Working-class affects: connecting affect theory to trade union revitalization efforts

by

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Abstract

In recent years, labour unrest in Canada and elsewhere has led to a resurgence in union organizing, job action and contract gains. This thesis sets out to understand how greater attentiveness to working-class affects or emotions might support this potentially revitalizing moment. Given the limited scholarship in this area, this study connects a literature review of affect theory with radical labour history to develop a framework for thinking about the affective dimensions of collective action within unions. Using that framework, the study then investigates the affective life of two Western Canadian unions through surveys and interviews. The thesis concludes that acknowledging and becoming more intentional in efforts to mediate the affective intensities that circulate, move people and organize life at the level of union membership represents an important focal point as a new cycle of class recomposition potentially takes shape.

Keywords: trade unions; affect theory; Canadian labour movement; labour revitalization; working-class culture

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> What moves people to act are affects, and while ideas are indeed important, their power depends on being connected to affects.
>
> —*Chantal* Mouffe*, Towards a Green Democratic Revolution*

1.1. Introduction

For working people all over the world, “class formation is a never ending process” (Franzosi, 294) in which workers creatively experiment with “new forms of workplace organization to defend their interests” as they are confronted with revolutions in production, managerial strategies or state restructuring (MacDonald, 2014, p. 725). Yet this experimentation is only ever as successful as the working-class institutions, political organizations, intellectual traditions, community-patterns and the “working-class structure of feeling” that sustains it (Thompson, 1966, p. 194).

For example, when industrialization first emerged in late 18th century Britain and the mode of production transitioned from largely autonomous labour to steam powered factories, such a structure materialized, enabling the growth of a new class consciousness among “diverse groups of working people and against the interests” of the dominant classes (E. P. Thompson, 1966, p. 194). At its base was a radical press which included newspapers like the *Poor Man’s Guardian* or the *Working Man’s Friend* as well as pamphlets published by individual political agitators. British cultural theorist E.P. Thompson described these publications as providing “the very tissues without which the [workers’] movement would have fallen apart” (p. 674). Local autonomous clubs, discussion groups or friendly societies also sprang up in which tradesmen met nightly in taverns, coffee houses and public houses to hear speeches and debate the issues at hand – creating a new habit of political meeting. Even debtor’s jails were considered “finishing schools for radicals” as individuals continued to read, argue and expand their networks while imprisoned (632). By 1833, a “working-class presence [could] be felt in every county in England, and in most fields of life” (E. P. Thompson, 1966, p. 807) This led Thompson to declare in *The Making of the English Working Class* that, “the working-class made itself as much as it was made” (1966, p. 194).

Similarly in the 1930s and 1940s in the U.S., the “unprecedented organization of industrial workers into the new unions” of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)

occurred alongside the emergence of mass media and the culture industries in which working class people were the audience, producers and consumers of the popular arts and entertainment (Denning, 2010, p. 4). "Mass consumption gave workers common experiences and language" (Friedman, 1993). Whether speaking of norms, beliefs and values or the "texts, artifacts, and performances" of political thinkers, artists or entertainers – all had a "central, indeed shaping, impact on American culture," building significant working-class power over those decades (Denning, 2010, p. 3). However, when capitalism began restructuring around the neoliberal paradigm in major Western countries by the late 1970s, those very community-patterns and infrastructures of dissent (Sears, 2014) built over decades to inform, nourish and sustain working-class feelings and demands began to erode alongside the power of the labour movement.

Indeed, as the renewal literature in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere over the last three decades demonstrates (see for example: Heery, 2001; Hurd, 2004; P. Kumar et al., 2006; Waterman, 1993), programs and policies seeking to revitalize worker associations have been severely constrained by neoliberal cultural and communicative practices supportive of free market ideologies (D. Kumar, 2007; Martin, 2004). Faced with these challenges, earlier attempts at renewal broadly included a shift from the collective action repertoires of industrial unionism led by the rank-and-file towards social movement unionism with its focus on social justice initiatives engineered by staff and union bureaucracy (MacDonald, 2014; Murray, 2017); concerns with the restoration of union density by consolidating power through mergers, bringing in new leadership, identifying new 'market segments' for unions to move into and other organizing innovations; the adoption of new communication technologies, internet use and contemplating 'cyber-unions' as a new union form (Fiorito et al., 2000; Murray, 2017); and a political shift more accommodative to neoliberalism through financial and organizational support of political parties that enable unions to sustain and leverage their bargaining capacity (MacDonald, 2014; Uetricht & Eidlin, 2019). As such, this focus on policy, technical and political fixes has meant that since the 1990s, renewal approaches have been largely top-down, led by union leadership and staff, policymakers and legislators (Uetricht & Eidlin, 2019).

In more recent years, labour organizers, strategists and scholars have criticized such top-down approaches as impairing workers' ability to act for themselves and make the changes they need at work and in their unions (see for example: Burns, 2022;

Camfield, 2011; MacDonald, 2014; McAlevey, 2016; Sears, 2014; Uetricht & Eidlin, 2019). Looking back at the bottom-up, member-led approaches to working-class power and practice in the 1930s and 1940s, this renewal literature calls instead for re-centering those methods or strategies – adapted to today's conditions – to rebuild power and a fighting working-class movement. This includes restoring union democracy as a "critical step in the larger process of union renewal" (Murray, 2017, p. 22); moving away from the servicing model to an organizing model[1] that empowers members to solve their own problems rather than relying on unions as a service or insurance policy concerned only with grievances and contracts (Price, 2017); a restoration of militancy at the rank-and-file level capable of developing a strong radical leftist current (Uetricht & Eidlin, 2019); building new workers' organizations such as tenant groups, or associations that focus on migrant rights or anti-racism (Camfield, 2011); and the return of "sharp class conflict" by first understanding that all who sell their labour in exchange for wages are part of the working class and through that recognition, the need to build a new type of labour movement that "fight[s] for an economy where workers control the wealth we create" (Burns, 2022, pp. 52, 8).

This thesis is informed by the insightful and compelling work of those calling for a return to member-led approaches that re-empower workers to remake their own conditions. However, through an engagement with affect theory, this study argues that the literature's emphasis on ideas, strategy and structure leaves the affective relations *that mediate them* largely out of focus. In other words, often left at the margins are the atmospheres, intensities and feelings at the heart of re-generating a working-class structure of feeling as described above. For example, greater union democracy could mean more membership control over their unions, but what moves members to participate in and strengthen that democratic process? Workers might face down a hostile employer to successfully unionize, but how are those feelings of winning and solidarity translated into the experience of membership and a long-term role in the labour

[1] The organizing model was first articulated in the 1980s by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) as a way to address falling union density by mobilizing the existing membership around workplace issues and the life of the union which, they assumed, would lead to growth (Hurd, 2004; MacDonald, 2014). When union density only continued to fall, the AFL-CIO shifted its emphasis towards external organizing as a top priority. While definitions and uses of the term have varied over time, this study takes the definition of the organizing model as when "members know they are the union, they do a lot for themselves and union staff provide a supporting role and where they provide leadership, it is as part of an active and conscious mandate given to them by the members" (*Trade Union Futures,* 2016).

movement? A class-struggle approach might convincingly argue that workers deserve a more equitable share of society's wealth, but what creates attachments to alterative social relations in response, and the political will to struggle for them?

Affect theory emerged in cultural studies in the early 2000s to answer questions like these – how extra-discursive relational forces or feelings can connect the body with the world; how the mobilizing forces of affect work to move people to action, political or otherwise; and how people become attached to ideas of the future and what is possible. Concerned that critical theory had reached an impasse in terms of understanding or addressing the crises of the present, affect theorists suggested new models were needed to generate the "affective foundation of hope that is necessary for political action" (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 2) by exploring how "larger social systems are experienced at the level of sensation or embodied feeling" (Cvetkovich, n.d.).

Despite affect's theorization as an organizing force (Just, 2019), only a handful of recent studies have considered affect theory in terms of the labour movement and class struggle. As feminist cultural theorist Rosemary Hennessy writes:

> The hope for transforming capitalism's class relations lies in organized collective action, and yet we know relatively little about the affective dimensions of how collective consciousness is motivated and inspired or the role of affective relations in its unravelling (2009, p. 310).

This study sets out to understand how greater attentiveness to working-class affects through an engagement with affect theory might support the revitalization of the labour movement. To investigate, this thesis first draws from labour history focused on Canada and other Western democracies followed by a literature review of affect theory to develop a framework for thinking about the affective dimensions of collective action within unions. Using that framework, the study then investigates the affective life of two Western Canadian unions through member surveys and interviews with union leadership.

1.2. Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 will continue with a brief review of the rise of labour militancy in Canada leading up to and including the 1930s-1940s period to describe what was driving the resistance that strategists and scholars draw from today. As unions and the

economy underwent significant changes after 1946, it then describes the postwar settlement and its effects on the working class as employers and the state began to re-assert their dominance. This section is followed by discussion of how the 'cultural turn' changed the established left's view of the working class as a revolutionary force, coinciding with the decline of class conflict in the 1970s and in the lead up to the start of trade union decline. With this backdrop established, the chapter concludes with the research problem and the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 offers a literature review of affect theory. It traces its roots in the philosophy of Spinoza, describes the 'affective turn' of the 1990s, and considers the affirmation of affect theory in the early 2000s. The chapter then reviews the practical application of affect theory to social movements before examining the limited literature concerned with affect and the labour movement to explore 'affective organizing.'

Chapter 3 lays out the framework for analysis for this study. It begins by first discussing the parameters of measuring affects and then develops *five affective dimensions of collective action* for analysis. It then describes the methods, why they were used, the data collection procedure and how the data were analyzed. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations applied in this work followed by the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the results of union member surveys as well as interviews with individuals in staff leadership positions at two Western Canadian unions – the BC General Employees' Union (BCGEU) and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE). The surveys examined the extent to which members are coming into contact with one another, sharing, learning, affecting and being affected in a way that builds cultures of solidarity. The interviews further explored the affective dimensions of collective action defined in Chapter 3 by focusing mainly on the experiences of workers organizing into their unions and other opportunities for members to work together.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a discussion of the findings to answer the research questions. The chapter makes an argument for why paying closer attention to the affective life of unions is important. It does so in terms of everyday communicative practice with a concern for existing union members, and more broadly around what a

consideration of affect theory might afford the labour movement as it continues its revitalization efforts.

1.3. Working-class resistance in Canada, two waves

As the social relations of production have changed and transformed under capitalism in Canada over the last 150 years, workers have adapted and transformed in response to the burdens and opportunities of those conditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, Italian workerists described this process as class decomposition and recomposition – the ongoing cycle in which employers work to assert their domination while workers develop capacities to resist (MacDonald, 2014; Sears, 2014).

The worker uprisings that occurred in the years after the two World Wars represent two important moments of resistance and recomposition which saw the working-class movement in Canada first get its footing, and then produce a highpoint of mass insurgency that many labour organizers, strategists and scholars now look back on as they think about how to rebuild a transformative working-class movement today.

1.3.1. Wartime resistance

Labour's relative passivity in the early years of World War I (WWI) began to change in 1916 as the brutal realities of trench warfare became more apparent, and significant working-class opposition to conscription began to grow (Kealey, 1992). Industrialists were also increasingly seen as profiteering off the war contributing to the criticism. At the same time, labour shortages from servicing the war effort "and a more muscular movement" put unions in a stronger position at the bargaining table to win concessions (Belshaw, 2016, para. 12). Then in 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution galvanized workers' movements across Europe and around the world with "a powerful sense of political possibilities" (Sears, 2014) towards establishing a new political, economic and social order that could transcend capitalist oppression and exploitation. Indeed, the years 1917-1920 represented the "first significant nationwide working-class challenge to bourgeois rule" in Canada (Kealey, 1992, p. 281).

Reaching a powerful peak in 1919 a wave of unrest swept across Canada that saw 400 strikes in that year alone, including the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919

(Belshaw, 2016). However, as the process of class composition and recomposition goes, employers were able to reassert their power by the mid-1920s, subduing the labour movement in Canada once again through management techniques that undercut worker autonomy on the shop floor[2] (Antaya, 2015).

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, workers in Canada as well as in the U.S., France and Britain organized on a mass scale once again following the impacts of the Great Depression and the Second World War (WWII). Labour shortages, coupled with discontent over speed ups, "frozen wages, lack of job security and repressive anti-union rules" strengthened the power of workers as they pushed further for better pay and conditions (Sears, 2014, p. 38). One third of workers across Canada took part in strikes in the early to mid-1940s (Thompson, 2021) to demand union recognition, raise wages and improve conditions despite "severe restrictions on the right to strike in war-related industries" (Hébert, 2015, para. 13). The 1945 strike against Ford in Windsor, Ontario for basic union rights marked "a high point of mass insurgency in twentieth century Canada" (Sears, 2014, p. 29). This action saw 11,000 workers walk off the job supported by the activism of families, church groups, businesses, students and other members of the surrounding community, with thousands more engaging in or planning sympathy strikes across the country (Panneton, 2006). After 99 days on the picket line, Ford workers reached a deal, winning their struggle for union security and setting an example that "gave the Canadian labour movement the confidence to fight for post-war gains" (CLC, n.d.).

While difficult and very often violent, driving both waves of insurgency was a working-class analysis that enabled workers to map the system of oppression, debate strategies and build repertoires of collective action (Sears, 2014). In the early 1900s, the largely immigrant composition of the Canadian working class[3] (Kealey, 1992) meant that

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[2] The advent of Frederick Winslow Taylor's modern theories of scientific management in the early 20th century provided employers a way to break worker control. Known as Taylorism, the "standardization of work processes" reshaped the workplace in order to maximize efficiency in manufacturing outputs. These simplified processes no longer required the creativity or skill of workers and removed their ability to set the pace of work. "Unionism was the main way that workers initially resisted scientific management." (Antaya, 2015).

[3] Indigenous people have been active as wage labourers since before Canadian confederation, however their role in unions and early strike actions has been marginalized. While "essential to the emergence of this country's capitalist industrialization" through their labour in the late 19th century, Indigenous workers were "squeezed out of the paid labour force by employers, non-

these workers "drew on conceptions of fairness and collective action rooted in their own traditions" (Sears, 2014, p. 43). Their analysis was further informed by the events of 1917 which provided the "material and intellectual context" of the unrest of 1919 (Belshaw, 2016, para. 12).

Although conditions were different by WWII, a new generation of workers developed capacities for collective action through a wide range of radical political organizations that maintained critical links to earlier periods of militancy that workers could draw on in debate and discussion. The political capacities these organizations provided taught workers how to "think through problems and find ways of effectively acting on the world" (Sears, 2014, p. 51). Within unions a strong commitment to self-activity and democratic control over the shop floor was also evident in both periods. Shop stewards played a central role having "developed extensive capacities for workplace direct action" (Sears, 2014, p. 35) "grounded in radical organizing dating back to the early 1900s" (Camfield, 2011, p. 37). They initiated action to conduct slow-downs, sit-down strikes and walk-outs; they policed the company, protected workers and negotiated with management. In the case of the Windsor Ford strike, stewards formed a policy committee and they made their own strategic decisions despite the fact that the union leadership wanted to end the strike earlier (Sears, 2014).

Throughout this radical period in Canada, left ideas (be they anti-capitalist, socialist or communist) were commonplace on the shop floor and throughout communities and working class parties and trade unions "had become mass phenomena by the 1930s" (Chibber, 2022a, p. 164). In 1933 the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Canada "emerged as a legitimate left-wing political force" and, becoming even more popular in the 1940s, won more seats in federal elections forcing government to "adopt and implement more left-leaning social policies which greatly benefitted all Canadian workers" (Antaya, 2015, pp. 15, 16). The left had a "genuine social weight" with significant "influence on the political, economic and cultural agenda" (Sears, 2014, pp. 50, 3) that is hard to imagine today.

Indigenous settlers and, in some cases, unions" (CCPA). As a result, Canadian labour literature can often lack Indigenous perspectives in descriptions of the working class.

1.3.2. Postwar settlement & decline

In response to the mass insurgency of the 1930s and 1940s again, employers and the state pushed back to reassert their domination by reaching a compromise for labour peace. This was achieved through what is commonly referred to as the postwar settlement in which new labour laws along with social and economic rights improved conditions for “large layers of the working class” (Sears, 2014, p. 54). Under these new laws, unions had the right to bargain with employers; grievance and arbitration procedures were set up to resolve disputes; and the dues check off which, while eliminating face-to-face dues collection, financially stabilized unions. In exchange, unions were required to be certified by a labour board in order to bargain, and there were restrictions on strikes during the life of a collective agreement, how bargaining units were defined and the recognition of employer rights and purview (Camfield, 2011).

The new regime essentially replaced ‘direct action unionism’ where issues were settled directly on the shop floor, with ‘contract unionism’ which meant issues would now be dealt with *outside the workplace* by union staff assisting with the enforcement of collective agreement rights through grievance and arbitration procedures. Some union leaders were also enlisted in the policing of union members by helping to enforce new rules such as ‘obey now, grieve later’ or to ensure members didn’t take illegal strike action. The new regime marked a major change in unionism and the labour movement in which class struggles were funneled into the more easily managed ‘certified unions’ with their rules and restrictions (Camfield, 2011).

At the same time, the class-based analysis that fuelled earlier militancy was also being dismantled. In the first few years of the Cold War, many communist-led locals and unionists (still inspired by earlier workers movements) who were critical of capitalism and supported extra-parliamentary action by labour were largely forced from union office by the end of the 1950s (Camfield, 2011). The state, employers, “social democrats and much of the trade union leadership” (Sears, 2014, p. 54) engaged in the anti-communist witch-hunt that resulted in the purge of “the most class-conscious workers and worker leaders from the unions,” (IS, 1975, p. 10).

The new regime also coincided with the postwar boom, a period of worldwide economic expansion beginning in the late 1940s. This meant employers were able to

provide workers higher wages because it didn't cut into their profits, but they wanted workers to give up what little control they still had over working conditions in return. As a result, "shop floor organization all but disappeared" (IS, 1975, p. 10). For many, this was an acceptable trade-off because the high wages and benefits unions bargained in this period left workers feeling as though they had now won what they had been fighting for. Not only did most workers now have higher wages, "union security, living standards and social programs," (Sears, 2014, p. 41) they also had new form of belonging and social citizenship in Canada where those that previously identified as working class came to understand themselves as members of the growing 'middle-class' instead (Ponce de Leon, 2015). As the years went on, this membership afforded them "wider societal participation through consumption, housing, education, and leisure" (Muehlebach, 2011).

However, postwar gains were not extended to everyone. The twentieth century view of the working class was premised on "whiteness, masculinity, colonialism and heterosexism" (Sears, 2014, p. 14). As such, women, people of colour, Indigenous, gay and lesbian workers were largely "excluded from these benefits or had access only to a lower tier" – a disorienting outcome for those left behind as "their former comrades withdrew from the fields of battle and proclaimed victory," making postwar gains a "complex combination of victory and repression" (Sears, 2014, pp. 54, 49).

When recession in the late 1970s brought an end to postwar prosperity, and capitalism began restructuring around the neoliberal paradigm, unions and left politics came under attack in Canada and other liberal democracies. The decomposition of the working class was once again afoot, with "capital accumulation [shifting] rapidly to new spaces and methods of production, shaking loose class compromises" made in the postwar period (MacDonald, 2014). This initiated a decline in both working-class culture and power from which the movement has not recovered (Camfield, 2011; Sears, 2014).

1.4. The cultural turn

Even before the neoliberal paradigm began to emerge, changes during the postwar period[4] had already initiated a significant turning point for the working-class

[4] The postwar period generally refers to the two decades following 1950, whereas Camfield puts the postwar period for the Canadian labour movement between 1945 and 1975 (2011).

movement in Canada and elsewhere. Not just in terms of labour law as contract unionism became the norm and many workers themselves stepped away from class conflict and retreated into middle-classness, but these developments also led to a sea change in cultural theory concerning the working class itself.

German philosopher and economist Karl Marx's ideas around the "sources of stability and conflict in modern society" (Chibber, 2022a, p. 1) had become the official doctrine of working-class movements by the end of the nineteenth century and remained influential for much of the twentieth (Kellner, 2021). At many points over these decades, it seemed that Marx's analysis had predicted capitalism's fate, and its overthrow by the working class was entirely possible, if not imminent (Chibber, 2022a). As working-class conflict in western countries began to decline by the end of the 1970s however, the failure of the West to become socialist in the twentieth century had now raised doubts about a Marxist class analysis, and whether it was equipped to explain the apparent consent of the working class to the capitalist system (Chibber, 2022a; Femia, 1982). After all, as Sri Lankan novelist, activist and organic intellectual A. Sivanandan sharply pointed out in the late 1980s, it appeared capital was the one undergoing the revolution, emancipating itself from labour while the left struggled to make sense the new relations of production falling into place (1989).

