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Alternative organizing

+ a special section

Feminism, activism, writing

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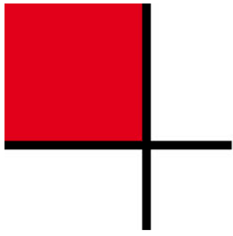

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What are the alternatives? Organising for a socially and ecologically sustainable world

Mary Phillips and Emma Jeanes

Feminism, activism, writing!

Sine Nørholm Just, Sara Louise Muhr and Annette Risberg

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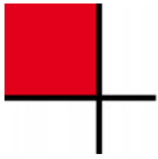

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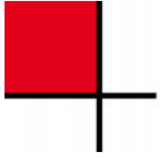

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What are the alternatives? Organising for a socially and ecologically sustainable world

Mary Phillips and Emma Jeanes

Introduction

This special issue brings together three articles and two notes seeking to explore alternative ways of organising that strive to address the social and environmental challenges we currently face. The collection traverses disciplines to include theoretical, philosophical and empirical papers; ranging from action-research methodology to the philosophy of Merleau Ponty to the post-capitalist politics of J.K. Gibson-Graham[1] and covering co-ops, political parties, makerspaces and alternative food provisioning. Notwithstanding the eclecticism of approaches and organisations, each tries to answer a central question: how can we organise differently given that we face the potential collapse of our current social and natural ecologies? The papers ask how we can build capacity for living and organising in ways that align better with natural systems, imagining ecologically sustainable and socially just alternatives. They posit different ways of understanding and experiencing nature and our social relationships, including how we research alternative organisations FOR sustainability (understood in its broadest sense) such that those organisations are further empowered to bring about change.

Never has the search for finding different ways of living in the world (Gibson-Graham, 2011) been so urgent. The capitalist market economy, gripped by the icy hands of neoliberalism, continues to wreak havoc on our social and natural ecologies. Indeed, the idea of the Capitalocene, described by Jason Moore as 'a multispecies assemblage, a world-ecology of capital, power and nature' (2016: xi),

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1 J.K. Gibson-Graham is the portmanteau name shared by feminist economic geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson.

has growing currency among scholars who recognise that we are living through a systemic shift in the earth's systems with 'the potential to transform Earth rapidly and irreversibly into a state unknown in human experience' (Barnosky et al., 2012: 52). Planetary boundaries are being crossed (Rockstrom et al., 2009) and climate stability and biodiversity pushed to breaking point (Mace et al., 2014; Steffen et al., 2015). The biosphere with which the fate of humans is inextricably interlinked thus continues to degrade at a frightening pace. Loss of habitat, poaching, use of herbicides and pesticides, pollution including the devasting impact of plastic waste in the oceans, climate change driven by growing greenhouse gas emissions and atmospheric concentrations of CO^2 are causing a genocide of animal, insect and plant life such that we are living through a sixth extinction event (World Wildlife Fund, 2016). Climate change is also leading to severe weather events such as hurricanes, wildfires, drought and flooding. Meanwhile, the politics of austerity mean that inequality and poverty are growing (OECD, 2018); for example, in the United Kingdom, between April 2017 and March 2018, there was a 13% increase in the three-day emergency food supplies distributed to people in crisis by the Trussell Trust[2], following a 6% increase over the previous year (Trussell Trust, 2018). Add to this an increase in precarious and poorly paid employment, the dismantling of welfare systems and a rise of the far right. The 'other', in the form of migrants whether legal or illegal, refugees, ethnic minorities, welfare claimants and the disabled, are demonised. A sense of belonging in a shared endeavour with others has been hollowed out and replaced by increasing alienation, atomisation, individualisation and a focus on the enterprising self who is wholly responsible for their self-determination through making choices that will determine success or failure (Dawson, 2012; Giddens, 1991). Political and geographical community and participatory culture is being torn apart (Monbiot, 2017).

At the same time, we edge closer to a collapse of capitalist economy, as its inherent contradictions become ever more apparent. Salleh (2003), taking a feminist-Marxist perspective, points to the tensions between the social relations of production versus the forces of production (for example, the potential displacement of jobs by new technologies may undermine the profit generated by labour), between the social relations of production versus its conditions (for example, factory conditions and local pollution damaging workers' health such that their capacity for productive labour is compromised) and particularly between the forces of production and an externalised nature (ongoing resource extraction undermines the availability of future inputs). The repeated and systemic crises these contradictions have caused have been resolved, thus far, by

2 The Trussell Trust runs a network of over 400 foodbanks, giving emergency food and support to people in crisis across the UK.

new means of extracting value from the natural world (Salleh, 2003; see also Biesecker and Winterfeld, 2016; Moore, 2015) but this has resulted in the ecological checks and balances of the planet being degraded. Capitalism has manipulated nature 'as inert and fragmented matter' which has resulted in the near collapse of 'nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal' (Mies and Shiva, 2014: 23) such that further appropriation of the work of nature is becoming increasingly difficult. As nature's resources become scarcer, their extraction is enforced by growing authoritarian action on the part of governments and corporations seeking to protect their economic interests. This is one of the elements of what Klein (2007) has called 'disaster capitalism'; delivering or exploiting crises to further embed controversial policies in their wake.

The existential nature of these interlinked ecological, social and economic crises means that it is imperative to look at alternatives to the ways we currently organise. Pinning down what is meant by alternative, and the significance of alternative organisation is a work in progress. An increasing number of social scientists have begun to research and theorise alternative economic and political practices (see Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016, for an interesting review). Cultural geography has been at the forefront of this, and in particular the work on diverse economies developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham. Two of our contributions, those offered by Willatt and Elzenbaumer and Franz, are also influenced by Gibson-Graham's work. Gibson-Graham critique the theorisation of capitalism, globalisation, financialisation and so forth as an inevitable condition, because it renders invisible a multitude of hidden and alternative economic activities. Gibson-Graham (2008) focus instead on the diversity of ways of, for example, remunerating labour, distributing surplus and establishing commensurability in exchange that might not be acknowledged by the capitalist system. They use an iceberg metaphor (2006) to illustrate how capitalism is a visible, but small, proportion of all economic relations, while a substantial number of invisible economies lie below the waterline, including barter, care work for children and elders, community service, donations, gifts or self-provisioning to name but a few. These are the unregarded 'glue' that holds society together but which allow the visible economy to function and which exist as glimpses of a potential and different future.

Indeed, Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) argue that the very label 'alternative' marginalises non-dominant ways of organising such that their credibility can be questioned. They point to the difficulty of describing the 'alternative' without reference to the already known, a point also addressed by Husted's contribution, and that aiming for radical discontinuity with current norms is bound to disappoint. Positioning 'alternative' against 'mainstream', or 'good' against 'bad' reveals a reductive binary thinking that blinds us to the current developments

and future possibilities of already existing divergent forms of organisation (Beacham 2018). Jonas (2010) also argues that binarism serves only to legitimise currently dominant economic and social relations whereas we should try to know, represent and narrate diversity and difference to challenge such categories. For Gibson-Graham, this means reading for difference, being open to the fluid and contingent nature of diverse economies and recognising them as spaces that enable experimentation in the politics of the possible, in order to seek a fundamentally changed society. While it is imperative that knowledge of the real and present dangers we face is disseminated, seeing only barriers, overshoots, decline and collapse in our current predicament is to preach a mantra of disempowering despair.

However, although interest in these concerns is growing in Management and Organisation Studies (for example, see the *ephemera* special issue on 'Organizing for the post-growth economy'), it has, as a field of academic research, been muted in addressing social and ecological challenges. Valerie Fournier has pointed out: 'if one looks at the field of organisation studies specifically, one may be forgiven for thinking that there aren't many alternatives to capitalist corporations' (2002: 189). This view is echoed recently by Martin Parker when considering most management and business education. His call to 'shut down' the Business School underlines the focus on large, profit-maximising corporations which does not consider alternative forms of organising as options; instead globalising, speculative capitalism is seen as almost inevitable (Parker, 2018). The myth that there is no alternative to capitalism and current dominant forms of organisation is thus promulgated by not only the ways in which the production of goods and services is ordered, by the creation of 'obedient' producers and consumers who are almost trapped within cultural and material webs but also by the foci and methods of much MOS research and the ways we educate many of those who will enter the world of work (Parker et al., 2014; Parker, 2018; Shiva, 2014; Shove, 2003).

It is a truism often attributed to Einstein that the thinking that has created a problem is unlikely to help us solve it, so we need to break free of those webs and think differently. Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010) argue that we need to look in the holes and interstices left by current institutions and in our current ways of doing things to find transformational practices that challenge and subvert the status quo (see also Gibson-Graham, 2006; 2008). What we are likely to uncover are not grand revolutions and ruptures, but micropolitical processes that stress the importance of local context, local provisioning, community and a renewed civic life. This is what many of our contributors have done; Willatt's research site is a community kitchen that collects and uses surplus food that would otherwise be wasted to prepare food for those suffering from social or economic exclusion.

The kitchen also runs pop-up cafes and education events to alert wider publics to the amount of food wasted by current provisioning systems. Schoneboom examines a 'makerspace' that re-draws relationships to the material, such that we question the provenance of the things we use and, just as importantly, the things we throw away. Elzenbaumer and Franz interrogate a printing co-operative that strives to work, as far as they are able, outside a system which prioritises commercial gain. Husted's focus is perhaps on the most radical of the organisations examined; Alternativet, a Danish political party who are striving for a new and participatory politics that will move away from systems that have become increasingly subject to corporate capture and increasingly undemocratic. These are, in the main, local initiatives that can be understood as resisting and attempting to reform, circumnavigate or transform market-orientated systems. For Gibson-Graham, these initiatives could be built on to develop ways of being and ways of organising that are focused less on growth and profitability but more on social and environmental flourishing (Gibson-Graham, 2003; 2008). They provide a way to see openings for a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

At the same time, we need to be wary of over-idealising or romanticising the possibilities offered by 'the community' or 'the local' as sites of transformation (for example, see Böhm, 2014 for a critical review of Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). While 'community' has emerged as a key concept to respond to global challenges (e.g. Monbiot, 2017), it is notoriously difficult to define so that, for example, the transience and dynamism of communities are overlooked as are the ways that communities of place can be overlapping and conflicting (Burchell et al., 2014). Communities and community action are often represented uncritically as an effective way of reaching vulnerable groups or of building trust and, according to Day, positive ideas of place-based 'collaborative action for the common good' (2006:1) complement ideas of belonging and identity. However, an unreflexive focus on the local can result in issues of power, inequalities, division, exclusion and hegemonic domination being ignored (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Harvey, 1996). Meanwhile, the potential power of the discourse or concept of community has been appropriated and exploited by government in the promotion of a broader neoliberal agenda. This would include abdicating the responsibilities of the state (at either local or national level) by an unrealistic call for community action to fill in the gaps and a masking of broader and systemic social issues (Aiken, 2015; McCarthy, 2005).

There are also issues around the capacity of radical and innovative projects to instigate change. Hargreaves et al. (2013) found that they faced two forms of challenge. First, intrinsic issues around their organisation and management, the skills and resources required, the loss of key people and vulnerability to shocks

such as funding cuts. Secondly, barriers to diffusion that limit their wider, external influence. These include context specificity, geographical rootedness, competition from less radical groups who develop watered-down versions of their ideas and, interestingly, ideological commitments to being other and outside the mainstream that result in an aversion to broader engagement. This last point resonates with a tension also experienced by NGOs campaigning on environmental issues: whether to engage with profit-focused organisations in the hope of influencing them to bring about change (for example, the World Wildlife Fund) which risks corporate capture and being used as a figleaf for business as usual, or the more adversarial approach taken by, for example, Greenpeace (Phillips, 2017). Middlemiss and Parrish (2010) explore the frontiers between structure and community/individual agency and are more hopeful that grassroots action can create change. They too point to the importance of community capacities: cultural capacity (the legitimacy of sustainability objectives arising from a community's history and values); organisational capacity (values of the active organisations within a community and the support they can offer for action); infrastructural capacity (support from government, business and community groups); and personal capacity (individuals' resources such as skills or enthusiasm). They demonstrate that grassroots initiatives for change, even with limited resources, can influence those around them and the social structures they inhabit through interactions between such capacities. This resonates with the focus placed by our contributors on how an ecology of support can be nurtured that will enable initiatives to build capacity. Elzenbaumer and Franz address the ecology of support head on, by setting out how the co-operative operates as a movement, drawing on practical, material, as well as emotional and value-based support to sustain their actions. Husted's study demonstrates how collective action and support can rely upon openness and understanding – an acceptance of difference within a community where there is nonetheless a shared commitment for change.

Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) describe community economies as 'spaces of ethical decision making' which resonates with another of the pre-occupations of our contributors. Striving to organise in ways that foster more regenerative, equitable and ethical practices underpins the ethos of the alternatives that they studied. For Parker et al., this is a fundamental element of being 'alternative', which cannot reproduce 'a social system which relies on coercion, of an economic, ideological or physical form' (2014: 36). At the same time, principles which uphold autonomy and the protection of individual rights must be co-produced with principles that foreground solidarity and 'begin with the collective and our duties to others' (2014: 36). Co-operation, community and equality 'become both descriptions of the way that human beings are, and prescriptions for the way they should be' (2014: 36). Finally, taking responsibility for the future is key; 'the

conditions of our individual and collective flourishing' (2014: 38) of the more-than-human over the long term and to achieve this, there must be a commitment to action. Elzenbaumer and Franz set out similar values that underpin their worker co-operative, and also how their enactment ensures its sustainability. In turn these values are sustained by other (particularly radical) organisations in the wider co-operative movement. Husted's paper focuses on the values of openness and inclusivity that make a new politics possible. At the heart of the paper is the challenge of navigating the values of 'openness' and those of identifying and committing to particular courses of action which become inherently exclusionary. Schoneboom also points to how more sustainable ways of organising and inhabiting urban space can arise from 'tinkering', being open to possibility and fluidity rather than a grand, explicit political vision. Furthermore, the contributions suggest a set of ethics and values that are not capitalocentric (Moore, 2016) and thus driven by the pursuit of growth and profit, but instead are grounded in a different moral logic that includes a revaluation and reorientation of the ways we live with other humans and within the biosphere (Phillips, 2017). Drawing on the work of Merleau Ponty, Korchagina places at the centre of her paper the need for a different way of understanding and experiencing nature that would lead to a moral transformation in relations with the more-than-human world. This is necessary because not only corporations but also alternative organisations and movements can reproduce problematic assumptions about nature. Thus a shift is required to stimulate transformative commitments to alternative forms of living and organising for sustainability. It is also part of the moral logic underpinning the approaches and practices outlined in our contributions that top-down, shallow sustainability frameworks that inevitably lead to business as usual (Phillips, 2017) are rejected but instead the skills, creativity and vision of members build sustainability from the bottom up. In relation to this imperative, Willatt turns the focus back onto the academic community to argue that research into alternatives must be guided by a practical and moral commitment to challenge unjust economic, social and political systems. She sets out the emancipatory premises and practices of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as one way to achieve this through respect for and being inclusive of local forms of knowledge and working with communities to use this knowledge to make the changes they have identified as important. As part of this, she outlines how she strives to include the ethical principles that are foundational to PAR in her own practice through structured ethical reflection; a collaborative approach that draws on communitarian and feminist ethics. In this way, she seeks to ensure the centrality of voices and participation of those who are co-creators of the research and of the transformations they wish to achieve.

Having drawn out the threads that bind our collection together, we now turn to outline in more depth the contribution made by each paper. Our collection opens

with Schoneboom, who explores a 'makerspace' in the North of England. This community-run space enables people to meet and utilise a diverse range of tools and materials available to make a wide range of things. Drawing on an ethnography, and including her own participation in the space, Schoneboom sets the scene for us as we imagine the uniqueness of the place, the vitality invested in and given to the materials such that both things and place are created, as well as social relationships. The makerspace is about potential and possibility, learning, sharing and relating, and being open to others. Whilst not necessarily ecological in nature, many of the 'makers' engage in recycling or upcycling materials, but whatever they craft there is the satisfaction of creation, of learning and of engaging with the material world. In an increasingly virtual world, the makerspace enables high levels of (face-to-face) interaction, peer support and shared learning. This extends beyond the members, with weekly sessions that are open to anyone, and a 'shopfront' that displays what is created that acts as an invitation to others.

Underpinning the activities of the maker space the paper considers how it is organised, to ensure a balance between the need to support the creative autonomy of its members and the rules necessary to create some order and enable the space to work for all. At its heart, the mode of organising retains a sense of possibility, a call for people to consider others, and infuses this with playfulness and humour.

Husted's paper introduces us to 'the alternative' in the context of a new political party in Denmark, *Alternativet* (The Alternative). A newly formed political party and movement, The Alternative exists to oppose hegemonic political practices, both in terms of their political ambitions and the ways in which they organise. Husted tackles a tension that lies at the heart of their desire to remain open, inclusive and 'universal' – open to anyone from across the political spectrum who seeks to join an alternative to current politics – and the need to 'particularise', that is to have policies and make decisions that imply exclusivity. The paper addresses how 'the problem of particularisation' is navigated through the management of subjectivity both of the collective subject (#EtNytVi, or #ANewWe) and the individual subject, the 'Alternativist'. While the former articulates the open and inclusive collective, the latter sets out the subject as someone who is open to others, attentive and curious. Drawing on Foucaultian notions of the subject, and Laclau's understanding of political identity, the paper argues that 'loose couplings' enable the organisation to manage the tension between remaining 'universal' and 'particular' at the same time.

The paper considers how radical politics – a politics that bases itself on opposition – can operate when it operates in the mainstream, in this case when

the party wins seats in parliament. This tackles the important question of how alternative ways of organising can practise in positive ways rather than remain on the fringes critiquing the status quo, whilst at the same time 'resisting' particularisation. Practically this is achieved through the collective and individual subjectivity, that emphasises openness, but also through inclusive 'bottom-up' processes that lead to the generation of a political programme. Drawing on discourse analysis of documentary material and interviews, Husted explores how the collective and individual subject comes into being, and how members identify with the collective and individual 'ideal' subject.

Drawing on a reading of care ethics as a radical social practice Willatt explores in more detail the 'how' of alternative organising through the means of PAR. Willatt aligns the ethical, political, emancipatory intent of PAR with the ambitions of many alternative forms of organising, namely that of a social and ecological commitment. Despite this, she argues that CMS – traditionally largely concerned with non-performativity – has tended to be more theoretical than practical. As a consequence PAR has been an underutilised approach in researching and informing the practice of organisations that have intentions allied to the 'critical' concerns of CMS. In the context of a community, volunteer-run kitchen in the South of England that uses waste food from large corporations to feed and support those in need, Willatt demonstrates how PAR can productively influence the process of organising. Specifically, it shows how the volunteers in the community kitchen were able to challenge the values and practices of its parent charity, leading to a more democratic way of organising.

As well as exploring the specific PAR practices undertaken (e.g. the learning history method, the structural ethical reflection method and collaborative approaches to research ethics), this paper also highlights the tensions faced by individual members when faced with competing values, and also organisations – in this case wishing to adopt a political stance on the causes of food waste and poverty whilst recognising that the organisation relied upon food waste from the very same organisations that it may criticise. This highlights that alternative organisations exist in complex relationships with their 'mainstream' counterparts.

In their note, Elzenbaumer and Franz explore the practices of a radical workers' co-operative that seeks to organise in co-operative ways and that is driven by an ambition for radical eco-social change. Based on a worker-owned printing co-operative that was set up by environmental and social activists in order that they could contribute to direct action (achieved through printing campaign literature) whilst maintaining an income, the note sets out the core values and principles that inform and sustain the co-operative. They describe how the values inform

practice and, echoing Husted's paper, the subjectivity of co-operative members. As well as being 'against' capitalistic practices, they also explore how these values and practices can be sustained, which they express as a manifestation of Gibson-Graham and Miller's (2015) 'economy as ecology'. With values such as 'anti-work' (working part-time and balancing work time with 'life' and activism), placing flexibility and multi-skilling over efficient working practices, ensuring practices are environmentally sound and space is given for environmental action, the co-operative seeks to play its own small role in challenging and transforming (capitalist) practice. But crucially it does not do this in isolation, and it recognises the interdependencies: an ecology of support. The co-operative can only survive through its relationship with other organisations (e.g. the rent-free space it occupies, advice, support) and its members rely on friends, family, partners and the welfare state to make ends meet. The sharing of space, values, labour and so on set out how this is an ecology, although it is also one that draws on institutional frameworks (e.g. the welfare state) that sit outside the immediate community, demonstrating the complex interplay between agencies.

In our last note Korchagina challenges us to think differently about our relationship with nature. Turning to Merleau-Ponty, she seeks to shift our understanding of what nature is and our relationship to it. Currently we're enmeshed in discourse that treats nature as something to be managed and controlled, largely for our own benefit. This, in turn, assumes the solutions to our current environmental crises can be found through our ever-advancing 'mastery' over nature (the gendering here is intentional) enabling us to continue to live our lives through ever-more sophisticated solutions. In contrast, there is a counter-discourse that stresses the rights of nature and its right to exist and thrive. But as Korchagina notes, this treats nature as a legal entity (a right it cannot exercise) and retains a sense of 'mastery' as we appear to know nature – and in doing so losing nature's inherent mystery and otherness. Woven through both perspectives is the separation between us and nature. Whilst we are distinct, such an approach fails to capture our inherent connections. Through the work of Merleau-Ponty she seeks to move the current relationship we have with nature – one that is framed and thus mediated by these discourse – towards an immediate relationship with the world which is both affective and elusive.

To sum up, our contributors focus on what *can* be done and on what *is* being done to develop alternatives that challenge the current orthodoxies which are leading to social and ecological breakdown. They break away from looking only at issues of power or domination, important as those are, but which can leave us overwhelmed by feelings of despair or futility. As Peter North has commented: 'I want to focus more on developing "our" power to create the world we want to see, theorising barriers as issues to be grappled with, not fundamental blocks to

progress' (2014: 1058). The contributions demonstrate that there is a messy middle ground between the status quo and revolution that can act as a platform from which to develop wider awareness and action. The power of capitalism and our current ways of thinking and doing to co-opt and dilute alternative practices and spaces should not be dismissed. However, we need also to avoid a self-fulfilling critique where such spaces and practices are presented as inextricably entangled in existing systems and should therefore be rejected such that any recognition of hopeful change becomes impossible. Overall these papers give us examples, ideas, reflections and conceptualisations of what 'being' and 'acting' alternatives might entail. Notwithstanding the position of these organisations and practices as being 'against' the system – the radical other – they are also nonetheless operating with and within them. They demonstrate how micropolitics and everyday actions can make a difference and point to another way.

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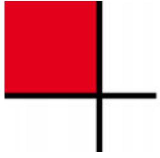
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Making Maker Space: An exploration of lively things, urban placemaking and organisation

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abstract

This visual ethnographic study, which was conducted at Newcastle upon Tyne's Maker Space, explores the organisational and placemaking processes that emerge from a passion for making things. Placing a particular emphasis on this lively engagement, it examines how makers get beneath the surface of everyday objects and perceive their potential for transformation. Tracing the intimacy that makers develop with materials and the surrounding sense of social vitality and possibility that this gives rise to, the study examines how place and organisation are continually renegotiated and given new meaning. The analysis contributes to the literature on sustainable ways of organizing that emerge from the interstices of everyday life and adds to a growing literature on space and organization. It infuses the metaphor of 'parkour organisation' (where parkour is conceived as a disruptive and sensual mind-body engagement with urban space) with a material sensibility drawn from scholarship on lively materials (a fluid conception of things as materials in movement) and ecological sustainability. The organisation that emerges from the needs of makers to engage in a fluid conversation with materials is posited as a sometimes tense yet fruitful negotiation that characterises Maker Space as vibrant and distinctly alive. This process is evaluated as in keeping with approaches to urban development that disrupt 'non-place', promoting critical awareness of one's surroundings, and of civic life, through sensual, richly textured engagement.

Introduction

> We entered Maker Space by the smaller room where a man was mending a ukulele and two guys were bent over the laser cutter, which was printing dinosaur shapes while giving off a smell of burning wood. In the bigger room, some of the makers were having a bubble-making evening, figuring out any way to make them – string, wire, tennis rackets, fans hooked up to computers; the place was jumping with creative energy and someone handed us a tennis racket to join in. Towards

> the end people had spilled outside to the parking lot, ferrying the bubble mixture in and out and gathering at moments to watch the big soapy bubbles bounce across the tarmac. (Maker Space fieldnotes, 2014).

Maker Space is a community-run resource in Newcastle upon Tyne that occupies a former storefront on a run-down block in the city's shopping district[1]. Focused on many aspects of making things from 3D printing to hand sewing, it offers members access to tools, workbenches and a friendly roomful of like-minded makers. This visual ethnographic enquiry explores the organised space that emerges from the activity of making things. It shows how, via a lively engagement with materials, Maker Space becomes a space of possibility that enriches the streetscape and wider city, supported by an emerging organisation that balances fluidity with structure (see Figure 1).

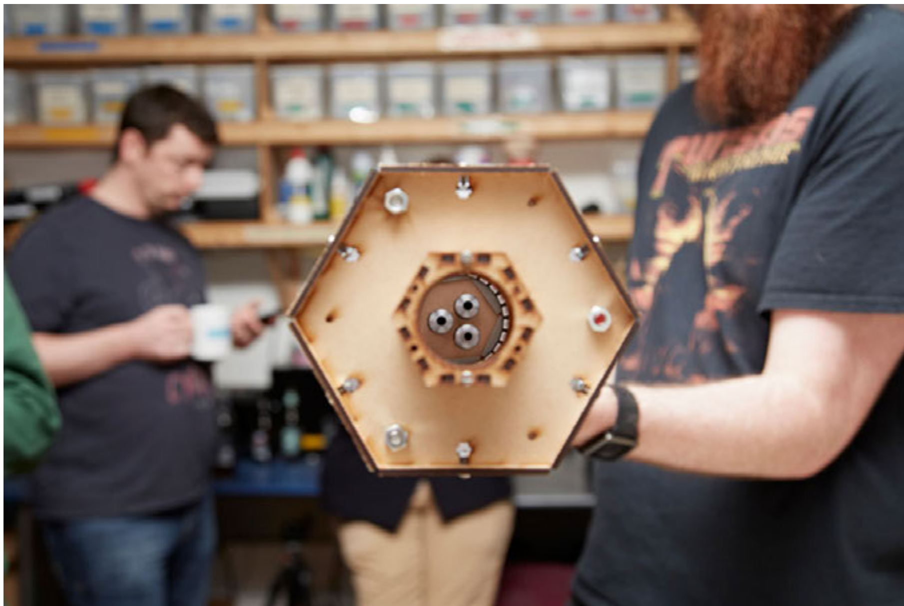

Figure 1: The creation of fascinating objects extends fluidly to the physical and social structure of the space.

This article connects scholarship on organisation and space to recent conceptualisations of the making of the material world, focusing on the urgent need to revitalise 'non-places' (Augé, 2008). Specifically, it brings together makers' sensitivity to the 'liveliness' of materials (Carr and Gibson, 2016) with a disruptive, sensual notion of organisational placemaking (Daskalaki et al., 2008). Whereas existing scholarship on maker/hack spaces has tended to emphasise an explicit, shared political vision as a means by which such spaces might transform

1 Maker Space has since relocated to another space in the city centre.

society, this research focuses more on the type of space that emerges from the tinkering itself, arguing that a passion for unfettered meddling with objects can agitate, even in the absence of a grand political vision, towards a more sustainable mode of organising and inhabiting urban space.

Carr and Gibson (2016) argue that over-emphasis on the financialised knowledge economy in the Global North has muted discussion of how the material world is produced. Upholding that those who make things hold the key to orienting society toward more sustainable outcomes, they call for micro-level analysis that re-focuses attention in this area. As such, they urge, 'ecological crisis demands more, rather than less, attention to materials and making processes' (298). With an emphasis on organisation and place, this article takes up Carr and Gibson's call for researchers to examine the connection between microspaces of making and broader debates about sustainability. Sustainability is considered here as a socio-cultural as well as ecological concept (Bontje, 2004; Hagan, 2015), defined around vibrant sociality, rich civic engagement and a mode of production that connects us meaningfully and respectfully to our world.

Connecting these ideas to organisation studies, the lively connection with materials that flourishes at Newcastle's Maker Space is considered here as an embodied, parkour-like engagement that restructures space 'as a realm of interaction and possibility, rather than a closed system' (Daskalaki et al., 2008: 60). Daskalaki et al.'s meditation on the radical inhabitation of 'an-aesthetised' (Dale and Burrell, 2002), homogenised non-places (Augé, 2008) urges organisational scholars to attend to unconventional practices that 'trick' such space into 'yielding creative possibilities and a sense of one's own body and humanity' (Daskalaki et al., 2008: 56). The contribution of this article is thus to infuse debate on organisation and space with a richer material sensibility, tracing the organisational and spatial processes that emerge, in this non-commercial interstice of urban life, from the passion for making.

The following section describes Newcastle's Maker Space, situating it in relation to the wider maker movement and scholarship on maker/hackspaces. This is followed by a brief literature review, which identifies aspects of the scholarship on lively materials that are relevant to sustainable organisation and draws out, from the literature on organisation and place, the relevance of sensual and embodied engagement to critical thinking and social transformation, arguing that attention to materials/making can enrich this scholarship. The methodology is then described, followed by a narrative drawn from photography, interviews and participant-observation in the setting. Returning to the literature, these findings are analysed in the concluding discussion.

Contextualising Newcastle's Maker Space

Newcastle upon Tyne's Maker Space is an independent, community-owned and operated workshop with 52 members[2] but is part of a maker phenomenon that has seen the growth of many such spaces globally. Worldwide, there are approximately 1,400 active makerspaces with around 500 located respectively in Europe and North America (Lou and Peek, 2016). A makerspace can be broadly defined as 'a collaborative work space inside a school, library or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools' (Makerspaces.com). Within this very broad container there is some debate about whether a distinction should be drawn between terms such as 'makerspace' and 'hackerspace' (Cavalcanti, 2013), however, the terms are often interchangeable – we therefore use the term 'makerspace' here to denote both. Organisationally, such spaces are diverse, including for-profit makerspaces such as the 'Techshop' chain, therefore the terms do not necessarily denote a collectivist or non-profit ethos. Alongside this heterogeneity, best-selling publications such as *Makers* (Anderson, 2013), as well as the popular Maker Faire events, promote the idea of a broadly unified worldwide maker movement oriented to reviving the art of tinkering as a hands-on, sociable way of transforming the world for the better (Dougherty, 2012). Notably, these somewhat evangelical claims have been tempered by recent critical analysis that situates making as primarily a leisure activity or personal lifestyle choice rather than one that is centrally oriented to social or political transformation (Davies, 2017).

Recent scholarship has explored many facets of the 'Maker Movement', from its role in education (Halverson and Sheridan, 2014) to its potential to transform supply chain design (Waller and Fawcett, 2014). Ethnographic study of hackspaces has produced textured accounts of making practice, showing infusion of hacker norms with feminist (Rosner and Fox, 2016) and Chinese cultural (Lindtner, 2015) characteristics. Focusing on cities, Richardson et al. (2013: 150), suggest that maker networks are reinvigorating cities 'transforming the architecture of industrial-era corporatism to reflect a new wave of maker values'.

While aspects of this literature connect making to social transformation, makerspace ethnographies tend to emphasise the existence of a shared political vision in driving such effects, rather than examining closely the organisational impact of working with materials in the space. For example, Lindtner's (2015: 861-862) account of the co-created Shanghai hackerspace XinCheJian, emphasises a shared commitment to upholding Chinese values while

2 Figure supplied during the period of study.

challenging normative career paths. Similarly, Rosner and Fox's ethnography of Mothership Hackermoms highlights the shared vision of gender equality undergirding the space, focusing on the type of space and organisation for making that emerges out of the 'dark, unromantic, slightly humiliating side of modern motherhood' (2016: 5). Also, Richardson et al.'s (2013) article observes the impact of making in Detroit but lacks a fine-grained analysis of how this occurs, calling for further sociological study of the processes via which making nurtures urban resilience.

The fluid relationship between making things, organisation and place-making thus warrants closer theoretical unpacking. Drawing on work that examines the relationship between materials, awareness that the world can be transformed and critical thinking about organisation and place this article therefore seeks to construct a more explicit link between this sensual engagement with making and emergence of a place-based organisation that is oriented to sustainable outcomes such as vibrant sociality and urban revitalisation. Specifically, the type of place that is created is found to be consistent with a mode of urban development that involves people more richly in their local environment, militating against the political amnesia and social atomisation that occurs in overly corporatised urban centres.

Theoretical characterisations of materials, making and disruption of non-place provide a useful starting point for reflecting on the buzzing activity that goes on at Maker Space. The research was conducted in a largely inductive fashion, meditating on the link between the critical scholarship of making physical things and that of place-making/organisation – the intention here is to 'set the stage' in terms of this literature – the findings are presented and evaluated against these theoretical ideas in the following sections.

Lively materials and sustainable placemaking

This article draws on a conception of materials and making that emphasises the ability of makers to treat their world as fluid and changeable. Critical of the hylomorphic model of subject-object that has dominated Western thought, Ingold (2012: 438) distinguishes 'leaky' *things*, conceived as 'gatherings of materials in movement', from 'stopped-up' or 'completed' *objects* which 'stand over and against the perceiver and block further movement.' Rooted in a Heideggerian conception of the thing, materials here are regarded as lively rather than passive and inert (Bennett, 2010), as lines of flow (Deleuze and Guatarri, 2004: 451-452) where 'being something is always on the way to becoming something else' (Ingold, 2011: 3).

Within this conceptualisation, making, defined generally as 'the composition and/or manipulation of materials that brings into being new or revised objects' (Carr and Gibson, 2016: 302), becomes very distinctly a conversation rather than the imposition of pre-conceived notions of form on inert matter. Making is a fluid, ultimately political correspondence that pays attention to materials in a way that 'transcends their configuration as things or objects at a singular point in time' (Carr and Gibson, 2016: 302). Those who make, it is implied, are able to shift from what *is* to what *could be*; they are well equipped to deal creatively with the contingencies thrown up by ecological crisis, countering a high throughput production model where everyday life is enacted – rather emptily – through 'finished', readily disposable objects.

Undergirding Carr and Gibson's analysis is the notion that hegemonic capitalist interests have generated a mode of production that cuts off the vitality of materials and obscures the provenance of the things we use and too readily get rid of, cutting us off from, in Hudson's (2012: 374) terms, the ability to 'imagine alternative ecologically sustainable and socially just visions of the economy.' Linking this scholarship on materials and making to the socio-political dimensions of place-making, Paton (2013: 1084) argues that, where sensual, creative interaction with materials prevails, making is a mode of familiarity that keeps space relatable, rendering hard surfaces porous and accessible to the senses. For Paton, this familiarity, which comprises an 'accumulation of bodily knowledges, where dense and fibrous relations with spaces and materials grow' (*ibid*.: 1076), can be easily broken and disengaged by economic and technical upheaval. However, if nurtured, this intimate relation can foster a sensual relationship that connects us richly and meaningfully to place.

Organisation studies, non-place and the 'parkour organisation'

Drawing on the above conception of materials/making, this article seeks to infuse Daskalaki et al.'s (2008) metaphor of the 'parkour organisation' with a material sensibility. A growing body of work has drawn attention to the relevance of lived space and place to organisational theory (Burrell and Dale, 2003; Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Guillen, 1997), upholding the interplay between the built environment, workspaces and the dynamics of managerial control or capitalist hegemony. Adding to this scholarship, Daskalaki et al. are specifically concerned with the radical inhabitation of homogenised, corporatised urban space as a means to disrupt non-place through a deeply reciprocal engagement of the body and the built environment.

Resonating with scholarship on materials and making, Daskalaki et al.'s (2008) analysis centres on a problematic derived from the deadening, closing down and

disengagement from place that derives from smooth, inviolable surfaces. Following the practice of *traceurs* and using their physical engagement with the city as a metaphor, this mode of organisation is conceived as challenging – through the body in movement – the pacified veneer of non-place.

The sense of non-place (Augé, 2008) resulting from contemporary urban development has been widely theorized (Jacobs, 1992; Relph, 1976; Sennett, 1990; Sudjic, 1993). Our cities are increasingly characterised by homogeneity and repetition and the relationship of the individual to place is contractual and objectified. Furthermore, loss of an intimate, vibrant sense of place numbs critical-thinking skills (Paterson, 1997), producing isolated individuals with limited potential for civic engagement. Loss of connection to place reduces the capacity for imagination of the possible, instigating a vicious cycle of political amnesia and environmental degradation (Farrar, 2011). The predictable retail and leisure offerings that prevail in urban centres too often epitomise this 'placelessness'.

Breaking through the 'superficial formalism' of placeless places, Daskalaki et al. (2008) argue for parkour-style interventions that physically and sensorily engage the body in space, yielding creative and critical potential. Again, the concern of this article is to infuse the metaphor of the parkour organisation with a material sensibility whereby a sense of possibility is transmitted via the sensual engagement with materials in the space. Making, as a sensual breaking-down and building up of things in a setting that itself becomes richly textured and storied through making processes can contribute to the notion of parkour organisation. The making of Maker Space can thus be considered in relation to theoretical insights around materials and making as well as suggesting a meditation on scholarship that highlights our need to connect with and co-create spaces that disrupt the anesthetising dynamics of the high street.

Methodology: Photographing and talking Maker Space

The study was inspired by the palpable creative energy experienced at Maker Space's publicly accessible Welcome Wednesdays (see Figure 2).

The largely inductive and interpretivist methodology involved participant-observation on Welcome Wednesdays over a two-year period by the author and a more intense period of semi-structured interviews and photography (with the photographer) during December 2015-January 2016. We sought to explore the relationship between makers and their creations, the surrounding texture of sharing and organisation, and the impact of Maker Space on the streetscape. The

author has been a member of Maker Space since March 2014 (after being coaxed through the door by her curious eight-year-old son) and has received many hours of guidance on various construction projects from Maker Space members. The research is therefore also informed by a reflexive meditation based on fieldnotes from her research diary, reflecting her participation in the space as a somewhat daunted 'outsider' while also explicitly aiming to capture the contagious excitement and enthusiasm arising from her subjective encounter with the Maker Space.

Figure 2: Welcome Wednesday, where the social buzz of the space is palpable from inside and out.

Maker Space has no single gatekeeper and permission to conduct the study was sought/granted by posting the details of the planned research activity on the Maker Space-admin mailing list (which is open to all members), fielding any questions, and being permitted to proceed in the absence of objections. Several members immediately volunteered to participate in the research as part of this discussion process while other participants were part of a convenience sampling process based on those who were around during the photographic engagement. As a result of the discussion-list-based recruitment, the interviews attracted members who have a founding or very active role in the space. All except one of those interviewed are male (which is broadly representative of the male-female gender ratio of the membership – this imbalance was outside the scope of this study but would make an interesting future research project).

The photographic engagement took place on Welcome Wednesday at the Maker Space Christmas party. Recognising that photographic meanings are contingent and subjective (Pink, 2014: 75), we aimed at a strategy of looking (Lyon, 2013: 25) that was casual and responsive to the direction of makers, using photography as a 'can-opener' (Collier and Collier, 1986) that facilitated makers' sharing their feelings during the social flow of the party and helped establish a conversational rapport in the subsequent interviews. Initially, the photographer created collaborative portraits with individual makers, intentionally focused away from the face to emphasise our interest in the sensual hands-on aspects of making. These photos were aimed at understanding members' feelings about the things they had made, through their manner of holding their creations and the features they wanted to show to the camera. The analysis of the photographic data, which was informed by interview conversation about the images during and after the photographic engagement, paid particular attention to how made things are handled; the juxtaposition of individual making and sociality; and the sensory 'marvelling' that accompanies the handling and display of these creations.

As part of our emphasis on understanding the sensorial dimension of place, we also combined photography and movement, in the form of 'walk-arounds' that 'attend to elements of the ways that people experience and give meanings to their environments' (Pink, 2014: 81). Julian (the photographer) was guided around the space by different makers, capturing aspects of the language of objects and signage (Sudjic, 2009) in the space that were meaningful to them. Drawing on Abby's (the author) reflection on Maker Space's impact on the street and how it feels to approach Maker Space from the outside, Julian also photographed the movement and energy of members as transmitted through the windows.

Informed by the photographic engagement, ten audio-recorded interviews of 25-40 minutes were conducted at Maker Space or – when the space was too noisy – across the street at the City Library, which overlooks Maker Space. After transcription, these were shared with participants for their validation. Given the reflexive and ethnographic nature of the research, the interviews were conducted in an informal conversational style, exploring meanings and impressions that attach to the space and to making practice. This two-way process has also involved 'bouncing ideas' off some of the makers with regard to the analytical/theoretical focus of the paper (especially the framing of making in relation to 'lively materials').

As in much ethnography (Duneier, 2000; Van Maanen, 1991) the author/photographer's subjectivities were treated as an integral aspect of this research and, rather than trying to excise it, the write-up focused on articulating feelings and experiences in a way that makers would read as a reasonable

interpretation of their world. Drawing on Pink (2009) the research design drew on an emplaced sensory methodology, acknowledging the 'sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment' (Howes, 2005: 7) in the space. Interviews were conducted in the space wherever possible so that machine noise and social interruptions worked their way into the conversation and the transcripts.

As such, we aimed to generate richly textured data based on a fluid engagement with the space. The transcribed data, fieldnotes and photographs were coded using NVivo with emergent themes identified using techniques drawn from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The interpretation of the data, while somewhat inductive, is also deeply informed by the author's critical theoretical orientation, which is in turn entangled with her efforts to learn how to solder and use a drill. The study aims to respect this layered interpretation of social reality and, within the constraints of article-length, tries to retain the richness and enthusiasm with which makers expressed their passion for making things, resisting the tendency to reduce or resolve its contradictory aspects (Van Maanen, 1988: 116).

Findings

Maker Space's main room, on a Wednesday evening, offers a pleasant mix of individual concentration, as makers huddle over their projects, and warm interaction. The white workbenches in the main room are in close proximity – the front one, which is at dinner table height, is often abuzz with quadcopter activity. The taller worktables in the rear are more suitable for woodwork, while another station to the side is set up for soldering, however these lines are blurred and it is not unusual to see, at the same bench, a maker poring over delicate circuitry side by side with another who is cutting out cloth or sawing wood. Amidst the enticing boxes of hackable bits and bobs and the boards hung with hand tools (each with its own silhouette to remind everyone to put things back in the right place), makers focus on their projects with an enviable level of absorption, punctuated by currents of banter and show-and-tell that permeate the space with a friendly vibe.

The following sections explore how the space emerges physically and organisationally around the act of making, with a fluid, unfinished quality that extends from individual making projects to the making of a richly textured and storied space. The findings are organised into four sections, exploring a) the emphasis on getting beneath the surface of materials and everyday objects; b) the realm of interaction and possibility that emerges around making activity in the

space; c) the extension outwards of the space in revitalising the streetscape and wider city; and d) Maker Space's emergent organisation as an engaging, lively making project.

Getting beneath the surface

> Armed with a cutting board and rotary cutter, Ben[3] was cutting out fabric for bags, measuring, coaxing the material quickly into shape with dexterity. He has only recently started dabbling in sewing but now runs Maker Space's sewing nights, learning how to do things with speed and focus. Recently, he has also become interested in quilting, and he showed me a photo of a unique, collage-style quilt he had made from pieces of clothing that his kids had grown out of. Now that the quilt is finished, he's onto another experiment with the bags, just to get to know the fabric and tools and see what can come out of it. (Maker Space fieldnotes, 2016)

When asked why they make things, many of the makers privilege the satisfaction of 'making to learn', highlighting the types of new skills and knowledge that they acquire through setting themselves a making task and becoming absorbed by it. Phil, one of the co-founders, who spends long hours on painstaking and fiddly projects, coaxing tiny components into or out of place with delicate tools, compares the thrill of successfully making something to summiting a mountain peak. Another keen maker, Rob, noted that he sometimes purposely avoids using existing tutorials in order to set himself more of a challenge and learn more directly, finding his own way to a solution.

This process can take on its own momentum leading to a sustained hands-on engagement and intimate familiarity with the materials at hand, with makers showing extreme tenacity in puzzling over a problem until they find a workable solution. As Rob, who has devoted huge amounts of hands-on time to projects such as the Christmas window display (which involved uncooperative moving penguins and precise mathematics) comments, 'you get so far along and you've got to finish it because if you stop then it would be silly.'

Re-purposing and re-using found objects is an ideal outlet for this curiosity about pushing boundaries and problem solving. In the space, this process is encouraged by the use of loosely organised scrap containers which offer a scavenger's cornucopia of obsolete circuit boards, cast-off kids' toys, plastic tubes and scrap wood that members are free to rummage through (see Figure 3). These are complemented by the more organised (yet full of surprises) rows of boxes of 'Stepper Motors', 'Bulbs (Working)' and 'Phone Bits' (see Figure 4), as well as more specialised hacking equipment such as the device Phil uses for extracting

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3 Pseudonyms have been used for Maker Space members.

soldered components from circuit boards (see Figure 5). Some of the makers described their making process as setting out from a discarded, superfluous or broken object and playfully feeling out the possibilities, handling and contemplating it to figure out how it might be re-used. For example, John, an expert upcycler, is re-purposing an old hospital stretcher as a radio mast, while Ben, another of the makers, regularly constructs toys for his children from things he has found lying around. For found objects as well as those that are purchased, the emphasis is on getting beneath the surface, redefining functionality or, as Phil puts it, 'breaking things apart to take their design function away and use them in different ways.'

Figure 3: One of many ever-changing boxes of free 'hackable' scrap items that makers can rummage through.

Figure 4: Maker Space Consumables: Colour-coded boxes provide order to shared resources in the space while preserving a rich sense of variety and treasure-hunting to those who scavenge their contents.

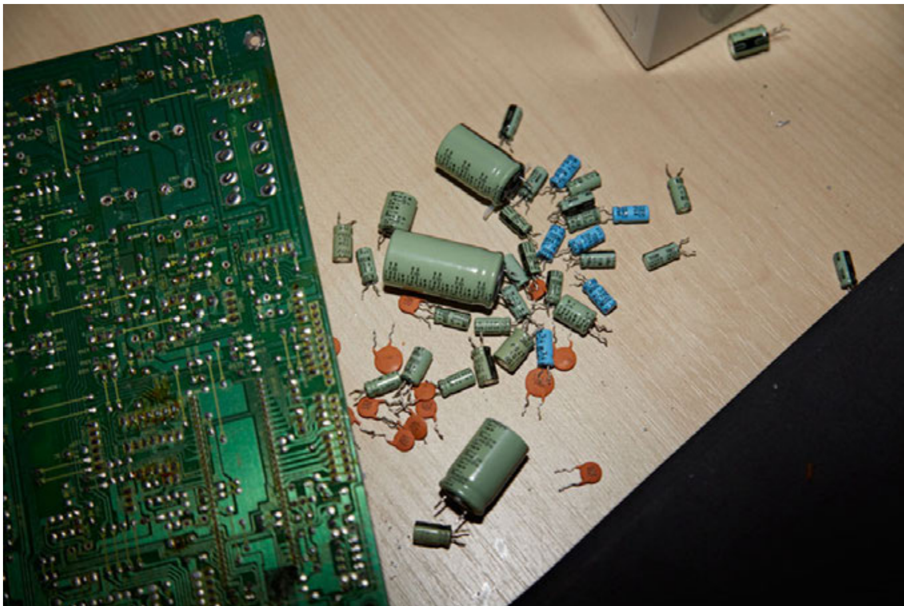

Figure 5: Components painstakingly extracted from old circuit boards, ready to be re-used in new maker projects.

While none of the makers expressed a particular ecological drive behind their making practice, the importance of making a well-built object of known provenance is a value that surfaced in several of the interviews. In particular, Ben regrets that things are no longer built to last, contrasting this with something he

has made, which 'you don't want to just throw away because you know you've invested a lot of time and effort into making it.' Working with Ben to create a photographic portrait of the wooden toy bus he has made for his children particularly highlighted the sense of beholding and marveling that results from this making process. In the photo, he holds the bus solidly and proudly like a sumptuous dish; reflecting on the deep satisfaction that derives from knowing the craft that has put into it, he muses, 'You can pick it up, you can show people you've got something there that you've made, that you can keep forever' (See Figure 6).

The pleasure that makers derive from the things they have created is tangible and often transcends the need for instrumental value. This was evident in the photoshoot, where makers turned their creations over in their hands for the camera, marvelling at the playful or aesthetic qualities. Rob, who has created a number of impressive objects including a laser-cut Perspex model of the Tyne Bridge and a complex cube comprising hundreds of white LEDs, celebrates the mathematical poetry of his beautiful creations. Creating the photographic portrait of his LED cube, he held it at angles that displayed the complex array of lights to the camera, joking, 'They serve no purpose at all whatsoever' (see Figure 7). Things are also valued for their storied quality and for the funky and sensual way in which they have come into being. Evie, who is relatively new to the space, particularly relishes the idea of giving her friends gifts of the one-of-a-kind things – such as laser-cut felted wool coasters (see Figure 8) – that she has crafted herself. During the production process, the laser-cut felt gave off an interesting, slightly singed aroma (in the photographic portrait we spent time celebrating and trying to capture the blackened edges visible in the photo) that, we agreed, enhanced its uniqueness.

Figure 6: A one-of-a-kind toy bus: 'You can pick it up, you can show people you've got something there that you've made, that you can keep forever.'

This emphasis on getting beneath the surface of everyday materials, surrounded by boxes of scavengeable bits and bobs, creates a place defined around surprise and fluidity – this open-ended, messy yet focused, emerging quality makes the space feel richly alive and creates a palpable energy that is explored further below.

A realm of interaction and possibility

> We were playing with this rubbery stuff called Sugru this evening – someone had gotten hold of a ton of little packets of it and about seven of us were gathered around the workbench, fiddling with it, stretching it, sticking it onto things, combining it with bits and bobs from the boxes, and chatting about our ideas. My brain felt sluggish and I created a round blue blob that I took shamefully home, feeling less able than the others, who worked fluently and creatively with the material, bouncing ideas around and discerning its properties and potential – one of the guys made a little bendy reading lamp that impressed everyone. (Maker Space fieldnotes, 2014).

Figure 7: Rob shows off his beautiful LED cube: 'They serve no purpose at all whatsoever.'

Figure 8: Laser cut felt and jewellery: 'I think the drive to do it comes from the satisfaction of just being able to teach myself to do something.'

Integral to this pleasure in crafting unique things is a high level of interaction focused around knowledge sharing and inspiration, as makers work cheek-by-jowl on their projects in the small space. This 'buzz' infuses the space with a flow of social energy as well as providing a continual feast of things to handle, puzzle

over and admire. Showing made things to others, whether Maker Space members, passers-by, or members of the wider community is a central trope of much of the activity that goes on in the space.

Social interaction at Maker Space is, as Ben puts it, like having 'a peer support network around you.' Knowledge flows quite openly in the space, helping people solve tricky challenges such as unusual soldering issues or finding just the right component to upcycle from one of the scrap bins. As Tim, a regular to the space, comments, 'there's always somebody out there with a completely off-the-wall idea that sometimes will just do the trick for you.'

This knowledge sharing, rather than feeling transactional, is embedded in a pleasure that derives from physical engagement with materials while hanging out and chatting in the space with like-minded people. Bill, a long-time maker who is currently working on a miniature arcade game, notes that although he has access to the tools he needs elsewhere, he comes 'for the social aspect of the Maker Space, to meet people, to share ideas we have in common.' Similarly, Tim makes a point of coming in to socialize, 'if I don't come in the rest of the week one day I'd like to try and make it in is a Wednesday these days, just to come in and chat to people,' while Rob enjoys the fact that due to the esoteric technical knowledge of many of the members, 'there's loads of people I can waffle on to my heart's content.' Interestingly, although specialist virtual discussion forums are plentiful, several of the members expressed their preference for face-to-face social interaction over virtual community and exchange, and were drawn to the hubbub of activity that takes place on a Wednesday evening.

Rather than simple information transfer, excitement and buzz about what is being made often becomes tangible in the space through the flow and form of things taking shape – as Evie comments, 'Everybody's got really creative ideas for things. I think that excitement carries throughout the community.' This produces 'crazes' as makers get interested in and build off each other's projects. As part of this contagion, 3D printers have multiplied – an assortment of them adorn the window ledge and are a highlight of the Maker Space 'tour' (see Figure 9, which was captured during the photographer's guided walk around), and the quadcopter craze has sprouted an 'obstacle course' of empty picture frames that hang from the ceiling to test flying skill when the space is not too busy. Wednesday evenings, as noted earlier, are often the focus of this buzz of curiosity and sensory experimentation – the small space may be filled with a noisy juxtaposition of diverse activities – from sewing theatrical costumes to drilling holes in scrap metal. During moments such as the launch of Tim's quadcopter at the Christmas party, such activity takes on the character of an 'event' – a shared moment that we were invited to record with the camera. In reflecting on the

photo, Tim described the launch as a moment of 'dread and excitement' – in such moments at Maker Space, there is a highly playful and celebratory atmosphere tinged with a thrilling edge of mechanical danger (see Figure 10).

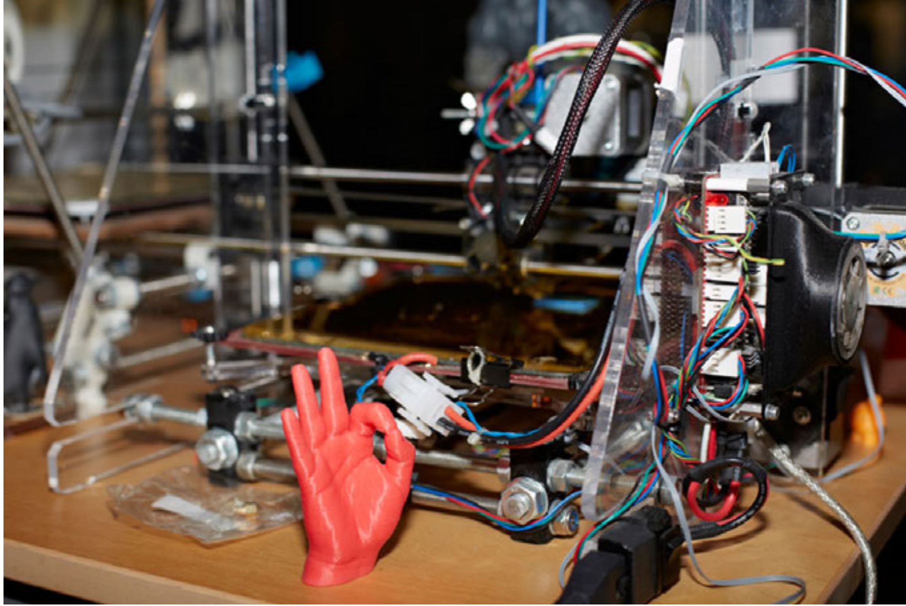

Figure 9: One of several 3D printers displayed in one of the windows: Excitement over particular technologies creates 'crazes' at Maker Space.

Extending outwards

> As we dawdled outside, we were joined by a small boy of about four who had gotten away from his mother, who was loath to leave her shopping bags unattended at the grimy bus stop to come after him. He admired the plastic ducks in the window and seemed to have an already established favourite, possibly from previous deviant excursions from the bus stop. I couldn't blame him for being attracted by the evolving array of colourful, peculiar objects that make this window a lure for the curious on an otherwise grim stretch. (Maker Space fieldnotes, 2015)

Maker Space members are keen to spread their excitement and knowledge outside of the space itself through display of the things they have made, as well as engaging members of the wider public in making. The large, shop-style windows that face the busy thoroughfare capture the attention of passers-by and those waiting for buses at the nearby bus stops. As Ben comments, 'we have a lot of things that we make displayed in our window and we do get a lot of families, a lot of kids, looking in and really enjoying what they're seeing through the window.' The display of plastic ducks in the window is a particular favourite with children and the 3D printers on display often lure in curious outsiders. At Christmas-time, the window display of penguins traversing Rob's laser-cut Tyne

Bridge served as a festive attraction, livening up a dreary section of the street. In warmer weather, as happened with the bubble-making evening (see opening fieldnote) the making activity literally spills out of the space onto the tarmac outside.

Figure 10: Members gather round for the quadcopter launch at the Christmas party – a moment of 'dread and excitement'

This bright yet non-commercial presence in the city centre complements the library opposite as an urban space that is not just focused around shopping and, importantly, is about inviting others to participate in getting beneath the surface of everyday objects. Makers also carry their practice to other venues, participating in library-based events, community arts projects and the annual Newcastle Maker Faire with enthusiasm. During the fieldwork, co-founders Phil and Seb were working on a shouting camera and 'self-hearing headphones' collaborating with an arts project that helps kids conceptualise making ideas. As Malcolm, an active committee member who is currently designing a 3D printing slicer notes, 'I like the idea of changing the community that we live in ... helping it grow, and this is one way to do that. I think it enriches the city to have this type of thing going on.' Bill enjoys giving people 'permission' to take dead or unused machines apart, commenting that he particularly enjoys Maker Space's community involvement in showing 'people that anyone can make things, anyone can create things, and you don't have to have an engineering background or a scientific background'.

Appropriate organisation for making Maker Space

> Please put half the cups one way up and half the other way up: We are never going to agree if cups should be stored bottom up or bottom side down. One way dust can get in, and the other the rims will get gunk from the shelf. It is a lose-lose situation. The solution is to do both. Don't be selfish. It is not the Maker Space way. (Notice inside the kitchen cupboard, Maker Space, 2016)

Generating an organised physical space that supports the creative autonomy and sociality at the heart of making is in itself a making project. Challenges of organisation, such as balancing 'messy' open-endedness with the need for rules (as in the case of health and safety), create a dynamic but productive tension – another puzzle for makers to solve – that promotes engagement in the space and fuels urban vitality.

Maker Space has a flat organisational structure in which, as Mark – a multi-talented maker who is currently working on a 3-D printed robot hand – puts it, 'Anybody is free to do anything with the space as long as it doesn't impact on other people's use of it' so that, in effect, 'no one really runs Maker Space'. A committee exists largely for legal reasons but emphasis is on openness and accommodation of different opinions with a commitment towards getting along and getting things done. As Seb, one of the founding members says, 'I like to keep things so everybody can have a say and everybody can have an opinion, but we don't have to get everybody to agree'. The general lack of coercion in the organisation's structure is balanced by the willingness of members to pitch in and take on less desirable tasks, and this process appears to work relatively smoothly.

