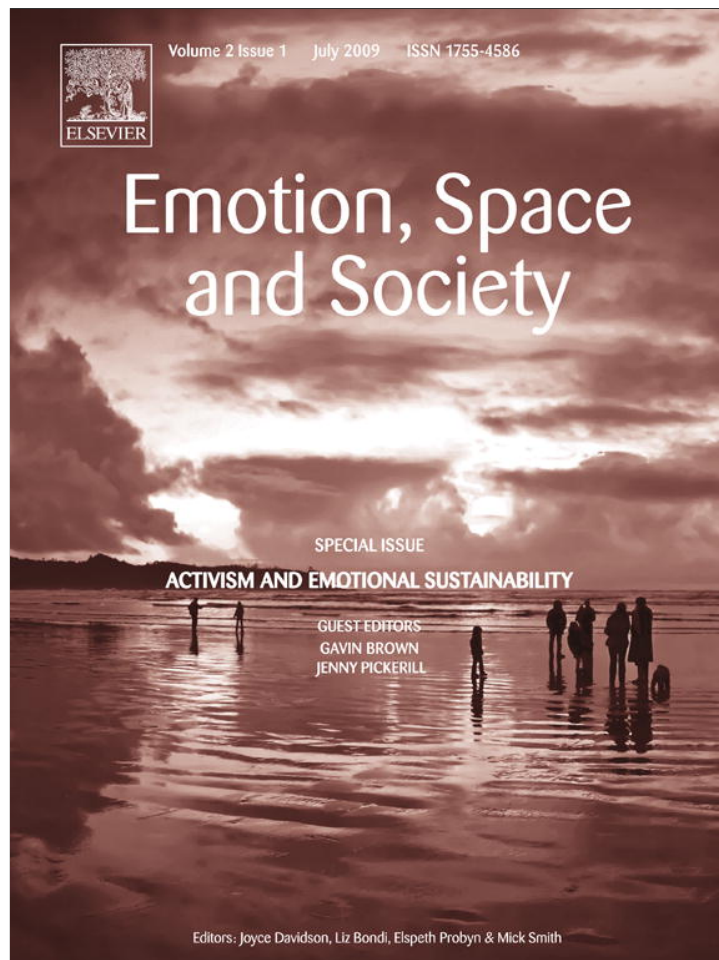


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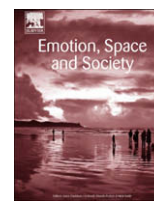
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 Editorial: Activism and emotional sustainability

Recent years have seen an expanded interest within Geography in the spatiality of emotions (Davidson et al., 2005; Thien, 2005) and affect (Anderson, 2006; Thrift, 2004); as well as the spaces of activism, protest and resistance (Anderson, 2004; Featherstone, 2003; Routledge, 2003). Outside Geography, various scholars have begun only recently to consider the emotions that inspire and sustain activism, that are provoked by it, and consequently what spaces and practices are necessary to sustain individual and collective resistance in the long-term (Cvetkovich, 2003; Flam and King, 2005; Goodwin et al., 2001). Although recognition of the importance of emotions to the sustenance of political organizing has long been advocated by feminists (Starhawk, 1997), too often activists, the academics who study and work with them and activist-academics treat this as (at best) a secondary issue that is of less importance than the more clearly 'political' objectives of activist campaigns. Activists often need to strive for deintegration from society (and oppressive behaviours) in order to cause social change, however "activists' experiences of deintegration and dissonance often lead to burnout, withdrawal or cynicism" (King, 2005: 152), and we need emotional reflexivity to overcome this tension.

This special issue, like the conference session that inspired it, seeks to draw together recent geographic scholarship on emotions, affect, and activism to consider how they might productively inform each other. It seeks to offer a spatial and geographic perspective to other social scientific enquiries into the connections between emotions and social movement activism. We attend to these issues both from a practical perspective that activists need greater support in considering (our/their) emotions, and as academics arguing that such topics require further attention. We also begin with the assertion that "emotions are contextual, embodied, and socially constructed (and deconstructed and reconstructed in fluid, plural and emergent processes); emotions are relational across relational spaces" (Askins, 2009).

