



Creative practice, activism and place-identities

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ABSTRACTS

Keynote paper

Manifesto for Creative Activism: Activist Ethnography, Sites of Intervention and Lines of F(l)ight: Paul Routledge

This paper will argue for an activist ethnography; a research strategy that involves politically engaged and committed research, that is practice-based and conducted in horizontal collaboration with social movements. It will discuss creative activism within different cultural and political-economic sites of intervention, and in so doing propose a manifesto for creative activism following different, yet related 'lines of f(l)ight'.

Session 1 Chair Marilyn Taylor

Spectacular Activism: Michael Buser

This paper introduces work I have been developing through an AHRC-supported scoping study on creative practice, activism and place-identity. As an overview piece, I will discuss a few key emerging themes including some ways in which cultural activist projects challenge dominant ways of seeing and constructing social worlds and how alternative imaginaries are put forward and experienced. As an urban planner, I am particularly interested in drawing attention to opportunities and challenges related to (dare I say) community development. Within this frame I consider activist engagement with 'the society of the spectacle' as a foundational part of the production of new spatial imaginaries. The presentation highlights divergent expressions of temporality, the role of participation and disappearance in activist projects and how such activism might inform contestations around urban space.

The spatialities of protest; public bodies and city spaces: Pollyanna Ruiz

While there is much talk about the centrality of 'the public' in the processes of democracy, there is also a deep sense of ambivalence about the gathering of *actual* public bodies in city spaces. This paper will examine protests which are

invested in particular localities and examine the creative practices and tactics used by activists against neoliberal capitalism to challenge dominant ways of seeing.

These issues will be discussed with particular reference to the Anti-globalisation Movement's summit demonstrations, which took place in the late 1990s/early 2000s, and the Occupy Movement's occupation of St Paul's Cathedral, which took place earlier this year. Summit spaces, such as those called into being by the WTO and the IMF at the turn of the century, occupied a place beyond the criticism and control of the world's citizenry. Encircled by a protective wall of concrete blocks and chain-link fences, these barriers actualised metaphorical boundaries between the included and the excluded. Consequently, anti-globalisation demonstrations focused on breaching the barricades which literally and metaphorically excluded 'the public' from the decision-making process. In contrast, Occupy Wall Street's simultaneous occupation of city space brought a marginalised majority into alternatively constructed city spaces and engaged the wider public in debates about the processes of democracy. In doing so it made the previously excluded 99% present visible by positioning them within the social spaces in which power is decided.

This paper will argue that both these movements have used occupation (differently) to temporarily unfix the meanings usually ascribed to people and places. In doing so, it will explore ideas about the relationship between social movements and the spatiality of contentious politics. It will conclude by suggesting that activists' use of spatial metaphors creates a politically productive oscillation of scales, which both unsettles the exclusionary dynamics of capitalism and offers utopic alternatives.

Making "Counter Publics" through the city: networks, exchanges and the creation of political discourses: Walter Nicholls

Nancy Fraser (1990) conceptualized "counterpublics" as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (68). These "counterpublics" enable activists to mark the limits of the order of things, identify how this order produces certain "wrongs" and injustices, and debate about the possible paths for a more just future. Counterpublics in other words allow activists to step outside of the "policing order" and engage in a true "politics" of justice (Rancière 1999). This paper shows that the relational attributes of cities (density, diversity, numbers, etc.) make them strategic spaces for generating these counterpublics and the "political" discourses associated with them.

The high number of diverse activists in close proximity to one another facilitates repeated exchanges between activists in different worlds (i.e. associations, religious groups, unions, universities, etc.). Constant networking between individuals from different activist groups permits the flow of messages, values, and discourses between them. Through these exchanges, individuals are placed at the intersection of the different ideas constituting the urban activist milieu. This allows these individuals to appropriate certain ideas of other groups and make them their own. For example, undocumented immigrant groups may employ the language of "coming out" from the gay movement to describe their own efforts to emerge from the

shadows of the city. These types of intellectual exchanges do not only permit the flow of ideas between different groups but also allow different groups to empathize with the struggles and forms of discrimination faced by other marginalized groups in the city. When undocumented immigrants talk about “coming out”, they come to recognize and feel similarities between their own plight and that of the gay community. Such a process of locating similarities at both intellectual and emotional levels reinforces feelings of solidarity with the multiple minorities operating in the city.

