

# Nobody knows what an insurgent body can do

## Questions for affective resistance

*Stephen Shukaitis*

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From a multitude of revolts, miniscule or general, intrinsic to all that exists, through a passionate struggle, an inexpiable affective combat in which one risks death, libertarian action attempts first of all to select and liberate new forces within situations and beings and in the interstices of the existing order. It attempts to create a common and emancipatory plane of existence, able to traverse the totality of present worlds and realities, and to recompose the totality of that which exists.

(Colson 2001: 241)

Baruch Spinoza once said that no one knew what a body could do, what it was capable of, when not determined by the mind. In saying this he was rejecting the idea that the body and mind, reason and emotion, are separate. For Spinoza, far from their being separate, it was only by understanding the nature of bodies and motions, bodies and their emotions, that one could understand the potential created when they interacted. Unfortunately, this unified approach to understanding emotions and creative potential was lost and forgotten for much of the past several hundred years, to be rediscovered in the most recent forty years by thinkers such as Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, Genevieve Lloyd, Etienne Balibar, Daniel Colson, as well as many others. What can anarchist politics and theorizing learn from these developments. What is it that an insurgent body can do?

To foreground questions of our individual and collective capacities to affect and be affected by the world around us means that questions and concerns about personal relations and caring for each other are not insignificant concerns that can be brushed aside to tackle whatever is the pressing demand of the day. As famously observed by Gustav Landauer, ‘the State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently’ (Landauer 1973: 226). Politics is not external to the relationships and interactions we have – it grows out of, is intensified by, and ties them together. Affect, developed through interaction and care, exists as expansive and creative powers: ‘it is a power of freedom, ontological opening, and omnilateral diffusion ... [that]

constructs value from below' and transforms according to the rhythm of what is common (Negri 1999: 86).

Surely the path to creating a better, joyous, freer, more loving world is not one that is premised upon a constant struggle that leaves one tired and run down. The question is one of creating communities of resistance that provide support and strength, a density of relations and affections, through all aspects of our lives, so that we can carry on and support each other in our work rather than having to withdraw from that which we love to do in order to sustain the capacity to do those very things. This is to create a sustainable culture of resistance, a flowering of what I am calling affective resistance – that is, a sustainable basis for ongoing and continuing political organizing, a plateau of vibrating intensities, premised upon refusing to separate questions of the effectiveness of any tactic, idea or campaign, from its affectiveness.

The simple gestures, even sometimes ones that seem insignificant, are often the ones that mean the most in creating affective community. Not that they are glorious tasks by any means – asking how someone is doing, taking an extra five minutes to work out what's bothering someone or why they're preoccupied – but because of this it is easy to overlook how important they really are. They form the basis underlying our ongoing interactions, lodged within the workings of our affective memory. Immersed within the constant and ever-renewing nourishment contained within the gift economies of language, motions and affections, all too often we fail to appreciate the ongoing work of social reproduction and maintaining community that these acts entail.

Creating a vibrant political culture, one that exists 'beyond duty and joy', to borrow the phrasing of the Curious George Brigade (2003: 33–40), is not an easy task. Indeed, as our very joys, subjectivities, experiences and desires are brought further and further into the heart of the production process, creating autonomous spaces based upon their realization becomes all the more tricky. Fortunately some people have begun to explore and find ways to cope with and overcome the traumatic stress and tensions that can build up as a part of organizing. But what about the less spectacular or obvious forms, the damage of the everyday? What happens as all the constantly mounting and renewing demands on our very being, our capacity to exist and continue to participate in radical politics, build up? We find ourselves in ever more cramped positions, unsure of how to work from the conditions we find ourselves in. Do we carry on as we can, slowly burning out and finally withdrawing from ongoing struggles, perhaps consigning them to some part of our former youth that had to be left behind to deal with other things? Might there not be other options and paths to take?

Affective resistance starts from the realization that one can ultimately never separate questions of the *effectiveness* of political organizing from concerns about its *affectiveness*. They are inherently and inevitably intertwined. The social relations we create every day prefigure the world to come, not just in a metaphorical sense, but also quite literally: they truly are the emergence of that

other world embodied in the constant motion and interaction of bodies – the becoming-tomorrow of the already-here and now. And thus the collective practices of relating, of composing communities and collectives, exists where ‘the interplay of the care of the self ... blends into pre-existing relations, giving them a new coloration and greater warmth. The care of the self – or the attention that one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves – appears then as an intensification of social relations’ (Foucault 1984: 53). And so it is from considering the varying affective compositions and dynamics that affective resistance begins. It is the unfolding map that locates what Precarias a la Deriva have described as affective virtuosity, where

what escapes the code situates us in that which is not yet said, opens the terrain of the thinkable and livable, it is that which creates relationships. We have to necessarily take into account this affective component in order to unravel the politically radical character of care, because we know – this time without a doubt – that the affective is the effective.

(Precarias a la Deriva 2006: 40)

### **Autonomous feminism and affective revolt**

Strike or unemployment, a woman’s work is never done.

