Towards a Method for studying Affect in (micro)Politics: The Campfire Chats Project and the Occupy Movement

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In their introduction to *A Postcapitalist Politics,* J.K. Gibson Graham quote artist-activist John Jordan stating, "When we are asked how we are going to build a new world, our answer is, 'We don't know, but let's build it together.'[1] This ethos of building together underlies the micropolitics of protest camps in which people must not only work, but also live together as they struggle toward a common goal. In relation to theorisations of affect, what differentiates the protest camp from other place-based or space-based social movement gatherings and actions is the sustained physical and emotional labour that goes into building and maintaining the site as simultaneously a base for political action and a space for daily life. At a protest camp people's perspectives toward others, as well as towards objects and ideas, are largely shaped through communal efforts to create sustainable (if ephemeral) infrastructures for daily life. Camps are frequently home to infrastructures such as DIY sanitation systems, communal kitchens, educational spaces, cultural festivals and performances, as well as media, legal and medical operations.[2]

In this paper we introduce a methodological framework we have designed to gather empirical data on the affective, every day encounters, or micropolitical life, of the protest camp. Combining theories of affect with existing qualitative frameworks for interviews and focus groups, we designed the 'Campfire Chats Project,' piloted in January 2011 with Occupy campers in Ottawa and Montreal, Canada. The Campfire Chats project is an experiment in how we share and document experiences of everyday lives in relation to political activism at protest camps.

The Fall of 2011 saw over a thousand Occupy protest camps built in cities around the world. Just as social movements have their own unique social, political and historical context, each Occupy camp must be situated within its own context. Nonetheless, many of the Occupy camps shared these infrastructures common to past protest camps. For example, in Occupy Wall Street's Zuccotti Park location, as in several other camps, activists built communal kitchens, libraries and wellbeing spaces. Some, including the Occupy camp in Portland, Oregon, also constructed grey water systems and built urban gardens. In other work, we have argued for the use of an infrastructural framework to better understand and compare experiences across the Occupy movement and other protest camps (Feigenbaum et al.) We will introduce and employ this framework later in this paper when we offer our analysis of affect in the camps.

This paper begins with a brief review of existing social movement scholarship on the study of affect that can be applied to protest camps. We then introduce our Campfire Chats methodology and describe its operationalisation through pilot runs in Ottawa and Montreal. Following from this, we move into a discussion of findings arising from this first set of Campfire Chats to explore the roles affect plays in specific acts of 'building together' at Occupy protest camps. We conclude by looking at the possibilities for expanding this methodological framework more broadly to study protest camps and related, place-based political groups, organisations and movements.

Affect & Social Movement Studies

Affect is defined in many different ways by thinkers from a variety of disciplines including psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, media studies and human geography.[3] While definitions vary from theorist to theorist, there are generally three ways that 'affect' is viewed to explain social interaction and experience. In application, and even in theorising the concept of affect, these different approaches largely overlap and inform each other. We separate them out here for purposes of familiarising the reader with this dense terminology:

1. Affect as a way of thinking about sensations we don't (or don't yet) have the language to describe.

This 'pre-discursive' or 'pre-personal' definition of affect in cultural studies is primarily put forward by Brian Massumi and other Deleuzian thinkers.[4] For this group, affect is intensity. It is the pre-cognitive sensation that drives and moves the body. In psychology, Silvan Tomkins and followers of his work also describe affect as pre-cognitive, arguing that it was what makes us feel. For Tomkins 'affect has the power to influence consciousness by amplifying our awareness of our biological state.'[5] The most commonly invoked example of this is a child before it has language and is therefore always in a state of 'pure affect.'[6] Depending on where one draws the line between 'pure affect' and 'feeling', we might also say that common adult bodily responses such as being jittery, crying when you 'don't know what's wrong,' or recoiling from a person, a smell or an image are examples of affect or affective states. This view of affect distinguishes it from feelings, claiming that feelings are sensations 'checked against previous experiences and labelled.'[7] In other words, by the time we can say we 'feel angry' our sensations have already been registered and labelled with the emotion 'anger'. The affective state comes prior to this cognitive and linguistic act of naming; it is instead the sensations that called on us to try to recognize and name our bodily state.