As cultural theorists sought to explain why events seemed to be moving in the opposite direction than what Marx's theory predicted, they zeroed in on the model of the base/superstructure (Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2022). This central metaphor in Marx's work posits culture and ideology as determined by the forces and relations of production, or the economic base (Peck, 2001). As Marx laid out in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

> The totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (1977).

While Marx didn't identify what was in the superstructure beyond what is "legal and political" he suggested that the superstructure included a society's type of government, values and culture which reflected the interests of the ruling class, not the

interests of the workers (Ervin, 2020). So as classical Marxist scholars understood it, the superstructure was the domain of ideas and meanings that simply reflected the base, without “a social effectivity of their own” (Hall, 1980, p. 60).

Cultural theorists now criticized this materialist model for overemphasizing the base and underemphasizing the superstructure and thus culture’s role as a determining force of capitalism’s stabilization (Buechler, 1995; Chibber, 2022a). In the 1980s influential British Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall challenged the “inadequacy of the base/superstructure model” as a theory of determination (2016, p. 24) when he asked, “what happened to the working class under conditions of economic affluence” (Chibber, 2022a, p. 81). For Hall at that time, the explanation for the system’s stabilization was not in the economic structure but the superstructure and in his estimation, this meant that classical Marxism had overlooked the way in which cultural hegemony affected workers’ consciousnesses (Jacobin, 2022). This was the crux of what became known as the *cultural turn* – a seismic shift in social analysis seeking to answer why class conflict was no longer occurring in the West (Chibber, 2022a).

Of the many ramifications of this turn, two are significant for this research: the shift in emphasis from the material to the discursive in terms of class struggle; and the de-centering of the working-class as a revolutionary force.

1.4.1. From the material to the discursive

When cultural theorists “abandoned the structural theory of class for a theory that presented it as a cultural construction” by the 1980s, they began looking to ideas, meaning and culture as the source of working-class consent (Chibber, 2017, p. 1). In this way, culture was understood as a “constitutive dimension of all social practices and thus an active force in politics and social change” (Hall, 2007, p. 46). Hall pointed to two key episodes behind this shift: the cultural revolutions and the theoretical revolutions of the mid-twentieth century (1988). Respectively, this included student radicalism and the civil rights, women’s liberation, ecological and the anti-war movements of the 1960s (Waterman, 1993) and the turn towards “semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism – and their concern for language and representation” the 1960s and 1970s (Hall, 1988, p. 25). The cultural revolutions turned towards the more individualized politics of the person, while the theoretical revolutions elevated rhetoric and discourse as ultimately

world-making through “words, ideas, images” (Sivanandan, 1989, p. 3). For example, feminism “turned to analyzing the discursive production of gender difference,” and as French philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote at the time, “nothing is extratextual” (Bonnell & Hunt, 1999, pp. 37, 36).

The ‘left intelligentsia’ now saw their task as engaging the new information society at the economic (production) and the political (ideological) levels by producing ideas, information and ideology that would influence how people think, behave, vote, etc., as the new basis from which to “overwhelm, if not overthrow, the bourgeoisie itself” (Sivanandan, 1989, p. 16). As Sivanandan put it, these developments in cultural studies represented “a shift in focus from economic determinism to cultural determinism, from changing the world to changing the word, from class in and for itself to the individual in and for himself or herself” (1989, p. 23).

These new cultural dynamics on the left began to influence a declining labour movement in the 1980s, and a shift from “traditional labour repertoires” of collective action to social movement unionism in North America occurred with a focus on “discursive capacity and narrative framings” (Murray, 2017, p. 18). The intention was to innovate and “activate multiple pressure points in order to achieve strategic leverage” in an increasingly hostile political environment for unions (Murray, 2017, p. 16). While this enabled unions to broaden their repertoires, the limitations of *symbolic acts* in the form of lobbying, rallies, and demonstrations that “focus on legal and symbolic routes geared toward media recognition and public condemnation of the government of the day” largely fail to organize “a serious, material challenge to the government and their corporate bosses” (Shantz, 2009, p. 127). Scholar and activist Alan Sears cites as an example the ‘Ontario’s Days of Action’ that took place in the 1990s against the Harris provincial government’s austerity agenda in which hundreds of thousands walked off their jobs to march and picket their workplaces, shutting down cities for days at a time (2014). It was a historic demonstration of force, but “was limited to symbolic strikes…that did not build counter-power” (Sears, 2014, p. 96). As Sears has written, the mass strike had become a “recurring motif in the neoliberal era” in which impressive mobilizations and participation remained largely symbolic because they failed to “build ongoing infrastructure to push farther” (2014).

In this light, one could argue in Italian Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci's terms that labour repertoires had moved from 'war of manoeuvre' type actions like slowdowns, occupations and strikes to a 'war of position' entailing a "cultural struggle of much longer duration and complexity" (Egan, 2014, p. 521). Sociologist Roberto Franzosi writes this has been a:

> …forced necessity of labor strategies at different points in time, at different points along the swings [of capitalism's development] – Gramsci's war of movement, when positions are conquered by miles versus war of position, when positions are mostly lost or won by inches, when lucky (2005, p. 436).

However, the problem is that a 'war of position' is "a necessary but not sufficient field of class struggle" (Gerke, 2019, p. 29). This means that:

> *…any* version of a Gramscian strategy requires that a dual war be waged; against a coercive machinery that springs into action when it has to, and against the reified atmosphere of the persistent cultural life of capitalist society (Gerke, 2019, p. 30, emphasis original).

Despite the need to respond to the new ways of organizing work, life and politics that the neoliberal period of capitalist development produced, the shift towards more symbolic repertoires of collective action and away from a dual strategy as described above has restricted union power.

1.4.2. De-centering the working class

The cultural turn's rethinking of class conflict also led theorists to abandon the Marxist presumption that "the most significant social actors [were] defined by class relationships rooted in the process of production" (Buechler, 1995, p. 442). Instead, they looked to new social constituencies through "other logics of action based in politics, ideology, and culture" and "other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality" (Buechler, 1995, p. 453). With no "clear-cut class identity," these new constituencies were nonetheless seen as the "carriers of the new socialism" (Sivanandan, 1989, pp. 9, 3).

As such, the labour movement was written off by the western left in Britain, the U.S. and Canada (Chibber, 2022b) as the agent of change in contemporary society because it "had ceased (if it ever was) to be a class for itself and was therefore incapable of revolution" (Sivanandan, 1989, p. 3). Indeed, as early as 1968, the "student

left were writing off the western working class as bought off, complacent and living off the fruits of imperialism" just as the largest wave of labour uprisings and unauthorized wildcat strikes since the 1940s was occurring in Europe, the U.S. and Canada (Chibber, 2022b). At the root of this abandonment was a shift from understanding workers as materially constrained by the risks of organizing, to being duped by culture – the ideology of the media, the employer, the church, etc. As sociologist Vivek Chibber explains:

> The intellectual, academic and student level, [thought] workers [were] fooled into accepting their place, because of ideology, because of culture. [Workers] don't really understand their interests – the term is false consciousness – and so they need to have it explained to them, that they're really being screwed over; in short, the left intelligencia was now telling workers that they understand their situation better than they do (2022b).

We can learn from the cultural turn that individuals don't operate from the one-dimension of class and that they are "rather in dialectically interrelated combinations of positions and identities" (Buechler, 1995, p. 456). However, the intellectual left's retreat into "university campuses and nonprofit organizations [and away from] the neighborhoods and productive establishments where labor confronts capital" (Chibber, 2022a, p. 176) did much to decenter worker agency and knowledge from working-class struggle.

1.5. Research problem & questions

Those working to reclaim something of the working-class power and democratic practice of the 1930s and 1940s must contend with the impacts of the cultural turn as outlined above. This means re-establishing emphasis on traditional labour repertoires that confront state power rather than a reliance on discursive strategies alone, and re-centering worker knowledge and agency.

Affect theory is likewise concerned with cultural theory's privileging of discourse, and the neglect of bodily knowledge. As will be outlined in the literature review, affect theorists have taken issue with discourse as the primary mode of representation because, as they suggest, it fails to account for the full resonance of the social world as it's actively lived and felt. This fixation on discourse also, they point out, writes the "body out of theory" (Hemmings, 2005, p. 550) and with it, 'bodily knowledges,' which are so

critical to apprehending how structures of power impose on bodies, and in turn, make possible capacities for collective action. As such, the work of this thesis sees a clear connection between reasserting the power of the working class as a social force, and affect theory's concern with how bodies move, act, align and dis-align in the process of social change. Not just in terms of being complimentary approaches, but in understanding that the strength of working-class movements past had strong affective dimensions (to be expanded on in Chapter 3) which may be better understood through affect theory while also offering insights into how we might recreate similar conditions in today's labour movement.

With only a handful of recent studies having directly addressed the affective aspects of collectivity and revitalization in the context of the labour movement, this thesis makes a contribution by developing a framework for thinking about the affective dimensions of collective action in the context of unions. That said, "thirty years of resurgent capitalist class power" and the subsequent shift away from collectivism and towards "intense attachments to unique individuality" (Dean, 2016, p. 21) has made a cultural response that can rebuild working class power extremely challenging. Therefore, this work hypothesizes that any affective dimension will be limited at the rank-and-file level of union membership, and more discernable when workers have the opportunity to work together, such as through organizing. With this in mind, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How could affect theory be put to work in terms of labour's revitalization efforts?
2. How is attention to the affective life of unionism important to the day-to-day communicative practice of unions?

1.6. Significance of the study

Research into the sociology of emotion dates back to the mid-1970s (Flam & King, 2005). Since the early 2000s, the sociology of emotion in relation to social movements has been increasingly explored (Hardy & Cruz, 2018) in terms of identifying the definite 'causal force' of emotions in protests, the daily operations of social movements and collective action as well as movement affiliation and disaffiliation to name a few (Goodwin et al., 2000). And, as any practitioner of strategic communication understands, eliciting emotions is key to persuasion – especially in today's milieu of

social divisiveness and the rise of the affective politics of the post-truth era (Boler & Davis, 2018). Yet, "rarely have these sociologies of intimacy, emotion, and affect appeared in analyses of labor organizing and collective action" (Hardy & Cruz, 2018, p. 249).

The significance of this research is firstly to contribute to the application of affect theory to the labour movement and the theoretical insights it may offer for revitalization efforts. Secondly, as a study of how affect and emotion cultivate solidarity, the intention is to respond to the current moment in which workers are struggling more than ever – with the cost-of-living crisis, the ongoing housing crisis, and growing job precarity continuing unabated – fueling a general feeling or *desire* among workers to organize into unions. As well, the pandemic laid bare the glaring injustice and extreme inequality of the capitalist system as "employees were being asked to risk their lives by coming into work without adequate personal protective equipment, paid sick leave, or hazard pay" (Skolnik, 2022) in its first months. And as workers toiled on the frontlines to keep goods and services flowing while struggling to pay for food and rent, the world's billionaires saw their fortunes increase by 54 per cent in the first year of pandemic (Picchi, 2021). These experiences, as Canadian labour scholar Stephanie Ross wrote, made workers "really rethink how much they're willing to sacrifice for jobs and their employers" (Innes-Leroux, 2023). While millions left the workforce (Fuller & Kerr, 2022), others started organizing, especially in the U.S., where workers at Amazon, Starbucks[5] and other chains launched a wave of union organizing, militancy and working-class mobilization starting in 2021 (Molla, 2022; Skolnik, 2022). And in 2023, labour unrest across Canada saw an uptick in strike activity and wage gains not seen for decades (Saba, 2023). Emotions are running high among workers, and for good reason.

One of the labour leaders interviewed for this study said: *even though I've been working in unions for the vast majority of my life, and I see all the problems with them, I still think they're [workers'] best chance*. It seems that those around the world fighting to join or create new unions to win economic justice would agree. But then the question becomes, how will the vitality of the present moment be carried into union membership –

[5] The current Starbucks unionization movement began in Buffalo, New York when a store voted to unionize in late 2021 (Molla, 2021).

into institutions still struggling with their own vitality after decades of stagnation or decline?

Whether or not unions will meet what seems to be a new opportunity to revitalize may be a matter of mobilizing the passions and generating affects “around which a progressive collective will can crystallize” (Mouffe, 2022, p. 32). Only then might they rewrite “not just the labor contract but the social contract more broadly” (Chibber, 2022a, p. 165).

Chapter 2. Literature review

Labour organizing, taking job action and doing the work of labour activism is driven by emotion – whether it's fear holding back an organizing drive, the joy of winning a union, or heated late night negotiations around the bargaining table. It's also the affective experience of solidarity with co-workers that turns people out for one more day on the picket line. Affect theory is concerned with how emotions, feelings and affects – or extra-discursive forces – move people into and through these kinds of experiences. Yet after over three decades of development during which time affect theory has been applied across a wide range of approaches to understanding human behaviour, social interactions and cultural practices, only a handful of recent studies have considered affect theory in terms of the labour movement. With the aim of investigating how greater attention to affects might support the revitalization of the working-class movement, this chapter and literature review will study the academic research concerning the emergence of affect theory in cultural studies.

The chapter first defines affect and then summarizes affect theory's theoretical foundation by briefly reviewing the work of seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch de Spinoza, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, as well as American psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Their work not only informed the initial turn to affect in the mid-1990s but it's also significant to understanding the evolution of affect theory, and how these early ideas and conceptualizations continue to resonate today. This is followed by a summary of the literature from the early 2000s that emerged *after* the turn to affect which advances earlier work, but also greatly expands affect theory's application to cultural studies. Many of these contributions focus on how capitalism feels, or the ways affective relations can move people in and out of political alignment or collective action. These explorations and theoretical frameworks are highly applicable and generative to thinking about the collective action and activism of labour unions.

The literature review then moves to the practical application of affect theory to social movements. It first explores the affective relations of political struggle for the insights they provide to this project. It then turns to the limited literature concerned with the labour movement to explore 'affective organizing.' The chapter then concludes that

while this literature review identifies a significant gap in the scholarship when it comes to affect theory and the labour movement, it nonetheless finds much to build on in making this connection. After all, cultural studies, which has always represented an important discipline for thinking about working-class struggles, constitutes the intellectual background for many affect theorists. For example, feminist and queer studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich talks about attention to affective politics as a way of confronting disappointment when it comes to the failure of political revolution and labour politics. The late literary scholar and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant talks about engaging the "affective aspects of class antagonism, labor practices, and a communally generated class feeling" already identified through affective descriptions of the present within the Marxist tradition (2011, p. 64). In these ways, working-class struggle is perceptible within much of the affect theory literature – the task for this study is to sharpen the focus.

2.1. Theorizing affect

2.1.1. What is affect?

Affect and emotion have been widely investigated across various disciplines from ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's study of classical rhetoric and emotions as part of rational decision-making (Zhang & Clark, 2018) to the fields of psychoanalysis and psychology as related to drives (Hemmings, 2015), in feminism and critical race theory, as well as in science and technology studies (Frykman & Frykman, 2016; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). In this way philosophers and theorists have been talking about affect in myriad ways, often without using the word, long before *affect theory* was articulated in the mid-2000s (Grossberg, 2010). With this diverse and often contradictory genealogy, applications of affect are almost as numerous as those that study it (Zhang & Clark, 2018). In a chapter in *Affect, Emotion, and Rhetorical Persuasion*, communication scholar Kevin Marinelli gathers these strands into three main paradigms: "classical rhetoric (affect as pathos); cultural studies (affect as extra-discursive energy); and neuroscience (affect as pre-cognitive emotion)" (2019, p. 17). These paradigms, while not strictly distinct, concern the role of emotion in public life, discursive excess that exceeds conscious interpretation and the biological production of emotion respectively.

This research is concerned with the cultural studies paradigm which has made "emotion, feeling, and affect (and their differences) the object of scholarly inquiry,"

(Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 3). While it is difficult to find a shared definition of affect among cultural theorists – and indeed communication scholars Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth write that "there is no single, generalizable theory of affect" (2010, p. 3) – affect can be described as "an approach to history, politics, culture, and all other aspects of embodied life that emphasizes the role of non-linguistic and non- or paracognitive forces," (Schaefer, 2019, p. 1). In this sense, our world is not just shaped by narratives and arguments, but also by "nonlinguistic effects—by mood, by atmosphere, by feelings" (Berlant quoted in Hsu, 2019). And in echoing the work of Welsh cultural critic Raymond Williams, affect is described as an area of culture "at the very edge of semantic availability" (Hennessy, 2013a, p. 44).

Affect can also be understood as synonymous with force or "*forces of encounter*" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, emphasis original) making affect "integral to a body's perpetual *becoming*" (Hipfl, 2018, p. 7 emphasis original). In this sense theories of affect ask: "*what bodies do* – what they want, where they go, what they think, how they decide – and especially how bodies are impelled by forces other than language and reason" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 1 emphasis original) through the ongoing "reciprocal process of affecting and being affected" in the world (Stenner, 2019, p. 50). Affects compel action and "their resonance results in the formation of something new in the universe" (Zuurbier & Lesage, 2016, p. 3).

In sum, attention to affect opens a theoretical space that's "sensitive to the dynamics, flows and processes of becoming that characterize the world" (Hipfl, 2018, p. 11) and aims to expand the "scope, depth and texture of theory to fully encompass the intricacies and contingencies of social phenomena" (Khoo, 2015, p. 43).

2.1.2. Affect theory's theoretical grounding

While the turn to affect within cultural studies first occurred in the mid-1990s through the publication of two essays (detailed below), this section will first describe two distinct intellectual strands that gave rise to these works. First it summarizes Spinoza's account of affects and human motivation. It will then turn to Deleuze's advancement and then transition from Spinoza's conception of affect as a "continuity between matter and mind" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 14) towards Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of affect as an autonomous, apersonal force, (Hipfl, 2018), making up the first strand. The section

then reviews Tomkins' psychobiological study of affect as embodied within the individual, making up the second strand.

Spinoza

Most contemporary affect theory literature within cultural studies links directly or indirectly to Spinoza and his insights into the power of affects (Frykman & Frykman, 2016; Grossberg, 2010; Hardt, 2007; Marinelli, 2019). Spinoza believed that "the essence of humanity is located in desire" which "takes the form of action or feelings" (Marinelli, 2018, p. 21) along the polarity of joy and sadness or, affects (Schaefer, 2019).

The concept of affect (or *affectus* in Latin) makes up the central part of Spinoza's major work the *Ethics,* and is defined as the "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affectations" (Spinoza, 1677, as cited in Robinson & Kutner, 2019, p. 114). The first half of this definition concerns the body and the second part the mind (the ideas of the relations of affectations) making up the two dimensions of affect for Spinoza (Robinson & Kutner, 2019). This duality enables one to apply reason to what the body senses. In this way Spinoza's concern with affect is ultimately a concern with one's "ethical responsibility… to investigate one's affections" to understand true causes and this for Spinoza results in "human freedom" (Marinelli, 2019, p. 24) because a free person cannot be led by anxiety and fear (Frykman & Frykman, 2016, p. 40).

This ethical responsibility however, extends beyond the individual because as Spinoza recognized, individual continuity is based on social continuity in the sense that if we fail to help preserve other selves, we too will perish (Hennessy, 2013a). This makes Spinoza's philosophy wholly relational in a reciprocal process of affecting and being affected (Stenner, 2019). This relationality also signifies the political dimension of Spinoza's philosophy in his view that "humans must collaborate with one another to enhance their *potentia*, their power to act" (Ruddick, 2010, p. 24) demonstrating the centrality of affect to collective power for Spinoza. The political dimension is also reflected in one of Spinoza's most-cited quotations among affect theorists, that "no one has yet determined what the body can do," which signifies that field of potential, of becoming through the forces of affective encounter through which emancipatory political work is done (Spinoza, 1677, as cited in Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 3).

While Spinoza's influence on affect theory through his understanding of the body's capacity 'to affect and be affected' is evident, scholars Bradley Robinson and Mel Kutner point out social theorist Megan Boler's insight that most affect theorists have not engaged directly with original or translated versions of Spinoza's work (2019). Indeed, the literature overwhelming cites Spinoza's presence and mobilization in contemporary affect theory as transmitted through Deleuze from the late 1960s onwards (Hennessy, 2013a; McMahon, 2018; Robinson & Kutner, 2019; Ruddick, 2010; Schaefer, 2019; Zhang & Clark, 2018).

Deleuze

Deleuze worked with Spinoza's ideas throughout his career (Schaefer, 2019) and clearly echoing Spinoza in his collaboration with Guattari they write in their 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

> We know nothing of the body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body (Deleuze and Guattai as cited in Robinson & Kutner, 2019, p. 115).

Emphasizing Spinoza's notion of affectations as either empowering or diminishing one's ability to act, Deleuze defines affect "as an *intensity* characterised by an increase or decrease in power" (Hemmings, 2005, p. 148, emphasis original). Yet while Spinoza provides an initial framework through his ontological concept of affect, Deleuze and Guattari make a move away from Spinoza's view of affects as inseparably of the mind and body (Slaby, 2019) and toward a conception of affect as a force, intensity, or pure potential (Cvetkovich, 2012). They write that "affects act in the nervous system not of persons but of worlds" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, as cited in Berlant, 2011, p. 14).

