

Special issue in activism and protest with(out) organization

Introduction

The eight papers published in this second issue of “Protest and activism with(out) organization” explore many of themes and narratives captured in the first issue, and extend these in new and important directions. Importantly, as well as continuing to engage with the diverse types of activism and protest that seek to enable new opportunities of social and environmental justice to take root within “human society,” there are persuasive appeals for more intersectional forms of activism to take root; activism which takes seriously both non-human animals and more-than-human worlds. Elsewhere, the need for individuals to be acutely aware of the specific contemporary socio-spatial configurations of oppression and injustice (particularly at the local level) is emphasized, as is the argument that injustice can be better challenged by encouraging more bespoke forms of individual and collective forms of action into being. Indeed, the reader will also be encouraged to recognize the benefits of stepping back from “the present,” and trying to better understand the historical lessons of activism, protest and organization. While not fetishizing history/ies of activism and organization, and thereby neglecting the unique and unprecedented opportunities and challenges of the here and now, important arguments are made to demonstrate how this knowledge and awareness can be applied and adapted in useful and meaningful ways.

Another central theme that runs strongly throughout the special issue is thinking carefully about “means” and “ends” of academic research in this context. How can researchers be confident that (we) are harnessing the most suitable methodology/ies and methods that will empower, engage and represent the protestors/protest movements that we desire to learn more about? Many authors are highly conscious of the complex identities, and ethical concerns, that come with the territory of the “academic-activist.”

Given this critical, and under-explored dynamic it is pleasing to see new insights and experiences being shared in this special issue. How have author(s) (successfully) negotiated access to activist groups, for example, and, as importantly, how has their positionality informed their approach to analyzing, writing up and presenting their findings within the conventions and expectations of a published article. Hopefully these reflections will encourage “good” or “innovative” practice to be made elsewhere, and speak directly to other academics who desire to work with – and indeed within – similar activist groups or organizations in future.

As a final note, in addition to going some way to capturing the tremendous depth and complexity of protest and activism that emerges both with and without organization (or indeed operating on a spectrum between these two polar ends), we really hope that each this special issue will inspire new activist imaginaries around what is possible, enactable and desirable in future. In that sense we would strongly encourage the papers to be framed as part of broader, complex, creative – and possibly beautiful – conversations and visions about how to bring forward the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental world(s) we most desire. If the contents of the special issue offer something tangible for people to approach the problems that we face in the world (as human beings, activists, academics and so on) then it will have gone a long way to realising the potential we had hoped for, back in 2015 when we first sat down and wrote out the initial call for papers.

Contents: second issue in activism and protest with(out) organization

Guest editorial

The opening paper in this second issue is “Organisation and formal activism: insights from the anarchist tradition.” Here Federico Ferretti examines some of our foundational (though perhaps unexamined) ideals and expectations of “organization” in politics. Through a thorough examination of anarchist writings, Ferretti details anarchism’s use and endorsement of organization. In a direct response to those who would depict anarchism as chaotic or opposed to organization, he documents a long history of explicit discussion of political and social organization among anarchists, including Kropotkin, Reclus, Fabbri and Malatesta. Ferretti’s contribution here broadens the spectrum of what “organisation” means and looks like in practice, and strengthens our appreciation of social organization and prefigurative practices, if we do not privilege formal institutions in our analyses.

The second paper is “Consensus and activism through collective exchanges: a focus on *El Cambalaches*, Mexico” by Erin Araujo. At the heart of the paper lies Araujo’s inspiring – and instructive – research into how people in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, (learn to) organize for autonomy through a small moneyless economy called *El Cambalache*. The paper draws timely reference to the diverse economies (and degrowth) literature which, in rejecting a capitaliocentric reading of “the economic,” opens up new future visions of work and community organization, embedded with social justice and environmental sustainability. Within this context, Araujo is particularly keen to critically explore the rules and structure of solidarity work in practice, and how actors and networks in both horizontal and other non-hierarchical relationships organize to share, support and exchange. A number of challenging questions are addressed, including: what challenges or barriers do individual and the community face; how are these addressed and resolved? What possible new opportunities and critical spaces are created by resisting, and organizing in and through non-hierarchical relationships?

