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Defining Activism

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Abstract

Activism is defined in this paper as involving local instigations of new series of elements intersecting the actual, generating new collective enunciations, experimentations and investigations, which erode good and common sense and cause structures to swing away from their sedimented identities. By appealing to Spinozism, the paper describes the microphysics of the activist encounter with stable structures and the ways in which activism imposes new regimes of succession of ideas and affective variations in the power of action. Rather than understanding activism as supporting or leading social struggles, the definition of activism pursued here conceives it as an open-ended process and stresses the role of investigation in relation to practices within the social situations to which activism addresses itself.

Keywords: activism, revolution, intervention, encounter, ideas, affects

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name, . . .
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? . . .
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name . . .
(*Romeo and Juliet*, 2, 2, 33–47)

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The proper name, functioning as a colour-line in this dramatic work, creates a dividing gulf—an obstacle that impedes a love—which, for Juliet, can only be fulfilled in the after-life of the name, beyond the violence of the couple's actual subjectivities. Here, Juliet's plea is not a lament, nor a banal cry of grief. It is far more significant; it is a discovery, or better, a rebellion in itself. Two moments are simultaneously involved in it. First, Juliet reproaches the organising function of the name in relation to the pre-personal body—'Tis but thy name that is my enemy: Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.' And second, in order for this reproach to become an active challenge, Juliet urges Romeo to dissent, to 'doff thy name'—to abandon it—demanding that he transcend his own organisation and alter the logic imposed by his name, for the sake of a bastard love. Her affect already recognises that the possibility of a prohibition 'would require *both persons and names*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 161).

Juliet thus asks Romeo to detach his body from the subjective territory of the Montague—'Deny thy father... ' (Reynolds 2009: 50). The two moments expressed here—the discovery of an organisation taking place and the call for action—are united in a critical attitude towards that which suffocates love, which, for the twosome, is really that which suffocates life. However, we must notice that what turns this attitude into an inflective relation to life lies in the relation between these two moments. Juliet's rejection of the organising function of the name in relation to the body—'What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part'—is an invitation to each body part to reclaim its autonomy, and to enter into the transversality of love. Her inquiry makes clear that the opposition to, or negation of, the state of things in the actual ('Tis but thy name that is my enemy') is to be subordinated to an affirmation of life through the potentiality of new assemblages to come, assemblages that halo the actual and are associated with a particular state of things ('without that title...'). What comes first, anyway, if we may speculate, is the positivity of the love running between Juliet and Romeo throughout their encounter.

This is their first affective discovery, which draws them into a search for alternatives. The negation is secondary due to the character of the inquiry: it has the power to make the reader wonder the unthinkable for the sake of performing the impossible love: does an arm, or a face, have a name? What does it mean to change a name? Juliet's inquiry thus creates the idea of another rhythm in which the love might be consummated. In this way her intervention joyfully affects the play, shifting the reader from one degree of reality to another. Here Juliet is, in

a Deleuzian sense, fabulating, hallucinating ‘a couple to come’ (Deleuze 1995: 174). She incites Romeo to depart from the protective world of his own familial fabrications, this time in the Bergsonian sense (cf. Bogue 2006: 202–23).¹ Another idea of love starts to condense throughout the scene, one indicative of an alternative image of the encounter of Juliet and Romeo.

There are three interconnected practical qualities present in Juliet’s radicalism:² a confrontation with a stratifying organisation (the name and its filiative association); a situational engagement (Juliet’s demand for Romeo to engage actively and intervene in his circumstances to produce another sociability, that is, another encounter which might enable their love); and, lastly, an inquiring attitude towards the actual – a militant investigation which eludes the pincers of royal science and its representations (the place of the family in the city of Verona, the tribal prohibitions, and so on). As a necessary step in the creation of new conditions, Juliet interrogates the conditions she wishes to leave. It is from the perspective of the third quality that we should read her enigmatic call at the beginning of the scene, intended to shake Romeo from his familial knot: ‘Wherefore art thou Romeo?’ – a genealogical call asking for reasons, interrogating the processes by which Romeo has come to own and still retains his name. Juliet directs her question towards Romeo’s positioning in the world, interrogating his commitment and obedience to the attachments and stratifications now trapping him in immobility. From this perspective, ‘Wherefore art thou?’ means: ‘What are your reasons for clinging to, in what ways are you committed to, your particular name and your way of life?’ Or, as Deleuze and Guattari might put it: ‘What are your microfascisms, Romeo?’ In other words, Juliet’s speech suggests that we should abandon the organised and patriarchal sense of the state of things (the name) by way of problematising *our relations* with other bodies, ideas and things in their actual state, not in general, but in an encounter within the situation in which they dwell. This calls for a reconsideration of the present composition of such relations. Indeed, ultimately, it is *a call to arms*, a call for new and better encounters – an approach I shall call the activist problematic.