At a collective level, interdependent networks between activist organizations encourage them to interrogate the commonalities of their various struggles. When diverse activists participate in a coalition during a particular campaign, they need a common frame to justify their contributions to their own constituents and to the outside world. They must interrogate the common factors that align them in the campaign. Large concepts like ‘justice’ and ‘rights’ serve as common frames to orient collective action because the lack of rights and justice is what has brought these different groups into the space of politics in the first place. The emerging political imaginaries and frames that result from individual and collective exchanges serve as necessary cognitive frames that enable activists to transcend temporal and spatial particularities and envision their particular struggles as intimately linked to broad movements for change.

This theoretical argument is illustrated through a case study of Los Angeles’ activist milieu in the 2000s. This milieu is constituted by activists from different worlds including immigrant rights associations, labor unions, universities, religious organizations, and political parties. As certain places in the city have become ‘connecting points’ for these diverse activists (e.g. universities, religious centers, events, cafes and bars, etc.), they have come into regular contact with one another to exchange ideas and stitch together their different discourses into new moral discourses and imaginaries of the political. The relational structure and exchanges found in this city has made Los Angeles a preeminent center for producing new imaginaries and activist discourses. For example, Los Angeles has been responsible for producing, or solidifying some of the most important activist discourses over the past 20 years including “Justice for Janitors”, “just economy”, “criminalization of the poor”, and more recently, “undocu-queer”. In this way, the particularly productive relational conditions found in the city have made it a generative hub of new ideas and discourses on justice, with these ideas being diffused through activist networks around the country.

References:

Fraser, Nancy (1990) "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", Social Text 25 (26): 56–80.

Rancière, J. (1999) Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Session 2 Chair Jane Arthurs

The minute interventions of Stewart Lee: the affective conditions of possibility in comedy, repetition and activism: Scott Sharpe, Maria Hynes and J-D Dewsbury

In order to gain attention in a media-saturated environment, activism is haunted by the problem of how to do something new. Understanding the origins and mechanisms of innovation in creative practice is thus a challenge that itself requires a degree of creativity. In this paper we find this creativity in a consideration of the way that humour – and specifically the stand-up comedy of Stewart Lee – can operate as a kind of model of innovative action *per se*. We spotlight how the performative cusp of humour is an imminent and generative creative political act that subtly rewires an individual's awareness and acceptance of dominant social norms and authority. At the heart of the paper, we juxtapose the macropolitical theorizations of the multitude by Paulo Virno (2004, 2008) with the micropolitical affective theorizations of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988, 2010).

According to Virno (2008), a joke functions like a geographical map, reproducing, in condensed form and at a reduced scale, 'the techniques that allow us to modify a form of life'. That is, jokes are like diagrams, which chart the interruptions and inflections of forms of life at a scale that makes them readily perceptible. These techniques of modification, we argue, produce spaces of innovative action, both discernible and immanent, fragile yet powerfully incipient. For Virno, they enact a linguistic state of exception, pointing to the infinite potential of everyday praxis in providing a model for political action. Yet, as our analysis of Lee's mobilisation of the mechanisms of repetition and difference will show, humour as a model for framing the political is better understood in terms of the micro rather than the macro production of novelty. If humour can produce macropolitical effects, it is not because it functions (as Virno would have it) as a possible solution to a state of crisis or political problem. Rather, as Lee demonstrates so well, wit has a special relation to the new, less because it effects an irruptive change than but rather because it exposes us to the affective conditions of possibility through which something new arises. Through his attention to the form rather than the content of humour, through his use of repetition and through the creation and maintenance of tension, Lee provides a sort of slow motion capture of innovative action.