Through this move they want to reject "structuralist models of doing history" which they feel "inoculates the world against what [they] identify as *becomings*, "or the emergence of radical novelty, new lines of flight away from existing series" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 13, emphasis original). They see affect as autonomous from structure, moving in an "entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad *becomings* across human and nonhuman" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 6, emphasis original). For example, through

their concept of ‘the virtual and the actual,’ Deleuze and Guattari describe becoming in how “reality is constantly making itself, actualizing itself, producing particular actual realities out of and alongside the virtual” (Hipfl, 2018, p. 7). The virtual is pure capacity and potential, while the actual is the reality that is produced in concrete existence.

For some theorists, this conception of affect that moves beyond materiality and the conditions of embodied life leaves us with “a politics of radio static” devoid of organization and without a theory of power (Schaefer, 2019, p. 32). Or as Marinelli describes, “while Deleuzian philosophy marks a rejuvenated interest in human sensation on one hand, it further destabilizes human agency on the other” (2019, p. 23). However, as cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg argues, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy isn’t meant to be used in concrete work or for descriptions of empirical reality but rather, as generative for thinking about alternatives in the virtual (2010). In other words, their philosophy highlights affect as a fundamental force that shapes our reality, how the “present articulation [is] only one actuality among many virtual realities” and points to a “contingency about the world that opens up possibilities” (Grossberg, 2010, p. 318).

Tomkins

Writing at the same time as Deleuze in the 1960s, Tomkins was studying affect from an entirely different perspective. In his four-volume work *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, in which the first two volumes were published in the 1960s and the latter two in the 1990s, Tomkins understands affect to be the primary mechanism behind all human motivation and, as he identified, “the bottom line for thought as well as perception and behavior (Tomkins, 1981, as cited in Schaefer, 2019, p. 36).

Tomkins developed nine ‘primary affects’: “interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, distress-anguish, anger-rage, and fear-terror, shame-humiliation, dissmell (reaction to bad taste/smell) and disgust” (Zuurbier & Lesage, 2016, p. 38). Hard-wired and innate, affects work through what Tomkins called ‘the affect system’ which, working alongside the psychological drive system, acts as an amplifier of drive signals (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) by introducing a “much richer and more varied realm of potential values into the life of an organism,” leading them to seek out different possibilities to satisfy a drive (Stenner, 2019, p. 45). These potential values derive from affective memories of previous experiences that we apply to new situations (Hipfl, 2018). Tomkins believed neurologist Sigmund Freud’s theory of drives didn’t go far enough and

that a blend of drives, affects and also thoughts and perceptions co-assemble to form the basis of motivation (Frank & Wilson, 2020).

Tomkins' affect system offers a "matrix for mapping the contingent connections between bodies and histories" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 39) and as Tomkins himself elaborates, "[t]he basic power of the affect system is a consequence of its freedom to combine with a variety of other components . . . " (Tomkins, 1981, as cited in Schaefer, 2019, p. 39). As feminist scholar Clare Hemmings notes, Tomkins' work suggests that "affects have a complex, self-referential life that gives depth to human existence through our relations with others and with ourselves" (2005, p. 552). For Tomkins then, "affect is the primary motivational system, for without its amplification, nothing matters, whilst with its amplification, anything *can* matter" (Mussell, 2018, p. 23, emphasis original).

2.1.3. The affective turn

The 'affective turn' in cultural studies and critical theory is widely understood to have been initiated by the publication of two essays in 1995 – *The Autonomy of Affect* by philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi, and *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold* by the late queer feminist theorist Eve Kosofsky and her collaborator, scholar Adam Frank (Cvetkovich, 2012; Frykman & Frykman, 2016; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Zhang & Clark, 2018). Each essay advanced the two intellectual strands described above – affect as an autonomous, apersonal force and affect as embodied.

Through Deleuze, Massumi's 'philosophically inflected' theory of affect equated with intensity is concerned with the "unceasing movement that constitutes the process of becoming," (Hemmings, 2005, p. 554). He is interested in affect's "potential for novelty and disruption" (Stenner, 2019, p. 39) and as a different order of experience and approach to account for social forces. Massumi also makes a distinction between affect and emotion, claiming affect as preconscious, unmediated, distinct from and prior to emotion (Mussell, 2018) or "fundamentally exterior to cognition, language and emotion" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 4).

Through Tomkins' theory of "innate, neurologically calibrated affects," (Rooney et al., 2020, p. 46), Sedgwick and Frank's interest is in bringing "questions of embodiment and materiality" into analyses of "societal arrangements and power structures" (Slaby,

2019, p. 35). They viewed Tomkins' affect system as a productive theoretical model capable of reintroducing a sense of "subjective freedom into theory" (Mussell, 2018, p. 23) drawing from a "bricolage of available forms" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 38). In their essay they focus on the affect of shame in particular to challenge its conventional understanding as something one should strive to overcome by "turning to its dependent opposite, pride," but insist instead on what they understand as its transformative capacities (Hemmings, 2015, p. 148) in which "shame is illuminated as a productive resource" (Shaefer, 55).

While their concepts of affect are qualitatively distinct from one another, both essays are responding to what was perceived at the time as a "critical impasse in cultural theory" (Hemmings, 2015). Massumi, Sedgwick and Frank believed "outmoded forms of critical and cultural theory," prevalent since the late 1970s (Mussell, 2018, p. 21) left cultural theorists without the ability to fully account for the formation of the subject; our qualitative experience of the terrain of our social worlds; and our political processes which were limited to binary oppositions rather than attending to relational modes of power (Hemmings, 2005, 2015, p. 147).

Most specifically, these theorists sought to challenge the "assumptions of critical discursive theory" as the primary mode of representation (Stenner, 2019, p. 44). By relying only on the symbolic and leaving out the dimension of intensity, Massumi, like Deleuze, was concerned that "cultural theorists [had] divested the world of all becoming" leaving only interpellation into "existing modes of signification" (Mussell, 2018, p. 25). Critical theory's pre-existing frames, in which "everything, including nature, is constructed in discourse" (Massumi, 1995, p. 100), do not recognize and therefore close off what is emergent or potential. On a "stable map of the always already known" (Hemmings, 2005, p. 554), these frames only register change and movement by major upheaval or periodic rupture, overlooking the "slightness of ongoing qualitative change" and rendering the *everyday* as a "place where nothing ever happens" (2019, p. 51). For Massumi, the "fluidity of affect is what escapes those structures" (Mussell, 2018, p. 25). For Sedgwick, affect had the power to jolt "cultural studies out of what she saw as a hegemonic, confining and 'paranoid' critical mode based on discourse theory" (Wetherell, 2015, p. 145).

While de-privileging discourse on the one hand, they also moved to write the body more prominently back into critical theory (Hemmings, 2005, p. 548). As scholar Donovan Schaefer describes, “affect theory seeks to move beyond the postmodern fixation on the polysemy of representation [towards] a more textured account of how bodies work” (2019, p. 26) or a concern with the “body’s capacity to act, to engage, to connect” (Clough et al., 2007, p. 2). Hemmings points out that the body has been addressed for decades in cultural studies within critical race, feminist and postcolonial theory (2015, p. 149). However the emphasis of the affective turn was on rejecting structures as ultimately determining, and towards the “surfaces and textures of everyday life” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 5) to understand how and why bodies move. Massumi calls for a “new understanding of the body in its relation to signification” (1995, p. 105) and Sedgwick and Frank understand affects as producing “bodily knowledges” (1995, p. 520) making the experiencing body the theoretical focus of their respective work (Schaefer, 2019).

Grossberg observes that cultural studies always fails and its failure is guaranteed because the world is always changing – it is always forced to remake itself in response to the new “configuration or articulation of modernity’ (2010). For Massumi, Sedgwick and Frank, remaking cultural studies required attention to affect in order to be better attuned to the qualitative forces outside social signification (Hemmings, 2005, p. 550), and to “account for the fullest resonance of the social world we wish to understand,” (Hemmings, 2015, p. 147).

2.2. Affect theory

The two essays described above and these authors’ subsequent work have been highly influential in affect theory’s development (Mussell, 2018) leading thereafter to a “virtual explosion” of research and theory across interdisciplinary studies of affect (Frykman & Frykman, 2016, p. 9). While Tomkins’ categorical model of nine innate affects did not have much staying power within cultural affect studies (Slaby, 2019) Sedgwick’s scholarship became enormously influential in feminist and queer theory, emotion psychology and phenomenology (Schaefer, 2019). Her work is described as a crucial touchstone for a “reparative rather than paranoid critical approach” to cultural studies (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 5). And while Massumi’s work is criticized by some for its polarization of affect and emotion (Hennessy, 2013b; Stenner, 2019) or the Deleuzian-

inspired theory of affect as pure potential without a material dynamic that can connect it to theories of power (Leys, 2011), his work remains highly influential in philosophical approaches to affect that focus on virtuality, intensity, novelty and the potential of becoming (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010).

This review will now examine the contributions of theorists who played a pivotal role in the rise of affect theory itself during the first decade of the 2000s and have remained instrumental in shaping its development. This includes Berlant, Cvetkovich, Hemmings and Hennessy as well as anthropologist Kathleen Stewart and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed among others. This section summarizes the continuities and differences in the evolution of affect theory since the turn; the idea of ordinary affect and its role in world-making in the everyday; the renewed emphasis on affects' materialist grounding in understanding their relationship to power; how affects help construct a sense of 'capitalism's outside' as a place to clear ground for social movements and to mount opposition; and the indeterminacy of affect as an opening to alternative futures.

Neoliberal crisis & new forms

The critical impasse in cultural theory that prompted the turn to affect in the mid-1990s has continued to motivate the subsequent development of affect theory. After "corporate management and state policy-makers" in the West began forming a consensus around neoliberalism in the 1990s (Sears, 2014), capitalism even more "profoundly invaded the human organism" (Hennessy, 2013b, p. 37), intensifying the impasse in which cultural studies – and the left more broadly – has lacked a vision for change or a sense of "any workable alternative" (Sears, 2014, p. 97).

For example in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the U.S., Berlant initiated the 'Public Feelings' group with a loose collective of other scholars in New York, Chicago and Austin, Texas interested in the role of affect and emotion in public life (Cvetkovich, 2012). Cvetkovich, a member of the Austin group, described a "sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better" (2012, p. 1). This network, Cvetkovich writes, was looking for "a way to describe neoliberalism and globalization, or the current state of political economy, in affective terms" and to "generate the affective foundation of hope that is necessary for political action" (2012, pp. 11, 2).

Three highly influential books interpreting this moment were published in the following decade. Sara Ahmed's 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, critiques "a model of social structure that neglects the emotional intensities" (2004b, p. 12) and makes a case for looking at *what emotions do* as part of "larger material and discursive structures of the nation-state" (Riedner, 2006, p. 700). Kathleen Stewart's 2007 book *Ordinary Affects,* echoes Massumi in pointing out the inadequacy of totalizing terms like neoliberalism, advanced capitalism, and globalization to adequately describe the immanent force of a "weighted and reeling present" (2007, p. 1). And Lauren Berlant's 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*, which tracks the deterioration of the social democratic promise of 'the good life' in America since the 1980s through increasing inequality, economic precarity and political instability describes the resulting impasse of the present as no longer *organized* but *disorganized* by capitalism. While these books don't offer a way out of the impasse per se, they offer a "training in paying attention" (Berlant as quoted in Zarranz et al., 2017, p. 13) and a way of apprehending the production of the present by sharpening our "affective attunement" (Frykman & Frykman, 2016, p. 11).

The emphasis on the separation between affect and discourse has also become less prominent. In fact, critical discourse scholar Margaret Wetherell argues that splitting affect from everyday discourse and meaning-making "makes little social psychological sense" because there is no simple dividing line between discourse and affect (2015, p. 152). Similarly, social psychology scholar Paul Stenner sees attention to affect as an opportunity to expand on discursive analysis by including the "affective dimensions of experience, conduct, and communication" as a richer way of accounting for human behaviour, cognition and social interaction (2019, p. 51).

Finally, there is less emphasis on a sharp distinction between affect and emotion along the lines of Deleuze and Massumi's work. By the early 2000s we begin to see the words *affect, emotion, feeling* and *sentiment* used interchangeably such as with Stewart, who avoids distinguishing between affect and emotion by referring to 'forces' and 'intensities' as a vague 'something' (Frykman & Frykman, 2016). Cvetkovich uses affect and emotion in a generic way that includes "impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (2012, p. 4). Ahmed is similarly uncommitted to differentiation and defines emotion as synonymous with affect (2004b). However, her intention is also political in not abandoning the concept of emotion but rather contributing to its reclamation a "facet of our history and human capacity that has been trivialized and

made invisible” (Hennessy, 2013b, p. 66). In other words, she “contests the saddling of the term ‘emotion’ to a masculinist caricature” concerned only with private experience (Stonecipher, 2020, p. 8).

Ordinary affect

Attention to the affective dimensions of “ordinary life in the present moment” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 11) has continued to ground affect theory. Massumi had already pointed out that social constructivist models overlook what happens in the day-to-day however, this notion extends further back into cultural studies. Raymond Williams’ 1977 book *Marxism and Literature* presented culture as a “way of life” and a “structure of feeling” – a concept that resonates across the work of affect theorists from the 1990s to present (Ahmed, 2004b; Berlant, 2011; Cvetkovich, 2012; Frykman & Frykman, 2016; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Grossberg, 2010; Hennessy, 2013a). Williams too was seeking a “theoretical sensibility for the energetic immediacy of affective encounters” (Slaby, 2019, p. 38) as a counterpoint to the “reduction of the social to fixed forms” (Williams, 1977, as cited in Slaby, 2019, p. 38).

Attention to ordinary affect also provides ways of developing systemic accounts of power. For example, in *Depression: A Public Feeling,* Cvetkovich thinks about depression as a cultural and social phenomenon rather than a medical disease to “describe the present through attention to the felt experience of everyday life” (2012, p. 12). For Berlant everyday affective life is the condition of ‘crisis ordinariness,’ their term for how the present is structured under the crises of contemporary capitalism, and the conditions in which “people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressure to scramble for modes of living on” (2011, p. 8).

Ahmed says Marx has shown us that “the ordinariness of the world is an effect of reification” (2004b, p. 179). She tracks the affective power of emotions to *produce* this ordinariness through their circulation, repetition and stickiness and the ways they can construct both possibilities and limitations for some subjects. For example, hate produces relationships of difference through an ‘us’ and ‘them’ in which the ‘us’ becomes reified as normal and ordinary while the ‘them’ is cast as invading or contaminating what is ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ (Ahmed, 2004b). Ahmed reaffirms what gets constructed as ordinary as “something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work” (2004b, p. 180).

Materiality & history

For Deleuze and Guattari, “structuralist models of doing history” confound emergence, novelty, and *becoming* (Schaefer, 2019, p. 13). Likewise, Massumi views affect as “autonomous from history and social life” (Hennessy, 2013a, p. 42). However, as scholars Kate Hardy and Katie Cruz argue, affect and emotion are not just “post-structural concerns, but can be considered within a materialist frame of analysis” (2019, p. 249). As such, Hardy, Cruz, Hemmings – and Hennessy in particular – are wary of theories of affect that “abstract it from material history” (Hennessy, 2013a, p. 37).

Hennessy’s work with affect is grounded in the principles of materialism (2013a, p. xvii). She brings forward Spinoza’s conception of affect as “a significant component of the process of meeting individual and collective human survival needs” (2013a, p. 47) to point out how his insight corresponds with the “basic premise of historical materialism” (2013a, p. 41). It’s in this sense that Hennessy establishes the materiality of affects in how they are “corporeal intensities transposed into emotions and feelings that are in turn inflected by the social relations that shape a culture’s meaning-making system” (2013a, p. 46). Affects flow through the “circuit of nature-bodies-labor through which needs are met and social life is reproduced” (Hennessy, 2013a, p. 66).

Berlant also sets out to “produce a materialist context for affect theory” show how the affective atmospheres in which we find ourselves are part of a shared historical moment experienced viscerally in the “material scenes of living on in the present” while also providing “evidence of historical processes” . For example, people have remained attached to fantasies of the ‘good life’ in America through the “residue of common historical experience” despite the increasingly precarious nature of contemporary life that has foreclosed on this possibility for so many (Berlant, 2011, p. 64).

Ahmed finds evidence of historical processes through her key concept of affective economies which refers to the circulation of signs of emotion that, in their social movement and repetition over time, generate affective value. Returning to the example of hate, one may be hailed into a history of meaning through a racial slur as a result of “histories that have stayed open” exposing an individual to being “‘impressed upon’ or hurt in a way that follows from the history of insults” (Ahmed, 2004b, pp. 59, 60). Recognizing affect’s material history in this way enables us “to realize that affect is produced, that it is always affected and effective in multiple and complex ways, and that

it is always structured” (Grossberg, 2010, p. 337) in how it “binds us to [or is produced in] a particular set of historical circumstances” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 150).

Capitalism’s outside

Berlant recalled that both Deleuze and Massumi viewed “the overproduction of affect as a good fuel for private capital growth and the exhaustion of the subject, who is reduced to the dramatics of getting by,” (as quoted in Zarranz et al., 2017, p. 13). In an affective reading of Marx, political theorist John McMahon describes his theory of alienation as “that of the diminishment of affect” or the external force that confronts the worker and drains them of affective capacity (2018, p. 10). Yet while capitalism has always harvested the affective capacities of workers, it can never do so completely leaving an ‘outside’ where affective opposition can arise (Hennessy, 2013a).

Hennessy writes about an “outside to capitalism [that] creates a *meantime* between what is and what can be, a political opening where social relations and cultural categories take on new value” (Hennessy, 2013a, p. xix, emphasis original). This potential for a meantime always remains open because workers are always negatively affected by capitalism’s prioritization of profit over their well-being resulting in unmet needs. Through capacities for attachment and cooperation, alternative ways of “knowing and surviving” can be built (Hennessy, 2009, p. 311). As Hennessy’s writes, “unmet needs do indeed haunt our imaginations, our ability to dream another world, and our labour to make possible its realization” (2009, p. 311). It’s in this outside or meantime where people can come together in common cause to learn and strategize, identify leaders and take collective actions that make life better.

In a similar sense to Hennessy, scholar Michael Hardt made a case in his 1999 paper *Affective Labour* that because labouring also produces “social networks, forms of community, biopower” (1999, p. 96) that this holds out the potential for liberation. Inverting French philosopher Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower to view power not from above but from below, Hardt suggests that exploitative labour “works directly on the affects” which can build oppositional subjectivities and biopower on the ground (1999, p. 98). Later in his work with political philosopher Antonio Negri they call on readers in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* to “see affective dynamics as the birthplace of a new form of political subject, the global multitude, which can be the agent of fundamental and radical change against the capitalist world economy” (Slaby, 2019,

p. 346). In other words, they name affective dynamics as integral to the social networks and communities that form outside of what capital can capture, and where opposition can arise.

Importantly, the development of oppositional subjectivities also depends on care and mutual aid. As Ahmed argues, the possibility of gathering together to “clear spaces or ground for action” that can generate new meanings and orientations depends on how we feel about others (2004b, p. 166). However, this goes beyond comradery and involves “social interactions through which needs are met and subjects are formed” (Hennessy, 2013a, p. 58). As Hennessy writes, developing oppositional subjectivities in capitalism’s outside is highly dependent on affective care and collaboration which “permeate[s] relationships and propel[s] action” (2013a, p. xviii).

Affect’s indeterminacy

While Hemmings affirms there is no denying affects as “they are what make up life,” (2005, p. 548) she is also cautious in measuring the capacity of affects to be transformative rather than simply reproductive or consolidating of an existing dominant social order (2015, p. 151). For example, she argues from the perspective of critical race theory that “affect plays a role in both cementing sexed and raced relations of domination, and in providing the local investments necessary to counter those relations” (2005, p. 550).

Gregg and Seigworth and also describe affect as “bear[ing] an intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality,” (2010, p. 10) that can build utopias or dystopias which means affect theory can be applied to progressive, democratic movements “just as well as it explains the appeal of conservatism, reaction, and fascism” (Schaefer, 2019, p. 1). In a similar vein, affects can join people together just as easily as they can divide. Because emotions are relational “they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’” in which depending on how we feel, we are moved to align with objects, places, others, or turn against them (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 8).