This normative framework seems to support makers' interest in being left to get along with the creative flow of their projects, without things becoming too locked down or stalled. At the same time, in areas such as health and safety, or in organising resources for communal use, structure and regulation are evident but humour and a homemade aesthetic help to uphold these rules in a non-dogmatic fashion (See Figure 11). Situations have arisen, such as the storage of dangerous chemicals in the fridge or the acquisition of more powerful tools, where it becomes apparent that tighter regulation is needed, however, as Malcolm points out, this can produce tension as 'people don't feel that they want all that organisation'. While not without its frustrations, this tension between messiness and organisation unfolds dynamically and productively, appearing to support the fluid continuum between autonomy and collaboration that members need to support their lively conversation with materials.

Figure 11: Safety warning on the laser cutter: humour and homespun signage 'soften' the regulatory features of the space.

This open-endedness extends to the membership model. Unlike some other hackspaces, Maker Space operates an open membership policy where anyone can join and pay the monthly membership fee of ten pounds (those who wish to pay more or less are able discreetly to do so), and non-members are invited to come and use the space for free on Wednesday evenings. Beyond the financial side of membership, the makers feel that the norms and culture of the place act as a natural filter, appealing to like-minded people who are interested in making objects in a supportive community of peers.

Those who are too anti-social or who are not sufficiently interested in making would not tend to hang around for long. As John says, 'It's like because we know the people that are coming in are interested in the sort of stuff we're doing or they wouldn't come through the front door.' Building on this openness, the welcoming atmosphere on Wednesday evenings is a considered and intentional effort on the part of members (See Figure 12). Noting the slightly aggressive feel of some techie spaces, Seb says about co-founding the space, 'I wanted it to be a space I would feel welcome and want to go to, like the theme tune to *Cheers*, kind of thing.'

While the fluid, open-endedness of making extends to a welcoming and inclusive set of social norms, and supports members in getting involved in those projects that interest them, there are limits and challenges in the current organisational framework. The open-door policy on a Wednesday runs up against possible

insurance issues and there have been occasional 'characters' who appear to be quietly scoping the place out for possible theft. The popularity of Wednesdays has also sometimes been a problem, creating social overload, particularly when visitors appear to want makers to do things for them rather than making things themselves. Normatively, members also distinguish their hobby-based activity from the more entrepreneurial and contractual 'Fab Lab' model, and tend to direct business-oriented enquiries elsewhere. Oriented to self-directed creation of tangible things, these checks and balances on openness arguably protect Maker Space from becoming more instrumental and commodified.

Figure 12: Makers have worked to create a welcoming atmosphere, inviting the public into the space on Wednesday evenings.

The organisational and physical form of Maker Space is a work-in-progress and perhaps because of the challenges and tensions involved, it appeals to these avid problem solvers. Noting the similarity between Maker Space's machinations and the Houses of Parliament, Malcolm notes that this building process has made him feel engaged with the political situation and why this is not working correctly, 'So from my experiences I've certainly learnt about community and how it works right now, our community, our society, whatever you care to call it.'

Discussion: From lively materials to revitalised place

This meditation on Newcastle upon Tyne's Maker Space has traced the emerging organisation and place-making efforts that arise from members' making desires

and practices. As such, the makers' efforts to break through the hard 'stopped-up' surfaces of the things we use are characterised as a materially infused form of parkour organisation. This sensual engagement, via making things, between the human body and place, interrupts structural expectations of this former retail-space, encouraging 'chance, interaction, possibility, imagination, creativity and change' (Daskalaki et al., 2008: 51) that spills over into the street and the wider city.

The study identifies fluid connections between making activity in the space and disruption of non-place, exploring how the creation of fascinating objects extends fluidly to the physical and social structure of the space. This was reflected in some of the photos, which convey the micro-scale of making (and the pride in showing things off) against a backdrop of social interaction and shelves stacked with rich resources (see Figure 13). The excitement and self-fulfilment that derives from crafting a unique model of the Tyne Bridge or a wooden bus and the structuring of the space around lively interaction and surprise are richly intertwined. The creative inspiration and learning opportunities that derive from intimate familiarity with wood, cloth, and electronic circuitry, much of this focused on re-purposing of found objects, creates a lively conversation with materials in the space but also an awareness that place might be continually renegotiated and infused with new meaning. Fascination with problem solving in the realm of 3D printers and felt coasters also connects seamlessly to an engagement with tweaking and finessing the organisation to support the creation of these quirky, personal, one-of-a-kind things – playfully navigating the continuum between looseness and regulation – the political, social, spatial and material project of making Maker Space itself.

This intermingling of self with the things we create and the anchoring in memorable and richly textured place (Paton, 2013) that radiates outwards from this has deep implications in the political and ecological realm. Bland and repetitive cities dull our ability to appreciate our interconnectedness and 'retard our capacity for imagining future, better places by instituting a paralyzing uniformity' (Farrar, 2011: 727) that diminishes political engagement. By contrast – as evidenced by makers' interest in designing a fluid, workable organisation – memorable spaces that we can deeply connect to are politically engaging, fomenting a radical democracy that is 'unruly, uncertain, unfinished, collaborative, alive' (Farrar, 2011: 732).

Maker Space, as well as being dynamic and engaging, has a playful sensibility that extends from the free-wheeling exuberance of the bubble-making evening to the humorous yet purposeful notices that prevent coffee mug disputes or protect eyes from laser damage. This an open-ended position that, in Paterson's (1997:

90) terms, contains the seeds of its own existence. Such a process is disruptive in terms of challenging the imagination to consider what *could be* rather than being imprisoned in what is (Carr and Gibson, 2016), suggesting the type of physically and socially vital spaces as well as the kinds of re-use of materials that are possible in cities. Such a process, which agitates toward re-inventing our relationship to materials and making as well as our engagement with place, 'speaks of possibilities and, as with all notions of life, it can be said to be joyful' (Paterson, 1997: 90). In terms of creating a fluent dialogue with materials that negotiates place as an unfinished and lively making project, this suggests a realm of endless possibility and, in Paterson's terms, a continuous future.

Figure 13: Members devoted countless hours to devising this elaborately constructed moving Christmas window display of 3D-printed penguins crossing a laser-cut Tyne Bridge.

In keeping with Dale and Burrell's (2002) assertion that the relationship between organisation and space has been under-researched, Maker Space's intervention in the urban environment, rooted in the sensual, sociable, unfettered-yet-organised creation of tangible things, is an intriguing example of the vitality that can take root in the interstices of a homogenised landscape. As a materially infused contribution to the notion of parkour organisation (Daskalaki et al., 2008), this study urges greater attention in organisation studies toward examining practices that break through the surface of things, 'tricking' space into yielding new possibilities while restoring us to a richly interconnected sense of self. In such interventions – against the corporatised, anesthetised, commodified city – 'human agency and the performativity of the everyday, are capable of

transforming the otherwise alienating non-places, to grounds of possibility, creativity and civic identity' (Daskalaki et al., 2008: 49). In these parkour-like forms, which re-negotiate the meanings of the structures in which we are embedded, disruption of the status quo is possible and greater attention from our field is warranted.

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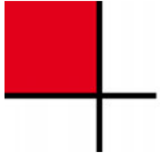
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Mobilizing 'the Alternativist': Exploring the management of subjectivity in a radical political party

Emil Husted

abstract

Recently, a new wave of predominantly left-wing political parties has emerged across Europe. These parties seek to challenge the hegemony of dominant discourses by introducing novel procedures for active participation, democratic deliberation, and bottom-up decision-making. One particle in this wave is *The Alternative*, a newly elected party in Denmark. In keeping with the spirit of bottom-up decision-making, The Alternative's entire political program has been developed through a series of publicly accessible workshops. Initially, this highly inclusive approach provided The Alternative with important momentum, but made it equally difficult for the party to particularize its political project without simultaneously losing support. The Alternative thus needed to find ways of maintaining a universal appeal while going through a process of particularization. In this paper, I will explore how this 'problem of particularization' is resolved (or at least postponed) within The Alternative through the management of subjectivity. Drawing on both documents and interviews, I argue that the party sustains its universal appeal through the ongoing mobilization of a collective subject called 'A New We' and an individual subject called 'the Alternativist'. While the former is described as a boundless collective open to anyone, the latter is characterized as a person who is inclusive, attentive, open-minded, curious, and selfless – but also incapable of demarcating the party in terms of political representation. Ultimately, this allows The Alternative's project to grow particular without losing its universal appeal.

Introduction

> When the hope for something else and better perishes, the alternative dies with it [...]. However, belief is necessarily accompanied by doubt. Without doubt belief turns into conviction and blindness. Conversely, without belief doubts very easily

> develop into cynicism and dejection. The alternative thinker, writer, speaker and practitioner is one who is full of faith but far from faithful. (Schreven et al., 2008: 136)

With the rise of political parties like Podemos in Spain, Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy, and The Alternative in Denmark, a new wave of party politics is currently sweeping across Europe. Inspired by the global uprisings of 2011-2012 (Mason, 2013), these parties seek to bridge the widening gap between 'the people' and parliament by introducing novel procedures for active participation, democratic deliberation, and bottom-up decision-making. At least four features characterize the parties in this wave. First, they all crystallized out of movement-like organizations. Secondly, they all claim to be 'transversal' – that is, they claim to transcend traditional political frontiers and seek to mobilize support from across the political spectrum. Thirdly, they all more or less explicitly position themselves in opposition to the political establishment ('La Casta') and the 'old political culture'. Finally, they all experiment with some kind of bottom-up approach to policymaking (Husted, 2017a; Iglesias, 2015; Tronconi, 2016).

Consequently, the political objectives of these parties are rarely grounded in any pre-defined set of demands but are usually much more universal and abstract. As argued by Ferrero (2014: n.p.): 'It is the social movements – the less institutionalised, more open and eclectic groups – that dictate the political orientation of the parties'. In fact, what initially united these parties was little more than a common opposition to the hegemony of dominant discourses, such as neoliberalism and patriarchy, and the worn-out practices of the political establishment (Tormey, 2015). In this sense, they could be described as radical (Newman, 2007), counter-hegemonic (Sullivan et al., 2011), or even populist (Laclau, 2005a).

However, what makes this wave of parties truly novel is not so much its counter-hegemonic 'logic of articulation' and populist propensities (Laclau, 2005b: 33). The novelty rests with the process through which these parties entered parliament. Traditionally, when political projects emerge and become popular, they undergo a process of universalization, in which a *particular* struggle is de-contextualized and turned into a *universal* struggle, capable of representing a chain of equivalent identities (Laclau, 2001). One only needs to think of the detachment of the social democratic project from the working class struggle to picture this process. However, the aforementioned parties seem to go through the exact opposite process: Instead of universalizing a particular struggle, they particularize a universal struggle by seeking to institutionalize radical politics through the parliament. This is indeed not an easy task, as the entry into parliament entails adding positive content to an otherwise negative identity. Hence, to prevent their radical identity from collapsing, and to prevent a

potential loss of support, these parties need to employ a series of organizational coping strategies that I will refer to as 'management technologies'.

In this paper, I will explore the management technology of subjectification in the case of *The Alternative*, a recently elected party in Denmark. Through an analysis of documents and interviews, I set out to examine the relationship between the party's managerial discourse, as articulated by the political leadership, and ordinary members' identification with those subject positions that are produced by this discourse. In what follows, I argue that what keeps The Alternative's radical identity from collapsing is the ongoing mobilization of a collective subject called 'A New We' and an individual subject referred to as 'the Alternativist'. While the collective subject is rhetorically framed as a boundless entity that is open to anyone, the individual subject is characterized as inclusive, attentive, open-minded, curious and selfless, which (besides being generally attractive characteristics) deprive the subject of its ability to particularize and demarcate the party in terms of political representation. Ultimately, this allows the actual policies of the party to grow particular, without The Alternative losing its universal appeal.

Radical politics and the question of identity

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'radical' holds at least two meanings. One is related to the word 'root' (from the Latin word *radix*), which signifies something fundamental or essential. Another interpretation, however, proposes that being radical means to be independent of or to depart from what is considered mainstream or traditional. In that sense, being radical is not so much about getting to the root of something but about 'rooting out' (Pugh, 2009: 2). In other words, being radical means to position oneself outside established norms and institutions. It is this latter conception that guides the present paper. Throughout the paper, the word 'radical' is thus not used in any essentialist way as denoting something truly revolutionary but as an identity marker invoked by The Alternative as a way of positioning *itself* outside established norms and institutions. One example is the party's founding document, which states that The Alternative 'has the courage to imagine a radically different future' (The Alternative, 2013b: 1). Another example is the political program, in which the need for 'radical solutions', 'radical reforms', and 'radical transitions' are repeatedly expressed (The Alternative, 2014a). But what, then, does this kind of positioning mean for a political party that aspires to enter parliament?

According to Newman (2007), radical politics today should be counter-hegemonic, in the sense of promoting universal ideals that run counter to

dominant discourses, such as neoliberalism and patriarchy. In terms of identity formation, this essentially means that radical politics must be based on negativity. As Laclau (2006: 652) notes, it is the '*negative* feature' that unites radical political projects. This, however, does not mean that there is nothing constructive or meaningful about radical politics. Instead, it implies that the defining feature of radical politics, rather than something positive, is a common opposition to the provisional hegemony of established 'positives' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 93). Accordingly, radical politics does not imply subjection to any one dominant discourse. On the contrary, the job for radical politics is to offer de-subjection from hegemonic discourses as a way of enacting and organizing collective resistance (Newman, 2007).

This conception of radical politics – as politics based on negativity – has significant consequences for the identity of organizations that, like The Alternative, pride themselves on being radical. Most importantly, it means that such organizations have to resist continuously any process of particularization, as this implies a move towards positivity, meaning institutionalization (Lok and Willmott, 2014). The reason for this is best illustrated by Laclau's (1996) conceptualization of 'the universal' and 'the particular' as two distinct levels of the political that, on the one hand, are mutually constitutive and, on the other hand, fundamentally unbridgeable. While *particular* identities are characterized as being differential, in the sense that they can be clearly separated from other particular identities, *universal* identities are identities that have surrendered some of what initially made them particular in order to represent a chain of equivalent demands (Laclau, 2005a). Those demands that enter the chain are equivalent, only because none of them are prioritized over the others. Hence, the task of representing an equivalential chain can only be carried out by an identity, which itself lacks positive content (Laclau, 2001).

The universal is thus a more or less empty place occupied by a so-called 'empty signifier'. According to Laclau (1994), an empty signifier is a signifier that lacks a signified. Instead of pointing to something positive within a system of signification (a difference), the empty signifier points to the very limits of the system: A 'radical otherness'. As such, what is represented by an empty signifier is nothing but the pure negation of that which is excluded from the system itself. To emphasize this point, Laclau (1994: 170) refers to empty signifiers as 'signifiers of the pure cancellation of all difference', which means that the particularistic/differential relationship between the various elements in the equivalential chain is substituted for a universal relationship based on negativity.

Now, if we accept Laclau's (2005a) and Newman's (2007) assertion that radical politics requires the production of empty signifiers to represent a host of

equivalent demands, new light is immediately thrown on radical political parties' attempts to enter parliament. Why? Because the entry into parliament necessarily entails a particularization of the political project, which is caused by the need to respond to the logic of the established system. With every bill passed and every proposal advanced, particular meaning is assigned to an otherwise universal identity. Accordingly, there is often a certain conservatism embedded in radical political projects, such as the Occupy movement, as the move from universality towards particularity entails a collapse of the negative identity, which then implicitly strips the movement of its ability to provide radical critique of that which it claims to exclude (Laclau, 1996). The logical conclusion seems to be that radical political parties either remain outside the realm of parliamentary politics or suffer particularization at the altar of realpolitik.

Nonetheless, this problem seemed to offer little obstruction for The Alternative in its efforts to enter parliament. In the national elections in June 2015, the party earned almost 5 percent of the votes and entered the Danish parliament with nine seats. After the election, support for The Alternative in terms of memberships and opinion polls has continued to grow. This leads us to this paper's research questions: *How does the management technology of subjectification allow radical political parties, such as The Alternative, to maintain a universal appeal when going through a process of particularization? And what implications does this have for the individual members' room for manoeuvre within The Alternative as a political organization?* To answer these questions, the paper proceeds to consider the notion of subjectification in organization studies.

Subjectification in organizations

According to Foucault (1982), subjectification refers to the process by which an individual is transformed into a subject. As such, the notion of the subject should here be understood as something fundamentally different from, yet interrelated with, the individual: While the latter refers to human beings of flesh and bones, the former refers to a position within language that is contingently and provisionally occupied by the individual (Foucault, 2000). The subject is thus always a subject of language, and subjectivity should accordingly be understood as a process rather than a finalized achievement (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994).

Building on this conception, Foucault (1982: 781) argues that the notion of the subject holds two meanings: 'Subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge'. Both these meanings, Foucault argues, 'suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to'. Accordingly, subjectification is a two-way process, carried out

in concert by the individual and its other. As Butler (1995) notes, becoming a subject depends equally on mastery and submission, meaning that subjectification strongly depends on the individual continuously performing its own subjectivity. Hence, individuals are far from deprived of agency in relation to the construction of their own subjectivity, even though this tends to be a common interpretation of the Foucaultian perspective in organization studies (Newton, 1998; Reed, 2000).

Identity work and overdetermination

The majority of subjectification studies in organizational research have focused on subjectification as an indirect way of controlling individuals by encouraging specific conceptions of selfhood within the organization. For instance, Bergström and Knights (2006) explore how subjectification in recruitment processes can be a powerful tool for aligning potential employees with the culture of the organization. An important point here is, however, that subjectification in these processes depends on the candidate's acceptance of the managerial discourse, which leads the authors to conclude that subjectification is 'a complex condition and consequence of the mutually interdependent relations of agency and discourse, not a determinant of either' (Bergström and Knights, 2006: 370). Such observations about the relationship between agency and discourse have fostered a wide range of publications that investigate different enactments of 'identity work', which is often interpreted as a particular mode of resistance (Commisso, 2006; Laine and Vaara, 2007; Whitehead, 1998). In these cases, identity work 'refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1165). Elaborating on this, Watson (2008: 130) argues:

> Individuals have to work 'with the grain' of existing and dominant discourses and subjectivities but, as they do this, they can exploit the variety of sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting, discourses and subjectivities in order to craft a self which is, to an extent, 'their own'. Individuals will, of course, vary in the extent to which they are relatively active or passive in these matters.

Translating these observations about identity work into Laclauian terminology, one could argue that what provides individuals with agency in terms of their own identity construction is what Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 95) call the 'impossibility of society'. With this, Laclau and Mouffe refer to the anti-essentialist idea that no single discourse is able to fully determine something's or someone's identity. All meaningful elements are always already overdetermined by numerous competing language games (Wittgenstein, 2009). For instance, what it means to be an academic cannot be fully represented by any one discourse. Instead, an

excess of meaning always (over)determines 'the academic' as a subject. As argued by Holmer-Nadesan (1996), this discursive overdetermination is then exactly what provides the individual with space of action in an organizational setting. It is precisely the discourse's inability to fully determine the identity of any given element that marks the individual's freedom. In other words, the notion of overdetermination provides the very precondition for identity work.

As we shall see, overdetermination plays an important role in The Alternative. This is the case, not just because it offers ordinary members the freedom to craft 'their own' sense of self, but because the party's managerial discourse implicitly embraces and accentuates the ambiguity that follows from overdetermination. By encouraging members to be highly inclusive, open-minded, attentive, curious and selfless, they turn ambiguity and indeterminacy into virtues to live by. Through 'the Alternativist', the party's political leadership thus manages to produce a subject that lacks the ability and desire to fully determine anything, let alone the party itself. This ultimately allows The Alternative to move from universality towards particularity, without abandoning its universal appeal, since the very meaning of The Alternative remains inherently ambiguous.

Research design

The case of The Alternative

On November 27, 2013, the former minister of culture in Denmark, Uffe Elbæk, and his colleague, Josephine Fock, summoned the press to announce the birth of a new social movement and political party called The Alternative. The main purpose of The Alternative, they proclaimed, was to work towards a sustainable transition and a so-called 'new political culture' in which edifying dialogue would replace tactics and spin. However, besides a manifesto and six core values, The Alternative had no political program (The Alternative, 2016). This radical emptiness allowed an incredibly wide range of people to read their own personal preferences into The Alternative. In fact, the very idea of articulating an alternative to the current state of affairs initially seemed to mobilize anyone who felt a need for radical change.[1] Consider, for instance, the following passage from the party's manifesto:

1 A survey conducted by The Alternative in 2014 suggested that the majority of the party's members (57.3%) had not previously been members of political parties. That said, three quarters of the members previously voted for center-left parties, with the majority (28.8%) voting for the far-left party, The Red-Green Alliance.

> The Alternative is a political idea. About personal freedom, social dignity, and living, sustainable communities. A hope. A dream. A yearning. For meaning, sense and compassionate relationships. The Alternative is an answer to what is happening in the world today. All around us. With us. The Alternative is a shout out. Against cynicism, lack of generosity and the ticking off which prevails in our society [...]. The Alternative is for you. Who can tell that something has been set in motion. Who can feel that something new is starting to replace something old. Another way of looking at democracy, growth, work, responsibility and quality of life. That is The Alternative. (The Alternative 2013a)

Such universal appeals initially provided The Alternative with important momentum, but made it equally difficult for the party to particularize its political project without simultaneously losing support. However, since The Alternative was launched only 18 months before the national elections, the party urgently needed a political program. Inspired by the open-source community, The Alternative thus embarked on a series of public workshops called 'political laboratories'. Through these workshops, more than 700 people participated in a highly inclusive bottom-up process that culminated with the publication of The Alternative's first political program, which was presented at the party's first annual meeting in late spring 2014 (The Alternative, 2014a).

On June 18, 2015, The Alternative ran for parliament. Thanks to a well-crafted campaign and hundreds of devoted volunteers, the party earned almost 5 percent of the votes, which allowed it to enter the Danish parliament with nine seats. Since then, The Alternative has continued to develop the political program, while also engaging in day-to-day politics. For instance, shortly after its official entry into parliament, The Alternative helped pass a bill (sponsored by the right-wing government) that grants tax deductions to people who renovate their homes in sustainable ways. This process of particularization, in which a political movement based on universal opposition to the establishment transforms into a political party with a detailed program, is what this paper sets out to explore.

Methodological considerations

Empirically, the first two parts of the following analysis are based on a detailed reading of nearly 200 official documents written by The Alternative's political leadership during a period of 26 months from August 2013 to October 2015. This period was chosen because it covers the process in which The Alternative developed from a loosely defined movement and into a particularly well-defined political party. Chronologically, the empirical framework begins with the party's founding document and ends with a transcript of The Alternative's political

spokesperson's opening speech in parliament, which was later published by a Danish newspaper.[2]

Those documents that ended up as part of the paper's empirical framework were chosen by reading through the primary bulk of The Alternative's external communication, such as newspaper articles, blog posts, and official documents. In total, these documents amounted to well over 1,000 pages. These pages were then subjected to thorough interpretation and coding so that those documents that did not make reference to collective or individual subjectivity were excluded. However, as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue, subjectivity is not always defined through direct references to the subject in question. Subjectivity might likewise be produced through descriptions of the subject's environment, its values, or its constitutive Other. Accordingly, documents that produced such accounts were likewise included.

Analytically, discourse theory is concerned with exploring how discursive elements are tied together in systems of meaningful practices and how these systems then shape the identities of subjects and objects (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Adopting that analytical ambition, I set out to explore what meaningful practices shape 'the Alternativist' and how those practices are negotiated and adopted by members of The Alternative. Inspired by Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) account of the Projective City's great man, I analyzed the documents by making a list of characteristics that The Alternative's political leadership associated with 'the Alternativist'. In doing so, I quickly realized that some practices, such as the act of building bridges (rather than walls) and listening (rather than talking), were more central than others. These characteristics were then shortlisted and later included in the first two parts of the analysis.

The third part of the analysis is based on 34 semi-structured interviews with different members of The Alternative. Among these respondents, seven were members of parliament or candidates in the 2015 national election, eight were board members or employees at the political secretariat, and 19 where ordinary members. The quotes used in the final part of the analysis all belong to members of the latter category. Most respondents were recruited for the study through the method of 'snowballing', where the researcher lets one respondent lead him/her to the next. This method allows the researcher to engage with multiple perspectives on the same problem, without necessarily trying to construct a fully representative account (Ekman, 2015). In order to probe the respondents'

2 Documents written in Danish and all the interviews have been translated to English by the author. All translated interview quotes have been approved by the respondents.

identification with 'the Alternativist', I asked them different questions that revolved around their perception of The Alternative as an organization and themselves as members of that organization. This entailed asking them very basic questions, such as: *What characterizes an Alternativist?*, but also more complicated questions, such as: *Imagine you had to write an entry about The Alternative in a dictionary, how would it begin?* This allowed me to hone in on the different enactments of identity work that exist within The Alternative.

Like the documents, the interviews were coded and analyzed by first compiling all explicit references to 'the Alternativists' in one single document. Next, I added more implicit references as well as more general descriptions of The Alternative's organizational culture. From these coding exercises, several interesting themes quickly emerged. For instance, the notion of open-mindedness figured in almost all interviews: Being an 'Alternativist' is a matter of being open-minded. Similarly, the theme of inclusivity was more or less omnipresent: Anyone can be an Alternativist, as long as they believe in the need for radical change. These themes were then shortlisted and turned into a coherent argument. Other themes were excluded from the analysis. One example is that of the party's six core values (empathy, generosity, humility, transparency, courage, and humor). The main reason for excluding this theme is that it would extent the argument beyond the scope of this paper (see Husted, 2018). Even though statements regarding the values do not figure explicitly in the forthcoming analysis, they nonetheless helped shape the argument that is conveyed throughout the rest of the paper.

Analysis: Managing subjectivity in The Alternative

The paper's findings are divided into three sections. While the first section delineates The Alternatives' attempts to mobilize support by defining a collective subject called 'A New We', the second section explores the party's attempts to subjectify members through the (often implicit) articulation of an individual subject called 'the Alternativist'. The third section delves into the members' own identification with both the collective and the individual subject positions.

Constituting 'A New We'

Uzma Ahmed, one of The Alternative's candidates, initially coined the term 'A New We' as a way of describing her own stance on integration policy. Later, this stance was adopted by The Alternative, and 'A New We' is now used in the title of the party's official policy document on integration (The Alternative, 2015b). Even though the notion of 'A New We' primarily belongs to the areas of integration and immigration, the meaning associated with this collective subject has

significant implications for the rest of The Alternative's activities. This is the case because the Alternative is founded on the idea of prefigurative politics, which means that the party seeks to reflect, at an organizational level, those changes that it is advocating at a societal level (Maeckelbergh, 2011). As stated in the party's founding document:

> The Alternative must be an example of the societal changes that we wish to see happening. Hence, it is important that The Alternative becomes a laboratory for the development of new organizational forms, managerial styles, decision-making processes, and transparent communication. (The Alternative, 2013b: 5)

Another example of prefiguration within the Alternative is the party's six 'debate principles', which are guidelines meant to aid party members when discussing politics. These principles include six almost Habermasian statements, such as 'we will listen more than we speak' and 'we will emphasize the core set of values that guide our arguments' (The Alternative, 2013c). However, besides being helpful guidelines in a political debate, these principles likewise prefigure the society that The Alternative is advocating, as they reflect the vision of a 'new political culture' in which spin and tactics are replaced by more productive and open-minded dialogue.

Just like the debate principles, the notion of 'A New We' is not only the name of a political vision for future integration policies but could also be interpreted as an internal guideline for the construction of The Alternative as a collective subject. The main idea behind 'A New We' is to construct a new social identity that is defined in terms of 'dialogue rather than power' and that epitomizes everyone irrespective of race and beliefs (The Alternative, 2014b). It is an outcry against the dominant discourse on integration, where being Danish is something that is defined in terms of exclusion rather than inclusion. As argued by Uzma Ahmed in an article in which she for the first time introduces the notion of 'A New We':

> 'We', as in the Danes, are defined on the basis of a desire to exclude those who are not Danish enough. And those who are not part of the 'we' must prove that they work hard to show that they are good enough. (The Alternative, 2014c)

Like many other initiatives within The Alternative, the notion of 'A New We' is based on negativity and opposition. Again, this does not mean that it lacks a positive sound or that it is inherently reactionary, but that the meaning of 'A New We' is intimately tied to its constitutive outside (Laclau, 1994). The discourse of 'A New We' is, first and foremost, a reaction to the hegemonic discourse on integration and the exclusionary dynamics that follow from it. This oppositional stance is further emphasized towards the end of the above-mentioned article, where Ahmed reacts to a series of events in Denmark that she interprets as manifestations of the dominant discourse of exclusion:

> This summer's strikes against our common 'we' has made it clear to me that the only way to move on is to define a new 'we'. This is a new we that provides us with the freedom and space to be curious and to picture ourselves in a new way. But let us start by accepting that what has been is no longer viable. I look forward to uniting heart-to-heart in the Alternative. (The Alternative, 2014c).

Throughout this article, the new 'we' is never defined in any positive terms. Instead, the dominant discourse of exclusion is continuously invoked as the constitutive outside of 'A New We'. This is a crucial point to keep in mind throughout the analysis. The construction of The Alternative's collective subject as the negative image of the discourse of *ex*clusion inevitably positions the notion of 'A New We' within a discourse of *in*clusion. At least, it means that no one can be excluded from the collective *a priori*. Other leading members, such as the party's founder, Uffe Elbæk, frequently articulates this point. For instance, in a New Year's speech, recorded and broadcast by a Danish newspaper, Elbæk stresses the importance of abandoning the practices of exclusion, which allegedly has made people incapable of listening to one another:

> We need to listen to each other; we need to see each other; we need to talk about what is important right now, and we need to make sure that there is room for everyone in the future that starts tomorrow [...]. I hope that we wake up from the idea that security means building walls. No, instead of building walls, we need to need to build bridges. We need to build bridges between each other, also in relation to politics. (The Alternative, 2015c)

The argument about building bridges, not walls, is likewise interesting. This is the case because the metaphor of 'the bridge' seems to recur in much of The Alternative's external communication (e.g. The Alternative, 2014d). In many ways, the guiding idea behind the metaphor is the same that drives the notion of 'A New We': Instead of basing communities on a discourse of exclusion, as represented by the metaphor of walls, we need to redirect our thinking towards a discourse of inclusion. This is further explicated by the party's desire to move away from the traditional political rhetoric of 'us and them' and towards a more embracing rhetoric of 'us and us'.

The notion of 'A New We', which could be interpreted as an organizational ideal for The Alternative, can thus be described as a fully inclusive community that cannot be demarcated *a priori*. Through 'A New We', The Alternative is implicitly described as an organization that has no immediate boundaries, and there seems to be no obvious frontier that decides who is allowed to join the party and who is not. As stated in the party's manifesto, quoted above, The Alternative is for anyone who feels that something is about to change. Being part of The Alternative is thus not so much a question of political conviction as it is a question of wanting to achieve social change (The Alternative, 2014b). As

explained by two leading candidates in a somewhat polemic piece entitled 'Who votes for the Alternative?':

> When someone mentions The Alternative, most people think of Uffe Elbæk – and then of dyscalculic vegetarians in Jesus sandals who sit in circles and sing songs about wind energy and incense sticks. But we are a complete palette of Danes [...]. Impossible to pigeonhole on a political red/blue spectrum – that is us.

Figure 1: The Alternative's local office in downtown Copenhagen. On the left, a city limit sign saying #ANewWe

And they continue:

> We don't care who you previously voted for. Just feel and think whether you also want to participate in making Denmark and the world a slightly more fantastic place – for more people. You are welcome. (The Alternative, 2015d)

This conception of The Alternative as a party that is impossible to pigeonhole and thus capable of representing almost any oppositional identity is likewise reflected by the individual members. Across the 34 interviews conducted for this study, the vast majority of respondents answered that 'everyone' is welcome to join the party as long as they are open-minded and as long as they believe that the established system is broken and needs fixing. As one respondent put it:

> We don't need to agree on everything. As long as you realize that the current system doesn't work, and as long as you are willing to do something about it, then I guess that you're an Alternativist. (Respondent #1).

This statement, which quite clearly reflects the most commonly held view amongst members of The Alternative, leads us to the second part of this paper's analysis. Having established the basic conception of the party, the analysis now turns to the construction of 'the Alternativist' as an individual subject. As we shall see, the notion of 'the Alternativist' is closely related to the collective subject of 'A New We': While the party itself is portrayed as a boundless entity, the notion of 'the Alternativist' is similarly constructed as a subject that embraces the logic of inclusion and refrains from marginalizing particular identities within the party.

Mobilizing 'the Alternativist'

In a recently published newspaper article, Uffe Elbæk describes the pressing need for a so-called 'friendly revolution', which is as much a revolution of the mind as it is a societal revolution. The article could be read as a call-to-action for supporters of The Alternative, and it is structured around 25 propositions that are meant to pave the way for the revolution. Each proposition corresponds to a letter in the Danish alphabet. Proposition 24, which corresponds to the Danish letter Ø, is entitled 'Øer' (islands, in English) and it states:

> Islands and bridges are connected. That's how it is in Denmark. But this is also the case in relation to people. Luckily, we are pretty good at building bridges in this country. However, in the world, but also at home, people are increasingly becoming preoccupied with building walls. Exercise your capacity for building bridges. This is what the future needs, now more than ever. (The Alternative, 2015e)

This proposition is interesting because it seeks to forge a connection between the previous discussion of 'A New We' and the idea of 'the Alternativist' as an individual subject. First, an argument is made about the necessity of building bridges between people of different origins and convictions. Second, an appeal is made to the reader about exercising his or her own capacity for building bridges. This is important because the idea of prioritizing bridge-building over wall-building is central to the characteristics of 'the Alternativist'. Throughout the party's external communication, this political subject is sought mobilized by appealing to its central characteristics and by implicitly linking these characteristics to the conception of The Alternative as an organization. The simultaneous mobilization of the collective and the individual subject is thus performed by framing the latter as a product of the former, in the sense that the one cannot be separated from the other. In that way, the political leadership avoids creating unwanted tensions and inconsistencies between the two subject positions, which seems to be an otherwise frequent consequence of the

simultaneous mobilization of individual and collective subjectivities (e.g. Knights and McCabe, 2003).

That being said, one particular tension remains: While 'the Alternativist' is framed as anyone who thinks the system is broken and believes in the need for change, 'A New We' likewise includes people who do not necessarily think so. This tension is resolved partly through the method of 'decoupling', which will be examined in the paper's discussion, and partly by attributing certain characteristics, such as open-mindedness and inclusivity, to 'the Alternativist'. One example of the latter is the following quote, which is taken from another newspaper article written by Uffe Elbæk:

> What we are experiencing right now is an omen of a cultural and value-based paradigm shift across generations, cultures and social status. We have started to notice each other. We have started to develop a new kind of connectedness in relation to our common problems and in relation to our desire for the colorful and multifarious life. (The Alternative, 2014e)

The article that contains this quote is provocatively entitled: 'Dear Dane, have the courage to exit the hamster wheel'. Here, the metaphor of 'the hamster wheel' is invoked to describe the ongoing pursuit of material growth within the neoliberal economy, which once again illustrates how the counter-hegemonic identity of The Alternative is embedded in the construction of 'the Alternativist' as a political subject. It is, furthermore, important to notice how this and other articles, such as the one containing the 25 propositions, is addressing the reader directly, here in the shape of 'the Dane'. This rhetorical move plays an important role in the mobilization of the 'the Alternativist', as the strategy of addressing people directly has proven incredibly effective in processes of subjectification. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) note, identity regulation through the direct reference to specific individuals is effective because it explicitly details the expectations towards people who occupy that particular social space.

Similar approaches to the mobilization of 'the Alternativist' can be detected throughout most parts of The Alternative's communication. For instance, in correspondence with the ongoing focus on cooperation and bridge-building (rather than competition and wall-building), much of The Alternative's communication is concerned with describing how the practice of listening rather than talking is a defining feature of 'the Alternativist'. This becomes clear through the previously mentioned debate principles. As the party notes in an introduction to the principles, an 'open and *attentive* debate constitutes the nerve of democracy' (The Alternative, 2013c, italics added). These principles are, however, not just fine words on paper. Rather, they are frequently referred to during political laboratories, speeches, TV debates and other kinds of public

communication. For instance, during political laboratories, the facilitators will often make reference to the principles as a way of getting people to listen to one another instead of just trying to win an argument. The debate principles are likewise mentioned in the party program, where it is stated that:

> The Alternative's politicians will debate according to The Alternative's debate principles. We don't believe that politicians are all-knowing oracles who cannot admit that there is something they don't know, or that politicians can't recognize a good argument even though it's coming from a political opponent. (The Alternative, 2014a: 9)

The six debate principles are not only concerned with the act of listening. For instance, the fifth principle holds that being curious towards political opponents is a virtue in political debates. Once again, it becomes clear how The Alternative's debate principles fit well with the party's vision of a new political culture, which is reflected in the organizational ideal of 'A New We'. Being curious towards political opponents resonates well with the desire for inclusive communities. Interestingly, through the party's external communication, this desire to be inclusive is often translated into a need to repress personal egos: One should be more concerned with 'we' than with 'me'. As the political leader, Uffe Elbæk, puts it in yet another newspaper article:

> If the goal is to develop a new and far more dynamic and transparent political culture, then we as politicians and citizens need to unlearn [...] a lot of things, which we today take for granted. For instance, we need to unlearn undesirable patterns of conflict and status. We also need to learn how to dare to keep the decision-making process open as long as possible. We need to unlearn our desire to fulfill our own egos [...] while we learn how to think about the common good – together with our political opponents. (The Alternative, 2014f)

It thus seems fair to conclude that 'the Alternativist' is a person who could be described as incapable of demarcating The Alternative in terms of political representation, as such an act would run counter to the characterization of 'the Alternativist'. Instead, 'the Alternativist' holds on to the belief that 'there is always an alternative', to borrow a phrase from the party's manifesto (The Alternative, 2013a). By encouraging a conception of self that builds on inclusivity, attentiveness, open-mindedness, curiosity and selflessness, the political leadership renders The Alternative's members more or less incapable of excluding anyone from the collective and, thus, incapable of particularizing the party by defining it in positive terms. Returning to the notion of overdetermination, one could argue that The Alternative's leadership wholeheartedly embraces the ambiguity that follows from 'the impossibility of society' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 93) by forging a subject that completely abandons the pursuit of determination. Accordingly, 'the Alternativist' implicitly

accepts that The Alternative as a political organization is cloaked in ambiguity and that the identity of the party should remain unfixed, and hence, universal.

The implications of such subjectification will be discussed in the paper's discussion, but before getting to that, we must attend to the members' own perceptions of self in order to explore how these members seek to craft a self which is – to some extent – their own (see also Watson, 2008).

Negotiating 'the Alternativist'

For most of the members that were interviewed for this study, The Alternative seemed to constitute a peculiar, but nonetheless quite compelling, phenomenon. When asked about what initially attracted them to The Alternative, several respondents found it hard to articulate what political demands or ideological agendas exactly appealed to them when they first heard of the party. Some stated that 'it just felt right' (Respondent #11), while others claimed that The Alternative seemed to represent all that they are and always have been (Respondent #7). Some members were, however, also quite conscious about their shortage of words when describing why The Alternative attracted them. One respondent, who ultimately decided to write a letter to The Alternative when she first heard of the party, put it like this:

> I wrote that I could not explain what it was, but that I was willing to do anything to participate. I wrote that I had never done any political work before, but that I wanted to be part of this in any way possible. (Respondent #3)

Another respondent described the same sense of hard-to-explain identification with The Alternative's political project like this:

> I have been involved with The Alternative ever since the day Uffe launched the party at a press conference. I immediately wrote them an e-mail saying that I wanted to join. This was just something that I had been waiting for… or, it felt like I had been waiting for it, without actually knowing that it was coming. (Respondent #9)

This feeling of attraction could be interpreted as a sign of the affective investment that follows from this kind of political identification (Laclau, 2005a: 110); an investment that is fueled by the individual's desire to transgress the unbridgeable distance between itself and that which represents it discursively (Laclau and Zac, 1994). Most of the respondents described The Alternative as a party that somehow managed to represent them as persons in a way that they had never experienced before. Even though several respondents had previously been politically inactive, they suddenly felt an urge to join The Alternative, as the party

seemed capable of signifying all that they ever wanted politics to be. In fact, a handful of respondents (e.g. Respondent #4, #15 and #30) even explained that they, independently of each other, were considering starting their own political party when suddenly The Alternative arrived and 'stole' their idea:

> I think a lot of people, like me, have considered starting their own party… and I actually spent quite some time pondering what this party might look like. But what happened was that I didn't have to create that party, because it was suddenly created for me. (Respondent #4)

Quite a bit of this immediate and unconditional identification with The Alternative might be explained not through the particular policies of the party, as the party had no political program at the time when most respondents decided to enrol, but through the sheer emptiness of The Alternative as a signifier. By basing the party on a series of universal ideals, such as the ambition of working towards a 'new political culture', a 'sustainable transition' and 'A New We', The Alternative allows an incredibly wide range of individuals to read their own personal preferences into the collective. This goes back to the notion of radical politics as a specific logic of articulation, in which an equivalential chain of demands are united through the representation of a sufficiently empty signifier (Laclau, 2005a).

Interestingly, this reluctance to politically delimit the party is furthermore reflected in the descriptions that most respondents provided for this study. As respondent #1 explained in the quote displayed in the first part of the analysis: If one realizes that the established system is broken, and if one is willing to do something about it, then one could be considered an 'Alternativist'. Ultimately, this means that defining the party in terms of political representation becomes incredibly hard for the common member of The Alternative, and those who do try to define it frequently end up with definitions such as the one below:

> I know that The Alternative is a political party, but for me it's much more than that… it's much more like a movement. In fact, to me, it's a lifestyle, or a way of being in the world that so many people have been longing for. (Respondent #17)

Or as another respondent put it when asked to describe how a dictionary entry about The Alternative would begin:

> That, I really don't know… After the beginning, I would write that we were an answer to people's desire for all kinds of other things. […] You could also write something harsher: There was an admission of failure; politics had reached the end of meaningfulness. In these conditions, we tried to create something new without having the answer. (Respondent #22)

As Torfing (1999) explains, such descriptions testify to the ambivalence that comes with trying to define, in positive terms, signifiers that lack a signified. To illustrate this, Torfing suggests the word 'democracy', which has always been notoriously hard for political scientists to define. This, he argues, is due to the fact that democracy 'only exists as an objectified void created and maintained by the name which names it' (Torfing, 1999: 50). Likewise, this seems to apply to The Alternative as a signifier, since the identity of the party can only be described by defining *what it is not*. This means that all positive definitions of the party appear as political constructions, which is why most attempts at defining The Alternative are framed negatively. An example of this is the party's manifesto, in which The Alternative is defined as outcry *against* cynicism and as a *countermeasure* to what is currently happening in the world (The Alternative, 2013a).

However, the question that this paper revolves around is how the party maintains this emptiness while going through a process of particularization. The argument so far has been that 'the Alternativist', as a political subject, is discursively framed by The Alternative's leadership as a person who is open-minded, embraces the idea of fully inclusive communities and, thus, refrains from demarcating the party in terms of political representation. As explained in the theory section, however, such attempts at subjectification rest firmly on the members actually embracing those subject positions that they are offered. While important moments of resistance were indeed detectable (I will return to these later), most respondents clearly embraced the subject position of 'the Alternativist'. For instance, when asked to describe the characteristics of 'the Alternativist', one respondent put it like this:

> I think that an Alternativist is someone who meets the world with an open mind. It's someone who easily laughs, but is clear in his opinion and is ready to act on it. It's someone who is ready to do something for others and happily sits down and listens to them. It is also a person who is not steadfast, and who doesn't know 100% what he wants and what the truth is. (Respondent #15)

In this quote, many of the themes from the first two sections of this analysis recur. For instance, the idea about listening to others seems almost lifted out of the party's debate principles (The Alternative, 2013c), while the notion of not being steadfast corresponds well with the 'undesirable patterns of conflict' that, according to Uffe Elbæk, need to be unlearned (The Alternative, 2014f). Likewise, another respondent emphasized this idea of not being too firm about one's own convictions while describing The Alternative as a group:

> Well, we are a bunch of fundamentally tolerant people who have this open-minded approach to other people. This is also reflected in our political ideas... It is pretty

> damn hard to be narrow-minded, while being part of The Alternative. That, you quickly become tired of. (Respondent #1)

As these quotes illustrate, 'the Alternativist' is largely embraced by members of The Alternative. However, the last quote is particularly interesting in relation to this paper, as it suggests an almost normative dimension to the characteristics of 'the Alternativist'. As a member of The Alternative, the respondent explains, you quickly grow tired of being narrow-minded. Besides the descriptive nature of this statement, it could likewise be interpreted as a way of expressing the normative ideal that, when joining the party, one *should* not be narrow-minded. This is particularly interesting because it frames the kind of normative control (Kunda, 1992) that underpins the subjectification of 'the Alternativist'. By identifying with this subject, it could be argued that the common member of The Alternative deprives him or herself of the ability to particularize and demarcate the party.

However, the lack of ability to define and demarcate the party is not only constraining. In fact, it enables 'the Alternativist' to exercise his or her own political preferences within the boundaries of The Alternative as a political organization. These liberating effects are perhaps most visible in the way internal divisions are able to co-exist without causing conflict or marginalization. One example, which seems to recur in several interviews, is the internal division between the 'hippies' who, in the eyes of many members of The Alternative, are overly preoccupied with sustainability and ecological living and the other members. As one respondent explained:

> Well, I'm not one of those eco-hippies. There are quite a few eco-hippies in The Alternative, and that is totally fine by me. I think that the thing about only eating 100 grams of meat a day is... well, it's fine by me. I like vegetables and all that, so I don't really provide any resistance towards it. But it's one of those cases where I can't follow the logic. (Respondent #12)

Similar accounts were provided by other members such as respondent #19, who emphasized that those people within The Alternative that spend most of their time eating organic cakes and talking about feelings are on the fringe of what she considers 'alternative' (Respondent #19). In a similar vein, respondent #11 argued that the biggest challenge for The Alternative might be that the eco-hippies end up taking over the party (Respondent #11). These accounts are, however, always supplemented with a shared understanding that everyone is welcome in the party and that no one should be excluded.

The example of the 'eco-hippies' is illustrative of the way in which The Alternative's universal appeal is preserved. Even though several respondents distance themselves from the 'eco-hippies' as a way of negotiating what it means to be an 'Alternativist', such enactments of identity work never result in a

stratification of identities. As already explained, this is because 'Alternativists' generally lack the ability (and probably also the desire) to install a hierarchical relationship between themselves and others. As a respondent noted: To say, 'I am alternative, you are not', is the antithesis of what it means to be alternative within The Alternative (Respondent #30). Thus, the fear of the 'eco-hippies' taking over should not be interpreted as a fear that is predicated on that particular identity ('I like vegetables and all that'), but as a fear of stratification as such (especially since nothing indicates that the eco-hippies are, in fact, 'taking over'). This is the case because the prioritization of some identities and demands over others would result in the immediate collapse of The Alternative's universal appeal. Hence, within The Alternative, all identities are considered equal and anyone who feels that 'something new is about to replace something old' is considered alternative (The Alternative, 2013a). When asked about how one recognizes an 'Alternativist', one respondent put it like this:

> Who's an Alternativist? Well, at the most fundamental level, I would say that we all are. Then, of course, there will always be some hardcore business dude with grey hair that needs a bit more persuading. But then, in the end, I bet he too once had dreams and visions. (Respondent #17)

As shown in this third part of the analysis, most respondents embrace the notion of 'the Alternativist' as it is articulated by The Alternative's political leadership. Even though several respondents engaged in individual identity work by, for instance, distancing themselves from other members of the party, such as the so-called 'eco-hippies', they generally mirrored the official description of 'Alternativists' as people who are inclusive, attentive, open-minded, curious and selfless. These characteristics were similarly reflected in the respondents' individual perceptions of The Alternative as an organization capable of representing almost anyone politically – at least anyone with dreams and visions.

Discussion: Towards decoupling

This paper's epigraph is borrowed from an *ephemera* editorial that ponders the virtues of alternative thinking and acting. Here, the closing argument is that the pursuit of alternatives always entails a productive curiosity towards 'the other' and, by implication, 'another'. This is what leads Schreven et al. (2008: 136) to conclude that the alternative thinker, writer, speaker and practitioner is full of faith but never faithful. In a sense, this could also have been this paper's conclusion. By encouraging a conception of self that builds on inclusivity, open-mindedness, attentiveness, curiosity and selflessness, The Alternative's political leadership produces a subject who is highly concerned with 'the other' but also incapable of determining the party itself, as this implies marginalizing 'another'.

The immediate effects of this kind of subjectification were displayed on The Alternative's Facebook page, where a member posted the following comment in response to a policy proposal supported by The Alternative in parliament:

> I don't need to agree with the party's policy in that many areas to believe in the project. The most important thing for me is that it's a product of pure democratic debate without dogmatism. To me, it's a strength that we maintain a curious disagreement all the way through the party, and that we don't lock ourselves into political programs. (Facebook, 2015)

The members' almost unconditional identification with 'the Alternativist' offers some interesting insights into how radical political parties work. At a theoretical level, the attempt to move from a position of universality towards a position of particularity invariably entails a narrowing of political representation. This poses a problem, as it makes it difficult for The Alternative to particularize its political project without simultaneously losing support. At a practical level, however, this problem is resolved through the construction of a subject position that, in the end, deprives members of their capacity to demarcate the party in terms of political representation. In doing so, The Alternative avoids marginalizing an array of political identities, as the dividing lines between different factions within the party never turn into actual demarcations. Even though the 'eco-hippies' might be somewhat secluded within the Alternative, they are never actually excluded from the collective, as no true 'Alternativist' is in a position to do so. This is the case because the very act of marginalization runs counter to the characterization of 'the Alternativist' as a person who builds bridges rather than walls and who employs the rhetoric of 'us and us'. Hence, while the party continues to grow more particular by each proposal advanced in parliament, The Alternative maintains its universal appeal and radical identity.

The Alternative's success in maintaining a universal appeal despite particularization could easily be interpreted as a successful attempt at bridging the otherwise unbridgeable distance between 'the universal' and 'the particular'. However, as argued by Laclau (2001), this is theoretically not possible, as the collapse of the chasm between universality and particularity would coincide with the end of democracy. This indicates that The Alternative has somehow found a way to appear universal and particular at the same time, without actually realizing this conflation in practice. Given the above, the most plausible explanation is that The Alternative has managed to implement an informal and untold decoupling between its universal body (the movement) and its particular body (the party). While the party, represented by the political leadership, engages in all kinds of particularistic activities (such as, for instance, the tax deduction bill), the movement sustains its equivalential chain of popular demands by not prioritizing any particular demand over others (see Husted and Plesner, 2017).

Strategies of decoupling or 'loose coupling' (Weick, 1976) have traditionally been used in a variety of organizations as a means of responding to reforms. For instance, as Hernes (2005) notes, public sector organizations affected by the New Public Management regime have used such strategies to respond to the combined demands of accountability and efficiency without prioritizing one over the other. By loosening the structural coupling between its various parts, the organization is able to appear as if speaking with two tongues, thus provisionally avoiding fundamental change. As such, the loosening of couplings may be seen as an effective way of deparadoxing an otherwise paradoxical situation – as a way of avoiding paralysis (Czarniawska, 2006). By partially decoupling the movement from the party, The Alternative manages to respond to the particularistic logic of parliament while preserving the universalist spirit of radical politics. In this way, the party avoids marginalizing supporters who disagree with the activities of the political leadership and the policies they advance in parliament, as the quote above implies.

The challenge for radical political movements wanting to engage with party politics is thus a matter of maintaining some kind of distance between movement and party, since collapsing into one organizational form would most likely cancel the movement's radical/universal identity (Husted and Hansen, 2017). However, as Hernes (2005) notes, decoupling or loose coupling is rarely a permanent solution. Over time, loose couplings tend to tighten, which inevitably leads to adaptation and reform. After the elections in 2015, support for The Alternative continued to grow for another year, peaking at 7.1 percent in spring 2016. Today, however, the opinion polls have once again fallen below 5 percent, which may be an indication that the party's universal appeal has diminished as a consequence of entering parliament. This suggests that radical political parties, such as The Alternative, need to find ways of maintaining a more permanent decoupling between movement and party, and further research is needed to investigate ways of doing this as well as the political and organizational repercussions of such a strategy.[3]

3 In representative democracies, decoupling may seem like an inherently problematic solution to the problem of particularlization, but it aligns well with the notion of 'revolutionary realpolitik', devised by Roxa Luxemburg as a strategy for democratic socialism. Here, the idea is that the parliamentary group pursues incremental changes that gradually pave the way for more radical changes instantiated by the movement.

Conclusion

The paper contributes to the literature on subjectification by showing how ambiguity can be used strategically in a political organization. As Eisenberg (1984: 231) argues, 'strategic ambiguity' can be an effective tool for generating 'unified diversity' because it supports the synchronous 'existence of multiple viewpoints in organizations' without this causing conflict or paralysis. While plenty of studies have provided empirical backing for this claim (e.g. Denis et al., 2011; Giroux, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009), few have transported these observations to a political context. Through the case of The Alternative, we learn that ambiguity can be produced by inviting members to recognize themselves as inclusive, selfless, and curious people who lack the ability and desire to demarcate the party in terms of political representation. We also learn that this type of ambiguity can be used to advance specific political causes, because it allows The Alternative to pursue particularistic objectives without losing its universal appeal.

The paper likewise contributes to the literature on identity work in organizations by providing a fresh perspective on the way individuals relate to managerial discourse. By showing how affirmative identification rather than dis-identification or counter-identification can have liberating effects for the individuals involved. This is, of course, not an entirely novel observation (e.g. Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Knights and McCabe, 2003), but again, one that is rarely made in relation to studies of political organization. In particular, the case of The Alternative shows how the affective investment that follows from political identification (Laclau, 2005a) can be maintained despite increased particularization by partially decoupling the party from the movement.

Furthermore, these findings have a series of implications for the study of radical political parties within organization studies and beyond. First of all, they imply that such parties should not be treated as one single entity but as two somewhat autonomous organizations, operating according to two very different logics. Secondly, they demand an empirical sensitivity towards those technologies that make such a decoupling possible by, for instance, clouding its very existence. Finally, they require a willingness to conduct fieldwork at multiple sites, as valuable insights might be lost by engaging with merely one research site, such as the parliament.

However, important questions for further research arise from such conclusions. For instance, how is decoupling performed in practice? What managerial practices are employed to maintain a (loose) coupling between the movement part and the parliamentary part of radical political parties? If a decoupling

between those two parts is needed in order to maintain a universal appeal, how then is the organization kept from fracturing? Last, but certainly not least, how much particularization can radical political parties cope with before they implode? Will the decision to enter a coalition government, for instance, signal the end of universality? Such questions undoubtedly need answering if we are to fully comprehend the new wave of political parties that currently seems to be leaving a lasting mark on contemporary European politics.

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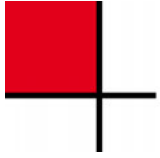

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Re-envisaging research on 'alternatives' through participatory inquiry: Co-generating knowledge on the social practice of care in a community kitchen

Alice Willatt

abstract

This paper explores the role of participatory action research (PAR) in shaping critical management studies (CMS) research with 'alternative' organisations. It looks to the emancipatory commitments of PAR, in conjunction with its aim to generate theoretical and practical knowledge, as a means to address recent calls for CMS to cultivate practical relevance outside the academy. I develop this argument by drawing on my doctoral research, which brings together feminist theories of care with participatory practice, to explore the engagements of a community kitchen based in the South of England. I trace how the research opened collaborative inquiry into the challenges of negotiating a politicised caring agenda in this emergency food provisioning context. I explore how it initiated efforts to democratise the communication structures of the national charity to which the community kitchen belongs, and also reflect on some of the ethical challenges I encountered along the way, relating to issues of voice, participation and the sustainability of the research outcomes.

Introduction

Historically, Critical Management Studies (CMS) has focused on market-orientated, profit-maximising corporate forms of organisation (Fournier and Grey, 2000). Recent years, however, have seen a growing interest in alternative forms of organising (Reedy and Learmonth, 2009). This has included organisations that challenge structures of patriarchy, racism and other forms of

oppression, reject market rationality, are community owned, non-hierarchically organised and premised on non-market forms of exchange (Parker et al., 2014). In the midst of this rapidly diversifying field, Cheney encourages scholars to consider the heuristic value and practical worth of this research, asking how we might lend support to the commitments and values of such spaces (Cheney, 2014).

Questions concerning the practical relevance of CMS are long-standing, often discussed in relation to the field's commitments to not only 'unmask the power relations around which social and organisational life are woven' but to also explore avenues for emancipation (Fournier and Grey, 2000:19). Despite these aspirations, there is little evidence to suggest CMS has been successful in either changing the oppressive managerial practices it critiques (Parker, 2002) or engaging the sectors of society it claims to represent (Fournier and Smith, 2012). Rather, scholars have criticised the lack of social and moral relevance in CMS research (Spicer et al., 2016), pointed towards the self-serving characteristics of the field (Tatli, 2012), and highlighted the potentially colonising and silencing nature of empirical practices on the people it claims to represent (Wray-Bliss, 2002). As Voronov points out:

> ... CMS scholars generally have failed to treat practitioners' knowledge, interests, and concerns as legitimate. Instead of finding a common ground between the concerns of researchers and those of practitioners and negotiating the differences in epistemologies, interests, and agendas, CMS scholars appear content to work in isolation in pursuit of purely academic challenges, with questions of practical relevance hastily inserted into the concluding paragraphs of research papers. (2008: 941)

These criticisms have resulted in calls for a 'third wave' of CMS that 'starts from the point of addressing and critiquing organizational issues that are of greater public significance' (Spicer et al., 2016: 226). This has encompassed discussions about engaged forms of scholarship that create progressive alliances between researchers and the researched, and reach out to audiences outside of the academy, such as activists and social movements (King and Learmonth, 2015). This paper responds to such discussions by arguing that participatory action research (PAR) has a role to play in developing a stream of inquiry on alternative organisations that pursues theoretical, practical and emancipatory interests.

PAR seeks not only to understand and interpret the world, but also to bring about positive social change through a democratic inquiry process intended to generate 'practical solutions to issues of pressing concern for people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 1). Much like the principles associated with alternative organisation, it strives to challenge and transform 'unjust and undemocratic

economic, social and political systems' and find more socially democratic and ecologically sustainable ways of living together on earth (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 11). Fundamentally, PAR is premised on a deep respect for local forms of knowledge and equally, the ability of communities to use this knowledge to create the changes they want to see. It marks a radical rejection of positivist epistemologies underscored by claims of objectivity and neutrality; rather, researchers adopt an overtly political position through their commitments to participation, co-production and social justice.

