Affect Space
Witnessing the Movement(s) of the Squares

Eric Kluitenberg

Essay – March 10, 2015

Eric Kluitenberg analyses the complicated logic of "Affect Space", as he calls the public gatherings and urban spectacles that have been taking place over the past few years in cities around the world, from Zuccotti Park in NYC to Tahrir Square in Cairo, Gezi Park in Istanbul to the streets of Hong Kong. Kluitenberg attempts to figure out how the massive presence of self-produced media forms, the context of (occupied) urban public spaces, and the deep permeation of affective intensity relate to each other and how together they are able to produce such baffling events.



Osman Orsal, "Lady in Red", Istanbul, 28 May 2013.



"Lady in Red" sequence.

Ever since early 2011, we, as a global media audience, have been witnesses to an unabating and strangely recurring yet unpredictable urban spectacle – sudden massive forms of popular protest staged in public squares and streets, disrupting the spatial, legal and political order, curiously drenched in the massive presence of "the camera" and near real-time, media reports. Markedly different from previous revolutionary moments, however, these stagings are no longer predominantly mediated by the classic global mass media spectacle machines (corporate and state TV, newspapers and magazines), but by an unending avalanche of self-produced media expressions – the inevitable Tweets and Facebook posts, online videos, digital photographs on a variety of image-sharing platforms (open source, corporate, sub-cultural and mainstream alike), activist blogs and discussion fora, and a host of other homegrown media outlets. Virtually none of the producers of this media avalanche can be characterised as "media professionals".

Meanwhile, the former "news" media are playing a catch-up game with the next unanticipated eruption of real-time, globally mediated, popular dissent. The spectacle is not characterised primarily by monumental heroism but by volatility and a paradoxical air of ephemerality. Though consequences of the actions unfolding can be dramatic and severe, these public gatherings themselves seem to dissipate as suddenly as they burst into existence. Subterranean tensions can be identified, and (professional) media commentators rush to point to "underlying issues" (in Egypt: Mubarak, in Spain and Greece: youth unemployment, in the US: income inequality, in Ukraine: Yanukovych, in Brazil: failing or absent social policies, in Syria: Assad, in Hong Kong: electoral reform, in the UK: tuition fees, in Haren: "You Only Live Once", in Ferguson, MO: racialised police violence). However, as the list grows the "issue at stake" appears to become increasingly arbitrary.

Rather than focussing on the "issue at stake", it seems necessary to begin analysing the pattern of these events unfolding before our eyes. For all the emphasis that has been put on the technological component of this evolving pattern, the internet, "social" media, wireless and mobile media by a variety of commentators (including myself), and, despite the crucial and constitutive role that the massive presence of such media technologies has played in these intense public gatherings, the events we have witnessed and the pattern that has emerged cannot be reduced to this technological presence alone.

Not just "drenched in media", but drenched in affect

Importantly, these massive popular gatherings and collective outbursts of dissent are pervaded by a deep affective intensity that can certainly not be explained from an exclusively *techno*logical point of view. Commentators may indeed have been quick to rush to the "underlying issues to explain this intensity". This is perhaps most clearly evidenced in the case of Egypt and the infamous "January 25" uprising, where the "underlying issue" (autocratic military rule) had been present as a damning force and source of frustration since the 1950s – so, here we need to ask: why this eruption just now? Upon closer scrutiny, the "underlying issue" seems at best able to offer only part of the explanation of this affective intensity.

Two of the most prominent among the many commentators, sociologist Manuel Castells (Castells 2013) and researcher and investigative journalist Paolo Gerbaudo (Gerbaudo 2012) have both pointed to the crucial "emotional" dimension of these protests. In Castells analysis, the "networks of outrage and hope", as he describes them (and also the title of his most recent book), are infused by emotion. Partly conscious, partly unconscious, they resort to basic resources to give shape and utterance to these emotions, most significant for Castells the use of images in the protests, both on- and off- line.

Gerbaudo, however, points towards the deliberate and "organised" nature of these stagings that function almost like (urban) scenographies designed for the display of collective dissent. He describes these stagings as "emotional choreographies", developed through trials and failures of the activists at the root of many of these protests. For Gerbaudo this calls into question the claim of "leaderlessness" of the supposed new "movements". The claim of leaderlessness, interestingly, originated from within both activist and professional media circles. Instead, what is emerging, according to Gerbaudo, is not a new type of organisation or hierarchy, but a "choreographic" form of leadership, diffuse and without explicit claims to formal leadership, and yet highly deliberate, which sets the frame (in a sense, the stage) for the unfolding collective event (drama/ choreography).

Still, to understand the unfolding pattern something else is necessary. First, it is necessary to distinguish and delineate the three constitutive elements that have already been indicated here: the massive presence of self-produced media forms, the context of (occupied) urban public spaces, and the deep permeation of affective intensity. Beyond this, we need to figure out exactly how these three constitutive elements relate to each other and how they are able to produce such baffling events, the sudden massive mobilisations as much as their rapid dissolution, and their apparently *inherent* ephemerality. How can the interaction of these three constitutive elements be understood to produce this repetitive and thus far unabating pattern of public gathering in dissent? What type of relationships evolve there? And how does the constitution of this pattern affect its possible outcomes and results?

The need to ask these questions is provided by the paradoxical results of many of the protests we have witnessed: They seem to be imbued with a simultaneous remarkable success in mobilisation and a dramatic lack of political efficacy (an inability to produce desired political outcomes). To name but a few of the most glaring examples here: in Egypt, after the disastrous capture of the "revolutionary moment" by the Muslim Brotherhood with its conservative doxology and economic incompetence, military rule quickly reestablished itself at the expense of a large number of casualties. In the US, no change in income inequality has been noted by statistical offices since 17 September 2011. In Spain, Greece, and Italy, youth unemployment remains at disastrous levels. And worst of all, in Syria, what was once hailed as the bloodless "Syrian Cyberrevolution"[1] has descended into a civil war producing the largest displacement of civilians since World War II – exemplifying the horrendous depth of affective intensity. Naivety, today, in view of such unacceptable political tragedies, is inexcusable.

Self-mediation / Affect / Hybrid Urban Spaces

So, let's begin by disentangling the three constitutive elements of the pattern of mobilisation in what could be tentatively described as the "movement(s) of the squares".[2] For the sake of convenience, I will reduce them here to three adjectives: the technological, the affective, and the spatial. Identifying them first separately will make it easier to examine how they relate to each other, and, most importantly, to identify the possible political implications these "emergent" relationships may have. It is necessary to follow this slightly artificial path of reasoning because in practice these three elements are continuously involved with each other, which makes it hard to figure out what might actually be going on here.

Beyond the audience: Self-mediation as the constitution of mediated presence

The technological element, although not in itself sufficient to explain the remarkable events we have witnessed and keep being confronted with – usually when we least expect them – is crucial for establishing the pattern of mobilisation in these events. Obviously, large-scale mobilisations rely on communication resources and capacities. Therefore, the technological element refers primarily to communication technologies, and more particularly to electronically networked communication media. I use the concept of electronic networks *[www.onlineopen.org/the-network-of-waves]* here because the reduction to internet-based communications misses the point that indeed any type of communication medium, electronic or otherwise, can be used for mobilisation purposes, and it is the nomadic fluidity of activist operations across any and all media that makes them resilient and efficacious. A wonderful example of this was the telephone voice mailbox service, *Speek 2 Tweet*, which enabled ordinary citizens to voice their dissent anonymously during the initial stage of the anti-Mubarak protests in Egypt by phone. These messages would then be passed on via a Twitter feed as regular (text) Tweets to the rest of the world.[3] The point here, of course, is that the vast majority of Egyptians had no regular access to the internet at the time of the protests, and so, other networks had to be utilised.