However, the indeterminacy of affects reveal “a contingency about the world that opens up possibilities” (Grossberg, 2010, p. 318). Grossberg uses the Deleuzian concept of ‘the virtual and the actual’ to think about how on the one hand, the current conjuncture under neoliberalism feels fixed and that we can’t think outside its logics. Yet

on the other hand, there is the possibility of different actualizations, different “ways of being modern” among the totality of many virtual realities (Grossberg, 2010, p. 319). Grossberg writes: “the North Atlantic vision of modernity is one actualization with its dominant machines of affect and dominant regimes of affect, and dominant structures of affect, and dominant ways of belonging” (2010, p. 324). He is arguing that if we understand that other articulations are possible within a reality that is “continuously constructing itself,” we might be able to do the analytic and political work of understanding how to “move into another set of articulations” (2010, pp. 323, 325). Affect theory turns our attention to the world-making forces of affect’s immanent potential. As Stewart writes, the world is always “tentative, charged, overwhelming, and alive” through “affect’s lines of promise and threat” in the always emerging present (2007, pp. 128, 129).

2.3. Affect theory in practice

Approaches to affect theory have expanded significantly since the turn to affect as described above. Yet when it comes to scholarship that considers the communicative practices of the labour movement through the lens of affect theory, Hennessy points out little is known and much is to be learned (2013a, p. xiv). This section will first turn to scholarship on the affective dimension of political struggle for the insights it provides to this study’s overall objective. It will review political theorist Jodi Dean’s assessment of how an affective dimension worked to motor U.S. and British communist parties of the 1930s before turning to a study of the affective dimension of a protest camp in Helsinki, Finland.

The remainder of the section will explore the available research that engages affect theory with labour unions. This includes studies of what Hardy and Cruz term ‘affective organizing’ which overlaps with and is highly generative for application to the communicative practices of labour unions. These works also shed light on why a gap in the research may exist, and how attention to the affective dimensions of the labour movement is long overdue.

2.3.1. Affect theory in political struggle

In her 2016 book *Crowds and Party,* Jodi Dean argues that the affective dimension – that which cultivates the political subjectivity required to bind people together into collectives – is missing in the party form today. This is because, she argues, society has largely transitioned from collective forms of political struggle – namely the party form – towards the politics of individualism. This is exemplified for Dean in political uprisings that took place from about 2005 to 2015. In moments like Occupy Wall Street, the "energy of the crowd opens to political subjectivity" (Dean, 2016, p. 125) but with no infrastructure in place to maintain fidelity to the crowd's demands in challenging dominant arrangements, its efforts are incomplete. The crowd without representation dissipates.

What's required in re-establishing the affective dimension then is "the affective infrastructure of the party," which in the past, "provided the material support for its symbolic location" (2016, p. 209) and from where members could see and feel the power that resulted from their collective efforts. She refers to communist parties of the 20th century, particularly in the U.S., that had this dimension through the commitment and militancy of their membership. Through the "grinding ordinariness" (Dean, 2016, p. 228) of everyday practice and the ceaseless injunction to do more that communist party members placed on themselves, the affective infrastructure ensured the work would get done through accountability to one another. Emotional needs were also met through "language, meetings, rituals, and reports [that] channeled poverty and hope into practical optimism" (Dean, 2016, p. 234). The affective infrastructure also created a distinct space in which every day experiences could take on meanings outside the confines of capitalism, opening up the possibility of another world that members could already feel – echoing the notion of 'capitalism's outside' as discussed above.

When the time came to set things in motion, to organize members into political action at a demonstration or to fight on the terrain of the "other," the affective infrastructure gave meaning to those actions retroactively in its "capacity to make the crowd felt after its dissipation" (Dean, 2016, p. 247). In describing this movement of meaning Dean says, "collective power works back on those that generate it" (2016, p. 249); the "affective space of the party *works on* its members, pushing them to act in their collective interest," (2016, p. 237,emphasis mine) generating affective attachments in the

service of struggle. For Dean, it is the affective infrastructure that can hold open space, enlarge the world and "maintain the gap of their desire" for those engaged in the long-term and difficult work of political struggle (2016, p. 249).

Scholars Lena Näre and Maija Elina Jokela's ethnographic research concerning a 'Right to Live' protest camp set up in the centre of Helsinki, Finland in the spring of 2017 further explores the concept of an "affective infrastructure" (2022, p. 2). The protesters, mostly asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, were demonstrating against Finland's tightened legislation that made gaining asylum more onerous, resulting in increased rejections and deportations. In their analysis they follow Berlant's 2016 definition of affective infrastructure as "the lifeworld of structure" defined by use and movement (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 4). Following Spinoza, this involves *affects* that circulate and move between bodies and, *affection* which refers to "bodies' capacity to affect and be affected through impressions made by external bodies (human and non-human)" (Näre & Jokela, 2022). In order to sustain political protest they argue, the "affective infrastructure must be created and maintained" through the "mobilisation, maintenance and circulation" of those affects and affections (p. 2).

The authors identified three aspects of the affective infrastructure at work in the protest camp. First is the capacity to reconfigure place-related meaning. The camp's location in a historically and nationally important part of Helsinki created a space that stood in opposition to the status-quo. Bolstered by the support of nearby cultural institutions such as the art gallery, where a giant 'Refugees Welcome' banner was hung, the protest was "able to generate refigurations of meanings and affects attached to Finnishness and Finnish nationalism as white, exclusive, and ignorant of racialized others, such as asylum seekers," (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 7) making the plight of asylum seekers more visible to public scrutiny. Second is the role of affective labour which is required to maintain the affective infrastructure. This can take the form of sharing supportive messages from social media, to nurturing social ties between activists to support collaboration within the protest. This is difficult work that requires enormous affective effort and resources to maintain momentum. As well, "affects circulating between subjects not only unite but also separate and can even cause the infrastructure to break down" (p. 11) highlighting the ambivalence of affects and necessitating the continuous negotiation of meanings and affects attached to the protest by the activists. Third is the use of affect to manage the political message. Camp protesters actively

worked to transform, disrupt and mediate the affects circulating in the public sphere that commonly attach negativity and strangeness to the figures of 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee.' This was done by hanging Finnish flags in the camp, writing friendly messages to passersby as well as creating a colourful environment that was at times fun and carnivalesque. In response to aggressive passersby that had been threatening the camp, especially at night, protesters also called on white female Fins to stand in solidarity with the racialized bodies of the protesters *inside* the camp, thus altering the affective atmosphere through their presence.

As the authors describe, "the entire affective infrastructure of the protest, including its materiality, atmosphere and soundscape, was aimed at transforming the image of the asylum seekers into a non-threatening one" (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 14). Näre and Jokela conclude that "political action is as much about the material and practical tasks of providing food, care and material resources as it is about managing the movement affectively – about being present and mediating affects circulating among human and non-human bodies and materialities" (2022, p. 14).

As both examples of political organization and action suggest, the affective dimension (and the mediation of affects) is central to driving and sustaining collective efforts. Because unions engage in similar political aims – from representing a symbolic location from which workers fight for their rights to the work of campaigns and strikes – these examples provide relevant insights despite gaps in the literature around affect and labour as described in the next section.

2.3.2. Affect theory & the labour movement

In 2009 Hennessy wrote that "the hope for transforming capitalism's class relations lies in organized collective action, and yet we know relatively little about the affective dimensions of how collective consciousness is motivated and inspired or the role of affective relations in its unravelling" (2009, p. 310). Later in her 2013 book *Fires on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera*, she remarked that although feelings are "the daily medium in which concepts come to matter and organizing efforts are lived," only since the early 2000s has academic theory directed attention to affect in regard to this dimension of social movement (Hennessy, 2013a, p. xii). An academic review of her book calls on union activists and education

officers to take up Hennessy's ideas, writing that "many unions and union activists remain unaware of their own affective commitments" and as such, affect must "be made visible to activists and explored consciously as an ever-present element in our ongoing contestations of capitalism" (Healy, 2015, p. 291).

In 2019 Hardy and Cruz wrote that "a significant body of research has explored the sociology of emotion in relation to social movements" yielding important insights, yet "rarely have these sociologies of intimacy, emotion, and affect appeared in analyses of labor organizing and collective action" (2019, p. 249). They suggest this striking absence may be due to the "implicit materialist orientation of scholars working in the fields of the sociology of work and employment and industrial relations" (2019, p. 246) which might exclude more abstract concepts like affect.

And in 2020, communication scholars Nicole S. Cohen and Greig de Peuter continued to point out the gap in how, "emotion, feelings, and affect are only rarely—explicitly at least—centered in studies of worker organizing, even though affect, or 'the power to affect and be affected,' is immediately evident in the organizing context" (2020, p. 26). This rest of this section will turn to the work of these scholars, and their explorations of the affective dimension of labour organizing. It will end with a brief summary of when appeals to affective struggle in the labour union context can work to undermine what is termed affective solidarity.

Affect-culture on the Mexican Frontera

Through her years of involvement and participant observation in workers' movements in the maquiladora communities of northern Mexico, Rosemary Hennessy has studied the affective dimension of labour and community organizing. Over time she noticed what she refers to as a "spectrum of affective relations featured in the process of collective organizing" (2009, p. 213). For Hennessy, affects represent "an interplay of bodily sensations, perception, consciousness and conveyance to others" (Healy, 2015, p. 289). As opposed to a theory like Massumi's in which affects are an asocial, pre-personal intensity, Hennessy views affect as grounded in the principles of historical materialism in the sense that they flow through the collective and relational processes of meeting human needs (2013a). When these needs go unmet as a result of capitalism's pursuit of profit at the expense of livelihoods, the affective resonances that arise create what Hennessy terms "affect culture" – the medium or "emotional habitus" (2013a, p. 53)

in which “attachments of affection and antagonism, belief, betrayal, identification, and frustration” (2013a, p. xii) circulate. In their circulation, they can either bind “people to a common cause and to one another” or they can antagonize and pull people apart (2013a, p. xii).

In one account of her experiences, Hennessy describes how 300 factory workers waged a 16-month strike in an attempt to improve their wages and working conditions by electing new representation. As she recalled, “for those on the front lines, affective relations were the binding agent of collective action” and collective agency (2009, p. 316). Through this experience workers transitioned from individual fear to feeling collective power, in a transition from ‘I’ to ‘we.’ While many lost their jobs and were blacklisted, they gained political education, formed new networks and relationships and new “visions of alternative ways to live and to care for one another” (2009, p. 317). Over time however, affective relations were also the corrosive that dissolved their struggle when their efforts began to falter.

Whether binding or dissolving, this mediating role of affect-culture is what Hennessy wants to draw our attention to because of its “influence on the success and the failure of many campaigns” (2013b, p. 68). As she warns, “we ignore [affective relations] at the risk of losing the ground for collective struggle and the shared horizon of our goals, for they are the glues and solvents of social movement” (2009, p. 311).

An intimate union in Argentina

Drawing from Hennessy’s work, Hardy and Cruz studied in 2008 what they argue was an affective organizing strategy carried out by the Argentinian sex workers’ union AMMAR (Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina). Sex workers are historically excluded from unionization, labour and social protections because they don’t share a traditional workplace or employer, their work is informal and sometimes illegal, and sex work lacks acknowledgement as a legitimate form of labour. Further complicating organizing for AMMAR were competitiveness and police repression, both of which decreased opportunities for the women to come into collaborative contact with one another (Hardy & Cruz, 2019).

AMMAR activists began their organizing efforts by walking the areas where women were working and stopping to chat for a few minutes. Then they began offering

resources for sexual health or literature on workers' rights and eventually many women were attending events, joining the union and meeting in AMMAR offices to talk about their struggles. Beyond the material benefits of associating with AMMAR however, Hardy and Cruz describe how the affective dimension of the union brought workers into a *process* where many experienced personal transformation, developed new collective political subjectivities and as one worker put it, gained "an energy to live" (2019, p. 254). This affective dimension consisted in AMMAR facilitating spaces of care and solidarity through socialization, games and gossip; in mutual aid or through members' feelings of belonging and dignity; and crucially, in generating newly formed identities as legitimate workers deserving of rights and respect. AMMAR also "centered celebration within the activities of the union" (Hardy & Cruz, 2019, p. 253) often holding barbeques after long workshops and sharing small prizes and gifts. All of this was crucial to building and maintaining new affective relations that were fundamental to bringing individualized competitive workers into a collective, and through which an "intimate union" (p. 246) could be built.

Relations between the women were sometimes fraught and "conflict and arguments punctuated the daily life of the union" (Hardy & Cruz, 2019, p. 252) necessitating intervention to restore unity. However, as Hardy and Cruz conclude, AMMAR's work in Córdoba "hold(s) invaluable lessons for locating relationality and care at the center, rather than in the margins, of labor movements as a basis for the wider transformation of social relations in capitalism" (2019, p. 258).

New media organizing

In their 2020 book *New Media Unions,* Cohen and de Peuter study a wave of unionization across digital and legacy media outlets in the U.S. starting in 2015. In this work they explore "affect's mobilizing force" (p. 27) in "facilitating contexts for the emergence of solidarities" as journalists fought to form new unions from scratch (p. 36).

Following Hennessy's work to describe affective organizing and cultures of solidarity, the authors also identify affective relations as central to labour organizing. From early organizing conversations about common experiences and hopes, to building large networks of trust and solidarity, affective relations produced the collective bonds that enabled people to take action. They point out that these bonds are fragile, and that organizers' affective traits of supportiveness and enthusiasm were crucial to

acknowledging vulnerability and helping workers overcome fear which is “a core challenge of affective organising” (p. 35).

Cohen and de Peuter note how “affect surfaces in the expansion and contraction of workers’ sense of what is possible in a given situation” (2020, p. 26). Like in Dean’s work above, a growing confidence in collective action can widen the horizon of possibility for workers when they become aware of their power to act. Likewise, social media can also provide material support to organizing workers through online expressions of solidary from allies or the public. This can create energy, connect people and most importantly, reaffirm workers’ convictions at vulnerable times in the organizing process when all the cards are on the table.

The authors also distinguish between the dimensions of affect and communication in their work – not in the sense of the old dichotomies between affect and discourse – but to show how they work in tandem. Here they describe affect as operating relationally, as an intensity passing in-between bodies while communication is “the social and material process of the production of meaning” (2020, p. 27) such as face-to-face meetings or publicly posted materials. “Communication is the stuff of mobilizing” while affective relations represent the vital force that energizes momentum (p. 26). In the context of class struggle, scholars Eeva Kesküla and Andrew Sanchez, discussed in the next section, similarly talk about affect as having both aesthetic and emotional content – symbols that are interpreted and recognized among those in the struggle, and an emotional force that can bring new people in (2019).

The journalists in this study reported feeling stressed and emotionally exhausted while also empowered and “finally doing something that matters” (Cohen & de Peuter, 2020, p. 39) throughout the organizing process. This demonstrates the “generative yet fragile” (p. 26) work of affective labour. Fear, for example, can either “frustrate or fuel willingness to take collective action” (p. 44) and this is what makes attention to emotions, feelings and affects so vital in the organizing context.

Invoking negative affects

While the literature above demonstrates the role of affect in organizing and building cultures of solidarity, we have also seen how affects can dissolve those solidarities. In their study of two unions in Kazakhstan and India, Kesküla and Sanchez

show how when “affects of struggle” or “emotive appeals to languages of struggle” are mobilized by unions to inspire solidarity, they can end up generating an affective basis for critique if unions fail to meet those affective ideals (2019, pp. 116, 112).

The history of trade unions rooted in political struggle is, as Ahmed has phrased it, a history that remains open. As such, unions commonly invoke a history of international socialist struggle through “a discourse of dramatic confrontation” between the forces of labour and capital to legitimate their authority as political actors (Kesküla & Sanchez, 2019, p. 115). In fact, the authors write that “all political institutions have an affective core of some type that creates feelings of purpose, significance, and belonging” (p. 116). When unions mobilize the dramatics of struggle as bureaucratic institutions however, there is often a slippage between those emotive appeals and the “banal, bureaucratic functions that comprise the everyday business of political life in formal sector trade unions” (p. 119). In other words, there is a disconnect between affective proclamations of union power and the slowness of change experienced by many workers in their day-to-day struggles, which unfortunately leads many members to think of their unions as “either corrupt or ineffectual” (p. 110).

Kesküla and Sanchez cite cultural anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford’s conception of the affective turn as “inviting closer attention to the ‘forces that move people, forces that attract, repel, and provoke’” (2019, p. 116). As the authors have shown, invoking affects *instrumentally* can repel and provoke, undermining a union’s connection with their members. Indeed, closer attention to the power of affect makes clear that there is a responsibility in invoking them.

2.4. Conclusion

This literature review tracked the emergence of affect theory in cultural studies from its roots in seventeenth century Spinozan philosophy to its recent application to the labour movement with a focus on ‘affective organizing.’ The early distinction between a philosophical disembodied affect (Massumi) and psychobiological embodied affect (Sedgwick and Frank) at the affective turn in the mid-1990s has given way to a proliferation of scholarship that has both extended and departed from these lineages (Timar, 2019) due to the ephemeral, open, contingent and ambiguous nature of affects.

However, Spinoza's basic notion of the body's capacity 'to affect and be affected' remains a constant across the affect theory literature.

The findings have also shown that despite affect theory's place in cultural studies, it has only recently been applied to the context of the labour movement. Yet, there is much to build on in making this connection with regards to the relevance of affect theory to the communicative practice of labour unions, and as an important dimension of working-class struggle. Especially if as McMahon suggests: affective relations of domination require affective relations of resistance (2018).

Hemmings makes the observation that theorists often combine multiple understandings of affect within their theoretical frameworks (2015). This project will follow suit by combining recent affective organizing literature grounded in a materialist framework with a concern not with what affects are, but rather what they *do* (Ahmed, 2004b) and with an emphasis on the importance of sharpening affective attunement (Berlant). It will also take inspiration from a Deleuzian philosophy of affect as a contingent force that's always constructing the world anew. After all, it's from the potential of this promise – of dignity, of a better life – that we do our work in the labour movement.

Chapter 3. Framework & methodology

This study investigates how affect theory could be put to work in terms of labour's revitalization efforts, and how attention to the affective life of unions may be important to their day-to-day communicative practice. The research proceeds first by discussing the parameters of measuring affects and then defines five *affective dimensions of collective action* for analysis as outlined in the framework for analysis below.

Survey and interview questions were then developed based on this framework to broadly investigate the presence of affective relations at two Western Canadian unions – the BC General Employees' Union (BCGEU) and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE). A random survey of rank-and-file members as well as two interviews with individuals in staff leadership positions at both unions were conducted as described in the methods section below. This chapter concludes with the ethical considerations applied in this work followed by the limitations of the study.

3.1. Framework for analysis

3.1.1. Measuring affect

Affect is an organizing force which can both build and break the bonds of solidarity. This is why Hennessy argues that "paying attention to the affective investments entangled in organizing is a strategy we cannot afford to neglect" (Hennessy, 2013b, p. xxvi). But as Gregg and Seigworth write, theories of affect not only lack a generalized definition but constitute something of a "methodological and conceptual freefall" (2010, p. 4). This is because affects are "fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable" and therefore "not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis" (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). So how do we pay attention to something so elusive?

Stewart describes her approach as creating a contact zone for analysis through "a close ethnographic attention to pressure points and forms of attention and attachment" in an effort to become attuned to affect (2007, p. 5). Similarly, Berlant describes affect theory as "a training in paying attention…a way of describing the overdetermining forces that make a scene" (Zarranz et al., 2017, p. 13). This study

moves forward on this basis, recognizing that “affective analysis can only ever be approximate” (Nelson, 2019, p. 110).

Raymond Williams’ suggestion that “methodologically…a ‘structure of feeling’ is a cultural hypothesis” describes this approximation (as cited in Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015, p. 24). Making up the “affective elements of consciousness and relationships” as Williams defined it (Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015, p. 23), or a “shared affectsphere” (Berlant, 2011, p. 86) or “affective infrastructure” (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 1) as others later described his concept, the structure of feeling constitutes a process of emergence rooted in “particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions” as the present is lived (Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015, p. 25). What emerges and is composed in this process of becoming present then resonates as the cultural evidence of that hypothesis – in what affects and is affected.

In a similar sense, Massumi “defines affect as something virtual as distinct from something actual” (Stenner, 2019, p. 39) through his reading of Deleuze and describes how after passing from the virtual or potential into the actual or lived presence, affect is “everywhere in effect” (1995, p. 107). As such he says, “affect is indeed unformed and unstructured, but that it is nevertheless highly organized and effectively analyzable (it is not entirely containable in knowledge, but is analyzable in effect, as effect)” (1995, p. 107, see note 2).

Finally, Ahmed’s concept of affective economies “approaches emotion as a form of…world making,” (Ahmed, 2013, p. 12) not on the basis of what emotions are, but the idea that “emotions *do things*” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119, emphasis original). As she explains, “rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” (2004a, p. 119). For Ahmed, affects are analyzable in their attachment to histories of articulation, in how they “shape the ‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” and how they move bodies or keep them in place (2013, p. 1).

This thesis incorporates Stewart, Williams, Massumi and Ahmed’s scholarship to understand affects as interpreted or analyzed as firstly emerging from indeterminacy while tied to history (affects are constructed), and secondly, approximately measurable

in their *effects*. Therefore, while the limitations of analyzing these aspects through surveys and interviews are further detailed below (Section 3.4), this work uses these methods to assess the way unions construct and circulate affects, and the extent to which those affects register in members' experiences and affective relations are built.

