RECONFIGURING AFFECTED LABOR AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT
Through engaging with the concept of ‘noncollaboration’ this paper suggests that labors of being affected—where value is generated through seducing workers, consumers, employers, brands, and audiences in concert with the atmosphere of the product—provide insightful and illustrative instances for noncollaboration on the ground. ‘Affected labor’ constitutes both a primitive, intrinsic feature of social and cultural life—including the life of the mind—and a central lever with which capitalism functions and extracts surplus value from the temporal grip that feelings have over the body in the ‘heat of the moment’. That capitalism increasingly relies upon engaged ‘players’ being moved by one another means the product presents a key sphere for noncollaboration; the act of being affected contains a latent wealth of possibility as to the range of directions to move in thereafter. Such an opening for noncollaboration is developed in this paper as a logic of subversion: a paradigm shift to feeling affected. In exploring empirical and hypothetical examples of, and potential for, harnessing the creative logic of being affected, this analysis renegotiates the essential place of the individual in critiques of neoliberalism.

KEYWORDS
noncollaboration, affected labour, assemblage, capitalism, feeling
Freedom in chaos

The production of desires and affective ecosystems that contemporary values are generated from aren’t recognized through a traditional principle of equivalence. Yet these desires, affects, subjectivities and so on predate productive application in the capitalist context (Eden 2012; Virno 2007). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (1994), for example, explain the potential of the immaterial skills that are exploited in many contemporary labor settings in terms of the innately self-organizing and cooperative capacities of “living laborers”, because their cooperation and the “association of producers” more generally form subjectively and independently of capitalist maneuvers (282-283). Rather than the logic of capital predicting the product, “[c]apital becomes merely an apparatus of capture, a phantasm, an idol” (Hardt and Negri 1994, 282–83). While employers’ appropriate value out of living labor, such labors—communicating well, embodying aesthetics and ethics, reproducing cultures, being affected, and so on—are also inherent aspects of living life irrespective of the category of worker, employer, consumer, audience, follower etc. (Cameron 2018; Eden 2012; Hardt and Negri 2000). Rather than the traditional Autonomist version of revolt—through the proletariat unshackling themselves by negating and refusing their conditions of labor (Exodus)—Paolo Virno (2004) envisions proletarian emancipation through the affirmation of creativity, cooperation, and ‘species-being’: that is, one’s innate desire to produce and to create while refusing certain forms of appropriating work (Hardt and Negri 2000, 362, italics own).

In a kind of proletarian paradox—where freedom almost resides within the chaos of work—the majority of the skills required in labors that produce (immaterial) value actually predate capitalist time. This signals a key break in the Post-Autonomist tradition that has developed since around the 1990s: from ‘Exodus’ as the necessary refusal and negation of work, to ‘Exodus’ as individual affirmation and appropriation of the specific freedoms within work as life and labor continue to blur in immaterial production. Central Post-Autonomist figures Antonio Negri (1994) and Paolo Virno (1996, 2004) suggest their revised project of Exodus as a way for people to reappropriate their social creativity and generate self-ruling multiplicities, separate entirely from the state but not necessarily from their labor (Hardt and Negri 1994). The authors respectively foresaw Exodus as a process of noncollaboration: exercising labor power as a means to refuse the conditions of labor through affirming rather than negating work (Eden 2012; Hardt and Negri
Rather than conceiving a desired utopia or final destination, noncollaboration happens locally in states of becoming, like materialism more broadly, that sees being as a subjectively constituted set of localized practices in time and space (Patton 2003). The question Virno proposes we ask of any given space of labor, then, must be specific to that locale: “how we can act to modify the relations of force within this social organization of time and space” (Joseph 2005, 32, emphasis in original). For Negri (2008), noncollaboration is characterized by “creative separation” and “the consolidation of a new structure of existence, a new ontological figure” and “metamorphosis,” which together communicate the central idea that desires can and should create new bodies because “[s]ubjectivity is not a facticity, it is an imperceptible departure” (101-105). And the point of departure of the new social subject is not immaterial production as such but its materialization in the subject’s flesh” (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006, 3). Noncollaboration, then, describes one’s simultaneous appropriation and affirmation of the creative desires that are put to work in ‘living labor’ as points of potential and transformation, while redirecting, augmenting, rejecting, and reconstituting its ‘ontological figure’ and the economic advantages born out of exploiting creative ‘species-being’ (Negri 2008, 101-05; see also Hardt and Negri 1994, 2000). But how does noncollaboration function without falling into traditional modes of antagonism or refusal, such as in the protest model that appears largely unsuccessful in curbing systemic inequities in contemporary times; how do we noncollaborate with capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2017)?

