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# Activist Sense: Affective Media Practices during the G20 Summit in Hamburg

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## Technecologies of Sensation

The G20 summit took place in Hamburg from July 6-7, 2017. From July 4-8 Hamburg's police authority declared a 38.5-square-kilometer area of the city a special security zone. People could be strip-searched without any reason, roads could be blocked for indeterminate periods of time, and any public meeting counting more than two human subjects could be declared an illegal assembly. One might call this a state of exception. However, as I will argue, the term is somewhat misleading. For this 'state' is not only prolonged indeterminately; it also becomes a continuous modulation of sensation, of its distribution and suspense. Protest against the G20 summit might be the most visible remnant of the anti-globalization movement, which took a transnational and media-infused form ever since the 1999 mobilization to Seattle. Its cry "another world is possible" still haunts the discursive sphere of the movements and informs contemporary forms of protest.[1] Yet this cry for alternatives is usually related to social movements and their discursive politics, while the aesthetic and affective aspects of

such “alternative ways of living” are overshadowed. My focus here is on the latter. I will consider the international alternative media center FC/FM as it assembled during the G20 protest in Hamburg, in order to shed light on how a *technecological* experiment develops its own social, sensuous, and affective platform for a politics of activist sense and affective relaying. In the following, I will conceive of the concept of *technecology* not just in relation to the work of Félix Guattari (2008) but also in resonance with Luciana Parisi’s notion of “technoecologies of sensation.”[2] With this term Parisi focuses on the role of the sensuous as part of a “machining field of code-drifting communication ready to engender surplus values of sensing at all scales of transmission,” which exceeds any pre-given sense of the machine or the human body.[3] In a similar vein Gerald Raunig (in this issue) differentiates technecologies from post-media imaginaries. Technecologies are not only ubiquitous, networked media technologies that bring about new modes of sensing and the production of subjectivity. Rather, they become an integral activating layer, temporalizing, and spatializing, in more-than-human modes of existence. The search for a concept of activist sense revolves around these modes of existence as embodied, felt, and sensuously engaged processes of contemporary media activism.

## Technopolitical Tendencies

Seattle and subsequent public protest mobilizations to major summits of leading industrial nations were steadily infused more and more by the aesthetic enhancement and inventive deployment of media. With the Arab Spring and Twitter Revolution at the latest, the steadily increasing impact of the use and power of social media on social movements became evident. Social media have come to massively shape modes of organizing, sharing information,

and intervening in direct actions on streets, in squares, and across always multiple spaces of political work. Crucially, these new media entanglements allow for a heightened awareness of counter-aesthetics, or rather, alternative distributions of the sensible that differ from those advertised by mainstream media.[4] Amongst others, the Spanish 15-M movement prominently included a conscious discussion of the aesthetics of social movements' digital media ecologies beyond their status as a technical means to an end.[5] With the term *technopolitics,* activist groups in Spain introduced a conception of media practices that not only efficiently mobilizes the communicative powers of social media but also foregrounds the various aesthetic and sensuous modes of activation that come about in social movements. The different formats of technopolitics ranged from generating an alternative (social media) platform called *n-1* to mobilization kits for impromptu protests against the eviction of owners from their mortgaged homes.[6] In the following I want to relay this aesthetics and affectively attentive realm of technopolitics with the alternative media center FC/MC as a crucial node in the infrastructures of resistance that were mobilized throughout the G20 summit in Hamburg.

At first glance, the FC/MC could be seen in the spirit of alternative media centers, which have been part and parcel of many anti-globalization protests accompanying G8/G20 or WTO summits. However, as a singularity, it can best be understood by considering how some of its specific circumstances differ from media centers in the past. On the one hand, FC/MC was conceived by a group of people who work in various media, art, and academic contexts alongside their activist practices. This is important given the institutional practices and resources attached to them, which form a crucial and partly tacit background to the way in which the

