
From Noun to Verb: The Micropolitics of

“Making Collective”

Interview between Nasrin Himada and Erin Manning, July 2009

NH: I think changing the concept from a noun to a verb, from collective to, as you suggest, *making collective*—opens up potential for new ways to think and do collaboratively. To think the concept of the collective—a coming-together of bodies that initiate a process of collaboration, participation, extension, and sharing—is to think and practice a politics of collective assemblages. This provokes a new ethics of practice that is not based on the idea of the common, but on the idea of technicity, and raises the question of the relation between theory and practice. How is it that from practice and experimentation concepts emerge? How do we create the conditions for this relation to take place?

EM: You raise a number of interesting issues. I think the question of technicity is key, and it's an issue that comes up, in one way or another, in all the interviews in this issue. Bruno Latour talks about techniques with respect to the singularity of the *project*. Techniques, as each of the texts in this issue underline, are modes of existence that create nodes of importance, in the Whiteheadian sense. Brian Massumi calls them “performed transition mechanisms,” referring especially to what we, at the SenseLab, have been calling “techniques of relation.”

The danger of the idea of the common – which only begins to become interesting if we move it toward the notion of the *commons* – is that there is a presumption that the *project* pre-exists the problematic. The common claim is to know in advance what is at stake. To predefine the project in this way subverts any potential for creating a new set of problems. The project, in these terms, can only be deciphered, categorized, judged within the frame of its preexistence. Techniques, on the other hand, are always immanent to the event in its unfolding. They are not equal to all tasks and must therefore be reinvented each time. Techniques are neither specifically political nor artistic nor ethical. They move across, emphasizing points of emergence or singularization. Techniques thus potentially create conditions for a singular unfolding of the event.

Adam Bobbette gives a nice example of technique in an artistico-political context. In his description of the cocoons he creates, he mentions that they were originally built for squatters in New York City. The cocoon was thought as a make-shift shelter that could act as a mobile home free to move from surface to surface (from the ground to the tree, for instance). The technique, as he points out, is not the cocoon as such. It's the making-mobile of the idea of home or shelter or even simply momentary safety. "It could be used for anything," he writes, "and it could be made from just about anything." The flexibility of the cocoon is part of its technicity. What emerges through the cocoon emerges across the modalities of its deployment. As he says, "it's really a very flexible object."

This idea of flexibility is key to micropolitics. Flexibility is not a moral standard. As Maurizio Lazzarato points out, debt is a technique used by governments to promote an individualization of society through a resubjectification of the individual. Debt is a pliable technique which is indefinitely flexible, its flexibility key to its deployment by techniques of governmentality – as we've seen in the 2008-2009 economic crisis. Maurizio Lazzarato talks about debt's flexibility in terms of how debt creates and is used to mobilize regimes of subjectivity. "[Debt]," he says, "is an economic technique and a technique for the production or the control of subjectivity." It's important to underline this mutability of technique, I think, to make it clear that the micropolitical is neither the smaller version of the political, nor its moral standard. The micropolitical passes through the political at different levels with different effects. It is, as Brian Massumi says, "a perception of a qualitatively different kind."

To come back to your question, then, I think we create the conditions for ethico-aesthetic practices at the micropolitical level through a close attention to techniques. As we've seen in our work at the SenseLab, this requires flexibility and the ability to allow a project to fail. Each project creates its own conditions for experimentation and proposes its own techniques. But without attentive development of the potential of these openings, a project can easily fall flat. That's why we spend so much time in the preparation of each event. Each event is its own fine balance between choreography and improvisation. What we seek to do – as we've done for our recent event, *Society of Molecules* – is to facilitate crossings and openings by creating limits on how the event can come to expression. In the case of *Society of Molecules*, these constraints were meant to enable certain precise ways of creating affective tonalities between and across different local constituencies, giving rise to specific techniques mobilized at the local level.