3.1.2. The affective dimensions of collective action

In thinking through how to analyze affect, the shape of the transitory social spaces and atmospheres through which affects flow are described above as a 'structure of feeling,' a 'shared affectsphere' or an 'affective economy.' The affect theory literature also includes the "'affective dimension' of lived experience" (Marinelli, 2019, p. 22), an "'affective infrastructure' shaped by the political cultural economy of emotions and affects" (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 4) or "affective fields" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 16).

In a more concrete example, Dean describes the affective dimensions of the political party form as the 'affective infrastructure' that provides "the material support for its symbolic location" and the "dynamics of feeling it generates and mobilizes" (2016, pp. 209, 210). In the labour context, Hennessy describes the "affective dimension of organized collective politics" as what she terms 'affect-culture' – that which mediates "the social interactions through which needs are met and subjects are formed" (2013b, p. 56). Overall, the affective form variously refers to "the affective dimensions of experience, conduct and communication" (Stenner, 2019, p. 51).

This thesis adopts the concept of an affective dimension from affect theory and connects it to the affective relations of class struggle apparent during the radical period of working-class resistance as described in Chapter 1 (and brought further into focus below). Taken together, five affective dimensions of collective action that work in inter-related yet distinct ways to produce, mobilize and sustain affective solidarity and collective action are identified in the context of unions. As described below, these include relations that enable the circulation of affects; a shared analysis; union democracy; care and mutuality; and class commitment.

Circulation of affects

Affects are fundamentally relational therefore, in order to affect and be affected, their circulation between "human and non-human bodies and materialities" (Näre &

Jokela, 2022, p. 14) must be possible. This refers to the ways affects flow and resonate through people, objects, texts, practices, sensations, institutions, ambitions or “any number of other things” (Hennessy, 2013b, p. 46; Sedgwick, 2003). For example, in the Right to Live protest camp described above, affects flowed through conversations, a sense of community, signs & banners, messages of public support through social media, the provision of food, solidarity from Finnish residents on-site, the symbolic location of the camp and the soundscape.

Likewise, unions represent a symbolic location of working-class struggle as an affective form. Affects flow and circulate through the practice of organizing, worker meetings, union communication and strikes, as well as through social media platforms and the way a union is portrayed through traditional media channels. As far as those affects impress upon, resonate and accumulate to build affective solidarity among individuals, they can turn “fear and anger into action and hope” (Cohen & de Peuter, 2020, p. 26) or through the transition from ‘I’ to ‘we’ on the picket line. This is how in Ahmed’s terms emotions do things, they “align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments” (2013, p. 119).

Within this circulation however, “affects are inherently messy and ambivalent, and they cannot be linearly assessed as leading to either positive or negative outcomes,” (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 9). Our interactions are shaped “by mood, by atmosphere, by feelings" (Hsu, 2019) that carry positive or negative affective charges in their circulation. This ambivalence necessitates attention to the active management and mediation of affects on the part of those working to keep a collective effort moving forward together. For example, affective management can determine whether an organizing defeat means dejection or doubling down to win. Affective struggle therefore “requires the mobilisation, maintenance and circulation of affects and the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected” (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 2).

Shared analysis

As Gramsci wrote, “the historical unity of the ruling classes is realized in the state” and the history of subaltern classes therefore is “intertwined with the history of the state and civil society,” (1971, p. 52). What this suggests, as Sears writes, is that the elite promote “a particular interpretation of the past with a vision of the future” that promotes the knowledges, beliefs and relations that make their continued domination

possible (2014, p. 7). As such, the dominated must push beyond "narrow cultural categories that explain, justify, and mediate who [they] are" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 311) and instead "make sense of their own experiences (past and present)" (Sears, 2014, p. 7).

The surge of working-class resistance described in Chapter 1 was driven by a shared analysis that enabled the anti-capitalist left to map the system, debate strategies and build repertoires of collective action in resistance (Sears, 2014). Through participation in political meetings and access to radical publications for example, the working class developed a "rudimentary analysis of history, the capitalist economy and how to fight for a better world" (Camfield, 2011, p. 74). This development of a shared analysis beyond 'ruling ideas' is the work of class making and generating class feeling. As E.P. Thompson articulated, "class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), *feel* and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different" (1966, p. 9, emphasis mine).

Hardy and Cruz describe this in the practice of union organizing as bringing workers into a process where they can learn and develop political subjectivities with the capacity for struggle (2018). Where "self-employed sex workers in Argentina possessed no preexisting conceptions of themselves as occupying a shared social location, or even of their labor as [a form of legitimate] work," joining a union enabled them to cultivate a shared analysis through which they claimed their right to organize, to build collective bonds and reject individualism and competition, and to reconstruct their identities as members of the working class deserving of better conditions (Hardy & Cruz, 2018, p. 257).

Articulating working-class interests outside of ruling ideas also creates an alterity and therefore an *affective dissonance* between prevailing conditions and a different vision of social-economic relations – a better life. In this sense, people can be "mobilized politically – through desire – to validate the marginal and create new possibilities for embodiment, historical recognition and alternative histories" (Hemmings, 2015, p. 155). Indeed, it's the absence of a shared analysis, a unifying vision or a set of common goals among the left as it exists today that represents one of the biggest barriers to envisioning new possibilities or mounting a strategic response to the exploitative political, economic

and cultural agenda of neoliberalism (Grossberg, 2010; Sears, 2014). As Camfield writes, “most active union members do not have a clear alternative to the explanations given by employers, politicians and corporate media pundits for what is going on” (2011, p. 101).

This is not to suggest a monolithic or uniform analysis across the left or the working class is possible or desirable. As left history shows, this has been far from the case with a multiplicity of voices, a wide range of organizations and an “ongoing circulation of debate and discussion” that took place among the left in the first half of the twentieth century (Sears, 2014, p. 50). At its base, a shared analysis continually generates and regenerates a “collective political position” (Dean, 2016, p. 200) from which to bridge “self-understanding and possibilities for action” (Sears, 2014, p. 16).

Union democracy

As discussed above, Spinoza’s theory of affect is concerned with the body’s power of acting as related to human freedom and happiness – whether that power is increased, diminished, aided or restrained – in terms of meeting needs and self-preservation. However, because meeting needs is dependent on social relations, “such a power is only made possible in a community in which human affects are guided collectively” (Ahern, 2015, p. 119). It’s in this sense that workers formed their own organizations to collectively influence their ability to act, *rather than be acted upon*, and this makes the function of those organizations a matter of democracy.

As industrial unionism began to take hold in the early 1900s in Canada and the U.S., one of the hallmarks of the Industrial Workers of the World’s unionism for example, was indeed “democratic control of the organization by its members” (Camfield, 2011, p. 107). As described above, when workers make decisions from the shop floor and call for a slowdown or strike, “it is taken less as a command from above than as a self-exhortation” (Chibber, 2022a, p. 71). In the *doing* that union democracy allows and necessitates, workers build confidence and generate the perspective that enables them to *act*. In this way the “dialectical form of the political subject” (Badiou as cited in Dean, 2016, p. 158) is put into motion as workers learn from their activism in the ongoing process of negotiation, resistance and struggle the pursuit of class recomposition. And in this sense, workers must understand and accept their roles within the union structure for it to be effective (Chibber, 2017).

When the direct action of industrial unionism gave way to contract unionism, the democratic structures that organized the affective intensities of meeting individual and collective needs began to erode. As such, many union members began to lose the kind of "activist and leadership capacities" workers gain from running their own affairs and thinking of the union as being their own (Camfield, 2011, p. 61). This is why much of the recent renewal literature puts democracy at the centre of trade union revitalization.

Care and mutuality

An underlying theme throughout the literature review is the role of care, support and mutuality in enabling groups to take collective action. The capitalist system makes individuals less directly reliant on others outside their households or families, but when that system fails to meet one's needs through exploitation, those unmet needs can become the basis for political agency as we turn back to one another in resistance. The affective intensities of care are what enables a collective to bond, thrive, and generate "affective attachment in the service of struggle" (Dean, 2016, p. 247).

In the case of AMMAR's organizing efforts, empathy and compassion circulating in the spaces of care and solidarity that the union created "set new affects in motion" among the women (Hardy & Cruz, 2018, p. 251). This occurred through socialization, celebrations and gift giving, game playing and gossip as well as touch, friendship and offers of help that in turn generated feelings of belonging and dignity. It was also care that helped transform many women's relations with one another from conflict and competition on the street to cooperation and collective solidarity. As Dean notes, affective structures can support our collective and egalitarian impulses and diminish dominant tendencies towards self-interest and individualism (2016).

Cohen and de Peuter describe how care featured in new media journalists' strategy to counter the anti-unionism and fear mongering of management. Organizers responded by "emphasizing solidarity, care, and collective power" not just by wearing union buttons and performing mutuality to bosses by visibly gathering together, but through one-on-one conversations to simply ask, 'are you okay?' (2020). Acts of care such as this not only help maintain worker confidence in their efforts and demands but support the general maintenance and continuity of the affective dimension of organizing.

Care and mutuality in the spaces workers clear for opposition are vital to cultivating “bonds based on the shared hardships and pleasures of working-class life” (Camfield, 2011, p. 74) – whether it’s checking in on someone’s well-being or serving tea on a cold day on the picket line. It’s in this way that care of oneself and others becomes a political act of agency and resistance and this is why Hardy and Cruz call for “locating relationality and care at the center, rather than in the margins, of labor movements as a basis for the wider transformation of social relations in capitalism” (2018, p. 258).

Class-based commitment

The long-term and difficult work of social change and class-based struggle is “necessarily fragmented and episodic” because the activity of subaltern groups is “continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups” (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 54, 55). This fragmentation must be confronted by those willing to commit to carrying the struggle forward – which is typically composed of a “relatively small minority” (Franzosi, 2005, p. 433).

Within the U.S. communist party of the 1930s for example, it was “militants, organizers, agitators and vanguards” that kept the fight alive – the dedicated few who devoted themselves to the cause (Dean, 2016, p. 148). Their work was to maintain the affective infrastructure of the party that held open the space “between the actual and the possible” for its members, thus “making real the possibility of another world” it seemed they could already feel (Dean, 2016, pp. 239, 221). This space also “works[ed] on its members, compelling them to act in their collective interest,” each feeling “the inner force of their collective strength as a command or duty (Dean, 2016, p. 237).

Likewise in the context of unions in the radical era, it was the steward layer that made possible the great strike wave before and during WWI (Lichtenstein, 2019) and the shop floor militancy of sit-down strikes and plant occupations in the 1930s and 1940s (Sears, 2014). These radical trade unionists, also referred to as “the militant minority,” (Franzosi, 2005, p. 295) represented the “layer of workers with a vision and strategy for how to organize, fight, and win” (Post, 2016). It's also this small minority of activists that commit to holding the line that make possible what appears to be spontaneous rupture – when protests, occupations or other acts of resistance seem to suddenly emerge from nowhere. These eruptions are the result of “networks of communication, learning, memory and solidarity” – “microsystems of struggle” working under the radar that help

"catalyze collective action" when the opportunity arises (Sears, 2014, pp. 37, 9, 36). During an opening, affects can be mobilized that tap into the wider self-interest of a larger majority, driving political action (Mouffe, 2022). In this sense, a class-based culture of resistance must already be in existence for it to emerge more broadly, otherwise there is nothing for the rest of the working class "to plug into during moments of crisis" (Panitch & Gindin, 2009).

From this perspective, unions and other working-class organizations are among the few entities that can support militant minorities or the committed few willing to maintain a critique of capitalist society (MacDonald, 2014) and organize and maintain the capacities for disruptive working-class power more broadly (Uetricht & Eidlin, 2019).

Conclusion

As Berlant wrote:

> just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history, and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed, a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested (2016, p. 395).

Likewise, just because individuals are members of a union does not mean they will necessarily develop attachments to that union or one another in solidarity. The affective relations of solidarity must be continually nurtured and developed, and this study proposes that the five affective dimensions of collective action described above play an important role in that process.

3.2. Methods

As already noted above, the elusive and fluid nature of affects and affective relations present methodological challenges for measurement and analysis. As such, this study sought to measure affective relations among union members by *effect*, or in other words, by identifying the extent to which members engaged with the five affective dimensions of collective action as put forward in this study's framework for analysis (see Section 3.1).

To approximately measure those effects, three methods in a sequential design were employed to enable the quantitative findings of the survey to be expanded upon by

qualitative method (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). This included a survey of the membership at each union, a content analysis of the survey's open-ended questions, and two interviews with individuals in staff leadership positions at each union. Both survey questions (see Appendix A) and interview questions (see Appendix B) were developed following the literature review and based on the framework for analysis established above.

Because this wasn't a comparative study of unions, the BCGEU and AUPE were chosen based on the researcher's access and familiarity with the unions due to her employment as a communications officer at the BCGEU. This enabled the researcher to approach the study with unique context and insight into communicative processes and practices within these unions. AUPE was also chosen for its similarities to the BCGEU (both represent public and private sector members and are roughly the same size) which proved useful in considering the similarities and differences in the results. The rest of this section will describe why each method was used, the data collection procedure and how the data were analyzed.

3.2.1. Surveys

Rationale

The primary method of data collection was through surveys, a common quantitative research method that explores "relationships or degrees of association between relationships" that are cheap to administer and provide anonymity (Gunter, 2011, p. 242). Given that the population being researched for this study was dispersed throughout the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, the online self-administered survey method was chosen in order to reach rank-and-file union members across this geographical range.

Procedure

At the time of the survey, the BCGEU and AUPE represented 85,000 and 100,000 members respectively. According to Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, the sample size required for 95% confidence for a population of that size is 383 responses (2021). To address the fact that not all members have email addresses on file with their unions, a stratified random sample of 10,000 members from each union was invited to take the

survey. Therefore, 10,000 members were randomly selected from each union's list of active members with email addresses on file to receive the survey invitation.

One survey for each union consisting of 20 identical questions (see Appendix A) was created using the SurveyMonkey web survey tool. The surveys were distributed to members at both unions throughout May and June of 2023 and an incentive was offered to take the survey.[6] Together, the surveys received a total of 1,297 responses (777 responses from the BCGEU and 520 responses from AUPE). In addition, there were 964 and 690 comments from members at the BCGEU and AUPE respectively. Before analysis, incomplete surveys were removed as well as responses from bots that attacked the AUPE survey which was distributed first. This vulnerability was corrected for the BCGEU survey by requiring members to enter a password for access, eliminating bot exposure.

Analysis

Qualitative data from open-ended survey questions was examined using content analysis. First appearing in the 1940s and developed most prominently by communications theorist Harold D. Lasswell (Franzosi, 2008), content analysis is a method of analysing "written, verbal or visual communication messages" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107). It is now used both quantitatively and qualitatively (while not being mutually exclusive), to analyze in a replicable way how elements of a text are situated in, and refer to, a wider cultural context (Rose, 2016). As Krippendorff also notes, content analyses are meant to demonstrate how texts come into being and "mediate between antecedent and consequent conditions," (2019, p. 83). This is particularly apt to this study in terms of how affects are often constructed through histories of articulation (antecedent conditions) and become observable *in effect* through how they shape and move bodies (consequent conditions). As such content analysis "is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences and context" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107).

The content analysis proceeded using a deductive approach which aims to test "categories, concepts, models, or hypotheses" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 111). As such, the analysis set out to answer this study's research questions using the framework for

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[6] To incentivize members to take the survey, upon completion members were entered into a draw at each union to win one of ten SaveOnFoods gift cards worth $25.

analysis developed for this thesis. The data were imported into the software program NVivo 14 and read through several times before being coded into categories related to the framework such as: 'supports social justice' or 'positive about the organizing model,' etc. (see Appendix C). Quantitative data were analyzed within SurveyMonkey using frequencies and cross-tabulations.

3.2.2. Interviews

Rationale

The secondary method of data collection was through semi-structured interviews. This type of interview was chosen to ensure the questions were guided by the framework for analysis, but also allowed for the knowledge, experience and interpretations of the interviewees to be expressed (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Because the success of interviews normally depends on good rapport and trust, familiarity between the researcher and interviewees presented an advantage to the study (Walling, 2010). Overall, the goal of the interviews was to validate this study's hypothesis that affective relations are more apparent at the organizing level and bring further context to the findings in the literature review.

Procedure

Individuals in staff leadership positions were recruited for interviews due to their knowledge of the labour movement in Canada and its current challenges, their direct involvement and knowledge of union organizing, and the communicative environment in which unions strive for renewal. As such, they are uniquely positioned to engage in a conversation about the theoretical underpinnings of this study in relationship to member initiatives and the day-to-day function of their unions.

The semi-structured interviews had five long-form questions (see Appendix B). The interview with the person in a leadership position from the BCGEU was conducted in person on November 21, 2023. The interview with the person in a leadership position from AUPE was conducted over Zoom on December 14, 2023. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and both interviewees elected to be quoted confidentially.

Analysis

Analysis proceeded based on the study's framework for analysis as described above, however given the smaller volume of data collected, insights and quotes from interviews were reflected directly in the analysis in the next chapter.

3.3. Ethical considerations

The ethical dimensions considered for this study revolve mainly around surveying union members. The approach followed the main ethical principles of research of "obtaining informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality" (Beninger, 2017, p. 58). Anonymity and confidentiality for union members is particularly important in terms of harm as it relates to job security and their relationship to their employer making this key to their ability to participate.

To obtain informed consent, this study clearly demonstrated what constituted consent including what research objectives members will be contributing to (Mattingly, 2005). Subjects of interviews are often unclear as to what the research is really for, especially when being asked personal questions (Walling, 2010). Therefore, steps were taken to make the survey preamble and questions as clear as possible, including the use of plain language to ensure understandability for members with English as a second language. Union leaders were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were also given the opportunity to choose whether or not their identity would be disclosed in publications or presentations resulting from this research. All information gathered from the survey and interview processes is securely stored.

3.4. Limitations

Regardless of the research methodology, all studies have limitations representing weaknesses that may influence the conclusions. The limitations of this study include the methodological constraints of studying affect already addressed above, the limitations of online surveys, the inherent nature of researcher bias and the scope of the study.

There are three ways the online survey method potentially limited results as representative of affective relations within the unions studied – the relatively small sample size and the risk of bias, the quality of union data, and accessibility. Firstly, this study surveyed two unions in Canada of similar size and composition in terms of the sectors they cover representing a relatively small sample size. While the selection of email addresses was based on a stratified random sample of 10,000 members at each union, there is the risk that "respondents with biases may [have] select[ed] themselves into the sample" (Andrade, 2020, p. 575) meaning that the responses may be skewed when it comes to members' view of their union. However, because the research is easily replicable, surveying members on a repeated or expanded basis could clarify the generalizability of the findings or to reveal trends across labour organizations in Canada. Secondly, because unions rely on employers to provide much of their member data, union data can unreliable and present limitations such as incomplete, missing or out-of-date data. For this reason, a truly random list of active members to contact about the survey could not be produced. And finally, the disadvantages of online surveys present accessibility limitations that may unintentionally exclude those without reliable access to the internet, or older less digitally-literate individuals (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). As well, many union members are newcomers to Canada and are more fluent in languages other than English. While survey questions were worded with this in mind, the English-only survey may have presented barriers to accessibility.

Researcher bias is inherent to qualitative studies due to the subjectivity a researcher brings to the process in the form of "particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2004, p. 21). This makes recognition of bias an important factor to the reliability and validity of research findings, and it is the role of the researcher to be transparent and reflexive about the "processes by which data have been collected, analyzed, and presented" (Galdas, 2017, p. 2). To that end, it's both important and interesting to point out the dynamic in researching trade union revitalization as a staff member of a union. This is because throughout the labour movement literature, union staff (and often union officials) have long been viewed as having an outsized influence over membership activity, holding a privileged position, or interfering with the rank-and-file's ability to democratically run their own affairs (Camfield, 2011). In other words, there can be a conflict of interest between workers and the bureaucratic environment in which union staff operate. That said, the intention of this

project is to consider affect theory's potential role in re-centering workers as the democratic and driving force of their organizations. It is hoped therefore that the researcher's experience as union staff provides useful and meaningful context towards achieving that goal.

Finally, the scope of the research was limited to two unions and the survey questions were not designed to delve deeply into member relations to capture the true vibrancy of the membership and therefore only sampled the surface of these activities. As a result, it is difficult to clearly gauge the depth of affective relations across these two unions. Future research could potentially surface more detailed results by, for example, using this study's framework to study a group of workers over a determined time period, bargaining process, job action or project. The hope instead has been to offer a starting point for thinking about how and why paying attention to the affective life of unions might be important, and how that might be done.

Chapter 4. Research findings

Guided by the five affective dimensions of collective action defined in Chapter 3, this chapter presents the results of the BCGEU and AUPE member surveys as well as interviews with staff in leadership positions at each union. The surveys examined the extent to which members are coming into contact with one another, sharing, learning, affecting and being affected in a way that builds a culture of solidarity. The interviews further explored the affective dimensions of collective action by focusing mainly on the experiences of workers organizing into their unions and other opportunities for members to work together. Each section briefly recaps the relevance of the survey questions to each affective dimension of collective action before detailing the findings.

