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# **Between “Ethical-Political Affectivity” and the “Politics of Affects”: Intersubjectivity, Alterity, and Group Psychoanalysis**

Ana Paula Paes de Paula<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

## **Abstract**

This article demonstrates that beyond understanding the conscious motivations behind social actions, it is essential to enable individuals and groups to identify both individual repressions and social constraints, thereby allowing them to recognize their unconscious dispositions. It is worth noting that both consciousness and the unconscious mobilize affects and, with the aid of individual and group psychoanalysis, can transform into an “ethical-political affectivity”—challenging us to move beyond the “politics of affects.” The article explores the possibility of transposing psychoanalytic work into social groups as a means of overcoming discursive asymmetries and fostering individual and collective self-reflection, thereby enhancing communicative action, as it is through intersubjective processes and conditions of alterity that ethical-political affectivity emerges, ultimately shaping political and collective subjects. To this end, the first section addresses the concept of ethical-political affectivity, drawing on Brandão’s (2012) theoretical framework. Next, the discussion turns to Habermas’s (2012) theory of communicative action, highlighting the symmetries between the concepts of ethical-political affectivity and communicative action. The third section discusses the interplay between the conscious and unconscious in relation to the previously discussed concepts, highlighting group psychoanalysis as a key tool for both individual and collective self-reflection.

**Keywords:** ethical-political affectivity; communicative action; psychoanalysis; critical theory.

## Introduction

Recent research revealed that affectivity remains an underexplored dimension in organizational studies, as well as in the realm of democratic and participatory processes. It has been found that—despite the importance of this aspect in social relations and practices—in studies of organizations, the topic is commonly approached from an instrumental perspective, focusing on emotional intelligence, the phenomenon of leadership, and the management of subjectivity and emotions. There is also a body of research on emotions in organizations, which seeks to highlight their importance and the individual's perspective (Álvarez, 2011; Conrad & Whitte, 1984; Fineman, 2002; Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Leitão, Fortunato, & Freitas, 2006; Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Nord & Fox, 2004; Oliveira, 2014; Sieben & Wettergren, 2010; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Reckwitz, 2012). However, this literature review reveals that the exploration of their role as a driver of organizational social practices remains underdeveloped.

This topic is challenging and difficult to address. First, affectivity is a taboo subject, sometimes considered irrational and beyond scientific thinking. In the 1960s, Adorno (2003) acknowledged that the formation of individuals and their actions requires love—though he framed this cautiously, wary of being misinterpreted as advocating “sentimentality.” Second, as Reckwitz (2012) and Oliveira (2014) point out, the topic remains largely unaddressed, since emotions are generally regarded as individual phenomena or psychological manifestations. This perception leads organizations to treat emotions as something to be controlled and managed, rather than understood within the broader framework of social practices.

Without disregarding the research contributions made on this subject, this article takes a different approach by seeking to bridge the concepts of ethical-political affectivity (Brandão, 2012) and communicative action (Habermas, 2012a/1981, 2012b/1981). It highlights their equivalences to demonstrate that the modes of action outlined by Habermas are driven by affects that diversify, organize, and modify human activity.

Drawing on these theoretical contributions, I recognize the existence of both positive, joyful affects and negative, sorrowful ones. Actions can generate either an “ethical-political affectivity” (Brandão, 2012)—when rooted in communicative action, fostering autonomy, solidarity, and a collective spirit (critical formation)—or a “politics of affects” (Sawaia, 2003), as seen in the manipulation inherent to dramaturgical action, which unfolds into training, competitiveness, isolation, and loneliness (automatism).

This article seeks to demonstrate that, beyond understanding the conscious motivations behind social actions, it is essential to enable individuals and groups to identify both individual repressions and social constraints, thereby allowing them to recognize their unconscious dispositions. It is worth noting that both consciousness and the unconscious mobilize affects and, with the aid of individual and group psychoanalysis, can transform into an “ethical-political affectivity”—challenging us to move beyond the “politics of affects.” In other words, the article explores the possibility of transposing psychoanalytic work into social groups as a means of overcoming discursive asymmetries and fostering individual and collective self-reflection. This enhances communicative action, since it is through intersubjective processes and conditions of

alterity that ethical-political affectivity emerges—ultimately shaping political and collective subjects.

