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## Notes on Affective Practice: an exchange

Sarah Kanouse and Heath Schultz

The recent development of affect as a focus of scholarly activity has followed a proliferation of creative activism that addresses the emotional and embodied experience of social and political life. Just as the affective turn in aesthetically-inflected political work has led to the development of new forms and methods (and the re-interpretation of old ones), so to does an attention to ‘felt life’ demand changes in how scholars approach their subject and understand their methods.<sup>1</sup> Yet expectations for academic discourse in the humanities – from privileging the masterful critical gesture to the imperative of scrupulous citation to long publication timelines – runs the risk of ‘dis-affecting’ affect. A project rooted in desire and affection can quickly be transformed into yet another academic chore or, worse yet, an anxiety-ridden exercise in delivering an analysis rooted in extraordinarily deep feeling or personal experience in professionally acceptable form. Sensitive to this danger, the editors of *parallax* announced that this special issue would take a more exploratory mode, inviting contributors to draw on ‘the primary texts, interviews, participatory action research and critical self-reflection to draw out the tensions and possibilities produced in [...] practices which traverse the institutional territories of art and politics’.<sup>2</sup>

In that spirit, we submitted an experimental, epistolary essay reflecting broadly on the methods employed by Compass Collaborators, a loose group of artists, activists and writers with whom we work. Initiated in the autumn of 2010, following Compass participation in the United States Social forum, the exchange began initially as Sarah struggled with the relevance of the group’s open-ended, collective research trips (called ‘drifts’), public workshops and private retreats. The written conversation ultimately unfolded over many politically turbulent months – both in the United States and across the globe – and assumed its current form less than two weeks before the 2012 US presidential election, a moment of intense frustration, surprising anxiety and inevitable disappointment (regardless of outcome) for both of us.

More essay than scholarly article, what follows is the record of an attempt (the word ‘essay’ being from the Middle French *essai*: a trial or attempt) to come to terms with both the promise and limitations of an artistic research practice employing travel, self-pedagogy and the formation and strengthening of social bonds. The epistolary form evokes the processual nature and inter-subjective exchange that are hallmarks

of a Compass research drift. We chose to retain the specific voice of each individual and allow evolutions in our thinking to remain evident in the final text. In writing, we negotiated our overlapping relationships: a new collaborator joining an established collective project about which a long-time collaborator has doubts; a graduate student in dialogue with his mentor/advisor and individuals developing a friendship inflected by age and gender differences, shared projects and distinct institutional positions. The choice to reveal process, voice and subject position within the text are much more than a ‘mere’ formal decision. Instead, these choices instantiate the essay’s implicit argument: the paramount significance of attending to the ever-changing political contexts – both macro and micro – in which we work and to be open to the inevitability of self-transformation through social and aesthetic action rooted in love.

### On Drifting Adrift (SK)

I am drifting. I am sitting in a car from Japan, hurtling across the oil lines and wheat fields of Saskatchewan, twisting my body to reach back and distract a tired baby with a new book or toy. The rest of the world dissolves in her shrieks and in the grey sheets of water that assault the grey car. What passes for my whole life is here – my child, my husband, my laptop. The world could fall away, forever, and for a passing instant I think it might be OK, so long as the baby is still here to shriek.

I am adrift. I am going to Detroit to attend the US Social Forum, a gathering of social movements, at a time when I feel less a part of a movement than ever in my adult life. I am joining a group of friends who have experiences and make projects together, projects that sometimes show up in bookstores and museums and get called activist writing or art, depending on the context.<sup>3</sup> Some of our experiences and projects address vital ecological and political questions, such as ethanol production and industrial agriculture, in solidarity with social movements, though it would be a hubristic stretch to claim to be one. We call ourselves various things and let others call us Compass, as if we know which way is North. We came together five years ago in response to the geographical vastness of the American Midwest. Many of us with ties to Chicago found ourselves scattered, for work or family, across what used to be prairies. We felt isolated and lived with a sense of restricted political possibility. We began to ‘drift’ together, influenced both by Guy Debord and Precarias a la Deriva, as a way of experiencing how power is distributed and generated in space, even in the oft-derided and misunderstood American Midwest. Compass collaborators Claire Pentecost and Brian Holmes term the method ‘Continental Drift’, emphasizing the need to maintain a global perspective on our embodied, sensory experiences, and discuss it as a means of collective self-education.<sup>4</sup> We drift to counter our sense of isolation – which we sense is shared by others – and to learn about and link broadly resistant practices across time and scales. Each year, we also hold a retreat (perhaps better described as a stationary drift) and come together for three or four days to talk about culture and politics, support each other in our work, imagine collective projects and strengthen the friendship bonds between us. Drifting is one of our methods of place-based research, and in the summer of 2010 we are practicing it, in small groups, on our way to

converge in Detroit. We have invited others going to the Social Forum to do the same, and we plan on sharing our experiences and discussing our methods when we get there.