Nevertheless, the distributed architecture of the internet has introduced a significant rupture. This is different from earlier decentralised forms of community media in that the internet logic shifts the emphasis of the communication process to the nodes of the communication network. While the network may show dramatic differences in density and massive centralisations around platforms such as social media and photo and video sharing platforms, search engines as entry points to the information space, and blogger networks, the shift in logic is that the primary stream of content originates from the nodes and flows into the central connection points rather than from the centre to the nodes (as happens most crudely in the industrial production model of broadcast media). This shift should not be idolised as a new ideal of democratic communication. Massive distortions of capital and control have already emerged here, but it has significantly reshaped the notion of a media "audience". The roles of passive consumers and active producers can be easily reversed, aided not in the least by the wide proliferation of cheap portable recording devices, mobile phones, smart phones and digital cameras. Production media have become so self-evidently a mainstream activity that it is almost impossible to think about it critically. The absolutely massive media production that has been unleashed here further exacerbates this problem, where, paradoxically, the production of media far outranks (quantitatively) our collective capacity for media reception.

Under such conditions, where, by definition, most material remains unseen, the qualifications inherited from broadcast media analysis break down. I usually refer to this space of activity as "self-mediation".[4] Self-mediation refers to the constitution of mediated presence through the appropriation of media production and distribution tools and infrastructures by nonprofessional media producers.

What early examples of self-mediation in internet-based community projects, in early net.art and streaming cultures circles in the later 1990s and early 2000s showed was that established notions of professional media production did not help to qualify and understand these practices and their curious fascination – especially for those actively involved in it. The "audience-reach" of these media productions was dismally small, yet the expenditure of energy on the projects was enormous. In many ways, these early projects prefigured the staggering flow of self-produced digital media on video sharing platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and others, or photo sharing on Flickr, Instagram, Tumblr and other services, 99% of which would never have been deemed worthy of being shown on "professional" media channels.

"Quality", that holy grail of media professionalism, just seemed a totally anachronistic concept from an unimaginably distant past (even though the new channels had only existed for a few years), and seem even more so today. "Content", is another concept that self-mediation practices seem to eschew. It would be absolutely wrong to state that there is no content in self-mediation or, for that matter, that these expressions do not have any quality, either based on their own criteria or according to anachronistic media standards. Much rather, we would have to acknowledge that there is a tsunami of content and an unfathomable multiplicity of quality standards in the universe of self-mediation. A deluge that is impossible to oversee, comprehend, absorb – indeed qualify – and, because it overwhelmingly remains unseen, is never registered by an "audience".

What is it then that motivates the self-mediating subject leaving aside the question of how to designate this subject? Neither content, nor quality, seem to be of primary concern. The only plausible explanation to me seemed to be, and still does so today, that what these self-mediators (all of us) engage in is a very basic form of marking presence – of marking the fact (if only to oneself) of existence. However, as researcher Caroline Nevejan has correctly observed, presence requires witnessing, leading her to introduce the concept of "witnessed presence", [5] which flies in the face of the idea that most of these materials will remain entirely unseen by anybody other than their maker. However, the idea of witnessed presence may be just strong enough if it exists merely as a potential or imagined quality. In other words, for the self-mediating subject, an imagined audience might be just enough to justify the act and the excessive expenditure of surplus energy in marking presence and, with that, marking the fact of one's existence.

The marking of presence is also a form of initiating contact and communication with others and of creating the potential for communicative interaction. That is why the "audience", the witness in Nevejan's terms, is still required, even if it is only imagined. It also suggests that presence itself is not the aim of the self-mediating process, but is instead a stepping-stone towards something else. But this "something else" is clearly not "conveying content", even if self-mediation can be "over-full"with content. Nor is it the establishment of qualitative norms (cultural, aesthetic, ritualistic, or otherwise). Instead, the communicative behaviour can be characterised as what anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1920s referred to as "phatic communication": A form of speech act aimed at establishing social and emotional relationships, or short affective relationships, rather than conveying information (Malinowski 1923). Similarly, I maintain that the principal aim of self-mediation is the establishment of affective relationships, not the communication of information or a specific message.

Beyond "emotion": Affect as nonconscious incipient connective force

This introduces the next complication: how to more accurately describe what is meant by "affective relationships". This task is complicated in a way similar to trying to explain the notion of self-mediation by the seemingly self-evident daily use of the term "affective", which suggests that all who refer to this term implicitly understand what the term is supposed to mean. The widely accepted daily use of the term makes it difficult to think about it critically, and yet it is exactly here that great gains can be made.

The first complication is that the adjective "affective" introduces and conflates at least three other terms that need to be clearly separated from each other: feelings, affect(s), and emotions. The problem here is that these three terms are used almost interchangeably in daily practice, as if they refer to one and the same thing, whereas they actually and, in my view, explicitly do not.

A second, potentially more serious complication is that, within the emerging field of "Affect Theory", [6] different approaches and understandings coexist. The Human Geographer and prominent protagonist of affect theory, Nigel Thrift, in an insightful article titled "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect" (2004), distinguishes four approaches to affect. Each of these approaches introduces a different conception of affect that opens up both possibilities and its specific limitations in determining its political implications.

The four approaches to the conception of affect that Thrift distinguishes are, in brief: (1) a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct, and which concerns itself primarily with the question of how emotions occur in everyday life as visible conduct through bodily states and processes (referencing the work of sociologist Jack Katz); (2) affect associated with psychoanalytical frames and a notion of drive (referencing the work of Eve Sedgwick and Silvan Tomkins, and to which the work of philosopher Slavoj Žižek and political scientist Jodi Dean can also be added); (3) naturalistic adding capacities through interaction in a world that is constantly becoming understood as nonconscious intensity (referencing the foundational work of 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza and the reinterpretation of his work by Gilles Deleuze, and, importantly, the extended work in this line of thought by Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi, who I will follow most closely); (4) Darwinian, expressions of emotion as universal and the product of evolution (referencing Charles Darwin and psychologist Paul Ekman).

This quick list makes it clear that even within the field of affect theory that wishes to clarify the distinctions between the three terms emotion, affect and feeling there are wildly different interpretations and analytic traditions, each with their own merits and pitfalls. Thrift is right to point this out and chooses not to take a definite stand regarding the efficacy of these different approaches, but instead tries to draw on their strengths to develop his own analysis of the "spatial politics of affect", to which I will return later.

I have chosen a different trajectory, however. In my approach to affect, I follow philosopher Brian Massumi and how he views affect as a nonconscious and never-to-be conscious intensity that impinges on the body, while emotion is the capture and qualification of that intensity, which implies a radical closure (Massumi 2002). Massumi's concept of affect as a directly embodied nonconscious intensity and its characteristics turns out to be crucial for understanding the "connective pattern" of the "movement(s) of the squares" as I hope to show below.