center was conceptualized. On the other hand, the cooperation with the St. Pauli football club and the use of part of its stadium was based on the club's strong ties to an alternative political agenda and its open engagement in the city district of St. Pauli. Using the stadium, which also hosted an Antifa soup kitchen, was a strategic move to locate the FC/MC in very close proximity to the actual summit's convention center. In spring 2017 weekly meetings were initiated to advance the concrete planning. Most of the infrastructure – technically, materially, and in terms of volunteers – grew through the support of associated networks such as the Chaos Computer Club and was backed by a large list of groups and places throughout the city and beyond. Since the FC/MC was not an institution but a temporary collective and media experiment, it distinguished itself from the traditional media platforms such as Indymedia. Its inventiveness resided in an idiosyncratic approach of being open to all press and media practitioners (except secret service, police and fascists) and providing a space for alternative media practice. It also comprised many inventions, including a specific software for accrediting journalists and activists and a secure server infrastructure for receiving and storing the data that was being dropped day and night throughout the summit. One month before the actual summit, technical and infrastructural know-how fused with continuously shifting ideas about what shape the modes of production inside the center should take. Some of these questions remained unresolved while others developed, many unforeseen. However, in contrast to contemporary media practice, a common ground was to refrain from reproducing classic forms of media production, including their operating modes, their unilateral temporality, and their aesthetics. Over 400 people from all backgrounds volunteered and shaped the center's active role as part of the diverse protest against the G20.[7]

Housed in the 2500 square meter ballroom at the St. Pauli stadium, the FC/MC facilitated 400 workstations for journalists, media activists and bloggers, two professional studios for interviews, and ten video and audio working stations for media production. It maintained a 96-hour livestream, an information center and a Twitter feed, and hosted six press conferences with key organizers of various demonstrations, the solidarity summit and specific guests such as lawyers, NGO-activists around the globe and researchers.[8] In addition, the structure included a community kitchen and different lounges, resting areas, and a bar. It was as much a social space of care as it was one of media production and dissemination. The center's mission was a collective effort to change the perception of the G20 summit in Hamburg. The concept of the media center was to offer bloggers and tweeters, editorial collectives and staff, video activists, free radios, precarious media workers and established journalists a media production space "much cooler" than the official G20 Media Center at the Hamburg Fair (the official meeting place for the G20).[9]

"The FC/MC understands itself as a material-semiotic device to reclaim journalism for social justice and to free it from the suffocating embrace of states, corporate PR and commercial interests. As such, the FC/MC is a meta-medium to re-invent critical media, news and reporting." It's slogan: "Re-invent critical journalism in times of affective populism!"[10]

If this article is framed in the context of emergent *technecologies*, the FC/MC was a singular experiment for the unfolding of a support structure, built on existing (techno-) political networks (like the Right to the City Network) and forming a "temporary collective" that engaged in concrete political work without merging into an identifiable group.[11] This partial autonomy and anonymity (only a small group of the core organizing team became

visible in the mainstream media while many remained active in the background), without becoming relativistic or politically indifferent, turned the technecological assemblage of the media center not just into a technologically advanced experiment for the interlacing of the mental, the social and the environmental ecologies[12] or an expanded field of "forms of affecting and enunciation."[13] It also became a felt and intense singularity that transsubstantially carried across different modes of existence, of which some are technical, some organic, and others physical or mental. Félix Guattari hinted at the rupture in contemporary forms of media and techno-activism through modes of affective politics in his last manifesto-style text "Remaking Social Practices":

"An essential condition for succeeding in the promotion of a new planetary consciousness would thus reside in our collective capacity for the recreation of value systems that would escape the moral, psychological and social lamentation of capitalist valorization, which is only centered on economic profit ... Ethical and aesthetic values do not arise from imperatives and transcendent codes. They call for an existential participation based on an immanence that must be endlessly reconquered."[14]

If Guattari contrasts modes of capitalist valorization with ethical and aesthetic values – crucial fields of remaking social practices as he outlines in *Chaosmosis* – he also hints at a more sensuous and affective, embodied and felt dimension of value that is at stake.[15] Key to an understanding of contemporary technopolitics is the distribution of value along these more felt intensities, as they become part and parcel of technecologies as integral platforms for the circulation, modulation, and relaying of affective dimensions in contemporary media practices.

