The Return of the Freudian Couch®

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THE RETURN OF THE FREUDIAN COUCH ® – MANAGING AFFECTIVITY
THROUGH TECHNOLOGIES OF COMFORT

By Malou Juelskjær¹, Dorthe Staunæs & Helene Ratner

a. Department of Education, Aarhus University, b. Department of Education, Aarhus University, c. Department of Management, Politics, and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School

PRELUDE

Sigmund Freud’s couch is a legendary piece of furniture. It is currently found on display, along with the rest of his office, at the Freud museum in the London suburb of Hampstead. It is soft, heavy, and has impressions and indentations from bodies that have reclined upon it. The fabric is worn where legs have swung up and hands have wrung. The couch is slightly inclined at one end, where heads have rested, slightly elevated, while bodies have sunk into its soft padding, so as to become one with the thickly woven, oriental rugs with red and auburn patterns. This is where Freud’s (mainly female) patients could be found: on their backs, perhaps with their hands folded over their stomach, eyes closed or fixed upon the many small antiquities, figurines, boxes, pictures, and memorabilia from Freud’s archaeological collection that were crammed into the office. Freud would be in a chair at the head of the couch with his side to the patient and out of view, listening with his good ear. The purpose of Freud’s couch was to release trauma and hysterical paralysis by facilitating the patient’s free associations, thoughts, memories, feelings, and dream images. This is interesting but, “How does it relate to modern school life?” you may ask. Well, our response is that Freud’s couch in some sense is currently transforming the intensity of modern school life in a very real way in regard to optimizing the human resources of educational organizations. In this article we claim that the legendary prototype found in that private space of Freud’s office has been

¹ Corresponding author Malou Juelskjær maju@dpu.dk
generalized to couches in educational organizations – in or near the principal’s office. In this manner, the material-affective set-up surrounding Freud’s couch has been exported into relations between the principal and the students in secondary school and the therapeutic relation can now be identified as a management relation. The question that fascinates us is therefore: how do comfort technologies such as couches co-produce management relations in schools and what implications does the installation of such aids have for school management?

The claim that a generalization and dissemination of psychological and psychoanalytical ideas has occurred and is ‘put to use’ to guide employees in modalities of self-management, may seem recognizable to readers of contemporary educational literature framed by perspectives from psychology, sociology, and political science (Ecclestone. & Hayes 2007; Ferudi 2004; Fendler 2001; Popekewitz & Brennan1998; Rose 1999; Smeyers et al. 2007; Thomson 2011). With this article we attempt to zoom in on affective and material features and processes that make such government/management practices (im)possible; a zooming in that may teach us something new about those practices and their effects. The data analyzed in the article have been generated in secondary schools with their particular cast of students, teachers, parents, and principals.

AFFECTIVIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
Over the last 10-25 years, two approaches have influenced basic schooling within the Nordic countries. It has at the very least moved toward a utilitarian performance culture through the introduction of features such as quality reports, performance contracts, and national tests (Krejsler 2007; Pors 2009). At the same time, a culture of (self-)reflection has gained ground through evaluation tools and dialogical methods (Knudsen; 2011; Bjerg & Staunæs 2011; Moos 2004; Nielsen et al. 2011; Olson & Aldenmyr 2012; Staunæs 2011; Staunæs et al. 2011). These aspects are well analyzed. What we add to this field are optics for the analysis of something much less
noted, namely that and how educational management have been affectivized (Bjerg & Staunæs 2011; Bjerg 2013; Blackmore 2009; 2011; Day et al. 2011; Leitwood 2006; Moos et al 2011; Staunæs 2011). This means that strategic activities such as management tasks are perceived through the lens of affectivity (i.e. through moods, emotion, sensations, and the senses). Education is currently described as a competitive factor or an opportunity for improvement or future possibilities (Herman 2007) within a globalized economy. When the school’s task is interpreted as creating competitive labor for a globalized market, students must learn to learn, develop, and attune to further education. This heightens the emphasis on schooling as a learning context. An important part of school management is therefore to retain students in the educational system and make them want or even desire it, and this emphasis involves, we claim, affectivized management practices.

When caring about, taming, and expressing one’s desire to realize one’s potential becomes an ideal, the management task is often said to become management of self-management. In opposition to the growing literature on self-management and the management of self-management, which is aimed at improving performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006; Manz and Neck, 2004), the point for critical studies of managing self-management is to take an outset in governmentality (Foucault, 1991; 2009; 2010; Raffnsøe, 2010). In these studies, the production of subjectivities is seen as an effect of discursive power (Rose, 1996; 1999), technologies of power (Dean, 1999), and discursive orders and patterns of the normative (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Educational researchers informed by Foucault (1991; 1997) have published groundbreaking work on ‘governmentality’, i.e. how student mentalities are governed and what subjects and subject positions are produced (Baker & Heyning 2003; Hultqvist & Dahblberg 2001) by management technologies. This work demonstrates how important education is in governing mentalities (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998) and nurturing ‘flexible souls’ (Fendler, 2001) and how (school) children have a potential for the future (Hultqvist,
2005). While critical studies of management as well as education are inspiring, these approaches have primarily dealt with how the production of identities, subject positions, and the reflexive elements of self-management contribute to shaping the self in relation to a certain appropriate identity (e.g. the creative pupil or the self-developing employee). In addition, they often take a macro perspective on normative and moral orders and discourses while focusing less on the precise machinery of productive processes as they are played out in life (Bjerg & Staunæs 2011). Finally, there seems to be a blind spot concerning the affective and emotional aspects of ways of governing mentalities.