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (2013) concept of assemblages—as born out of the “flow,” yet very much a diversion from the general ‘flow’—provides a useful conceptual framework for thinking about noncollaboration (473). Assemblages form as individuals express themselves and cooperate according to their difference; as arrangements of “traits deducted from the flow,” each embodying multiple individualities and expressions that are dependent upon their connection with other coordinates (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 406). Assemblages are predicated on the coming together of differences to form new bodies. Individuals that make up assemblages refuse to fit the measure of a majority: they are “minoritarian becomings,” centered around individual transformation and renegotiation of their desires, while also facilitating unconstraint and empowerment to achieve present ones (Tampio 2009, 393). For Deleuze and Guattari, the question we ought to ask ourselves is: how to balance chaos and order such that one’s creative force and potential to transform (the creativity of immaterial labor and affirmation of a wide range of forms of work) can prevail, without violence and the risk of harm to collective life (negation, refusal, symbolic violence etc.)? Henceforth, Deleuze and Guattari revise the more romantic conception of revolution as in the “bloody historical events” (Patton 2003, 24) and overt rejection, dismissal, and refusal
in acting against majority capitalist systems and modes, towards a potentially more workable and practical use of a “very fine file” being used to open up its vast possibilities (Tampio 2009, 384-385). It’s unclear, though, how the fine art of balancing pursuit and restraint of desire—in the exploration of subjectivity as difference—can be achieved in forming abstract assemblages and in using a “fine file” to noncollaborate (Tampio 2009, 395). By asking what happens if different actors within the assemblage get re-represented/redeployed/reconfigured as a sight of resistance, this conceptual essay expands and illustrates what noncollaboration means on the ground, utilizing empirical, anecdotal, and hypothetical examples of everyday life instances of, and potential for, redirecting “the flow” and harnessing the creative logic of “affected labor” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473).

Noncollaborating with affected capitalism

Contemporary capitalism is built off an economy of desire that recognizes the strength of short-term pleasure, affect, as a vulnerable point of weakness; an invitation to pull at the affective heartstrings of consumers during that moment of “this-ness” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 3; see also Massumi 2015). It runs off the ephemeral nature of being moved preconsciously—by sensorial atmospheres and visceral feelings happening within the body during interaction with other bodies, ideas and objects. Indeed, the value, atmosphere, vibe, and aesthetic ethic of the product and brand—the immaterial value—functions very similarly to derivatives in measuring finance as highly immeasurable and fluctuating abstractions; here, “a complex web of conversions among a wide range of forms of wealth” produces an abstract benchmark of value so that, for example, the future of a currency can become a reified tradable commodity (Hardt and Negri 2017, 165). Derivatives are continuously being calculated in accordance with the unpredictability of demand and supply—and the combined behaviors of consumers, audiences, workers, employers, atmospheres and market fluctuation more generally—as production increasingly takes place in the moment, or what Michael Hardt (1999) terms “Toyotaism”(Hardt and Negri 2017). Toyotaism, as a development beyond the organizational model of ‘Fordism’ and later ‘Taylorism’, structures efficiency in production through elastic and horizontal production lines: decision-making is made in the moment and autonomously, and according to situational influences and forces at play. Together, derivatives, being affected, and the Toyotaist period more generally, are situationally determined responses to the variety of pleasures made by both producers in a kind of tango with consumers/investors/audiences
(Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2017). The on-the-spot ‘this-ness’ of contemporary production creates new forms and vibes, uniqueness, thoughtfulness, and authenticity in accord with the range of engaged “players” whose interactional dynamic sculpts the product and its immaterial value (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 3). Moreover, such affects cement their point of difference that is required to retain value in saturated liberal markets.