A small number of CMS scholars have highlighted the shared ideological premises of CMS and participatory research, for example by noting their mutual concerns regarding oppression, voice and power (Voronov, 2008). Brewis and Wray-Bliss argue that in positioning 'ethics as a central warrant for research', participatory approaches have a central role to play in radically re-imagining the relationship between researcher and researched (2008: 1531). However, they recognise that in the context of research with corporate organisations, emancipatory objectives risk being hijacked to advance managerial goals. In light of this, they argue that any prospective uptake of participatory approaches would need to be met with a related shift towards researching concrete alternatives. Stewart and Lucio make a similar point about the potential for 'management ideological capture', highlighting the need to locate the radical potential of PAR not in the method itself but rather in the 'socio-political orientation of the researcher' (2017: 537). There are also several examples of scholarly engagements with critical and participatory forms of action research, for example an inquiry on environmental conflicts between corporations and community groups (Strumińska-Kutra, 2016) and a voluntary sector organisation aiming to adopt non-hierarchical organising practices influenced by anarchism (Land and King, 2014).

This article aims to contribute to these discussions by making a case for CMS to further develop a participatory stream of inquiry within the growing field of research on alternative organisations. However, given there is much debate around what counts as 'alternative', and research in this area can bring us to a range of different social spaces (Parker et al., 2014), I recognise that PAR may not always be useful or appropriate. In light of this, I do not wish to make a universal argument for the role of PAR. Instead, I position its radical epistemological premises and practices, when adopted in conjunction with the critical commitments of the field, as one way, amongst others, to constructively address concerns around the practical significance of CMS research. This article explores the promise of PAR, alongside some of the challenges associated with its practice, by drawing on my own experiences carrying out a four-year research project with a community kitchen based in the South of England.

I present this paper in six sections. The first introduces PAR from its political and philosophical roots, identifying how the participatory worldview informs commitments to participation, voice and the co-development of knowledge in the service of social change (Heron and Reason, 1997). The second illustrates the role of PAR in shaping the performative identity of the diverse economies research associated with feminist political economists (Gibson-Graham, 2008). The third section discusses how this field has informed my own theoretical and empirical engagements with the community kitchen, and outlines the process of collaboratively establishing the research objectives with members of the community kitchen. Fourth, I outline the structured ethical reflection method (Stevens et al., 2016); a collaborative approach to research ethics that played a central role in setting the objective of the research and addressing key ethical issues. Fifth, I introduce the learning history method at the centre of the research. This is a narrative approach to PAR that involves bringing a core group of co-researchers into a process of reflection and learning on key organisational issues to develop narrative documents that inform action (Roth and Bradbury, 2008). Finally, the sixth section outlines some of the key findings, analysis, and contributions of the research, demonstrating how it generated an intersection of practical and theoretical knowledge on the social practice of care. It also reflects on some of the ethical tensions that arose and considers the limitations of the research outcomes.

Participatory action research

Participatory forms of research are sometimes approached from a purely methodological viewpoint, which risks side-lining political commitments to voice, participation and empowerment that are so central to its practice. These commitments can be traced back to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his belief that liberation from oppression must come directly from those who have experienced it. Particularly influential is Freire's (1970) understanding of action as derived from 'critical consciousness'. This is a process through which learning generates critical insights about oppression that raise consciousness around how networks of power and subjugation operate, are sustained and perpetuated, such that individuals are empowered to speak out and take action against such systems. Freire's work has informed the philosophical foundations of PAR, often expressed as the participatory worldview.

The participatory worldview identifies participation as fundamental to our experience of being in the world and making sense of all that we encounter (Heron and Reason, 1997). The encounters we have with the living world tell us not of our individual and abstracted existence but of 'being in a state of

interrelation and co-presence' (Heron and Reason, 1997: 5). The participatory worldview stands in opposition to dominant western philosophy and its limited understanding of 'human' as masculine, rational, autonomous and competitive (Reason, 1998). Its relational ontology, often expressed as a form of communitarianism (Gustavesen, 2001), shapes the social and ecological justice commitments at the heart of PAR. Communitarianism manifests 'as a form of ethics, the first principle of which is the interconnectedness of human life, respect for others, dignity, concern for the welfare of others and solidarity, as well as an abiding concern for ecological matters' (Lincoln, 2001: 127).

The participatory worldview informs the radical epistemology of PAR, which 'affirms the fundamental human right of persons to contribute to decisions which affect them' (Reason, 1998:149). The implication of this belief is that the individuals and social groups at the focus of social science research should participate in the knowledge produced about them. Instead of treating knowledge as a cognitive phenomenon that centres on the individual insights of the researcher who treats participants as passive objects of study, knowledge is co-generated through relationships, open dialogue, and action (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Participants play a central and active role in the knowledge production process, which draws on the breadth of their experiences and local knowledge. The communities involved in the research have ownership of the knowledge produced, and can utilise it to create the changes they want to see. This informs the 'extended epistemology' of PAR (Reason and Bradbury, 2006), which attributes value to propositional knowledge (knowing 'about' something through the use of theories and concepts) alongside practical forms of knowledge.

These philosophical premises shape the practice of PAR, which involves the researcher working alongside a group of 'co-researchers' as they move through iterative cycles of action and reflection (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). It begins with the inquiry group identifying a particular issue they would like to change, planning the change, acting and observing the process and result of this change, reflecting, and then re-planning the process again. As the cycles of action and reflection evolve, new learning and knowledge emerges which can inform and change the course of the research. It is for this reason that action research adopts an emergent form, requiring a fluid and malleable inquiry process that can adapt as the co-researchers engage in new learning that shapes action. There is an extensive body of literature on participatory research methods. A good starting point is *The Sage encyclopaedia of action research* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014), which provides an overview of hundreds of methods, including the learning history and structured ethical reflection at the centre of my research with the community kitchen.

Drawing inspiration from the diverse economies field

If we are to cultivate a participatory stream of inquiry within CMS research with alternative organisations, one place we might look to for inspiration is diverse economies research in the field of political geography. Gibson-Graham identify this field as a 'collective project of construction', positioning PAR at the centre of research engagements with community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 627-8). Diverse economies scholars aim to establish 'alternative ways of thinking economy outside of the dominant capitalocentric conceptions' by reframing our understanding of what constitutes the economy and an economic actor (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003: 146). In this sense, it holds strong parallels with research on alternative organisations, which has sought to decentre capitalist forms of organisation by casting light on a range of alterative organisational realities (Parker et al., 2014). When the meaning of economy, and indeed organisation, becomes rooted as a capitalist space 'structured by concentrations of power and qualified by deficiencies of morality and desirability' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxvii), this leaves little space for recognition of alternative economic realities. Reading for economic difference and diversity enables us to transcend theorisations of capitalist dominance, radically reframing our understanding of social and organisational life and casting light on a range of community economies responding to social and ecological justice concerns (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Rather than judging and dualistically defining these spaces as good or bad, alternative or mainstream, their approach requires being open to learning, recognising them as fluid and contingent as they seek to negotiate a better future in the austere conditions of the here and now.

Crucially, for Gibson-Graham, this involves the researcher/s drawing on their academic resources and skills to co-create knowledge alongside community economies, which can help them address the challenges they face as they attempt to survive and grow:

> ... rather than judging community economic experiments as unviable because they depend on grants, gifts, state subsidies, long staff hours, volunteer labor, unstable markets, and so on, we study their strategies of survival, support their efforts to learn from their experience (much greater than ours), and help them find ways of changing what they wish to change. (2008: 628)

In bringing together the reading for difference approach with participatory practice, diverse economies scholars strive to develop a 'performative practice where new economic subjectivities might be explored, realized and reiterated' (St. Martin et al., 2015: 14). This field provides copious examples of where PAR has been used to engender collaborations with alternatives, such as community food economies (Cameron et al., 2014), and co-generate practical knowledge that

has contributed to the social and environmental justice agendas of these spaces. It provides a rich source of inspiration for further developing a stream of inquiry on alternative organising that is underscored by a critically performative and emancipatory agenda. Indeed, the theoretical and methodological tools of this field informed my own doctoral research project with the community kitchen, which aimed to develop an intersection of theoretical and practical knowledge on the challenges of sustaining an emergency food provisioning service.

The community kitchen

The community kitchen, located in a city in the South of England, provides free community meals made from food waste collected from local stores and supermarkets. It is run by volunteers and is part of a larger national charity that has a network of similar emergency food provisioning projects. It adopts a dual social and environmental justice focus, responding to the food waste crisis and an intersection of pressing social crises, such as hunger, fuel poverty, social isolation, and loneliness. It is based in a community centre located in an inner-city neighbourhood reported to have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. The community meals are open to the public, attended by many marginalised social groups, such as people who are vulnerably housed, living with mental health issues, living with drug and substance addiction, single parent families, and pensioners. Many of the guests are living in food and/or fuel poverty, are homeless or in temporary housing, have received cuts or sanctions to benefits, and rely upon food banks and other emergency food provisioning services to feed themselves and their families. The distinction between 'guests' and 'volunteers' is not clear-cut, with many guests becoming regular volunteers over time and volunteers often coming to eat when not signed up on the volunteer rota. Aside from the community meals, the volunteers also run outreach educational workshops and pop-up meal events, many of which communicate political messages about the systemic causes of hunger and food waste.

Cloke et al. (2017) point out that much of the literature on emergency food provisioning services, such as food banks and community drop-in centres, depicts these spaces as co-opted by neoliberal state agendas, facilitating both the commodification of social assistance and individualisation of systemic injustices such as hunger and homelessness. These spaces often become cast as 'inextricably mired in the neoliberal politics of their context, and no possible good can be seen in them' (*ibid.*: 706). My research joins a small number of scholars drawing on Gibson-Graham's 'reading for difference' frame to develop a more nuanced reading. While being careful not to romanticise these services,

this involves departing from such readings and being open to the often 'neglected politics' (Williams et al., 2016: 2292) that emerge in the affective engagements and day-to-day practices of these spaces.

I bring together this reading for difference approach with feminist theories of care. Feminist care ethics depart from assumptions about the rationality of morality by situating moral decision-making in grounded social contexts, calling upon our lived experiences and affective responses to both others and the world around us to determine moral courses of action (Gilligan, 1982). Second generation care theorists, such as Joan Tronto (1993, 2006), break from early essentialist constructs of care as a gendered moral disposition, extending our understandings of care as an activity that takes place in private and local settings, to position it as a radical social practice. Tronto (1993) points towards the potential of lived caring engagements to stimulate a critical analysis of social relations of power and inequality that can motivate us to push for systemic change. However, she also documents how socially constructed moral boundaries have historically excluded the voices and experiences of women and other marginalised groups. The positioning of morality as requiring a detached and disinterested perspective, that is distinct and separate from politics, side-lines political arguments for care that foreground structural issues of inequality and social relations of power. By casting the experiences of marginalised groups as personal and private concerns, rather than public issues that require a political response, dominant power relations are sustained and perpetuated. She argues that re-negotiating these boundaries is crucial in order to carve out a place for care-based moralities in social life.

Hamington (2006) argues that although a number of scholars have developed theoretical accounts of the transformative potential of care, there are very few empirical inquiries that explore how these ideas give meaning to grounded social contexts. My research responds to this gap, while also addressing a practical issue of pressing concern to the core team co-researchers. Many of the community kitchen volunteers believed the central charity's business-like approach, and their focus on growth and expansion, compromised the local values, politics, and ways of working in the community kitchen. They were frustrated at what they saw as the charity's de-politicisation of issues such as food waste and hunger, arguing that they failed to either acknowledge or tackle the root structural causes. This became a central focus of the research, informing the selection and design of the learning history method, which aimed to open dialogue with representatives from the national charity, explore difference, and democratise the charity's decision-making structures to enable greater participation of those working on the ground delivering projects into communities.

It is important to point out that my role, as a researcher, was to work alongside the community kitchen team who were co-researchers in the inquiry. Following the guidance of Sarah, a community kitchen project co-ordinator, I sought consent from the central charity to carry out the research, and Sarah and I informed the central team of its focus. I was not under any obligation to serve the managerial interests of the charity beyond respecting their request for anonymity in the publication of the research. Different members of the community kitchen team had approached the central charity on multiple occasions, prior to the research, to discuss their concerns, so the central charity were aware of these issues before the research was initiated. They said they would be supportive of the inquiry's aims and open to hearing the co-researchers' proposals for increasing the voice and participation of the community kitchen and wider charity network.

Structured ethical reflection

The structured ethical reflection (SER) is a collaborative approach to research ethics, influenced by communitarian and feminist ethics (Stevens et al., 2016). It was developed in recognition that the standard ethical review processes, focused on individual researcher reflections and meeting universal ethical protocols, leaves little space for the voice and participation of those at the centre of the research. The SER involves the 'outsider' researcher bringing a group of co-researchers into a process of ethical reflection to identify the core ethical values most significant to their work, which are then taken forward to inform the different stages of the research process. In this case the SER helped navigate ethical challenges that arose and shaped collective decision-making at different junctures in the research. I initiated the SER early in the research with three co-researchers who were involved in the co-ordination of the community kitchen and were my first point of contact for instigating the research. I provided a list of over 60 values drawn from the SER literature, which are derived from ethics associated with PAR and intended to help guide the selection process (Stevens et al., 2016). In recognising the limitations of using prescribed values developed in a Western cultural context, I also invited the group to select their own. The three co-researchers identified and discussed five values, which were then presented to the wider co-researcher team, who revised and adapted them until they were satisfied.

The values were placed into the left column of an SER grid, with the top columns representing the stages in a research project, such as developing partnerships, constructing research questions, and the publication of research. Drawing on these values I worked through an SER grid to develop a series of ethical

questions relating to the different stages of the research. The questions are 'designed to serve as touchstones to determine how these values are being reflected at each stage of the overall research' (Stevens et al., 2016: 433). The grid below (Figure 1) demonstrates this process in relation to two values.

The SER is not intended to provide a clear direction or definitive answer to ethical concerns, but rather to open collaborative reflection, discussion, and mindfulness of important issues, which the researcher would be unlikely to identify through individual reflection alone. The co-researchers defined the first value of 'openness and transparency' in relation to my agenda, expectations and time and resource capacity. This discussion led to the establishment of a regular 'researcher briefing slot' in the community kitchen's weekly team meeting, in which I provided updates on the progress of the research, addressed issues that arose from the questions outlined in the SER grid, and responded to co-researchers' concerns.

The second value, 'social justice', reflected the team's wider commitment to addressing social causes such as hunger, homelessness, social isolation and social marginalisation, alongside the environmental issue of food waste. It was a vision of justice underpinned by a 'collective solidarity' with those who experience social marginalisation and exclusion. This value informed their efforts to create 'an inclusive environment' in response to the potentially asymmetrical power relations between the people volunteering and those attending the meals. Despite efforts to diversify the volunteer body by encouraging fluidity between guest and volunteer roles, a significant proportion of the volunteers, including myself, were white, middle-class and lived in neighbourhoods outside where the community kitchen is located.

Values	Developing partnerships	Constructing research questions	Planning project/action	Recruiting co-researchers	Collecting data/taking action	Analysing data/evaluating action	Member checking	Going public (presentation & publication)
Openness & transparency	How open have I been about my research goals, aims and intentions?	Who guides the writing of research questions? Has there been co-authorship?	Am I being open about the amount of time and resources I have available?	Have I communicated my research objectives in the recruitment process?	Have I ensured co-researchers have access to the data in order to plan action?	How can I be transparent in my analysis of the data and respect requests for anonymity?	Do participants have a chance to interrogate the data?	Do I have consent to present and publish research in journals, community platforms, at events, etc?
Social justice	How will the research and partnership serve the teams' agenda?	Do the research questions ensure a focus on the team's social & env. justice goals?	How will the proposed actions contribute to the team's social & env. justice goals?	Have I ensured the participation of a diverse range of community kitchen members?	Who benefits from the actions taken and how?	Whose voices are included and excluded in the analysis of data?	Do co-researchers find my analysis useful? Will it inform practice?	How can I communicate research to other groups with similar social and env. justice agendas?

Figure 1: Segment of Structured Ethical Reflection document

Reflections on the value of social justice opened discussion on the potential for the research to privilege these majority voices, particularly given the inward-looking focus on addressing the relationship between volunteers and central charity representatives responsible for delivering social projects of care into communities. This is problematic given 'almost all discussions of care start from the perspective of care giver, not care receiver', illustrating a wider 'intellectual trend in a society in which the lives of autonomous actors are taken as the norm for human action that care will be discounted as an aspect of human life' (Tronto, 2006: 15). The co-researcher team comprised of 15 people; four core project co-ordinators, seven self-identified as volunteers, and four identified as being involved in both guest and volunteer roles. Three of the volunteers spoke about experiencing social marginalisation relating to physical and mental health issues, being vulnerably housed, and/or being unemployed. The participation of these voices was of central importance. Further in this article I identify actions I took that aimed to include these individuals in the research process. These decisions were informed not only by the PAR literature, but also guidance on researching with socially marginalised groups (Liamputtong, 2007) and a mental health-training course I attended before beginning the research.

The learning history

The learning history method is a narrative approach to action research, developed for use in organisational contexts (Gearty et al., 2015). It involves bringing together the team of co-researchers to participate in individual and collective reflection on a pressing organisational issue. Through the research process they build materials that will allow them to address this issue with the view to creating change. Central to this is the construction of a learning history document, described as a jointly told tale between the researcher and organisational members (Roth and Bradbury, 2008). In this case, the learning history provided a process through which members of the community kitchen and national charity could address the long-standing tensions in their relationship. While members of the community kitchen had previously attempted to raise these concerns individually, the research sought to co-generate a collective and critically constructive voice intended to open dialogue with members of the central team on key concerns held by community kitchen volunteers, and call for a more democratic strategy with participatory structures of decision-making.

The learning history begins with the outsider researcher, myself, conducting cycles of reflective interviews with the insider research team and then synthesising this material, and other relevant historical data, into a meta-narrative of the organisation's history (Gearty et al., 2015). I conducted interviews

with 15 members of the co-researcher team, before bringing the co-researchers together for a series of workshops that focused on their relationship to the national charity. The workshops included a range of creative exercises that sought to explore different experiences and perspectives on this relationship. It included a 'story session' in which co-researchers reflected on pressing issues and tensions, as told through first-hand accounts drawn from transcribed interviews (informed consent was sought from each participant prior to the use of interview segments). The transcribed sections of the interviews were discussed, annotated, and mapped into different themes, which covered a range of interconnected issues, such as concerns about the charity's recently announced corporate partnership, and the lack of volunteer voice in decision-making concerning its future strategy. I aimed to make this process accessible for one co-researcher who had learning difficulties that impacted his ability to read and write, by ensuring written stories were orally presented.

I synthesised the data and themes generated from the reflective interviews and workshop into a learning history document, which adopts a two-column format with the researcher's narrative in the left column, and the raw data from interview transcripts and recorded sessions from the workshop in the right (the analysis section of this article provides segments of the document demonstrating this format). The intention of this process is to build a collaborative narrative that draws from a plurality of voices, making visible the role of the researcher's own voice in this process.

The first draft of the document was presented to the co-researcher team, and then underwent several iterations of checking and re-drafting, in which the co-researchers reflected on its contents and made amendments until they were happy with the final version. The co-researchers chose to name the document 'An Expression of Concern', rather than a learning history. They felt this more aptly represented its contents, which communicated the team's growing sense of alienation from the central charity's agenda and practices, and outlined proposals on how they might work together to address this disconnect. The document was shared with approximately nine members of the national charity, the CEO, and their board of trustees, who were invited to add written comments, in a bid to open a final cycle of reflection and learning.

Findings and outcomes

This section draws from the learning history and SER process to trace some of the findings and outcomes in relation to key areas addressed through the research process. First, the central charity's lack of engagement with the systemic

causes of the social and environmental issues they address, and, secondly, their corporate partnership with Gordanos (pseudonym used to protect the organisation's identity), a transnational services company. I discuss how the research developed learning on the boundaries that inhibit a politicised care practice, and instigated efforts to re-negotiate these boundaries by increasing the voice and participation of volunteers across the wider charity network. I also discuss some of the ethical tensions that arose in collaborating with co-researchers and reflect on the limitations of the research outcomes. In so doing, I aim to provide insight into how the inquiry generated practical learning and knowledge, informing efforts to democratise the charity's working practices, which also enabled the development of theoretical insights on the challenges and tensions of maintaining a social space of care.

Negotiating a politicised care practice

The following segment (Figure 2) of the Expression of Concern weaves together a range of perspectives on the charity's reluctance to draw connections between their emergency food provisioning activities and wider structural socio-political circumstances.

Several of the voices in this segment advocate for a politicised care practice that adopts a wider transformative agenda (Tronto, 1993) in which responsibilities to care stretch beyond providing a 'sticking plaster' response to hunger, social isolation and food waste. For Amir, the community kitchen responsibilities must encompass constructive engagement with the systemic cause of social and environmental injustices by taking action in local communities. Similarly, in Robert's case, caring for specific contexts of need and ensuring well-being at the local level, requires speaking out against oppressive forms of governance. They are critical of how the charity reduces care to an immediate response to the local and particular, and problematise its attempts to draw boundaries around the community kitchen's caring responsibilities, such as by silencing their efforts to connect rising rates of food poverty to government austerity policy.

However, through the research process it became evident that the 'practices of care display a range of ethical priorities, commitments, attitudes and beliefs' (Bowden, 1997: 184). During the learning history workshop, Tina's understanding of the community kitchen and wider charity differed from many of the other co-researchers. In the above quote, taken from discussions in the learning history workshop, she explains how the charity's 'brand of soft activism' was important to ensure prospective volunteers weren't put off by a 'hard-line approach' and to 'maintain relationships with supermarkets'. She spoke about the importance of the community kitchen adopting the central charity's 'un-

biased' and 'non-political' approach, which challenged other co-researchers' assumptions and beliefs about social change, opening conflict in the inquiry.

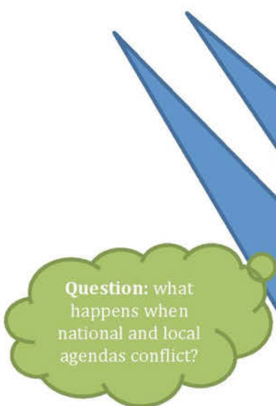
ii) The central charity's acknowledgement & engagement with important social and environmental issues

The third point we wish to address is that some members of the team feel restricted by the charity's lack of acknowledgement and engagement with what we believe to be some of the driving forces of food poverty and environmental degradation in the UK. At times the limitations and restrictions set by central office has conflicted with the local kitchen's desire to engage in pressing issues, for example to acknowledge the role of austerity in exacerbating poverty and increasing the need for emergency food provisioning services. We understand that there are constraints due to the organisations charitable status and we also wish to acknowledge that different members of the team hold differing opinions relating to this issue, as represented in the right column. However, similarly to the development of strategy and corporate partnerships, we feel this topic needs further democratic discussion, dialogue and negotiation.

Peter (previous co-ordinator): "The bunch who started the community kitchen off… were quite political and took quite a political approach to it and then you know, it wasn't that long after, it was like a year or two in, when the charity was first starting to expand quite quickly, nationally, a leading politician turned up to one of their things, and it was just a bit like… I don't really want to be involved in an organisation that invites that politician, do you know what I mean? If you invite him you haven't done your analysis in my opinion, and I think a lot of people shared that opinion… we had different ideas about the politics that underpinned it."

Amir (volunteer) reflecting on historical issues: "One of the complaints was the central charity insists on not speaking about the main problem in the way the consumer society has led us to this situation of massive food waste and atomisation. We understand there are limitations to what we can do as a charity. However, sometimes we put hurdles against ourselves that do not need to be there. For instance there are numerous ways in which we could organise actions in our communities that are about the fundamental causes of our problems. The actions could be explicit, but that doesn't mean they are campaigning, therefore they would be compatible with our role as a charity. Our community kitchen, or at least some members, thought that the central charity is becoming a charity that's putting sticking plasters on problems as opposed to trying to solve the problems from its root."

Robert (previous co-ordinator): "We did an educational strategy which talked about austerity and we said in one of our blogs, because we used to have a real great blog, political blog, food waste blog… we just said, which is a fact, there are more homeless people due to austerity… we weren't saying, here is a piece about austerity, we were saying, there is more homeless people due to austerity, so there are more that are coming to the kitchen, and then the article was about something totally different, it just had that line in it, it was just about the charity's plans for the year... We said we have got to meet this need, this is how we are going to meet the need... and the central office asked us to take it down"



Kate (volunteer): "we could also do more lobbying, which is something that has been talked about. We talked about it a bit when the law came in in France, that you can't throw out food until you have offered it to charities… [but] I think you have to be really careful not to alienate people and I think sometime activist labels can put people off…"

Tina (volunteer): "actually depending on our aims, I think remaining unbiased is one of our strengths… To me the charity has never been about activism, it's been about practically doing things, not to change the system but to help people… I think the charity's brand of soft activism actually attracts a lot of volunteers who may be otherwise put off, although similarly it might discourage people who want to take a more hard-line approach, and, it presumably helps maintain our relationships with supermarkets."

Figure 2: Segment of Expression of Concern document

Although conflict is not unusual in PAR, given it is a relational practice charged with complex power relations, it can be challenging to know how to respond. There were cracks appearing in what I had assumed to be the group's 'shared' vision of social change, as collectively defined at the beginning of the research through the SER process. I knew it was crucial not to ignore these cracks, but felt unsure how to hold inquiry into the conflict and where to locate my own political perspective in this process. Like most co-researchers, I too believed there was a moral imperative to engage with the wider systemic causes of the social and environmental crises they addressed. But, who was I to define the terms of the social change? After all, didn't I have an ethical commitment to honour the perspectives of the co-researchers, even when they diverged from the rest of the group's and my own?

Although it did not generate a resolution as such, returning to the established values generated in the SER opened reflective discussion on the relationship between care and power. It opened new learning and understandings of what it means for individuals to embody an ethic of 'solidarity' in their volunteering, and how this differs for 'charity'. During this discussion Sophie explained:

> If what you are trying to do is charity, it can feel like you are kind of standing in a higher position and giving charity to the needy, as in its going in one direction, whereas solidarity is supposed to be on the same level. It begins from the recognition that we live in a society that unfairly disadvantages and discriminates against some people over others. And it's about saying, right; we have to get together to do something to change this.

Sophie emphasises why caring for marginalised sectors of society must begin from an analysis of social relations of power, rather than an assumed position of detached objectivity. She highlights how benevolent approaches to care, in which recipients of care are cast solely in terms of need, neglects important connections between care and power. This understanding of solidarity implies standing with, rather than for, individuals who are socially and structurally disadvantaged. While the group discussion didn't resolve the different politics that led to the conflict in the first place, it did generate ethical reflection on the structures of power and privilege that imbue caring relations. It raised what care ethicists identify as important questions around autonomy and otherness in the lived practice of care (Sevenhuijsen, 2003). Furthermore, by returning to the SER, and the questions of transparency and representation of voice, I was able to open discussion around my authorship role and position in narrating this difference in the Expression of Concern. The final document reflects the co-researchers' requests to include diverse perspectives, even where they were contradictory. It underwent multiple rounds of checking, amending and re-drafting, in which I encouraged them to question my sense-making and framing of their concerns.

Following the dissemination of the Expression of Concern, the central charity provided a written response and invited the co-researchers into a dialogue about the issues and proposals outlined in the document. Two charity representatives, one of whom was Arnold, responsible for overseeing the community kitchen, visited the project to meet with the co-researchers. This opened a further cycle of learning, expanding co-researchers' understandings of the wider charity context in which the organisation exists and competes for survival, and how this limits the scope for a transformative caring agenda. They explained that the charity was reticent to engage in 'politics' for fear it might negatively impact their applications for grants and funding. This reflects research findings on how competition for funding increasingly drives the strategy and approach of non-profit organisations, particularly in the contexts of recession and austerity (Jones et al., 2016).

Arnold also spoke about the impact of the lobbying legislation introduced in 2014, which places restrictions on what non-political-party organisations can publicly voice in the period running up to an election. He explained it was complex to navigate, especially given they did not have the resources to employ a policy affairs officer, which left them 'reluctant to engage in advocacy work'. This statement became particularly pertinent to co-researchers in the year following the research, when 122 organisations, including others delivering social projects of care, wrote an open letter to the government, arguing that the legislation weakens democratic debate by silencing the voices of charities representing some of the most marginalised sectors of society (O'Dowd, 2017). This speaks to a wider trend documented by care ethicists in which the voices and concerns of those engaged in care work are often repressed in public debate (Tronto, 2006).

Re-negotiating the boundaries to care

The learning history not only generated collective learning on the challenges of negotiating a politicised care practice, but also served as a vehicle through which the co-researchers attempted to widen the boundary conditions around the charity's caring responsibilities in relation to their corporate partnership model of funding (see Figure 3). During the initiation of the research project, the charity announced their new partnership with Gordanos. This involved Gordanos donating money to the charity as part of their corporate social responsibility commitment to support community groups working on pressing social and environmental issues. This partnership was problematic for several co-researchers due to Gordanos' transport contracts with the Israeli government, which they saw as directly contributing to the subordination of Palestinian people.

We would like for community kitchens to have more of a democratic voice and influence in the decision-making process and selection of corporate partnerships to ensure they represent the principles of the charity and its wider community. One way this could be achieved is for the central office to develop an ethical criteria or protocol to guide their selection of partners, which kitchens could help develop and feed into.

Anisha (volunteer) speaking about Gordanos: "They are involved in building transport connections between settlements in occupied lands that are illegal under every law in the world and yet still exist... these settlements are built inside Palestinian land, the transport routes would connect them up making them more official, meaning that more Palestinian land was going to be lost, making these settlements irreversible. It also cuts up routes that Palestinians can travel on because they are completely trapped within their own country... it will validate the Israeli settlements, which is really bad from the land point of view, also for like practical things, like water, these settlements are draining Palestinian towns of water. It is an actual serious abuse of human rights. For the central charity to be socially moral and active, you shouldn't partner yourself

Tom (volunteer): "I volunteer with the 'Palestinian Network Group' and now I've found out about the central charity's partnership with Gordanos I feel really conflicted.. I don't want to be in an organisation that actually supports the illegal occupation and the violence that has been committed against people, including my friends that live in this city."

Question: what ethical principles might guide the selection of partners?

Sarah (co-ordinator): I asked whether there was criteria for accepting or rejecting partnerships and pointed out that I thought that the Gordanos one conflicts with the charity's goals. Essentially they don't have a protocol as yet but they did say it was something that they are putting together. That seems like exactly the kind of thing that the projects should feed into. We could come up with a brilliant protocol if it was done collectively, and then it means that we can carry on doing the good work that we are doing but you have got a kind of feeling that you have participated in the development of that."

Figure 3: Segment of Expression of Concern document

In the learning history workshop, Tom, who was vulnerably housed and experiencing mental health issues, spoke openly about how the community kitchen enabled him to meet his food needs while also forging meaningful relationships that were beneficial to his wellbeing. However, the recent partnership with Gordanos had left him 'feeling really conflicted' as it undermined his commitment to Palestinian activism. Anisha, a university student who spent time volunteering for an NGO in Palestine, argues 'for the charity to be socially and morally active, you shouldn't partner yourself with a company that has any kind of blacklist'. These accounts position 'morality and politics as a set of congruent and intertwined ideas' (Tronto, 1993: 7), calling for an extension of the moral responsibilities of the charity to encompass a (political) resistance to accepting funding from corporations inculcated in oppressive state regimes.

The learning generated through the sharing of these concerns informed actions to establish a politicised care-based form of moral accountability within the

charity's working processes. We hear this as Sarah calls for a 'collectively' designed ethical 'protocol' to guide the selection of corporate partners, which would include the participation of volunteers like Tom and Anisha advocating for greater critical scrutiny of corporate behaviours and engagements. In the meeting following the dissemination of the Expression of Concern, Sarah presented the proposal for the charity to introduce a digital participatory decision-making platform and discussion forum that aimed to democratise the charity's working practices by enabling volunteers from the charity's wider network to voice concerns and participate in key decision-making. She demonstrated how this might work in the case of developing an ethical protocol informed by the voices, local knowledge and experiences of those working on the ground in emergency food providing projects.

The charity agreed to implement the proposal and has since established an online forum for representatives of community projects to raise concerns and feed into decision-making. Most recently they have used this to invite members of community projects to participate in the design and running of their annual conference. This led to the community kitchen facilitating a training session for the wider charity network about how to engage in advocacy work that raises awareness around the causes and environmental consequences of food waste. Reflecting on the research, several co-researchers spoke about 'feeling a greater sense of belonging' to the charity. For some the research fostered understanding and sympathy around the differences that exist relating to where the organisation locates its responsibilities to care, alongside an acceptance of the limitations this brings.

Although the central charity has been in contact with co-researchers about the design of an ethical protocol, in the two years following the research they have not yet instigated this process, marking a significant limitation to the research outcomes. Furthermore, the research did not result in the dissolution of the corporate partnership model altogether, as several volunteers had wanted. Although the partnership with Gordanos was a one-year agreement, which has now come to an end, from Anisha's perspective the corporate partnership model of fundraising means the charity still risked being co-opted by corporate agendas, enabling businesses like Gordanos to present their activities in a socially and environmentally conscientious light. In the months following the research Anisha explained how her involvement had 'affirmed her commitment' to Palestinian activism and led her to 'significantly withdraw' her participation in the community kitchen. Although she occasionally volunteers, she now chooses to focus her volunteer engagements with another community food-based project that adopts an explicitly political message in response to the recent European refugee crisis.

At first, reflecting on this research outcome, I was concerned I had facilitated a research project that led to one of the longest standing volunteers (at that time) to withdraw her involvement, resulting in a loss of valuable knowledge and skills. However, although Anisha's withdrawal marked a real loss for the project, it was an action informed by learning generated through research, which ultimately enabled her to make an important ethical decision that was informed by a commitment to social justice. Perhaps what is more concerning to me, is that although Anisha was able to take this stand, for co-researchers like Tom, who relied on the community kitchen to meet their weekly food needs, such an action would come at a significant personal cost to his health and well-being. In this sense, while the research was successful in creating different forms of change at the individual, group and organisational level, there were also limitations relating to power and who was able to participate in enacting such change.

Conclusions

At its most general level, the research generated learning on the aims, objectives, and role of the community kitchen and its membership of a parent organisation. It opened up what are fundamentally axiological lines of inquiry pertaining to where we locate the value of such a project. Does this lie in its capacity to provide an immediate emergency response to the pressing social and ecological crises of our times? Should we locate it in its ability to cast light on the structural causes of such crises and push for social transformation? Or, do we root it in the messy intersection, somewhere in between?

In developing cycles of dialogue and reflection, the research facilitated learning on difference and the challenges of addressing it. It underscores the potential of PAR – its participatory epistemology, focus on real life contexts, social justice concerns and orientation towards action – in developing a powerful intersection of theoretical and practical knowledge on the challenges of sustaining a social project of care. It provides insight into how we might locate a 'common ground between the concerns of researchers and those of practitioners' (Voronov, 2008: 294), in this case by pursuing mutual interests in care as an important social practice, radical theory, and ethic. Although this paper has not provided concrete answers to the difficult ethical challenges that may arise through collaborative inquiries relating to issues of voice, power and participation, it has cast light on some of the methodological tools that might help us address these issues. By bringing care ethics into conversation with PAR I suggest our inquiries with alternative forms of organisation can develop a 'care-full' research practice that places important ethical and practical concerns at the forefront of our research engagements.

Since completing this research I have become aware of numerous other social projects attempting to grow by adopting similar strategies to the charity discussed in this article. In so doing they have developed partnerships with business organisations, governments, politicians, and in one case, a high-profile celebrity. This has opened up pockets of internal conflict around the consequences of such actions in compromising the values and beliefs of those working on the ground in localised contexts. While this research does not offer neatly packaged solutions to such challenges, it does generate insight into how organisations might acknowledge and confront these difficulties through a democratic inquiry process that gives credence to a range of voices and experiences. It points towards the potential role of researchers working at the critical intersections of organisation and management in nurturing such inquiries. Fundamentally, it suggests that at the heart of this process must lie an engagement with the wider question: what are the fundamental beliefs and premises that bring us to this work in the first place, and how do we sustain these moving forward?

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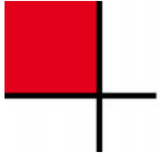

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Footprint: A radical workers co-operative and its ecology of mutual support*

Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz

Introduction

This note aims to explore examples of co-operative ways of organizing work and life that are rooted in a desire for radical eco-social change. We look at and unravel the politics of work and the *ecology of support* of Footprint, a worker-owned printing co-operative, which is located in Leeds (UK). The first part places special attention on the values and value-practices that inform the co-op's daily activities, while the second part explores how the sustainability of Footprint's radical working methods are interlinked with their participation in a (trans)local ecology of social and environmental activism. These notes are based on two semi-structured interviews with four of the worker-owners (one made in 2011 and the other in 2016) and participant observation that took place between June 2015 and February 2016 when we lived at the housing co-operative that also hosts the printing co-operative in its basement.

Footprint and its value-practices

> We want to see a world based on equality and co-operation, where people give according to their ability and receive according to their needs, where work is fulfilling and useful and creativity is encouraged, where decision making is open

* We want to thank Footprint for the time spent with us to explain their ecology of support, showing us around their print shop, putting together materials on Radical Routes, commenting on a draft version of these notes and making us many cups of tea while patiently answering our questions.

> to everyone with no hierarchies, where the environment is valued and respected in its own right rather than exploited. (Footprint Workers Co-operative, 2015a)

Footprint is a small ecologically-minded print shop specializing in the production of zines, posters, books, leaflets and CD wallets up to the paper size of A3. Its five worker-owners proudly state on the co-op's website that as they have no bosses they run the business as they want, 'doing interesting jobs for interesting people' and aspire to be

> Straightforward, friendly, responsible and responsive, rather than aiming to deliver comprehensive, multi-platform printing solutions to clients in the voluntary and vocationally challenged sectors. (Footprint Workers Co-operative, 2015b)

The co-op was established in Leeds in 1997, a former industrial city in the north of England that today has approximately 770,000 inhabitants and a large student population. Footprint was initiated by a group of four environmental and social activists from a white, British, middle-class background. Starting up the printing co-op was a way for the founders to live independently of state benefits and to create a form of regular employment through which they could contribute in a meaningful way to the environmental and social direct-action movements with which they were involved. When considering how to get off state benefits, the founders were clear that a co-op would be their ideal form of action, but it was almost by chance that they decided on opening a print shop: at the time the group was looking for what kind of activity they could engage in, one of the founders was offered an old printing press for very little money (Footprint, 2004) and they decided to buy it despite the fact that none of the founders had any experience of working in the print industry. So, in 2000, after having learnt how to print, they began producing printed matter for activist campaigns and local community groups, thus inserting themselves in a long tradition of anarchist printers who rely on second-hand or slightly out of date machines to produce effective campaign materials (Ferguson, 2014).

Today, only two of the founding members are involved but the co-op remains structured in a level hierarchy, where all worker-owners are able to do all jobs the co-op requires to keep going and where all of the co-operators have the same say over how things are done. The principles and desires that Footprint emerged from and is committed to are still closely linked to what its founders valued (e.g. co-operation, self-organization, solidarity, the environment, direct action) and what they despised (e.g. competition, exploitation, hierarchies, oppression, environmental destruction). By acting upon this selection of principles and assembling working processes that (re)produce, reinforce, and spread what they value, Footprint have over time managed to create a set of 'value-practices', i.e.

'actions and processes, as well as correspondent webs of relations, that are both predicated on a given value system and in turn (re)produce it' (De Angelis, 2007: 24-31), that can be considered radical for a printing business while also enabling its members to sustain effectively their livelihoods. In the next section we introduce and discuss key elements of these value-practices.

Antiwork politics: Valuing insubordination

The way the co-op is structured is driven by the worker-owners' conviction that work should be fulfilling but should neither take over life nor activism. They thus commit themselves to only work part-time, taking up a stance that challenges work as an individual moral practice and a collective obligation. With their commitment to part-time work the co-op members want to challenge what feminist theorist Kathi Weeks describes as 'the willingness to live for and through work' as this willingness renders subjects 'supremely functional for capitalist purposes' (2011: 12).

Although everyone in the co-op works part-time, the hourly wages for all Footprint members as well as people who occasionally help out is set at £8.50 an hour, regardless of expertise or experience. Moreover, for every hour they work, they also pay 50p into a common pot from which activist projects are supported, either by donating to them directly or by using the accumulated money to cover the cost of printing jobs for campaigns that find it hard to gain support from other places (such as those for the rights of gay and queer prisoners). This low-wage economy is amongst others made possible because all 'Footprinters' – as the co-op members refer to themselves – are committed to lead low consumption lifestyles with lots of DIY making infused and mixed with activist, anti-consumerist frugality. With their frugality, Footprinters do not inscribe themselves or the co-op into a movement of 'voluntary simplicity' as this seems too focused on *individual* choices of consumption and spirituality (McDonald, 2014), they are instead interested in creating the time and space for themselves and others to engage in joyful, angry or mischievous anti-capitalist activities and campaigns, both at a local and translocal level.

Efficiency usurped: Striving for variety

For the members of Footprint working collectively in a co-operatively-owned business is all about making their working practices fit their values, needs and desires. As we have seen, this translates into working part-time, but also into having the flexibility to go off and throw one's time and energy fully into a campaign without losing one's job. In terms of organizing between themselves, these two aspects represent quite a challenge in terms of keeping the print shop

running as this implies that printing jobs and machines continuously need to be handled by different constellations of people.

Being able to constantly rotate tasks means that all worker-owners need to know how to take care of each part of the business – from producing estimates for customers, to fixing parts of the machines to laying out graphic work and so forth. To deal with the complexity of tasks required, the co-operators try to keep detailed step-by-step guides for each printing job so that others can carry on where one has left the job. In addition, they rely on keeping their various skills up to date by continuously teaching each other. The time this peer-to-peer learning takes and the errors or misunderstandings that are inevitably generated, reflect the fact that efficiency in itself – as a means to streamline work processes in order to make more profit – is not something that is valued in this co-op. In fact, Footprinters vehemently state that for them being efficient is boring and that – though efficiency is on their radar as a necessity they cannot completely ignore – it is not a priority to them: the goal of the co-op is not to maximize its profits but to do a job that its members find politically worthwhile, enjoy doing and as activists they can be satisfied with. So, while it is not efficiency that makes Footprint viable as a business in the long run, it can be said that its resilience comes about through shared anti-work politics and the friendships and shared goals these create when put in practice.

Environmental activism: Putting 'nature' before profit

The disregard for efficiency also comes through in Footprint's environmental activism as trying to reduce their environmental impact often means choosing more laborious processes or costly materials over quick and cheap fixes. Substantial commitment, for instance, is given to activities such as choosing printing machines that are known for their low energy consumption, sourcing machinery second-hand and learning how to fix it, getting phone, electricity and bank contracts with ethical companies and making sure to only source paper made from 85-100% post-consumer waste from paper mills that are as close by as possible. Moreover, the co-op decided to reduce its range of services on offer by never printing on glossy papers as these are either coated with plastic or china clay – both of which heavily impact on the environment. Besides these choices around machines, materials and energy, considerable time and effort goes into reducing, recycling and re-using their waste in the most appropriate ways. Small non-printed offcuts are for instance composted just outside the print shop, while printed off-cuts are put aside for packaging and larger off-cuts are inserted into conventional recycling streams. While Footprint's activities clearly impact on the environment, this impact is never justified purely for profit or a need to outdo competitors.

Besides their ecological commitments within the co-op, its members dedicate time and resources to environmental activities outside their business. They for instance support both financially and physically tree-planting actions in Yorkshire, the county in the UK where Leeds is located. They do so knowing that planting a few trees cannot really 'offset' or counteract their carbon usage, but because they see it as part of a larger ecology that helps to reforest local areas and thus to prevent floods and erosion while also increasing bio-diversity and stabilizing old slag heaps from coal mining.

Economy as ecology: Challenging notions of community and belonging

Considering the way Footprinters pay attention to social dynamics and their interrelation with ecological issues, we like to think that they are gesturing towards what feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham and Ethan Miller call 'economy *as* ecology', i.e. 'a web of human ecological behaviors no longer bounded but fully integrated into a complex flow of ethical and energetic interdependencies: births, contaminations, self-organizing, mergings, extinctions, and patterns of habitat maintenance and destruction' (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015: 8). A flow in which values radically different from those fostered by capital are being enacted and interdependencies with more-than-human others are acknowledged. Admittedly, this enacting and acknowledging comes with all sorts of difficulties and contradictions, but nevertheless with a commitment to challenge capitalist notions of what counts as valuable and with an approach that cares also for more-than-human actors. Moreover, Footprinters foster, fine-tune and spread value-practices that enact pre-figurative eco-social politics, while being themselves transformed through these practices. In fact, the co-op is a training ground for a non-capitalist practice that takes into account ecological interdependencies and for many of the worker-co-operators passing through Footprint the co-op substantially contributes to re-shaping their subjectivities.

According to Footprint's own experience, enacting and experimenting with a commitment to post-humanist, anti-capitalist practice requires tenacity as almost every little change or deviance from how a printer operates 'normally' requires extra effort: from dealing with paper in the most environmentally friendly way, working with second- (third- or fourth-) hand machinery and working out ways to rotate tasks. For working through (and against) the viscosity of capitalist infrastructures and modes of doing that they encounter daily, they gain their strength from an engagement in/with local and translocal, social and environmental solidarity struggles: these help them to keep their values and politics embedded in what they do, acting as a constant appeal for making their activities contribute to eco-social change even if at times this feels like walking

through a swamp. As it seems clear that no one is able to walk through a swamp without allies and without places of firm land, in the next section of these notes we will unravel some of the elements of Footprint's ecology of support.

Footprint and its ecology of support

> Equity cannot exist in a vacuum.
>
> (Janelle Orsi, co-founder of the Sustainable Economies Law Centre[1])

> We want to take control over all aspects of our lives. However, as we are not all in a position of control we are forced to compromise in order to exist. We are working towards taking control over our housing, education and work through setting up housing and worker co-ops, and co-operating as a network. Through gaining collective control over these areas we aim to reduce reliance on exploitative structures and build secure bases from which to challenge the system and encourage others to do so.
>
> (Radical Routes, 2013)

Footprint's existence as a radical co-op from its beginnings to today would not have been possible without it being embedded in an ecology of mutual support – materially, socially and intellectually – and without the benefits of the welfare state which previous generations have arduously fought for. So here we want to introduce the key actors Footprinters have identified when mapping the ecology of which they are a part. In choosing to speak of an 'ecology of support' rather than of a network of support, we refer to the work of feminist philosopher María Puig de la Bellacasa, who has for us convincingly argued that ecology refers to a form of relating intent on holding things together resiliently rather than intent on continuous expansion, while also invoking cyclicality as well as life and death (2016). This notion of ecology is close to how Footprinters consider the functioning of their co-operative business. Moreover, when speaking of Footprint's ecology of support, we also think of the 'ecology of practices' (Stengers, 2005) they contribute to and which, in the words of feminist philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers, brings up the question of belonging: what practices, modes of doing and thinking do I/we belong to? Together with this question, thinking of Footprint as an active part of an ecology of practices also speaks of an 'experimental togetherness amongst practices' where practitioners (or in this case, radical co-operators) learn together what works and

1 This quote comes from a talk Orsi gave at the conference Platform Cooperativism: The internet, ownership, democracy at The New School in New York on 13-14 November 2015.

what does not. Through this mutual learning together, they create a 'milieu' that enables them to challenge and experiment with change, while unfolding their own force (2005: 195). What is more, they direct the force they unfold also towards sustaining – both materially as well as socially – other people who want to set up radical co-operative businesses or housing co-ops, thus creating relations of mutual support. So, over the next few pages, we will explore what kind of actors are coming together and how in this way Footprinters create a milieu in which non- and anti-capitalist values can be sustainably experimented with.

Cornerstone Housing Co-op: Rent-free premises

The print shop is located rent-free in two rooms in the basement of Cornerstone Housing Co-operative in Leeds – the co-op where two of its current members live. Cornerstone, just as Footprint, is committed to eco-social change and most of its members are dedicated to environmental and queer activism. Since its beginnings, Footprint has been located in the basement of this housing co-op, also because its founding members lived there at the time and saw the chance to transform the basement into a space that sustains production inscribed in radical politics. The access to this space at no cost is, and always has been, a key factor in keeping down the running costs of the business. And so Footprint and Cornerstone are closely entangled not just through the overlapping of co-operators and the anti-capitalist values that bind them together: Footprint's office is also Cornerstone's office space where physical and digital files are stored; Footprinters contribute to the housing co-op's work-weekends during which improvements to the house are made; they also make use of the housing co-op's kitchen and at times transform common areas such as the living room and the corridors into storage and production spaces, especially when their two basement rooms are too small for current jobs. The possibility of this supportive connection was set out at the beginning of the 1990s, when a group of environmental activists established the housing co-op by buying a large Victorian building from people who were sympathetic to their values and actions.[2] The mortgage for the house has since been paid off, which means that Cornerstone as a co-op does not have financial pressure from outside and can decide how best to distribute the material wealth it has accumulated and keeps accumulating through the monthly rent its members pay.[3]

2 Narratives within Cornerstone say that in the 1980s the radical feminist magazine Spare Rib was produced in the house that now hosts the co-op.

3 The monthly rent at Cornerstone is calculated according to 1/3 of one's income, with a minimum of £50 a week. This means that there is a wide range of rents coming in.

Radical Routes: National mutual aid federation

Footprint and its hosting co-op are both part of the wider UK-based mutual aid federation Radical Routes, which currently brings together 26 housing co-ops (with 186 individual members), three workers co-ops (with 13 individual members) and three social centres (with 49 core members active in running the centres). This federation has grown from a small group of independent co-operatives established in 1986 who wanted to create a structure that would enable them to pursue their collective aims in a more effective way and that would allow them to raise funds for its member co-ops to become viable in the long-run. The initial ecology of co-ops – which had many more workers co-ops than it has now – was made up of hard-line co-operators and social change activists who shared the common goal of taking control over the means of production and removing landlords, bosses and managers in their and other people's lives. This shared stance means that within the federation a legacy has been built up of housing co-ops hosting worker co-ops rent-free in order to make them viable without the need to seek maximum profit (for more details on Radical Routes see also Gradin, 2014).

For Footprint being part of Radical Routes means belonging to an ecology of activist practices that encourages as well as enables them to stick to their radical value-practices: they can rely on the federation's support in economically difficult times, they can get advice on legal and technical issues, can discuss difficult issues around modes of non-hierarchical organizing with like-minded co-operators, and are encouraged to continuously problematize their value-practices, for instance through discussions and workshops at the four yearly Radical Routes gatherings. Moreover, the federation gives work to Footprint as they carry out the majority of Radical Routes' printing jobs – ranging from training booklets to flyers. In turn, each member of Footprint (just as any co-operator as part of a Radical Routes co-op) needs to commit him-herself to 15 hours per week to activities that foster radical eco-social change – whether at work or outside of it.[4] Moreover, the co-op makes a quarterly service payment of £20 to Radical Routes to ensure the costs of keeping the federation going are covered.[5]

The decision of setting rent at 1/3 of one's income is a way to experiment with wealth distribution amongst the member-owners and beyond.

4 The 15-hour rule is a constant point of discussion within Radical Routes as in its current formulation it is not clearly stated if what you do at work counts towards these hours and what constitutes activities that contribute to radical social change.

5 The service payment rates vary between the different members of Radical Routes and are about ten times higher for established housing co-ops than for workers co-ops as they have a much larger monetary surplus each year.

Like in any ecology of practices, belonging does not come without conflicts and tensions. At Footprint, for instance it is acknowledged that being part of Radical Routes is an important part of keeping radical politics embedded in the co-op, but this does not automatically mean that contributing to the federation is something that all co-op members enjoy or take up eagerly. This might be because contributing entails extra meetings, during which the tactics and politics of often very tricky organizational issues need to be agreed upon. Getting a grasp of the complexity of these issues takes considerable amounts of engagement throughout the year, as, since 1988, the federation holds four weekend gatherings per year, to which each member co-op needs to send at least one delegate that can contribute to the consensus decision-making process. So the time commitment is no small deal for Footprint.

However, those who do engage thrive through Radical Routes: the gatherings become not only a place of collective strategizing, decision making and supporting new radical co-ops, but also a space to get a sense of personal fulfillment by sharing one's expertise, plotting future activities and spending time with other activists who you have become friends with – thereby getting a real sense that the ecology that they are all part of is making a difference and supports the experimentation of non- and anti-capitalist value-practices.

Customers: Activists, artists, musicians, community groups

In terms of the people who keep Footprint going by assigning them print jobs, the co-op started out by relying on activist campaigners, community organizers and radical co-operators. Since then, the range of customers has expanded to include artists, zine producers and bands – mainly reflecting the interests and social networks of the various co-op members that have passed through Footprint (but also Cornerstone Housing Co-op) over the years, many of which were musicians, graphic designers, artists or people active in permaculture. And so, while co-op members might have changed over time, many of the customers that they brought into Footprint's ecology have stayed as they appreciate the balance between print quality, price and work politics.

While for Footprint the aesthetics of their printed products did not play a major role at the beginning, this has changed over time. The advent of online communication made many printed newsletters for activists and citizen groups superfluous and people who want to see their materials in print today do so because they value the aesthetic qualities and physicality of a well-printed artefact. This shift in values and needs led Footprint to put substantial amounts of (mostly unpaid) work into attending zine fairs around the UK and organizing the annual Leeds Zine Fest, where mostly DIY zine producers come together.

During these events they showcase and sell materials they have printed, but also bring along their Risograph printer to produce 'a zine in a day' with people attending the fairs. Through the participation in and activation of such events they spread the word about the services they offer and the politics that inform their co-op. In doing so – just as with some of the work with Radical Routes – they rely on contributing to and connecting with the milieu they have affinities with, which allows them to keep printing things they can support rather than needing to rely on random customers and content to keep their business going.

Co-operatives UK: The national co-operative network

Footprint is also a member of Co-operatives UK, a secondary co-operative bringing together thousands of co-ops across the country. Through this connection it gets business mentoring and expertise related to co-operatives more generally, not necessarily with a focus on radical eco-social change, but still with co-operative values at their core. For a couple of years, one of Footprint's founders also worked for the Co-operative movement as a consultant for other co-ops and channelled that income – which on an hourly basis was paid much more than the work at Footprint – back into her own co-operative.

The connection with Co-operatives UK seems to function well for Footprint despite the often divergent politics. On the one hand because Co-ops UK mostly brings together people who are genuinely interested in co-operative values and principles, as in the UK there are no direct governmental incentives such as tax benefits for actually running a business as a co-op (as might be the case in other countries). On the other hand, Footprinters value the fact that within the Co-ops UK network they can be a voice that contributes with more radical ideas and approaches, for example making sure issues such as wealth distribution and workers' self-management are also discussed from a perspective that more substantially challenges established practices of value production and distribution.

Welfare state: Covering the basics

Since its beginnings, Footprint has also been enabled through benefits paid through the British welfare state: in the early days, the printing training that allowed the co-operators to actually start the print shop had for example been made possible through unemployment benefits and even today several of the worker-owners still rely on housing benefit in order to divide their lives between part-time work and part-time activism. Though members of Footprint might at times feel a tinge of guilt about their reliance on the benefit system, they are well aware that the benefits they rely on are the result of generations of labour activism and that through many of their activities within and outside work they

contribute to defending the various levels of social protection the British welfare state still allows.

Social and ecological support: No-one is an island

To keep going as a co-op, each member of Footprint also relies on his or her social bonds and conditions: some are living in other Leeds-based housing co-ops or in places owned by their partners, while all of them rely on their families and friends when things get difficult. Moreover, at present, none of them need to provide care for children or elderly people. Though these kinds of enabling conditions which play out at a personal level might often go unacknowledged within Footprint, they are a substantial part of what enables each member of Footprint to remain a worker-owner despite the low salary they pay themselves. The importance of these bonds and conditions in enabling the co-op might also reflect that it is not by chance that all members of Footprint are white British and at least half of its current members are from a middle-class background – a background whose privileged conditions they now actively work against.

Besides the personal social conditions contributing to Footprint's ecology, we think it is also important to consider that all of it is embedded in a non-human ecology that in the north of England still holds together well enough to not pressingly intrude on a daily basis so it can still be considered as a background for human action (Serres, 1995; Stengers, 2012). However, as environmental activists, Footprinters are well aware that their activities 'rest upon and utilize an earthly base' (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015: 7) that is neither infinite nor infinitely resilient. And maybe, so we like to think, the compost heap, the plum tree and the wild garden in front of their print shop's door acts as a daily reminder of this vital, yet easily taken for granted connection.

DIY skills: Making do as a material and aesthetic strategy

A key element in Footprint's ecology are also the skills of the people involved, be they acquired professionally, passed on by people in their ecology of support or self-taught through DIY making and fixing. When the co-operators started out with the clunky litho printing press they for instance relied on a print engineer to pass by to help them with the intricacies and errors of the machine about once a week – something they could never have afforded to pay for. The same goes with several of their current machines for cutting, printing, folding and stapling: without the fixing skills of the worker-owners themselves and the people in their network the maintenance costs would be overwhelming.

The heavy reliance on DIY skills also reflects itself in the aesthetics of Footprint as a print shop, which in turn pretty much reflects the politics of the ecology they

contribute to. The print shop itself resembles for example more a squatted space or a scene from one of Ursula K. Le Guin's sci-fi novels such as *Always coming home* (1986) rather than a high-street copy shop or a hip artist-run print initiative. There is lots of salvaged furniture, recycled computers and other machinery, self-built shelves cramped into a rather tiny workspace and walls covered with political posters, stickers and art works. Also their website reflects this DIY aesthetics and opens with an illustration of five people in hoodies pushing a printer as if it was a battering ram that is firing off sheets of printed paper in the direction of riot police. In fact, rooted in an anarchist DIY subculture, when Footprint design something they seldom use aesthetic tricks to smooth things over or to make them look slick but rather to underline the radical politics they inscribe their work (and ethos) into. Thus, observing Footprint from the outside, its reliance on DIY skills, expertise held by their allies and the particular aesthetic that tends to come with them, are all important factors to keep the costs low and the business running, but also functions perhaps as a kind of marker that invites some people in more than others.