This, in part, is what makes affect so difficult to talk and write about affect. The moment we use any commonly understood words to describe bodily states (angry, anxious, sad, disappointed) we are already leaving the affective realm and talking about feelings and emotions. Another way to think about this is to imagine a time when you 'didn't know what you felt' or 'felt more than one thing'. What we call feelings here could be better understood as affect, sensations that we are trying to name but struggling to find the right words for. In Massumi's terms they are 'intensities' we are unable to capture, to contain or to fully express. This distinction can help us understand how feelings can be interpreted differently, at different times, and by different people.[8]

2. **Affect as the ways that sensations can move and circulate through physical and virtual spaces.**

This second perspective on affect focuses on how affect travels and circulates. Theresa Brennan describes this travel as a flow, suggesting that we should perceive people as interpreters, rather than receivers of feelings, affect and information.[9] Looking

at the role of media and 'communicable affect' or 'affective contagion,' Anna Gibbs argues that media act as amplifiers of affect, increasing the rapidity of communication and extending its reach almost globally.[10] Everyday examples of this include feeling the 'tension in a room,' flame wars that erupt over list serves or emails, or online 'shit-storms' that hit corporations or people after they made contentious comments. In activist politics this would include the notion of 'fairy dust' enchanting anti-capitalist politics.[11] Affect is also discussed by Lawrence Grossberg in his writing on fandom and the atmosphere at a party or concert.[12]Speaking in relation to social movement formations, for Linda Kintz it is important both how affect moves through space and place, as well as between people at the site of encounter.[13] She uses to the term 'resonance' to discuss the 'intensification of political passion in which people with very different interests are linked together by feelings aroused and organised to saturate the most public, global issues.'[14]

3. Affect in encounters and interactions that move, stir or arouse something in us and produce a change.

Derived for some from the Spinozian trajectory of theorizing affect and picked up in Deleuzian thought, this approach, closely related to the other two, looks at affect in relation to the question 'What can the body do?'[15] Concerned with our capacities for action--be they positive or negative--affect is seen as the sensations that effect what the body can do. New sensations, responses or reactions generate potentials to act in new ways. These kinds of affective encounters can come in response to conversations with a friend or at times a stranger, an incident you witness on the street, at work, or at home. They can also happen in response to watching a film or documentary that triggers sensations, opening new ways of understanding yourself and the world, of increasing your capacity to act.[16] We see this notion of 'transformative affect' expressed in many protesters descriptions of their participation in actions and events. For example, in his work on the anti-roads movement, John Jordan describes direct action as an 'inherent rush' in which the 'excitement and danger of the action creates a magically focused moment, a peak experience, where the real time suddenly stands still and a certain shift in consciousness can occur.'[17]

Although there are many differences in their approaches, these diverse scholars theorising converge around the idea that a better understanding of our affective life can help make sense of how transformations in consciousness and behaviour happen. Yet, while affective sensations are what propel us 'to act' in activist settings, they are not often accounted for by scholars or protesters when they engage in, and reflect on, movement debates. For example, in social movement circles debates around nonviolence, black bloc, mainstream media strategy and dietary policies can often spark heated discussions and disagreements. We call these 'hot topics' or 'raging controversies', but we rarely ask what is that makes them 'hot' or 'raging'? These emotive descriptions of political discussions do not get unpacked, and often people interact with each other only on the linguistic level, spending hours in meetings trying to reason to consensus. In these kinds of intense situations, greater attention to our bodies, to how and why they respond as they do, can lead to better discernment of ourselves and others, as well as to what is going on with the spaces and objects that are around us. This is what Therese Brennan refers to as 'interpreting the flesh'--a process of being attentive to our sensations and feelings that can enable transformations in how we relate to each other with greater understanding and care.[18]

Sara Ahmed's theorisation of emotion in political communities is particularly useful to a study of the affective micropolitics of protest communities. Ahmed argues that affect can be thought of through an economic model in which feelings mediate relations between the 'psychic-social' and 'individual-collective.' For Ahmed, affect is what bind subjects together. As affect travels it accumulates value, moving sideways to create attachments, moving backwards to connect us to the past.[19] Ahmed argues that collective formations emerge out dialogical practices, 'the conversations, the doing, the work.'[20] Through these interactions people form and severe attachments to each other, as well as to ideas (and ideals).