To this end, the first section addresses the concept of ethical-political affectivity, drawing on Brandão's (2012) theoretical framework. Next, the discussion turns to the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 2012a/1981; 2012b/1981), highlighting the symmetries between the concepts of ethical-political affectivity and communicative action. This analysis underscores their interconnections and the pedagogical significance inherent in both. The third section, drawing on psychoanalytic concepts such as false projection and false identification, explores how the conscious and unconscious interrogate the previously addressed concepts. It positions group psychoanalysis as key to both individual and collective self-reflection, reinforcing the importance of intersubjectivity, alterity, and dialogism on the path toward emancipation. The article concludes with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## **Ethical-political affectivity**

The concept of ethical-political affectivity was developed by Brandão (2012, p. 18), who described it as “inconceivable without the presence of the other” and requiring “social spaces for subjective construction” that strengthen both individuality and sociability. In other words, ethical-political affectivity depends on both alterity and intersubjectivity. In this article, alterity is understood as the recognition of and respect for differences among people, while intersubjectivity refers to communication between individual consciousnesses, grounded in reciprocity. Moreover, I will emphasize the concept of affectivity rather than emotion, because affect refers to drive in the psychoanalytic sense—specifically, the Freudian notion of an internal energetic impulse that influences a person's behavior. This can be positive or negative, whereas emotion is merely a reaction to a stimulus. In other words, the concept of affect is more complex and better aligns with the theoretical framework of this article.

Brandão's work (2012, p. 16) is grounded in a Vygotskian-Spinozist perspective, which treats “action and affect as indivisible units of subjectivity.” It also draws on recent studies of affectivity and participation, incorporating the critical contributions of Theodor Adorno. Thus, seeking to overcome the opposition between reason and emotion—as well as the notion that affectivity is an expression of irrationality—Brandão undertook a theoretical exploration in his work. Drawing on Adorno, he found elements to move beyond a purely negative conception of affectivity, while turning to Spinoza to affirm the positive value of emotions, viewing them as a potential foundation for any ethical-political action. In Vygotsky, Brandão found contributions to further Spinoza's concept of affective positivity, arguing that the subject emerges as a meaning-endowed being and is constituted through social praxis.

Regarding the dialectic between reason and emotion, Brandão (2012) draws on Rouanet's (1999) contributions, which highlight that the Enlightenment—despite its veneration of reason and science—also grants power to affectivity. For Rouanet (1999), within the framework of Enlightenment thought, the mediation between desire and its object—or between the passion for knowledge and the known object—always occurs through the social order. In other words, the social world is the source of all illusions of consciousness.

In Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), Brandão (2012) seeks theoretical grounds to question the place of passions, given that they were expelled from the world by Enlightenment thought—since compassion, for instance, becomes suspect, as it too can be calculated and manipulated. Brandão concludes that, for the Frankfurt School thinkers, compassion alone is insufficient to promote human emancipation. Moreover, not even love escapes the ideology of industrial society, which calculates and fragments it. The question that arises is how to enable emancipation when, in the sphere of action, individuals are reduced to mere executors—cybernetic machines devoid of self-reflection and transformative action. Brandão (2012, p. 59) states the following:

It is necessary, therefore, to overcome everyday praxis—which, born from labor, accompanies it in its moment of unfreedom, mirroring life's hardships. The defining trait of this kind of praxis is the lack of (self-)reflection and the fetishization of the administered world. A timely praxis, on the contrary, would entail an effort to move beyond barbarism—and, being critical, it could not use the same weapons of irrationality, such as violence and oppression. Unlike activism—which, for Adorno, constitutes pseudopraxis due to its impermeability to theory—critical praxis cannot substitute ends for means, nor can it ever be reduced to the mechanical application of theory.

Thus, contrary to everyday praxis, Brandão (2012) notes that Adorno (2003) advocates for a critical-transformative praxis, which is discussed in his writings on education. In these works, he emphasizes subjectivity and actions capable of producing reflective, affective subjects. For this, it would be necessary to overcome cultural semi-formation—which produces automated and mass-produced humans—to achieve education capable of fostering critical self-reflection. This implies renouncing indifference, emotional detachment, and the absence of empathy. For Adorno, a critical education would be synonymous with an emancipatory process—one aimed at achieving autonomy and resisting passivity.

Brandão (2012) also discusses Spinoza, noting that, for Damasio (2004), the philosopher stands out for his work on feelings and emotions. Similarly, Sawaia (2003) argues that affectivity in Spinoza is imbued with epistemological and political positivity, as it shifts from the realm of instincts to the sphere of ethical-political knowledge. In other words, Spinoza understands the connection between knowing and acting by recognizing affectivity not as something private but as the very ethical-political foundation of human experience. After all, it is affectivity that provides the raw material for ethics and is implicated in the human experience of servitude—or of freedom.

*Conatus*, as the power to act, is what underlies Spinoza's theory of affectivity, ethics, and politics. Brandão (2012) examines one of the key concepts in Spinoza's system: the idea that all things strive to persevere in their being (Spinoza, 1989). In other words, *conatus* stands in opposition to the death drive, "...a positive force or effort intrinsic to all beings, driving them toward life and self-preservation" (Brandão, 2012, p. 100). For Chauí (2006), *conatus* is immersed in the affective world, being both corporeal and psychic—more than a principle of self-preservation, it is a pursuit of self-expansion, expressing the essence of humanity.