Concluding thoughts

Having traced some of the key elements of Footprint's activities and the ecology it belongs to and cares for, we hope that – despite the simplifications we have had to operate in – we have captured a sense of the mutual support necessary in order to make *work and the worlds work creates* a thoroughly political question not only in theory but also in practice. With Footprint it becomes clear that experimentation that challenges conventional notions of the economy and that problematizes in practice the need to work, where to work, with whom to work, what to produce through work and how long to work (Weeks, 2011: 35) needs to be strongly embedded into an ecology of anti- and non-capitalist practices active in the multiple spheres capital tries to dictate: production and reproduction, ecological and social relations, mental conceptions of the world and technologies, institutional forms and organizational arrangements (Harvey, 2008: 123). It is this embeddedness in multiple spheres that allows for holding Footprint's world together resiliently, without an idea of continuous expansion in terms of business turnover but rather a caring for the relations between the different spheres as suggested by Puig de la Bellacasa's reading of ecology. By being embedded in an ecology of ethical non-capitalist practices across multiple spheres, a virtuous circle is created that fosters resistant and inventive subjectivities that together explore what it means to work, to provide for one's livelihood, while also acknowledging a being-in-common across distant geographies and multiple species. This ecology, which at least in part protects those who belong to it from the pressures of the capitalist economy, is then at its

best, when it seeds and supports more radical co-operative activities beyond itself, effectively creating a self-reinforcing ecology of practices that theorists Nick Dyer-Witheford describes as a 'circulation of the common' (2006). This is a circulation in which knowledges, material goods and social relations that have been produced and assembled by people taking the matters of work and life into their collective hands are being passed on in order to proliferate sites of non- and anti-capitalist experimentation.

Given the difficulty of starting such an ethical circulation, two aspects seem key for the ecologies of support such as the one lived (and worked) by Footprint: one is the necessity to pass on institutional memory in order not to fall into learnt capitalist value-practices, to protect material commons from re-privatization and to continuously problematize what genealogy of radical practices of production and reproduction one is and wants to be part of. The other necessity is one of continued support for people – near and far – who want to engage in similar value-practices, because starting out can be daunting when the place you live in seems to not even have a glimpse of a supportive ecology in sight. In such a situation, the support offered by an already existing anti-capitalist ecology of practices can constitute a real lifeline.

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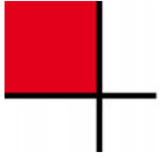

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Organizing for an ecologically sustainable world: Reclaiming nature as wonder through Merleau-Ponty

Natalia Korchagina

Introduction

Nowadays the newfound corporate penchant for sustainability programs and sustainability reporting is met with increasing disillusionment and critique on the part of the public, environmental groups, and critical management studies community, the realization being that if companies are jumping on the sustainability bandwagon, it is not because of a pang of responsibility for nature but because of a good business case (Banerjee, 2003; Painter-Morland and ten Bos, 2016; Phillips, 2014). Within this economic logic, nature is reduced to a means to organizational ends, be those ends profits (Seebode et al., 2012), industry renewal (Guthey and Whiteman, 2009), or business firm's legitimacy and a license to continue 'business as usual' (Bansal and Clelland, 2004).

The smokescreen of the corporate sustainability discourse, then, cannot eliminate a disturbing sense that we are not only failing to alleviate the sheer extent of our harm to nature, but actively amplifying it: 'complex ecological problems are increasing, not decreasing' (Whiteman et al., 2013: 307). Stirring up our senses are imaginings of the future that are nothing short of apocalyptic:

> According to the Global Footprint Network's calculations, in 2012 the demands we made on the Earth's biocapacity (to absorb waste and regenerate renewable resources) was the equivalent of 1.5 planets...The calculations also suggest that if current population and consumption trends continue, by the 2030s we will need the equivalent of two Earths. (Global Footprint Network website, 2012, quoted in Parker et al., 2014: 14)

And as the unending stream of corporate irresponsibility scandals reminds us, the gap between corporate sustainability rhetoric and practice is getting ever wider. Just as one illustration, one could think of the 2015 Volkswagen emissions-testing scandal in which the company that announced itself as 'the world's most sustainable automaker' (Volkswagen, 2014) was revealed to have underhandedly and unscrupulously manipulated its car emission levels by using so-called 'defeat devices' (Schiermeier, 2015). Among commentators, there is a suspicion that this practice 'may be more widespread' among car manufacturers (*ibid.*).

All this raises complex questions as to the underlying causes of such behaviors and possible ways out of the environmental crisis. Some management scholars opine that what we need is more stringent regulations, policies, quantification and control of business-induced environmental degradation (Whiteman and Hoster, 2015). Others invoke arguments of a utilitarian kind that justify the need to 'save' nature in terms of nature's usefulness to humankind as a pool of resources that ensures human survival and progress. As this second type of argument goes, we should be more careful in managing nature – a precious resource – lest we face 'a state less conducive to human development' (Rockström et al., 2009, quoted in Whiteman et al., 2013: 309).

More critically-minded scholars have expressed doubts that such legalistic and utilitarian approaches and arguments can procure long-lasting sustainable change. For example, environmental philosopher Neil Evernden argues in 'The natural alien: Humankind and environment' (1993) that they will fail (and have failed) us because they do not change our deep-seated ways of thinking about nature and ourselves in relation to it, which in turn shape our practices. In organizational studies, Starkey and Crane (2003) make a similar point: our entrenched cultural assumptions about and representations of nature constrain our ability to transcend the unsustainable paradigm.

If indeed the environmental crisis is a crisis of our philosophical assumptions and beliefs about nature, it demands that we engage in their questioning and revision; that we develop not only behavioral, material and technical alternatives, but also alternative ways of thinking about ourselves and the more-than-human world around us. Indeed, these two enterprises need to be intertwined, for commitment to concrete alternatives will arguably be more enduring and thoroughgoing when it proceeds from a different way of seeing and experiencing the world, rather than from contingent self-interest or legal regulation.

In line with the above, this article is concerned with exploring dominant assumptions about nature that permeate modern-day discourses and how they

constrain our ability to refashion our relationship with nature in more hospitable terms. Enlisting examples, I will suggest that not only corporations but also alternative organizations and movements reproduce problematic assumptions about nature, which makes the latter no different, on a deeper level of a worldview, from their pro-growth corporate adversaries.

As a line of flight, I will then explore the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty which allows for a radical re-imagining of nature and ourselves in relation to it. And although Merleau-Ponty never developed his project into an environmental ethic and thus offers no explicit normative prescriptions as to how we should behave towards nature, as philosopher Ted Toadvine suggests, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy 'can alter our ethos by shifting our sense of *what is* and how we experience and interpret our relations with things' (2009: 134, emphasis in original).

As such, my proposition here is that Merleau-Ponty's thought can help us organize for an ecologically sustainable future. By offering us a different way of understanding and experiencing nature and our relationship, it can prefigure a 'moral transformation' (Crane, 2000, quoted in Banerjee, 2003: 164; Reason, 2007) in relation to the more-than-human world and stimulate active participation in alternative forms of living and organizing for sustainability.

Unravelling dominant assumptions in modern discourses of nature

How do we come to know nature through modern discourses and what are the implicit assumptions underpinning such knowledge?

Predominantly, these discourses are in the grip of positivist science, which construes nature as a collection of separate entities that are knowable in principle, the assumption which entails another one: that nature can be brought – if only with time and accumulation of scientific knowledge – under human control. The conjunction of these assumptions already signals why many scholars are doubtful that scientific discourses can enable radical change.

For one thing, by creating a 'veneer of objectivity' (Morar et al., 2015: 17), science-based rationality backgrounds and even extinguishes all other forms of responding to nature, such as ethical intuitions and affective engagement. By relying on science to tell us the 'facts' and offer 'solutions', we distance ourselves personally from nature. We let our relationship be mediated by impersonal data, cold and detached. This leads to what Worthy (2008) conceptualized as 'phenomenal dissociation', a profound lack of immediate and sensuous involvement with nature and the consequences of our actions on nature.

A related reason is that reductionist, mechanistic assumptions deny nature any sense of its own, and thus invite and legitimize human control over it. As Evernden puts it:

> Starting with mechanistic assumptions, it [ecological research] can only discover machines. Consequently it will always seem reasonable that we can manipulate the ecomachine. If we can fix engines, we can fix ecosystems. (1993: 21)

We see these assumptions perpetuated for example when organizations announce that nature's 'crises' can be duly 'combatted' with intelligent 'solutions' (Alternatiba, 2016). It is telling that these words come from an alternative organization. The fact that even such organizations and initiatives reproduce, if only unconsciously, the assumptions of human supremacy and power over nature probably explains why the material and behavioral alternatives they offer often do not find purchase with the public. By leaving our underlying view of nature unchallenged, they arguably fail to provide a resonant motivation to commit to these alternatives.

The second type of discourse, often used by alternative organizations and environmental activists, is a normative one where certain 'rights' are extended to nature. This discourse shares some of the underlying assumptions with the previous one. Nature is also constructed here as knowable, this time by analogy with a human being – specifically a modern human being for whom 'rights' are an inalienable value. A vivid example of this discourse adoption is Bolivia whose indigenous president, with the support and involvement of social movements, passed The Law of Mother Earth that stipulates eleven rights for nature, including 'the right to life and to exist; the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration; the right to pure water and clean air; the right to balance; the right not to be polluted; and the right to not have cellular structure modified or genetically altered' (Vidal, 2011).

Similar criticisms apply to this second discourse. By anthropomorphizing nature and thus rendering it known, the rights discourse equally denies nature its Otherness, its transcendence over human cognitive powers and cultural categories. The extension of rights to nature is further contestable because nature is obviously not a legal subject and cannot invoke its rights in court, so it is unclear how the rights discourse could be implemented in practice.

A further problematic side of this discourse is that, just like the science-based discourse, it frames our relationship with nature in terms of control – this time legal control. What such a framing forecloses is the possibility of ethical responsiveness to nature, which cannot be procured through a set of rules, rights, and laws (Rhodes and Harvey, 2012). And as the undiminishing stream of

environmental scandals suggests, it is questionable that regulations alone can bring about behavioral change, let alone genuine commitment to sustainability.

Finally and significantly, both science-based and rights-based discourses presuppose a deep divide between humans and nature: nowhere is there talk about how we are related to nature. Humans and nature are drawn apart. In both cases, there is no intertwining between us and the natural world. Such divisive assumptions arguably obstruct sustainable change because they disconnect nature from our sense of who we are and our lived experience.

Below I explain how the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty signals possibilities to revise the above problematic assumptions, offering us a different way of understanding what nature 'is' and illuminating how we might arrive at this different understanding. I will further provide some suggestions as to how I see Merleau-Ponty's work inspiring sustainable change at the level of practice and belief.

Exploring alternatives through Merleau-Ponty

It is important to establish that Merleau-Ponty does not describe any ideal of human-nature relationship. On the contrary, he acknowledges that in modern times our thinking of nature remains in the grip of scientific discourses and 'dogmatic common sense' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: xi), which we take as 'the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge' of nature (*ibid*.: 23).

That said, the philosopher points to what these discourses occlude and what we can turn to as an alternative source of understanding: our corporeal, perceptual experience of nature, 'our immediate relationship with the world' (Barbaras, 2001: 28) that is always there before discursive and analytical thought. Going further still, he contends that we should indeed challenge the priority of science in framing our understanding of nature and instead affirm perceptual experience as a primordial and privileged source of knowledge: 'natural being is…eminently being-perceived' (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, quoted in Barbaras, 2001: 37).

Perceptual experience is important because, Merleau-Ponty claims, how nature appears to us in perception is different from how scientific and other discourses construct it. It is the perceived being of nature that Merleau-Ponty sets out to describe and reclaim as a source of original understanding. This is accomplished primarily in his later work and especially through the concept of 'flesh', which has been widely recognized to hold far-reaching implications for environmentalism (Bannon, 2011) and key aspects of which I detail below.

To begin, Merleau-Ponty clearly challenges the objectivist idea of nature as a collection of material entities that have no inherent sense. 'Nature is … different from a simple thing', he writes (2003: 3). But it is also 'different from man' (*ibid.*), for it is not a mere discursive construction or mental representation. As such, neither scientific nor rights discourses do justice to the being of nature.

If perceived nature is neither an objective being nor a mere ideality, how are we to describe its being? Merleau-Ponty suggests that perceived nature is its material presentations that are immanently sensible to us: 'Nature is what has a meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought' (*ibid.*). The concept of 'flesh' summarizes this idea. Merleau-Ponty describes flesh as 'the visibility of the invisible' (*ibid.*: 209); 'the unicity of the visible world and, by encroachment, the invisible world' (1968: 233). The perceived is 'fleshy' and at the same time meaningful. The fleshy (visible) and the meaningful (invisible) are not separate but intertwined in the very act of perception, and are thus two conjoined layers of being. For example, the being of 'a jaguar in the rainforests' or 'of a hummingbird' in the Amazon is apprehended only as their carnal manifestations, however they cannot be reduced to carnality (Fóti, 2013: 116). Natural beings are not bundles of physical properties, for they have a unique style of being, a unique affective and expressive value for us, which is not separate from their physical presentations: '[M]eaning [is] inextricably embodied in the configuration of its sensible presentations' (Toadvine, 2009: 57).

It is important to emphasize that for Merleau-Ponty the meaningful, or the 'invisible', dimension of the perceived world is not representational. Perception never gives us 'objective being, substantial, completed' (Dastur, 2000: 29). However, this does not mean that it is somehow pre-representational, or on its way to becoming a representation. Instead, the philosopher introduces a new term to describe this meaning: *expressive*, which denotes sensibility that is not positive knowledge, but affective, elusive, and strictly 'ungraspable' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 214). Perceived being has a 'unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent' (*ibid.*). There is a constitutive absence at the heart of presence, which makes natural being something that forever transcends our powers of knowing it.

It is precisely as non-positive being that nature is a source of emotion and an impulse to creativity. According to Merleau-Ponty, nature has the power to move us to creative expression which should be understood broadly as expressive activity, be that gesturing, speaking, dancing, or even smiling or sighing. From the modest to the highly creative, nature arouses in us impulses to express it: 'Everything comes to pass as if expression arose through the world's striving to be perceived, to be painted, spoken, and thought' (Toadvine, 2004: 279). If these

impulses come from perceived nature, Merleau-Ponty proposes to speak of nature as unfolding its expression through us. This implies that our relationship with nature can be deeply affective, relational, and intimate versus one based on control. As Ted Toadvine elaborates:

> My body's struggle to express would then be nothing other than the world's struggle to express itself through me, as if I were an organ of this single massive body named Nature. Human being might be thought of as nature's engine of self-expression, its own coming-to-consciousness. (2004: 279)

Here we should say that not only the human body is the organ or site of nature's expression: Merleau-Ponty also thinks of animals, who are perceivers like us, as such a site, even proposing to speak of animal culture (Merleau-Ponty, 2003). With this, he challenges the anthropocentric worldview and establishes continuity between humanity and animality that both continue the '"miracle of expression" originating within nature's own depths' (Toadvine, 2009: 54). These ideas are in turn consonant with contemporary work in critical animal studies (e.g., Gruen, 2015) that challenges reductionist understandings of animals (as mere biological organisms whose behavior is mere reflex) and instead proposes that they perceive the world as meaningful and relate to it that way.

That said, we should not interpret Merleau-Ponty as suggesting that our relationship with nature is by default harmonious, passionate, and enchanted. As mentioned earlier, he is well aware that a modern person tends to think that atoms are more real than his/her immediate experience of nature (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). And indeed, the problem might be that we have 'forgotten' how to experience nature, for in our cultures contemplative perception is often looked down upon as a waste of time. Value is placed on 'productive' time, which creates a rush to make, manage, and control (Bakken et al., 2013). So we rush past nature on our way to work – to our offices filled with the artefactual rather than natural – and do not really come into perceptual contact with it.

However, this does not mean that we cannot (re)engage ourselves with nature and experience its expressive, affective, creative being that Merleau-Ponty affirms. To help us in this, we can for example turn to arts. One could think of the impressionists who painted the ephemerality of the perceived, or Cezanne who said: 'Nature is always the same, but nothing about her that we see endures' (Toadvine, 2013: 109). Not only painting, but also other forms of art as well as artists' experiences of the more-than-human world can 'teach' us about how human perception allows us to experience nature. These should be reclaimed as valid sources of understanding in our personal lives, but equally at schools and universities where knowledge of nature remains almost exclusively shaped by the sciences.

But of course, central emphasis should be placed on actually making perceptual contact with nature. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, we will emerge from it more fulfilled as the expressivity of the natural world enables creative, affective and spiritual dimensions of human life. Put differently, Merleau-Ponty's thought might allow us to (re)discover the natural world as a source of wonder, which should not be diminished as a marginal or unimportant experience. In fact, the experiences of self-transcendence and affectivity in encounter with the natural world have been long recognized as important to a fulfilled existence (e.g., Marotto et al., 2007).

Related to this and probably most importantly, Merleau-Ponty's ideas indirectly suggest that our current notions of wellbeing need to be challenged. While in western societies we continue to associate wellbeing with wealth (wellbeing = monetary wealth) (Painter-Morland, 2015), Merleau-Ponty suggests that our wellbeing is intimately tied to the natural world and ability to experience it. So while the reduction of nature to a pool of resources (to its visible aspect) makes possible nature's exploitation and accumulation of monetary wealth, another kind of wealth and wellbeing is lost in this process. What is lost is the ability to perceive nature as a 'miracle of expression' (Toadvine, 2009: 54), as unicity of the visible and the invisible aspects, and with it lost is our expressive, imaginative, and spiritual life.

By acknowledging nature's transcendence and sensitizing us to it, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can facilitate the emergence of an ethos of dwelling hospitably with the more-than-human world (Bannon, 2011). Such an ethos certainly does not emerge as a set of normative maxims, but as an experience of standing in wonder before the natural world.

In sum, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy emerges as deeply complementary to the project of alternative organizing for sustainability as it provides resources through which we may become critical of the dominant discourses of nature and move towards alternative ways of speaking about, experiencing, and living amidst the natural world. In this way, his thought might enable us to resist the corporate capitalist logic that represents our wellbeing in terms of endless material growth. It might help us realize that in the pursuit of such growth we diminish not only nature's being but also our own being, as we equally become a productive resource that is tightly managed, measured, and controlled by organizations, such that we lose the capacity to experience ourselves otherwise. As such, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can stimulate us to explore and create alternative forms of organization and sociality that would take seriously the idea that human wellbeing is not separate from the natural world, and a different set of values this implies.

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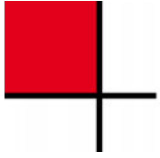

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Challenging the saga of corporate climate champions

Jasper Finkeldey

review of

Wright C. and D. Nyberg (2015) *Climate change, capitalism, and corporations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (HB, pp. 265, £69.99, ISBN 978-1-107-07822-2; PB, £21.99, ISBN 978-1-107-43513-1)

Context

Man-made climate change is a reality. Droughts, floods and typhoons caused by global warming have been experienced around the globe. In *Climate change, capitalism, and corporations,* Christopher Wright and Daniel Nyberg explore corporate responses to the changing climate. Importantly they look at how multinational corporations adapt, affirm and reinvent their role in relation to the threats of climate change. The authors intend to 'outline the *processes* though which corporations are shaping humanity's response to the climate crisis' aimed at ultimately affirming the status quo [23; emphasis in original]. Not without shuddering fascination they look at the innovative ways in which corporations manoeuvre to satisfy the multiple demands of government regulators as well as increasingly green-minded employees and consumers. Crucially it is Wright's and Nyberg's contention, that corporates are moulding their responses to climate change in their own image; i.e. conforming to the logics of consumerism and economic growth. The authors' inquiry goes beyond a study of corporate reporting and critical secondary literature. Interestingly, they have complemented their analysis with interview material conducted with corporate executives as well as sustainability managers.

The authors leave no doubt that they perceive climate change as the single biggest threat to humanity. It seems no coincidence that the book is devoted to the authors' children. Climate change is not around the corner, but actually already affects all of humanity. Wright and Nyberg start off listing fatal climate events in the past decade that must directly be linked to changing weather patterns. Hurricane Sandy hit New York City in 2012, two years after Russia experienced the worst heat wave in history. The bottom-line being that if climate change even affects superpowers, the message should be clear to everybody of the need to act. Consequently the question becomes: why not then study government's responses to climate change? Why studying corporations?

Corporations form the backbone of today's neoliberal variant of capitalism. Their 'power and agency' [14], Wright and Nyberg suggest, is worthy of diligent analysis in many respects. Importantly, corporations' economic muscle dwarfs the GDP of many middle-income countries. They show that a relatively small club of economic entities among which corporations rank high is responsible for the larger part of global emissions. Not surprisingly companies such as BP, Gazprom, Chevron and Royal Dutch Shell score highly among global polluters. These companies take on very complex roles in society that Wright and Nyberg aim to flesh out.

Corporations act as innovators. Self-appointed green gurus from the business world with the likes of Richard Branson have suggested that corporate solutions can fix the climate. For companies, climate change bears both risks and multiple potentials to make money. 'Green' can be the driver of marketing strategies as well as the trigger for waste reduction in supply chains. Obviously there is the criticism of 'greenwashing' that looms over these efforts but notwithstanding this reservation, corporations insist that their responses to championing the climate crisis are key.

The corporate fix

Wright and Nyberg see the corporate fix to climate change much like the attempt to square circles. To their mind the corporate drive to expand markets and hence to fuel consumerism goes down to the very core of the problem. The paradox here is that corporate capitalism destroys the very nature that ensures its survival. By burning fossil fuel with ever-greater speed, corporations come to be the gravediggers of nature they ultimately rely on. As the subtitle of the book suggests, contemporary capitalism exercises a form of creative self-destruction. The same way capitalism has destroyed the remnants of feudal society, its destructive force has now turned against itself. Instead of at least slowing down

on fossil fuel consumption, deep-water oil drilling, tar sand processing and coal and seam gas drilling are portrayed as the harbingers of accelerating destructive forces. Initiatives to fertilize oceans or suck carbon out the atmosphere cloud the urgency of genuine solutions to climate change. [13]

Borrowing from Boltanski and Ciapello (2005) they advance that corporate capitalism has found ways to incorporate critique. Carbon pricing is reducing emissions to 'one single commodity' [38] no matter where they originate. To these ends 'gas-guzzling four-wheel-drive vehicles are seen as equal to those of a company that builds wind farms' [38-9]. Carbon trading schemes are part of strategies of what Wright and Nyberg call 'corporate environmentalism'. Corporate environmentalists suggest that a profit-driven economy and a healthy environment are not mutually exclusive. 'The image of "green" or "natural" capitalism proposed through corporate environmentalism and business sustainability promises no conflicts and no-trade offs' [41]. Advertising the opportunities of win-win solutions, corporations have managed to reverse the trend in the 1970s and 80s towards more governmental regulations. Corporations successfully lobbied for a voluntarist approach to save the environment. The story goes that risk of climate change is best managed if corporations adhere to the market mechanisms only.

As much as corporations are successful in preventing regulation they are also impacted by climate change. Unpredictable weather conditions can potentially destroy or delay operations. The authors however highlight the business opportunities of a warming planet. Corporations anticipate physical risk by utilizing climate models, developing emergency plans for extreme weather events and other ways to predict unprecedented weather fluctuations. Wright and Nyberg show for instance how insurance companies draw on weather forecasts to consequently declare catastrophe-prone areas as 'uninsurable' [55].

Proactive risk management is not limited to physical damages. One of the most daunting threats for corporations is reputational loss. In the day and age of brand value, reputation becomes an invaluable asset. In order to prevent reputation loss companies have started spearheading public debates to advocate corporate responsibility. NGO representatives in fossil-fuel companies bear witness to the incorporation of adversaries. Risk becomes something to be managed as it is inevitably '"out there" and need only be "found" and "captured"; and once this has been achieved, of course, the next step is to exploit it' [62].

This debate lays bare the multiple alliances of corporations aimed at co-opting or lobbying crucial decision-makers. The authors illustrate the corporate muscle by pointing at former US-president Bush's close ties to the oil lobby [81]. Beyond the

more obvious coalitions, Wright and Nyberg also refer to corporate financing of think tanks, and astroturf organizations taking a tokenistic stance towards climate change.

Birth of the office activists

Green corporate discourses do not solely have the function of marketing products better, but also aim at responding to the demands of employees who increasingly call for 'green' and 'sustainable' workplaces (sometimes even at the expense of lower pay). To illustrate this point the authors come up with a typology describing employees' relation to climate change. They distinguish between the rational manager, the change agent and the committed activist. While rational managers acknowledge climate change, their primary preoccupation is the economic wellbeing of the company. Change agents show high commitment to a sustainable corporate culture. Therefore they actively work on schemes to promote waste reduction in the office or promote less air travel among colleagues. But only the committed activist is prepared to categorically say 'no' if she feels that her green value system is under assault. Some committed activists even leave their corporate career for the sake of political and community activism behind [131].

Ultimately climate change is also a battle for the hearts and minds, or '*ideological battleground*' as Wright and Nyberg put it [162; emphasis in original]. Therefore multinational corporations take emotions very seriously. Looking at the examples of advertisements of car manufacturers the authors note how the struggle against climate change is increasingly linked to upbeat messages. Car manufacturers portray buying the right vehicle with low emissions as a positive contribution to save the climate.

Wrapping up their argument, Wright and Nyberg show how corporations have invested in different myths to stand their ground in the face of green critique. At the heart of the mystification lies corporate omnipotence. The latter entertains the idea that 'rational expertise businesses have at their disposal is somehow capable of taming nature' [171]. In reality corporate expansion accelerates creative self-destruction.

No way out?

In a final chapter, Wright and Nyberg reserve a little less than five pages to the search for alternatives. While the prior reflexions seem even repetitive at times, the search for alternatives is sketchy at best. The authors' alternatives entail the

de-commodification of nature, finding a new language to 'disrupt' [192] rampant climate change and more citizen involvement. These propositions are not spelled out at great length and are therefore hardly worth mentioning. The book closes with a call for positive messages as 'Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr taught us' [194]. This message is somewhat surprising in a book that leaves little room for positive messages. A bit like a happy ending in a distressing movie that you really would not have expected. But leaving the dramatic composition of the book aside, one wonders what is really new here? *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations* has a lot in common with Naomi Klein's *This changes everything* (2014). While Klein also focuses also on governments' *and* corporations' implications in climate change, Wright and Nyberg look at corporations through most of the book as actors in their own rights. This bears the risk of reducing the multiple influences of entrepreneurial thinking in climate debates to the initiatives of the private sector. It is fair to say that governments with neoliberal inflections also push for market solutions in the face of the climate crisis. This crucial insight from Klein's book remains understated in this book.

Another reservation with regards to the book is its very stance on nature. Throughout the book the authors rely on a notion of nature (or, better: the destruction thereof) that separates it entirely from society. In Nyberg and Wright's understanding, humans act *upon* nature. Organized humans working for corporations and stand outside of nature inflicting harm on the planet. Nature in *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations* is construed as the passive tap for extraction and sink for waste. This distinction between society and nature is with little doubt an operative binary today as Jason Moore (2015) notes. Nevertheless to accept the nature (without humans)/society (without nature) binary bears the risk of contributing to the ecological rift the authors lament. Moore therefore suggests convincingly studying 'nature through capitalism' and 'capitalism through nature'. He emphasizes a co-production of human and extra-human environments. With regards to Nyberg and Wright's book this view can help achieve a more dialectical view on the co-creation of the way corporations work through nature and nature works through corporations. The book perpetuates a view that sees humans depleting and looting the planet (what we effectively do), disregarding the way humans are a part of this nature.

Despite these complaints the authors manage to come up with a wide array of different corporate strategies with regards to climate change. Corporate responses to climate change seem to be a rendition of General Giuseppe Garibaldi's: 'things will have to change in order that they remain the same' – corporations have to remain versatile and incorporate critique in order to pursue unsustainable growth and the commodification of nature. Scholars interested in

the organization of climate change will find a rich resource for ideas and references in this well-researched book. The contribution should help to bring debates around climate change and corporate critique to the centre stage in organization studies.

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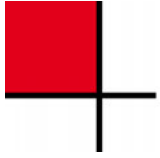

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Alternatives to neo-liberalism: Towards greater social and ecological justice

Saptaparni Pandit and Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha

review of

Parker, M., G. Cheney, V. Fournier and C. Land (eds.) (2014) *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*. London and New York: Routledge. (HB, pp. 386, £185.00, ISBN 9780415782265).

Introduction

This book – re-issued as a paperback in September 2018 – engages with alter-capitalist tropes of thoughts that envisage possibilities of pathbreaking socio-economic transformations in a world where everything is subsumed under the pervasive hegemon of global capital. It begins by drawing our collective attention to the bizarre fact that despite the Great Recession that happened in 2008, different forms of global capitalisms continue to be portrayed as the 'only game in the town' and through the course of 24 comprehensively crafted chapters, the book problematizes this univalence of the unchallenged paradigm of global capital. This is done to subvert the monological narrative that '[u]nbridled growth, trade liberalization and ruthless competition' are the 'only or best ways of organizing the contemporary world' because 'the reality is capitalism has always been contested and that people have created many other ways of providing for themselves.' [iii] This book therefore, explores economic and organizational alternatives that transcend far beyond the narrow imaginations of economists and organizational theorists and focuses on innovative modes of cooperatives, communes, community currencies, scrounging, co-housing, etc., to reiterate that another world is not only possible through non-conventional and non-capitalo-

centric ways, but is already in practice through such alternative modes of organizations. The book desists from merely complaining about the present and relies more on offering new avenues for the future by furnishing a critical analysis of contemporary global capitalism that can lead to our engagement with forms of politics by other means that relies more on values of solidarity, freedom and responsibility. In the process of doing this, the book gives voice to modes of new organizing templates that remain unrepresented or marginalized in conventional political studies but which in fact can have significant contributions in achieving social and ecological justice. Corporate globalization has brought the planet earth and the lives of millions of people on it to the brink. Assessing the devastation caused by global capital, Vandana Shiva, noted environmentalist and ecological activist who wrote the preface to the book, rightly observes that 'Climate extremes are an environmental externality of a fossil fuel based, capital driven economy. We must find alternatives both because oil is running out, and because climate chaos has become a major threat to our survival.' [xxii] Keeping this in mind, this book seeks to look for alternatives:

> to protect the earth, to generate creative meaningful work, and provide more and better food… and… the seeds of these alternatives are being sown everywhere, and form a vital part of the contest between an ecocidal and genocidal system, and alternative ideas which are attempting to create Earth Democracy to protect the freedom of humans and all species. [xxii- xxiii]

In the beginning, the book discusses the promises and glaring failures of advanced capitalism and subsequently we are given a thorough account of possible alternatives to liberalization. The initial section on 'Alternatives: Past, Present and Prospective' contains definitional understandings of capitalism as provided by luminaries such as Boal et al. (2005), Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), and Harvey (2011), who enunciate the bloody and aggressive accumulation drives of capitalism and also talk of active past, present or prospective deviational methods from capitalism such as 'collectivism', 'de-growth', 'Kibbutzim', 'The Diggers', 'partnership', 'autonomism', 'gift exchange', 'social economy', 'Occupy', 'social accounting', 'the commons', 'permaculture', 'microfinance', and 'credit unions'. The subsequent chapter on 'Imagining Alternatives', written by Geoff Lightfoot, also incorporates the issue of 'prefigurative politics' [39] to materialize the possibility of non-conventional ways of finance and organizing.

While they talk of alternatives, the book does not claim to provide 'out of the hat' solutions to the crisis that plagues the world today. In the words of the editors:

> This is not a utopian book… it is more like a recipe book, in which the chapters function to provide some ideas and inspiration by documenting the history, current state and future possibilities of alternatives to market managerial

> capitalism. With a recipe book, you are not told what to make, but are encouraged to think that you don't need to keep on eating Chicken McNuggets. Other ideas are available. [40]

In explicating those alternative ideas, the book maps, in the span of 24 chapters, the cartographies of different models of innovative organizing and living that pose a strong challenge to the narrative of the indispensability of global marketocracy. The book is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the theme of *laissez faire*, its devastating fall out and the necessity for a change in ideas, and the subsequent sections focus on work and labour, exchange and consumption, and resources. Under the thematic heading of these different sections, the book incorporates chapters that bring to the fore varied alternative modes of sustenance, economic management and political or social organizations such as worker recuperated enterprises, communes and intentional communities, non-commodified labour, fair trade, complimentary currencies, eco-localism, alternative and social accounting, credit unions, and people-led education. The very titles of these concepts testify to their non-capitalist characteristics and the editors bring under a single volume a compendium of essays that enunciate a wide range of modalities for a new world.

At the very outset, the editors define what capitalism is and we are also told of its well-known central objective, namely the primitive accumulation of wealth. This has been made possible through the process of division between labour and the means that resulted not only in the alienation between the assets that go into the production of outputs and the actual product but eventually to a division between humans and their humanity. This gives birth to reification, 'alienation, anxieties and insecurity' [10]. The second chapter enunciates these aporias of capitalist accumulation to build a logic of deconstruction of the liberalized view of life by addressing various forms of non-commodified labour like slavery and domestic labour as an integral part for the functioning of a capitalist society. These inner contradictions of capitalism that allows it to accommodate non-commodified forms of labour within its pervasive logic of universal commodification inevitably erode its fundamental claims. Chapter three emphasizes the fact that all forms of organizing are political and towards the end of this chapter, the author stresses the importance of reflexive organizing to inaugurate alternative imaginaries of organizations. Such constant questioning and evaluation of organizational *a priories* is of the utmost importance for the sustainable development of everyone. After three chapters the book starts with a new section – work and labour. Chapter four provides an exhaustive account of cooperative enterprises and 'horizontalized decision-making and labor process' [57] and elaborates on the Argentinian experiment in ERT (*empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* or worker-recuperated enterprises) and in doing that it analyses the:

> [T]heoretical challenges and empirical underpinnings of workers' self-management... the chapter theorises self-management as rooted in class-based actions and struggle... practices of self-management are rooted in the spontaneous, 'bottom-up' and direct actions of workers struggling to go beyond the typically exploitative, and authoritarian nature of the capitalist workplace. [48]

Workers' struggles and transformative self-management models are referred to here to establish these points. The 'dual realities' of self-management of the Argentinian ERTs are brought to focus when the authors note:

> [O]n the one hand... ERTs must attempt to maximize production and revenues as much as possible within competitive markets... on the other hand, they must also take into account the social and solidarity objectives and values of the cooperative. [55]

In a similar vein, the following chapter discusses the merits of the 'rise of co-operativism and worker co-operatives today' [64], addressing worker co-operative values, incentives and different types of co-operatives that are in practice today in various parts of the world. The logic that gets explored here is the democratization of the economy through an alternative model of co-operative organization of finance. Such an alternative economy would be broader and more human and ecology friendly. The authors note:

> A system of self-governing enterprise would not of course, eliminate conflicting interests, goals, perspectives, and ideologies among citizens. But it would tend to reduce the conflict... give all citizens a nearly equal stake in maintaining political equality and democratic institutions in the governance of the state. [84]

Closely connected to the idea of solidarity co-operatives are 'communes' and 'intentional communes' [89] that thrive on the ethos that 'cooperation is key to human survival' [90]. The chapter on communes reminds us that 'only since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Global Capitalism has competition supposedly supplanted cooperation in human consciousness and made cooperative communities seem like alternatives to the norm' [*ibid*]. The section on Micro-philanthrocapitalism in this chapter enlightens us about alternative organization in the kinship community of Ndem in Senegal that offers a holistic approach to community development.

Optimistic communitarians can foresee a bright community-oriented future of non-violent, humanitarian, agriculturally based but market engaged sustainable lifestyles in which conflicts are resolved amicably and people are also freed from destitution. Community based practices that were in use in the 1960s and 70s are being reused today.

The book also engages with issues of non-commodified labour, domestic labour and immigrant workers. Migration has been inevitable in a world of transnational capital and cross-border trade and therefore a cosmopolitan notion of migration should be the norm. As the authors note, alternative forms of immigration organization 'fashions positive forms of sociality, culture and politics, grounded in a vision of human worth beyond narrow nation state membership' [147]. Discussing non-borders brings us to the world wide web and global social media networks that blur all national demarcations. The chapter exploring these ideas refers to 'biolinguistic capitalism' or the social production of values under social media network impacts and possibilities of resistance through alternative media actors, arguing that:

> At stake is not simply the role of real-time media in processes of organization, but a politics of anonymity that acknowledges the central role of algorithmic actors in the constitution of collective agency. By algorithmic actors we mean the grammar, rules or parameters of code which can shape the organization of people and things... just like organizing, code has political effects... the question of anonymity is at the heart of an emergent politics of information governance, addressing the role of protocols, policies and practices in systems of networking. [151-152]

If we can have future trajectories of political subjectivities through social networking assemblages and hacktivism, we can also supplement such alternative political subject formations with radical ideas of non-commodification. The political economy of capitalism primarily relies on the principle of exchange or exchange value of commodities, and in the next section of the book we come across utopian ideas and practices of *non-exchange* and *non-consumption*. In other words, we encounter an unmasking of the basic political economic fundamentals of global capitalism, namely exchange values, primitive accumulation drives and global consumption. The chapters on fair trade, social justice, and production alternatives belie the basic claims of capitalism. Fair trade operates both 'in and against the market', working through market channels to 'create alternative commodity networks for items produced under more favourable social and ecological conditions, and simultaneously working against the conventional market forces that create and uphold global inequalities' [167]. Fair trade can also achieve better growth and alternative production dynamics. Another revolutionary but pragmatic form of counterculture against the theory of conventional exchange is the emergence of the notion of 'complementary currencies' [182]. In recent times, the authors show, we have seen a 'mushrooming of complementary currencies such as Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETs), electronic... currencies and local scripts circulating in small towns' [182]. Defying the hegemonic grammar of capitalism, myriad counter-currents of alternative life styles are being practised across the globe as expressed in the chapters on gifting and gift economy, and voluntary simplicity. All these

ideas dislodge the supremacy of liberalized claims that people are prone only to consumption and accumulation and therefore connecting to the developmental and mass production bandwagon is the only gospel that exists. Taking a leaf out of that alternative vision, the chapter on bio-regional economy argues for the replacement of global capitalist economy with 'self-reliant local economies' or 'bioregions' because:

> Economic growth, the shibboleth of capitalist economies, cannot be compatible with sustainability, and that finding ways of divorcing growth from energy and resources, known as 'decoupling' cannot be practically achieved. [220]

The idea of bioregional economy runs counter to state-controlled and market-controlled systems of productions and believes in revolutionary notions of 'reclaiming control of resources' [226] and 'self-provisioning' [232] that substantiate the wide benefits of bioregional economies or 'eco-localism' [236].

Going through these chapters the reader is likely to be struck by the cavalcade of new ideas that forge a feasible alternative to our pre-existing concepts of socio-economic organization. Such notions can be translated into reality if we have alternative resources to sustain us, and this is the focus of the final section of the book. All these experimental ideas are in practice now, in different places across the globe, and the dystopic reality of ecocide and mass poverty or gross inequality unleashed by capitalism is vigorously challenged by such pre-figurative ideas of sustainable resource mobilization. The book's focus here on various new social movements to this effect also testifies the rise of pre-figurative radical political imaginaries that talk of alternative politics and organization.

What are the takeaways then from the book? If we situate the book in the epistemic climate of Anthropocene and global ecological crisis, it emerges as a great contribution to future thinking and the bottom line that we gather here is, cooperation should have stayed the norm rather than competition because unprecedented economic growth is causing unprecedented deterioration of the human and environmental condition. Consciousness about the prime significance of natural resources in the subsistence of living things and their immediate physical component is needed and 'microphilanthrocapitalism' emerges here as a viable alternative that can be thought upon for future. The section on exchange and consumption transcends mere economic grounds and perceives consumption and exchange from broader social and environmental perspectives. Maintaining a balance between the commitment to market, nature and society is difficult but that is what the book professes through all its varied sections. Due to the delocalization of production for cost cutting purposes, and high levels of production and consumption, the environment is suffering as is set out clearly in the first chapter which argues that the levels of ecological footprints

have also multiplied. As stated in chapter 15, this is also partly because people do not feel they have a stake in the ecological effects, proposing the idea of a system of economy that focuses on the individual's relation with their communities and the natural world rather than the market through relocalizing production and economy and taking responsibility for one's own resources and emissions. The discussion on 'eco-localism' also points to the friction between the goal to achieve environmental results and regulating democratic processes.

The final part of the book also fosters the notion of collective ownership of resources so that compatibility between the ideology of the organization and its assets can be maintained. Even the crux of competition as happens in banks can also be created on the basis of a collective agreement. Resources belonging to a community can well be seen as a platform for alternative values and practices, as discussed in detail in chapter 19. What is needs to be understood is that we need to grow our resources, independent of the market or other chains of command. The chapters offer fascinating insights into the dynamics between means and ends, and innovative people-centric and earth-centric technology that can be termed as prototypes of ecological technology, that may assist.

The book ends by way of a self-assessment, measuring the potentialities as well as the inefficacies of the alter-capitalist modes analyzed through the chapters. The concluding section named revisits the initial claims and objectives of the book and reexamines the propositions made in the various chapters on alternative modes of organizations and in doing that it raises the all-important question of whether the very alternatives themselves are inscribed within the circuits of global capital. Boltanski and Chiapello's seminal work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) is referred to here to signify that the new mechanisms of global capital can appropriate the very voice of discontent that threatens to destabilize capitalism. The book therefore, ends by reiterating the towering challenges that any form of alter-capitalist modes would encounter while attempting to subvert the global domination of liberalization and by acknowledging the challenges it ends in reposing hope in the transformative vectors of future thinking and alternatives. The editors admit that it is ultimately a mere book and hence cannot claim to take on the supranational might of *laissez faire*, and neither does it claim to do that but it surely achieves to forge a plank of non-*a priori* thinking that can transform our future.

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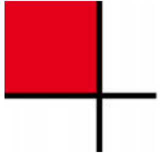

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Molecular Red: Wark's Marxist-posthumanist perspective on the Anthropocene

Daniel Singer

review of

Wark, M. (2015) *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*. London: Verso. (PB, pp. 304, £16.99, ISBN 9781781688274)

What might an engaging Marxist take on the Anthropocene look like today? McKenzie Wark's 2015 text *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* provides one possible answer for just such a journey (for the journey, he suggests the reader pack an Australian Aboriginal dillybag!). Before undertaking this trip, the reader should be forewarned that Wark's writing is theoretically challenging, sometimes daunting and suggestive, so a prior knowledge of Marxist theory and posthuman thought helps with the task at hand.

Wark's journey begins with the writings of a largely forgotten Bolshevik historical figure, Alexander Bogdanov. Bogdanov is generally recognized today as an early pioneer of systems theory, though his roles as a prominent revolutionary, for example playing chess against Lenin, as the Science Fiction writer of *Red Star* or as a proponent of blood transfusions, while largely forgotten, provide interesting historical reading. More importantly, in chapter 1, Bogdanov's system theory called 'tektology' is refashioned by Wark to illustrate how climate change functions where two life systems link and overlap together in a form of 'disingression' leading to 'paraly[sis]' and potential 'decline' [41-42]. This 'disingression' is further described as a '*metabolic rift* between economy as organization and nature as environment' [41]. Wark explores the metaphoric potential of tektology where one concept from one system (biology) is substituted

into another system (history), by recasting the *metabolic rift* (a phrase borrowed from Marx) as the 'carbon liberation front':

> Of all the liberation movements of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one succeeded without limit. It did not liberate a nation, or a class, or a colony, or a gender, or a sexuality. What it freed was not the animals, and still less the cyborgs, although it was far from human. What it freed was chemical, an element: carbon. [11]

In chapter two, Wark introduces the reader to the fiction of Andrei Platonov, a Russian writer during the time of Lenin and Stalin. Platonov is considered an exemplary Proletkult worker. Proletkult is the name for Bogdanov's school of communist culture, where knowledge in the sciences and the arts is organized from labour's perspective. (Coincidentally, the game of chess, which Lenin lost to Bogdanov, was played at Bogdanov's Proletkult school in 1910 on the Island of Capri, Italy.) Platonov's experiences of working as hydro-electric engineer struggling against nature to reduce widespread famine, or with comrades of questionable quality which he related in his fiction, are considered by Wark as a template for the contemporary experience of the Anthropocene from the labour point of view.

Chapter three extends Bogdanov's theory of tektology from the Soviet Union to present day American high tech and hip California. The theoretical works of three resident Californian theoreticians of science are summarized, particularly as they pertain to the Anthropocene. Feyerabend, a philosopher of science, accounts for changing scientific truth through the centuries as an evolving narrative, much like Bogdanov conceives of changing religious/philosophical truth as predicated on the style of social governance (feudal, mercantile, proletarian, etc.). What is considered important as truth is considered relative; for example, climate change is time specific. Haraway, a biologist by training, analyzes human biology as one system of knowledge metaphorically 'ingressing' [41] into and impacting a second system of knowledge, human psychology, through time. For example, blood understood in biology as an essential energy system shaped nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western race theory. Metaphoric concepts of vitality and purity were substituted from one sphere of biology to another sphere of social theory. In contemporary times, genetics has taken the place of blood as the predominant metaphoric signifier grounding a system of neo-liberalism where metaphoric concepts of selfishness, longevity and enhancement are substituted from the biological to the social sphere. Neo-liberalism in its selfish, individualist, non-cooperative outlook and global reach as yet has been unable to contain the carbon liberation front. As a Marxist, Haraway further critiques neo-liberal capitalism by projecting the cyborg as our individual

ideal future biology into an imagined corporate engineered future. Quoting Haraway, Wark argues:

> Cyborgs are monsters, or rather *demonstrations*, in the double sense of to show and to warn, of possible worlds. 'As monsters, can we demonstrate another order of signification? Cyborgs for earthly survival!' [93]

Barad, a student of Haraway and physicist by training, identifies the climate change apparatus as a resource constitutive of everyday human knowledge. The uncertainty of weather predictions (beyond a week) and amorphous climate change predictions – based on physics' apparatus (measuring sensations for complex computer simulations) which provide only limited knowledge of the world – impacts human psychology. Wark characterizes this substitution of uncertainty (from physics to human psychology) as metonymic. 'Analogy has its place in Barad, but her thinking is more metonymic than metamorphic' [101]. Understandings of air pollution, global warming, and climate change evolve and grow in a metonymic chain as people sense in all its imprecision and wonkiness the growing danger, e.g. from buying bigger gas guzzling SUVs for secure family travel, among other examples of a society unhinged. Finally, a historical mapping of the empirical development of climate science is rendered schematically, particularly as networked to military requirements, with its maximal concern for predicting and controlling the environment as a 'theater for war'.

Much as chapter 1 introducing tektology maps onto chapter 3, chapter 4 similarly resembles chapter 2 in that it traces a historical tale from communist Russia to contemporary California. Californian Kim Stanley Robinson wrote an award-winning 1993-99 Science Fiction trilogy based on Bogdanov's 1908 *Red Star*. Both writers use Earth scientists on the planet Mars as a mirroring device to examine contemporary practices on Earth. Both texts are utopian in so far as the scientists living on Mars are shown to be more socially advanced than the inhabitants of Earth. In Robinson's *Green Mars* some of the Martians return to Earth which is experiencing massive flooding and other ecological disasters due to climate change. As an 'ingression', the Martians try to reorganize life as the Earth's 'environment' changes and becomes less favourable for human species survival. Unlike much contemporary pessimistic dystopic science fiction with its abundance of monstrous cyborgs geared to producing Brecht's alienation effect, there are neither overlords nor cyborg mega-warriors in Bogdanov's or Robinson's Martian worlds, and the outlook, while not overly optimistic, does provide a visionary space for ontological and social development.

Most Marxist analyses are dismissive of the Anthropocene as a productive concept. Some Marxists want to label the climate change crisis as the Capitalocene where the economic substructure trumps the superstructure

(Hartley, 2015). Other Marxists conceive of the Anthropocene as part and parcel of the ideological superstructure where the concept functions as myth (Malm, 2015) or fetish (Cunha, 2015). Contrarily Wark inverts the Marxist substructure-superstructure paradigm so that economic power flows from corporate control of intellectual property (i.e. the superstructure) down to material production (i.e. the substructure). Wark calls these new owners of intellectual property the vectoral class:

> I see the vectoral class as the emerging ruling class of our time, whose power rests on attempting to command the whole production process by owning and controlling information. In the over-developed world, an information infrastructure, a kind of third nature, now commands the old manufacturing and distribution infrastructure, or second nature, which in turn commands the resources of this planet, which is how nature now appears to us. (Wark, n.d.)

The Anthropocene configured by the vectoral class (i.e. a political economy based on a superstructural flow downward to the base) is grasped as more than a fetish or mythology, but potentially as a problem (e.g. risk society management) or an economic opportunity (for water, agri-business, green energy companies, etc.). Activist writer Naomi Klein in an interview after the 2015 Climate Conference responds:

> There had been encroaching corporate sponsorship at previous ones but in France you got the nuclear industry, you got the private water industry, which is very, very strong in France, and these huge agribusiness companies that sponsored the summit. And so they were marketing their product as climate solutions [...] (Winship, 2016)

From a critical theory perspective, the Anthropocene takes on a darker meaning of crucial importance as a new form of imperialism negatively impacting what Wark calls 'the under-developed world' (Wark, n.d.).

Bogdanov's labour theory begins with the monistic premise of people struggling with nature for survival. Wark writes: 'The labor point of view is a monism, yet one of plural, active processes. Nature is what labor grasps in the encounter, and grasps in a way specific to a given situation' (2015: 26). The centrality of nature seems to correlate with the environmental ethos of posthumanist thought. When Wark citing Bogdanov writes about valuing folk proverbs on a par with scientific knowledge and philosophy [23] or writes, 'When the whole is more than its parts, there is organization; when there is less, there is disorganization' [39], this reviewer oddly feels he is reading a primer on posthumanism. Similarly, posthumanist writing about 'habitability', 'ecocide' and 'multispecies entanglements' (Theriault, 2015) echoes themes found in Bogdanov's and Robinson's science fiction. Wark, though, takes a critical distance from posthumanist thought. While Wark is sympathetic to the work of Haraway (who

is widely read as both a Marxist and posthumanist writer), he diverges from the materialist foundation of much posthumanist thought constructed on the convergence of the environment, the body and the mind formed into a monistic materiality. In particular, Spinoza's monistic materialism, sourced by many posthumanists as foundational (Braidotti, 2013: 56-57) is appraised ambiguously by Wark as an imaginary *leap in the dark*:

> While sympathetic to Joseph Dietzgen, the worker-philosopher, Bogdanov did not think it progress to retreat from Marx's engagement with Hegel to Spinoza, which resulted in an even more abstract and contentless monism. Dietzgen was, however, the source for Bogdanov's idea that there could be specifically proletarian class-forms of thought, or proletkult. Dietzgen's achievement, like Marx's, is neither the dialectic nor materialism, but the labor point of view. (2015: 28)

While I would highly recommend this book, I wish Wark would have extended his analysis to posthumanism more generally, and in particular been more thorough in analysing Spinoza's (or Deleuze's) monistic embodied style of being. Bogdanov and Wark appear to privilege scientific labour as the premier source for knowledge about material substance (scientific workers in Wark's terminology are the hacker class as analysed in his best-known work, *A Hacker's Manifesto*). Contrarily Dietzgen and Marx seem to privilege the industrial factory labourer as an historical force with its own unique knowledge and sensibility. Perhaps a little more affinity with the *salt of the earth* productive and reproductive labourers would inspire. Wark argues:

> A materialist philosophy is a contradiction in terms, for as philosophy its materialism remains contemplative. Tektology, as a monist approach to knowledge, organizes it. Materialist philosophy is new wine in old bottles; tektology seizes the bottle factory and makes it a cooperative. [40]

Nonetheless, while a 'cooperative' might be inspiring, without the wine it's not worth very much! Cybernetic-molecular posthuman systems need not be theoretically divided or conceived as mutually exclusive from an embodied molar materiality. Here I am arguing that the posthuman 'environment', that is posthuman cognition, should be relationally distributed more widely.

Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene succeeds as it resuscitates a largely forgotten intellectual Marxist tradition – Bogdanov's Tektology and Proletkult – then updates and inserts its insights for purposes of reorienting and positioning oneself productively in relation to what is widely considered as today's #1 global crisis. As an intervention into radical posthumanism, the theoretical framework supplies a solid ontological grounding, which neither subscribes to the all too prevalent positive psychology mindset nor lapses into despair. In the conclusion of the text, Wark writes about his younger years conversing in his hometown

Australian communist party headquarters where there was a picture of Marx, then Lenin and finally an empty picture space where only a nail remained. Here, Wark was informed, a picture of Stalin had once hung, which was then taken down after 1956. This reader assumes that comrade MacKenzie Wark today would like to replace Lenin with Bogdanov, and leave the third remaining picture placeholder allegorically empty for purposes of instruction. Hopefully Wark's Proletkult will find its market niche.

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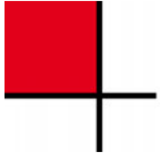

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'Why is a raven like a writing desk?'

Mark de Rond

review of

O'Doherty, D. P. (2017) *Reconstructing Organization: The Loungification of Society*. London: Palgrave Macmillan (HB pp v + 324, ISBN 978-1-137-48920-3)

Damian O'Doherty's *Reconstructing Organization* is a wild tale of bob cuts and cats and talking chairs, set within the confines of Manchester airport. Rarely has a steel and concrete waiting room (for that is what airports are to its visitors, if not its employees) seemed more vivacious and colourful. Think *Alice's Wonderland* with its strange and curious creatures, the author its likeable, excitable, Mad Hatter.

The book draws on two-and-a-half years of good old-fashioned fieldwork at Manchester airport, just a few miles down the road from Damian's office, in the parish of Ringway, 'a small and almost forgotten community that lies somewhere in the borderlands of Manchester and Cheshire'. It tells of the becoming of a project within one of the airport's terminals – an Escape Lounge – constructed over nine months between August 2009 and June 2010, at a budgeted cost of £1.7m.

Airports are the sorts of places many of us will go to some lengths to avoid. It is here that people trolley the wrecks that have become their lives to the promise of paradise – Tenerife, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, La Palma, and the like – only to be met by queues of the fussy and argumentative, processed in turn by people traffickers in primary colours. While universities and the army may

have moved on from the hay-days of David Lodge, airports largely haven't. If ever an honest day's work was done by organizational ethnographers, this surely must be it.

The Escape Lounge was to provide respite for those on the move from others on the move, and provides a good focal point to this account. This ethnography does not lack in originality: the author pulls no punches in extracting his pound of flesh from the concrete jungle that is Manchester's finest. It is well written. The author has clearly thought a great deal about the organization of work around the airport generally, and that of the lounge project in particular. All this makes for an interesting, if not always straightforward, read.

Part of what makes this ethnography unusual is the realisation that we find ourselves caught in the author's ruminations. There is little sense of 'being there, being them', or the rich description that has traditionally been the mainstay of ethnography. Few details are provided of the airport and surroundings, its people and their everyday preoccupations. One cannot help but feel like this is a reflection on fieldwork far more than a cultural description of the world of others – we spend far more time in the Damian's head than in the field – suggesting a predilection for theorizing over story telling.

Along similar lines, Fabian Muniesa, in the book's Postscript, says: 'What we need is not ethnography. What we need is Foucault, Deleuze, Sloterdijk, Adorno, Marx, Leibniz and Spinoza. And Samuel Beckett to that matter' (p. 273). Perhaps. But whatever happened to richly detailed, descriptive accounts – Goffman, Becker, Hughes and Geertz come to mind – as the substance from which to construct provisional explanations of social life? Goffman's gorgeously meticulous descriptions of life inside total institutions and on the Shetland Islands, for example, still rank among the most influential writings in sociology today, yet are relatively theory-light. O'Doherty's two-and-a-half years of fieldwork could, and should, have provided such rich fare and yet where in the book did it go? Why spotlight the work of others (the book contains some 700 individual references) over one's own quite so much?

The resulting book is a smörgåsbord of theories but with no real sense of how they connect to the fieldwork or indeed add up to a meaningful whole. While Damian is clearly a clever guy, and well-read, it isn't always clear how what he saw and recorded over two-and-a-half years of observation (as opposed to what he read during this period, prior to it, and subsequently) shaped his theoretical agenda. Aside from regret at missing out on the action, this observation had me mull over what (too) often felt like an imposition of theory/theories over

observation, even as the author himself argues for the import of 'resisting the temptation to precipitously explain away ...' the observed.

Along similar lines, I felt uneasy at times with what felt like reductive descriptions, for example, of business schools and managerial types. While I have some sympathy with the critiques levied at both by critical management scholars, descriptions or allusions often felt like caricatures – Mad Men, The Office, that sort of thing – and unlike the mostly intelligent, thoughtful, and morally sensitive managers I've come to know over fifteen years or so of engagement. In my experience, managerial types often have little choice but to respond to scenarios that are substantially without precedent, with no real choice but to act before having all the relevant information, and to provide leadership in organizations with potentially little consensus on what matters most and why. James March (2005: 10) once described corporate leaders as toiling away at the great conflicts of life: a predilection toward equality and modesty versus an urge to power and self-assertion; a commitment to rationality, instrumentality, and the pursuit of self-interest versus a conception of duties, obligations, and the pursuit of justice; a desire for clarity, integration, coherence, and unity versus a propensity to ambiguity, inconsistency, and conflict; a claim of human significance versus an awareness of human absurdity and mortality. It is a description that, to me, seems kind of right (even if, no doubt, some will be true to stereotype). I'm afraid the characterization of corporate women and men in *Reconstructing organizations* leaves little scope for subtlety and variety.

I also found myself struggling to understand whatever was meant by 'loungification'. Perhaps this was the author's intention: to invite the reader into unpacking an as yet insufficiently defined empirical observation. Even so, the absence of a working definition left me full of self-doubt: what had I missed? What was I not seeing?

A promised introduction to loungification early in the book left something to be desired. On page 20, it is described as stringing together 'a "lash up" made up of a dispersed series of materials, ideas and subjects. In tracing this "lash up" loungification also helps adumbrate something like a fragile "crack" or "line of flight" that runs like a zigzag through the content and boundaries of formal organization'. We are told it is a bit like Gidden's structuration but not quite like it ... that it exists in 'the next five minutes'.