As protest camp participants are often in contact with one another for hours at a time (whether cooking, at working group meetings or sitting around in a tent), it is through these interactions, especially as they occur repeatedly over time, that campers form attachments to each other and to the protest camp. There are shared pleasures and practices, as well as persistent disagreements. Daily dialogues and debates shape

camper's feelings towards each other, as well as towards ideas, activities and objects.[21] These interactions often reveal to us the 'the differences that matter' in political communities.[22] These differences, we argue, are layered with meaning and reveal the ways in which both nameable feelings and unnameable sensations effect actions and interactions in the (micro)political life of the protest camp.

III. The Campfire Chats Methodology

Working from this theoretical framework, the 'Campfire Chats' project was designed to gather research on and document camp life, as well as to provide a movement-building exercise. Like any experimental methodology, the process was designed to be refined over time and shaped by feedback and input from others. The methodology for the Campfire Chats project had five key aims. To:

1. Create a method that mirrors the forms of dialogue that take place in a protest camp.
2. Capture protest camps as active, agential spaces that necessitates care.
3. Investigate how affects (feelings, moods) lead to particular effects[23]
4. Look at the construction of experience and 'echoes' between campers' experiences across time and space[24]
5. Privilege polyvocality and the importance of engaging with protest camps as multi-perspective and polysemic spaces.

To achieve these aims, the methodological design of the project took inspiration from the idea that it is through and around objects that we form attachments and political orientations.[25] Objects form an active, fundamental part of the day-to-day operations of protest camps–be they materials (tents), practices (General Assemblies) or ideas ('We are the 99%'). For our project we used the technique of "photo elicitation" to prompt participants to tell stories in relation to protest camp objects. This technique involves the use of photographs as interview conversation prompts.[26] In his comprehensive review of the uses of photo elicitation, Harper notes that the technique has been used across social research to examine understandings of social class, community, identity and culture. In the same review, Harper argues that the use of photographs can be more effective than

words alone as they can 'enlarge' memory.[27] Liebenberg has also commented on the advantages of photo elicitation noting that 'images may facilitate participant articulation of lived realities in a manner that brings a focus to research results better aligned with participants' lives. Similarly, through use of visual material, researchers may discover and demonstrate components of community lives that may be subtle or easily overlooked.'[28] Given our interest in affect and lived experiences at protest camps, we viewed the use of pictures as appropriate prompts to elicit discussions linked to the everyday and micropolitics of protest camps.

Image Selection & Card Decks

Images used in photo elicitation may come from different sources and thus may be taken by the researcher, curated by the researcher, taken or even drawn by the research participant.[29] For the Camp Fire chats project, pictures were selected in advance by the researcher. By having the researcher select the photographs for discussion Clark-IbáÑez suggests that the researcher can 'capture taken-forgranted aspects of the participants' community or life that prompt discussion.'

The Campfire Chats project selected images to design a deck of 50 photo elicitation cards. Each card had one photograph containing images and/or words that were dominant and recurrent visual signs, icons and slogans of the Occupy movement. The photos were selected using a three pronged strategy. First, images were sought according to key word searches on Google images using key words such as "Occupy", "protest", "protest camp". Second, images were sourced from the web pages of Occupy groups (e.g. OccupyTogether.org) or through social media platforms such as Facebook(e.g. Occupy Wall St) and Tumblr (e.g. Pepper Spraying Cop http://pepperprayingcop.tumblr.com/). From these websites, photos with images of slogans such as 'Occupy Everywhere,' 'We are the 99%,' and 'De-Colonize Occupy' were selected. Other cards bore copies of heavily circulated images such as the "Guy Fawkes" *V for Vendetta* mask (worn by the hacktivist group Anonymous and popularised at Occupy).