As implied above, managing self-management is a passionate affair; it is affectivized and when it includes methods from the psy-sciences, we speak of psy-management of self-management (Staunæs, Juelskjær & Knudsen 2011). This indicates a shift in regard to what is managed. Affective psy-management distinguishes itself from other kinds of managing self-management by focusing upon the intensity of affectivity rather than the identity of subjects (ibid.). This shift indicates a displacement in relation to what is being managed. It does not mean that the management of identities and the management of intensities are not related. Indeed, it has been shown that affectivity is quite efficient in shaping subjectivity (Wetherell, 2012). However, it does mean that management works strategically with affect and intensity, where the management of intensity regards the way in which something or someone is strategically attuned. The logic in this is that those involved in the school should not merely feel. Their affects, feelings, and senses must be treated in a way that supports school goals and tasks, such as retaining the young people in the educational system. On the basis of psychological theories on learning, school is conditioned to produce commitment, desire, motivation, and interest among the students (“learn and have fun”, flow, and the desire for learning are examples of framings of this enactment/ambition).
Part of affective management takes place through the use of therapeutic techniques. We have observed that it also takes place through furniture, which is why in this article we take the analytical angle of psy-management’s affective dimensions through so-called” comfort technologies” (Juelskjær 2009). The hypothesis is that precisely the materiality of comfort technology opens up for the emergence and duration of the affective. We focus on the couch. The couch contributes to determining how in its intensity, psy-management can gain relevance, and the couch makes it possible that, for example, a trembling anger toward the school can be transformed into desire for and devotion to it.

In this article, we do not view affective management in positive or negative terms - but as a handling of feelings, which includes moods, senses, and sensations. The theories concerning self-management and educational management in the literature, in their focus on affective management through comfort technologies, take into account the fact that affective relations and intensities, moods, and atmospheres facilitate certain relations to the self. All the while affective atmospheres and tensions can cut off, disclose, and discard other relations to the self and formations of subjectivity (Bjerg & Staunæs 2011). We are curious about how educational management in everyday, informal, and coincidental circumstances are affectively related to technologies of comfort, such as couches, and the effects this has upon schooling and the management of schooling. While the affectivisation of management seems to be a tendency in Scandinavia, it is perhaps an unnoticed tendency, and it is perhaps even unnoticed that the intimacy and what could be termed ‘ritualised cosy-ness’ of both educational leadership and comfort technologies may be a specific Scandinavian answer historically to schooling and ‘bildung’ and furthermore strengthened as an
answer to the transnational competition and the fear of lacking behind upcoming educational front-runners.

**ANALYTICAL RESOURCES**

The purpose of this first section is to give a short account of the affective and material turns, so as to present three core concepts for the analysis of the empirical data: affectivity, intra-activity, and comfort technology. The linguistic turn focused on the performativity of language, i.e. how the world is created through language and discourse; a number of other simultaneous turns have been taken. ‘The affective turn’ (Clough 2007; Hemmings 2005; Massumi 2002) and ‘the material turn’ (Haraway 1991; Barad 2007) expand insights given in the linguistic turn into the performativity of the social to include non-discursive components, such as materials and affect. In so many words, we attempt to open the analytical perspective to more than merely linguistic components as constitutive in (human/social?) life by analyzing the entangled states of agencies in the production of (governed) subjectivities. Here we only gesture toward the researchers that we draw on. They are of course by far the only relevant thinkers to use. When we orient ourselves toward these material and affective turns, it should not be viewed as a rejection, but rather a reversion to the original outsets, such that these are expanded in a qualitative outset.

As for the material turn, we are mainly inspired by Karen Barad (Barad 2007) and the account that “the forces at work in the materialization of bodies are not only social and the bodies produced are not all human” (Barad, 2007: 224-5). For Barad, the material and the discursive are produced through each other as “intra-activity” (ibid.). Intra-activity should not be understood as reciprocity or symmetry between language and object, discourse and matter, it is not a question of introducing a “parliament of things” (Latour 1991), “but a questioning and unsettling of representationalist politics” (Juelskjaer & Swennesen, 2012:14), a move to onto-epistemology, where practices of
knowing and being are mutually implicated; we are of the world (Barad 2007:185). Knowing is a direct material engagement (even concepts come to matter as “material articulations of the world” (Barad 2007: 139)), where agential cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility: prior to the intra-action and the agential cut, words and things are indeterminate and consequently, there is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object: onto-epistemology (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012:53).

The analytical approach in the article, then, is not about shifting one’s gaze from the subjects to the couch, but rather to consider how the couch and the subjects are co-produced through intra-activity. The analysis is oriented toward specific intra-actions, where there is a multitude of furniture, bodies, movements, gazes, sounds, and activities. It is an “agential cut” in the intra-action revealing things and people. Agency thereby resides in the intra-active incision and is not distributed in things and people (it is a matter of entangled agencies) – and the analytical focus is on what is produced in the intra-action.

The concept of affectivity has been much discussed in recent years under the headline of an affective turn. A popular and thought-provoking approach concerns affectivity as intensity that touches us and is touched by us and includes more than human emotions and moods such as atmospheres (see for instance Massumi 2002:15). Rather than being something that one has or is, affectivity must in this perspective be understood as a tension, a charging, which expresses itself relationally. Affectivity can be impounded and fixed; it can even be dissolved – in the blink of an eye. It moves and touches relations and subjects, whereby it creates new relations and subjects. We are affected and it thereby becomes possible to think and feel the world in certain ways.
In this manner, affectivity is not in opposition to rationality, but rather a qualitatively different way of experiencing the world (Thrift 2004). Affect is a transpersonal capacity; it draws in many bodies – it resides therefore both within and between bodies, connecting bodies by flowing between them (Pile, 2009: 8-9, drawing on Anderson 2006). Affective flows have effects – and might be subjected to emphasis of strategic control and management. This leads us to note that to study management of self-management with the lens of affectivity means attempting to specify human processes of becoming when these are subjected to strategic control and management. This very broad definition goes across human and non-human actors, and gives rise to some very interesting analyses of doing analysis exactly across taken-given divides. But in research specifically dealing with the management of humans and with human meaning-making, some retooling is needed.