4.1. Member surveys

Circulation of affects

To determine the extent to which affects or intensities can circulate among union members, and affective relations might grow, the survey asked how members stay connected to their unions, and whether this included communicating with one another. The survey also asked how members perceived messaging about their union in the news or on social media as part of their exposure to the circulation of signifiers connected to their union.

The survey found that the primary way members communicate with their union is through email, with 39% (BCGEU) and 38.3% (AUPE) reporting they use email 'all the time.' However, when it comes to opportunities to connect with fellow members, 76% (BCGEU) and 58% (AUPE) said they rarely or never go to in-person meetings or events. When it comes to connecting directly with a steward, 9.5% of BCGEU members and 5% of AUPE members do so all the time while 31.9% and 22.8% respectively do so sometimes. 11.4% (BCGEU) and 12.8% (AUPE) report staying connected to their union through fellow members.

When asked about their level of interest when a story about their union is in the news or on social media, 34% (BCGEU) and 40% (AUPE) reported being very

interested, while 46.7% (AUPE) and 53.4% (BCGEU) reported being somewhat interested with only 9-10% at both unions reported being uninterested.

Shared analysis

The survey investigated the degree to which members may have engaged in working-class analysis on two fronts: in struggle through an organizing drive or job action, and by asking whether or not they had engaged in learning and training with fellow members.

The survey confirmed that members at both unions overwhelmingly joined as a result of being hired into unionized jobs – 83.7% at AUPE and 88% at the BCGEU. However, twice as many AUPE members (10.7%) organized in compared to the BCGEU (4.6%). Likewise, a majority of members at both unions (66-67%) have never participated in a strike by walking the picket line themselves, or by supporting other workers on strike.

When it comes to accessing education such as steward training or other workshops and courses, 43.8% (BCGEU) and 42.4% (AUPE) have taken training at least once, with just over half of members at both unions never having accessed it at all. That said, there were 25 combined comments about a lack of education and training and a desire for greater access. As two members said:

> I think the union could do more to educate workers on their collective agreement and the options available to them as part of the union.

> I think the union does need to build up the level of organizing theory in the wider membership - show how the financialization of housing is grinding the lower classes into the dust.

The survey also looked at shared analysis more broadly from a class-based perspective by asking how members perceive their unions engaging in wider social justice issues – from strengthening public services and occupational health and safety regulations to advocating for affordable housing or childcare programs. The results found overwhelming support for unions working to influence the general direction of society in both B.C. and Alberta, with both unions responding with 85% in support. As several members said:

> All of those issues, affordable housing, childcare, etc., all have to do with work.

> We are one of the biggest representatives of the working class and as such need to advocate for the working class politically.

> Wages are only one aspect of my job. It is important to ensure I have a safe workplace as well. I am proud that my union advocates for strong public services as well.

When it comes to a shared understanding of the issues workers face in their particular fields, most members at both the BCGEU and AUPE agreed that their union has the right ideas about improving conditions. However, others also disagreed or were unsure – an ambivalence that was reflected in survey comments about feeling disconnected and underrepresented due to geographical distance or their union being too large to accommodate everyone's interests such as:

> This union is powerful because it is large, but I feel it is out of touch with most employees because it is so big.

Democratic functionality

Union democracy is critical to generating the affective intensities that enable the self-activity and leadership capacities needed to build solidarity and resistance. As such, the survey investigated the degree to which members perceived their union as democratic as well as the extent of their own democratic initiative and participation as members.

Asked whether or not members felt their union was run democratically and in a way that empowers them, 43.6% (BCGEU) and 47.9% (AUPE) said yes. And when asked if they trust their union to work in the best interests of working people *whether or not they were involved*, respectively, 30.9% and 33.6% said they did all the time while another 45.2% and 39% said they did some of the time. Just 10.2% (BCGEU) and 11.8% (AUPE) said not at all. About half of members at both unions (BCGEU 45.9%; AUPE 52.7%) reported rarely or never feeling excluded by the leadership.

Democratic participation also relies on understanding one's role in the process. When asked whether they felt they understood their role as a union member, 52.7% (BCGEU) and 57.3% (AUPE) said they did with length of membership positively correlating to understanding at both unions. For the members who said they did not

understand their role or were unsure, a number of comments suggested that part of it could be due to lack of information as one member wrote:

> I know we have elections, but when they happen it's usually a single email and a little blurb about each candidate, so I don't typically vote because I don't truly know anything and can't make a properly informed decision.

Bottom-up approaches to union renewal place the democratic functioning of unions at the centre of those strategies with the view that workers must think of their union as their own. To that end, members were asked what the phrase 'you are the union' means to them, or makes them think about, in an open-ended question. Just over 60% of respondents from both unions commented, and a majority at both unions (BCGEU 58.9%; AUPE 58.1%) either did not agree with the phrase or understand its intention. Disagreement was reflected in negative comments such as:

> It's a good catch phrase. That's about it.

> It's an empty statement. We are rural and don't feel connected at all.

Misunderstanding was reflected in passive comments such as "we voice our concerns and hope the union acts on the issue" or "we should get a say in our bargaining but our opinion is rarely asked." Another member wrote that the statement means "that whatever policies or agreements the union is doing it is for the best interest of the people."

Those that did agree and demonstrated an understanding of the phrase's intention (BCGEU 37.7%; AUPE 39.3%) used active language such as:

> I think it means that you get what you give and that we are the power that makes unions work.

> It means that the fight starts at the worksite and that the union is there to supply the resources we need.

> It's very much an organization for the people, run by the people.

> It takes all workers to be the union and work together to improve working conditions and wages and benefits.

Reactions to the phrase 'you are the union' (and related comments on other questions) also revealed the extent to which members view their union through the 'service-based model' in which the membership is passive with employed union officials

or staff doing most of the work of the union, or the 'organizing model' in which the membership is active in the functioning of the union with union staff providing a supporting role (*Trade Union Futures*, 2016). Of the 421[7] combined comments that reflected either view, 152 signified the servicing model and 269 signified the organizing model as in the examples quoted respectively below:

> I'm paying all this money every month for this union and I don't feel like I don't truly understand all that they're doing for me.
>
> It's up to the workforce to collectively move grievances forward. Union supports and helps, but it's a people's movement.

Care and mutuality

The affective intensities of care are what enables a collective to bond, thrive, and clear space for opposition. The survey touched on care broadly by asking whether members felt their union or other members care about them.

When asked if members felt included, supported and connected to other working people in their union who are committed to shared interests, just 13.2% (BCGEU) and 17% (AUPE) said 'all the time.' At both unions, 42.3% said sometimes while 40-44% said rarely or not at all signifying a member to member disconnect. When asked if they have the sense that their union genuinely cares about their well-being as a worker, a majority of members at both unions agreed.

Thinking about the role of values in generating group affinity, when asked if they thought their values and their union's values were similar, 49.6% (BCGEU) and 53% (AUPE) agreed; respectively, 16.2% and 18.8% disagreed while 34.2% and 28% were unsure.

Class commitment

The survey aimed to get a sense of members' commitment to their union by asking about participation, taking on a union position, as well as their sense of a common identity and pride in their union.

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[7] 274 (BCGEU) and 147 (AUPE).

When asked how many activities supportive of the union members participated in over the previous year (including things like voting on their collective agreement, attending a local union meeting or joining a labour day celebration), 35.3% of members at AUPE and 10.3% of members at the BCGEU reported participating a lot; 35.3% (AUPE) and 60.5% (BCGEU) reported participating a few times, and 29% at both unions reported participating in no activities.

When asked if they would serve on a committee or run for an elected position with their union, 25% of members at both unions said yes, 37% (AUPE) and 39% (BCGEU) said no, and about 30% were unsure. Just 5.3% of respondents from the BCGEU and 7.4% from AUPE said they already had. When asked if they felt they share a common identity and have common goals as members of the working class, 49.3% of BCGEU members and 57% of AUPE members said yes. And when asked whether they felt a sense of pride being part of their union, 50-52% of members at both unions agreed.

4.2. Leadership interviews

Circulation of affects

Labour organizing, as the affective organizing literature has described, relies on the delicate balance and maintenance of affective relations. The interviewees reflected this in their answers both in terms of successful organizing drives, and through the difficulty in conducting organizing conversations online when the COVID-19 pandemic kept us socially distanced.

Organizing normally begins with face-to-face, in-person meetings even if it's just one-on-one conversations in kitchens, living rooms or coffee shops:

> I'm going to try to prioritize in-person meetings because you can feel the emotion a bit more, pick up on body language, develop a rapport, develop relationships and build trust (Robin, interview, November 21, 2023).

> At the start [of organizing], it is all emotion that is not terribly tangible. It's more just like a deep feeling of injustice. And I love it because we can work with that (Jesse, interview, December 14, 2023).

Importantly, when a worker makes contact with a union to organize, they must have a group of workers already behind them. As Jesse said:

> If an individual has a bone to pick with their manager, but they don't really have any influence, it won't go anywhere. So, it's our job to figure out whether that is widely felt or not within that worksite. But also, even if it's not necessarily widely felt, does that person have any influence? Could they help make that more widely felt (2023)?

The affects of injustice or unmet needs must be in circulation among a group of workers. “If it's not there, you can't do anything” (Jesse, 2023) as this quote illustrates:

> I've been through an organizing drive which was absolutely brutal. When we got towards the time for the vote we ran our numbers and it was very much people of colour against white people. All the white people did not want a union, all the people of colour did [but the groups weren’t talking to each other] and so we lost that vote. And years later, they managed to, I think, shift their numbers so they were eventually organized but it took many more years (2023).

When it comes to organizing across multiple worksites it is also important that workers already have relationships to draw on. Workers will say “oh, I know so and so in that building or in that program” (Robin, 2023) and they will reach out to bring them into the discussion. Conversely, both interviewees reported a noticeable drop in affective intensities among workers when they had to rely on online meetings or phone calls to organize during the pandemic:

> When you're on a phone or when you're on Zoom, especially as an organizer working with people on those sites, if you can't have that in-person contact it's just luck of the draw just to know what works. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. And it's hard to figure out why. It can be done, but then it really does rely on someone really warm and charismatic (Jesse, 2023).

On the importance of affects circulating through media throughout the organizing process, interviewees were split due to the differing labour board protections available to workers in each province. In B.C., workers have more labour board protections around speaking out about their working conditions. Robin described that when a website with the faces of workers that signed union cards was published, more workers felt confident stepping up to sign cards themselves. And when the news media reported on the organizing drive, members saw their stories and demands reflected back on them, empowering them to stay the course. It gave workers “that legitimacy and some protection, to choose to sign a card, knowing that the community and the media and

politicians were watching” (Robin, 2023). Robin noted that organizers don’t normally engage media, but:

> We wanted to try a new tactic….there was just so much fear [around signing cards] that we had to eventually go public. It definitely helped us get to the threshold that we were trying to achieve (2023).

In Alberta, workers have fewer labour board protections around speaking out about their working conditions. For this reason, Jesse said they would probably not use this tactic at all. “As soon as somebody has their face on something…as soon as someone says they're even remotely pro-union, it puts a target on them” (Jesse, 2023). Jesse commented further on how the media landscape has changed: “No one trusts any media now…and [people] think anything that comes from unions is propaganda anyway” (2023). Touching on the idea of unions developing their own media, Jesse said “it'd be interesting, but it would require unions to work together, and we don't do that so well” (2023).

In terms of spaces for union members to connect and build relationships, Jesse asked, “where are we finding inspiration in each other today?” and noted the lack of working-class cultural spaces like the union hall or labour temple of the past:

> I think if we could figure out a way as a labour movement, to go back to the time when we had labour temples, I think it would help a lot. Because, you know, labor temples were originally built as places for folks to hang out with their brothers and sisters and fellow workers. And we don't have anything like that anymore. It was supposed to replace the church because in previous times, that's where all of the community and the social situations came from, the church. And if you wanted to get people involved in unions, you had to kind of go away from the church and have labour temples, and that worked. Now there are no public common areas anymore (2023).

Jesse noted how this would have to be built organically:

> And I think the thing is, to build those social situations, you would have to start with places where people are already talking. Of course, it has to be intentional, that we build those spaces, but it has to allow people to organically come in. But we don't have that. And I don't see any way to have that right now (2023).

When it comes to communicating organizing wins to the rest of the membership or to the labour movement more broadly, Robin said there is less of an outward focus:

> With organizing, we're just thinking about, what do I do to keep these members engaged, we're not thinking outwardly" [about telling the story]. "We don't use [social media] effectively but perhaps we could find ways to use social media to celebrate and share organizing stories to inspire other non-union workers to unionize (2023).

Among the membership there are also "people out there who are doing some spontaneous stuff, but we don't know about it…we need to capture those stories" (Robin, 2023).

Shared analysis

Coming into the process of organizing, many workers have little knowledge about how unions work and there is also a critical need to meet workers where they are based on their needs and self-interest. For this reason, both interviewees said that coming to a broad working-class analysis, critical of capitalism in particular, is something that might come much later in their membership, if at all. At the organizing stage workers are interested in:

> What do I get out of this? Will I get extra pay? Will I lose something? For most people joining the union, it's about wages and it's about feeling disrespected or undervalued by their employer. They want respect, control over their workplace, and acknowledgement that they know how to do their jobs (Robin, 2023).

What draws people into the organizing process and unionization is when workers realize they have a shared *self-interest*. Jumping into class analysis at the earlier stages can in fact "work against people's own self-interest" (Jesse, 2023) as this quote describes:

> You don't have to talk about class, you can talk about what you're trying to win, and the fact that winning is more likely when you have a bunch of people doing the same thing. But people that come in and start talking about communism or socialism, oh my, it turns people off immediately. So, I think all of the theory works, that is undoubtedly the case. But it tends to raise people's hackles as soon as you start talking like a theorist (2023).

As Robin put it:

> I think that a lot of workers are just like, this is the way it is, my boss is trying to make a profit. And some people accept that. And so that's why it's up to the organizer to ask those questions so workers can come to the conclusion that the working-class interests are not in line with the

> employer's or the boss's interests. So that's why organizers always say: 'we've got to meet the workers where they're at.' So, the first initial meetings, conversations, [organizers are] just kind of digging, asking them tons of questions about their working conditions and to assess their understanding of what unions are, and what they do – do they think the union can solve their problems with a magic wand or do they believe in collective action (2023)?

Meeting the workers where they're at also means understanding that some labour movement jargon has affective values that can work against an organizer. As Jesse said:

> You can show solidarity without talking about solidarity. And rather than talking about building power, why not talk about building leverage? It is the same thing, but it doesn't have the same connotation (2023).

As well, Jesse explained how discourses can exclude people:

> I love to hire young folks, and so they come in, but they wear their class analysis like a badge. And it does not resonate with a ton of people. Maybe other young people who already have those perspectives, but [for others it's problematic because] no one wants to feel stupid. Let's just not make people feel stupid. You can explain the exact same ideas (2023).

Working-class analysis also depends on how workers view unions. "When they see us as a third-party organization that provides benefits, help from a servicing rep, a lawyer, I don't think they're going to analyze themselves as being working class" (Robin, 2023). As well, a lot of white-collar workers "see themselves as being above the working class, and that they actually don't need a union because they're smart and can negotiate their own working conditions with the boss" (Robin, 2023).

Given these dynamics, organizers strive to motivate members to take initial steps to *start* acting like a union:

> What I hope is that, when we are organizing a worksite that we can help inspire these workers to act like a union, meaning to act collectively and realize whose side they're on, and that collectively, they can make changes. That they see the union as a tool for social change. That's how I judge if it's a successful certification…are they signing up to be stewards and activists? Are they going to continue to remain a tight unit? And will they continue to organize their worksite and communicate with the workers? A working-class analysis may come much later (Robin, 2023).

Similarly, Jesse noted, “I believe in class consciousness. I just don't think we start with that…we don't want to force it on people. If people want to come to that, and they want to have more information [we have union courses],” (2023).

Union democracy

Both interviewees reported that the organizing process is largely worker-driven and democratic. Conversations at the outset of organizing explain:

> Here's what the unionization process looks like, here's where you guys are at, what do you think are the next steps to get to that next level (Robin, 2023)?
>
> When we're just in the card signing phase, it's all about them making decisions – first they've got to map out the worksite – who has power, who are the natural social groupings? And they have to decide on, who’s going to talk to certain workers and there's a lot of training involved in how to talk to workers. And then making decisions on, when did they want to meet? How regularly do they want to meet? Who do they want to include in the inside committee (Robin, 2023)?

As Jesse said:

> I think you have to listen to the members. And sometimes you're going to make stupid mistakes. But you're there to give them advice. They don't have to follow your advice. But I find that when people are organizing, like honestly, they're happy with what you tell them, and they will get it done (2023).

Having just been through the democratic process of an organizing drive, this is an important time to continue “build[ing] people's confidence” and democratic view of their union (Jesse, 2023). But whether this happens depends entirely on how workers are transitioned into the membership because “if you don't have some kind of segue, yeah, it's really easy for people to just get lost” (Jesse, 2023).

Both interviewees said that their unions strive to make this happen following a drive however, once workers transition into membership, there are several ways tensions arise around democratic control and members’ abilities to run their own affairs.

Referring to this study’s survey in which 85% of members at both unions said they thought their union should influence the general direction of society, Jesse said:

> I don't think that is necessarily indicative of what the folks in elected positions think. That's because rank-and-file folks, they can actually just speak their mind, which is great. Elected folks are not necessarily able to do that, because they know that the couple of people who disagree could potentially make huge issues for them. So, the higher up you get on the elected food chain, the less likely you are to take those kinds of positions (2023).

Other issues with democracy can surface later on with the expiry of a collective agreement and the initiation of the bargaining process in which a member must understand their role to participate, yet there can be a lack of understanding or education around how the process works. For example, you may:

> …have a situation where you have the upper level elected who are like, 'you need to get everyone ready for strike.' And then you have organizers and members going, 'people don't even know that we're in bargaining… these are the kinds of resources we need, this is the kind of messaging.' So, democracy still works – but [workers] have to pass that up through their part of the org chart. You have a chapter chair, you have a local chair, and you need to make yourself heard to those people at the upper level (Jesse, 2023).

While much of the recent renewal literature calls for a return to the direct action of the radical era, this is very difficult to achieve in an anti-union political environment such as in Alberta, or when members look to staff reps or their union as a service to make it happen for them. Robin said:

> If a request from a member [to make a change] is outside the collective agreement, the servicing rep might tell the member there's nothing that can be done. For some reps this may be because they are strategically concerned with keeping a good relationship with the employer, or because of workload and their limited capacity to help the member problem solve outside the collective agreement. But the members should be thinking: is this a deeply felt, widely held issue and how can we organize around it ourselves (2023)?

Care and mutuality

The interviewees reported care and mutuality arising more organically than strategically in the organizing process, and dependent on the temperament of the organizer assigned. For example, care surfaces when workers offer "little things like I'll pick you up and take you to that union meeting" or a worker may offer their home as a meeting space (Robin, 2023). It happens when an organizer is "really feeling people's comfort level," or when workers "talk to a staff organizer if to say 'so and so's in trouble,

what should we be doing?'" (Robin, 2023). Care and mutuality also arises through potlucks and meetings that turn into social events during organizing drives. "I think that that is a more natural part of the initial organizing drive" (Jesse, 2023).

More strategically, care and support comes through in thinking about what workers will do when the boss calls a worker into their office, or there's captive meeting to ask workers about their organizing activities. Workers discuss "how are [we] going to respond to the boss or help each other" (Robin, 2023)?

Overall, both interviewees suggested the need to be more proactive about this aspect of bringing workers together into a process. Robin suggested "we should be more thoughtful about that," and that care and support should be more intentional (2023). We should be asking, "what's the plan for the workers to take care of each other" when …*this happens*"? Robin also said it's very relevant with groups of workers who work in more challenging environments such as in supportive housing where co-workers could be struggling themselves or facing difficulties supporting residents in their care.

Robin also noted how care and mutuality play an important role when it comes to addressing a lack of trust, when people feel they've been "ratted out, or so and so was talking" as often happens (2023).

When it comes to support at the community level, Jesse noted the value of care and mutuality during a strike:

> One of the most successful strikes was when the community did come out. They brought their barbecues and they were cooking burgers for the strikers. It was adorable. In fact, everybody is bringing food to the strike line that they've made and it's wonderful (2023).

However, including the community requires engaging in a conversation, acknowledging how they may be affected and offering to provide information about what's going on:

> When we look like we're going into a strike situation we do tend to make postcards. We just go drop them in their mailbox or sometimes we knock on their door to give it to them saying we might be going on strike in the next 72 hours, we hope to not inconvenience you, but this is what we're fighting for. If you want to know anything else, please come out to the strike line. So, we do try to include the community in that way (Jesse, 2023).