Finally, photos were selected with an active theoretical interest in protest camp objects and infrastructures. To this end, we chose images which were specific to the

architectures and artifacts of Occupy protest camp life. These pictures included a camp library, wiggle fingers consensus hands, use of the 'People's Mic' and hand painted signs for 'well-being' and 'women's space.'

While the majority of the cards were designed to use at any Occupy camp, we were also interested in local experiences and thus included some images which were specific to the camps hosting our chats. In our Montreal deck we included a picture of the statue of Queen Victoria that was controversially decorated on the first day of the encampment with an Anonymous mask, a Quebec Patriote flag, and sign reading "Zeitgeist." The Occupy Ottawa deck had a picture of a banner which read "Occupy Ottawa" and had the Canadian parliament buildings in the background.

Pilot Study

The Campfire Chat project was designed for groups of 3 – 15 people and to run for between one and a half and three hours. The Chats were designed to be audio recorded, with all names anonymised and consent forms given out in advance that specify the purpose of the project and its aims. If participants requested that an audio recording not be made, the chats were designed to be able to run without recording, using another method of documentation. Ideally chats were to be co-facilitated with one person serving as the conversational facilitator and a second person serving as a note-taker, time-keeper and what is called a 'vibes watcher' in consensus decision-making who notes people's behavioural cues to be able to draw attention to what might be unspoken disagreements, upset participants, or a lack of energy in the discussion.

For our pilot run we hosted two Campfire Chats. The first was with Occupy Ottawa and had three participants. Two of the three had moved permanently to the Occupy camp during its 39 day existence, while the third went after work and on weekends. The second chat was held in Montreal with ten participants. Seven of these participants had lived and worked at the camp, three were supporters who made occasional visits to the camp. At our Occupy Ottawa chat, a quiet public meeting space in a local university was used. This allowed for participants to easily find us and to feel comfortable to come or go if necessary. However, drawbacks to being in a public setting included some outside noise and interruptions. For the Occupy Montreal chat,

arrangements were made to use space at a local media cooperative. This space was already familiar to the Occupy community and offered a quiet and comfortable setting. Participants in both of our pilot study chats consented to audio recording. During the Campfire Chats participants were asked to sit in circle around a table or alternative surface. The deck of object cards was spread out in front of the participants with the image side facing down.

Analysis

This section offers a preliminary analysis of the roles that affect and emotion play in the micropolitics of everyday life at Occupy protest camps. After conducting these two Chats, our recordings were transcribed for coding. Our coding frame was generated alongside our broader methodological framework that organises protest camp life infrastructurally, identifying four sets of operational structures that can be found in some variation across all protest camps. As these organizational dimensions interact, they enable and hinder each other, creating the unique architecture and rich context of each protest camp. These infrastructures are summarised in the table below. [30]

Table 1: *Coding Frame*

Communication	**Discusses how campers develop media and communication strategies/used media within the camp or from the camp to the outside world**
Governance	**Relates to decision-making, structure of camp roles or organisational logistics of camp planning**
Domestic	**Discusses camp as 'home', everyday tasks, building camps, shelter, sanitation, squatting**
Action	**Relates to direct actions, action planning or action support (legal, medical, well-being)**

Each key infrastructure served as a main code to help draw out comparisons between these two camps in the pilot study. The following discussion section of this paper uses

these four infrastructures to organise central issues that arose in the Campfire Chats. To outline how we operationalised both this methodology and these infrastructures, we look at an example for each one in turn: communication, governance, domestic, action.

Communications

The issue of how, if at all, activists within a social movement should interact with mainstream media has long been a contentious issue.[31] Often simply referred to as 'the media debate' within activist circles, the issue of how to interact with mainstream media, remains a 'hot topic' for discussion, as our Occupy Montreal Campfire Chat demonstrated. Given the presumed divisive nature of the topic, theories of affect can provide a useful lens for understanding why debates around these issues become so heated and people's different attachments and experiences of media objects and practices shape how a protest camp's media strategy unfolds.