According to Brandão (2012), Spinoza emphasizes that *conatus* is both an expression of individual desire and the foundation for sociability, since it is realized through encounters with others—that is, through alterity and intersubjectivity, it affects and is affected by the other. Affect

increases or decreases the power to act. In the first case, there is joy and strength to persevere, whereas in the second, effort is weakened and gives rise to sadness. As Brandão (2012, p. 109) notes, there is also a connection between rational knowledge and power:

We are, therefore, active when we are the adequate cause of our thoughts and our everyday actions. This happens when we follow our nature and our *conatus*, striving for self-preservation. On the other hand, we are passive or suffer when what happens to us is not fully understood—meaning we are not the complete cause, but only a partial one.

For Spinoza (2003), active affects are actions, whereas passive affects are passions. In the case of actions, there is a full realization of the *conatus*—the generation of perfection and autonomy arising from the actualization of our natural self. Regarding passions, they can be joyful—such as actions—exerting positive effects on us and increasing our power, or sad, when they become sources of suffering and constrain the *conatus*, for they arise from external causes and act contrary to our nature, producing imperfection. Love and hate are derivative affections—when what we love endures, we feel joy, and when what we hate grows stronger, we are saddened. As for fear—a sorrow passion—Spinoza holds that it cannot translate into action; moreover, it fosters tyranny:

Maintaining a superstitious worldview is the most effective way to dominate human beings, as it perpetuates fear and uncertainty. The crowd, seized by this fear, submits to anything and anyone, so long as they are promised shelter from misfortune and the fulfillment of their desires. Preferring tyranny over heresy, the plebs allow tyrants and priests to profit from their condition. Nevertheless, to maintain their position, they must continually instill fear and hope in the people. (Brandão, 2012, pp. 114–115)

The end result of this empire of fear and hope is “... mutual hatred and violence” (Brandão, 2012, p. 116). Tyranny strives to keep the plebs dispersed and disorganized, while democracy allows for a greater organization of the collective *conatus*, reversing this situation—liberation depends on collective and institutional efforts, as purely individual effort cannot obstruct the dominant oppressive force. Thus, “...only by combining positive affectivity and critical knowledge can the culture of fear be blocked and the chain of servitude paralyzed” (Brandão, 2012)—and this is only possible within the collective domain.

In this way, Brandão (2012) draws on Spinoza (1989) to argue that actions, as joyful affects, are highly potent and that even passions can be transformed into positive affects. Humility, self-love, contentment, generosity, and gratitude are joyful affections; when guided by reason, they uphold piety, honesty, and friendship. The foundations of an ethical life begin within passions and develop through the strengthening of reason, so that reason and affectivity enable the construction of freedom (Chauí, 2006). Affectivity would thus be “...a condition of possibility for reflexive action, as it is affects that drive it” (Brandão, 2012). Thinking and acting arise from our affects, and it is the desire for joy that drives us toward knowledge and action (Chauí, 2006). Moreover, the condition of freedom requires alterity—the presence of the other:

Aware that others are essential to the fulfillment of his freedom, the free man seeks to bond with his fellow beings through strong ties of friendship. He learns that only free people can truly be grateful to one another. They know that, in their freedom, they always act in good faith and, guided by reason, are not driven by fear but by joy (Brandão, 2012, p. 125).

Brandão (2012) then seeks a dialogue with Vygotsky (1925/2001), highlighting his concept of catharsis, which would be a dialectical overcoming of experienced contradictions—an aesthetic experience that transforms passions into virtuous inclinations, described as “...the Spinozist transformation of passion into action, of sorrow into joy, and of heteronomy into autonomy.” According to Brandão (2012), conscious action would not be possible without affectivity, and without catharsis, there can be no subjects. In Vygotsky (1926/2004), it becomes clear that affects diversify, organize, and modify human activity, leading Brandão (2012, pp. 149–150) to conclude the following:

Affectivity thus gives new meaning to the practical and linguistic actions of individuals, since affect is also the result of an evaluation that an individual makes about the world around them and their relationship with it. Vygotsky is profoundly Spinozist when he argues that in the subject’s conflictual relationship with the world, they experience strength and satisfaction each time they overcome it. Conversely, he feels depressed and suffers whenever he is overcome by external forces (or powers).

Emotion would thus be a call to action—or a renunciation of it—and since to educate is to transform, it also entails confronting fundamental affects such as selfishness and aggressiveness. Rather than avoiding affective situations, students should be encouraged to face them, thereby transforming their feelings. Thought and feeling are inextricably linked, such that there can be no education without affectivity (Vygotsky, 1926/2004).

However, this is not about manufactured affectivity—what Sawaia (2003) calls the “politics of affectivity”—but rather its opposite, which Brandão (2012) calls “ethical-political affectivity.” Instead of training, competitiveness, isolation, and loneliness, we would have autonomy, solidarity, and a collective spirit—in other words, critical thinking rather than automatism. In this context, Brandão (2012) emphasizes the importance of language as the basis of human social activity and consciousness:

Language, by grounding social activity and human consciousness, is, on the one hand, external—since it enables communication between individuals—and, on the other hand, internal—as it allows for the organization of one’s own internal functions and systems. As a sign, it mediates between social experience and individual consciousness.