What is needed is a component that relates to power, the social and the cultural. Affectivity is not just about indefiniteness, energy, constant virtuality, and movement. It is also about something becoming something definite – at least, with reference to subjectification and management. Sometimes, what is quivering and indefinite bursts, overflows, and becomes fixed as a definite feeling. Affectivity can be seized and fixated as something definite (Bjerg 2011). However, this does not mean that it always will be the same feeling, all the time and everywhere. Therefore, there is a need for an analytical tool that can capture the fact that there is more than one and less than many affects. If the aim is to study how to manage on the basis of affectivity and how an attempt is made to provoke certain types of feelings, it is necessary to expand the Massumian approach and develop tools that can also capture various manifestations and different qualities of intensities.
In relation to humans, which are our main focus, affectivity must be grasped as a somatic, neural, subjective, historical, social, and personal matter. As Margaret Wetherell (2012) points out, a social-psychological analytical approach must make us capable of grasping affects as flowing activity, as a pattern, or more precisely, assemblage, in which affects are composed, figured, entangled, mobilized, and recruited. Affectivity is the participation of the emoting body that makes an assemblage of affect rather than an example of some other kind of social practice. Recruiting is onto-formative: it constitutes object and subject. Affects need to be located in actual bodies and social actors and not to be mysterious circulations (ibid.).

As noted previously, prior to the intra-action and the agential cut, words and things are indeterminate. This is in parallel to the Massumian/Deleuzian idea that affectivity has to do with the moment before (the linguistic) confiscation of affect as a particular feeling/emotion. Intra-activity suggests an agential cut i.e. a creative incision that does not preclude, but produces the division between words and things (Barad, 2007) and we may now add: emotions/feelings. Affective flows may be present in the intra-activity and draw in bodies (human and nonhuman) – they reside where words and things are indeterminate, and affectivity may be studied/analyzed as intensities are transformed through the agential cuts. In this respect, the two perspectives may be compatible to the analysis at hand, as we look at specific cuts/transformations. We stress that this way of thinking/linking the material and affective is not suggested by Massumi, Barad, Wetherell, or any other for that matter; but we suggest this as a productive take on the material-affective - if one is interested in affective educational management and its social psychological effect on students in schools.

**COUCHES AS COMFORT TECHNOLOGIES**
In pointing to couches as comfort technologies at schools, we suggest that school furniture plays a strategic role as something that concerns the school’s potential for acting. The concept of comfort technologies (Juelskjær 2009) is inspired by Mike Michael’s concept of ‘mundane technologies’. These are non-spectacular, everyday technologies (Michael 2006), the performativity of which is integrated into everyday life and therefore not noticed as such. He emphasizes the necessity of heightening one’s view for such naturalized and subtle technologies. With the concept of comfort technologies, we therefore look at how interior design in professionally constructed settings such as organizations and educational institutions helps set the conditions for managing schooling.

Managing of and through affectivity concerns strategic and intentional actions, which are also implemented through material surroundings, interior design, and comfort technologies. Agency does not reside in the manager as such, but comes about through the intra-activity that has been arranged through bodies-in-furniture, the affective flows among bodies, words being said in specific tones of voices and the instigation of narratives from other rooms (such as what occurs in the classroom, fights in the schoolyard etc.). Management, as it is lived, is of this complex topology: this is intra-activity that charges and voices the tone and tempo of the narratives and therefore also the management bodies and counter-questions that are produced. Affectivity and materiality merge through features such as sounds and voices, which have various volumes and speeds, but simultaneously produce each other. In the analysis, we therefore look at how voices, tonality, listening, talking, and acting co-produce special affective moods. This is used to show how affective management is about giving narratives new endings that leave the subjects in a novel affective state and that can be accompanied by management decisions. To follow up on this theoretical review, we will now provide a short description of the empirical material before turning to the analysis.

EMPRICIAL MATERIAL
The empirical material stems from Juelskjær and Staunæs’ project *Psy-management* (2008-2012) and from Ratner’s PhD project *Promises of Reflexivity. Managing and Researching Inclusive Schools*. (2009-2012). The first project builds upon a database developed by researchers and students involved in the research programme *Organization & Learning* at the Department of Education at Aarhus University. This database is constituted by observations and interviews conducted by students and researchers with administrators, principals, vice principals, teachers, and students, as well as photos taken by the associated researchers. Finally, the database contains ministerial documents concerning school management. The data from Ratner’s thesis contain field observations.

**THE AFFECTIVE-MATERIAL TURN MEETS THE FREUDIAN COUCH**

Couches may enact and accelerate affectivity, they may lower intensities and may enable us to fall asleep. Couches are part of very different landscapes; we deal with the landscape of institutionalized learning and the managing of intensities of this landscape. As we wrote in the introduction, the Freudian couch is a legendary example, part of a landscape of therapy and used to make patients relax and speak without restraint. Freud used it as a medical instrument and not merely to retain the patient in a certain position. He was also concerned with the couch’s potential to function as a trigger of artistic, social, and psychological associations. The couch’s material and its integration into the room full of archaeological finds and Freud himself behind the patient became a material-affective site, where furniture, body, and thoughts connected with each other and created the possibility of activating the unconscious and repressed so that it could be spoken.

Freud’s couch therefore became a sanctuary from everyday life, but also a productive place for creating new selves and affective states. It is the couch’s ability to stimulate body and mind, imagination and reflection that has fascinated therapists and researchers like us across the world. As we see it, these selves and affective states do not come from nothing, but can be seen as a
combination of the patient’s anamneses, Freud’s furniture, and therapeutic techniques of asking questions, guided by history and mythology, as facilitated by the archaeological references found in the office. Keeping the Freudian couch in mind – and our theoretical resources as such, we analyze the management of intensity.

“WE SHOULD TALK A BIT MORE ABOUT THIS, BUT I HOPE TO END IT WITH A HUG!”