By page 95, I still had no real idea as to what was meant by loungification, though I'd meanwhile made peace with my inability to grasp what presumably would have been obvious to everyone else. Finally, on page 106 there is some welcome definition: 'to extract and then establish what it is that is specific to the

organization of the lounge takes considerable perseverance and patience, but it is towards this ambition that we have been using the placeholder concept "loungification"'. Or is there?

This is the closest we've come to a definition. By now I understand it to be something ontological ('to make headway in this peculiar ontology' as the author refers to it, and as Gibson Burrell blurbs: 'looking to explain ontologies-in-the-making') yet am thrown off course by a further amendment on page 107: 'loungification is a mode of ethnographic inquiry'. Really? Does this not propel it into the realm of epistemology or methodology?

On page 144, we are told that: 'What allows us to hold all these things together and to trace emergent patterns of organization is the deployment of this concept *loungification*. It is a concept that helps tune our attention to things in process ...' Right. So why not simply call it 'process' or a 'becoming'? What is loungification *uniquely*? Presumably it is something that connects the Wonderland that is Manchester's Escape Lounge with organized life more broadly but, at least to this reader, the concept remained just ever so slightly out of reach.

In Lewis Carroll's 1865 fantasy novel, the Mad Hatter is credited with the following riddle: 'Why is a raven like a writing desk?' When Alice finally gives up trying to figure out why, the Hatter admits, 'I haven't the slightest idea!'.

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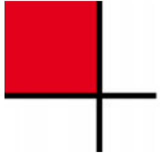

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Feminism, activism, writing! Introduction to the special section

Sine Nørholm Just, Sara Louise Muhr and Annette Risberg

Invitation

Feminism seems to be undergoing yet another public revival as persistent gender inequalities and the absence of basic rights and freedoms, e.g. the right to equal pay and the freedom of bodily integrity, are becoming apparent and being called out – also in the supposedly 'equal' Nordic welfare societies (e.g. Holck and Muhr, 2017). On these basic grounds, feminist activists fight against gender pay gaps, gender segregated labor markets, sexual assault, domestic violence as well as for access to contraception and free abortion. In other words, equal rights on the labor market as well as in the personal sphere are still central to a feminist agenda. At the same time – and as always when women's rights find public points of articulation – anti-feminist as well as postfeminist arguments are blooming. The former rejects and opposes the need for addressing gender inequality while the latter claims that gender equality has already been achieved. Despite evidence to the contrary, then, some argue that the feminist project is no longer relevant because it has succeeded (this is a particularly popular discourse in the Danish media; see Muhr and Plotnikof, 2018). Others question the very foundations of feminism as e.g. evidenced in the US political debates surrounding Donald Trump (see Just and Muhr, 2018). The contours of social conflict, then, are looming large, but cracks are also appearing within feminist circles. Thus, claiming the right to be (and relevance of being) feminist and emphasizing the unremitting importance of feminist projects (Harding et al., 2012; McRobbie 2009, 2011, 2013; Redfern and Aune, 2013) does not ensure feminist harmony. To the contrary, debate about the role of feminism as it intersects with other topics of concern in a largely neoliberal political climate has

flared up (e.g. Gill, 2016; Gill et al., 2017; Lewis, 2014; Lewis et al. 2017; Liu, 2018a; Ronen, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014; Sullivan and Delaney, 2017).

These tensions give rise to new complexities and issues, raising questions such as: what is the feminist struggle about (Thomas and Davies, 2005)? Who may speak as feminist and for feminists (Hearn, 2014; hooks, 2000; Rumens, 2017; Tienari and Taylor, forthcoming)? Whose rights to what freedoms do 'we' tend to fight for (Just and Muhr, 2018; Naples, 2002; Oyewumi, 2002)? And, adding pressure to a sore spot, does feminist emancipation come with an overlay of cultural appropriation and an underbelly of class privilege (Ferber, 2012; Mohanty, 1988)? Surely, feminism must be intersectional (Essed and Muhr, 2018; Liu, 2018b; Villeseche et al. 2018; Ulus, 2018), but what are the expressions, practices, and aims of feminist intersectionalities? How do queer studies intersect with a feminist agenda (Christensen, 2018; Dahl, 2011)? Do particular struggles sustain or suspend the common cause? How – and to what extent – do expressions of female sexuality promote a feminist project (Gill, 2008, 2012; Schuster, 2013)? May, for instance, pole dancing be conceived as a feminist act or does it embody the very power dynamics that feminism sets out to dissolve (Just and Muhr, forthcoming)? Do the answers to these questions, perhaps, depend on the specific context in which the particular body performs? Such questions call for new approaches to feminist scholarship implying new methodologies for doing fieldwork and conducting analyses (e.g. Ashcraft, 2018; Ashcraft and Muhr, 2018; O'Shea, 2018; Riach et al., 2016) but also new modes of writing and other ways of communicating one's findings and thoughts (Beavan, 2018; Boncori and Smith, 2018; Katila, 2018; Philips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2006; Pullen and Rhodes, 2008; Vachhani, 2015), all in the spirit of probing and promoting intersectional feminist resistance in and to an otherwise neoliberal regime.

Given the increased public attention to feminist concerns and the intensification of foundational debate within feminist environments as well as the fierce challenges from outsider positions, feminist scholars face the twin task of strengthening feminism conceptually as well as fortifying it in practice. That is, we must, today, promote feminist scholarship AND activism as inherently interrelated activities (Ackerly and True, 2010; Muhr and Plotnikof, 2018; Naples, 2003). This means asking how we persuasively raise awareness about feminist agendas while querying whose voices are heard in the current debate and who these voices do and can speak for (Ahmed, 2004, 2007; Spivak, 1985; Swan; 2017). If we claim to speak for all women, who suffers? And, conversely, when one recognizes the particularities of one's articulatory position, who listens? How can we as academics promote a feminist activist agenda? How may we heed questions of representation without losing political clout? We need to

continue to address the socially awkward issues concerning the persistence of gender inequality while becoming better at addressing the conceptually problematic issue of what it might mean to speak for or as 'a woman'.

Wishing to facilitate conversations on some of these many and varied questions, we decided to organize an event at Copenhagen Business School. In the spring of 2017, we therefore sent out a call for participation in a workshop that asked participants to bring together (feminist) activism and (scholarly) writing in order to discuss the future of feminism in academia. With this workshop, we aimed to discuss how we can develop a viable research agenda for social change and what the means of advancing such an agenda – within disciplinary communities, in activist networks and to society at large – might be. To allow for creative practices of (feminist) writing, we abandoned the traditional workshop format of paper presentations. In this spirit, we did not ask prospective participants to submit conventional paper abstracts, but instead to provide a motivational letter stating their interest in and ambitions for feminist activist scholarship. Further, the workshop was free of charge, and PhD/junior scholars could apply for travel grants. Thus, we sought to put feminist and activist ideals into practice at the outset of the call, hoping this would attract many participants and open up a space for creative and caring discussions.

Participation

As it turned out, the interest was, indeed, overwhelming, and in November 2017 65 participants began a two-day conversation on the future of feminism in academia. In the course of these two days, we held four thematic sessions in smaller groups (three parallel tracks) with subsequent plenary sessions at which the groups presented their results – ideas, texts, drawings and more. There were no plenary speakers or other authoritative voices; instead, conveners who did not promote their own academic stands in any conventional way facilitated each thematic session, inviting open dialogue and discussion based on short presentations of what they perceived to be a main current challenge.

The four themes were:

- (Post)feminist Discourses
- Affective Activism
- Alternative Feminist Organizing

- Powerful Writing

For each theme, we suggested a few texts that might frame the discussions, and we provided the conveners with facilitation guides, asking a series of questions about the participants' understandings and practices of the thematic issues. Beyond the initial pointers, we left the format as well as the content to the conveners and their groups to establish and/or challenge – hopeful that each group would develop its own dynamics and that the discussions would branch out in many different directions. Thus, one convener asked participants in her group to use the five senses to explore what feminism means to them (see Baxter et al., this issue). Another suggested to her group that extra-discursive affectivities might become articulable by drawing collective mandalas. Personal stories and collective experiences were shared in several groups. Post-it notes and flip-overs as well as digital notetaking and brainstorming tools were some of the material and technological ingredients of the different processes. Indeed, the themes were explored in many different ways, based on the following common starting points:

For (post)feminist discourses, we asked participants to reflect upon their own understandings of and relationships with feminism. We suggested texts such as an interview with Angela McRobbie (2013) on the illusion of equality for women and Abby L. Ferber's (2012) explorations of the connections and similarities between color-blindness, postfeminism and christonormativity as starting points for conversations on the definitions, discursive regularities and social practices of feminism. Further, we struck an activist cord by inviting participants to articulate their 'one demand' to feminist practice. This first session set the scene for lively and heated, yet friendly, caring and constructive discussions of the multiple ways in which feminism claims its presence in our scholarly work as well as private lives. The contribution by Baxter et al. (this issue) is an example of the feminist methodologies developed in one of the parallel sessions on (post)feminist discourses.

The theme of affective activism was influenced and guided by Sara Ahmed's work. For this session we had suggested her article 'Not in the mood' (2014) as well as some excerpts of more explicitly activist writing published on Ahmed's blog. Here we found particular inspiration and encouragement in the figures of the feminist killjoy[1] and the feminist snap[2]. Visible in the contributions to this section (particularly Antonakaki et al., this issue; Basner et al., this issue; Munar, this issue), the participants quickly turned to Ahmed's more feminist work,

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1 https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/08/26/hello-feminist-killjoys/.

2 https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/.

exploring in particular the feminist snap in both theoretical, personal and embodied ways.

Alternative feminist organizing asked participants to consider activist and academic modes of organizing. This theme invited discussions of the meanings of 'alternative'. Alternative to what – alternative forms, alternative content or alternative aims? How may feminism inspire vibrant and viable alternatives to current realities, within and beyond academia? One source of inspiration here was Gibson-Graham's (2008, 2010) work on feminist belonging and diverse economies.

Finally, for powerful writing we provided examples of some of the texts and performances that have touched and inspired us the most. From the book chapter 'Eating the "Other"' (hooks, 1992), through an excerpt from Maggie Nelson's novel 'The argonauts'[3] to Andrea Gibson's poem 'Letter to white queers' (if you haven't seen it already, do yourself the favor of watching Gibson performing this poem[4]). With these various texts, we wanted to ask how academic and activist forms of writing might merge. We hoped to inspire conversations about and experiments with one of the strongest disciplining powers of academia: that of the peer reviewed journal article. The results of this session went beyond talk to actual experimentation with alternative forms. In the plenary session following the parallel discussions of powerful writing, we came together to witness an amazing materialization of feminist activism. As Christensen et al. (this issue) and Amrouche et al. (this issue) both beautifully exhibit this final plenary provided an affective (and effective) culmination of two intense days of feminist activist solidarity and care.

In sum, the participants engaged with energy and enthusiasm, immersing themselves in the discussions, drawings and writings of each group session and bringing solutions, suggestions and agendas together in the plenary sessions. Thus, several groups produced texts, visuals and other forms of documentation just as all sessions were audial recorded. All participants got access to all documentation after the workshop through digital platforms. Further, many of the participants continued their conversations on various themes and ideas after the workshop, expanding on material produced during sessions or producing new documents. These different sources and processes have resulted in – or, perhaps more accurately, turned into – the texts of this special section.

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3 https://harpers.org/archive/2015/04/in-the-pain-cavern/.

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpBUenMIe8U.

Documentation

The Feminism, Activism, Writing! Workshop is documented as a collection in this special section of *ephemera*. All together, they provide indications of and, perhaps, affinities for what happened during those two days in Copenhagen in November 2017 – and they present some of the conversations and aspirations that have continued to grow after the workshop. The articles can be read separately, but to get the full affective experience of the personal journeys, the thought-provoking discussions and the care put into developing each other as scholars and our scholarly (activist) community, we recommend reaing the issue in its entirety.

The FAW! section starts off with a paper by Lynne F. Baxter, Carole Elliott, Deborah N. Brewis and Jhilmil Breckenridge (acknowledging the input of all the other participants of the 'What is Feminism?' Group A workshop at *Feminism, Activism, Writing!*). In this paper, 'Sensing feminism', the authors develop a sensorial methodology for enabling inclusive participation in group discussion. Drawing on 'the five senses exercise' used by clean language practitioners, this method creates the potential for a space of equality as it doesn't require scientific knowledge or experience, but instead draws on sensorial experience. If facilitated sensitively, it holds the possibility of subverting hierarchical power structures. The authors demonstrate how this happened in the FAW! session, bringing out a great variety of experiences, opinions and perceptions about feminism and constructing a strong-because-multiple basis for further discussion and development of thought.

The next paper, 'Powerful writing as writing "with"' is written by Jannick Friis Christensen, Sarah Dunne, Melissa Fisher, Alexander Fleischmann, Mary McGill, Florence Villeséche and Marta Natalia Wróblewska. The paper starts out by asking a series of questions, among others 'what makes writing powerful?', 'is the academic genre a powerful one?' and 'can it [academic writing] be feminist *and* powerful?' Through three vignettes about different forms of academic feminist writing, the authors demonstrate the act of powerful writing, showing that academic writing can be both feminist and powerful in and of itself and as documentation/inspiration of socio-political activism. The paper ends in a reflection about the personal voice in collective writing, showing how powerful writing can make use of multimodality as a disruptive force.

The third paper, 'Powerful writing', is written by Charlotte Amrouche, Jhilmil Breckenridge, Deborah N. Brewis, Olimpia Burchiellaro, Malte Breiting Hansen, Christina Hee Pedersen, Mie Plotnikof and Alison Pullen. This paper provides detailed documentation of how two texts were produced during one of the

parallel sessions as well as of the participants' reflections before, during and after the production of these two texts. Hence, the paper demonstrates a method of producing text, but also gives the reader a sensorial experience of how texts can be produced in feminist collaboration. While the methodological contribution of this paper is important, the texts themselves, the poems that came out of the sessions, are affective feminist interventions in their own right.

Paper four, 'Snaptivism: A collective biography of feminist snap as affective activism' by Kai Basner, Jannick Friis Christensen, Jade Elizabeth French and Stephanie Schreven, takes one of the authors' personal snap moment as point of departure for theoretically and empirically discussing Sarah Ahmed's concept of the feminist snap. Through careful – and caring – collective rewriting of one personal narrative, the collective of authors combines the words snap and activism and develops the method of snaptivism. They encourage us all to become snaptivists and snap allies by collectively and supportively voicing and critiquing heteronormative and masculine structures so as to leave no one alone in – and with – their feminist snaps.

The fifth paper, 'Realising Sara Ahmed's 'feminist snap': Voices, embodiment, affectivity' is written by Melpomeni Antonakaki, Jade Elizabeth French and Cansu Guner. Based on detailed recordings, transcriptions and notes from one of the FAW! workshop's parallel discussions, the authors empirically analyze Sara Ahmed's concept of snap experience and propose a distributed and rearrangeable model for opening up questions of snap subjectivity. The authors analyze in minute detail what feminist voices embody and how collectivity rearranges experience in relation to two categories of the feminist snap: feminist pedagogy and feminist genealogy. Based on their findings, the authors propose the workshop format of Snap.tivism.

In paper six, 'Dancing between anger and love: Reflections on feminist activism', Ana María Munar narrates her own feminist story – of coming out as openly feminist. While this process may be read in parallel with Ahmed's account of the feminist snap, Munar develops her feminist identity in relation to the writings of Martha Nussbaum. In theoretical conversation with Nussbaum, Munar voices, confronts and debates some of the most pertinent and productive – as well as damaging – feminist feelings, anger and love, and the way they are constantly intertwined in feminist activism.

The FAW! section ends with the paper 'Feminism is dead? Long live feminism! A reflexive note on the FAW! Workshop'. Here, Elisa Virgili and Francesca Zanatta discuss how to live feminism within academia. They describe how conferences are often dialogic spaces replicating patriarchal dynamics of power,

but how they experienced the FAW! workshop as a space that challenged patriarchal regimes, encouraged and enabled scholarly encounters through feminist practices. They argue that the politics of care in academia, the positioning of scholars as feminists and the issue of precarity in academia are starting points for a radical transformation of academia. Through the learning(s) of the FAW! workshop, they call for a radical reconsideration of all forms of collective solidarity, based on the acceptance and celebration of affective-relational practices developed to cope with the challenges of precarity and requiring the acknowledgement of the value of both positions, as scholars and activists.

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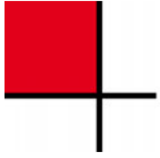
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Sensing Feminism

Lynne F. Baxter, Carole Elliott, Deborah N. Brewis, Jhilmil Breckenridge and the other participants of the 'What is Feminism?' Group A workshop at Feminism, Activism, Writing!

abstract

We offer a method for enabling inclusive participation in group discussion: the five senses exercise used by clean language practitioners. The method helped a diverse set of participants with intersectional subject positions articulate their perspectives on feminism in a non-hierarchical way. We describe the basis for the method, the intentions of the session convenor and results from the session. Participants reflect on the method and the responses it evoked. The method is a way of honouring individual perspectives and experiences whilst building connections between people. We think the method is useful for facilitating diverse groups in contexts such as workshops, teaching and meetings at work where the convenor wants to build inclusion and fresh perspectives.

Introduction

The purpose of this short paper is to discuss an exercise we found useful in communicating our perspectives on feminism. The exercise uses the senses to explore concepts in a metaphorical way. The paper begins by describing the reasons behind choosing the method and then describes how the method unfolds and its theoretical underpinnings. Workshop participants offer their evocations from the exercise in visuals and prose and the results of the exercise are recounted in the central portion of this paper. We propose the method as a way of facilitating the construction of an inclusive, thought provoking, communicative group, and offer it for others to consider in their own work in teaching and workshop convening.

Convening a workshop session – Lynne

Before the workshop began, the organizers were clear in communicating the tone they intended it to have. They wanted the workshop to be open and inclusive and promote dialogue to help build a constructive network for feminist action. The organizers contacted people to convene sessions, including me. They suggested some questions for each session and gave us freedom to structure it as we wanted 'but not too much'. I looked at the timetable and found my name against one of the first breakout sessions after the introduction. There would be around 20 people in the room each with their own intersectional subjectivities and experiences of feminism. At that stage people might not know each other or feel confident about speaking. I had been reading Walker (2014) and thought one of her exercises might be useful to open the discussion in a different way. Instead of asking people directly about what feminism meant to them, I decided to ask in turn how the different senses related to feminism for each person. The method evoked a wide range of contributions and let us gain different insights into something we all care about deeply. Many participants appreciated the method and discussed it more fully afterwards. Other session convenors used it in their sessions. What was it about the method that resonated? The next part of the paper discusses the basis for the method I used, the 5 senses exercise (Walker, 2014: 63).

The method is based on the work of Caitlin Walker who works on projects with groups of people in different organizations such as universities, businesses and schools. One of her tasks at the beginning of a project is to learn people's different perspectives on it. In addition, she wants the members of the group to realise other members indeed have different perspectives about the project. She accomplishes these objectives through the 5 senses exercise (Walker, 2014: 63). It begins by Walker asking people to 'see an elephant'. After some time, she then invites everyone to talk about their elephant. For example, people comment on the size of their elephant, where it was located, what type, what colour and so on. She then asks the group to 'hear music', 'taste a lemon', 'feel velvet' and 'smell smoke', and each time they explore the responses fully before moving on (Walker, 2014: 63). The exercise yields many different perspectives and a variety of connections people make on relatively simple topics. Walker (2014) discussed how it helped people communicate their views more clearly and promoted greater understanding amongst the groups. I thought the method interesting and explored how I might use it at the workshop, mindful of the context and the purpose of the session I was convening.

I decided to tailor the exercise to better fit the workshop aims and session topic. I thought it important to foreground feminism. So, instead of using elephants,

music, lemons, velvet and smoke, I asked, 'what does feminism smell like?' and gave some time for people to think and write about what they felt. Then I invited people to discuss what they had thought. We then repeated the process substituting different senses in relation to feminism. Some people were happy to speak, others needed gentle invitations. But overall contributions flowed well, and people seemed to enjoy the process. One person in the group of around twenty seemed annoyed about something, but I learned later it was about one of my personal responses to the exercise that I had shared with the group, rather than the method. My intention was to help people who did not necessarily know each other talk about feminism in an inclusive way. I think overall the exercise succeeded and was pleased when others adopted it or modified their own version for use during their sessions. The 5 senses exercise and Walker's work (2014) are based on a wider approach known as 'Clean Language' that might be of further interest. The next part of my section summarizes the work.

Clean Language is an approach to communication concerned with 'revealing metaphors and opening minds' (Sullivan and Rees, 2008: i). It is based on the late David Grove's ideas, who worked as a practitioner helping people communicate better in a variety of contexts. He did not write many articles and books on his methods, instead people who were engaged with his ideas wrote about them and developed them further (Lawley and Tompkins, 2000; Sullivan and Rees, 2008; Walker, 2014). A key part of his ideas is a defined set of 'clean questions' designed to ask a person their perspective so that the questioner builds on the respondent's language. The questioner does not put words into the respondent's mouth, so the unique perspective is articulated. Walker (2014) described using the questions in a series of contexts, for example helping children who have learning needs in school, students on a degree course learn their coursework better, and developing a new strategy with companies who were struggling financially. The examples of the technique in use (Lawley and Tompkins, 2000; Sullivan and Rees, 2008; Walker, 2014) demonstrated clean questions useful in obtaining ideas and participation. The approach appealed to me as it seemed to equalize group discussion as the questions were ones that everyone could answer. Through exchanging responses people gained insight about themselves and others. A key aspect of Clean Language was noticing metaphors and using them to communicate perspectives, explored next.

Advocates of Clean Language think metaphors are important in communication because they encapsulate and share meaning (Sullivan and Rees, 2008). A metaphor is a way of 'connecting with a pattern that has personal significance' (Lawley and Thompson, 2000: 5). Everybody has their own metaphoric landscape (Lawley and Thompson, 2000: 17). Imaginative metaphors can be expressed in a variety of ways including verbally, non-verbally and in material forms such as

drawing, writing and sculpting (Lawley and Thompson, 2000: 16). Grove observed during his practice that people discussed events and perspectives in symbols that included metaphors. The metaphors often drew upon the senses. 'People also see pictures, hear sounds and feel feelings in their imagination when they remember a past event or imagine a future event' (Lawley and Thompson, 2000: 4). Walker (2014), a keen follower of Grove's, developed her 5 senses exercise as a method of voicing people's metaphors. What metaphors did the modified 5 senses exercise evoke in the workshop participants? The next part of the paper recounts some of the responses.

A collective writing recounted - Deborah

The following piece of writing is an interpretation of the responses from one group of participants to the exercise described above. We began with a period of quiet reflection, during which time some people sat to think; some wrote down ideas, and some drew pictures. Lynne invited us to consider each of the senses in turn. I, and others, took notes during the discussion that followed, as each participant called out to contribute the images, words, phrases and emotions that had come to mind for them. Afterwards, we teased out the commonalities and differences in the metaphors that we held about feminism; we discussed our feminisms. Based on my notes and a visualisation contributed to by Annette Risberg using the online tool 'padlet', I have written the text below. This text attempts to convey the essence of what was co-produced through the exercise, faithful to the Clean Language approach. However, it is inevitably transformed to a degree by my own embodied response to the session and the way in which I have written the multiple responses into a single, poetic text. The synthesising of the contributed images into a narrative structure shapes the meaning of each; the images are positioned and therefore understood *in relation* to one another. This transition from individual to relational perhaps mimics what we collectively attempted to achieve in the room. The text below aspires to represent the collective writing that was produced by the workshop participants; it is a text with many authors:

> Feminism feels like comfort, like soft, strong corduroy. I can run my fingers across its texture to feel the grooves of experience that make it both supple and tough. It is the satisfaction of bursting, of bubble-wrap pop pop. We burst upward, into the air with gravity-defying lightness. And yet, it is courage. It is risk. We find it in the opening of one's eyes: it is found in the moment at which I see the edge...and jump. Some of us are pushed. Feminism feels like heat. A rage born of cause that binds a community. A community that jostles, we are not all smiles, but we embrace.

> Feminism looks bright, light – feminism is vivid; being visible. Its imagined futures are brightly coloured, colourful with the intersections of experience. That feminist of the future looks like Rosie, reimagined, who is riveting to us now in her multiplicity, as a collective. Feminism looks like women: this is good and this is bad; for feminism to look like women is to liberate and to constrain us.
>
> Feminism smells like ozone…its mountain-fresh air is utopia. The roses and lilies drift gently in. Feminism at once feels like sweat, like cup after cup of strong, black coffee. Bitter. Urgent. Feminism is a scented memory of welcome; of homecoming: it is free tea served from paint-peeled hatch windows in old village halls.
>
> Feminism tastes like staunch coffee, of stout. It is pungent as blue cheese and pickles, or marmite between two thick slices. One learns to appreciate it; to find it fine. There is a sweetness there – of chocolate, perhaps honey. It coats the palette, soothes. It is quenching like water flooding in after a long thirst.
>
> Feminism sounds like chatter, the buzz of voice. It is chanting, enchanting. Mmmmmm. I hear a common language uttered – we need only shorthand to feel ourselves heard. And still it is shouts of opposition – an alarm bell cuts through the consensus; it is the alarm bells that bring us together and which simultaneously threaten to drive us apart. A deafening thunder rises, is sustained by our energy, our resistance. The thunder breeds the desire for silence – we search for a place in which we can hear, we can listen. Be still and transform. Allow ourselves, allow each other, to hear the sweeter music that was always, a possibility, somewhere.

It strikes me, as I read this synthesised text, the metaphors used by participants ranged across more and less culturally-embedded experiences and imagery. For example, the ‘old village halls’ and ‘blue cheese and pickles’ directly evoke a national context (in these cases, British), whilst ‘thunder’, ‘chatter’ and the feeling of jumping over an edge appeal more universally to the human experience. In the context of exploring ‘feminism’ as concept and movement, the text reminds us to reflect on the specificity of our experiences, differing histories of oppression, and varying contemporary concerns. Whilst the metaphor-based method helped to create a space in which we, the participants, could both appreciate diversity and connect to one another across differences; privilege and marginalisation likely still played a part in the dynamics of the group. The Clean Language approach may have additional value to scholars and teachers who seek to engage with the ways in which for example race, disability, age, sexual identity, class, and global location, simultaneously inform our experiences; through seeking to elicit a range of metaphors and using these as a springboard to discuss and/or problematise the privileges of, and intersections in, our shifting social positionings (see Anthias, 2002; Holvino, 2012).

Reflections – Jhilmil

At the end of the activity, we brainstormed together as a group. As the handwritten notes show, on green and white paper, consciously or unconsciously choosing colours for progress, we were trying to take some of the collective ideas and energy towards a plan for the future – a 'feministo', as opposed to a manifesto, deliberating thinking of ways to rethink masculinity, leverage some of the privilege a lot of us have, and see how we could move towards a more credible voice, while keeping the very real threats and dangers of being co-opted into the very 'system' we were trying to change.

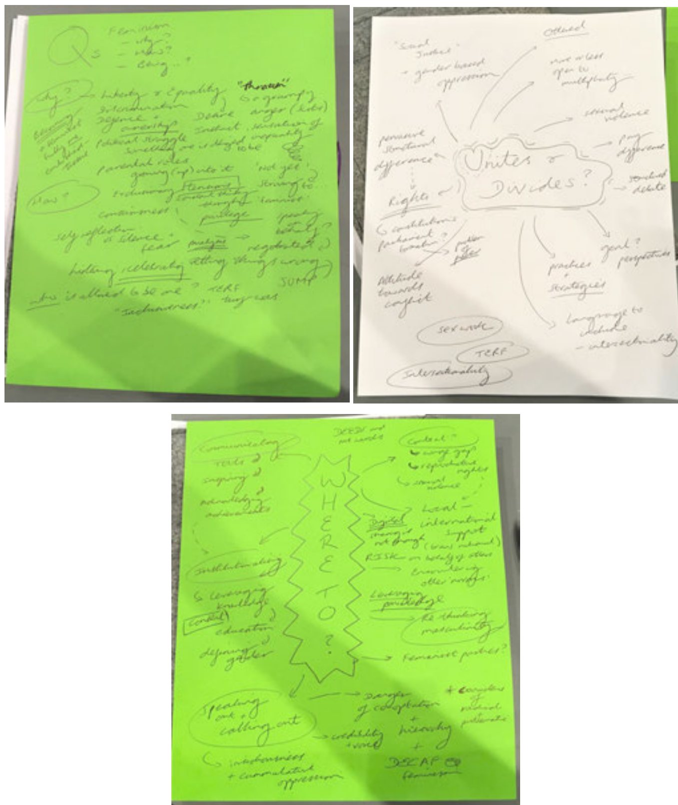

Figure 1: Pictures from the workshop

We thought it important to have deeds, not words and discussed ways, possible toolkits, to collate achievements and share progress with the group. We also discussed ways to garner national and international support, including the trans femme sector, which is increasingly coming out of the margins and can be an important ally and a powerful sisterhood. We also discussed the importance of the right language and language to include intersectionality, being hyper

sensitive to stay away from 'othering' and create more inclusion, even within this space[1].

Concluding thoughts – Carole

It is important to note that we finish writing this piece some ten months after the workshop. Since that time, we have separately and collectively engaged in other forms of activism or participated in conferences with more traditional formats and concerns. If many of us committed to attend the workshop because we fear the consequences of a rise in populist politics to feminism, the intensification of moves to quash legislation that previous generations of feminists fought for in a number of jurisdictions has only intensified our fears. Yet we carry the hope that the emergence of different forms of feminism, feminisms that are purposefully intersectional, will continue to encourage resistance and action.

Our individual responses to the questions proposed by Lynne's exercise illustrate how we each sensed feminism differently even though it is core to our values. Were the exercise to be used amongst a more disparate group then the responses would inevitably be different, and potentially challenge our feminist values. But the method helps us to move away from conventional ways of communicating our beliefs, values and relationship to gender inequity.

Lynne adds a reflection: As a convenor I welcomed the many responses the exercise evoked. I felt excited by the workshop yet nervous about my role. I worried that people might get caught in comparing perspectives and experiences instead of sharing them and building connections to create activism. We had to find a way of acknowledging people's deeply felt intersectional positionings while building connections. The method seemed to reduce the impact of hierarchies. On a personal note I had researched and thought through the method carefully beforehand but not, as would also be the case in teaching, rehearsed my own answers to the senses questions or prepared to be directive. When the participants reflected to develop their responses I also considered mine, and was surprised at what emerged, especially as we progressed through the senses. When we are in facilitating roles there is a tension between controlling and allowing the process to unfold. I did know what I wanted to happen next in the session but being able to join in like a participant helped me not foreclose responses or rush the process. Building connections and energy can be killed by

1 Further photographs of the notes, original materials may be viewed at this padlet, including a series of impromptu feminist placards that were created at the end of the session to call for action: https://padlet.com/lynne_baxter/lpt4dvsczbxb.

overly controlling mechanistic processes. The workshop organisers reshuffled groups for every session, and it was interesting to see how the exercise morphed accordingly. Like the contributions, each convenor had a different take on the method.

Back to Carole: The Clean Language method creates the potential for a space where nobody holds 'more' knowledge or experience. If facilitated sensitively, it subverts hierarchical power structures, where either knowledge, experience, or assigned gender can be used as a basis to dominate others. For feminism, and feminist activism in particular, conceiving the method as a metaphor can be productive in thinking how we engage with others who do not share our perspectives. The method's call to use our senses to reflect on a concept or idea, evokes emotional responses, which would otherwise be difficult to make explicit, or regarded as irrelevant to an activist context. This can also inform how we engage in other social movements, particularly in situations where individuals do not engage in conscious reflection about their behaviour within collectives (Collins, 1981), which are also shaped by emotions (Jasper, 2014). Developing a better understanding of how individual emotions interconnect and form within spaces of organizing (Callahan, 2013), raises awareness of how these interconnections can have both positive and negative consequences.

In conclusion, our engagement with the Clean Language method helped us to connect in a way that did not let us hide behind the other identities we brought with us into the room. It was simultaneously exposing and liberating to engage in a dialogue that was not, at least in part, shaped by previous conversations embedded in utterances (Bakhtin, 1986) formed in relation to other power structures. For feminism and feminist activism, we believe the method creates spaces in which we can engage in courageous conversations about new forms of resistance and renewal that draw strength from the diverse experiences of feminists, and from intersectionality.

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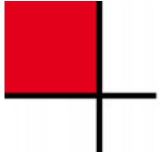

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Powerful writing as writing 'with'

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Towards powerful queer-feminist academic writing

Whether physical, political, or intellectual, power is usually seen as a male[2], or masculine attribute. Although – unsurprisingly – hardly present in the canon of writers (and clearly less represented in the list of Nobel prize winners), great female writers have left their footprint on generations of readers. Some of these authors are labeled as feminists, whether in fiction or nonfiction, starting as far back as Christine de Pisan in medieval times. Much more recent examples of feminist, powerful works include *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, or *I Love Dick* by Chris Kraus, and many others in between. Perhaps certain authors are excluded from the canon of powerful writers – writing outside the mainstream – for that very reason: attempting to produce powerful, feminist and queer writing. Whether an author is included or excluded from the canon, it still begs the question: what makes writing powerful? And more specifically, what are the genres of powerful writing? Is the academic genre a powerful one? Can it be feminist *and* powerful? Can queer-feminist writing in organization and management studies be powerful? One could argue that powerful writing is about changing certain institutions that govern norms for writing and publishing. But how can one change an institution from within without simultaneously perpetuating that very institution – at least in part? And how does

1 The authors contributed equally to this piece of work and are cited in alphabetical order.

2 Although we use binary terms (e.g. male/female, masculinity/femininity) we acknowledge and encourage the possible multiplicity in their understanding (masculinities, femininities, etc.).

that influence the possibility for powerful writing from non-conforming bodies, i.e. non-conforming bodies of text as well as the non-conforming bodies of our authorial voices? What desires drive powerful writing? These are some of the questions that we addressed during a session on the theme of Powerful Writing in the 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' workshop that took place at Copenhagen Business School in the fall of 2017[3].

We contend that devoting oneself to critical queer-feminist organization and management research implies believing that a critique of contemporary realities is possible and worthwhile, and, at the same time, that social realities are organized, that they can (referring back to a state of possibility) or even should (relating to the normative character of queer-feminist critique) be organized in different, alternative, and emancipatory ways. Powerful writing, within the queer-feminist project, should mean engaging in changing existing social relations of exclusion and marginalization (also in academia) and, again, it implies believing that this is achievable while working in academia.

In this research note, we discuss powerful writing as empathic intellectual work, we discuss its neoliberal context, and we reflect upon the link between changing realities and changing academia. We illustrate our theoretical discussion with two extended vignettes about some of our experiences. We hope that these examples of our personal experiences will resonate with those of our readers. Indeed, as the title of the note suggests, we purport that powerful writing is writing 'with'. In this spirit, we do not conclude by providing any definitive truths or how-to guides for powerful writing. Rather, we end the note by pointing to *beginnings*, that is, by outlining a few possible ways forward. Overall, our hope is to fuel the academic conversation about powerful writing.

Empathic intellectual work in the neoliberal academia

First, we contend that powerful academic and feminist writing could mean the simple (albeit not always easy) task of engaging *with* the world intellectually in what can be framed as empathic intellectual work. Empathic intellectual work means emphasizing the value of intellectual work, while acknowledging the position of academic as a privilege. This relates to what Ruth Sonderegger (2016: 22, italics added) calls 'the challenge (not) to speak *for* others'. It is a privilege to speak (and to write, we might add) and there are several ways to both take and give voice, empathically, through powerful writing. One could ignore any

3 During this session we also gathered ideas in this publicly accessible padlet https://padlet.com/florence_com/powerfulwriting.

asymmetries in power relations, rights, resources, respect, etc., taking absolute equality as a necessary starting point for emancipatory politics, as Rancière (1991, 2004) suggests. However, this might come at the price of ignoring socially structured differences that co-construct the specific starting points for engaging with the world as Spivak (1994, 2012) maintains. Rather than offer a long theorization on this subject, we propose instead to delve into a first vignette, in which we find an illustration of how such empathic intellectual work can be practiced – even over time, and how it can lead to powerful writing.

Vignette 1: Producing powerful feminist business ethnographic writing

In *Wall Street Women* (2012), a historical ethnography of the first generation of women to build professional careers (1956-2010), I, Melissa Fisher, a feminist anthropologist, followed this pioneering cohort as they moved from relatively modest career beginnings, holding jobs on the lowest rungs of investment banks and brokerage houses (in the 1960s and 1970s), to high-level positions in global finance and national politics (in the 1990s), and to new ventures in 21st-century international philanthropy and the promotion of gender equality globally. On the one hand, I followed certain traditions in feminist ethnography in the book and subsequent articles I wrote on various women's work and enterprises. On the other hand, I took some innovative approaches empirically, methodologically, and representationally. I wish to highlight two of these innovations in order to argue that they contributed to producing what I hope and believe is, powerful feminist business ethnographic writing: 1) voicing; and 2) long term access, positionality and collaboration.

First, after a chance meeting in a graduate anthropology class in the nineties, I followed the Wall Street women's cohort over more than two decades through a combination of traditional and innovative methods, and in the process was able to give readers a unique 'behind the doors' perspective on an elite group of women. Feminist anthropologists of work in the nineties were focusing on the marginal, the poor, and factory workers. Given the reflective and decolonial turns within the discipline, many feminist anthropologists wanted to give voice to the women they worked with (Abu-Lughod, 1993/2008). I too wanted to give voice to a group of largely unknown women, women who many, at least in the social sciences and certainly feminist circles, did not necessarily like, at least in terms of the women's embrace and facilitation of late capitalism. The issue for me in terms of providing powerful writing was to create a space, albeit an anonymous one, for the first generation of Wall Street women to voice and express their experiences, feelings including joy, frustration and the loneliness of being the only women in a sea of hyper-masculine men, as well as their experiences of sexual discrimination, a term that most of the women were not even aware of until the late nineties. Overall, feminist ethnographic writing provided me with the means to explore how the finance women themselves reflected on, critiqued, and sometimes re-worked the changing relationship between markets and feminism, thus allowing me to problematize the idea that market capitalism always and inevitably subsumes feminism.

> Second, I have been reflecting upon my own changing position, situation and connection with female financiers for nearly three decades. As Marietta Baba – arguably the 'mother' of business anthropology – wrote a number of years ago:
>
> 'It seems as if there is a kind of enmeshing of your life with the pathways of these women. Not like there's a community and you – where you yo-yo. Instead there's such a diffused group of women that are all around and that you follow up with – that they're not out of your mind'. (Baba, 2013: 120–121)
>
> While I have gone on to study various other types of business actors and institutions, including women's mechanical cooperatives, I have remained in touch with some of the financial women. Also, although not ethnographic in form, I have worked with producers and actors of the 2016 Sony Class 'first female financial thriller' *Equity* – about three very different women in NYC finance (Fisher, 2016). In this sense, contemporary women's experiences – difficulties, frustrations, ambitions – were dramatized to millions of ticket buyers. In addition, I along with the executive producer and others, have used the film as a pedagogical tool – showing it to audiences of students, bankers, and the public – to elicit a conversation about the state of women in finance, if and how feminism exists within Wall Street – as well as if and how a feminist movie about women in finance can or cannot be made. In this latter sense, I feel that I am promoting feminist scholarship and activism as interrelated activities. One of the challenges I face in doing so, is engaging with multiple audiences, from critical scholars to Wall Street CEOs, who have very different ideas and feelings about feminism, including particularly in recent years neoliberal feminism.
>
> To me, feminist ethnographic writing's strength is not about remaining in the stratosphere of theory or only at the level of storytelling. The power of feminist ethnographic writing, on business or another domain, lies in its ability to thread a middle ground – to link analytics to events, to draw the lines between stories and intersecting structures of power, gender, sexuality, and other forms of difference including whiteness (Fisher, 2017).

In reflecting upon the privilege of doing academic work, we find it worthwhile putting the current situation of the academic worker into writing. In particular, we contend that asymmetries within academia co-construct unequal starting points for writing powerfully. Neoliberalism is ubiquitous in every sense of the word; it characterizes market, capital, self, and even academic institutions. The university is now a neoliberal institution where precarious employment, free labor, and market-based demands are omnipresent for academic staff, administration, researchers and students alike. Of concern, in the context of this note, how this affects the possibility to do powerful writing when precarity affects feminist research projects and, moreover, women's studies and gender/sexualities programs.

Once heralded as a coveted career path and secure profession (think of the notion of academic tenure), researchers now face years of insecure, low hour contracts without guarantee, often seasonal and based on semester terms. Gill's (2010)

work, notably, focuses on her own experience of the intensification and stress of academic work though she does note at an early point her own privilege as white, educated and employed on a secure contract. In addition, there appears to be a growing delegitimization of feminist studies in the university and the subsequent defunding and even closure of said research programs. In 2016, the Women's Studies program at Ruskin College was terminated; accompanying it in the UK was University of Kent and University of Edinburgh that both cut institutional funding for gender and sexuality studies programs. Meanwhile at Oxford University, not a single member of staff at the Women's Studies department is salaried, making them 'Oxford's cheapest faculty' (Duan, 2016). Moreover, in many cases, feminist doctoral students are awkwardly and precariously placed in various schools – school of communication, school of cultural studies, school of arts and humanities – already at risk without the accompanying closure of said schools. In other words, there is no institutionalized feminist research setting to allow the field to live and prosper. Sara Ahmed (2017: 28) identified a similar situation, where, in her desire to research critical theory, she was placed in an English department.

Neoliberalism thus presents new and deeply concerning issues, particularly for early career researchers. So how do we achieve powerful feminist writing in the face of such neoliberal institutions? To fight back, it is essential that we do not become atomized within a system that sees collective action as a threat. After all, it is as a collective that feminism has been its most forceful and its most transformative. By working transnationally, through collaborative, flexible and creative networks (rather than individual and competitive environments), feminist academics can build new paths to expression and connection. Digital media offer new paths to connect our work with a broad audience. At a time when conversations about feminism are growing around the world, we want to acknowledge that writing for change means writing in modes which are accessible in every sense of the word. As stated in the title of bell hooks' famous book 'Feminism is for everybody' (2000), and so it remains, not least because there remains so much to fight for.

Changing realities, changing academia

Dhawan et al. (2015) criticize the psychoanalytic approach to desire as grounded in a fundamental lack. They ask how specific economic arrangements, like ownership and/or capitalism, shape specific forms of desire and, vice versa, how specific concepts of desire shape our thinking of possible economic arrangements. Arguably, mainstream neoliberal economics and organizations studies did and do still have a performative impact; changing realities would

imply de-centering their hegemonic position, re-positioning them as one of many possible ones and eventually rendering neoliberal economics and organization studies irrelevant through critical scholarship and powerful writing. But what is the desire for changing realities from a queer-feminist organizational perspective? Is it about determining organizational structures, organizational practices, that allow for practicing equality on an everyday basis; our desire for just and equal societies? Is it about queering organizations? What role can writing play in such endeavors?

When it comes to powerful writing, as feminist academics and activists we are caught in a double bind. Academic feminism, due to its heterogeneous intellectual heritage, builds on several powerful, ground-breaking texts of progressive social movements (Marx, Luxemburg, Gramsci...) as well as intellectual currents of existentialism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and poststructuralism that have engendered texts which are pioneering not just on a theoretical level, but also on a literary and artistic one (think of Cixous, Irigaray, Sartre, Veil, Benjamin, Derrida, Kristeva, Wittig...). At the same time, feminist thought has had a parallel development track outside of academia, as talented writers depicted the female life experience in a man's world (Woolf, Alcott, Plath) and showed how a female gaze might establish a new world which will not be a function of the male (Mansfield, Kraus).

And yet, despite these two powerful currents – the intellectual-theoretical and the fictional-literary – that bring with them endless new forms, new vocabularies, new avenues, we as academically-based feminists struggle daily with the written word. Beyond the typical challenges common to all those who write, our own gaze as feminist academics is tied in particular to the specific position of feminist thought which straddles the role of social movement, agenda, and theoretical current. On an intellectual level, we accept and cherish this hybrid identity as something which opens feminism up to different influences and inputs. In practice, this positioning brings with it several problems of a most pragmatic nature for the field of feminist research in academia. These are connected to our own positionality, the status of feminist research and such down-to-earth issues as job prospects of feminist researchers (Pereira, 2017). Very often we find that we need to make choices: to render our texts more academic in order to publish in the outlets which will allow us to progress in our careers (relating back to our earlier point on the realities of neoliberal academia), or to render them less academic (more personal, emotional, accessible, readable, authentic...) to better express ourselves or to reach a broader audience we wish to communicate with. Despite the fact that feminists have been actively questioning and subverting the traditional (male or masculine) patterns of academic writing for the last decades (Widdowfield, 2000), these problems remain pertinent. And perhaps they are

the most real where feminism could make the biggest difference. In the next vignette, one of the authors, Marta Wróblewska, reflects upon her experiences of feminist writing in different contexts and media.

Vignette 2: Writing, speaking, sticking

While Poland has admirable traditions of feminist writing both in the literary tradition (Żeleński, Krzywicka, Tokarczuk) and in the academic one (Bator, Iwasiów), currently the winds of history are definitely blowing against the women's movement and against the social-progressive agenda generally. In particular, one can mention the ongoing struggle for reproductive rights, including the #blackprotest movement which emerged in 2016. At the same time, there is a broader fight around identity issues in Poland – a young and extremely strong movement has emerged around nationalist, anti-European, anti-LGBTQ and anti-immigrant slogans (see e.g. Kozłowski, 2015).

This nationalist agenda found wide-scale support in intellectual circles. There emerged an entire intellectual environment – composed of journalists, writers, academics – who enthusiastically supported the nationalist current by developing its theoretical base. The historical-political reflection these authors put forward is based on ultra-conservative values and often bears traces of conspiracy theory, including linking the feminist agenda to communism – which in post-communist Poland is an accusation not to be taken lightly. With the boom of "patriotic" publishing (popular and academic books, several weekly magazines, etc.) and intellectual interventions (debates, exhibitions, etc.) the nationalist-misogynist agenda became intellectually legitimate, no longer something to be ashamed of, even for a student or an academic. With the development of audio-visual production around these notions (patriotic film, music...) and the rise of a merchandise industry (patriotic t-shirts, gadgets, etc.) radical, xenophobic patriotism became something we never expected it to be – *sexy*. From a theoretical perspective, this alliance between academics, intellectuals and the broader social masses, has been taking the form of what Gramsci referred to as 'historic bloc' (1971/1999: 384, 689-691).

Throughout my adult intellectual life – around a decade now – I, Marta Wróblewska, have strived to support the feminist agenda in Poland, particularly through writing. My master's thesis in philosophy investigated intellectual links between critical theory and feminism. In the years after graduation I published translations of important feminist theory, poetry, and commentaries to feminist novels. Most of this frantic writing – published in different papers and digital venues – seemed to go unnoticed. Even worse, I discovered that parts of my scholarship have been cited in ultra-conservative, far-right outlets, including an academic journal in theology, to support the very thesis I was arguing against – that the connection to left-wing politics was feminism's original sin. Disillusioned, for a while I gave up, focusing on the more academic strand of my work. But hearing about triumphs of ultra-conservative movements in Poland, and particularly seeing racist, nationalistic, homophobic symbols in the public space (as graffiti, sticker-art, gadgets displayed at shop windows) still sparked in me the same anger and will for action. Only now, I was looking for different forms of expression, which would allow these outbursts of emotion and outrage, these snap moments (Ahmed, 2017), to become interventions.

Over the last few years I experimented with three different forms of expression, which, I hoped, would allow me to express my sentiments in a more direct manner, by intervening directly in the public space. The first one was t-shirts. As 'patriotic clothing' was becoming a trend in Poland (including brands such as 'Red is Bad' opening shops on main shopping streets in Krakow and Warsaw), I decided to experiment with the idea of reclaiming symbols of People's Poland. I chose not the overtly ideological ones which are not only extremely loaded symbolically, but also explicitly banned by the Polish law – but symbols of institutions which in today's capitalistic regime could be looked upon with nostalgia, such as beautifully-designed logos of various co-operative initiatives. While my 'Społem' (co-operative grocery store) t-shirt was commented on favorably by friends, and a bit ironically by family-members belonging to the older generations, it failed to realize its goal, as it was not perceived as a *political* or *ideological* intervention, but rather as a playful borrowing of vintage logotypes in the vein of hipster aesthetics.

Figure 1: T-shirt with logo of co-operative founded in the era of People's Poland – image produced using creator on megakoszulki.pl website.

The second intervention was inspired by my participation in the 'Breaking the silences in the neoliberal academy' workshop at the University of Warwick[4], the final activity of which consisted in collectively producing feminist zines challenging the modern performative academia. The energy and the technique which stayed with me after this event, gave me the inspiration to prepare a similar zine for the upcoming Polish Independence Day (2016). Polish military and patriotic holidays (not unlike most of those which take place around the world) in general tend to celebrate soldiers, leaders, politicians – usually men. In order to question and subvert this trend, together with a group of female co-authors we decided to dedicate a zine to eight positive heroes of Polish history, who 'fought' for a better future with their talent, skill and intellect – several of them female or feminists. We distributed this zine during a patriotic ceremony and had very positive reactions. It was an uplifting, empowering and collectivist experience we could build on. And so we did.

4 Link to the call for papers: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/breaking_our_silences_on_the_neoliberal_academy.pdf.

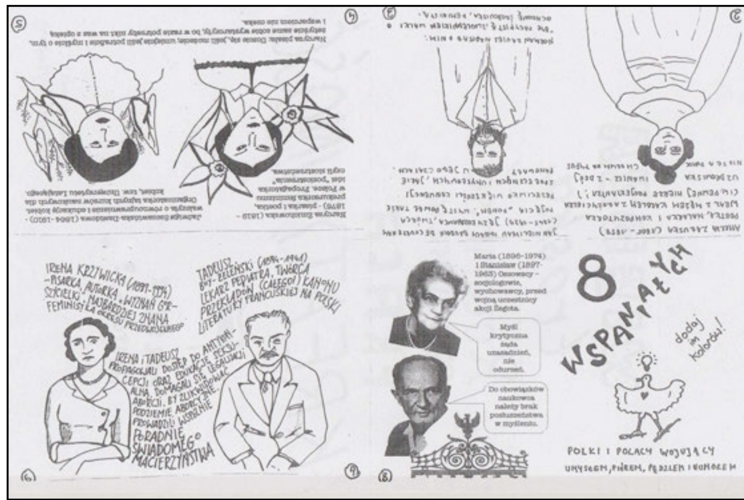

Figure 2: Picture presenting one of the pages of the zine featuring eight heroes and heroines of Polish history[5]

The following year (2017), for the same holiday, women from the same group met to produce another artistic form of urban intervention – sticker art. Stickers have been used for years by Polish hooligan groups, resulting in a true proliferation of often offensive (homophobic, racist, xenophobic) slogans which are now ubiquitous on bus stops, on public transportation, at road crossings, etc. The idea behind our project was to playfully and ironically subvert the standard slogans of these groups, by playing on sounds and rhymes. So 'God, honor, homeland' ('Bóg, honor, ojczyzna') became 'Fava beans, hummus, vegetables', ('Bób, hummus, włoszczyzna'), 'Poland for Poles' ('Polska dla Polaków') became 'Poland for Polish women' ('Polska dla Polek'). The official slogan of the patriotic march 'We want God' ('My chcemy Boga') was changed into 'We want ice cream' ('My chcemy loda') – we also replaced a sword in the nationalistic 'Falanga' symbol with an ice cream cone. Apart from these, we produced stickers with several slogans referring to the struggle over women's reproductive rights such as 'We don't want God at the gynecologist's' (playing on the official slogan of the Independence Day March – 'We want God'). The stickers were meant to be used in a reactive way, i.e. for covering existing offensive stickers.

This was by far our most successful intervention. Many of our friends and acquaintances congratulated us on the idea and requested a few stickers for their personal use. When these were shared on social media, we got several requests for the original files, so that groups outside our city could print out their own stickers. In the months that followed, when confronted with a hostile symbol in the public space, many times I reached into my purse for my 'secret weapon'. This was an empowering feeling. The fact that I often later found these stickers torn or scratched off confirmed my sense that I was engaging in the broader struggle over exposing and disrupting the symbols that dominate the Polish public space.

5 Retrieved from www.przeklamliteracki.wordpress.com.

Figure 3: Picture of the sticker art subverting the 'God, honor, homeland' slogan. The sword in the nationalist Falanga symbol was replaced with a carrot. In the background: participants of the polish Independence Day celebrations[6]

In the context of these varied experiences in engaging with the feminist agenda and combating the anti-feminist (anti-progressive) movement in Poland, I would be tempted to say that the less academic my intervention was, the more powerful. The less wordy, the more it was read. At the same time, however, I realize that while this bottom-up urban activism was not academic in its character, it would have never taken place had it not been for my academic background and inspirations. Without the 'academic moments' the 'activist moments' would not have been possible. Taking up, once again, Gramsci's concept of historic bloc, I would see my academic writing and my every-day, pop-culture or urban-culture gestures as attempts to intervene on different levels in a social movement which is complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted, as attempts to disrupt the existing historic bloc.

Concluding comments – Powerful writing now!

We believe that powerful writing, besides a desire to change realities, also implies a desire to change academia. Contemporary academia, governed by measuring output (in top-star ranking journals), impact (citations) (see e.g. Callahan, 2017) and relevance (i.e. a functionalist epistemic understanding of usefulness) establishes a capitalist system of redistributing credibility, attention and financial resources towards those who already have such resources (known as the Matthew effect). Working and existing in contemporary competitive academia, we do not have the impression that our readiness to share, to engage in acts of solidarity, to

6 Source: Facebook page of a journalist who observed the gathering. The post provoked 879 reactions.

engage in activism is supported by institutional arrangements. However, powerful writing means to maintain that these possibilities exist, that they can be nurtured and that pursuing an intersectional feminist agenda combined with a critique of late capitalist forms of (knowledge) work and production is a way worth pursuing. Indeed, changing academia means constantly engaging with the question of how to criticize, remodel, and/or subvert the structures while working out of a position that is formed exactly by those structures one tries to subvert. Speaking up collectively for livable work conditions – within and beyond academia – is the first step.

In the spirit of the 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' workshop in which we started our discussion about powerful writing, we think it fit to end this note on some suggestions for ideas and actions that can be carried out and promoted right now.

The personal voice of collective writing

Asha Dornfest once said in an interview 'I think new writers are too worried that it has all been said before. Sure, it has, but not by you' (Goins, 2016). Yet, writing a paper is always a product of our entanglement with other contributors in the form of comments from colleagues, reviewers and editors, but also the research material, inspiration from other authors, etc. In co-authoring and writing things up collectively we acknowledge that position. In this way, we not only get to amplify our individual voice through the voices of others, we also get to develop several different voices and, therefore, get to voice difference. This note itself, as the product of a breakout session during the FAW! workshop, is the work of more people than the ones credited as authors.

Multimodality

Powerful writing develops across the mediascape: academic articles, but also shorter newspaper or magazine pieces, blog posts, panels, speeches, stickers, etc. as illustrated in the vignettes above. Besides, writing may take many forms and cannot be reduced to text, since it can also include other bodies of symbols such as mandalas, quilting, performances, and so on. Derrida famously made the statement 'I have only one language, yet it is not mine' (1998: 21), encouraging multilingualism while reminding us that none of us owns nor masters any given language, whether spoken or written, even when we claim a mother tongue.

Disruption

Academic writing can feel much safer than writing for a broader audience. In academe, the worst thing that can usually happen is that we will be politely

ignored or receive some derogatory comments from reviewers or conference participants. However, the broader the audience we try to speak to, the broader the spectrum of the reactions we can expect – sarcasm, anger, contempt, intimidation, aggression, threats... What if we 'speak' (or 'stick' – referring both to our second vignette and to Sara Ahmed's (2014) exploration of the stickiness of affect) more publicly? Do our hearts beat a little faster? We also get certain reactions because we disrupt – or act as killjoys (Ahmed, 2014) – and that's the whole point. Is it really 'speaking' if you are merely repeating or parroting what is already agreed upon? Speaking up means disrupting that agreement, saying something that may be ill-heard because it comes to function as a breakage in pointing out something problematic and therefore poses a challenge to – and potentially kills the joy in, for instance, a dominant nationalist narrative (as illustrated by the vignette from Poland).

Last but not least, we suggest that powerful writing has to be related to ***powerful reading***. This also supposes writing texts in a way that reading them can have an impact; writing texts that can and should evoke intersubjective resonance, share thoughts, provoke ideas, arguments, feelings and, eventually, action. During the 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' workshop, some participants brought up a video in which Maya Angelou[7] describes with vivid insight how powerful words shape our world. Words, Angelou says, are things. As such, our ability to produce feminist writing that invigorates, confronts and disrupts starts with us being mindful of how we make use of the written word. Going forward, it is through the careful and powerful crafting of words that we will build a scaffold for feminist work within the academe and beyond – and achieve our aim of writing 'with'.

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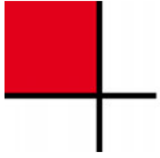

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Powerful writing

Charlotte Amrouche, Jhilmil Breckenridge, Deborah N. Brewis, Olimpia Burchiellaro, Malte Breiding Hansen, Christina Hee Pedersen, Mie Plotnikof, Alison Pullen plus each of the other participants of the writing group

abstract

Writing. Writing against. Writing for.
Together, in part, with difference.
Collaborative. Desire for change.
Disrupting mainstream ideologies and practices.
Resistance. Activism. Against neoliberalism.
Feminism in its multiplicity.
Fragmented. Moving forward. Rupture.
Writing for social change. Writing for life.

Preamble – Alison Pullen

During 2017, I was Otto Mønsted Visiting Professor at Copenhagen Business School and was delighted when the organisers of the *Feminism, Activism, Writing!* workshop asked me to facilitate a session on 'powerful writing'. The workshop's 65 participants had been divided into four groups: the group that I would work with was randomly allocated and I had no idea who would attend. Our purpose was to discuss the relation that writing can have to feminism and activism. My broad aim was to move from 'discussing writing' to 'writing'. It was important to me that I didn't offer too much direction to the group, and I definitely didn't want to influence the group with my own epistemological and methodological approaches to writing which has to date been broadly housed within an academic ethos of writing: dirty writing (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008), feminine writing (Sayers and Jones, 2015), writing as labiaplasty (Pullen, 2018), writing as love

(Vachhani, 2015; Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018), and writing differently (Grey and Sinclair, 2006).