In Vygotsky (1930/1991), this notion of consciousness as mediated by language is best understood through his socio-historical theory, developed between 1928–1932, in which he argues that language enables dialectical overcoming—that is, catharsis. In the intrinsic relationship between the individual and culture, a dialectical integration into social life and collective activity

also emerges—one rooted in the historical development of affects, not to repress emotions but as a way to understand them. Brandão (2012) also emphasizes that Vygotsky (1934/2001) highlights how the path between language and thought is indirect and internally mediated by an affective-volitional tendency. Thus, consciousness emerges as the synthesis of a subjective world mediated by language, thought, and affects.

Thus, Brandão (2012) argues that—through the unity of thought and language, mediated by affect—humans assign meaning to everything that results from their actions. Such meaning is socially constructed and is based on communication between individuals, who use signs as intersubjective mediators. Because the affective-volitional dimension is integrated with thought, we can say that all thinking is affective, and all affectivity reaches the level of consciousness. Brandão (2012) concludes that the action to transform everyday life stems from a practical-critical attitude, such that “...revolutionary is the conscious and affective agency of subjects who transform their realities—not only in a political moment of rupture but daily, through encounters with others.” By reclaiming affectivity and alterity in the subject, it is possible to materially reorganize what exists, generating new meanings and directions to overcome the administered society and enable effective participation:

Once affectivity is reclaimed as both constitutive of and constituted by the subject—and thus understood as an inherently human process inseparable from action (ethics) and thought (consciousness)—we can also recognize that all critical-transformative praxis, including participation in its full dimensions (social, political, communal), can only emerge as an expression of both reflection and affect. (Brandão, 2012)

For Brandão (2012), effective praxis—including educational labor—must confront suffering, the excesses of power, and perverse social structures, challenging the pervasive sense of indifference to construct “... an ethical-political affectivity grounded in compassion and understood as a co-emotional experience among equally dignified subjects, all endowed with the capacity to give meaning to the world.” It is a commitment to the other, in which “... thought, language, feeling, and action are built through meaningful encounters with others, within a zone of potential development for subjectivities—a space that is also the *locus* where society and history intersect.”

## Linking ethical-political affectivity and communicative action

This section establishes a connection between ethical-political affectivity in Brandão (2012) and communicative action in Habermas (2012a/1981, 2012b/1981). Considering that the notion of ethical-political affectivity primarily emphasizes alterity and intersubjectivity, it invites us into a dialogue with Habermasian theoretical contributions. In **The Theory of Communicative Action**, Habermas (2012a/1981, pp. 35–36) defines communicative rationality as follows:

...core experience of the spontaneously unifying, consensus-generating force inherent in argumentative discourse, wherein diverse participants overcome their initially subjective

viewpoints and, through rationally motivated agreement, simultaneously secure both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.

According to Habermas (2012a/1981), this process of understanding takes place within the horizon of the lifeworld, which is communicatively rationalized by the participants themselves in a constructive and pedagogical manner. This avoids the distortions caused by the imperative of capitalist modernity, which devalues cultural traditions and subjects them to a limited, partial form of cognitive-instrumental rationalization. In the lifeworld context, the aim is to reconcile modernity with tradition. Thus, a communicative community's interpretive achievements involve, on the one hand, the singular objective world and the intersubjectively shared world of the group, and on the other, the subjective worlds of individuals and other collectivities.

Habermas (2012b, 1981) explains that when this distortion occurs—the mediatization of the lifeworld, which is deemed necessary to address the increasing complexity brought by modernization—it turns into a colonization of the lifeworld, as the "...systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration, even in areas where consensual coordination of action can no longer be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake." When the lifeworld is colonized by the system, a separation arises between social integration and system integration, such that the former loses ground to the latter. Faced with an increasingly dense network of interactions that evade immediate normative control, the coordination of social behavior follows alternative paths. Communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding gives way to strategic action aimed at success, while the tools of prestige and influence replace linguistic understanding. Communication thus becomes manipulative, fostering training, competitiveness, isolation, and loneliness—rather than the autonomy, solidarity, and collective spirit inherent to the ethical-political affectivity theorized by Brandão (2012).

To clarify this further, Habermas (2012a, 1981) presents four concepts of action in the social sciences: teleological action (strategic and goal-oriented), normatively regulated action, dramaturgical action, and communicative action, which he defines as follows:

[...] interaction between at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish an interpersonal relationship (whether through verbal or extraverbal means). The actors seek an understanding of the action situation in order to coordinate their plans of action—and thus their actions—in a mutually agreeable manner.

