



# Manifesto for Collection Action – Toward An Ethico-Aesthetic Politics

Erin Manning

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## **OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF “CASSEROLES”** *textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge*

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### **Manifesto for Collection Action – Toward An Ethico-Aesthetic Politics**

*Erin Manning, Concordia University, Faculty of Fine Arts*

#### **1. “Carrément dans le rouge”**

The movement to the streets begins as a directed critique aimed at the neoliberal project of transforming the right to education into individual debt. Students have had the courage to take this problem to the streets. This is not a fight about \$350. Nor is it a comment on an individual’s capacity to afford education. The neoliberal project is “an economic technique for the production or the control of subjectivity,” as Maurizio Lazzarato notes, that keeps each individual in their own bubble trying to make their way out of a vicious cycle of credit. “Instead of the right to retirement, you get an individual life insurance. Instead of a right to lodging, you get the right to a mortgage. These are techniques of individualization” [translation modified]. Instead of education, you get credit. And with the increase in its cost-value, you get the right to have your education packaged to fit neatly into that neoliberal cycle, making education the product of your credit-based expenditure. Take thought out of the equation. Make a check-list instead of what needs to be covered to successfully enter the job market. The irony: the job market does not respond to pre-packaged goods – capitalism moves too fast for that. What it needs is the forward-thinking force of the not-yet packaged in order to create the new: a paradox not lost on the students.

#### **2. From Individual to Group-Subject**

The project of neoliberal capitalism targets the individual over what Félix Guattari calls the group-subject. Think group-subject not as a many-faced group of individuals, but as the force of what emerges when the group exceeds the individuals in its midst. By keeping to the individual, by enforcing a battle of individuals, as the Charest government has incessantly done since the beginning of the strike, a splintering of the nascent collective discourse is sought that gives voice to the fracturing of the field of political activation. This is a tactic that understands well that an emergent politics never grows from an individual. The maple spring has made this abundantly clear: individuals were repeatedly heard in courts as regards their “individual” right to study, individuals were repeatedly targeted in political demonstrations (think Gabriel



Nadeau-Dubois). By remaking the political in the frame of the individual, the complexity of the emergent collectivity is backgrounded to foreground the already-known. The discourse returns to that of the consumer: student as consumer of knowledge pre-packaged (think power points).

### **3. The Force of Thought**

The students have given voice to a systemic problem across universities both local and international. We professors owe them our support, for it is we who will continue to work within a system that increasingly does not facilitate the necessary conditions for environments of learning. With months spent each year trying to secure grants that are one of the few ways we have of funding our overworked and underfinanced students (80% of students in Quebec hold jobs on top of studying), with class-size ever increasing, with the chill in the job market and our many PhD students competing for the same jobs, with the increasing fear in the market of interdisciplinary work and open-ended thinking, we are being put in a position of packaging thought in ways that go against its very complexity. Not to speak of the increasing tendency to quantify research and question any publication strategies that don't immediately conform to the modes of dissemination recognized by the institution (think art event, workshop, experiment in research-creation). Note that this attack against the very heart of what distinguishes the humanities and fine arts (their capacity to invent new modes of thought) affects education at its very core.

### **4. Make Time for the Movement of Thought**

It is much easier to go to class than to demonstrate in the streets for 100 days and counting. In fact, the generation that has taken to the streets since 2011 (in the Occupy movements, and in demonstrations in Québec and elsewhere for the right to free education, to an end to neoliberal policies, for ecological change etc.) would be the one most forgiven for not giving a damn. Look at what they are inheriting!

In the words of Jean-Marc Léger (2012):

Chers **boomers**, ce n'est pas parce que vous n'avez pas réussi à changer le monde que vous devez empêcher les jeunes de réussir à leur tour...Eh bien, chers boomers, vous n'avez rien compris de ce mouvement. Les jeunes ne veulent pas porter le fardeau de vos erreurs...Pour une fois que les jeunes se lèvent, il faut les écouter, il faut les comprendre et il faut les encourager. On crée des enrégés et on les empêche de mordre.

Ne les brisez pas et donnez-leur une chance de réussir là où vous avez échoué.

## 5. Movements of Thought are Ethico-Aesthetic

Félix Guattari speaks of the necessity of an ecosophy – a politics at once applied and theoretical, ethico-political and aesthetic. This politics moves away from individualist politics (politics in the name of the police, of the government, of religious affiliation). No longer a “discipline of refolding on interiority, or a simple renewal of earlier forms of ‘militancy’, [but] a multi-faceted movement, deploying agencies [*instances*] and dispositives [*dispositifs*] that will simultaneously analyze and produce subjectivity,” this is a politics always still to be invented. There has never been a more urgent time for this call to change, a call that, in Guattari’s terms, is a three-headed ecosophy that includes the environment, social relations and subjectivity.

