Notes on Affective Practice

An Exchange

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SARAH KANOUSE & HEATH SCHULTZ

ON DRIFTING ADRIFT - SARAH KANOUSE (SEK)

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

I am adrift. I am going to Detroit to attend the US Social Forum, a gathering of social movements, at a time when I feel less a part of a movement than ever in my adult life. I am joining a group of friends who have experiences and make projects together. Some of our experiences and projects talk about social movements, though we are not ourselves one. We call ourselves various things and let others call us Compass, as if we know which way is North. We came together almost four years ago in response to the geographical vastness of the American Midwest—as territory where many of us with ties to Chicago found ourselves scattered about for work or family, living in towns where we felt isolated and lived with a sense of restricted political possibility. We began to drift together, influenced both by Guy Debord and Precarias a la Deriva, as a way of experiencing how power is distributed and generated in space, even in the oft-derided and misunderstood Midwest. We drift to counter our sense of isolation—which we sense is shared by others—and to link broadly resistant practices across time and scales. Each year, we also

hold a retreat (perhaps better described as a stationary drift) and come together for three or four days to talk about culture and politics, support each other in our work, imagine collective projects, and strengthen the friendship bonds between us. Drifting is one of our methods of place-based research, and in the summer of 2010 we are practicing it, in small groups, on our way to converge in Detroit. We have invited others going to the Social Forum to do the same, and we plan on sharing our experiences and discussing our methods when we get there.

I am drifting, adrift. No matter how much we talk about drift as method, no matter how powerful the bonds of affection become between us on these trips—not just between spouses and lovers and children but also between friends—there remains a sour note. Something in the ecstatic feeling of travel together remains shiftless, rootless, and untrustworthy. Maybe that is part of its charm. We show up in the middle of the night at run-down motels. We burn hundreds of gallons of gasoline extracted from the Alberta tar sands whose pipeline system my small family is tracing in this particular drift. We sneak photographs out the passenger window and poach wireless in the parking lots of a better class of hotels. In Detroit, I encounter women from a neighborhood organization fighting the construction of a refinery to convert tar sands oil into the gasoline that I will burn in my car as I drive home. They are neither drifting nor adrift, and they don't need me to articulate the tar sands' spatial politics or elucidate the relationship between the micro and the macro of petroleum production. But if given a chance to contribute full-time to the "front lines" of a movement, to become "embedded" in a specific place and campaign, I am pretty sure I would shy away. In the United States, there are relatively few examples of militant research—the situated, collective knowledge production that animates social movements and enhances a collective capacity for political imagining.[1] The term itself originated in a particular context—the Argentinean crises of the early 2000s—and can only in its broadest outlines be applied to an American context of political fragmentation, professionalization of activism, and the containment of so-called radical intellectuals in the academy.[2] It's not just that it is very difficult to work in this way (though it certainly is); it's also that many people in the Compass come from an art background in which debates over the wisdom of committing to a cause versus leveraging art's traditional (if largely mythic) autonomy for critical ends still provoke heated debate. In my context in the American Midwest, there is something I trust about my untrustworthy drifting; it is just hard to articulate what it is and far easier to recognize what it lacks.

I find myself making a few allegations, phrased as rhetorical questions. Who is the drift, not to mention the winter retreats, ultimately for? What do they really produce? We call it "drifting," acknowledging a debt to the intellectual-

and-affective, embodied inquiry of Situationist psychogeography. Could critiques of the avant-garde apply to us, as well? In describing the drift as a research method, am I indulging in the timeworn, avant-garde arrogance that my conversations with my friends, my experiments in living, my attempts to understand the world represent an earth-shattering break with capitalism and present some kind of grand model for others to follow?