The task in our session was simple: I asked the group or the participants to collaborate on a piece of writing. I had no idea how big the group would be before the session started, and asked the participants to divide themselves into two groups along the left and right sides of the boardroom table at which we sat. I asked each group to complete one sentence. I asked the left side of the room to address 'I write against'; to use the sentence as a 'trigger' for thinking and writing; and the right side of the room to think about 'I write for'. I gave each group some paper and asked them to write. From my perspective, there were no pre-session expectations, and I felt that this was a risk. Most of the participants were unknown to me and to each other – What if they say 'no'? What if they change the task? Would it matter if they resisted? But the group didn't, and the groups formed. One group moved to another space and I moved between the two spaces to watch how they worked (this had not been my intention initially). The two groups approached the task differently. Once the groups were reconvened, it became apparent that two pieces of collaborative writing were created and read aloud in our small group. The pieces were then presented to all workshop participants in a plenary session. This collaborative writing can be read below.

'I write against' – a co-produced text read aloud by Olimpia Burchiellaro

Every Christmas becomes harder and harder to endure. Lights on Regent Street – and fake snow starts flaking from the end of November. Shops and people go mental because they have to buy presents for themselves, families and friends. The repetition of sameness. Aren't people bored of listening to the same songs over and over again? Why am I one of the few to feel this hatred? The family gathers in the same house, with the same people, who smile at each other and pretend to care about each other's lives. Relatives that always make the wrong present choice, and that despite you telling them what you like and what you don't like, they still get you that tacky t-shirt brand that is so popular on TV. I haven't had a TV since I was 18. Every year they pretend they're fine with you not having a family and a proper job, but just for a few days... what about the rest of the year?

I write,

I write against,

I write against time,

I write against

Eurocentric conceptualisations,

seriousness and discipline,

the presumed neutrality of social science,

dichotomies of gender, male privilege, white privilege, privileges of power,

Injustice.

I write against

paradigmatic coherence,

the public/private divide,

methodology as a tool,

heroes, saviours, role models and leaders.

I write against the need to make knowledge marketable, coherent, true and useful.

I write against established mainstream thinking regarding gender,

against patriarchy.

I write against trans-exclusionary feminists, heterosexual feminists, white feminists,

Western feminists. Hillary Clinton/Emma Watson/Angelina Jolie-type feminists.

I write against measuring the value of an individual based on their number of

publications and their productivity.

I write against homophobes as well as those who unproblematically embrace

LGBTQXYZ identity politics.

I write against nationalistic symbols in the public space,

I write against the friends of women who are not really friends,

I write against those who celebrate female pain, those who know what's best for us,

or so they claim,

Most of the time I write in vain, and I despair.

But I continue,

I write again,

I write against,

I write against despair,

I write against patriarchal oppression and the subordination of women in

organisations and society at large,

against nationality, purity and linearity, and the dominantly disembodied ways in

which organisations are usually approached and portrayed,

against masculinity, certainty, domination and heterosexuality, aiming to give voice to

the multiple subject positions that inhabit organisations.

I write against the ancestry of patriarchy that masquerades as tradition and authority,

against the force that insists that we keep quiet, the voice that says you are not an

authority, the insistence that some things should remain unsaid.

I write against the culture that insists by its privilege that oppressions we see are just

hallucinations,

against patriarchy's assertions and their claim over that which is mine too,

against assumptions, and lazy stereotyping, against tropes that are old and boring.

I write with my back against a wall of self-governance. I write against the I that writes against...

being, in opposition.

I write against.

Wanting to write for...

***

'I write for' – a co-produced text and a collective reading

Speaker A: I'm writing for liberating (my) our writing.

Speaker B: A psychophysical vibration released into words.

Speaker C: I write because I want to change what I find – injustice.

I write for justice.

Speaker D: I'm writing for opening up myself and places for in-betweeness.

Speaker E: I write for the possibility to take up space.

Speaker F: I write for the radical potential of space – of words – for the individuals caught inbetween. I was once, too, without words to explain my being in the world.

Speaker G: I write for a future without cultural, racial, class, or gender-based oppression. I write for free bodies. I write for undoing your privilege. I write for equality, community and support. I write for her and his future.

Speaker H: I write for always being curious and ready to listen to and read normative understandings and for always being ready to destabilize their construction and effects – including my own part. I write for nuancing our understandings and questioning our taken-for-granted concepts that make us see, hear and feel certain things while overseeing, overhearing and neglecting others. I write for a more nuanced version of our everyday life.

Speaker I: My writing is traces of myself behind.

I am here, and I matter.

I write for myself but for others to read.

Speaker J: I write for mutuality;

to feel my existence,

to connect; in relation.

Write for change, for transformation.

Stop the stilting of my body in the everyday.

I write to stop,

to flow – to stop to *allow* flowing

to allow bleeding,

Write to see my mortality, yours too.

See yourself refracted.

Speaker K: I write for myself when I need to feel a part of myself again. I write to challenge and to question what I see around me. I write for experience – to experience, to remember, and to record the experience, and to acknowledge. Writing makes me feel like there is something behind and that I've lived.

Two processes

After a period of discussion around the issues that the idea of 'writing for' and 'writing against' brought up for individuals, Alison asked the 'I write for' group to start to write from a single piece of paper: in turn, each member wrote their contribution, folded the top of the paper down to cover it, and handed it to the next person along to produce a single text. After all members had added to the text, the paper was unfolded, and the text was read by passing it again around the group. The reading began at a new spot around the table, so each member of the group read the words of another. All participants seemed surprised and delighted by the writing, and the experience of reading it aloud. As a group, it was decided that this practice would be brought to the plenary, again assembling in random order and reading the words of another member for the first time. The presence of the group was deeply affective and the submission to reading each other's writing anew conveyed a vulnerability which was powerful to both be a part of and to watch.

The 'writing against' group started writing straight away, constructing their own segments of text. They wrote quickly and shared their writing with each other by reading them aloud. Then they discussed what aspects of each person's text could be used in the collaborative effort. Olimpia read the group's co-produced text aloud with much affect and it carried a powerful force.

***

What is powerful writing? Perhaps the question doesn't matter. But, being in the plenary room, and hearing these words delivered by the participants, was to be witness to what powerful writing could be. Not always in the text, not always in the words used to convey the powerful, but in the practice of writing honestly and openly; writing with as much trust as the process enabled. The room applauded. It was a charged environment where the writers, readers and listeners were affected. To be affected; perhaps this is the importance of powerful writing. To leave a mark, a trace...not only on paper, but under the skin.

I WRITE FOR

processing
pattern
uniqueness
Self expression
freedom
ENVY
emotions out
peaceful
FLOW
private + safe
share
anti-creative
community
writing to get going
Leave traces
SLOWING
Communing
Letting go
Loose ends...
drops
JOY
(Meaning)
Ambiguity
Discipline
controlled
demand to produce
kills
Access + opening up
self-transformation
Mashing together
beautiful but imperfect
writing to oral audience
Memory
Reforming
Sonorous substance
vibrations
poetic
imagined
second guessing
STATEMENT

where is it?
protecting one's ~~fetal~~ writing
Multiple processes of writing
writing to exist
Safety
exposing one's flesh
vs review!
violence
theory release audience
precarity
Margins
Naming
writing as armour
Spaces
personal
To make visible
to hide
critique
violence done to-by others
Loss in closure of the text
Internet
finding language
the ethical
Adding others
Adding oneself
Landscape
MESS
Territories
Reception?
ordering
politics of naming
Queer or feminine writing
To leak + bleed
virus, infection
Analysis
immobility
"free"
Legitimacy
validated
Writing

(1) I'm writing for liberating (my) our writing

a psychophysical vibration released in words

I write because I want to change what I find injuste. – I write for justice

I am writing for opening up myself and ~~[crossed out]~~ places for in-betweenness.

I write for the ~~opportunity~~ possibility to take up space.

I write for the radical potential of space – of words – for the individuals caught inbetween. I were once too without words to explain my being in the world.

I write for a future without cultural, racial, class or gender based oppression. I write for free bodies. I write for undoing your privilege. I write for equality, community and support. I write for her and his future.

I write for always being curious and ready to listen to and read normative understandings and for always being ready to destabilize their construction and effects – including my own part. I write for nuancing our understandings and questioning our taken-for-granted concepts that make us see, hear and feel certain things, while overseeing, overhearing and neglecting others.

I write for a more nuanced version of ~~the~~ our everyday life.

(2) My writing leaves traces of myself behind
I am here, and I matter.
I write for myself but for others to read

I write for mortality
To feel my existence in to connect
in relation
Write for change
for transformation
stop the stilting, of my body in the everyday
I write to stop,
to flow – stop to allow flowing
to allow bleeding
write to see ~~[scribbled out]~~ my mortality
yours too.
see yourself refracted

I write for myself when I need to feel a part of myself again. I write to challenge and to question what I see around me. I write for experience – to experience, to remember and to record experience, & to acknowledge. Writing ~~for~~ makes me feel I've left something behind & that I've lived

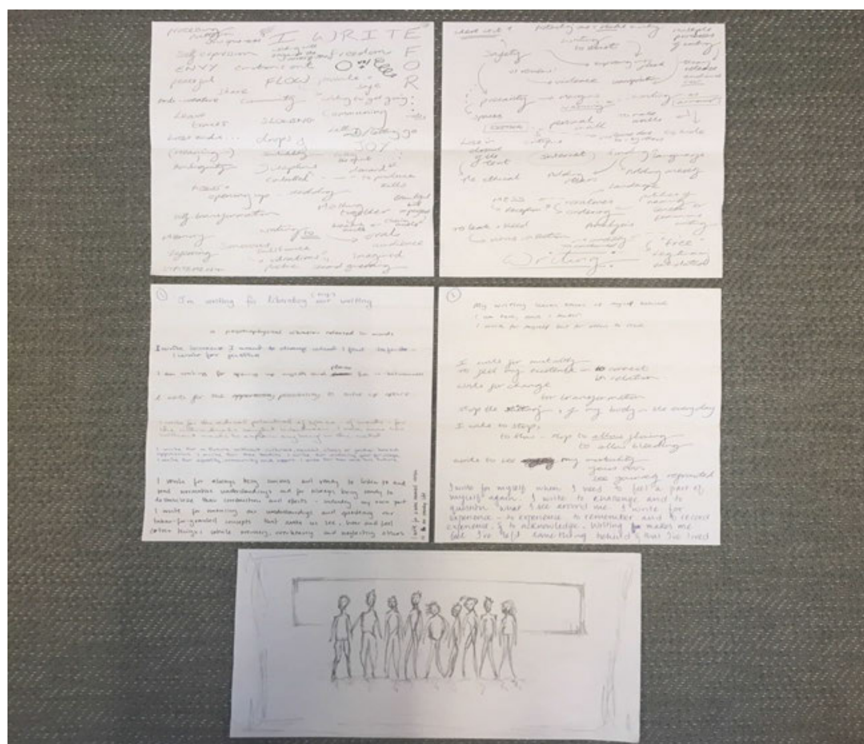

Figure 1-3: Images of the 'I write for' group's collectively produced material

Reflections from group members

Jhilmil Breckenridge – 'I write for'

The reason I went to this powerful workshop on Feminism, Activism, Writing! was because I have been using writing in my work for so long. A voice to speak for the marginalised, for the disenfranchised and for the possibilities to be treated as equal. Even though I always say my feminism takes a more humanistic approach, I think it is vital to acknowledge the years of patriarchy, colonialism and white feminist culture. These will take years of concerted effort to change and, thus, I write for.

I write for women who are told to choose between a career and having children. I write for the labourer in the street in India, sitting on her haunches, sari pulled up, breaking stones, while her baby sleeps in a sling made from an old sari under the mango tree. I write for the girl child waiting to be born, often her breath doused before she is even born. I write for the boys who don't know they are being inappropriate because they are told this is what boys do. I write for all the women raped, the ones struck with acid, the ones whose genitals are mutilated

and the ones being stoned in countries with unequal laws. I write for queer women, gay women, women who are not sure they are women. I write for us all.

Because if I don't write, it hurts too much. The world is an unfair place, a cruel place, and has made these rules about what is womanly, what is feminine, what is 'allowed'. It is time to start unshackling minds and bodies and hands and legs. It is time to start soaring. The time is now, and the clock is ticking.

Just like the #MeToo movement which took 2017 by storm, we need to keep empowering our sisters to move, to start looking beyond the hypocrisy of current neoliberalism, to get our brains working again, to get out of the drug that is social media, to create powerful grassroots movements that are real, achievable and sustainable.

In this workshop, there was a yearning, a collective power that seemed alight with hope. I hope we can garner and tap into some of that magic. Because a collective sisterhood of women, from our knowledge of ancient covens of witches, can be powerful magic. The time for this alchemy is now – the world needs our collective call to action.

Charlotte Amrouche – 'I write for'

At this workshop we were asked as a group what we write for. I wrote 'I write for the opportunity to take up space', then scribbled out 'opportunity' and replaced it with 'possibility'.

As students, researchers, academics, we are required to produce a great quantity of writing. To write 15,000 words. 3,000 words. 10% over and under guidelines. A conference paper. A chapter. A report on our progress (read: how much we've written). We are taught exercises to write easier, without fear, faster, longer. In these spaces I write to propel my work, my research, my career.

This kind of academic writing is so very different to what we created together. Being asked to write on an A4 page with ten to fifteen others was to be asked to write little. To synthesise. To take up space and also to make space. To collaborate.

We went on to read each other's words aloud, twice. In doing this we gave voice to the very things that drive each other's work and our passion for feminist theory and writing. Since this conference I've reflected on what it means to take up space with our writing. I have gone back to Susan Bordo arguing to take up space in our bodies, with our bodies. As I write this, a historic referendum debate is going on in Irish society on whether we will decriminalise abortion. Part of this debate is a project called In Her Shoes where women are telling their stories about how Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion has affected their lives. They write in order to take up space in this public and political debate that is taking place. Writing our words and stories stakes a claim for space.

I remember the collective silence around the table as one at a time we wrote what we write for, the only sound was the pen on the paper. There was so much respect in that exercise, to make sure that each of us was heard, that each person had the time to collect their thoughts and write them down.

Malte Breiding Hansen – 'I write for'

My first thought is that writing 'against' somehow seemed more appropriate for a cisgendered gay man in a workshop on Powerful Feminist Writing. Because what is 'powerful' and what is 'feminist' about a man writing on gender and feminist issues? That is certainly a position I would normally never allow myself to indulge in. Writing 'against' something, seemed at least to hold the promise and possibility of writing in solidarity or assumed synchronization with my own queer struggle. To write 'for' something, on the other hand, assumes my ability to find links and pathways in which feminists, of all sorts, – queer feminists included – might find something in common. A common enemy and vision on a shared battlefield. Recollecting Haraway (1988) and the situated knowledge of researchers, how can anyone write 'for' anything but themselves? And how might we find flows and energies that in certain moments, spaces and times follow parallel routes?

As Alison introduced the task, and in my subsequent reflections, I have wondered if feminist writing is powerful in this exact conjoining of egocentric and social aspects of writing. That we all represent exploited and hurt islands in our unique ways. Our calls for feminist change are carried from island to island by lonesome ships, following political and academic streams of knowledge. The message is powerful if it brings up new inspiration, new solidarity, new courage and new scholarly insights and reflections in the inhabitants of the other islands – not least the reader.

If that is so, Alison's task is a way to bring the islands closer together for the sake of producing one single message in which powerful feminist writing for a moment creates a single voice of multiple visions. The 'power' being in its multiplicity.

These are my thoughts as I add to our powerful piece of feminist writing that I write for 'the radical potential'. My radical potential. Not equating the two, but hinting at the connection between the personal and the social. Just as I afterwards share my reflections and background stating that feminist and queer writing always have been a way for me to become intelligible; to make my struggle real and tangible by listening to messages of other feminist and queer writers from other islands. The ones that resonated my reality were the ones that were powerful to me.

This writing task was therefore powerful, in the sense that it held the potential of creating multiple resonances with the realities of multiple voices, in one single powerful piece of writing. To make the lived experiences of each island become visible and intelligible in their shared – and singular – character. That is powerful feminist writing to me, and I thank Alison for letting me be a part of it.

Deborah N. Brewis – 'I write for'

I look forward to this workshop. I look forward to it knowing that it will necessarily open me, that the power it will generate may wound me. I look forward to it without hesitation. I have picked my group allocation at random and seen that Alison will be leading the session with us. I find her writing powerful. She has sought to channel power in my writing. The very concept of her helps to sustain the power in me.

As we begin, I look around the room. I see some faces I know, and some that I don't. In each of the waiting faces I see a yearning, barely suppressed. Pressing up at the surface. Yearning, or rage. Where glances meet, we are bound together in anticipation, in a desired recognition.

It is proposed that we split into two groups, to write for and to write against. I feel this deeply as a rupture. The yearning and the rage that for me are so closely intertwined are splintered, alienated from one another.

But as we write, I feel a liberation. Liberated from rage. Yearning flows out; I write about the desire to flow open onto the page. An opening has been plugged, perhaps by that rage working in the room next door? I imagine it there, achieving a fiery flow of its own.

The focusing in on ‘for’, on that imagined future, is meditative. I try to sink into it. I want those around me to see me, to see an us.

We are sometimes asked, ‘but what are you for? what are you *for*?’ So much of what I am for, what I write for, is defined by that which I am against. This exercise of powerful writing heightened my awareness of that fact, and, reflecting on it now, I was met with a struggle that this againstness can produce: I am against simple; I must be/write complex. I am against constraints; I must be free. I feel a power in rejecting this opposition; rejecting an engagement with this force that is pushing (back) at me, defining my cause. The master’s tools (Lorde, 2003). I want to side-step: to hop outside of the binary reactionary force. The power diffuses throughout me, Audre infuses – I am taken up by a desire to recognize the binds that seek to ‘include’ me, to write myself out of them.

In the writing that emerged I saw this desire in others too, and the writing was nurturing. I realize more and more that side-stepping must necessarily be achieved as a collective act – my opposing force is not your opposing force, nor theirs. We achieve sideways together.

The reading of our text produces immediacy, intimacy, of relation: the invitation for one to inhabit the force of another. Forces, ‘fors’, are compiled in our mouths. They jostle. I feel your words jar as they pass by my teeth; I hear my words catch on yours. I try to give up ownership of them. This is the necessary discomfort of striving for community. The striving is key. I try to sink into it.

It was the power of this striving that hit – it hit us in the first round of reading, and then those of larger room in the second.

We have released our words to each other, and now to others beyond our rooms. I can’t own my ‘for’ any more than you can, not in the seeking of a power as us. For again meets against, but is perhaps no longer so defined by it. We have given part of ourselves to each other, made an offering. There will be new rounds of striving.

Christina Hee Pedersen – ‘I write against’

A decision

The three words made my day. *Feminism, Activism, Writing* – such lovely assemblage.

So much what I have strived for all my years in Academia. Did not have time to go to the conference at CBS, though. Too much teaching, writing, reviewing, too much pressure.

Signe, my feminist university friend, my old redstocking ally, grabbed my arm and insisted: Let's go together – we never have the chance to talk anymore, it seems such a good opportunity to share what seems like a feminist uprising, a strong revival. A sense of community. So, we went.

A poem

I know only one of you in the group beforehand. I enter the group with open curiosity. As an equal and as different. Senior, second wave, lesbian – rebel and conformist – for and against simultaneously.

Wanting to get acquainted with Alison's approach to – and take on – feminist writing, curious to meet young feminist rebels from different places – wanting to enter conversation. Treasuring Australian feminists and their scholarly work. Identifying Alison with that tradition.

I bring with me an immense longing for meaningful communities in academia. I look for moments and places where feminist voices are at the center, legitimate and strong. Contexts with trust, far from object – and strategic thinking.

It so happened that I got together with the 'writing against' group of women.

We made quite different individual texts arching from the very concrete, to politically programmatic, to storytelling to carefully analytically elaborated texts. Bending and folding in and out of individual and collective perspectives, in and out of academia, individual and social movement. Reflecting longings and belongings in 'the against'. We made a powerful text, I wrote it down, – inhabited it and shared it with other feminists later on.

A process

Curiously, I don't remember much about what the 'writing for' group did.

But, I can recall our own process of doing the collage of text with each other around the table – producing through a quick, dynamic dialogue, performing freedom, a lovely parenthesis. Feminist desires – the driver.

There was 'power over' in the decision making – of course, but a strong will to include. I recall a strong sense of being included and including all texts.

A memory

'This is the kind of text I would love to be able write', my son said to me when I read out aloud the poem after the conference. What is left is a vague memory of joint effort and strong engagement, and a strong text that still lives and can be used by any of us and others to start encounters, conversations writings about feminist politics at the universities. The framing of collective writing processes is alpha and omega – as is trust.

What three words can do – feminism, writing, activism.

Olimpia Burchiellaro – 'I write against'

Writing against. I am looking forward to this activity. Writing Against. I think I am good at writing against. I can think of plenty of things I am against. We sit down and we are writing against. Our pencils poised. Our laptop keys pressed. We are all writing against. I am pointing fingers on the keyboard as I write against. 'And U and U and U!' I am comfortable writing against.

We share what we are against. Our writing merges, mixes, moves, mingles, melds, and meets in the places we recognise – together – as the places where inequality breeds. Our writing is more than the sum of our individual voices. It is more than one. It is less than many. We share a moment of belonging, a wink of an eye as we perceive the commonalities between our (writing) againsts. I read the text out loud. I forget what it is I wrote against. I wrote against. And, to some extent, I still do. The collectivity of the exercise becomes a form of belonging. I am that. I am not that.

But what does it say about the kinds of investments I have made that I am comfortable writing against? Isn't writing against, as a form of critique, supposed to be uncomfortable? Isn't that its purpose? What if critique, or indeed, being against, becomes so comfortable, so normal, so ordinary, so common, to lose this very purpose? I am scared by the ease with which I find myself writing against.

Don't get me wrong. The exercise was helpful, I found it liberating, empowering. But upon reflection, what intrigues me is why writing against made me – and still does – feel powerful. So much of my self is invested in writing against. Against positivism. Against the unproblematic embracing of neoliberal understandings of what academia, or what the world, can and could be. Against the discrediting of queer and ethnographic methods in Business Schools. Against heteronormativity. And homonormativity. Against the Business School itself. A feminist lesbian anti-capitalist killjoy seduced and empowered by the simplicity with which writing against narrates the world. It should be harder to

write against. I should feel my limbs and fingers stiffen and hesitate in remembering and documenting the persistent injustices of the world. Not in a powerless way either though. Just, you know, in a this-should-not-be-normal kind of way, in a this-should-still-really-baffle-me kinda way. I should also have learnt by now that the world is messier than any writing against – or for – will ever convey.

I remember, I wrote that I write against Hillary Clinton/Emma Watson/Angelina Jolie-type feminists – by which I meant white liberal feminism, that feminism that tells you that WOMAN is a thing, a global phenomenon, that we are all sisters, that #HeforShe doesn't reify the gender binary, that the War in Afghanistan was a war for women. I wrote against Hillary Clinton/Emma Watson/Angelina Jolie-type feminists. But what have they ever done to me? Are we even supposed to be writing against individuals? And if we are (I did), is that a reification of the myth of the coherent self? Are we writing against structures (whiteness, capitalism, heteronormativity)? And if we are, isn't the performativity of our language inadvertently but necessarily reifying these structures? In writing against, are we, as Gibson-Graham (2009) warn us, constituting inescapable monolithic monsters? Would Eve Sedgwick (1997) think I am paranoid?

Writing against. I find comfort in writing against. I make critical feminist queer investments in writing against. We need writing against. But we also need uncomfortable writing, alternative writing practices, a writing that cannot be encapsulated by the for/against binary, unpredictable, messy writing.

Mie Plotnikof – 'I write for'

When I hear of the task, I'm thinking about the dichotomy that it takes as its premise. But then I wonder if it is a dichotomy, or maybe rather a tension? A tension that saturates most of our academic being, doing, writing, living: any research account is positioning itself in tensions of working for/against something, someone, somehow. When we construct research questions, we attend to something rather than other things. When we design methods and collect data, we co-construct specific thoughts, conversations, interactions, events, documents rather than others. When we write papers, we also play the inclusion/exclusion game via references, citations, theorizing and analyzing. But because the kind of research we do is about people, life and society; it is a very basic requirement that we reflect carefully on the ways in which we work through this tension of for/against, and the effects that this has on our research.

Thinking further about my current idea of writing for, I'm struggling a little. And I'm struggling with finding myself struggling. Shouldn't this be easy? Do I not

have a clear storyline to voice here? Why is my research purpose not rushing from my heart and head into my arm and through my hand out on paper right away? … Come to think of it, I actually do have a pretty firm idea of my own research purpose, but I'm not used to having to tell it out loud. I'm much more used to strategizing and considering how to argue my point in relation to audience, to other scholars, to other studies. But once I get that this is not a strategic research exercise its actually easy. It's actually exciting.

The room is quiet. People are busy, minding themselves. The atmosphere is not tense but concentrated. People are thinking so loud that we can almost hear it. I'm sweating a little. But I'm also getting this feeling of being part of something. Of taking over something that somebody else had embodied and now I am embodying it, to then pass it on and somebody else is embodying it. Not because I'm giving it to somebody else, but because we are all helping each other to create and carry this piece of paper of writing for. It's not heavy although the content is heavy. Explosive. Troubling. Touching. Powerful. I realize that a few of us have tears running down our faces.

Reflections 3 months later

After reading Alison's e-mail today, I still remember the power of this shared writing experience. I'm still thinking about the performativity of this little piece of paper and one simple question – what do I write for? I'm still curious as to how and why the quiet room, the solo-writing, the handing over of paper, the extreme concentration accumulates into not just a piece of paper with a lot of heavy and important idea(l)s for the necessities of writing, but also a textual, material, bodily and social manifestation of something more than each of us. Than each of our words. Than a momentary feeling of care or consensus. Actually, to me it seems, it is almost the opposite of consensus – it's the multiple voices of all of our purposes, of all of our struggles, of all of our working through this tension of writing for/against. And this intense feeling of being a voice amongst many other important, different voices is giving feminism a new meaning and matter to me. It may come across as a banality, but nevertheless an important one.

Collaborative ending

Writing differently in the neoliberal academy poses many risks – these are risks that feminists have been talking about, and have been taking, for decades now. Feminist research has always transcended disciplinary divides: sitting around one table, engaged in one single task, we challenge the ways in which we and our

writings are 'disciplined'. Our politics, whilst manifesting across different projects and struggles, unite from a politics of transformation, and it is here that our daily struggles take on renewed energy as we see the bigger picture... Whose voices count? Whose bodies are legitimate(d)?

Listen. Hear. Here in the spirit of listening we gain strength from each other; we gain solidarity between each other. We experience solidarity and common ground in the doing. It is a something that sustains us, each of us, and the 'us' itself.

I write against the culture of burnout, I write against the misogyny that threatens my existence, I write to breathe, and I write for those women who can't. I write against those that judge. I write against those that hide behind the words of the academic review process. I write for others to have different spaces to breathe and work within. I write because I don't know how not to. I write for disruption, I write because I erupt. Writing differently exposes the patriarchal forces that determine whose work is deemed 'excellent' in a culture of biased metrics and surveillance. Our challenging of and emancipation from these forces starts with working differently and writing together and alone is part of the process. It is our writing that travels, that others know of us and that may inspire new writing. Writing is how we come to be in the academic sphere, we become. Writing is a small part of the picture – the text is not all that we are, and the text only does so much – and yet we write with our bodies every day and in every relation: we write with our love, our care, our sacrifice and our joy.

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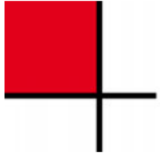

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Snaptivism: A collective biography of feminist snap as affective activism*

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A wedding memory

> I am one with the chair and the chair becomes one with me. It compliments my body; supports my lower back and so I find myself sitting – and very comfortably seated.
>
> The choice to sit in the chair was not mine to begin with. My choice was to show up to the event itself. But on the table in front of me, there is a small card with my name written on it. The card tells me that the chair is my designated seat for the wedding banquet that I'm attending. Around the table sit another five guests. Together, we form one of several small islands of tables in the room – each populated with family and friends of the newlywed couple.
>
> Love songs play over the speakers. Their lyrics express heterosexual desires. The atmosphere is, perhaps not surprisingly for a wedding dinner, thick with joyfulness. I can't help but get affected a little. Even though the music – the love that is in the air – does not bear any resemblance to the love that I feel, know of, and can identify with in my own marriage.
>
> It may be that the current mood is gay. But it is gay as in happy and not as in queer.

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* We would like to thank the editors of this special section for their insightful comments on earlier versions, which helped us to refine our argument and encouraged us to take advantage of this note format

1 The authors contributed equally to this piece of work and are cited in alphabetical order.

I scan the room to find my husband located across the sea-floor that divides the party into separate parties – one at each table. I notice that him and I, and the only other non-heterosexual couple, have been split by the seating arrangement. Everybody else is paired with their opposite-sex partner. A friend of the bride, single and female, is positioned next to my husband. I feel an ache in my chest – the kind that makes you aware of the discomfort of your own body being misplaced, of belonging; but not quite.

Suddenly, the chair feels less comfortable. I'm trapped in that chair, and no matter how I reposition my body, I can't let go of a sensation of uneasiness and restlessness. The chair has turned me into a passive bystander to a setting. A setting that in that moment emerges to me as the very materialisation of a differentiating societal institution. Marriage. An institution that I, and others like me, have been excluded from historically. In most countries, we still are.

The seating plan seems to keep my husband and I – as well as the lesbian couple that are also legally married – from enjoying the recognition of our marriages on equal terms with all the other married couples that happen to be heterosexual.

My thoughts revolve around this idea(l) of marriage. I now remember why I find it problematic. As a society, we reward and honour marriage; legally and grant economic benefits. Marriage becomes a socially desirable way of living your life. And at the same time, society excludes (some groups) of people from enjoying the same privileges. This seems both unfair and absurd to me.

Am I naïve to believe that equal access – in the form of the right to same-sex marriage – would also mean equal treatment? Are queer lives simply being co-opted?

As the merry-gay music continues, I depart with my line of thought. I notice and become attuned to the dinner set-up that renders my love invisible. In this physical setting, my affection for my partner is apparently deemed less legitimate, or even irrelevant. We are unequal to that of all the heterosexual couples. Couples whose romantic feelings are omnipresent – and so readily accepted as 'right' and proper. Couples whose love every-body strives for.

I feel this physically. It is as if these couples have sucked out all air in the room and taken up all space. There's room for no deviation from that norm.

With a simple seating arrangement at a social event, I'm momentarily confined to that infamous closet. The same closet that I was expected by family, friends, and society to come out of. I am made to pass as part of the collective One rather than the Other that I am.

My Otherness, however, becomes visible time and again, as conditions force me to come out the closet again. And again. And again.

The two other couples at the table assume that I'm coupled with the woman next to me. I'm assumed heterosexual until otherwise proven. Oh, the irony! She and I are in this together, and more than they can possibly imagine. She has also been temporarily torn from her same-sex spouse. Sitting next to each other, we cannot help but constantly act as a mutual reminder of our circumstances. Our mis-

matching makes us appear 'same' to the other guests. But two wrongs don't make a right.

A photographer asks us to scoot together. We are to have our picture taken so as to capture – and immortalise – the loving moment. A moment we are forced to spend away, detached, and disentangled from our own spouses. The woman and I pose. Reluctantly. We try to shake off our conflicted feelings. So the make-believe can seem true. For the happy couple.

What else can we do? Make a scene? I keep reminding myself that it is all about the newlyweds and not me. The purpose of my attendance is to witness their love. By witnessing, I attest their social status as the quintessence of what it means to be a family.

It is as if my female table partner and I are stuck in our chairs so as to help perpetuating a heterosexually striated space. Together, the place cards and the meagre chairs have robbed us of any agency.

Or maybe we handed over our capacities to affect the situation by sitting down in the first place?

Regardless, the effect remains: we become spectators of the undoing of our subjectivities in that heteronormative space. We go through the motions, because the motions are there to go through.

My thoughts are now on the tradition of the wedding itself. Four people are silently deemed null and void; while all four people hold official roles at the wedding. I am the designated chauffeur for the newlyweds. I am the guarantor of their safe journey when they leave for the honeymoon of their dreams the following morning. The woman next to me is the toastmaster. She introduces an array of speeches, all of which represents forms of love. Forms that are, in that setting, implicitly deemed more valid than my romantic tie to my partner: familial, platonic, siblinesque. Her spouse is the gift coordinator, entrusted with the new riches of the couple. My husband is the groom's best man.

Four individuals, all of whom are noticeably visible in the wedding. All of whom have a status. And yet, by a simple act of a seating plan, our marriages are invisible.

The constant re-negotiation of this in-visibility becomes a source of frustration for me. How can we be trusted these key functions and, simultaneously, be the recipients of unequal treatment?

Heteronormative. I write the word down on a slip of paper. All guests have been tasked with summarising their experience of the day in just one word. The happy couple will then read the slips on their anniversary to commemorate the day.

I doubt they will be able to re-live my experience of the day. But my message is not intended for them. I write it so that I can let go of some of the anger that's been building up slowly. So I can feel emancipated from the chair, from the striated space. It works. Momentarily.

Soon after, the bride performs a ritual. She visits each table to 'sell' red roses to all the men. The men then hand over the rose to their spouse as a token of devotion. My husband and I get a rose each. The lesbian couple gets none.

The reason for the ritual, we are told, is for the bride to collect some spare change. This way, she has a bit in store, in case the husband – the assumed breadwinner – isn't able to provide for the family.

I wonder if the male-female seating arrangement is also to be explained away with tradition. The newlyweds have, throughout the day, been somewhat selective about what traditions to follow. For example, the bride has given a touching and heartfelt speech to her husband. Traditionally, her place is next to her husband, silent. Traditionally, the wedding is where she is re-defined and valued in terms of her belonging to him. This is, traditionally, marked with her prefix changing from miss to Mrs. Traditionally, you don't opt-in to some traditions but not all.

After the three-course meal, a line of flight appears. I can part with my chair and turn my back on the striated space. I can both literally and figuratively speaking stand on my own two feet. Stand up. For myself.

As I stretch my legs and shake off the remnants of the chair, attempting to enjoy the party, the groom approaches me. Frankly, I'm not in the mood to talk to him, yet. And the groom is drunk. I don't know if it is him or the alcohol speaking, when he urges me to show a little affection for my husband.

All I know is that I become intoxicated from his utterance and that his words point at me like the beam of an interrogation room spotlight. Is he questioning my devotion for my partner? Is he really asking of me to be affectionate and share the very intimacy that we have been cheated out of for the entire day? The affection that his other friends and family have shared seamlessly throughout every mention of love, while both I and my husband were given a companion of the opposite sex to play pretend with?

I'm not only out of words; I'm also out of air. I can't breathe. My chest is heavy with feelings of resentment. I don't know where to put my feelings.

It is as if my body is preparing me to snap even before I realise it'll happen. The snap is corporeal before consciously enacted.

I snap. Not by explaining myself, arguing, or starting a fight. I snap by turning around and leaving. I walk away with heavy and fast-paced steps. I cross the room diagonally, across a dancefloor of happy couples. It's the longest route for me. It's the closest to an exit.

That snap moment is when I re-gain agency. I withdraw myself from the wedding-assemblage and let the cold evening breeze fill my lungs with air.

Now at a distance, I also realise that the snap didn't come out of nothing. It came from something and somewhere. Everything came together in that particular moment. It was not only about the remark from the groom.

> The snap was a reaction to the entire wedding-assemblage: the room, the setup of the furniture, the music, marriage as an institution and its traditions, the other guests' small talk. All of this accumulated. Coming at me as micro-aggressions that would just make the space tighter and tighter. Until there was absolutely no room for me to be. And so, I had to explode. Or rather, implode.
>
> I could no longer contribute to keeping a cultural love-design where men and women neatly sit together so as not to break with any social norms or expectations. So as to not disturb the heterosexual matrix.
>
> Like the rest of the party I found myself to be gay, just not as in happy, but queer as in fuck them.

Introduction, background and context

A snap might be a breaking point but in the hands of Ahmed (2017a, 2017b) it can also be conceived as a creative and affirmative action. As the memory above outlines, a snap is ephemeral. Sometimes it is only in the aftermath of a snap we realised it has happened. We note that 'a body can be snap, you arrive and there is a sharp break with what came before' (Ahmed, 2017a), which asks allies in queer-feminist and anti-racist work to be aware of how their bodies might confer privilege. These were just some of the facets of the 'snap' that were considered during the Feminism, Activism, Writing! (hereafter FAW!) session on affective activism, held at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) in November 2017. During this FAW! session, numerous feminist scholars shared stories inspired by what Ahmed refers to as *feminist snap* (2017b: 198). This is not a term that is easily confined to one single definition but instead allows for a multiplicity of experience to exist within its concept. A snap 'can mean to make a brisk, sharp, cracking sound' but also 'to suffer a physical or mental breakdown' and 'to snatch or grasp suddenly and with eagerness' (Ahmed, 2017b: 189). It might mean 'to open, close, or fit together with a click' (*ibid.*: 189). It is a concept that both brings people together and cleaves them apart, that inspires but also breaks, that opens but also closes. Relevant for this note is to think of snapping as similar to a valve that helps to release the pressure built up from normative expectations. Or in Ahmed's own words as 'that moment when the pressure has built up and tipped over' (2017a) and which 'can be the basis of a revolt, a revolt against what we are asked to put up with' (*ibid.*).

In combining the words *snap* and *activism*, one of the authors (Jannick) produced the neologism snaptivism during the FAW! session on affective activism. As an example of snaptivism, Jannick shared a story about him leaving a wedding in protest of the heterosexist atmosphere. This was the first version of the wedding memory, which led the FAW! session discussion to revolve around the activist potentials of snapping. The idea of snaptivism was readily improvised upon by

other session participants, who shared their own snap moments. We wondered if we could become 'snap allies' by building a feminist support system of lending ears that are willing to listen. All these snap(py) moments shared revolved around Ahmed's (2017a) conception of 'feminist snap' that highlights the possibilities for new beginnings when snapping (although the snap itself is seldom the beginning – it is merely what's first noticed), and hence points to activism as a related concept.

After the FAW! session, we, the authors, decided to choose one of these shared snap moments and opted to explore it further by using the framework of collective biography as proposed by Davies and Gannon (2012) and others (Davies et al., 2005; Davies et al., 2013; De Schauwer et al., 2018). We felt that this framework was particularly appropriate, as it reflected most closely the open and conversational tone of the FAW! session format, but additionally provided us with a structured approach to guide our discussion. The aim was to direct a specific focus not only on the language of the snap story, but also the affectivity of it. Collective biography is a workshop format that seeks to get as close as possible to the minute details of a memory-event, drawing out its *embodied sensations* via 'collaborative attention to detail' (Davies and Gannon, 2012: 360). In the sections below, we describe how we conducted our collective biography work with the purpose of exploring the empirical phenomenon of what we call snaptivism. We dedicate the remainder of this introduction to positioning our note with the work of relevant scholars, connecting key concepts and providing the context of our snaptivist efforts.

With this note we want to further unpack the activist potential a snap moment may hold. The collective biography workshop was initially thought of as a way of intervening in the snap memory-story. As our work on the note progressed, we came to realise that the workshop was also in itself an activist endeavour in the sense that the moment could be turned into movement. The snap moment reported here should therefore not be thought of as a static representation of the snap as it really was or how it really happened. Rather, the moment – the snap wedding memory-story – is where we began to explore the movements, the repetitive citations of norms that achieve a fixed pattern of being (in accordance with the heterosexual love-design). The memory becomes material in presenting and analysing a potential moment for change, of becoming-different (non-heterosexual, snap ally, etc.). In our collaborative work, the snap becomes a way of gathering (research) material (Ahmed, 2017a) and, potentially, a means for snap stories to travel and have an effect beyond the collective biography work undertaken by us.

We propose that the collective biography framework, as suggested by Davies and Gannon (2012) and adapted for this note, is one way of providing the feminist support system that Ahmed talks about in her lecture, blog and chapter on the feminist snap. In becoming feminist ears, we are willing to hear the exhaustion of struggling to live in a world that negates your existence, we aim to create a (safe) space in which the snap can become expressive, i.e. shared rather than contained, by telling its story, collectively. Furthermore, this may alleviate or make sense of the accompanied feelings of anger, frustration, resentment. As the memory is shared, it becomes a social story and thus political (see e.g. Cahill, 2007). As the ephemeral snap gains momentum, we hope that the individually experienced moment, otherwise thought of as personal, is rethought of as having movement towards change.

We understand the re-working of snap memory-stories, by means of collective biography workshops, as both embodied and engaged research (e.g. Holck, 2018; Ashcraft, 2017). This is because our labour invokes affective feelings and reactions on behalf of everybody involved, i.e. both the original memory-holder (the one snapping) and those who work to experience the memory, namely the memory-workers (snap allies). This latter effect is created in the joint process of unpacking the moment, unfolding the story thus, in being affected by it, we become snap allies. If snapping, as Ahmed (2017a) has it, is about breaking a bond, then snaptivism is about creating new ones, among the allies, towards doing things differently. As evident from the final iteration of the wedding memory presented above, certain snap experiences are sensed through and among bodies (human as well as nonhuman relations) and can for that reason not be grasped unless we render ourselves sense-able (Ashcraft, 2017) and response-able to affect. While affectivities cannot be reduced to mere matters of feelings, emotions and moods (e.g. Ahmed, 2014) – these are all an integral part of the snap memory-story in their capacity to affect and, as such, to have a material effect (Fox and Alldred, 2017), in our case on our collective biography workshop. Looking at emotions affectively is, as Ahmed (2004) writes, a matter of investigating the actions they perform and what effects that follow from them. In this way, the memory-work allows for embodied apprehensions of the snap, including affective bodily changes.

Change is the cue that takes us back to the neologism of snaptivism. A 'snap' might be a moment experienced as individual pain but the activism undertaken in hearing the story and processing it through collective biography can perhaps mitigate some of the isolation. For Ahmed, the 'feminist snap might be how we tell a counter-story, the story that we must tell still; a story that if it is to be told requires sharp and sudden movements to get through' (2017a). Similarly, Fotaki et al. (2017: 10) note, 'feminists remind us that it is crucial for us as

organisational scholars to reiterate affect as socially situated rather than as an individual and depoliticised state of being and experience'. In both instances it is imperative to do this work together. If this is the case, engaging in collective work can help amplify the story and to create space for ephemeral movements. Coming out of the FAW! session, sensing something (had) happened in sharing those moments, the collective biography experiment aims to further develop a snap moment shared by Jannick into a collectively shared story. The story itself went through many iterations – beginning at the FAW! session and ending in this note. Our workshop was facilitated by digital meetings held among the authors of this note, in which we adopted and adapted the collective biography approach to allow for Ahmed's feminist snap.

The remainder of this note will firstly explore how we queered the collective biography framework, originating in Davies and Gannon (2012) to adopt and adapt it with our understanding of the snap. This also includes the practicalities of undertaking the workshop, acting as a guide and timeline for the project. Secondly, we reflect as a collective on the moments of affectivity through writing our responses to the workshop. Here, the text operates under 'we', with each reflection shared and discussed by each member of the group and seeking to capture the ephemeral nature of the snap as we move back and forth between moments that sat with us. Finally, we offer, (in)conclusively, some of our insights that others may wish to contemplate should they wish to similarly take on a queered collective biography approach to snapping and become snaptivists.

Research procedure: Queering collective biography

Collective biography writing is, according to Davies and Gannon (2012), a method with which to revisit and explore a particular memory-event, in a larger theoretical context that concerns itself with issues of being and becoming. Specifically, through description, the main task is 're-capturing precise details from memories by remembering key images from our past, fleeting glimpses and scents' (Zbróg, 2016: 291). Thus, through 'collaborative attention to detail' (Davies and Gannon, 2012: 360), 'material and sensory' (*ibid.*: 369), we are also to draw out embodied sensations from the event. Key in this setting is to achieve the most honest writing of a memory that originates with the holder of it, in our case the one who presents and shares their snap moment, through its further examination by those collectively present. Throughout, the idea is to avoid repetitive and boring, even worn-out stereotypical explanations, because they consolidate normative behaviours that 'keep us in place and in character' (Davies and Gannon, 2012: 358), including as individual subjects. Instead, collective memory work and writing seeks to put this subject position, specifically its

isolation 'under erasure' (*ibid.*: 357) in favour of encounters during which we work through intensities and flows that move us collectively.

Thus, the workshop format of collective biography aims to get the participating memory-workers, in our case the snap allies we become, intimately involved by encouraging continuous probing of the details of the unfolding story, and allowing them to feel moved by the truth of the memory. The snap allies come to realise that they themselves know the moment under close observation *from the inside*, which is also what the set of instructions are geared towards. Thus, to prepare for our collective biography work, we first studied the instructions as suggested by Davies and Gannon (2012). Specifically, Davies and Gannon encourage participants not only to not use clichés or offer explanations in relation to the event, but also stipulate to generally be aware of the language used, as well as to pick up and choose words that are true to the remembered subject (*ibid.*: 359).

We selected the collective biography approach as it offered us a fruitful ground to examine the body given to a text. That is, how language expands possibilities of re-writing, mutating history and drawing collective lessons. However, we also decided to experiment creatively with queering collective biography writing in order to jointly interrogate the storyteller's use of language, especially regarding the words chosen and their affective import on the listeners. In order to do such queering, we extended the instructions and participant-positions to address the collectivity of snapping. That is, by queering our method we wanted to get at and explore what had been taking shape in the room at CBS where the FAW! session took place: new subject positions. These were not entangled, yet nevertheless we no longer found and felt ourselves or our individual snap moments to be in isolation. If not entangled together, and sharing a sense of political urgency, then what?

Queering the procedures allowed us to constructively destabilise the positions of both the original memory-holder and of the memory-workers. We think of all positions as equally contributing and claiming the collective lessons of the feminist snap. In effect, the holder position might not remember exactly what happened before and/or after or what personal truth is to be drawn/felt in the aftermath of a hurtful/shameful event. Consequently, regarding the holder, we approached the temporality of the workshop as appealing to a non-linear time (layering the past, present and future of the story). Thus, rather than analysing the biography of the emergent subject of Davies and Gannon's (2012) notion of collective biography, the story itself became the protagonist, having a biography of its own. Regarding the positions of the memory-workers, we brought ourselves together around one story as snap allies instead of sharing a story each. Starting

out as listeners, we ended up as being rallied behind the one wedding memory-story as allies, because we could collectively appreciate why this snap happened, bonding over it. Both moves of queering aim to mutate how authorship and truth are distributed: no version of the story is understood to be individually authored.

The most important aspect, we argue, is to commit to certain words/expressions within the story and although uncertain, share the file containing the story amongst all participants as an active move of trust and solidarity. This move may be seen as catering to what Vachhani and Pullen (2018) conceptualise as affective solidarity. Writing about the organisation of feminist resistance to everyday sexism they specifically point to how a move away from individualising experiences towards collective empathy can help mobilising solidarity. This affective solidarity, we argue, is necessary if we are to not only understand, but also rally around individual experiences – personal snap stories – and render them collective (maybe even public) in inscribing them into the political. 'Affect is a force that places people in a co-subjective circuit of feeling and sensation, rather than standing alone and independent' – as Fotaki et al. (2017: 4) write for the *Organization* special issue concerning how critical thinking of affect comes to matter in organisation studies.

The practical details of queering collective biography

While Davies and Gannon's (2012) collective biography starts with each individual authoring an account, we started with the following practical task: decide collectively *what accounts for a (feminist) snap moment?* The interest here lies not with the examination of memory-event(s) in general, but addressing *the specificity* of a snap (as past event and as story to be told/written). We were five memory-workers[2], including the memory-holder, working through Jannick's written story (see timeline below for an overview of the different stages in our collective biography work). Focusing all our curiosity on the details of just one story resulted in credible presentations of experiences (memories) in that we could discuss and question gaps or elements that seemed peculiar or untrustworthy. We could provide associative feedback by connecting to the story through own experiences of snapping in similar situations. Obtaining this sort of familiarity with the story, and its development, leads to what we felt were collective stakes appearing. This state of collective buy-in rendered it possible for us to begin exemplifying and illustrating the story based on emotional percept and the sensory impressions. Such descriptions were achieved by answering

2 Of which four of us decided to continue with the collective biography writing for this note. We would, however, like to thank our fifth memory-worker, Cansu Grüner-Birdal, for her thoughtful contribution during the workshop.

questions related to how the memory-holder felt about certain things happening in the story, where in his body he felt it, what scents he registered, etc.

In preparation, each workshop participant read a shared text (an early version of the wedding memory), forming questions for the collective biography work, which took place online due to the different geographical location of each of us. However, this preparatory phase did not preclude the possibility of spontaneous lines-of-questioning popping up during the workshop. When we started the online session, one member read the guidelines aloud (as presented in this section) and, collectively, we decided the end point would be the moment when all of the attendees felt they knew the experience of the memory as if it were their own. We felt we would instinctively know when this occurred. Jannick read the early version of the memory to us and then we began to ask questions about gaps, curiosities and inconsistencies in the memory. Then, Jannick worked on his notes and a video recording from the workshop to present us with the outcome: the final version of the wedding memory as presented above. From the first version of the memory (the oral story shared at the FAW! session more than six months ago at that point) to this last iteration, we all felt that we did know this memory as our own (we elaborate on this in the next section).

The collective work undertaken allowed us to pull apart the memory from the first utterance inside a room at CBS (during the FAW! session), which was left unquestioned, to a story that had been built upon and rigorously looked at from many sides. The outcome was not necessarily that we felt we knew how to act differently if a similar situation occurred. Rather, the deep knowledge afforded from the telling and re-telling of the story created a sense of comradery and support. The collective biography work revealed how snapping cannot be thought of as a singular event. Even though we focused our attention on one memory-story it became clear to us that to live our queer-feminist lives, to be feminist scholars in the academic life-world, requires continuous snapping to simply be. By building a community working collectively on a past memory we re-formulated it in a way that displaced Jannick as the problem and centred him as the snaptivist. The memory had '[begun] to register and resonate affectively in the bodies of the listeners' (Davies and Gannon, 2012: 360) and thus brought the workshop to a close with each participant feeling part of the snap story, becoming snap allies in the process.

Timeline of our collective biography workshop:

- 20-21 November 2017: The snap story is shared for the first time as a short remark during a session about affective activism at the Feminism,

Activism, Writing! (FAW!) workshop at Copenhagen Business School (CBS).

- 22 February 2018: We, the authors, have our first online meeting where we decide upon the one snap story we want to work on (the wedding memory). Jannick begins to write down his snap moment.

- 5 April 2018: We have our second online meeting to explore appropriate theory and methods. Jannick continues working on his snap memory.

- 18 May 2018: Jannick shares his written snap moment during our two-hour long online collective biography workshop and the rest of the authors, the snap allies, start probing the memory-story.

- 28 May 2018: We have a follow-up online meeting to re-work the final details of the written wedding memory. We read it out, re-edit and interpret the snap to get a deeper sense of the story and the forces 'behind' the given situation.

On becoming snap allies

In this section, we describe in more detail how *doing* this collective biography work on the snap memory-story affected us and how we affected it. The snippets shared below may be understood similarly to the drawings that emerged from De Schauwer and colleagues' (2018) workshop: in them, we do not offer our reflections, but rather seek to capture in writing a snapshot of us affectively resonating and rallying, as a snap-allied collective, around a shared memory that now has become a part of us. Even more so, with our writing (which came more natural to us than drawing) about how we proceeded during the workshop, we aim to capture the ephemeral nature of the snap, our discussions and the process overall. Therefore, we offer our affective insights similarly to how they emerged during our workshop, flowing spontaneously, zipping back and forth between different story parts that did something to us, animated us, angered us, even, over which we bonded, laughed, and became allies – as also illustrated in the snapshot below from the video recording of the workshop.

Figure 1: The authors during the workshop, in full affect

The wedding memory, initially shared as a spontaneous comment within the safe space provided by the FAW! session on affective activism, has acquired its own biography. In this process, we discovered how much hinterland there can be to a single comment and how our queered collective biography approach also allows those who were previously uninvolved to appreciate the importance and depth of a moment shared by someone else. In turn, we became snap allies. Yet, this is just one comment out of many shared at the FAW! session that we could have explored in more depth. What more did we leave behind?

Particularly striking to us is how we, the memory workers and snap allies as women, could feel into a different instance of denied privilege: from being discriminated against due to our gender (a naturally recurring topic in the FAW! session) to physically experiencing discrimination as a homosexual man. There it is, the odd sensation in our guts that comes when the body registers that something is not quite right, even before the brain can properly articulate it. The sense of astonishment we all experience when discussing the seating arrangement! Writing down the word *heteronormative* as a résumé of the evening strikes us, almost like a portent, as part of the build-up to snapping. What to do? There is no place to go, because the 'right' place is already taken! Oh, the repressed repulsion towards the alcohol-infused groom at the end of the

memory. We all can feel indignation and anger, we are all affected as if we had been there with Jannick in that room... wait, are we in a Pensieve?![3]

At the same time, doing this memory work means so much more than opening us up towards the experience of someone else. We become immersed in the discrimination experienced as a significant event, not something to be brushed over. Its infuriating quality lies in the self-righteousness with which our ally is mistreated. And what about those who differ much more visibly from the mainstream assumption of *what is right* or *how things should be*? The exercise of re-living, a(ffe)cting Jannick's memory simultaneously sharpens our awareness of daily, casual injustice and naturally leads us authors to discuss privilege, speaking up and snapping for/with others, particularly those unable to do so themselves.

One recollects on the moment of snapping, making it public and sharing it again, in a different space, at a different time. The repetition makes a difference every time the body of text starts expanding as the possibility for articulating the stakes in snapping are emerging, because of it. Repeated and recollected by the one to which the moment belongs, by listening and asking questions, making suggestions, telling our own stories, we make the moment reach and rock backwards and forwards together. Movement. Repeated and recollected together we extend the moment in the process; embroidering it into a richer narrative at every turn we take.

For instance, it emerged that red roses played a part in this particular snap, which we seized on together, asking for their significance in adding to the accumulation of pressure that built up to the moment. Tradition to some, the bride sells roses to the men in the room, which they gift to their female partners. This exchange highlights how, while being a heteronormative event, heterosexuality and gender create exclusions at weddings that gay spouses are not able to participate in on equal terms, with both Jannick and his husband taking roses but feeling unable to give them to one another not being of the opposite sex. The group found this expanded part of the story similarly stifling, empathising with the tension created in such a ritual. Listening, probing for more details about the ritual of the red roses, we all started to feel increasingly outraged at it, understanding how it contributed to the snap, and sensing what it must have felt like, being moved by it. Yet without losing perspective in the process, which is what happens in collective biography, and also what it proposes and aims for, given its ontological and epistemological underpinnings.

3 An object from the magical universe of Harry Potter, used to review stored memories.

During the collective biography workshop, there were boundaries that existed between us still, however moved we were, which became apparent most obviously when there was a pause in the absence of the one who snapped. Jannick suddenly disappeared from our online meeting because his laptop ran out of battery. Most significantly, in the gap (lasting a few minutes), we questioned what we would have done, differently. Would we have intervened in the ritual, disrupted it by not participating in the exchange, or by repeating it with a difference? Nevertheless, we were connected still, to the moment, to what happened, including to the one who snapped. Being distinct bodies, our boundaries did not prevent us from feeling what happened, because they were porous ones that allow for 'the transmission of affect' (Brennan, 2004), the flow among us that connects us, without losing sight of each other or of what happened. Rather than becoming entangled, we bonded, and became affective snap allies, which accounts for how we relate, collectively. This collectivity explains what else productively happened embryonically in the room when we initially shared the snap moments at the FAW! session, and sensed there was more to them as well.

Listening to Jannick relate to us his story that we had only read bits and pieces of beforehand, before our collective biography workshop, moved us in a way that the words on the screen had not. Whether that means that our eyes are corrupted against affect and being affected, having been taught to observe without getting too close, to keep a critical distance, to not be affected, or care, we don't know. For ears also involve distance in that we can be hearing something that takes place further removed from us, unlike our sense of smell, although we can sense a whiff of fear that suggests distance too, so as not to suggest that smell is a sense of proximity exclusively. But our ears unlike our eyes and like our nostrils and mouth are openings that suggest we are open to others, that open us up to others, whether we like it or not. Our eyes can only leak from their openings to *demonstrate* affect, being affected by reflecting what they see. In the case of our ears, short of not listening, we have to take in what happened as it finds its way around our own experiences. Like this, we get in touch, and can be touched by the one telling the story.

Listening to Jannick unfold his story, one of us interrupted with thoughts about the reference to his husband, jarred, an embodied sensation too. Jarred, she was reluctant to bring up how can one feel (increasingly) ill at ease at an event and during a ritual that one has participated in? Or rather, perhaps, what about this wedding makes it disturbing, offensive, perhaps even oppressive, to the point of snapping? We debated briefly how the weight of tradition could explain it, as being the problem, like traditional table-seating, which Jannick indeed said they did not abide by at their wedding. Another example would be the rose tradition as

part of the ritual, which as out of date from a feminist point of view, dragged the wedding behind the times, tearing the gap and the difference between the two weddings.

'I'm trapped in that chair and no matter how I reposition my body I can't let go of a sensation of uneasiness and restlessness' (from the wedding memory). Another huge moment that resonated with us was Jannick's almost claustrophobic connection to the chair. In many ways, he might have swapped places and broken the seating code. But these visible actions would have signalled a larger protest, in a space that asks you to be an audience not an actor. We felt the tightening of the chest and the raising frustration at being kept in place by social nicety, especially as Jannick and the other couple mentioned are both legally married yet were separated by this outmoded traditional seating. In terms of sharing the memory collectively, we felt the physicality of this moment: the restlessness; the discomfort; the passivity. Perhaps this is because we shared similar moments where we have longed to visibly show dissent but have been unable to due to the larger social structures that we find ourselves placed in.

Watching the story build up from a comment in the FAW! session in November 2017 to a full narrative in this note more than half a year later has been a unique experience. It allowed us to get to grips with a fleeting moment in time and, during the course of the process, to become snap allies. This allyship conveys more than just conversation. We picked, ripped, added, questioned, poked and prodded the story. We dwelled on word choices and objects mentioned. Collectively, we spurred each other on to different trains of thought, pointing out moments that another may not have noticed. This is what it meant to us to experience the written memory as if it were our own. In queering the collective biography workshop, we freed ourselves up to work on one memory in intense detail. Those who supported the memory became snap allies as they worked and re-worked the moment, aiming to de-centre Jannick as the 'one heard as shouting' (Ahmed, 2017a) to become the one heard and understood in detail.