The papers by contributors in this issue explore the connections between activism and emotions in a number of political and geographical contexts; as well as expressing how these connections are (re)produced through a range of different spatialities (Leitner et al., 2008). Askins reflects upon the way emotions shape our choices as academics and activists. Using her experiences of working with asylum seekers in Newcastle through the group *Families Unite in Newcastle* she argues for an acknowledgement that our research, teaching, learning and others' acts within and beyond the academy are all motivated by emotions. She critically explores the concept of activism and its constitution and explores "how emotions travel, how they circulate" between different spaces and places. In summary, Askins calls for us

to understand the role of passion in academia, in a paper that highlights the limits of static conceptualisations of academic 'positionality'.

Horton and Kraftl also seek to critically expand conceived notions of activism through an evaluation of mothers' participation in a *Sure Start* programme in Northamptonshire, contrasting accepted practices of activism with the mothers' "conditional activist dispositions". They explore the emotional consequences of the mothers' participation in the centre and how these are in fact "implicit activisms", raising the question when does activism become activated? Central to their paper is a consideration of the politics of place, and the scale at which change might need to be enacted in shaping participant's emotional responses and capacity for action. This paper raises important questions about how broadened notions of 'activism' might, in turn, change and challenge considerations of emotional sustainability in (modest) processes of social change.

In our own paper we enrol empirical examples from different forms of autonomous (anti-capitalist) activism in Britain, to offer a detailed exploration of the role and importance of emotions in the sustainability of activism. In particular, we consider the role of a range of different sites and spaces in sustaining activists through cycles of protest, considering what spaces of activism can be opened up by a closer attention to emotions, and how the sites and networks in (and through) which protest and other activist practices take place shape the emotional and affective engagements of participants. In part, the evidence we present suggests that often activists need to move away from (and outside of) sites of direct protest and confrontation in order to construct spaces that can sustain both their emotional well-being and their resistance over a longer time period. As autonomous forms of activism attempt to prefiguratively enact new post-capitalist social relations in the here and now, we suggest there is still some way to go in changing affective relationships within many of these groups. Like several other contributions to this special issue, our paper addresses the complex temporalities folded into practices that seek to sustain activism which is envisaged as part of an open, on-going process of radical social transformation.

Wilkinson asserts that it is not just that emotions matter, or which emotions matter in sustaining activism but there is a politics of emotion within activist cultures. This politics is often invisible and yet inherent in many activist spaces. Primarily using the example of autonomous (anti-capitalist) social centres in the UK, as well as the spatial practices of meetings held within these centres, Wilkinson seeks to queer considerations of emotions in order to "develop a wider political vision of why emotions matter". She identifies how there are hierarchies of emotions that are

considered valid within activist groups. She employs a “performative approach to emotions” questioning the implicit assumption in much work about emotional geographies that there is some kind of emotional authenticity which can be unpacked through close analysis.

Gruszczynska uses interviews with participants in the March of Equality in Poznan, Poland (2005) to reflect upon the emotions evoked in mobilising high-risk activism in a harsh political context. The march, organised by lesbian and gay organisations, was banned and encountered a brutal reaction by the local police. In this unsympathetic political climate, the organisers sought to mobilise powerful spatial connections with previous time-spaces of protest in Poland, drawing principally upon memories of the Solidarity movement from the 1980s, which had organised protests in exactly the same site in Poznan, as a source of emotional strength and legitimacy. Following the mass arrests of the Equality marchers, the solidarity protests were organised outside key Polish institutions around the world. The adoption of their cause across physical distance and cultural difference was an important factor in enabling the Poznan activists to continue their campaigning. This paper again highlights the importance of considering the temporalities of activism, as well as its spatial relationships, when thinking about the potential for (and limits to) emotionally sustainable resistance.