Distinguishing the first three concepts of action, Habermas (2012a, 1981, 2012b, 1981) notes that teleological action primarily involves an objective world, whereas normatively regulated action involves both an objective and a social world. Dramaturgical action, on the other hand, involves an objective world, a social world, and a subjective world. Through this, the actor seeks to evoke a specific impression of themselves in the audience, thereby controlling how much access others have to their intentions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, and emotions. Habermas emphasizes that although the first three models of action make use of language, they conceive of it in a one-sided manner—that is, not as dialogic language. In the context of the colonization of the lifeworld, what we observe is not merely a predominance of teleological action (also termed instrumental action), since Habermas argues that this is inherent to all forms of social action. Rather, it is teleological action

coupled with dramaturgical action—which involves the subjective world in the sense of manipulative communication.

Habermas (2012a,1981) argues that for mutual understanding to occur in any action situation, three validity claims must be met:

- the claim that the statement made is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the mentioned propositional content are indeed satisfied);
- the claim that the speech act is correct in relation to an existing normative context (or that the normative context it invokes is legitimate); and
- the claim that the speaker's expressed intention aligns with their actual belief.

Moreover, in their externalizations (communication in action), the actor relates to the objective world (entities about which true statements can be made), the social world (legitimately regulated interpersonal relations), and the subjective world (the speaker's inner experiences that are accessible to others). Thus, according to Habermas (2012a, 1981), in communicative action, action and communication are not equated, because all forms of action make use of it. In this way, the distinctive feature of communicative action is that, since it is based on the construction of cooperative interpretation processes, it is not a staged act of interpretive understanding but rather an effective joint cooperative action.

Communicative actions always require a rational interpretation from the outset. In principle, the relations of those who act toward the objective world, the social world, or the subjective world—whether strategically, normatively regulated, or dramaturgically—are open to objective judgment, equally so for both the actor and an observer. In communicative action, even the starting point of interaction becomes contingent on the ability of those involved to reach mutual agreement—an *intersubjectively* valid judgment—about their world references. According to this model of action, an interaction can only succeed insofar as those involved reach a consensus with one another; and this consensus, in turn, depends on yes/no stances toward claims backed by reasons. (Habermas, 2012a, 1981)

Habermas (2012a, 1981) also emphasizes that those who act communicatively do so within a referential framework of the three worlds (objective, social, and subjective), grounded in the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims—that is, participants must be capable of mutual criticism. This is because the “... same structures that enable understanding also ensure the possibility of reflexive self-control in the process of understanding” (Habermas, 2012a, 1981, p. 227), such that the potential for criticism is inherent in communicative action itself. This idea also resonates with Brandão's (2012) concept, which involves alterity, self-reflection, and a practical-critical attitude.

As Brandão (2012) argues, affectivity gives new meaning to subjects' practical and linguistic actions—that is, there is a connection between action, thought, and affectivity. Thus, there is a

parallel between the concept of ethical-political affectivity—which suggests an action dependent on the presence of the other, as it demands otherness and intersubjectivity for a shared, subjective construction of meaning—and the aim of producing political action that is inherently ethical. This is closely tied to Habermas’s notion of communicative action, which is not merely communication but a cooperative and consensual practice that also entails alterity and intersubjectivity. In both, we find reflexive and affective subjects engaged in transformative praxis. In other words, this article argues that communicative action and ethical-political affectivity can be treated as equivalent concepts, reinforcing in this framework the question of intersubjectivity and alterity, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Communicative action and ethical-political affectivity

Source: Author.

As Habermas (2012a, 1981) argues, the problem—as we have seen—is that in modernity, understanding-oriented action (which encompasses the four action concepts) first emerges as a restructuring of the lifeworld in response to the increasing complexity of organizational processes. This complexity places ever-greater demands on understanding-oriented action to handle coordination. In this restructuring of the lifeworld—aimed at ordering and coordinating it according to the demands of capitalist modernity—the bond between action and processes of mutual understanding is sidelined in favor of instrumental values such as money and power. These gradually replace language as the mechanism for action coordination, dissolving the link between understanding-oriented action and communicative rationality (which is dialogical) to reinforce success-oriented action and instrumental rationality, mediated by teleological and dramaturgical action (which are monological). It is important to note that Brandão’s (2012) concept of ethical-political affectivity also encompasses dialogicity, as it involves the subject’s dialectical integration into social life and collective activity—where language, thought, and affects mediate their subjective world.

In Habermas’s view (2012a, 1981), however, it is not a matter of competition between understanding-oriented action and success-oriented action, but rather between two principles of social integration:

[...] On the one hand is the mechanism of linguistically mediated communication, guided by validity claims, which emerges with increasing purity from the rationalization of the lifeworld; on the other are the non-linguistic steering media through which systems of success-oriented action become autonomous and differentiated.