Work in this sense is consumption, and vice versa: workers need to be seduced in order to seduce others, invest in the (probably precarious) job, communicate the product’s vision, and, ultimately, be better workers. The affected assembly of audiences, workers, employers, brands and consumers—in concert with the atmosphere of the product—often draws its value out of enabling the formation “assemblages,” or a “constellation of […] traits deducted from the flow” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of political subjectivity is the assemblage, because it actualizes freedom in such a way that allows for community and agency in what they describe as a “garden more than a tree” and growing as a “network of intersecting and conflicting assemblages” (Tampio 2009, 385). Reified or not, born out of capital or not; the “garden[s]” or zones of production/consumption still harbor, nurture and feed expressive (political) subjectivities, because life and labor are increasingly indistinguishable (Tampio 2009, 385). Maurizio Lazzarato (2009) describes work (and unemployment) as the “overall” or “mass effect” of the living breathing multitude of intersecting, reciprocal and coproducing knowledge/power structures, subjectivities, and affects that jostle and rely upon each other for value articulation, in a process of “mutual presupposition.” (113). Like Toyotaism, mutual presupposition depicts the ensemble of subjective practices that cross wires and call on each other to help produce a common vernacular—meanings and values that constitute “form[s] of life”—that cannot be reduced to any one person or thing (Hardt 1999, 98; Lazzarato 2009). That affected capitalism enables the formation of assemblages, which represent political subjectivity as “being in–itself,” renders such labors as interesting spaces to gain necessary insights into new modes of noncollaboration, given that immaterial products “are a form–of–life” (Hardt 1999, 98; see also Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

**Subversion through a paradigm shift to feeling affected**

The delicate balance of desire for transformation as well as desire for care—that is, the pursuit of creative potential without harm to oneself and others characteristic of both assemblages and noncollaboration—can be systemically traced through the
sensation of affecting and being affected. Theorizing affect means theorizing the realm of the momentary, or what Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) describe as the “this-ness” of everyday life (3); affects represent collisions and a type of push in the world (Thrift 2004). In line with the local and environmental nature of noncollaboration and assemblages—as subjective and material practices born out of place and space—affect cannot be isolated or taken out of context, for as the authors put it: “affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2, emphasis in original; see also Clough 2008). It is the friction or collision, the points of confrontation between a body and other bodies (or a body and object) that give way to the resultant affect in accord with the time and space in which it arose (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). Benedict de Spinoza (1996) impresses affect as being a collective structure as opposed to an individual faculty: it requires the collaboration of bodies and objects because the potential of the body is defined by its forces of encounter (Brown and Stenner 2001; Deleuze 1998). Furthermore, the extent to which affects—as “forces of encounter”—influence the person is addressed in Spinoza’s (1996) statement: “for all the ideas we have of bodies, indicate the actual constitution of our own body more than the nature of the external body” (112). A priori and preconscious, affect is defined by a transformational, fleeting and collaborative function that is contingent upon the situation in which it arises (Clough et al, 2007).