In a Danish context there are no formal rules against teachers, principals, and students giving a hug, a pat on the shoulder or the like, as there may be in other national contexts. Whether or not a hug would seem appropriate or odd or even as transgressing the privacy zone of the student depends on the situation, the relations etc. In other words there seems to be a cultural cosiness embedded in the relation between management and students. At School X, the couch is stuck in a corner of the principal’s office; it is an older model with green wool upholstery, high armrests and a high back, and a light, beech frame. This is not a “sloucher”, like one in front of a TV, but a well-padded piece of furniture, which (as the principal notes) is not pretentious or too posh. When children are enrolled in the school, they and their families are invited to sit there for a chat. The mother and children often sit on it, while the father sits at the head of the meeting table. The principal sits at the middle of the table with her back to her desk, facing the couch, and keeping the father in the periphery of her field of view. This couch is the students’ and (some) parents’ first tactile encounter with the school. Through the years, students and parents sit there if problems crop up or there are things to discuss. They sit up straight and do not put their feet on the coffee table. They do not let their whole body come into contact with the upholstery like a patient in Freud’s office. The couch at School X is a place where you can relax and attain a more personal, confidential, and individual relation with the principal. Indeed, the atmosphere may be so relaxed that a mother may ask if they mind her “nursing the baby”, she notes. Mette is the principal at School X and she states the following as her managerial ambition:
“There is one thing I really believe in when it comes to management and that is the conversation –
dialog, especially with the parents [...] It is important that this place is considered pleasant and
that they feel at home; that they are well received in a mild, friendly, and courteous manner.”

The ambition draws on one of the stronger trends in what we have termed “psy-management”,
namely, appreciation through dialogue as a way of performing managerial activities. This
management by (appreciative) dialogue is further described: friendliness, mildness, and courtesy
when receiving the parents is intended to create a sense of the office being a pleasant place in which
people can feel “at home”. With the couch in the corner, the sense of home has a specific
materialization in the office.

However, not all conversations in the couch arrangement are pleasant or friendly. For instance, the
principal recalls a father who, in the middle of a conversation, jumped up from the couch and
threatened to kill her, because it had been recommended that his child repeat a year. There are also
stories of mothers that “scream and cry” when told that their children do not adhere to the school’s
conception of appropriate behaviour. Sometimes the conversation takes place in the couch on a day
following an emotional event. In such situations, the couch is a meeting place for the school and a
student or family that is gripped in intense anger, outrage, or excitement: “It isn’t fair”, or with
feelings of shame: “It is so embarrassing” or humiliation: “Is my child not good enough?”. What is
the task of management in such situations? An analysis of the interviews suggests that the task of
management becomes alternately forcing and reducing the intensity of the social relations. Our
analytical framework helps identify the unpleasant situation that is created and affects parents that
sink into the couch and thereby become small. The female school principal reflects:
“Often men won’t sit in the couch – probably because it is 5-10 cm too low. For quite some time now I have thought of putting some blocks under the legs, so that it is elevated a bit.”

What if the couch were in fact elevated – how would this re-configure the management of affectivity through the comfort technology? The principal seems, at least for the time being, to be indecisive about whether or not that might be a ‘smart move’, as the couch is still without blocks. Power imbalances reside within these entangled agencies: the specificities of the intra-action of the couch arrangement (with its soft upholstery and low construction), the gendered and tense bodies and the event/issue that is to be negotiated, and the conclusions to be drawn with high-stake consequences for the school, the student, and the parents. Power imbalances are produced and sensed in the intra-action. By listening carefully to the recorded interview with the female school principal – focusing on the rhythm and tone of the conversation through her voice - we put ourselves in a state of imagining how the particular mode of speech cuts off negative emotions and transforms them to positive ones. A comfort zone is thereby established around the couch and the parents may accept the direction the negotiations take. The tempo and the soundtrack of the speech, the softness of the couch and the “problematic issue” co-constitute the situation, so that the participants feel enveloped, included, and ready to open up, rather than disassociated from the situation in such a way that they simply answer: “yes”, “yes” to the relation of intensity between themselves and the school principal: “Yes”, to the commitment of loyalty that emerges following an extended conversation, during which one has made oneself at home in the couch, released tense thoughts, and perhaps begun to feel a desire to join in once more. The comfort technology supports a school management that seeks to relax and soften fixed intensities. Management via the couch means attempting to reduce the anger and rage that students and parents may be afflicted with, but
also means trying to move beyond the feelings of humiliation and injustice. And so, following our theoretical set-up, the discursive practices of ‘solving a problem’ are also practice of material-affective agencies co-constituting what may come into existence.

Furthermore, it seems that the pace is an important component. Let us zoom in on the process of one episode, where a student has been expelled from the school for a period because of bad behaviour at a school party. The student and her father are seated on the couch. The teacher is sitting on a chair next to them. The female school principal has initiated the process of “bringing the student or parents to a meeting” where the point is to “relate” as she expresses it. By doing this she takes up the narrative and social constructivist approaches given in pedagogical-psychological literature. She begins with “recognition” and goes on to say that:

“What happens in the process is that you start by recognizing her, that is, letting her talk. In those kinds of conflicts I don’t lecture. Let them talk, so I begin by saying: “Safiyye, how did you experience it...”

So here, management concerns the possibility of establishing:

“...that the student understands the situation...here, the father, who is next to her, is a good mediator, because he is loyal toward the school. He was also aware that his daughter had stepped way out of bounds. He was therefore in a hurry to apologize by noting that, “Mette, you know I do my best to bring up my children correctly...”
When the father “plays along” you know that the couch and the associated questions are working. As the school principal says: “We have already come so far and things are starting to soften up.”

The dense and fixed intensity, which was expressed by the student through anger, humiliation, and excitement begins to change into a more “mellow mood”. This could be analyzed as reminiscent of Freud’s couch, which was used to relax the patient and cure hysterical fixation. Soothing the intensity concerns the student as well as the parents. It may be developed and used as an important fuel in other rooms, so as to create new possibilities. As the female school principal states:

“This ends in complete dissolution – in the good way. They arrive at the psychologist and it ends up with the mother crying: “We have a lot of problems at home and we don’t know what to do - how do you manage a child like this […]?” We have got hold of the student. The parents recognize that she has issues, and now something must be done.”