Habermas (2012a/1981) then draws attention to another point: the consciousness required for communicative action encompasses not just self-preservation but also self-awareness and self-reflection—an aspect often underexplored and heavily emphasized by Brandão (2012) in the concept of ethical-political affectivity. However, this “self-awareness” does not occur in isolation but rather through interactions with others. Thus, the central point that Habermas seeks to explore is language and intersubjectivity, shifting from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language. In his view, communicative rationality, unlike instrumental rationality, does not passively succumb to an obsessive drive for self-preservation. Instead, it recognizes that the mere survival of a subject or system is insufficient—what truly matters is preserving the very process of socialization among individuals through communication. This means avoiding the narcissistic trap of seeking identity with the other and instead embracing the possibility of understanding those who are different from oneself.

On the other hand, Habermas (2012b, 1981, p. 252) emphasizes the following:

From the *functional perspective of understanding*, communicative action facilitates the transmission and renewal of cultural knowledge. In terms of *action coordination*, it enables social integration and the fostering of solidarity. Finally, from the *standpoint of socialization*, communicative action contributes to the formation of personal identities.

These aspects correspond to the processes of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization, which, in turn, point to the structural components of the lifeworld: culture, society, and person. Thus, it becomes evident that “...communicative action does not merely constitute a process of understanding; at the same time, actors engage in interactions that allow them to form, affirm, or renew their own identity and their membership in social groups” (Habermas, 2012b, 1981). Moreover, Habermas argues that incorporating new structures of rationality, such as communicative rationality, requires a higher level of learning, making pedagogy the solution—a point also emphasized by Brandão (2012). Thus, it is necessary to discern when the mediatization of the lifeworld turns into its colonization.

The key to this is understanding how material reproduction and symbolic reproduction occur, because the former must align with the needs of society rather than the interests of money and power; and the latter should not be pathological in a way that paralyzes and distorts communication. For Habermas (2012b, 1981), the loss of meaning and freedom during the lifeworld’s colonization by the system is not accidental but stems from the encroachment of economic and administrative rationality into spheres such as education and culture. These losses are structurally induced, producing subsystems that develop a dynamic beyond our control, thereby segmenting the lifeworld into the domains of science, morality, and art—each governed by the imperatives of the system.

Communicative action in Habermas (2012a, 1981, 2012b, 1981) and the ethical-political affectivity in Brandão (2012) share many common points, particularly regarding language and dialogicality, as well as their potential for criticism and the way out through pedagogy. However, it is important to emphasize that, for Brandão, the key issue is that these operations are mediated by affects, such that affectivity is taken as the condition of possibility for reflexive action.

In this article, I seek to bridge these two concepts in order to demonstrate that the modes of action identified by Habermas (2012a, 1981, 2012, 1981) are driven by affects that diversify, organize, and modify human activity. Considering that there are positive and joyful affects, as well as negative and sorrowful ones, such actions can generate either an “ethical-political affectivity”—when dealing with communicative action, fostering autonomy, solidarity, and a collective spirit (i.e., critical formation)—or a “politics of affects,” in the sense proposed by Sawaia (2003). The latter is exemplified by the manipulation inherent in dramatized action, which unfolds as conditioning, competitiveness, isolation, and loneliness—in other words, automatism.

### **Ethical-political affectivity, communicative action, and the issue of unconscious: Toward a group psychoanalysis**

In the previous sections, I observed that both Brandão (2012) and Habermas (2012a, 1981, 2012b, 1981) primarily emphasize accessible subjectivity—that is, they focus on intersubjectivity and the potential for self-awareness as the foundation for developing a practical-critical attitude. However, the question of the ideal linguistic situation for communicative action is subject to a distortion that goes beyond our conscious perceptions, since subjective processes and affectivity itself also have unconscious aspects. In this section, I demonstrate how the unconscious aspects of this distortion can produce not “ethical-political affectivity” but rather a “politics of affects.” Drawing on psychoanalysis and the work of Rouanet (2001), I explore the concepts of false consciousness, false identification, and false projection.

Rouanet (2001), when discussing communicative action through the lens of Habermas (2012a, 1981, 2012b, 1981), emphasizes that within the context of technocratic ideology, praxis is nullified in favor of conditioned behavior, since “...the justification it proposes stems not from the sphere of interaction but from the sphere of instrumental action”—that is, praxis is subsumed by *techné*, shifting focus onto the productive forces themselves—where science resides—rather than on the relations of production. This transforms it into what Brandão (2012) terms “everyday praxis,” which ceases to be “transformative praxis.” In this way, technocratic ideology not only exerts technical control and adaptive behavior but also seeks to separate intersubjectivity itself from anthropological characteristics. In this process, norms and values are hollowed out, giving rise to prescriptive propositions that are unverifiable and subject to mere opinion. Thus, in place of true consensus, an apparent consensus emerges—one that even seeks to render itself immune to doubt. Praxis is thereby reduced to *techné*.