The documentation in this issue of *Society of Molecules* makes apparent how differently each molecule responded to the problematic of creating a distributed ethico-aesthetic political event. Each molecule was asked to engage directly with local concerns. One of our techniques was to *not* seek to create a content-based continuity between the molecules. This meant that we were also expecting to know little about the subtle differences between molecular undertakings in say, Sydney, Australia, and Naples, Italy. But we also did not want each molecule to function completely separately. So we had to come up with a technique to keep them affectively connected. With 15 molecules in 9 countries and 14 cities, the challenge was to develop a technique which would allow the molecules to resonate across local spacetimes without requiring their coming-together to be based on their singularly local content. Our experience from past events is that content is not easily translatable and generally loses its affective intensity in the primarily language-based mutation from one locale or event to another. The techniques we invented therefore had to be focused on affective linkages. As with all techniques, some were more immediately successful than others. For instance, each molecule had an emissary they sent to another molecule, either actually or virtually. This really worked, I think: it generated excitement in a 3-way network (since all molecules received and sent an emissary). Another technique was for the emissary to leave a seed behind and then, post-event, each molecule was asked to document the growth of that seed. It may be too early to tell, but my sense is that in many cases, this technique was too distanced from the affective tenor of the event and so may have lost its potential force. Documenting the seeding process was meant to offer a method for pursuing local molecular interventions by bringing the molecule back together post-event in a way that connected to other molecular processes. The seed was thought as a kind of affordance for the transmutation of one molecular process into another. We were looking for a technique that would propose a form of communication that did not evolve through the description of a past event but instead engaged with an ongoing process that was fed by an existing collaborative project. Our hope was that this documenting process would subtly call forth aspects of the molecular interventions – we'll see how it evolves.

Earlier, I mentioned the necessity to accept the possibility that things might fail. What I meant by this – if we take the question of the seed, for instance – is that you have to be willing to allow things *not* to take the shape you imagined. The work of micropolitics – the creation of techniques for collaboration – is arduous. It involves a lot of experimentation and patience, and especially, I think, it involves an openness toward a new way of working together. It has to fall on fertile

ground. As you know, at the SenseLab, we've always emphasized, following Guattari, that the modes of encounter for collaborative micropolitical exploration are not based on a personalized understanding of subjectivity. We are not working out of a pre-established notion of friendship, for instance. It is the project, the event, the technique that moves us to work together. Without the project, there is no group subjectivity, and therefore no collective process.

NH: In the interview with Adam Bobbette he talks about the relation between politics and art as having to do with perception, and I think this links well to the relation between thought and practice. He says, "What I have been learning from Smithson, and which you find taken up by so many others (including Deleuze and de Landa) is that politics is always enacted through perception. It must allow particular kinds of worlds to be sensible while foreclosing others. Here then, politics crosses the threshold of aesthetics. And so what then might it be to practice on perception, what other kinds of worlds become perceptible?" How do you think we might engage with this idea of the relation between politics and perception in the context of a micropolitics?

EM: Brian Massumi's interview addresses this question in some detail and raises some issues I think would be interesting to discuss in the ethico-aesthetic context of collective micropolitical intervention. The micropolitical, he says, never registers consciously. In this sense, it is akin to microperception, which registers only in its effects. This does not mean that micropolitical interventions cannot be planned, that precise and rigorous techniques cannot be invented. It means that what is micropolitical about the event will never be known as such. It will be felt, it will have an effect, but it won't *be* in the strict sense of the term. Massumi calls this a "something doing": "There is always a something-doing cutting in, interrupting whatever continuities are in progress. For things to continue, they have to re-continue. They have to re-jig around the interruption. At the instant of re-jigging, the body braces for what will come. It in-braces, in the sense that it returns to its potential for more of life to come, and that potential is immanent to its own arising."

Politics and perception come together in this non-conscious re-jigging. It is non-conscious in the way that affect is, working not on the pre-constituted body, but on the in-bracing of the body-becoming. In this betweenness of feeling and doing, there is no content as yet. In Massumi's words: "That affective quality is all there is to the world in that instant. It takes over life, fills the world, for an immeasurable instant of shock. Microperception is this purely affective rebeginning of the world."

Micropolitics, it seems to me, functions on a similar spectrum, activating the affective potential of the interval between feeling and doing. For some, this may make it sound like a “soft” politics, but it’s quite the opposite. What is usually constituted as *the real thing* – Politics with a capital P – is far less rigorously inventive, precisely because it operates in the sphere of representation where pre-composed bodies are already circulating. The micropolitical is that which subverts this tendency in the political to present itself as already fully formed. All politics is infested with micropolitical tendencies. This is what makes the political an event. In my opinion, much of political theory continues to invest too heavily in the already-articulated “capital P” Politics. The reason for this is simple: it is extremely challenging to speak of what has not yet fully taken form. Like the microperception that tweaks the event of perception, the micropolitical is the force of the political event that potentially unmoors it.