I am drifting, adrift. No matter how much we talk about drift as method, no matter how powerful the bonds of affection become on these trips – not just between spouses and lovers and children but also between friends – there remains a sour note. Something in the ecstatic feeling of travel together remains shiftless, rootless and untrustworthy. Maybe that is part of its charm. We show up in the middle of the night at run-down motels. We burn hundreds of gallons of gasoline extracted from the Alberta tar sands whose pipeline system my small family is tracing in this particular drift. We sneak photographs out the passenger window and poach wireless in hotel parking lots. In Detroit, I encounter women from a neighbourhood organization fighting the construction of a refinery to convert tar sands oil into the gasoline that I will burn in my car as I drive home. They are neither drifting nor adrift, and they don't need me to articulate the tar sands' spatial politics or elucidate the relationship between the micro and the macro of petroleum production. But if given a chance to contribute full-time to the 'front lines' of a movement, to become 'embedded' in a specific place and campaign, I am pretty sure I would shy away.

In the United States, there are relatively few examples of 'militant research' – the situated, collective knowledge production that animates social movements and enhances a collective capacity for political imagining.<sup>5</sup> The term itself originated in a particular context – the Argentinean crises of the early 2000s – and can only in its broadest outlines be applied to an American reality of political fragmentation, professionalised activism, and the containment of radical intellectuals in the academy.<sup>6</sup> It's not just that it is very difficult to work in this way (though it certainly is); it's also that many people in the Compass come from an art background in which questions over the wisdom of committing to a cause versus leveraging art's purported autonomy for critical ends still provoke heated debate. There is something I trust about my untrustworthy drifting; it is just hard to articulate what it is and far easier to recognise what it lacks.

Though the group has called for a 'longer, slower, deeper' engagement with geography and the infrastructures of transnational capitalism, we rarely spend more than a few days in any place and often no more than an afternoon. While the conversations we have may be meaningful and the observations perhaps astute, they are limited, and not just in an 'all knowledge is partial and contingent', post-structuralist sort of way. The duration of our engagement allows some impressions to be gathered but prevents the slow filtering of multiple, contradictory streams of information that staying in a place over a longer time, say months or years, might permit. From time to time, we visit places in the Midwest that point to liberating, sustainable futures and are inspired by what we find. We describe these drifts as knitting together a Midwest Radical Culture Corridor, a real-and-imagined place built of relationships between divergent, but sympathetic, oppositional political, aesthetic and life practices. When we return and speak to friends working full-time in areas in which we only dabble (permaculture, 'natural' building, local food systems) it sometimes uncovers wildly divergent points of view about the same

people and places. By dropping in for a day or week, we may see only what we are primed to see and what our local hosts and guides would like to show.

If this critique sounds familiar, it should. Tourism has been discussed and criticised in strikingly similar terms. Bashing tourists has a long and proud history among intellectuals, from Daniel Boorstin's classic indictment of their pursuit of spectacular inauthenticity to Zygmunt Bauman's less-than-flattering portrayal of the tourist as a signal figure of postmodernity.<sup>7</sup> Even those whose critique is more nuanced, notably Dean MacCannell, acknowledge the challenge of 'ethical sightseeing'.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the Compass drifts romanticise and exoticise those we visit as much as heritage parks and living history museums do for more mainstream tourists. How different is it, really, that my 'tourist gaze' is directed at cooperative solar energy systems, barter economies, and homemade aquaculture tanks?<sup>9</sup> My ability to sustain a belief in these efforts is bolstered by my mobility: shielded from the often discouraging and mundane details of day-to-day operations, I am free to remain 'inspired'. That this sort of mobility is largely an artefact of both class and race privilege is so obvious as to seem beneath comment. It helps explain why most of us on these drifts have graduate degrees, faculty positions, or neo-bohemian lives of voluntary (and mostly gentle) poverty. Our privileged mobility parallels the mobility of capital that produced the rust-belt cities, megafarms, and supply chains we trace in an attempt to know.