Thus, Rouanet (2001) corroborates that the ideal linguistic situation necessary for communicative action ceases to exist, as communication is disrupted by external constraints and internal distortions. With this systematic distortion of communication, dialogicality fades away, giving rise to the spread of neuroses and ideologies—as the fundamental distinctions between reality and illusion, essence and manifestation, what exists and what is desirable, vanish. What

happens is that, beyond intentional actions, individuals often act unconsciously due to psychological and ideological barriers that obscure the dynamics of violence. The discursive justifiability of norms and institutions becomes the embodiment of instrumental rationality, obstructing practical discourse—that is, praxis itself. This discursive justifiability encompasses administrative planning activities, extending into the realms of education, family organization, and urban policy—all of which are engulfed by technocratic ideology.

In Habermasian epistemology, as interpreted by Rouanet (2001), a monological truth attained individually is devoid of meaning, for it lacks alterity and intersubjectivity: truth can only be achieved through a non-authoritarian process of collective argumentation. Habermas believes that, despite the technocratic ideology, consciousnesses have not been irreversibly corrupted, as he holds onto the utopian possibility of restoring communicative action. Rouanet (2001) then explores psychoanalysis as a pathway to this restoration, since beyond consciousnesses there is also the issue of the unconscious that emerged. Psychoanalysis, as a science of self-reflection and the dissolution of reified structures, could suggest ways to overcome communicative distortions.

As a therapeutic process, psychoanalysis “[...] inevitably leads to the discovery of its roots in an emancipatory interest—namely, the dissolution of barriers to the subject’s communication with themselves” (Rouanet, 2001). In this process of self-reflection, knowledge and interest intertwine, revealing its pedagogical nature—one oriented toward emancipatory interest, which begins with an awareness of the repressive situation—that is, with a critical attitude. In the individual, this repression manifests as repression, linked to neurosis—a mechanism that removes from consciousness certain meanings associated with memories of unpleasant experiences. Neurosis finds its counterpart in the social sphere—repression—which excludes these repressed interpretations from public discourse. However, the repressed material seeks distorted access to the public sphere—whether through dreams, jokes, or neurotic symptoms. Thus, there is an interrelation between the public sphere of communication and the private sphere of the unconscious: repressed material is barred from intersubjective communication and obstructs relations of alterity, producing a “false consciousness” in the individual. This blocks their accurate perception of internal reality—a distortion further reinforced by external ideology.

It is within this context that the aforementioned “ethical-political affectivity” gives way to the “politics of affects”: the repressed material within the individual interacts with the suppression produced by technocratic ideology, and their “false consciousness” leads to adaptive and manipulative behaviors fueled by negative and sorrowful affects. This distances them from the possibility of communicative action, as intersubjectivity and alterity become blocked, hindering self-awareness and a practical-critical attitude. According to Rouanet (2001), psychoanalysis is pivotal in reversing this process, as it fosters awareness of repression and promotes self-reflection by seeking to reintegrate repressed material excluded from public discourse. In his words, neurosis is nothing more than a reflection of what society produces:

Neurosis is the intrapsychic extension of a societal process rooted in the distortion of the communication process. At the same time, the worldviews that legitimize this distortion derive their strength from their ability—whether greater or lesser—to satisfy individual phantasms, whose source lies in the very repression of drives. Cultural tradition can be understood as the sedimentation of projective fantasies, meant to vicariously gratify

forbidden desires. Neurosis and institutions function as symmetrical mechanisms to shield socially undesirable desires from critique and discursive problematization. (Rouanet, 2000,)

Thus, the individual and societal structures of false consciousness are closely related. It is through “[...] sociopsychological mechanisms that the structures of individual and societal false consciousness are formed. These mechanisms ensure the opacity of existing legitimations and inhibit discursive problematization” (Rouanet, 2001). Given that these sociopsychological mechanisms are tied to socialization and personality formation mechanisms, psychoanalytic concepts such as false identification and false projection—from which the Frankfurt School’s critique of culture derives—are essential for understanding the workings of false consciousness.

According to Rouanet (2001), individuals are integrated into the system through false identification—that is, via the phenomenon of imitation, whereby they assimilate into reality without fully identifying with it. Part of this dissonance is resolved through false projection, which enables individuals to expel feelings and desires they cannot acknowledge in themselves, attributing them externally to others. This generates a delusional reality that obstructs subjective reflection—precisely the process that would otherwise allow them to contribute to the construction of the real. The individual submits to assimilation into the dominant culture (false identification) and surrenders their own creative capacity (false projection). Both false identification and false projection prevent individuals from perceiving reality and attaining autonomy, thereby obstructing their emergence as true subjects. What would be the way out?