I. Introduction

This brief detour through Shakespeare introduces us to the main focus of this article: to try to develop a conceptualisation of activism, working towards a definition. As we shall see, this will involve a return to the

practical qualities we have just discerned in Juliet's speech. The concept of activism I envisage here is intended to open up what is analysed, making possible further connections and intersections, and bolstering activism itself. Only when we manage to create a productive relationship between the material aspect of the assemblage ('the intermingling of bodies reacting to one another' [Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 88]), on the one hand, and its discursive aspect, on the other, is representation eluded, allowing us to open the actual up to a more transparent relation with the virtual. In other words, activism has to be also present *in* the concept, stirring both thought and action. From this, we can see why there is little interest here either in the investigation of individual motives or in a normative framework. For instance, the psychological and social mechanisms used in political psychology to explain activism in terms of the structure of causality between the individual psyche and the action itself—such as parental inculcation, principled education, political morality, universal moral duty, social altruism, and so on (see, for example, Gross 1997)—in fact explain very little concerning the empirical relationships between bodies and things. Such mechanisms do not account for the body of the activist, the field of action, the assemblages involved, and the multitude affecting and being affected. The tendency of such psychology to search for the origins of political actions in terms of the theorisation of psycho-social motives appears misplaced when we think of the world in terms of fluxes of incessant creation.

Spinozism, as Deleuze contends, 'confers on finite beings a power of existence' that is never exhausted, and which 'bears with it a corresponding and inseparable capacity to be affected, [which is] *always exercised*', in an infinity of ways (Deleuze 1992: 91, 93; emphasis added). In other words, the power of acting is not something to be found in a personality of this or that type, nor necessarily in one specific environment rather than another. More simply,

We can know by reasoning that the power of action is the sole expression of our essence, the sole affirmation of our power of being affected. But this knowledge remains abstract. We don't know what this power is, nor how we may acquire or discover it. *And we will certainly never know this, if we do not concretely try to become active.* (Deleuze 1992: 226; emphasis added)

Instead of theorising incentives, it is better to explore by experimentation that which is already actively varying. Western normative ethics have tried to impose a democratic framework that limits and contains nomadic forms of resistance (the concept and practice of civil society

bear the hallmark of all forms of that containment). But merely by creating distinctions between moral worlds, such normative ethics do nothing to further the exploration and intensification of present activist potentialities.

It is crucial for what follows that we examine the relationship between activism and the concept of revolution. Deleuze and Guattari clarify what revolution means: 'schizophrenising the existing power structure, making it vibrate to a new rhythm, making it change from within, without at the same time becoming a schizophrenic' (Buchanan 2008: 10; Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Therefore, revolution is given in the passage of a structure from rhythm A to rhythm B (the structure changing in the passage), where the structure can that of a social, political or economic system, a system of friendship, an educational system, a household, an individual person, a specific human-animal system (for example bovine slaughter regulations, or practices of species preservation), a field of art, or of any other stable natural or social environment. However, it is important to stress that we are not advocating here a sequential model of revolution, one determined by a telos adopted in advance. As revolutionaries, we always exist in many dimensions, in the midst of that from which we try to escape and struggle against, interwoven with the material we start to experiment with. It is the passage that is revolutionary, not the final arrival at a new rhythm. And yet, activism is not itself that passage of rhythms; rather, it is a temporary sub-rhythm of denunciation, wounding the first rhythm, from which it carves out a becoming into new territories. As Raunig explains, drawing on Holloway's works on the Zapatista movement: 'it is more the first steps into seemingly new terrain, posited on the old terrain, fighting against this old terrain and using it at the same time to transform it into something different' (Raunig 2007: 41-2).

Always starting as a wound of alterity within the habitual, activism refers to that fleeting fraction of encounters and connections still not engaged in the organisation of the second rhythm. If, following Guattari, we conceive the machine as being in opposition to structure (Guattari 1984: 111-20), then we may conceive activism as machinic, that is to say, plugging a movement of deterritorialisation into a territorial assemblage, and thereby activating the territory for further connections (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 333). This causes the assemblage to swing 'between a territorial closure that tends to re-stratify [it] and a deterritorialising movement that, on the contrary, connects [it] with the Cosmos' (337). When activism connects itself to a system, an established relation of forces is distracted, and to some extent diverted into a

far-from-equilibrium state. In other words, we learn from Deleuze that the revolutionary passage occurs when a system is pushed beyond a critical threshold, moving from a state of equilibrium into a state far from equilibrium (see Bonta and Protevi 2004). As an assemblage of encounters pushing the system towards new states, activism is one of the causes bringing about evolution and re-creation within the system. Nothing concerning the success or betrayal of the revolutionary passage is relevant to us here; rather, the focus is on the assemblages of affects agitating stable systems in order to tip them in non-linear directions. As a sign of denunciation, activist practices trace out and map the lines of a society at specific zones—its intensities and boundaries—with a view to grafting an outside onto them. In this way, they become indicative of those zones' new potentialities. By installing themselves in official territories, activist practices thus become the harbingers of a new openness.