Gina Badger’s project *The Little Dig* is a nice example of how micropolitics works microperceptually. *The Little Dig*, as you know, is a temporary non-monetary economy based on the exchange of dirt. Between May 11-16 2009, Badger deployed *The Little Dig* in Boston’s financial district: she put a pile of dirt on the grass in front of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, proposing a new kind of exchange and creation of value. At the surface, the project is already compelling, and certainly, in many regards micropolitical: it addresses consumerism, for instance, in a generative way, proposing a different model of value. But, as she points out, what really make up the project are the techniques that underlie its political potential. These techniques pre-date the dissemination of the project and include a long and bureaucratic process that involved specialists at the MIT Insurance Office; the Environment, Health, and Safety Office; her MIT program’s administrative staff; the programming coordinator at the Rose Kennedy Greenway, her collaborators; her housemates; friends; and people from craigslist who provided and then took away the dirt. This collaborative network was held together, it seems to me, by a micropolitical proposition that made a political promise that could only be felt in its effects. Her project was not a metaphor for money, it was a material way of feeling and doing the exchange, where the exchange happened just as intensely at the level of the project itself (on the grass in front of the Federal Reserve Bank) as it did in the complex mobilized networks of bureaucracy, friendship, etc. The project *is* the techniques deployed for bringing to thought the various levels of engagement key to developing a micropolitical process. This micropolitical process, as it develops into an artwork, brings perception to the fore, making felt the complex inadequacies and paradoxes of our current modes of exchange.

Again, what seems important is to remember that the micropolitical is not in itself a modality for “positive” change. Micropolitics is not situated squarely on the political spectrum in terms of “right” or “left.” It moves across, transversally. Brian Massumi and Maurizio Lazzarato both make this very clear. Speaking about the Bush regime in the United States, Massumi emphasizes the politics of threat that coursed through the population during Bush’s 8-year tenure. Politics that operate through their effects are micropolitical: they “work on many levels and at many rhythms of bodily priming to ensure a relative success.” Such techniques are seen everywhere in the American war machine, and although they are less mobilized in the Obama administration, there certainly remains a reservoir of micropolitical potential from Bush’s tenure. This potential remains open to reclaiming by the “right” and the “left” – reclaiming has always been a part of the active passage between the micro and macro on the political spectrum – but this excess of micropolitical potential might just as well open onto new forms of collective community organizing as mobilizing itself in affective politics of fear. We saw the potential mobility of the affective within the micropolitical in the Obama electoral race: Obama deployed many of the affective strategies we had seen during the Bush regime, but instead of tweaking them toward fear, he tweaked them toward hope.

For a micropolitics of collective enunciation, it seems that what is required is a grasping of the potential before it can be regulated within the dominant system of the day. The notion that the micro and the macro are always intertwined – something Lazzarato explains beautifully in his interview – is what makes the concept of the micropolitical so generative for me. The generative potential of the micropolitical is strengthened, I think, by its capacity to be captured by the macropolitical and deployed within various universes of value. This allows it to remain mobile and resist becoming didactic. Its potential, as Massumi points out, “is immediately collective. It’s not a mere possibility, it’s an active part of the constitution of that situation, it’s just one that hasn’t been fully developed, that hasn’t been fully capacitated for unfolding. This means that there are potential alter-politics at the collectively in-braced heart of every situation, even the most successfully conformist in its mode of attunement.”

It would be interesting to explore further the more negative reactions to the micropolitical expressed in both Isabelle Stengers’ and Bruno Latour’s interviews. Isabelle Stengers prefers to think the potential of the between – what we would call the micropolitical – as the *mesopolitical*, emphasizing the milieu. For her, there remains a “coefficient of ‘polemic truth’ associated to micropolitics.” For me, Stengers concept of the “meso” is very much in line with how I understand the micropolitical. This suggests

something quite interesting: that how the micropolitical has been mobilized within the particular Franco-Belgian academic/political scene in which Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers circulate may have undone it of its potential. The micropolitical as the thought of the milieu has been reinscribed into the value-based micro/macro dichotomy. From the thought of the middle, the micropolitical has become the edge of a spectrum that demonizes the complex interweaving of different political regimes. It has lost its capacity to move across and through.