(Dalla Costa and James 1972: 30)

To find inspiration and some kernels of wisdom for teasing out a basis to expand the concept of affective resistance, perhaps one could turn to the experiences and knowledges in the history of autonomous feminism,<sup>1</sup> from the writings of figures such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici to campaigns like Wages for Housework and the more recent organizing of groups like Precarias a la Deriva. Their efforts come from experiences where the very basis of their being, the capacity of their bodies to care and relate are directly involved in necessary functions for the reproduction and continued existence of capitalism; involved in necessary social reproduction, but in ways that for a long time have been unacknowledged by large segments of the so-called progressive and revolutionary political milieu. From this necessary but unacknowledged position one can learn from their insights into organizing to find routes and passages toward more affective forms of resistance.

Despite the importance that autonomist feminism has played in the development of autonomous politics and struggles it is commonly relegated to little more than a glorious footnote of figures emerging out of autonomist thought (Katsiaficas 2001). Strangely enough, because housework, caring labour and many other forms of social labour were not directly waged, it was often assumed that they simply took place outside the workings of capitalism, as if they existed in some sort of pre-capitalist status that had mysteriously managed to persist into the present. Organizing around gender, affective labour and

issues of reproduction posed numerous important questions to forms of class struggle that focused exclusively on the figure of the waged industrial worker (Hardt 1999). The revolts of housewives, students, the unwaged and farm workers led to a rethinking of notions of labour, the boundaries of the workplace and effective strategies for class struggles: they enacted a critical transformation in the social imaginary of labour organizing and struggle. Because the labour of social reproduction and unwaged work was not considered work, was not considered to produce surplus value or to be of relevance for capitalism, it was often ignored and overlooked as an arena of social struggle. Relegated to an adjunct status compared to what was held as a/the real focus of power, economic power and class struggle, it was assumed that these sorts of concerns would be worked out after capitalism had been overthrown. But, as argued by Alisa Del Re (1996), there is a great importance in learning from and taking seriously the concerns put forth by autonomous feminism, precisely because attempting to refuse and reduce forms of imposed labour and exploitation without addressing the realms of social reproduction and housework amounts to building a notion of utopia upon the continued exploitation of female work.

Autonomous feminism, by exhorting that this simply was not going to stand any more – that it was ridiculous to be expected to constantly care for and attend to the tasks of social reproduction, from childcare to caring for parents to housework, all the while being told that what one was engaged in was *not work at all*<sup>2</sup> – shattered the ossified and rigid structures of the narrowly and dogmatically class-oriented radical imagination. As observed by Elisabetta Rasy, feminism is not external to politics, neither is it necessarily part of class struggle in an already determined manner; rather it is a movement within these various groupings, a movement creating conditions for the emergence of other subjects and experience to finally be acknowledged and learned from:

feminism opens up a magnetic crack in the categoric universe of the male-Marxist vision of the world, painfully exhibiting a history of ghosts behind the slippery façade of facts and certainties. The absolute materiality of the ghosts who embody need and desire stand in contrast and opposition to the phobic philologies of the existent and the existed.

(Rasy 1991 [1978]: 78)

Organizing around issues such as legalizing and creating access to abortion, divorce, contraception, sexuality, violence against women, while not reducible or contained within the framework of class struggle, embodies a challenge to forms of class-based social domination as it exists through the ability to control and restrict possibilities for social reproduction.

This shattering of the previously hermetically sealed dead-end of the radical imagination opened up a long-needed avenue for contesting and confronting forms of domination in all aspects of capitalist society (Shukaitis 2009). As

argued by Leopoldina Fortunati, while it may have appeared that the processes of production and reproduction operated as separate spheres governed by different laws and principles, almost as if their relation was a ‘mirror image, a back-to-front photograph of production’, their difference was not a question about whether value was produced, but rather one of how the production of value in social reproduction ‘is the creation of value but *appears otherwise*’ (Fortunati 1995 [1981]: 8). This is directly contrary to claims that housework and forms of domestic labour produced use values and thus were not involved in the production of value for capitalism.<sup>3</sup> In other words, by only focusing only certain forms of social labour and the exploitation involved in them (which was considered the basis for an antagonistic political subjectivity capable of overthrowing capitalism), this analysis overlooked myriad forms of social power and exploitation that operated within fields of social production and reproduction that, because of their unwaged status, did not appear as such. And perhaps even more importantly, this blindness, a situation created by the obfuscation of the theoretical baggage, also blinded radicals to the possibilities for political action emanating from these positions. But, as long as housewives, or the unwaged, or the peasants, or other populations were excluded from the narrowly defined Marxist framework of analysis and politics, ‘the class struggle at every moment and any point is impeded, frustrated, and unable to find full scope for its action’ (Dalla Costa and James 1972: 35).

### **Wages for/against housework**

We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known.

(Federici 1980: 258)

Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink.

(Dalla Costa and James 1972: 35)

There has long existed a relation between the nature of social reproduction and women’s forms of political self-organization.<sup>4</sup> But this relation is not specifically between women and the form of political organization as much as it is the influence of the resources and possibilities available for supporting social reproduction. Rather, because of their location within specific articulations of social roles and relations, it is more often women that are affected with a greater intensity by various forms of political domination and power that attack the basis of social reproduction. Just as the destruction of the commons was accompanied by the enclosure of the female body (Federici 2004) (which largely came to replace the role formerly played by the commons through countless hours of unacknowledged labour), neoliberal assaults from

the 1970s until the present have targeted collective ownership as well as the meagre gains congealed in the form of welfare state programmes and the gains won by feminism.