There is, however, no dissociative distinction between activism and revolution; rather, activism infuses the concept and practice of revolution with an incessant discomforting movement that helps to protect new revolutionary forms of organisation from the dangers of stratification and its oppressive side effects. In this perspective, activism nurtures revolution, keeping it alive. Here, Raunig's treatment of the concept of the revolutionary machine, used to explore missed concatenations between art and revolution during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, might help clarify the relationship between the two concepts. Following Negri's works from the 1970s, and Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000), Raunig adopts the 'triad model of the revolutionary machine' as comprised simultaneously of insurrection, resistance and constituent power (see Raunig 2007: 25–66). For Raunig, insurrection is the mediating component that concatenates the revolutionary screams of horror—the expression of resistance, and hope—and the expression of constituent power (see 41–8). Immanently, the three components are all present in activism, but the irruptive character of insurrection—its 'temporary flare' (56), compared with the more laborious character of resistance and constituent power—make it a better basis for exploring the relationship between activism and revolution. Contra Raunig, the division he proposes between a time of duration of the permanent molecular revolution (expressed by resistance and constituent power) and a time of rupture (expressed by the event of insurrection) runs the risk of dispensing with the latter when the former is actualised through processes that deepen the fascistic tendencies in the new organisation. Incessant activist ruptures are vital to maintaining a

rhythm of infinite movement in a revolutionary machine. Activism, we might say, is revolution's *conatus*, its tendency or instinct to persevere in its revolutionary power; thus we have a series of activist ruptures within revolutionary processes—the power of creation as constituent power remains faithful to the eternal return of difference, and draws itself away from the entrapments of constituted power. Deleuze and Guattari pointed to the coupling of resistance and constituent power in their treatment of the war machine; opposition, resistance, can engage in revolutionary action '*only on the condition that they simultaneously create something else*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 423).

Although Raunig, as did Hardt and Negri before him, portrays insurrection as essentially spectacular (think the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Kolkhozes, or the Zapatistas), it is possible to understand insurrection as a perceptible act of opposition to a ruling power or habit, without tying it to a Hollywood-style image. For instance, a Bartlebyan moment of refusal is an act of opposition which might infect a state of affairs and develop into an activism,³ whether it occurs in a scrivener's office, in a call for a love, or at home through the forces exerted by a change in posture of a woman's body when a patriarchal tradition is challenged. It is in the insolence and intensity of the challenge posed against constituted power (whatever its form or mode), and its associated way of life, that activism is located, and not necessarily on the barricades or protest marches.

Activism's logic is thus interventionist and operationally hyper-active. First, it latches onto certain zones and injects external forces, causing a differential change in the system. Second, it involves an emphatic attention to life, similar to Bergson's attentive recognition; that is to say, it evaluates each object by causing it to pass through different planes in order to gain a critical appreciation of it; at the same time it frees itself from the distractions of habitual recognition that social systems impose upon us (cf. Deleuze 1989: 44–68).

II. A Second Distinction

For Deleuze, life has an ever-changing problematic structure. Every multiplicity changes its virtual structure by way of actualisations, that is, by passing into temporary solutions (the virtual differentiates itself and becomes different from itself in the process). This brings forth new conditions for the creation of the new in the real (see Smith 2007). Aided by various representational and mystifying machines, patterns and forms hide these processes; further, stratified patterns have the power to

create interests, which in turn force neurotic and paranoiac functions onto desire (see Deleuze and Guattari 1983). As a result, there is a backwash of narrowing our belief in the potentiality of virtual structures. With little belief in the virtuality of life, always interwoven with social obedience, a peaceful and wide zone of sedated individuals is secured. Balibar's Spinozism explains how this passivity is engendered:

When an individual is passive, it is because his soul has been subjugated by the circulation of the affects and by the 'general ideas' that inhabit the collective imagination . . . His body too will have been simultaneously subjugated by the unrestrained influence of all the surrounding bodies. (Balibar 1998: 94–5)

From this passage it becomes clear why activist practices take it to be part of their responsibility to recirculate affects away from the 'general ideas' of a society (or of smaller multiplicities). In so far as, collectively, we vehemently stick to the dominant forms of life (practices and discourses) without any critical intake, we deepen our complicity with the burial of the virtual, as well as with the betrayal of the infinity of life. Activism finds here its most basic function: the unfolding of a Julietian critical engagement with dominant forms of life and their self-reproductive representations – the 'general ideas'. In this sense, activism is that which diverts life from its tendency to eternalise and deepen itself in its actual forms, that which pledges to 'connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 14).