If this critique seems rather damning, it certainly feels that way to me, and it's levelled against myself most often. But it also feels too easy, absolute and disabling. It makes me feel helpless in my sadness and isolation, and guilty in turn for feeling impotent. Like many discussions of privilege by people on the American left, it remains mired in a zero-sum, almost Catholic identity politics whereby privilege is a sin to be disavowed and expiated at all costs. Compass friends Maribel Casas-Cortés and Sebastián Cobarrubias wrote, 'the category of privilege can limit the potential activities or alliances of social movements, or dismiss those that already exist'.<sup>10</sup> They suggest that a more helpful approach might be to remain conscious of how privilege operates while considering how the *subject positions* it produces might be used. This 'non-categorical politics' demands a rigorous practice of inquiry, action, and self-reflection, ideally connected to concrete political activity but also calling into question the constitution of subjectivities and experiences. 'By attending to the microscopic elements of everyday life, research can connect with people's experiences, allowing for mutual recognition and the discovery of previously unthinkable combinations and possibilities.'<sup>11</sup> In other words, what do our distinct positions within interlocking systems of oppression, capitalisation and socialisation enable us to experience, think, know and do? What do our sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping positions allow us to occupy, subvert and create?

This shift of emphasis from privilege to position accomplishes several important tasks. First, it makes visible the ways that mobility is not a function of privilege but rather a function of the capitalist present, which distributes forms of mobility unequally according to privilege. People and forces with different positions within the capitalist present experience and use mobility in different ways. Some of them are exploitative, others liberating, but all are intellectually and politically productive. Second, it favours a dialectical approach over the dichotomy of inside/outside on which conventional forms of tourism – as well as disabling identity

politics – are based. If tourism traditionally functioned to create a field of the exotic other against which one’s own culture might be understood, thinking positionally suggests that these relationships are multi-dimensional, overlapping, shot through with contradiction and in constant motion. The form of mobile research that the drift represents is therefore, in part, an attempt to understand our own positions in *dialogue* with others’ subjectivities and *as part of* broader institutions and infrastructures. As Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias have written in the context of the drifts practiced by Precarias a la Deriva, “‘field research’ is a temporary expedition into singular experiences. Precarias’ project searches for commonalities and fosters singularities’.<sup>12</sup> This recognition of positioning within systems – our singular commonality – and shared experience among individuals also sets apart these forms of artistic practice from a neo-avant-garde approach hinging on alienation, distance and shock.

Thinking about the drift this way, my self-critique becomes less damning, enabling me to ask the more open-ended question, ‘What, ultimately, *is* produced by our drifting?’ We know our drifts and gatherings create affection, most durably among ourselves but also for and with those we encounter and visit. They help us overcome isolation and sadness and enlarge our capacity to care. We believe drifting produces knowledge, however incomplete, of social and economic systems as manifest and contested by localised efforts. We hope it initiates relationships, however tenuous, between ourselves and the places and people we meet on our travels. Rather than making some grandiose claim for this method, or dismissing it as self-indulgent and lazy, can the love, knowledge and relationships we know we build be recast as something meaningful and politically necessary, if necessarily incomplete?

### Thinking through Sadness (HS)

I’m really sad. But saying I’m sad doesn’t quite cut it. Sad, depressed, fearful, bored, anxious, ambivalent, lonely, discouraged. Getting closer.

This sadness is not a neurosis stemming from my ‘personal’ life. Instead I’d like to insist, as others have before, on recognizing it as a *political condition*, a by-product of our lives under capitalism. The personal is political, as it has always been. Our time, bodies and minds are inscribed with capitalist competitiveness (we hustle to live, if some more than others), rhythms (cyber-time, or hyper-speed) and productivity (more + more + more). We know that the American, and increasingly global, way of life is a farce, a tale told to keep us moving. These are the rhythms of our everyday, the geography of our psyches and the landscape that produces our *political depression* in the form of sadness, fear, boredom, ambivalence, loneliness, depression, impotence and anxiety.<sup>13</sup>

Franco Berardi defines emotion as the ‘meeting point between body and cognition: a bodily elaboration of information that is reaching our mind’.<sup>14</sup> As such, we should expect our culture to be one that lacks intimacy. If our skin only ever touches the keyboard, our eyes scan e-mails, our hands work the assembly line and our minds rehearse our anxieties – then our political depression comes as no surprise.

Situating sadness as a condition suggests a need for interrogating the structures and the environments that are producing and exacerbating our anxieties. Situating sadness as a *political condition* suggests a need to interrogate the political environment that penetrates the collective psycho-sphere. Political sadness implicates capitalism, it diverts our attention from psychological accounts of the fragile individual to the production of stress and anxiety as a collective condition of life in a globalised competitive marketplace. Depression suggests a sick individual, but *political* depression suggests a sick polity.