Having snap allies caring for the story (by actively listening, asking questions, re-presenting experiences from other perspectives and with words that seemed more accurate or true to the memory) helped Jannick as the original memory-holder exploring different aspects that had not necessarily appeared to him as relevant to the building up of the snap moment. He, in other words, became aware of a broader spectrum of fragments, how they all contributed to the story as a whole, and how this much more nuanced and hence increasingly complex memory was material in terms of its capacity to affect him differently. The rose ritual is but one example. It wasn't part of the original memory-story shared during the FAW! session at CBS, nor was it mentioned in the first written

versions of the snap moment. It was the supportive probing from the snap allies that saw it materialising.

Most importantly, Jannick came to realize that his inarticulate snap could be thought of as less conscious than he initially believed when presenting it at the FAW! session. Not that we want to introduce a dualistic understanding of reason and thought as the opposite of affect and emotion. Rather, we have, in retrospect, come to think of the story as an example of what Sara Ahmed (2014: 145) calls 'compulsory heterosexuality'. That is, how the narrative of heterosexual coupling as an ideal – which not surprisingly was omnipresent at the hetero-wedding from the snap memory – shaped, if not what Jannick's body could be, then at least what it, to a certain extent, could do. The latter is a non-deterministic view and raised questions about whether Jannick could or should have done something differently. These questions popped up among the snap allies during the part of the collective biography workshop where Jannick was gone for a couple of minutes due to technical issues and were for that reason not addressed properly. They do, however, seem relevant to get a deeper understanding of the affect economies (Ahmed, 2004) at play in the wedding memory. We, therefore, end this section dwelling on these questions, presenting what we, in line with Ashcraft (2017), call an embodied critique of the wedding-assemblage.

To perform this embodied critique, we return to the chair that started the memory. The original memory-holder found the chair to play a non-trivial role in the memory because his bodily experiences were attached to that chair; his emotions were directed towards it as an object. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2014) mentions a chair to exemplify and associate with the feeling of being comfortable (or not). She argues that comfort is about the fit between body and chair (object). She explains how her comfortable chair is not necessarily comfortable to you or to us. The chair has taken shape from the bodies that have previously sunk into it, making it awkward for differently shaped bodies. So, to be comfortable is, according to Ahmed (2014: 145), to 'be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins'. Or, in this case, where the body ends and the chair begins. Body and chair become one and the same.

Now, back to the wedding memory: A heteronormative environment or space like the wedding memory is comfortable for those who can inhabit that norm.

But as Ahmed (2014: 146) also points out, this availability of comfort for some, in this case heterosexual bodies, depends on the labour of others (non-heterosexual bodies) and the burden of concealment. She states that: 'Comfort may operate as a form of "feeling fetishism": some bodies can "have" comfort, only as an effect

of the work of others, where the work itself is concealed from view' (Ahmed, 2014: 149). In this case, heterosexual bodies get to be comfortable in their chairs, while non-heterosexual bodies labour to conceal their discomfort.

The chair reminds us how the heterosexually-striated space was already impressed upon by such bodies that sink comfortably into their chairs. While Jannick could not sink into his or the social space without a sense of discomfort or a feeling of disorientation. Jannick's non-conforming body clearly was out of place, which called for the emotional labour on his part. Eventually, his body and the chair turned out to be incompatible.

Thus, this wedding memory is not a happy one. The snap can therefore be seen as an affective act of killing joy or getting in the way of a happiness that does not have the agreement of the original memory-holder (Ahmed, 2014: 224-225). Back to the question: could or should Jannick have done something differently? Let us paraphrase Ahmed: Jannick's discomfort in itself was about him inhabiting the normative space differently.

(In)conclusion

'A snap is not a starting point, but a snap can be the start of something' (Ahmed, 2017b: 194). Our experimenting with queering the collective biography workshop allowed us to investigate what leads up to our snap while simultaneously becoming and moving forward as snap-allies to the original memory holder. Put differently, we find our queered approach to collective biography helpful to intertwine different strands of time between the memory and its initial memory holder as well as the different memory workers with their own pasts, presents and futures.

In so doing, our message was deliberately presented in a format that differs from what may be considered usual in academia. Breaking free of some of the constraints that scientific writing contains enabled us to engage differently, more freely and actively, with the snap as a form of activism. We feel that this allowed us to develop better insights and to communicate them in a different, hopefully more accessible manner. Therefore, we also contribute to a recent movement with an interest in writing differently (Gilmore et al., 2017).

In lending our ears to Jannick, in listening to him answering our questions and working with him to turn the snap-moment into a snap memory-story, one in which we now all break bonds (Ahmed, 2017a), the queered collective biography process becomes empowering. We therefore find the queered collective biography an inclusive and effective way to process and come to terms with one

certain instance. Committing to one memory, instead of working on multiple stories (cf. Davies et al., 2005; Gannon and Davies, 2007; De Schauwer et al., 2018), was helpful for us to get deeply into one snap moment in a way that allowed others to engage even if they came from different backgrounds or were not comfortable to share their own snap stories publicly.

This of course links to the ongoing issue around how and which stories to choose for collective biography work (Bansel et al., 2009; Davies and Gannon, 2012), to which we cannot provide a final answer, which, admittedly, was not the aim of our experimenting. Scrutinizing a single story, however, had each of us remembering and relating to our own, personal snap moments, and, despite some of them remaining unspoken, their perceived similarity to elements of Jannick's snap moment validated them and incorporated them as part of now 'our' wedding memory. We can then identify this memory-experience as *shared* (rather than merely personal), as social and therefore as political (Cahill, 2007). This is why this process was empowering for all of us, as we were all able to inscribe the personal into a collective political. Thus, the value of becoming snap allies means that our evocative anecdotes may contribute towards a larger purpose, giving the single snap story more resonance, making it intensely felt and thereby real (Davies and Gannon, 2012: 360).

We also want to point out that our queered approach allowed us to transgress borders by taking on and giving up privilege in a way that was perceived as moving on an emotional level and provided eye-opening experiences for all involved. Collective biography seems to work well in learning/teaching environments (Gannon and Davies, 2007) and we can imagine that this queered approach we put forth could be fruitful for use in the classroom or for other teaching purposes, in particular with more diverse groups.

Moreover, groups of memory workers may not necessarily have to be collocated. For our work on the wedding memory shared here, we mostly adhered to online communication: the workshop and surrounding conversations were held using Skype as a platform, written texts were shared via email and online platforms that enabled simultaneous editing. We were surprised by how well this worked for us, although we do of course acknowledge the benefit of working on a topic we all had a mutual interest in.

At the end of this, what did we gain? We find ourselves connected to an informal network of scattered snap allies and, as we hope, are more aware to take notice of and prepared to call out heteronormativity, inequality and exclusion when we next encounter it. We became aware of the fact that our snaps have power, that

they are a form of activism – snaptivism. In this spirit, we encourage our readers to become snaptivists and, collectively, give a biography to their feminist snaps!

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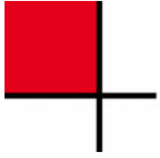

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Realising Sara Ahmed's 'feminist snap': Voices, embodiment, affectivity

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abstract

This paper is an empirical examination of Sara Ahmed's anatomy of snap experience and proposes a distributed and rearrangeable model for opening up questions of snap subjectivity. One (multimedially recorded) conversation becomes the basis for such examination. The authors analyse in minute detail what feminist voices embody and how collectivity rearranges experience in relation to the two categories pertaining to the feminist snap – namely, feminist pedagogy and feminist genealogy. We created and worked on an affective-semiotic-material mapping of the conversation, paying attention to the ways a multiplicity of perceptive apparatuses mediates and organises affectivity schemes, which in turn give insight into the workings of the aforementioned snap categories. This 'transmedial analysis' is a performative methodology inspired by the work of Lisa Blackman on 'embodied hauntologies'. Based on our findings, we propose a workshop format, called Snap.tivism.

Introducing Snap.tivism

> SLM: I was actually going to ask you to discuss in smaller groups your own snap moments: When did you snap? I think it is such a fantastic concept; if you have not read it, she [Ahmed] uses it to describe the moment where she realised [pause], it is where something happens [pause], somebody said something that makes you snap [pause]. So, [pause] yeah the feminist snap. When was your feminist snap? Oh! I know there are probably several, because I have several [...], but can we discuss in groups of 4-5? And there discuss feminist snaps for next 10 to 15 minutes? Ok. (Audio: 3m22s; transcript: 1)

> I remember each of these occasions not only as an experience of being violated, but as a sensory event that was too overwhelming to process at the time. I can still hear the sound of the voices, the car as it slowed down, the bike that rushed past, the door that opened, the sound of the footsteps, the kind of day it was, the quiet hum of a plane as I woke up. Senses can be magnified, sometimes after the event. (Ahmed, 2017a: 23)

To snap means to lose it, to *lash out*. To snap means also to realise, to *find out*. We learn from Sara Ahmed's recent writings how the snap (both noun and verb) is primarily a word that stands for a sudden and loud sound. Yet in its semi-metaphorical use for rethinking how we live with painful experiences and especially feminist outbursts, the sudden and the loud might even disconnect. A life-event might already be a distant memory by the time one suddenly realises that what once took place was in fact her *own snap*; its echo carrying the pain and frustration of years. As Ahmed notes in Living a Feminist Life, '[s]enses can be magnified, sometimes after the [traumatic] event', in a way that one may not just touch lightly upon the issue, but *cling on* the detailed recollection of components 'too overwhelming to process' (Ahmed, 2017a: 23)[1]. When one has found herself in such disconnection, focusing on another's snap might be catalytic in reworking the composition of what was perceived as personal and solitary. The process of realisation is thus a collective matter, which reworks this perceptive disconnection across time, space, objects and self(-ves) involved.

In this paper, we offer an empirical examination of the recollections, magnifications, intensities and transformations of the 'feminist snap'. Moreover, we introduce a workshop format that invites readers to continue examining the potential of collectively dealing with snap experiences. We call this Snap.tivism, a term generated during a conversation at the 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' workshop (FAW!), a two-day event based at Copenhagen Business School (CBS), 20-21 November, 2017, which brought together issues of (feminist) activism and (scholarly) writing.[2] Here we focus on one sub-group and the conversation we shared (authors also being participants), which took place in K.4.74 (hereafter, the Room).

As participants, we were introduced to the notion of the snap being something in itself, manifesting at moments of 'losing decorum' in the face of injustice, sexism, racism and all sorts of asphyxiation feelings in contemporary institutions. We initially divided into smaller groups, for 40 minutes, to discuss

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1 'Living a Feminist Life' is the 2017 book of Ahmed. It stemmed out of her blogging endeavors at https://feministkilljoys.com/. It contains conceptually the full continuum of her commitment to diversity work and feminism.

2 CfP: https://www2.gender.hu-berlin.de/ztg-blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/feminism-activism-writing.pdf

our own incidents and later to identify common 'characteristics of our snaps on affective level' (23m06s). For the remaining 1 hour and 40 minutes, we shared these thoughts across the Room, in a round table conversation. The term 'snap' came to embody many things. Alongside bigger societal issues, our day-to-day struggles with unconscious bias(es), microaggressions and debilitating, chronic inequality were discussed, as well as those moments of violent disillusionment regarding future prospects inside the institutions we engage with and toxic relations we maintain. We spoke of having experienced 'good/bad snaps', 'in/articulate snaps', 'un/conscious snaps', 'snap-for-another', 'snap-by-proxy', 'violent snap', 'passive snap', and 'snap solidarity'. The snap vocabulary is repetitive yet malleable, and this is part of its tropic capacity for affective and mental association among thoughts, emotions and stories.

The variety of recollections shared in the Room, as well as the range of responses generated are, we argue, worth empirical examination for two reasons. Firstly, the study allows us to navigate the complexity of Ahmed's 'feminist snap' proposal (as reflected in its multiple drafts, namely the 2017 lecture, 2017 blog and 2017 book chapter that together form Ahmed's anatomy of the snap[3]). This is the task of the theoretical section, where we offer a reconstruction of Ahmed's thesis on the Snap, while building a more abstract formulation of the concept. This abstraction highlights how two categories, 'feminist pedagogy' and 'feminist genealogy', operate within the concept as a collective process of realisation. Secondly, we believe Snap.tivism to be a reproducible workshop format, which contributes to the current turn to affect methodologies in feminist scholarship. For such purposes, we provide a methods' section, devoted to presenting the underpinnings and sequence of steps of the transmedial analysis. The longest section of the paper consists of the findings and observations. We mobilise illustrative examples from the analysis to touch upon our main theoretical points and demonstrate how they express themselves in the Snap.tivism workshop.

On Sara Ahmed's 'feminist snap'

> A snap is not a starting point, but a snap can be the start of something (Ahmed, 2017a: 194)

This section is an expose of our theoretical and feminist dues to Sara Ahmed, for always taking us from what feels very personal (vulnerable, secretive and shaming) to what actually does collectivity, day in, day out, when leading a

3 Links to all three sources can be found here, https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/.

feminist life.[4] We particularly focus on Ahmed's categories of feminist pedagogy and genealogy; both necessary to explore the intricacies of Snap.tivism (as a workshop format) and the 'feminist snap' (as a concept). Ahmed defines the feminist snap 'not as a single moment of one woman experiencing something as too much, but as a series of accumulated gestures that connect women over time and space' (2017a: 200). In the following paragraphs, we offer insight into the two ways Ahmed has been examining such gestures of connectivity in her essays and in turn we showcase how stories, visual and literary material, function as illustrative arguments (neither fully empirical, nor purely theoretical). In the process, we slowly 'distil' the concept by constructing an abstract schema for how feminist genealogy and feminist pedagogy can be defined as two complementary modes operating within the feminist snap and organising snap subjectivity.

Ahmed examines snap experience as pertaining to a rearrangement of in/visibility and embodied perception. At moments when an individual points out the problems power creates but *does not see*, one emerges as all that power creates and sees: an isolated, hypervisible yet muted position. Building on earlier work regarding queer(ing) phenomenology[5], she describes how at the moment of snapping (let's say, when calling out in a public setting a racist or sexist comment) a reversal of positionality takes place. The act of indexing an issue often gets perceived as the issue itself and starts featuring *in its stead*. After the reversal occurs, the act appears as the violent interruption in the seamless fabric of institutional life and haunts the snappy subject from then on, inducing a suffering directly related to the conditions of institutional in/existence. 'If you have to shout to be heard you are heard as shouting. If you have to shout to be heard you are not heard' (Ahmed, 2017b). Figures such as the snappy woman, the willful girl, the killjoy (2017a: 191, 66, 195) are singled out as agitators, their voices rendered irrelevant, their presence unfit. This is much more of a shared experience amongst feminists that one might initially think. The Snap.tivism conversation brought at least five instances that narrate in detail the experience of simultaneously being casualty and perpetrator of institutional circumstance. It takes collective work to break away from such absurd and dangerous positioning.

Much of this necessary work is captured by Ahmed's provocation towards her readers to realise how the snap 'is not a starting point' (*ibid.*: 194). A feminist take on incidents deemed sudden, violent, angry and overall *snappy* reorients our

4 This formulation of 'collectivity being done' is versed in the social constructivism understanding that sociality is a daily accomplishment, something that is *being done (or undone)*. Same applies when looking the particularities of 'solidarity' or 'collectivity': these concepts do not index a thing intrinsic to an abstract social domain; they 'are done' in practice.

5 See. Ahmed, 2007.

attention *backwards* from their explosive 'present' and *towards* figuring out that the point of origins does not lie in the incident itself. It all starts by *listening carefully* and then culminates to an actual adjustment of the reader's sensorial and mental assumptions. One simple example of perceptive adjustment happens within the recurring trope[6] of the 'broken twig'. Ahmed uses the broken twig to engage one of readers' major senses (hearing) in a naturalistic setting with no apparent social or political stakes, and yet she turns everything upside down by drawing unexpected connections:

> Say you hear the sound of a twig snapping. You might not have noticed the twig before; you might have not noticed the pressure on the twig, how it was bent, but when it snaps, it catches your attention.
>
> You might hear the snap as the start of something. A snap is only the start of something because of what you did not notice, the pressure on the twig. (Ahmed, 2017b)

Going beyond the 'broken twig', we claim that there is a powerful argument in all illustrations that Ahmed uses: the snap is not a spectacle to be witnessed from the outside. Stories about another's violent eruption invite the reader to recognise oneself in another's distress, in another's pain. Following the careful listening we mentioned above, mutual recognition within the condition of pain is the second gesture in realising the snap as a collective matter. Collective snaps are borne upon our own wounds, when our eyes roll with disillusionment, when we meet one another's rolling eyes (another favourite trope of Ahmed).

From the moment a snap is heard and noticed, there is neither a fixed, nor singular subject position to it. Snap subjectivity distributes among the reader/listener, the narrator of the story (Ahmed) and the protagonist's recollection of body- or emotional- bits and parts in a painful episode. Snap.tivism showcases a process similar to what Ahmed's text(s) suggest: that it falls to a chorus of feminist allies to intervene (on both the distribution of snap experience and perceptive rearrangement) by extending gestures such as giving space for stories to be carefully heard and for recognition cues to empower realisation of the snap's potential. Such conclusion encompasses two dimensions of collectivity: the feminist snap is a type of shared lesson-in-feminism and an extended and unconventional kinship-making. Concerning the former, this is the provocation and promise of calling 'feminist pedagogy' an equation: the moment of mutual recognition makes us equal, as we recognise how we have all been

6 More than a metaphor, the broken twig is an exercise in perceptiveness, connecting the participants of this story across their respective biographies, making their encounter a certain distribution of suffering and responsivity. For these reasons, we call it a trope.

there before, over and over, and most probably will find ourselves back there in the future. In a complementary mode, Ahmed shows us how to use shared lessons and experiences in order to draw familiar lines that *cut across* nuclear families, conventions and institutions. There, we argue, lies the invitation of the 'feminist genealogy' as a category that allows revisiting the lived experience of snap but not from a solitary point of view. This is a future-oriented genealogy stemming out of bonds we choose and in the face of the inescapability of snap experience within institutions we live and work at. Together feminist pedagogy and genealogy give a formula for the fierce reimagining of solitary suffering as 'accumulated history' (2017a: 202) and feminist strategy.

To conclude, although snap experience might form on a premise of isolation and suffering, feminist education and collective intervention have the ability to change the rules of the game. That would be the promise of realising the feminist snap and for that we located a series of feminist gestures that contribute to the process. The gestures culminate within moments of 'feminist pedagogy' (as the past lessons that become our guide for the future) and 'feminist genealogy' (the legacy we choose to inherit today for our sake within snappy futures). Ahmed warns that this owning up to the inescapability of future embarrassing moments and reclaiming feminist rage can be framed as self-sabotage (*ibid.*: 198) or even violence (*ibid.*: 199); yet, it is also the necessary strategy to showcase how sexism, racism and inequality are constituent features of modern institutions. In this way, we conclude with Ahmed, that the snap is about 'feminist hope' (*ibid.*: 210).

Materials and method: Transmedial analysis of the Snap.tivism format

> But it is not just that feminist ears can hear beyond the silence that functions as a wall. I referred earlier to how working on the problem of sexual harassment led me to my own act of feminist snap. Once it is heard that you are willing to hear, more people will speak to you. While a snap might seem to make the tongue the organ of feminist rebellion, perhaps snap is all about ears. A feminist ear can provide a release of a pressure valve. A feminist ear can be how you hear what is not being heard. (Ahmed, 2017a: 203)

> Methodological sensitivity is not an entirely human affair, and requires many eyes and ears – human and nonhuman – which can work with traces, gaps, absences, submerged narratives, and displaced actors in order to shape a form of mediated perception. (Blackman, 2007: 25)

In the rest of the paper, we explore Snap.tivism as one expression of the feminist snap, asking how a number of strangers were affectively rearranged to emerge as snap-allies within the timespan of a conversation. Since the categories of Ahmed connect multiple pasts and futures, we tried via the choice of methodology to

create a suspended present. The word 'present' captures both an interest into the voices of speakers, and the remembered 'present' of the snap-stories. When such suspension is possible, then the collective past(s) and future(s) expressed in a certain format can coalesce and thus be empirically examined as components of a broader transformation.

For the analysis of the conversation and shared spatiality of the Room, we attended primarily to – what we considered as – *affective dimensions* of Snap.tivism. We used a method that understands media technologies to take hold and further perceive *voice in its embodiment*, along with accompanying 'immediate, visceral, non-intentional ways in which bodies are conscripted by media' (Blackman, 2012: 18). This echoes the methodological sensitivity and the theoretical investment to try and *see* through somebody else's voice (or multiple simultaneous voices), focusing on those traumatic and triumphant stories, like the snaps, that cannot be put into words easily. Our approach draws on the work of feminist scholar Lisa Blackman. Blackman has developed an 'analytics of experimentation', which tunes into the inherited, yet forgotten, histories that express themselves in 'novel' and controversial research within the field of psychology (Blackman, 2014, 2012, 2007). Blackman's main focus lies with recovering these histories as active *genealogies* (sometimes expressed under the more recent term of *hauntology*[7]) and revisiting their importance for contemporary theorisation of subjectivity and affectivity. Throughout her work, genealogies are shown to mediate the contemporary arena of public contestation and its circulating sentiments (especially the expression of negative feelings). We apply *transmedial analysis* as one specific operationalisation of Blackman's much richer concept.

Transmedial analysis embarks on 'an attempt to explore precisely those carnal generational connections that exist genealogically but which cannot be articulated' (Blackman, 2012: 127). *Voices are taken to embody collective histories and collective tropes into coping with trauma* (Blackman, 2010). Thus, we argue that Blackman's analytics may come to a fruitful interface with Ahmed's concept of the 'feminist snap' and its two components. Both scholars have resisted bordering the subject of affect within a Cartesian mind-body duality or binding it down to bio- or neuro- matter (Ahmed, 2008). Two working assumptions are maintained in respect to the complicated nature of relationality vis-à-vis the body question. The first is that perception is always mediated. This means that it is

7 Blackman specifically draws inspiration from the work of Avery Gordon and Grace M. Cho, to speak of how '[e]mbodied hauntologies work with the traces, fragments, fleeting moments, gaps, absences, submerged narratives, and displaced actors and agencies that register affectively – in a profound sense that there is something more to say, that one should look for something more than now' (2007: 26).

found distributed across diverse *perceptive apparatuses* (with the human sensorium being one of those, but neither superior, nor exclusive). That is why narrating the findings appears as not entirely human affair. This becomes clear when tracing and pinning down *affectivity schemes*: main events, shifts and intensities are located at the intersections of different media representations and this is where powerful and/or insightful collective episodes *register*. The second assumption is that *affect does not pertain to movable and flowy qualities* that operate upon subjectivity and corporeality (with the latter two deemed as stable substrata). Ahmed has written extensively on ways to overcome both the inside-out and outside-in model of depicting emotional flow and against transmission (2013, 2010). Similarly Blackman's analytics offers an 'explor[ation of] different conceptions of affective exchange which do not presume flow' (2012: 23). For example, Blackman often captures the problem of affect by drawing on the persistence of the personality riddle: *how do we live singularity when confronted with all evidence, all powerful demonstration of multiplicity?* We contend that a careful reading of how affectivity schemes emerge and guide the analysis in this paper offers an analytical alternative to presumption of flow, movement or contagion, inspired by both Blackman and Ahmed.

Transmediality was possible due to the FAW! Organisers' recording of the event via diverse technologies (both electronic equipment, i.e. video and audio recorders; internet based tools and platforms; and office /education gear, i.e. blank poster-sheets and colourful material, ie. markers, post-its, drawing equipment). Consent, both concerning the recordings and the plans of the organisers to encourage study of such material and the potential widespread circulation of it, was obtained early on the first day at the first plenary session. On the matter of using specific quotations from the transcript we sought consent from the speakers (although not in a formalised manner) via our collective, social-media-based platform of staying in touch and coordination.

In an initial analytical round, we sought familiarity with the intensities of the conversation, the pace of each speaker, the patterns, the different media. To this end, the transcript and audio were analysed simultaneously, by playing the recording multiple times while following the writing in the form delivered by the transcriber (a person, not software). The transcript consists of 19 A4-pages and about 10.000 words. The audio is a 1 hour and 50 minutes M4A file. We performed four full-length recapitulations of the process without stopping the flow of the audio and just getting familiar with localisable moments where the two media *correspond well* or *diverge significantly*. Localisation means marking inside the transcript text an area with a note, adding the time-frame details from audio. Correspondence and divergence, in their use here, try to capture how different media-outcomes that report on the 'same', might still (in their internal

structure) end up *representing* differently 'one and the same' voice. This internal structure is taken to index each medium's *perceptiveness*, the particularly suggestive or inviting input an apparatus brings on *the table of analysis*.

After the above is achieved, the analyst has enough insight to 'navigate' specific voices and their role in a lasting event. Chunks of conversation start appearing as *self-contained*, they have a highly locatable start, an observable built-up, a crescendo/peak moment, and an end. We call this process the 'build-up(s)'. Three such processes were located and we used colours and symbols to demarcate them on a printed version of the transcript. Further work inside the build-ups focused on *omissions*, *paraphrases*, the use of *explanatory text* (inserted by the transcriber), the expression of *repetitive utterances* (speech act of same speaker) or *parroting* (speech acts of many). 'Omission' refers to the identification of an episode, which although clearly captured by the audio does not translate anyhow into the transcript (it does not apply to background noises not being transferred to the body of the text). 'Paraphrasis' refers to a differential insertion: most common are cases where the words used to express a thought have been substituted for synonyms or alternative phrasing. Here is also used when a singular input is found inserted in text but split across many voices, many 'Speakers' (capitalised when it names a voice). It does not refer to spelling or hearing mistakes (i.e. not recognising an academic term, or not understanding a name etc). 'Explanations' point to ways the transcriber mobilises interpretative skills, or gathers tension via other means around a voice or episode that ends up being 'explained'. 'Repetition' and 'parroting' refer to utterances that are clearly heard more than once in the audio but are expressed somehow singularly in the transcript. The latter also does not carry any judgment regarding the consciousness state of the speakers.

The final phase examines the resulting graphic representation of correspondence or divergence moments. Audio and transcript are chopped and reworked in smaller pieces (especially for re-working the build-ups down to their particular characteristics). By becoming the object of study, the build-ups helped to identify the particularities and perceptiveness of secondary media and their contribution. At that point the transcriber emerged as *a medium distinct from the product of her labour*. Actually, this extracted two types of mediations operating on the first pair of media (the axis 'audio:transcript'), the position 'transcriber' and the position 'analyst' (both of which are performative mediations; they do not correspond to the persons). They are of interest only in their isomorphism: 'transcriber' emerged through the labour the analyst was inserting, while the latter got implicated into the work of producing the transcription outcome, thus together forming the secondary axis of mediation 'transcriber:analyst'.

Finally, in the aftermath of the bulk volume of analysis (which was mostly carried out by the first author) all three authors were implicated in debating the results, doing necessary work complementary to ordering the observations, especially debating the choice of excerpts and the style of presentation. There are many ways to express the results that transmedial analysis yields. We decided on one that reports on the conversation as much as analysing it. Making apparent the uneasy co-existence of multiple mediations upon same text is an important facet of this work. Consequently, all excerpts were re-worked to make visible both the original transcription and parts of the analyst's comments on it. The latter uses brackets when omissions or commentary are inserted post- analysis, while all parentheses belong to the original transcript. Furthermore, the usage of lines that cut an excerpt to smaller pieces indicates the separate steps of a build-up. The transcriber's decision to alphabetically index voices was maintained and spans from Speaker A to Z5, but the identification at times of 'audience members' had to be corrected as there was no audience perspective to Snap.tivism. We strikethrough said identifications when appropriate and in this way the transcriber features as both a mediation maintained and cancelled.

Findings and observations: The characteristics of 'feminist snap' as a collective process

The following five points cover the full spectrum of observations stemming from the transmedial analysis. Their enumeration from #1-#5 serves the purpose of presenting first findings that touch upon more general theoretical arguments (#1 and #2) and then de-escalate to the intricacies of specific moments of interest. We draw heavily on the audio/transcript at every observation, yet complement that with analytical points going back to the theoretical categories and making explicit how affectivity schemes appear at each observation, before turning to the conclusion we draw for each.

Observation #1. The 'feminist snap' both feels and thinks

We start with an illustrative argument for how feminists always already start *in the aftermath* of snap experience, with a condition of unavailability – of narrative, of motivation, or emotional readiness. The first task of the encounter then appears to be the collective forging of a snap-specific lexicon, the matrix to imagine and then realise emergent connections inside the Room, which obviously were not there beforehand. Specifically, we examine the introductory minutes into the plenary part of Snap.tivism:

SLM: ok I will try to see if we can get this somehow in plenum without completely losing momentum [many giggles and sudden scratching noises] So

sorry if I'm disturbing [13s of chairs being dragged] see, even the room kind of changes [unintelligible] when we do it like this and sit around the table. Does anyone want to chair?

What did you talk about? [more laughs]

[Omitted **Speaker A**: We had a really good chat up here… and I say that on behalf of all of us]

Speaker A: One thing that we reflected on after sharing our snaps was that we also had really a lot of potential snaps they didn't make out of our mouth and how we feel so much pressure to sort of snap effectively and your post-snap reflection can be really difficult [omitted: in your own brain] and wish you had articulated certain things for certain effects uhm and sometimes we have the energy in the context to think about it in the moment, sometimes it is afterwards and sometimes there is not any thought because you're so angry… and so there were sort of many levels to our snaps.

Speaker B: yeah we talked about things we negotiate in the moment, our position in the space and ourselves and what kind of relationship to the persons [omitted: in the room] and the relation to the person we are snapping at, also the construction [correction: -iveness] of the snapping in the first place, will they even get what you say? will you make an impact and also how safe the space is?

[Sudden keyboard clicking sounds]

~~**Audience member**~~ [substituted by: Speaker L in low voice]: whether you have snap allies

SLM: say it again

~~**Audience member**~~ [Speaker L louder]: what one would call snap allies

SLM: oh yeah… because that makes a huge difference, because snapping alone is a difficult one

Audience members: collective Snaps [this repeats three times]

Everyone laughing

(Audio: 40m42s-41m18s; transcript: 2)

As a text, this excerpt sits prominently at the start of the transcript stretching across the A4 surface, while in the audio file, the same part is an almost imperceptible 1m36s, located already 40 minutes into the discussion. Reason for this significant discrepancy between how the two media mark the beginning of the plenary is the non-transcribability of the small groups' part. From the point of view of the analyst, in the textual representation (transcript), there is nothing to be heard and written before the group discussions are over. On the contrary, the audio demands 40 noisy minutes of full attention. Listening through is tedious yet at times rewarding: sudden shouts, laughs or silences punctuate a homogeneous noise, certain terms and references clearly heard, the surprise of recognising familiar voices etc. The text 'spares' one from this mess, as transcription starts with the plenary. At the same time, this remarkable omission does not do anybody any favours: it does not allow for understanding the specific labour or involvement of the transcriber:analyst working with this particular material, for example while waiting for the noise to settle and the job to start on the text. With this sentiment in mind, of one that had to go through a long-lasting yet 'unproductive' sensory event (here, imagining the frustration or relief of the transcriber:analyst at the end of 40min of being attentive in the face of unintelligible noise), we proceed to a close examination of the 'switch' moment.

Many stories, as well as personal and collective pasts, have already entered the Room in the 40 minutes of unintelligible noise. Yet the plenary initiates in the aftermath of recounting those, of which only a ghostly presence became textually available to us. Speaker A opens the plenum reporting on her group's 'post-snap reflection'. We always already start in the *'post-snap reflection'*, in a direct confrontation with the leftover tensions, consequences and questions. Stories and their content is fixed and unavailable inside the unintelligible audio, not only for the transcriber:analyst, but apparently for the speakers as well. Then the discussion turns from reflection towards a sudden, first collective insight: *snapping alone is a difficult one →thus, 3 times of collective snaps* (twice in a very low voice and one final loud voice establishing the term as available for the Room). A certain affectivity emerges in relation to the Room, schematically 'mirroring' the Room:

Enduring an overwhelming sensory event // starting the real work in its aftermath

(Schematic representation)

This schema both touches upon the experience of the axis transcriber:analyst and captures the first lesson drawn inside the Room. Drawn in thinking, drawn in feeling. Neither of these qualities is privileged. There is no fixed priority and no

determinism. We view the schema as a companion to Ahmed's reminder that the snap is not the starting point: we begin with the aftermath, because it is all we are left with. The content of a violent episode might be 'too overwhelming to process' (Ahmed, 2017a: 23) yet as Speaker B suggests 'sometimes we have the energy in the context [of the snap] to think about it in the moment, sometimes it is afterwards and sometimes there is not any thought because you're so angry...'

These voices capture how participants in Snap.tivism neither start with similar readiness to tackle haunting memories, nor do all share personal stories. Some might not have a narrative available, some might have produced concrete framings regarding the past. Nevertheless, we meet one another *in the aftermath*, meaning we meet one another where it hurts. Three haunting questions are eventually posed – 'Will they get what you say? Will you make an impact and how safe [is] the space?' These questions quickly provoke the 'snap allies' term and the idea of 'collective snaps'. The transcriber also appears to have practically debated how to represent what was taking place at the exact moment of lexicon generation (a debate that creeps into the transcription when an enunciation is made more than once, i.e. when the bold font does not extend to the pluralising -s in '**audience member**s'). Overall, at the moment of switching format, the Room proceeds to generate the lexicon (terms and their connections), which accompanied the conversation from that point on. The transformations in our feelings and thinkings that followed the introductory moment become apparent in observations #3, #4 and #5.

Observation #2. The build-up and ending of the 'feminist snap'

The plenary conversation appears not to rely so much in similarity of opinion, subscription to a certain flavour of feminism or use of rhetorics. Rather, speakers offer *words-in-progress* – a vulnerable conversational mode that neither seeks a fixed position for the speaker, nor is polemical in its juxtapositions. Furthermore, speakers take conversational turns in unmoderated fashion and make use of a short and symmetrical amount of time. The collective pace and rhythm allow for observing the build-up of a process that is parallel to the inputs and yet autonomous in its trajectory. This might be specific to the Snap.tivism format, which relies so much in shared words and physical spatiality, and in the following observations we use it to imagine further the distributive nature and rearrangeability of Snap.tivism and its words-in-progress.

The analysis recovered three such build-ups (actually 2 and a half, because time pressure forced an early and external end to the 3rd). We label those from here on either as fms1, 2, 3, or 'build-ups'.

The common characteristics of all three build-ups are the following: 1) structured around one (vocal) automatism that surrounds the inputs and escalates with time, 2) one discursive theme being unpacked and 3) the generation and repetition of playful snap lexicon. These elements support one another by building up from scratch feminist snaps, while facilitate each reaching its peak, showing its potential and confront its limitations. Indeed, we argue that fms1+2+3 start, develop and eventually end at the intersection of feminist pedagogy and feminist genealogy, when feminist hope is achieved simultaneously to the realisation of the inevitability of future snaps (observations #3, #4, #5 explore each build-up in detail and show what happens at the final intersection).

Observation #3: The anti-snap. Recalling the experience – transforming the relation

From 42m51s until 46m50s the second collective lesson drawn in the Room takes place: the *anti-snap* (at 46m11s -12s. omitted from transcript). This lesson is drawn in a similar fashion as the lexicon generation of observation #1: repetitive enunciations from low voice to louder voice and a burst of laughter all around. We understand the anti-snap as a catalytic moment in which the speakers manage to reverse the negative relation to past snap experiences. The anti-snap is at the heart of fms1.

Fms1 is a good example to demonstrate how the 'distributed subjectivity' and 'perceptive trajectory' (as argued in the theory section) are expressed in the Room. It builds on 'laughter' as a workable proposal and laughter as the little automatisms shared in the Room. In a few words in those 4 minutes, we laugh, at times excessively, and we rework how to relate to past and future snaps, via trying out *different styles of laughter*.

SLM: you haven't had good snaps?

Speaker C: no really bad [soft giggle]

SLM: I have had good snaps

Speaker C: no I think most of the times I've challenged people [omitted: I have taken away] feeling worse than empowered

SLM: is it because you were alone then? Because that's the snap allies coming in here

Speaker C: maybe but I also think I have gotten fear of not being articulate enough, not representing the position well enough

[Long pause]

[___(1)__first feminist snap starts building-up about here____]

yeah I think ~~I understand~~ [as I was saying] [unintelligible] take most things with humor and now I'm really repositioning myself on things that have happened and I'm really uhm annoyed at myself for laughing it off and not snapping, you know

SLM: but I recognise that, because sometimes when I snap especially because it is in an affective moment I don't get to be explained properly so if I would have written it

Audience member: and then you spend the whole day afternoon thinking things you could have said

SLM: I could have said something really, really good to that person but when I snap you know verbally you get into a position where it gets too complex to get the argument across and afterwards you regret if you didn't formulate it differently because then that would have made the snaps more effective

Speaker D: [omitted: I might even say something like] when you are talking to people and then taking a step back you can say 'I'm not going to educate you'

Speaker E: because sometimes you are in that situation where somebody is enjoying your agony [...] you know it's exhausting and it's very hard when your politics are so close to you like that. Sometimes it is just best not to exhaust yourself like that and just say 'let's take a minute to agree to disagree' and not engage in this

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[omitted: 2 x the anti-snap
followed by slowly rising in intensity laughs]

Speaker F: do you think there is space [pause] you were talking about

Speaker E: [omitted: politics put pressure] to be articulate constantly I would imagine that

Speaker F: do you think there is space for the 'inarticulate snap'? Because my favourite snap was really inarticulate, it was originally a response to someone who said something very inappropriate and I think it actually worked because it

really was direct and inarticulate. You think there is space for that? It was not totally inarticulate, I said what I wanted to say in 10 words (laughing)

Speaker G: I think there is space because when you become inarticulate you are showing like the force of your affective reaction to it you're showing force how you feel about it so I think it can work

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker k softly]: like if you punch someone for example

Everybody laughing

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker E]: Sometimes it is the only way

Speaker G: you were saying something?

Speaker J: no I was just wondering if laughter counts as being not articulate because I often find it liberating when Alison Pullen[8] for instance, she has this tendency if somebody is saying something that's really absurd she's laughing

[omitted **SLM:** like the whole room can hear it]

Speaker J: [resumes] ...excessively so and then I start laughing as well because it just seems so absurd and I don't know if the person is picking it up but at least for me it feels liberating that 'ok, I know that somebody is agreeing with me that this is absurd right now', yeah

____[omitted: **Speaker E** (very softly): oh that was a really good point]_____

Speaker G: that was interesting because there was like the problematic feeling of having laughed something off when maybe we could have dealt with it but laughter can be something powerful, highlighting the absurd

SLM: but you also talked about laughing it off so not engaging in it but just go like ha ha ha

[= this 'ha ha ha' is an ironic, cold laughter]

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker C]: or more like as a defence mechanism as well, so I don't have to dwell on it

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8 Many thanks to our snap ally, Alison Pullen, who read and commented on the early draft of the paper and gave consent to mentioning her name. For details on Alison's work see. https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/ .

[omitted: sometimes it is powerful,

yes it is powerful,

powerful]

Speaker H: sometimes it is funny but sometimes it is horrible at these levels I think things are so nuanced

SLM: yeah because what else she does is if there is a lecture hall and then there is someone saying something really absurd you go ha ha ha

[= this laughter follows the inflation and intensity of what is commonly referred to as the 'wicked laugh'[9], Ahhaha]

[the transcriber explains:] *Everybody agreeing and laughing*

[actually some are imitating the 'wicked laugh' while everybody else burst into excessive laughter and giggles]

~~**Audience member**~~ **[Speaker E]**: I think there is an amazing interview with (unintelligible) where she goes like 'haha how absurd'(=this 'haha' is loud, excessive and connected in one breath with the 'how', i.e. HaHa*HowAbsurd*)

Everybody laughing [specifically = many wicked laughs]

SLM: yeah something like that, and we're always punished for our piercing voices so maybe we can use them for something

Speaker I: just a comment. Maybe the question is not whether there is any space for not being articulate but [...] actually there are occasions that are not worthy of our articulations, because when you're articulating something you already put so much mental and emotional labour, there are so many conventions and negotiations happening just by the way you arrange one word after the other, in speech or in paper. What if something is totally unworthy of our articulations and we just have the right to laugh it out loud?

(Audio: 42m51s-49m20s; transcript: 2-5)

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9 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evil_laughter.

It might not come as a surprise that speakers initially relate to past snaps in a *negative way*. Whether felt or remembered, and not explicitly mentioned in the conversation, we talk of 'bad snaps', 'passive positions', we use subjunctive speech: 'if only I would have written my snap', 'then spend the whole afternoon thinking things you could have said', 'I could have said something really, really good'. As explored in observation #1, the conversation starts in the aftermath of the snap experience, so that is where the fms1 stems from: a place of *guilt* for having laughed it off, *insecurity* for not being able to speak eloquently and *exhaustion* for always engaging in dead–end fights. These sensations are magnified by the mere recollection of previous experience and suffering.

The first major change comes in creating the term 'anti-snap'. It creates a paradigmatic 'before and after' event that situates the conversation strongly in relation to it. The negative feelings are expressed before it, but there are no indications of shame or guilt after the anti-snap, no sentences in the subjunctive, no lonely giggles. Let's follow how:

The anti-snap emerges out of the 'exhaustion' comment of Speaker E, succeeded by the provocative question on the 'space for the inarticulate snap'. Speaker F and E are heard by the transcriber as intertwined inputs:

[omitted: 2 x the anti-snap
followed by slowly rising in intensity laughs]

Speaker F: do you think there is space [pause] you were talking about

Speaker E: [omitted: how politics put pressure] to be articulate constantly, I would imagine that

Speaker F: do you think there is space for the 'inarticulate snap'? because my favourite snap was really inarticulate

This is *one voice speaking,* yet heard as the words of two. Technically it is 'Speaker F', self-interrupting her own sentence, before re-formulating the question. We suggest what is being registered here is a reversal in the relation to the snap experience. It moves from a negative relation to the snap experience towards negating the snap (in creating the option of anti-snap) for the possibility to relate otherwise: claiming a relation to the labours of speech-acts ('not worthy of our articulations', 'I said what I wanted to say in 10 words', 'HaHa*HowAbsurd*'), from passivity to forming 'active' decisions ('not going to educate you', 'punching someone', 'laughter can be something powerful, highlighting the absurd'). The anti-snap introduces a necessary relief. We have more leeway in how we relate to

the snap and it does not include only negative affective registers (shame, guilt, pain, loneliness, humiliation etc). It is further accompanied by a subsequent collective 'release' that is expressed in the combination of the in/articulation theme and spurs of excessive laughing. The latter is of course *co-ordinated* in different laughing proposals (the ironic and deflating cold laughter, the adoption and rehearsal of the wicked laugh, the gratifying collective laugh[10]).

The way laughter is coordinated inside the Room renders available to analysis another schema of affectivity at play: the speakers proceed from thinking about previous snaps to imagining future ones as both possible and positive scenarios, via means of a schema, which is symmetrical to the Room and to the anti-snap. It speaks *of another woman, in another room, doing something recognisable and desirable to us all*. In detail, it starts taking shape from the moment Speaker J opens what will become the 'wicked laughter proposal' and builds-up to its adoption/rehearsal a few lines down the transcript. Speaker J mentions how it feels *liberating for her when another (Alison Pullen):*

> has this tendency if somebody is saying something that's really absurd she's laughing excessively so and then I start laughing as well because it just seems so absurd and I don't know if the person is picking it up but at least for me it feels liberating that ok I know that somebody is agreeing with me that this is absurd right now.

The liberation that Speaker J invests in, we argue, stems from the point of view of somebody witnessing another woman, another's response, not following necessarily on her footsteps but taking comfort in a companionship of sorts where 'somebody is agreeing with me'. We are still in the anti-snap phase, where our words negate the snap experience. We pointed out in the theory section how the snap has no 'audience perspective' and here it becomes clear how distribution (think the symmetry between the Room with the 'whole room [that] can hear her') and the rearrangement of perception (from total negation to collectively rehearsing future wicked laughter) unfolds in conversation. Imagination and recognition are important here to turn around the terms of the relation. Via means of laughing a powerful laughter, we escape the negative relation to the snap. The reversal opens up a whole collective *thinking through* session:

______[omitted: **Speaker E** (very softly): oh that was a really good point]______

10 This takes place a bit later (49m32-35s; 49m42-46s).

Speaker G: that was interesting because there was like the problematic feeling of having laughed something off when maybe we could have dealt with it but laughter can be something powerful, highlighting the absurd

SLM: but you also talked about laughing it off so not engaging in it but just go like ha ha ha

[= this 'ha ha ha' is an ironic, cold laughter]

~~**Audience member**~~ **[Speaker C]**: or more like as a defence mechanism as well, so I don't have to dwell on it

[omitted: **softly all around**: but sometimes it is powerful

yes it is powerful

powerful]

Speaker H: sometimes it's funny but sometimes it's horrible at these levels I think things are so nuanced

Speakers E, C, SLM, G do not offer words of agreement with one another here. We see a trajectory of thought shaping up where every step is a sentence. These sentences collect all available proposals that have fallen on the conversation so far. Its content reads both as a recapitulation of what was mentioned before the anti-snap and what became afterwards, with a special focus to what laughter has been before and after. Speakers associate with one another's words as words-in-progress, to slowly approach a collective formulation; hence, collective pedagogy session for *recalling the experience – transforming the relation*. The total release from any reservations comes when it is pointed out how 'if there is a lecture hall and then there is someone saying something really absurd you go ha ha ha (wicked laugh)'. In its symmetry, this schema includes: 1) the imagination of a loud, public feminist intervention (wicked laughter), 2) in a setting familiar to all of us (a lecture hall), 3) in a situation familiar to us (witnessing the absurd in speech acts), 4) in a setting where we are not alone ('someone is agreeing with me'). In order to achieve both the reversal of relation and the trajectory of thought, the speakers associate with one another's words by unpacking the theme of laughter (laughing something off →laughing as witnessing another's response →laughing together and well against absurdity). At the same time the 'unpacking' is constantly encouraged by little automatisms (here in a laughter form) of accumulated volume and intensity: from speaker's lonely giggle →ironic, cold laughter →collective wicked laugh. Between 48m26s-48m38s the Room is buzzing with loud, wicked laughter. This is the crescendo of the build-up for the

fms1. From there on, two speakers register a similar opinion that practically remarks how our time, our labour, is to be valued: 'there are occasions that are not worthy of our articulations' and 'if someone says something, you hand them a card saying "here are some recommended readings"'.

Fms1 comes to an end at exactly 50m37s –there is no dramatic exit and no disagreement, just a reminder for moments when laughter cannot offer a powerful escape. After a cycle of loud laughter, Speaker k registers from a low, very low voice. And changes everything:

Speaker k: I think that's a great response but sometimes it is microaggressions that cut a little too close and too deep, and they can be produced from family politics and then you just have no choice but to repeat the same argument and the same debate over and over again

(audio: 49m52s; transcript: 5)

The change that Speaker k introduces was evident from the very first round of studying the audio file. It is heard in the low voice that contrasts with the previously established among speakers 'high pitch', sarcastic tone and slower rhythm. It is heard in the long pause (4 long breaths) after she finished talking. It is felt in the sadness registering in the voice and the specific words she spoke (the authors all specifically remembered this particular input). All of the above plays a role in hearing a sudden shift in the conversation and its accompanied automatisms. Moreover, one eventually traces the change that has been registered via another means: the transcriber inserts for the first time a speaker in a minor (not capital letter) – Speaker *'minor k'* (Transcript: 5). This is a coincidence, yet this is exactly the sort of suggestive mediations one works with, when engaged with transmedial analysis. Something unique happened at that exact input, towards which all media somehow register a reaction. There is no other minor letter case Speaker throughout the text and after further analysis recovered the exact build-ups regarding fms1 and fms2, minor k became the meeting point for all involved perceptive apparatuses as it stands in a transition from fms1 towards fms2.

On inquiring the conditions of a fms' end, we argue that Speaker 'minor k' not only demonstrates the inescapability of future snaps via laughter, but also touches on a key point that haunts the Room and our imaginations:

> At times you just have no choice but to repeat the same argument and the same debate over and over again 'I said this because that, what aspect do you want to look it at from, yes we can rehearse it all over again'

This haunting sentiment maintains and repeats itself via other voices. Interestingly it does not acquire a name or a description. At 56m35s, SLM openly associates back to 'minor k':

> also what *you* were talking about – you know – about coming home and trying to – you know – do we need to have this conversation again? [emphasis added]

or at 1h10m46s, Speaker X uses the trope to narrate an important snap incident in her life:

> I was so pissed off by having what *you* were saying the same conversation are we going to have it now or are we going to have it later or after dinner or I don't want to care anymore [emphasis added]

Speaker 'minor k', from then on, embodies the point that gets no name (what *you* were talking about, what *you* were saying).

Overall, in the first documented build-up, we showed how a collective recollection of snap experience is transformative in terms of the emotional and educational content one attributes to it. We followed the effort of a group of voices to engage and unpack a certain proposal, the satisfaction that is drawn at break-through moments and the realisation of how far this response might take the group. The anti-snap not only reached its potential, but in its ending offered the grounds for the next build-up – which engages the input of Speaker 'minor k'.

Observation #4: The snap-by-proxy. Cues of recognition – matters of non-existence

~~Melene~~ (Speaker I): ok some of the previous thoughts made me realise also that there is some sort of 'literacy' in recognising our own snaps or recognising other people snapping

(Audio: 01h02m49s; transcript: 8)

The build-up towards fms2 touches upon issues of snap literacy and how to recognise one another in our vulnerable and explosive moments. It is another illustrative example of how the 'feminist snap' develops by drawing on past experience and future inescapability. This time the collective thinking process concerns inequality, with the most available case study being 'life in the Academia'. Discussing Academia (the work environment for most speakers) features its own automatism: if only we could count the number of 'hmmm(s)' and 'yeahs' between 1h00m07s until its spectacular end at 1h10m04s.

Inequality in Academia is discussed through a series of stories and examples (in a 10 minute slot, 8 stories and 3 general comments are shared). All pointing to the absurd frequency and force of sexist and violent behaviours we have to deal with on a daily basis. In academic (work) contexts, who may snap and from what positions? This question is at the heart of fms2.

Speaker Q: I sometimes choose to snap for someone else. You can see the other one is actually snapping but doesn't dare or for some other reason sort of doesn't do anything and then I was like 'I will, I have nothing to lose' (laughing) I don't know actually if it's a good or bad thing, sometimes it might be good because at times things need to be articulated and said out loud, but sometimes it does diminish the person who didn't snap [unintelligible] vulnerability, I don't know [omitted: perhaps it stands as example, next time you dare to snap yourself] but I particularly recognise in work related situations that this is what I do, it's not necessarily that I am offended, but somebody needs to say it out loud so I will

[All around: hm, uhm, hm, hm, Yeah, hm, hm, hm]

Speaker G: For example in academic circles, like PhD students and young researchers are in more precarious situations, like when I see people snapping on behalf of their, not many people are willing to do that but the few who do that we are so grateful

Everybody agreeing [with 'yeah' and with 'hmm']

Speaker R: In that situation and context it's an act of solidarity. I can't tell you the amount of times I have been [unintelligible] at my PhD, wishing that someone would come and back me up, like the thing being recognised so it is not great behaviour [if you are at the periphery] I think in that context it's good, but I guess maybe it's about acknowledging the snap by proxy to the person as well, so they are included and they know that you knew that they were feeling quite [unintelligible]

Speaker G: we need like a handshake,

Speaker Y: or code

[yeah, yeah and awkward laughs]

[Omitted: several suggestions for candidate gestures]

Audience member [Speaker Q]: or like a wink

(Audio: 1h05m14s-1h07m13s; transcript: 9)

The snap-by-proxy proposal debates matters of recognition and solidarity. It builds onto thoughts and ideas regarding a shared code or gestures for all snappy people out there: give us a wink, a certain handshake, show your symptoms of suffering the same pain. 'Perhaps we could even have these conversations beforehand' (audio: 1h07m17s). Throughout its build-up, fms2 dares to imagine an activism attuned to snap, futures of preparedness and more 'effective' responses than mere outbursts, which make its ending all the more intense for the participants.

At the end of this build-up, it is Speaker V and the suggestion that perhaps the Room should consider the issue of academic existence/non-existence as pertaining to a more fundamental question:

Speaker V: But, [what you described] is directed to both male and female so it is not that question, or might be more important to ask – you know – what kind of research is valid research, so not 'who' is it being conducted by necessarily. I find, what you said about storytelling as political practice that might not resonate with a department of Politics and Philosophy, regardless of who is conducting the research and that I think unfolds a whole culture of legitimising specific spheres more than others or how they are conducted and that kind-of roots the idea beyond the binary, idea of gender or a quality as being the end of feminist strategy

[_____________Shift to another question_____________]

[__________fms3 starts here__________]

Speaker W: also maybe I wanted to ask everyone about our snaps when they become really vulgar and ridiculous and violent is there anything that can be said from what we mythicise as a radical feminist or whether there are any points where such a response could say something or is it always you think patriarchal tools because you resort into violence?

(Audio: 1h09m20s-1h10m37s; transcript: 10)

At this excerpt, there is an attribution of double Speaker identity to a singular voice, even though there is no pause, no interference in how the audio has captured this voice. Similarly to the occurrence of a minor letter to designate a Speaker, this is an exceptional episode, which manages to cut across different media, marking the end of fms2 and the beginning of fms3. W's question inquires over the possibility of claiming for ourselves both feminist rage and

vulgarity. This is the only moment inside the Room that snap experience, not its aftermath, is so central and so prominent. In contrast to the pausing effect Speaker 'minor k' had before, this time the immediate pivoting question leaves zero time for coming to terms with Speaker V's proposal. Our conversation transcript features only one narration of a snap experience per se and this particular voice appears right after speaker W. The transcriber inserts right next to Speaker's name a unique explanatory sentence: ((speaker shares her experience)). Indeed, it is one full episode, with all its intensity, feelings, magnification of senses and all sort of details mixing issues big and small, speaking of the shame and frustration that accompany feminist rage. This results in a number of felt tensions that culminate during the fms3.

Overall, the snap-by-proxy builds on aspirations to both commit to snap experience, while also avoiding it, preparing for it, even escaping from it. V's assertion, which points to the inescapability of our institutional positioning (no matter the literacy and recognition cues), hits the Room with the unanticipated force of collective realisation.

Observation #5: Technologies of snap. Possible futures – alternative archives

[Omitted **Speaker C:** I love that name Snap.tivism, like snapping on behalf of others when we feel that is the right thing to do]

[silence for 5s]

SLM: what else shall we do?

[longest silence throughout the conversation: 11s]

~~**Audience member**~~ **(Speaker L):** [omitted: maybe try not to punish ourselves too much for our snaps, we talked on how harsh is the post reflection for each, sometimes] I think life is not perfect, it's not that you get to revise and resubmit your conversations, so it might be nice for the times you snapped to be less harsh on yourself

(Audio:1h29m44s-1h30m34s; transcript: 16)

With the name 'technologies of snap' we introduce the last part of our conversation, which was interrupted due to time constraints, but still managed to build itself up quite significantly. Listening through the transcript, at first it feels like a light conversation on several artefacts that we can create or at least consider to make our snap experiences more successful, more collective, less painful, less scary. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the excerpt above, there were also pauses of

silence and moments of dissociation. This dual response of brainstorming and silence is pertinent to our final observation. Especially in the manner it indexes a deep recollection of self-help, self-empowerment practice. 'Maybe try not to punish ourselves too much for our snaps'. We note that no specific automatism guides or invigorates this build-up. Instead we contend that brainstorming (specifically on technological means and artefacts) *takes exactly this role*. It felt repetitive and 'hungry' (not greedy, but for sure needy), like building a survival kit or to-do list (Do this, do that, or that etc.), where 'everything goes' as far as tools are concerned. Moreover, the speakers do not debate in any depth the technological proposals; they are weaving them onto the surface of the conversation. And they remain on the surface (meaning we do not debate the terms and commitment of certain choices versus other etc.), until *a contrasting association* regarding what is to be done for future snaps builds a direct bridge with intimate and personal statements on past events. In observation #5 we examine the surface and the hidden depths of the last build-up, and propose to see the 'bridge', the contrast as our Snap.tivist *archival* collection.

A number of practical ideas, artefacts, art and activism projects, media platforms and self-help recipes were mentioned in the Room. In terms of solutions, the most prominent of these related to a discussion on archiving practices. Prominent because more than one proposal touches on archiving. Let's take the following case in point:

~~Melene~~ [Speaker I]: one possible practice would be like a real appreciation of the work of repetition because affective experiences are re-lived and hit us in the face with same exact intensity and are totally [un]controllable, so like really appreciating repetition means organising it it's really crucial [...]

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker M]: you were also saying like 'every day feminist' what it's called?

[4 Speakers repeat 'everyday sexism']

Speaker G: everyday sexism

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker M]: yeah yeah exactly, that's appreciation of repetition and also archiving the feminist female experience of sexism in everyday experiences

Speaker G: [a colleague, Ulrike Marx[11]] in our discipline she was talking about [long pause] she was doing a paper, she is a critical accountant who's talking about the 'everyday sexism project' as a way of accounting across institutions, yeah it's really good, so we have not got any economists but we have got an accountant

~~Audience member~~ [Speaker I]: but how does this practice look like?

Speaker G: it's just the 'everyday sexism project' so that way of collecting stories, but [Ulrike]'s talking about it as a way of accounting [for feminism and against harassment]

(Audio: 1h26m46s-1h29m18s; transcript: 15-16)

A central facet emerges regarding the ways personal experiences are transformed while discussing alternative snap futures and technologies. It manifests in the fms3 via a unique conversational pattern: speakers 'throw on the table' ideas and proposals for the development of future snap-artefacts (see excerpt on 'the resource' below), but in their discursive formulations they do not go into details regarding these technologies. The expressed inventiveness is excessive and guides the conversation, the way laughter had done at observation #3. And it is followed by longer than usual pauses, where a perceptive pivot takes place: via means of reference to an artefact, art project or network each Speaker jumps directly to revisiting a past experience, to reliving how it felt.

Speaker Z3: [omitted: the person I interviewed on hysteria runs] a martial arts class for women and non-binary people and it's amazing, it's called ~~Charlie~~ Shadow sisters and she kind of talks about sometimes that being

[she pauses for 4s. Something changes]

I think it's a really hard one because I always like 'the idea' of the snap, but the bodily response that I know as a queer woman when I've been assaulted in the street, that is completely crippling, and my snap in like the most severe cases was calling the police a few days later and even that for me was like a resistance thing to be even like *no that was not ok* and *I'm going to try and do something about it*

(Audio: 1h35m39s; transcript: 17)

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11 Many thanks to our snap ally, Ulrike Marx for reading the early draft and permitting us to mention her full name. For details on her work, see: https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/business/people/academic/ulrike-marx.

