
ephemera: theory & politics in organization

## What is *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*?

*ephemera* is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

**theory**
*ephemera* encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

**politics**
*ephemera* encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

**organization**
Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.

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# Whither emergence?

Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Christian Garmann Johnsen and Konstantin Stoborod

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# Hosting emergence with hospitality

Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Christian Garmann Johnsen and Konstantin Stoborod

## Introduction

This special issue follows from the location of our 2015 conference, which took place in Moscow, the capital of a country that is often referred to as 'emerging'. What does it mean to be 'emerging', we thought, and (how) can this concept be mobilised to mean something else? When we speak of an 'emerging' country/market/economy, 'emerging' – a politically correct version of what was previously called 'lesser developed' – refers to an entity that has supposedly opened its doors to growth-oriented capitalism and is catching up with the 'developed' countries of this world. In our view, this conception of 'emergence' is problematic in at least two ways.

First, it creates divisions by maintaining a hierarchy of 'developed' and 'emerging' countries, in which the latter are positioned as lagging behind. Regardless of whether these are mainstream business magazines or critical left-wing journals, such divisions are constantly reproduced: developed – developing, core – periphery, First World – (ex-)Second/Third World, North – South, West – East. There are, of course, geopolitical and cultural differences that have implications for analysing certain areas separately (e.g. Alcadipani et al., 2012; Gorbach and Salamanyuk, 2014), as well as for epistemologies to do this from, without succumbing to the global coloniality of knowledge (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Castro-Gómez, 2007; Tlostanova, 2012). However, 'the "West" – that damned word! – names this disjunction' (Badiou, 2008: 60), suggesting that the path the 'developed' countries have taken is the only possible option for humanity.

Second, 'emergence' entails a capitalist teleology. However, as they face entangled ecological, economic, social and political crises, which can be referred to as

'multiple crisis' rooted in the capitalist system itself (Brand and Wissen, 2012), the 'vanguard' countries have lost sight of their telos. The recent US elections and the Brexit referendum, as well as the rise of the far right in Europe and the US are all harbingers of a dramatic change in the perspective. Alongside this, the ultimate goal of capitalist growth is becoming increasingly unclear. Vitality is being squeezed out of human lives, while austerity, precarity (Standing, 2011) and inequality (Piketty, 2014) are increasingly on offer. The countries that have stepped onto the path of 'emergence' by adopting some form of neoliberalism are not necessarily in bloom either (e.g. Dale, 2011). Furthermore, it is no secret that such emergence takes place at the expense of certain localities and groups of people (Escobar, 1995; Badiou, 2008).

Ironically, one crucial concern is whether there are any alternatives to the world that has 'emerged' in this way. With its publication on the 100-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution, this special issue offers an occasion for reflection. This remarkable event created room for radical alternatives and progressive change to arise, such as the Soviet environmentalism of the 1920s (Gare, 1993) and the implementation of women's rights in the Soviet Union, including equal pay and abortion rights, much earlier than in the 'Western' countries. At the same time, with growth dominating the economic and social agenda, combined with authoritarianism, it 'emerged' into a social, economic and environmental disaster. As such, even though 'anti-emergence' seems to be the only response to 'emergence' in terms of capitalism and economic growth, we do not want to dismiss the word itself. Instead, we argue that a different understanding of the notion of 'emergence' can help us to (re-)imagine alternatives and open a myriad of mutually enriching ways of thinking – the focus of this issue.

The rest of this editorial unfolds as follows. First, we outline the different conceptualisations of the notion of emergence. Second, based on the approach adopted in this special issue, we follow Derrida in offering to rethink emergence with hospitality. Third, we ponder over the contributions that have come out of adopting this approach in practice and the contradictions of the process. Finally, we outline the contributions.

## Emergence without politics?

'Emergence' comes from the Latin *e-*, which means 'out, forth', and *mergere*, which means 'to dip'. As such, the term suggests openness, undecidedness and multiple potentialities. For example, it may be defined as 'the process of becoming visible after being concealed', with *emergere* in Latin also meaning 'bring to light' (Oxford dictionary, online). This suggests multiple ways to think about emergence, which

is what we invited this issue's contributors to do. We did so without suggesting a focus on certain streams of literature or research traditions, thereby staying true to the openness that the etymology of the word entails. However, we are well aware that some conceptual literature has dealt with emergence in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and, indeed, organisation studies. In this section, we offer an overview of the term in light of the earlier literature and argue that, although insightful as a philosophical concept, it lacks engagement with politics.

The British ethologist and psychologist Conwy Lloyd Morgan initially coined the concept in 1923, although it can be traced to earlier philosophers like Leibniz and Shelling (Gare, 2002). Emergence has been conceptualised through either a diachronic or a synchronic understanding. A diachronic understanding of emergence refers to the appearance or development of a phenomenon, while a synchronic understanding focuses on the relationship between the properties and powers of the whole and its parts (Elder-Vass, 2005). Thus, in the 'emerging' economies/markets/countries discourse, a diachronic emergence takes place, with countries that were not previously part of the global market entering it, i.e. establishing market-oriented systems and experiencing fast economic growth via economic liberalisation (Hoskisson et al., 2009). However, it is emergence in the synchronic sense that has received most attention in the conceptual literature (Elder-Vass, 2005; Sawyer, 2001).

In the conceptual discussion of synchronic emergence, a key question is whether the whole can be explained solely by its parts. Is the whole larger or different from its parts? Alternatively, is the whole simply the sum of the individual components? 'Individual emergentists' maintain that society is nothing but the collection of individuals. This position is mostly defended by economists as well as some sociologists, including F.A. von Hayek, one of the 'founding fathers' of neoliberalism, who argued that higher-level social phenomena emerged from individual actions (see Sawyer, 2001). This understanding of emergence resonates with the 'emerging market economies' discourse in which the individualist ethos is complementary to economic liberalisation. The calculable and elsewhere-tested recipes that are forced upon 'emerging' entities often do not work. Moreover, they exclude ideas, practices and people not seen as fitting into these recipes, thereby testifying to a complete disregard for specific contexts.

In sharp contrast, the 'collectivist emergentists' insist that the whole cannot be explained by the properties of its parts (see Sawyer, 2001). A common example is water, which consists of hydrogen and oxygen but has properties that are different from both of these elements (Elder-Vass, 2005). Sawyer (2006: 148) uses the examples of collective music creation, especially jazz, and improvisational theatre to demonstrate how the outcomes of each of these activities are unpredictable,

contingent and not fully explainable by the group's components. For him, emergence is a collective phenomenon. In their own unique ways, the contributions to this issue offer different approaches to exploring emergence beyond an individualistic mode of reasoning.

Emergence has also been connected to questions of organisation (e.g. Lissack, 1999[*]). Elder-Vass (2005) argues that organisation is actually *central* to emergence, as it brings the 'more than' into the mere collection of elements, allowing emergence to take place. Relatedly, Sawyer (2006) stresses the self-organised character of emergence, which he refers to as organising without the organiser, as seen in a flock of birds flying in a V-shape or an orchestra not necessarily in need of a conductor to perform. Although readers of *ephemera* will immediately connect such self-organisation to political questions of organisation (e.g. Bell, 2014; Stoborod and Swann, 2014), this connection is manifestly lacking in most conceptual discussions of emergence. Indeed, it is surprising that 'emergence' is mostly used in descriptive and somewhat rigid ways, even in explicitly critical strands of thought.

This point echoes Protevi (2006), who notes that scholars have been too preoccupied with the synchronic understanding of emergence. In contrast, he uses Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy to zoom in on a diachronic understanding, and he speaks of emergence as the 'novelty' that is located outside of the existing system. For us the point here is not to call for a prioritisation of understanding emergence in the diachronic sense. As noted earlier, diachronic emergence might as well denote a shift to capitalism, as experienced by 'emerging economies'. However, the connection of emergence to going outside the existing system resonates with us and, in fact, points to where our interest in the concept lies. This connection can be found in some scholarship, where emergence has been mainly associated with going outside the dominant systems of thought. It has helped highlight the inseparability of the physical and the mental, of nature and society, and of nature and culture – in other words, it has been used to problematise the many schisms by which today's societies, as well as sciences, are divided, and recognise the wholeness of the world (e.g. Gare, 2002; Pueyo, 2014).

Gunnarsson (2013) pushes this discussion even further and uses the concept of emergence to understand nature and culture as inseparable, but without one being subsumed by the other (see also Soper, 1995; Malm, forthcoming). In so doing, she not only critiques the tendency to conflate nature and culture when arguing for their connection, but also voices the ambition for feminist research to

[*] This is what the whole journal *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* is devoted to, the first issue of which we are referring to here.

understand the political and, consequently, drive social change (see Gunnarsson, 2013: 18). The attempt to mobilise the notion of emergence to address the problems and possible transformations of our troubled world is exactly what unites the contributions to this issue. However, to be able to unpack the various views on emergence driven by these intentions, the concept needs to be met with 'hospitality'. Hence, we must remain open to new understandings of emergence and think creatively about how it can be conceptualised. Next, we explore the very possibility of remaining open by drawing on Derrida's discussion of hospitality.

## Rethinking emergence with hospitality

With the intention of moving organisation studies toward a new location, we hosted the 2015 *ephemera* conference in Moscow. The aim was to explore different understandings of emergence. This issue, which stems from the Moscow conference, uses the concept of emergence to explore alternative politics, epistemologies and ontologies. By virtue of casting our eyes on these issues, we are, in fact, going back to the genesis of *ephemera*. The original vision for the journal, as stated in its very first editorial, was to 'produce a space for the articulation of *alternative models of critique*' insofar as critique 'challenges orthodoxies, questions power relations, [and] disrupts the normal' (Böhm et al., 2001: 4, original italics). To achieve this goal, Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones and Chris Land – the journal's founders – hoped that *ephemera* would facilitate a dialogue that would 'interrupt and erupt' (*ibid*.) by creating a space for critical discussion around organisation. For us, emergence is linked to attempts to explore alternative terrains for engaging in various practices, obtaining knowledge, organising politics and understanding the world around us.

Along these lines, we wanted to seek out other ways of exploring the concept of emergence, which offers fertile soil for grappling with alternatives due to its polysemy. Nevertheless, this endeavour entails a certain impossibility. While we intend to introduce alternative perspectives on emergence in organisation studies and academia more generally, we might simultaneously be laying the premises for how such a conversation would take place. In other words, we want to remain open to new ways of thinking about emergence, but we might have already presupposed what those ways of thinking entail. Such an approach would proceed on the basis of having unconsciously prepared for the unpreparable, expected the unexpected and foreseen the unforeseeable. However, in order to truly remain open to new ways of thinking, we must receive the unexpected, tolerate the unforeseeable and accept the fact that we might be taken by surprise.

No one is more aware of this 'aporia' or 'self-engendered paradox' (Norris, 2002: 49) than Jacques Derrida. In his discussion of hospitality – the event of receiving the arrivant or the guest – Derrida makes the following argument:

> The absolute arrivant must not be merely an invited guest, someone I'm prepared to welcome, whom I have the ability to welcome. It must be someone whose unexpected, unforeseeable arrival, whose visitation—and here I'm opposing visitation to invitation—is such an irruption that I'm not prepared to receive the person. I must not even be prepared to receive the person, for there to be genuine hospitality: not only have no prior notice of the arrival but no prior definition of the newcomer, and no way of asking, as is done at a border, "Name? Nationality? Place of origin? Purpose of visit? Will you be working here?" The absolute guest [hôte] is this arrivant for whom there is not even a horizon of expectation, who bursts onto my horizon of expectations when I am not even prepared to receive the one who I'll be receiving. That's hospitality. Hospitality is not merely receiving that which we are able to receive. (Derrida, 2007a: 451)

Here, Derrida reflects upon the impossibility of remaining open to the other. If our horizon of expectation has certain preconfigured expectations of who the guest will be, or what he or she will say or do, then no genuine hospitality can take place, as we are only able to recognise the guest on the basis of those expectations. Hence, we are neither open to what the other represents nor able to receive the unexpected. For this reason, genuine hospitality, according to Derrida, can only take place when we are confronted with someone whom we are unprepared to receive. Derrida further remarks:

> The arrival of the arrivant will constitute an event only if I'm not capable of receiving him or her, only if I receive the coming of the newcomer precisely when I'm not capable of doing so. (2007a: 451)

In other words, it is only on the basis of a fundamental impossibility that hospitality can take place. It is important to emphasise that the fact that Derrida considers the event impossible does not imply that it never takes place. Quite the contrary, the event does occur, perhaps more often than we think. The main point is that, in the words of Derrida, 'I cannot say the event in theoretical terms and I cannot pre-dict it either' (*ibid.*: 452). Genuine hospitality manifests itself when we least expect it – when our preconceived beliefs are challenged or when we are confronted with something that transcends our current expectation horizon. What, then, are the necessary conditions for this to happen? How can we, as scholars, allow new insights to enter our field? How can we, paradoxically, remain open so that the event can take place?

For Derrida, an event entails the emergence of the new. However, what does it mean to invent the new? Invention of the new, Derrida emphasises, involves embracing the 'new, original, unique', which requires us to '[break] with

convention' (2007b: 1). Moreover, invention 'inserts a disorder into the peaceful ordering of things' (*ibid.*). At the same time, Derrida notes that in order for an invention to be acknowledged as new, it has to be 'evaluated, recognized, and legitimized by someone else' (*ibid.*: 5). Any new insights must comply with expectations about what is considered original, unique and inventive. Herein lies a paradox. On the one hand, any invention has to transcend established social conventions in order to avoid merely repeating the old. On the other hand, any invention has to appeal to the established order insofar as it is recognised as inventive. In other words, an invention has to simultaneously transcend and conform to a system of conventions. In turn, any attempt to invent the new must confront a paradox: the new is possible insofar as it is impossible.

This paradox is embedded in the academic discourse in which we partake. Although we strive for innovative research, we remain within an academic tradition that operates on the basis of conventions for what is considered, for example, 'excellent', 'relevant' or 'impactful' (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012; see also the recent special issue on 'The labour of academia', Butler et al., 2017). Any discourse, especially the academic one, remains governed by rather rigid conventions that deem certain utterances appropriate and others inappropriate. These are fundamental assumptions about what is right and wrong, true and false, rational and irrational – de facto, what is acceptable and what is not. This is particularly evident in the literature on, for instance, emerging economies. Paradoxically, having confronted truly unforeseen and complex phenomena (like post-colonial independent India or post-Soviet neoliberally reformed Russia), the respective fields of inquiry came up with nothing better than measuring them against the yardstick of 'developed' countries – that is, with the West. This was an outcome of operating within what Derrida terms the 'binary oppositions' that govern our thinking.

In academic discourse, we always have certain expectations of what serves as a rational argument, what constitutes a solid concept and how persuasive academic writing should look. There are methodological standards, criteria of consistency, structures of argumentation and specific terminologies to which academic writing should adhere. Any discourse, as Böhm et al. (2001) recognised, following the work of Foucault, is embedded in power relations. Therefore, it is neither necessary to abandon those conventions nor easy to do away with them. Nevertheless, we should be aware of the fact that academic work, including organisation studies, proceeds with certain presuppositions, and that any new insights must both transcend and conform with those presuppositions. They will invariably confine experience to certain preconceived oppositions that prevent alternative modes of reasoning from emerging (Cooper, 1986).

In line with Derrida, we posit that our task in not only this special issue but also the field of organisation studies and academia in general is to 'destabiliz[e] foreclusionary structures' (Derrida, 2007b: 45). This allows for the release of new modes of experience and new ways of looking at the world – in short, that which is yet to come. The challenge is driving a wedge between the oppositions that inevitably define the field. This is not a dialectical pursuit of arriving at synthesis. Quite the opposite – we must learn to live with aporias. On the one hand, the understanding of emergence that we offer here is about openness, undecidedness and multiple potentialities. On the other, for this understanding to assume a comfortable position within organisation studies, it has to be brushed against what we know to be conventions of the discipline. To put it differently, we face the impossible task of being a good host to emergence.

## On the possibility of being a good host

The self-engendered paradox that Derrida identifies is common for both scientific and social-scientific epistemologies. Yet, while the paradox is somewhat accounted for in such fields as quantum physics, the social sciences, including organisation studies, lack a coping strategy. The radical twist that we dare to introduce here is to let emergence, so to speak, host itself. Indeed, when offering his metaphorical language of hospitality, Derrida makes it tempting to further indulge in musing with it. One cannot help but notice that the setup to which Derrida alludes in his analogy is very specific, arguably of a petit bourgeois kind. Imagine, instead, that you have a guest who does not expect much and brings their own booze, and that you do not suffer from any philistine qualms. That is the kind of guest we expected when wondering 'Whither emergence?'.

In the case of apolitical deployment of the concept of 'emergence', we witness a conspicuous inability to challenge 'the peaceful order of things' and a rather ardent desire to subject emergent phenomena to the conventional framework of knowing and interpreting. How does this issue allow us to think and act differently? It is not straightforward, but not impossible. The key is to allow emergence to navigate between the Scylla of reproduction of convention and the Charybdis of putting anything under the banner of new and innovative. This implies that we have been guided by the following less metaphorical considerations.

Fundamentally, we refrained from adopting an expert position suggesting that 'we' are the ones who represent Western/developed academia. It was also paramount for us to avoid creating yet another collection of contributions that would represent a different (from Western) point of view, for this would have undermined the idea of the world as one. Our approach aims to transcend the divisions mentioned

earlier by thinking beyond the dualisms between developed and developing, core and periphery, First World and (ex-)Second/Third World, North and South, and West and East. In this way, the issue is performative. This being noted, the marker of 'emergence' inevitably opens up spatial contexts to non-Western areas of interests. Albeit some scholars might not be domiciled in these respective geographies, which highlights the futility of any attempt to demarcate between 'here' and 'there'. As a result, when we task ourselves with creating the basis for new ways of thinking about emergence, it is vital to avoid traps of exotifying, romanticising or othering. Although this special issue covers contexts that are conventionally referred to as 'emerging', we insist on engaging with them as parts that make up a whole.

A more explicit approach to becoming a good host that would satisfy Derrida's criteria for genuine hospitality to some extent would be to adhere to an 'open-door' policy. Contributions could channel through, but we would not know their take on emergence. *ephemera* has always been open to submissions that are 'experimental modes of representation'. Yet, it is important to remain aware of the challenge of thinking beyond established formats and conventions. In preparing this issue, while keeping the doors open and remaining open to surprises, we witnessed apprehensions of the theme of emergence that made themselves comfortable within the offered space: a play, a comic and unconventional polemic. At the same time, it is crucial that openness is not confined to a particular *special* issue.

A final consideration relates to making decisions, which cannot be avoided. Merely succumbing to an 'anything goes' approach would risk devaluing all knowledge claims. This would also undermine Derrida's requirement for validation of innovative disruptive knowledge. Thus, although this is considered commonplace, we urge scholars who are ready to take part in our pursuit of 'genuine hospitality' to be truly self-reflective about the degree to which the field of enquiry is really open. In addition, despite the openness and multiple possibilities that the etymology of the word 'emergence' suggests, it is not simply a useful philosophical concept that helps clarify positions within critical research – it is also a political commitment. This is a thread and intention common to the contributions to this issue.

## Overview of the contributions

Now that we have declared our epistemological and political commitments, it is time to see whether the contributions that found their way through our open doors have managed to make themselves feel at home. We are not going to introduce the contributions in the order of their appearance in this issue or in any other pecking

order. Instead, we are going to waltz between them, as they rather naturally share topics relevant for conversation, like good guests would at a drinks reception.

We move first to the buzz of legitimate discontent over the totalising liberal conceptions of 'emergence'. The article by Maitrayee Deka takes us geographically to the 'I' in a praised BRICS quintet and goes straight to the heart of the problem with economistic grand narratives of emergence, which always overlook the finer details. On the basis of her rich fieldwork material gathered from the 'labyrinth *like* bazaars' of Delhi, the author critically evaluates the nature and impact of the 'Make in India' programme. This top-down governmental programme designed to bolster India's manufacturing sector and attract foreign investments completely disregarded the knowledge and skills of the actors in the informal economy, who nurtured an ethos of turning obstacles inherent to Indian economy and society into opportunities. This was achieved through what Deka calls practices of 'tinkering' or 'improvisation' – the sort of grass-roots ingenuity reflective of a much more heterogeneous social world than the state pundits were willing to recognise. Their vision, instead, was that of an imposing lion (the logo of the 'Make in India' programme) that safeguards formalisation of the economy according to a particular imperative of neoliberal globalisation.

Srivatsan Lakshminarayan picks up on those zoological obsessions of policymakers and explains that roaring tigers, lions, confident elephants and other beasts are ways to package up a country and sell it on the global financial market. By providing a detailed analysis of macroeconomic policies, the ins and outs of 'haute finance' and various mediated discourses of growth and competitiveness, this contribution tackles the core mechanics of ruthless international competition. The main observation here is that in the post-reform India (and by no means it should be treated as a unique and isolated case) all the powerful actors are paddling a very narrow and instrumentally economic understanding of what constitutes emergence. By employing the work of Karl Polanyi for his critical analysis, Lakshminarayan warns that such parochialism sweeps through the diversity and humanness of collective histories and geographies and results in 'the non-reflexive advancement of performative growth over its subjective and substantial alternatives'.

Thus far we have got two very poignant accounts of how distinctively jejune, reductive and yet very potent narratives of emergence dictate the terms on which peoples and entire geographies have to advance. In fact, they even colonised the language with which we could tell different stories, articulate different understandings and conceive of an alternative world. Journalists, politicians, lay public, as well as academics have been so taken with this only existing way of

telling the stories of catching up with the developed world that any attempt to escape them is bound to face difficulties.

The grand narratives of growth and emergence that Deka and Lakshminarayan bring to our attention are extremely strong. In fact, they are so strong that they tend to become omnipresent, making it very difficult to build narratives that are not centred around them, regardless of whether those narratives aim to praise or critique. This is demonstrated in Matilda Dahl's contribution, which zooms in on the phenomenon of M-pesa mobile money in Kenya – a way to exchange money using mobile phones that existed even before Swish. Dahl experienced the technology first-hand while working in one of the mobile money booths, where she engaged with people within and around M-pesa. However, she does not wish to offer insights into the business's success nor provide a counter-narrative to it. Instead, she tells a *different* story, a story that is difficult to tell due to predefined ways of thinking and writing. In telling this story, she shares her thoughts and frustrations, but actively chooses not to make a knowledge claim, thereby leaving the story incomplete. This allows for the story to unfold in readers' minds in a myriad of ways. This introspective piece, which is infused with personal affect, testifies to the difficulties anyone willing to escape a well-rehearsed emergence narrative would encounter.

If emergence is to be taken outside the existing system, as we invited our contributors to do, then one would have to go beyond traditional tropes and conventional focal points. In this regard, Dahl's rejection of making a point about emergence may be seen as creating a crack that might open up the concept to other understandings. Bayo Akomolafe and Alnoor Ladha, in their piece, focus on precisely this crack and conceptualise emergence as the 'onto-epistemology of not-knowing'. In their provocative (by academic standards) article, the authors take inspiration from a wide range of sources, including popular culture, psychedelics, quantum physics and, notably, the work of Karen Barad. They reject the linear and calculable understanding of emergence as catching up in terms of economic growth via economic liberation. More importantly, they reject pre-conceived recipes for social change, suggesting that 'knowing' and claiming to know inevitably close off some potentialities and, consequently, emergence. Instead, they 'reimagine emergence as a radical indeterminacy that unsettles the grounds upon which the exclusionary discourse/practices of neoliberal expansionism as emergence are built'.

We read the approaches of Akomolafe and Ladha, and Dahl not as surrender or recognition of the futility of efforts to enact change, but as a call to keep our eyes open, regardless of whether we are trying to organise alternatives, undertake research or engage in other praxes. At the same time, it is as important to open

our eyes to and make sense of existing phenomena that may help to engender a better world.

Neera Singh brings to our attention the community forestry initiatives in Odisha, India, where affects, emotions and subjectivities shape up the practices of commoning. Being key to forest protection, they make commons a lot more than just an organisational form. She argues for thinking of the commons as 'affective socio-nature relations' and practices of commoning as a means of nurturing this relationship. Thus, if we open our eyes, it is actually possible to see manifestations of emergence that are already happening. Emergence, in Singh's study, can be found in the 'lived practices of dwelling in the environment and making it home', with human beings, too, being seen as 'emergent rather than fixed and immutable'.

Without undermining affect's potential to bring social transformation of the kind that many readers of *ephemera* would like to see, it is important to remember that affect can also be used to pursue capitalist goals or certain organisational agendas (see Karppi et al., 2016). This is highlighted in Nicolas Bencherki's piece (this issue), which examines the case of military wives, and how their self-organising attempts are either discouraged or inevitably claimed by the military organisation depending on how they fit with the organisation's image. The military is by no means an alternative organisation that threatens capitalist emergence. However, this example should stimulate thinking about any groups or organisations positioning themselves as alternative or anti-capitalist – regardless of whether they are collectives, cooperatives or commons. Even organisations with the 'best intentions' tend to put organisational interests at the fore by, for example, sanctioning open critique or appropriating individual actions for organisational ends. Such subordination of people makes even politically just alternatives problematic and is far from encouraging of social transformation.

Nicolas Bencherki uses the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon's concept of the pre-individual to rethink the relationship between organisations and their members. Traditionally, social sciences in general and organisation studies in particular have either considered organisations as the aggregation of individual actions (individualism) or systems that constitute their members (holism). With the concept of the pre-individual, Bencherki circumvents the dualism between holism and individualism, and suggests that we should pay attention to the pre-individual processes that constitute actions. To illustrate this approach, Bencherki offers an analysis of the documentary *Nomad's land*, focusing on the relationship between the army and a group of military wives. His analysis suggests that we should remain sensitive to the politics involved in individualisation processes and look at how actions are always configured by pre-individual forces.

The contributors to this issue have different takes on emergence, and trying to pinpoint the 'right' one is not our task. This openness, we suggest, hints in the direction of active politics. This can be best demonstrated by art, as art does not necessarily posit where or what the 'truth' is, but creates affect and invites people to think and feel. This issue offers a whole set of contributions devoted to art and artistic interventions, highlighting the centrality of art in imagining and acting for a different world. However, the art world itself is not without problems, with precarity, marketisation and, as Autonomous Artists Anonymous vividly demonstrate, the vicious circles of signification and commodification at the forefront from an early point in one's life as an artist. According to this collective, even explicit political statements on art always run the risk of being captured within them, feeding into capitalism's value creation. Emergence instead arises from the engagement with art itself and is seen as 'new forms, sensations and affects which operate outside and beyond signification and cognition, and which can provoke change, within us, between us and in how we live together, in and of the world'. As such, there is hope in art's radical potential via the refusal to commodify it or the affects it creates. This has clear political implications without screaming about politics.

We think this is exactly what the artistic contributions to this special issue do. In order to avoid overburdening them with our interpretations and in line with the understanding of emergence in this issue, we keep their descriptions brief. Brian Showalter Matlock's play on hierarchy and cooperation brings together thinkers and strands of thought from different times in dialogues on these themes or the lack thereof. Eileen Laurie's comic takes us to an academic conference in Rio (what an emergent destination!), with climate change happening in the background and jellyfish paying a visit. Both the play and the comic drive our attention toward particular themes – hierarchy and cooperation, and climate change – and are political in this sense. However, they do not point fingers in overly obvious ways, leaving the space for thinking and imagination, as well as emotional and affective responses from the readers.

We have not been fully able to stick to our promises, however, adding some interpretations and pointing some fingers. More broadly, despite claiming openness when introducing the contributions, we have still said quite a lot. After highlighting undecidedness and multiple potentialities, we have insisted on taking stances and acting politically. This speaks to the topic of Andrei Botez and Joel Hietanen's note, which reflects on the paradox associated with following Gilles Deleuze and explores the possibilities of enabling new thought to emerge. While Deleuze explicitly takes issue with the idea of one final truth and embraces the idea of thinking differently, the reception of his philosophy has turned him into what the authors call 'the "official philosopher", the oracle that speaks the non-truth'.

This poses a fundamental challenge for those who choose to draw inspiration from Deleuze's philosophy in their own scholarship, as one can only remain loyal to Deleuze's legacy by betraying it. These authors emphasise that thinking requires violence, and that without this violence new thought cannot emerge.

This point resonates with us. We are willing to open up the concept of emergence and host its different interpretations while also trying to think and make our voices heard. Violence has certainly been committed, but it is up to our readers to decide whether the sacrifice was worthwhile.

This special issue is rounded off by reviews of recent books that have been carefully tailored to the subject of the issue. They offer additional forays into a multifaceted understanding of emergence and augment the view presented in the issue's original contributions. Think of them as a book stall that you happen to notice while leaving a post-conference discussion.

Beata Sirowy's review of Santiago Zabala's *Why only art can save us* is another contribution highlighting art's key importance for social change. Drawing on Heidegger's thought and, to some extent, on critical social theory, it argues that art can foster a return to *Being*, which is currently dominated by technology and instrumental rationality. This *Being* would be in a non-reductionist perception of the world and human existence. Empty aestheticisation of art will not awaken it, but there is much more hope in art that creates a sense of emergency and an awareness that a different world is possible.

Marco Checchi reviews *Vulnerability in resistance* – an edited volume that is comprised of a series of essays that engage with the interplay between vulnerability and resistance. Those essays take us to a variety of geographical and political contexts. Departing from and being largely indebted to the work of Judith Butler, the contributions in this book make various attempts at rethinking the nature of vulnerability and its occurrences on a diverse political landscape. The book, as Checchi hints, can propel further reflections on what possibilities for resistance can be created and spotted once we realise that power is vulnerable too.

In Martin Parker's review of David Bell's thoroughly scholarly monograph *Rethinking utopia* we get to the question that is always on many sceptical lips when, like in this issue, different and ultimately better worlds are being argued for. Namely, is this not all a bit unrealistic? The answer is 'no', if we follow the argument of the book, which rejects the usual thinking that eventually renders utopia as a desire, as something which is never here and now, a 'nice idea' for which we are always longing. The point of the book, which this issue is

wholeheartedly willing to solidarise with, is that utopia is a collective practice of creating new forms of affect in the prefigurative present.

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# Becoming a commoner: The commons as sites for affective socio-nature encounters and co-becomings

Neera Singh

## abstract

This paper draws attention to the somewhat neglected domains of affects, emotions, and subjectivity in the study of the commons. The paper argues that a focus on affective and communicative relations among humans and between humans and more-than-humans can enrich our understanding of the practices of commoning and the processes of *becoming* a commoner. Using the case of community forestry initiatives in Odisha, India, it illustrates how rural people become commoners through the embodied practices of caring for the forests as a shared common. The paper uses this empirical example and conceptual resources from affect theory and relational ontology to think about the commons as affective socio-nature entanglements and as a nurturing ground for subjectivity. It discusses the implications of attention on the commons and the practices of commoning for enabling the emergence of other-than-capitalist subjectivities.

## Introduction

Let us begin with the story of a pasture 'open to all' and the herdsman and his herd of sheep that Garrett Hardin uses to illustrate his prediction of the 'tragedy of the commons'. Hardin's herdsman, as a 'rational being', strives to maximize his gains by adding sheep to his herd until his actions inevitably lead to the degradation of the common grazing pasture (Hardin, 1968). In this 'mini-maxi' model of humans, where humans are seen to minimize efforts or inputs and maximize returns (Graeber, 2001: 6), the affective life of the shepherd is muted. In the picture that Hardin invites us to imagine, the pursuit of self-interest by all actors

leads to 'ruin for all'. This caricature does not take into account the possibility that the shepherd might grieve the loss of his green valley when it degrades, or that grief might galvanize him into action to avert the tragedy. The affective and communicative relations between the pasture and the shepherd and amongst the shepherds and their power to bring both the commoner and the commons into being remain invisible in this picture.[1]

Scholars working on common pool resources have extensively critiqued Hardin's prediction of the tragedy.[2] Elinor Ostrom's landmark work has been especially influential in showing that local communities can self-organize and craft institutions to avert this tragedy (see especially Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Gardener, 1993) and that private property or state authorities are not the only means by which to solve common pool resource problems. While common pool resources (CPR) work in the Ostrom tradition seeks an alternative to the powerful and reductive narratives derived from liberal and neoliberal economic theory, it tends to reproduce the very defining features of these narratives (Bresnihan, 2016). Working with the same methodological individualist assumptions of neoliberal economic theory that it critiques, it assumes that without proper rules, incentives, and sanctions, individuals will degrade and ultimately destroy common resources (Bresnihan, 2016; Cleaver, 2007). It thus pays insufficient attention to alternative conceptions of rationality and to humans as 'thinking-feeling' empathetic beings. This paper draws attention to this neglect and argues that attention on affective and communicative relations between the commons and the commoners can lead to more robust theorizing about the commons, and also possibly help in bringing together divergent ways of thinking about the commons.

The uses of the term *commons*, as McCarthy (2009: 498) points out, are manifold, and the term can be thought of as a 'keyword' in Raymond Williams' sense of the word. While CPR theorists predominantly focus on small-scale natural resources as shared commons, autonomous Marxists talk about 'the common' in the singular as a principle of organizing production and as the shared commonwealth of humanity. As enclosure of the commons intensifies, and all realms of life are increasingly commodified, the calls for reclaiming commons or inventing new commons are growing strong. These calls are coming from diverse sources that do not necessarily share similar theoretical foundations (McCarthy, 2006). On the

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1 Peter Linebaugh (2010) observes Hardin's 'rational' herdsman is likely to be a selfish or lonely herdsman. He says that in history, the commons have mostly been governed, and the greedy shepherd is likely to be punished by some community governance system.

2 Hardin also admitted, in an article written in 1998 (p. 682), that 'the weightiest mistake' in the paper was the omission of the modifying adjective 'unmanaged'.

one hand, there are activists involved in struggles to 'reclaim' the historically enclosed commons, or reassert local rights over land, forests, and water bodies as part of the struggles against extractive capitalism; on the other hand, there are emerging practices of creating new commons, especially in the global North in spheres such as open-source software, urban gardens, and the reclamation of cities. Traditionally, CPR theory has engaged with shared natural resources, such as forests, land, and water bodies that need collectively respected rules to manage them. It has expanded its ambit to include non-material social and cultural resources such as information and intellectual property or even shared culture itself as the 'new commons' (for a review see Hess, 2012). In contrast to the work of CPR scholars, a growing number of commons activists suggest that diverse commoning projects represent 'an alternative form of production in the make' (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014: i95) and are reminders that 'alternative social relations are entirely thinkable' (McCarthy 2005: 16). Summing up this perspective, Federici and Caffentzis (2014) emphasize that the commons are not only the practices for sharing in an egalitarian manner the resources we produce but are also a commitment to the fostering of common interest in every aspect of our lives and political work. These activists advocate thinking about commoning as a set of generative practices that support sustenance and enhancement of life (Linebaugh, 2008; Bollier, 2014; Bollier and Helfrich, 2014).

As the Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich, in his brief but powerful essay titled 'Silence is a common' (1983), reminded us that the process of 'enclosure of the commons' was not merely a physical takeover of the commons by the lords in eighteenth century England, but signified a shift in the attitudes of society towards the environment. This shift entailed seeing the environment as a resource to be exploited for human needs instead of as a commons to be cherished, shared, and nourished through practices of care (Illich, 1983). Resisting this dominant shift, indigenous peoples and other locally-rooted cultures around the world have often continued to view the common(s) as a source of sustenance of life that needs to be nurtured with relations of care[3] (Kimmerer, 2013; Sullivan, 2009; and many others). 'Thinking and feeling with the Earth[4]' (Escobar, 2016), these cultures

3 Instead of essentializing indigenous cultures, I am following scholars like Escobar and Ingold who emphasize how indigenous onto-epistemologies emerge from lived practices of dwelling in the environmental and making it home.

4 Escobar's idea of 'Thinking and feeling with the Earth' is based on Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1984)'s use of *sentipensar* and *sentipensamiento* to elaborate the 'art of living based on thinking with both heart and mind'. The notion of *sentipensamiento* was later popularized by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano as the ability found among the popular classes to act without separating mind and body, reason and emotion (Escobar, 2016). These ideas resonate with a Spinozian perspective of affects.

often embrace a stance of deep interdependence and a sense of 'being-in-common' with the rest of the world. This perspective underpins countless examples of place-based movements and resistance against extractive industries around the world. For example, Mapuche activists protesting petroleum extraction from Vaca Nuerta in Argentina assert, 'Our territories are not "resources" but lives that make the Ixofijmogen[5] of which we are part, not its owners' (cited by de la Cadena, 2015a). This perspective is also reflected in the work of feminist scholars (Shiva, 1988; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999; Federici, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2011) and the recent work of anthropologists (de la Cadena 2015b; Tsing 2010) who emphasize on the need to nurture the commons through an ethics of care.

The calls for commoning emanating from this tradition highlight the revolutionary potential of the commons in anti-capitalist struggles (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; de Angelis, 2013); the commons' capacity to perform counter-hegemonic common(s) senses (Garcia Lopez et al., 2017); and the need to include more-than-humans in our thinking about the commons' community (Breshninan, 2016). Building on this work, I emphasize the need to conceptualize and nurture the commons as a site for becoming a commoner. I argue that the commons can be conceptualized as a site of affective socio-nature encounters or as affective socio-nature relations that can foster subjectivities of 'being in common' with others. I emphasize that thinking in terms of affective relations and the work that commons *do* (other than producing goods or resources) provides a helpful way of bringing together diverse ways of thinking about the commons.

The paper engages a critical question of our times, which is how to transform our ways of being human and relating to the rest of the world. Felix Guattari (1995: 119-20) once eloquently said that one of the most pressing questions of our times is 'how do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity – if it ever had it – a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet?' I bring attention to the potential of the commons and practices of commoning to nurture this sense of responsibility by posing the following questions: What are the conditions that foster affective relations between the commons and commoners? How do people become commoners and imbibe norms that foster other-regarding behavior and support collective action to govern the commons?

With the affective turn, Western social sciences and humanities are embracing perspectives that are remarkably similar to indigenous ontologies. Using

5 Ixofijmogen, the Mapuche concept of 'biodiversity', resonates with the perspective of seeing the forest as kin or a parent amongst other indigenous peoples (de la Cadena, 2015a).

conceptual resources offered by affect theory and relational ontology in conjunction with my empirical work with forest communities in Odisha, India, I argue that we need to think of the commons as 'affective socio-nature relations' and practices of commoning as a means of nurturing this relationship. I argue that a focus on affects and affective relationality helps to transcend the dualism of subject and object, the commons and the commoners, and encourages us to think instead of the commons and commoners as co-constituted through intersubjective communication and affective relations. Doing so helps us to envision alternate ways of valuing nature and to see the commons as a site for fostering subjectivities of being commoners.

I begin with a brief description of the empirical context of my work which, to use Guattari's imaginary here, is for me the 'force to think with'. In subsequent sections, I discuss theoretical resources on affects, affective relationality, and subjectivity and how they lead to different ways of conceptualizing human and human-nature relationality. These two theoretical sections are followed by a discussion of how these conceptual resources help us to think about the production of the commons and commoners through affective socio-nature relations. I conclude with a discussion on practical implications of using theories of affect to think about transformations in environmental behavior and subjectivities.

## Collective action to conserve forests in Odisha, India

Odisha's case of collective action to conserve forests is the empirical context that informs my work and the theoretical arguments in this paper. My engagement with community forestry initiatives in Odisha spans more than twenty-five years and the theoretical arguments in the paper emerge from this long engagement. The state of Odisha lies on the eastern coast of India. It is one of the poorest provinces in the country as per the traditional economic parameters of assessing poverty. Almost 80 percent of the state's population is rural and depends on subsistence agriculture. Forests play an important role in the rural subsistence economy and have been the site of acute contestations following their enclosure by the colonial state.