During our Chat, participants disclosed that prior to the start of Occupy Montreal's occupation of Victoria Square, there had been a 'huge debate' on whether or not the camp should contact or interact with 'traditional media'. The debate centred on issues of trust as some activists expressed a general 'distrust' of traditional media, while others endorsed a selective approach that acknowledged there were some 'sympathetic journalists'. As with past movements, the debate about interacting with mainstream media at Occupy Montreal was divisive and, based on the account of chat participants, lead to an inability to reach consensus on the topic. One chat participant noted that, as a consequence, 'many people were just going to the media without consulting, people didn't have a strategy, because, they wanted to use them, while some others didn't want to use them, so, there was not much consensus there.' For a movement which is based on the principle of open dialogue, the inability to gain consensus on an initial policy of mainstream media interaction is significant.

While mainstream media interaction was a 'big debate' prior to Occupy Montreal's founding, with the occupation's commencement, much of the media and communication strategy cantered around a 'Media Tent' erected during the Occupation. However, as Camp Fire Chat participants revealed, the media group did not function:

> Man 5: There [was] a big problem inside, there's a group of committees formed for the Occupations, and they called themselves 'Media co-ordination and Communications', and they put out the sign outside that said 'Media Co-ordination and Communication'. But they didn't really do any media, or any co-ordination, or any communication.

Responding to the perceived media and communications gap, core activists, referred to as 'the founders' created an 'External Communication' group which sought to compensate for the inaction of the original Media co-ordination and Communications working group. The 'founder's' increasingly important role became the subject of some tensions:

> Man 5: … But that was an underlying tension, that there were these founders who have these kind of closed committees that were like, really important, but not doing anything after a while. Not to be completely unfair to these guys, a lot of them were working Security all night, and they were like, walking zombies [laughter], and so…it was something that needed to be done, and there were like, these different groups that were trying to work around each other at some points, so yes, there is disorganization, there is a lot of it.

Both the issue of too much control as well as that of disorganisation are flagged up and both, importantly, are causing anxieties and tensions in the camp. The comment 'not to be unfair' shows how the speaker (Man 5) acknowledges the burden often placed on a core group of people running the camp. However the tensions that arise in protest camps because of anxieties over too little or too much organisation and control by core activists and 'founders' more often than not erupt into fierce conflicts that threaten the camp in its entirety.

Governance

As camp meetings are spaces of exchange that generate a great deal of intensity, looking at the affective dimensions of such spaces and interactions can help us better understand the complexity of governance in social movements. In our Montreal Campfire

Chat, a discussion around governance infrastructures arose in relation to an elicitation photo card showing a bilingual banner. The discussion generated an affect rich dialogue about General Assemblies—large, open meetings where Occupiers came together to raise and deal with the day's issues engaging in direct democracy:

> Host: Were you trying to do, I know it's very difficult, but, any kind of live translation, whisper-translation…?

> Woman 2: In the beginning, as everything was very structured and transparent ... people would come around etc, and then, as the formats for the general assemblies loosened up ... that [translation] section has got more or less lost, depending on the GA ... I think people who entered GA for the first time, or who have been having alienated experience with the general assembly already, are coming in and then walking away, feeling super excluded…

This experience of exclusion was contrasted by another Occupy participant:

> Woman 1: I hear what you're saying and I can understand how people feel uncomfortable, as an Anglophone coming here, I never felt excluded, I felt more like, hard-headed to take the initiative, to be involved

Layering a broader analysis onto this discussion of bilingualism, one participant presented this case in the words of an anti-oppression framework, according to which French 'should' take predominance because of its historical oppression.

The same occupy camper also argued that'[to] translate everything was impractical and arouse quite a fierce debate.'