In this conception, broadly speaking, both "affect" and "emotion" can be understood as belonging to the wider domain of "feelings". But, whereas affect refers to a nonconscious intensity that is registered by the body in response to various impulses ("impingements") from the environment that remain strictly outside of consciousness, emotions should be regarded as conscious attempts by the cognitive system to capture these intensities and

qualify them. When we experience a particular emotion we can try to name it and express, to ourselves and others, what the possible emotional state is we are experiencing. Clearly then, this is a conscious act, but one that takes time and effort, and often a collective effort to articulate exactly what it is we are "feeling".

Affect operates on a completely different track, not so much in opposition to emotion and cognition, but parallel to it. The reason is that affect (following Massumi's conception) refers to an extremely basic process: the body registers impulses from the environment, not least of which through the autonomic system, ***before*** any conscious / cognitive processing of these impulses and the intensity they generate has taken place. The biological body is the carrier of affective intensity, which should first of all be seen as a space of potential, a potential for conscious sensation, but also a potential for interaction contained in the vitality of the biological body. This intensity can be registered by others and establish connections through precognitive forms of affective linkage. The term that Massumi introduces for this process of affective linkage is "resonance". The interactive potential of the biological body, then, is contained in its capacity to "resonate" with impulses from the environment.

Two elements of affect become extremely important for our analysis here: the speed of affect and the semantic openness of affect.

The missing half second

Massumi notes that affect moves at approximately double the speed of conscious perception and the qualification of impressions and states of the body. Cognitive experiments have shown that conscious qualification of such bodily impressions and their "completion in an outward directed, active expression" takes on average 0.5 seconds. Massumi calls this lapse the "missing half second" (Massumi 2002, 29). Bodily responses to such impressions can, however, already be measured (for instance, in changes in galvanic skin resistance) within 0.2 to 0.3 seconds. With an average of 0.25 seconds, this implies that the affective link takes half the time to establish itself and operates at twice the speed of conscious qualification.

Nigel Thrift further reinforces what Massumi has so beautifully described as the "missing half second". Thrift points out that repeated clinical tests by cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists have revealed that the engendering of a conscious reaction to impulses from the environment can take up to 0.8 seconds and in some cases even longer. That we register our "experience of events" as seamless is simply the result of the fact that we experience them in a continuous flow.

If we follow Massumi's suggested average response times, then affective responses take 0.25 seconds to be formed, whereas conscious responses take 0.5 seconds. In short, affect moves at twice the speed of consciousness. The relationship between affect and its capture in consciousness (through an articulated feeling or emotion) is always, and necessarily so, asymmetrical. In a way, our conscious perception is playing a continuous catch-up game with our affective states, which is already lost a priori.

Semantic openness of affect

The second element of affect follows directly from its speed. Because affect operates outside of, and parallel to, consciousness it has no fixed semantic structure. It cannot have one because for it to have a semantic structure it would have to be articulated by consciousness first, which would imply its capture and closure. Semantic openness is thus a key characteristic of affect. Affect connects the heterogeneous in all sorts of counterintuitive ways. According to Massumi, the level of intensity is characterised by *"a crossing of semantic wires*", it is not semantically or semiotically ordered, instead "it vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate" (Massumi 2002, 24).

The semantic openness of affective intensity can provide us with more definite clues regarding the success of the mobilisation processes witnessed in the "movement(s) of the squares". They are often able to gather a remarkable heterogeneity of participants, particularly in the early stages of the protests. This is something that has been repeatedly observed by commentators as well as in the rather more sceptical analyses of the protests. It would seem that the semantic openness of the affective link between protestors is a key factor in overcoming a vast array of ideological, material, cultural and political differences.

Affective language

Given the conception of affect as precognitive, nonconscious, bodily intensity it would seem entirely adverse to language, which, after all, relies on the conscious cognitive processing of a "symbolic order". However, Massumi points out that language does not simply lie in opposition to intensity (affect), it is "differential" in relation to it. Language (articulation) does not serve to capture or even qualify this intensity, but it moves, as Massumi says, on parallel tracks (Massumi 2002, 25). Language should be understood to "resonate" with intensity (affect). It can both dampen as well as amplify it. Affect and language thus can form complex resonance and feedback patterns operating on each other in unpredictable yet not arbitrary ways.

The implication here is that certain specific linguistic structures resonate particularly strongly with affect and can powerfully amplify it, while other specific linguistic structures dampen and suppress affective responses because of a lack of resonance and because they instead invoke a mode of cognitive processing and indeed deliberation, which is in direct opposition to affect.

Affective slogans as "resonance objects"

Generally, the most generic types of slogans and phrases, those most void of content, resonate most strongly with affective intensity. The famous "We are the 99%" slogan of Occupy Wall Street is a prime example. While the slogan vaguely (but insistently) refers to the excessively unbalanced division of wealth in US society, it makes an impossible claim to represent the concerns of a dizzyingly complex and contradictory constituency (i.e., 99% of the US population). Moreover, the slogan was subsequently reused by other occupations, by, among others, those active in the EU, where other radical political issues were introduced, but where the 99% versus 1% division of wealth was not the primary "underlying issue".

The slogan "We are the 99%" should therefore be regarded as semantically void, which is exactly what made it so highly effective as a resonance object for the displacement of affective intensity across ideological, cultural, and political divides. Meanwhile, the slogan "We are all Khaled Said", to a certain extent, more specifically associated with the Egyptian context, operated on a similar level as a resonance object in the eruption of anti-Mubarak protests, where it served to temporarily unite a deeply divisive demographic structure. And

with considerable ambiguity we could also observe a similar dynamic regarding the recent affectively charged expressions "*Wir sind das Volk*!" in Germany and "*Je suis Charlie*" in France – and beyond.

What we are witnessing here is a split between content and effect in affective mobilisation, and this has been a recurring feature throughout the various protest gatherings we have seen since 2011. This holds important political consequences that both protestors and authorities are only slowly coming to terms with and that transcend the specific context of the densified public protests in the urban space we are studying here. More about that later.

The affective image

Castells, in his analysis of the Spanish 15 M protest gatherings, observed that images played a crucial role in expressing "emotions" and rallying the protestors (Castells 2013). Indeed, an intense visuality, both online and offline, has accompanied virtually all of these gatherings, not just in Spain, but also in the US where a stunning array of Occupy Wall Street posters, flyers, web banners and other visuals were produced; in the UK's student-led protest gatherings; during the Egyptian anti-Mubarak uprising; during the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul; as well as during Occupy Maidan (Ukraine); in Brazil and most recently in Hong Kong. That images played a crucial role here in the mobilisation and expression was plain for everyone to see and is a grand testimony to the vitality of political cultural expression.

However, Castells did not say much about exactly *how* these images functioned in the protests, how they were able to attract and mobilise such a massive and heterogenous constituency, which described itself so beautifully in the opening sentences of the manifesto of the Real Democracy Now! initiative:

We are ordinary people. We are like you: people, who get up every morning to study, work or find a job, people who have family and friends. People, who work hard every day to provide a better future for those around us. [7] It should be possible to pinpoint this a bit further, however. The principal question here is how the image could function as an affective resonance object in the "movement(s) of the squares"?

A "mathesis singularis"

To begin finding an answer to this question we have to refer back to an extremely well-established source, which may seem a bit oddly out of place here. I am thinking of the brilliant analysis of the photographic object by Roland Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida* (1982).