As was the case elsewhere in India, the British delineated large tracts of Odisha's geographical area as forests and brought them under state control. This enclosure of commons as state-owned forests disrupted local forest-people relationships and governance arrangements similar to those described for other parts of India in the vast literature on environmental history (among others, these include Guha, 1990; Gadgil and Guha, 1993; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999). The post-colonial state

continued with the colonial forest governance framework and forests were charted into the nation-building project. Various state governments prioritized commercial extraction of timber and pulp for paper industries over local needs. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the effects of extensive commercial timber extraction combined with unrestricted local use had started becoming visible. Many villages started experiencing serious shortages of supply of wood and forest products due to degradation of forests. In some cases, villagers narrated that the forests had become so degraded and the wood so scarce that they had begun digging out the roots of trees to use as fuel. In one village, people recounted the frustration they experienced when they could not find wood for a cremation pyre for a homeless man. When confronted with such dire situations, villagers realized that they needed to do something before it was too late. Triggered by such experiences, many villages decided to devise rules and undertake patrolling measures to protect their local state-owned forests. By the 1990s several thousand villages were actively protecting neighboring forests through community-based arrangements. It is estimated that as many as 10,000 villages in Odisha have elaborate community-based forest governance arrangements (for descriptions and details of such governance arrangements see Human and Pattanaik, 2000; Kant et al., 1991; Singh, 2002).

These collective arrangements to conserve forests emerged in the absence of formal rights over forests [6] and without any financial incentives to trigger conservation. They are typical examples of collective actions documented by scholars working on the commons in the Ostrom tradition. They demonstrate how local residents, or the commoners, do not stand as silent spectators in the face of an unfolding 'tragedy' but rather devise rules to self-govern and avert the tragedy through a 'bottoms-up crafting of institutions' (cf. Haller et al., 2016). In many of these conservation initiatives, people have borne enormous personal costs to protect forests. In the district of Nayagarh, for example, several villages made the decision to give up goat rearing for many years to help the forest regenerate by alleviating grazing pressure. Though not a common occurrence, there have been several instances where villagers on patrolling duty have been murdered by small-time timber mafia, and individuals have often guarded forests at considerable risk to their own lives. While Ostrom's design principles for collective action explain how collective action is sustained and institutions endure over time, institutional approaches do not offer good explanations about what drives people to protect forests, often risking their own lives, or what fosters the intimate relationship that

6 India's Recognition of Forest Rights Act (FRA), enacted in 2006, provides for recognition of community rights over forests. This law is yet to be fully implemented, and the community forestry initiatives in Odisha predate this law.

underpins such actions.[7] As I have discussed elsewhere in greater detail (Singh, 2013, 2015), villagers in Odisha have forged intimate relations with forests in the process of taking care of them.

Through their embodied caring labour, local residents have not only grown forests but also their sense of community and 'being-in-common' with the rest of nature and with each other. In the process, they have cultivated new subjectivities of being forest caregivers (Singh, 2013). The villagers use a local system for sharing forest patrolling labour, called *thengapalli*, in which a walking stick is passed around signaling a household's turn to contribute labour for forest patrolling. Partaking in *thengapalli* provides an opportunity for villagers to enter into an embodied relationship with the forest. Usually two to four people go to the forest daily for *thengapalli*. In Dengajhari village in Nayagarh, where I recently undertook a participatory videography project, women described to me how their daily patrolling work is made into an event of joyful sociality. One woman described it thus,

> Someone takes salt, someone dry fish, and someone mango kernel. ...We all sit together and eat. We watch (keep a vigil on the forest) till evening and then return home.

Another added,

> We tell our children, 'come, let us go to the forest. Fruits or roots whatever we will get, we will eat. We will have a feast'. The children accompany us happily. We cook and eat inside the forest and return home in the evening.

The daily patrolling trips thus provide opportunities for affective sociality in which intimate knowledge and ways of relating to nature emerge (Raffles, 2002), and the forests become sites of constituting social relations (cf. Gururani, 2002). Through the daily patrolling trips for *thengapalli*, villagers come to know the forest intimately and learn to respond affectively to its needs for care. Women often gather a variety of berries, dig tubers and root vegetables, and gather greens for cooking while on patrolling duty in the forest, while at the same time looking out for any instances of fresh cutting of trees in the forest. These everyday actions and performances (cf. Garcia Lopez et al., 2017) foster or reinforce affective relations. In view of the material dependence on the forest, local villagers had strong affective ties to begin with, and active care of the forest as a cherished common further strengthened these affective ties. People began to care for the forest – including the trees, plants, and the wildlife that returned to the forest as it regenerated – in the same way as intimate social relations are developed, by spending time together

7 For a good overview of emergence of institutions see McKay (2002).

and paying attention to each other. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000: 47) argues that hunter-gatherers in widely separate parts of the world view forests as parents, and he suggests that 'to speak of the forest as a parent is not to model object relations in terms of primary intersubjectivity, but to recognize that at root, the constitutive quality of intimate relations with non-human and human components of the environment is one and the same'. Similarly, anthropologist Nurit Bird-David illustrates that the Nayaka in South India develop intimate relations with the forest 'by spending time with them' and by investing in the relation the same 'care, feeling and attention' (1992: 29-30) that they do in social relations. Through *thengapalli,* the labour of patrolling and taking care of the forests is dispersed, and the opportunity to develop an affective relationship with the forest through active attention is shared broadly within the community. In my research, I have found that when villagers delegate patrolling responsibilities to a hired watchman, they have fewer opportunities to develop affective relations with the forest, which dramatically diminishes their overall enthusiasm for the forest. Even though other activities, such as visiting the forest to gather wood or other forest produce, offer opportunities for an embodied connection, *thengapalli* offers a different attunement to the forest due to the labour invested in its care. This resonates with Norton et al.'s (2012) findings about the so-called IKEA effect, which suggests that people love what they create, especially when their labour leads to successful completion of tasks. Still, more systematic research is needed to understand the processes and conditions that lead to affective relations between people and forests.

Understanding the conditions that lead to these affective relations and foster environmental subjectivities is of central importance for fostering care of the commons. In the following sections, I elaborate the conceptual ideas about affect and affective relationality followed by a discussion about subjectivity and discuss how attention on affects and subjectivity helps think about fostering the subjectivity of being a commoner.

## Affect and affective relationality

In recent years, the social sciences and humanities have seen an explosion of interest in the ideas of affect and emotions. What is now labeled as the 'affective turn' in cultural studies (Clough and Halley, 2007) has been animated by different orientations to affect that range from Silvan Tomkin's psychobiological approach to Deleuze's Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). I draw upon the Spinozian theory of affects as elaborated in the work of Brian Massumi, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Giles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, among others. Affect in this formulation is seen as the power to affect and be

affected, and the relationship between these two powers (Hardt, 2007). Affect is different from emotions as conventionally understood and denotes a relational force that flows between bodies and which enhances or diminishes their power of acting (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). To affect and be affected is to be open to the world and to the possibility of being transformed through this engagement with the material world.

Affect is a pre-cognitive and transpersonal intensity that flows through and defines bodies – where bodies are not limited to human bodies. Initially nameless and potentially 'unruly', relational affects often consolidate and manifest as emotions and emotion episodes are themselves specific affective dynamics, temporarily stabilized by patterns of reflection and narration (Slaby et al., 2016). To fully capture the entirety of human experience, it is important to focus on the interrelated domains of feelings, emotions, and affects, and to recognize that they are a necessary accompaniment of cognition and rationality (instead of an impediment to it).[8] Also, attention on affect does not mean an inversion of Descartes' proposition 'I think, therefore I am' into 'I feel, therefore I am'. Rather, it compels appreciation that thinking and feeling are inseparable. And the 'I' that appears as stable and fully formed is relationally entangled in the processes of becoming. Thus a more appropriate proposition might be 'I feel, think, and relate and therefore I become'. And this becoming is necessarily a process of 'becoming with' the many others with whom we share this planet (Haraway, 2008). This perspective is echoed in indigenous thought and activism around the world, for example in this assertion by an Indigenous Elder in Guatemala, 'I am the land that thinks' (Desjarlais, 2014), or in Escobar (2016)'s examples of 'Epistemologies of the South' in which many different ways of understanding the world emerge from 'Thinking and feeling with the Earth'.

Scholars associated with the affective turn have pointed out that Spinozian philosophy and his theory of affects inspires ecological thinking (Bennett, 2009; Smith, 2012) and enables a 'dialectics of the positive' (Ruddick, 2010) given its emphasis on relations, possibilities, and emergences. Spinoza's conception of *conatus* as a striving of all bodies to continue to exist and enhance the scope of their existence further supports an ecological perspective that decenters humans. Instead of the striving for utility maximization that dominates economic imagination, Spinoza offers conatus, that is, a striving for associations that enhance our capacity to act and give us joy (Read, 2015). Spinozian theories about affect and conatus support a relational ontological perspective that shifts attention

8 As I elaborate later, neuroscience and behavioral economics are also emphasizing this aspect; especially notable is the work of Antonio Damasio and Dan Ariely, among many others.

from essences or totalities to relations, emergence, and co-becomings. In this ontological perspective, humans and 'human nature' are seen as emergent rather than fixed and immutable.

Challenging the conception of humans as homo economicus, a Spinozian perspective suggests that we are not only hardwired to maximize utility but are also driven by the desire to care, give, and be valued as givers. Questioning the homo economicus model of humans is, of course, not new. Starting with Amartya Sen's (1977) essay titled 'The Rational Fools', the rational economic actor has been challenged in diverse disciplines, and alternate conceptions of humans have gained ground. In evolutionary biology, for example, Jeremy Rifkin's work (2009) shows that cooperation and empathy are important evolutionary traits, and Frans de Waal (2010) further elaborates that humans are not the only species capable of displaying empathy and a preference for fairness and justice (also see Brosnan and de Waal, 2003). In the field of behavioral economics, a large body of literature establishes that emotions and the subconscious realm play an important role in human decision-making (Norton et al., 2011) and that we are often 'predictably irrational' (Ariely, 2008). Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's work (1999, 2003) shows that emotions and rationality are intermeshed and that our ability to make decisions relies on and mobilizes our ability to feel. Furthermore, thinking and feeling happens not only in our brains but is also connected to embodied ways of being and negotiating our way through the environment. Neuroscience is thus confirming what Spinoza intuited more than three centuries ago and expressed in the form of his theory of mind and body parallelism.

To return to our herdsman and his herd, the herdsman's decision to add another sheep – or not – is not solely a rational decision but is an affective decision made by a thinking-feeling-relational being in response to cues from her social and biophysical environments. In addition to governance institutions, affects and affective capacities play a central role in shaping both the shepherd's socio-natural environment and her responses to it. Moreover, the shepherd is not a stand-alone actor but a relational being entangled in a complex set of relations with other human and nonhuman actors. The process of 'dwelling in the environment' (Ingold, 2000) entails not simply the most efficient extraction of 'resources' from one's environment but the forging of relations of care and reciprocity with nature and other species in the process. The self that emerges through these affective socio-natural interactions differs from the atomized individual subject of Western thought. This self includes a sensibility and concern for the well-being of others with whom it is relationally entangled, a point that I elaborate in greater detail in the following section on subjectivities.

## Subjectivity and the commons

Philosophers and activists alike have highlighted that the current ecological crisis demands us to rethink our modes of being human (Plumwood, 2007; Klein, 2015). As feminist eco-philosopher Val Plumwood (2007: 1, cited in Roelvink, 2013) puts it:

> If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure…to work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves…We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all.

Reinventing a different mode of being human is thus one of the most critical challenges of our time, which compels attention to the conditions of subjectivity formation.

Subjectivity, which can be broadly understood as 'ways of perceiving, understanding, and relating to the world' (Read, 2011) or 'one's sense of what it means and feels like to exist within a specific place, time, or set of relationships' (Morales & Harris, 2014: 706), has been an important concept of academic research since the 1960s. But in nature-society studies, the issue of subjectivities has been relatively neglected (Morales and Harris, 2014). This is changing, however, with an increasing realization that the crisis of the environment is connected fundamentally to human ways of being and relating to the world.

Some of the recent works in nature-society studies on the issue of subjectivity include Arun Agarwal's deployment of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality to understand how subjects develop disciplinary environmentality (Agrawal, 2005); Andrea Nightingale's work on the role of emotions in the production of subjectivity (Nightingale, 2011); and Robert Fletcher's elaboration of Foucault's different modalities of governmentalities to understand neoliberal conservation (Fletcher, 2010). While there is growing body of work by feminist political ecologists and science and technology studies scholars (Latour, 2004; Nightingale, 2013; Sultana, 2011; Whatmore, 1997) that shows that subjectivities emerge from engagement with the world, 'the subject' of Western social sciences as a stand-alone actor is yet to be dethroned. In my earlier work (Singh, 2013), I have critiqued the emphasis in governmentality-inspired approaches on the making of the subject and invited attention instead on the processes of becoming and the emergence of collective subjectivities through affective relations and immersion in one's total (social and biophysical) environment (also see Milton, 2002; Ingold, 2000).

Here, I deepen this analysis by arguing that we need to analyze how collective subjectivities emerge from the entangled affective ecologies of nature, society, and the self. Thinking in terms of 'affective ecologies' allows us to think transversally

across the three ecologies of 'nature, society, and the self' that Felix Guattari (1989) encourages us to do. Affect theory presents analytical tools for such transversal thinking that unravels the conditions for our subjectification.

The commons, as autonomous Marxist Antonio Negri tells us, are not just resources for supporting material existence but are sources for nurturance of our subjectivity. Enclosure of the commons, thus, is not just a physical enclosure and 'primitive accumulation of wealth' by the elite but is fundamentally a process of 'primitive accumulation of the conatus' (Read, 2015, citing Albiac, 1996: 15) through homogenization of subjectivities and the creation of a 'one-world world' while limiting other worlds and 'anthropos-not-seen' (de la Cadena, 2015a). It denotes a loss of control over the conditions for the production of subjectivity. As Read (2011) puts it, Marx's concept of alienation denotes 'not a loss of what is most unique and personal but a loss of connection to what is most generic and shared, i.e., it is a separation from the conditions of the production of subjectivity' (124).

The current capitalist order is not only destroying the natural environment and eroding social relations but is also engaged in a far more insidious and invisible 'penetration of people's attitudes, sensibility, and minds' (Guattari and Negri, 1990: 53). Freeing up the conatus, or human striving, from the narrowly defined striving of utility maximization, and allowing alternate ways of being and subjectivities outside of the dominant market logic to emerge, is fundamental to the process of revival of the commons. Revival of the commons, then, becomes critical not simply from the perspective of restoration of access and control over physical resources, but from the perspective of countering this alienation and finding a way to produce alternate subjectivities and alternate worlds. From this perspective, we need to reclaim the commons as material resources not only for subsistence and livelihood but also as the grounds for the production of subjectivity. As Read (2011) emphasizes, the struggle over the commons, including the knowledge commons and the digital commons, is as much a struggle over the forces and relations that produce subjectivity as it is a struggle over wealth and value (Read, 2011).

In view of this, commons scholars need to pay attention to the conditions of subjectivity production in addition to institutions, discourses, and power relations that shape the production or disappearance of the commons. Beyond the structure-agency dualism, this perspective helps us appreciate, as Guattari says, that '[v]ectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual'; rather, the individual is 'something like a terminal for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data processing machines etc.' (Guattari, 2000 [1989]: 25). Expanding subjectivities beyond the realm of the psyche, we need to theorize and analyze them as collectively experienced and not only a means

of understanding and making sense of the world, but also as a major force shaping the world that we live in.

For conceptualizing and analyzing subjectivities as collective and emergent from the 'in-between space' of structure and agency, philosopher Gilbert Simondon's theory about individuation is very useful. Simondon (1924-1989) is one of the most inventive thinkers of twentieth-century philosophy whose work has been somewhat neglected within the English-speaking audience. His work, however, has influenced philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari, who use Simondon's theory of individuation centrally in their work. Simondon's ideas help us to focus on the process of individuation, that is, the process through which a being becomes an individual, and conceptualize it as not only a psychic but also a pyscho-social process. Through his theory of transindividuality, Simondon questions the centrality of the individual and the principle of individuation within Western philosophy (Read, 2015; Combes, 2013). He argues that the Western notion of the individual tends to equate existence, or 'being', with 'being as an individual', and it ignores existence that is prior to or outside of existence as an individual. In privileging the essence of things, it overlooks the fact that the ultimate reality is made up of 'relations, tensions and potentials' (Read, 2015). In contrast to historically reductionist ways of looking at social phenomenon as either emerging from rational actions of isolated individual actors or as a product of social structures, Simondon's ideas help us grasp the productive nexus from which both individualities and collectivities emerge (Read, 2011). According to Simondon, 'the conditions of our subjectivity, language, knowledge, and habits are neither individual nor part of any collective, but are the conditions of individual identity and collective belonging, remaining irreducible to each' (Read, 2011: 113). His ideas have been taken up by Deleuze and Guattari to reconceptualize the self as 'spatialized, decentered, multiple, and nomadic' in contrast to the conventional view of the self as 'coherent, enduring, and individualized' (Rose, 1998).

This reconceptualization of the subject is supported by two of Simondon's theses (Virno, 2004). The first thesis states that *individuation is never concluded*, which suggests that the pre-individual is never fully translated into singularity, rather the subject *is* the interweaving of pre-individual elements and individuated characteristics (*ibid.*: 78). The subject is a composite mix of 'I' and 'one', 'standing for unrepeatable uniqueness, but also anonymous universality' (*ibid.*). For example, the subjectivity of being a forest conservationist in Odisha is an interweaving of the individuated 'I' and an anonymous collective 'one' who depends on sensory perceptions of the species, the collective heritage of language and forms of cooperation, and the general intellect. The day-to-day embodied practices in the forest, through which *one sees* the *mahua* flowers spread on the forest floor, *smells* its intoxicating scent, and *feels* the shade of the tree in the

smoldering heat as one gathers and *touches* the flower are all affects that depend on senses that are part of a generic biological endowment (Singh, 2013).

Simondon's second thesis states that the collective, or the collective experience, is not the sphere within which the salient traits of a singular individual diminish or disappear; 'on the contrary, it is the terrain of a new and more radical individuation' (Virno, 2004: 78). This thesis leads Simondon to conclude that 'within the collective we endeavor to refine our singularity, to bring it to its climax' (*ibid*.: 79). Simondon thus insists that we 'seek to know the individual through individuation rather than individuation through the individual' and that we focus on the *process* of individuation rather than look for a *principle* of individuation (Combes, 2013: 2). In doing so, he calls for a radical understanding of the process wherein a principle is not only put to work but is also constituted through the process. Such a processual understanding of subjectivity has important implications for rethinking the notion of the subject in political thought and practice.

These ways of conceptualizing the self and subjectivity resonate strongly with indigenous views of thinking about the self as entangled with the rest of the world (de Castro, 2015; Kohn, 2015; Ingold, 2000; Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013, Escobar, 2016, among others) and also with emerging insights in biology and physical sciences (Barad, 2007; Escobar, 2007; Weber, 2016). Indigenous cultures around the world give primacy to relations and relational existence that emerge from their stance of connectedness, gratitude, and solidarity with the rest of the world. In this view, the self is not seen as an autonomous subject acting on the world, but as a relational emergence responding to the world. In the recent academic turn to the ideas of affect, materiality, and relationality, the connections and intellectual debt to indigenous thought are not acknowledged adequately (Escobar, 2016; Todd, 2016) and there are calls for seeking connections between Indigenous thinkers and Western scholars driving the 'affective' or 'new materialist' turn in social sciences in ways that are not colonizing.

Commons scholars and activists are well-positioned to contribute to the cross-fertilization of these ideas and to explore empirically and theoretically how different ways of being in the world are conditioned by ways of relating to the commons. A critical opening to explore is how different understandings of the self and relational ethics *emerge* from certain ways of being with the world and how Indigenous perspectives about the commons can offer ways of nurturing a stance of interdependence and care for the more-than-human world.

Returning to my example of community initiatives to conserve forests, a processual understanding of subjectivity helps us explore how embodied practices

of caring for the forest lead to subjectivities of 'forest caregivers', whose sense of the self includes thinking about forest conservation. Through the process of taking care of their local forests and creating conditions for the forest's enrichment, villagers have not only regenerated forests but have cultivated or strengthened subjectivities of being conservation-oriented and of being commoners. The subjectivity of being forest caregivers emerges from their everyday actions of caring for the forest. These caring practices include patrolling the forest, picking up dead and dried wood, removing weeds, picking berries, and so on and so forth to support the conditions for forests' regeneration and enrichment. These activities draw people into affective relations with their local forests, its vegetation, and its wildlife and generate a sense of 'being-in-common' with the forest and with the other members of human community. Affects play an important role in the process and are the medium by which intersubjective relations with their social and natural environment are strengthened, as a growing body of literature is now beginning to appreciate (Anderson, 2009; Sultana, 2011; Nightingale, 2013; Milton, 2002; Dallman et al., 2012, among many others). These affective relations are similar to the relations of care and affection that people are likely to develop with pets as 'companion species' (Haraway, 2008) or relations of love with plants in one's garden (Archambault, 2016). In this case, affective relations with forests are also shaped by the materiality of the forest and local subsistence dependence on it. These affective relations are further strengthened through conservation care practices and play an important role in strengthening subjectivities of being a commoner in active relationship with the forest and with other villagers who share these landscapes. This subjectivity of 'being-in-common with' is eloquently summed up in this proclamation by one of the community leaders: *Samaste samaston ko bandhi ke achanti*, which implies that 'all [bodies] are holding everyone else together' – a sentiment that resonates with the idea of affective relations tying everyone together into a collectivity. Although he was referring to social relations and relations of accountability within a social setting, he could have been espousing relational ontology and echoing a Spinozan conception of collective bodies.

These new subjectivities of forest conservationists include a sense of being part of a community of forest caregivers and of having affective relations with the forests that they have cared for. As I have emphasized in my earlier work, it is important to understand that these relations and ways of relating are not 'natural' to 'Indigenous' peoples or an essential part of their culture; rather, these ways of being emerge from affective interactions. By creating conditions for such emergences, these kinds of subjectivities can be fostered. Understanding the conditions that enable such emergences, then, becomes critical from the perspective of nurturing alternate subjectivities and post-capitalist futures. Examining how subjectivity is produced becomes critical and an important

political project as it can help us understand, as Read (2011: 114) puts it, 'how subjectivity might be produced otherwise, ultimately transforming itself, turning a passive condition into an active process'. The multitudes of examples of collective action for reclaiming or creating new commons are appropriate sites to explore processes contributing to the production of subjectivity.

## From commons to commoning: Commons as affective socio-nature relations and commoning as world-making practices

In recent years, the concept of the commons has become central to anti-capitalist struggles. Diverse projects for commoning that include community gardens, local currencies, community supported agriculture, bio-cultural restoration efforts, peer-to-peer production initiatives, and so on (see Bollier and Heinrich, 2015, for several dozen examples). A wide range of activists and practitioners are invoking the vocabulary of the commons to defend the disappearing material commons as well as to expand non-material commons as practices for building communities, solidarity, and alternate subjectivities (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2010, De Angelis, 2013). In so doing, commoning is seen as a world-making practice that leads the creation of 'a collective subject or multiple collective subjects' who foster the common interest in every aspect of our lives and political work (Federici and Caffentizis, 2014). Commoning is seen as a way to reclaim control over our lives and over the conditions of our reproduction (*ibid*.).

In contrast to the CPR scholars who focus on the commons as shared natural resources, autonomous Marxists refer to 'the common' as a singular and following Hardt and Negri's lead maintain that 'the common' is not only the earth that we share but also the 'languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth' (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 139). In this invoking of humanity's commonwealth they emphasize that instead of seeing humanity as separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, such a notion of 'the common' focuses on 'the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world' (Hardt and Negri, 2009: viii). While natural resource commons in the CPR theories are defined in terms of rivalry and possibilities of exclusion, the cultural and intellectual commons are not subject to a similar logic of scarcity and exclusionary use (McCarthy, 2006) and are rather seen as abundant. The cultural common, Hardt and Negri (2009: 139) write, 'is dynamic, involving both the product of labor and the means of future production'.

While this diversity in talking about the commons creates analytical challenges, it also offers productive openings, by drawing attention to the world-making possibilities of commoning practices to create the pluriverse, that is, the Zapatista

vision of a 'world where many worlds fit' (Escobar, 2016). The analytical lens of affect and relational ontology helps bring to light the productive overlaps between these diverse ways of thinking about the commons. It helps us to think of the commons as 'affective socio-nature relations' and as sites of affective encounters productive of novel subjectivities. The commons are not just shared natural resources but are also our shared affective capacities to act and respond, and these affective capacities shape encounters, driven by conatus or striving as a force for becoming. The commons are thus sites for affective encounters between humans and the more-than-human material world, as well as practices that nurture these relations. Thinking in relational terms about affective encounters helps us appreciate the important role of the more-than-human actors in the production of the commons and commoners. The commons, both as material resources and as conditions for subjectivity, get produced due to the coming together of the labour and creative energies of humans and more-than-human actors. And value emerges from this coming together, and thus what we need to cherish, value, and advance are opportunities for such coming together and for co-flourishing. Seeing commons as spaces for affective encounters between humans and more-than-humans helps us appreciate that they are the nurturing grounds for fostering what Haraway terms 'response-ability' – that is, our ability to respond ethically to the demands of the many others with whom we share this world. Commons are nurtured through commoning practices that, in turn, enable us to think, feel, and act as a commoner.

Such a perspective helps us to think about the commons not just as *lived-in* landscapes but as *living* landscapes that are alive with dynamic social and ecological relations. The Western social sciences are now engaging with renewed interests in the material world and are insisting that this 'new materialism' take the vitality of all matter and agency of the more-than-human world more seriously and inspire an environmentalism that is driven by a deeper love for the material world (Bennett, 2009). Instead of using the God's eye perspective of seeing the world as fully knowable from the outside, and largely as dead matter, the ontological revisioning ushered in by the ideas of vibrant materiality helps see us the world as alive and things and beings always in the process of making – a process, moreover, that can only be experienced and explained from partial, situated perspectives. The latest developments in the sciences, especially within quantum physics and new biology, also lend support to these perspectives of connectedness, emergence, and contingency.

While these ideas may be new, or newly rediscovered, in the social sciences, they form the bedrock of Indigenous worldviews, where the world is seen as alive and as an active participant in the unfolding of human drama instead of being merely an inert backdrop for it. The current time of environmental crisis demands that

we embrace such perspectives, but do so through processes of respectful engagement (Todd, 2016). Most importantly, we need to explore how to foster conditions that support such perspectives and lead to an emergence of a stance of openness, gratitude, and appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life. Cultivating alternate modes of being through friendships and alliances is an important part of strategies for emancipatory social formations (Igoe, 2015).

To summarize, attention on affective relations enables: 1) a different conception of the human – as more-than-rational, open-ended, in the process of becoming; 2) a different understanding of the realm of the 'social' and of social processes – not as emerging from individual actions or from structures that enable or constrain individual action but as emergent in the processes that constitute both the individual and the collective but which are reducible to neither (and the collective includes more-than-humans as well); 3) a different conception of nature as socio-natures or as affective ecology animated with affective social-nature relations that co-constitute the social and the natural realms.

While it is now commonplace to talk about socio-natures, the conditions *for the production of* socio-nature relations are typically not critically examined. We need to develop analytical tools that help unravel the process of emergence of socio-nature entanglements and the production of socio-natures. The conceptual resources and insights emerging from the recent affective and ontological turn provide openings for more of this kind of robust theorizing about the commons and about the processes of becoming a commoner. The methodological challenge for us is to find tools to explore affective dimensions. Our traditional tools of analysis that are rooted in an ontological perspective are focused on signification and representational politics; non-representational theory, on the other hand, requires tools that call attention to the 'onflow' of everyday life, focus on practices, explore the pre-cognitive realm, and draw from performing arts to reintroduce a 'sense of wonder' into the social sciences (Thrift, 2008).

## Conclusions

Reflecting on the future of the commons, David Harvey (2011) notes that our thinking about the commons has been enclosed in a far-too-narrow set of assumptions and caught in the debate about private-property versus state interventions. Ugo Mattei (2012) has similarly emphasized the need to think beyond the state-market duopoly and see the commons and practices of commoning as not only a property rights arrangement but as articulating an alternate set of values. Instead of seeing the commons as a third-way or as an alternative to the state or the market, seeing the commons as affective socio-nature

relations helps to rethink what value *is* and focus on what value we want any governance or property rights arrangement to deliver. In addition to exchange value and use value, it helps to think in terms of what Haraway (2008) terms as 'encounter value' of human and more-than-human encounters. Thinking about the commons in terms of affective relationality, as sites or space of affective encounters and as a set of practices that nurture the subjectivity opens space for other-than-capitalist subjectivities and post-capitalist futures.

I have emphasized the need for a processual understanding of subjectivity and attention to the conditions for subjectivity production. Why are issues of subjectivity important for scholars working on the commons? First, the current ecological crisis is deeply connected with our ways of being human. Second, the solutions that we are seeking to find our way out of this crisis are increasingly market-based and likely to reproduce the subjectivities and modes of being human that have gotten us into this situation in the first place. Third, we need to understand how subjectivities are produced so that we can actively produce alternate subjectivities. Commons scholars can make significant contributions in this regard because the commons are important grounds of producing subjectivity. Relating to a place or a resource as a common calls upon us to act like a commoner and through these actions inculcate subjectivities of being a commoner.

While institutions and 'rules-in-use' play important roles in constituting subjectivity, affects are the medium through which institutions are experienced, interpreted, and reworked. For this reason, analytical attention on institutions needs to be complemented with attention on affects, emotions, and subjectivity. Analytical attention on affects helps unravel conditions of subjectivity formation. As discussed in the paper, it helps us to appreciate that the conditions of subjectivity do not reside solely in an individual or in the environment but are part of the conditions that constitute both but cannot be reduced to either. By analyzing how affects circulate and subjectivity is produced, we may begin to find ways to nurture and expand our 'response-ability' and 'becoming with' the world that we share with many others.

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# A pre-individual perspective to organizational action

Nicolas Bencherki

## abstract

While organization studies and sociology have put considerable effort in attempting to explicate the way individual and organizational action are related, this paper proposes to borrow from the insights of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, and to begin with action first by thinking of it as pre-individual, i.e. logically prior to any individual. This recognition turns the spotlight to the processes by which action, at once, contributes to the individuation of both people and organizations, thus constituting them. Affect plays a central role in the continuation of personal individuation processes into collective ones. The theory is illustrated through the analysis of segments of a documentary, *Nomad's land* (Corriveau, 2007), which tells the story of the tumultuous relationship between the Canadian army and the spouses of military members. The analysis will show how thinking of action as pre-individual reveals co-individuation's political implications.

## Introduction

A newspaper headline reads 'Canadian army heading for Africa', but the photograph that accompanies it shows that it is men and women who are being deployed, leaving their families behind. The slip from individual to organizational action is common, and has preoccupied organization studies and sociology alike. Both disciplines have kept busy attempting to connect the two levels and understand the passage from individual to organizational action – and the other way around (Eisenhardt, 1989; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The prevalence of Durkheimian sociology has led to a framing of the problem following an ontology of being, i.e., thinking of organizations and their members as distinct entities whose relation needs to be understood (Bencherki and Snack, 2016). For

Durkheim, indeed, 'Collective tendencies have an existence of their own [...] they too affect the individual from without' (1951: 309).

Attempts to connect the collective and the individual have ranged from the principal-agent model (e.g. Grossman and Hart, 1983) to Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; McPhee and Zaug, 2000; Scott et al., 1998), and to studies of institutional work (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012; Zundel et al., 2013). Individuals, it has been suggested, carry out actions on behalf of the organization, enact the structures that constrain them, or alter these structures. In all cases, the assumption remains that there are, on the one hand, organizations, and on the other, people. The theoretical problem here consists of understanding how communication can take place between these two autonomous levels.

Rather than inferring the sort of relation that would allow the passage of action between already-constituted people and organizations, I propose to turn the investigation on its head. Following the ideas of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, I will suggest acknowledging that action is pre-individual, i.e. logically prior to any individual. This recognition turns the spotlight to the processes by which action, at once, contributes to the individuation of both people and organizations, thus constituting them. In this process, affect plays a central role in the continuation of personal individuation processes into collective ones. Through the illustrative case of a documentary about the wives of Canadian military members, I will show how thinking of action as pre-individual reveals the political implications of co-individuation.

## Connecting the individual and the collective

The various perspectives seeking to reconcile individual and collective action have, in fact, remained vague on their definition of action. Similarly, while they each suggest some form of communication between the two levels, they provide no clear definition of communication. For instance, the principal-agent model suggests that organizations delegate actions to their stewards, but does not provide concrete accounts of how delegation takes place (Vickers, 1985). Structuration theory, for its part, has a richer discussion of action (Giddens, 1984: 3), but provides few empirical descriptions of the collective–individual relationship, and Giddens himself offers no clear definition of communication (McPhee and Iverson, 2009). As for the institutional work approach, it paradoxically alternates between the stable 'it-ness' of structure, and the agentic capabilities of people who, it turns out, can alter it (Zundel et al., 2013). Current approaches, in summary, presuppose the substantial existence of beings, and each one 'stands for itself, by itself, and has to be (causally) re-linked, which takes a major theoretical effort' (Weik, 2011: 658).

Said otherwise, collectives and individuals are two banks that need to be bridged, and it seems that the bridge is harder to build than expected.

The difficulty comes in part from the presumption that only the organization's non-problematic members are worthy of study, thus ignoring those whose belonging is not so clear. For instance, consultants' membership in client organizations is ambiguous (Wright, 2009), and new forms of work blur conventional employment relations (Barley, 1996; Barley and Kunda, 2004), while people with fringe socioeconomic conditions 'dwell and work in the periphery' of organization studies (Imas and Weston, 2012: 206). Literature finds only specific kinds of workers to be relevant, although organizations become increasingly post-bureaucratic (Hodgson, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006), and precarious work is normalized. The need to redefine the organization–person link is even more obvious when studying alternative organizations – for instance criminal organizations (Dobusch and Schoeneborn, 2015; Scott, 2013; Zundel et al., 2013).

Instead of deciding in advance on who or what matters – which people, what structures, etc. – and then attempt to clarify their relations, starting from the relation itself turns this into an empirical question. In doing so, a relational perspective renders obsolete the project of bridging the so-called micro–macro gap (Emirbayer, 1997; Latour, 2005, 2008). A relational approach views action as a difference, and refrains from deciding in advance who or what makes a relevant difference in a given situation: whether someone or something is marginal or in a dominant position is the *outcome* of relations rather than being predetermined. What matters is the genetic process that constitutes beings by distinguishing between systems and their environment, and carves out individuals from the continuous stream of reality; any distinction or stabilization is therefore an empirical accomplishment (Cooper, 2005). Authors who have adopted such process metaphysics have borrowed the insights of many different philosophers. For example, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) borrow from Bergson (1944) to suggest thinking in terms of *becoming* rather than *being*, and that organizations are ever-changing, while Czarniawska and Hernes (2005) show how actor-network theory allows accounting for so-called macro-actors without the need to posit an unobservable level of reality. Others have espoused the views of Whitehead (1979) to discuss organizational learning as a process (Clegg et al., 2005) and the role of possession in organizing (Bencherki and Cooren, 2011). Bergson and Deleuze have been shown to provide alternatives to a linear view of information when studying organizational knowledge (Wood and Ferlie, 2003).

These works, however, still tend to distinguish between different types of entities ahead of any empirical investigation. For instance, they often assume that organizations are ever-changing, but humans are not. Bergson, for example, takes

a point of departure in the idea of human interpretation. Furthermore, his concept of *élan vital*, some have argued, accounts for living beings in different terms than those that are used to describe material reality (Deleuze, 1966). Along the same lines, Weik (2011) convincingly shows that Whitehead's understanding of the ontogenetic process rests on Platonic eternal objects that shape reality. More recently, Cooper (2005) has advanced a relational ontology, but he nevertheless retains the notion of a human agent as distinct from its ever-changing environment. As Barthélémy (2005) explains, these perspectives display a continued belief in Aristotelician *hylemorphism*, whereby creativity consists in the meeting of form and matter. Yes, beings are processual, but they need a blueprint – be it ideal forms, human understanding, or people's agency. I would like to propose, instead, that when something appears to be created from the interaction between beings, organization scholars should empirically explore these interactions as a communicational process. Drawing on insights from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, I will show that when attention is paid to communication, it reveals how action circulates between people and organizations, and, in doing so, constitutes them. This view allows speaking of the individuation of human beings and that of the organization in the same terms, without needing to suppose that either is stable while the other is changing. To allow such a conceptual shift, it must be acknowledged that action logically precedes the beings that appear to be its authors.

## Action as pre-individual

Explicitly opposing hylemorphism, Simondon (2005) proposed an ontogenetic theory to account in the same terms for the constitution of physical, biological, psychical and trans-individual beings. While Simondon's work has received some attention in academic literature, in particular in discussions of technology and society (e.g. Bardini, 2014), it has received only limited attention in organization studies (rare exceptions include Leonardi, 2010; as well as a special issue of *Culture and Organization*, see Letiche and Moriceau, 2017; Styhre, 2010). For example, the philosophy of Simondon has been shown to subsume the opposition between structure and agency in routines (Styhre, 2017). In his 'allagmatic' perspective (Simondon, 1989: 82) – *allagma* means 'change' in Greek – there is no need to postulate an ontologically prior blueprint, to reconcile levels, or a form with a substance, or understanding with reality, for in fact the phases of being coexist. I am not, as a human being, anterior to society; at any moment, I am

contemporaneous to each of my cells and to the whole universe. The constitution of beings proceeds from kin to kin, in an open-ended process[1]:

> an individuated life is neither the unfolding of what it has been originally, nor a journey towards its ultimate term, which it would be preparing. [...] The present of being is its *problematic as it is resolving*. (Simondon, 2005: 322)

Action, for Simondon, is not the deed of any agent – indeed, such thinking would grant 'an ontological privilege to the constituted individual' (2005: 23) – but rather a difference that tilts the stability of a being and provokes change. Whether a particular action makes a difference for a human being, a collective, or something else is an empirical question. Several individuation processes take place at once, and as an individual is constituted, so is its 'associated milieu'. For instance, the body is thought's associated milieu (Simondon, 2005: 132), but the body's individuation is contemporaneous to that of thought, and whether one of them is the focal point and others are considered the milieu is a matter of perspective. Action is therefore pre-individual to beings, but it is not chronologically prior to them. A being does not participate in the individuation of others only once it has completed its own; individuations continue into each other ceaselessly. It is as I learn more, as I get older, as I accrue lived experiences, that I am contributing to my department, to my field of research, or to my students' individuation.

Regarding human individuation, Simondon speaks of pre-individual action in terms of affect. Simondon does not use the concept of affect in the common psychological sense, as regularly discussed in organizational contexts (Fineman, 2008; Hjorth and Pelzer, 2007; Styhre et al., 2002). Rather, affect is autonomous (Massumi, 1995), operating contemporaneously but logically prior to any subject: it is 'affect-itself' (Clough et al., 2007). Following Spinoza (1981), affect must be thought as *ad-facere*, as an action on something, such as the body (Massumi, 1995, 2002). This definition turns the spotlight to the organs by which bodies may sense and capture affections, and engage in affective relations. Sørensen (2006: 139) summarizes Spinoza's thought: 'the body does not yet know what it can do, it does not know what it is capable of, it has not yet found the thresholds of its powers to affect and be affected' (see also Deleuze, 1988).

Affect is not limited to human bodies; it extends to organizational and social bodies, as illustrated by the *ephemera* special issue on the 'symptoms of organization' (Raastrup Kristensen et al., 2008). 'Affectivo-emotivity,' for Simondon, is essential to the constitution of collectives. It is an 'emotional and provisional disindividuation of the subject' which 'prepares a step back towards

1 All translations from French works are my own unless noted otherwise.

the pre-individual before the new step forward, towards (psycho) social individuation' (Barthélémy, 2014: 67). In Simondon's own words:

> the relation to the milieu [...] is accomplished, in the case of individuation, through emotion, which indicates that the principles of existence of the individual being are questioned. [...] This state implicates forces that put on trial the individual's existence as an individuated being. (Simondon, 1989: 130)

For Simondon, affectivo-emotivity corresponds to an individual's (re)discovery of the pre-individual load it/he/she carries, in order to resolve it not within it/him/herself, but through participation in a collective, for an individual 'does not exhaust the tensions that allowed its constitution.' It is from 'that load of reality that is still non-individuated that man (sic) seeks his kindred to constitute a group where he will achieve presence through a second individuation' (Simondon, 1989: 192). Social realities, including organizational settings, is 'not a term in a relation,' but rather a 'system of relations' established through 'relational activities' (Simondon, 1989: 179). These activities are communicational: 'The transindividual does not localize individuals: it makes them coincide; it makes them communicate through significations: it is those information relationships that are primordial' (Simondon, 1989: 192). The philosophy of Simondon can therefore be summarized through the following motto: the being in relation and 'relation in the being' (Simondon, 1989: 24).