The way that the body receives feeling during each force of encounter, or affect, depends on how the mind strives to understand that feeling through past feelings of a similar kind, in the form of ideas (Spinoza 1996). This striving to understand feelings in the body represents a form of human desire or essence, but, crucially, striving—or what Spinoza terms “conatus”—should not be confused as a subjectively fixed essence. Rather, the desire to self-preserve is a bodily force that is constantly undergoing mutation and augmentation according to the dynamic range of “ideas, signs and images as impersonal, non-subjective, autonomous conductors of power, affect, as well as being part of the scene of subjectivity itself” (Williams 2017, 352, emphasis in original). The will to self-preserve, then, is a subjectively impressionable sponge subject to the chaos of every moment. Less of a conceptual category and more of an active mode of existence or striving, conatus is the outcome of the relations of bodies and objects, ideas, and atmospheres, rather than formed prior to the affect or collision (Williams 2017). It is through being affected—the passage from one state into another—that the person will come to experience heightened or lowered sense of will to act (conatus). Moreover, the history of one’s experiences of feeling helps to define their affective attunement in
the present: past feelings, joys, and traumas of a similar kind are woven into the fabric of the person’s mind, becoming nostalgic triggers the present, rendering feeling both a deeply private experience as well as ontologically dependent upon the coming together of opposing bodies and objects as a community project. In this way, the vaster the persons range of experiential references—their history of relations with other atmospheres, environments, bodies and objects—the more plurality and experience of difference they have to draw from in responding to those feelings happening in the present moment. Conversely, if the person has many experiences but they are all of a similar kind, they will have less plurality and experiences of difference to draw from when they reason with the feelings happening in their body (Deleuze 1988; Spinoza 1996). Whether joyful or despairing, being affected triggers a slight—even fleeting—shockwave of recognition or empathy; in being moved by something, to feel variations of pleasures and pains, the body is responsibly recognizing, briefly empathizing with a feeling, subject and idea, and preconsciously drawing on its own experience in striving to understand the feeling and reinforce their own ideas. Thinking in the moment, expanding experience, informing the conatus, challenging ideas, reactions and limits, are all, then, openings for “accessing a greater creative force in transcending oneself,” through being affected, as well as being a highly lucrative source of contemporary value and manipulation/exploitation (Tampio 2009, 386).

What if one saw oneself as being affected across all spheres of everyday life, given that immaterial products “are a form-of-life” (Hardt 1999, 98)? A psychic paradigm where people—irrespective of their being observers, users, and/or consumers of capitalism—recognize the level at which their “affected labor’ constitutes, modulates and reproduces mass material effects and ‘the flow’, acknowledging that they are being affected, may expose the well camouflaged ethics governing our propensity to feel (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). If we saw ourselves as seduced and empathetic to certain subjects more than others—if the paradigm was shifted to understand work, communication, creativity, consumption, love, (un)consciousness etc., as actually requiring us to affect and be affected—would new vectors for noncollaboration, that is more assemblages, begin to form outside of the flow more frequently? But the paradigm shift must be foregrounded in the individual’s power as actually “infinitely surpassed by the totality of the external world” because the preconscious sponge of our mind collects sediments of past feeling; that which Sigmund Freud (1997) understands as affect’s “pre-individual” basis (Sharp 2007, 749-750). However—within the surpassing totality of the collective unconscious, that pulls and pushes affected bodies into developing their subjective ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad”—all engaged players’ awareness is critical in the paradigm shift required to noncollaborate by feeling affected (Sharp 2007). Brian Massumi (2015) clarifies that, while there is no total affective autonomy,
there certainly is an autonomy in terms of confrontations and dealings with affects as potential avenues for freedom. Consequently, recognition of the causality and co-depenency of affecting and being affected, and the value being derived, would provide a useful way of thinking through contemporary uncertainty. To recall Anthony Carnera’s (2012) significant point, “affects [sic] is what activates us, what connects us with others and thereby confront us with our own limits” (80-81). Even by simply recognizing this, we “actualize affect’s resistant potentials” by revealing its forces of control over the body and its ultimate intensity: pleasure and ‘the moment’ (Hynes and Sharpe 2015, 116). That is, if employees, employers, consumers, audiences, passers-by, and observers—i.e. affected laborers—were aware of the value and potential for manipulation that their being moved brought to mainstream economics through noncollaborating with it, perhaps the cycle of acquiring pleasure in the moment that is widely reported on would be intercepted and diverted, and, perhaps, a more transparent principle of equivalence would acknowledge such labors, revealing the actual immaterial assembly-line and law of value.