The wonderful quality of Barthes treatise on photography is that it weaves together a number of strikingly different themes – a reflection on the *noeme*, the essence of photography, a quest to discover whether photography exists at all, if it has a "genius" of its own, and, at the same time, a reflection on the irreversible ontological status of the photograph; that it depicts something that no longer exists, that all reflection on photography is inescapably a reflection on the impossibility to capture and hold the past, to retain the living moment, to stop the flow of time, in short, that all photography is a reflection of death. And for Barthes, more specifically, his quest for the *noeme* of photography becomes a quest to come to terms with the loss of his mother. Sorting photographs in her apartment shortly after her death, he desires – but does not expect – to find the one photograph that could restore her unique being to him, until he finds that one photograph; photography as an instrument of an impossible science of the particular, a *mathesis singularis*...

Barthes begins his quest from a strikingly simple, almost banal starting point, which leads him to his impossible science of the singular. He wonders what it is that makes him generally indifferent to the vast majority of the plethora of photographic images that surround him. At best they stir only a cursory interest in him, but mostly they leave him completely unmoved. Then there is another class of images. They break with this general rule, they exert a special attraction upon him. A fascination? An interest? Not really. Barthes observes that there are certain images that produce "tiny jubilations" in him, as if referring to "a stilled center, an erotic or lacerating value" buried within himself (Barthes 1982, 16). So he wants to find out what it is in these particular photographs that "sets him of"?

Studium versus punctum

This second class of images, the images that exert a special attraction seemed to adhere to a general rule. In each of them, Barthes observes there was a "co-presence of two discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they did not belong to the same

world" (ibid., 29). On the one hand, there is the element of the photographer's skill, familiarity with the subject of the photograph and the spectator's own knowledge and culture that he or she brings to the photograph. This element of the photograph always refers to a classical body of knowledge, with varying degrees of success depending on the photographer's level of skill (ibid., 25–26). Barthes calls this element the *"studium"*.

In other words, we could say that the studium is what in the image pertains to convention and to that which is understood to be a good or proper image. It is via studium that Barthes becomes interested in so many photographs, but without special acuity. They generate only an average level of interest, which rests upon the recognition of the theme, the motive, the composition and the acknowledgement of the photographer's skill.

The second element is of an entirely different order. It manifests itself not so much as a contrasting form or incongruous motive, but more as a rupture of the image. This element disturbs the conventional image (the studium), breaks it in a way and opens up a gap that escapes interpretation. It cuts through the carefully composed tissue of the skilful photographic image, almost like an uncontrollable force (which Barthes indeed discovers it to be later on). Barthes writes: "This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of It like an arrow, and pierces me" (ibid., 26). This second element that disturbs the studium Barthes calls "punctum": "punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident, which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (ibid. 27). The *punctum* belongs to a different world, indeed, and pertains to a different power, a power that Barthes' phenomenology, his impossible science of the particular, agreed to compromise with, a power that he did not want to reduce – that power was affect: "being irreducible, it was thereby what I wanted, what I ought to reduce the Photograph to; but could I retain an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria" (ibid. 21)? And the Barthes's discovery in making himself "the measure of photographic knowledge" was that the punctum *is* affect.

We cannot understand the *punctum* as an element in the image that has visual properties (which sounds like a paradox at first). Instead, the *punctum*, is more a visual incommensurability. Barthes calls it a "sovereign contingency". It is the unexpected and uncontrolled encounter with the Real (in the Lacanian sense) that the photograph makes possible, because of its immediacy and its causal and unbreakable tie to its subject (the referent) in the optical/chemical process (Barthes wrote this before the advent of digital photography). The *punctum* is exactly that which in the image defies and disrupts interpretation, and at that point, opens up a semantic and even existential void, a non-space and a non-time in which that which is normally indexed as separate can suddenly be

connected, vaguely, but insistently …

The image as a resonance object

By turning to Barthes's impossible science of the particular, his *"mathesis singularis*", we can – surprisingly – do what Castells has failed to do entirely, account for the particular image and its role in the process of affective mobilisation in the "movement(s) of the squares". The question is not *if* images played a role in mobilisation or not, because obviously they did, given the exuberant and at times excessive visuality in literally all the protests. This is a non-question. The real question here is *which* images played a crucial role, and *why*? We must turn to the particular to establish a more general (though never universal) rule for the pattern of affective mobilisation under scrutiny here.

There are many examples. Certainly Khaled Said's morgue photograph,[8] and, prior to 2011, another crucial example; the death of Neda Agha-Soltan on 20 June 2009 in Teheran [9] captured on video and circulated on YouTube, or the earliest images circulated on Twitter of the police brutality at the start of the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul.[10] The list grows quickly, but we can only understand these images and the role they played in the protests by studying the particulars of each one of them individually. From that exercise we may be able to establish something of a more general rule or principle, but, I have to warn you, one that will only emphasise the "sovereign contingency" of the Event.

The "Lady in Red"

To emphasise this science of the particular, I will discuss only one image here: "The Lady in Red" by Turkish photographer Osman Orsal (working for Reuters News Agency). The photograph depicts an event that took place on 28 May 2013 at Gezi Park, Istanbul, right next to Taksim Square. A very small, nonviolent group of protestors, who convened to protest against the planned demolition of Gezi Park to make way for a large-scale urban development project initiated by Istanbul's city government, which is controlled by the ruling AK Party. The project foresaw a combination of shopping malls with the construction of a giant Mosque (in an otherwise mostly secular part of the city). Protestors were attempting to stop construction workers in bulldozers from uprooting trees in the park.

The riot police at the scene, meanwhile, reacted with disproportionate violence. The photograph captures the moment when Ceyda Sungur, a research assistant at Istanbul Technical University's School of Urban Planning was attacked by a police officer in riot gear, wearing a gas mask, when he sprayed pepper spray directly into her face. The woman has slightly longer curly hair, which is pushed backwards by the force of the release of the pepper spray, as she turns her face away but tries to hold her ground, before finally giving up and eventually falling onto a park bench, where she was able to regain her breath and wash out her burning eyes. We know, furthermore, that she did not suffer permanent injury from the event and that her motivation for being at this demonstration was primarily to protest the AK party-controlled city government's spatial politics and the destruction of one of the few green areas in this part of the city. Gezi Park is also only a few blocks from the School of Urban Planning.

The images of the initially very small protests at Gezi Park started to circulate almost instantaneously via platforms such as Twitter, and prompted both a media frenzy and a mushrooming of the size of the protests that would eventually spread across Turkey to various other cities. However, within the flood of images and visuals that would be subsequently produced in what has since become known as the Taksim Square Riots, or #occupygezi, [11] Osman Orsal's photograph of the "Lady in Red" (Ceyda Sungur) has become something of an icon of this protest movement. The visual motif of the woman in the red dress with her curly hair blown away by the thrust of pepper spray was copied on websites, on actual banners in urban protests, in graffiti murals, in cartoons, adopted to

medieval Turkish imagery, and there's even a Lego version of the scene. The photograph itself was widely circulated on a variety of social media platforms, within Turkey and internationally, and the image was also picked up by mainstream media, for instance, in two articles published by *The Guardian*. [12] Its wide circulation and its adaptation to various visual genres and media offline and online testifies to the vibrancy of the image and its galvanising function for the mobilisation process in the case of the Gezi Park protests and their aftermath. The question remains, however, why exactly? What is it about this image that "set off" so many "spectators" and turned them into active participants in the protests?