Communication, for Simondon, takes a special meaning. The individuation of any being occurs as a structuring movement propagates from kin to kin, as a process he calls transduction (see also Styhre, 2010): 'there is transduction where an activity starts from the center of being [...] and extends in diverse directions' (Simondon, 1989: 25). The transductive establishment of relations consists in circulating actions from one center to another, and in so doing structuring and individuating the collective being. Those actions are pre-individual, which means that transduction does not happen inside, say, an organization. Whether something gets organized or structured due to the transductive circulation of action is an empirical matter. An organizational or human body provides a context or a milieu to its actions to the extent that they contribute to it, but the actions also escape any given body – they are never quite *its* actions. Said otherwise, a being only possesses its components from a particular perspective: their contribution to its individuation process; possession is never complete or univocal.

This understanding of organizations does not preclude the importance of signification processes in constituting organizations (Cooren, 2000; Cornelissen et al., 2015; McPhee and Zaug, 2000). For Simondon, though, signification does not precede the collective individuation process: 'The existence of the collective is necessary for information to be significant' (2005: 307). Information here refers

to the *in-formation* of a being, the process through which it is constituted. An action acquires signification through its participation in one or several individuation processes, thus allowing for multiple significations. Concurrent significations, then, are not mere misunderstandings, but rather the outcomes of simultaneous individuation processes.

Finally, individuation processes are never final. Organizations, people and things continue, perpetually, their individuation. While there is clearly a challenge in attempting to account for one being's individuation when everything else is moving, recourse to seemingly stable beings is but an analytical shortcut that already implies the outcome of the individuation process. Fully embracing a pre-individual approach, in summary, contributes to organizational studies in at least three ways:

1. Communication becomes crucial for the study of organizational constitution and action, but it must be understood as the propagation of action – what Simondon calls transduction;

2. Relatedly, signification becomes the study of the participation of action in a given process of individuation, while keeping in mind that a same action may take part in several individuation processes at a time, and therefore be captured in several configurations that provide it with different significations;

3. No privilege may be given to any particular being or type of being, including humans, since what is being investigated is precisely their individuation; it is only at the conclusion of the study that the analyst will be able to determine *for whom* or *for what* a particular action was carried out and a particular signification produced.

## Methodological and analytical implications

Few Simondon-inspired empirical studies exist, and it is therefore difficult to refer to precedents to describe potential designs for such a study. It is possible, though, to outline a Simondonian research approach from his work. An allagmatic perspective emphasizing individuation processes requires a resolutely empirical approach that does not simply assume that any action occurring within an organization, or any action performed by a formal member, contributes to its individuation (Bencherki and Snack, 2016). Scholars must instead observe, concretely, how action moves around, thus at once structuring and individuating human beings, things, and organizations, and simultaneously making them all act. Hence, empirical research must remain agnostic as to who or what counts, or

what actions matter. For instance, postulating structural influences would amount to granting an ontological privilege to structures.

What makes an action relevant or significant is its contribution to an individuation process. Research must therefore describe those contributions or, conversely, the way individuation processes may be put at risk. I propose to do so by combining a form of second-hand ethnography with a narrative analysis. Cooren's (2004) ethnographic description of the way action may be passed from a person to a note, and the other way around, exemplifies the empirical work an allagmatic perspective demands. Ethnography is also the approach used in many empirical studies conducted in the process tradition (c.f. Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009; Langley, 1999). Simondon's insistence on the circulation of action also parallels narrative analysis' focus on the way action is distributed among actors (Greimas, 1987; c.f. Robichaud, 2003).

As an illustration, I suggest looking at excerpts from the documentary *Nomad's land*, written and directed by Claire Corriveau (2007) and produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The documentary tells the stories of military wives who have little control over their life because of frequent moves, and whose relation with the army is ambiguous. The experience reported by the women she interviews echo not only current literature on gender-biased division of work (cf. Alvesson and Billing, 2009) but even the very recognition of women as contributing at all to the organization, even in the most gender-stereotypical forms. The documentary thus provides an extreme example of the intricate relation between individuals and their organization.

For the purpose of this article and given the illustrative status of this data, the documentary serves as a form of second-hand ethnography. Cunliffe and Coupland (2012), for example, have drawn from a documentary about a rugby team to illustrate the embodied nature of sense making. Zundel, Holt and Cornelissen's (2013) study of institutional work rests on excerpts from the popular TV series *The wire*. In each case, researchers are careful to only make claims their data affords. Corriveau's film being a documentary and somewhat reflexive about her own process allows confidence in this data source for the humble, illustrative purpose for which it is intended. Furthermore, Corriveau's account is consistent with research on the hardships and stress of military families, and spouses in particular (c.f. Asbury and Martin, 2012).

Yet, the documentary has limitations. First, it provides imperfect access to male military members' voices or to those of army representatives. Also, critiques accused Corriveau of describing a reality that was true decades prior to the film's release – and it is now another decade later. Second, it fails to grasp the diversity

of the Canadian army, by only interviewing women in heterosexual relationships. Third, another limitation is that the documentary switches between English and French regularly (a typical Canadian reality), and some of the data presented here uses the translation provided in the closed captioning. Finally, and most importantly, using a documentary limits the analysis to what is being said and shown, which in this case leads to the impression of a somewhat stiff opposition between the women and the army, both described by the director as already-constituted entities. I will show that even within available data, it is possible to shake this supposition, in particular by showing that the individuation of both the women and the army is at stake and far from being completed.

My analysis will focus on the women who testify in the documentary, as they are attempting to continue their personal individuation process through the collective individuation of the army. I may suppose that OSSOM, the organization they created to defend their rights, serves as an alternative outlet for their frustrated individuation. Had the documentary provided more data, I could study the way OSSOM's individuation is continued as it captures and channels the available affectivo-emotive loads of the women, as there are clues to the effect that many volunteer organizations may operate similarly (McAllum, 2014). The women's families also take charge of the brimful pre-individual load they carry. The documentary, however, in what may appear as a somewhat conservative move, appears to associate the women with their children, thus conflating the family's individuation with that of the women – not being able to school their children becomes the women's own problem. The husbands are extraordinarily absent from the documentary, an exception being Lucie Laliberté's retired spouse, whose intervention is limited to laconically praising his wife's determination. This may have to do with military regulations on their speech. I may speculate, of course, that the men's individuation is very much affected by the situation of their spouses: there is no reason to suppose that they are not also continuing their individuation processes as members of their family, as fathers of their children, as participants to their communities and as contributors to many other collectives besides the army. For instance, in the analysis below, I will be making the assumption that officer Saint-Laurent speaks on behalf of the military organization – but of course I have no knowledge of his own family situation, his opinion about the women's situation, or whether he has suffered himself from the throes of deployment. In other words, the pre-individual actions that I study do not only concern the women and their relation to the army. They could contribute to many different individuation processes, and the limited conversation offered below is an artifact of the analysis of the documentary's own partial depiction of the women's reality.

## Illustration: *Nomad's land*

Three excerpts will be presented. The first is a commentary made by Lucie Laliberté, an advocate for the rights of military wives. She introduces a women's group she founded in 1984 to meet and discuss a certain number of issues among them. The group's efforts, though, were met with hostility by the base commander. The second and third excerpts relate to the creation of an army-run community center where women offer each other services on a voluntary basis.

To account for the circulation of action between individuation processes, I will focus on the narrative performance of alternative relations between action, the human author, and the organization. More specifically, I will focus on the relationship between two beings: the women and the army as an organization. Throughout the documentary, the women speak of their outrage at being denied a place in the military. This affectivo-emotivity corresponds to the disinviduation process that renders problematic again the pre-individual load of the women. This load must be resolved into a collective individuation (Barthélémy, 2014). Table 1 presents a few possible relations between pre-individual action and the individuation of either the women or the army. An action may contribute to either a human being's individuation, or to that of an organization. Depending on which contribution is recognized, the human member is allowed or not to continue his or her individuation process into the collective. Possible scenarios include, when both are recognized, either co-individuation (when the recognition is positive) or the channeling of individuation (when constraints are posed); they can also include usurpation on either side (cells 2 and 3). The final cell of Table 1, where both the human being and the organization do not incorporate the action, is more difficult to imagine empirically: it may correspond to acts of God, or to the denial of the action's very existence. While reductive, these four situations highlight that deciding on an author is the outcome of individuation, not its starting point. Precisely, the documentary's argument is that the women's subaltern position resides in the negation of their own action's authorship. As revealed in the analysis below, depending on how action is allowed to participate into individuation processes, the women may be controlled and, to a lesser extent, exercise resistance.

| | | Action contributes to human individuation | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Allowed | Prevented |
| Action contributes to organizational individuation | Allowed | (1) Co-individuation / Channeling individuation | (2) Usurpation of human action by the organization |
| | Prevented | (3) Usurpation of organizational action by the human / Avoidance of contamination | (4) Denial of the existence of the action, or act of God |

*Table 1*: The contribution of action to human and organizational individuation processes

*Excerpt 1 – Political activity*

The first excerpt consists of a comment by Lucie Laliberté, an advocate, lawyer, and spouse of a military member. She explains the beginning of the Organization of Spouses of Military Members (OSOMM):

> What we did is was... we decided to organize a meeting, and we outlined in the newsletter where and when the meeting was going to be. We were told that the base commander had to approve our newsletter before we could distribute it, and we had no intention of doing that. Hum, we thought we're civilians, we just happen to live on this base, and we've got some legitimate things we want to talk about, and we're just going to distribute the newsletter. [...] We wanted to talk about pensions, daycare, the dental plan, those kinds of things. The... The base administrative officer basically just went down our list and he said 'this one's political activity, this one's political activity.' Daycare was political activity, trying to get daycare. Dental plan, that was political activity. You know, pensions, was political activity. And we learned very quickly, that when the military wanted not to give us things that we wanted, they called us civilians, and when they wanted to control us, they always reminded us that we were part of the military. [...] But what they threatened to do was to arrest us under the trespass regulations. And, keeping in mind that this is where we lived, our schools were there, the churches are there, our houses are there.

A possible reading of this excerpt consists in recognizing that the women are individuals, but their individuality is an ongoing process that includes preserving their teeth, caring for their offspring, and planning for their old age. As they realize that their personal individuation may only continue through the army's, they experience affective-emotivity when they are prevented from doing so. Their existence as mothers, as bodies in need of healthcare, and as persons who will age,

is at stake. That is why they view their requests for daycare, dental plans and pension, as legitimate.

To negotiate the integration of their pre-individual loads – their teeth, their health, their children – into the collective, they wished to publish a newsletter and organize a meeting among themselves. However, Lucie explains, the base commander needed to approve the newsletter. He described their demands as political activities, which are forbidden on the base. If they insisted on publishing the newsletter, he would accuse them of trespassing – into their very own homes.

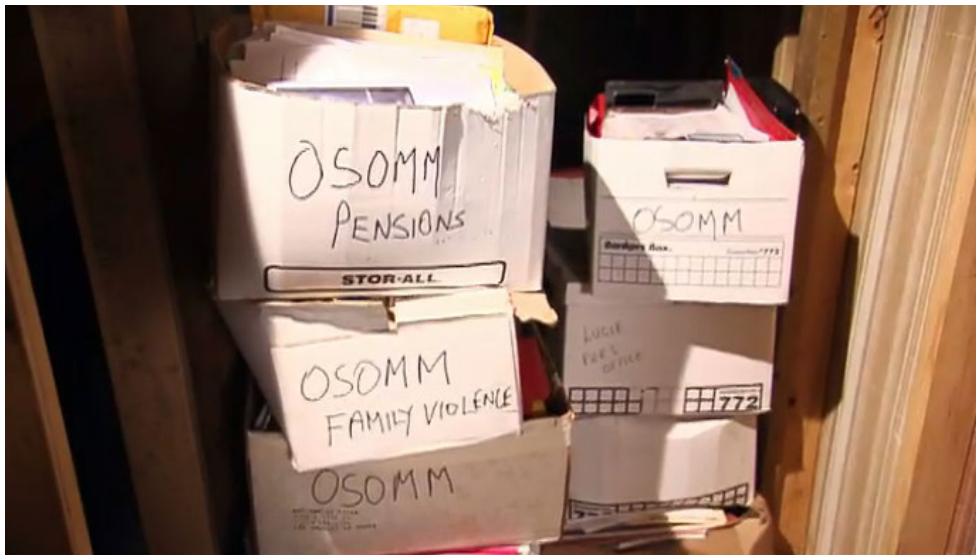


*Figure 1*: Lucie Laliberté founded OSOMM to defend the rights of military spouses (screen capture, reproduced with permission from the National Film Board of Canada).

The base commander does acknowledge that the women's concerns are also the army's, but not in the way Lucie expected: these actions are the army's because they are political activity – such a label seems to be the only organ available to the army's body to capture these actions. The army channels the women's individuation process: if they wish to participate in the military collective, they will do so as trespassers. Lucie describes this situation quite clearly: the army acknowledges them as members whenever it wishes to control them. The women are therefore partial members – Lucie agrees that the women are civilians living on a military base – but the way various pre-individual loads are allowed to participate in collective individuation is the object of disagreement. The commander's refusal puts at stake not only the particular concerns they raised, but all aspects of their existence as individuals and participants to the army collective.

If they are deemed to be trespassing, then the army is denying their ownership of their very homes, their belonging to their churches, their children's schools.

The army's perspective is not presented in the documentary. However, it is possible to assume that the commander regards extending privileges to spouses as a threat to the army's (masculine) individuation, as the army is based on 'social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to friendship and comradeship, to *esprit de corps* and to the love of mankind in general' (Butler, 1997: 109). In that sense, it is the commander's – and other men's – own male individuation process and its ability to continue into an all-male army collective individuation that is possibly at stake, at least in its current form. It is conceivable that, to the commander, acknowledging women's contribution in the army is not only nonsensical, but is also a threat to the organization's and to male personnel's ongoing individuations. However, the documentary does not present enough data to confirm these speculations.

The base commander's seemingly paradoxical move – recognizing actions as belonging to the army, since they are political activity, but then forbidding them – reveals that control implicates a form of participation. To be subjected to power is, after all, to be a subject. If the actions only belonged to the women – for instance if he could only describe them as private – then they would not have had anything to do with the army, and he could not forbid them, but the women could not have continued their individuation in the army collective in any way. This would have corresponded to the third cell of Table 1: the army attempting to avoid contamination by the women's actions. The commander's narrative therefore allows the actions to participate in both the women's and the army's individuation processes, as illustrated in the first cell. If limited to the role of trespassers, the women still have a role, and their struggle is recognized as political.

*Excerpt 2 – The list*

Later in the documentary, Corriveau focuses on the then-new Valcartier family centre, on a military base located in Quebec City. The centre's liaison and information officer, Dany St-Laurent, presents 'Operation Oasis':

> One of the major services we offer here in Valcartier is called 'Operation Oasis.' Here's an example of concrete help. This is what we call 'The Checklist.' It's a little exercise we ask families to do before the husband or wife leaves on a mission abroad. For example, the car. The Mrs. doesn't know mechanics, or even where the husband's garage is located. They identify all that together. What must be done to have the fewest crises possible while our spouse is away on a mission. The beauty of this is that it wasn't family-center employees who created this, it was community members. That's how we support families undergoing deployment.

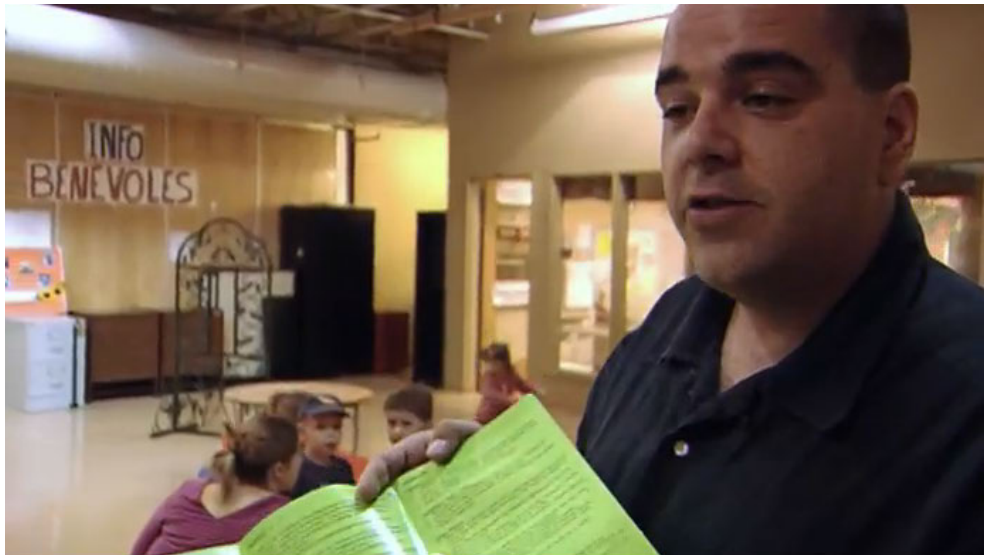


*Figure 2*: Officer Saint-Laurent presents the checklist (screen capture).

Again, the analysis must presume that St-Laurent's voice is also the army's, which the documentary takes for granted. The way the officer skillfully presents the 'checklist', and gives the example of a practical problem 'the Mrs.' may face following her spouse's departure: figuring out how to get the family car repaired. While the example builds on a gender stereotype, it reveals that St-Laurent is aware of the affectivo-emotional potential of the spouse's absence.

There are at least two ways in which the checklist helps continue the women's individuation into that of the army collective. First, St-Laurent presents the checklist as a service offered by the military to take over the individuating role of the missing spouse, i.e. it is a service 'we offer'. The army, thanks to the checklist, acts as a surrogate husband, and permits the women to reroute their individuation process towards the collective. Second, St-Laurent presents the checklist (which consists in a brochure) as an exercise 'we ask families to do', and as one of the ways 'we support families'. Through the use of personal pronouns, St-Laurent appropriates these actions (creating of the checklist, offering support) for the army, but also acknowledges the women's participation in the collective: the tool was created by the 'community'. The army is able to offer that service because the women (and possibly the men) created it; action is shared between the two, which corresponds again to the first cell of Table 1. However, this time, it is presented as a positive co-individuation process: that contribution is not used to control people; rather, it is described as being 'the beauty of this'.

*Excerpt 3 – The daycare*

In this third excerpt, the narrator explains how it is possible for the military to provide many services, including daycare:

> Many of the activities and services offered in the resource centres rely on volunteers. For this, the army depends on the abundant workforce of women, who in many cases have been forced into unemployment. The paradox is that most of the services women are being offered are being donated by the women themselves. [...] The invisible work of the military wives contributes directly to army logistics. It's a military expense we each cover personally. It goes unacknowledged, unrecorded, and unpaid.

*Figure 3*: The women have to volunteer their time in order to be offered free daycare (screen capture).

An example of such a service is the daycare, where, according to one of the interviewees: 'If I volunteered, my daughter could go to daycare for free for the duration'. In other words, parents could send their kids to daycare for free, *but only if they were also present to take care of the other children*, which in a sense cancels it being daycare. If I continue assuming that documentary reflects the events as they unfolded, the army appears to appropriate the women's actions: the daycare is offered within the army's facilities and is 'one of the services we offer', according to St-Laurent. As with the checklist, St-Laurent discursively attributes the action (watching over the children) to the army, whose individuation is therefore continued through those actions. It becomes a more caring organization that offers additional services to its members. However, here the women are not recognized as those who contribute those actions to the army in the first place, before it – the army – offers them back to them. According to the narrator, the work of women

in the army 'goes unacknowledged, unrecorded, and unpaid'. The daycare is therefore an example of Table 1's second cell and a case of usurpation: the army recognizes the actions as its own and incorporates them into its own individuation process, but ignores the women as also being their authors and prevents them from incorporating these actions into their own individuation processes. Beyond the practical problem of affordable daycare on the base, the excerpt expresses the women's feeling of injustice, an affectivo-emotivity that leads the narrator, but also the women she interviews, to feel a form of disindividuation where their existence as mothers, but also as neighbors and friends taking care of the children of other families, finds no resonance in the organizational collective.

## Discussion

The purpose of the analysis is to illustrate, by focusing on the women's experience as presented in Corriveau's documentary, the analytical framework that could be made using a perspective that considers action as pre-individual – and therefore as not belonging *a priori* to one actor or another, but rather as circulating and contributing to the individuation of various beings.

*Nomad's land* emphasizes the way that women's actions, in fact, do not necessarily belong to them. Each action may or may not participate in either their own individuation or to the continuation of their individuation into the army collective. The distribution of action to various individuation processes is achieved, among others, through the speech acts of interviewees (and the documentary itself is a set of speech acts). Still, the women's authorship of their actions is not always denied. But when it is recognized, it may be to channel their individuation process and make them 'trespassers', or to highlight their positive contribution to family center's activities. In the case of the daycare, however, women's actions were entirely usurped by the army, which constituted itself as a caring organization at their expense. Therefore, individuation processes are always at play. Even when an action is not acknowledged as contributing to the women's individuation, it is because other individuation processes – for instance, the army as a male organization – are privileged.

A humanist perspective may refuse to accept the separation between women (and people more generally) and their actions. After all, they invested time and toil in activities that were, then, denied to them. Yet, while the documentary sheds a grim look on that separation, my point is that it is central to the pre-individual character of action. In turn, it allows us to acknowledge the political and constitutive nature of individuation processes. It is precisely because military spouses *need* those actions to continue their individuation that the army's denial of their contribution

affects them and leads to affectivo-emotivity. What is at stake is the possibility for these women to continue their personal individuation into a collective individuation. If their actions intrinsically belonged to them, then officer St-Laurent would have done little more than misrepresent reality, with little consequence on the women's individuation. Relatedly, the army's efforts to appropriate the women's actions would make little sense, if it did not need to integrate those actions into its own ongoing individuation, whether as a male organization or as a caring one. When action's pre-individual character is acknowledged, then the interplay of concurrent individuation processes becomes salient and offers an analytical lens to understand the relationship between identity, organizational membership and power.

In particular, the excerpts show that communication does not only *represent* prior actions; communication is itself a set of actions – including speech acts – through which other actions transductively circulate from one entity to the next, and in doing so, constitutes relational configurations that allows them to exist and to act. Each voice, including the documentary itself, is an attempt to offer an alternative relational configuration. As participants seek to continue their respective individuations through communication that they exist *via* the relation.

This pre-individual and relational perspective allows us to understand the existence of multiple significations for a same action. What an action – say, requesting a dental plan – signifies corresponds to its contribution to the individuation of the entities at play. From the army's perspective, the women's actions are either political activities to be controlled, or services benevolently offered to members of the community. From the women's standpoint, they are legitimate demands whose denial threatens their existence as mothers and aging bodies.

The literature on 'post-bureaucratic' organizing (Hodgson, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006) suggests that new forms of work are more fragmented and horizontal, and one could argue that they consist in blurring the processes by which people and organizations share their actions. Indeed, while in conventional workplaces, the employer may claim its employee's actions carried out during work hours (Pagnattaro, 2003), ownership of work is made ambiguous by flexible schedules, telework, and new contractual forms. Action now circulates between domains that are structured in vastly different ways, such as, for instance, the relationship between family life and work life. The pre-individual perspective suggests beginning the investigation of contemporary forms of work from action itself.

It is not up to the analyst to privilege one individuation process, one configuration of relations or a set of significations over others. Multiple individuations coexist,

for actions contribute to several individuation processes at once. Presuming that one individuation is truer or of greater priority would amount to downplaying others and those to whom they matter, in addition to assessing individuation processes from the perspective of one of the already-individuated beings.

## Conclusion

The excerpts from Corriveau's *Nomad's land* show the potential of recasting organizational action through a pre-individual lens. Reducing action to its alleged author would render the intricate situation of military spouses, but also more broadly the relationship between persons and collectives, senseless. Instead, a Simondonian view draws attention to action itself, whose contribution to a person's and/or an organization's individuation process is discovered through affectivo-emotivity and the risk of disindividuation. People do matter and make a difference, but an exclusive focus on them would fail to explain why some actions matter to their personal existence, and what makes those same actions organizational.

In Corriveau's documentary, each of the women's actions is singularly captured, allowing or not the women to be (partially) included in the army... in the same way as Corriveau has included some aspect of the women's lives in the documentary and left aside others, and in turn as I have resignified the documentary in this article by selectively incorporating some of its actions and left aside others. The women's actions are therefore recaptured and continue participating in the individuation of beings (a documentary, an article) through Corriveau's work and my own, without necessarily transiting through each individuated woman. The documentary's protagonists admit the difficulty of deciding on the ownership of action. By admitting that there is no ready-made answer, organizational researchers may observe the circulation, from kin-to-kin (there is no abstract communication), of action and its ability to contribute to the individuation of people and organizations alike.

The idea that relevant social actors could be other than humans or organizations (understood as groupings of humans) may appear counter-intuitive. Yet, a pre-individual perspective shows that what scholars commonly call individuals are the outcome of ontogenetic processes whose units are not persons, but actions. It is only at the price of this step back from personhood that, in fact, a person's quality may be understood. If people or organizations were already given, then why worry that their actions may be usurped from them? When it is understood that individuals are delicate, instable coalitions of actions, then the importance of caring for our relations with them takes on its full meaning.

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# Street level tinkering in the times of 'Make in India'

Maitrayee Deka

## abstract

The paper discusses the future of Delhi's electronic bazaars in the wake of the 'Make in India' (MiI) program. MiI aims to develop a home-grown manufacturing base that, among its many goals, also targets the same popular market sector that the bazaars currently operate in. However, there is virtually no consideration of the role of bazaars and the informal economy within the MiI program. Rather, this initiative, along with similar efforts to render the economy formal and transparent, sees the bazaars with their reliance on cash transactions and their scant respect for intellectual property rights as part of a regressive grey economy. This paper initiates a discussion on what could be the consequences of following the present route of disregarding the informal economy that, in fact, has hosted the most industrious model of production in the country.

## Introduction

There has been much enthusiasm associated with the 'Make in India' (MiI) program that was launched in September 2014 (Kala, 2015; Khedekar, 2014). The program targets 25 core sectors to make India a manufacturing powerhouse. In a country that did not develop a robust manufacturing base post-independence, (Roy, 2012; Sanders, 1977), the MiI wants to make a significant contribution in that direction. Growth in manufacturing is expected to garner revenue and create employment opportunities for a large section of the population. The program was seen as particularly timely in relation to the slowdown of the Chinese economy.

Resource-rich India with low labour costs could compete with the Chinese hegemony in world manufacturing (Zhong and Kala, 2015)[I].

I want to issue a caveat early on, namely that this paper does not discuss MiI in its totality, nor does it go into an in-depth discussion on the various schemes undertaken so far. Instead, the paper focuses more on the discourses surrounding MiI in relation to the electronics industry. The paper is a speculation on the future of local cultures of tinkering, as large-scale programs make headway into the informal economy that has characterised much of the Indian market for low-cost consumer electronics.

As far as the electronics industry is concerned, the MiI program wants to go beyond the $65 billion domestic market for electronics and make India a competitive actor in the $2 trillion global market. The turnover of the Indian electronics industry (including consumer electronics, electronic components, industrial electronics, computer hardware, communication, broadcast equipment, and strategic electronics) is currently at $6 billion or less than 0.5% of the world market. To increase the share of Indian electronics in the global market, the government has welcomed investments from foreign companies such as Samsung, Eriksson and Foxconn (Seth, 2015; Thevar, 2015). These initiatives are primarily geared towards export. In the immediate future, however, the MiI intends to support manufacturing and foreign investment that addresses the domestic market (D'costa, 2015). The ASSOCHAM and EY report (2016: 12) estimates, 'around 50-60% of the demand for electronic products is fulfilled through imports, while nearly 70-80% of the electronic components market is import-dependent'. MiI is keen to meet the internal demands for electronics as well as make the domestic market attractive to foreign investors.

As a manufacturing plan, with its eye on the domestic market and local innovation cultures, MiI could collaborate with bazaar actors. However, to the extent that bazaars are considered in MiI, they are expected to wither away and their participants become a reservoir of cheap labour for the formal economy (Bhattacharyya and Verma, 2016; Green 2014; Karnik, 2016). Other aspects of the bazaars such as their understanding of the local consumers, their practices of market-friendly technical fixes, and their industrious nature are ignored.

The rest of the paper analyses the foreseeable links that MiI could have with the informal economy, and how its present agenda of limiting its interaction with

[I] ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and EY (Ernst and Young) report (2016) states that as of 2014, the average manufacturing labour cost per hour in India was US$0.92 as compared to US$3.52 in China.

formal actors and institutions could play out in the larger context. To this end, I describe the role that bazaars have played historically as an important place for disruptive improvisation, and how the bazaars have always experimented with electronic products. Through empirical examples, I analyse the everyday improvisation that makes the bazaar an important player in the domestic market of electronics in India. I further depict the type of consumers that are dependent on the bazaars for their purchases of cheap electronics. In the final section, I show how, historically, the bazaar-like mode of transactions and the accompanying survival instinct has been part of the manufacturing process in India, and how the hasty and one-dimensional approach that MiI seems to be undertaking, is foolhardy when it comes to dealing with the informal economy. A large part of the population became involved in state-led modernising programs by semi-legal routes. In order for MiI to truly reach the bulk of the people, first there needs to be an understanding of bazaar level conditions and then a willingness to make real changes in the MiI agenda to involve people who do not have elite privileges.

## Electronic bazaars and improvising[2]

Traditionally, the bazaars have played a crucial role in the domestic market for electronics. They are places for selling products, and for tinkering with them, creating new kinds of cheap and accessible products. The bazaars are part of a transnational network of 'globalization from below', where semi-legal goods and crisscrossing trade networks have made electronics accessible to growing sections of the urban underclass, whether in original (often recycled) or in counterfeit versions. Gordon Mathews and his colleagues contrast this to the

> high-end globalization, governed by the multinational corporations whose names everyone knows, from Apple to Nokia to McDonald's to Coca Cola to Samsung, and by institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO. It is globalization as championed by nation-states, as well as by mainstream media outlets as The Wall Street Journal and The Economist. It operates, at least in theory, in a legal and transparent way. 'Lower-end globalization' on the other hand, operates under the radar of the law. It may involve obtaining knock-off goods, whose logos have been appropriated from the brands of 'high-end globalization', and smuggling those goods across borders for sale by street vendors in cities across the globe. (Mathews and Yang, 2012: 97-98)

While speaking about Delhi's bazaars, Lajpat Rai market, Palika Bazaar and Nehru Place, Ravi Sundaram (2010) sees them as part of a 'Pirate Kingdom', which describes the other side of India's postcolonial existence. Sundaram maps out

[2] The terms 'improvising' and 'tinkering' are used interchangeably to contrast bazaar level technological fixes with the top down 'innovation' models that are more respectful of intellectual property laws as well as institutional training and research.

Delhi's Masterplan of 1962 that privileges the vision for the future from the elites' perspective (politicians, technocrats and the burgeoning section of bureaucrats). The modernist plan laid the grounds for the zoning of the city into residential, commercial and industrial zones.

> The displacement of 'noxious' trade and 'non-confirming industries' outside the city, along with private dairies and gwalas, which were to be removed to designated areas. Slums were to be subject to clearance and renewal based on a survey and classification of slum areas. (Sundaram, 2010: 46)[3]

As the process of ordering the city along the lines of the Delhi's Masterplan began, the bazaar became one of the few places where a less disciplined life existed and flourished. In the Mughal era and in colonial times, bazaars were open places, a meeting ground for merchants and tradesmen from villages and towns (Bayly, 1998; Fanselow, 1990; Yang, 1998). Sundaram (2010) argues that Delhi's Lajpat Rai market, Palika Bazaar and Nehru Place are an extension of the 'secret' life of the bazaars of the eighteenth and nineteenth century – a diverse range of commodities sold face-to-face via messy networks of people, products and power alliances.

Lajpat Rai market, Palika Bazaar and Nehru Place were built in the early decades of the country's independence to largely rehabilitate Sikh and Hindu partition refugees. Lajpat Rai market in the old Delhi area, overlooking the Historic Red Fort was developed in the 1960s as a wholesale electronics market. Over the years, the market has sold a host of products: transistors, switchboards, wires, TVs, music cassettes, bulbs, and video games to name a few. Palika Bazaar located in the central district of Delhi was the first underground air-conditioned market in Delhi. Established in the 1970s, it came to host a number of traders from the neighbouring areas. The dome-shaped building with a number of concentric circles is a retail market selling clothes, electronics, food, toys, and books, among other things. In the 1970s, town planner Jagmohan imagined Nehru Place as a kind of European 'piazza' where cultural and intellectual life would mix with commerce. By the 1990s, Nehru Place had become one of the important markets in Asia, selling computer hardware, assembled computers, and pirated software/video games. The market also has a number of corporate offices, computer showrooms and repair centres.

Sundaram (2010) and Liang (2010) described the urban bazaars as vibrant places that throw light on ordinary lives and their politics. The chaotic physical landscape

[3] 'Gwalas' means 'herdsmen' in Hindi. The urbanization schemes made them marginal and many of them gave up their traditional trade in favour of pursuits more suitable for an urban context.

and commercial exchanges paved the way for the presence of media goods in forms unanticipated by their original creators. In his analysis of counterfeited brands in Tamil Nadu, Constantin Nakassis (2013) used the words 'surfeits' to include the grey domain in which products circulate outside of authorised consumption. Nakassis places the discourses and practices of 'surfeits' in the world of fake brands and copies that has opened up a whole world of negotiation for the non-elites to legitimise global brands.

Apart from providing access to consumer products, Sundaram (2010) observes that the labyrinth *like* bazaars provide protection to people who have been displaced by the urban plans, such as groups of migrants, slum dwellers and labourers. Sundaram shows how the dense and crowded shops in Palika Bazaar help traders to evade police raids by retreating to the interior parts of their shops.

Pointing out the relation that bazaar-like places develop with commerce and legality, Liang (2010) uses Partha Chatterjee's distinction between a civic and political society to show how the non-elites' relation to state laws and policies is different to how 'citizens' perceive it. As he puts it:

> In India, for instance, the creation of the category of the citizen subject demanded a move away from the oversignified body of the individual marked by religion, gender, caste, and so on to an unmarked subject position, 'the citizen', a category based on equality and access and guaranteed rights within the constitutional framework. But the majority of the people in India are only precarious who often do not have the ability to claim rights in the same manner as the Indian elites do. Instead, the manner in which they access the institutions of democracy and 'welfare' is often through complex negotiations and networks and often is marketed by their illegal status. (Liang, 2010: 360)

Gulshan Kumar, a fruit seller in the Daryaganj market established the T-Series Music and Film production company by recording popular Hindi film songs with lesser-known artists. Taking advantage of the 'fair use' clause of the Indian copyright Act, Kumar was able to circulate his cassettes to every nook and cranny of the country. His story represents how ordinary people use loopholes in the legal systems and form lucrative alliances to get past their own limitations of wealth, or education (Liang 2005).

In Liang and Sundaram's work, 'piracy' is synonymous with the bazaar way of life. The different practices of 'counterfeiting, copying, smuggling, and trafficking' create sources of livelihood for people who could not take part in the modernising project in India through official channels (Dent, 2012: 29). With its decrepit infrastructure and open networks of traders, distributors and importers, Delhi's bazaars create new media forms testing the legal and aesthetic limits of urban existence.

## Improvising, from a fieldworker's point of view

In this section, I use empirical examples to describe how the traders tinker with the hardware of video games. Street level tinkering is significantly different from the systematic way in which innovation is imagined in formal spaces such as corporations and public institutions. While many of these innovations anticipate profits through patents, it is the lack of a proprietary regime that gives the bazaars the opportunity for tinkering. Needless to say, these disparate approaches to intellectual property laws come from completely different motives. While for formal actors, they communicate with an existing market, in most cases for the informal actors the pressure is to constantly create a market for 'small profits', which suit the needs of low level consumers.

I first visited Delhi's bazaars towards the end of 2012 and conducted a year-long ethnographic study that lasted from September 2012 to September 2013. I spent time interacting with the traders. I had structured interviews with them and casual conversations on a day-to-day basis. At times, I also interviewed consumers and distributors who came to the shops. I went back to the markets in January 2015 and later in the months of March and April 2016. I focused mainly on the traders of video games, seen by some scholars as an information product per excellence (Dyer-Witheford and Sharman, 2005; Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009). I was interested in finding out what happens when a sophisticated video game enters the culture of backyard innovation in the bazaars.

In Lajpat Rai market, I spoke to close to 18 traders of video games. Most of the shops were small, having enough space to accommodate a trader and his assistant. A few of the shops were more spacious with organized displays on the walls. While makeshift shops kept appearing and disappearing at regular intervals, by the time I was well into my fieldwork, I had established good contacts with five shops that I regularly visited, at least once a week. With other shops, my visits were contingent on the trader's willingness to talk to me on a given day. During the time that I spent in Lajpat Rai, I saw the shops not just as places for selling products, but also as places where a single product could be broken down into different parts based on the needs of the market. A shop would have a 'Made in China' handheld video game, but also circuit boards, parts of which were sold loosely or used for repairing. There would be cartridges, original and pirated DVDs, knock-off and original consoles. On top of that were the abandoned consoles, parts of which were used for repair. The possibility of a product to be a finished good and a raw material at the same time created the spirit of tinkering. As long as the assemblage or dismantling of a product created new consumer bases, it was worth exploring in the markets. To quote from field notes:

> Harish is a distributor who comes every other day to Lajpat Rai. He acquires TV games from local manufacturers and sells them to the traders at a wholesale rate. The local manufacturers import component parts such as circuit boards from China and package the final product in India. In this way they are able to save custom duties and can also provide a novelty to the product (by way of packaging and attractive covers). In July 2013, I was at Bharat's shop when Harish approached him with new TV games. While dealing with locally assembled consoles, they started talking about the skills that bazaar actors have. Both were in agreement; putting together different parts produced in China needed one to have basic knowledge about electronics. However, the skill and knowledge of Chinese workers were much higher than Indians. Their analysis attributed the gap in Indian workers' knowledge to a lack of opportunity and resources. Bazaar actors do not get to work on sophisticated machines, unlike their Chinese counterparts. They also pointed out that any innovation, even grey ones, received appreciation from the Chinese government. In contrast, the Indian government did not support bazaar level solutions.

In Palika Bazaar, I interviewed 20 traders and shop assistants. Many of these traders were from small business families in Delhi. A few traders were also migrants in the city. Coming from the surrounding states of Delhi, these traders had started their businesses by chance. Ramesh, a trader, recollected how in the late 1990s, he was a delivery person with the popular gaming franchise *Milestone*. On his many visits to the markets, he realised the possibility of having his own shop there. After negotiating with an existing trader in one of the shops, he was able to acquire a small corner. From there he started selling original and contraband video games. Most of the shop assistants were migrants in the city. They travelled from neighbouring states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar looking for job opportunities in Delhi. Many of them had similar stories of how they had found a job in the market by simply wondering around and interacting with the existing traders.

The shops at Palika have original DVDs and consoles, second-hand and pirated DVDs, refurbished consoles and gaming accessories. The second-hand economy of games attracted a range of consumers to the market. With an ingenious trader buying a used DVD from a consumer, it opened up the market for used games. Simply by packing old DVDs with transparent paper and putting price tags on the back (to give the impression of a new DVD), many traders found ways to resuscitate their trade, foraying into areas the formal economy did not take into account. The repairing and *modding* of gaming consoles are among the activities that create a niche market.