This political sadness is something we must both activate and with which we must cope. How can we externalise these psychic-emotional states into political gestures? And how do these gestures become shared emotions that circulate between us, forming the basis for collective movement?<sup>15</sup>

Following Feel Tank Chicago, I sense that there can be a better sociality, a finer way of living. We have no blueprint only a ‘visceral intelligence’, attracting and repelling us toward and away from general directions. We know that ‘visceral impulses are bound up in culture. We know that emotions, like thoughts, are cultivated’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it would seem, there is a need for research that recognises the importance of both sensation and intellect and attempts to cultivate a visceral intellect.

Let’s cultivate new emotionalities, new loves, new friendships and new networks of mutual-aid.<sup>17</sup> But let’s also identify, and withdraw from, those psychic burdens that seep into our bodies and minds, dampening these efforts.

Let’s have more contact. Let’s touch our feet to the land, our hands to skin, our lips to lips, our mouths to ears.<sup>18</sup>

We need to ‘invest’ our energies in the realms of the affective and the intimate – a necessarily political act. To steal back our time and energies for communal and loving engagements will be integral for a finer, more sustainable livelihood. It *is not* simply an act of leisure. *We are not interested in a vacation.*

### Working through Leisure (SK)

Maybe we are not *only* interested in a vacation, but the fact remains that what we do sometimes looks an awful lot like one. It’s also a fact that people in the US aren’t taking nearly enough of them. Both worker productivity and hours have been going up for years, with attendant stressors on physical and emotional health, familial relationships and involvement in social and communal organizations.<sup>19</sup> Internationally, recent economic austerity measures in Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain have reduced public investments, wages and benefits for the employed while cutting unemployment benefits to the involuntarily jobless. There is a structural imbalance between the overworked on the one hand and the unemployed on the other, one that contributes to the political depression you describe. If everywhere ‘free’ time is under attack, taking a vacation might not be so terrible, after all. That’s maybe where we want to start but not end.

Left discourse on affective, relational, embodied, ‘leisure’ experiences remains underdeveloped compared to the analysis of waged and domestic labour and often highly critical.<sup>20</sup> We have learned that tourism is a rite of social class membership; that recreation is a pressure valve that diverts revolutionary anger and the transformation of free time into a commodity called leisure is made productive to capitalism and becomes the source of someone else’s labour.<sup>21</sup> But it is possible that even compromised forms of leisure can be engaged in ways that are non-compliant, that don’t go along with the program of consolidating class positions or colonising psychic and emotional life with leisure products. If the Compass’s drifts and annual retreats can be caricatured as forms of leisure, then let’s work through the kind of leisure they are. Let’s try to recover and amplify the spirit of curiosity, desire for non-instrumental experience and quest for pleasure, friendship, and love that is bound up in all of leisure’s problematic contradictions. We won’t purify our engagement with leisure of its tensions, and we’ll certainly invent new ones we didn’t see before. But sharing time with others is a necessary precondition to cultivating the ‘new emotionalities, new loves, new friendships’ you describe, and that time might just have to look like leisure.

### Diagnostics of Love (HS)

In thinking through the relationship between these more informal affinities and broader political movement(s), we’ve looked to Michael Hardt and Colectivo Situaciones and their theories on the related concepts of love and militant research.<sup>22</sup> We’ve wondered together if *love*, when considered as a political concept, might offer a way forward, a way to cope with and, ultimately, to activate political depression as we reclaim ‘leisure’ – torn from the grips of the market – as pleasurable.

Both Hardt and Colectivo specify love as an important concept precisely because, in entering into a relationship of love, each party is transformed by the relation. However for Hardt, normative conceptions of love spoil its political potential. When love becomes a closed concept, existing only inside the family (whether family is understood in terms of the couple, broader kinship ties, or ethnic and national groupings), it becomes impossible to extend oneself to those who fall outside this closed circuit, rendering less possible a transversal affinities-based politics that expands beyond one’s ‘own kind’.<sup>23</sup> But it is only in this opening up that we can tear ourselves away from the notion that we are ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ a particular social grouping. As a political gesture then love is a wilful *action* that requires effort.

I should confess that I haven’t worked much with Compass – I’ve only participated in a fraction of probably hundreds of conversations. I recall my first encounter with members of Compass was at an otherwise forgotten political art event in Chicago. As we began our discussion, a Compass member issued a challenge to us: ‘How can we work together when we can’t be honest about how we’re doing?’ She was pointing out everyone’s tendency to respond ‘...oh I’m fine, how are you?’ Her challenge was also a question: how might we share ourselves more fully with one another within this political and cultural community of affinities? She was suggesting that this loving act is necessary; we need to share our anxieties just as we share our politics. As Colectivo suggests:



In a love relation [...] the existence of two or more finds itself pierced by this shared experience. This is not an illusion, but an authentic experience of anti-utilitarianism, which converts the 'own' into the 'common' [...]