Since we know so much about the background of this photo, the people involved, the aftermath, the fact that Ms. Sungur was luckily not seriously injured, and that many more serious and lethal accidents occurred during the ensuing riots, we can rule out that it was a simple case of pubic outcry over police brutality. The event was obviously a case of disproportionate use of police force, but we cannot reduce its vitality to this "conventional" reading.

All that I have described thus far is part of what Barthes would call the *studium* of the photograph. My contention is, however, that the image derives its attractive power from the co-presence of two incongruous elements in the image: one is the cordon of policemen in riot gear forming a straight line with their shields, standing in battle formation, while one police officer, wearing a gas mask, advances from the cordon with his pepper spray canister aimed at the face of the protestor. And finally, the gush of pepper spray itself, which violently assaults the (female) protestor like some phallic (acid) emanation, unleashed into the woman's face.

The second element is the image of a woman in a very "proper", red dress, a symbol of her belonging to a particular educated middle class, nothing too fancy, no haute couture, but also not working-class, and certainly not an anarchist protestor's garb who is bent on upsetting the general order. Her white tote bag seems strangely informal and completely out of place in this scene, as if it just had walked over from the college campus (as its owner actually did). Then there are the brown shoes, urban style, again very middle class, not overly designed, but also not a symbol of either poverty or anti-statist, anti-corporate deviance. Her hair is markedly secular, unveiled, curly, well-maintained, and generally "conventional" in style. Everything about this lady in a red dress embodies the emblems of the middle class, and she is everything in this image that does not belong here.

And yet, these two incongruous elements: the phallically aggressive riot cop and the conventional middle class, college-educated woman coexist in the same image. Moreover, the two heterogeneous elements are directly linked by the gush of pepper spray and the curly hair blown away from the face of the woman, which suggest that they belong simultaneously to the same scene and yet to very different worlds as well. And this very fact constitutes an incommensurable contingency. We as spectators instantly recognise both sets of conventional emblems and their implicit significations, but somehow, we can't seem to place the two elements together in our understanding of the scene. This ambiguity creates a rift in our understanding – the *studium*, as in Barthes classic analysis of photography, is punctured or ruptured by the sovereign contingency of this impossible encounter.

Here is the *punctum* in full force – more than any of the gruesome images of protestors literally run over by police cars, the swollen eyes, the marks on the beaten backs, bleeding heads, corpses, burnt limbs, convulsing torsos, memorials for the martyrs of Gezi, the cut faces, the crying children caught in the middle of the street violence, the tear-gassed dogs, the vomiting protestors, the policemen firing their weapons at the protestors, the armoured trucks ploughing into the unarmed civilians, the teargas grenades flying through the air leaving broad trails of smoke, the water guns, a stitched- up street cat, the rock throwing protestors, the billowing gas clouds, the broken limbs, the gunshot wounds, the scorched

skin, the bandaged faces, the burning barricades, the crying men, women and children, the defiant standing immobile in the midst of the chaos, the massive gatherings of ordinary citizens, the onslaught of bulldozers, the rubble, an old man gasping for air, hosed-down protestors in the street, more teargas and more blood, and all of the paraphernalia of popular protest – it was this image of the "Lady in Red" that galvanised the affective attraction of the #occupygezi protests.

The gap in understanding engendered by the co-presence of the two incongruous elements, creates a semantic void that resonates particularly strongly with the protestor's and spectator's affective intensity and is able to amplify this intensity exponentially. It was not the conventional images of protest that we by now all know so well, and that arouse only mild interest in us, but this incongruous image that became the potent affective attractor.

Not a lack of content, but an overabundance

Before we turn to the spatial dynamics of the protest, it is necessary to note that I am not suggesting that there is "no content" in these public protests and their primarily affect-driven pattern of mobilisation. In fact, I am stating exactly the opposite. These protests do not *lack* content, no, quite the contrary, these protests are overflowing with content. As we observed earlier, these protests were able to assemble a remarkable heterogenous crowd of participants, and there is the strong suggestion that it is precisely this semantic openness of the affective link that was a key factor in (temporarily) overcoming ideological, material, cultural and political differences.

Affect acts here as an incipient connective force that can connect what is normally indexed as separate, allowing protestors with wildly different political and religious convictions to come together, inserting a wide variety of sometimes entirely contradictory messages, aims and demands into these gatherings. This is possible because the affective mode of mobilisations relies not on a shared issue, demand, or conviction, but precisely upon the absence of such.

Consciously articulated political strategies run counter to this affective mechanism, as Massumi observes, because consciousness is "delimitative" (Massumi 2002, 29): the half second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outward directed, active expression – this half second is overfull – in excess of its actually performed action and ascribed meaning. Will and consciousness are subtractive – limitative, derived functions that reduce complexity too rich to be functionally expressed (p. 29).

Imperfect capture of affective intensity

Massumi understands the "formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage" as the capture and closure of affect, of which emotion is "the most intense, most contracted, expression" (Massumi 2002, 35). Emotion can thus be considered instrumental in the constriction of the free flowing autonomy of affect.

The capture of affective intensities by emotional dispositions (individual and collective) is, however, never complete because of the speed of affect and because of its lack of semantic/semiotic structure. This imperfect capture of affective intensity leaves behind a residue, which Massumi calls a "non- conscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder" (ibid. 25). Emotion for Massumi is both the most intense expression of the capture of affective intensity and of the fact that "something has always and again escaped" (ibid. 35), which constitutes the autonomy of affect.

Both social movements and strategic political formations can be portrayed as attempting to capture affective intensity and to bring about its closure, by forging collective emotional dispositions, or by directing it towards strategic political objectives. But this capture remains inherently incomplete, generating a continuous source of instability, which can erupt unpredictably and seemingly spontaneously.

The impingement of this autonomic remainder on the self-mediating subject and the body of the protestor can be recognised as an incipient force driving the subject to find new forms of connection beyond the coded expressions of affect, which can account for the recurrent pattern of street protests and public square occupations: A meeting of the bodies of protestors creating new (semantically open) resonance patterns of affective intensity that avoids strategic fixation.

This leads to an inescapable implication: Whatever types of political formations are created in these affect-driven mobilisation processes, because of their heterogenous composition, the emerging formations cannot but be inherently unstable.

Affect and urban space

The relationship between affect and urban space has been an important theme in the work of Nigel Thrift, whom I quoted earlier with regard to each different "reading" of affect producing its own politics. According to Thrift, cities may be seen as "roiling maelstroms of affect", as he describes it early in his essay "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect" (Thrift 2004). [13]

Particular affects such as anger, fear, happiness and joy are continually on the boil, rising here, subsiding there, and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life (ibid. 57).

Given the ubiquity of affect as a vital aspect of cities, Thrift muses that one would expect that the affective register would form a large part of the studies of cities, but he (as well as I) finds it strange that this is mostly not the case. It is addressed, but then often as a side issue, as a frivolity, as unessential to the study of how cities function and are shaped and what kind of interventions can be unleashed there. Thrift considers this "criminal" neglect and proposes addressing this gap in search of possibilities for progressive interventions in this area.

