Authority as a transductive ordering process

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We would like to propose here that authority consists in the kin-to-kin communication of an order from one ordered domain to the next, following the insights of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1958/2005). This view allows recognizing both the intrinsically organizing nature of authority – it is precisely the ability to order a domain in a particular way that is authoritative – and its necessarily interactional dimension – it does not exist outside of particular and situated ordering actions. Furthermore, it allows opening up authority to any form of being, by insisting on the pragmatic effect of ordering, rather than assuming any particular source of authority. Contrary to other process philosophers, such as Whitehead (Weik, 2011; Whitehead, 1929/1979) or Bergson (Bergson, 1944; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), Simondon's philosophy does not appeal to any "eternal objects" (i.e., Planotician ideal forms), nor does it rely on any particular human consciousness. In other words, there is no need to assume any form authority should take, or assume that authority lies in the perception of any being. From the moment the ordering effect occurs, then something or someone has authority. This does not mean that we need to do away with meaning, but to Simondon signification, as he calls it, consists in the part a particular action plays in a particular ordering process; in other words, what something "means" is what it contributes to the emergence of a given order.

This last notion takes on a particular importance in the case of the interaction under study for this preconference. Indeed, what is noticeable is the apparent mismatch between the left side of the screen and the right side, as they are separated by the high counter, i.e., the domain of Kim Davis and that of the couples who are trying to obtain a marriage license and the journalists following them. Besides the striking visual distinction, what is interesting is the fact that, in their respective talk, these two domains obviously fail to gain authority over each other, and do not structure each other in significant ways. Even their ability to ask / respond to each other (i.e., to sustain adjacency pairs) is modest, and most of the conversation resembles a dialogue of the deaf.

One of Simondon's famous examples is that of a mold that would form clay into a brick. Against the Aristotelitian hylemorphic idea that an idea form (the mold) would simply shape substance into a product, Simondon spends times explaining how the mold and the clay are two domains of order, with their own material intricacies and details, and that the ability of the mold to in-form clay is a form of transduction,

i.e., the concrete, kin-to-kin transfer of action. A mold would not shape water, for instance, and clay would not be molded by a mold that would bond with it.

In the same way, the couples perhaps expected that the invocation of a Supreme Court ruling would suffice to impose on Kim Davis a form of ordering – that she would instruct her personnel to print out marriage licenses, sign them, etc. They discovered, however, that a domain must be ordered in a particular way to be able to be affected by another one (Simondon has an elaborate theory of affect that we could also use in this analysis). Kim Davis is caught up in a different ordering, which she discloses when discussing her relationship with God, the consequences she will face, etc. For her, the meaning of her denial of marriage licenses must be interpreted in light of its participation to that particular order. In contrast, the couples who are facing her are involved in a different order, where their couples, the law, etc., matter more than God, and where their presence in this county office has quite a different signification. The two domains, therefore, cannot affect each other, and neither has authority over the other.

The interactional analysis of power and authority must therefore look at the interfaces where one domain may affect the other, but also at the ways in which the structuration-so-far of each domain allows or not the passage of action across domains. This structuring-so-far is observable, among others, in the figures / things that are interactionally mobilized in interaction and made present in the situation (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Bourgoin & Bencherki, 2015; Cooren, n.d.), but also in the orientation that participants have to different aspects of the situation.

3	Ermold	Don't smile at [me
4	Moore	[Here she is
5		(0.5)
6	Kim	I did not smile
7		(2.0)
8	Kim	I'm not being disrespectful to you
9	Ermold	You absolu [tely have disrespected us
10	Moore	[you absolutely are, treating us as second class citizens=
11	Kim	=[No I don't ((shaking her head))
12	Moore	=[is what you are doing, telling us that we don't deserve the same right rights
13		that you think you have

In the above excerpt, after Ermold asks Davis no to smile at him, she denies having smiled. She then specifies that she is not being disrespectful to him, perhaps because she understands Ermold's request as

indicating that he interprets as smile as a form of disrespect. Ermold then seems to seize the occasion to express his outrage and to insist that she has, in fact, disrespected us. Moore complements Ermold's answer – even overlapping with his turn of talk – and explains what is disrespectful about Davis's behavior: she has been "treating us as second class citizens" (line 10). Kim interjects a denial within Moore's turn.

This excerpt is interesting as it reveals that Davis and the two men are not orienting to the same issue when they discuss the problem of "disrespect." Davis arguably refers to the interactional situation – smiling or not, for instance – whereas the two men view disrespect as having to do more broadly with the refusal to issue marriage licenses.

Davis's orientation to the immediate situation is again apparent when, in the midst of legal argument from her opponents, she simply reasserts that "We are not issuing marriage licenses today" and tries the manage the crowd, for instance when at line 40 she begins saying "I would ask you all to go ahead and-". Again, at line 52, she asks people to leave, as they are "interrupting my business". One of the rare agreements she has with the two men is when Moore says "You can call the police" (line 56), to which she agrees "That's exactly right xxxxx".

In fact, when Davis, at line 46, answers to a question by Ermold that she is acting under God's authority, it is one of the rare moments that she actually orients to the questions asked by the two men – and her answer may be interpreted as a rejection of the terms of the issue as "framed" by them.

We therefore have two domains: that of Davis's orientation to her "business", and the two men's orientation to the broader legal and moral issues involved in the denial of their marriage license. This may appear to be paradoxical, as Davis's appeal to God would tend to be associated with a greater concern for moral matters than with banal, temporal ones. However, the analysis of the data reveals that this is not the case. Perhaps – but we are speculating – her trust in God somehow "frees" her from the moral concerns evoked by the gay men.

In any case, those two differently structured domains clearly do not speak to each other, as the few responses the men get from Davis – and vice-versa – illustrate: Davis does not answer the men's questions; they do not leave the room when she asks them to, etc. This fact, we argue, shows the importance for domains to be minimally similarly structured (by orienting to the same concerns, by recognizing the same figures as authoritative, etc.) for one domain to be able to exercise authority on the other.

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