Given the often-harsher effects that capitalism and the whole array of forms of social domination have on women, it really should not be of any great surprise that they would play important roles in struggling against these forms of domination. From the mothers' demand for 'bread and herring' that started the Russian revolution (Sorokin 1950), to the role of women in struggling against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programmes and austerity measures that accompany the disciplinary devices of international loan slavery, the importance of and roles played by women all too often get ignored or passed over because they do not fit into the form of what is generally recognized as political action. This makes the reluctance of much of the Left, from Marxist theoreticians to union organizers, to see the relevance of feminist organizing as a class issue all the more exasperating. It's one thing to be exploited constantly and seemingly throughout all moments of the day and spaces of one's life, but then it's another, even worse, condition to find that one's allies and comrades don't consider one's struggle against these conditions to be part of a common endeavour. In other words, women found themselves trapped in conditions not only with a 'double shift' of work in both the formal waged sense and in tasks of social reproduction, but also during what Ursula Huws has referred to as their 'third shift'. This is the third shift of labour that is necessary for the social reproduction of political organizing, whether union organizing or otherwise. Many such movements were replete with people who did not understand these multiple layers of labour or their difficulties, and treated organizing around them as 'reactionary' and 'divisive' (Huws 2003: 112). Or, as quipped by Silvia Federici, 'We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle' (Federici 1980: 255). Given that, feminist separatism is clearly a totally sensible response to 'comrades' that are often little more than condescending and patronizing allies.

Autonomous feminism is thus not just important in itself, but also in that it works as an important reopening of a sedimented imaginary of struggle. It is a cracking apart of an imaginary blinded by its own categories and presuppositions. By demanding that housework and caring work be recognized *as work*, that labour takes place not just in the physically bounded workplace but also exists all throughout the tasks of social reproduction and community life, autonomous feminism opened, and continues to open, a space for a reconsideration of many of the concepts and tactical baggage that had been held on to. 'Once we see the community as a productive centre and thus a centre of subversion, *the whole perspective for generalized struggle and revolutionary organization is re-opened*' (Dalla Costa and James 1972: 17). In other words, the personal is political, but it is also economic, as well as social and cultural. Struggles around issues of care and housework, of the tasks of the everyday, are not just

individual concerns unrelated to broader political and economic questions – they are the quotidian manifestations of these larger processes. Recognition of their connections, as well as the connections against questionable power dynamics in the home, school, office, hospital and all spaces of social life, is an important step in socializing and connecting minor moments of rupture and rebellion into connected networks of struggle (Shukaitis 2008). As Dalla Costa and James argue, there is great importance in understanding the relation of domestic labour and its exploitation to struggles diffused throughout society precisely because '[e]very place of struggle outside the home, precisely because *every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home*, offers a chance for attack by women' (Dalla Costa and James 1972: 38). Organizing around domestic labour acted as a key point in the development of autonomous struggles because of its locations within intersecting dynamics of gender, race and class (Van Raaphorst 1988);<sup>5</sup> learning from these struggles is all the more important precisely because of the multiple constraints and difficulties women faced, and ways that they found to contest multiple forms of social power and domination.

One of the ways these demands would become embodied was in the various Wages for Housework campaigns. Originating initially in Italy and the UK, these campaigns, based on demanding recognition of the countless hours of unpaid work involved in typically female labour, quickly spread to many locations across the globe. Originating from struggles of women of the classical working class (such as demands around equal pay in the workplace), student groups, the New Left and various feminist organizations, the campaign used many of the concepts and framing of Marxist categories while at the same time attempting to move past the limitations of and assumptions about the 'true' revolutionary subject that often accompanied them. Admittedly the campaign and demand for remuneration for housework were controversial and received much criticism from both the right and the left.<sup>6</sup> In particular, it was argued that the campaign could have the effect of further consigning and limiting women to a domestic sphere, this time in a way that had been argued for through a feminist lens. Anna Ciaperoni makes this argument:

It is insidious to try to re-establish – even through filters from feminist experience – a theoretical value for the age long confinement of women to domestic activities, though unconstrained, because how many women actually choose housework? In this way one risks erasing ten years of feminist struggle and practice, for the destruction of the ideological basis of female subordination.

(Ciaperoni 1991 [1982]: 270)

Alternatively it was argued that the demand for wages represented a further commodification of yet another aspect of life and was harmful in that way. But what is most inspiring here, and most useful for rebuilding movements of

affective resistance, is how these women found ways to formulate new demands from the ambivalent positions in which they found themselves. Working from within these constraints they formulated new modalities for political antagonism, finding ways to socialize and connect struggles based around the ways their capacities and very existence were exploited. This could be understood as Wages for Housework's function as a pole of class recomposition and route for the increasing of collective political capacity of struggle. In the words of Mariarosa Dalla Costa:

The question is, therefore, to develop forms of struggle which do not leave the housewife peacefully at home, at most ready to take part in occasional demonstrations through the streets ... *The starting point is not how to do housework more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle: that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labour but a higher subversiveness in the struggle.*

(Dalla Costa and James 1972: 36)

The various Wages for Housework attempted to do just that: to find positions of higher subversiveness in struggle from which it was possible to organize against the isolation and misery that accompanied the miserable conditions of capitalist patriarchy.

