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Introduction

Anja Kanngieser and Gavin Grindon

Over the past decade, creative modes of dissent have increasingly been capturing the imagination of international social and political movements, the academy and gallery curators. In their emphasis on the affective and the aesthetic, practices of so-called ‘creative politics’ have sought to both remake traditional political practices of resistance and expand our notion of the space of the political by connecting what moves us affectively to what moves us politically. While much discussion has taken place around the general paradigm of creative modes of dissent, there has been less exploration of the affective and micropolitical aspects that underpin them and which are essential to their communicative and connective operations. This special issue hopes to address this gap by examining not just the forms and effects of such dissent, but also how they work and why.

The most visible moments of organized political action are often documented in breathless accounts, which relate their joy, audacity and triumph, or are focused on as an exemplary moment of reception by curators and critics of ‘interventionist’ art. But such moments are composed of micropolitical relations and movements that are bodily and affective, personal and emotional, which often slip under the radar of what is commonly thought of as political. These are some of the movements and relations that we wish to discover. At the same time, in looking to connect affect to effect, we hope to explore when and how practices of creative politics succeed in moving between these minor, individual acts of resistance and collective practices of dissent. For this special issue we invited critical contributions that examine creative political practices in terms of these micropolitical processes and which focused on their affects, including those of failure, disjunction, resentment and sadness. Through these, we aimed to explore minor, every day practices of subversion, organization and co-relationality – moments that are often less visible and less public. With a critical eye on the purpose and value of such research, we especially invited contributions that employed various forms of participatory action – or militant – research to examine modes of dissent that the authors themselves work with.

Since the 1990s creative politics (framed variously as activist-art, interventionism, creative resistance, cultural activism and several other terms) has been addressed by a broad set of disciplines, principally social movement studies and cultural geography, media studies and art history. Each has brought their own methodological problems and insights, but those of media studies have perhaps

been predominant. In this field, success for creative politics has often been measured in the discipline's own terms of the clear impact of mass-media visibility. But these terms of measure can also be terms of exploitation, in which to succeed is to fail. The victories of social movements often exceed the terms of the institutions they challenge, and often appear (if they appear at all) in negative, as failed projects. One way in which the approaches of different media studies engagements with creative politics run the risk of being reductive of these other effects and potentials is in a tendency to neglect the micropolitical. Art history is often better suited to accounting for the complexities of an intimate, local aesthetic engagement. But the methods of art history are also often predisposed on the individuated reception of a static work. This has changed somewhat with the vogue for collective performance and participatory work, but even here there is often still an emphasis on aesthetic autonomy, which leaves the strategic field of social change a long way off.¹ Creative politics is often curatorially reframed in terms of an exemplary public moment or encounter divorced from wider strategies or social movements, often as and alongside 'interventionist' work focused solely on such moments.

This special issue suggests a deviation in method, which highlights the micro-political as a point at which these issues of local aesthetics and wider political strategy are indivisible. The baggage of the term aesthetics (never mind political aesthetics) often holds one back from engaging with the issues of strategy and effect. Writing on affect since the 1990s, however, has reframed accounts of feeling, emotion and sensation vis-a-vis social relations and social change. More recently, the engagement of many autonomist and post-autonomist Marxist thinkers with these accounts provides a particular strategic orientation towards social movements. Such an approach, in both its theoretical terms and its methods of autoethnographic 'enquiry', are of potential use to those interested in the new terrain of cultural production and how artists, designers and other cultural workers might organize and produce differently for social change.²

To think about the relevance of affect for this special issue it is helpful to frame affect as transitive and extra-human, closely tied to thought in action or process. This understands affect as moving through and across events, bodies, spaces and experiences, in excess of individual or community, eluding any kind of capture. Affect in this sense is a force that arises out of and through relationality and exchange. It underlies and accompanies every event, from the exceptional to the quotidian and is sensed in the 'perception of one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability',³ giving us a feeling of embedded-ness in our experiences and perceptions. The changeable nature of affect, and our sense of it, intensifies our experiences and our positionalities to them. Moreover, affect as intensity is both a catalyst for connection and rupture: it is transformative in that it can break open socialities, and it is connective through the new relations and worlds it compels. Simply put, it is catalysed by, and further catalyses, change.