In the midst of a pre-emptively staged media spectacle around the G20 and its felt repercussions on bodies, the city of Hamburg was not just a "display of modern police work,"[16] as Hamburg's senator for internal affairs called the massive technological, material and bodily armament of the police (online and offline), but also a highly stratified sensuous dispositive which the police, the state, and, in part along with them, the tabloid media attempted to control, both on the streets and in the (social) media. The result: "riot porn" was the dominant media representation of the G20 and the protests against it, rather than a more differentiated media coverage of the multiple events, forms expression and critical discourse that converged and developed in Hamburg throughout the summit. From this point of view, the FC/MC media center provided not only a different social and affective space for over 1000 accredited media activists and journalists. It also allowed for many different volunteers of different backgrounds to converge and collaborate in what were often quite improvised situations, sharing a common interest in contesting the dominant forms of representation permeating the mainstream media.[17]

Thinking more about FC/MC's modes of operating will allow *activist sense* and *affective relaying* to be conceptually explored as potential ways of rethinking contemporary effective media politics. Activist sense relates to the question of sensuous activation and the way an overall distribution of the sensible comes to bear not only on how things become felt under specific (media) conditions and sensuous capacities, but also how modes of activation with and through sensuous capacities become a crucial concern for media activism. Affective relaying concerns the modalities through which such activations of the sensuous operate across spatiotemporal confinements without losing their situatedness.

## Activist Sense

A large-scale experiment such as the FC/MC involves the generation of an alternative stream of information outside the sensuous regimes of mainstream media (in a way, streaming platforms such as U-stream in the Occupy movement or Periscope in the Hamburg G20 have served a similar purpose).[18] Beyond this, however, its singular quality lies in producing alternative affective politics at the constitutive levels of interlacing perception, bodies, and thought, all while taking its own social, technological, and – in terms of converging practices – pluriversal and heterogeneous character seriously. Affect is not a mere intersubjective form of relation but rather a temporal layer coupling past events and their tendencies to possible future becomings. It is the felt intensity of immanent activity as barest sensation before any definite registering, and its categorization takes hold of the situation. It is, to use William James' term, a "bare activity," a "something doing" the purpose of which is the pulsing of change, that is, infinite differentiation.[19] In the context of the FC/MC this meant asking: how to relate the capacities, techniques, and practices of various human and more-than-human networks to effectuate and express in a way that other temporalities, sensations and alliances become possible amidst a molarizing media event such as the G20? As an integral layer of experience affect becomes the focus of a politics of relaying this immanent activity through the sensuous in addition to the discursive. This activity, however, often gets harnessed into a politics of pre-emption rather than a multiplication of sensuous activations.[20] Whereas the FC/MC aimed at pursuing critical journalism in times of affective populism, such pre-emptive media politics bank on affect's power of activation while reducing its complexity. 'Critical' then might mean

to multiply in order to contest reductionism. While remaining a contested term, 'critical' means very concretely to resist immediately subsuming the felt intensities into shallow representational containers. Right at the beginning of the protest FC/MC's editorial board abandoned the idea of maintaining a continuous (chronological) stream of information other than a twitter feed with verified news on events taking place. Instead, the production of media formats unfolded by collectively scanning the incoming materials and then branching off into different projects without a predetermined order or hierarchy of relevance. The spatial proximity of the editorial desk, the OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) desk navigating the livestream and the computer editing stations allowed for a constant flow of sharing and inserting into each other's processes. The way things were created, shared, and finally put online happened as much on an affective and immanently felt level as it was tied to the technological assemblages with their unique modes of expression.[21]