In that sense the ultimate goal of such campaigns could be seen not as the demand of wages themselves, but rather as using the demand for wages to ferment and spread antagonisms against the structural systems of patriarchy and capitalist control that have long instituted and relied upon the unwaged and unacknowledged burden of women's labour. This was the source of much of the antipathy towards the campaigns, based on confusing the demand of wages for housework as object (from which it could be seen to keep women in the home, the commodification of caring labour, etc.) rather than as a perspective and catalyst of struggle and change. This confusion, argues Silvia Federici, separates a moment and temporary goal of the struggle from the dynamics of composition and the formation of collective capacities, and thus overlooks 'its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society' (Federici 1980: 253). The demand for wages for housework is not then an embracing of and struggle for waged status, but it is a moment in finding effective methods to struggle against the imposition of work and the dynamics of class power that exist under capitalism. That is, Wages for Housework is precisely the construction of a composition of social forces that makes it possible to struggle against the forms of housework, social roles and dynamics of exploitation that underpin them: 'To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it' (Federici 1980: 253). In other words, Wages for Housework is a moment in the struggle of wages *against* housework: a strategy

of composing class power from the position that women have found themselves in, but precisely to escape from that position. In the words of Roberta Hunter-Hendersen,

The essential task was to re-appropriate our own energy, intellectual, social and emotional, and it meant working together with patience as we unfolded our constricted limbs, began to stretch our oppressed kinds, and learnt again to interact with each other.

(Hunter-Hendersen 1973: 41)

### **We've drifted a long way (or have you?)**

The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women as women and the possibility at last of their liberation.

(Dalla Costa and James 1972: 23)

Despite the amazing feminist upsurge that entered public visibility and consciousness during the 1960s and 1970s, many of the issues that inspired it continue to exist, even if there have been vast improvements in addressing some of them. Disparities in wages, gender discrimination, differences in power and violence against women continue to be major issues for almost the entire world to a greater or lesser degree. The neoliberal onslaught of the 1980s and ongoing dismantling of the welfare state in much of the industrialized west have also created difficult questions for many women. And, perhaps most depressing in some ways, large sections of the left, and even the 'radical left', continue to largely ignore issues around gendered labour and forms of organizing around them.

It is from this realization that Precarias a la Deriva, a feminist research and organizing collective which in many ways is one of the most notable inheritors of this strand of feminist politics, began. Precarias a la Deriva formed in Spain in 2002, starting out of a feminist social centre, La Eskalera Karakola, initially as a response to a call for a general strike. The problem is that a strike did not address the forms of labour that many of the women were involved in, namely forms of care work, invisibilized jobs and precarious work. For those involved in these forms of work, participation in the strike would be unlikely to have any positive effect on their circumstances and could very easily end with them losing their jobs altogether. In fact, a majority of people who were increasingly involved in such forms of work, which have come to be discussed under the concept of precarity, were not even that affected by the proposed changes in labour legislation that inspired the call for a strike because their social position was already so unstable.

The members of Precarias a la Deriva thus set out to find methods to investigate and understand the changing nature of work and social relations

and to develop methods of generating conflict that would suit this changing terrain. The method they initially chose to work with was that of the *dérive*, which is drawn from the Situationists, who employed forms of wandering through the city while allowing themselves to be attracted to and repulsed by its features and thus hopefully to open up new spaces and experiences that would otherwise and usually be ignored or overlooked (Debord 1958). Precarias a la Deriva modified the concept of the *dérive*, which they argue in many ways was particularly marked by the social position of the bourgeois male subject who had nothing better to do. Instead they sought to update the *dérive* to drift through the circuits and spaces of feminized labour that constituted their everyday lives.<sup>7</sup> The drift was thus converted into a mobile interview, a wandering picket that sought out women who were involved in the many forms of precarious and caring labour, to find out how the conditions affected them, and how they might work from them. They decided to investigate five overall sectors and interconnected spaces: (1) domestic; (2) telemarketing; (3) manipulators of codes (translators, language teachers); (4) food service (bars, restaurants); (5) health care. Using this method, the mobile interview/picket was used

to take the quotidian as a dimension of the political and as a source of resistances, privileging experience as an epistemological category. Experience, in this sense, is not a preanalytic category but a central notion in understanding the warp of daily events, and, what is more, the ways in which we give meaning to our localized and incarnated quotidian.

(Precarias a la Deriva 2003b)

Precarias used this practice of drifting as a means to explore the ‘intimate and paradoxical nature of feminized work’, to wander through the different connections between the spaces of feminized labour, and to find ways to turn mobility and uncertainty into strategic points of intervention:

to appropriate the communicative channels in order to talk about other things (and not just anything), modify semiotic production in strategic moments, make care and the invisible networks of mutual support into a lever for subverting dependence, practice ‘the job well done’ as something illicit and contrary to productivity.

(Precarias a la Deriva 2003b)

They aim to use these forms of intervention to construct what they describe as points of aggregation which, borrowing from the Buenos Aires militant research group Colectivo Situaciones (with whom they have corresponded a great deal), will be constructed based not a notion of aggregation capacity (the construction of mass forms of organization) but rather on consistency capacity, or the ability to form intense and dense networks of relations (Colectivo Situaciones 2005).