> Lalit is a repairperson of video games in Palika Bazaar. In early January 2015, he bought an expensive 'reballing' machine from China costing him about ₹200,000. He has been making a living out of cracking PlayStation and Xbox consoles since the 1990s. He knew how to fix new hardware to the motherboard, enabling old consoles to play new DVDs of video games. However, he has found it to be a good

> strategy to invest in 'reballing' machines. He believes that there is going to be more work in the line of repairing IC boards of gaming consoles. According to him, companies such as Sony and Microsoft are unable to create sound integrated circuit boards, as they have to cram a number of functions into a tiny chip. The result is that some of the solder balls get damaged. With the reballing machine, he is able to fix the damaged solder balls. Lalit points out that it is a very delicate operation. He took a week's training from a person in Bombay to understand all the nitty-gritty of reballing. Lalit recollects that it was very difficult to find someone working in this particular area. He says, even after finding the right person, it took much persuasion to convince the person to train him. He paid ₹30,000 for just a week's training. Lalit thinks that it was a worthwhile investment. He points out that the New Sony PlayStation 4 is about ₹50,000. It is beyond the capacity of the average person in India to afford such an expensive machine. Gamers are more likely to repair their old consoles than to invest in new ones. This creates the space for someone like Lalit to use his reballing skills and revive damaged IC boards. He is willing to spend hours meticulously heating the chip to remove it from the motherboard. Then carefully remove the old solder and replace it with new solder balls. For Lalit the test is both physical as well as mental. A successful reballing procedure takes him close to six hours and requires ₹1200 worth of electricity. Lalit thinks considering everything else, it is turning out to be a lucrative investment. He gets approximately ₹2500 for each reballing job.

In Nehru Place, I interviewed approximately 50 street vendors of pirated software and games. About 90% of them came from the Madanpur Khadar Resettlement colony[4]. Many of them grew up close to the market, and the market was like an after-school playground. Seeing friends and acquaintances selling software and games, the young men started as street vendors from a young age. They kept in their stock pirated DVDs/CDs of computer games and other kinds of pirated software. The DVDs/CDs were illegally downloaded in the Chandni Chowk area in old Delhi. On most days, a delivery person arrived in the early hours with the pre-ordered stock and distributed them to the different groups of street vendors.

The market picked up in the 1990s, and along with it, the trade of pirated software and computer games. What was at that time seen as a luxury product, a single DVD of Adobe, sold for close to ₹5000, but the pirated versions of them were available for ₹500. The street vendors sold only pirated computer games and none of the console games. A reason quoted for this was that their consumers did not have enough money to buy a console. Most of them did not even own a personal computer. The consumers that the street vendors encountered were likely to buy an assembled computer and they bought gaming DVDs/CDs as an additional purchase. The traders mentioned the consumers' first interest was to download

[4] The Delhi Development Authority relocated the residents from slums in Nehru Place, Nizamuddin, Sarojini Nagar, Hauz Khas, Chanakyapuri, and Kalkaji to the Madanpur Khadar Resettlement colony (Batra and Mehra, 2008).

the pirated version of Microsoft word. If the gaming DVDs piqued their interest, they also bought them.

## The place of the bazaars in today's consumer society

The last section analysed empirical examples of everyday improvisation in the bazaar. This section develops how everyday improvisation connects video games to the mass consumer in India. I describe the place of the bazaars in the contemporary consumer society in India, taking into account the new middle class as a harbinger of a new kind of consumerist aspiration.

The rise of a consumer society in India has received attention. The early 1990s were the watershed years, when the country embarked on an era of economic liberalization. Since then scholars have noticed marked changes in consumer behaviour. Leela Fernandes (2006), for instance, argues that in the decades following the country's independence, frugality was a dominant trait of consumers. However, she argues that the attitude changed dramatically following the1990s:

> In the 60s and 70s this whole bit of accumulation of wealth was still suffering from a Gandhian hangover. Even though there were a whole lot of families who were wealthy all over India in the north and south, if you notice, all their lifestyles were very low key. They were not exhibitionists or they were into the whole consumer culture. Now I see that changed completely... You want to spend on your lifestyle. You want your cell phone. You want your second holiday home, and earlier, as I said, people would feel a sense of guilt – that in a nation like this, a kind of vulgar exhibition of wealth is contradictory to Indian values. I think now consumerism has become an Indian value. (Fernandes, 2006: 29)

The changes in consumer habits are tied to the celebration of the middle class. Even within the amorphous middle class, it is the urban English educated professionals, the so-called 'new middle class' that has been the harbinger of the consumer economy in India. Seen by some as the poster children of India's neoliberal ambition, this class of upwardly mobile professionals spends substantially on clothes, gadgets and cars, placing them on a par with a global consumer class (Butalia, 2013).

Although the middle class and the new middle class have directed the consumer economy, the number of people who purchase consumer goods is difficult to measure. One of the problems is the gap between people's perception of belonging to middle class and their actual income level (Bhattacharya and Unnikrishnan, 2016). Studies have noted that a large number of people think that they belong to the middle class, although their income level is much lower to that of the median

group. The 2011-12 India Human Development Survey (IHDS) jointly conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the University of Maryland suggests that the Indian middle class composes 6% of the total population. An annual income of 2.7-13.4 lakh was taken as the benchmark. The same survey found out that about 49% of the population perceived themselves as belonging to the middle class, although their monthly income was close to ₹5000, much lower than the average income of ₹22,000 (Kundu and Rathore, 2016). A Pew Research Centre Study puts the global middle class estimation at $10-20 per capita daily income and defines a lower income group as earning between $2-10 dollars daily. According to these estimates, only 2% of the population in Indian fall into the middle class category. Most people are in the low-income category: they rank much closer to the lower limit of $2 dollars rather than $10 (Venkataramakrishnan, 2015).

If we take into account consumer behaviour per se, the IHDS study shows that 90% of the time, people had only one of the following consumer durables: a motor vehicle, a computer or laptop, a TV set, a cooler or an air conditioner, and a refrigerator. In most cases, people owned a TV set and not the others. Moreover, a household having all of the five assets belonged to the top 2.75% of the entire population (Kundu and Rathore, 2016). These studies highlight that the rich and the new middle class constitute only a small part of the entire population (Anand and Thampi, 2016). Most people are in the low-income group or poor, surviving with a daily income of $2 or less.

The bazaars remain places that cater primarily to people who have consumer desires but might not have the resources to translate them into reality. Many people who came to the markets in 2013 were from low-income group and the diverse middle class. In Palika Bazaar, a category of consumers was urban professionals, people working in the corporate sector as either technological or managerial professionals. Another popular category was school students who came accompanied by their parents and guardians. A third category was buyers who made home deliveries of games to individual customers. Finally, there were gamers from lower and middle-income groups that came to repair consoles.

Being primarily a wholesale market, the main type of buyer in Lajpat Rai market was the distributor who made deliveries to shops in the urban periphery, or to other cities, small towns and villages in India. The individual consumers who came to the market were mostly parents who wanted to give their children affordable handheld games. The consumers coming to the Nehru Place were mostly young men who bought pirated computer games. Much like the street vendors, the consumers were immersed in the informal economy. Some of them worked as

delivery boys or as shop assistants in parts of Delhi and in the national capital region.

I encountered many young gamers in Nehru Place who were unemployed or were in odd jobs. They liked to play combat games such as *Mustapha* on their cell phones. The gamers downloaded pirated versions of different games on their phones and approached their friend networks to acquire cheap DVDs. The markets were attractive to people who could have the experience of playing games like *Counter-Strike* on the assembled PCs they had bought in the market. Many of them came to know of games by playing them in popular gaming cafés.

This section described the role of the bazaars in the contemporary consumer economy particularly with respect to the outreach of the bazaar to mid- and low-level income consumers. The next section analyses how bazaar practices have historically resulted in a particular model of capitalism. Within this model, manufacturing did not develop into a full-blown industry, but was characterised by small ventures. The small and medium level enterprises were an outcome of capital being diverted from industrial investments to speculative practices in the bazaars.

## Bazaars' role in India's manufacturing journey

This section describes the relationship between the growth of a native manufacturing base and bazaar practices. Particularly in the nineteenth century, bazaar level transactions began to form an important part of capitalist organization and thus determined the shape that manufacturing and industrialization would take in independent India. Historically, India's manufacturing base was made up of artisanal and craft units. In order to integrate the dispersed production units into the market, there were informal arrangements. Tyabji (2015) argues that the lack of plantation-like arrangement made it difficult for the colonial powers to transform traditional household units into a large-scale industrial base. An exception to this was tea plantation. The spatial location of labour in tea gardens made it relatively easy to build industrial units, similar to the way industrialization began in England. However, with most other businesses including those of cotton and jute it was difficult to attain the same level of organization. As Tyabji (2015) suggests, this led to the development of intermediaries and practices of speculation that prevented the growth of an industrial culture.

Even after independence, major industrialists diverted capital from industries to speculative practices. Profits were not kept aside for further investments but were used to speculate in the bazaars, based on the rise and fall of global prices and local

production. It was the physical bazaars, where credit operators worked that were the centers of commerce. In an economy characterized by high credit risks at the base, the bazaars represented a set of financial methods, which effectively exploited the poverty of population and the uncertain seasonal agricultural conditions (Tyabji, 2015: 9).

In India, we have seen a move from merchant to speculative capital without full-fledged development of industrial capital (Arrighi, 1994). The bazaars, combining the ethos of semi-legal transactions and a physical market place had an important role in the growth of a unique culture of manufacturing.

The intermixing of institutional and traditional practices in the manufacturing scene continues to this day. The ASSOCHAM and E&Y (2016) report points out that small-scale units dominate the manufacturing scene in India. Most of the time, they do not have the necessary resources and networks to complete production in a single industrial unit (Raj and Sen, 2016). This results in small-scale firms subcontracting parts of the production process to the informal economy (Moreno-Monroy et al., 2014).

The closest that the MiI has come to considering the informal economy is by foraying into the start-up economy. In fact, the ASSOCHAM and E&Y (2016:20) report identifies start-ups as possible partners 'to bring out the real spirit of the "Make in India" initiative'. In order to 'mix local production and assembly of parts', the report states the 'focus needs to be on indigenous product conceptualizing to manufacturing'. Start-ups are considered as agents that are able to build lucrative enterprises amenable to the prevailing environment.

However, starts-ups have a completely different ecosystem from the bazaar and the only way they can incorporate the informal economy is by transforming its participants into a new kind of 'platform labour' (Srnicek, 2017). Start-ups have a more systematic approach to intellectual property laws and innovation in general and their ethics do not necessarily fit into the flexible improvising that bazaars are known for. Aggregators, such as Ola and Uber, have an institutional culture that uses algorithms to manage their business models and at the same time have a traditional hiring process in which people are recruited by word of mouth (Sakthivel and Joddar, 2006; Padmanabhan, 2016).

## Conclusion

Bazaar actors are now caught in an environment where the only real form of collaboration they see is through meeting the labour requirements of the burgeoning start-up economy (Chakravarty, 2015; Crabtree, 2016; Lerche, 2015;

Sethi, 2015). Otherwise they find themselves marginalized, as there is an urgency for the government to formalize the informal economy. The spread of bank accounts, the Aadhaar scheme, as well as the demonetization of 2016 are attempts at tracking black transactions and formalizing credit exchanges (Ghosh, 2016; Rai, 2016)[5]. Moreover, e-commerce businesses are targeting the same market for cheap and second-hand goods, previously provided by the bazaars. It appears that if an ambitious program like MiI does not see bazaar level economic practices as more than a regressive grey economy, the infrastructure and knowledge of popular consumers might be lost.

However, the loss is not one-sided. Outside of the corrupt networks, bazaars embody an industrious way of life that is unique to India. The difficulty in building a homogenous manufacturing base cannot be blamed only on self-interested corrupt industrialists. The fact that India is a country with many small and medium level enterprises shows that the problem is much wider than corruption alone.

If we talk of Wittfogel's (1957) thesis of oriental despotism, building on Karl Marx's notion of an Asiatic mode of production, then we need to take seriously the hypothesis that unequal distribution of power was an integral part of productive activities in the sub-continent. The centralized power that rulers held through control over the canals that circulated water paved the way for large governable communities. Moreover, colonial power did not establish its domain in an egalitarian society. One of the reasons that colonial power succeeded was that it fuelled the rivalries of princely states and later built a land tenure system that empowered the landlords to collect taxes. Compared to the elites, the masses face many constraints, not only economic, but cultural and religious as well, mainly through the caste system and communal tensions. Things like professional training, knowledge of the English language, access to capital and intellectual property protection benefit mostly the elite knowledge workers.

If it were not for the bazaar-like places, different knowledge systems, and obsolete products, the spirit to turn constraints into opportunities would not exist. This is where MiI falters: it is unable to understand its own population and their everyday struggles. It is constructing a completely new infrastructure of factories and shop floors. Probably a more fulfilling exercise would be to continue conversations on both sides: create new infrastructure and alliances with formal actors as well as reach out to informal actors, include their popular knowledge and creative spirit.

[5] Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique-identity number that is tied to an Indian citizen based on his or her biometric and demographic data. This scheme has been criticized on privacy grounds as it permits greater control over individual movements.

The bazaars have always included more people and products, most of which are otherwise rejected as excess as in the case of the urban poor or obsolete goods. Most importantly, bazaars have an ecosystem, which allows the gainful employment of a large number of people with a heterogeneous set of technical skills and limitations.

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# Perverse particles, entangled monsters and psychedelic pilgrimages: Emergence as an onto-epistemology of not-knowing

Bayo Akomolafe and Alnoor Ladha

## abstract

In contrast to the relative equilibrium and mechanical conservativism at the heart of mainstream articulations of emergence, we 'see' emergence as errant, monstrous, ironical, nonlinear and indeterminate. Progress is not emergence. And emergence is not an arrow. There is a spontaneity at work that undermines the fundamental tenets of Calvinian teleology – one of which is the story that the world is captive in an unending progression towards grander sophistication, a process ineluctably steered by men (or to be more precise, 'educated' white men). In this playful interdisciplinary analysis of emergence, using 'new' insights into the 'perverseness' of the quantum world, and drawing from psychedelic research, popular culture, and Indigenous wisdoms, we reimagine emergence as a radical indeterminacy that unsettles the grounds upon which the exclusionary discourse/practices of neoliberal expansionism as emergence are built. In doing this, we point to other spaces of power, where new embodied forms of justice (in form of different ethico-epistemo-political imaginaries) might thrive.

## Introduction

If to write is to unsettle old assumptions, to hint at the unexpected, to form trajectories to the effaced and inappropriate, and to make room for radically new embodiments of justice, then the burden of this essay is truly an ethical intra-vention[I] (Barad, 2007) – a thought experiment into the embryonic *elsewheres*

[I] We mischievously coined this word, pace Karen Barad's neologism of 'intra-action' to undermine the notion that we speak from a vantage, exterior point. In her book,

tugging at our frames of the present. Jumping playfully from charged visions of queer, self-birthing particles and ubiquitous, psychedelic compounds that destabilize the primacy of a local, three-dimensional reality to considerations about complex adaptive systems, climate justice, shamans and unwieldy sentences and footnotes, we write to wrestle with the stabilized visions and fantasies of *emergence* held by corporate hegemonies. We suggest that emergence is not the inevitable march of Western progress denoted by trivialities such as GDP growth, corporate revenue expansion, technological innovation or any other form of 'achievement'.

The purpose of this interdisciplinary article is concerned with ethics: to open up radical spaces of possibilities once we accept the possibility of not-knowing. The aim is not to articulate a political manifesto that replaces capitalist accounts of emergence with something as equally fictitious. We are not trying to supplant one blueprint for another. Rather, we write to disturb convenient ways of reading the world. We do this by pointing to other places of power – broadening the spectrum of what is considered permissible. Jumping from here and there. Or making here and there by jumping.

If one were interested in linearity, this essay proceeds from the context of the climate change struggle to the root causes of this struggle – the deadening ideology of late-stage capitalism and its corollaries of patriarchy, rationalism, white supremacy and anthropocentrism. We draw on the concept of entanglement as a primary metaphor for emergence, and an unfurling of the 'other' as a mirror into our own souls, abandoning the fixity of any theoretical outside or of monsters under the bed. We invoke quantum physics, neuroscience, behavioural psychology and complexity economics as haptic heirs to their dualist counterparts, pointing to a new direction of messiness, intra-action, and symbiotic evolution with Nature and the universe itself. We pose paradoxes in order to challenge our notions of agency and causality, to re/discover the potency of liminal edges, and of other places of power where meaning and matter are intra-twined.

## The context: COP21, climate change and other crises

> Produce less climate change and more stuff!
>
> *Get satisfied* (cartoon illustration by Mike Swofford)

*Meeting the universe halfway* (2007), Barad writes about intra-action (not interaction) to illustrate how entanglement precedes thingness. In other words, there are no things, just relationships, and these ongoing relational dynamics are responsible for how things emerge. Similarly, an intra-vention is how we posit our complicity in perpetuating the very circumstances we strive to disrupt.

We do not do our writing in a void, but in a charged political space defined by passive aggressive back-and-forths between Russia and Turkey and threats of angry reprisals and economic sanctions (Al Jazeera, 2015); by the looming shadows and inexplicability of ISIS and Boko Haram; by the escalating tensions brought about by a Euro-migration crisis without convenient answers; and, by the replicated masculinities and reinforced hopes of techno-rationalistic urgency (perhaps best embodied by Bill Gates' investment of billions of dollars in an 'innovative' private-public venture to create 'clean' technologies that mitigate the climate crisis). As we write, the flickering pixels of the television screen are animated by excited infographics about what is touted to be the most important gathering on climate change – the COP21 (Conference of the Parties) summit (November 30 - December 11, 2015) in Paris, a city still reeling in the eddies of an unprecedented series of devastating attacks stemming from a legacy of crusades, colonialism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, institutional racism and other entanglements that defy causality.

Dancing flags, firm handshakes, sturdy lecterns, bold speeches and cut-away shots to an 'appropriate' audience are all featured. 'We have been presented with two options and we need to choose', the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia announces to 150 other heads of state; '[w]e either condemn our planet to further destruction... or we save it' (Hamilton, 2016). Commentators juggle the hefty consequences of a successful summit, envisioning an international climate deal that ensures nation-states move towards reducing carbon emissions, and eradicating dependence on fossil fuels.

And yet, the very nature of the COP talks (which started in 1995 in Berlin) are the site for the reproduction of the normative values, anthropocentric assumptions, Western hegemony and phallic patriarchy that have contributed to ecological destruction and necessitated climate action in the first place.

Climate change is not simply a political/environmental issue, something that can be resolved in the sparkling glare of cameras and behind the forced smiles of world leaders after a few carbon commitments. It is a spiritual crisis, an existential crisis, an epistemological crisis. And to meet it, we must come face-to-face with the noxious heap of ideologies we have swept under the carpet of orthodoxy. We must confront what it means to be human, the ironies and impossibilities of growth for growth's sake[2], the impasses of human agency, the linearity and limitations of

[2] See an earlier issue of *ephemera* 17(1), February 2017 for a detailed discussion of the post-growth economy (Johnsen et al., 2017).

capitalist teleology. The substructures of our experience as a species in these moments of charged transitions need to be upturned.

Even if the highest ambitions of the talks are achieved, and reticent nations (which directly correlate with the largest carbon emissions, as in the case of the US) strike an unprecedented deal to drastically reduce carbon emissions (while providing funding for 'emerging' nations like India), it most likely would not acknowledge the marginalised and excluded among us, who are indeed the vast majority of humanity. And of course, these talks and their 'outcomes' will reinforce the dominance of one-way-of-knowing, leaving the capitalist trajectory intact.

The materiality of the talks contain an inner momentum towards replication, not radical difference. The historical 'phallogocentrism' (Derrida, 1978: 20) of the COP talks exemplify just how resolute its anthropocentric concerns are – how resoundingly the discourse on emergence derives from capitalism, and excludes other political modalities that do not coincide with the creed of commodity production.

To truly meet the climate crisis is to confront patriarchy unfettered, the phallocentric authority of science and its (not-so-)quiet delegitimization of multiple cosmovisions and cacophonous nonhuman (transhuman, inhuman, other-than-human) agencies, the Cartesian epistemology that believes in the givenness of the subject-object dichotomy, and, among other entangling concerns, the humanism that says 'man makes everything, including himself, out of the world that can only be resource and potency to his project and active agency' (Haraway, 1991: 297).

In a nutshell (not that we presume anything could ever be resolved or spoken about so conclusively!), to make space for a more ravishing climate justice, to 'redeem' emergence from a stultifying hall of mirrors, a deadening capitalist linearity, is to contemplate the nature of Nature. And nothing short of a reconfiguring of our familiar understandings of causality, locality, agency, intentionality, individuality, choice, and subjectivity will constitute a potent ethical intra-vention.

In contrast to the relative equilibrium and mechanical conservativism at the heart of mainstream articulations of emergence, we 'see' emergence as errant, monstrous, ironical, nonlinear and indeterminate. Progress is not emergence. And emergence is not an arrow. Emergence can 'best' be understood in terms of entanglement, in terms of crisis, of shifting alliances and strange dalliances and morphing identities. There is a spontaneity and indeterminacy at work that undermines the fundamental tenets of Calvinian teleology – one of which is the story that the world is captive in an unending progression towards grander

sophistication, a process ineluctably steered by men (or to be more precise, 'educated' white men).

In place of this certitude, in this article we articulate an onto-epistemology[3] of not-knowing (with the help of Karen Barad and Niels Bohr), which is to say much more than that there are critical limits to our abilities to access reality as it is. It is to say that reality is indeterminate (as the paradoxes of studying particulate matter eloquently suggest). It is to suggest that we re-situate ourselves

> as spontaneously responsive, moving, embodied living beings – within a reality of continuously intermingling, flowing lines or strands of unfolding, agential activity, in which nothing (no thing) exists in separation from anything else, a reality within which we are immersed both as participant agencies and to which we also owe significant aspects of our own natures. (Shotter, 2014: 306)

It is to say the world unfurls not according to the predetermined logic of growth or progress, not according to the marketplace, and certainly not around 'us'. Such geocentric and anthropocentric assumptions are caving in and hollowing out giving birth to queer, troublesome visions that disturb our confident humanism, make room for the perverse and return the gaze of the 'other' back upon ourselves.

## The monster isn't under the bed

> I'll be back!
>
> Arnold Schwarzenegger (as 'T-800 Model 101' in *The Terminator*, 1984)

> There's nothing more toxic or deadly than a human child. A single touch could kill you. Leave a door open, and one can walk right into this factory; right into the monster world.
>
> Henry J. Waternoose (voiced by James Coburn in Pixar's *Monster's Inc.*, 2001)

The tragedy of the monster is a recurring trope and energetic motif in modern cinematic history. Whether it is the time-travelling cyborg in *The Terminator* (1984), whose flesh (or living tissue) cleaves to metal, or the endearing animated story about extra-dimensional creatures learning to exploit the fear of human

3 Karen Barad coined this term (2007). Onto-epistemology means what is in the world (ontology) and how we know what is in the world (epistemology) are not separate, but emerge materially in an ongoing dynamic. That is, the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge are entangled, not fixed or final or determinate. In a fuller sense, none of these can be divorced from power and what we find valuable or just, so to write about an 'onto-ethico-politico-epistemology' is probably more appropriate, but no less infuriating.

children to power their own economy (in *Monsters Inc.*, 2001), or the gripping narrative of a psychopathic serial killer's vicissitudes with emotions and a normal suburban American existence (in the television series *Dexter*), our fascination with monsters seems everlasting.

Invading aliens, melancholy moons that turn accursed persons into werewolves, Frankensteinian contrivances (like bio-engineered super-dinosaurs or artificial intelligence) whose 'unnatural' ferocity quickly teaches an audience that one should not 'play God'. These monsters touch tensions about the safe divides between the essential and the adulterated, between what is natural and unnatural. The image of a giant King Kong perched precariously on a New York skyscraper, holding on to the object of his barbaric affections, Ann Darrow, as if she is his shibboleth to a more humane existence. His cure from his gargantuan rage is a poignant testament to our own collective quests for purity, for stable grounds. Politically, and more contemporarily, the monster manifests as the teeming population of Syrian refugees lingering at the barb-wired borders of nation-states – inspiring anxious legislation and whispered questions about 'who to let in'. Or a transsexual showing up in a hyper-evangelistic Christian community.

The monster is Outside. That is his Luciferian place. To indwell the festering swamplands outside all that is actually ordained. To melt through Cartesian categories. To inhabit the unthought and the unthinkable. To sin. However, the reserved area we allocated to monsters is shrinking, and we are coming to terms with just how absent an 'outside' really is (Barad, 2007). The 'world out there' – the eminent subject of representationalist scholarship – no longer lies at a distance from us. We are very much in touch with the world, and produce it via techno-scientific, cultural and political practices. The world is *performed* (*ibid.*); 'our understanding of phenomena is inseparable from the instruments we use to measure them' (Doyle, 2015: online), which means we do not have the luxury of indifference or victimhood when we encounter monsters. We are entangled with them.

The more we excavate our assumed pureness in search of firm grounds – of a Cartesian kind – the more we run into irony. The more we get into turbulent, riddling spaces. The more we find just how monstrous /complicit/adulterated/impure/nonhuman/chimeric we are, so that the tale of Ann Darrow and King Kong becomes not a narrative of beauty and the beast, but a politics of mutual beastliness. Reminding us of one aspect of this beastliness, Dorion Sagan (2011: online) reminds us how biologically compromised we are:

> Ten percent of our dry weight is bacteria, but there are ten of 'their' cells in our body for every one of 'ours,' and we cannot make vitamin K or B12 without them.

> Vernadsky thought of life as an impure, colloidal form of water. What we call 'human' [is] also impure, laced with germs. We have met the frenemy, and it is us.

Just before we turn our attention away, he adds, driving the knife into the body of essentialism even further:

> [B]efore leaving this point of the pointillist composition that is our Being made of beings, please notice that even those cells that do not swarm in our guts, on our skin, coming and going, invading pathogenically or aiding probiotically – please notice that even these very central animal cells, the differentiated masses of lung, skin, brain, pancreas, placental and other would be strictly human tissues that belong to our body proper – even they are infiltrated, adulterated, and packed with Lilliputian others. The mitochondria, for example, that reproduce in your muscles when you work out, come from bacteria. We come messily from a motley. Indeed we literally come from messmates and morphed diseases, organisms that ate and did not digest one another, and organisms that infected one another and killed each other and formed biochemical truces and merged.

Sagan's point is that the human body or even 'human nature' is not some distinct Platonic category, but an ongoing admixture of weird becomings – an inter-speciated emerging deconstruction with no denominating logic or principle. There is no golden rope through the mush, no guiding hand, no Promethean agenda. Not even Darwinian teleology – and its presumed internal mechanism of natural selection by slow mutation – touches on the radical 'hospitality' and strangeness of being/becoming human/nonhuman.

However, the trouble we are encountering is not cosmetic. It is not merely bone-deep or cell-deep; it strikes at the 'heart of things' – undoing the haughty distance modern man supposed he had achieved by harnessing the power of the electron. Particulate matter, like T800, is 'back!'; it is more monstrous than anything we can imagine. And it may be us.

## Persistently perverse particles and the monster in us

> You are something the whole universe is doing in the same way that a wave is something that the whole ocean is doing.
>
> Allan Watts, 'The real you' (2014)

At the turn of the 20th century, as our conventional notions of linearity, cause and effect, and the inner workings of the human body were radically being upturned, classical physics also began to run out of steam. It was fast becoming an incomplete account for how the world works, and rumours were now rife that the revered Newtonian/Einsteinian faith in the fundamental existence of a positivist, objective world populated by discrete 'things' (with pre-set values that are

consistent with or without an observer) was imploding. There are many ways to map the historical uncoupling of classical physics – its inadequacy in the face of black-body spectral emittance, for instance. However the site of our concern is simultaneously the *smallest* and the *largest* space in our modern mattering: the quantum.

The controversy surrounding quantum theory was really a high-stakes debate on the nature of reality, and no other figures loomed large over the quantum landscape like Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, arguably two of the most compelling thinkers of the Western world and 20th century physics (Howard, 2009). As Howard (*ibid.*: 3) avers, 'both Bohr and Einstein understood early and clearly that the chief novelty of the quantum theory was what we, today, call "entanglement", the non-factorizability of the joint states of previously interacting quantum systems'.

At one end of the discourse was Einstein, who maintained the 'thingness' of things, insisting that there was a spatial discretization of systems. It was necessary to Einstein for a *separation principle* to exist. Physics – the entire enterprise of science – was otherwise unintelligible. Bohr however adhered to an understanding of entanglement and, drawing ideas from Chinese philosophy, articulated the principle of complementarity and ontic indeterminacy[4].

For Bohr, there were no *things* (Howard, 2009). Identity is not inherent or mutually independent, but entangled with the experimental circumstance or the specific measuring apparatus. *Thingness*, the quality of being a 'thing', emerges as a feature of indeterminate entanglement. Whether an electron behaves like a wave or a particle – whatever value 'it' may take – is inseparable from (and/or complementary to) the specificity of the measuring 'paradigm', and not an intrinsic, predetermined feature.

The site of this contest about the nature of particulate matter (and therefore the 'nature' of emergence) was the dual slit experiment or two-slit apparatus.

4 The central question of ontology is what a thing really is – independent of opinion, outside of interaction, in a neutral state. The matter behind the matter, if you will. Bohr fashioned the concept of ontic indeterminacy, in effect rejecting the idea that things have properties in themselves 'outside' of the myriad relationships and complex web that grant them being. Ontic indeterminacy evokes the provisionality of the world and the vagueness of boundaries (Barad, 2007). Karen Barad's concept of 'intra-action' is premised on ontic indeterminacy, which is the understanding that the identity of a thing, its properties, the features that grant it its 'thingness', are not fixed or inherent, and only emerge in the context of relationship. Light is not inherently a wave or a particle; what it 'is' depends on how it is performed in concert with other agencies (*ibid.*).

Otherwise known as Young's experiment (since it was first performed by Thomas Young in the first years of the 19th century – long before quantum mechanics – to demonstrate that light behaved like a wave), the apparatus was a simple way to demonstrate whether an entity was a particle or a wave (Barad, 2007).

Bohr and Einstein agreed that entities would exhibit wave-like patterns once diffracted through the double holes of the initial barrier: the experiment had been performed many times before, and the results always showed an interference pattern on the final screen. Their contentious disagreement arose from a thought experiment, a *Gedanken*: what would happen if the experiment were modified so that the particular entity, say, a photon (a quantum of light) traveling through the slit, could be determined? What if we knew which slit allowed the entity to pass – that is, what if we could observe the entity pass through the slits? Would the final screen still measure a diffraction pattern, showing conclusively that the real nature of light is wave-like?

Einstein felt that the results would be the same – that a diffraction pattern would be recorded on the screen, and that if the passing entity could be detected, it would be caught behaving like a particle at the slits – thus exposing the deficiencies of quantum theory. Bohr took a radically different path, rejecting his colleague's classical ontology, insisting that the nature of an entity is not fixed or inherent, but 'emergent' – changing with the apparatus in place to determine its nature, and intra-acting with meaning. Light is not inherently a wave or a particle. There are no inherent objects with predetermined properties. Instead of a diffraction pattern, Bohr predicted, a hypothetical 'which-slit' experiment would show the 'solid-looking, bam-bam-bam hits behind the individual slits on the final barrier that measures the impacts' (Lanza, 2010: 211).

As it turns out, Bohr's prediction has been confirmed in hundreds of varying 'which-slit' experiments performed ever since:

> [W]hen a which-slit detector is introduced, the pattern does indeed change from a diffraction pattern to a scatter pattern, from wave behaviour to particle behaviour... this finding goes against both Heisenberg and Einstein's understandings, and strongly confirms Bohr's point of view, for it can be shown that the shift in pattern is the result of the entanglement of the 'object' and the 'agencies of observation'. That is, there is empirical evidence for Bohr's performative understanding of identity: Identity is not inherent (e.g. entities are not inherently either a wave or a particle), but rather 'it' is performed differently given different experimental circumstances. (Barad, 2010: 259)

Bohr's 'dazzling proof that we live in an indeterministic universe' (Bard and Söderqvist, 2014: 134) disturbs the classical view that the world is a collection of solid stuff, an arrangement of fixed attributes, subservient to physical law. It draws

together the outside and inside, the monstrous and the proper, King Kong and Ann.

We are no longer bounded 'I's whose task it is to study natural 'laws'; we are inside the frenzied equation. 'We' are an entanglement – always emerging. The very materiality of the world is inescapably entangled with epistemology and justice (or 'justice-to-come'). Karen Barad explains entanglement in terms of intra-activity, or the ongoing dynamic of emergence that reconfigures everything:

> Entanglements are not intertwinings of separate entities, but rather irreducible relations of responsibility. There is no fixed dividing line between 'self' and 'other', 'past' and 'present' and 'future', 'here' and 'now', 'cause' and 'effect'. (Barad, 2010: 265)

Since there are no dividing lines, there are no fixed exterior positions, except that which has been excluded or cut out due to the specificity of a circumstance or practice/performance. In Barad's reckoning what gives an object its 'specificity', its properties, is an entanglement 'between' things.[5] Entanglement implies that the ontic unit of reality is not a 'thing', but a congealed configuration of cacophonous agencies. Nature is wild, precarious and exploratory, lacking the sort of firmness and phallic permanence upon which an immutable grounding of capitalist teleology can take place, and undercutting the foundational assumptions that seems so central to the Western project. The Cartesian assumptions that undergird the binary givenness of the world are undone. Even with an appreciation of the notion that there are no individual things with fundamentally discrete and pre-relational properties, it is easy to miss the quantum weirdness and profound preposterousness of matter.

Dominant rationalist thought tells us, for instance, that cause always precedes effect; that 'things' – boundaried and 'featured' and separate – are local (that is, they cannot be situated in two places at the very same time); that what a thing 'is' – its fundamental nature – is fixed; that time flows 'forward', so that the distinction between 'past', 'present' and 'future' is rigid; and that reality is composed of infinitesimally small individual bits of 'matter'.

Quantum theory discombobulates these classical notions, showing how at quantum levels[6] these Apollonian artefacts of 'time' and 'space' and 'self' and

5 Barad's theoretical stance can be described as 'agential realism' – a non-representationalist, post-humanist account of how the world materializes.

6 According to agential realism, the binary distinction between micro-reality and macro-reality is intra-actively co-constituted, not 'given'. So the usual retort that reality is essentially weird at more basic levels, but adheres to a classical trope at macro-,

'other' and 'this' and 'that' are already threaded through with 'interferences' and infinite alterities, so that an entity is 'an infinite sum over all possible histories'. What we are talking about here is not that an electron, for instance, is a gradual product of reverberating moments already past, but that an electron straddles the fuzzy lines that distinguish past and future, playing with im/possible possibilities, touching itself and perverting order.

It is this ardent spontaneity at the 'heart' of matter that, queerly enough, is the condition for all forms of materialization and all forms of bodies. The classical idea that nothing really comes to touch anything else – that what we feel in our hands when we hold a book is not the 'book' but electromagnetic activity (similarly charged particles repelling each other) – is replaced by quantum theory's submission that electrons are not tiny billiard balls hoisted in a vast space of no-thing-ness, but inseparable wanderings of the void. We learn that:

> the electron not only exchanges a virtual photon with itself, it is possible for that virtual photon to enjoy other intra-actions with itself – for example, it can vanish, turning itself into a virtual electron and positron which subsequently annihilate each other before turning back into a virtual photon – before it is absorbed by the electron. And so on. This 'and so on' is shorthand for an infinite set of possibilities involving every possible kind of interaction with every possible kind of virtual particle it can interact with. (Barad, 2012: 9)

Emergence, construed along the lines of ontological indeterminacy, does not happen along pre-given trajectories. It is a wild madness. We are confronted with the spectre of our bodies, with the perversity of electrons – noting that these already entail an infinite alterity, 'so that touching the other is touching all others, including the "self", and touching the "self" [an unfathomable multitude] entails touching the strangers within' (Barad, 2012: 7). In a time when the figure of a monster/alien/abomination is still arguably the most magnetic cinematic draw, how appropriate it would be to showcase the Other with muted visuals and no commentary, but with the eminent reminder: the monster is 'us'.

## Haunted bodies and hidden ghosts

> You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? Well, who the hell else are you talkin' to? You talkin' to me? Well, I'm the only one here. Who the f--k do you think you're talkin' to?
>
> Robert De Niro (as Travis Bickle in *Taxi driver*, 1976)

---

everyday levels is 'itself' a practice of denying the significance of entanglements between the 'two'.

As quantum physics has maddeningly shown us the multi-faceted mirror of monsters and denied the plausibility of the 'other', neuroscience, the other pinnacle of the natural sciences, according to the rationalist's own hierarchies, has shown us the power of the unconscious, and that there is no 'I' that is in theoretical control. At any given second, we consciously process only sixteen bits of the eleven million bits of information our senses send to our brain, leading Tor Nørretranders, the Danish science writer, to describe human consciousness as the *user illusion*. He states:

> There are no colors, sounds, or smells *out there* in the world. They are things we experience. This does not mean that there is no world, for indeed there is: the world just *is*. It has no properties until it is experienced. At any rate, not properties like color, smell, and sound. I see a panorama, a field of visions, but it is not identical with what arrives at my senses. It is a reconstruction, a simulation, a presentation of what my senses receive. An interpretation, a hypothesis. (Nørretranders, 1998: 293)

Neuroscience is revealing the primary metaphor for the brain to be the elephant and the rider. Our conscious mind is simply a passenger sitting upon a greater essence that is directing the elephant/rider complex, or more aptly, the elephant/rider entanglement, while allowing the rider to hold onto its illusion of control, mastery, directionality and fixity.

As the pillars of Cartesian logic crumble from the calcification of false assumptions, as we start to feel the presence of our self-induced veils, as we see our host environment disintegrate in the face of our techno-utopian hubris, new 'evidence' is coming from every crevice of life, even from the very halls of power that deny subjectivity, reminding us how intra-relational we really are. In a sense, Robert De Niro's character Travis Bickle in the film *Taxi driver*, asks an evocatively critical question: when we stand before a mirror, who indeed are we talking to? Our bodies are no longer 'ours', haunted as they are by the 'other', disturbed by 'ghosts' of restless entities whose feet have traversed preposterous times, worlds and possibilities.

The social sciences are revealing that human beings are highly contextual, indeed, intra-contextual. From the famous Stanley Milgram experiments of the 1960s where subjects would torture strangers with an electric shock, simply because an authority figure made the request (Romm, 2015), to the Good Samaritan studies (Darley and Batson, 1973) where theologians and moral philosophers would walk past bleeding subjects on the street if they were late for a sermon, we are being shown that the 'fundamental attribution error', the belief that character traits are fixed (as if such fixity could exist!), is giving way to the primacy of circumstance. Or, queerly put, the primacy of non-primacy. Context comes before reality. And

perhaps reality is simply context and intra-context subjectively witnessed by entangled complexes and monsters within.

In the realms of economics, almost every tenet of neo-classical economics has been falsified. Complexity economics, the branch of economics that finally incorporated the second law of thermodynamics, has shown that there cannot be a perfect equilibrium in a world of entropy. The self-evidence of wealth concentration, regulatory capture and the arbitrage of high-velocity trading, have shown us that 'perfect information', the Cartesian dualists *ex deus machina*, is as elusive as a theory of everything. Behavioral economics, in many ways one of the few 'credible' branches of modern economics, has shown that human beings are highly irrational, prone to all sorts of biases from information framing to temporal ordering.

What is clear is that a 'thing' is only a 'thing' in 'context' of relationship. This includes us. If we change the relationship or the context, the 'thing' changes. We may be 'rational' in some contexts, and not in others. In other words, there are no 'things', only entanglements, and, by definition, an entanglement is not an already determined value. It is an ongoing promiscuity that makes thingness possible, the waltz of a thousand im/possibilities.

How does one enter the plateaus of radical possibility rather than deadening winnows of scientific reductionism or 3D banality? Our ancestors had many avenues into the infinite, to non-ordinary states, from trance-induced dancing to pack-hunting to the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants. They understood that there was no 'other', no 'outside'. In practice, they understood that we are Nature and plants are Nature (whether psychedelic or not). They understood that communing with teacher plants, as they are still known, allows us to create new neural synapses and activate latent cells of potentiality.

Even the pagan traditions of Western Europe, the Indigenous Peoples of the 'Old World', were deeply immersed in ritual and honoured sacraments to achieve these states before the Crusades of Christianity forced the monoculture of the mind upon all who survived their 'rationalistic' cleansing (Lash, 2006). Every complex civilization has had a symbiotic relationship with plant medicines of some form: the Mayans and Aztecs worked with psilocybin, the Incas with ayahuasca, the Ancient Egyptians with blue lotus, the Vedic Indians with ganja and the elusive soma, the Ancient Greeks with ergot and other plants in the mystery schools of Eleusis (Hancock, 1995).