Though the group has called for a "longer, slower, deeper" engagement with geography and the infrastructures of transnational capitalism, we rarely spend more than a few days in any place and often no more than an afternoon. While the conversations we have may be meaningful and the observations perhaps astute, they are limited, and not just in an "all knowledge is partial and contingent," post-structuralist sort of way. The duration of our engagement allows some impressions to be gathered but prevents the slow filtering of multiple, contradictory streams of information that staying in a place over a longer time, say months or years, might permit. From time to time, we visit places in the Midwest that point to liberatory, sustainable futures and are inspired by what we find. Later, speaking to friends who work full-time in areas in which we only dabble (permaculture, natural building, local food systems) sometimes uncovers wildly divergent points of view about the same people and places. By dropping in for a day or week, we may see only what we are primed to see and what our local hosts and guides would like to show.

If this critique sounds familiar, it should. Tourism has been discussed and criticized in strikingly similar terms. By trying to knit together a Midwest Radical Culture Corridor, these drifts perhaps romanticize and exoticize those we visit as much as heritage parks and living history museums do for more mainstream tourists. How different is it, really, that my romantic exotic is comprised of cooperative solar energy systems, barter economies, and homemade aquaculture tanks? My ability to sustain a belief in these efforts is bolstered by my mobility: shielded from the often discouraging and mundane details of day-to-day operations, I am free to remain "inspired." That this sort of mobility is largely an artifact of both class and race privilege is so obvious as to seem beneath comment. It helps explain why most of us on these drifts have graduate degrees, faculty positions, or neo-bohemian lives of voluntary (and mostly gentle) poverty. Our privileged mobility parallels the mobility of capital that produced the rust-belt cities, megafarms, and supply chains we trace in an attempt to know. It also parallels the mobility of international charity that operates on a similar economy of distanced inspiration, as the invitations to join expensive service trips for Yale alumni to destitute-but-safe countries and end-of-year fundraising appeals by various NGOs now crowding my inbox remind me.

If this critique seems rather damning, it certainly feels that way to me, and it's leveled against myself most often. But it also feels too easy, absolute, and disabling. It makes me feel helpless in my sadness and isolation, and guilty in turn for feeling impotent. Like many discussions of privilege by people on the American left, it remains mired in a zero-sum, almost Catholic identity politics whereby privilege is a sin to be disavowed and expiated at all costs. Compass friends Maribel Casas-Cortés and Sebastián Cobarrubias recently wrote, "the category of privilege can limit the potential activities or alliances of social movements, or dismiss those that already exist."[3] They suggest that a more helpful approach might be to remain conscious of how privilege operates while considering how the *subject positions* it produces might be used. This "non-categorical politics" demands a rigorous practice of inquiry, action, and self-reflection, ideally connected to concrete political activity but also calling into question the constitution of subjectivities and experiences. "By attending to the microscopic elements of everyday life, research can connect with people's experiences, allowing for mutual recognition and the discovery of previously unthinkable combinations and possibilities."[4] In other words, what do our distinct positions within interlocking systems of oppression, capitalization, and socialization enable us to experience, think, know, and do? What do our sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping positions allow us to occupy, subvert, and create?

This shift of emphasis from privilege to position accomplishes several important tasks. First, it makes visible the ways that mobility is not a function of privilege but rather a function of the capitalist present, which distributes forms of mobility unequally according to privilege. People and forces with different positions within the capitalist present experience and use mobility in different ways. Some of them are exploitative, others libratory, but all are intellectually and politically productive. Second, it favors a dialectical approach over the dichotomy of inside/outside on which conventional forms of tourism—as well as disabling identity politics—are based. If tourism traditionally functioned to create a field of the exotic other against which one's own culture might be better understood, thinking positionally suggests that these relationships are multi-dimensional, overlapping, shot through with contradiction, and in constant motion. The form of mobile research that the drift represents is therefore, in part, an attempt to understand our own positions in *dialogue* with others' subjectivities and *as part of* broader institutions and infrastructures, rather than in *distinction* to them. Finally, this recognition of position within systems and dialogue among individuals also differentiates our form of drifting from a neo-avant-garde emphasis on alienation, distance, and shock.