One does not experience friendship or love in an innocent way: we all come out from them reconstituted. These *potencias* – love and friendship – have the power to constitute, qualify, and remake the subjects they catch.<sup>24</sup>

If love is an action that is productive, then enacting love might establish these very spaces, allowing us to work in *immanence*. To work in immanence is to inhabit a situation with others, to become a part of a co-created space rife with new possibilities. This immanence is what puts us into *dialogue* with each other as well as with those we might engage while drifting. For me, this makes evident the importance of understanding the conversion as an act that might transform one's 'own' into something 'common'. It is part of reconceiving love as an act, open to all intermingling subjectivities. Here, identity (notions of inside and outside and a sense of belonging) becomes surpass-able, as multiple singularities begin to occupy new spaces of potential.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, love is *process*, love is *work*, love is *composed* and love is *constitutive*.

### Creation of Knowledge (SK)

Love makes knowledge *differently*. You've described how friendship and love remake the individual and how they are therefore a part of a remaking of a cognitive framework beyond capitalism. If we think of drifting and the retreats also as productive of knowledge that is shared with the world through exhibitions, events, and essays, how does the *work* of love engaged in those experiences influence the shape and tenor of the knowledge they produce?

Our collaborator and friend Claire Pentecost has written about the 'public amateur', a figure pursuing specialised knowledge out of curiosity or personal desire, unfettered by disciplinary boundaries. Love, curiosity and desire motivate the amateur. For instance, the caregivers of disabled people know far more about navigating the health care system than policy wonks, and they mobilise politically to advocate for their loved ones and broader community. By making this inquiry public, social and collective, the amateur's research becomes both more robust and more democratic. The figure of the amateur suggests how research and education might be explicitly distributed across the social body, rather than concentrated and fortified in corporate and academic bunkers. The amateur can post inexpert, even naïve questions that may uncover, through their very lack of assumptions, what the expert cannot. The amateur, far more than the professional, can allow himself to learn in public, to share with others his process so that the learning becomes collective and transformative.<sup>26</sup> What the public amateur cannot do (large-scale clinical trials of life-saving medication, for instance) is obvious, as are the limitations of drifts and retreats that explore places only for days or weeks. However, rather than dismissing the knowledge pursued through these methods as superficial – a criticism that implicitly accepts either academic expectations about rigor or militant

research's call for long-term engagement with specific social movements – I'd like to consider what they actually permit and produce.

Drifts proceed from a position of 'interested ignorance'. Our ignorance of a space, formation or topic is not total. Shaped by an understanding of the world that faces sharply and unapologetically left, we know just enough to intuit that we need to know more. Some of this learning is accomplished through reading, but the drift-as-method favours embodied explorations of places and social exchange with the people working in them. In this context, our interested ignorance has a profoundly levelling effect. Echoing Jacques Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster, we proceed from a presupposition of equality.<sup>27</sup> Our ignorance positions the speaker as a source of information and creator of knowledge and the audience of well-travelled artists and academics as eager pupils. The drifts are not just methods for the Compass to conduct research but also, maybe primarily, micro-seminars in which people share the results of a lifetime their own 'research' with us. I will never forget the tour sixteen-year old Sarah Holm gave of her family's organic dairy farm in central Wisconsin in June 2008. The poised, articulate, and rather formidable teenager held rapt a group of ten adults two or three times her age for an hour and a half. We peppered her with questions about the farm, our demonstrable inexperience dissolving the hierarchies of age and education and attenuating the social cleavages of religion and politics.<sup>28</sup> On numerous occasions, our curiosity about the worlds inhabited by those we visit has clearly been gratifying and meaningful to them, and they have responded with a great generosity of time and information. The drifts proceed by a loose plan, always open to happenstance, charisma, whim and coincidence (*à la* the *dérive*) in order to respond to the offers and suggestions of those we meet along the way.