The practice of the *dérive*, the drift, as wandering interview and as a form of militant research, was thus an important starting point (and continues to be an important practice) for Precarias because it operates, in their words, as a form of ‘contagion and reflection’ whose potentiality is not easily exhausted; it is ‘[a]n infinite method, given the intrinsic singularity of each route and its capacity to open and defamiliarize places’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2003a). The shifting and transformation of everyday social relations and realities does not cease during the first phase of engaged research and intervention into a social space. Hence the need to continue to ask questions about how those spaces, and those living within them, are formed. As methods for visible political intervention transform the composition of a particular space, the relations within it also change. While militant research is often employed briefly to get a sense of the situation in which intervention will take place, after the initial inquiry the projects cease, and organizers continue to rely on their knowledge of the composition of social relations and realities without taking into account how they have changed. Precarias, by utilizing the openness and fluidity of the drift, of its capacity to defamiliarize one in an environment, emphasized the need to keep the inquiry open. The aim is to keep circulating and exchanging knowledges, often through the forms of workshops, gatherings, *encuentros* and publications, which are then fed back into other projects.

For Precarias in many ways find themselves, though they have drifted quite far to discover new methods of intervention, having to confront many of the same questions that faced feminist organizers in the 1970s, particularly those involved in campaigns such as Wages for Housework. While Precarias argue that ‘care is not a domestic question but rather a public matter and generator of conflict’, they are also quite aware of the difficulty in this task, for, as they observe, there is ‘the question of how to generate conflict in environments which are invisible, fragile, private’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2003a). This division between the political and the personal, the public and the private, has long been one of the dividing lines that feminists have confronted as a barrier to the raising of their concerns and demands without having them merely dismissed as *their* concerns and demands. One can see this dynamic, for instance, in the ways in which concerns about retreat from public life, the spectre of bowling alone, overlook the invisible networks of civic engagement embodied through forms of care which are at the same time forms of political involvement (Herd and Meyer 2002). This is the process whereby discussions around gender become understood as ‘women’s issues’, rather than the construction of gender and social roles more broadly. Or the ways in which domestic labour and care, even in discussion of them within radical political circles, can become assigned and narrated as a feminist issue alone, rather than seeing the ways in which these forms of labour and interaction relate to and are enmeshed within the larger frameworks of power being contested. Critically involved in primary socialization, they are, perhaps, the primary tasks in keeping together a society.

Precarias' answer to this encompasses multiple parts of their overall project and centres to a large degree around questions of affect. Rather than treating issues of domestic labour, the role of empathy and the creation of relations, interaction, sexuality and forms of care as separate issues and concerns, they describe them as the communicative continuum sex–attention–care. This continuum connects the diverse sectors and areas of their investigations, along which they point out that sex, care and attention are not pre-existing objects but socially narrated and constructed ones. They are by no means naturally formed in a specified arrangement (although they are often *naturalized* as if this were the case), but rather are 'historically determined social stratifications of affect, traditionally assigned to women' (Precarias a la Deriva 2006). It is along this continuum that Precarias see the role of affect as being key, existing at the centre of the chain that

connects places, circuits, families, populations, etc. These chains are producing phenomena and strategies as diverse as virtually arranged marriages, sex tourism, marriage as a means of passing along rights, the ethnification of sex and of care, the formation of multiple and transnational households.  
(Precarias a la Deriva 2003a)

This perspective of looking at the interconnections between forms of activity that have often been constructed as feminine is extremely important, especially in a period where the forms of activity described as such have become much more enmeshed and widespread across the functioning of the economy, from the 'service with a smile' or 'phone smile' of the McDonald's employee and telephone operator to the hypervisibility of the (female) body in media and advertising as a way to excite libidinal desires for the glories of consumption. And it has been argued that those involved in caring labour, who constitute an estimated 20 per cent of the workforce, tend to be more highly class conscious regardless of the gender of those involved (although notably there are higher percentages of women employed in such positions) (Jones 2001). Thus the question of affective resistance, attention to the dynamic of affective labour, becomes all the more pressing because those involved in such work contain a potentiality for rebuilding an inclusive revolutionary class politics at a moment when it may appear to have vanished from the realm of existing possibilities.

Arguably, the increasing rise of forms of human resource management, particularly those stressing the appreciation of diversity and cultural difference, as well as attention to issues of gender, are also part of the growing presence and importance of skills of communication and interaction extended through the social fabric as directly productive activities and abilities. But this 'becoming woman of labour' (Negri 2004; Corsani 2007; Osterweil 2007), which as an ambivalent process has highlighted the potentiality found within forms of affective labour and relations, has also continued to be marked by forms of social division and domination in which gender relations are historically

embedded: ‘a tremendously irregular topography, reinforcing, reproducing and modifying the social hierarchies already existent within the patriarchy and the racial order inherited from colonialism ... [upon which] the global restructuring of cities and the performances and rhetorics of gender are imprinted’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2003b).

Precarias a la Deriva thus propose a typology for considering forms of feminized and precarious labour, based not upon overall transformations in social and economic structure (although such is clearly related), but rather on the nature of the work and the possibilities it opens up or forecloses for insurgencies against it. Typologies based on specific forms of economic transformations in labour markets (for instance distinguishing between chainworkers and brainworkers) lack coherence, they argue, and tend to overlook the many ways in which similar dynamics overlap and affect multiple positions (as well as tending to homogenize various positions and particularities). Developing this typology based on unrest and rebellion, they propose three general types of labour:

1. jobs with a repetitive content (telemarketing, cleaning, textile production) which have little subjective value or investment for those involved – tendency for conflicts based upon refusal of the work, absenteeism, sabotage
2. vocational/professional work (anything from nursing to informatics, social work, research, etc.) where there is a higher subjective component and investment – conflict tends to be expressed as critique of the organization of labour, how it is articulated, and the forms it takes
3. jobs where the content is directly invisibilized and/or stigmatized (cleaning work, domestic labour, forms of sex work) – conflict tends to manifest itself as a demand for dignity and recognition of the social value of the work.