Dissolving or softening issues on the couch can be the first step toward transformation, not unlike the almost magical moments where hysteria and paralysis left Freud’s female patients – when the body relaxed. Freud’s furniture arrangement and therapeutically vague hmmm-responses slowly released free associations and allowed them to flow through the room. While for Freud it could take years for the paralysis to release its grip, the pace is much faster in a modern school setting and involves greater guidance and precision. There is a certain timing and rhythm to this and there are rituals that must be seen through. The principal recalls:

“At one point the father says to his daughter: “I think you should give the teacher a hug”, but I could see that the teacher was not ready for that yet. So, I said: “I think we need to talk more about this, but I hope that it ends in a hug.”
The school principal therefore works toward reuniting the teacher and the student in a hug, but not before they are both “ready”. In this regard, management is also a matter of sensing how to choreograph the situation: To sense when the resolution of the fixed intensities takes place: and with the risk of ‘sensing wrong’ or not being able to ‘assist’, ‘de-tensify’ or vaporize the affective flows as they may be multiple and counteractively productive within the intra-action. We remind the reader that affect is understood as a transpersonal capacity, drawing in bodies as affects flow between them, residing within and between bodies (Massumi 2002, Pile 2009). The flows may have effects and shifting effects as agential cuts transform some of the flow into something else. An agential cut, for example, establishing the naming of a tense situation by the jump of a body out of a couch and a throat screaming “This is not fair”, “I’ll kill you,” or a cut as the body jumps up to grab another body in order to transform the flow into a hug, thereby producing an emotional state and showing/enacting: “this is how I feel about this situation: let’s reconcile”.

The question remains: When are they ready and what remains to be done for the intensity to affect them in such a way that a hug seems appropriate and not a violation or too invasive an act? If we immerse ourselves in other parts of the interview (and view the telling as enactments rather than descriptions (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012)), it seems that the moment when intensity becomes reconciliation is found when students and parents say what the teacher and principal want them to say. This often involves recognition of one’s own errors, making an apology and assuming responsibility: bringing employees and students toward reconciliation involves practices of materializing the facts of the matter with certain logics – establishing specific relations between school-home, teachers-students (in which the school and the teacher are the ones who know what is right). This reminds us of how affective flows also run through and are transformed by discursive
practices of producing guilt and remorse; in other words, that such categorizations are also the
effects of the cuts of the intra-actions.

Let’s look further into how practices of reconciliation enact the manager. Here is a situation
involving a 15 year old boy and the school principal:

“I don’t want to be a disciplinarian for somebody else, so I bring the parties in and place them
there to talk my way through it. I say: I know your father and your sister. Your father is going to be
upset if he hears about this…”

In hearing this, one is tempted to say that Freud did not live in vain. Before we draw any
conclusions from the quote, let us go through it in slow motion. Where the process in the original
Freudian couch involved the therapeutic “hmmmmm” and free association, speech is ordered
differently on the principal’s couch. “I bring them in” (to my office) and place them there (on the
couch) and “talk myself into them”, the school principal says. She thereby indicates how the couch
and the way of talking are infiltrating techniques of managing the situation. She not only speaks
with the students, she inquires into their personalities, thought patterns, and emotions by activating
relations that reach beyond the immediate framework of the school, i.e. the family. This initially
involves the “father” (who is ascribed an especially important position in the Freudian universe)
and then the “sister”. Naturally, Freud is merely one resource to draw upon. It is easy to imagine
how conceptions of parents requiring special respect are used for students with an Arabic/Middle
Eastern/Muslim background, of which there are quite a few at this particular school. Here, possible
loss of honour and degradation is employed, not for talking with the student, but to them. At any
rate, an “alliance” is built up with the elusive father, who is the powerful “Other”, against whom one has failed. What is the result of this? Let us fast forward in the conversation:

It ends up with a big boy crying and saying: “I’ll never do it again, I promise, it’s over – never again.” Then it is possible for me to speak with him, and I say: “How do we move on from here? Perhaps you should apologize to your teacher?” “Yes, I’ll apologize – will you come with me?” Then we apologize and move on. This works 100 times better than screaming and shouting at him.”

These quotes suggest management of affectivity levels. Components such as being placed on a couch, the method of speaking to the student and not merely with him, importing the father figure – all this manifests itself in an almost rhythmic dissolution of tension through crying. When that level of intensity has been attained, it becomes possible to open up a new strategic approach or “take”. The method of speaking to the student is replaced by speaking with the student and this affects the student in a certain way. It creates opportunities for apologies that may be taken out of the office and used to clear up bad moods and atmospheres in the organization. Recalling Foucault (2008), we could say that the person on the couch confesses his ‘sins’. A person has sinned and is given absolution and redemption through confession. It is as if the couch – and its way of facilitating resolution and homeliness – assists the process of confession and opens up for the transformation of the affective fabric of the enactment of disobedience or resistance into displaying acceptance of guilt – a process that is a pathway back to the classroom and therefore also learning.

DIFFRACTIVELY READING
Whereas the couch at School X is in the female school principal’s office, it is outside the office at School Y. At the first school it might not have been private, but it was at least sheltered; this other couch is accessible to public view. The analysis now shifts to a new site to examine management
practices at School Y. By doing so it might seem as if we are inviting the reader to make a
comparison, but in fact we are not. It is not an analytic activity of reading the schools against each
other, comparing the two management practices, and deciding which one is best. Instead, we aim to
embark on another methodology; that of diffraction.

“Diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike
methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of
reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate
differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded and how those
exclusions matter [...] reading important insights and approaches through one another” (Barad
2007: 30)\(^i\)

As stated from the beginning, we want to engage in specificities of the intra-actions that transform
the affective ‘tones’ of the events. By diffractively reading the two sites through each other we may
embark on their various entanglements and be attentive to what gets excluded and what comes to
matter (ibid.) in such a way that we attend to the ‘nitty-gritty’ of the events. Furthermore, we must
remember that a couch as a comfort technology is analytically understood as part of the entangled
state of agencies of the intra-activity – for which reason it does not make sense to single out the
couch as an “actant” that has agency on its own.

At this point, we may reveal that we also engaged in reading diffractively when considering School
X, though for the sake of readability this was never explicated: There were always two sites present
in our engagement with the analysis, already diffracted through each other. The analysis/article
enacts connections and new cuts by analytically connecting the schools in some version of time and
space, and as we think that, “[P]ractices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world” (Barad, 2007: 91), then our ethical responsibilities are of and part of those (re)configurings (Barad 2007 chap. 8): We stress that the analysis has not singled out good and bad principals, but (as noted throughout the article) has attended to the material discursive-affective practices whereby agencies and possibilities of managing are done and undone – by looking at the patterns of difference that make a difference in the specificities of agential cuts.

SOLIDARITY AND ALLIANCE
The couch at School Y is a classic three-person couch from the 1960s and the auburn, wool pillows are loose and disorganized. Some are crooked and reveal the hard and faded wooden frame. There are also footprints on it from students who have rested there with their feet up. The furniture is against the wall across from the entrance to the management-office, where the door is often left open. This is where students end up if they are sent to the principal. This is where the events of the class or recess that brought the students to this particular circumstance are narrated. The couch conversation may continue in the office and the mood established there extends into the office, often associated with decision-making and management. Much more happens in and around the couch than mere explaining and solving of conflicts. Let us take an example from the ethnographic field notes:

A student from 6th grade sits on the couch. School management is gathered in the office across the hallway. The student lingers at the entrance and looks in. The three managerial staff members look up and expect a question. “Is Casper her?” he asks, looking for the school principal. “No he is away at a seminar.” The student hesitates, neither entering nor returning to the couch. The principal puts his arm around his shoulder and asks him, “Why are you not in class?” He looks
down and reluctantly informs that he has been thrown out. He slouches and turns his face away. He seems upset; he accepts the principal’s friendly gesture.

A student has been sent out of the classroom and to the couch in front of the office, as the teacher’s punishment for disobedience. When he is alone in the couch he can relax, sink into the pillows, and feel what is difficult to identify when the body is tense with anger from events in the classroom. Perhaps he senses the effects of exclusion. Maybe he is ready to listen once more – to be understood and comforted. Perhaps it is these small incentives toward a mood change that make it possible for him to stand up and position himself in the doorway into the office and look for somebody he knows well:

The principal asks why he has been expelled from the classroom. The student looks up for the first time and explains: “[The teacher] gave me a choice: I could leave or get thrown out at the slightest squeak.” “And you chose to leave?” he asks. The boy nods. The principal still has his arm on his shoulder and ruffles his hair: “Who says that to kids?” They look at each other in mutual understanding. The boy is sent to the library to do his homework.

Perhaps the material-affective intra-action of couch and boy has assisted the principal: it relaxed and prepared the child as we saw at School X. Perhaps the principal’s arm around his shoulder creates a promise that the boy will not to be despised or met with recrimination. The arm around the shoulder promises solidarity in the up-coming meeting - someone who will listen and understand. Unlike at School X, the arm around the shoulder is not something that happens after the principal has set the tone and rhythm. Here, intimacy plays a different role, since it follows up on the mood that has been established by the couch. Rather than reconciliation, the encounter enacts comfort and
solidarity. Someone listens. Perhaps the intra-action of couch and body resolves the accumulated tension and therefore constitutes an affective passage to the office. Management issues are taken up only after the student has gotten up from the couch and stands on the verge of the room where managerial decisions are taken. It is here that the quivering intensity is taken up: not like at School X, where confessions must proceed, even before the issue of guilt has been taken up. You do not make your way to the emotional register, you are already within it and this is continued through the offer of an arm around the shoulder. This makes the management area a place where the student can go, a place where he is understood – not a place to take guilt upon him and apologize, but a place where he can take the task of learning upon himself. Guilt is put upon the teacher, and the student is sent to the library to continue his studies. Most likely these will be taken up with greater willingness now that the desire to be a part of the school has been re-established.

Reading this management activity explicitly through those activities we have come to know about at School X we find interesting specificities in the material-discursive-affective practices that produce and maintain relations of management and students: In the instances at School X, the material-discursive of pace of voice, tone of voice, ways of turning sentences and turn-taking are important components intra-actively enacted with the work of the couch in managing the intensities and turning tense bodies into learning-able student-bodies. Whereas in the example above from School Y, the materiality – or material-discursive fabric – of putting an arm around the student’s shoulders and ruffling the student’s hair assist the comfort technology and the further management practice.

Another example is likewise from a meeting where a student is brought in from the couch in the hallway:
The head of administration looks at the couch and catches a glimpse of a 7th grade boy. “Why are you sitting out there?” she asks. “[The teacher] said I was thick.” “Well, have a word with the principal.” The boy waits on the couch and when the principal comes out the boy is invited into the office and the door shuts behind them. “This young man has been expelled from [the teacher’s] class” the head of administration remarks. “Yes” the student interrupts. “He called me thick, and I said, ‘Don’t call me thick,’ and he threw me out.”