Second, our acknowledged inexperience fosters a kind of open, collective listening. We don't pretend to know enough to disregard anything. Just as developmental researchers have hypothesised that children experience time more slowly because they haven't learned to filter out 'extraneous' information, our drifts and retreats produce their own temporalities, dense with wondrous detail. We are all, in varied and individual ways, attentive not only to the content but also to the contexts and subtexts of what we are hearing, seeing, and doing. This radical listening is two-way. Presupposing equality means that we are aware that those we visit learn as much about us as we do about them. Our questions, curiosity and presence create the conditions in which people come to understand their own projects differently, through conversation that is only partly guided by us, and their impressions of us are certainly as layered as ours of them. With so many people involved unevenly in different exchanges, we inevitably find, though subsequent discussion, that the conversation, tour or presentation we all just experienced together held far more facets than any one individual could or did perceive. What we experience also finds resonance with or rattles against our expectations in meaningful, often unsettling ways. In contrast to the deep knowledge produced over years, our encounters find density crowded on the surface in a very brief moment in time. In this way, the impressions that we gather even in a short visit are far too messy and diverse to be reduced to the confirmation of assumptions or the wholesale acceptance of a unified narrative presented by those with whom we converse.

Even in a compressed timeframe, tensions and incongruities in the places and people we visit are manifest, but we also choose to respect the stories people tell about themselves. Our broadly and heterogeneously anti-capitalist, feminist and democratic orientation pre-disposes us to give special attention to those working in scales and manners that are marginal to global capital and to pursue a praxis of respectful listening. We take seriously the stories of organic farmers, labour educators and community organisers, even – and perhaps especially – when their narratives better describe what they aspire to be than what they currently are. Listening to them reinforces, enriches and refines how we practice our political commitments. With the ‘own’ converted into the ‘common’, the inevitable failures of any project become a shared territory to work within and be transformed by. Perhaps this is a practice of politicised love. It certainly seems an experiential, relational application of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick termed ‘reparative reading’, in which critical tendencies are constantly in dialogue with affective, and even affectionate, ones.<sup>29</sup>

Critique – perhaps aligned with what Kosofsky termed a ‘paranoid’ style of scholarship – is a mode with which we are very familiar, and it has been enormously useful for analysing and unmasking the injustice, violence and unsustainability of capitalism and for scrutinising different forms of revolutionary praxis. But as important as it is to be conscious of the inconsistencies and compromises of every attempt to produce something beyond capitalism, endless critique can end up reinforcing the ideology that ‘there is no alternative’. We’ve long known that there is no outside position from which to critique; a politics that embraces the potential of love might help us feel our way toward responding to/with the people, movements and projects we encounter that are not yet, and never will be, doing ‘enough’. With the Left’s existing textbook full of unrealised propositions, disabling factionalism, and epic failures, we may learn something by being a little generous and loving with our nascent and imperfect efforts.

#### Notes in advance of a conclusion (HS + SK)

*Can we cohabitate with you? Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests, and passions can be eliminated? Revolutionary time, the great Simplificator, has been replaced by cohabitation time, the great Complicator.*

Bruno Latour, ‘Politics of Time, Politics of Space’<sup>30</sup>

Over the two years in which we slowly wrote and edited this text, the political landscape has shifted dramatically. At first, it seemed wildly depressing, as we watched a rabid far right sweep the November 2010 US election. As new governors and Tea Party legislators assumed office in January 2011, we watched in horror as state after state passed almost unimaginably repressive laws and slashed taxes to create the very deficits that would justify the most extreme parts of the far-right agenda. Internationally we watched the excruciating progression of the Greek financial crisis, with its succession of privatisation plans and increasingly draconian austerity measures in exchange for bailouts that helped no one more than wealthy European states and investors who managed to salvage some fraction of their capital

at the cost of an unemployment rate of nearly 25%.<sup>31</sup> In short, we began to see the neoliberal order, ascendant for the last thirty years, crumble in all the least surprising ways, that is, with various forms of violence against the local and global poor. Yet in the midst of our shock and sadness emerged an outpouring of energetic resistance. In the States, this took the form of the weeks-long occupation of the Wisconsin capitol in Madison in February 2011, to be followed six months later by whirlwind of the Occupy movement. Occupy Wall Street, along with the groups that have formed from Oakland to Okinawa, represent the biggest, most recent and most visible instance of this political awakening. But the American political awakening began right here in what we've long called the radical Midwest, and it continues to bubble to the surface in all its messy, emergent energy.

While writing this essay, we visited Madison, Wisconsin together and joined nearly 100,000 people descending on the capitol to protest Governor Scott Walker's attacks on unions and the working class. We were able to hang out inside the occupied capitol for a while, grooving to the neo-hippies beating drums and sporting fresh Wisconsin Solidarity tattoos – a clenched fist emerging from the state map. Thousands of hand-made signs covered nearly every inch of the building, and on the second floor exhausted activists cat-napped in marble niches. Though it maybe cliché to say it, it truly felt like the 'people's house'.