Thinking about the drift this way, those questions I ask myself become less rhetorical and accusatory and more straightforward. What is ultimately produced by our drifting? That's a very fair question, and trying to answer it

may also answer the broader concerns about the drift-as-method. We know our drifts and gatherings create affection, most durably among ourselves but also for and with those we encounter and visit. They help us overcome isolation and sadness and give us the capacity to care more for ourselves and the world. We believe drifting produces knowledge, however incomplete, of social and economic systems as manifest and contested by localized efforts. We hope it initiates relationships, however tenuous, between ourselves and the places and people we meet on our travels. Rather than making some grandiose claim for this method, or dismissing it as self-indulgent and lazy, can the love, knowledge, and relationships we know we build be recast as something meaningful and politically necessary, if necessarily incomplete?

THINKING THROUGH SADNESS - HEATH SCHULTZ (HS)

I'm really sad. But saying I'm sad doesn't quite cut it. Sad, depressed, fearful, bored, anxious, ambivalent, lonely, and discouraged gets closer to how I feel.

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

I experience profound isolation in off-the-beaten-track Iowa, an isolation exacerbated by the loneliness of life in the University. I spend most of my time necessarily magnetized to my job as a teacher and as a student, bending my psyche to its limit, punishing and straining any remaining optimism, will, or happiness. As is the case with many jobs, I spend much of my time performing useless, bureaucratic, time-sucking labor. Like most affective laborers, I'm consistently overworked. As a student, I'm constantly consuming irrelevant or neutered material that is severed from any real political engagement. This, of course, makes more meaningful work, engagements, and relationships increasingly strained, strung-out, scatter-brained, and frail. I express these sentiments to my peers and they nod in agreement.

If we were able spend half as much time as we currently spend on these entaglements on friendship, love, or politics, I wonder if we might be less depressed. The investments of our energies, whether political, psychological, or libidinal, are forced into zones from which I want to escape. I want to direct these energies elsewhere, somewhere with potential, possibility, vision, and feeling.

Italian theorist and activist Franco "Bifo" Berardi defines emotion as the "meeting point between body and cognition: a bodily elaboration of information that is reaching our mind."[5] As such, we should expect our culture to be one of isolation and lack of intimacy. Our skin only ever touches the keyboard, our eyes scan e-mails, our hands work the assembly line, our minds rehearse our anxieties, and our bellies are full of corn syrup. Given this situation, our political depression, our sadness, should not surprise us.

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

Thus, I want to express an open, polyvocal sadness in order to build a language that can articulate this political depression. I want to recognize this sadness as something we must both activate and with which we must cope. Ignoring it does us no good. Sadness, depression, anger, anxiety, and ambivalence are all energies, which is to say that they are in movement and thus constitute a kind of force. Perhaps their force is destructive. I think you have already illustrated this when you spoke above of your sadness and paralysis in relation to privilege and its critique. But my questions are these: how can we externalize these psychic-emotional states into political gestures? And how do these gestures become shared emotions that circulate between us, forming the basis for collective movement?

Following Feel Tank Chicago, I *sense* that there can be a better sociality, a finer way of living. We have no blueprint only a "visceral intelligence," attracting and repelling us toward and away from general directions. We know that "visceral impulses are bound up in culture. We know that emotions, like thoughts, are cultivated."[6] Thus, it would seem, there is a need for research that recognizes the importance of both sensation and intellect and attempts to cultivate a visceral intellect.

Let's cultivate new emotionalities, new loves, new friendships, and new networks of mutual-aid. But let's also identify, and withdraw from, those psychic burdens which seep into our bodies and minds, dampening these efforts.

Let's have more contact. Let's touch our feet to the land, our hands to skin, our lips to lips, our mouths to ears.