Thrift gives three reasons why he considers is criminal neglect not to address this issue:

-First, systematic knowledges of the creation and mobilisation of affect have become an integral part of the everyday urban landscape: affect has become part of a reflexive loop which allows more and more sophisticated interventions in various registers of urban life.

-Second, these knowledges are not only being deployed knowingly, they are also being deployed politically … to political ends: what might have been painted as aesthetic is increasingly instrumental.

-Third, affect has become a part of how cities are understood. As cities are increasingly expected to have "buzz", to be "creative", and to generally bring forth powers of invention and intuition, all of which can be forged into economic weapons, so the active engineering of the affective register of cities has been highlighted as the harnessing of the talent of transformation. Cities must exhibit intense expressivity (p. 58).

The problem, Thrift notes, is that the smallest elements can have tremendous effects. There is an awareness of how the performative produces changes in affective states which becomes increasingly minute, both because of we have a better understanding of cultural forms and how they play the affective register (in the arts, theatre, but also in advertising,

entertainment and design) and because of new insights offered by the cognitive and neuro sciences. These new scientific insights increasingly operate in a "micro-space" of persuasion/seduction. Roland Barthes, shortly before his death, in one of his last lecture series, posthumously published as "The Neutral" was already calling for a similar effort: "a hyperconsciousness of the affective minimum, of the microscopic fragment of emotion … which implies an extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer" (Barthes 2005, 101).

Hybrid Space and densification

If the intensified political deployment of the "knowledge of the creation and mobilisation and affect" in the ever-smaller micro-spaces of everyday life already posed a problem for (the possibility of) a deliberative politics of democratic checks and balances, then the intense densifications of hybrid space only further exacerbate this problem. In my " Navigating Variable Urban Densities *[www.onlineopen.org/navigating-variable-urban-densities]* "column for the Open! platform, [14] upon which this essay expands, I emphasised the need to consider the "densification" of hybrid space in relation to the deployment of affect.

The concept Hybrid Space was originally coined by the architects Frans Vogelaar and Elisabeth Sikiaridi *[www.onlineopen.org/soft-urbanism]* (1999) and designates a single, unified concept of space that is characterised by the simultaneous presence (co-presence) of different, heterogeneous and, at times, contradictory (operational) spatial logics. The concept proceeds from the assumption that different spatial logics are superimposed in any "lived" space. Physical structures, whether they are natural or constructed, are superimposed with processual flows that operate according to a different and mostly incommensurable spatial logic. Such flows can be flows of communication, trade, goods and service provision, transportation, data flows, even face-to-face exchanges and public gatherings of various kinds. While the concept of hybrid space is thus not necessarily defined by the superimposition of technological infrastructures onto the "natural" or built environment, the spatial density and heterogeneity is greatly increased by electronic media, especially by the increasing presence of electronic signals, carrier waves, wireless communication and data networks in lived environments.

Vogelaar and Sikiaridi cite the visionary work of media theorist Vilém Flusser as an important source of inspiration for their concept. Flusser's essay "The City as Wave-Trough in the Image-Flood" (1988) "reconfigures" the city as a system of attractive forces of ever-varying density, constituted by the webs of interhuman relations flowing through strands that act as information channels through which ideas, feelings, intentions and knowledge flow. Flusser maintains that the density of the webs of interhuman relationships differ from place to place within the network, and get knotted in what we could describe as "human subjects" [15] – the greater the density, the more concrete the relations. The density of the webs of interhuman relations differs not only from place to place (spatially), but also from moment to moment (temporal), which is highlighted by the ever-changing connectivity options on wireless networks as we move through the city, for instance. And, even if we stand still, signals may drop away at any moment …

Flusser observes that the dense points in the networks form what he calls "wave-troughs in the field", densified connective patterns that draw large numbers of humans and devices together in the web of interhuman (and inter-machine) relations. These dense points exert an "attractive" force on the surrounding field drawing in an increasing number of interhuman and machine relations from the periphery. And, he concludes: "These wave troughs shall be called 'cities'." (ibid.)

The fascinating aspect of Flusser's conception of the city as a network of information channels and flows is that its constitutive processes are described as entirely "blind". Forces operate on a field, attract and draw in from the periphery, densify, almost as if they are in danger of imploding onto itself like a black hole. These terms seem indeed closer to

a physics or cosmology discourse, rather than an analysis of urban and human geography. However, it is exactly this quality which makes his conception ideally suited to think through and conceptualise the dense flows of affect and information signals in the massive public protests of the "movement(s) of the squares".

Against spatial dichotomy

Hybrid space (as a concept) emphatically rejects any form of spatial dichotomy, especially with regards to electronic and networked (wireless) communication technologies. It rejects on equal grounds the sci-fi pop image of "virtual realities" (of the *Matrix* type), the early cyber-utopian reveries of an "independent cyberspace",[16] but also the spatial dichotomy famously proposed by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) and reiterated in his *Communication Power* (2009). Castells contrasts the embodied space of lived experience for the vast majority of the world's population, the "space of place", with a disembodied placeless space of information flows, the "space of flows". Power – be it political, economic (financial), or cultural – is increasingly organised in this placeless space of flows, according to Castells, which leads to structural schizophrenia in society, creating divides that urgently need to be bridged.

However, what the work of sociologist Saskia Sassen *[www.onlineopen.org/public-interventions]* from the early 1990s onwards has clearly shown is that this so-called "placeless" space of flows is very clearly located. It requires a dense overlapping infrastructure of technological, knowledge, information processing and political capabilities to project itself around the globe. These overlapping infrastructures are typically found in what she termed "Global Cities" and thus offers a specific location for this networked regime. Her analysis also revealed that this regime creates massive centralisations of economic and political power that should and, indeed, can be resisted (occupied) locally (Sassen 1991). Invoking spatial dichotomies obscures these basic "matters of concern" and suggests an unjustified sanitary image of the new regimes of networked power relations, presenting them as increasingly unchallengeable.

Hybrid space offers exactly the opposite of a sanitary image: Volatility, discontinuity, and ever-varying densities of superimposed, incommensurable and colliding spatial logics – without recourse to an "outside" space – are constitutive characteristics of its conception. This concept does not offer assurances and signals (carrier waves) may fade at any moment; interference is a constant factor in these densified hybrid spaces, while control remains ambivalent, disruption can come from any side, complexity abounds in the unseen – evidenced by the beauty and fascination of wireless spectrum allocation graphs, which also show that 99% of the wireless spectrum is restricted from public access.

Double presence in Hybrid Space

Even the most remote locations today are no longer free of the presence of electronic signals; short wave radio, satellite transmissions, local networks (for instance, near polar research stations), geo-positioning satellites, and other signal carrier waves hybridise even the most sparse environments on the planet. The enormous proliferation of mobile and wireless technologies in public space exponentially increases the density of (hybrid) urban spaces in particular. This trend continues to grow with, for example, the current introduction of 4G wireless networks and beyond, produce an ongoing densification of the web of potential relationships between human subjects and technological objects. This process dramatically expands the range of potential interactions between previously unrelated actors, which generates a new complexity and unpredictability of social relations.