The boy does not hesitate to inform the principal about his perceived injustice. The couch has reduced the intensity and relaxed the boy. In response to the direct encouragement to tell his story, he can narrate events without lowering his gaze and enters the office and closes the door without fear. This student does not only need comfort: he becomes important in making a decision about a teacher. This is not merely a political or pedagogical decision, but about managing through moods and emotions:

The administrative staff look at each other and move from the desk to the small coffee table. The boy is invited to sit down with them. “Right” says the head of administration and takes a deep breath. “Something doesn’t sound right, but I must know what happened up to the event. Why did he call you thick? There must have been some reason?”. “Well. I just asked how far we had gotten in the book – I didn’t know. And then the teacher says, ‘One thing is that you don’t understand anything; another is that you are thick. Go to the office!’ The staff begin conferring with each other. The boy is talking about a teacher about whom they have already received several complaints. They agree to write down the boy’s account. The vice-principal fetches paper and pen and the principal explains that he must know all details and that the boy is not thick. They write down what class the event took place in, the teacher involved and what was said. The word are
repeated and written down. Then the principal says, “I have informed the teachers how I want things at this school - we must get along and I want the students addressed politely. We don’t have any thick students here. The head of administration adds, “I have always said: there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers. And you received a stupid answer.” “Yes” the principal notes. “I cannot accept this tone. I apologize and I wish it weren’t so – I want us all to respect each other. That is the whole point of it all”. “But it is not your fault” says the boy. “Either way, I am still sorry you had to experience this.” The principal says. He speaks slowly and calmly to the boy. He looks him in the eye and smiles seriously. The boy sits uncomfortably in his chair, after which he is sent to the library and the managerial staff discusses whether to fire the teacher.

The observer notes the seriousness of the situation and the action oriented tone of the principal’s voice: the position as an equal around the table and the matter-of-fact-voice sets off a rhythm of decision-making potential. Decisions must be made and it must be done correctly. From being a student who had been placed on a couch for being thick, he is transformed and mellowed by the couch and turned into a witness in a case of teacher malpractice. Documentation is gathered: the student’s words are written down to be used in a later conversation with the teacher in question. The information must be correct and the boy is taken seriously. When the managerial staff speak among themselves with the boy present, it sounds as if they are excited. The room vibrates with eagerness of getting it right, of preparing for confronting the teacher. Perhaps they want to correlate the student’s experiences with the other complaints. Interestingly, though, when they speak with the student, the eagerness goes into a slow pace. Their voices convey patience and comfort and suggest that they are willing to listen when he speaks. Hereby the student’s feelings of reproach can be transformed into recognition. The student is met not only with listening ears, but with agreement and people who take responsibility and apologies upon themselves. These are upset people who
rather than reprimand seek mutual respect. It is in that moment that the student, without any
couragement, states, “But it is not your fault”. The affective economy is now transformed into
mutual care. However, the principal insists on apologizing for what has happened. The event is not
replete with arms around the boy’s shoulders as before. The mood is rather action oriented. The boy
is not merely comforted, but experiences that his emotional state of having been wronged and the
unpleasant event with the teacher are turned into ‘words of fact’ that are acted upon. When the
student is invited to sit with the managerial staff at the table, it does not signal equality or
symmetry, but being a part of the issue. He becomes a student who has been subjected to the wrong
kind of pedagogy, which does not support the desire to learn or the desire to belong to the school. It
has created tensions that must be addressed, in order not to push the student into further states of
feeling upset about school – which may accelerate learning-destructive processes. Here,
management is about recreating trust in the school as a place that is nice to be in, in spite of the
experience with the teacher.

At School Y the couch is therefore not a place where the principal is the source of truth, which
others must listen to, agree with, and reconcile themselves to, as at School X. In correspondence
with the newest trends in management, students here are instead met with enthusiastic ears. In psy-
management this may be called the listening dimension: the management’s willingness to be
transformed in order to keep power (Staunæs, 2010). The couch softens the children before they are
brought in. Management listens and catches stories about the injustices experienced by the students
and they speak your case over and against the teachers when their pedagogies do not correspond
with school values. The couch arrangement produces less tense students who are not on guard, on
edge, sweating, and jittery. It is from this relaxed state that they can enter the office. By the
movement from couch to office an intra-active production of student and principal takes place,
affectively charged with a sense of co-existence, making way for the next actions: student solidarity through an arm around shoulders or an invitation to sit at the table. Management seeks to resolve and dissolve rage and accumulated senses of injustice that linger in the student. These are all affects that can generate the germ of school rejection within the student. The aim is therefore to generate a student subjectivity that is confident that the school is trying to help and a student subjectivity that is therefore (continuously) willing to learn.

Seen from the perspective of management, the couch transformation is the object of management regarding both students and teachers: on and around the couch, management becomes a transformation of the disciplinary logics found in the classroom to logics that appreciate the students. To become a student of this arrangement is to become a student with a voice; the sense of injustice becomes the feeling of having been heard and being right. After being sent to the couch, the student is given a new perspective on and sense of the Self and is then either sent to the library or back to the classroom. This has wide-reaching effects, since the principal manages the teachers’ possible management of the classroom. This management has been implemented through the student and is therefore brought back to the class. However, affective management through the couch arrangement has several dimensions; in this case, it also constitutes the preparations for building up a case against the teacher. The student’s voice, which is a product of the intra-activity of the couch and the office, has become a written document, which can travel along different routes of management back to the teacher as an evaluation of the work performed. The aspect of guilt has therefore not disappeared altogether from School Y, but has rather been transformed into a requirement for improvement among the teachers. That, which at School X is a burden for the student has become, at School Y, the teacher’s work. In other parts of our empirical material, the ritualized cosyness of educational management combined with this figure of change from ‘the child
as the problem’ to ‘the teacher as the problem’ seems to appear and create heavy problems for teachers in regard to authority (Ratner 2012).

**FREUD’S COUCH RETURNS IN MANY VERSIONS**
In this analysis we have worked with interviews and observations with specific theoretical ambitions of teasing out subtle material-discursive-affective practices that are productive in the activity that is named “management of self-management”. In doing so, we join the company of other scholars who are laying the groundwork of onto-epistemological analysis. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) note in reference to their Barad inspired analytical practice:

“Consideration of the narration [...] as presenting a performative practice requires a re-interpretation of the material, or a re-thinking of the relationship between the material and the discursive. Such re-positioning demands that we re-think voice, and data, and the subject, not as a separation of the theoretical from the material, but as an enactment, as a performative practice, one that asks “how matter and embodiment come to matter in the process of research itself, and in the process of how participants account for what they tell us and how we view their tellings as enactments rather than descriptions”. (Jackson & Mazzei 2012: 127).