We need to use our energies to build communal and relational ties. We need to "invest" our energies in the realms of the affective and the intimate. This is necessarily a political act, as we will be forced to steal back our time and energies from all our disciplinary engagements. This is necessary if we

seek a finer, more sustainable, livelihood. It is *not* simply an act of leisure. *We are not interested in a vacation.*

WORKING THROUGH LEISURE (SEK)

Maybe we are not *only* interested in a vacation, but the fact remains that what we do sometimes looks an awful lot like one. It's also a fact that people in the US aren't taking nearly enough of them. Both worker productivity and hours worked have been going up for years, with attendant stressors on physical and emotional health, familial relationships, and involvement in social and communal organizations.[7] I speak from firsthand experience. Internationally, recent economic austerity measures in nearly-bankrupt European countries like Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain have involved reducing public investments, wages, and benefits for the employed while cutting unemployment benefits to the involuntarily jobless. Similar measures are being proposed across the US. There is a structural imbalance between the overworked on the one hand and the unemployed on the other, one that contributes to the political depression you describe above. If everywhere 'free' time is under attack, taking a vacation might not be so terrible, after all. That's maybe where we want it to start, but not where it ought to end.

Despite a relative flourishing of recent scholarship, Left discourse on affective, relational, embodied, non-work experiences remains underdeveloped compared to the analysis of waged and domestic labor. Much of what is out there, including a range of classic texts, is critical—calling our attention to tourism as a rite of social class membership, the transformation of free time into a commodity called "leisure" and made productive to capitalism once again, recreation as a pressure valve that diverts revolutionary anger.[8] No, that isn't what we want, not at all.

But we also recognize that even the compromised forms of tourism and leisure can be engaged in ways that are non-compliant, that don't go along with the program of consolidating class positions or colonizing psychic life with leisure products. Even the stereotypical American family vacation to Europe, for instance, may clearly be a middle-class rite of passage or express conservative, Eurocentric ideas of cultural heritage, taste, and education. But it is also motivated by a desire for a different experience of time and place, a different mode of noticing, and a different way of relating to loved ones. If the Compass's drifts and annual retreats can be caricatured as forms of leisure, then let's work through the kind of leisure they are. Let's try to recover and amplify the spirit of curiosity, desire for non-instrumental experience, and quest for pleasure, friendship and love that is bound up in all of leisure's problematic contradictions. We won't purify our engagement with leisure of all those contradictions, and we'll certainly invent new ones we didn't see before. But sharing time with others is a necessary precondition

to cultivating the "new emotionalities, new loves, new friendships" you describe, and that time might just have to look like leisure time.

DIAGNOSTICS OF LOVE (HS)

Yes, finding pleasure in others' company certainly does not automatically translate to new political possibilities and affinities. As you've suggested, we need to discover the ways in which "leisure" intersects with our relationships, impinges upon them, and captures them for commerce. Perhaps most importantly, and as you aptly observe, "leisure" has been repurposed as a pressure valve to manage revolutionary sensibilities. So, where does this leave us?

I think Compass has attempted to think through the ways in which we can politicize our own friendships and personal relationships, while maintaining a commitment to building very real political affinities. Which is to say, that yes, the practice of drifting is political. But this statement does not negate the very real emotional investments that Compass members have in each other, in the spaces we traverse and the people we meet, and in the politics in which we engage. Instead I want to recognize that political engagement is necessarily emotional, not just cerebral or rhetorical. (This, perhaps, is a privilege of a middle class that is slowly withering).

In thinking through the relationship between these more informal affinities and broader political movement(s), we've looked to Michael Hardt and Colectivo Situaciones and their theories on the related concepts of love and militant research.[9] We've wondered together if *love,* when considered as a political concept, might offer a way forward, a way to cope with and, ultimately, to activate political depression as we reclaim "leisure"—torn from the grips of the market—as pleasurable. We've also deployed the concept to explore our positionality in the university and the practice of drifting.

Both Hardt and Colectivo specify love as an important concept precisely because, in entering into a relationship of love, each party invests in and is transformed by the relation. Of course, we typically think of love as limited to a particular kind of relationship, a way of thinking that, for Hardt, leads to the destruction of its political potential. When love becomes a closed concept, existing only inside the family (whether family is understood in terms of the couple, broader kinship ties, or ethnic and national groupings), it becomes impossible to extend oneself to those who fall outside this closed circuit, rendering less possibile a transversal affinities-based politics that expands beyond one's "own kind." But it is only in this opening up that we can tear ourselves away from the notion that we are "inside" or "outside" a particular social grouping. The implication here is that love, as a political gesture, is a willful *action* that requires work and much effort. We must twist away from the idea that we simply 'fall in love' and thus have no volition when building affinities and relations with others.

