the process, but rather, it is brought to different levels of individuation and cannot be fully resolved. Thus, it is bound to remain out of any rational grasp and comprehension.

Here, in relation to the ontological and ontogenetic structure of the individual–environment pair and its evolution, I will add a short reply to Conradson's (2021) curiosity in directly asking about Simondon's internal structure: 'Is "internal structure" a metaphor for one's way of being in the world or, more internally, one's patterns of thought? Are changes in "internal structure" subject to voluntary control?' This notion would require another article. However, very briefly, the structure (materially and, in a way, metaphorically) here refers to the topology of the individual, which is made of an interior and an exterior, both communicating via an internal resonance (transduction). Here, I would say that voluntary control does not apply. We are in-between conscious and unconscious within the realm of affects. I will cite here Voss (2018: 102), who provides a short but clear explanation of what this internal structure is: 'The living being . . . establishes an internal resonance between the interior and the exterior, where "internal" refers to the fact that both interior and exterior are part of a single system of conditions'. This makes up the topology of the individual, which features a corresponding chronology: the internal, material layer refers to the past, whereas the external one refers to the future. In the individual, there is no distance between inside and outside, past and future. They dynamically and relentlessly overlap and are actualised in the present space and time. In other words, we might call it a 'spacetimemattering' (Barad, 2008) in the now-time of everyday life.

I conclude this commentary by adding here something about my general reading of Simondon and the application of his theory to the field of (irregular) migration. It is important to note that my purpose is not only to make Simondon's ideas operational but also to develop them in a way that could be further applied to migration studies, human geography, and beyond. Thus, not only is the way in which I presented the theory simplified compared to the original texts of the philosopher, but it is also slightly adjusted so that it can be operationalised. While Simondon's concepts might appear abstract and universal (and they partially are), as Conradson (2021) notes, I maintain – with Massumi (2015) and Deleuze – that a concept that is not lived is nothing. Hence, what I hope to do in my future research – and for which I put the bases in this article – is indeed to give body and life to these concepts, or, according to Conradson (2021), to give them 'gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and citizenship status'. With the help of other disciplines (e.g. feminist and postcolonial scholarship, which again Conradson cites), this could open up new insights into the broader field of human geography and the social sciences. Once the bases of the theory are set, and the ontology and ontogenesis of the individual–environment pair are defined (which I did in the article, and elsewhere, see Tedeschi (2019)), then the discussion can be expanded to further levels of analysis, and to the embodiment of the concepts. However, this could not be the focus of this first article, as it is only the presentation of the theory and a first, sketchy application.

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Note

1. This is a small part of a dialogue reported in my ethnographic diary.

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