The call of the students, voiced consistently in energetically clear and consistent terms, has often spoken in the name of ecosophy. Theirs continues to be a creative deployment of politics in the name of the not-yet, the transindividual, the group-subject, the socius reinvented. Critics speak patronizingly about the students being “spoiled,” “not understanding the economics of the situation,” “making impossible demands.” This is Guattari’s point – that the demand of the political MUST be impossible. It must exceed the thinkable to touch on new forms of attraction (new universes of reference). What is at stake is much larger than most media commentators and politicians have been willing to acknowledge. Nothing less than a renewed engagement to new ways of thinking is at stake. This is what the university can do when given the opportunity, and it is what we professors can do when we take to the streets.

## 6. Reimagine the Public

In a talk spoken in the early days of the Occupy Movement, Judith Butler (2011) says:

In the last months there have been, time and again, mass demonstrations on the street, in the square, and though these are very often motivated by different political purposes, something similar happens: bodies congregate, they move and speak together, and they lay claim to a certain space as public space...Collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the

architecture. As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment...At such a moment, politics is no longer defined as the exclusive business of public sphere distinct from a private one, but it crosses that line again and again, bringing attention to the way that politics is already in the home, or on the street, or in the neighborhood, or indeed in those virtual spaces that are unbound by the architecture of the public square.

Student actions have been remarkably creative during the strike. They have worked and are still working to animate the space of the public, challenging its implicit differentiation from the space of politics (behind closed doors, in the office of the politician, of the public servant). Taking over the public has long been a tactic that reminds us that the political is active everywhere a group-subject takes hold, and that this politics, the politics of the emergent collective, is the one where new potentials for collective living best take form. The response from the public has been loud and clanging. Think the casseroles, the joyful atmosphere of children banging on pots and pans every evening at 8pm, reminding all of us that politics involves making ourselves heard, and, especially, taking the time to make ourselves heard. For as Guattari says, this is always a question of taking time, and this is something the students have paid for: they have taken time out of their studies (though teach-ins have been plenty, as have workshops and creative organizing around the generating of new ways of organizing against the dominant neoliberal strategies continuously popping up around them, with Loi 78 only the loudest and most obviously repressive amongst them). Some of us professors have voiced disdain about our classes being “disturbed” by these tactics. What is learning if not a disturbance? Pedagogy is the making-public of the disturbances of thought – the ways in which new forms of knowledge challenge accepted norms, reorganize static configurations of the already-known. There has rarely been such a flow of education in Québec as in these 100 days! Make it public!

## **7. Become United and Increasingly Different!**

The ethico-aesthetic is not about sameness, and neither is the call to mobilize the students have voiced over these very loud four months (and counting). It's a cacophony, a polyphony, and this is as it should be. Recall the confusion around the Occupy Movement. “How to occupy an abstraction?” asks McKenzie Wark. “Perhaps only with another abstraction,” he responds.

Occupy Wall Street took over a more or less public park nestled in the downtown landscape of tower blocks, not too far from the old World Trade Center site, and set up camp. It is an occupation which, almost uniquely, does not have demands. It has at its core a suggestion: what if people came together and found a way to structure a conversation which might come up with a better way to run the world? Could they do any worse than the way it is run by the combined efforts of Wall Street as renter class and Wall Street as computerized vectors trading intangible assets? (Wark, 2011)

It's not that the student movement does not have clear demands. In this way it differentiates itself from the Occupy Movement. But nor is it that its demands are homogenous and restricted to an economic proposition. A movement is precisely that which moves – that which gathers momentum, activating abstractions still in-forming. A first call – for free tuition – is supplemented by everything its proposition opens up, which in this case is nothing less than the rethinking not only of education, but of the force of the public in its ability to collectively rethink what is at stake in a world that increasingly instrumentalizes that which should never be instrumentalized: thought, creativity, pedagogy.

Guattari (2000) speaks of heterogenesis or “processes of continuous resingularization.”

The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquests in other domains - the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level. (p. 83)

## **8. The Force of Red**

Recall: Early morning metro lines in Montreal populated by movements of red shifting from one metro car to another. Still early days when red was barely a sign of the days to come. A peaceful, quiet, powerful demonstration of an emergent collectivity.

Recall: A masquerade ball takes to the streets (March 29). Joyful, ludic, a demonstration against the injunction to masquerade, a playful engagement with the potential of dress to make a difference. But also more than that – a way to activate a wider swath of the population, a way to give meaning to a history of carnival and the capacity of the town square to be a political gathering-ground.

Recall: Red bicycling through the city (March 30). Vive la vélorution! Note the ways in which this ties in with an increasing sense of ecological politics in Québec – the greening of alleyways, the creation of bicycle lanes throughout the city, the dream of making sections of the city car-free, communauto, bixi. Link that to Tour the L'île en Rouge (April 1).

Recall: Carré Rouge Humain (March 29). Bodying the square, holding the square to the presence of a dream for a different future.

Notice that red has come to stand in for much that was unthinkable 4 months ago. Notice that you see red – a balloon, a garment, a light – and it is no longer simply a colour but a movement, a movement of thought.

## **9. Live up to the force of your capacity to think the unthinkable!**

Gather forces. Strike. Mobilize. Manifest!

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