The ethical crux of affect can be found here: in a concentration on the immersion and participation in the world, in belonging to the world and to *each other* as a lived, self-affirming reality independent from the value of bureaucratic, state or religious apparatuses.⁴ This is why an 'aesthetic politics' for Brian Massumi is one whose 'aim

would be to expand the range of affective potential'.⁵ Each article in this special issue engages in some way with such a kind of aesthetic politics.

Directly engaging with a self reflexive understanding toward such an aesthetic politics, Sarah Kanouse and Heath Schultz contribute an autoethnographic inquiry into the work of Compass Collaborations, an artistic research collective of which they are a part, around the time of their participation in the 2010 US Social Forum. Drawing on ideas of militant research, their text takes an open, experimental approach over a formally academic one to more immediately ground and test out notions of political 'sadness' and 'love', in relation to their own collective experiences and interactions.

Continuing the trajectory by Kanouse and Schultz on new social movements and protest camps, Anna Feigenbaum, Patrick McCurdy and Fabian Frenzel introduce us to an original and inventive method for documenting and making sense of transitory moments of affect within social and political protest. They show its utility in relation to their own primary research on Occupy and other protest camp organizations, for which it was developed. Their 'Campfire Chats' methodology draws out a detailed and intense picture of how, through apparently minor moments of affective engagement, objects, images and slogans can powerfully form and direct the identities of social movement participants and the orientations of movements.

Sharing this spirit of self-reflection, the next two contributions both reflect critically on tendencies within creative politics. Firat and Kuryel confront the potential reification of 'creativity' within movements and campaigns, offering an alternate perspective grounded in the example of resistance to privatisation and precarity in the Turkish tobacco industry in 2009.

Other tensions and negotiations emergent in creative, political forms of work are illustrated by Susan Kelly in her discussion of artistic co-writing processes. In her text Kelly invites us on a journey through some of the difficulties of undertaking artistic work within political realms, specifically in terms of affective and communicational labour; a critical focus of much contemporary autonomist Marxist literature. Traversing issues of relational aesthetics and subjectification, Kelly provides an honest and careful insight into the often-invisible lines of power and control in collaborative authorship.

A similar sensitivity is shown by Manuela Zechner in her paper on the family in social movements. As for Kelly, what is at stake are questions of labour and social reproduction, the navigation of collective and common subjectivities and forms of life. For Zechner, while discourses of affect and micropolitics often address creative and nonconventional forms of labour, they tend to ignore the place of the family in issues of sustainability, aging and social organization. Speaking to this lacuna, Zechner calls for a rethinking of the function and composition of the family, especially in networked and precarious modes of life and work. For Zechner what is crucial to this is the invention of creative ways of conceiving reproduction and care. By drawing from the recent Spanish 15M movements, Zechner demonstrates how

we might experiment with different imaginaries of familial structures outside of heteronormative, nuclear models.

Crucial to how Zechner approaches the political is an attention to the complex and opaque aspects of political and emotional work. This is common to many of the discussions included in this special issue: an embracing of the messy, small and uncertain experiences that make up political organization. Such an embrace underpins Tetsuo Kogawa's work on micro-radio. Through conversation with Anja Kanngieser, Kogawa introduces the reader to the history of micro-radio or small-scale radio in Japan during the 1980s. What Kogawa's story brings to an exploration of the micro-political and affective terrains is a study of a particular technology in the search for sites of common articulation and connection. By revealing the very little known practices of micro-radio, Kogawa reminds us of the importance of those localized, minor and experimental forms of transmission; an importance that resonates across different scales of political organization, from the most invisible to the most spectacular of moments.