Creative methodologies as a resource for Mayan women's protagonist:, Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes

Mayan women's struggles for their own protagonism within histories of colonization and imperialist intervention in Guatemala highlight the complexities of gendered racialized power. Resistance always exists, even though it may be continuously invisibilized, including through Northern feminists' production of knowledge about 'the victimized Other.' This paper analyzes the transformative potential of creative methodologies, including the creative arts (drawing, collage, storytelling), embodied practices (massage, human sculptures, role plays, theatre), and beliefs and practices from the Mayan cosmovision (ceremonies and rituals), in psychosocial and feminist

accompaniment processes with Mayan women who are advocating for truth, justice and reparation within a context of ongoing impunity, militarism, and violence against women in postwar Guatemala. Specifically, the analysis is centred on the use and impact of creative resources within two distinct multi-year projects that have engaged Mayan women who are survivors of gross violations of human rights committed during the thirty-six year Guatemalan armed conflict, including sexual violence, massacres and massive displacements. The paper maps the points of connection and disconnection between these two processes, and explores whether the usage of creative methodologies in the two projects – as informed by feminist, human rights, psychosocial, and indigenous discourses – were experienced by participants as contributing to individual healing and social action and transformation. The work contains multiple contradictions and challenges. Participants are all Mayan women survivors of gross human rights violations in the context of war and they are deeply constrained by extreme impoverishment, which intensified in the wake of their loss of husbands and sons and the fragmentation of community structures. The focus on the psychosocial and on sexual violence as well as the skills and resources of ‘outsider’ individual and institutional companions contributes to sometimes eschewing a focus on the structural conditions of impoverishment in favor of a focus on individual wellbeing or healing and/or political violence and human rights. The work described herein seeks to critically engage these dynamics towards a more holistic intersectional analysis that recognizes the continuing influence of histories of colonization on structures of inequity. The projects reflect collaborations among local NGOs comprised of Ladina and Mayan professionals and non-professionals, indigenous leaders within local communities, and international feminist participatory action researchers. This diverse set of intermediaries collaborates in but is also problematic to the processes described herein, that is, this is contested terrain.

Situation specific art, global capitalism and displacement anxiety: Lynn Froggett

Much of contemporary arts practice has been place or situation specific, and attempts to explore the spatiality of cultural experience have ranged from the re-designation of intimate places of inquiry as spaces of play, to the re-visioning of urban and regional landscapes, the subversion of local/global distinctions or the hybridisation of cultural forms. There is often a preoccupation with displacement at the heart of such practices. These may be exploratory or reparative in nature, and from a psychosocial perspective can be seen as an aesthetic expression of widespread social displacement anxieties stimulated by commodification and globalisation. Drawing on recent research into new model arts institutions, the paper will ask what situation specific art tells us about displacement anxiety and what responses it offers in terms of consciousness-raising, engagement and mobilisation.

Session 3 Chair Stephen Bottoms

Acupunctured! The activism of disproportionate impact : Jane Trowell

London-based arts and activist group Platform works collaboratively to stimulate lasting change towards social and environmental justice.

We are interested in carefully planned actions that trigger strategic reactions at scale. This approach may result in a stark, sudden shift, or set off a domino-effect of long, slow, sustained change. And it may fail.

This paper will discuss three Platform projects: "License to Spill", a campaign to stigmatise and remove oil-company funding of the arts, focusing on BP and Tate; and "Shake! Young Voices in Arts, Media, Race & Power", a youth project fostering cultural activism in the context of anti-racism and environmental justice; and the Bristol-based project "C Words: Carbon, Climate, Capital, Culture" which took place at Arnolfini over two months in 2009.