We have tried to make visible a similar ambition concerning the empirical material through the ways in which we have presented/written the analysis, though noting that working with the affective dimensions adds both layers of ambitions and challenges: Pile remarks that “Representations of affect can only ever fail to represent affect itself – that is, it is necessary to be suspicious of, and if possible to avoid, representations of emotions” (Pile 2009 :8) though he then adds that “affects can be manipulated” (ibid.). We have not searched for affects ‘as such’, but affective flows have effects that might be subjected to emphasis of strategic control and management. Therefore, the ambition
has been to examine how an intra-activity analysis of affectivity and material circumstances can capture the management effects of comfort technologies. We have zoomed in on moments of transformations – agential cuts – showing how discourse, materiality, and emotions are co-constituted by the cuts. So, in accordance with Pile, you can neither name nor put your finger on the affect but you may analytically ‘see’/’spot’ the transformation, vis a vis the cuts; as when the father on the couch in the principal’s office reacts by suggesting a hug between his daughter and the teacher and the principal choreographs the temporality or pace of the possibilities of hugging on the basis of her sense of the situation. We hope to have added to the discussion of the educational management of self-management concerning affectivity by providing suggestions as to how a material-affective perspective can bring new depth to analyses of (self)management, but also and in return, insights into how attention to the agency of materiality suggests a new firm basis for an otherwise fleeting affectivity.

At the beginning we asked how comfort technologies such as a couch generate other possibilities for managing intensity and how Freud’s couch is returning. Let us answer those questions in reverse order and point out how the Freudian couch has returned in a more strategic and management oriented version. This does not merely concern using the couch to challenge the hysterical paralysis in some people, but the couch transforms the intensity, so as to guide moods, feelings, and sensations in certain directions. At both Schools X and Y this concerns an affective transformation, so as to (re-)create a motivation for the school and its learning and requirements for loyalty. At School X, the couch functions as a trigger for intensity, which allows you to open up, relax, and become integrated into the school. Integration takes place by dissolving the intensity, through the “person being managed” confessing guilt, such that anger and opposition is transformed into devotion and reconciliation. Following Foucault’s conceptualization of pastoral power, we may say
that the couch assists management in its confessional approaches, where the manager sets a
direction for the herd and brings those that lose their way back to the flock (Foucault 2008). A
School Y, the couch is a trigger of intensity, but here it is not the student that must conform, but
management. The couch creates a manageable student as well as an invitation to participate in
decision-making in an office where people listen. Outrage is transformed into solidarity and caring.
From here, the principal and the student can collaborate and share responsibility and tasks, such as,
“Who is to be responsible for problems and assignments?”, “Who takes care of whom?”, and “Who
is to improve?”

Couches, chairs and other comfort technologies are taken up in other texts and genres that concern
schools, management and organizations. Our curiosity and contribution concerns how material and
affective perspectives adjust these analyses by giving a detailed account of the stages and rhythms
in psy-management. Comfort technologies help the affects come about and later crystallize into
concrete feelings. They help “fasten on to” a certain affect that supports the goals and values set by
the organization. By zooming in on the minute material and affective details that support or
counteract psy-management we add a novel perspective to existing analyses of governmentality
and the educational management of self-management) that goes beyond mere control technologies..
In our analysis, the couch becomes a material component in a process that involves intra-acting
with those who sit in it, as well as those that do not. We have examined bodies that touch the couch
and are moved affectively; voices that send and affectively charge concepts from the “psy-
sciences”, ears that tune in on certain frequencies and catch certain sound waves. Management of
self-management is brought about through strategic attempts to heighten and direct intensity, in
various ways and with various consequences for the managerial task. Management – with or
without couches- is never an innocent activity. When the management of self-management concerns
creating positive feelings for the school through affective transformation, the object of management
is changed. Here, management via the couch becomes a question of altering moods, feelings and
experiences, so as to distribute positive feelings in a new way, (re)producing the child to loyalty and
a desire to become a learning student, rather than a student (or parent) that rejects the school
because of bad experiences. When the emotional register becomes an object of management and
when self-management is distributed through an affective shaping of feelings, this task becomes
more comprehensive, but also more fragile. It is not given that there is a one-to-one relationship
between affective transformation and the production of positive feelings toward the school or even
the relationship between the desired affective transformation and what actually happens. It may
also produce new tensions that may add to a problematical, psychological environment.
Management therefore depends upon being able to actually transform the affectivity involved and
that this transformation can lead to self-management; and we stress that it is a relation of
dependence not of control. Affective management becomes an attempt to distribute authority to
subjects, who can and are willing to take up self-management. The Freudian couch is found in more
and more locations, but when it is found in a school, it is not necessarily a place you visit of your
own free will or without other logics counteracting. One could ask how a manager or principal,
whose formal responsibility concerns making decisions, laying off employees, prioritizing, and
choosing, can enter into a therapeutic role like Freud’s. One problem could be special conflicts of
interest, diverging expectations, and disappointments of a special affective kind when the manager
is both the judge and the therapist.

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i Concerning diffraction see especially Barad 2007 chapter 2. Also interviews with Barad (Juelskjær & Swennesen 2012), From the beginning, Barad’s inspiration for the methodology and ethics of diffraction have come from Haraway, but she develops them through her queering of quantum physics and the development of the notions of apparatus, phenomena, intra-activity etc. This note is only to hint at the fact that there are so much more to be said, and so many more far-reaching consequences of this methodology, analytically, than we have the possibility to embark on within this article.

ii In Denmark, the school management at each school consists of a school principal, a vice-principal and an administrative principal. Often there will also be managers of specific teams.