Ophélie Véron, in “(Extra)Ordinary activism: veganism and the shaping of heterotopias,” employs her extensive research into veganism in France to demonstrate the effectiveness of everyday, ordinary and interpersonal activism. She counters the biases in the literature on social movements that favours mass mobilization and collective and/or direct action, with a detailed account of several interwoven activities at different scales and in different spaces, by individuals and groups with loose but supportive organization. Building on anarchist frames that emphasize prefigurative politics, praxis and the here and now, Véron introduces the idea of “hemerotopia,” to describe alternative even revolutionary spaces that are not in situated in an extraordinary time or place, but in everyday, banal activities. In this, she encourages deeper thinking into the ways in which everyday life and activism are implicated in each other.

Next we move to the Czech Republic, where Pavol Frič and Martin Vávra explore the decline, since the late 1990s, in formal membership in civil society organizations (CSOs) and the rise of “freelance activists.” In their article, “Czech civil sector face to face with freelance activism,” Frič and Vávra analyze a strong data set of a large, representative survey and in-person interviews. Sorting CSOs by type, and activists by acts, motivations and demographic characteristics, they are able to distill several relationships that indicate competition among modes of activism. Although freelance activists make use of the institutional structures of CSOs, and are likely to also be member activists, the role of CSOs as “schools of democracy” is dubious. Interestingly, Frič and Vávra do not find significant differences along gender lines or age, suggesting

the move to freelance activism is not a generational shift. Nevertheless, a decline in membership as well as trust in CSOs is clearly occurring, which suggests, contra Offe, that formal social and political organizations are not being replaced by new social movements but by a much less formal collectivism.

The next paper is “Finding the movement: the geographies of social movement scenes.” Here Kimberley Creasap draws on rich ethnographic research focused on the autonomous movement scenes in the two major Swedish cities, Stockholm and Malmö. Focusing on the significant socio-spatial consequences of the uneven process of gentrification, the paper call on the reader to consider how this impacts on the ability to open up, or close down, social movement scenes. Drawing attention towards how activism is organized and shaped according to local political, cultural and geographic influences, an engaging and insightful narrative around the specificity of social movements emerges. The impact of gentrification, interpreted as part of a wider privatization of public space, results in increasingly precarious and fragile nature of social movement scenes, and thus becomes an important site of agitation, contestation and protest.

In “Start your own revolution: agency and action of the Riot Grrrl movement,” Caroline Kaltefleiter builds on her previous work as well as her own experiences in Riot Grrrl. In this paper, she argues that world politics and social justice, particularly anti-war activism, were important aspects of the movement, but these have been largely ignored to date. Focusing on the work of the punk performance artist Exene Cervanka, she highlights the explicit positions taken by Riot Grrrl on geopolitics, housing and homelessness, and reproductive rights. Kaltefleiter’s study brings out the significance of feminist, horizontalist, creative associations for the development of political philosophy and praxis, and their continued influence on anarchist groups and other social justice movements in the present.

Alessandra Rosa’s paper, “Affective strategies used by student activists as the University of Puerto Rico is under siege,” documents largely spontaneous, site-specific activism on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico in 2010 and 2011. Two back-to-back extended strikes by students in response to tuition rises and the police siege of the camps were initiated by a small group, but quickly blossomed into something greater when the response of fellow students was significantly greater than expected. Rosa’s particular interest is the way in which students’ commitment to a prolonged and difficult action was sustained through effective use of affective language and imagery. As Rosa notes, there is still much to explore in the role of emotions within social movements; her mid-mobilization research here makes a strong contribution to our understanding of the tactical role of emotions, as well as the inter-relationship of in-person and internet communications.

The eighth and final paper, “Convergence as organization: blockup against the ECB” is co-authored by Bjarke Risager and Yannick Nehemiah Harrison. The paper begins by focusing on the efforts (on March 18, 2015) of the transnational Blockupy coalition to block the inauguration ceremony of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. Noting the creative, experimental and spontaneous dynamics within street-based forms of protest and organization, the paper argues that mainstream organizational theories fail to capture the complex realities of organization evident within these mass protest events. The desire to go beyond mere critique though, and suggest better ways of thinking and exploring these contemporary forms of activist organization, leads to a new theoretical framework being proposed. This framework is then held up against the experiences of the Blockupy 18M coalition, which is illustrated by some excellent

primary research drawn from participant observation and in-depth interviews with activists. The implications of this are fully considered in the conclusions to the paper, which ends with a range of important and searching questions of great relevance both for further academic discussion, and for the individual activist(s) alike. Guest editorial

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