Understanding affective attachment here can help work through the emotionality of this "fierce debate." It is through these conversations that the distinct identities of Francophone and Anglophones emerge. Another participant offered a somewhat different perspective, pointing toward an intervention made by a Spanish Occupy camper:

> Man 4: Well I had a different experience, I remember the second time we met …everything was in French, and then somebody got up, and spoke in English, and there were people who were complaining. And then there was a debate for a short period of time, whether we can be speaking in the language we want, and I remember someone, who was from Spain specifically, said that in Barcelona, there was no debate about whether to speak Spanish or Catalan, and Catalan people are quite proud of being Catalan, but still, anybody would speak anything they wanted. And so, many of us said, 'we're not here for the language, we're here for other reasons.'

This shared anecdotal experience from a Spanish occupier works to shift the focus of debate. For some campers at the meeting this interjection enabled them to re-orient themselves to the issue of bilingualism. This points toward the transformative potential of affect. As a new idea or perspective is introduced, old feelings and investments can be called into question. While an analysis of why it is important to prioritise French at Occupy Montreal can remain, feelings of anger, loss and bitterness can become 'less stuck' to the action of translation, allowing occupy protesters to shift their focus from the politics of language to the politics of the financial crisis. Bilingualism is untethered--if temporarily--from its place as the object of 'fierce debate' as new values are attached to the act of translation in political organising.

Another participant also noted a difference in how language use was accepted inside and outside the space of formal meetings:

> Woman 1: I think outside the meetings it was a really comfortable space, like, I found people were really inclusive, and it was interesting to sit in a group of people, like, sitting around, hanging out at night, doing whatever, just listening to the mix of languages. And not only French and English but sometimes Spanish, other languages. For me, just to sit back and observe, I thought it was a really interesting space for the mix of that, and I think people really tried to be accommodating to other people.

Other Campfire Chat participants voiced agreement with this observation. The difference in protest camper's use of and response to language in informal social spaces versus the formal space of the meeting points toward the relationship between feelings and biographical experience.[32]The space of the formal meeting carries with it the authoritative weight of governance that taps into state-based histories of repression and marginalisation in which Quebec's language debates are rooted. This exemplifies Sara Ahmed's argument that in the affective economy, affect travels backwards and forwards through time.

Domestic

In our Campfire Chat with Occupy Ottawa, participants discussed a strategy for dealing with tension at meetings brought forward by some of the protest campers. While still relating to governance, here we see how domestic infrastructures, relating to home-making, are built to help sustain and navigate self-governance in the space of the camp.

After a spate of aggressive interactions at assemblies, some people brought forward the idea of calling a 'Family Meeting.' At a family meeting, campers would stand in a circle and a large stick would be passed around. Anything that you were feeling and wanted to get out, you would say to the stick, rather than to a specific person or people. Everyone was asked to listen without comment and anyone who wanted to say something would have turn to 'talk to the stick.' (This talking stick is likely related to those brought to protest movements via the Rainbow Gathering which appropriated it from Northwest Indigenous tribes.) The Family Meeting was introduced as a way to reduce tensions and negative sensations and feelings in the camp to enable occupiers to negotiate and work through the challenges generated in decision-making process. Here is how one camper, new to this idea, explained the meetings:

> Man 1: Specifically if there was something that had happened they would call a 'Family Meeting' and then you pass the stick, and it was always known, should be respectful and talk to the stick and not to the person. So those people would say

> like, ‘I'm really frustrated’ or angry you know and pounding the stick. But it was nice because you know you don’t interrupt ... you say what you need to say.

Another camper described how the process allowed people to get out what they were feeling without taking it out on other people:

> Woman 1: It was a non-confrontational way of just saying, ‘I'm really angry at you guys right now…’ Because sometimes we would get bogged down by the issues of the camp like, all those things to keep everybody warm and fed, and keep everything going. And it becomes this tension and you just get angry at each other and then somebody would just want to say ’I'm just angry’ and they felt better, and it was like okay, well.