Just as we caught our breath from the struggles in Madison, Occupy Wall Street exploded in September 2011. Soon, our own Occupy contingent arose in solidarity, encamping in a downtown park for six months and holding weekly General Assemblies to collectively determine the future of the movement. Like many local groups, Occupy Iowa City's fragile contingent struggles to move forward as part of a global movement while having a meaningful impact locally. Despite these inevitable difficulties, Occupy at its most active demonstrated that we are at a political turning point. For the first time in our lives, thousands of people in the US have come together to politicise individual suffering, to cook and share food with strangers, to make their bodies vulnerable to the weather and police, and to do this not just for a 'day of action' but day in and day out, for weeks that stretched into months.

The Occupy movement has redrawn the divide between public and private, a line that usually legitimates the power of the already powerful. We have remembered the meaning of public space, that is, remembered how to use it, how to share and expand it. We might say we are finally learning how to take steps away from the aggressively atomising realities of our lives toward constituting a commons with others – in space, in relations, through food and gestures, in giving time and parts of our selves. The ideological diversity of the movement – a source of occasional frustration – shows how the silos of political and lifestyle homogeneity that many of us live in can easily crumble in the face of profound material and psychic urgency.

In retrospect, it's clearer why Sarah's scepticism about Compass methods peak in 2010. As the political far right gained the momentum that would soon sweep them into legislatures and governor's mansions, it was painfully obvious that something far larger and broader-based than the affective research and micro-political encounters of Compass drifts was needed. The possibility that social context may

make one's tactics irrelevant must be confronted in a radical practice that, following Nicolás Sguiglia and Javier Toret, attempts to 'always listen and test the emergent social uneasiness and potentialities, developing the capacity to transform the current atomisation process into conjunctions and isolation into collective potency'.<sup>32</sup>

But we also now know, after coming down from wild proliferations of resistance like Occupy, that we can never fully predict when mass struggle will emerge, and that the ecstasy of being swept up into something larger than oneself carries with it a particular *feeling* response, charged with joy and burdened with the anxieties of unsustainable intensity. The accelerated and simultaneous feeling of intimacy, on the one hand, and political agency, on the other, is overwhelming and exhausting. The process of finding 'collective potency' must constantly proceed, even when heightened moments of struggle have ended and the micro-political and inter-subjective scales are the only ones we can locate. These micro-politics offer us a different feeling response: one that is slower and more deliberate, one that is mutually self-transformative with others. We did not understand it entirely when we began writing this essay, but we have learned over these turbulent years that the absence of the emotional and embodied intensity, so present in mass movements, is part of what led Compass to experimental research methods like our drifts, as a way to cultivate inter-personal relations, to search again for our collective power, and to experience our inquiry in an embodied and affective way. It is with similar motivations that we began this essay, with a desire to ask: how can our love – our co-constitution of knowledge and friendship – help us find our way to the next movement of mass transformation?

We hope that Madison and the Occupy movement mark the beginning of a mass psychic break with conventional, spectacularised and ultimately unaccountable electoral politics and toward a renewed belief in more fundamental social and inter-personal change. For the time being, we will continue to work micro-politically, with our friends and collaborators, to discover through practice the contours of social and political life in the places where we live. In the next moment of an expanded, mobilized 'we', we trust this quieter practice will have taught us how to act together, in all of our fragmentation, with all our disagreement.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In a roundtable at the 2012 Modern Languages Association, scholars of affect studies addressed questions of process and form. See <<http://supervalenthought.com/2011/12/09/affect-theory-roundtable-questions-mla-2012-authors-lauren-berlant-ann-cvetkovich-jonathan-flatley-neville-hoad-heather-love-jose-e-munoz-tavia-nyongo>> [05/09/2012].

<sup>2</sup> Call for proposals for 'What Moves Us? Affective Micropolitics in Art and Activism', a special issue of the journal *parallax*, as posted to the Anarchist Academics mailing list <<https://lists.aktivix.org/mailman/listinfo/anarchist.academics>> [05/09/2012].

<sup>3</sup> As of the time of this writing, two books have been self-published under the Compass name: *A Call to Farms* (2008) and *Deep Routes: The Midwest in All Directions* (2012). Our heterogeneous output has also included a map of Midwest corn- and coal- geographies and a continuing series of performative hearings into the impacts of the Monsanto Corporation on specific communities. See <<http://midwestcompass.org>> for more information. An earlier version of this essay was published in *Deep Routes*.