This entanglement of the personal and the political is perhaps most acutely captured in the work of live artist the Vacuum Cleaner, who provides our cover image. An art activist collective of one, the Vacuum Cleaner explores the world of political activism, mental health, capitalism and power through brandalism, performative encounters and guerrilla communication. In a series of performances 'cleaning up after capitalism', (in this case on New York's Wall Street in 2003) the Vacuum Cleaner sought to bring visibility to the destructive and alienating effects of capitalism through humour and spatial intervention. By destabilising the public and the private realms through unexpected behaviours, he both situated the struggles of neurodiversity within a social and political framework and challenged the smooth function of accumulated sites of power, opening up spaces to question the seemingly organic and necessary operations of everyday life under capital.

So what might we take, then, from these very different methods of engagement, vocabularies and ways of relating within creative political organization? There are three intersecting points to do with affect and micropolitics that we might consider when looking to present and future imaginaries. Firstly, our social relations, that is to say how we relate to ourselves and each other; Secondly our communication, our ways of speaking and listening and finally, the temporalities and transversals that are leveraged through these practices.

Writing about the dynamics of power and resistance, Gustav Landauer commented that 'the State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another'.⁶ This sentiment is echoed in autonomist and post-operaist writings on the mechanisms of capitalism. What is critical to the creative activisms explored in this issue are ways of being and relating that antagonise, escape and reconfigure those of capital and the state. Whether through allowing for more pleasure, fun and conviviality, spaces for careful disagreement and conflict, or opening out new understandings of family and love, complimenting these relations

are organizational and political methods for experimenting with different possibilities, as flawed and messy as they may be.

Such experimentation, especially in how we listen and speak to one another, may provide moments for resistant practices to be articulated in more unseen, everyday and subtle ways. In an era that puts to work our capacities for communication, empathy, intelligence and aesthetics, escape routes may be found in new forms of life that invite the formation of common expression, the meeting of common stakes and desires that seek to negotiate capture by capital. For Augusto Illuminati, ‘these are not to be understood as fixed aggregates, existing romantic communities, or vital spheres that are prior to systematic colonization, but rather as linguistic games with multiple and variable participants’.⁷ The practices of creative politics enact these kinds of games that play with and subvert hegemonic feedback loops, helping us to conceive possibilities of doing things otherwise.

The focus here on everyday as well as more spectacular practices is critical. As is the attention to the times of the present along with the futures yet to come. The creative political practices introduced in this special issue share a transversal aspect that moves between varying scales of organization and visibility, from public performances and direct action to friendships and care networks. The spaces of politics mapped through these transversal movements are as oriented by multiple desires for the end of capital as they are toward carving out autonomous spaces in the here and now. It is through their recognition of the mutual constituency and importance of diverse scales and sites of resistance that these projects and experiences become interesting. Indeed, it is by way of this recognition that we might come to envisage and prefigure an affective politics that is on the one hand sensitive to the nuances and struggles of our everyday worlds, and on the other, inventive enough to embolden our wildest hopes and speculations.

Notes

¹ For a more detailed account of these methodological issues, see Gavin Grindon, ‘Pick Apart the Different Approaches’, *Together What Can We Do?* *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* <<http://www.joaap.org/diablog/gavin-grindon-pick-apart-the-different-approaches/>> [21/01/13]

² See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto, 2002) and Colectivo Situaciones, ‘On the Researcher-Militant’, *EIPCP* <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en>> [21/01/13]

³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p.36.

⁴ This ‘each other’ has significance for Massumi who argues for a political response imbued with

an ethics of care and hospitality. Because of the uncertain nature of affect this is all the more imperative. Brian Massumi, ‘Navigating moments’ in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, ed. Mary Zournazi (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.240-241.

⁵ Massumi, ‘Navigating moments’, p.235.

⁶ Gustav Landauer, ‘Weak statesmen, weaker people,’ *Der Sozialist* (1910). Excerpted in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas – Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE-1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005).

⁷ Augusto Illuminati, ‘Unrepresentable Citizenship’ in *Radical thought in Italy: a potential politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.183.

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