Creating time and space to work through the effects of these affect rich encounters, Occupy Ottawa campers were able to better discern their sensations and untangle how they arose from their own biographical experiences.[33] The process of de-personalisation and de-narrativisation, as performed in the Family Meeting exercise, helps ‘unstick’ our feelings and emotions from particular ideas and objects, allowing room to consider other perspectives and possibilities. It can help people to remember that feelings do not need to harden inside us, but can be released.[34] The physical act of shouting or crying at the stick allows emotions to flow back out into the world.[35] As one camper put it, it was a way ‘to deescalate things’ that prevented people from ‘taking their frustrations out’ on other campers.’ While initially apprehensive about the idea of Family Meetings because of its association with ‘hippie stuff,’ for this camper, ‘it actually turned out to be a really good thing.’

Action

Actions, like meetings, are often spaces of intensity, where bodies enter vulnerable states that both produce and respond to affective sensations in the moment. In our Campfire Chat with Occupy Ottawa, participants’ recounted the eviction of the camp,

elicited by a photo card showing an image of a protester being carried away by two police officers. This led to an affect rich discussion of the action of resisting eviction.

On November, 22 2011, after just over a month of its existence, the Occupy Ottawa camp was served with an eviction order. In response, Occupiers mobilised media and supporters for the day the eviction order was served, but the police did not act. Only a day later, the following night, when most media and supporters had left the camp and there was a remaining group of eight protest campers, did the police conduct the eviction. As with previous Occupy camp evictions in North America, before launching their operation, police established a wide perimeter around the camp closing it off to media and the public. With the perimeter in place, the the eight remaining Occupy campers were forcefully arrested in the presence of 150 police officers. 7 of the 8 protesters were later released with a $65 ticket.

One of the campers we spoke to in the Campfire Chat was part of the remaining group of eight, while the two others in our focus group had been watching the eviction from the perimeter. All expressed similar accounts of how they responded to the unfolding events. The operation of the police was strongly criticised for being carried out at night in a move that was deliberately both secretive and overtly forceful. The police attempted to avoid media attention and used an excessive operation, considering there were only eight campers remaining. This is a common eviction tactic seen in a number of Occupy camps, as well as in anti-roads camp and peace camp evictions in the UK and US.[36]

In the Ottawa Campfire Chat the two women who witnessed the eviction from the side lines, reflected on their experiences of the night:

> Woman 2: It was really quiet at night at 3 o'clock in the morning, and there is big fat snow is like coming down, and beautiful white snow everywhere and our friends were being dragged to the snow because they are singing in the fountain like it was just so real. I was just like why.
>
> Woman 1: I was so angry.

> Woman 2: [The police] just stand there, and look right through you, and it felt inhumane that's what it felt like, it felt like these people weren't acting with human nature towards you. They looked at you like they didn't care …hundreds of them standing and just looking, watching people be dragged away…

Here the affect laden astonishment of the moment comes clearly to the foreground. As participants' described it, there was a serene setting, a snowy night and eight remaining campers singing in a fountain, around them a massive police operation unfolds. The two women participants remember having an immediate experience, not comparable to what they had previously seen in media coverage of similar events. The women were directly affected by the disproportionally of force, by the fleshy encounter with police violence.

There is a clear indication of feelings in what Woman 1 describes as being 'so angry'. Described here with the commonly used emotional demarcation 'so angry,' she seeks to capture what was an immediate gut response to witnessing injustice that is not rationalised or put into perspective (the cops are just doing their jobs, etc.) and this intense, bodily response leads to a transformative moment in the relationship of the woman as bystander to the police force in general:

> Woman 1: I think the worst part of this entire thing for me is that I now actually have zero trust or faith in cops, even less than I had before. I don't know how that's possible, but I don't feel they are there to protect people or to help people. I feel like they are there to serve the interests of whoever has money, or whoever sends them to do the dirty work forcibly. And I don't feel safe that I'm in a society with all these police stations. I don't feel comfortable.

Drawing from this example, we see that affect plays a transformative role in shaping political identities (anarchist, anti-police). Rather than offering a linear argument about policing practice and discourses around safety, this moment of witnessing brutality is felt in the body. In learning to articulate this anger, a subject position is formed that (re)orients the Occupy camper to a critique of state policing. Understanding how affect shapes subject positions in such ways is fundamental to understanding the formation and

shifting of activist identities, and particularly how they align into collective communities and campaigns.