(Precarias a la Deriva 2005a)

The question for Precarias, as already observed, is finding points for commonality and alliances, lines of aggregation where intense forms of relations and communities can emerge and are strengthened. Precarias have also been involved the creation of various social centres and feminist spaces where such can occur and have been involved in the EuroMayDay Networks and parades, which have acted as key points of visibility for those contesting existing conditions.

Thus the central problem, and one that has become much more pressing in recent years, is around the issue of security. The military and neoliberal logic of security,<sup>8</sup> involving anything from increased border controls and migration regulation to the proliferation of private security firms and non-governmental, has risen during the past twenty to thirty years, during the same period that the decline of the welfare state and apparatuses of social security and welfare measures have been taken apart. This overall shift in the macropolitical situation is articulated in what Precarias describe as a ‘micropolitics of fear’ that is

directly related to the regulation of the labour market (and the configuration of state–labour–business) and to increasing forms of instability and precarization of life that extend over the whole of society as regimes of discipline. The increasing importance, or perhaps overwhelming nature, of the logic of security is such that Precarias have argued that it is ‘the principal form of taking charge of bodies and organizing them around fear, contention, control, and management of unease’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2005b). At the same time as regimes of security, visibility and exploitation come together in a particular kind of state form, parts of the state devoted social welfare are dismantled. Precarias see this as a moment where it is necessary to put forth a logic of care as the counterpoint to the logic of security which has become the hegemonic dispositif of politics in many locations, because, as they argue, ‘[c]are, with its ecological logic, opposes the security logic reigning in the precaritized world’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2006: 39).

This involves four key elements: affective virtuosity, interdependence, transversality and everydayness (Precarias a la Deriva 2006). These four elements are used to address questions of the sustainability of life, of the ability to continue in the everyday tasks of life, labour and communication in which we are constantly immersed. Thus it becomes possible to create cracks in these forms of articulation (Sharp 2005), and by doing so to focus on the role that forms of care, affects and relations have in the continual process of social reproduction. Or, as Precarias describe it, to develop ‘a critique of the current organization of sex, attention, and care and a practice that, starting from those as elements inside a continuum, recombines them in order to produce new more liberatory and cooperative forms of affect’ (Precarias a la Deriva 2006: 41).

Precarias have pursued this through two related proposals, arguing for what they have described as ‘biosyndicalism’ and the proposal of a ‘caring strike’. Biosyndicalism, which as the name itself implies, is a drawing together of life and syndicalist traditions of labour struggle while stripping them of their more narrowly economic elements. This is not to propose that life has ‘become productive’ or that it has ‘been put to work’, as starting from a feminist analysis of affects, caring labour and social reproduction makes it quite clear that affects have always been productive, productive of life itself, even that forms of life existed for many years that were not enmeshed in capitalist relations because they did not yet exist. Rather than claiming that life has now become productive, the argument here is that there are changing compositions of capitalism, modulated as eruptions of social resistance are reintegrated into its workings. In these transformed arrangements affective labour is more directly exploited, occupying a more central position. Similarly, it is not that conditions of instability and a precarious existence are a new phenomenon (as they have been perhaps more the rule than the exception for the vast majority of the history of capitalism); rather this process of precarization comes to currently encompass a much broader swath of the population than it has in recent times. Biosyndicalism for Precarias does not mean that labour struggles are no longer

important. Rather it indicates that as processes affecting the composition of labour are not restricted to a clearly definable sphere of 'work', conflicts over them likewise cannot be easily marked in one area or sphere. Thus it becomes all the more important to learn from these struggles and their successes (as well as their failures) in order to 'invent forms of alliance, of organization, and everyday struggle in the passage between labour and non-labour, which is the passage that we inhabit' (Precarias a la Deriva 2005a).

Thus they propose what they call a 'caring strike', a strike carried out at the same time by all those involved in forms of work all along the sex-care-attention continuum, from those involved in domestic labour to those involved in sex work, from telecommunications workers to teachers, and so forth. While this in many ways is close to the idea of the general strike so cherished (and fetishized) within the syndicalist tradition, the difference is that this is a combined strike by those involved in related forms of labour involving the dynamics of care. It is these dynamics, that are increasingly productive and important to the workings of the economy, that are the most often invisibilized, stigmatized, and underappreciated. While campaigns like Wages for Housework were built upon bringing visibility to forms of struggle and care within the home, Precarias are for expanding this notion to include the same dynamics and processes involved in the home that are spread across the economy, and bringing visibility to them, to organize around them, and to consciously withdraw their productivity, that which holds together the whole arrangement. In their words,

because the strike is always interruption and visibilization and care is the continuous and invisible line whose interruption would be devastating ... the caring strike would be nothing other than the interruption of the order that is ineluctably produced in the moment in which we place the truth of care in the centre and politicize it.