Creating solidarity: performance and material culture in British anti-apartheid direct action: Gavin Brown

Does boredom inspire creativity? What do creative forms of activism do? This paper considers how creative activism is entangled with the affects and temporalities of sustaining long-term activist projects, as much as from a desire to communicate a political cause in accessible forms. From April 1986 to February 1990 the supporters of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group [City Group] maintained a Non-Stop Picket outside the South African Embassy in London calling for the release of Nelson Mandela. The Non-Stop Picket was colourful and noisy. Its minimal physical infrastructure of banners, placards and few storage boxes was used to maximum effect to communicate its opposition to apartheid. Positioned on the pavement directly outside South Africa House, the picket was strategically placed to draw attention to apartheid and bring pressure to bear on the regime's representatives and allies in the UK. Singing and chanting were used to disrupt the work of the embassy, express solidarity with those resisting apartheid in South Africa, but also to pass the time. Many of the songs sung on the Picket came from the struggle in South Africa and were sung in London as an act of solidarity with distant cultures of resistance, but news songs and raps were developed on the Picket, often during quiet night shifts. Drawing on recent archival research, this paper considers the songs, imagery and creative direct actions that took place on the Non-Stop Picket as a creative response to the complex emotions and temporalities through which protestors demonstrated that they were 'non-stop against apartheid'.

Disobedient Objects: Agency and Determinism in Activist-Art: Gavin Grindon

This paper will re-examine notions of agency, embodiment and materiality in relation to the 'activist' objects produced by artists associated with terms such as

activist-art, tactical media and interventionism. The paper will argue that the socially-engaged, dynamic aesthetics of this art's queer, liminal objects function apart from the broad institutional terms and terrain of relational or participatory art (under which they are often subsumed), and can be better understood as a coherent tendency within the context of social movement production and composition by drawing together debates on determinism, agency and social movement across autonomism and queer theory as a means to grasp the dissenting agency and performativity of such art.

BIOGRAPHIES

Professor Jane Arthurs, Director of Research for UWE's Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education is working with Dr Buser in an advisory and mentoring role for the AHRC Connected Communities Scoping Study. Professor Arthurs is a leading scholar in cultural studies and focuses on theories of cultural citizenship, feminist cultural expressions and the politics of creative resistance and campaigning. She is committed to interdisciplinary forms of enquiry that enable different perspectives to be brought to bear on the understanding of the politics of contemporary culture. Professor Arthurs is a member of the Digital Cultures Research Centre and the Gender and Culture Research Group at UWE, and on the advisory board of the Bristol Festival of Ideas.

Stephen Bottoms is Professor of Contemporary Theatre and Performance at the University of Manchester. He is Principal Investigator on the current AHRC project "Before the Flood", working in collaboration with Prof. Lindsey McEwen (Professor of Environmental Management, UWE). In 2010-11 he co-ordinated the AHRC network project "Reflecting on Environmental Change through Site-Based Performance." Steve is a theatre director, sometimes performer. He has just co-edited an edition of Performance Research "On Ecology", and his books include: Sex, Drag and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance (with Diane Torr, University of Michigan Press, 2010), Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island (with Matthew Goulish, Routledge, 2007), Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement (U of Michigan Press, 2004), among others

Gavin Brown joined the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy during the summer of 1986, when he was 16. Over the next four years, he became increasingly involved with both the Picket and the running of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group. His most regular shift on the Picket was 12 – 6pm on Saturday afternoons. Over the last 20 years he has been involved in a wide range of queer, anti-racist and anti-capitalist activist projects. Since 2007 he has been a Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Leicester. He is principal investigator on the "Non-Stop Against Apartheid: spaces of transnational solidarity activism" research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust (<http://nonstopagainstapartheid.wordpress.com/>). He has published widely on the geographies of sexualities and social movement activism.

Michael Buser is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments (SPE), Department of Planning and Architecture, at the University of the West of England, Bristol. His research at SPE focuses around three broad themes: community activism and creativity; democracy and neighbourhood governance; and spatial theory.

Michael's current work investigates the notion of cultural activism and the opportunities for activist-led creative practice in local communities. He is particularly interested in notions of resistance, conflict and the pursuit of alternative imaginaries in urban areas. Within this arena, he is PI on a scoping study for the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Connected Communities programme on the topic of cultural activism and place identities.