A critical engagement can be deployed at least in two ways, following a distinction between two conceptions of how to revolutionise the world (Colectivo Situaciones 2001: 31). The first is characteristic of traditional leftist politics, which base their political struggles on a yearning to change the world. Here, activism is expressed in the encounter of forces, bodies and things which furthers direct struggles against multiplicities, and in which singularities are perceptibly isolated by agglomerations of the ordinary. In this version, strategically, activism collides with the stable structure, producing a sort of dialectical relation. Theatrically, the subject in this drama is the resulting antagonism. Operationally, it aims at a transformation of the state of things that may amount to a combinatorial view of novelty: 'only little more than the rearrangement of matter in the universe into ever new forms' (Smith 2007: 2).

In contrast, some contemporary forms of escape – those proliferating alternative life-experiences – are not concerned with changing the world, but rather would like 'to produce it anew' (Colectivo Situaciones 2001: 31). These activisms problematise the structure of the existence of the actual form by contemplating and experimenting with the

changing conditions of the new – ‘testing... alternative forms of social organisation’ (Raunig 2007: 60) – bringing about change not in a combinatorial fashion, but in the nature of particular areas of life. By embracing the whole of the real and not only the actual, new singular points are created by changing the multiplicity in question. What is most significant in these sorts of activisms is that resistance is thought and operated not in a dialectical contraposition to constituted power (*potestas*) in a reactive mode; rather, though an unavoidable relation of conflict with constituted power comes into being, resistance here unfolds as immanent difference which draws on the natural force of creation (*potentia*).⁴ From this perspective, Raunig’s distinction between resistance and constituent power appears redundant; the two are not just linked but mutually implicated.

This version of activism multiplies new practices, and in doing so bypasses existent stable practices and their manifestations of oppression.⁵ The first mode of activism assumes that solidifications and closures can be challenged. The second mode leans on the assumption that oppression cannot take on everything; this mode always opens up a reflexive distance that is absent in the first mode. As praxis, the first mode of political activism is reactive, polemical, litigious, and engaged in incessant argumentation. As examples we can think of pressure groups for legislation change, High Court petitions, protests, persuasion campaigns, and so on. The second mode is more quiet but ontologically invasive. Examples include alternative modes of education, promoting new ways of life, rethinking narratives, investigating the conditions of oppression, and so on. Comparing the two versions, we should keep in mind that there is a ‘feedback’ aspect in confrontational activism: challenging a practice or an idea has a nurturing effect.

III. The Functions of Activism

Activism is not a secluded or hidden phenomenon. It is extroverted, involved in the generation of public events. Most activisms I know of take very seriously the repercussions of their actions within the broader society, both locally or/and globally. Many activists publish reports on their practices and experiences, have internet sites, or, more traditionally, distribute printed material to the general public; indeed, it is well known that they are anxious to encourage the public to participate in and attend their discursive dramas.

Ill-advisedly, some forms of activism develop into missionary activity, and sometimes wind-up as messianic. This carries the risk of destroying

the very becoming characteristic of activism. Any presumption on the part of activists to define life in moral terms – instead of understanding their activity as promoting potentialities – functions to homogenise activism and fill the plane of consistency with energy of just one type. This excess then becomes equivalent to a drastic reduction in the potential of bodies, hence the indices of heterogeneity and of transversality are reduced as well. This version of activism, which is unfortunately always present to some extent, generally takes the form of a paranoid reaction to the world on the part of well-defined and determined subjects – ‘the Stalins of the little groups’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 139). The terror they impose, like that of the majoritarian society, is one of reterritorialisation.

What is it that activism brings about? What occurs in the encounter between activist practices (body A) and its spectators (body B)? What can be said of that encounter? We are going to need to anchor off Spinozist shores (*Ethics*, Books II and III). First we need to add to the drama a necessary third body, C, which is that body of stable relations (social, political, educational, cultural, and so on) into which activism taps. We already know that, for most of us and for most parts of our lives, a relation of commitment and obedience is what characterises our relationship to C (B–C).