I should confess that I haven't worked much with Compass. I've only been on a few "stops" of a much longer process of drifting. I've only been part of a handful of conversations, and there have probably been hundreds over the last few years. But I do indeed have a relationship with Compass, a loving engagement. Moreover, how I came to be involved in Compass was not a coincidence.

Piecing together information from zines, underground culture rags and chats with participants, I learned about, and later came to understand, a cultural scene in Chicago that was fiercely critical, often anti-capitalist, and, perhaps most importantly, appeared to invest a great deal of energy in mutual-aid and support. Many readers will not find this surprising, some will even have helped to establish this network I'm describing. Others, as was the case for me before I moved to Chicago in 2007, will be thinking of the relatively well-known Temporary Services and the fantastic Mess Hall, the closest thing to a "home base" that the Chicago activist-art scene has.

I excitedly ran to Chicago after finishing college and got to know the group of folks who made up this "scene." It is here that I first met the friends and fellow travelers who had formed Compass a few years earlier. I later became a part of this collective and came to understand the political-cultural tendency that I think informs Compass and the Chicago scene more generally. I want to share a few encounters I had along the way that I think illustrate this tendency I'm trying to describe.

I presented a piece of writing I had done (for the first time) in a little get together that a friend of mine had organized. A woman in attendance sensed my tremendous fear and anxiety. With great sensitivity, she asked me questions about my talk, and, in the process, helped me to translate what felt like a bumbled mess of a presentation into more coherent terms. At the time I thought, and I still think, that this was such a beautiful, caring gesture. After the event was over, she and some other folks, came over to introduce themselves, asked if they could take some zines I had made back to Mess Hall. Then, they invited me out for beers to chat more about culture and politics.

Another particularly memorable experience took place at Mess Hall. A Compass member issued a challenge to everyone sitting around the circle as we began our discussion: "How can we do work together when we can't be honest about how we're doing?" She was pointing out everyone's tendency to respond "oh I'm fine, how are you?" when, in reality, most of us were overworked or out of work and we all felt politically depressed. Her challenge was also a question: how might we share ourselves more fully with one another within this political and cultural community of affinities? And the suggestion was that this act is necessary to our ability to sustain ourselves and our collective efforts. We are all struggling. We need to share our anxieties just as we share our politics. As Colectivo suggests:

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

One does not experience friendship or love in an innocent way: we all come out from them reconstituted. These potencias*—*love and friendship*—*have the power to constitute, qualify, and remake the subjects they catch.*[10]

As I've tried to illustrate with these quotidian moments, co-constituted space of these kinds allows us to explore the possibility of learning new ways to engage with one another and, in the process, new ways in which we might sustain both our creative social practices and our livelihoods. Or, if love is an *action* that is productive, then enacting love might establish these very spaces, allowing us to work in *immanence*. To work in immanence is to inhabit a situation with others, to become a part of a co-created space rife with new possibilities.[11] This immanence is what puts us into *dialogue* with each other as well as with those we might engage while drifting. It is part of what distinguishes our attempts from the avant-gardism of the Situationists' drifting; we are trying to establish new spaces for collective political engagement and expression. For me, this makes evident the importance of understanding the conversion as an act that might transform one's "own" into something "common." It is part of reconceiving love as an *act*, open to all intermingling subjectivities. Here, identity (notions of inside and outside, and a sense of belonging) becomes surpass-able, as multiple singularities begin to occupy new spaces of potential.[12] In this sense, love is *process*, love is *work*, love is *composed*, and love is *constitutive*.