We do not take these words as forming a sort of confessional testimony (the Foucauldian truthful subjectivity does not lie within the magnified and hyper-registering sensorium of the fms3). The long pause of Speaker Z3 captures that point precisely. She starts re-considering the hysteria proposal as talk of empowerment and as offered by her interviewee, to then suddenly awaken to her own 'crippling' body testimony. The contrast continues between feelings of safety/companionship (by talking on the standardised, sharable, controllable) to feelings of the visceral, the instinctual, the paralysis (by talking on 'fight or flight response', hysteria, unproductive reactions). This way of creating sentences and feeding into the conversation allows for a collective perception to open up and become available for analysis.

Specifically, the fms3 is concerned with re-working the relationalities between strength and armour. Many options are suggested and are momentarily endorsed or at least celebrated:

Speaker G: [...] having a document just to share those and then some kind of response that might not be a snap it might not be as snappy as a snap but just like a quick way of dealing with it so it doesn't derail the whole experience like actually sharing the classic ones that we get all the time and having to come up with answers ourselves individually too

Audience member: like a snap resource

Everybody laughing

Speaker G: yeah like a spreadsheet because I was going to do within our network so maybe we could combine forces and just share it because it would save us so much energy if we just collectively came up with these ways of dealing with it quickly so we can get on with what we're going to say

[**several omissions in the transcript here**: Proposals how to collect, measure, standardise the snap package: *Resource, Spreadsheet, Manual, Dictionary, Glossary, CBT manual*]

[**Speaker Z2**: That is like a cognitive behavioural training manual: 'you'd better be conscious, you'd better be level headed, and do not forget the resource, always look into the resource before you snap']

Speaker Z2: [omitted: I wish it was that easy, but at least from my responses] there were moments where I felt I didn't snap hard enough, oh I wish I had that to go to

(Audio: 1h32m56s-1h33m15s; Transcript: 16-17)

Indeed, although some provocative ideas, like the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) manual, are positively responded to, they also come with a layer of irony and pain registering in the voices: 'you'd better be conscious, you'd better be level headed, and do not forget the resource, always look into the resource before you snap'. The technological options we considered give form and stabilise ways we work through the felt tensions in a collective *looking backwards* that meets its complementary mode in *looking forwards* to the inevitability of future snapping. Silence and long pauses open up the speakers to experience made excessive by suffering and trauma; in envisioning a future of 'snap allies', 'snap manuals' or 'snap CBT' the voices are seen to also look backwards at times in which these resources could have, might have, would have helped. They capture the affective-semiotic-material instructions for future Snap.tivists.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we provide a working model and outline key characteristics regarding Sara Ahmed's 'feminist snap', attending to its *thinkings* and *feelings* in equal measure. Our theoretical part focused on Ahmed's examination of the snap, but also further supported a theoretical elaboration on the feminist pedagogy and feminist genealogy categories via means of presenting how both intervene on the distribution of suffering and re-arrangement of perception during the snap's realisation (as in becoming real, becoming collective) process.

Through transmedial analysis, inspired by the work of Lisa Blackman, we were able to reach in minute detail what feminist voices embody and how they strive to rearrange experience in relation to the two categories of interest – feminist pedagogy and genealogy. We created and worked on an affective-semiotic-material 'map' of the Room, drawing insights from the pace, intensity, and affectivity patterns therein located. Although haunted by negatively charged memories and experiences, through the collective process and the associative patterns of the speakers' voices, Snap.tivism as a conversational format was found to intensify the volume and mutate the registers of what Blackman calls 'embodied hauntologies'.

The findings and observations section contains a detailed account of the most insightful episodes stemming from the transmedial analysis of the Room. At first, we demonstrate ways that the temporality of snap experiences plays out in relation to the Room. Especially how different media locate the 'beginnings' of the conversation at significantly diverging points in time and in space. We use

this discrepancy to rethink Ahmed's reminder of the snap not being a start in itself, and to observe how collective lessons are drawn in its aftermath. At Observation #2, we offer an overview of the 'feminist snap' as expressed in the Snap.tivism conversation. We draw out its processual character and internal ingredients, in what we termed the fms1+2+3 'build-ups'. This overview touches upon the theoretical provocations of snap subjectivity: considering how media attribute identity to speakers, split voices in more than one personality, render certain voices superior to others, seek out 'to explain' some reactions, etc.

By Observation #3 we take the space to present the full-blown build-up of fms1 in minute detail. We follow how via repetitive automatisms and the examination of a singular topic the 'feminist snap' is redistributing negative feelings and rearranges the given pasts, familiar presents and available futures in the anti-snap proposal. We draw on the inner workings of a symmetrical affectivity playing out via means of collective imagination and imitation/rehearsal. The lessons drawn in fms1 become the basis for the next build-up, as explored in observation #4. Here we get even closer to the speakers' familiar, snap-worthy environments, i.e. Academia, and pursue patterns of recognition and snap solidarity on a day-to-day basis. The analysis of this part highlights how our literal non-existence (the cancellation of our credibility; the violence of rigid structures) in certain institutions gets navigated by *doing collectivity*. Finally, Observation #5 takes the opening of available futures and the recognisable patterns of the previous two build-ups as starting points for looking backwards, revisiting hurtful pasts and seeking to archive them as the bulletproof armour for future snaps. The affectivity in this process expresses itself in the form of a relationship: investment in feelings of safety and control, in order to find courage in the Room and revisit a haunting past. The temporalities of the personal snaps give the workable components to tweak, to shift perception as a collective stake.

Overall, we sought to suspend the elusive 'present' of the Room, in order to examine in detail how the 'feminist snap' expresses itself in connection and in education. We discovered ways that we – as speakers and via conversational modes – took stock of past situations and complex emotional states before looking forwards to a future where we are available to others as snap.tivists. We stayed as close to Ahmed's proposal as possible to seek in our voices' embodiments the distribution across a queer 'genealogy, unfolding as an alternative family line' and the rearrangement of burdens and pleasures of our 'feminist inheritance' (Ahmed, 2017a: 192). For such purposes, we also had to trust Blackman's method in order to create a more pluralistic and suggestive account for what Snap.tivism might be about (beyond our own memories and personal lessons). This has been part of a greater 'feminist communication system' (Ahmed, 2017a: 211) and we are proud and grateful at the end of this

journey. We invite all you possible snap.tivists out there to 'give space' to snap experiences and experiment with the format and terminology offered here. Sharpen your recognition cues, work out your snap gestures and do not despair: at the end of a 'feminist snap' lies available the kernel of the next build-up.

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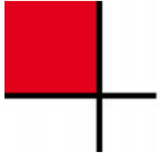
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Dancing between anger and love: Reflections on feminist activism

Ana María Munar

abstract

Do we need anger to advance an agenda of gender equity? Is love the appropriate emotion or a misplaced emotional reaction in the face of injustice? In this paper I begin by reflecting on the interlinkages between activism and anger, I then apply the thesis presented by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum to examine a series of personal experiences of gender and feminist activism. In her book, Nussbaum (2016) discusses the nature of anger and claims that anger is both a sign of deficient rationality and morally wrong. She defends that if we aim at developing a more just society that contributes to human flourishing we should reject anger and instead encourage a speedy form of transition-anger followed by a further emotional change into love. I enter into dialogue with Nussbaum's main thesis by examining a number of activist examples that go from the personal and intimate spheres to those of work environments and institutional settings and further to the level of scholarly global networks. This essay finalizes by reflecting on the bumpy emotional dance that links anger and love.

> Injustice should be greeted with protest and careful, courageous strategic action. But the end goal must remain always in view: as King said so simply: "A world where men and women can live together." Building such a world takes intelligence, control, and a spirit of generosity. That spirit has many names: Greek philophrosunè, Roman humanitas, biblical agapè, African ubuntu – a patient and forbearing disposition to see and seek the good rather than to harp obsessively on the bad (Nussbaum, 2016: 249-250)

Openly activist and anger

If there is one experience that gender activists can often recognize it is the one of anger. I have been a declared feminist activist for the last eight years. If you wonder about my use of the word 'declared' there is a reason for it. I have had feminist convictions much longer than this, already from my first years of studying political science in the early nighties. However, for any activist there is a before and after a public declaration in a relevant forum about being pro- a cause. Here both the aspects of public and of relevance are important. What I mean by relevant is that some form of pronouncement has to happen among significant others – people whose opinion we deeply care about or who have some form of power over our future possibilities and not only for example in an obscure online forum using an anonymous identity. And with regards to the public dimension, it is not the same to go for drinks with a close friend and declare feminist beliefs than to give a public speech at a conference or to actively contribute by writing opinion pieces in mass media, etc.

I have plenty of friends whom I love and admire that have stated to care for gender equality and who have never made any public declaration of support to a feminist agenda for change. It does not seem to be so much a problem of 'consciousness raising' as it was termed by the socialist/radical wave of feminism (Nakray, 2014) as a problem of seeing feminism as a core identity or as an existential passion. The most typical case of non-activist sympathizers is the many that over the years have responded with private expressions of support to some of my contributions in global email lists or to campaigns in social media, while confessing that they do not feel capable of arguing for this publically. There are many reasons for why such a position can be defendable and even reasonable, some have to do with the political or social situation of the countries and institutions they live in – an open declaration is simply not safe or the cost of such act will be extremely high. Others relate to specific biographical circumstances or personality dispositions such as being more or less afraid of conflict. It is much easier to jump into the water if one knows how to swim.

An interesting case is the people who have feminist beliefs, but do not feel they can provide the arguments to support them. They simply lack feminist literacy and have not been trained into feminist thought; and here again also there is a difference between 'liking' a feminist slogan on social media or even joining a public women's march and feeling knowledgeable. The later takes time and effort and gaining such knowledge is not always desired enough or available. And then there is the weighting of the stereotype. Extensive research on implicit prejudice (Hardin and Banaji, 2013) shows we are not only impacted by culture,

we *are* culture and the word 'feminist' comes loaded with feelings and historical understandings:

> The study by Fiske et al. (2002) shows that people identify "feminists" as being "competent", but also "cold" (i.e. disliked) and that this identity elicits hostile sexism. [...] The overall scheme that links women who demonstrate "competence" to "coldness" (i.e. being less liked) translates into multiple aspects of our life, like sexuality. Popular culture depicts feminists as dangerous vamps, but not bimbos. When it comes to parenthood, feminists can be mothers but may be perceived as the "cold" kind of matriarch.
>
> This pattern places women academics in a "double bind" situation of experiencing competing demands without a clear resolution (Jenkins, 2014, p. 162). Research on gender bias shows how the agency and skills often attributed to female leaders or to feminists, such as assertiveness and being authoritative, imply that they are perceived as unfriendly (Rudman & Glick, 2001). In comparison, a 2006 study found that "many people think that feminists are ugly, uptight, angry, aggressive, harsh, strident, demanding, dogmatic, man-hating lesbians" (cited in Weiss, 2015). It seems that the price of believing that "women are human" is a high one to pay. That is why (to paraphrase Adichie, 2014), as soon as one declares oneself to be a feminist, it is necessary to add a "but": "Hey look, I am a feminist, but I am not angry... I am the smiling feminist"; "I am a feminist, but I love babies and my grandmother"; "I am a feminist, but I love my husband and I do not hate men" or "I am a feminist, but I like lipstick, party dresses and stilettos". (Munar, 2017: 516)

And while these past years we have witnessed famous cultural personalities or political leaders embracing the word 'feminist' such as Beyoncé, President Obama or Prime Minister Trudeau, I wonder if these declarations, however positive and commendable, are not the privilege of those that can take a feminist tag without suffering the backlash of stereotyping which follows with it. What if the one putting the 'I am a feminist' t-shirt on was the maid at the hotel, the family mother in a conservative traditional culture or the female factory worker?

Members of the LGTBQI community use the expression living as 'openly gay'. I think for all feminists, there is also a before and after the 'openly'. Such an event is often easy to remember. In some cases it is a sense of conviction and belief that has made them go into activism, like the transformation that happens through reading feminist literature, seeing one report after another of gender inequality, or attending courses on diversity or gender studies, but in many others it is the anger felt during a lived injustice what has sparked in them a need to actively do something about this. Far from what one would believe by reading feminist history not all the sparks come from major social injustices, often what it takes is a quite trivial anecdote. I clearly remember my 'opening' moment. It was a simple announcement sent to a large email list-serv for a men-only academic job position at a university in the Middle East. A female colleague replied with a one single sentence email that said 'This is wrong'. After which

there were a few responses of senior academics attacking her position, responses that in their tone I felt were filled with contempt. That first debate touched upon something that is still a major and unresolved issue in feminist activism and scholarship, the paradoxical tension between believing in the dignity of all cultures and ways of life, and the non-superiority of specific societies (as opposed to the belief of a hierarchical structure of the world cultures with the West or the global north at the top and the rest lacking behind) while at the same time advocating the normative superiority (i.e. the goodness) of universal values of equality, freedom and dignity for all and of care for our planet. However intellectual stimulating this dilemma was, it was not the intellectual puzzle what pushed me into activism, but the attitude of the participants in that email conversation – I could not take the contempt towards feminism that was pouring out of many of those answers. I remember being at the kitchen table writing a long email answer and feeling so angry that I would forget to eat breakfast and post-pone all other duties. This seems now a common pattern in my activist life something that could be called the 'activist diet'.

Anger is not only an emotional reaction towards what is perceived as a historical wrongdoing regarding gender equality, but also often an answer to what can be considered a lack of solidarity in our social circles or work environments. Because while I can relate to the reasons behind the lack of public support to feminist activism, still it is not always easy to be the one at the front receiving the criticism while seeing what appears to be the passivity in many others. We need to make a reflexive pause here because at this point is very easy to become judgmental or self-righteous or simply angry. However, there is no better way to check ones self-righteous mind than to turn the light into oneself because how many are the causes that one sympathizes with but that one does not feel prepared to engage in public debate for? Two such causes for me are the Palestina-Israeli conflict and climate change. While I have no problem declaring my opinion in private and also try to act according to my beliefs (sometimes more successfully than others), I feel far from ready to give a keynote or to engage in extensive political debates about two topics of which I only have limited knowledge about. In these cases I am the one sending private emails of gratitude to people that are able to enlighten public opinion and take a stand while dealing with a sense of not living up to my own (unrealistic?) standards. As expressed in the greeting card's quote of a compassionate friend: 'You must remember this ...a fish is just a fish'... Indeed, and 'a human is just a human'. How often do we tend to forget this in states of exasperation?

As my activism has been evolving I have reflected on a common backlash of anger – the sense of ridicule and sometimes shame that often follows an angry episode. I have become increasingly engaged in the 'what can be done?' after an

angry reaction, but also noticed that it takes more to make me angry, that anger has been replaced by a sense of recognition. The feeling is more like a 'here we go again … let's see what this time we can do about it' than an 'I am furious about this'. Eight years down the road of activism, it was in search of a personal enlightenment that I turned to the work of Martha Nussbaum *Anger and forgiveness: Resentment, generosity, justice* (2016). I read this book during a summer holiday, as a way of finding some new insights into a personal existential dilemma. It is through my own biographical experience of anger that I have become more and more concerned about what such an emotion does to me and to us and to the advancing of feminism because – do we need anger to advance an agenda of gender equity? Or is love a more appropriate emotional reaction in the face of injustice? Here, I am not aiming at conveying the fullest complexity of the analytical explanation of Nussbaum. Instead, this is a reflection on what I consider to be the essence of her argument and its relevance for feminist activism exemplified through a series of personal memories and anecdotes. Kellee Caton in her beautiful work on humanism introduces a new word 'biogratized' to refer to 'the individual and personal equivalent to 'historicized'' (2016: 49). What the following sections present is a 'biogratized' essayistic reflection in the hope to start a conversation about the role of anger and love in feminist activism.

Understanding and questioning anger

In her book Nussbaum begins by examining what is anger. She introduces us to the understanding of anger of Hellenistic philosophers, especially Aristotle, of modern psychological literature (e.g. the work of Richard Lazarus) and of her own extensive scholarship. It is worth noticing how her own understanding of anger has been evolving and in several occasions she announces how the arguments that we are presented with represent a break from her previous position. She appears especially concerned with the right delimitation and understanding of the term. Chapter two and three appendixes are all devoted to this conceptualization effort.

The Aristotelian understanding of anger maintains that anger is an emotion that involves (1) slighting or down-ranking (2) of the self or people close to the self (3) wrongfully or inappropriately done (4) accompanied by pain and (5) involving a desire for retribution. While overall recognizing the value of this understanding, Nussbaum departs from Aristotle in that she believes his scope of anger is too narrow in two accounts.

First, she argues that the focus on the self or 'people close to the self' is too limited. She emphasizes how the idea of 'oneself' or 'one's own', can be understood as 'ones circle of concern' including those instances of wrongdoing that affect ones core values of the self, and agrees with Adam Smith's view on anger by stating that if the concern ceases so does the emotion. We can feel an injury to causes or principles that we believe to be important without having a sense of loss of personal status. Going back to the anecdote of how I entered into feminist activism, while I did not think that the scholars on that email list defending gender segregated higher education systems and only-men academic positions where consciously aiming at injuring women academics, still I felt anger at them as representatives of a system where there are major inequities in the treatment and career opportunities of women versus men. I was not angry at the agent which I could not even visualize, I did not know any of the professors protagonists in that online conversation and I cannot recall their names. I was angry at the act. Pressing 'sent' felt like shouting to the whole unknown world – we have had enough! In such moments I simply cannot stay silent, it does not feel like an option. Another example could be the anger felt while witnessing xenophobic or racist acts against refugees although nor I or any of my closest ones share that identity and I do not feel such unethical acts result in a low ranking of my personal social status.

Secondly, the scope of anger should be broadened to include cases in which people unconsciously act in denigrating ways. We may understand a specific denigrating behavior as caused by a pattern of prejudice or bias in a society or organization (not consciously decided by the person) and still feel anger. Other examples of activism come to mind here: my public disapproval to the appointments of yet another male Dean of Education to the leadership team of my university when the other two academic leaders (i.e. the President and the Dean of Research are men) and of another male co-editor-in-chief for a relevant research journal in my field, which has already another male co-editor-in-chief. In both cases I found the appointed men to be competent and highly capable of doing a good job. I also know them personally and I consider them to be really nice people, but as I commented on an online post about this issue:

[I]t's not about an individual. It's a reproduction of a biased system again and again and again. So yes thinking diversity in all major appointments is a duty for all journals and all universities. We have to keep at this. And we can also be against a decision-making process which is biased without being against a person… it's a reproduction of inequity.

Therefore, Nussbaum's further expansion of the classical Aristotelian view on anger seems especially relevant for feminism. To fight against the slighting or

down-ranking of people on the basis of their gender is a cause/principle. Also 'anger is in a way a cultural universal, since in all societies people react to wrongful damages and wish for payback; but specific forms of anger are strongly shaped by social norms regarding what an insult is, what honor is, what manliness is, and so forth' (Nussbaum, 2016: 254). And, as the implicit bias literature amply demonstrates, relationships and policies about gender are highly impacted by cultural patterns of belief and conduct.

Anger is a complex emotion that involves both pain and pleasure, and requires casual thinking. The payback wish (the desire of retribution (5)) is the positive expectation of a future good. There is a target to anger (usually a person) and a focus (the act that we believe to be the wrongful damage). Nussbaum mentions how the focus that anger has on down-grading (what she calls 'status-injury') has a flavor of narcissism attached to it, because the focus is moved from the wrongfulness of the act itself to the relative social standing of the injured person vis-à-vis others. This is one of the most profound but also most difficult insights that appeared from this reading. It is an invitation to me and to other activists in general to question if the root to our anger is the injustice of an action or if the hurt is because we feel a loss in status. 'Am I an activist-narcissist?' I found myself reflecting on my own behavior during some of the heated debates I have been engaged in during these past years and the answer was 'sometimes yes, sometimes not'. In some specific occasions clearly there was a narcissistic element to my activism. It will be easier to exemplify this with a concrete case.

A couple of years ago an important international conference in my field of research was announced with a lineup of seven male invited speakers. As it had already become customary for me at the time, I sent the organizers an email where I noticed the gender imbalance, pointing out the consequences that this kind of practice had for the career opportunities of female academics and inviting them to reconsider their decision. I received several reactions to my email going from the very common ones of 'we did not do this on purpose' to the 'it is not our fault ...what can we do if all the editors are men?' At this point I had grown so accustomed to the varied portfolio of excuses that they did not bother me anymore, but there was one reply especially hurtful which stated that 'women' were not really the issue and that there were so many more forms of inequality that were more relevant in academia and that should be prioritized. This is the classical strategy of putting up the 'all diversities matter' card every time one sees a demand for gender equity. That response also came from someone that I knew personally and that had a reputation of being 'progressive' in our academic circles. I fired up in anger to that reply.

On the spot, I simply wrote an answer with the clear intention of exposing the patronizing sexism of that email and of humiliating both the argument and the sender. It was not a kind answer, and clearly not something I am proud of looking back to. Was there an element of justice in that? Yes, clearly, but also of narcissism. I was feeling that by accusing the feminist cause of selfishness and lack of generosity towards other non-privileged groups this colleague was downgrading a cause that is important in my life and injuring others whom I loved, but also that by being categorized as 'narrow-minded' feminist I was being downgraded in my academic and social status. The result after sending that 'here I am wining the argument-email' was that I had a five minutes 'pay back' satisfaction and a much longer feeling of distress that follows me even today when I think back to that conversation. Up to this day I find myself avoiding any contact with that scholar whenever possible not because I have come to agree with his position (because I have not) but because I am ashamed of how I acted towards that person in that specific situation. And this brings us to Nussbaum main points which are that anger is both (1) a sign of deficient rationality and (2) morally wrong.

Why is anger rationally deficient? The focus of critique here is on the desire for retribution that is a core aspect of the emotion of anger. First, we have to recognize that many times we may have misinterpreted the wrongdoing and that our 'rational' judgement may be flawed (we are also full of biases and prejudices). 'Anger always contains a cognitive appraisal, even if stored deeply in the psyche and not fully formulated' (Nussbaum, 2016: 263). There are situations where anger is based on false judgement and therefore deficient. To put this in a feminist context if a colleague gives me a comment which I first perceive as being a form of paternalist sexist (e.g. 'let me help you with that difficult issue'), but which later I recognize as being founded in genuine care for my wellbeing (e.g. this colleague was not questioning my competence but knew of my overbooked work schedule), my feelings of anger will be transformed into feelings of gratitude towards that person. But even in cases where anger is justified and grounded in rightful judgement, it is still deficient. This is because no matter the punishment or retribution that we may inflict on those that have wronged us or anyone/anything in our circle of care, the past remains unchangeable. A belief in punishment as the right way of changing past offences is according to Nussbaum a form of 'fantasy', a superstition that our societies and popular culture tends to indulge in. If we consider that nothing of what we may do will ever change the past, the only rational response to a wrongdoing appears to be future oriented; a different form of emotional reaction that Martha calls 'transition anger'. In a state of transition anger, we may still recognize the wrongdoing and have a sense of outrage. However, we would not dwell on it or

fuel payback fantasies, instead very quickly our efforts will be directed towards creating better conditions to avoid or minimize wrongdoing in the future.

There is however a case where the retribution of anger is efficient and rational, the one where we believe that the wrongful act has resulted in a downgrading of our perceived status. By punishing, slighting or down-ranking those that made us angry (as well as the ideas or values that they represent) we may obtain a rise in relative status (and this may refer not only to our individual status but to the status of a group or our center of concern). Why is it that I reacted so strongly to several of the many debates on gender inequality that I have been engaged in over the years? What part of my reaction has to do with promoting the wellbeing and the flourishing of other human beings or myself and what part with humiliating the 'other' as to regain the perceived loss in status? To me this is one of the most accurate insights presented by Nussbaum's analysis and one that links closely to the description of anger's narcissistic dimensions, but to comprehend this we need to turn to the second question on the moral and normative dimensions of anger.

Why is anger morally wrong? If we agree with Nussbaum's analysis that anger appears to be efficient only as either a narcissistic tool or as the means to restore relative status, then the question is if regaining or improving relative status in a social context is a good end in itself. And here I fully agree with her analysis. In feminist activism there is a major difference between fighting patriarchy or inequality as the means to achieve a society that enhances human flourishing or to foster a dream of revenge aiming at downgrading 'men' or 'the elite' etc. This status logic is based on a zero-sum game (Wright, 1999), an ideology that sees the world through the lenses of a limited amount of power (if some get it others cannot) instead of that of abundance where there can be wellbeing and flourishing for all. In this worldview society resembles a status pyramid where there is always someone at the bottom. This logic tends to reproduce the injustice of patriarchy this time with new victims and new villains. Additionally, and this is something Nussbaum herself does not engage so extensively in, the status strategy is also essentialist. The problem of essentialism being that it sees the human only as part of a fixed collective identity this being class, nationality, gender, or sexuality, etc. in this way elevating a 'fixed' collective identity and eradicating the possibilities of individual freedom and exploration. As the existentialist philosophers remind us of, it is also possible to think and advocate for the contrary position; that existence precedes essence, that humans are more free than what they dare to recognize, including the freedom to rethink the whole status system while claiming the messiness and ambiguity inherent to trying to make sense of oneself and the world.

So how is Martha Nussbaum inviting me to contemplate my feminist anger? I imagine her bright courageous self saying to me: 'Ana, I get you are angry, and this may even be for all the right reasons (this was a sexist/discriminatory/unjust act or situation or system), but remember to put a question mark to your primary judgement and causal chain of thought, make sure that even when you conclude that the outrage was rationally justified, you try to avoid falling into the trap of wishing the suffering of the other as this cannot change the past and will not lay out the foundation for a more hopeful future, and finally check your narcissism, try not to use this as an excuse to engage in the morally dubious status game'.

Instead she will invite me to embrace the state of 'transition anger' and to dance into love. Transition anger includes all the features from anger (from 1 to 4) but one, the desire for retribution (5); the payback wish is absent. Looking back at the experience of activism, I remain less convinced of Martha's analysis at this point. Let me explain. The state she refers to as 'transition anger' is the moment where anger gets transformed into hopeful strategic activism. Personally, I have felt this as a form of metamorphosis, not as a complete different emotional state to anger. Like the butterfly is also the worm, activism hope has also activism anger in its DNA; the same causal chain of thought on why a wrongdoing was made is still central. There is not such a clear cut as Nussbaum's work seems to suggest between these two states. The difference is that the expectation of a future good which is also inherent to anger is changing its nature. It is not anymore following a zero-sum logic (punishment and retribution), instead this future good includes also the agent of the wrongdoing, a future of good for all. Nussbaum seems so focused on rejecting payback-anger (a position I very much sympathize with when considering how the glorification of retribution and punishment of contemporary cultural and political systems is at the root of much of human suffering) that she minimizes the role that anger plays as a seed to action, a seed which also includes hope and not only a sadistic enjoyment based on the imagination of the other being hurt or down-graded. To be angry instead of for example only being sad is rooted in a form of self-love, the belief in one's capabilities, the appreciation of self-efficacy (we/I can do something about this) and in a belief on human dignity (we/I do not deserve this wrongdoing). Because it is true that an aspect to an angry emotional reaction is narcissistic, but equally there can be an element of altruism and hopefulness in that same emotion, a form of altruistic anger which main focus is the wish of justice through collective transformation.

Taking a look back at my two previous biographical examples; the public debates and my angry feelings towards 'all male panels' at conferences and gender inequity in top-positions in academia (or what is more broadly considered the leaking pipeline), it is easy for me to recognize the moments where the need for

payback or humiliation was transformed into creative policy action. The experiences of outrage that I felt through multiple occasions these past eight years were the seeds that got transformed into a series of activist workshops, performances, task-forces, on-line communities and documents such as statistical reports on the gender gap in academia (Munar et al., 2015), gender and leadership practices at universities (Munar and Villeseche, 2016), guidelines for gender equality at conferences and in publishing, special issues, letter templates, handbooks, posters and memes to protest all-male lineups of speakers.[1] These initiatives were created through collective efforts and the conversations that lead to and permeated these actions did not follow a clear emotional template where first was anger and then after a sharp cut there was love or hope. Instead we were angry at turns or on different levels and also hopeful and loving at turns and on different levels.

Figure 1: Collective mandala on activism. Source: Author's photo.

A way to grasp this emotional complexity is to explore contemplative and meditative practices on being and becoming an activist. The experimental freedom of the workshop 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' (20-21 November 2017, Copenhagen) provided a creative and trustful space where it was possible to

1 Some of these documents can be accessed here https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Jbny3yv5EfsF1XfNnpL6EZp4Y4DFPxb-?usp=sharing

engage in this type of reflection. At the workshop I lead a collective activity which consisted on drawing a mandala while contemplating the lived experience of 'activism'. Mandala drawing is an ancient tradition that can be found in different cultures and that aims at reaching a contemplative state. I began using mandalas as a personal meditative technique and later on decided to apply it to my academic practices. The beauty about this activity is that it can help us to move away from the 'winning the argument' type of communication, which so often characterizes knowledge sharing in academia. Instead there are no wrong and rights mandalas. The drawings are a personal or collective (if it is a group of persons drawing together) expression of a lived experience. It is an activity that engages the creative and emotional part of our brain and it has the potential to bring us closer to understanding the phenomenology of feminist activism. Mandalas are not argumentative explanations of what activism means but instead an artistic expression of how does feminist activism feels, how it is embodied and experienced in daily life. I have chosen two of the mandalas (see figures 1 and 2) that exemplify the emotional fluidity between anger and love.

Figure 2: Collective mandala on activism. Source: Author's photo.

As the previous examples show we can be angry at a situation and loving so much that we dare to put extensive time and care into activism, risking both reputations and likeability; loving to be able to do something about gender

inequity, loving how friendships could blossom through activism. But is this kind of political activism, love?

If love is the answer, then what love?

While Martha Nussbaum's insight and detailed explanation of anger is extraordinary, her utilization of the word 'love' and the emotion of 'love' is much more fuzzy. She tells us that this is the emotion that will bring us justice and wellbeing; however, she never sets up to conceptualize this properly. She exemplifies what she means by love with speeches and historical events taken from the lives of three impressive political leaders: Gandhi, Mandela and King. The descriptions of how these three personalities in their own ways approached injustice are deeply inspiring, but personally I was left with the impression that while I had received some very well-structured arguments to support the rejection of anger and practical examples of how to overcome such a 'trap', I had not received a clear analysis of what is love and how are we to nurture love. Instead love seems to be an amalgam that includes hope, compassion, empathy, courage, cooperation, friendship, generosity, lightheartedness, kindliness, humor and humility among other aspects. This resembles mostly a list of how to be a good human being – a mix of virtues and emotional states – more than a clear analysis of the emotion of love.

While I considered myself quite illiterate on the topic of anger (partly one of the reasons why I bought Martha Nussbaum's book to start with) this is not the case with love. The emotion of love is one of my passionate interests and I have been fortunate to engage with different authors that have analyzed the nature of love such Alain Badiou, Søren Kierkegaard, Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Fisher, Esther Perel, Simon May, Octavio Paz among others. To this I should add dozens of works of literature or art that deal with love and have had a deep influence in my understanding of this emotion: the short stories of Alice Munro, the novels of Elena Ferrante, Gabriel García Marquez, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood; the poetry of Neruda; the films of Kieslowski, Fellini or Almodovar; the songs of Leonard Cohen, Nina Simone, U2, Amy Winehouse, Joaquin Sabina, Silvio Rodríguez; the installations of Sophie Calle or Louise Bourgeois to name a few. And then there are the readings related to spirituality or faith where love is also a core element from the Bible to Sufi poetry. If we add them all in a complex mix do we get the answer to anger and the right recipe of how to conduct feminist activism? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Precisely what makes art and literature such compelling means to interpret the emotion of love is that they are able to address its paradoxical and complex nature in a more effective and

convincing way than most of the conceptual essays or self-help handbooks would ever do.

So, what is the problem that I have with Nussbaum's general call to love? While morally seductive, this answer appears to lack the necessary sophistication of analysis to become useful and operational. I am left with an open invitation to love and without a guide about how to go about this besides the examples of three political personalities (and I can confess here that it bothers me that they are all men and that, while recognizing their amazing public courage and leadership, love seems to have divided their actions in public and private lives. And isn't that somehow a classical masculine version of what love is supposed to look like? A taken for granted superiority of the public sphere versus the private? There is a lot to be learned here from feminist ethics of care). But most importantly, Nussbaum's analysis lacks the insight into the more complex and morally problematic sides of love. Like is the case with anger, love also has features that can be questioned both rationally and normatively, such as the love to nation, country, religion and tribe which can be at the expense of others, the love of a specific individual which can erase any former promise of 'loving forever' that we could have made to former or current partners, the love to a job or a vocation which can be at the expense of family or communal responsibilities. Fear, submission and possession are core features of love. Love can be obsessive or get hijacked by power games and manipulations just to mention only a few of its problematic aspects.

A major insight of this intellectual and artistic mix is that love takes different modes; erotic-love, parental-love, love for neighbor, and friendship-love just to mention a few classic ones. In Simon Bay's *Love: A history* (2011) we get an insightful overview on the understanding of love in Western history. His main thesis being that

> [L]ove is the rapture that we feel for people and things that inspire us in the hope of an indestructible grounding for our life [...] [I]f we all have a need to love, it is because we all need to feel at home in the world: to root our life in the here and now; to give our existence solidity and validity … [L]ove is what allows us to deepen/intensify the being. (Bay, 2011: 6)

So, what can we wish for the future of feminist activism? I wish that we may embrace Martha Nussbaum's major teaching on anger as an alarm bell for injustice and as an emotion to connect with the principle of basic human dignity and self-worth while dancing away from hateful retributive payback fantasies.

'I want a Sunday kind of love. A love to last past Saturday night' sings Etta James. Like her, I wish a dance with and towards love but not all kinds of love. I wish a

mode of love that will have as one of its core principles kindness and self-compassion so we can learn to see, but also to accept the shame and ridicule that often follows on the steps of anger without self-loathing and with hope. Love as a way of being in the world which allows us to experience our existence on the basis of difference. I want a solidarity kind of love, a kind of love that will see the freedom of all as the freedom of each one of us.

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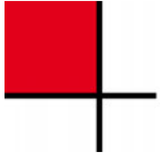

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Feminism is dead? Long live feminism! A reflexive note on the FAW! workshop

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abstract

How to live feminism within academia? What are the tools required to enable this process? With these questions in mind, and with our experiences as researchers, activists and friends, we participated in the two-day workshop 'Feminism, Activism and Writing!' (FAW!). Whilst conferences are often dialogic spaces replicating patriarchal dynamics of power, we experienced the FAW! workshop as a space that challenged patriarchal regimes, encouraged, and enabled scholarly encounters through feminist practices. In this collaborative piece, composed as a collective rather than as individuals, we offer an overview of our reflections developed during and after the workshop. In particular, we focus on three areas informed by the themes explored in the workshop: the concepts of affect, solidarity and the politics of care in academia, the positioning of scholars as feminists, and the issue of precarity in academia. In our reflections, we argue that these three areas ought not to be explored nor dealt with separately, as intertwined and informed by the neoliberal, patriarchal practices. We therefore suggest these areas as starting points for a radical transformation of academia, through the lenses and practices of feminism. Through the learning(s) of the FAW! workshop, we call for a radical reconsideration of all forms of collective solidarity, based on the acceptance and celebration of affective-relational practices developed to cope with the challenges of precarity, and requiring the acknowledgement of the value of both positions, as scholars and activists.

Feminism is dead? Long live feminism!

Is it feasible to explore, dissect and live feminism within academia, a system that contributes and feeds into the very discrimination and violence denounced by feminism itself? And if so, what are the *tools* necessary to dismantle the *master's*

house to paraphrase Lorde (1984)? What is the role of activism and writing, and how can we incorporate these practices in feminism?

When we first found out about the workshop, our attention was caught by the association of feminism with writing and activism, a decision which could be associated with one of our feminist heroes, Audre Lorde: feminist, writer and activist. The second element of interest was the proposed format for the workshop: two days of interactive and cooperative learning and sharing, divided in four streams of focus ((post)feminist discourses, affective activism, alternative feminist organising, and powerful writing), and fuelled by a rich reading list circulated ahead of the gathering, to allow prior engagement and reflection. Crucially, the workshop's invite stressed the desire for the gathering to be interdisciplinary in its nature, not only from a discipline perspective but also in terms of modes of engagement with feminism. This element seemed to reflect how, although having academic careers stemming from quite different disciplines (Elisa's initial studies were in Philosophy and Francesca's in Psychology), over the years we have always found in feminist theory an element of encounter and synergy. We both work in academia, although in different fields and under diverse circumstances, and we are both activists. We live in two different countries, within different politico-economic contexts; we come from different families, but we have read the same books. On skype we discuss the events and news of our countries, Italy and the UK, and we send each other the latest book that has challenged our thinking.

The openness of the workshop's scope also felt as a fitting reflection of our diverse ways of combining scholarly activity with activism, informed by our professional affiliations and geographical locations, but also by our conversations and shared reflections. Thanks to its nature, the workshop therefore functioned as an opportunity to gather as friends, sisters, feminists and colleagues. It constituted an opportunity to reflect upon, identify and further develop awareness of both the issues that need addressing and the tools that need (re)forging to advance, reshape and experience feminism. For the two of us, the workshop functioned as an opportunity to come together and discuss *our* topics with other people, gazing at each other across the room, remembering our last conversation on that exact matter. We decided to participate in the workshop together, and this provided us with the unique opportunity to reflect on our individual and collaborative activities and work, and on how our affective relationship conditions our work. Under this light, affect became a resource and not a limit, as we will try to explain in these pages. As a kinship gathering, the workshop presented us, and all participants, with the opportunity to meet as both people and scholars, encouraging contributions of both emotional and theoretical knowledge. The kind of sisterhood we developed during this workshop has its

roots in feminist activism and its way of producing knowledge. Sisterhood is a strategy to resist patriarchy that permeates the academic world; it is a strategy that substitutes collaboration for competition, a horizontal relationship with a vertical one.

The patriarchal encompassing nature of academia has been extensively discussed, within and beyond feminist scholarship (Rose, 1994). Conferences are often dialogic spaces replicating patriarchal dynamics of power. Female, queer, precarious and scholars of colour are mostly absent from keynote speeches, confined to less prestigious roles/panels, conditioned to lower engagement and marginalised due to the expensive nature of most conferences (Hinsley et al., 2017). In a chapter of the edited volume 'Speaking out', Mills (2006), for example, explores the impact of performance anxiety on female academics in conference settings, suggesting that women are more likely to experience this phenomenon as a result of the influence of stereotypical beliefs on gender and public speaking. Unhelpfully, female scholars are also faced with the existence of a body of literature policing their outfit choices and attitudes at conferences (see e.g. Stavrakopoulou, 2014).

The promotion of conference spaces that challenge patriarchal regimes and encourage affective practices is most certainly a step forward towards the '*alien future'* introduced in Xenofeminism (Hester, 2018). This '*alien future'* stems from a challenge to the linear, traditional conceptualisation of future/time, of production, and of kinship. In FAW! we recognised elements of this *'alien future'* in the circular discussions (the four themes were re-proposed during the two days and discussed in alternated sessions and through sharing/collective moments), in the replacement of sessions as paper-driven moments of production of knowledge with non-formal gathering including multimodal practices of sharing, and in the encouragement to create a kinship-like space. Through this format, the FAW! workshop offered space, time, and opportunities for discussing, exploring and practising innovative expressions of scholarship and activism. The shared respect for each other's thinking enabled friendships to arise, and the desire to share knowledge with friends stimulated impulses to write common papers, creating new opportunities for conversations. This section of *ephemera,* and its articles, stem exactly from this: collaborative, shared labour informed by friendship, passion, solidarity and a specific interest in feminism.

A note on our writing process

To create cooperative thinking, we reflected and discussed our experiences, notes and memories from the FAW! workshop. This dialogic process led to the

identification of three key areas, which we decided to explore in written format separately, partly due to different schedules and locations, partly as an exercise to juxtapose individual thinking into collectivity. We wrote this final piece through a composition method inspired by the Dada cut-up technique (Tzara, 1920), confining it to paragraphs rather than to word level as in its original form, and manipulating slightly the sequencing to ensure a certain level of coherence in the development of our arguments. The aim is to eliminate the individuality of our voices and experience, to embrace co-production of our knowledge.

Affect, solidarity and the politics of care in academia

Affect develops in being in between, in transition, between the capacity for action and the capacity to be acted upon (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). Affect offers the body to a reality of encounters: affect is performative, as it pushes the body to action, to a situation of infinite becoming.

Academia is in many ways an emotionally demanding, if not draining, field of labour (Butler et al., 2017), in which the *marginalised* frequently are conditioned to wearing a mask (Fanon, 1952) to fit in, to play the game, and to avoid drawing undesired attention.[1] In addition, the incessant shift towards neoliberalism in universities has pushed women, particularly early career researchers (ECRs), into an even more marginalised and precarious position; not only in financial terms but also with regards to visibility, opportunity, and capacity for presence and expression. The 'myth of the individual merit' as discussed by Bagilhole and Goode (2001) is inheritably connected to patriarchal systems of academic progression. The patriarchal bias is prominent[2] in impacting preferences for certain modes of socialisation and in shaping stereotypical performative routines (Heilman, 2012). Certain behaviours, attitudes and skill sets are therefore identified as contributing to the formation of the perceived 'individual merit' (*ibid.*). Becoming skilled at wearing a specific mask (Fanon, 1952), exhibiting certain attitudes and withholding undesirable emotions/responses become necessary elements for recognition and *success* in academia. At the heart of these processes is the art of regulating and expressing emotions, a subjective art, informed by many factors such as race, generation, class, culture, religion, and of course gender (in the stereotypical representation of it). Using this acknowledgment as starting point, we attempt to untangle some of the fundamental knots in the connection between academia and activism, and

1 See Stavrakopoulou (2014) for tips on how to dress appropriately for a conference if you are a woman.

2 Please note patriarchal systems are only one of the forces creating privilege in academia.

between academia and feminism. In this process, we have come to realise that the social networks surrounding this area of research are mostly of affective nature (Borghi, 2011).[3]

FAW! offered numerous opportunities to discuss and experience the issue of gender-stereotypical expression of emotions. In one of the plenaries during the workshop, we discussed how women frequently withdraw or hide affect and emotions in scholarly environments. Meyers (2013) defines this act as 'disciplining of the self'; a performative series of actions self-inflicted and aimed at limiting and shaping women's experience of academia so as to fit within neoliberal, patriarchal standards of behaviour, presence and production. Affect[4] as cultural practice, conversely, is linked to allowing oneself to feel and engage and therefore is capable of bringing bodies together, of creating contact with other bodies. Emotions are not a private matter, they move between subjects, bodies and symbols and develop realities, they align individuals and communities, or bodily spaces and social spaces, through the intensity of attachment (Ahmed, 2004).

In completing the application to the conference, we agreed to perform an act of disciplining of ourselves. We opted to omit that a reason for attending the workshop was our friendship and desire to share a scholarly encounter on the topic that links our research interests: feminism. On the very first day of the conference, we quickly realised that our disciplining was not necessary. The format, the conversations, the participants, the methods: every element of the workshop allowed, enabled and promoted the honest sharing and communal experiencing of emotions otherwise *forbidden: friendship, affection, anxiety, frustration and even anger*. Working through and within these varied and explicit emotional states felt like an enabler for a more cohesive and supportive space for learning, planning and thinking.

We believe affect and emotions are crucial initiators and sources of inspiration and action in academia as much as activism. Inspired by the histories of

3 Once again it is necessary to remember the use of sisterhood as a strategy. These affects not only create a web of material support, they also function as reminders that expressing one's emotions is a crucial element of the creative process (in the scholarly sense).

4 We follow here the definition of affect by Sara Ahamed: 'I actually wanted to disrupt the idea of emotion coming from within and then moving out towards objects and others. Some people use the word affect to describe how you're affected – to affect and to be affected – thereby expressing a bodily responsiveness to the world that the word is used to donate. I rather use emotion because that word took me further in not starting with the question of how we are affected by this. [...] I actually use affect as part of what emotions do' (Ahmed and Schmitz, 2014: 97)

genealogies of women in Italian feminist groups in the 70s (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and De Laurentis, 1990), and by present actions of activist groups such as Sisters Outsiders, we recognise the need for more opportunities for inclusive and affect-enabling interactions and thinking. Affect, bodily meetings, creates knowledge in the moment produced by bodies and the movement of affect between bodies, in a sort of affective circle.

Precarity

Affective relations must be considered within the socio-economic context in which they have developed. Precarity constitutes a crucial element and experience in academia at present. It was therefore of great importance that the workshop engaged with this topic in various ways and under different lenses.

Whilst the general discourse seems to point towards individualisation, with a push towards the private initiative to deal with the precarious nature of academic labour (and beyond); in the workshop, we explored precarity as a diffused phenomenon which requires a communal urge for change. It was firstly noted that it is unhelpful to assume that all participants would have the same economic means to attend a conference. Secondarily, it was discussed that, particularly as feminists, we cannot entrust the resolution of financial disparity and problems to scholarships, which are often insufficient and adding to the already existing amount of labour.

It was therefore positive that participants could not only apply for financial support, but were being offered the possibility to be hosted in a local attendees' home. Aside from contributing to building a community of affect and care, this practice enabled the participation of colleagues who would have otherwise been marginalised by neoliberal consumerist conference practices. We would argue that it is thanks to these practices that we create opportunities to reconsider radically all forms of solidarity, taking into consideration the existence of affective-relational practices developed to cope with the challenges of precarity. We have friends in different cities that host us during a conference for which we have not received any scholarship, and we return the favour when we host these friends to attend activist events we have organised. New typologies of affective networks exist and continue to develop, with groups with different generations, origin and typology, all of which are translated into original relational practices and into original forms of knowledge, contextualised and bottom-up, fundamental to survive in the present.

A second interesting aspect of academic precarity is the ambiguous and controversial relation with the publishing business. There are two core problematic aspects of the current publishing model: the unpaid labour of scholars (writing, reviewing, editing, etc.) and the costly subscriptions which limit access not only to individuals, but also institutions (Fyfe et al., 2017). At a recent workshop for ECRs, the senior colleague presenting admitted to the problematic nature of the contradictory practices currently entertained by scholars and institutions alike. On one hand academics share awareness and frustration at the exploitative system in place, on the other hand they contribute to the system, offering themselves to self-exploitation for the purpose of career progression and survival.[5] As denounced by Fyfe and colleagues (*ibid.*: 16), the possibility for change is 'stymied by the inertia of the academic prestige culture'. It is in practices such as Guerilla Open Access (Penn, 2018) that we recognise a feminist action, promoting fair and equal access[6], peer to peer sharing, and destabilisation of models promoting status quo and prestige above knowledge, activism and cooperation. As other alternative practices, we download articles for each other to secure equity of access; we peer review each other's articles with the grace often missing in other peers' anonymous reviews. In the same spirit, resources in preparation to the FAW! workshop were shared in advance, ensuring materials enabling equal participation were fully accessible.

A third aspect of precarity is the concentration of employment and the derived limited accessibility to secure employment for ECRs. The precarious nature of academic positions has been widely explored and discussed in recent years as an outcome of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2000; Clarke, 2012). Nikunen (2012) explores the imaginative and resourceful coping strategies of precarious scholars in Finnish academia. Of particular interest is the identification of positive aspects of academic employment, such as personal satisfaction and interest and the opportunity for multiple identities, to compensate the anxiety caused by time-limited and hard to get contracted roles (*ibid.*). The emphasis on this specific defensive mechanism is in relation to our initial question: is academia a context for feminism and activism? Are these possible when we, scholars, are so embedded in self-deprecating forms of acceptance and subjugation? Awareness, acceptance and exploration of our own selves as scholars/activists, alongside the recognition of our privilege and limitations, become therefore a crucial element in developing practices of

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5 We recommend Brienza's study (2016) of a MA course in self-publishing as representation of this inconsistent approach towards publishing industry and practices.

6 *ephemera* is not only open access, but also run by a collective and dependent on the 'free' labour of academics.

collective solidarity. It is through knowledge of our own positioning that we open opportunities for shifts and changes.

Positioning

Positionality is a core element of research; in teaching research methods, we, as scholars, emphasise the importance of reflexivity and awareness of existing, shifting, and emerging power relations (Holt, 2004). It is necessary to recognise and acknowledge that the experiences, conflicts and problematics explored during the FAW! workshop are typically white, European, situated in a defined geo-political and historical context, although enriched by internal differences brought by the individual experiences.

The concept of positioning revolutionises the distinction between subject and object of research. It eliminates absolutes and neutralities, shedding a light on the multiplicities in the privilege of authors, or conversely their subaltern status, or their agency. To unpack this concept and its importance, we recommend a reflective analysis of three elements: categories (understood as generation, gender, race, age, etc.), context and the elements of relationality between these. This process enables a more open exploration of the idea of privilege, which is at the heart of the process of self-contextualising and positioning. The workshop as context is not uniform, and the privileges, categories and the positionalities were not the same across participants, as containing many forms of subalternities within themselves. Through the workshop, we collaborated and shared awareness and knowledge of positioning and/or situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). We all started from a shared theoretical position, feminism, and through gathering we reflected on the feasibility of its practice and its limitations, in our everyday lives. In particular, we reminded ourselves of the importance of awareness in self-positioning in practising feminism. The readings proposed in preparation to the workshop contained a number of points of inspiration with regards to self-positioning within the feminist discourse(s) and practice(s).

> Positioning is a space of spatial and temporal nature in which the subject is co-produced, the opposite of a relativist instance. (Braidotti, 2017: 55, our translation)

Within the context of feminism, we find it particularly challenging to situate ourselves in discussions on motherhood and child-centred futurism. Informed by readings of feminism's second wave, first hand witness of maternal absolute dedication melting into self-elimination, aware of being privileged middle-class educated white cis-gendered woman, we struggle to accept and reason with female associations with procreation, maternal, guardianship, and futurism.

Yet, do we qualify as queer in sense of '*violent undoing of meaning*' (Edelman, 2004: 132)? Edelman (2004) discusses the idea of sinthomosexuality as act of dissociation from heteronormative behaviours and practices, as *'undoing the meaning*' of society as filtered through heteronormativity. As individuals, is our struggle with (and ultimate rejection of) heteronormative ideas of female as child-centred future, maternal, and care, enough? How can we position ourselves and 'female' within feminism? What happens when this positioning becomes a collective action? When each individual contributes with their own positioning to the group dynamic and discussions? The FAW! workshop has created a space to discuss our privileges, avoiding speaking for others and encouraging others to contribute, whilst also being mindful of those realities missing and not represented. During the two days, the collective space allowed for reflections on our own and beyond our own positioning, for acknowledgement of privilege, and for identification of necessary areas of action to eliminate discrimination, *violence* and exclusion.

Activism and academia

The debate on the positioning of feminist studies within academia started in the 70s and is still ongoing. What is the meaning of 'inside' and 'outside' academia? Were we inside or outside academia during the workshop? A clarification is hereby necessary to avoid confusion between activism and the neoliberal-informed conceptualisation of academia as situ of production (Nikunen, 2012). We were undoubtedly hosted by an academic structure, which materially supported the workshop, however not all participants belonged to the world of academia. Most importantly, not all the knowledges introduced to the workshop had been developed and produced in academia. What constitutes feminist activism in academia, and beyond? In light of the issues discussed in relation to the precarious nature of academic labour, and the already saturated workload of female academics, often 'burdened' with caring responsibilities, would we expect also activism to fit within academic labour or should it be situated outside of it? Lynch (2010) warns against the fallacy of promoting and idolising the 'care-full' academics, being responsible for an overload of caring responsibilities (be it in relation to colleagues, students, activism or else). The discussion on the typology of relation (of care?) that should be established with institutions of political, academic and cultural nature is still ongoing: should this be a matter of integration, assimilation or independent autonomy?

The urgency of raising awareness of the embodiment of mental pain and struggle into physical form is discussed in various forms and contexts[7] (Do Mar Pereira, 2016), most importantly as bodily outcomes of internalised and accumulated daily lived experiences of discrimination and violence (Wortham, 2016). In relation to raising attention to the issue of burn-out, Lynch (2010) identifies the demand for activism in academia as a possible element of exclusion of scholars with personal caring responsibilities.

On the one hand, it is necessary to adapt analytical tools and objectives in the passage between activism and academia; on the other, this adaptation requires a certain level of compromising. There is an alternative route which enables to retain one's views and position as autonomous, but taking this route may lead to isolation. This separation of activism and academia is situated within neoliberal, heteronormative understandings of care, research and production.

Since the 70s, different theories and strategies have been developed around this inside/outside discourse, informed and shaped by different socio-cultural contexts and financial resources available. The risk here is to reduce activism to gendered versions of care, research and production. In the context of the current political climate and the reforms affecting Higher Education, precarity rarely informs the configuration and dynamics between the inside and outside of academia. In this format, the act of caring is confined to women, as maternal figures and protectors of the future (Hester, 2018), whilst research and product sit primarily within the male experience and performance of academia. The risk of gendered activism is to confine women's possibilities within a future, care oriented role replicating that of mothers.

Researchers shifting between the inside and outside of academia have enabled activism, with its practices and knowledge, to infiltrate academia. Some of the most important theoretical advancements originated outside academia, as deviations of the disciplined and disciplining academic thought. If rigorous, positivist, immaculate science sits within the reign of stereotyped male academia (Heilman, 2012), then it is the task of feminist activism to infiltrate and occupy the academic space with infectious affect, imperfect and situated knowledge (Haraway, 2016; Hester, 2018). The very nature of feminism requires the uneasy task to reconsider the concept of discipline. In this form, activism responds to the definition of 'contamination of the academic practice' (Do Mar Pereira, 2016: 102) through 'everyday acts of defiance' (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000: 283). Whilst feminism as a field benefits and needs to slip in and out of different

7 See interview with Hasmig Tatiossan [https://youngfeministfund.org/2017/08/tracing-young-feminist-activist-selfcare-journey/]

disciplines, current academic systems and practices, both in teaching, research and publishing, impose rigidity and belonging to a specific discipline. The current structure and articulation of disciplines and sub-disciplines poses the necessity to choose between universities as neoliberal businesses, with learning as investment, and universities as new spaces for public learning, with different meanings of learning, thinking and political engagement. This dichotomy is connected to Foucault's concept of disciplinary practice as a form of modern knowledge, normalised and normalising, with the aim to produce experts and administrative forms of governance.

Moten and Harney's (2004) manifest 'The university and the undercommons: Seven theses' further explores and analyses this concept. The authors suggest that the professional critics of Higher Education systems are not in fact critics, in the sense of resistance and reaction to the professionalisation of knowledge, but are themselves part of this very process. Is this the case for feminism? Is it avoidable? Conversely, subversive scholars create resistance through the rejection of academic regulations and metrics of excellence and production, inciting to take from and use academia as opportunity for new knowledge, occupying its spaces with other thinking (Moten and Harney, 2004).

In 'Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed', James C. Scott (2004) explains how the modern concept of state has marginalised non-discipline specific knowledges, related to local traditions, with the aim to simplify and rationalise social and political practices. This process defines the normal and natural, in other words it shapes us as natural repetition of norms. The correlation to gender dynamics is evident. Scott privileges practice-based forms of knowledge identifiable with the Greek word *metis,* emphasising reciprocity, collectivity, mutuality, diversity and adaptability (Scott, 2004: 183). These alternative forms have a rooted tradition in feminism, having been treasured by women excluded from male forms of ratio (reason). Interpreting and cultivating these alternative forms of knowledge might offer a solution to the disciplining of knowledge. Is it, however, possible to produce and teach an un-disciplined knowledge?

This idea of activism as an act of pollution of the immaculate knowledge production process correlates to Hester's (2018) and Edelman's (2004) discussion of heterosexual interpretations of queerness as agents of pollution of social norms and practices. Why should we fear this act of pollution? Is this pollution in fact death?

Of course not; feminist activism is not a wish for regulation of reproduction (although articulated as such in certain forms, see Haraway, 2016), it is not a

renunciation of the future, and it is not a mere act of challenge to neoliberal capitalist living. It is acceptance of our mortality, our fallacy, our limits and, ultimately, of a future:

> when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable. Seriously unthinkable: not available to think. (Haraway, 2016: 57)

Gaining awareness and learning to 'grieve with' (Haraway, 2016: 38) we might learn to 'transform silence' (Lorde, 1984: 41) into resistance, WORDS and activism.

The issue of disciplining of knowledge is in fact not confined to research, but also to teaching. As teachers, we are confronted with gruelling challenges. What texts should we adopt? How do we design learning spaces that encourage horizontal and equal participation? How can we support the development of criticality? In academia, activism might be an opportunity to reconsider the value of teaching as an act of struggle aiming to develop new 'theoretical journeys', formulating 'theories from lived experiences' (hooks, 1994: 73-74), shaped by our affective bonds, friendships, positioning and mortality.

The unique case of Italy, perhaps in its extreme difference from the rest of Europe and the USA, emphasises the importance of moving between the boundaries of inside and outside academia. Numerous Italian scholars are in fact exploring matters related to gender and feminism, regardless of the complete absence of departments dedicated to these specific areas of study. Many of them feel out of place. Then again, this experience of not belonging, being out of place is familiar to the female. Nevertheless, even in the role of outsider, elements and memories of belonging remain. The concept of nomadic subject of Braidotti is of help in further untangling this point. To be out of place does not prevent the possibility of being inside, or even outside the norm. Whilst the subject out of place has no belonging, as it belongs to nowhere and everywhere simultaneously, it is this status that allows for it to move and migrate, to be a xenofemnist subject: permanently outside and beyond the norm, an eccentric and precarious subject.

Queer and gender studies share their status as ontologies of the present. They investigate the present (more specifically the contemporary, as per Deleuze's distinction) through the historical reconstruction or the various normative discourses, with the aim to comprehend how to manipulate the contemporary. They stand as critique of our contexts and of ourselves, as both subjects and objects produced by context-specific dynamics.

The role for scholars is therefore that of interpreters of the now, contemporary, to be in the position to develop practices of resistance and enact a critique in the form of voluntary disobedience to heteronormativity. It is in this process and context that research is activism.

The hope is for these theories to connect with practice, for academia to embrace activism, for texts to infiltrate bodies and vice-versa. At the FAW! workshop this hope became provisionally present, indicating possible futures.

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