What activism does, when it acts, is introduce an initial movement of deterritorialisation into the internal relations of body C, forcing a variation in the latter’s relations to the spectators (body B), and in the interim creating a new relation between activism and the spectators. Let us take a simple example to see how the three main bodies may encounter one another in a concrete situation. In Israel, a segregationist educational system (body C) complements a broader structure of social segregation between Jews and Palestinians, citizens of Israel. In 1998, a group of parents (body A) set up an initiative to establish a bilingual, Arabic–Hebrew School in the northern region of the Galilee. Sufficient numbers within the local communities (body B) were enthusiastic enough to join in, and, ultimately, the school named *Galilee* was established and has operated ever since (see Svirsky et al. 2007; Svirsky 2010). In this example, reaching new operational rhythms was bound up with the repressive operations of older rhythms (mainly rooted in an obsession with collective identity).⁶

As the encounter begins to express itself, effects on the different bodies start to circulate, caused by the intermingling of affections between them (affections might include: one’s route home changes because of a demonstration; police repress demonstrators; a class is cancelled by

the student union; humanitarian relief reaches a population under siege; an alternative school building is found; and so on). Following Spinoza's epistemological parallelism, we may say that to every object or thing there corresponds an idea (Deleuze 1992: 113–4). Following the activist encounter then, at least two sorts of ideas are being affirmed on the bodies: ideas that have friction, itself caused by activism as their object, and ideas that have as their objects different aspects of the system of relationships A–B–C. The affections caused by the activist encounter arouse different spiritual and bodily sympathies and antipathies, which are tantamount to the ideas of these affections (attesting to different degrees of compossibility between the bodies in the encounter and their different capacities for being affected). Correspondingly, the power of acting of the bodies involved in the encounter either increases or decreases. Whichever is the case, we are, according to the definition of Spinozist affects, in the presence of a regime of the succession of ideas, which is followed by a variation in the power of action or in the force of existing. Deleuze explains that 'this kind of melodic line of continuous variation' is defined by Spinoza as affect (Deleuze 1978: 3–4). It is not unlikely that the circulation of new passions will be one of the effects of an activist initiative. When faced with the eruption of a new activism, spectators may react with either enthusiasm or anger, or some permutation of the two. But activism makes clear that there is no linear correspondence between such passions and the variation in the power of acting (increase or decrease), since the displeasure or rage triggered by a certain activism may lead ultimately to counter-activism.

The key point here concerns the slide or passage between two different states of ideas in the bodies involved, and, especially, the attitudes of the bodies in respect of the ways they come to perceive the functioning of the stable body C under the activist attack. These perceptions will depend on the ways we understand the activist encounter in its relations both with the social stable body under attack and with us, the spectators; they depend on the kind of ideas we have of these relationships and effects. Though 'our ideas of affections do of course "involve" their own cause, that is, the objective essence of the external body', it is also true that 'as long as I remain in the perception of affection, I know nothing of the [action]'. Thus, my idea of a particular demonstration, of a new school, of a humanitarian aid project, and so on, is only partial, and of the lowest kind in Spinoza's terms, since they only '*indicate* a state of our body' (Deleuze 1992: 146–7; 1978: 6).

What this kind of knowledge creates is an image that only expresses the objects (the activist encounter and the relationships between the

bodies) by their effects on us. How bad are these inadequate ideas for our analysis of activism? Practically speaking, what would it mean for us, as spectators, to have a higher knowledge of causes – that is, to have ‘notion-ideas’ of the activist encounter and to become the cause of our own affects, rather than having merely ‘affection-ideas’ of it? And how might activism help us to move away, at least partially, from the passions that the accidental pattern of the encounter affirms in us? All these questions are important in so far as they contribute to the more general question of how activism approximates the threshold of becoming a project of alternative collective action.

A notion-idea, says Deleuze, ‘no longer concerns the effect of another body on mine, it’s an idea which concerns and which has for its object the agreement or disagreement of the characteristic relations between two bodies’ (Deleuze 1978: 10).⁷ This notion of agreement (and disagreement) between the encountering bodies needs to be seen in light of Deleuze’s account of the Spinozist idea of ‘what a body is capable of’: its significance depends on our efforts to know which affections we and others are capable of, given our society, our culture, our specific historical life, and so on. From the point of view of the notion-idea, drawing up an ethological chart of the compositions of relations seems to be essential for activism. Put simply, this means developing a reasonable knowledge of ‘what a people can bear’ when they are confronted with practices such as those introduced by activism (contrary to what critics may think, this is not necessarily equivalent to developing practices which are in harmony with the actual). What we can bear politically is seen here as linked to what our bodies can do in relation to a specific political issue. Reasonable knowledge leans on the assumption that affecting others joyfully should not be considered a sin for activists. For Spinoza, reason is, after all, a problem of becoming, and self-righteous ‘anti-becoming’ attitudes abound among activists. This question of reasonable knowledge takes us back to Juliet’s investigation of the conditions for a new, more agreeable encounter with Romeo. And the idea of investigation being part of activist practice leads us on to what has been implemented lately by activists and researchers as *militant research* (see Biddle et al. 2007; Malo de Molina 2004; Benasayag and Sztulwark 2000). As defined in 2009 by the Collective ‘Precarias a la Deriva’ (Madrid), militant research is a process of re-appropriating our own capacity for *world-making*, which questions, problematises and pushes the real through a series of concrete procedures. More forcefully, for the Argentinean ‘Colectivo Situaciones’, activism is not about leading or supporting struggles but about dwelling actively in

the situation—investigating it—with a view to the emergence of an alternative sociability (Colectivo Situaciones 2001: 37). The first premise of activist militant research is that there is no global knowledge on how things should be; rather, activism entails an engagement in the production of situational or local knowledge. This is why the activist-machine is a paradigmatic case of learning in Deleuze's sense—a constant experimentation of the discordant exercise of the faculties disconnected from every form of identity (cf. Deleuze 1994: 164–7).