The connective pattern at work in the "movement(s) of the squares" built on the densification, the volatility and the attractive forces with their unpredictable feedback patterns in hybrid space – partly deliberately and partly nonconsciously. The process of

affective mobilisation via online communication channels charged the bodies of the spectators with an intensity for which this online, disembodied, screen-based environment offered no possibility for release. This discrepancy between the affectively charged body and the anaemic, digital network environment was a crucial factor in driving literally thousands upon thousands of citizens beyond the screen, seeking to connect in the streets and squares, turning them instantly from disinterested spectators into active participants and protestors. Anger or frustration over the various "issues-at-stake" undoubtedly created a favourable predisposition towards this heightening of affective intensity. However, as we have seen, the issues varied from locale to locale, often bringing actors together who did not share a similar agenda (political, ideological, religious or otherwise) even within the same locale. Meanwhile, the connective pattern is nearly identical in all cases.

Once on the street or square, the hybrid densification increased exponentially, not only because of the presence of technological networks, but especially because of physical proximity. The protestors thus established a "double presence" (both embodied and mediated) that dramatically increased the range of possible association between what were previously mainly unrelated social actors. It is important to keep in mind that affect is radically synaesthetic. It fully involves all of the senses.

In these extremely dense gatherings, all of the sensory registers are triggered and contribute to the catalytic process of affective intensification: the visual signs, the banners, the sound of voices, the drone of human-mike assemblies ("mike check! mike check!" – the protagonist invoking the repetitions by the crowd of the short phrases spoken by whoever has been addressing that same crowd, producing a particularly powerful form of affective resonance), but also the smells, the hormonal exchanges, the excited gaze, the gesturing, the touch – the air, (tear-)gas, moistness, cold, heat, movement, people running, the rush of adrenaline triggered by impending danger (police officers charging), physical confrontations, rocks, bullets, gas canisters whirling past, bloody wounds … And, across all of these registers of sensation, we have the massive presence of mobile media in the physical space, which is busy recording and transmitting – sometimes in real-time – the incessant hum of mobile phones.

The increased densifications and double presence in hybrid space create new conditions for affective feedback and hyper-connectivity: The street, the square and urban public spaces are no longer simply spaces for the embodied encounter with the "unknown other"; they have been transformed into media platforms themselves, feeding back into the transnational and translocal media network, both synchronously (in real time via live text, image and sound feeds), and asynchronously (via audio and video uploads and reports). This creates dense points in the urban sphere in near-real time that exert tremendous attractive forces on their periphery, drawing in more and more interhuman relations into its field.

Beyond the square: Spaces for action

In the so called "movement(s) of the squares" three constitutive elements – technology, affect, and hybrid urban space – link up in a distinctive connective pattern that creates intensive feedback loops between embodied and electronically mediated exchanges by previously unrelated social actors. This pattern has been able to produce massive forms of popular protest across a bewildering range of geographic, cultural, and political contexts, addressing a variety of heterogeneous issues. The unpredictability, the repetitiveness, the diffuse organisational structures and ephemerality of these "public gatherings in dissent" carries important political implications, some of which I have already hinted at.

The activists involved in staging (or perhaps initiating) these protest-gatherings very effectively seized upon the affective registers to which both the speed of mobilisation as well as their characteristic affective intensity testify. For the activist, this involved the

creation of "resonance objects" that resonate particularly strongly with the semantic openness of affect (visual, textual and auditory), using an essentially trial and error experiential and experimental method to arrive (only half-consciously) at their proper shape (aphoristic slogans, affective images, human microphone rituals, public urban encampments and dense embodied gatherings). The semantic openness of affect played a crucial role in transcending political, cultural, ideological and religious divides at these gatherings.

In adopting the protest and mobilisation patterns from one to the other local context, the activists engaged in what Saskia Sassen has described as the "knowing multiplication of local practices" (2006, "Public Interventions"), which draws on the increased capacities for establishing horizontal translocal connections via electronic networks (primarily internet-based communications) on a de facto global scale, while bypassing vertically nested transnational institutional hierarchies. As a result, local practices could be constituted on a transnational scale. Sassen refers to this spatial principle as a "multi-scalar local" (ibid.).

Besides practical exchanges of tactics, literature, visuals and online communication resources, the new forms of self-mediation enabled by the distributed media infrastructure of the internet and wireless communication networks allowed for the constitution of mediated presence by a multiplicity of ordinary citizens who enacted themselves as protestors within the networked media space. This created a specific form of recognisability. Self-mediation not only allowed these citizen-protestors to become present in the political context they were contesting, but crucially also with regard to each other. They thus established a translocal presence that was recognisable and able to precipitate active linkages and increased interaction. The affective dimension of these linkages acts here as a powerful "incipient connective force" establishing connections across a wide variety of localities.

However, the emergent political formations resulting from affect-driven mobilisation processes are inherently unstable, firstly because of their heterogeneous make-up. Secondly, as we argued earlier, neither collectively articulated emotional dispositions nor strategic political formations can ever provide a complete capture of affective intensity. This imperfect capture leaves behind an affective residue (Massumi's "autonomic remainder") that generates a steadily growing potential for future affective mobilisation which can erupt unpredictably and seemingly spontaneously, and thereby lead to continued instability.

Thirdly, it is not the claim that there would be no content, no demands, no matters of concern in the "movement(s) of the squares" that is problematic for their political efficacy, but exactly the opposite: that they are overflowing with content, demands and matters of concern. This overabundance of content and issues carries with it the inevitable fractious make-up of these emergent political formations. Hence the fruitless debate over a politics of consensus, [17] which has been particularly strong in the US occupy "movement", but which did not lead to any identifiable political results.

It would seem then, that the paradox of simultaneous success in mobilisation and the apparent lack of political efficacy of the "movement(s) of the squares" is mirrored by a split between content and effect in the process of mobilisation. This raises a final question, which is how to imagine instituting the type of "progressive political interventions" that Nigel Thrift, for instance, is calling for in this complicated context (Thrift 2004, 58)?

Two distinct approaches present themselves in addressing the complicated logic of this new techno-sensuous spatial order, which, for sake of convenience, we can refer to as "Affect Space". These two approaches might seem to contradict each other, but I propose that they must be considered to be in conjunction but not necessarily as complementary approaches. If they produce contradictory results and insights then these contradictions

should be accepted and explored.

The first approach aims at a better understanding and the creation of a subjective awareness of the complicated logic of "Affect Space". Predictive unifying theories are of no use here. Like the activists – who developed their tactics in situ through trial and error – stumbling onto new forms that revealed themselves rather than that they were deliberately created, we should also rely on experiential and experimental methods to further explore this new spatial order in an attempt to find its progressive political potential.

Luckily, we do not have to venture blindly into "Affect Space" – a vast repertoire of experimental and experiential methods is readily available to us. But this time it does not come from the domain of political activism. I am thinking here primarily of the psychogeographic explorations of the Situationists outlined by Guy Debord in his texts "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955) and "Theory of the Dérive" (1956). These ideas have received something of a rejuvenation via the renaissance of psychogeographic explorations in locative arts. But the artistic/aesthetic explorations of network culture in the net.art movement of the 1990s also come to mind here. These artistic procedures deliberately mixed up online and embodied cultures and offered a rich repository for staging exploratory urban interventions to intensify and make subjectively present the operation of the affective registers of urban space and their malleability.