Alison Crosby is an Associate Professor in the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her work focuses on anti-racist feminist contestations of histories of militarized, colonial, and imperial violence, and in particular, how we understand survivors' multifaceted struggles for voice and subjectivity, and the claiming, narration and performance of memory that challenges the hegemonic. She is currently engaged in three research projects: *Understanding Women's Struggles for Justice, Healing and Redress: A study of gender and reparation in postwar Guatemala*, which is a participatory action research project of which she is the principal investigator, working in collaboration with Professor M. Brinton Lykes from Boston College and the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG) (and funded by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada-SSHRC and the International Development Research Centre-IDRC); *Trauma, Development and Peacebuilding: Towards an integrated psychosocial approach*, a transnational research project headed by Professor Brandon Hamber, director of the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at the University of Ulster (and also funded by IDRC), to which Prof. Crosby and Prof. Lykes are contributing a Guatemala case study for a forthcoming edited volume; and *Understanding Memory through Memorialization: A transnational feminist comparative project*, which is a collaboration with Sri Lankan colleague Dr. Malathi de Alwis. Most recent publications include: (with M. Brinton Lykes), "Mayan women survivors speak: The gendered relations of truth-telling in postwar Guatemala," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (2011, Vol. 5, pp.456-476); and, also with M. Brinton Lykes, "Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research" in *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (Second Edition), edited by Sharlene Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications, 2012).

J-D Dewsbury is a senior lecturer in cultural geography at the School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol. His research centres on the relationship between bodies, affect, technology, habit and plasticity with current research focused upon performance research and performative methodologies; new materialism and emerging ecologies of thought and matter; and the question of politics and subjectivity in the concept of the event in post-continental philosophy. He is bringing much of this work together in a book entitled *Performative Spaces: materiality, events, and subjectivity*.

Lynn Froggett has a cross-disciplinary academic background in the Social Sciences and Humanities and is Professor and Director of Psychosocial Research at the University of Central Lancashire. She is also Professor at The University of Stavanger, Norway and Collaborating Visiting Professor at the University of Roskilde, Denmark. She retains a long-standing interest in public health, welfare and well-being policy and relational practice, but over the last decade a key focus has been on the contribution of the socially engaged arts to human well-being. She has led a succession of empirical research and evaluation projects in clinical, cultural and community settings as diverse as youth justice, museums, hospitals, new model arts institutions, primary care, community organisations, regeneration contexts, schools and festivals. Current projects are concerned with the role of the arts in civic action, cultural renewal and local democracy.

The theoretical and conceptual development from this body of work is cumulative rests on in-depth, hermeneutic, ethnographic, biographical narrative and visual methodologies. It brings together perspectives from the social sciences, the humanities, psychoanalysis and cultural studies. Recent themes of relevance to this seminar have been the relationship between symbolisation and personal or community transformation, the aesthetic function in the internalisation of social structures, the role of illusion and delusion in social change processes, the role of the aesthetic faculty in apprehending complex social phenomena.

Gavin Grindon completed his PhD at Manchester University under Prof. Terry Eagleton and is now postdoctoral research fellow in visual and material culture at Kingston University of London. He has published in the *Oxford Art Journal*, *Third Text*, *Radical Philosophy* and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, and has been involved in a number of art-activist collectives.

Maria Hynes researches and teaches at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Her current research interests include affect and biopolitics, resistance, enthusiasm, matter and plasticity and the relationship between aesthetics, science and ethics. She has published in a variety of journals, including *Parallax*, *Culture Machine*, *Borderlands*, *Fibreculture* and *Continuum*. She has written various articles relating to humour and social, cultural and political change with Scott Sharpe from UNSW@Canberra. She is currently in Bristol as a visiting fellow with the School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol.