Cox seeks to unpack the diversity of approaches to personal sustainability and understand their complex situatedness within different histories, cultures, places and politics. In other words he suggests that we need to view sustainability as both a collective, political and an individual issue and problematic. He uses the example of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, and notes that it is often those who spend time musing on issues of emotional sustainability who have the least to offer in terms of effective practice. Thus, he argues, we need to locate more useful examples to guide us. As part of his typologies he identifies emotional sustainability as reliant upon emotional resources such as “strong religious cultures, a class-based or political ethic”, and skills of emotional management, noting the significant impact of mental health issues.

Finally, Cass takes a very different approach to the other papers and explores how oppositional activism to renewable energy technologies is constructed by developers as emotional and hence, by default, irrational. Such developers feel able to disregard such opposition (or are upset by its intrusion into the planning process) as being less valid than their own quasi-scientific determinations of, for example, landscape impacts, or noise levels or impacts on bird life. He argues that emotional understandings of, and attachment to, particular land, landscapes and place are key here and shape the manner in which they are evoked in defiance of an (apparently) rational environmental logic (of mitigating climate change). Cass argues that we need to accept and understand these emotional responses in order to further engage in productive debate about the adoption and expansion of renewable energy technologies.

These papers, which consider a broad variety of forms and spaces of activism, help us identify a number of insights into the relationship between activism and emotions, and the construction of forms of activism that are emotionally sustainable for their participants. First, the very notion of *activism* remains contested. Often implicit assumptions are made as to what is ‘valid’ activism and what is not. Both Askins, and Horton and Kraftl call on us to value more local, everyday, and implicit forms of activism. Second, this ambiguity around activism also complicates discussions of the ‘*everyday*’. In part, this is a matter of the scale at which participants engage in their activism, with the ‘*everyday*’ being associated with a local, neighbourhood scale, and the sites of recurring sociality

within those locations. Nevertheless, these ‘*everyday*’ activisms can address (or respond to) issues instigated at a national or global scale. For example, Horton and Kraftl carefully situate the lives of the mothers they studied within the everyday context of the post-Welfarist, neo-liberal state. Similarly, in these contexts there is no straightforward association between the everyday and the ordinary or mundane.

Third, *spatiality* underpins these discussions of everyday and notions of activism, and a broad variety of sites and spaces are considered here: the meetings where activists plan their activities (Wilkinson); the gatherings, convergence spaces and social centres where activists relax, share information and skills, and consolidate their networks (Brown and Pickerill; Wilkinson); sites of mutual aid and solidarity (Askins; Horton and Kraftl); numerous spatial expressions of protest, direct action and insurrection (Cox; Gruszczynska); and, the bureaucratic spaces in which state and corporate actors determine their responses to activist campaigning (Cass). However, the papers in this collection do more than simply consider sites fixed in place. Some contributions consider how emotions flow through activist networks (Gruszczynska); whilst others address how emotions are triggered or mediated by specific spatial practices, such as consensus decision-making (Wilkinson), or meditation, prayer and ritual (Brown and Pickerill). Fourth, these papers highlight how emotions *move* across time and space. We see this in the progression of emotions in newcomers to direct action, and in the international solidarity extended across distance to the organisers of the Poznan March for Equality.

Fifth, emotions remain *undervalued*. As Cass illustrates they are still seen by many as irrational and hence invalid. Wilkinson discusses the need to understand the politics of emotion and how activists, often implicitly, validate certain emotions while disregarding others. If we are not able to understand the importance of emotions *per se*, then we will remain unable to seriously interrogate the importance of emotional sustainability. It is noteworthy that activists find space for attending to their emotional sustainability by temporarily removing themselves from visible spaces of activism and protest (Brown and Pickerill). Finally, despite the work presented here there remains a lack of knowledge, work and practical guidance on forms of *emotional sustainability* and indeed there is a paucity of research on emotional ‘work’ in non-work contexts, only somewhat countered by the work here. As Askins notes, we are still reticent to reflect upon our own roles within social change and academia. Indeed there remains much debate as to how to tackle the issue, let alone provide answers. Ultimately we are left with a feeling that what often sustains us most is simply an ambiguous sense of hope, and the opportunity to create some space in which to listen to our own needs.

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