The media coverage running up to the G20 fueled a preemptive politics focused on the discourse of violence and security put into place by various political stakeholders.[22] Refusing either to submit to the visual language of riot porn or to follow the temporality of instant news reporting, the center had to resonate between the sensing bodies in the streets, "in alliance,"[23] held by their material, bodily and affective support, while at the same time distributing differential signs across various media platforms. The question of how to activate in way that what occurs makes sense – meaning, to become effective – while working through the sensuous defines one of the FC/MC's main concerns. Activation defines something quite distinct from more neoliberal conceptions of attention and attention economy and the harnessing thereof. While attention economy appropriates the power to arouse

attention to then extract value from this engagement, activation in the way I use the term emphasizes the opening of a new potential of experience before its actual capture. In resonance with the overall affective envelope of constant activity as the barest layer of experience, the question of activity and activation concerns the manner in which these activities actualize and become felt. The problem of multiplying perspectives to contest linear media narratives, however, verges on the danger of becoming relativistic. The effect would be a loosening of the means of critically problematizing the reductive pre-emptive media politics. Thinking about activating also raises the question of how to multiply possibilities of relating to an event in its complexity without becoming relativistic. In other words, critique becomes a situated affective force actively contributing to an incommensurable complexity affording to remain aware of the singular differences each of these situations convey.

If the aim was to activate in order to embrace complexity, then sense takes on a double meaning. It has to interface sensuous elements to cue them into sense-making. If perception concerns the affective, it is temporal, relaying of different kinds of activity to actualize. The sensuous is never a given but something that is composed between the body and its environment by mutually altering either of them.[24] In Massumi's terms, this process is a "differential attunement" of affective forces.[25] In the making of perception as a retrospectively experienced activation and contraction of forces, differential attunement ensures not only that heterogeneous temporalities contract into the unfolding of a perceptual event but also that such an event cues different bodies and their modalities into its becoming without having to synthesize them. Activist sense puts bodies into alliance as part of the material and spatio-temporal welter of experience through the cueing of

temporalities, that is, through affect. Put differently, the body is becoming in alliance not through a mere co-presence with other bodies but through their shared power of actualizing differentially the continuity of the present while remaining open towards a collective becoming. The manner in which these cueings constitute a collective process of becoming determines how sense becomes felt. It is *sense* beyond the more traditional conception of meaning. Meaning would refer to the overall context of *an* event; it is a retrospective operation. Sense, on the other hand, arises in the midst of a situation, not as unification but a production of differentials in the middle of their emergence – like differential attunement, which seizes the experiences of multiple bodies, it is dissensual. The power of perception in the making, of activity being relayed, and of *dissensual attunement* is the common ground of an emergent politics of activist sense.

**How to relay affectively?**

In light of the continuous processing of differential attunement, what the FC/MC tried to generate was primarily a space of gathering and making. In this way it set the conditions of emergence for what Massumi termed "counter-power."[26] Counter-power is not a binary concept. If experience is basically the interfacing and cueing of bare activity towards specific attunements, which preemptive operational logics attempt to modulate, then counter-power banks on this emergent affective quality of experience. The FC/MC was not just a space for the production of blocs of percepts and affects spread throughout different media outlets but rather an infrastructural element in a larger constellation of forces and networks, attempting to set conditions of emergence that would compose the sensuous by activating other temporalities than the newsreels of chronological

media practices. It engaged in different modes of suspense and composed an affect-oriented space for care, shelter and rest as much as acceleration, intervention and, most importantly, it gave rise to a zone for ethico-aesthetic experimentation. Its point of departure was the care for another mode of effectuating, of cueing affective relays through its various platforms – like the press conference, short video features, interviews, live stream, a twitter feed, press releases – but also bodies in space and time, inside and outside the center, before and after the event. It was and still might be a genuine machine for the transtemporal, translocal, and transcorporeal relaying of affects. Counter-powers of resistance move through the body as a vessel for activist sense to resonate in a collective event.