In its place a new concept is born – the meso – which Stengers defines as “the locus of invention where the pragmatics of the question are far more alive, lively, more difficult to forget than the micro or the macro, between which the game of truth is always at stake.” Perhaps what we can learn from this conceptual drift can be linked to how we might think perception in the artworld. Concepts must redeploy themselves, making themselves felt, activating present conjunctions. While the micropolitical for me does express potential in and for the milieu, for Stengers and Latour, it is the meso which is creative of difference and potential. It is the meso which affirms its co-presence with/in a milieu. And it is the meso which is most pragmatically material. As Stengers says, “All material is in relation to a milieu.”

NH: And Guattari says, “Any micropolitical approach consists precisely in the attempt to assemble the processes of singularization on the very level from which they emerge.”

I think that the military, for example in both the U.S. and Israel, has an understanding of how the micropolitical works in relation to a milieu. What I mean by this is that the military has come up with very sophisticated techniques in relation to how war affects and infects—technologically, architecturally and cartographically (take for example Eyal Weizman’s work on the architecture of occupation in Palestine and also how much that influenced the architecture of occupation in Iraq, or for example the “Arab” simulation villages that have been built in the deserts of Nevada and the infamous “Chicago” base in Israel), and academically (take the RAND corporation for example, the not for profit institution for research and development playing a key role in implementing and influencing policies and decision making for the US government). We see how the micropolitical in this case is working intensely with the macropolitics of warfare. We really see how the micropolitical and macropolitical are in constant relation, composing the “becoming-work” of politics.

I am just wondering how we can make the lines of relation more visible between how the micro and macro function in relation to each other but in the context of activist work. And I think this is really relevant to Barbara Glowczewski's work.

And from there maybe we can go back to this question of why the micropolitical is valuable as a point of departure for a new politics. I am thinking here in particular of how Guattari takes up micropolitics as " a question of making a new kind of pragmatics enter these fields: a new kind of analysis that actually corresponds to a new kind of politics."

EM: As you point out, collaborative work must pay attention to the point of inflexion where singularities appear. We see a nice example of this in Barbara Glowczewski's discussion of the film she made during her first stay - in the late 1970s - in the Aboriginal community of Lajamanu, Australia. The important lesson Glowczewski learned through the process of making art in a different cultural context was that one aesthetic system could not be simply superimposed onto another. Explaining her rationale of using a jumpy, sped-up editing style, she says: "For the film I made in Lajamanu in 1979, I thought to use that technique because of a stupid analogy: I thought the use of time condensation through rhythmic cuts would be like the condensation in dreams. Dreaming is so important for Aboriginal people, and I thought if we condense a lot of visual information into one image it should sort of explain visually what the dream is about." Despite Glowczewski's best intentions, the Aborigines were confused about the representation of their dancing in her film. They thought it undermined their dancing ritual and made them look stupid. "Their response to the film made clear that the representation 'in time' of their movement was a key aspect of the content of their ritual. For them what was important was the real speed of the performance, of the enactment, of the dance because the speed at which you enact the traveling from one place to another itself carries information." As I think Glowczewski's example makes apparent, processes create their own singularities. As Glowczewski's artistic practice evolved within Aboriginal communities, so did her capacity to attend to the singularities as they emerged and to find modes of re-telling that sought less to represent their practices than to collaborate with them.

When Glowczewski returned to France in the early 1980s, she became close with Felix Guattari, who in turn became a strong influence on her work. One of her key insights of that period came from Guattari's insistence on the singularity at the heart of micropolitical interventions. It was Guattari who pointed out to her that there was an important difference between singularity and essence. "This changed a bit after a

discussion with Felix Guattari who told me to be careful. He suggested that there might be a difference between a singularity and an essence, pointing out that everything I had written was underlining the complex singularities at the heart of aboriginal culture. So I started to pay attention to the relation between singularities and politics. This new approach also followed from Guattari's ideas about micropolitics."