The psychedelic philosopher, Terrence McKenna, famously proposed the 'Stoned ape' theory of human evolution where he suggested that psilocybin, the active

ingredient in magic mushrooms, assisted in the human development of speech among other major evolutionary developments. He argued that physical evolution is a slow process, therefore we were capable of language thousands if not tens of thousands of years before we actually used our latent physical potentiality (McKenna, 1994). According to him, since psilocybin is one of the only psychedelics found on every continent, it operated as a mycelial network, both providing information and connecting this newly acquired wisdom to other societies across the planet. This would explain why there are *Axial Ages,* where exponential explosions of novelty take place, demonstrated by the earliest cave art, cuneiform language, complex governance structures, the invention of the wheel, and other 'innovations' appearing simultaneously on multiple continents. This theory is the anthropological equivalent of quantum entanglement.

McKenna uses the language of 'synesthesia', the blurring of boundaries between the senses which is caused by hallucinogens, which then leads to these developments. McKenna helped to elucidate the link between psychedelics like psilocybin and dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a naturally occurring compound in many plants and animals, including humans, which is a structural analog of serotonin and melatonin. Although humans produce DMT, the psychonauts[7] among us claim that DMT floods the human body in both the birth canal and during the death process. As such, DMT has been called the *spirit molecule* by psychiatrist Rick Strassman (1994). DMT can also be ingested as a psychedelic in its own right. Strassman has stated that the 'most intuitively satisfying' explanation for the DMT experience is that DMT allows a person to perceive genuine 'parallel realities' inhabited by independently existing intelligent beings (*ibid.)*.

During a 1998 workshop entitled the *Valley of novelty*, McKenna (2006: online) explains:

> Psilocybin and DMT invoke the Logos, although DMT is more intense and more brief in its action. This means that they work directly on the language centers, so that an important aspect of the experience is the interior dialogue. As soon as one discovers this about psilocybin and about tryptamines in general, one must decide whether or not to enter into the dialogue and to try and make sense of the incoming signal.

In McKenna's book, *True hallucinations*, he explains what the 'spirit of the mushroom' has spoken to him directly on many occasions. Here is a direct quote from the mushroom entity:

7 A psychonaut is someone who utilizes altered states of consciousness to explore a wide range of activities.

> Symbiosis is a relation of mutual dependence and positive benefits for both of the species involved. Symbiotic relationships between myself and civilized forms of higher animals have been established many times and in many places throughout the long ages of my development. (McKenna, 2006: online)

Now what is one to believe? Did mushrooms teach us to speak? Do they interact with other species? Are they extra-terrestrial spores that we have been in symbiotic relationship since the dawn of our ape ancestors? Are there parallel realities occurring simultaneously that can be accessed through chemicals that exist in our own bodies?

We do not ask these questions to simply invoke the *Heyokah spirit* – the sacred clown that Indigenous cultures like the Lakota people of the Turtle Island[8] actively conjure, in order to interject humor and disrupt the pathos of hubris. We pose these riddles in order to challenge our reconfigurations of agency. To re-direct our gaze towards the excluded edges and other places of power, where story and meaning are created and uncreated.

Perhaps these counter-narratives offer deeper truths that acknowledge perverse particles, microbial symbiosis, cognitive biases, unconscious riders, haunted bodies and hidden ghosts. Perhaps the scientific, rationalist worldview that would tell us that 93% of our DNA is 'junk DNA' simply because we are yet to understand it is as unlikely a scenario as speaking with extraterrestrial mushrooms. And perhaps any claim of a positivist, objective reality that denies quantum physics, separates us from Nature and tells us that selfishness will lead to a market equilibrium is less useful than the notion of parallel realities. So what then shall emerge?

## Whither emergence?

> God is ridiculous – but if you're going to have one, make a good one.
>
> Frederich Neitzche (1882)

> We're not in Infinity, we're in the suburbs.
>
> Jason Schwartzman (as Albert Markovski in *I heart huckabees*, 2004)

To see what is emerging, one must ask what has emerged to date. The very same logic that has produced our climate crisis appears to be the logic that claims the ability to solve what it has begotten. On what grounds then do we situate and legitimize the capitalist meta-narrative of emergence? What is emerging? Surely

8 Turtle Island is now known as the North America.

China, India, Nigeria, South Africa are not emerging, in any meaningful sense. Just as they are not 'developing' in any sense outside of the economic relativity of richer nations. If Nature withholds her sceptre, and cannot endorse the imperative of growth, the typography of emerging markets and Comtean trajectories, what does that augur for the sanctity of neoliberalism? Even more pressingly, what socio-politico-economic imaginaries have we lost to allow the foreground of frenzied commercialism and social hierarchy to matter?

As Luther Standing Bear, the Lakota elder, reminds us in his description of an *original wisdom* and understanding that was trampled over by Western cannibalism, linear ideals of progress, and a rationalism that could not see other ontologies as part of a broader emergence:

> We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth as 'wild'. Only to the White man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land infested by 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing; from his approach, then it was that for us the 'wild west' began. (Standing Bear, 2006: 22-23)

Perhaps we have permanently forgotten our other ways of knowing. Yet there seem to be entangled possibilities in the idea of ancient futures; one can hear their comforting murmurings on a quiet day. One may wonder whether the act of invoking the plurality of tongues and myths may itself lead to emerging pathways to different political imaginaries, without the fixity of linear time.

Surely, if the monster is us there must be an alternative (with apologies to Mrs. Thatcher). The neoliberal capitalist perspective of emergence as progress defined by GDP growth, technological advancement and material accumulation is laden with commodification, extraction and self-interest. Not only does it talk about 'emerging markets', it also contains the idea that history is the gradual mobilization of Nature for anthropocentric uses, and that commodity production is the most beneficial aim of the collective politico-economic system.

How can we recast our gaze, as the Russian Cosmists did when they described humans not as earthlings, but as 'heaven dwellers' (Young, 2013)? The emerging onto-epistemology from quantum physics to evolutionary psychology is showing us the severe limitations of our rationalistic, dualistic, Enlightenment model.

When we accept the simultaneous entanglement and limitations to traditional ontologies and epistemological world views, we may conclude that we will not arrive at the 'base theorem' or the final stream of logic; no political vision will be

entirely adequate. Even 'enemies' are part of a tapestry of becoming. There is no end point, no underlying motif, no bass tone, no hidden embroidery around which we must stitch. There is a rich spontaneity that froths at the edge of action, and accounting for this beyond the simple tropes of choice and intentionality is a matter of justice. A deepening of responsibility might look like deep reflection or it might look like communing with five grams of dried magic mushrooms in a dark room. And/or it may look like an emerging form of revolution surpassing all fixed notions of linearity.

Even among the intra-actions, the decision is not between action and non-action, the vehement activist or the passive Buddhist. These dualities no longer serve us. We can simultaneously recognize the pain of the world in non-amputation and full feeling, while delegitimizing the capitalist system and overthrowing the imperialist tendencies of in/humanity that is within us all. Action is the movement of multitudes and multiple realities; it is not a solitary act. We can reclaim the colonized notion of emergence and engage in an autopoietic dance of creation and surrender, action and reflection, intra-action and observation.

Pyotr Kropotkin, the formative anarchist philosopher, reminds us that just as our crisis is not simply a political crisis, but a metaphysical crisis, the coming shifts and desire for radical change will not be one-dimensional, but rather intra-relational:

> One feels the inevitability of a revolution, vast, implacable, whose role will be not merely to throw down the political ladder that sustains the rule of the few through cunning, intrigue and lies, but also to stir up the intellectual and moral life of society, shake it out of its torpor, reshape our moral life and set blowing in the midst of the low and paltry passions that occupy us now the livening wind of noble passions, great impulses and generous dedications. (Kropotkin, 1992/1879-1882: 7)

This brings us back to the deafening banality of COP. Although the negotiators in Paris do not represent the best interests of the planet in any meaningful sense (how could they when they are intoxicated with the memetic virus of growth-at-all-costs?), we are still entangled with their cosmologies and their pathologies. We are enmeshed in a system of late-stage capitalism based on profit-maximization, detached individualism, and deadly consumerist logic. Yet there is no 'solution' in the tidy activist sense. No final answers.

As the great anarchist mystic and trickster spirit, Hakim Bey, boldly claims:

> In one sense, the sons and daughters of Gaia have never left the Paleolithic; in another sense, all the perfections of the future are already ours. Only insurrection will 'solve' this paradox – only the uprising against false consciousness in both ourselves and others will sweep away the technology of oppression and the poverty of the Spectacle. In this battle a painted mask or shaman's rattle may prove as vital

> as the seizing of a communications satellite or secret computer network. (Bey, 2003: 46)

The Biblical text tells the story of a famous ziggurat, the so-called Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9), as a mythical insurgency of men against the feminine profligacy of Nature. In the wake of an Earth-shattering deluge, with men still trembling from the echoes of such a devastation, it was decided that a tower was to be built – to mitigate (a favourite word of climate change proceedings!) the impact of unsavoury weather:

> Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly'; then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:4)

Their hopes for ascendancy were summarily dashed when God introduced confusion and turbulence to their project:

> Now the whole world had one language and a common speech… [But the Lord said] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. (*ibid*. 11: 7)

The escape from telluric grounds, the attempt to instigate a less than radical openness to the world and enclose the modern self away from its spontaneous entanglement with the *outside*, was thus halted by confused speech. By trouble.

In a time when moral lessons are eschewed with postmodern cynicism, perhaps there is something ethically vital to note here: it is that Nature resists fixity or the foundational stability of emergence-by-commercialization. No matter how much we try to escape it, we are part of a cacophonous parliament of things.

As we recognize emergence as entanglement, as trouble, as a haptic involution, and we see modernity as some kind of epistemic incarceration from the wildness of things – as a practice of denying the significance of our already in-touchness, we will create more room for emerging counter-narratives and mythologies – for the multiple primacies of psilocybin and the shaman's rattle and our grandmother's epistemology and the soft embrace of other dimensional beings, diminishing the monologue of political emergence as correspondent with an inherent scheme of things. Only then we will create the capacity to activate 'junk DNA', surrender to diffraction, embrace a politics of not-knowing and birth emergent futures worth living.

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# A chronology of fragments: Struggling to write a story alternative to the grand narrative of emerging economies

Matilda Dahl

**Nairobi, Kenya (spring 2011):**

As I am to walk out the door of our apartment in central Nairobi where we have been living for a few months, in order to go to the grocery store, the cleaning lady, Imma, who has become almost like a family member, stops me and asks:

> 'Matilda, while you are going out, could you please tell Fred at the gates to send me 20 shillings[1], because I need to make a call?'
>
> 'Of course', I tell her. And as Fred – who is keeping big gates which are the only way to get out of the gated community where my apartment is – opens the gates to me, I ask him to send over 20 shillings to Imma.

I recall I was a bit confused after this conversation, sensing that the simplicity in which Imma and Fred transferred small sums of money to each other was quite amazing. How did they do it? What was this?

'This' is called M-pesa, by now a world-famous system for small money transfers by phone, developed by the Kenyan Telecom company Safaricom. Unheard of by me, and many others in Europe, back then.

[1] Corresponds to approximately 10 Eurocents

## Two years later in Stockholm, Sweden (March 2013):

> Sitting in a cosy pub in the center of Stockholm together with some of my closest friends, we are about to pay the bill. We got to know each other during our studies at the Stockholm School of Economics many years ago. Some of them work in the financial sector, others as consultants and the like. Some of us have cash, other credit cards. One of my friends, Jenny, works in one of the big Swedish banks and she asks the rest of us: 'But doesn't anyone of you have "Swish", this app in the mobile? That way we could just use our mobile phones to split the bill?'

Few around the table have heard of this thing called 'Swish' and no one has it – except for Jenny, the banker. So we have to split the bill the usual way, handing over several credit cards to the waiter and a bunch of crumpled bills. Apparently, a crowd of middle-aged women-economists in Sweden, one of the richest and most technologically advanced countries in the world, were in 2013 quite far from using the mobile banking technologies that have since long been commonplace even among the relatively poor in Kenya, East Africa.

What a stunning observation – I thought! Sweden versus Kenya, and Kenya is so much more advanced in the use of a technology called mobile banking. An area where the banking and telecom sectors in Sweden had been working long to establish a standard, and make people use it, without much success. From my own surprise about this fact, and other people to whom I talked, a research study began to emerge. What were the features that explained the success of mobile banking in Kenya and the lack thereof in Sweden? The surprise was based on the taken for granted assumption that when it comes to finance and telecom Sweden ought to be 'more advanced', such is at least the image of the country. For once it was relatively easy to get a research grant. In the application I basically wrote that I wanted to spend time in Nairobi to understand this 'miracle' and see what we could learn from it in Sweden. I was about to tell the story that Sweden has to 'catch up' with Kenya, surprisingly.

To say that this is surprising (thus worth telling) is in a sense confirming a post-colonial normality. A normality where a northern European country is more advanced than an African country, and as soon as we find a proof of the opposite we are to exclaim: 'wow, look at that, they transfer money in a more modern way than we do in Sweden – I would never have expected that'. This is a normality that I am raised in, which is transferred to me by almost any research paper or course book within my field (Business Administration). My normality is constructed from a western point of view. And I continue constructing it as I tell the story of the Kenyan mobile money miracle.

So I went back to Kenya, and stayed for seven months in Nairobi, studying M-pesa. But not by doing elite-interviews with people working as managers at Safaricom,

even though I did meet with one such manager. What I ended up doing was a participative study in an M-pesa booth in a dusty and busy street in Nairobi. Together with James, who worked in the booth 12 hours a day at least 6 days a week, and who told me everything he knew about M-pesa. But we also talked about many other things. I told him about snow and the Swedish welfare system. He told me about Kenya. But those things were sort of on the side. My research notes were mainly about M-pesa, and the customers that came to buy cash or to buy 'float' (SMS correspondence to cash).

## Research diary, Nairobi (27 January 2015):

> I have been sitting in this tiny M-pesa booth for a few hours now, my back is hurting, the space is really small. It is such a difference to see this from inside the counter, I am doing the 'M-pesa' together with James. James works here 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. He is employed by Tim who is an M-pesa agent. It is through Tim, who drives one of the taxis we use here that I got the opportunity to tag along, inside the M-pesa shop. The shop, which mostly resembles a cupboard – there is room for two chairs and very small table behind the counter – is situated next to a restaurant. It has two small hatches, one towards the dusty street, and one towards the inside of the restaurant. Beside exchange of cash for an SMS and vice versa James sells scratch cards (units you can call for) and makes photocopies. But the main business is the 'M-pesa'. James is teaching me how to do it, he thinks I am pretty smart and getting a hook of it. Great. All you need is an old cellphone, preferably a Nokia with a long-lasting battery. James has a smartphone for private use, but the M-pesa shop uses the old Nokia to make M-pesa transfers. It is much faster when it comes to sending and receiving SMSs, James explains.
>
> People come to the shop either with cash in their hand that they want to transform into SMS, or the other way around, they want to withdraw cash from their M-pesa account (which is not really an account in the proper sense but a sort of SMS-balance). The whole transaction is wordless and smooth. I feel like a human cash machine. And if I am to translate the function of M-pesa into something I have experienced it would be a combination of a cash machine and a bank transfer system. Except that there is no bank involved. Just a phone company. And a lot of small M-pesa booths all over town with people like James sitting inside them, with a small phone in their hand, receiving or handing out cash. All booths are painted in green, the 'Safaricom-green', a special nuance. Safaricom is the Kenyan partly state-owned telecommunications company that launched M-pesa and is now world famous within the telecom, mobile money sector. It was the first company that succeeded in making people use their phones to transfer money to each other on large scale.
>
> An elderly man comes into the booth crossing the dusty street; he has 3000 shillings in his hand. James explains that he is a carpenter selling chairs and tables he has made on the other side of the big Ngong street. He has probably just sold some furniture and wants to put the cash into his M-pesa rather than carry it in his pocket. He hands the 3000 shillings to me and I send an M-pesa SMS to him, putting the bills under the cashier. As soon as he has gotten the confirmation he continues tapping on his small phone. I ask him what he did with the money? He explains he

> sent part of the sum to his daughter who lives 600 km from Nairobi and he pays his electricity bill. 3000 is a big transfer. Many customers come and hand in 50, 100 or 200 shillings.
>
> This is a busy street corner, and most people hand in cash rather than withdrawing. The bills pile up under the counter. We have to inscribe every transfer in a big notebook and the customer needs to sign it. According to the rules of Safaricom, each person making a transfer needs to show ID. This seldom happens in this corner. I ask why. 'Well, I know all these people' – says James – 'I have been sitting here for several years and almost all of them I know. They work here close by'. There comes an SMS to the phone. It says 'Sebastian, 2500 shillings'. What am I supposed to do? No one is there in front of the booth? A little while later an older lady shows up. She is there to get the 2500 for Sebastian. He has a business further up the corner, explains James, who knows both the lady and Sebastian. She comes every day, it is explained to me.
>
> So what is it that we do there inside the booth? On the surface, we take or give away cash, and check that an SMS is being sent and received. I am trying to understand the system. My interpretation is that what we actually do here is that we sell and buy what is called 'e-float' (James just says 'float'). Float can be seen as an 'SMS currency'. Cash is transformed into float, and float is transformed into cash with M-pesa as the intermediator. Safaricom takes a share from each transaction. The business model is thus that of a phone company: the more transfers (SMSs being sent and received) the better. It builds on the logic of 'many small transactions' – quite contrary to the banking logic. To set up an M-pesa account is free. This has little to do with what I know as banking. It is not banking and it is not regulated as such. It is seen as mobile service and thus avoids financial regulation.
>
> The M-pesa booths are run by independent agents. These are entrepreneurs that invest their own capital to start up an M-pesa booth. Tony has three booths. This one is really profitable, it yields a profit of 100 000 shillings a month. 30% of that goes to Safaricom....

I could go on here. I have pages and pages of notes like this. Photos. A Swedish researcher in business is taught how to M-pesa by a Kenyan agent. Probably not many have the kind of empirical material I have. Some colleagues might call it 'low hanging fruit'. But how am I to frame it beyond the business emergence story, which I do not want to tell the usual, sort of 'low hanging fruit' (and somehow easy, uninteresting) way: Kenya is considered an 'emerging' economy, so everything that emerges and can be evaluated and appreciated by an eye of global capital gets written about. I keep thinking about all the alternative stories that are not told. And the performative role of the 'success against all odds' story that is being re-told to me in the kiosques in Kenya. It keeps on circulating, from the global to the local. There are so many other stories to be told, but they end up being too painful, too emotional. So far from any 'objectiveness' one could ever have. How to tell them, is it even to be called 'research'?

One such story is about James and me, and how he saves me from going into custody. It is about my last day in the field, two days later I was going back to Sweden. A few times a week James walks alone from his M-pesa booth with four big piles of cash (one in each pocket in his jeans) a few blocks to the bank in order to 'balance' the cash (change it to 'e-float'). This day I walk with him to the bank and ask whether I can take a picture of him with my iPhone. He agrees. But as I lift my phone and take a photo of him, from behind, a military car comes around the corner. So I happen to catch the car on my photo.

After that everything happens very fast. An officer yells angrily at me, jumps out of the car and snatches my phone from my hand. I react with anger and tell him to give back my phone. It all happens fast. I am surrounded by yelling militaries. A mob starts gathering on the street. Voices get agitated. The officer says I have committed a serious crime. My first reaction, anger over my phone and over this attempt to get a bribe from a westerner is replaced with fear after some time. James explains that they are saying to the people on the street that if we were in the US I would have been 'shot on the spot' since I look like 'Al-Qaeda'. James manages to get me out of the mob and stops the officers from pushing me into their van. James tells me to go into a small shelter a few meters from the van. The officer says I am not going back to Sweden on Monday, because then I will be going to trial, and now I need to get into the van. I ask them to give me my phone so I can call my lawyer.

My lawyer talks to the officer through my phone. Nothing happens, still agitation. James tells me we need to bribe the officers before this gets dangerous. We do. Or I do, with his intermediary help. I am not seen handling the money, nor is the officer in charge. Suddenly everything calms down. The officer in charge comes towards me, shakes my hand and wishes me a pleasant stay in Kenya. It is almost surreal. I go and fetch my son from school and decide to forget about it all. Because how am I to make sense of it? How can I include this in my field study, how can I not? It affected me deeply. Suddenly a story about mobile money became a story about life and death and bribes and many other things. At least from my perspective. And any research I do will of course be affected by me.

Is this to be seen as the 'backside' of the miraculous emergence story we are used to hear? I'm not convinced at all. However it was not what I was studying really, it just happened. And I cannot pretend it didn't happen. Nor would I slide into concluding that a 'real' catching up with the 'advanced' West will not happen as long as incidents like this take place – this again would be an inadequate interpretation, undermining the importance of this new technology or casting a shadow on it, which it does not deserve. Maybe it can be a reminder of the fact that economic or business success stories do not automatically lead to political change.

However, I am not taught how to write about it, how to make sense of this at all as a business scholar, which in itself can be seen as part of the problem. Is my whole academic discipline so naïve? The answer is most probably yes.

What happened in Kenya is so far from everything I was taught as an organizational scholar. It interferes with my personal life, my deepest fears, as a human being. It is also a story about friendship and about sticking up for another human being. He could just have left me there. My experiences during this stay 'inside the booth' are so far from the official picture of the Mobile Money miracle, as it is usually perceived. Even if I leave out my last day's experience. It will never be covered in the stories circulating globally. Such as the viral Facebook update by Mark Zuckerberg, a few years later:

> Just landed in Nairobi! I'm here to meet with entrepreneurs and developers, and to learn about mobile money – where Kenya is the world leader. I'm starting at a place called iHub, where entrepreneurs can build and prototype their ideas. Two of the engineers I met – Fausto and Mark – designed a system to help people use mobile payments to buy small amounts of cooking gas, which is a lot safer and better for the environment than charcoal or kerosene. It's inspiring to see how engineers here are using mobile money to build businesses and help their community. (1 September 2016)[2]

There is of course not one grand narrative, one story to be told. The global economy is full of success stories that travel fast. Some are told many times and get a life of their own. Companies have great resources to form grand narratives. Some people in the global economy, Mark Zuckerberg for instance, will be listened to when telling a story. And it is difficult not to be drawn into this type of 'success narrative' in 'unexpected places' – wow look what is just emerging here, I could never have guessed! But the surprise is in the eye of the beholder. And in the global economy, some people are looking and writing and 'analyzing', while others are under the gaze, often voice-less. Then there are those stories in between, and beyond, which don't fit, which we do not know what to make of, that we might be scared or too puzzled to write about. Because they are complex and emotional, and as management scholars we have been told to leave emotions outside, to keep our sight clear. But our sight might perhaps then risk to get deprived of its humanity. And maybe, starting with empathy and engagement, even if its Western and not fully informed, could be a way to put together the fragments in order for new – perhaps more unexpected – stories to emerge?

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[2] Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook account, 1 September 2016 [https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10103073829862111].

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# Market fundamentalism in the age of 'haute finance': The enclosing of policy space in 'emerging' India

Srivatsan Lakshminarayan

## abstract

The rise of the Emerging Market is a remarkable exemplar of an idea that originated and was socialized in Western financial markets during the 1980s. It has since gained rapid, wider normative status with respect to a particular set of beliefs that motivate policy choices on macroeconomic management, economic development and financial sector reforms in developing and less developed countries. I draw on the Polanyian notion of commodification and recent extensions to his scholarship in the realm of ideas that seek to explicate processes through which the dominant ideal of the self-regulating market is justified as fundamental to the organization of society. Against the backdrop of globally mobile capital, I critique the prevalence of a particular ideology of emergence in which commodified geography and commodified finance interact to shape policy. In this process, evaluative talk plays a key role in legitimizing the expectations of global capital and overcoming inherent contradictions through the rhetoric of non-crises. I thus highlight the ascendance of a narrow and instrumentally economic understanding of emergence in contemporary, post reform India as is asserted in conventional policy discourse. I conclude by remarking on the significant constriction of ideational space for the consideration of alternative, historically informed approaches to social and economic development. The legacy of Karl Polanyi serves as a prophetic reminder for the consequences of such constriction.

> [Initially]...There was no foreign portfolio investment in emerging markets. In fact, the name was designed to give a more uplifting feeling to what we had originally called the third world fund.
>
> Former Deputy Director, The International Finance Corporation (IFC)

## Introduction

Karl Polanyi (1944-2001) attributed the early nineteenth century rise of market society and its integrative economic logic based on the institution of the self-regulating market to the conjunctive rise of a universal economic motive (personal gain) and the fictitious commodification of land, labour and money. It is arguable whether Polanyi could have foreseen the extent of fictitious commodification in contemporary market society, in particular the commodification of entire geographies. Kaur (2012) emphasizes the ascendancy of the superficial project of corporatized nation branding over development-tethered nation building in the competitive race to emerge as *the* desired destination for global capital. Against the backdrop of nation states increasingly seeing themselves primarily as managers of capital, she identifies:

> a defining aspect of neoliberal economic restructuring over the past few decades has been the re-making of the nation-form in the image of the corporation — Nationality, Inc — complete with its own trademark and a brand image. The shift marks the move from the ideas and practices of nation building to those of nation branding, which is often suggested as the attainment of a higher and more complete form of nationhood appropriate to the era of globalization. (2012: 605-606)

Notions of *emerging*, *emergence* and *emerging markets* are central to this exercise of competitive nationalized brand building (Kaur and Hansen, 2016: 269), particularly in the international market for finance. The term *emerging market* represents an idea that originated in the IFC (a leading World Bank member financial institution focused on private sector initiatives in developing economies) over three decades ago to elevate a potential but fledgling asset class (investment category comprising securities with similar characteristics) to a new standard worthy of attention from international banks, fund managers and capital providers. *Emergence* now transcends economic, political and public policy spheres and is pervasive in the lexicon of economists, academics, analysts, businessmen, executives, fund managers as well as the print and electronic media in India today. The notion of an *emerging India* interacts deeply with collective construction of national identity. In particular, the idea of emergence increasingly demands adherence to a set of standardized expectations in the domains of macroeconomic policy, financial markets and indeed, the political economy, as repeatedly articulated and enforced by key internal and external actors.

Such expectations are usually enacted through evaluative talk that define red lines of acceptable behavior. In so doing they seek to establish norms that de-legitimize alternate notions of development (including the vehement rejection of the policies of a previous generation) that cannot be accommodated by the immediate needs of globally mobile capital. In the process of establishing such norms through the

reproduction and enforcement of evaluative talk, India's *emergence* corresponds to the Polanyian description of a growing, acquisitive and inherently contradictory market society. The outcome is a remarkably rapid transformation of a civilization into an appendage to the self-regulating market, on course towards the 'running of society as an adjunct to the market' (Polanyi, 1944/2001: 60).

## The great transformation

Particularly in the last three decades, Karl Polanyi's classic oeuvre, *The Great transformation*, 1944 has been the subject of analysis and interpretation across the disciplines of economic sociology, economic anthropology, historical sociology and critical political economy. Institutional theories of change describe Polanyi's work as a remarkable example of macro-social analysis based on the use of 'history as an analytical tool', consider Polanyi as one of the founding fathers of classical historical institutionalism (Steinmo, 2008: 122) and acknowledge him as one of the original contributors to the institutionalist approach of the study of political economy alongside Thorstein Veblen and Max Weber (Dunlavy, 1998: 114; Steinmo and Thelen, 1998: 3). Economic and historical sociologists and political historians have been at the forefront in debating, theoretically extending and empirically examining Polanyian constructs and methods (Block, 1979, 2001, 2003; Block and Somers 2005, 2014; Dale 2010; Gemici, 2008; Hann and Hart, 2009).

Recent scholarship on Polanyi has sought to re-interpret his profound yet somewhat ambiguous ideas in a neoliberal context. Intellectual epitaphs to Polanyian thought arising from his *wrong* interpretation of history and emphasizing the historical persistence of market societies in mankind's deterministic evolution towards the modern market economy have also been attempted (Hejeebu and McCloskey, 2004: 137). Others have sought to problematize the apparent challenge to Polanyian thought presented by the mutating yet persistent nature of capitalism in seeking re-interpretations that can lead to 'progressive possibilities' (Dale, 2010: 208; Watson, 2014: 622). Amidst repeated crises, Polanyi's ideas on the socially disintegrative consequences of the fictitious commodification of land, labour and money in an industrial society, that subjects its social sphere to the dominance of free markets and, the reactionary processes of the double movement, command renewed attention. The 'ghost of Karl Polanyi' (Levitt, 2013:1) continues to stalk debates beyond the confines of the World Economic Forum.

Polanyi challenges the ahistorical presumption pervasive in significant sections of mainstream modern economic (and indeed, social) thought that contemporary

arrangements and methods of organization are advancements of timeless practices. Polanyi's ontological commitment to a holistic view of man, and his temporal critique of industrialized Western society is therefore, appropriately suited to a contemporary study of eastern societies such as India, where, arguably, for most of the twentieth century, the independent sphere of the market economy did not dominate human society. Polanyi's analysis refutes economic determinism that tends to relegate social motives to irrelevance by presuming that all changes in society are driven by the economic sphere. He also represents a direct challenge to micro or reductionist theories of institutional change that place economic rationality over all other forms of rationality and theorize institutions, uncritically, as the consequence of *innovations* by powerful actors driven by rational self-interest.

## Market fundamentalism and ideational processes

The notion of *market fundamentalism* in contemporary Polanyian scholarship owes its *substantive* origin through Soros (1998) to Polanyi. Polanyi's thesis of the rise of the market economy predicated on the commodification of man, nature and money, the resultant transition of society into a market society and the central role of 'values, motives and policy' (Polanyi, 1957: 250) in the institution of economic processes in society, prefigure the rise of *market fundamentalism* in a market society. Block and Somers re-define and deploy this notion in a somewhat deprecatory manner to highlight 'the quasi-religious certainty expressed by contemporary advocates of market self-regulation' (2014: 3) and inductively theorize within a framework of ideas and narratives that synthesizes ideational processes of institutional change with Polanyi's account of the rise of the self-regulating market (2005, 2014). They extend Polanyi's conception of embeddedness in a market society, i.e. the arrangement of institutions of the market vis-a-vis social institutions, to the ideational sphere. Accordingly, Block and Somers argue that the notion of *market fundamentalism* constitutes 'ideas, public narratives and explanatory systems by which states, societies, and political cultures construct, transform, explain, and normalize market processes' (2014: 155). Their work represents a singularly significant and operationalizable extension of Polanyian theory in the domain of ideas, with implications for contexts such as India.

Just as markets are embedded differently at a functional or structural level within market societies, i.e. the separation of political and economic institutions is configured differently in market societies over time and space through regulations and institutional arrangements, markets are also embedded and re-embedded differently at an ideational level. A key, inductively derived assumption on which

ideational embeddedness is based is the following: ideas exercise an independent role in catalysing institutional change in certain contexts. Once this assumption is accepted, Block and Somers posit that 'many battles over social and economic policy should be redefined as conflicts not over whether markets should be embedded but rather which ideational regime will do the embedding' (*ibid.*: 155).

Thus, ideas are contested within ideational regimes and, regime changes in a given society are rare. Ideas that are in tune with the given regime are epistemically privileged. The broader regime prevalent in the contemporary global context is one of historically persistent *market fundamentalism*. Block and Somers (2014: 166-173) attribute its ascendance and persistence since nineteenth century Western society to three underlying principles. The first is social naturalism - the claim that the laws of nature govern society and that the laws of the market represent the natural order of things. The second is theoretical realism constituting apparently inductive but substantively deductive causal claims that argue from observable effects to the true unobserved reality, e.g. that unemployment and low wages are invariably observed in a welfare society not *despite* welfare support but *because* of welfare support. The third principle is that of the conversion narrative, i.e. conversion of actors or groups from one ideational regime to another through the neutralization of the prevailing narrative and the depiction of an alternate story by moving back and forth between 'a more harmonious past before the onset of the crisis' and 'forward again to the problematic present' (*ibid.*: 172). The operationalization of the current regime is sustained through processes that seize crisis opportunities by seeking to problematize the crisis, argue counterfactually so as to delegitimize the original intellectual sponsors as architects of the current crisis and seek to alter the narrative by promising a utopian alternative for the future through a powerful counter-narrative. Thus *market fundamentalism*:

> simply imposes a different kind of embeddedness from that of institutional pragmatism, (social protection) one that tells a different story about the urgency of liberating markets form the tyranny of policies that violate the autonomy of self-regulating natural entities. (2014: 184)

Consequently, *market fundamentalism* provides a crucial entry point through which a number of Polanyian constructs can be operationalized in the analysis of narratives relating to prevailing ideas and institutions, without necessarily subscribing to deterministic outcomes. Specifically, I draw upon the interplay between commodified geography, commodified money (global finance) and the notion of *market fundamentalism* in problematizing the dominant ideological and policy proclivities in *emerging* India.

## Commoditized space, notions of emergence and global capital

The metaphors deployed to describe *emerging* economies in geographically prefixed predatory or behemoth-like terms explicit in image conjuring exercises in the global economic discourse, and particularly, the financial media such as *Asian tigers, African lions, the dragon, the elephant* etc. serve dual purposes. They capture and perpetuate the intensely competitive nature of international capital mobilization in the new pecking order of emergent nation states engaged in the race to *outperform* within the asset class of emerging markets, reminiscent of the analogous race for survival in the wilderness. Further, they provide lubrication to the public aspirations amongst the vanguard of emergent nations — to emerge victorious in this race. The components of this asset class however are not homogenously constituted. Sidaway (2012: 57) provides an interesting description in terms of the spatial dimension of emergence through his description of re-converged enclaves as demarcated zones of development within 'the third world' that represent sites of fulfilment and function as nodal representatives of the globalized world but are 'partially dis-embedded' (perhaps, even starkly so) from their immediate context.

However, there is an additional temporal dimension to this emergence, which manifests itself in the belief patterns and notions of the *emergent* nation. These arise from qualitative connotations associated with emergence and are anchored in an impression of purposive motion — from the past (undesirable, servile) to the future (developed, assertive, aggressive). Such an understanding seeks to foreclose consideration of options since the materialization of any schisms, however deep, are non-controversially attributed to temporary aberrations encountered in the progress towards a promised, powerful and redeeming future. Such aberrations are often perceived as opportunities to incrementally correct technical flaws in policy instead of substantively challenging direction. Emergence, thus comprehended, is associated with a set of fiercely guarded emotions and beliefs appropriated by the elite, *enlightened* citizenry of the emergent. Particularly in the case of India, these often include a feeling of purposeful redemption, a belief in a vague yet shared perception of a relentless pursuit of the economic summit and a qualification *earned* by virtue of an unwavering focus on coaxing digits of growth out of the economy. A demonstrated commitment to global economic integration that entitles, indeed commands greater attention to a *performing* India from the audience of national and international spectators becomes imperative as *emergence* increasingly constitutes a tenuous perquisite representing privileged membership in a global club of the like-minded. Such recognition however is contingent upon India's continued inclusion in prestigious financial groupings and indices so as to justify a persistent premium in investment valuation.

Consequently, in the domain of economic policy, advocacy of an *emerging* India requires the establishment of an institutional environment that is able to simultaneously accommodate incompatible components. In particular, these include the enduring facilitation of powerful private innovators who are able to contract at minimal transaction cost and continually undertake institutional innovation in the prospect of private gain. Additionally, a stable polity is sought, that sees itself primarily as a service provider in the assurance of continuity as a legislator of low cost contract enforcement and non-interference. Such a polity is expected to commit itself to an efficient property rights system so that incentives for *frictions* arising from subjective perceptions rooted in alternative logics (tradition, custom and local belief) are minimized. Further, a judiciary geared to unambiguous and speedy resolution of disputes in its primary role as low cost third party enforcer and, an amenable citizenry who cultivate necessary opinions are desired, so that a stable institutional environment can be maintained to facilitate the operation of other institutional components. These expectations by the orthodoxy as *the* essential template for institutional design and change for *emerging* India re-centre our attention on Polanyi's notion of the 'economistic fallacy' (Polanyi, 1953:1). Fundamental to Polanyi's conception of the economy as an instituted process are his accompanying emphatic injunctions to avoid equating the economy with the market in its purely formal, economistic sense instead of its human counterpart (a presumptive encumbrance of our zeitgeist) thereby ignoring the place of economy in society. The economistic advocacy of the orthodoxy however is beholden to haute finance.

In the globally interconnected financial economy, commoditized money has a special role to play in the commodification of geography i.e. branded *emergence*, by interacting with domestic notions of emergence and therefore, enforcing emergence from without. Lee (2003: 62) highlights the devaluation and consequent destabilization of locationally fixed capital through spatial mobility of financial capital across geographies and investments in compressed time, originating from the process of continuous, comparative evaluations predicated on increasingly fragile (and often oscillating) financial knowledge. When applied instantaneously over a range of time horizons (investment holding period considerations), such knowledge amplifies the liquidity, scale and power of financial markets and facilitates the construction of geographically uneven development. The very threat of (re)switching of financial capital consequent on such mobility exerts policy pressure on emergent states that is reflective of:

> the geographical imaginations and experience of those working within financial markets and the interactive construction and exchange of knowledge – often over very short time frames – in which they are constantly engaged. (Lee, 2003: 63)

The continuous flow of information through broker networks, content providers and financial media creates perceived and actual instantaneous arbitrage opportunities across geographies or investments (asset classes), serving as stimulus for the continual readjustment of views, consummation of value realization and movement of financial capital to the next transitory destination in order to *unlock value*. The notion that such attributes of mobility and instantaneous re-pricing of risk on a global scale are essential for a perennial, universal reflection of underlying assets at their fair value appears clearly antithetical to another mainstream economic assertion (World Bank Report, 2010) that productive investment requires a stable regime, reliable institutions and a predictable business environment. Underlining this dialectical opposition is the fact that globally mobile financial capital constantly juxtaposes the value of *real* investment against its *fluid*, market determined price, fueling volatility, affecting sentiments and thereby adversely influencing real investment and business decisions. Lee (2003) highlights this antithesis in the context of global risk aversion and a flight to quality, resulting in reduced portfolio investment in emerging markets, pro-cyclicality of capital flows and a consequential penalty that emerging markets bear for global growth slowdown.

## Inherent contradictions of self-regulating finance

Pro-cyclicality of capital flows, especially in the form of foreign portfolio investment (into domestic equity and bond markets of emergent states such as India) presents a deepening persistent challenge to one of the fundamental postulates in finance. The sub-discipline of portfolio theory within modern international finance espouses asset class diversification as a means of countering cross-asset class return correlation especially in the face of recurrent and prolonged contagion in financial markets, often in anticipation of such events. This assumes significance in the post Global Financial Crisis (GFC) regime. In its simplest form the exercise involves (re)switching financial capital amongst combinations of investable assets that bear low positive to zero correlation, for example, cash and equity. At a more sophisticated level, it involves evaluating combinations of assets (including geographies) that at the margin yield superior positive nominal risk adjusted returns per unit of volatility at the level of the portfolio. Recent trends on the effectiveness of global portfolio diversification strategies, especially in equity and bond markets around and after the GFC are instructive.

The process of establishing new destinations for financial capital through the creation and re-categorization of *emerging* and *frontier* territories aids the widening of portfolio opportunities through the emergence of alternate investable asset

classes (geographies) that appear initially heterogeneous. However, increasing policy isomorphism over time is manifested through shared attributes such as dependence on unpredictable global capital to mobilize foreign currency reserves and finance real sector growth and, rising inter-connection with global financial markets. This diminishes portfolio diversification benefits, especially over the short to medium term arising from higher financial asset return and volatility correlation between emerging markets and the US (safe haven) during peak contagion (e.g. GFC), rising co-movement of returns during bull markets since GFC and significantly greater interdependence of bond returns in emerging markets (Bianconi et al., 2013; Dimitriou et al., 2013; Syriopoulos et al., 2015). Recent calls for replacing asset class diversification with (often) ambiguously interpreted risk factor based diversification (Ilmanen and Kizer, 2012) require dynamic portfolio management and entail high transaction costs. Frequent regime shifts affect underlying risk factors and further mandate taking on leverage in the portfolio of an order that effectively exposes the portfolio to a different form of risk.