The moments I describe above, exemplify a committed willingness to open oneself up to new affinities but also to put in the *work* required for building and sustaining them. This insistence on supporting the curious, developing, and the struggling, rather than to shun them, as so often happens in more "professional" settings, matters. Despite the pressures of professionalization, the Chicago milieu I'm describing responds to life under contemporary capitalism as one that cannot exist outside itself. Capitalism is not only an economic system but is also a system of relations, a cognitive framework that imposes itself upon the social psyche.[13] In response to this fact, we work to make new spaces and feelings, collectively making a psychic break as we articulate values, possibilities, and relationships that escape the territory of capitalist imaginations and rhythms. In this remaking of value and systems of relations, love has something to offer as a kind of training ground for elaborating and developing non-capitalist subjectivities and relationships.[14]

CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE (SEK)

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

The affective nature of the research—its origin in desire, its pursuit as a convivial enterprise—is as much a key to its character as the transitory, even superficial engagement with specific places that I often find myself questioning. If you argued for what is transformative about the process *within* the group (which is itself not a unified thing but rather ragged and porous), I want to address how love/desire/friendship affect the knowledge that we collectively produce, share, and circulate.

Claire Pentecost, one of our collaborators and friends, has written about the "public amateur," a figure pursuing specialized knowledge out of curiosity or personal desire, unfettered by disciplinary boundaries and unblinkered by career goals. Love, curiosity, and desire motivate the amateur. For instance, caring for a child with multiple food sensitivities may prompt a father to become an amateur allergist and to share his findings in parent support groups and online forums. The caregivers of disabled people know far more about the intricacies of Medicaid policy than policy wonks and Congressional staffers, and they mobilize politically to advocate for their loved ones and broader community.[15] By making this inquiry public, social, and collective, the amateur's research becomes both more robust and more democratic. The figure of the amateur suggests how research and education might be explicitly distributed across the social body, rather than concentrated and fortified in corporate and academic bunkers. The amateur can post inexpert, even naïve questions that may uncover, through their very lack of assumptions, what the expert cannot. What the public amateur cannot do (large-scale clinical trials of life-saving medication, for instance) is obvious, as are the limitations of drifts and retreats that explore places only for days or weeks. However, rather than dismissing the knowledge pursued through these methods as superficial—a criticism that implicitly accepts either academic expectations about rigor or militant research's call for long-term engagement with specific social movements—I'd like to consider what they actually permit and produce.

Drifts proceed from a position I might call "interested ignorance." Our ignorance of a space, formation, or topic is not total. Shaped by an understanding of the world that faces sharply and unapologetically left, we know

just enough to intuit that we need to know more. Some of this learning is accomplished through reading, but the drift-as-method favors embodied explorations of places and social exchange with the people working in them. In this context, our interested ignorance has a profoundly leveling effect. Echoing Jacques Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster,[16] we proceed from a presupposition of equality. Our ignorance positions the speaker as a source of information and creator of knowledge and the audience of well-traveled artists and academics as eager pupils. The drifts are not just methods for the Compass to conduct research but also, maybe primarily, micro-seminars in which people share the results of a lifetime their own "research" with us. I will never forget the tour 16-year old Sarah Holm gave of her family's organic dairy farm in central Wisconsin in June 2008. The poised, articulate, and rather formidable teenager held rapt a group of ten adults two or three times her age for an hour and a half. We peppered her with questions about the farm, our demonstrable inexpertise dissolving the social hierarchies of age and education. On numerous occasions, our curiosity about the worlds inhabited by those we visit has clearly been gratifying and meaningful to them, and they have responded with a great generosity of time and information. The drifts proceed by a loose plan, always open to happenstance, charisma, whim, and coincidence (à la the dérive) in order to respond to the offers and suggestions of those we meet along the way.

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

visit are far too messy and diverse to be reduced to the confirmation of assumptions or the wholesale acceptance of a unified narrative presented by those with whom we converse.