Care and trust also entails that unions speak to members with authenticity and involve them in tangible work that will result in meaningful outcomes. For example, Jesse referenced the phrase '*when we fight we win*.' "When we fight, we have the actual chance to win, which we wouldn't have at all if we didn't fight, but when we fight, *we win?* – lie" (2023). Each time this ideal fails, it produces negative affect leaving workers to potentially think of their union is disingenuous, untrustworthy or ineffectual.

Class commitment

In the first year after an organizing drive, both interviewees said this is an important time in terms of workers' involvement and activism going forward.

> I think in the first year they are quite active. And I think that because of momentum, a lot of people are eager to become stewards or occupational health and safety reps or take education courses (Robin, 2023).

As Jesse said, it's at this point that workers are "literally the most excited that they will ever be in their career as a union activist" (2023). In describing this first year:

> The transitional MSO [membership services officer] is there until you get a collective agreement. So, they're there to be creative about how to protect your rights [in the meantime], but also to try and wean people off of being really dependent on the staff organizer. They try to link them up with education courses, different committees, and really be kind of ambassador between those groups. Because it's hard for members to be able to have this person who is like, completely on their side, completely there no matter what to not to having that. And that's super demoralizing for members (Jesse, 2023).

Robin said, in the first year "we are there to guide them" but once that connection to staff representatives dissolves as they fully transition into the membership, many can end up getting lost (2023).

> Once we hand them off to get plugged into the machine, then the organizing culture stops because there's no one asking them questions and prompting them, unless we discover a natural organizer [in the group] but that's very rare (Robin, 2023).

In this sense, Jesse disagreed with the statement by a NewsGuild worker involved in organizing digital journalists in 2020 who said, "the culture established during the organizing phase is the culture that will reproduce itself through time" (Cohen & de

Peuter, 2020, p. 32). Staying involved “requires maintenance, just like any relationship” (Jesse, 2023). As Robin said:

> That’s why we try to identify good leaders during the organizing drive, we definitely encourage them to become stewards. But, it would be interesting to follow them and find out okay, how are they stewarding? Are they stewarding with an organizing lens and how is it going? Do you need anything? What kind of support do you need? Do we do that – no, but maybe we should (2023).

While organizing in the radical era depended heavily on the steward layer which made possible some of the agitation and gains during that time, both interviewees suggested that the steward layer is both important and problematic in terms of member activism. Robin pointed out that even if a newly organized worker becomes a steward, their efficacy also depends on how they learn to do the role:

> If the steward had an organizing lens maybe they could be like, hey, this sounds really shitty, we should find out if others are impacted by it. And maybe they start talking to people or they set up a meeting (2023).

However, to move things forward, the steward will probably connect with a staff rep, and if that rep doesn’t also have an organizing lens, the steward might get stuck:

> This is because the temp servicing training course, as it is right now, isn’t going to teach you [from the organizing lens], so it's really just following the collective agreement. Although now it's kind of changing. I think some newer staff who are teaching the course are trying to say: ‘yeah, sometimes the grievance tool doesn’t work so you might have to do something outside of the grievance procedure.’ But when you're a temp servicing rep you many not do anything too out of the box because you're also worried about your employment (Robin, 2023).

And as Jesse said:

> It depends on the union, [but] I think we professionalized this so much that stewards have become less valuable. Because when you're someone on a worksite, and you have the option of having a paid membership services officer that has expertise from the union, or you have the option of talking to someone on your worksite, yeah, you're gonna go for the paid expert (2023).

There is also often a lag between when a group organizes and they get their collective agreement during which time members aren’t yet able to become stewards. Instead, both interviewees emphasized bargaining or job action, campaigns and projects

as better focal points for ongoing involvement to generate participation and commitment to their union. As Jesse described:

> Strikes are a fantastic way to get [some energy] back, but it depends on how long the strike lasts. Because the longer it drags out, the more likely it is that those that really deeply dislike their co-workers – they kind of forget about that when they get on the strike line, and it becomes like a big family, genuinely – but the longer you're on the strike line, the more those previous relationships start to rear their head (2023).

Outside of organizing or a strike, Jesse said:

> There's nothing you can do that is going to be on that level of intensity, but that being said, giving [workers] other things to work on together…because it's not just the high stakes that make a strike or an organizing drive, that's important, but it's the fact that they have to work together on something. And that's what brings the best out of people.
>
> Projects, I'm really just committed to projects that the members think are going to help them, that are structured, that allow them to work together. At least they can start to communicate about something that's tangible, with people with different interests, with different backgrounds, different perspectives on whatever it is, but they're working together to complete a task. And once they like each other, we can start talking about other things. But that actually does scare elected officials sometimes, because that is giving rank-and-file members the ability to do things outside of that hierarchical structure.
>
> If you can give people tasks they like it, it makes them feel like part of something. And not some bullshit like these make work tasks that unions sometimes do. That is demoralizing. If people can't see how the outcome is going to benefit them, they won't want to get involved. But they also want someone, I think everybody wants someone to be in charge (2023).

Similarly, Robin said:

> It comes actually to agitation. I think you need a campaign, some sort of focal point to agitate workers around that is a deeply felt, widely held issue. And then give them an ask like: 'will you help do this specific task on this campaign?' Because I think there's a lot of untapped capacity when the union is doing a campaign with a website or a petition, but there's no actual organizing where workers are talking to each other about a deeply felt, widely held issue that they care about.
>
> They need to feel that win. I remember [an organizer] shared a story, I think her name was Taylor. She'd never been an activist and then she took one of our trainings and learned about her rights in her collective agreement. And so, she went into work one day and the manager wanted to schedule whoever they wanted for a vacant shift. And Taylor

> said: ‘no, we've got to schedule by seniority, and you’ve got to call the casuals by seniority order.’ And management was like: ‘no, I can schedule whoever I want.’ Her coworkers overheard this conversation and one by one they stood beside Taylor to support her and say: ‘Taylor’s right, you're wrong. These are the rules in the collective agreement – and here’s our proposal: you’re going to put a sheet up, people are going to sign up’ for whatever the call was. And after that, Taylor signed up to be on the joint labour management committee (2023).

Jesse also described how working together provides good opportunities to build relationships in lieu of the union hall or other working-class gathering spaces. Through projects:

> …you can have sneaky social events. Like, let's get together for this meeting to talk about our progress on these specific tasks. And also, since we're here, let's go to the pub afterwards. You almost have to sneak in social situations, which works (Jesse, 2023).

Conversely, without clearly structured ways to engage with their union, members may have difficulty connecting and therefore becoming committed. Robin described a recent site visit where, “they appreciated us dropping in, and we listened to some of their issues. But then that was it. It was like, thanks for dropping by…but it wasn't intentional, and there was nothing to plug them into” (2023).

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter begins with a discussion of three main findings from the surveys and interviews conducted for this work: the limited circulation of working class affects among the rank-and-file; that affective relations are more apparent at the organizing level or within any initiatives where members have to work together; and while many members expressed frustration with union representation in the survey, they did so in a way that suggests they believe in the role of the labour movement and want to engage more deeply. Based on these findings, Sections 5.2 and 5.3 make an argument for why paying closer attention to the affective life of unions is important, thus answering the research questions before concluding the thesis in the final section.

5.1. Overview of findings

5.1.1. Affective antagonism

Overall, the member surveys confirmed the hypothesis that the affective dimensions of collective action as defined by this thesis – or the circulation of working class affects – are limited at the rank-and-file level. This was demonstrated most clearly by the reliance on email as the primary mode of communication, a significant number of members saying they *never or rarely* connect with their union in person, and a minority of members reporting that they connect with their union through stewards of fellow members on a regular basis. As well, with a majority of members joining as a result of being hired into a unionized position, and a majority never having been on strike, many members lack the experience of affective solidarity that comes with organizing in or taking job action.

The surveys found more evidence of affective antagonism that can result when "emotive appeals to languages of struggle" (Kesküla & Sanchez, 2019, p. 112) are mobilized by unions to inspire solidarity but fail to resonate with members' direct experience. This was illustrated in Jesse's example of how the labour slogan, 'when we fight, we win' can come across as disingenuous when workers fight and don't win, opening to the potential erosion of affective solidarity. Another member said that communications about union activities *seem* "a lot more 'rah-rah' than they feel" and the following quote reveals how telling workers 'you are the union' can fail to land:

> If we are the union, I do not feel empowered/educated on how to approach things. The things I have participated in have not felt effective in obtaining desired outcomes.

The survey also illuminated how affective antagonism can be generated when members actively try to engage, build a relationship or get involved, but their union fails to connect, respond or follow through:

> I’ve never even received anything from my union to welcome me. I don’t even have a steward.
>
> They say our opinions matter, but they never return email or phone requests. They don't have meeting in my town, no one lets me know what’s going on in the union, I've reached out to numerous people.

5.1.2. Affective organizing

As expected, affective relations at the level of ‘affective organizing’ as described in the literature review, and discussed in the interviews for this research, are far more apparent as affects are central to these processes. This includes organizing drives, as well as ongoing internal organizing among the membership.

During organizing drives, strong feelings of injustice and the desire to change their working conditions is what brings a group of workers together, making the circulation of affects the basic condition for collective action. Without the circulation of these feelings, “you can’t do anything” as an organizer (Jesse). In-person communication is also essential in order to read body language, build rapport and establish trust along with the need to manage feelings and affects that enable the group to continue working together and building momentum. Throughout the process, workers also experience self-activity and have democratic control over their efforts. Care arises organically in the course of working together, but should be centred more intentionally rather than leaving it at the margins (Hardy & Cruz, 2018).

What is less clear, as the interviews revealed, is how the affective relations formed in a successful organizing drive are translated into the experience of union membership. When the organizing culture stops, when there isn’t a segue, “it’s really easy for people to just get lost” (Jesse). Whether a group of workers remains a tight unit after organizing and carries on “acting like a union” or continues to “organize their worksite and communicate with the workers” without ongoing guidance from the union is

an open question (Robin). Organizers often encourage workers to become activists or stewards after organizing. However not only is there limited capacity to follow up to find out how they are doing and if they need any support (Robin), a steward's ability to get things done can depend on what staff they're working with in the union, and whether that staff person is willing or able to assist outside of the grievance procedure. Stewards remain important to the function of unions and could be better supported to play a vital role as this member comment suggested – "we don't have a steward so it's challenging to feel connected to something." However, it appears decades of contract unionism have also diminished the role of stewards as leaders in their worksites. As described in the interviews, many members with worksite issues opt to talk to paid union staff with "expertise from the union" rather than reaching out to their steward (Jesse).

When it comes to a working class shared analysis and union democracy, workers are less likely to experience these dimensions during an organizing drive, and more likely as members through education, committee participation or job actions. Camfield calls strikes "schools of struggle [that can] change those involved" through their experience of working collectively (Camfield, 2011, p. 28). While both interviewees said that a successful organizing drive produces the highest levels of emotion and excitement workers can reach in the experience of unionism – "strikes are a fantastic way to get [a lot of that energy] back" – and get members involved again, or for the first time (Jesse). Since members generally experience more strikes than organizing drives, strikes are important opportunities to exercise the affective dimensions of collective action. Attention to affects can also help guide the process – from managing affective relations, to ensuring that slogans and promises that the union generates authentically reflect members' demands as well as their ability to win them.

Outside of strikes, both interviewees mentioned the importance of campaigns and projects as focal points for involvement. Projects bring members together around something tangible they can do, they create social situations for workers to build relationships and as Jesse said, "once they like each other, we can start talking about other things." Robin also described affect at the heart of campaigns and projects as bringing workers together around a "deeply felt and widely held issue" that gets members talking to each other. Member agency around campaigns and projects, however, can still be constrained by the hierarchical structure of unions.

Most unclear in this research was the class commitment dimension of collective action. While on the one hand it only ever involves a small number of organizers and agitators, the fact that today, most members are not even active in their unions (Sears 41), makes militancy and the possibility of direct action even more unlikely. Supporting this dimension would require a stronger labour movement and working-class culture more widely – or as described in Section 5.2 below, *affective economies of the working class*.

5.1.3. Optimism

While many comments in the surveys reflected frustration with union representation, there was often an aspirational tone to these complaints. Many members asked for and wanted more in terms of support, connection and engagement. They said they wanted to see and hear from union leaders and provide their own input and feedback. This demonstrates an appetite to connect more meaningfully, and to be invited into such a space as this particular comment makes most clear:

> I am interested in participating in the union and supporting fellow workers, but I have rarely ever seen an entrance point... not even when [my union] was beginning strike actions last year. This was a disappointment and felt a bit alienating. It is strange to want to participate in a union and to be a member and never have anyone approach you about the union or let you know what is happening and how to participate.

Multiple member comments indicated a desire for greater access to education and training. As well, few respondents in the survey said they get too much or irrelevant information. Instead, members complained about a lack of information with which to understand how their union works, and their role as members as the following quotes show:

> This is my first time ever working for a union, and I have very minimal knowledge of them. I do not find there is a lot of basic intro information easily accessible for new members to gain knowledge.

> I think we should often hold real gatherings, not necessarily strikes, trade unions and workers' representatives can communicate face to face for many times, and even establish a chat group to facilitate communication, know the will of the majority of people, and better serve the people.

> I don't think there's enough communication. The boards are outdated and any opportunity to attend union hosted events are always missed. Additionally, I feel [the union] does less for their members of some [areas] than I see for others or even other unions.

> I would like to feel more of a connection to my union. Who can I call or email if I have questions?

> I feel like the union is not me. It's very large and often I feel disconnected with the union unless I need to complain. It would be nice to be linked in a positive way.

When it comes to union democracy, only a minority of members at both unions outright dismissed the idea that their union was run democratically (16.8% BCGEU; 24.6% AUPE). Most members either said yes, or that they didn't know, which leaves open the potential for better engagement on this front as these two comments show:

> I'd say it's run democratically but not very good at empowering.

> Yes [it's] democratic, but not especially accessible.

Similarly, on the question around what 'you are the union' means to members, again, many who commented negatively about the phrase wanted it to mean more, and better resonate with their own experiences:

> Good propaganda, which should be true.

> Unfortunately the statement is false. The union is an organization that has become too large and top heavy to actually support its members. I would like to emphasize that I truly respect and recognize the role the union has played in protecting workers. I understand how far we have come.

> I appreciate the union but feel a disconnect as I work for a small branch that is usually overlooked and not interacted with unless we request the union's presence. This statement doesn't mean much to me and my coworkers.

> [This statement] makes me feel guilty because I have no idea what's going on. I don't have time but I'm glad someone's fighting for us.

A high number of members at both unions also indicated significant interest when their union is in the media. Through the lens of affect theory, this suggests an attachment in the sense that they are potentially affected by the 'circulation of signs' related to their union, or that their union produces. Regardless of whether encounters

with these signs are binding or antagonizing, this indicates relevance and belonging to the particular social collective (Slaby, 2019) that is their union.

The work of unions "is all about emotion" (Jesse) – from the affective appeals that invoke the history of class struggle to organizing, striking and working together on campaigns or projects that make working life better. And while this is no secret to union organizers and labour practitioners, these findings suggest that through the lens of affect theory, there is an opportunity for unions to take the affective dimensions of collective action more seriously by paying *closer attention* as the next section will detail.

5.2. Affective unionism

Unions, of course, make affective impressions all the time whether they are intentional about it or not. Therefore, if we accept that "affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters," (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010a, p. 2), then we should pay closer attention to how union members are marked by affective encounters with their union. This entails firstly acknowledging affect as an extra-discursive organizing force within the scope of union communications and with definite outcomes, and secondly, becoming intentional in efforts to mediate those forces as related to union goals and objectives.

The rest of this section will answer this study's first research question by presenting four ways affect theory could be put to work in terms of labour's revitalization by paying closer attention. The first two focus internally with a concern for existing members, and the second two focus externally on what affect theory might afford the wider labour movement as it responds to the post-pandemic moment of working-class resistance.

5.2.1. Affects are the glues and solvents of collective action

> We ignore [affective relations] at the risk of losing the ground for collective struggle and the shared horizon of our goals, for they are the glues and solvents of social movement.
>
> —Rosemary Hennessy, *Open Secrets*

Closer attention shows us how affects can work to fortify and sustain or undermine and weaken collective action which necessitates their management and

mediation when workers unite. As already detailed in this study's methodology, how affects shape desire, a scene, or a process is not guaranteed, but as the circulation of signs produces effects we can ask: are our actions generating affects and feelings that are empowering our aims, or diminishing them?

An affective lens reveals how "capacities do not belong to individuals but are about how bodies are affected by other bodies" (Ahmed, 2013, p. 183). Providing mutual aid and support, deciding on a solution or articulating a vision together and celebrating achievements produce affects that solidify bonds of trust and build feelings of power that can enhance workers' desire to push farther. Even when workers experience a setback, strong affective relations can result in a doubling down of resolve to overturn a defeat, channeling the anger roused by inequity into the will to keep fighting. As far as positive affects impress upon, resonate and accumulate, they are central to building affective solidarity among individuals by turning "fear and anger into action and hope" (Cohen & de Peuter, 2020, p. 26).

Conversely negative affects can damage feelings of solidarity such as when affect is used instrumentally by unions to make promises and claims that are not (or never could be) followed through on. For example, just as the collective bargaining of previous eras *made* the working class, it is likewise *unmade* by the undermining effects of concessionary bargaining under neoliberalism (MacDonald, 2014). As scholar Ian Thomas MacDonald says, each 'tactical retreat' teaches anti-solidarity and damages morale and unity which affectively undermines the perceived power of the labour movement (2014).

Attention to the glues and solvents of affect also foregrounds the importance of building positive affective relations across an increasingly diverse union membership base. This is because language barriers can keep people in the dark; hate, misogyny and racial discrimination poisons solidarity and collaboration; and lack of inclusion forecloses on diverse perspectives enriching the movement. Failure to acknowledge and address these divides leaves organizing workers with affective fault lines from the start.

5.2.2. Centering the worker

> The working class made itself as much as it was made.
> —E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*

Closer attention helps clarify and reinforce why re-centering the worker is critical to the revitalization of worker associations. In Spinoza's formulation, affect is concerned with the body's power of acting as related to human freedom and happiness. Workers came together to form their own organizations for this reason – to collectively and democratically influence their power to act in their own interests. As such, it matters whether workers feel they have the power to act, or whether they feel they are being acted upon.

Workers feel they are being acted upon when they don't feel they have decision-making power as union members, when their input is dismissed or unsolicited, and when they can't make their views known. As one worker put it, "my union tells me how to feel, not me telling them how I feel." The affective resonance of language is also important – workers can feel acted upon when they're excluded or made to feel stupid by theoretical language used by organizers such as in Chibber's description in Chapter 1 of left academics telling workers they don't understand their own needs, or that they have 'false consciousness.' Instead, the fact that working class "activist knowledge begins in the realm of experience and indeed in the body and feelings of the individual" must be respected (Sears, 2014, p. 26).

Affect theorists of the early 2000s such as Cvetkovich were asking, 'how does capitalism feel' as a way to "depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action" (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 2). When workers come together their fear, disappointment and outrage, along with their hopes and desires, are their greatest resource for action. With the power to act on these feelings through self-activity, workers can move into important experiences that change them through gaining "politico-organizational experience," (Gramsci, 1971, p. 96). This process builds a self-reinforcing logic whereby workers learn through their experience of making gains together and become more inclined to continue undertaking collective actions (Murray, 2017).

Recentering the worker is to re-centre what the body knows, both in terms of grounded knowledge located at a "specific vantage point within social relations" at the worksite (Sears, 2014, p. 26) and within social struggle more widely.

5.2.3. The affective economy of the working class

> In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities — or bodily space with social space — through the very intensity of their attachment.
>
> —Sara Ahmed, *Affective Economies*

Attention to theories of affect can also provide insights into broader questions of labour revitalization. Ahmed's key concept of affective economies offers a conceptual model for thinking about how the decline of the labour movement has also been a decline in the circulation of working-class affects.

Ahmed has shown us how "we become invested in social norms" through the circulation and repetition of objects and signs (2013, p. 12). From Marx, Ahmed incorporates the flow and exchange of commodities as an analogy for how, in an economy of feelings, objects of emotions circulate between bodies and objects and accumulate affective value which can be mobilized politically. For example, this occurs when poverty is constructed as a personal failing rather than a reflection of society or when "right-wing discourse encourages resentment against migrants who are constructed as the enemy" (Mouffe, 2022, p. 43).