Ironically, in every instance of an (imported) crisis, emergent states like India are constrained to implement policy measures designed to speedily attract and retain foreign exchange reserves by incentivizing global capital inflow in its most transient form — foreign portfolio investment. Thus, we observe two pairs of incongruous dynamics. One pertains to the emerging contradictions within portfolio management techniques affecting portfolio investors of foreign capital and, the other to rising dependability on tenuous foreign currency flows while seeking to guard exchange rate stability and also financing growth. These represent classic Polanyian illustrations of the internal contradictions arising from the sophisticated reproduction of commoditized self-regulating finance in the global market that *emerging* countries such as India face.

There is a further dimension, however, to this perennially imminent threat of capital switching that Lee (2003) addresses partially. Indeed, the mere spectre of a large scale switching away of financial capital exercises a regulatory impact on local behaviour and norms, thereby ensuring conformity with global expectations and limiting discretion in policy and action at the level of the *emergent sovereign*. Not only must the emergent be compliant but must also *be seen to be* compliant at all times implying that any change in perceptions about intent is reason enough for the reconstruction of financial knowledge. This has profound implications. Every potential announcement and action by the *sovereign* must be carefully analyzed ex-ante and provision made for compensating factors so that cross spatial and inter-temporal expectations from global capital are adequately factored into policy decisions. Dissenting influential voices or opinions in policy corridors must be ignored or quelled lest financial markets catch on to the whiff of indiscipline and read rebellion from it. When such balancing is no longer possible, damage control

emerges as the last resort. Policies, thus lose connect with the developmental dimension of stated ideology and are increasingly hostage to the immediate verdict of financial markets.

## Evaluative talk

The process of capital switching does not occur passively but is accompanied and often determined by a strong sub-text of 'evaluative talk' (Lee, 2003: 67). Evaluative talk aims to continuously (re)create conditions appropriate for (re)switching through the discursive constitution of fitness for investment purpose. Such evaluative talk in the context of emerging markets is often comparative, juxtaposing nation states as lead-lag players so as to project them as examples of successes or failures on neoliberal parameters of economic reform. This is often accomplished by establishing expectations of reform implementation (in the public domain) from the elected head of the sovereign emergent in the process. Kaur (2012: 605) highlights the reversal from the earlier situation of 'the corporation seeking patronage as purveyor to the sovereign' to the prevailing regime where the state acts as purveyor to global capital through the display of abundant 'raw material, cheap skilled labour and unfettered access to markets'. It is no surprise, therefore, that the prospective customer is constantly evaluating the vendor's wares and publicly setting terms for their merchantability.

Based on analysis of prevailing discourses (popular and financial), I posit that evaluative talk, especially in the context of *emerging* markets, constitute three broad, cognate categories. These include value-laden exhortations for speedy implementation of neoliberal reforms while making exhortative, critical comparisons over time and space in order to highlight missed opportunities or to avoid being perceived as a laggard. Second, warnings of external risks (positive and negative) for example 'Fed tapering', Eurozone crisis and oil price movements, thereby highlighting needs for resiliency and continued reform commitment constitute another category. Finally, appeals to seize the opportunity to fulfil potential and attain one's destined place in the world order constitute the third. Evaluative talk typical of these categories can originate from internal or external actors and usually converges (across actors and categories) at critical moments when a decisive regime shift is imminent or appears possible. As an illustration, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) episodic warnings to 'emerging' economies like India of looming external risks and emphasis on speedy reform implementation as an antidote are typical of diagnostic rhetoric. These are premised on the expectation that every new wave of imported crisis accentuated by globally mobile capital must be countered by nimble footed policy implementation by emerging markets on their onward march to *emergence* (e.g. IMF, 2016).

Highlighting the dialectical nature of the problem, is the irony, that if fulfilled, these crisis events would constrain options for India's monetary policy (interest rate reduction), investment reform process (attracting foreign investment inflows) and foreign exchange management (stable exchange rate and robust foreign exchange reserve maintenance) at precisely the moment of the articulated need to implement these measures, thereby diminishing prospects for reform as judged by the same neoliberal standards on which these expectations are articulated.

Evaluative talks by internal actors include allusions to the *shameful* legacy of India's economic performance prior to the introduction of liberalization and commencement of global integration (1991), the externally anchored nature of the vision of what India must or must not do – the imperative of *measuring up* to international expectations, the separation of the social sphere from the economic and, the articulation of a *business case* for future financing of the social sector contingent upon economic growth. In the context of emergence, evaluative talk thus seeks to further the logic of commodified finance in two very distinct and related ways. First, it seeks to achieve and sustain the completion of the Polanyian triad, namely the commodification of land and labour. Second, in the domain of performance accounting, it demands on-going spatial (across emerging markets) and temporal (fiscal quarter or year) policy accountability echoing the earlier reversal of roles between state and corporation.

## Opportunistic invocation of non-crises in the service of market fundamentalism

How do prescriptions by the prevailing orthodoxy retain credibility against chronic and episodic crises of slow-down, recession and jobless growth? I posit that this is achieved through the evaluative rhetoric of *non-crisis*. This involves talking down by juxtaposing relative intensities of episodic indigence, emphasizing the absoluteness of *fundamentals* and, the imperative of countering capital flight. Such manufacture of crisis reconcilement is often accompanied by a pragmatic, naturalistic emphasis on the inevitable incurrence of globally imported costs for imminent local development. The discursive construction of concrete visions of development through persistent appeals to the power of instrumental imagination involves the constant conjuring of material manifestations of progress and the consequent shaping of realities that hide the tenuousness of access and ignore the problematic domestic reproduction of a colonial past, in the relentless and febrile makings of a new *free* history of a *free* society. The capture of ideology, vision and institutional action by conforming and totalizing imaginations is thus complete.

This paves the way for the situational negotiation of morals predicated on the economic imperatives of substantively non-economistic contexts that is simultaneously pervasive (by its reproduction throughout the hierarchy of society) and regressive (by its relentless shaping of individual and collective consciousness). The dialectical abasement of wholesome collective histories and geographies, their diversities and inherited human-ness, through the verbalized elevation of synthetic boundaries formalized in grand narratives of growth is thus achieved. Simultaneously, the reinforcement of conformity to the instrumental epistemology underlying such narratives through the continual emphasis on the precariousness of *growth* is on display, resulting in the non-reflexive advancement of performative growth over its subjective and substantial alternatives. The fierceness of calls for safeguards to growth arising from *unavoidable* imperatives to nurture the reified concept persists, in the course of which, the real subjective constituent is often, collateral damage. The latent negation of human-ness in the pursuit of metricized outcomes eventually, by its reproduction, constitutes a conscious abnegation of stated intent. Finally, the anticipatory rhetoric of *deep and impending crisis*, simultaneously serves preparatory and cautionary purposes (highlighting the *inevitable* consequences of failing to fall in line) in the age of *market fundamentalism*.

## Burden of proof

The over-riding (though not unchallenged) mainstream assertion dominating Indian economic policy discourse is the following — not opening markets to investment and competition, i.e. not establishing 'One Big Market' (Polanyi, 1944/2001: 75, 187), and the failure to unleash *animal spirits*, will accelerate the decline of India as an *emerging* super-power and jeopardize development. Arguments for a more complete commodification of land and labour prescribe a simpler land acquisition process that would overcome the challenges of adequate compensation, community consensus and social audit and, a labour market where separation is easier. Central to this naturalistic, conversion narrative is a mix of unreflective experiences and notions. Dissatisfaction with decades of *insular* and *bureaucratic* approaches to post-independence economic development acts as a powerful motivating force. Further, the collapse of communism is putatively interpreted as representing the permanent demise of non-capitalistic and often by conflated association, non-libertarian modes of economic and social organization. These are accompanied by misplaced juxtaposition of advanced capitalistic economic models with those of the former Soviet bloc to highlight the absence of viable alternatives and, the conflation of liberal, socialist models with those of failed communist models by tarring all alternative models of nation building and

development with the same brush. These arguments fail to adequately introspect, in several ways.

First, they over-weight (often unconsciously) a particular phase of Western development based on the self-regulating market commencing between the late 1960s and early 1970s and in particular the globalized neoliberal version ascendant since the early 1980s. However, they ignore the period of turbulence arising out of unregulated market orientation in the run up to the great depression and the period of relatively stable welfare capitalism after the end of the Second World War culminating in the early 1970s in which restrictions on international finance attenuated the commodification of money (Lacher, 1999: 356). They also discount the strong state-led (sometimes at the expense of democratic rights) and social infrastructure-intensive nature of development in the case of East Asia, the experiences of failed transition to capitalistic organization of eastern Europe and Russia in the 1990s through the foisting of market institutions on unprepared and incompatible societies (Williamson, 2000) and indeed, the prolonged period of political and economic turbulence in advanced Western societies since the GFC. Hence they are ahistorical by being selectively attentive. Further, they shift the burden of proof onto arguments in favour of alternatives to prove that alternatives are superior and worthy of consideration. In so doing, they impose their own market fundamentalist standards on which basis the acceptability of any alternative must be judged, i.e. they 'exercise ideological hegemony over the boundaries of political discourse' (Block and Somers, 2014: 184). Thus, they suffer from the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* – merely because a more effective alternative cannot be proven immediately, they assume the opposite, in this case, the financially capitalist proposition must be true, despite obvious inherent contradictions.

The reference to pre-1991 (pre-reform) India in popular discourse is representative of a widespread belief in the collective Indian mind, especially amongst wide sections of contemporary, educated middle and upper class Indians (who also dominate the bureaucratic, policy making, business and, increasingly, the political establishments), that India has never broken clear of the burdensome fetters originating from historic policy choices. 1991 represents a red-line in the past and notions of speed and flight need to be read in context – that of need for a decisive, permanent escape from a 'shameful' past and a prolonged present. Interacting with this belief, is the further notion that 25 years of reform, since 1991, have not produced desired results, putatively because the desired swift focus on wealth generation has been relegated due to an excessive preoccupation with redistribution, an argument often bordering on theoretical realism, e.g. that the poor need purchasing power not welfare support. This was exemplified by the discourse in the popular and financial media, in the run up to the 2014 general

elections that was overwhelmingly critical of and anathematized *policy paralysis* and *governance deficit*. There is now, therefore, more than ever, the widely articulated need for speed and flight.

## Conclusion

In the context of discussing different bases on which theories of ideology can be organized, Geuss (1981: 7) analyzes rituals as non-discursive elements of religion (itself a component of ideology) and thereby, draws a distinction between the beliefs and attitudes most people in society naively associate with (a particular) ritual, either implicitly or explicitly through participation in the ritual and 'the conflicting theological interpretations conceptually sophisticated members of the society give to the ritual.' Analogously, I posit that the wider, and to a significant extent, manufactured discourse on Indian emergence has focused overwhelmingly on the coveted short-term outcomes (jobs, infrastructure, better standard of material life, competitive out-performance) of neoliberal policy choices that the path has thus far involved taking, thereby, shaping public beliefs and expectations amongst explicit and implicit participants with respect to their own participation in the ritual of emergence.

Conversely, those having influence, providing inputs into or responsible for policy choices ('the conceptually sophisticated') are far more circumspect with respect to the structural adjustments and the tariff involved in emergence as a desideratum, almost dispassionately so. This dispassion is often a function of the disproportionate effects of such adjustments on the governors and the governed but more fundamentally reflective of the lack of space for alternative ideas and an inadequate critical appreciation of the zeitgeist. In either case, however, the discourse is overwhelmingly about methods, efficiency and narrowly instrumental aspects. The ideological mooring of India's *emergence* at this time is remarkably reflective of Polanyi's prescient characterization of the rise of the market economy in early nineteenth century England in the wake of the Industrial Revolution:

> Fired by an emotional faith in spontaneity, the common-sense attitude toward change was discarded in favour of a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be…The elementary truths of political science and statecraft were first discredited then forgotten…household truths of traditional statesmanship, often merely reflecting the teachings of a social philosophy inherited from the ancients…(were)…erased from the thoughts of the educated by the corrosive of a crude utilitarianism combined with an uncritical reliance on the alleged self-healing virtues of unconscious growth. (1944/2001: 35)

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# The rise of stagnancy and emergent possibilities for young radicals: Deleuze and the perils of idolatry

Andrei Botez and Joel Hietanen

## It's only another fold

> You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. (Exodus, 20: 4-5)

What, asked the philosopher Bruce Benson, do the philosophers Nietzsche and Derrida have in common? They were both concerned about idolatry (Benson, 2002), or the act of creating images, indeed objects of substitution, stand-ins in place of the one that is to be understood as beyond the realm of humanity; simulations of the Real beyond reality. With ease, we could add Gilles Deleuze's philosophical oeuvre to Benson's list, for he, in his insistence on the immanent and the emergent, never attempted to conceal his disdain for idolatry. Indeed, the idolaters are people of 'artificial lives', the ones who *make* essences, stable *representations* to mask the emergent flow of forces and intensities. It is they, not the artful, who are the true mystics, the fanatics, and the superstitious (Deleuze, 1991b: 74). They who so desperately have faith in their 'stable representations' are the ones who have truly come to privilege hallucinations and fantasies (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 25).

In contrast to what one might have learned to assume, being *radical* is conceptually founded on *staying close to the roots* (Lat: *rad-ixes*): you shall not make for yourself an essence, an idol (εἴ δωλον). Do not become a false god. To be radical means giving up on hallucinations, and fantasies, on mysticism and superstitions. To be radical means: do not bow down, do not worship. This carves us a fold in academia

where the question of what finds stability becomes apparent: what is it that is worshipped here, that which maintains positions of power and triumphantly parades the Idols of truthfulness? In the words of Nietzsche, it is the *truthful* man who seeks to condemn the expression that is life, s/he who sees life as an evil and a sin to be atoned for; truth's terrorizing inclination to judge (Deleuze, 1989). What has the ability to stay so it can be recognized as a means with which to judge?

As the theologian Richard Neuhaus, the founder and editor of the highly influential journal *First Things*, noted, it was André Malraux who said – shortly before he died in 1976 – 'The twenty-first century will be religious or it will not be at all' (Neuhaus, 1997). A few years earlier, in 1970, Michel Foucault published a short essay entitled 'Theatrum Philosophicum'. In it, he declared, perhaps somewhat flippantly: 'one day, perhaps, this century will be called Deleuzian' (Foucault, 1977: 165).

Was Malraux right in his assertion? How could he say such a thing after Nietzsche's madman had shouted 'God is dead!' a century earlier? Additionally, how could Foucault say such a thing after he himself declared, in his 1966 book 'The order of things', that, by analogy with Nietzsche, man is dead? True, while Malraux was pointing to the 21st century, Foucault was reimagining the 20th. However, the temporal distance was only apparent as Deleuze, the man of emergence himself, became increasingly popular throughout the Anglophone world after the turn of the 21st century, his presence manifesting in fields such as organization theory (e.g., Linstead and Thanem, 2007; Thanem, 2006, Sørensen, 2005) and, more recently, consumer research as well (e.g., Hietanen et al., 2014; Kozinets et al., 2016; Hietanen and Andéhn, 2017).

God is dead, man is dead: how then can there be a century of anything?

And yet there is. One of persistent habit and custom. Besides fanaticism and superstition, there is another element that directly defines the idolaters, the essence-makers or, worse, the essence-discoverers, and that is dogmatism. As Hegel (out of all thinkers!) wrote, 'dogmatism as a way of thinking [...] is nothing else but the opinion that the true consists in a proposition which is a fixed result' (as quoted in Deleuze, 1994: 211). Hegel was right, but his claim was also incomplete. Dogmatism is not related to fixed essences only, but also to everything that tends to be expressed through absolutes. Therefore, dogmatism can readily infuse a Deleuzian non-fixed, non-truth / multiple truths within its circuitry.

The main weapon against idolatry, essentialism, and dogmatism is criticism, but only the kind that can envisage a pure outside that refuses to rebound back to its origin. As Deleuze noted, Kant is the first philosopher who understood critique as

having to be total. Total because 'nothing must escape it' (Deleuze, 1983: 89). Nothing. For theorizing to keep emerging and the thought-machine of academia to keep humming, the critical vector is the fuel for problematizing. This is where the young radical in academia finds pure potential, only to then be repeatedly reeled back in for lack of faith in the iconic register.

A few years ago, Daniel Zamora published a piece in the leftist magazine *Jacobin* titled *Can we criticize Foucault?* (Zamora, 2014). What seemed a rather innocent question, created a storm of gargantuan proportions (Elden, 2014). When it comes to Deleuze and most notably his collaborations with Guattari, with the very notable exceptions of, for instance, Badiou's (1997, so close to the 21st century) book *Deleuze: The clamor of being* (see Žižek, 2012), he seems to have largely escaped criticism. And where there is no criticism, there is idolatry. As his presence increases within organization theory, consumer research and even marketing, he's become something akin to an untouchable figure – the mystic too impenetrable to touch. Is this surprising? Maybe yes, maybe no. Paraphrasing Zamora (2014), Deleuze always took pains to inquire into theoretical corpuses of widely differing horizons and to constantly question his own ideas. Unfortunately, the intellectual process-oriented Left has often remained trapped in a 'school' attitude, i.e. the 'little Deleuzians' (Blake, 2016), often keenly refusing to consider or debate ideas that start to question his premises.

Within this particular journal [*ephemera*], his name (alone, or together with Guattari) appears an impressive number of times (e.g., Helle, 2008; Pedersen, 2011; Sørensen, 2003; Yue and Peters, 2015), akin to *à la mode*, a hype. It is essential (pun intended). And being so, means it's uncriticizable: dogmatism is there, although in a decidedly more elusive way. Truth consisting of fixed, certain results is replaced by its equally unquestionable negation. *There is no truth* except in the fragments of a deception and a disaster; *there is no truth* except a betrayed truth; *there is no truth*, but orders of truth (Deleuze, 2008: 73). *There is no truth*, there are only evaluations (Deleuze, 2015: 18). The truth of non-truth, and nothing beyond.

In this sense being a Deleuzian has never been easier. His name is uttered with almost sacred reverence at organization theory conferences and now also increasingly in gatherings of consumer research and marketing scholars. Those who follow his views are sometimes self-proclaiming themselves 'heretics'. Strange, were they not supposed to be radicals? You cannot be both: you're either close to the roots (radicals), or away from them (heretics). Business people – what a sobering thought! – have found in Deleuze a new friend, an ally that can and should be trusted. In an increasing number of academic circles, Deleuze, the monstrous and the blasphemer, has become the 'official philosopher', the oracle

that speaks the non-truth. Hallelujah. As is commonplace with academic surges of lines of thought, the situation has escalated rapidly. In many gatherings, being skeptical of all this fanfaronade might earn you, almost immediately, the abhorred status of a positivist. Accordingly, gathered in the corridors after yet another presentation, Deleuze and friends adorning the power point's slides, arousing the adulation of the worshipers, the researchers are exchanging tales of the latest mistreatments suffered at the hands of their archenemies: the positivists, those who 'do not understand how things *really* are'. They wear these wounds as badges of honor: the more you have, the more official you are. And there is plenty of enjoyment to be had in one's repression (also Baudrillard, 2007; Lyotard, 2004), giving away one's identity and body in a mad dash to be extinguished as a commodity (also Cederström and Grassman, 2008; Plester, 2015). Here is where Deleuze has now emerged into something like a becoming-mummy, dipped in formaldehyde and worshiped by his disciples. If we are to follow Deleuze's own definition of the fetish, i.e. a frozen, arrested image (Deleuze, 1991a: 31) – a term very often used interchangeably with 'idol' (Deleuze, 1986, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 2000) – there he is without the movement his image-thought would seem to necessitate. His non-truths have become unquestionable truths, replacing the 10 commandments with the *n-1* commandments. Through their disappearance they now reverberate everywhere, vanishing into ubiquity. No young scholar is allowed to embrace and use any of his concepts until after some mummified founding father has graciously approves. You're ready! You're already there! Death by means of de-animation.

The irony here is that you don't need to be a positivist to oppose Deleuze. You *only need to be a Deleuzian*. Was he right or correct in his approaches? Of course he was, and this is *exactly* the reason we have to destroy him.

## Being young in academia: Writing against Deleuze, with Deleuze

> Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? (Latour, 2004: 225)

Academic viability has always, in its internal consensus-seeking tendencies, constituted of anxious circuits to young scholars who have entered into recalcitrant experimentations in their own craft. Focus on the ideas you can sell, theorizations sellable as humble tokens. Specialize. And this is how tenure track departments have become mausoleums, false idols' temples of all but impossible demands for most. Us, becoming-giraffes with Lamarckian aspirations. Those are spaces forcing everything *backwards* (towards the islands that were 'there' before, waiting) and *inwards* (memory, introspection, identity). Spaces stinking of formaldehyde, fear, and superstition. No, wait, [insert favorite FT50 journal here] is now 'ready'

for Deleuzian scholarship! Open the floodgates then and breach the palisade. This is an academic culture moribund, where the image of thought is regimented and disciplined. Let's meet in a bar and spend the evening graphically discussing publishable 'hot topics', 'preferred' reviewers and sellable 'insights'. This is thought that refuses to think itself, and here and now, naïve as ever, we call for more thinking thinking thinking itself. A Deleuzian should thus be wary of a most pressing formula:

thinking – (emergence [of thought] + violence [to thought]) = 0

In other words, thought that ceases to endlessly impose violence on itself = logocentrism. Thinking that refuses to think – hence de-idolatrize – thought itself; no *shocks to thought* (Deleuze, 1989), an affective nothing. *Being-within* constitutes an existence on the continent, on the idolatrous 'where'. But some of these young scholars dream of islands, displaying a longing for oceanography, i.e. for 'smooth spaces' without depth (Deleuze, 1995). In their cravings for difference, they are assembled into sailors that navigate with *maps* that close in upon themselves, not *tracings* that open up new becomings. Often to bear stigma for such perilous disobedience, they pledge allegiance to ignorance, instead to the certainty of the point of arrival. There never was a day of the radicals, simply perennial twilight. Reaching habitable islands is a history of martyrology.

It would however, be a mistake to think that internal consensus-seeking infects or defines only the *status quo*. Not at all. As we noted earlier, given Deleuze's celebrated mummification, by the time these young scholars start dreaming, the islands, the 'smooth spaces' are *already* striated spaces, continents in their own right. In other words, once Deleuze became a Deleuzian-*ism*, the -ism morphs itself into an isthmus: everything becomes linked, patterns emerge, models of explanation, truth. Abstractions, certainties, the hard dogma of the no-truth truth. In a fetishistic act of mirrored logic, they are invited to kiss the hammer that smashes the idols of the positivists, to raise hosannas to the blasphemer, the god that gave them the *n-1* commandments, and as such, landing on their island equates to raising the flag on yet another Iwo Jima. Desire realized, desire conquered, desire dead, a nightmare, of course (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The hammer: the tool that smashes the idols becomes an idol in itself. Who has the courage to crush it? The blasphemer becomes a no-truth teller. Who has the courage to curse him? Once dreamt, the island should be easily forgotten. Not only because of the pressure the *status quo* and the heretics puts on those radicals 'desiring' to fly, but because the island should not be remembered long enough to become covered over by signification – as Adorno wrote (Adorno, 1981: 249). The idolaters remember too much. An island, a gesture covered by signification

becomes a totality, a limit, a horizontal wall. Indeed, only the 'great Amnesiac' (Deleuze, 2004: 11) can inhabit an island. However, because 'sometimes you forget to forget', as the Polish painter Stefan Czerkinsky noted in his dialogue with Deleuze (Deleuze, 2004: 283), that's where the trouble starts.

More deconstruction to destruction, more iconoclasm to iconoclasm ought to be added. Stop remembering, stop recognizing. No, that thing wasn't there *before*. For the true radicals, there are no islands, there are no 'theres'. The radicals do not bow, they do not worship, and they do not not-worship.

## Move!

Thus we, the 'radical youth', search for *crystals* (see Deleuze, 1989: 274), but not for crystals themselves, but for them as movements: upon their rotation, endless spectrums of color are created. There are no crystals, don't bow. The crystalline regime refuses to explain because it simply flashes with affect and then disappears before it can explain (*ibid.*). In its continuous ignorance, its furious momentary affectivity, it keeps forgetting its point.

Dream (never discover) new places, institutions, for there never were any. There is nothing that precedes the *now*. If there is, then don't listen to its siren's call. Destroy it. Do not believe in words, we have learned to trust them too much. They are convincing, because they come bearing gifts, i.e. nouns, essences: promises of subjectivity, identity, and memory. A noun attached to an object is terrifying, for it creates an image of thought that controls the exterior; a mastery of the universe. But the world does not need delusional heretics. We cannot tolerate them anymore. Burn them, then burn your 'self' with them. Do not wish to be remembered: why becoming another false idol, a 'where'? Simply make a fold where there was none (and there's never one), be the seed of an origami (see Deleuze, 1993) that will vanish long before its creation. Emergence has no tomorrow, but let it too wither before the new.

Deleuze-the-idol, when visiting our dreams, a spectral speaking mummified-Deleuze, is still alive and kicking, and through him religion and fanaticism. Malraux was right: the 21st century seems indeed to be religious, something especially evident within the corridors of academia. Foucault, as always, queer and confused. He was right – the man is dead – while also being wrong: there cannot, and should not be a Deleuzian century. Ever. As Lyotard noted in an obituary

dedicated to Deleuze: 'Why did I speak of him in the past? He laughed. He is laughing. It's your sadness, idiot, he'd say'[1].

Let us (pseudo-)conclude this essay by paraphrasing Nietzsche's famous dictum: Deleuze is dead. Deleuze should remain dead. Forget him! (Galloway, 2015). Stop being a heretic: be a radical. This would mean: destroy the hammer that smashes the stagnation, blaspheme the blasphemer, rise against the 'century of something'. The twenty-first century will not be at all, and not even that.

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[1] A fax sent to *Le Monde* by Jean-François Lyotard upon Deleuze's death (*Misère de la philosophie*. Paris: Galilée, 2000: 194).

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# Political art without words: Art's threat of emergence, and its capture within signification and commodification

Autonomous Artists Anonymous

We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present!

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 108)

On hearing the phrase 'political art' most people nowadays will think of art which is trying to make a statement or art enlisted for a specific cause. It is seen as art whose politics is largely overt and explicit. But is this the only way art can be political? Does art need to be legible and meaningful to be political? Or can art be political through its affective sensations? As an artist, currently studying fine art and making untutored forays into philosophy, these questions have dominated my making and thinking. This note, and the accompanying artworks woven through it, are attempts to interrogate how art can operate politically beyond meaning, language and representation. Guided by the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I will argue that there is an often-neglected political potency stemming from art's affective abilities to engender what I will call 'emergence': that is new forms, sensations and affects which operate outside and beyond signification and cognition, and which can provoke change, within us, between us and in how we live together, in and of the world.

This emergence does not arise from statements, but from the creation of sensations and affects that move the viewer/participant through the affective, corporeal responses produced in the encounter. It thus acts outside any regime of codification, signification, or representation, and operates on an asignifying register to create new forms, thoughts and feelings. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, in this way art can alert us to other potentials within, beneath or beyond those we are consciously and intellectually aware of, to a virtual realm of potential which is present and immanent to the self, and the world. This capacity to produce the new, and to instigate change at the level of affect, which in turn can provoke change at the level of consciousness and cognition, is key to art's micropolitical potential, neglected by the current tendency within artistic discourse and practice to prioritise signification, representation and cognition. It requires both an altered conception of artistic autonomy, and an understanding of sensations and concepts as intrinsically connected.

Art's potential for emergence is however continually blocked and diverted by the regimes of commodification and signification operating both within and outside of us. Both have dire impacts at the level of subjectivation, inuring us to capitalist oppression, exploitation and destruction and ensnaring us to deploy our creativity in its service. Artistic emergence then is vital in the search for non-capitalist and non-oppressive ways of being with ourselves, each other and the world. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari quoted above, through this emergence art can, when combined with an ethical dimension, ensure that creativity can help us to resist the present.

## Art's capture within signification and commodification

> Art necessarily produces the unexpected, the unrecognisable and the unacceptable.
>
> (Deleuze, 2006: 288)

Art's political power is both celebrated and contained under capitalism. While relying upon our creativity, capitalism actively ensnares and commodifies it. While this occurs across arenas, it is clearly exemplified in relation to 'political art', where capitalism serves to marginalise and suppress the affective power and politics of sensation.

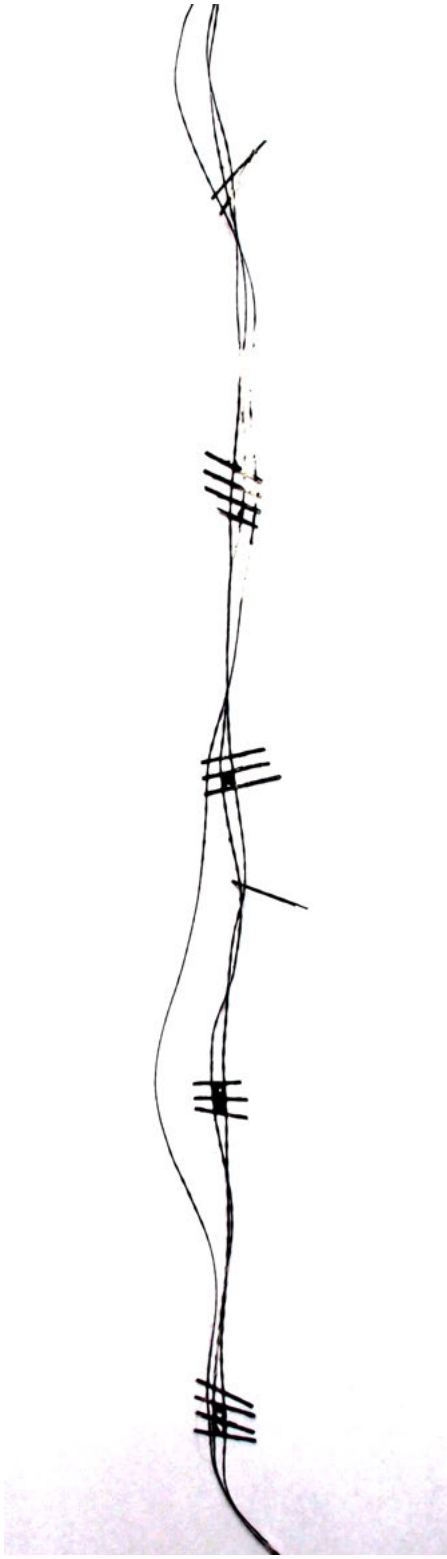
Contemporary art today is dominated by linguistic signifiers and coded referents – images, tropes, narratives, representations, ideas, and situations are used to construct, demonstrate and/or illustrate legible, discursive meaning. With such art the elicited response derives primarily from the viewer or participant's conscious, cognitive and intellectual powers of interpretation, often requiring knowledge about the work's means of production, rationale and the wider socio-political context, and frequently precipitating copious accompanying notes and wall texts. These works are more explainable than experiential; they elicit the question 'what does it mean?' over that of 'what does it do?' (although of course the experiential aspect may remain important in doing this). As Stephen Zepke observes, since the 1960s, 'all artistic practices have had to involve a minimum of conceptual reflection in order to be considered in any way contemporary' (2006: 157).

While linguistic signifiers and coded referents have always been present in art, their role changed as, in tandem with the expansion of capitalism, art began to be conceived as the result of autonomous, individual expression, rather than servicing community rituals, high priests or powerful patrons. Marcel Duchamp famously

highlighted and exploited this development by daring the art world to accept a bottle rack as an artwork. His success demonstrated that the market, characteristically rapacious, was catholic in its tastes and flexible with its definitions. The only proviso was that there must be documentation and authentication to provide an object to commodify and a subject to remunerate. For Zepke, Duchamp's readymades 'revealed art's conditions as epistemological (i.e. Conceptual) and institutional' and in so doing effected their dematerialisation, and 'the complete subtraction of the affect from art' (2008: 35-36).

Although initially part of a political technique to resist commercialisation, the dematerialisation of the artworks could even enhance their value, and the emphasis on linguistic meaning as opposed to affective sensation has done nothing to halt the process of turning artworks into luxury trophies, since 'people really did want to buy these things they could make themselves, not least *because* of their political ambitions' (Zepke, 2006: 160). Such ambitions are depoliticised and translated into profitability. Art purchases are made as speculative investments, with the prices set according to projected future trends, encouraging homogeneity through the influence of herd-like dedicated followers of fashions.

In order to achieve this dematerialisation, artworks deploy codes and referents that are most often produced by, and act within, the current semiotic economy. This results

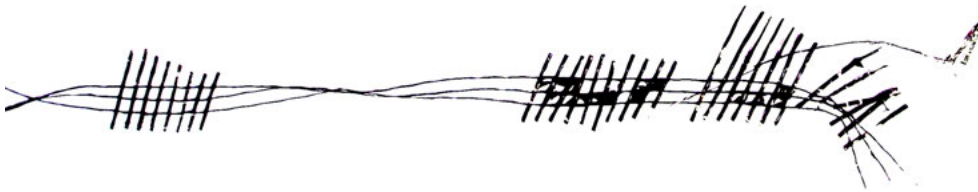


in art which, however critical and important, is unable to escape or challenge the mechanisms through which meaning and sense are formed (Zepke, 2009: 177). They reflect the world back at us, rather than create it anew. While of course signification can be combined with more affective sensations, I would contend that the signifying would usually win out over the asignifying, overcoding the uncoded, since what can be named, defined, and argued over is likely to garner more attention and kudos. This is particularly true in a discursive environment dominated by opinion-formers (such as critics, curators, gallerists) who need to justify their importance (and salaries), as well as in the general environment in which we are encouraged to value reason, interpretation and intellectual faculties above perceptual, corporeal and affective ones.

Through its incorporation and instrumentalisation within capitalist logic, signifying art feeds and affirms the logic of neoliberal capitalism, in which seemingly nothing, even the immaterial, can escape commodification, and in which the production of concepts by a precarious workforce constitutes another new virgin territory to colonise and a labour force to exploit (Zepke, 2006: 16). The designation of anything as potentially art and the promotion of art-as-idea does not make art more autonomous, it makes it more reliant upon already-existing codes of signification and market-driven processes of commodification.

The fetishisation and commodification of the art object has been resisted, through

either refusing to produce artworks or dissolving the artwork into life. Lazzarato interprets Duchamp's ready-mades as a refusal to work and a repudiation of the 'hand and virtuosity of the artist' (2014a: 13) while the Situationists and more recently proponents of 'relational aesthetics', amongst many others, designate political and social interventions as art. Both strategies have been inspiring, radical and powerful, but they also relinquish the production of art as affectively and sensorily powerful objects. Moreover, designating interventions as art can render them politically safe: incorporated into the state capitalist machinery they are reduced to equivalent of their market or social value, occluding at least some of their political power. In Zepke's damning critique, 'art becomes life (but life stays as it is)' (2011: 74).



## Art and commodification of the self

> What mechanisms of our subjectivity lead us to offer our creative force for the fulfilment of the market?
>
> (Rolnik, 2011: 36)

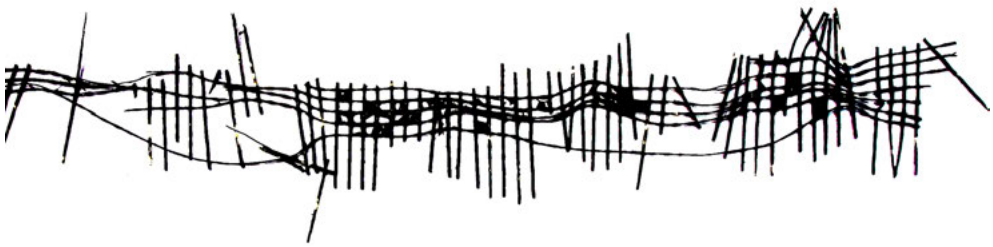
Art's subsumption under the logic and mechanisms of late capitalism carries a wider significance in terms of effecting our subjectification – that is how we are made as subjects. The putatively autonomous artist is now the archetype for all post-Fordist workers (Lazzarato, 2011; Lorey, 2011), exemplifying the selling of one's self, via one's creativity and becoming what Lazzarato has called an 'entrepreneur of her/himself' (*ibid.*: 47). While seeming to embody freedom, autonomy and radicalism – society's outspoken outsider – today's artist can only succeed if they are able and willing to 'choose' to be the flexible, precarious, itinerant 'creative' whose income is predicated on never-ending and never-sufficient game of self-promotion and self-commodification. In order to construct and express one's 'true' self, one must be prepared to sell one's creativity: all workers must be like 'artists' who create, commodify and market themselves in order to *be* themselves, whose subjectivity becomes based on becoming an individualistic, neoliberal hustler required to safeguard and express a coherence,

unity and sovereignty to be marketed and sold. My experience is testament to how this filters through to art schools: currently I am being encouraged to promote myself, to put myself 'out there', and attempts are being made to teach me how to hustle. I am also being urged to provide interpretations and meanings for my work, since this is deemed a requirement of a 'successful work' and of 'making it' as an artist.

A wider consequence is that artists' putative radicalism – which may or may not be evidenced in their artworks – is harnessed not only to glamourise and normalise precarity but to neutralise and commodifiy alternative and resistant subject positions. In so doing, the artist-as-entrepreneur glorifies, celebrates and normalises the increasingly widespread neoliberal conditions of post-Fordist labour: temporary contract-based work, with fluctuating pay, no job security, sick-pay or pension, and no clear boundaries between one's alienating job and life outside it, producing constant anxiety, fear and loss of control (Lorey, 2009). Such insecurity is a key aspect of neoliberalism's onslaught of workers' rights and ties of solidarity and the figure of the artist is its new model. With the outside brought inside, the alternative has become the norm, and their radical critiques are nullified, with grave impacts on the world we are able to both build and imagine. As Suely Rolnik writes:

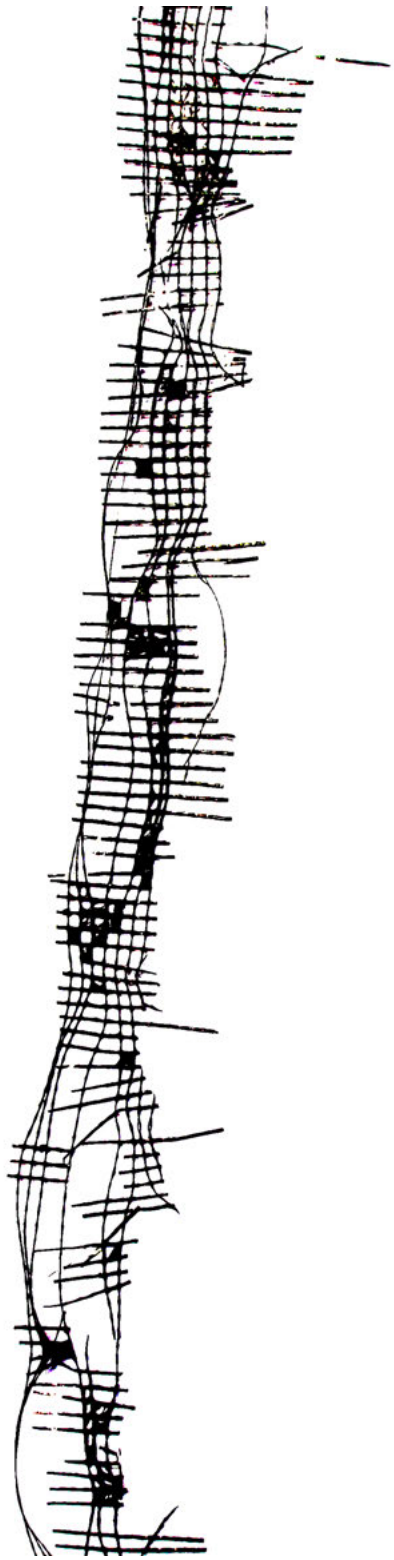
> [T]his kind of pimping of the creative force is what has been transforming the planet into a gigantic marketplace... This is the world that the imagination creates in the present. (2011: 29)

Left in this desolate landscape are hordes of 'emerging' artists toiling away, accumulating academic qualifications and pop-up exhibitions to adorn their CVs, often making ends meet in some other job(s), desperate to be discovered and secure the patronage of the cultural gatekeepers all tied to state or corporate capitalist institutions. Their 'emergence' in the art world is defined as the profitability of their art, and those who do 'emerge' and become 'established' are those whose subsumption within the capitalist logic is complete. This exemplifies the suppression of emergence that arises through the art itself, that resists the market-driven means of understanding and valuation, and in particular that which arise through affective sensations. Of course artworks can still act politically through the affective responses they engender, but they will be combating forces of signification and commodification. We need therefore a mode of creativity that operates, is viewed and is valued outside the constrictions of capitalism, that is free to be incoherent, arational and unorganised, untethered to linguistic signifiers or commodity-form, which exceeds representation in order to speak with sensations. For how can we imagine or build alternative practices and ways of life outside capitalism and its systems of signification, if our most basic tool – our creativity – is ensnared within them?