Noncollaborating through a paradigm shift to feeling affected doesn’t simply infer that one is literally affected by the material world at the whim of their passions, indeed, merely reacting to feelings can actually reinforce division and cause harm. For example, an impassioned political audience reacting to affects felt within party politics—buying the t-shirt, rallying, consuming and communicating shared ideas, and otherwise laboring to produce the same political product that they passionately consume—may not always be a “constellation of traits,” widely informing the conatus, creatively separating, expanding the range of experience, or thinking in the moment (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473). Such affected labor isn’t so much organized according to multiplicity and difference, as is a key aspect of assemblage-thinking (and noncollaboration), but rather seems to be based on affectively contagious versions of sameness (Deleuze and Guattari 2013; Negri 2008). While being affected in this example strives to self-preserve (conatus), it doesn’t appear to be informed through finding the common element in difference, and, in this way, may not diversify experiences and ideas through plurality in ordering the affects (Spinoza 1996). Moreover, whereas noncollaborating with being affected suggests the limits and triggers in affected capitalism as potential points of one’s subjective departure and reappropriation of “species-being” through a psychic presence, thinking in the moment in some such impassioned political audiences appears to be in the form of harboring and sealing ideas, succumbing to the moment of passionate ‘this-ness’ (affect) (Seigworth and Gregg
And, although in both cases joy in ‘the moment’ increases a person’s power to act as evident in the sorts of empowerment impassioned audiences may feel through being affected, it is the range of experiential ideas from the past that help negotiate the “margin of manoeuvrability” in the present—what the idea has in common with other ideas constituting the person’s mind (Massumi 2015, 19; Spinoza 1996). This difference in *conatus*—as informed by sameness or by range—helps to delineate between what Spinoza terms ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate ideas’, where the former requires a person’s accessible and varied archive of experience and their resultant knowledge of the thing affecting them in seeking to understand the cause (Spinoza 1996). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) emphasize the subtle balance of both restraint and pursuit of desires for liberty, freedom, metamorphosis, assemblage-thinking, and creative transcendence: unrestrained, experimental pursuit of desire without harm to oneself and others. Many impassioned political audiences in postmodernity, like the MAGA base, however, appear to pursue desires and act on behaviors that may be harmful to others, through physical and symbolic violence etc. In contrast to noncollaborating with being affected and practicing assemblage-thinking as is suggested in this paper, the impassioned political audience: strives to self-preserve through sameness, may be harmful to others, appears to succumb to the passion of the moment as an endpoint or climax, is vulnerable to “inadequately” ordering the affects, and tends to disproportionately pursue desires more than balancing and negotiating their meaning and restraint (Spinoza 1996).

Noncollaboration through feeling affected —when one acknowledges being affected is being made vulnerable as well as potentially uplifted —may, then, be approached through one’s presence in a personally reflective sense, rather than being present in terms of the toxic and pornographic desire cycles of a rampant consumer society or an impassioned political audience gone rogue. Liberation from the vulnerabilities faced by feeling capitalism, like Deleuze’s minoritarian subject, might mean something related to an internal and psychic presence (Tampio 2009, 393). Feeling affected recognizes the potential to act within each encounter or collision, as both a potentially highly manipulative market threat as well as a new pathway, vector or “deduction from the flow,” to move in a new direction and order feeling according to experience, difference and “species-being” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473; Hardt and Negri 1994; Spinoza 1996). Recognizing the way being affected is a major source of capitalist value may prompt heightened embrace of the moment, the moment that is usually snatched up by a precarious labor market, to become one of resistance, reasoning, and negotiation with certain affective intensities in the pursuit of specific freedoms and opportunities in being affected, ‘living labor’ and ‘species-being’ (Hardt and Negri 2000). By ‘being present’, and in doing so recognizing the potentially new
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directions enabled by being ‘woke’ to feeling, one is potentially less vulnerable to the subjective pitfalls of thinking overly ideologically (Spinoza 1996). The ephemeral logic of postmodern, or Toyotaist, production demonstrates the way pleasure and the moment hold a stronger control over the body’s capacity to act on those feelings and, in this way, one’s awareness around the vulnerability to being temporally affected could aid the ordering of the abundance of sensorial shocks and feelings experienced in the (capitalist) moment, as well as informing alter-economics (Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000; Spinoza 1996).