In the first half of the twentieth century, an economy of working-class feelings around dignity, fairness, solidarity and comradery circulated widely through objects, texts or gestures to construct a 'we,' a group of subjects who identified as the working class which in turn shaped actions, orientations and collective bodies. From as far back as the 1850s until the 1950s, (Camfield, 2011) 'economies of the working class' in Western democracies circulated emotions through culture, publications, gatherings and celebrations, education, art and community spaces in a way that linked workplace and community. Sears describes this through his concept of the 'infrastructure of dissent' – "the means of analysis, communication, organization and sustenance that nurture the capacity for collective action" (Sears, 2005, p. 32). In Canada this variously included workplaces, trade unions, cultural sites, political organizations and labour temples as well as informal community hubs in working-class neighbourhoods and a "communication infrastructure that included books, bookstores and publications, women's, queer, Aboriginal and anti-racist groups" and different kinds of "anti-capitalist organizations" (Sears, 2014, p. 16).

However, just as affective economies are produced as the effects of circulation and accumulation, they can be dismantled or transformed. As such, economies of the working class were slowly dismantled beginning in the second half of the twentieth century through various transformations or dis-accumulations. Cold War tensions had turned communism into a 'dirty word' used to create "a deliberate climate of fear" around holding left wing ideas and engaging in political activism (Sears, 2014, p. 65). Economic growth and the "desire for well-being or the feeling of middle classness" (Muehlebach, 2011, p. 63) displaced working-class feeling for many as the left's affective attachment to collective political struggle began turning towards attachment to individuality. Signifiers like 'socialism' lost the mobilizing power they once had (Mouffe, 2022) and eventually the social meaning of central concepts like 'class' or Marxism were transformed, turned over to the accumulation of negative affective value from which average workers distanced themselves. For example, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared class a 'communist concept,' advising Britons against collective action and to pull themselves up by their bootstraps instead (Jones, 2013). Finally, neoliberal restructuring through which employers relocated sites of production to where they could pay workers less broke "histories of articulation" (Ahmed, 2013, p. 1) by dislocating workers from "strong union histories" (Sears, 2014, p. 95).

Rebuilding affective economies of the working class – or an infrastructure of dissent – that re-establishes the social weight of the left and working people's "influence on the political, economic and cultural agenda" is long-term, difficult work that could only be done "in forms appropriate to [the] transformed conditions" of the neoliberal consensus (Sears, 2014, pp. 3, 2). However, Ahmed's scholarship on affective economies offers a generative concept from which to consider how that might be approached by considering what emotions do.

5.2.4. Power & affective resistance

> All great transformations must be affective in order to be effective.
>
> —William Mazzarella, *Enchantments of Modernity*

Attention to affects is not just to acknowledge them, or realize they're produced (Grossberg, 2010) but to recognize "affect has become one of the key means of sustaining power relations in contemporary" societies (Hipfl, 2018, p. 9). "Always

present, always humming through the immanent field of power relations" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 64), affects, as we have seen, determine the body's power of acting; align, shape and move bodies or collectives; mark some as included and others as excluded; produce what becomes reified as normal and ordinary; and reproduce dominant power relations (Hennessy, 2013b, p. 50). However, it's been right-wing movements, not the left, that have shown a strong ability to mobilize common affects to win power (Mouffe, 2022). Almost three decades ago, Massumi pointed out that the right has always better understood that "power 'feels' before it thinks" (Schaefer, 2019, p. 21), writing:

> In North America at least, the far right is far more attuned to the imagistic potential of the postmodern body than the established left, and has exploited that advantage for the last decade and a half. Philosophies of affect, potential, and actualization may aid in finding counter-tactics (1995, p. 105).

Massumi gives the example of U.S. president Ronald Reagan's success as a politician, despite the incoherence of his speech, disregard for detail or his unpredictability. At play was his political manner – the timbre of his voice, the performance of confidence – that, when transmitted into other contexts like the church or the chamber of commerce, landed in those localities where "the Reagan incipience was qualified, given content" (Massumi, 1995, p. 103). Sivanandan similarly describes Thatcherism in Britain as a political form concerned with images. By constructing a new social bloc symbolically around the image of choice bound up in the identity of the so-called "share-owning working class," the electorate began thinking "not in terms of *policies*, but of *images*" with which they could identify and strive for (Sivanandan, 1989, p. 9, emphasis original). Today, image and emotion in politics has only intensified through the "affective politics of digital media" that work to capture attention, polarize debate and influence election outcomes (Boler & Davis, 2018, p. 1).

As the right increasingly focuses on "visuality, narrative and emotions," (Katja et al., 2022, p. 1) Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe says the left's rationalist framework has focused too much on mobilizing arguments around good policies and programmes, neglecting the importance of affects and emotions in "mak[ing] people *desire* those policies" (2022, p. 42, emphasis original). This is because, as Mouffe suggests, liberal democratic theory views politics as a "field in which rational consensus will be established through the free exercise of public reason" but this leaves "no space for passions and affective forms of identification" (2022, p. 20). Following Spinoza,

Mouffe concludes that “you do not fight emotions with ideas, but with emotions stronger than those that you want to displace” (quoted in Le Dem, 2017).

If, as Kathleen Stewart writes, “power is a thing of the senses” (2007, p. 84), an engagement with affect theory is an important step towards understanding how “feelings, emotions, affects, moods, and sensations are not [just] cosmetic” (Schaefer, 2019, p. 1). In their production and circulation they generate “forces and powers that create and mobilize political subjectivity” (Williams, 2010, p. 246) in all spheres in which power relations exist, including unions.

5.3. Affect theory in labour practice

Beyond the broader implications of this study’s look at affect theory and the revitalization of labour unions, this work has also generated insights in terms of its second research question around how attention to the affective life of unionism is important to the day-to-day communicative practice of unions.

5.3.1. Audience segmentation

Closer attention to affects show us their importance in building affective solidarity for collective action, but also how damaging negative affective charges can be to member engagement and solidarity, and that there is a responsibility in invoking them. This can occur when unions make emotive appeals that don’t land authentically, feel transactional or that unions can’t follow through on. It also occurs when members reach out for support, information or to get involved and they don’t hear back. This study’s survey found that many new members are not welcomed to their union and have little information about their role or the opportunities of membership. Existing members can have trouble communicating or getting information when they put their hand up to take an action or when they are looking for support from their staff representative.

Establishing affective relations requires connection, engagement, reciprocity and investment in relationship. And while maintaining those relations across a large membership base of 100,000 is not feasible, this study made clear there are specific segments of the membership that could be prioritized in terms of improving engagement, communication and better establishing affective relations. Outside those involved in job

action this includes new members joining through an organizing drive; the (rare) natural organizer identified in a group; new members joining through a new job and that require union orientation; and members that put their hand up to take action on a campaign or project.

5.3.2. Message construction

While theorists of affect initially emphasized that which was "beyond, below and past discourse" (Wetherell, 2013, p. 350), the theory has more recently emphasized how affects and discourse work in relationship. Ahmed presents affective economies, for example, as "social and material, as well as psychic" (2013, p. 46) in looking at how "the cultural politics of language use and discourse mediate social and embodied encounters" (Stonecipher, 2020, p. 1). Cohen and de Peuter distinguish between affect as the vital force that enables people to take action, and discourse or communication as the "social and material process of the production of meaning" (2020, p. 27).

In practice, although a union communication intending to cultivate solidarity or spur action may be received individually, the power of its message will be in the affects produced in relation to other members or individuals implicated in fulfilling the communication's call to action. As we have seen, "capacities do not belong to individuals but are about how bodies are affected by other bodies" (Ahmed, 2013, p. 183). For example, emotional persuasion in a bargaining communication that evokes what members are feeling about their demands, and what they have to do *together* to fight for them, may be far more effective than emotional persuasion around a campaign ask that lacks relationship to others or the potential to build collective capacity from the perspective of the receiver.

As well, the relationship between affect and discourse draws attention to the ways communication "always produces more than what the author intends to say" (Marinelli, 2019, p. 22) due to the non-narrative structure of affect (Hennessy, 2013b). This means that a communication will be interpreted from within the affective field of the receiver – their mood, their feelings about their union, their perception or evaluation of a message's call to action – thus emphasizing the role of context and relevance in effective message construction.

5.3.3. Telling the story

One of the interviewees noted that their union could tell their stories more effectively, perhaps through social media or other means to inspire other non-union workers to unionize. And without a strategy to tell stories internally, many successful, spontaneous direct actions that members carry out at their worksites can often remain unknown to the rest of the membership.

Through the lens of affect theory, this is a missed opportunity to allow the circulation of affects to "*work on* its members…to feed back in and reinforce the affective space" of the union (Dean, 2016, p. 237). When an affective infrastructure is in place to generate and mobilize feelings arising from taking action, winning and building political power, it "affirms our practices and activities and pushes us to do more than we think we can" (Dean, 2016, p. 249). In other words, "collective power works back on those that generate it…to produce enduring bonds of solidarity" (Dean, 2016, p. 249).

Celebrating wins or sharing learnings and stories with others through communications, events, ritual or demonstration is how collective power expands, becomes visible and available to others, and invites bodies to align in collective aims – and should be a communications priority.

5.3.4. Workers' continuity

In his 2022 book, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn*, Vivek Chibber addresses the long-standing question around why a system like capitalism, based on domination and exploitation, continues to experience ongoing stability (Heideman, 2022). For Marx, exploitation leads to resistance which leads to a collective response – a class for itself. Chibber argues that the forces of the class structure actually work in the *opposite* direction, constantly pulling workers apart and making *individual* responses to exploitation more attractive and far easier to achieve than collective responses. He concludes that, "a structural class theory, properly understood, does not predict the inevitability of class formation but rather its uncertainty" (2022, p. 18). Union organizers and communicators often do their jobs within the spaces of that uncertainty in the sense that they must demonstrate to workers that taking a collective

approach will better guarantee their well-being and livelihood than standing still or going it alone.

As affect theory shows us, people are always investing in their continuity through affective attachment to dreams, ideas, an anecdote or an institution that appears to hold out the “promise of reciprocity and belonging” (Berlant, 2011, p. 21). Indeed, as Camfield writes, workers movements are only as effective as they are able to “enhance or at least preserve life value…and have an impact on the ability of people to satisfy their needs” (2011, p. 95).

An affective approach in this sense reminds us of the ongoing importance of authenticity in communication and making promises; speaking to members’ concrete problems, frustrations and demands, and to being intentional about demonstrating how engagement with their union is a worthwhile investment in their own continuity.

5.4. Conclusion

Union renewal programs and policies which seek to revitalize worker associations have been underway for decades, yet unions have remained some distance from the power and vitality they had at their height in the mid-twentieth century. That said, the impacts of the pandemic have shifted things considerably in just a few short years.

As millions of ‘non-essential’ workers lost their jobs in the early days of the pandemic, and millions more, deemed essential, were forced to risk their health to continue working on the front lines, workers learned how little they were valued by some employers. When businesses began reopening, labour shortages gave workers and unions the power and negotiating leverage to put greater demands on employers for higher wages and better conditions. And as the cost-of-living crisis continues, so do these tensions as workers refuse to take low paying jobs they simply can’t afford. As Ross put it, at this time workers are “trying to articulate a vision for an economy that rethinks the role of working people and what they are owed for their labour” (Innes-Leroux, 2023). All of this has given way to a kind of militancy, labour unrest and public support for unions in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere not seen in years.

However, the question remains: will unions, institutions still struggling internally with their own vitality after decades of stagnation or decline, be able to meet the moment and translate the hope, commitment and passion of workers leading this surge of militancy and organizing into the experience of union membership – and by extension, a revitalized labour movement more broadly?

This research has argued that closer attention to affects and the insights affect theory brings to thinking about the affective life of union membership could support these efforts. This is because, when the labour movement has been strongest in Canada and elsewhere, it’s because the affective dimensions of collective action were also strong. During the mass insurgency of the 1930s to 1940s outlined in Chapter 1, workers were in more direct contact with one another enabling the affects of solidarity to circulate among them like an economy of feeling that drove action; they had a shared analysis that made sense of their direct experiences and they developed political subjectivities for collective struggle; democratic control over their affairs was more common as was

initiating direct action; mutual aid, care and support helped build capacities for resistance within communities; and a commitment to doing the work of class struggle was more evident in militant minorities and the working class more broadly.

Through the lens of affect theory we see that affects must be both considered and managed towards collective aims; that it matters whether workers feel they have the power to act, or whether they feel they are being acted upon; that affective economies of the working class or infrastructures of dissent are essential to rebuilding the movement; and that affects operate to influence power relations with the capacity to construct possibilities for some, and limitations for others. In these ways, affect theory offers something of a finer resolution in perceiving the emotional intensities that circulate, move people, and organize life.

Affect theory also teaches us we are always becoming, being moved and moving others, and we are always constructing reality from a multiplicity of possibilities and openings for political change (Grossberg, 2010). In North America in the early twentieth century, workers did exactly that when “labour was able to figure out how to take advantage of the structural and institutional facts of [that] time and build organizations that brought workers together as a class” (Chibber, 2022a, p. 160). At that particular conjuncture, workers found opportunities for class recomposition and in our own time, the pandemic has undoubtedly created new structural and institutional facts to seize upon.

The role of labour unions in the revitalization of a working-class movement will undoubtedly depend on ardent and visionary leadership – from union leaders to militant minorities – to help create the conditions for new articulations, political subjectivities and collective social relations. But with a view from the membership – among those already organized who may not yet be connected or active in their unions, to those passionately working to organize into unions now – the simple question: *how does union membership feel?* may be an important and possibly transformative one.

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Appendix A.

Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Ethics Application #30001423

Labour Renewal Communication

1. How long have you been a member of [UNION]?
   - ☐ 0 to 1 years
   - ☐ 1 to 5 years
   - ☐ 5 to 10 years
   - ☐ 10+ years
   - ☐ I don't know

2. What age group are you in?
   - ☐ 24 or younger
   - ☐ 25 to 34
   - ☐ 35 to 44
   - ☐ 45 to 54
   - ☐ 55+

3. What sector do you work in?
   [union dropdown]

4. Please indicate how you stay connected to [UNION]:
   In person meetings/events: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Through other members: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Through a steward: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Phone calls: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Email: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Zoom meetings or town halls: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Union bulletin board at work: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Union website/member portal: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Union social media: ☐ never ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

   Other (please specify): [comment box]

5. How do you generally feel when you see a story or post about [UNION] in the news or on social media? Please select the statement that best describes your experience:
   - ☐ You are **very interested,** if your union is in the news, you want to know what the story is about.
   - ☐ You are **somewhat interested**, it really depends on what the story is about.
   - ☐ You are **uninterested**, you would flip the channel or keep scrolling to find something more interesting.
   - ☐ None of the above.

6. Thinking of your sector, do you feel [UNION] understands what's happening in the field, the challenges you and your co-workers are facing, and has the right ideas about improving conditions?

   ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I don't know

   [comment box]

7. Do you feel that [UNION] is run democratically?

   ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I don't know

8. At the most basic level, unionism involves negotiating higher wages and benefits and improving working conditions for workers. However, many unions such as [UNION] engage in wider social justice issues from advocating for affordable housing and adequate sick leave legislation to affordable childcare programs. Do you agree with unions working to influence the general direction of society? Why or why not?

   ☐ Yes, unions should engage in this work.

   ☐ No, unions should not engage in this work.

9. Were you part of an organizing drive, or did you become a member as a result of being hired for your job?

   ☐ organizing drive ☐ hired ☐ I don't remember

10. Have you ever participated in a strike by walking the picket line with co-workers, or by supporting other workers on strike?

    ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I don't remember

11. Thinking about your membership in the union, please indicate how you feel about the following statements:

    I feel included and connected to other working people in my union who are committed to shared interests.

    ☐ not at all ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

    Whether or not I'm involved, I trust my union to work in the best interests of working people.

    ☐ not at all ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

    I feel excluded because the leadership runs the union and it's difficult to have your voice heard.

    ☐ not at all ☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ all the time

12. How many activities supportive of the union did you participate in over the previous year? (This can include things like voting on your collective agreement, attending a local union meeting or joining a labour day celebration.)

☐ many ☐ a few ☐ none

13. Have you ever accessed union training for education? (This can include things like steward training, occupational health and safety or other workshops and courses.)
☐ once ☐ a few times ☐ never ☐ I don't remember

14. Do you feel that you understand your role as a [UNION] member?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ unsure

15. Do you have a union membership card, t-shirt, pen or any other item from the union or with the [UNION] logo?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I don't know

16. Do you feel that union members share a common identity and have common goals as members of the working class?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ unsure

17. If asked, would you serve on a committee or run for an elected position with the union?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I don't know ☐ I already have

18. Unions often say that *you are the union* – meaning you and your co-workers. What does this statement mean to you or, what does this statement make you think about?
[comment box]

19. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below:
- I feel a sense of pride being part of [UNION]?
  - ☐ Agree/Disagree/Unsure
- I have the sense that my union genuinely cares about my well-being as a worker.
  - ☐ Agree/Disagree/Unsure
- I feel that my values and the [UNION]'s are similar.
  - ☐ Agree/Disagree/Unsure

20. We've covered a wide range of questions and it may have got you thinking about unionization, the labour movement and more. If you have any other thoughts about the questions in this survey, or would like to add something else from your perspective, please do so in the comment box below:
[comment box]

Appendix B.

Interview Questions

Interview Questions
Ethics Application #30001423
Labour Renewal Communication

Q1: Referring to the framework outlined for this study, how do you see these dimensions playing out within organizing drives:

A. How do the intensities or feelings of the organizing experience flow between individuals? (e.g. face-to-face meetings, meals, public messages of support, website, awareness of media).
B. How do workers analyze their situation, come to conclusions about what to do. Have you experienced workers coming to think of themselves differently as a result? Is the analysis (like power mapping) usually organizer led?
C. Does decision-making flow democratically? What kind of decision-making tensions arise and how are they resolved? Are there tensions between workers and union officialdom in the organizing phase?
D. How do workers care for and support one another through the process?
E. Does the organizing experience result in a commitment by some to engage in the ongoing work of the labour movement? (run for a position, go to convention, join a committee, etc.) How often does that happen?

Q2: When an organizing drive is successful, how is this reflected back to the larger membership as evidence of the strength and relevance of the labour movement? Do you feel more could be done to highlight these efforts?

Q3: How is the experience of organizing along with the affective intensities it creates (relationships, power, expectations, etc.) carried through to the experience of membership? For example, a NewsGuild worker involved in organizing digital journalists in 2020 said, “the culture established during the organizing phase is the culture that will reproduce itself through time.” Does this sound right?

Q4: In addition to fighting a hostile employer to form a union, going on strike is one of the other most affective experiences workers can have in building collective bonds, class consciousness and worker power. Of members surveyed, a minority said they have experienced a strike and a fraction said they organized into the union through a drive. For members without those experiences, what do you think are the most effective ways to build affective relations among the membership – whether it's within individual bargaining units, at the local level or across the union. Who leads this work?

Appendix C.

Coding Categories (NVivo 14)

Name	Files	References
C1 communication	2	203
advocacy fail	2	8
affective experience	2	47
info fail	2	57
involve fail	2	72
members disconnected	2	14
support fail	2	64
wants more info	2	12
C2 training	2	25
C3 democratic functionality	1	101
corrupt	2	44
Dissatisfied representation	2	103
Excluded	2	96
Ineffective	1	6
Organizing model	2	269
Service model	2	152
unsure	1	6
C3 we are the union hailed	2	304
C3 we are the union unhailed	2	464
Angry	1	42
Passive	1	41
C4 care and trust	2	29
org size	2	16
overwhelmed	2	13
positive	2	2
Social justice no	2	66
Social justice yes	2	126

Figure C1. **Screenshot of NVivo 14 Coding Categories**

Appendix D.

Promotional Materials

Email 1: Survey launch

Subject: **Survey: Are you feeling connected to your union?**

Win a Save-On-Foods gift card worth $25 by participating in this short, confidential survey (it takes **8 minutes** to complete).

The survey is being conducted by a graduate student at Simon Fraser University in B.C. studying union communication, and who also works for a union. They want to hear your thoughts on communicating with your union, connecting with other members and the role of unions overall.

Will you take a few minutes now to fill out the survey? Click here to take the survey

While results will be shared with AUPE, no member data will be collected, and **all responses will remain confidential**. As a thank-you for your time, you can enter to win one of twenty (20) Save-On-Foods gift cards worth $25 each at the end of the survey.

Click here to take the survey

We hope you will share your thoughts and ideas with this project.

Thank you,

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Email 2: Reminder

Subject: **Survey: Are you feeling connected to your union?**

Win a Save-On-Foods gift card worth $25 by participating in this short, confidential survey.

If you've not yet had the chance, will you take an 8-minute survey for a university research project looking into how members communicate with their union, connect with other members and the role of unions overall? It doesn't matter whether you communicate quite often or very rarely – every union member's input is important.

Click here to take the survey

The survey is being conducted by a graduate student at Simon Fraser University in B.C. studying union communication, and who also works for a union. While results will be shared with AUPE, no member data will be collected, and **all responses will remain confidential**. As a thank-you for your time, you can enter to win one of twenty (20) Save-On-Foods gift cards worth $25 each at the end of the survey.

Click here to take the survey

We hope you will share your thoughts and ideas with this project.

Thank you,

Figure D1. Screenshot of Email Invitations (AUPE version)