Essence is a macropolitical concept. It engages at the level of fabulation, creating an ideal milieu with a retrospectively continuous history. Through essence, we come to the vocabularies that define, that situate the absoluteness of a concept such as native, woman, national etc. Singularities, on the other hand, are unique convergences that appear as remarkable points. This appearance is brief and completely depends on the conditions of the convergence. When it perishes it can never be resuscitated, and yet, similarly to Whitehead's subjective form, it can have an effect on future singularities.

In the context of Australian Aboriginal culture, the convergences of singular effects regularly move transversally between the micro and the macropolitical. As Glowczewski points out in her discussion of the "death in custody" issue, when Aboriginal research groups came together to propose recommendations for macropolitical dissemination, their way of working together was micropolitically motivated. She explains: "it was absolutely incredible working in an environment of Aboriginal people of different generations with different experiences [...] and watching them invent answers to all the constraints that the state was bringing to them. In the end the process didn't restrict itself solely to the theme of death and custody: they were rebuilding everything, education, health, justice system, police, housing, environmental issues. And they proposed this incredible sort of weaving, throughout the continent, of more than 360 recommendations, which were given to the parliament and voted by the parliament and out of 360 recommendations maybe only 30 were applied ten years later." What stands out here is that in order to address one particular law, a mode of collaboration had to be put into place. This mode of collaboration had to be sensitive to different modalities of thinking and speaking, writing and disseminating information, crossing as it did a population with different oral and written skills – including many elders who never learned to read and write but whose views on the matter were of the highest importance. This sensitivity to a collective process resulted in much more than a bureaucratic decision concerning one specific problem. It became the cultivation of a process that opened itself up to the wider effects of the "death in custody" issue. Creating a kind of collective subjectivity, the discussions became focused on the wide web of convergences this particular law could bring into focus. Their

concerns were as micropolitically oriented as they were macropolitically inclined. For instance, they became concerned with environmental issues that cross different communities in different ways. These are issues that have macropolitically effects – they bring with them global environmental consequences as well as national ones that in turn affect the governance of different milieus of Aboriginal culture. They are micropolitically because they emerge from the milieu. They become macropolitically when, for instance, they bring forth new laws at the national level that effect the governance of communities and territories. Take mining, for instance. Criticism has been voiced that in view of new mining operations Aboriginal “Dreamings” (*Jukurrpa*) have had a tendency to “spring up” that weren’t considered constitutive to a particular aboriginal community. The Dreaming here refers in part to a spiritual ancestor who resides within specific landscape affordances. To talk of these Dreamings as though they could be owned by certain groups at the expense of others is to misunderstand the strong rhizomatic quality of Aboriginal culture where land does not stand-in for parsed-out territory. Although Aboriginal communities do have direct influence over very specific sites (and/as Dreamings) these Dreamings can only exist in a network of emergence that gives life to the present of collective becoming across groupings. To take over a part of land as though it were not in some way connected to another is to cut across a system of life. This of course has both micro and macropolitically consequences. In the case of holding back transnational mining projects it may affect both the national position in a global market and in that sense effect macropolitically change. On the local level, the funds used by mining might have been mobilized for community projects that could have given the community a certain independence. Either way, the convergence of macro and micropolitically instantiates new debates about land ownership and territoriality that in turn in some sense alter the field of the political. This is what I mean by the macro always being infested by micropolitically effects.

This ease of passage from the micro to the macro is key to understanding the concept of the Dreaming. The Dreaming – which can also be translated as *law* – directs contemporary everyday life as much as it tells the history of Australian Aboriginal culture. The story it tells is both absolutely singular – it is carried through the ages as a specific iteration of the serial continuity between land, spirituality, space and time – and it is prone to a certain degree of continuous mutation. This paradox of representation and movement can be seen in contemporary paintings by Aboriginal artists. Rather than “representing” the Dreaming as “this” or “that”, these paintings create new conditions for living the Dreaming today. These conditions are as visual as they are spatio-temporal. They are ways of moving, ways of thinking and becoming as much as they are

ways of remembering. This flexibility between memory and movement is a reminder, I think, about how necessary it is to keep the flow between the micro and the macro, between that which is in creation and that which exists more concretely and can be represented. It is a reminder that even that which seems to represent carries within it the seeds of its own potential subversion. In this sense, we cannot think outside the vocabulary of singularities as serialities. Everything that is experienced is micropolitical in one way or another. How we speak of it or write about it or use it politically may have a macropolitical orientation, but any fissure, any opening always speaks of renewed micropolitical potential.