In terms of how this might be done, organising protests on behalf of the rights of weakened groups, or filming their experiences to gain sympathy (or prizes), is not enough. What is needed is the combination of activist research with populations experiencing alternative sociabilities (Colectivo Situaciones 2001: 38).⁸ Here resides one of the major differences between investigation-based activists and classical civil society NGOs, which tend to adopt an a priori agenda for change. It is not that regular acts of protest lack any significance; rather, the claim here is that they cannot be seen as the focus of revolutionary action. The situational production of knowledge should be seen in direct relation to the difference between changing the world and creating it anew, with revolutionary activism being committed to the latter.

It is true that the activist-machine 'kills the joy' (Ahmed 2009) of those fearing the effects of the activists' revolutionary horizon on their peaceful life and privileges. In so doing, activism necessarily undermines solidarity. But producing unhappiness cannot be activism's goal or sense. Although sadness inevitably accompanies every activism—even those supporting the action may feel 'local sadness' (Deleuze 1978: 9)—it is hard to see the point to causing sad affects in others. We already know one of the activist's bad habits: to induce in us sadness and resentment as the necessary preparation for forming a critical attitude which will make us politically active.⁹ But there is no good reason to look for such bad encounters as a matter of strategy (tactical bad encounters might be considered circumstantially, assuming an awareness of their destructive effect on all bodies involved). '[N]othing in sadness... can induce you from within sadness to form a notion common to something which would be common to the bodies which affect you with sadness and to your own' (11). At times, as activists, we feel the urge 'to make things clear' to help people to understand a particular issue by engaging in radical action, as if they are in need of a brighter light in their life. But pure intensity does not necessarily lead to a good encounter: 'a blue that is too intense for my eyes will not make me say it's beautiful' (14).

From a Spinozist ethical perspective then, working towards a level of strategic knowledge concerning the ways bodies A, B and C can be mutually affected goes hand in hand with the need to ‘organise encounters’ as ‘the effort to form an association of men in relations that can be combined’ (Deleuze 1992: 261). The incredible amount of time activists spend on articulating ideologies will count for little if their practices are separated from a strategy that includes, at least partially, entering into joyous participation with others – meaning, pursuing compossible relations with them. Activism’s role is not to secure that compossibility, but to open up and remain open to its potentiality.

Let us move on to another of activism’s functions. The inadequate idea brought forth by the affections between the bodies involved in the activist encounter has two sides: ‘they “involve privation” of the knowledge of their cause, but are at the same time effects that in some way “involve” that cause’ (Deleuze 1992: 149). The second aspect, explains Deleuze, contains something positive, indispensable for the passage into adequate ideas, which is, in fact, the power of thinking, or what is enabled in the first instance by the faculty of imagination (149–50). This natural condition not only leads to the conceptualisation of the passage into common notions, but also means that we might have a multiplicity of several and different affection-ideas – inadequate ideas. Reacting to an activist action, we might form a specifically fearful image of a particular intervention as the result of becoming affected with anger. But, in addition, the intermingling of affections in the activist encounter also actualises the formal idea of the revolution. Whichever of the affects it arouses, the variation of affection-ideas caused by the activist encounter involve a sort of ‘background noise’ – a singular range of frequencies of perceptions – involving an idea (inadequate as it might be) of a ‘people to come’ hovering above and intersecting with activist practices. In other words, given that ‘the ideas we have are signs, indicative images impressed in us’ (147), we are claiming that the disrupting action of activism imprints in us a hallucinating sign which indicates the formal presence of a revolution. This is why we said before that activism is not itself the revolutionary passage of rhythms in a structure, but only announces that passage’s potential existence. It is apparently to this feature of activism that Appadurai directs his words:

The imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work ... and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ... and globally defined fields of possibility ... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact ... [it] is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape. (Appadurai 1996: 31)

This function of activism stands in relation with the other, that of striving for the formation of common notions. Though causing bad encounters for many, for the 'background noise' not to become dead noise and activism not to be washed away, activism needs to avoid creating an excess of the unhappiness it inevitably causes. For example, when activists clash with the institutional forces responsible for raising separation walls (the Berlin Wall, the West Bank wall, and so on), they still need not to overlook the idea or possibility of more agreeable encounters taking place between the segregated bodies.