## Art and philosophy – twin techniques of creation

> We paint, sculpt, compose and write with sensations. We paint, sculpt, compose and write sensations.
>
> (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 166)



Art can enact another kind of politics however. Affective politics can take us outside of what we know, beyond what we can consciously, intellectually and linguistically process. Such a conception of artistic creation chimes with a philosophy of creation that seeks to construct new ways of feeling, thinking and existing. Working together, both can help us find ways out of the entangled traps of signification and commodification. In this section I will explore how I have tackled this in my own thinking and artistic practice. Over the past three years I have made various artworks, which have intersected with my more philosophical enquiries, circling around the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (writing separately and together). I have chosen to have these 'discrepant grid-lines' intersecting with the text because they often feature in my work in various incarnations, and I hope this intersection to embody the connected-but-different relationship I conceive for art and philosophy.

In bringing together art and philosophy as I am doing here there is a danger of treating practice as illustrations of philosophical theories, and of treating philosophical concepts as metaphors rather than active, operative and material. This is not my intention: I have not made my artworks in order to explain any concept, nor do I wish them to be explained by any. This would limit them both. I intend my works to be sensed and experienced, freely and openly, not interpreted. However, this is not to say that

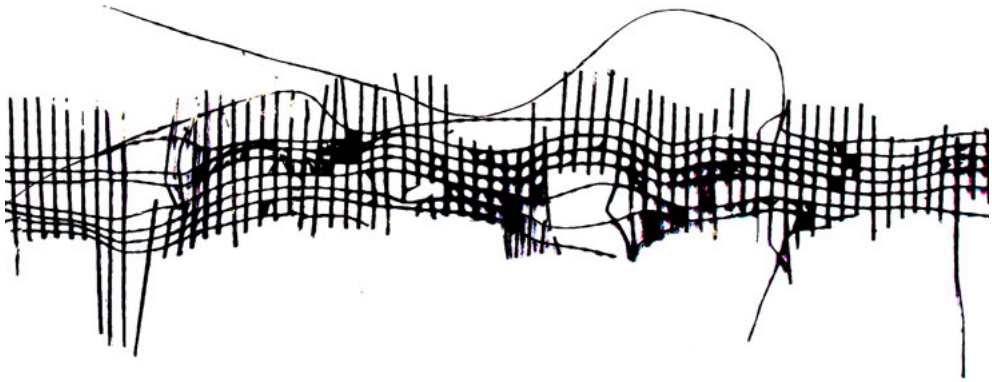
my works are conceptually empty and just pretty pictures. Since thought and feeling can never be fully separated, sensations are inseparable from concepts. I like to think of sensations as the raw material for concepts, with the capacity to engender conceptual and cognitive shifts. The question for me then is how affective sensations can operate in ways which *enact* a philosophical proposition; and obversely, how a philosophical proposition can *enact* an aesthetic sensation. Thus, in what follows I do not wish to describe how I have consciously planned and constructed my work but how I think it operates.

My use of geometry, more specifically, the grid (totemic in the recent history of Western abstraction, and central to other less imperialising histories of abstraction) operates through its refusal of resemblance or correspondence to existing forms. Of course, this can never be entirely successful as any image will always evoke associations, but the aim was to create asignifying forms which did not stem from representation or include legible referents, abstraction rather than something abstracted. Recognisable forms are easily found – faces, bodies, animals, landscapes – in non-geometric forms even if unintended. Further, works that are truly 'chaotic' in appearance evoke order through its absence: they still activate the binary opposition between order and chaos, and between representation and abstraction.

Instead, with abstract geometry I try to create without models or representation, in order to gain a certain independence and autonomy from the current. In addition, working outside language and other regimes of representation, signification and codification permits an autonomy from set agendas or messages. For some, my abstract geometry resembles a digital code or a musical score. I am happy with this correspondence since it recalls language and codes while, particularly since they have been deliberately pulled, broken and twisted, they remain impervious to any reading or deciphering; their resemblance to asignifying codes serves to emphasise their illegibility.

This abstraction and asignification is a technique to hone the work down to its sensations, rather than any intended,

conscious meaning. It creates a different relationship between subject/object, form/content and form/matter. Representative or more consciously conceptual artworks operate through mobilising the distinctions between these states, applying thought to materials to turn them into a representation, and thereby instituting clear distinctions between the subject (artist) and object (artwork), and the artwork (the representer) and the world (the represented). Sensation however offers no viewpoint or commentary on the world, and speaks from no vantage point above it, describing it; instead it speaks from within and yet simultaneously, and paradoxically, outside the world. Such art creates groundless, formless sensations, produced through the encounter rather than from the form/content or subject/object relationships.

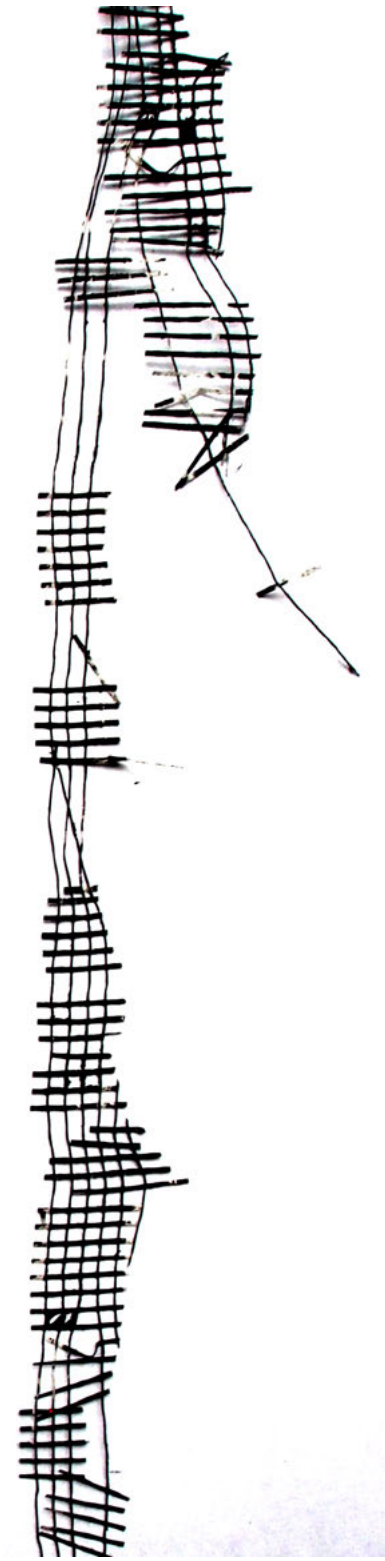


## Art's affective micropolitics

> Abstraction is the attempt to show in thought as in art, in sensation as in concept, the odd, multiple, unpredictable potential in the midst of things of other new things, other new mixtures.
>
> (Rajchman, 1998: 76)

Encounters with affective sensations can thus provide a route towards a realm of perception outside of or beneath language, meaning and interpretation. Affective responses bypass our intellectual, rational senses as they are not based on what we know or understand, nor on any system of logic, representation or signification. Sensations affect us directly, bodily, and singularly – that is differently each time – in ways which though autonomous of conscious thought and feeling, may still provoke new and changed conscious thoughts and feelings.

Affect can be understood beyond the phenomenological framework with its focus on the material, individual and embodied experience, and as a portal into an



imperceptible, virtual realm of potentials which are present and immanent to the self, the event and the world. As Grosz writes (2008: 3, fn.2), affects 'link the lived or phenomenological body with cosmological forces, forces of the outside, that the body can never experience directly'. I like to imagine that this realm *hovers within* what we can see and process consciously and intellectually, since this conveys both its virtuality and materiality. Through creating sensations which mobilise affects, art can make visible these imperceptible forces that, as Deleuze and Guattari write, 'populate the world, affect us and make us become' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 181).

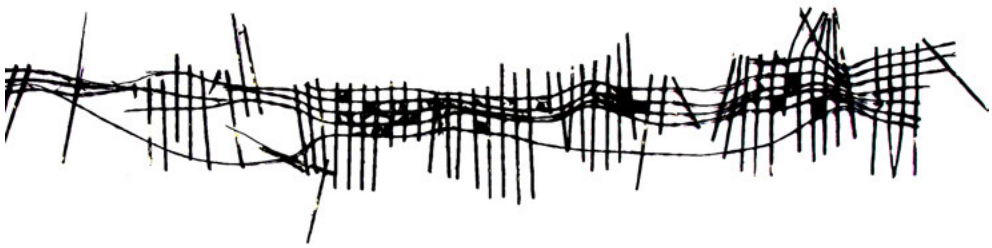
I feel that this is enacted within my practice through a constant disavowal of my hand. Throughout my work I often find, not entirely consciously, that there is something in between my hand or implement and the paper or canvas – some tape, a printing block, fabric etc. – which diminishes how much control I can exert, inserting another agency within the process, and often making the process feel more like a conversation, or sometimes an argument, between myself and my materials, rather than purely my sovereign volition. The use of the tape here demonstrates this tendency. I enjoy the fact that it constructs the forms for me, while I disrupt the perfection of the grid by painting, cutting and pulling the tape, producing unpredictable effects. This leaves the composition to forces outside of my subjectivity, and eschews any sense of expressing any personal narrative, often still present even in abstract art. My tapeworks include the outside to co-create the work, to depurify and mix-up the elements within the work, and decentre the subjectivity behind it.

Affect is then also always wider than our own personal experience, and always has an apersonal, asubjective dimension. It allows us to connect to others and to the world, by reminding us that we do not begin or end as pre-formed, sovereign individuals, but exist in-relation to and in-process with the world around us, which is also constantly in flux. When we respond affectively we are reminded that we do not know ourselves, that we cannot know ourselves, that our selves are always in process, forming out of a myriad of relationships, intensities and forces beyond what appear as the boundaries of the self. Affect names the capacities of the body to act and experience in ways we cannot predict or control, making us feel this in-relation-ness. In short, they can take us out of ourselves, out of what we can already imagine, activating un-felt feelings, and un-thought thoughts. As Erin Manning writes, '"I am" is always, to a large degree, "was that me?"' (Manning, 2016: 37). This offers a necessary corrective to the Modernist, sovereign and enclosed sense of artistic autonomy (usually normalised as belonging to a white, bourgeois, heterosexual, able-bodied male), in which the art is conceived as somehow above life, made up of pure and transcendent universals. Instead, affects are autonomous of codes, signification and representation, but not autonomous of the world and others. This kind of autonomy is not individual and disconnected, but always both embodied within and connected to others, and the world.

For me, this is an often neglected and suppressed source of art's political potency. This is a special type of politics however: a micropolitics, which works through imperceptible forces and impacts upon one's subjectivity. This politics is not conscious, literal, or chosen. Through mobilising affects, sensation activates and challenges our capacity to move, to experiment, and to change. In contrast to the explicit, literal politics of most so-called conceptual art, the politics of affect can be thought of as pre-political, since its politics is non-verbal and nonconscious. Sensations then are created and they produce affects, which are defined not by how they are interpreted, but by the unpredictable and singular impacts they have upon the

viewer/participant. Affects attune us to the world of the virtual, in ways which can help and inspire us to reconfigure the actual.

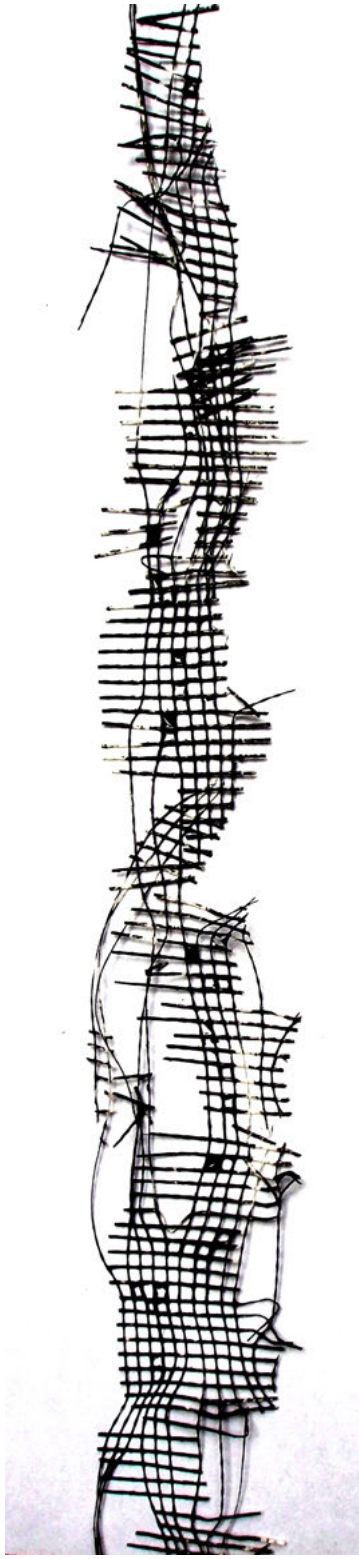
This affective political potency unique to art can help us get both deeper within and out of ourselves, our subjectivation and representation. As Guattari writes, art can operate politically when it 'engenders unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being' (Guattari, 1995: 106). It does so through a fidelity to experiment and to break out of spoken or unspoken diktats or fashions, and to operate outside regimes of meaning. Indeed, as John Rajchman has written, it is only via encountering the outside that one can break out of consensus and act and think creatively: we are forced to think, he writes, 'by something we cannot recognise, given through a violent aesthetic element, a sensory or affective contact with something that doesn't fit, which shakes up how we are accustomed to think' (Rajchman, 2008: 87). However, as we have seen, our capacities and desires to break out of the known are being restricted and dampened through a co-opted and desensitised conception of art acting within the regimes of commodification and signification. We need to conceive of art, its politics and its context differently.



## The 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm'

> Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.
>
> (Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in O'Sullivan and Zepke, 2010: 3)

I have argued that speaking with affective sensations is a neglected but necessary part of art's potential politics and can aid our attempts to exit and resist capitalist norms, modes and behaviours. However, there is an additional way in which this kind of art can operate politically: it is an instructive model for how we should all be able to conduct our lives, and create our worlds. Taking a cue from this conception of art's power to activate emergence through sensation and affect, Guattari instructs us to conceive of the world and our selves to be in a permanent state of creative and experimental flux: for everything to be subject to forces of



creative emergence and the production of the new, without reference to any models, norms or representations, but aiming to respond to cues from the immanent, virtual realm. As Guattari noted, 'one creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette' (Guattari, 1995: 7). Unsurprisingly, this approach is not inherently liberating – affect is increasingly used to mobilise reactionary, even fascist, forces. It requires an 'ethical commitment' (O'Sullivan and Zepke, 2008: 4), hence Guattari's coinage of the term 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm' (Guattari, 1995).

The implications for this ethico-aesthetic paradigm, the instruction for genuinely creative, emergent and resistant art, are deep and wide-ranging. To me they speak most keenly of an alternative to the current dominant mode of subjectivity. Instead of trying to understand our selves and our experiences as individual, rational, and coherent (which most often will be based on a model – usually white, male, bourgeois etc.), and with particular uses (which are usually defined in relation to the capitalist economy), Guattari's paradigm encourages a more generous, sensitive and open version of subjectivity, placed in a more ecological relationship with the outside: like various components (within and without our 'selves', human and non-human) existing in a complex ecosystem rather than individuals stacked against (and often on top of) each other. This guards against both a view of individual selves at the centre of our universe, and of humans at the centre of the universe, diminishing our sense of control over the world (which produces, for example, obscene forms of technophilia such as genetic modification, and catastrophic intransigence over climate change) and increasing our power to effect change within and with the world.

At a more individual level it can lead to a more intensive, attuned and sympathetic reading of one another – without always expecting logicality or reasonableness, and attending to how we will always also be in thrall to imperceptible and affective forces and intensities which are not subject to the laws of rationality, logicality and legibility. Rolnik characterises this as being vulnerable to the other, arguing that this is a 'precondition for the other to cease being a simple object for the projection of pre-established images, in order to become a living presence, with whom we can construct the territories of our existence and the changing contours of our subjectivity' (Rolnik, 2011: 25). This vulnerability is precisely what is activated by 'a specific capacity of the sensible' by which she means the body's capacities to respond beyond cognition and consciousness, attuned to imperceptible forces and intensities, capacities which are exercised by art's powers of affect and sensation. This connection with the virtual that hovers within and outside us, the excess that escapes any system of codification or subjectification and remains ever in flux, is what enables change and creation.

Evidently it is well-nigh impossible, at least in the supposedly developed 'West', for art to operate outside capitalism, unless it is created, engaged with and spread through private or underground networks. The Internet, for some an archetypal rhizome might offer some redress, but most sensations are rather diminished when pixelated, and one must of course beware the commodifying forces at work attempting to capture its liberatory potential (see Buchanan, 2007). All the structures in place to support the larger-scale production, dissemination and consumption of art are infected with and reproduce capitalist processes and values. So are our habitual modes of viewing and experiencing art – for instance the gentrifying pop-up exhibition, the commercial gallery, or the corporate-sponsored national museum. What is required is a transformed context for art, in which we can make and experience art beyond personal expression, and without profit-generating commodification. Only within this resistant and liberatory ethical paradigm can art's affective power be fully unleashed, and art can function as a 'collective reappropriation of the production of subjectivity' (Guattari, 1995: 133). While escape is currently impossible for most of us, and it is impossible to avoid capitalism and its many and insidious, often invisible and internalised, proscriptions, affectively forming so much of how we think, see and feel, I believe that art which resists and escapes totalising regimes of codification will, even if enclosed in the gallery, produce through the sensations and affects they create, an excess and an emergence. This emergence, operating as it does on the level of affect, can help give us the power and capacity to create moments, spaces and routes in which it is possible to think, feel and act differently, to access the outside that is inside, the radical potential within the present.

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This note has been written anonymously in the name of a collective – Autonomous Artists Anonymous – in an admittedly limited attempt to resist marketing a 'self' as an entity to produce capital (financial or social).

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# Leviathan lives: A short play about hierarchy and cooperation

Brian Showalter Matlock

## abstract

When people work together, who decides how their collective efforts are allocated and who receives the benefits from their collective product? This short one-person play contrasts several influential organization theories to explore these central questions of collective action. As personified mystical characters, theories of Hobbes, Marx, Anarchists, statists, and neoliberals present themselves in verse as forms of analysis. I have three primary goals exploring these questions in theatrical form. First, I aim to denaturalize the mundane systems and theories of organization by anthropomorphizing them into strange characters to which audiences can freshly react. Secondly, I widen the timescale so the present systems, which can feel inevitable and unchangeable, can be seen as a mere moment within a long history of change, poised for new developments. Finally, I aim to shape current efforts which strive toward cooperation and mutualism; by embracing the complexity of the task before us and sparking the imagination and creativity needed to renegotiate the way we organize ourselves to accomplish tasks and share the benefits.

## Introduction

Even for those who consider the costs of capitalism and hierarchy to be unacceptable, a viable alternative remains elusive. Elements of cooperative ownership and leadership hold promise, but are currently a peripheral microcosm within the global capitalist system. Aside from formal institutions of ownership and management, organizational patterns are heavily embedded in culture, intuition, and habit. The task ahead is a drastic re-negotiation of the personal, social, and material fabric of our society.

To approach this task I use a tool that seldom finds itself in the hands of an economist – a play. This short one-person play explores several major organizational theories of the modern era. The theories generally agree that there are benefits when people work together. They diverge, however, on the questions of 'who decides?' and 'who benefits?' What tasks are worth doing, who does them, and how is the collective product distributed? The play engages with these questions by using one of the most basic building blocks of change – our imagination.

This play is inspired by Ben Halm's work *Theatre and ideology* (1995), in which he writes about the Ghana National Theatre Movement. The Movement aimed to build a new identity for Ghana beyond the self-and-world consciousness which had been so deeply scarred through the era of colonialism. Similarly, we can create new stories and images of who we are and what our society can look like. We can engage in mental rehearsals of how to navigate that world with its problems and possibilities. In this play, I personify the organizational theories as characters that interact through a condensed history. These characters are alive and well in contemporary debates and their personification is intended to give those debates a fresh perspective.

Finally, a word on how to read this play. You will notice an extensive collection of footnotes; I advise that you ignore them in your first encounter. The main body of the play is intended to be read as it would be performed – as a work in and of itself. The allusions and imagery which the footnotes elaborate are intended to reward re-reads and further contemplation, and allow further research for those interested.

I would like to thank my wife, Adrianne Showalter Matlock. I am indebted to you for your critical feedback, support, and help in turning this play into a publication.

## The play – Leviathan lives

Leviathan:

I am Leviathan – great dragon of the sea[1],
I'm told I'm scheduled for extinction but nothing yet has been able to defeat me.

[1] Leviathan is a sea creature mentioned several places in the Hebrew Scriptures, described in Isaiah Ch. 27:1 as 'dragon of the sea'. This image of a great sea monster was appropriated by Hobbes to represent the commonwealth in his book *Leviathan* (Hobbes and MacPherson, 1982/1651).

I am the uber-dragon[2] foretold of by my sycophantic prophet Nietzsche;
who in his syphillactic[3] madness received a vision concerning me.
My defining characteristic, besides my countenance so dour,
is certainly my ever all-consuming will to power[4].
My stature is composed of all the straining, striving people[5]
whose efforts are woven together by control – my knitting needle.

Qoheleth[6]:

[giggles, clapping] Well done!
I apologize for Leviathan, waiting his turn is not his revealed preference[7].
I am *not* his companion, though by now I am accustomed to his presence
and must admit that I admire his delectable irreverence.

Ah yes, how rude of me! Just because we've met before doesn't mean you recognize me.
I am Qoheleth, Wisdom, the One who destroys[8], the One who dances!

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2 Related to Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* (overman/superman) from *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 2012/1883). After the death of god, who was the source of otherworldly values and meaning, the Übermensch creates new meaning and values based on the present, and imposes these created values on others who passively accept the world and values as given.

3 There was a popular rumor that Nietzsche had syphilis, and this brought about his madness and death. This is contested, and other theories of his apparent dementia are given by those such as Schain in *The legend of Nietzsche's syphilis* (Schain, 2001).

4 'The will to power', or *Wille zur Macht* is something Nietzsche dealt with as a basic part of life – beings have the impulse to use their power and potential, and to expand it even at risk of death (Nietzsche, 2014/1886).

5 Hobbes uses the metaphor of Leviathan's body to describe the commonwealth – the various parts of the body are unified in action by the direction of a single head, representing the power of the state. The state maintains unity by imposing the will of the ruler(s) to direct, punish, and protect the rest of society (Hobbes and MacPherson, 1982/1651).

6 Qoheleth is the original Hebrew name of the book/author of the Greek 'Ecclesiastes'. The word means 'assembler', or 'gatherer'. In the book of Ecclesiastes, the author famously tries to find meaning and satisfaction in various activities, both virtuous and illicit, and one by one concludes that these pursuits are 'meaningless, a chasing after the wind' (Ecclesiastes 1:14, New International Version).

7 A reference to Paul Samuelson's (1938) theory of revealed preference in his consumer choice theory whereby the consumers 'reveal' their preferences for goods by their purchase.

8 This is imagery of the God Shiva, who is an amalgam of various traditions. Shiva is widely regarded in Hinduism as one of the three primary aspects of the divine – the one who destroys or ends all things. In the process of Samsara (the reincarnation life cycle of birth, life, and death) there is Brahma who created the world and begins life, Vishnu who sustains life, and Shiva, who ends life. Life is then begun again. Shiva is

I am gifted with many hands; my most famous one invisible[9].
I am your narrator and promethean guide throughout this dragon's tale.
'Everything is meaningless!' is the moral of this story as I expect it to be;
[giggles]
but the authors are not yet finished, so we'll just have to wait and see.

Our subject is this pernicious drake who emerged prehistorically
and henceforth has directed serfs and proles with his authority.
The dragon and his devotees contend his reign inevitable[10] ad infinitum,
although some suspect the doing can be done *devoid* of his dominion.
I myself have dealt him a thousand deaths but each time he is reborn,
and this last time he emerged from the sea with seven horns![11]
A thoroughly religious man, he is adept at juggling both God and Mammon[12].
He managed to only drop one of them! Poor God. [giggles]

Let us go now to an academic conference to hear what the wise, (well,
intelligent) have to say about our serpentine subject.

Hobbes:
I am Sir Thomas Hobbes, the foremost Leviathanologist.
Look merely at his handiwork – who doesn't stand in awe at all he hath
accomplished?
Who can complain? Who suffers injustice?
Does not a runner beat her own body to cross the finish line first[13]?
Does anyone care of the aches and pain suffered by the ankles and lungs
That *they* should take the victor's glory when the race is won?

---

depicted as dancing in many traditional renderings, and is sometimes known as Nataraja, 'Lord of dance'.

9 'Invisible hand' is taken from Adam Smith specifically in his *Theory of moral sentiments*. Smith attempts to show how people seeking only their personal betterment are fooled into hard work, the fruits of which are primarily distributed through society, not attained by the self-interested (Smith et al., 1987/1759).

10 The 'neo-Hobbesian view' described by Sam Bowles (1985) includes those who see hierarchy as the necessary and natural organizational form. An important example of this is Alchian and Demsetz's Hobbesian-style explanation for the persistence of hierarchy in capitalist firms. They argue that workers willingly agree to be monitored and cede profits to the capitalist in order to keep everyone from shirking (Alchian and Demsetz, 1972).

11 An allusion to the apocalyptic imagery from book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

12 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon [the god of money]' (Mathew 6:24, King James Version).

13 Imagery drawn from 1 Corinthians Ch.9 and Ch.11.

Wouldn't we all love to wear the crown, to be the achiever of sublimity...
and *that* is the problem which Leviathan has vanquished providentially!
We are all bound into his body and he decides to what end we are directed.
In his absence 'twould be war declared and the body detonated!

This would be far worse[14] than the dragon who... devours a few.
*And* takes the cream for himself and lets the milk trickle[15] down through.
For it is fear that binds us to him[16], of one another's actions.
In his auspices alone we can work under the safety of his lashes.

Qoheleth:

As with all academic conferences, during the question and answer session
there was one who acted on the Oedipal urge to unfound and upend the expert's mastery
with eloquent condescension and self-righteous blow-hardery! [giggles]
Karl Marx everyone! [golf-clapping]

Marx:

Pardon me dear Hobbes,
whose handiwork did you say? Leviathan's only 'work' is to take out credit.
The feats are accomplished by the many, to whom he is indebted.
He is the heir to the product of their duty,
along with all the other sharers in the stolen booty[17].

Great feats have been accomplished by virtue of our synthesis[18]-

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[14] Hobbes argued that the injustices and indulgences of the leader(s) of the commonwealth do not compare to the problems that would exist without the commonwealth. Hobbes concludes that people thus have no grounds to question the sovereign even in the face of injustice or malfeasance (Hobbes and MacPherson, 1982/1651: ch.17-18).

[15] This is a reference to supply-side or 'trickle-down' economics. This theory puts policy focus on increasing profitability for the capitalist class in order to entice them to invest. The logic is that this investment would then provide jobs and growth which would benefit the rest of society.

[16] In chapter 18 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that whether people cede power to a democratic government or submit to a foreign conqueror, they do so out of fear of the alternative.

[17] In *Capital: Vol. 1* ch. 24, Marx refers to classes that receive a distribution of the surplus from the capitalists (such as land lords, politicians, managers, etc.) as the 'sharers in the booty'.

[18] *Capital: Vol. 1* ch. 13: *Co-operation* (Marx and Mandel, 1992/1867)

not based on the innovation or hard work of our protagonist.
The verdict comes swift in this invective -
it is plainly stated that the nature of production is collective.
The extractionary rule of the dragon fiend must be overturned -
value is created by labor and to the laborers must it return.

Qoheleth:
And as with all academic conferences, their words were immediately put into action!
The people appear to be gathering at the Red Square,
Let us see what it is they are up to there!

Leviathanovna[19]:
I am Leviathanovna, and I serve only as the head of this collective of equals
the true Marxian vision of surplus shared with all the working people.
*But* as one more equal than others[20], to question or defy me is henceforth illegal.
Do as I say, your surplus I'll take, but don't worry, I represent you!

The Anarchist: [In the style of Rage Against the Machine]
Who are you to represent the will of the masses?
So diverse the individuals, so varied their passions[21].
I am an anarchist, one among the many
who find this coerced cooperation to be deadly.
You boast of the division of labor – facilitating expertise and artistry;
but do you not seek to turn us into silent and stupid machinery[22][23]? [grunt]

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19 Leviathanovna: Russian patronymic meaning 'daughter of Leviathan'.

20 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others' (Orwell and Hitchens, 2003/1945: 134).

21 From Bakunin's letter about his excommunication from the First International: 'Who would dare flatter themselves that they could even encompass and comprehend the infinite multitude of diverse interests, tendencies, and actions in every country, every province, every locality, every trade, the vast array of which, united, but not made uniform, by a great shared aspiration and by a few fundamental principles which have already penetrated the consciousness of the masses, will constitute the coming social revolution' (Bakunin, 2001/1872: 193-194)?

22 Braverman (1998/1974) argued that increased technology does not result in increased skill and pay of workers, but a separation of those who conceive of work and those who execute work. The result would be a deskilled and poorly paid production labor force.

23 The other influence to this line was Adam Smith's famous use of a pin factory as a praiseworthy example of the division of labor, but later in *The wealth of nations* he writes that those who spend their lives in factories doing a few simple and mindless tasks,

Is this the orthodoxy of your royal priesthood -
for there to be a commonwealth, we must descend into beasthood?
Mutualism presses bricks while federation mixes mortar;
for freedom is the mother, not the daughter of order[24] [x5]
If I can't dance it's not my revolution![25]

Leviathanovna:
How cute, you are a unique little snowflake.
Well, welcome to the snowstorm, you want my crown? Come and take it!
I have accomplished already with force what you hope to do by magic.
Your faith in human nature so naïve and *stup*idly tragic.
While your spirit is admirable and your dancing so 'effective',
please accept my apologies on behalf of the collective.
For the people!
[Pantomimes dangling the anarchist above her mouth, dropping him in, and swallows him whole]

Qoheleth:
Meanwhile, in the Fordist factories of Yankeedom,
picketing Marxies poised to storm the Dragon's inner sanctum.

Leviathan:
Though oft accused of being dense and hard of hearing,
I have taken notice of the crowds of peasants, torches in hand, approaching.
[picks up list of demands]
Um... on an unrelated note out of my own goodness and patent generosity
I grant, uh, potty breaks for all and [looks more closely at list of demands] *a 40-hour work week*!?
[quickly regains composure and a smile]
This of course applies only to the sovereign state;
the colonies remain with their current fate.
After all, we must allow them to be free to choose[26],
for all we know they may prefer lose!

---

'become as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become' (Smith, 1994/1776: 302).

[24] A quote-turned slogan from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *Solution of the social problem* (Proudhon, 1927/1849).

[25] This anarchist slogan is a paraphrase of the response Emma Goldman gave to a young boy who told her that 'it did not behoove an agitator to dance... with such reckless abandon' (Goldman, 2006/1931: 42).

[26] *Free to choose* (Friedman, 1979)

Besides, their lower standard of living justly doth ensue
because obviously... er... markets or what have you.

Qoheleth: [enters, joyfully dancing]
Let me interrupt this story, with yet another story.
It is about a poor man's son[27].
He felt his father's lot unbearable; such toil to produce so much yet left with none.
He thirsted for the lot of the wealthy and powerful authorities;
you see, castles need no apologists, but neither do they give apologies.
The son spent his life in stress as he labored and agonized
in pathetic obsequiecence to superior strata – just to be recognized! [giggles]
Now, I will not tell you how the story ended, for its dénouement is not what's fundamental.
He experienced more headaches in a month of ambition than in a life of poverty, transcendental.

[brief pause]
So what then is the moral?
The virtue of contentment?
The injustice inherent in the system?
The social beneficence of self-delusion?
Yes! Yes! Yes!
[giggles]

Oh, look who beheld my story!
Here comes Leviathan, who has no ears to hear for himself,
but knows how to turn all things to his advantage. [grins]

Leviathan:
Yes, my human capital[28]! Listen to Qoheleth, listen to Wisdom!
As her story plainly showed, the pursuit of wealth is a prison.
Be content to labor under my paternalism so fatherly.
Submit to my direction and I will ensure you blissful poverty!
Let us return to the former glory before the socialistic lies,
we will be neo-liberated when you tax incentivize!

[27] This story is from Adam Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* (Smith et al., 1987/1759).

[28] *Human capital* (Becker, 1994/1964)

Regardless of your wage, you can only buy what I supply.
Deregulate and privatize; else ALL of us shall surely die!

Qoheleth:
And so it was in those days that the length of the workweek increased;
productivity rose while wage growth appeared to decease.

There is yet a final character in this epic saga of Leviathan:
Why, it is *you* my ever hospitalatious audience!
For Leviathan lives, and you must decide what sort of role you'll play.
Will you attempt to take his crown and name or be content to produce his hay?

What do I ask of you?
That you work 90-hour weeks fighting for the 30-hour workweek? [giggles]
That you read 100 books a day so that you can convince Leviathan how wrong he is? [giggles]
Perhaps if you work hard enough you will spread the word in a journal no one reads in a language no one speaks! [giggles]
Perhaps when *you* are Leviathan *you* will be the most generous Leviathan ever! [giggles]
I've heard that one before! [giggles]

Ah, please don't lose hope, for I'm an equal opportunity destroyer.
You see; threads of aspiration and absurdity make up the same embroider.

Consider that we lend each other our imaginations;
to sit within and without ourselves with all these complications.
For we may not see it all but can expand our intuitions,
though even I may never see its full form come to fruition.

Can there be a future without the dragon lumbering o'er it?
Can we work together without descending into warring?
The answers don't exist until they live in minds and practice.
Our daily experiments and vision-seeing are our only tactics.

For is it not a revolution to choose people over greed?
Is not *love* the greatest propaganda of the deed[29]?

So learn we must and share we shall our progresses and failures, as we embrace and co-define cooperative human behavior.

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# Killer jellyfish rock Rio

Eileen Laurie

## Why I draw comics in general and comics on *Pelagia noctiluca* in particular

I draw comics, also known as graphic storytelling, also known as sequential art, also known as the ninth art,[1] also known as low culture. The English-speaking world came a fair bit later to the party than the Francophones, but today this genre is being taken seriously as never before.[2]

*Killer jellyfish rock Rio* is the second in my *Killer jellyfish* series,[3] which humbly follows in the satirical tradition of Jonathan Swift and *Rake's progress* by Hogarth, viewed by some as 'the father of the modern cartoon – and the modern comic, too'.[4]

Before I drew comics, I made other kinds of art. In 2007, I made an installation of a two-metre-long whale and was reading a lot about the oceans. This article caught my eye:

1 Seago, K. (2014) 'The ninth art: A review of comics in French. The European bande dessinée in context', *The Comics Grid*, 4(1): 1-2. [http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/cg.a]

2 Barnicoat, B. (2012) 'The graphic novel's spectacular rise: From kids' comics to the Costa prize', *The Guardian*, 23 November. [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/nov/23/graphic-novel-spectacular-rise-costa-prize]

3 www.eileenlaurie.se

4 Mount, H. (2014) 'Hogarth, the father of the modern cartoon', *The Telegraph*, 1 November. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/11202643/Hogarth-the-father-of-the-modern-cartoon.html]

> A second pack comprising millions of juvenile mauve stinger jellyfish has been spotted off the coast of Scotland, less than a week after an overwhelming attack by *Pelagia noctiluca* killed 100,000 salmon at a Northern Ireland fish farm.[5]

The more I read, the more surreal it became: headlines like 'Jellyfish take on US warship' [6], 'Spineless attacks on nuclear power plants could increase' [7] or 'Jellymageddon: Can we stop the rise of the jellyfish?'[8] were classic 'low art' comic tales. This was truth being a whole lot weirder than fiction. So when I started drawing comics, the jellyfish were a perfect subject.