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- <sup>4</sup> Claire Pentecost, 'Notes on the Project Called Continental Drift' in *Deep Routes: The Midwest in all Directions*, ed. Rozalinda Borcila, Bonnie Fortune and Sarah Ross (Iowa City, IA: White Wire, 2012), pp.16–24.
- <sup>5</sup> See Colectivo Situaciones, 'Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions', trans. Sebastian Touza and Nate Holdren, in *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations and Collective Theorization*, ed. Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber with Erika Biddle (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), pp.73–93.
- <sup>6</sup> After translating numerous militant research texts, Nate Holdren more recently expressed his disillusionment with the idea, observing that research militancy has circulated in the Anglophone world in an almost exclusively academic context, severed from social movements and becoming entangled with career concerns. The inclusion of this essay in *parallax* may be just the thing to make him wince. Nate Holdren, 'What in the Hell ... Are the Politics of Militant Research', 3 April 2010 <<http://crashcourse.666.wordpress.com/2010/04/03/are-the-politics-of-militant-research/>> [11/09/2012].
- <sup>7</sup> Daniel Joseph Boorstin, *The image: a guide to pseudo-events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) and Zygmunt Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp.29–30.
- <sup>8</sup> See Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011). Also see MacCannell's older, germinal work, *The Tourist: a new theory of the leisure class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).
- <sup>9</sup> See John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: SAGE, 2002).
- <sup>10</sup> Maribel Casas-Cortés and Sebastián Cobarrubias, 'Transatlantic Translations: Detectives and Researchers for the Revolution(s)', in *Uses of a Whirlwind*, ed. Team Colors Collective (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), p.228.
- <sup>11</sup> Casas-Cortés & Cobarrubias, 'Transatlantic', p.236.
- <sup>12</sup> Casas-Cortés & Cobarrubias, 'Transatlantic', pp.236–7.
- <sup>13</sup> Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semi-ocapitalism and the pathologies of the post-alpha generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), p.42.
- <sup>14</sup> Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, p.102.
- <sup>15</sup> Colectivo Situaciones, 'Politicising Sadness', in *What Would it Mean to Win?*, ed. Turbulence Collective (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), pp.90–97.
- <sup>16</sup> Feel Tank Chicago, 'Manifesto' <<http://www.chicago-red.org/feeltank/>> [01/02/2011].
- <sup>17</sup> For a synthesis of various non-normative thinkers on love see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp.179–188.
- <sup>18</sup> See Felix Guattari's section on 'Queer Subjectivities', in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), pp.185–232.
- <sup>19</sup> The classic text on this topic is Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). For more recent statistics geared to a general audience, see <<http://20somethingfinance.com/american-hours-worked-productivity-vacation/>> [15/05/2011].
- <sup>20</sup> Much of the scholarship on leisure is heavily sociological. See Chris Rojek, *Capitalism and Leisure Theory* (London: Tavistock, 1985) and *The Labour of Leisure* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010).
- <sup>21</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2006).
- <sup>22</sup> See Michael Hardt's lecture at the European Graduate School on 'Love as a Political Concept', available at: <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/michael-hardt/videos/about-love/>> [15/07/2011]. See also Colectivo Situaciones' essay 'On the Researcher-Militant', *Transversal* (2006) <<http://transform.eicpc.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en>> [07/01/2011].
- <sup>23</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, p.183.
- <sup>24</sup> Colectivo, 'On the Researcher-Militant'.
- <sup>25</sup> See Colectivo, 'On the Researcher-Militant' and Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- <sup>26</sup> Claire Pentecost, 'Beyond Face', in *Talking with your Mouth Full: New Language for Socially Engaged Art* (Chicago: Green Lantern Press, 2008) pp.29–45 <[http://www.clairepentecost.org/beyond\\_face.htm/](http://www.clairepentecost.org/beyond_face.htm/)> [07/09/12].
- <sup>27</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- <sup>28</sup> Informal conversation with Sarah Holm revealed her to also be a homeschooled Christian then volunteering for the 2008 US presidential campaign of Republican Senator John McCain. Our commitment to a polyvocal practice spurred us to invite her to contribute to our first book, *A Call to Farms*. Her contribution begins on page 33.
- <sup>29</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
- <sup>30</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Politics of Time, Politics of Space', *Domus*, 876 (December 2004), p.79.

<sup>31</sup> 'Labour Force Survey: June 2012' (Piraeus: Hellenic Statistical Authority) p.6 <[http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101\\_SJO02\\_DT\\_MM\\_06\\_2012\\_01\\_F\\_EN.pdf](http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101_SJO02_DT_MM_06_2012_01_F_EN.pdf)> [09/10/2012].

<sup>32</sup> Nicolás Sguiglia and Javier Toret, 'Cartography and War Machines: Challenges and Experience around Militant Research in Southern Europe', *Transversal* (2006) <<http://eicpc.net/transversal/0406/tsg/en>> [10/04/2011].

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