Far from a biologically-reigned turn to the individual as assumed to be in some total control, noncollaboration through feeling affected is not to say that it is solely up to the individual. For, as Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe (2009) qualify, “[b]y assuming ourselves to be masters of our bodies and their passions, knowledge of the real order of causes eludes us” (7). With the same vehemence, it isn’t enough to write-off passions based on their ultimate unknowability; indeed, the project of Freudian psychoanalysis is to expose the unconscious in full knowledge of its uncontrollability and impossibility (Cohen 2005). Without appreciating the empathy and recognition toward a specific subject through being moved in the first place, the experience of confronting “our own limits” is potentially detached from and obstructed (Carnera 2012, 80–81). Indeed, this is why Deleuze and Guattari (2013) describe liberty as a transgressive type of freedom that is concerned with the transformation and overcoming of habitual desires, as well as unrestraint to pursue desire in the felt moment (473). When such freedoms abstract and transgress social boundaries, they form assemblages, or “gardens” formed separately from the flow of things. The transformation of ones’ desires develops in accord with the tendencies of ones’ “inward forces” (Tampio 2009, 385). Perceiving feeling and acknowledging the affect things have on individuals, groups and societies is increasingly a requirement for those living in postmodern liberal economies and who are, at the same time, required to affect others in such wide-ranging jobs and industries as, retail/sales, hospitality, education, finance, health services, tourism, media/culture, public service, business and technology.

Conclusion

Labors of being affected present interesting opportunities for noncollaborating with capitalism and practicing assemblage-thinking, given the indistinguishable nature of life and labor in postmodernity, as is exposed in Post-Autonomist think-
ing of Hardt and Negri (1994), Lazzarato (2009), and Virno (1996, 2004, 2007). Indeed, the concept of noncollaboration is foregrounded on the recognition that production and work, in their broadest senses, are innately creative, desirable and liberating elements of living life, only they must be affirmed and appropriated by individuals themselves. And, while assemblages are not theoretically linked with production, capitalism and work, assemblage-thinking does provide insight into how we might think of noncollaboration on the ground; affected capitalism, like assemblages, works off seducing on a multidimensional plane that traverses the conceptual boundaries of consumer, worker, employer, audience, follower, passer-by etc. Like noncollaboration, assemblages—as cooperative pluralities that form separately from ‘the flow’ to form new and alternative ideas, forms and practices—are intrinsically creative practices found within the struggle for liberty and freedom (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Affecting and being affected happens both within capitalism and irrespective of it; being affected from moment-to-moment invites the opening to move in a new direction, negotiate with feeling, and expand the experiential archive with which feelings are related to one another and made nostalgic. The abuse of the moment in contemporary times reflects the fragility of feeling in the moment—as a point of weakness easily appropriated by capital and ideology. Therefore, this conceptual essay has suggested renewed attention be placed on noncollaborating with affected capitalism through exercising precisely that which has been put to work: the creative pursuit of desires, the opening-up and expansion of conatus, and assemblage-thinking through a paradigm shift to feeling affected (Williams 2017). Noncollaboration through a paradigm shift to feeling affected would understand work, communication, consumption, love, (un)consciousness etc., as requiring us to affect and be affected—that is, our ‘affected labor’. Rather than a deterministic approach to the individual as assumed to be rational and in control, a paradigm shift to feeling affected accepts the uncontrollable challenges of desiring and feeling, to emphasize the experiential value of feeling honestly and ‘being present’ in moving toward assemblage-thinking. A paradigm shift to feeling affected deploys “affected labor” to redirect its beauty and potential; and divert the “flow” of things (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 406).
References