This paradox is beautifully addressed in the Sydney molecule's "Generating Thought Experiment" – one of the micropolitical interventions that was part of the SenseLab event, *Society of Molecules*. Taking as a conceptual point of departure Suely Rolnik and Felix Guattari's *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, Mat Wall-Smith, Anna Munster, Andrew Murphie, Gillian Fuller and Lone Bertelsen take on the very idea of form and representation through the prism of "learning, research and thought across institutions." One of the mandates of *Society of Molecules* was to try to think with, against and across institutions. The idea was to create techniques that might enable an undoing of the strict micro (ethico-aesthetic) /macro (institution) perspective, since this strict dichotomy leaves us paralyzed in the face of institutions. To demonize the institution, as Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers point out, does not give us the tools with which to subvert it or to open it to its micropolitical potential.

"Generating Thought Experiment" is an instruction manual that invites us to learn/think/collaborate differently: "In the end it was decided that our 'aesthetico-political' event would take the form of a micropolitical resistance to what Guattari may have called a 'pseudo-scientific' 'enslavement' of thought and learning." Seeking to go beyond "benchmark" culture – the endless measuring, aligning and evaluating that has become synonymous with academia – the Sydney molecule created a manual for thought-generation through a fine-tuned list of micro-behaviours/contagious compartments. These micro-behaviours include taking on someone else's microbehaviours by differentially attuning to them, modulating the contagion that results from these new thought processes, thus creating "a patchwork existential territory with which you feel comfortable, but which gives you new powers." The Sydney molecule's [instruction manual](#) depends on a continuous flow between micro and macropolitical contexts and reminds us that the micro taken as didactic becomes a representation of itself ("don't so much imitate it – certainly don't mimic it"). It's not so much that we must

act micropolitically. It's that we must invent *across* practices and behaviours.

Nasrin, when you ask about how micropolitical practices are necessary to a rearticulation of the political, quoting Guattari's statement that links the micropolitical to the pragmatic, I think that what you are getting at is perhaps that we must start from the middle. It's not enough, as you point out with the example of the military – to "reside" in a micropolitical territory (if there were such a thing). We must generate vocabularies across. This is what Stengers means, I think, when she talks about the necessity to create concepts that take off from a singular political event. She explains: "To paraphrase Deleuze paraphrasing Artaud, I try to think 'before' the uncountable victims of this mania of oppositions [such as the macro and micro], to create concepts that include protections, modes of deception that do not cease to return and that don't pay attention to warnings." For Stengers, the danger of the macro/micro opposition is its potential to regulate the passage between their inherent tendencies to reterritorialize. Despite Stengers' unease around the concept of the micropolitical, I think she would agree that no matter what we call it, we must become sensitive to the modes of crossing that activate and emphasize certain political tendencies and in turn mobilize certain specific responses. Important is to become aware of how these transversal passages occur and where they might lead to. Stengers speaks of this in terms of 2 (his)stories [*histoires*]: "we are in suspense between two (his)stories." The first history involves a mode of capture that insists on continuous evolution while it distributes both the possible and the impossible. We might call it capitalism. The second history is that of an intrusion or a counter-capture. It cannot be anticipated nor prepared for; it cannot be desired in advance. It must be created.

Your own work has been taken over by the thought of the middle through this idea that thought must be created, that activism is as much a form of thinking/writing as it is a mode of action in the physical sense of the term. I wonder whether you could say more about how the Israeli-Palestinian border has become a leitmotif in your thinking about the micropolitical and where you situate this leitmotif in terms of your own activist practice. As you pointed out earlier, there can be no micropolitical intervention in the Palestinian context that does not at the same time engage with the macropolitics of militarization, global financial interests, the demonizing by America of Arab culture etc. I find it very interesting how exploring the micropolitical practices that have emerged in both Israel and Palestine as ethico-aesthetic responses to the wall and militarized borders has led you toward local questions concerning the relationship between architecture, politics and activism and also to the very concrete task of developing a

mode of writing that would itself be a form of activism. This physical distancing from the Palestinian border is, I think, a micropolitical act on your part that is very much in line with the *Society of Molecules* project. The singularities of micropolitical interventions are lived and disseminated, it seems to me, on a local level. While you can learn from global examples, there is always the danger that you will fetishize the micropolitical tendencies from afar without being able to take into full consideration their macropolitical captures. Do you think working locally facilitates a kind of micropolitical activist practice that remains sensitive to macropolitical counter-capture?