IV. Method

The life of an activist is marked by a sense of urgency, anxiety and alertness to a life under attack. It involves both a type of discomfort with the world, and a life-force seeking out the new; activism is therefore in and of itself turbulent and restless. It threatens our neat and secure life. It is the pure form of terror. This is perhaps why the drama of activism can be so annoying for spectators, and so dangerous for activists.

To describe activism's machinations I turn to Deleuze's theory of the series, as formulated in *The Logic of Sense* (1990). The claim here is that every activist-machine working in a particular zone of social, cultural or political action comes into being through the creation of a new series of interconnected elements as a result of alternative connections with (a) given registers of the actualised world, and (b) new imaginations. The new series engendered by the activist-machine never isolates itself, but rather aims at producing a communication of divergence with a specific official series within a particular zone of thought and action. This is analogous to a situation in which, suddenly and without warning, we introduce a new set of actors from among the audience or the street, to become an integral part of a performance on stage – or, if you prefer, we add an entirely new deck into the middle of a card game, or bring on a third team during a football game. In all of these instances a new game is created; by dissolving the former rules we bring new connections to bear upon the large conjunctions to which subjects and objects are currently in thrall, thereby changing the structure of the game. Once such a connection between the series has been established, a disjunctive and productive movement of distancing between the old and the new series appears, certain modes of excess start to circulate, and, finally, new products and flows come into play.

For example, when the State of Israel, its governments and its Jewish majority insist upon referring to Israel as ‘The Jewish State’, they are appealing to a certain associated series of elements in order to affix a certain symbolic meaning to a structure that is ‘haunted by a desire for eternity’ (Guattari 1995: 37): Jewish-State-the-Biblical-Land, Jewish-State-Holocaust-European-debt, Jewish-State-the-few-against-the-many, Jewish-State-agricultural-revolution, Jewish-State-stretching-out-its-hand-in-peace, Jewish-State-the-only-democracy-in-the-Middle-East, and so on. Conversely, when activist groups in Israel/Palestine articulate the name of Israel with other elements that are ‘shaped by a desire for abolition’ (37) – such as Israel-Nakba, Israel-segregation-apartheid, Israel-Gaza-strip-blockade, Israel-the-West-Bank-the-Wall, Israel-discrimination-Arab-minority, Israel-militarism, and so forth – they are in fact appealing to an alternative series of real relations implicating the state’s name. This second series attaches itself to the first series by implanting a differential correspondence between the respective elements of the series, thereby creating disequilibrium. As José Gil has pointed out, the true machine of innovation in Deleuze’s thinking of the event is the disjunction as the synthetic movement of divergent terms (Gil 2008: 18). There is an excess of one series over the other through their common interface, in this case with the name of Israel functioning as the Empty Square, and enabling ‘indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 348).

Through the activist interlacement of a new series, a paradox is introduced: ‘Paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities’ (Deleuze 1990: 3). This being the case, we can understand why, today, both Zionists and their critics sense a certain discomfort when appealing to the name of the Jewish state. This forced encounter between the two series, instigated by activism, redefines the trajectory of the name of Israel – approximating this name to its problematic actualisations. From the activist-machine perspective, a straightforward proposition such as: ‘It is the Jewish state that is oppressing, segregating and committing war-crimes’ changes something in the way the struggle is expanded upon, since new, real connections and relations are being claimed.

The question, in the case of Israel and its name, becomes not whether Israel must be recognised as a Jewish state, but what this name expresses in terms of actual experiences and virtual potentials. In this respect, Derrida’s treatment of the name of apartheid might

be worth quoting, interspersed with references to the Middle-Eastern analogy:

Those in power in South Africa [Israel] have not managed to convince the world, and first of all because, still today, they have refused to change the real, effective, fundamental meaning of their watchword: apartheid [the Jewish state]. A watchword is not just a name... is also a concept and a reality... [They]... wanted to keep the concept and the reality, while effacing the word, an evil word, *their* word. They have managed to do so in *their* official discourse, but that's all. Everywhere else in the world... people have continued to think that the word was indissolubly – and legitimately – welded to the concept and to the reality. (Derrida 1986: 163)

In the past, Derrida urged the world to call a thing by its name with regard to South African apartheid. In contrast with Juliet's plea, calling Israel by its preferred name 'will remain the "unique appellation" of this monstrous, unique, and unambiguous thing' (Derrida 1986: 159). By calling the thing by its name, while imposing a *contretemps* upon it, this part of the actual loses its grip on recent identifications. This is where we face the polyphony of the naming-function. On the one hand, in *Romeo and Juliet*, 'the proper name, when assigned to people, functions to consolidate... the subjective territories of individuals within a given society, that is, within an official culture' (Reynolds 2009: 48). On the other hand – as in the case of the names of the apartheid and the Jewish state: 'the naming-function provides a counter-tactic by which to undermine societies' mechanisms of control and surveillance' (280).