Even in a compressed timeframe, tensions and incongruities in the places and people we visit are manifest, but we also choose to respect—even believe—the stories people tell about themselves. Our anticapitalist, feminist and democratic orientation encourages us to listen to and take seriously the stories of organic farmers, labor educators and community organizers, even, and perhaps especially, when the stories better describe what they aspire to be than what they currently are. Listening to them and taking them serious reinforces, enriches, and refines how we practice our political commitments. Perhaps this is a practice of politicized love. With the "own" converted into the "common," the inevitable failures of any project become a shared territory to work within and be transformed by. Critique is a mode with which we are very familiar, and it has been enormously useful for analyzing the injustice, violence, and unsustainability of capitalism and for scrutinizing different forms of revolutionary praxis. But as important as it is to be conscious of the inconsistencies and compromises of every attempt to produce something beyond capitalism, endless critique can end up reinforcing the ideology that "there is no alternative." We've long known that there is no outside position from which to critique; a politics that embraces the potential of love might help us feel our way toward responding to/with the people, movements, and projects we encounter that are not yet, and never will be, doing "enough." With the Left's existing textbook full of unrealized propositions, disabling factionalism, and epic failures, we may learn something by being a little generous and loving with our nascent and imperfect efforts.

NOTES IN ADVANCE OF A CONCLUSION (HS + SK)

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

—Bruno Latour[17]

During the time we slowly wrote and edited this text (November 2010-January 2012), the political landscape has shifted dramatically. At first, it seemed wildly depressing, as we watched a rabid far right sweep the November 2010 election. As new governors and Tea Party legislators assumed office in January 2011, we watched in horror as almost unimaginable bills passed in Michigan, Ohio, South Dakota, New Jersey, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Most visibly, of course, Governor Scott Walker jammed his bill through cutting unions off at the knees in limiting their ability to collectively bargain in

Wisconsin. In Michigan, the Republican majority passed a bill that allows the state to declare a financial emergency in any municipality, clearing the way for the "Emergency Financial Manager" to seize control of the town, nullify all contracts (including labor agreements), and even oust democratically elected politicians, all in the name of getting the town "back on track" financially. Meanwhile, corporate taxes were cut everywhere, often creating the very budget deficits used to justify the most extreme parts of the far-right agenda. It seemed particularly ironic in processing our affective and emotive politics to be struck with such a devastating, seemingly paralyzing, blow with this new wave of egregious neo-conservatism. If we didn't know already, we learned in January 2011 that if the left ever had the luxury of time, this particular moment is not one of them.

But in the midst of our shock and sadness emerged an outpouring of resistance in the weeks-long occupation of the Wisconsin capitol in Madison, to be followed six months later by the still-in-process whirlwind of the Occupy movement. Occupy Wall Street, along with the groups that have formed from Oakland to Okinawa, represent the biggest, most recent, and most visible instance of this political awakening. But it began right here in what we've long called the radical Midwest, and it continues to bubble to the surface in all its messy, emergent energy.

While writing this essay, we visited Madison, Wisconsin together and joined nearly 100,000 people descending on the capitol to protest Governor Scott Walker's attacks on unions and the working class. The capitol had been occupied for two weeks or so, and it was a few days before Walker finally kicked out the protesters for the first time to, you know, "clean." We were able to hang out inside the occupied capitol for a while, grooving to the quasi-hippies and their drum circle, who sported fresh Wisconsin Solidarity tattoos (the clenched fist emerging from the state map) that had exploded all over the internet in the prior weeks. Thousands of hand-made signs covered nearly every inch of the grandiose building, and on the second floor exhausted activists cat-napped in marble niches. We watched people of various ages walk into the center of the rotunda and shout to all of us fellow activists. These pleas, information sharing, and update sessions were interspersed with songs, chants, and moments of relative silence and subtle chatter in the echo-y, multi-leveled monument to the democratic process. Though it feels funny to say it, it truly felt like the "people's house."

We didn't talk about our trip to Madison in terms of a Compass drift. The term might have felt a bit contrived for our last-minute road trip. But some of the dynamics we've been discussing for months were certainly at play during our visit. We were in Madison for only two nights, providing only a surface impression of the movement we wanted so much to join but, in other ways, were already a part of. We believed that going to the demonstration was

important both symbolically and because we needed to learn something—something about the movement and something about ourselves as part of it. We found ourselves profoundly moved by, and maybe even in love with, the scene in the capitol. Huge banners dropped from the top floors billowing out into the mezzanine. The drumbeats felt like a collective nervous system, interspersed with the quiet moments of conversation and debate. "It looks like something from Argentina!" we only sort of joked, but more seriously we kept repeating: "I've never seen anything like it."