M. Brinton Lykes, PhD, is Professor of Community-Cultural Psychology, Associate Director of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice, and Chair of the Department of Counseling and Applied Developmental and Educational Psychology at Boston College, USA. She teaches participatory action research, critical perspectives on race, gender and class, and several human rights and international justice courses and works with survivors of war and gross violations of human rights, using cultural resources, the creative arts and participatory action research methodologies to analyze the causes and document the effects of violence and develop programs that aspire to rethread social relations and transform social

inequalities underlying structural injustices. Her current participatory and action research focuses on migration and post-deportation human rights violations and their effects for women and children, with a particular focus on transnational identities and “mixed-status families” and on sexual violence against women in contexts of armed conflict and post-conflict transition, and on their struggles for truth, justice, healing, and reparations. She has published extensively in refereed journals and edited volumes, edited two books and co-authored two others. Her web site is www2.bc.edu/~lykes

Walter Nicholls is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Amsterdam. He completed his PhD in Urban Planning from UCLA. His main area of research has been the role of cities in social movements. In addition to this, he has recently been studying how undocumented immigrants create powerful political voices in hostile political environments. He has published widely in journals like *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *City and Community*, *Urban Studies*, *Environment and Planning A*, and *European Urban and Regional Research*. The title of his book manuscript on the immigrant rights movement is ‘I Exist’: The Undocumented Youth Movement in the United States.

Dr Paul Routledge is a Reader in Geopolitics at the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow. His research interests focus on critical engagement with social movement struggle in both the Global North (especially Scotland) and the Global South (particularly in South Asia). Paul's research concerns include geopolitics, resistance practices, militant ethnography, climate justice and climate change. He is author of *Terrains of Resistance* (1993, Praeger); co author (with Andrew Cumbers) of *Global Justice Networks* (2009, MUP); and co-editor of *Entanglements of Power* (with Jo Sharp, Chris Philo and Ronan Paddison; 2000, Routledge) and the *Geopolitics Reader* (with Gearoid O Tuathail and Simon Dalby; 1998 & 2006; Routledge). Paul has recently been researching peasant movement responses to climate change challenges and was involved with a range of peasant movements in 2011 in a Climate caravan that conducted popular education workshops throughout Bangladesh.

Dr. Pollyanna Ruiz (BA Liverpool, MA Sussex, PhD Sussex) is a Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her work focuses on the organisational systems which structure alternative and mainstream public spheres and examines the ways in which very differently orientated protest clusters communicate across political difference. She lectures on media and globalisation, the public sphere, political advertising and the alternative media, and has published work in a number of edited collections. Her forthcoming book *Coalition Dissent; Protest and the Public Sphere* will be published by Pluto Press. She is a member of the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies and the Association for Cultural Studies.

Scott Sharpe is a cultural geographer from the School of Physical, Environmental and Mathematical Sciences, at the University of New South Wales at Canberra and until January 2013, a visiting fellow at the School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol. His research investigates the relationship between thinking, the unconscious,

space, matter and politics. In collaboration with Maria Hynes, he has published on alternative means of political action and particularly the functions of humour in affecting social, cultural and political change.

Marilyn Taylor is an Emeritus Professor at the University of the West of England. She is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Voluntary Action Research in London and Visiting Professor at Birkbeck, University of London. She has been involved in research on community development and community participation for many years and currently has a learning advisory role with both the Community Organisers Programme and Big Local. Her book, *Public Policy in the Community*, was published in a second edition in 2011 (Palgrave Macmillan) and in the same year she also published a *Short Guide to Community Development* (Policy Press, 2011) with Alison Gilchrist. She is a Trustee of Involve and Chair of the Advisory Group for the Institute for Volunteering Research, as well as being a member of the NCVO Advisory Council and of the Steering Group for the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy.

Jane Trowell is a member of Platform, an arts and environmental & social justice campaigning group based in London. Jane is an arts educator with a background in curating, and a long involvement with exploring liberatory pedagogies in formal and informal settings. On behalf of Platform she initiated the course for adults "The Body Politic: Social & Ecological Justice, Art, Activism' (2004 - 9) and in 2010 she coordinated the pilot course "Shake! Young Voices in Arts, Media Race & Power" with partners Stephen Lawrence Centre.