The connection between the two series of elements instigated by activism forges a new space of relations and a new structure in which a problematisation of social and political issues is brought to the fore. The connection – or *ligação* in Gil's terms – is what creates 'a critical distance between members of the same species' by introducing variation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 322). We are now in a position to dare to offer an alternative reading to the famous 'Lodge yourself' passage in *A Thousand Plateaus* (161): investigate; create an alternative series of elements having new visual, audible and material elements; investigate-experiment. Then, by making connections, this series should intersect the dominant series at different points; investigate-experiment. You will be overwhelmed by the apparition of new images and affections, and, as a result, a reconsideration of life becomes inevitable.

Notes

1. As Bogue explains, for Bergson, fabulation is a protective shield (against social dissolution) which 'goes hand in hand with religion in creating the myths of forces, myths, and deities that foster social cohesion and individual contentment' (Bogue 2006: 205). In Shakespeare's play, familialism takes the place of religion.
2. I follow here the way the Argentinean Colectivo Situaciones (2001) explain their perspective on *Contrapoder* ('counter-power'). For Benasayag and Sztulwark (2000), the contemporary *Contrapoder* is expressed by creative and constructionist struggles that are not derived from sadness and do not rely on models or seek central power. Rather, they produce an anti-systemic subjectivity and are situational in their operation.
3. To appropriate Bartleby beyond this point will be futile, since Bartleby, as Deleuze explains, 'is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him' (Deleuze 1997: 74). As such, Žižek's (2006) Bartlebyan politics—premised upon an essential movement of subtraction from the hegemonic system which both guarantees an outside and allows one to criticise contemporary forms of what he defines as pseudo-resistance – as well as Hardt and Negri's (2000) take on Bartleby as the iconic anti-Empire work-refusnik – are both excesses of interpretation (cf. Beverungen and Dunne 2007), desperate formalisations of Bartleby.
4. As Raunig explains, in *Foucault* (2006), 'Deleuze makes the point that a social field offers resistance before it is organised according to strategies' (Raunig 2007: 53). In Hardt and Negri's register, 'resistance is prior to power'.
5. Oppression here is understood as the oppression of creative processes. Aiming at the ontological conditions of creation, oppression is infinite stratification, i.e. the accumulative spatialisation, homogenisation and quantification of duration. Oppression is a natural tendency, the twin of creative processes. In its social register, oppression mystifies stratification using the logic of representation. It occurs everywhere, including throughout activist initiatives.
6. This means that the idea that a revolutionary initiative can construct itself in isolation from the 'general society' in a separate territory is a short-term illusion. I have explained elsewhere how *Galilee*, as an intercultural assemblage, is being thrown back into the dichotomies of ethnicity just because it doesn't confront properly the fact that *potestas* can't be ignored (see Svirsky 2010).
7. To clarify: the affection-idea is associated with the effects of the mixing of bodies in the encounter, whereas the notion-idea is associated with the degree of agreement or disagreement of the characteristic relations of the bodies.
8. Since their appearance in the late 1990s, Colectivo Situaciones have made several interventions-investigations with different groups, such as with 'escraches-groups' (actions aimed at unmasking mainly individuals involved in the last Argentinean dictatorship), with Tupamaros (a revolutionary movement that emerged in Uruguay during the 1960s), and with the 'Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados de Solano' (a movement of the unemployed in the locality of Solano). For an extensive list of their activities and their published literature see: <http://www.situaciones.org>
9. Sometimes activists are not that different from Spinoza's priest or despot, who needs the sadness of his audience and their feelings of guilt in order to influence them. But sadness can only diminish our power of acting.

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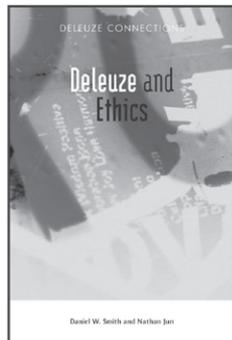
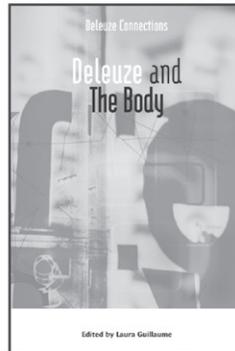
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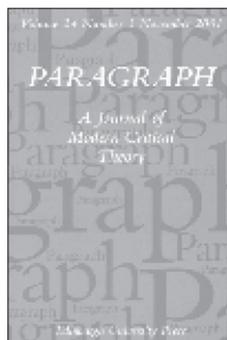
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