*Rock Rio* was created for this *ephemera* special issue. I couldn't resist the temptation of drawing the jellyfish visiting (and trashing) an academic conference. Yet the state of the oceans is no laughing matter: it is a state of emergency.[9] The jellyfish family members of the subphylum Medusozoa have been around a long time[10] and may well outlive us all, flourishing as they do in places where vertebrates and shellfish cannot. Dr Lisa-Ann Gershwin, renowned jellyfish expert and author of *Stung! On jellyfish blooms and the future of the ocean*[11] does not mince her words:

> Our impacts are creating tipping points, and once ecosystems have passed those tipping points, they become really stable in their new normal. Once jellyfish take over an ecosystem – or any pest for that matter – it's hard to undo that. Pest controlled ecosystems are some of the most incredibly resilient ecosystems around: think of cockroaches in your kitchen or dandelions in your garden, pests are

5 Haines, L. (2007) 'Second jellyfish pack moves on UK 27 November', *The Register,* 26 November. [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/11/26/second_jellyfish_pack]

6 Flannery, T. (2013) 'They're taking over!', *The New York Review of Books,* 26 September. [http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/09/26/jellyfish-theyre-taking-over]

7 Kopytko, N. (2015) 'Spineless attacks on nuclear power plants could Increase', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* 19 February. [http://thebulletin.org/spineless-attacks-nuclear-power-plants-could-increase8001]

8 Stelling, T. (2013) 'Jellymageddon: Can we stop the rise of the jellyfish?', *The New Scientist,* 13 July. [https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23130821-500-march-of-the-jellies]

9 UN (2013) 'United Nations world ocean assessment. Regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment including socioeconomic aspects'. [http://www.worldoceanassessment.org]

10 Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (2016) 'Jellyfish and comb jellies'. [http://ocean.si.edu/jellyfish-and-comb-jellies]

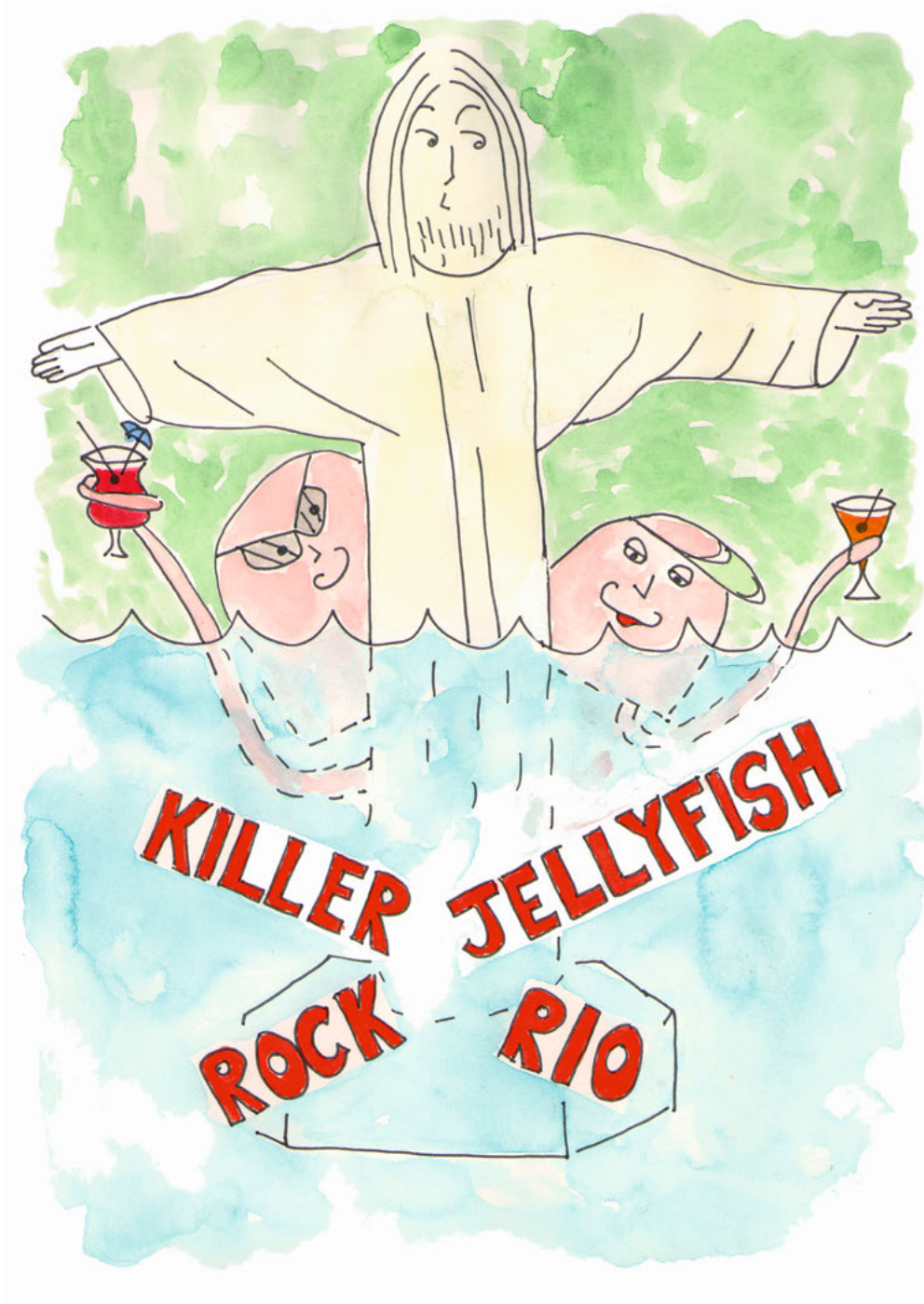
11 Gershwin, L.-A. (2013) *Stung! On jellyfish blooms and the future of the ocean*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

> tenacious by their very nature. The best way to fix this is to not let it happen in the first place.[12]

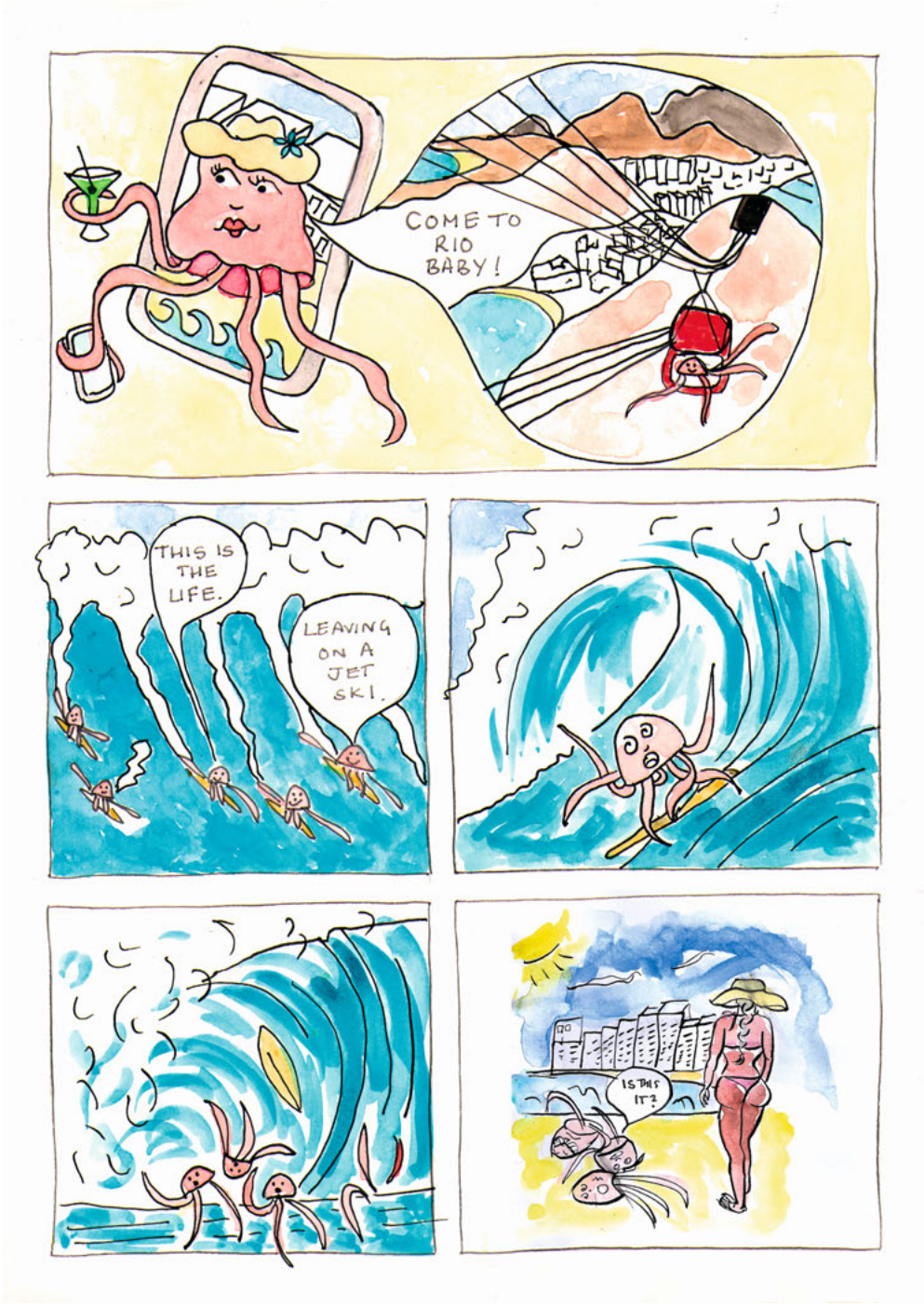
As jellyfish come ever more into prominence, can they help the hominid subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens*,[13] understand anything other than our own hubris?

[12] Nexus Media (2016) 'Are jellyfish going to take over the ocean? An interview with jellyfish expert Lisa-Ann Gershwin', *Popsci.com*, 8 December. [http://www.popsci.com/built-for-survival-jellyfish-are-quickly-becoming-pests]

[13] Encyclopædia Britannica (2017) 'Homo sapiens sapiens, hominid subspecies'. [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Homo-sapiens-sapiens]


KILLER JELLYFISH
ROCK RIO

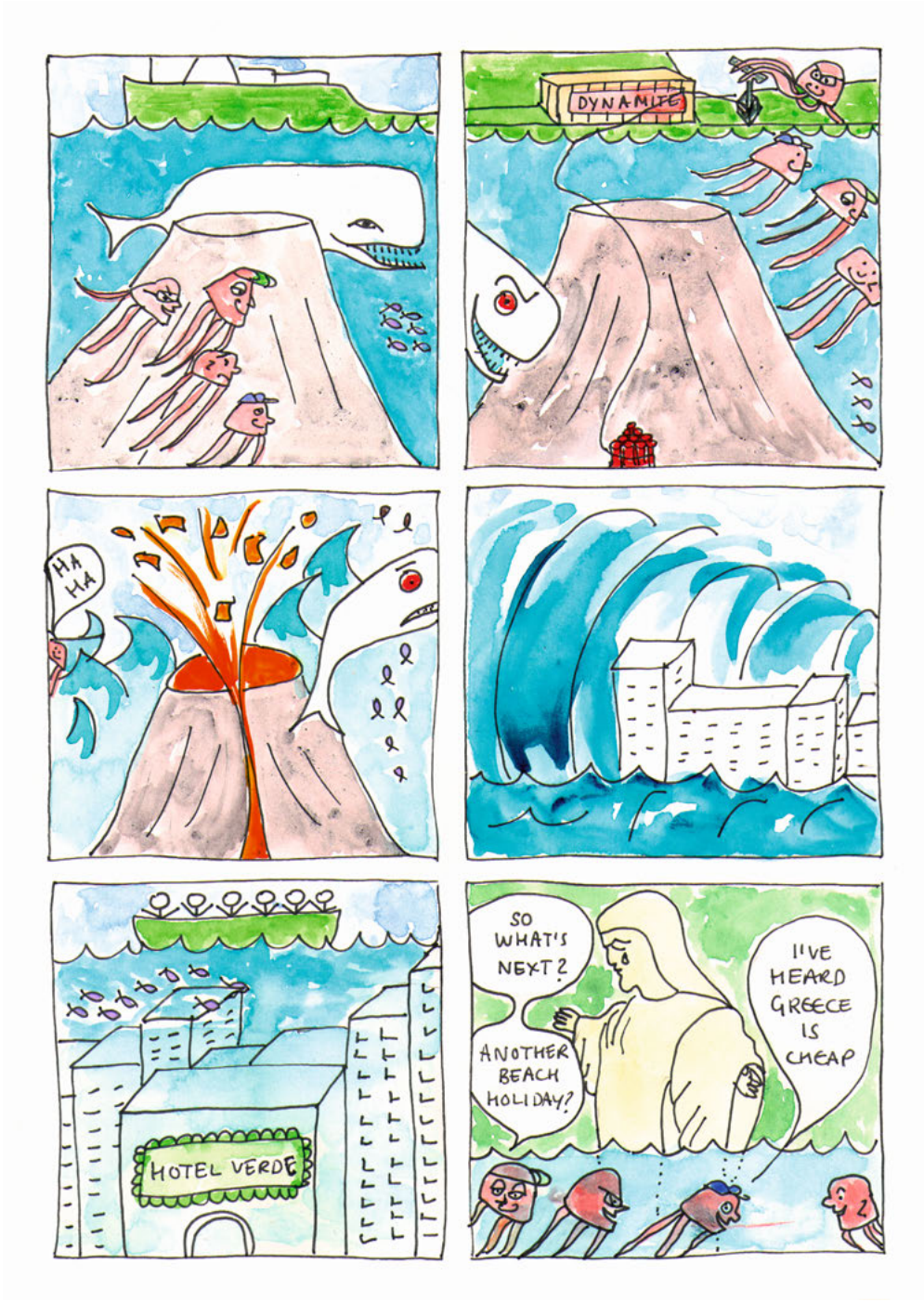

CRASH
BANG
HELP!
WALLOP
BORING
BORING
BUCK
FACE JELLY
PING
THIS IS SO FUCKING BORING!
FUCK ME!
BORING
PING
BORED?
WHY NOT HAVE FUN IN THE SUN?
YOU KNOW YOU'RE WORTH IT.


COME TO RIO BABY!
THIS IS THE LIFE.
LEAVING ON A JET SKI.
IS THIS IT?


IS THIS IT?
ARE WE THERE YET?
HOT!
HOT
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY FEET!
WHERE'S THE BAR?
MY FEET HURT!
TOPLESS
HERE WE ARE
COCKTAILS
HOT
HELP!
A DAQUIRI WILL DO NICELY


TIME TO HIT THE TABLES
SO WHAT NOW?
LES JEUX SONT FAITS!
SEEMS TO BE YOUR LUCKY NIGHT SIR.
SAÚDE!
YES, I HAVE ONE MILLION AIR MILES.
ME TOO. ARE YOU ENJOYING THE CONFERENCE?
ABSOLUTELY! I'M MAKING A KILLING WITH MY JELLYFISH BURGERS.
KILLING?
JELLYFISH BURGERS?
WHAT CONFERENCE?


THE NEXT DAY
HOTEL VERDE
GREEN WASH DAY 3
THIS MUST BE IT
CONFERENCE IN SESSION DO NOT DISTURB
Professor Grönblad
Doctor Verte
PRESENTATION TODAY!
CORAL BLEACHING?
OVER-FISHING?
OCEAN ACIDIFICATION?
PACIFIC GARBAGE PATCH?
NOT YOUR PROBLEM
JELLYFISH BURGERS THE NEW MUST-HAVE!
HEY! CHECK THIS OUT
YES OUR CO-OPERATION IS GOING WELL
I PUBLISHED IN THE GREEN-TECH-NEO-NANO-FANCY-PANTS JOURNAL. GREAT REVIEWS
ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING?


DYNAMITE
HA HA
HOTEL VERDE
SO WHAT'S NEXT?
I'VE HEARD GREECE IS CHEAP
ANOTHER BEACH HOLIDAY?

## the author

Eileen Laurie was born in Scotland and studied fine art in Northern Ireland. She has lived in several countries and is now based in Malmö: the 'comicville' of Sweden. A voracious reader from a young age, she also read comics, from *2000 AD*[14] to various Scottish classics[15]. A French friend gave her *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi around 2004, a work of graphic storytelling that makes very clear that we can use comics to tell any kind of story, not just about guns and men in tights.
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[14] https://2000ad.com

[15] McCall, C. (2016) 'Five classic Scottish cartoon characters', *The Scotsman*, 23 March. [http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/five-classic-scottish-cartoon-characters-1-4080587]

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# Art at the margins of contemporary democracies

Beata Sirowy

**review of**

Zabala, S. (2017) *Why only art can save us: Aesthetics and the absence of emergency*. New York: Columbia University Press. (HB, pp. 216, £49.95, ISBN 9780231183482)

In his recent book, *Why only art can save us*, Santiago Zabala makes an important contribution to the socially engaged art discourse, building upon phenomenology and critical theory. It is a text about demands *by* art, to use Michael Kelly's formulation [9], i.e. art's call for action on behalf of the weak, discarded and forgotten – the remains of Being on the margins of contemporary democracies.

The title of the book is a paraphrase of Heidegger's famous statement 'only a God can still save us', indicating a path beyond the world overpowered by technology, where everything is calculable, nature is treated as a standing reserve, and we aim to exploit and control the world. As Zabala argues, Heidegger's declaration should not be read in a literal sense, but rather as alluding to a forgotten realm of Being in our technological reality. Aiming to dominate and categorize the world, we replaced Being (existence) with enumerable beings (objects), bringing about 'the endlessly self-expanding emptiness and devastation' [2], related to the primacy of things over human relationships and nature.

In which sense the realm of Being offers us a salvation? A return to Being is a return to a non-reductionist perception of the world and human existence, a leap beyond instrumental rationality. Art can assist us in this process, awakening the

sense of emergency – an awareness that our dominating way of framing the world is not the only option.

## Modern aesthetics and the dominant worldview

The book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, 'The emergency of aesthetic', situates the problem of art in a wider context and discusses how contemporary aesthetics contributes to the concealment of Being, framing it within the parameters of the dominating worldview. Here the author aims to confront and overcome the metaphysical framework of modern aesthetics, and demonstrate that problem of art extends far beyond this domain.

Following Heidegger, who is the major reference for this chapter, Zabala sees the loss of a sense of emergency as the main problem of our times. There are of course emergencies, like military conflicts, terrorism, or refugee crisis. However, they are framed in terms of our globalized system and its dominant paradigms that include democracy (political), neoliberalism (financial), and NATO (military). Within this system we are offered readily applicable solutions preserving the status quo. There is little space for questioning the established ways of addressing the crises we face, and our role in them. Furthermore, the dominant impression of citizens in the developed countries is that reality is stable and fixed. We believe that everything is functioning correctly, and the current order will bring about the solution of our problems and provide conditions for a meaningful life.

The major problem of this framework is not only its objectifying character, but also how it reduces the world to a predictable 'picture', which is constantly being justified politically, ethically, and also aesthetically. Everything that does not fit into this picture is ignored and marginalized. Emergency, on the other hand, suggests openness, undecidedness, and a variety of options. It is an interruption of the reality we are accustomed to. We have to suspend our ordinary ways of perceiving the world – to use Heidegger's terms, 'the lucidity through which we constantly see' [17] – in order to experience it.

The absence of emergency reflects our epoch's metaphysical condition. Social and political crises we face are, according to Zabala, derivative of this condition. Art can help us to disclose this absence of emergency by turning our attention to the remains of Being – people and ideas forced to the margins of the dominant discourses and striving for change. As the author argues, we need not only political and ethical discourses, but also aesthetic forces to shake us out of the tendency to ignore paradoxes and injustices generated by the dominant paradigms and their instrumental rationality.

Art speaks to us more directly than rational discourses – it has an ability to address us on the existential level, to transform our way of looking at the world, and to mobilize us to action. In this perspective, works of art are far more than objects of contemplation, providing us with sensuous enjoyment – as viewed by modern aesthetics. Following Heidegger, Zabala claims that what makes art is not the quality of what is created, but its ontological appeal [19]. Accordingly, he responds to Heidegger's call for the overcoming of aesthetics, which similarly to technology frames and organizes beings, in this case to make them conform to the ideal of an indifferent beauty. In doing so, modern aesthetics preserves the lack of sense of emergency and becomes a means of preserving status quo. In order to overcome this condition we need to restore the critical, discursive potential of art.

## Art as a subversive strategy

The marginalized challenges of our times are specifically addressed in Chapter 2, 'Emergency through art'. Here Zabala discusses four categories of problems staying at the margins of contemporary democracies: 'social paradoxes' generated by the dominating paradigms; 'urban discharges' of slums, plastic and electronic waste; 'environmental calls' related to global warming and degradation of nature; and 'historical accounts' of ignored or denied events.

Three artists are selected for each of these categories. The works of kennardphillipps, Jota Castro and Filippo Minelli thrust us into the political, financial, and technological paradoxes that shape our social lives. Hema Upadhyay, Wang Zhiyuan, and Peter McFarlane deal with the problem of surplus products emerging on the verge of capitalism and urbanization. Nele Azvedo, Mandy Barker, and Michael Sailstorfer direct our attention to environmental calls caused by global warming, ocean pollution and deforestation. The artworks of Jennifer Kardy, Alfredo Jaar, and Jane Frere offer alternative readings of history and draw our attention to overlooked events.

This part of the book gives a solid insight into how arts existential and ontological alterations work in specific contexts, revealing fundamental problems of our times and mobilizing for action. Their creators, as Zabala argues, have retreated from culture's indifferent beauty in order to disclose the lack of emergencies in contemporary world, and to draw attention to the remains of Being. This type of art calls for action on behalf of the weak and excluded – art appears here as transformative, critical practice.

## Towards an ontological theory of art

The final chapter of the book, 'Emergency aesthetics', delineates a theory of art focused on art's ontological appeal. Zabala's aim is neither to criticize previous aesthetic theories, nor to propose a new one, but to outline a philosophical stance capable of interpreting existential disclosures of contemporary art. Hence, the art theory outlined in the book is clearly not aesthetic (i.e. focused on a non-cognitive experience of art, as emerging from the perspective of Baumgarten and Kant), but ontological – it addresses art against the background of human existence and the world. Zabala follows here pre-Enlightenment understanding of art, in which the cognitive dimension was central – art's role was to reveal truth about the reality. This understanding can be dated back at least to the ancient Greeks, for whom beauty and truth were two sides of the same coin, and was in the 20th century revived by phenomenological and hermeneutic thinkers. It stands in a stark contrast to the mainstream aesthetic discourse, inclined to exclude art's claim to truth, and accordingly to dismiss its theoretical and practical dimensions. As Heidegger points out, modern aesthetics presupposes a particular conception of beings – as objects of representation framed within the dominant worldview. Within this horizon art loses its relation to culture and follows the path of technology. In this context he speaks about 'the absence of art' (Heidegger in Zabala, 2017: 6), a state of being corresponding to the lack of a sense of emergency.

In order to overcome this condition, we need not only to put aside aesthetic representationalism, but also to disclose and interpret the forgotten, existential appeal of Being. Following Gadamer, Zabala considers art not an object on which we look and contemplate, but an event that appropriates us into itself and reveals the world. It invites us into a conversation that does not aim for a disengaged exchange of different interpretations, but addresses us in a direct way and changes our ways of perceiving the world. Further, building upon Danto, Ranciere, and Vattimo, Zabala claims that the truth of art no longer rests in representation of reality, but rather in an existential project of transformation. Today, artists and their audiences are called to intervene on behalf of humanity.

Art can respond to the absence of the sense of emergency in different ways. For Heidegger artworks disclose truth about the world by expressing it in its fullness and uniqueness in a non-reductive manner. As he demonstrates on the famous example of peasant's shoes depicted by Van Gogh, art can offer an in-depth glimpse into human reality. Critical thinkers on the other hand adapt a more subversive strategy, altering the reality we are accustomed to rather than representing it. In this perspective art confronts us with unexpected, strange, surprising, and provokes us to search reasons for that oddness. This in turn motivates us to take an ethical stance – to become existentially involved for the

sake of the weak and marginalized. Zabala follows the latter perspective, arguing that the lack of a sense of emergency in our contemporary realities demands a new aesthetic shock. What produces shock in art are not its formal qualities, but its refusal to situate itself within established perspectives.

As we can see in the examples from Chapter 2, alterations of reality created by artworks disrupt our fixed ways of seeing the world and require response and intervention instead of contemplation. To confront the alterations revealed in critical artworks, emergency aesthetics must depend on hermeneutics – an effort of interpretation is necessary to retrieve the existential appeal of art. Zabala follows Gadamer's view of interpretation as a fusion of horizons, governed by the existential situation of the interpreter. However, he sees the keystone of hermeneutics in the disclosure of the essential emergency – the absence of emergencies in our contemporary world, while for Gadamer it was the experience of truth revealed in art. Accordingly, in Zabala's emergency aesthetics interpretation has a militant, anarchic character. As he points out, anarchic interpretations do not strive for truth or completeness, but rather seek to preserve the disclosure of emergency and invite us to a resolute action in favour of the weak [120].

The final chapter is followed by an afterword, engaging in a direct dialogue with critical theory – such a dialogue is very much implicit throughout the book. The afterword also situates Zabala's effort in a wider context of contemporary, socially engaged art theory.

## Final reflections

Zabala's emergency aesthetics represents an original attempt to bridge phenomenology and critical theory, and offers a well-thought perspective on the challenges of contemporary democracies and the role and potentials of art in addressing them. Importantly, the book is more than a valuable contribution to art discourse. It offers as much aesthetic as ethical theory, providing a critical glimpse on the current way of framing the world and human life, and asking for action on behalf of the weak, marginalized, and forgotten.

Having said that, it must be noted that Zabala's work is not an easy lecture. Although Chapter 2, presenting selected artists and their responses to the lack of the sense of emergency, is generally accessible, philosophical discussions in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 may be difficult to follow for readers completely unfamiliar with Heidegger's phenomenology.

One of the strengths of the text is a breadth of phenomenological references, also including less commonly quoted works of Heidegger, such as *Mindfulness* (2006/1938-1939)[I]. The book would however benefit from a more explicit conversation with critical theory, to which indebtedness is mentioned mostly in the afterword. Heidegger appears as the principal reference throughout the text, but the view that art creates emergencies through alterations and disruptions of reality goes somehow beyond his perspective, alluding among others to Adorno.

The book can be recommended to philosophically inclined audiences interested in socially engaged art theory, and art's response to contemporary crises. The readers interested specifically in Heidegger's view of art will find this book very relevant throughout.

## the author

Beata Sirowy (PhD 2010, The Oslo School of Architecture) is Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Her educational background consists of both philosophy and architecture, and her research interests lie at the intersection of these disciplines. She is particularly interested in phenomenology and hermenutics and their implications for architecture and spatial planning, and in broadly understood ethical aspects of urban development. Her publications deal also with phenomenological theory of art. She is a section editor of the Nordic research journal *Formakademisk*.
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[I] Heidegger, M. (2006/1938-1939) *Mindfulness (Besinnung)*, trans. E. Parvis and T. Kalary. London and New York: Continuum.

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# Resistance in vulnerability with an eye to the vulnerability of power

Marco Checchi

**review of**

Butler J., Z. Gambetti and L. Sabsay (eds.) (2016) *Vulnerability in resistance*. Durham: Duke University Press. (PB, pp x + 336, £21.99, ISBN 978-0-8223-6290-6).

The general aim of this volume is to rethink vulnerability both at the ontological and political level and in its multifaceted relations with resistance. It features a series of essays that engage with the topic from a variety of geopolitical contexts and theoretical perspectives. This variety is also reflected in the different polemical targets that range from the patriarchical coupling of vulnerability and passivity to the neoliberal understanding of resilience and the humanitarian discourse. This is definitely a brilliant experiment that brings together a variety of heterogenous reflections, 'a polyphonic mode of making sense of the shifting problematic before us' (7). Yet, it is a polyphony of reflections and conceptual explorations, rather than a polyphony of authors. Because among the contributors, Judith Butler is clearly the cornerstone of the volume. In the general polyphony, her voice is absolutely dominant. But, far from being a defect, this constitutes the actual strength of the volume. Butler's thought on vulnerability, gender, public appearance and resistance is deployed, explored and applied from a variety of angles and perspectives. In this book, we see the results of what Butler's concept of vulnerability can do or how it can be used. In this sense, the volume is not only an interesting nomadic exploration of the potentialities of a concept (hence it draws

its philosophical relevance), but it is also an inspirational and thought provoking tool for further explorations.

Butler's concept opposes traditional understandings of vulnerability that link it to passivity, inactivity. Resistance is obviously excluded from this account of vulnerability. In its passivity, the vulnerable is the disposable victim that can only be helped or rescued. By the same token, vulnerability is traditionally gendered resulting from the patriarchical binary code that poses activity as a masculine attribute, while '[v]ulnerability appears as the ultimate truth about women; it almost becomes the general defining character of being a woman' (Ahiska, 221).

The conceptualisation of vulnerability becomes terrain for political contestation. As traditional understandings of vulnerability are produced by and reproduce dominant forms of political subjectivation, the rethinking of vulnerability in relation to agency and, by extension, resistance shows its political urgency and the prefiguration of an alternative politics of solidarity from below: 'Once we understand the way that vulnerability enters into agency, then our understanding of both terms can change, and the binary opposition between them can become undone. I consider the undoing of this binary a feminist task' (Butler, 25).

The starting point for Butler's reconceptualization is the idea of human body as relational and interdependent. The body is exposed to and depends on 'infrastructure, understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance' (*ibid.*, 21). But the idea of interdependence does not imply the lack of acting. This radical interdependency constitutes the ground to affirm vulnerability as ontological and existential condition. Vulnerability affirms both the capacity of the body to act and to be acted upon, to affect and to be affected. However, vulnerability is also a socially induced condition. Vulnerable populations or vulnerable subjects are indeed the result and effect of a history of power relations and systems of domination. There is a differential distribution of vulnerability and this, in turn, can be and is politically mobilised.

The political mobilisation of vulnerability constitutes the focus of Butler's essay. She looks at the politically and socially induced vulnerability that affects those whose infrastructure have been decimated by the neoliberal wave of austerity. On the one hand, the state enforces the destruction of basic material conditions for a livable life. On the other hand, it enacts its paternalistic humanitarian discourse reproducing the coupling of vulnerability and passivity. Yet, resistance emerges nevertheless, not only despite vulnerability, but precisely because of it. When this condition of precarity makes its public appearance through assemblies and demonstrations, vulnerability is not only exposed politically in the sense of Arendt,

but also vulnerability manifests itself in the face of police violence. 'Vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment' (*ibid.,* 22).

The other essays in the collection experiment with Butler's concept through original and often not reciprocally aligned trajectories. It is very refreshing to find attempts to engage with philosophy from unorthodox perspectives that are often disqualified from academic and scientific discourse. Elena Loizidou starts with her grandmother's dream to fly back to her village in Cyprus in a call for including dreams and their recounting into Arendt's conception of the political subject. Marianne Hirsch offers her personal recollections as a German Jew girl migrating to US and reflects on postmemorial aesthetic strategies to practice vulnerability as a form of attunement and responsibility. Elsa Dorlin gives a critical reading of masking from the veil wars in France to *Wonder woman* and then discusses 'Hey Baby!' a first-person-shooter video game where a woman indefinitely kills her harassers that questions, although problematically, the coupling of vulnerability and passivity. Other authors privilege art and aesthetics as a way of problematising vulnerability. The work of Palestinian artist and activist Mona Hatoum is presented by Elena Tzelepis as a political representation and enactment of vulnerable corporalities at the intersection of struggles over citizenship and gender. Başak Ertür proposes a brilliant analysis of barricades at Gezi Park, which he frames through Lefebvre as artefacts of counter-monumentalisation of resistance.

Another important contribution of the volume is the creation of a geopolitically diverse, although obviously not exhaustive, archive of vulnerability at stake in recent examples of resistance. Athena Athanasiou presents the idea of nonsovereign agonism through the experience of Women in Black, a group of women standing in the public streets of Belgrade in 1991 mourning the victims of their alleged enemies. Palestine features not only in Tzelepis's essay on Hatoum's art, but also in the interesting contribution by Rema Hammami that reports on the activism of Western volunteers from the perspective of the community of Masafer Yatta, in the South Hebron Hills. Kurdish feminism is the focus of the essay by Nükhet Sirman, where transgression becomes an existential and political condition, but also prefiguration of an alternative politics. Meltem Ahiska looks at the representation of violence on women in Turkey with a critical reading of those campaigns that depict the victimisation of women as complicit in reinforcing the coupling of women and passivity. Two essays engage with protests at Gezi Park in 2013. The volume largely depends on the discussions at the workshop 'Rethinking vulnerability and resistance: Feminism and social change' that took place at Columbia's University Global Center in Istanbul only one month after the Gezi Park protests. It is particularly interesting to see how the two essays converge to

provide a vivid account of the social and material fabric of the practices of resistance that took place during those weeks. On the one hand, the materiality of the barricades in the continuous process of dismantling and rebuilding recounted by Ertür. On the other hand, the internal agonism and transformations among the protesters representing the transversal composition of resistance, as described by the essay by Zeynep Gambetti.

Yet, despite this polyphonic way of thinking of vulnerability, there is an inevitable tendency for/towards repetition that transforms Butler's concept into a refrain or, at times, into a sterile litany. But this repetition does not solve some of the issues that necessarily emerge when a new concept is created. Beyond the richness of the operation of introducing a new concept accompanied by a series of critical reflections that put that concept at work following its potential lines of experimentation, there is still room from an ultimate question: why vulnerability? There is a persistent feeling that we could have thought along the same conceptual trajectories without ever mentioning vulnerability: relationality, interdependence, permeability (as Leticia Sabsay proposes in her essay), even Butler's own couple precarity-precariousness. These notions appear almost interchangeably in the volume, while little or no effort is made to provide a solid way of distinguishing vulnerability from them. The reason for this is possibly that such a conceptual distinction cannot be operated. Once vulnerability is presented both as existential and socially induced condition it depicts an ontology and a social dynamic that do not add much, for instance, to a Foucauldian conception of the body and of the social as traversed and constituted by power relations. It is absolutely relevant and urgent from a politico-philosophical perspective to affirm this radical relationality of being against liberal and neoliberal attempts to efface interdependence through the ideology of the self-mastery sovereign individual. But, this does not answer our initial interrogative: why vulnerability? Perhaps the only way to answer this question is by pointing at the current and traditional uses of the notion of vulnerability, those which foster a paternalistic attitude towards those victimised and defenceless bodies. In this sense, Butler's operation would consist of reclaiming the term by queering its meaning against these dominant views and the politics they reproduce and strengthen. It is through this genealogical function that we can fully appreciate the necessity of conceptualising vulnerability in this way. We are already beyond the question of 'why vulnerability?'. The volume engages directly with the question of how to think vulnerability differently.

Differently from what? There is very little attention to those mainstream understandings of vulnerability that this volume opposes. No author or theory is explicitly mentioned as a polemical target. If the reader is not familiar (as I am not) with contemporary debates on vulnerability it is quite hard to assess the scope and the success of this polemical attack. Most of the contributors to the volume tend to

refer more to a general patriarchical binary code and to a generic humanitarian discourse largely relying upon the liberal and neoliberal discourse of human rights. Sarah Bracke's essay is the only one that tries to decipher the material coordinates of this hegemonic understanding. She traces a brilliant genealogy of the concept of resilience showing the neoliberal framework that supports the contemporary popularity of this idea. She surveys popular self-help books as a way of portraying resilience as a positive asset to enhance one's human capital; also, she looks at policies on resilience developed by IMF and World Bank to normalise and regulate the capacity of vulnerable population to respond to austerity measures and processes of material exploitation. For Bracke, thinking vulnerability against resilience helps to trace the lines of resistance 'for a world beyond neoliberalism' (Bracke, 70).

Nevertheless, this relation with resistance, not only in Bracke's essay but throughout the volume, remains quite problematic. Whereas vulnerability is treated through a thorough conceptual analysis, resistance is discussed through its manifestations: public squares, barricades, demonstrations, but also resistant existences as in the example of Palestinians [Hammani] and Kurdish [Sirman]. The lack of a conceptual understanding of resistance leave several potential avenues implicit and unexplored. Howard Caygill's *On resistance*, Costas Douzinas' *Philosophy and resistance in the crisis* or Foucault's first volume of the *History of sexuality* might have been valuable theoretical frameworks to problematise resistance also from a theoretical perspective. This absence determines the emergence of a series of interrogatives that remain unfortunately unanswered. For instance, while several contributions depict resistance as the sudden outburst of the event, others rightly sustain an idea of resistance as continuous and uninterrupted process. Hammani eloquently summarises this perspective in reference to Palestinian resistance in the community of Masafer Yatta: 'to exist is to resist. [...] The everyday constant work of just "being" is made up of the multitude of acts of making life possible in and through the everyday' (Hammani, 172). This implicit tension in the understanding of the concept of resistance certainly reflects the polyphony, but in a sense the volume somehow misses the opportunity to offer a more radical intervention in the debate on the concept of resistance.

In fact, we might dare to ask what eventually this conception of vulnerability adds either to our understanding of resistance or to contemporary struggles in general. There are definitely some successful operations in this sense. For instance, it unmasks top-down hegemonic political mobilisation of vulnerability as in the case of those discourses that use the threat of terrorism or of an invasion of migrants to assert the right of the 'vulnerable' white man of the global North to fight back (or, indeed, to strike first). The volume also helps to oppose a certain masculine

ideal of heroism in resistance, in which vulnerability is effaced through the ideal of a self-sufficient and sovereign individual subject that mirrors and mobilises the same very discourse resistance is against to. This definitely constitutes an interesting and urgent task. Yet, I would like to use Hammani's essay to reflect on the efficacy of this attempt of locating vulnerability (or interdependency?) in resistance: 'For situated communities of hyperprecarity, this awareness that one's survival depends on so many others is an everyday doxa' (172). If hyperprecarious communities have always already known this radical dependency and vulnerability, whom is this volume for? Probably, it is for those populations who have been nourished by the liberal and neoliberal mantra of the sovereign masculine individual. But, this, in a way, is another 'everyday doxa' as academic books are generally meant for this kind of audience only. Is the volume then arguing for a romanticised celebration of dispossessed populations from which we should learn? That would definitely be an exaggeration, but this still remains as a potential line of enquiry to continue with the rethinking of the concepts at stake.

Perhaps the idea of rethinking vulnerability in power, rather than in resistance, might have been the key to really liberate an affirmative conception of resistance that remains somehow implicit throughout the volume. That resistance occurs both despite and for the sake of vulnerability is somehow an everyday doxa as well. Traditional understandings of resistance have often remarked the vulnerability, the impotency or even the futility of resistance. In resistance, we have always known that we might not be defenceless, but we are most probably bound to defeat. And from this everyday doxa, we conclude that power, on the other hand, is monolithic and eternal. Our imagination is thwarted to the extent that, as Bracke puts it following Jameson, it is easier to imagine the end of the world (from an environmentalist perspective) than the end of capitalism. But if vulnerability is an ontological and existential condition from which power cannot escape either, we could have definitely redefined the potential of resistance. This could promote an affirmative conception of resistance. In no way vulnerability needs to be excluded from resistance, but perhaps it would have been interesting to explore this other trajectory that is still present in the volume: power is vulnerable too. We still do not know what we can do (against a vulnerable power – despite our vulnerability).

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# No future. Utopia now!

Martin Parker

**review of**

Bell, D.M. (2017) *Rethinking utopia: Place, power, affect*. New York: Routledge. (HB, pp. 188, £88, ISBN 9781138891333)

## Introduction

Towards the end of this intriguing book (157), David Bell tells us how he fell in love with free jazz, of the improvised and generally impenetrable kind, when he was 17. It took him a while, but when he got it, it was music that opened up onto a world in which form was always being made at every moment, and the players slid and bopped off each other, making something new each time that they played. The musicians augmented each other's capacities and creativities when they played attentively and sympathetically together. Together, because this was not a question of one solo diva elevating themselves on everyone else's back, one boss with one vision, or one set of dutifully repeated clichés. This was music as collective making, and (in this book) an opening to utopianism, to the making of utopias.

It's a lovely metaphor, and I wish he had told me that at the start of the book. I wish that the practice of music making that holds so much promise for what he wanted to say was a theme introduced strongly at the beginning, and that then was used as a counter-point to the incessant beat of theory and academic reference. The hammering of not-this, and obviously not-that, of corrections to certain readings of Deleuze, or Bloch, or Negri, or Mouffe. There was a lightness and flexibility to the central argument here that I felt was largely trammelled by the genre conventions of writing 'politically engaged social theory for academic publishers'.

For myself, I wanted more jazz, more of David Bell's evident care and wit, and less academic bell ringing.

So what is the central argument? It's a smart one, that most radical understandings of utopianism throw away 'place' far too quickly. (I'm going to leave the right wing and market utopians out of this review, though he does have some nice things to say about their microfascist 'sad joys' too.) Using a range of writings from utopian studies (Moylan, Levitas, Kumar and so on), as well as extended readings of two novels – Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and Ursula le Guin's *The dispossessed* (1974) – Bell suggests that the dominant radical narrative is of the other place and other time, utopia as a kind of longing for that which is not now. Utopia is often framed as a desire, an impulse or method to expose the insufficiency of the present and the possibility of elsewhere and elsewhen. Utopia is exodus, escape, hope.

His problem, summarising very quickly, is that this defers and depoliticises so much, pushing utopianism into fiction, dream, desire, rather than thinking and doing it as a noisy and improvised prefigurative present. Utopia is instead co-opted as a 'nice idea'.

> Half an hour on the radio. Forty-five minutes in an art gallery. An article in the weekend supplement. A lifestyle book. A quirky module at an elite university. (136)

The anger and joy stripped out, all that is left is a postcard from somewhere we might want to visit but not live, and also the endlessly repeated warning against the dangers of blueprints, means that become ends in themselves. (Yes, yes – we know. And as Bell shows, such cautions can so easily become a dully pragmatic post-utopianism, or even a strident principled anti-utopianism.) Instead, he says, let's make utopia a co-produced place here and now.

Now I might quite possibly be simplifying far too much here, but I think that Bell's argument works best when he (nodding to Spinoza) frames utopianism as a practice which enhances the powers of acting of bodies, self, other and collective (38). We play together and produce joy, individuals only possible because of others, their affect a function of how they are themselves affected, our freedoms made collectively, our collective being the precondition for our freedom. This means an insistence that utopianism can be here and now, not just there and then. This is what Valerie Fournier (2002), quoted approvingly by Bell, has called 'utopianism', the practical cultivation of contemporary possibilities. Bell's utopianism is not a nostalgia for the future, but a practice that aims at producing new forms of affect in the present. Never mind the future, as a Novara media slogan has it, let's have utopia now!

I like the way that Bell tilts at some of the comfortable reading lists of 'utopian studies', particularly when it becomes no more than a variety of literary studies, and I very much like his suggestions that this version of utopianism is about making a place together, with anger and joy, against capitalism and the pale, male and stale (always acknowledging that he is part of the problem too). What saddened me was the way that this book, which could have been a carnival, an explosion, a joyful improvisation with a reader, felt too much like a text for a quirky module at an elite university. (Around a quarter of it is endnotes and references.) There are moments in which kittens dance across keyboards, the author lets his ideas and words spin and sway, and Ornette Coleman says mysterious things, but the backbeat is the sound of academic posts being staked.

Showing readers what this practice of utopianism might do is a really timely task, and one that chimes well with writing on prefiguration, Occupy, organizing without organizations, immediatist organizing, anarchist, green and feminist organization theory and so on. I want to know how Bell's version of utopianism might feel, sound, smell – not as blueprints (yes, yes – we know) but as an invitation to a different way of being. It seems to me, as a reader concerned with alternative organizing (Parker et al., 2014) that we now have a lot of thinkers converging on a different sort of organization theory. How can we do things together without trapping each other? How can we organize without building institutions that do our thinking for us? How can we continually remind ourselves that organizing is politics? These are questions that don't throw away organizing but rather, as Bell does, try to take it much more seriously than the business school ever does.

I'm very happy to call this utopianism, but I'm sure that very well referenced hardback Routledge books written with this kind of density aren't going to help that much. Instead, rather than annotating the score, I want David Bell to be showing me what sort of collective improvisations might help make a future that I would like to play in. He is clearly capable of such a task, and clearly recognises that it needs to be done. I want to join him there, in this place, though he can keep the free jazz.

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