NH: There are a lot of local activist groups here in Montreal (if that's what you mean by locally) that do a lot of important and necessary work. Tadamon! is one example of this. A collective concerned with issues in the Middle-East and right now focusing on issues concerning Palestine and Lebanon mostly, and also involved in the BDS movement (boycott, divestment and sanctions), which is another very influential and important movement that has emerged as a response to resisting complicity with the Israeli occupation on an international level. Tadamon! has also been advocating for the Bil'in case here in Montreal. Bil'in is a village in the occupied West Bank that has been, for the last four years, organizing protests against the building of the wall across its lands. Also, the people of the town of Bil'in are suing two Quebecois companies that are involved in the building of settlements and other types of residential buildings on Palestinian land. Under the Geneva international convention it is deemed illegal to build on occupied land, and so for the first time we see a push toward holding foreign companies responsible for how they're also aiding in the occupation. For me, the BDS movement and the Bil'in case trials are two important examples of how to think the local and the global together. What is important is not to think these separately – the local and global – but to know how to cut across them, which in these two examples we see taking place.

EM: I think the point you are making here about the local is very important. In the same way that it's false to consider the micropolitical as the smaller version of the political, it is equally important, I think, to allow the local to proliferate. Within the vocabulary of the micropolitical, the local is the milieu. It is the force of the event around which wider concerns converge. In this regard, the local is both absolutely singular and infinitely expansive or serial. Singular in the sense of happening here and now under these specific set of conditions. Expansive in the sense that its effects can be felt in other subsequent and simultaneous localities. How do you activate this complexity of the local in your work?

NH: My own work is not specific to Palestine or Israel but to a politics of warfare and capitalism, and how these intersect in writing through the example of Palestine. I often ask myself how I can make these lines visible, depending on the context, asking how can these processes be connected—not superficially but rigorously as a way to think through the ways in which these practices (of occupation) have an effect elsewhere. Language is important here, as you mentioned, to create a vocabulary that expresses the complexity of what we're dealing with, and communication is important, in terms of how we can make these thoughts graspable—Malcolm X is very inspiring in this regard.

As well as the Israeli architect Eyal Weizman. Weizman recently wrote an article called *Lawfare*, which he wrote in March of 2009 shortly after the assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009. This piece illustrates how the micropolitical works macropolitically. And yes, as you mentioned earlier, micropolitics is not something to simply idealize or fetishize, and Deleuze and Guattari have warned us of this that micropolitics has the tendency to become microfascist. Weizman's article brings this to light in some way.

According to Weizman, the attack on Gaza was not only the worst and most violent attack that Israel conducted on the Palestinian people, but it was also “one in which Israeli experts in international humanitarian law—the area of law that regulates the conduct of war—were most closely involved.”¹ Weizman calls this lawfare, “the use of law as a weapon of war” as one American judge put it.

Lawfare operated here at many different levels. First, the Israeli military was concerned with how to legalize large-scale destruction so that they could conduct highly destructive military operations “lawfully”—thus legalizing what would otherwise be illegal in the language of IHL, and avoiding accusations of war crimes. For example, “humanitarian munitions” was a term often used to describe the function of highly advanced military weaponry that they claimed had a smaller kill-ratio—minor “collateral” damage. What is important to think about here is how language is being used and by whom. How few are few—and—does not every life count?

Second, Weizman also mentions in this article the “technologies of warning.” The Israeli military dropped leaflets warning Gazans to leave or evacuate (we saw this image often in the news). The Israeli army used this technique in the assault on Lebanon (2006) as well but in Gaza something

¹ To read Eyal Weizman's article, see <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/legislative-attack>

different happened. Not only did the dropping of the leaflets serve to warn people to evacuate – as it had in the past. Now, the leaflets also had a legal component: if the civilians chose not to evacuate they were considered to have opted for the fight. To stay behind, to go back to your house to protect it, meant, according to an international law division officer, that you were a “legitimate target.” In this case, lawfare doesn’t humanize war, as these experts claim it does (whatever this means anyway), but proliferates and justifies it. The range of violence and destruction becomes elastic in the context of how law, in this case, becomes malleable.