Still, it would be fair to contend that, in so far as affect is semantically and semiotically unstructured, its experiential exploration is a cognitively "blind" process. This is true, and it also suggests an inherently complicated relationship with progressive politics. However, Massumi emphasises that the relationship of affect to language is "differential" and not so much in opposition to it. Particular linguistic structures resonate strongly with affective intensity and are able to amplify it forcefully (as discussed above), while others dampen affective intensity. Concentrated forms of articulate deliberation and its linguistic expressions in philosophical and political discourse certainly belong to this latter category, and they are the final instruments that we will turn to here.

Newly emerging progressive political movements that have emerged in the wake of these remarkable translocal protest-cycles should engage in deliberative forms of political design. If the progressive moment of the "movement(s) of the squares" was to signal the possibility of a new type of politics, beyond current restrictive and repressive codings of collective political formation, then the obligation for those who envisage the type of progressive political interventions that Thrift is calling for is to engage deliberately and consciously in new forms of political design.

In the wake of the prolific 15 M mobilisations, Spain could well be regarded as the most interesting "laboratory" right now for these new ventures into the practice of (progressive) political design. [18] But it needs to move beyond the new political parties that have emerged in Spain (Podemos) and Greece (Syriza), who play on, and within, the traditional domains of institutional representative democracy. These new practices extend into the invention of radically new forms of representation, new modes of democratic composition, as evidenced in the post-15 M, citizen-network model of democracy: Partido X. [19] The movement needs to transcend this "merely human" perspective; it needs to embrace the complicated questions of how humans and nonhumans can engage in the "progressive composition of the good common world", which was raised most insistently in philosopher of science, Bruno Latour's recent work. [20]

The challenge is to invent new forms of the political locally and translocally that are suitable for addressing the specific conditions of the bewildering range of localities that have fallen into crisis since 2011.

References

- Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982
- Barthes, Roland, *The Neutral*, translated by Rosiland E. Krauss and Denis Hollier, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005
- Castells, Manuel, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996
- Castells, Manuel, *Communication Power*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009
- Castells, Manuel, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Cambridge and Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013
- Debord, Guy, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", *Les Lèvres Nues* #6 (September 1955)
- Debord Guy, "Theory of the Dérive", *Les Lèvres Nues* #9 (November 1956)
- Flusser, Vilém, "The City as Wave-Trough in the Image-Flood", translated by Phil Gochenour, *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Winter 2005): p. 320–328. www.jstor.org
- Gerbaudo, Paolo, Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism, London and New York: Pluto Books, 2012
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2010
- Kluitenberg, Eric and Jorinde Seijdel (eds.), *Hybrid Space: How Wireless Media Mobilize Public Space*. *Open* no. 21, *Journal for Art and the Public Domain* , Amsterdam: SKOR / NAi Publishers, 2006
- Mackenzie, Adrian, *Wirelessness: Radical Empiricism in Network Cultures* , Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010
- Malinowski, Bronislaw, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages.", supplement to C. Ogden and I. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. 296–336, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1923
- Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press. In particular: "The Autonomy of Affect", p. 23–45, 2002
- Sassen, Saskia, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991
- Sassen, Saskia, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* , Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006
- Sassen, Saskia, "Public Interventions: The Shifting Meaning of the Urban Condition", *Open* no. 11 (2006): p. 18–26, www.saskiasassen.com
- Thrift, Nigel, *Non-Representational Theory: Space | Politics | Affect*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008
- Thrift, Nigel, Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect. *Geografiska Annaler* 86 B (1) (2004): p. 57–78
- Vogelaar, Frans and Elisabeth Sikiaridi, *idensifying™ translocalities*, Logbook NRW.NL (catalogue), Amsterdam: De Balie, 1999

Eric Kluitenberg is an independent theorist, writer and educator, working at the intersection of culture, politics, media and technology. He was head of the media and technology program of De Balie, Centre for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam (1999–2011), and taught theory of interactive media and technological culture for a variety of academic institutions, including the University of Amsterdam, the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and Academy Minerva Postgraduate Studies in Groningen. He was also a scientific staff member of the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. Currently he teaches media and cultural theory at the Art Science Interfaculty in The Hague. In 2013 he was a research fellow at the Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Publications include: *Techno Ecologies* (2012); *The Legacies of Tactical Media* (2011); theme issues '(Im)Mobility' (2011) and 'Hybrid Space' (2006) for *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*; *Delusive Spaces – Essays* (2008); and *The Book of Imaginary Media* (2006). He is working on the preparation of an international anthology on Tactical Media co-edited with David Garcia, to be published by MIT Press in 2017. Projects include *FREE!? – A one day journey into the cultures of sharing* (2013), *Economies of the Commons* conference series (2008–2012), *ElectroSmog – International Festival for Sustainable Immobility* (2010) and *Next 5 Minutes 3 & 4 – Festivals of Tactical Media* (1999 / 2003).

Footnotes

1. www.theguardian.com.
2. The name "movement(s) of the squares" has been used in a variety of activist media outlets, as well as news media reports. I use this term cautiously as a "temporary placeholder", only to tease out its inherent heterogeneity.
3. Heba Yeha Amin (2013), "Speak2Tweet: An Intimate Look at the Egyptian Psyche", Hybrid City II Subtle rEvolutions Conference Proceedings, University Research Institute of Applied Communication, Athens, pp. 63–67.
4. I originally introduced this term in 2001 while studying the marvellous Tenant Spin project in Liverpool, a web-tv studio housed in the UK's oldest tower block, which enabled the residents to provide their own views on the renewal process and the rest of their surroundings. See: Kluitenberg, Eric (2001), "Mediate yourself!", in: *Supermanual – The Incomplete Guide to the Superchannel*, Foundation for Art & Creative Technology, Liverpool, pp. 46–50. www.tenantspin.org.
5. Caroline Nevejan, "Presence and the Design of Trust", Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 2007. www.nevejan.org.
6. See, for an introductory overview, Gregg and Seigworth 2010.
7. www.democraciarealya.es.
8. www.elshaheeed.co.uk.
9. en.wikipedia.org.
10. www.tacticalmediafiles.net.
11. twitter.com, occupygezipics.tumblr.com.
12. www.theguardian.com, www.theguardian.com.
13. This essay was later adapted and republished as "Spatialities of Feeling" (pp. 171-197) in his book, *Non-Representational Theories* (Thrift 2008).
14. www.onlineopen.org.
15. It is relevant to note that Thrift emphatically rejects any notion of subjectivity "because the human sensorium is constantly being reinvented as the body continually adds parts in to itself" (Thrift 2008, 2).
16. See John Perry Barlow's "Cyberspace Independence Declaration": projects.eff.org.
17. See David Graeber, Some Remarks on Consensus: occupywallstreet.net.
18. Obviously, I'm thinking of the successful Podemos movement, but also the more experimental and radical design of the Partido X citizen network and "party without representatives": partidox.org.
19. partidox.org.
20. See, for instance, Latour's most recent project, "An Inquiry into Modes of Existence": www.modesofexistence.org.

Crosslinks

Navigating Variable Urban Densities: www.onlineopen.org/navigating-variable-urban-densities
Soft Urbanism: www.onlineopen.org/soft-urbanism
The Network of Waves: www.onlineopen.org/the-network-of-waves
Public Interventions: www.onlineopen.org/public-interventions

Tags

Activism, Aesthetics, Affect, Image, Public Space, Urban Space

This text was downloaded on November 10, 2026 from
Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain
www.onlineopen.org/affect-space