(Precarias a la Deriva 2006: 42)

It is not that Precarias magically solve all the most pressing questions of revolutionary politics for today. Indeed, there are difficulties contained in what they propose; what about forms of caring labour that are difficult (and perhaps sometimes even impossible) to refuse? For instance for those involved in critically intense forms of health care, of caring for relatives and children, and so forth? The rhetorical weight and power of such a proposition might very well lie in the reality that it is nearly impossible for those engaged in these forms of 'affectively necessary labour' (and perhaps more varying forms of socialized labour) to go on strike at all (Spivak 1985). Precarias' proposal of the caring strike and their concept of biosyndicalism do not solve these difficulties *per se*, but rather productively reopen these questions in much the same way that campaigns like Wages for Housework opened the question of feminist organizing and class. In this manner Precarias bring the focus back to aspects of gendered

labour and feminist organizing in ways that should not be forgotten. With the proposal of the caring strike, Precarias take part in an ongoing process of bringing visibility to underappreciated aspects of social reproduction (including for this discussion the social reproduction involved in maintaining the lives of communities of resistance) and by doing so raise the question of what it would mean to withdraw them. While there is great potential for social rupture and upheaval to be *'dérived'* from the sometimes manic movement of the radical imagination, it is likewise important to never forget the conditions and processes that underlie the possibility of its emergence and continuation.

### **A thousand affective plateau: anticapitalism and schizophrenia**

I think Utopia is possible, I see Utopia in humanity. We can reconsider our existence as completely utopian. Bringing a baby to life or simply the act of walking or dancing are examples of utopist action. Utopia should be in our streets.

(Anita Liberti, quoted in Kendra and Lauren 2003: 23)

The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to deeply feel with all human beings and still retain one's characteristic qualities.

(Goldman 1998: 158)

It's 3 a.m. ... and several months after I initially began writing this. And I must admit that in some ways things don't seem a whole lot clearer than when I began. There are still too many things to do (the pile in a different order than several months ago is about the same height) and I'm still tired. Have things ended up right back where they started, with the circle unbroken, by and by, but with no pie in the sky when I die? Joe Hill already told me that was a lie. And perhaps that is the point after all: that any sort of politics which promises all the glories of heaven/revolution to come some day after one spent all one's time and effort in devotion/organizing is deeply troubled. And perhaps most troubled in the sense that without attention to the ongoing forms of care, interaction and relations that constitute a community, especially a community in resistance, it is very unlikely to hold together for very long.

It is in this space that a focus on care, on affective relations, reveals its true importance: when framed as the question of affective resistance. For, as Precarias argue, care acts as the 'passage to the other and to the many, as a point between the personal and the collective' (Precarias a la Deriva 2005a). Affective resistance, the creation of new forms of community and collectivity, involves the creation of subjectivities, which in turn are produced in the formation of these emerging communities. So it is never possible to clearly differentiate between the formation of subjective positions and the formation of collective

relations, as they emerge at the same time and through the same process. But by focusing on this process of co-articulation and emergence, not as a means to stated political goals, but as political goals in themselves which are related to a whole host of other emerging communities, concerns and articulations, the care of self in relation to the community in resistance is clearly understood as necessary and important.

This is, perhaps not very surprisingly, quite close to arguments that are made and have been made within strains of radical political thought for some time, from arguments about the importance of pre-figurative politics (the refusal to separate the means of organizing from their ends leading to creating forms of organization which prefigure the kind of social arrangements to which struggles are organized) and the more recent emphasis on creating open spaces, networks and forums (Nunes 2005). The difference here is that one cannot overlook the very real forms of labour, effort and intensity that are required for the ongoing self-constitution of communities of resistance. To do so all too often is to reproduce patterns of behaviour that communities in resistance are working to undermine. Sexism, racism, homophobia, heteronormativity, classism reappear as people fall back on structures of thought and assumptions that have become normalized through their daily lives, or are assumed to have been dealt with.

Affective resistance does not proceed by making a giant leap through which all existing dynamics that one could wish to do away with are magically dispersed forever more. Indeed, if it were possible to radically change all the structures of thought, mental schemas and shortcuts and forms of socialization that construct our lifeworlds at once, it would be very difficult to do so without getting dangerously near insanity. Schizophrenia even. Rather, it is, to borrow a phrase from Italian feminist theorist Luisa Muraro, about creating 'relations of entrustment', an attention to the composition of relations as a necessary basis for revolutionary politics (Muraro 1991). It is to understand the composition of relations and affections as an important pole for a process of political recomposition, one that underlies and is necessary for such a compositional process. To prevent the radical imagination from ever settling into a notion that politics occurs 'over there' or at certain moments, rather than as something that grows out of the very relations and ethical interactions that constitute the fabric of everyday social life.

There are cracks in the structure of the everyday, uprisings, where it is possible to create new forms of relations and sociabilities: moments of excess. But it is also very difficult to maintain them for any length of time (Free Association 2006). Perhaps it might make more sense to wander towards creating a thousand plateaux of affective intensities, vibrating locations where forms of energy, community and intensity can be sustained and build links among other plateaux as they emerge. Thus affective resistance is not something that needs to be built from scratch, or something that only concerns relations within movements themselves. Rather it is a focus on intensifying and

deepening both the relations and connections that exist within movements, as well as finding ways to politicize connections and relations throughout everyday life. Gestures of kindness and care, random acts of beautiful anticapitalism, exist and support life in many more places than just where black flags are flown and revolutionary statements issued. Rather than considering interpersonal and ethical concerns as an adjunct and supplement to radical politics, affective resistance is about working from these intensities of care and connection.