Just as we caught our breath from the struggles in Madison, Occupy Wall Street exploded in September. Two weeks later, our own Occupy contingent popped up in solidarity with OWS. In our town, Occupy Iowa City has encamped in a downtown park for four months, with a few hardy souls still sleeping under ripstop nylon in subzero temperatures and scores more attending weekly General Assemblies to determine the future of the movement collectively. Like many local Occupy groups, our fragile collective struggles to move forward as part of a global movement while having an impact on a local scale. Despite these inevitable difficulties, Occupy demonstrates that we are at a political turning point. For the first time in our lives, thousands of people have come together to politicize individual suffering, to cook and share food with strangers, to make their bodies vulnerable to the weather and police, and to do this not just for a "day of action" but day in and day out, for weeks that now stretch into months. The ideological diversity of the movement—a source of occasional frustration—shows how the silos of political and lifestyle homogeneity that many of us live in can easily crumble in the face of profound urgency.

The Occupy movement has redrawn the divide between public and private, a line that usually legitimates the power of the already powerful. We have remembered the meaning of public space, that is, to remember how to use it, how to share it, how to expand it. Public parks have gone from empty to full, sheltering and feeding people, hosting collective engagements, as well as constitutions of friendships and affinities. And, despite the media's best efforts to encapsulate and neutralize the OWS message, public discourse has begun to examine the structural imbalances of power whose consequences in "private" lives have been devastating. Despite all the work that remains, Occupy has successfully countered stale conservative rhetoric of "personal responsibility," revealed how the "own" is actually the "common," and rejected the harsh, competitive logic of capitalism in favor of a more affective engagement with one another. In many ways, Occupy exemplifies so many of the things we have struggled to describe in this text. The transition to a more affective politics is sometimes clumsy and full of missteps, but in the commune-like occupations across the country, in the surprising affinities and alliances formed at General Assemblies and at the bar, and in the collective

act of sharing resources, knowledge, time, energy, and touch we are coming to know a new politics at both intimate and potentially global scales.

Madison and Occupy have given us hope, but we still struggle to understand and participate in movements that encompass so many varied people and political visions. This is the task that Nicolás Sguiglia and Javier Toret suggest when they challenge the radical left to "… always listen and test the emergent social uneasiness and potentialities, developing the capacity to transform the current atomization process into conjunctions and isolation into collective potency."[18] How do we surpass alienating fissures (Greens, Trots, Democrats, liberals, anarchists, social democrats, and so on), resist homogenizing tendencies and facile notions of political community, and refuse the brutal, instrumental logic of the Democratic Party? With a freshly galvanized political engagement, we see an incredible amount of energy, frustration, and desire in the streets. The challenge is to harness that energy to a process of forging durable affinities and "collective potency" that can express itself in more complex and radical ways than "Vote Democrat 2012."

Our task, as researchers, activists, teachers, students, and militants, remains no easier than before Madison or Occupy Wall Street. But perhaps it is a little clearer and more immediate. We know that we are dealing with compressed time, as the newly empowered far right passes legislation designed to make their electoral majorities permanent. Meanwhile, many working-class people are expressing their growing disenchantment with muddled expressions of outrage (the Tea-baggers' conservative nationalism; Democratic loyalists' sense of betrayal in the face of Obama's impotence; even the popular slogan "We are the 99%," which conceals significant differences in economic, racial, and gendered vulnerabilities among all but the elite.) But this moment requires full-tilt resistance just to hold ground. Because the crisis is so obvious, it has begun to produce new, more productive, subjectivities, alliances, and antagonisms. We hope that Madison and the Occupy movement represent a mass psychic break with conventional, spectacularized, and ultimately unaccountable electoral politics. We hope this campaign inspires other ways of inhabiting impoverished democratic spheres and offers us a means to act together, in all of our fragmentation, with all our disagreement.