Rather than foregrounding the refined technical infrastructure or musing about social media platforms' limited capacities, the relaying of affect builds on the immediate interfacing of technological and bodily infrastructures as material and vital support for action, as Butler suggests.[27] Activist sense not only denotes the bare activity of experience as a motor for change but is concerned with ethical questions of relaying differential capacities in their joyous, that is, potentiating, counter-powers across bodies, times, and spaces. The activist endeavor of the media center resides in its focus on making these activities immediately lived as creative events across platforms, senses and experience. Affective relaying means to relate temporalities or, in the words of William James, "longer-span to shorter-span activities."[28] Put differently, the microperceptions of a gesture that are felt in a specific situation carry the capacity to amplify another event at another space and time. Relaying then is quite different than the more conventional terms of communication or transmission. While communication and transmission processes are based on identifiable entities

sending and receiving, the process of relaying always involves a shift, not only of meaning, but of the very sensuous and material infrastructure (of bodies and machines). Relays effectuate phase shifts, changes of state, and thus create an event altering the overall state of affairs (and it might be just a felt sensation moving through a body). Figuring out how technopolitics enable and amplify such modes of sensuous relaying is a major challenge for contemporary forms of activism.

As a technecology the FC/MC's modes of activating and inserting itself into ongoing activities goes beyond the concept of connectivity or connecting networks. Relaying as a practice acknowledges affect's autonomous power of existence; it might be pre-emptively cued but it cannot be predetermined in its effects. [29] Such an openness of affective relaying can only ever function as a form of experimentation beyond the capture of representation. One of the most striking effects of the FC/MC providing an accessible production infrastructure was the different forms of use and production that came about during the 96 hours of the center's actual existence. Next to a floating editorial office feeding the livestream and filling the YouTube channel, many small projects took shape with people starting to use the deposited audiovisual material to create short pieces. Skills were shared and swapped in this process, new relations between heterogeneous elements were drawn, entirely new collaborations unfolded. All and everything was happening in the immediacy of the event while extending the event's temporal trajectory on the streets into multiple micro-temporal sensuous contractions, many of which continue to circulate today. Ethically this means asking how to experiment in ways that suspend representational capture for a temporal span sufficient to open new registers of potential engagement with an event, and how this can happen with forms of protest, resistance,

discourses, and colorful expressions as multifaceted as the social movements around the G20 summit in Hamburg. Aesthetically, this kind of affective relaying and suspense moves through the sensuous, immanently altering the dominant regimes of thinking and feeling and orienting these towards an expanded field of experience beyond dichotomous meaning structures. The challenge is to make sense through and with the sensuous as meaning's most critical edge, where antagonistic logic explodes into a polyphonous complexity that can only be engaged and experimented with instead of being reduced by categorial foreclosure into simplified narratives of violence or security.

The media center became a molecular time machine, interfacing bodies and technologies, percepts and affects, at their constitutive ontopowerful capacity. It not only intervened in the visual and experiential discourses around contemporary forms of mediatized protest; it also re-animated existent inventive counter-powers in activist practices. In other words, it contracted temporalities of bodies, experiences, and memories and relayed these into various modes of expression across different media platforms. The archiving of the massive amounts of audio-visual material is the most obvious trajectory along which affective power resonates into the present, providing material to contest police narratives in the trials against activists following the actual summit. However, the affective relaying of temporalities as a "micropolitics of singularities" also has to experiment with the power of activist sense to make temporality a relevant element in the overall affective envelope of an event.[30] Returning to the genesis of an aesthetics of technopolitical practices and Guattari's claim for an "existential participation based on an immanence that must be endlessly reconquered," the FC/MC remains a singularity of a spatiotemporal signature whose immanence was directly felt in the event ecology

of the larger networks of resistance during the G20. The question for the future of such affective relays of activist sense concerns not only technecological assemblages allowing for a sensuous and discursive translocal contagion (Buenos Aires is in sight for the coming G20). It also necessitates a reconquering of the material and embodied ground on the streets and in front of the multiple screens, broadcasting frequencies, and felt experiences on a transindividual, that is, on an immanently collective and affective level, which needs to find its singular modes of becoming expressive. The FC/MC might provide one potential glimpse into this kind of temporal differentiation of molarized event structures through the different affective relays that occurred, not only in digitized audio-visual streams but also in the infinite small moments of encounter of people around the globe, practicing in different contexts and geographies and with different capacities for relaying their concerns – from organizing a community kitchen to wiring a 4G camera livestream to organizing indigenous resistance against extractivism in Latin America.