## Notes

- 1 The category I'm employing here, autonomous feminism, is admittedly a bit clunky. While in this particular piece I'm drawing mainly from currents of thought coming out of autonomous Marxism (unorthodox Italian radical politics coming out of the 1960s and 1970s), this category is not meant to be a delimiting one. It is definitely not intended to be a historically or geographically closed category. Autonomous feminism can thus be understood as any feminist current focusing on the autonomous capacities of people to create self-determining forms of community without forms of hierarchy of political mediation and direction.
- 2 One should also note that the recognition of forms of gendered labour as work doesn't necessarily mean that struggles around them start from a better position. As Angela Davis notes, black women were paid wages for housework for many years in the USA before the advent of the Wages for Housework campaign, but that didn't mean they were in a better position in their struggles around such work. This should make clear that the potentiality for political recomposition found within a strategy such as Wages for Housework is always dependent on the particular social situations it is deployed within. See Davis (1981: ch. 13).
- 3 Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James emphasized the point this way: 'We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value' (Dalla Costa and James 1972: 33). It was on this point, the domestic labour produced value, surplus value in the Marxist sense, that provoked a great deal of controversy, particularly from those who held to their sense of Marxist categories regarding the dividing lines between productive and unproductive labour. It was often argued that women produced use values, not surplus value for capitalist production, and therefore were in a position more akin to feudalism or pre-capitalist relations. Alternatively, it was argued by people like Carla Consemi that, regardless of whether women were producing surplus value or not, the complex and multilayered nature of circuits of production and social reproduction makes this very difficult to directly perceive: '[Housework] does not produce "goods," it will not be transferred into money – unless it is in a very indirect, incalculable way (which is still to be examined)' (Consemi 1991 [1982]: 268). In some ways the question of whether domestic labour does or does not *really* produce surplus value might seem a bit silly from the outside of it. But to appreciate the significance of this it is important to remember that in the debate carried on in the terrain of Marxist thought to argue that such forms of labour did not produce value was an important part of marginalizing and arguing against their importance. Thus one can see how making the argument that domestic labour does produce surplus value expands the spaces where labour struggle occurs precisely because it is organizing around the production of value necessary for the functioning of capitalism. As argued by James and Dalla Costa, 'The possibility of social struggle arises out of the *socially productive character* of women's work in the home' (Dalla Costa

- and James 1972: 37). It might be possible to argue that domestic labour either does not produce value or does so in a way that is indirect, subtle and ephemeral, while still affirming the importance of feminist struggles around domestic labour. This was not an argument commonly made, and would be somewhat strange, and difficult to continue to make, within a Marxist framework centred on issues of exploitation in value production.
- 4 See on this Balser (1987) and Brenner and Laslett (1991), as well as the work of Aiwa Ong, who argues that the widening gap between current analytical constructs and workers' actual experiences comes from a limited theoretical grasp of both capitalist operations and workers' response to them (Ong 1991; 1987).
  - 5 Two examples of organizing around domestic issues are the Household Technicians of America, which functioned perhaps more like a guild than a union, and the National Committee on Household Employment, which was formed in 1964 by the joint efforts of the National Urban League and National Council of Negro Women. Particular articulations of power relations through gender and class are obviously enmeshed within dynamics of slavery, colonialism and imperial conquest, and how their effects continue to live on and shape social relations. In the USA, for example, organizing around domestic labour was very important for African American women still living within a social context shaped by the lingering effects of slavery, particularly in their struggle to clearly define their roles as independent employees (rather than servants of household masters). For more about this relation of race and the organizing of domestic labour, see Rio (2005), Kousha (1994) and Palmer (1984).
  - 6 For information on some of these controversies, as well as useful background information and history, see Malos (1980). It is also worth noting that there is some divergence and disagreement about whether the analysis put forth by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, which would be the inspiration for the wages for housework approach, supports this strategy. The main text of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* seems to imply that this demand would not be a suitable basis for organizing, while the footnotes appended afterwards in subsequent editions printed by the Wages for Housework Campaign, not surprisingly, claim that it is. There also seem to be some contested questions about which parts were jointly written and which were not. For more information on this apparent lack of sisterhood in struggle, see Laura Sullivan (2005). For a more recent overview and reinterpretation of these issues from multiple theoretical perspectives, see Caffentizis (1999).
  - 7 Arguably there could be seen to be some tension in this kind of updating. Notably, if the purpose of the *dérive* were to open up unforeseen possibilities and connections through the drift's openness, stipulating an already understood framework and space for drifting then could foreclose possibilities for connection that might exist outside that framework. Alternately one could argue that the Situationist notion of the *dérive* already had an understood framework and space of its operation (provided by the subjective positioning of those involved and the understood spaces of the city) that was not quite as open as they would have liked to believe. The alternations of Precarias have thus not limited the possibilities *per se*, but have thus made more explicit about their framework and positioning compared to that which was assumed in the SI version.
  - 8 Precarias a la Deriva's translators have often used the phrase 'securitary logic' to indicate the difference between more onerous forms of security (military, border, etc.) and security as a more positive value (sense of personal safety, freedom from assault). While such seems a useful distinction to make, I find 'securitary logic' quite awkward and thus have avoided using it. This should be taken to be a dismissal of attempts to found a politics based upon other notions of security, such as the True

Security action during the protests against the Republican National Convention in 2004 (which tried to put forward a notion of security appropriate to the building of self-determining communities as opposed to a military logic of security). See also Wendy Brown (1995).

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