This moment of transformation, intensely remembered in our Campfire Chat, is not just significant in this context. Indeed, it resonates with many (including our own) activists experiences. The immediate presence of injustice and police brutality, produces affect, and this plays a central role in the way we form relationships to the police, and more broadly, to the state and its sanctioned uses of force and violence.

Conclusions

As we have outlined, the Campfire Chats project was designed to examine how sensation, feelings and emotions play an important role in the everyday lives of protest campers. We designed our methodology around the notion that images of important objects--whether physical sites (tents), behaviours (using consensus hands) or media slogans (‘We are the 99%’). Campfire Chats prompt participants to tell stories in relation to protest camp objects. As Sara Ahmed argues, it is through and around objects that we form attachments and political orientations.[37]

Our analysis of Communication structure opened by recognising that interaction with mainstream media continues to be a contentious and ‘hot topic’ for activist debate. Affects at play in the ‘media debate’ in our case were linked to the contest role of core activists. Tensions arose as a result of the anxieties of participants because too much control had been accumulated by ‘founders’ of the Montreal camp. In relation to governance infrastructures, we discussed how meetings are intense spaces at protest camps, home to ‘hot topics’ and ‘fierce debates’. Affects ‘at work’ could be identified as occupiers experienced and overcame conflicts around identity in the Montreal occupy camp. As some spaces seemed to be better geared to overcome conflict over language issues than others, we could identify how affects were influenced by spatial and infrastructural settings in the camp.

Our analysis of affect and domestic infrastructures pointed to similar results in relation to the wellbeing of campers and their camp, as family meetings were created as a distinct space to deal with the overload of affect that arises in meetings and spills over

into camp life. Affect generated in meeting space needs to be dealt with or campers often resort to personal attacks. The example of the talking stick represents an interesting example of the role of specific objects in relation to affect. .

In relation to a camp's action infrastructures, the experience of police brutality featured importantly in the Occupy Ottawa Campfire Chat. In participants' recollection and reflection on the eviction we found evidence for affect as a transformative sensation. Moreover the 'effects of affect' experienced by the two women witnessing the forceful removal of their fellow protesters, resonated widely with shared experiences of 'becoming activists' resulting from the experience of police and state sanctioned violence.

Across each of these infrastructures and examples we showed how highlighting the role that affect plays in intense situations can help us to better understand what practices, ideas and objects are likely to create political conflict and disassociation. Likewise, it offers insight into what practices can best foster empathy and collectivity. From this preliminary operationalisaton of the Campfire Chats methodology we summarise these conclusions as follows. An understanding of affect:

1. Can help individuals better understand and articulate their bodily sensations, responses and reactions.
2. Allows for greater clarity and compassion in group discussion.
3. Provides tools for sustaining and working through intense moments of confronting difference within movement communities.

Limitations and Further Research

One of the most fundamental limitations of this paper results from its very topic. The nature of affect is, to some extent, that it is hard to hard to talk about it. Finding words that adequately describe affect is a matter of translation in which intensities, experiences and sensations inevitably get lost. This already happens in participants re-collections and becomes even more pronounced once the conversations are transcribed and cut to fit into an academic paper. In practical terms, 50 cards is more than can be used in a single setting. The exercise may work better if we preselected a smaller sample of

cards for each focus group. While it not possible to cover all the issues you might want to as a researcher, which would allow for more pre-determination in the themes of discussion. On the other hand, the element of surprise keeps the exercise as a game, making for a less normative environment and interaction than in a standard research interview or focus group.

Further applications of this research could see the Campfire Chats model extended to other contemporary camps, not just limited to Occupy. The Chats model could be adapted by replacing photo cards relevant to any group of people camping or participating in other kinds of political organisations. (This might look similar to group audit). We also feel that the model could be extended historically; however concerns around time and memory, common to oral history more generally, would need to be accounted for. However, the elicitation method of triggering affect through images would be interesting to test and compare in an oral history context.

Bios

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