The antidote to this would be criticism, for just like psychoanalysis, critical theory engages in an act of remembrance—not only of forgotten connections but above all of repressed contents, striving to reclaim the past. Moreover, while psychoanalytic interpretation focuses on repression, cultural criticism examines social oppression, since repression pertains to the unconscious, whereas oppression is a societal phenomenon. Culture criticism and analytical interpretation share the common aim of recalling the forgotten and rendering the unconscious conscious. (Paes de Paula, 2015)

Thus, the demystification of ideologies finds its counterpart in the awareness cultivated through self-reflection in psychoanalytic practice. In other words, the critique of ideology and the psychoanalytic therapeutic process are analogous—suggesting that the pursuit should center on collective processes of self-reflection: “Collective processes of self-reflection, led by representatives and organizations of oppressed groups, result—as in their therapeutic counterpart—in the dissolution of reified structures and in a reclamation of forgotten chapters from these groups’ autobiographies” (Rouanet, 2001).

In this way, in addition to understanding the conscious motivations behind actions, it is essential to guide subjects and groups in identifying their individual repressions and social constraints so they can become aware of their unconscious dispositions. It is evident that consciousness and the unconscious mobilize affects and, through individual and group psychoanalysis, can transform into an “ethical-political affectivity,” challenging us to transcend the “politics of affects.” In this way, psychoanalytic work within social groups could help overcome discursive asymmetries and foster individual and collective self-reflection, influencing

intersubjective processes and conditions of alterity. By enhancing communicative action and generating ethical-political affectivity, such work may positively impact the formation of political and collective subjects.

## Conclusion

In this article, I explored an alternative approach to understanding affectivity in organizations by examining affect from a psychoanalytic perspective—as a positive or negative disposition directed toward someone. This perspective seeks to overcome the taboo of affect as irrationality and to break the silence surrounding the discussion of this topic in organizational studies. The aim was to highlight group psychoanalysis as a key tool for fostering the development of political and collective subjects within organizations. This approach stimulates self-reflection, enhances communicative action, and activates intersubjective processes alongside conditions of alterity—ultimately generating an ethical-political affectivity.

Throughout this discussion, I explored the concept of ethical-political affectivity, drawing on Brandão's (2012) theoretical framework while integrating it with the concept of communicative action (Habermas, 2012a, 1981, 2012b, 1981). Brandão's (2012) ethical-political affectivity is a manifestation of alterity and intersubjectivity, insofar as it cannot be conceived without the presence of the Other. It seeks collective spaces for subjective construction, inherently demanding dialogue with Habermasian communicative action.

Thought and language—central to both authors—are mediated by affects and form the foundation for the practical-critical attitude of the “reflective and affective subject.” This attitude fosters self-reflection, cooperative and consensual action, and dialogical engagement as means to transcend administered society. Moreover, these interpolated concepts highlight the need for a new level of learning—one that avoids distorted communication, ensuring the way out is both pedagogical and formative.

Given that affectivity is a precondition for a practical-critical attitude, it is evident that the modes of social action outlined by Habermas—teleological, norm-regulated, dramaturgical, and communicative—are driven by affects. When these actions take a communicative form, they can foster “ethical-political affectivity,” generating autonomy, solidarity, and a collective spirit. Conversely, they may also give rise to a “politics of affects” when actions become monological, reinforcing conditioning, competitiveness, isolation, and loneliness.

Since distorted and monological communication also involves unconscious subjective processes, the psychoanalytic concepts discussed by Rouanet (2001)—such as false consciousness, false identification, and false projection—clarify how “ethical-political affectivity” or the “politics of affects” can emerge. This is because they demonstrate that the material repressed by the individual into the unconscious interacts with the repression produced by technocratic ideology, and its “false consciousness” leads to adaptive and manipulative behaviors fueled by affects. These behaviors distance the individual from the possibility of communicative action, as intersubjectivity and alterity become blocked, hindering self-awareness and a practical-critical attitude. In other words, there is an interplay between the public sphere of communication and the private sphere of the unconscious, as repressed material is barred from intersubjective exchange. This impedes relations of alterity and fosters a “false consciousness” in the individual.

This underscores the significance of psychoanalysis: as a science of self-reflection, it provides pathways to overcome communicative distortions by enabling individuals to critically examine them through discourse. There is an equivalence between the demystification of ideologies and the awakening of awareness through self-reflection in psychoanalytic practice, such that the key lies in collective processes of self-reflection. Thus, group psychoanalysis emerges as a viable approach for addressing both positive and negative affects manifested in organizations. Fostering communicative action and ethical-political affectivity contributes to the formation of political and collective subjects, as well as to participatory and democratic processes.

Through this interplay of concepts and their discussion, I have achieved the article's objective. However, I acknowledge its limitations, as well as the impossibility of exhausting this debate, given the topic's inherent complexity and openness to further interpretations. Thus, new contributions are welcome. It is worth emphasizing that the article did not aim to address the dynamics of group psychoanalysis; therefore, this issue is left for future research.

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## Author

### Ana Paula Paes de Paula

PhD in Social Sciences from IFCH-UNICAMP, with postdoctoral studies in Business Administration from EAESP-FGV. Full Professor at FACE-CEPEAD-UFMG and coordinator of the Participation and Subjectivity Research Center (NEPS).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8035-472X>

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