[1] For a general development of this cry "another world is possible" see also Pignarre, Philippe, Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, Basignstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

[2] Luciana Parisi, "Technoecologies of Sensation", " in: Deleuze/ Guattari & Ecology, ed. by Bernd Herzogenrath, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009, p. 182-199

[3] Parisi, p. 189.
In contrast, Eric Kluitenberg's "Techno-Ecologies Inhabiting Deep-Technological Spheres of Everyday Life", in: *Acoustic Space*

*11* (2013), p. 9-14, emphasizes the advent of networking media communication technologies bringing "about a complexity of social relations that we have only just begun to map" (p. 13) while presuming such media as given technologies to be engaged with.

[4] See for instance, Gerbaudo, Paolo, *Tweets in the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London: Pluto Press, 2012 and Kluitenberg, Eric, "Affect Space: Witnessing the Movement(s) of the Squares", *open! Online* (10/2015), https://www.onlineopen.org/affect-space (last accessed 19/01/2018), Leistert, Oliver, *From Protest to Surveillance – The Political Rationality of Mobile Media*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013.

[5] See Sánchez, Rául, "15M als Aufstand der Körper-Maschine", in: Lorey, Isabell, Roberto Nigro, Gerald Raunig (eds.), *Inventionen II. Die Kräfte komponieren.* Zürich/Berlin: diaphanes, 2011, pp. 48-60.

[6] See: http://comoacabarconelmal.net/h-en/ and in particular: http://comoacabarconelmal.net/portfolio/237/

[7] For a very detailed description of the center, its genesis and structure, see: Grimm, Maren, Oliver Leistert, Siri Keil, Ulrike Bergemann, "Die Formatfrage stellen: Das alternative Medienzentrum FC/MC zum G20-Gipfel", in: *ZFM* 18,1 (2018), p. 111-129.

[8] See: fcmc.tv (last accessed 13/02/18)

[9] See the first press release of the FC/MC: https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc_pm1_2017-12-05_en.pdf and https://fcmc.tv/about/ (last accessed 12/02/2018). For an impression of the contrast between the FC/MC and the official press center at G20's official location, Hamburg Fair see: https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute-plus/

videos/alternatives-g20-pressezentrum-100.html (last accessed 21/02/2018)

[10] See: https://fcmc.tv/about/ (last accessed 23/02/2018)

[11] Grimm et al., pp. 113-114.

[12] Guattari, Félix, *The Three Ecologies*, London: Continuum, 2008.

[13] Raunig, Gerald, "Technecologies Milieus, Midstreams, Subsistential Territories", in: *transversal* (03/2018)

[14] Guattari, Félix, "Remaking Social Practices", in: *The Guattari Reader*, ed. by Gary Genosko, London: Blackwell, 1996.

[15] See Guattari, Félix, "The New Aesthetic Paradigm," in: *Chaosmosis. An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, ders., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 98-118.

[16] http://www.zeit.de/news/2017-07/08/g20-fruehere-zitate-zur-sicherheit-des-g20-gipfels-08101203 (last accessed 13/3/2018)

[17] See Grimm et al., pp. 114 and 126.

[18] Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aestheitcs,* London: Continuum, 2005.

[19] James, William, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. 161.

[20] See Massumi, Brian, *Ontopower, War, Powers, and the State of Perception*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 3-20.

[21] For an overview of the more than 70 productions coming out of the media center see: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHDTjtjyMFJqAhE4DxjAg9Q (last accessed 12/03/2018)

[22] Grimm et al., pp. 128.

[23] Butler, Judith, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street", in: *transversal* (09/2011), http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en (last accessed 14/02/2018)

[24] See Parisi 2009, pp. 190.

[25] Massumi, Brian, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2011, pp. 112.

[26] Massumi, Brian, *The Power at the End of the Economy*, Durham: Duke University Press 2015, 91.

[27] Butler 2011.

[28] James, p.188.

[29] Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press 2002, p. 35.

[30] Guattari, Félix, Suely Rolnik (2008): *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. Translated by Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), p. 183.