Gaza became the object of an experiment in lawfare, not only in regards to weapon testing (such as white phosphorous and DIME we saw in the many images disseminated) but also specifically in direct relation with the regulations of IHL. This is important to think about because not only do we see how language plays an important role in how it’s utilized to evoke “humanitarian” violence, but we also see how the military is working strategically to change regulations and laws, and work them from within their limit. What the military does here is work micropolitically at a macropolitical level, seeing how far the limit can be pushed. This doesn’t just have consequences for Palestinians.

And what is so disturbing and disconcerting is that we’re always, in effect, not feeling the distance enough. Even though we know that this is happening, we know it’s happening to others, and it is happening somewhere else. But we need to force the incommensurable distance into activation, and this goes back to Guattari’s plea as well in “Remaking Social Practices”, where he says that the challenge is to make these lines of relations felt, and make them visible. It’s hard to make felt the urgency of action for change – the urgency *in* life – when we’re so comfortable, or comfortably far away.

I have a problem with the idea of everyone picking their own battleground and fighting for it. I think this is a strange approach—activism in fragments. I think what is important, and what I think is difficult and most challenging, is what Guattari adamantly calls for when he asks “how can we become united and increasingly different?”

What connects Palestine to Iraq, and how do we deal with that in relation to the shooting of Freddy Villanueva in Montreal-North? I don’t mean we need to identify each solitary event and try to figure out some kind of common ground to connect the situations. I am suggesting that we need to work from a politics in context—we’re living in a time where we see the lines of connection between capitalism and warfare getting blurrier and

blurrier—and to go back to Stengers' concept of *mesopolitics*, we need to begin from the middle, and to rebegin, as Massumi also suggests.

The building of walls is a good example of how events in one place are intrinsically connected to those in other places – how the local meets the global. Walls can be thought of as systems of thought/systems of power that are perpetually creating the “have nots” of the world, isolating and containing them. For example, the Israeli wall is not just a Palestinian problem. Of course, it's specific to Palestine and the occupation, but it's also proliferating similar initiatives all over the world. Mike Davis brings attention to this. New walls are being built in Saudi Arabia at its border with Yemen, in India at its border with Kashmir and Bangladesh, Bhutan is walling its border with India, Botswana is building an electric fence alongside its border with Zimbabwe, Costa Rica has walled its border at Penas Blancas, and then there is the long fence along the Mexican-America border, some of it still unbuilt, but all of it very much a part of the Mexico-America divide. The significance of this is overwhelming—not because it's new, it's not, we've seen this happen elsewhere and in different forms, with gated communities, and new urban development strategies—. But what is significant about this particular set of wall construction is that the walls are emerging from the context of the global economy of warfare and occupation.

So, how can we create a vocabulary that can speak to the complex relations between these vast landscapes of difference? How do we get at the problem of in-articulation to what is in actuality ungraspable? I think we have a lot to learn from fiction and poetry. And Foucault has a beautiful quote that I keep going back to when confronting this problem in my own writing. Foucault, speaking of Blanchot's work, writes, “Fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible.”

EM: Perhaps an event such as *Society of Molecules* is a starting point. I mean this in the sense that *Society of Molecules* as a concept and as a distributed micropolitical event can never contain the “meaning” of its political activity. It is a call, a proposition. Its potential will only be known in its continued becoming. In this sense, there is no “full visibility” of its politics, no “making sense of it” across or beyond existing political constituencies. *Society of Molecules* is a call for the making-apparent of an already-existent commotion at the micropolitical level. Harnessing this commotion may be another way of embracing the urgency *in* life you speak about. Urgency *in* life is a call to create again, from the middle. It is a call to invent techniques for the making perceptible of transversal operations,

and to tweak these techniques as they are captured and reified. As Nietzsche said: “Was that life?” “Well then! Once More!”²

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1966) p.157.