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# **"MAKING SENSE" AESTHETIC COUNTERPOWERS IN ACTIVIST MEDIA PRACTICES**

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# KEYWORDS

AFFECT, SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, G20-SUMMIT HAMBURG, POLITICS OF PERCEPTION, PREEMPTION, GILBERT SIMONDON

# ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE ENGAGES WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ALTERNATIVE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FC/MC WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED AND OPERATED DURING THE 2017 G20-SUMMIT IN HAMBURG. RATHER THAN FOLLOWING ESTABLISHED NARRATIVES ON ALTERNATIVE MEDIA OR MOBILISING DISCOURSES ON AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE IN THE ARTS, THE SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL LOGICS OF AFFECTIVE AND PREEMPTIVE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION DEFINE THE MAIN SCOPE OF DEVELOPING WHAT IS TERMED "ACTIVIST SENSE" AND THE EMERGENCE OF POTENTIAL "AESTHETIC COUNTERPOWERS" AS PART AND PARCEL OF AN AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION. DRAWING ON THE CONCEPTION OF AFFECT IN SOCIAL MEDIA STUDIES AND ON THE NOTIONS OF FIELD AND INFORMATION IN THE WORKS OF GILBERT SIMONDON, THE FC/MC WILL BE ANALYSED AS A BUILDING BLOCK IN THE OVERALL INFRASTRUCTURE OF AFFECTIVE RESISTANCE AGAINST DOMINANT AND PLATFORM-BASED NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE AND THREAT AMPLIFIED BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA. THROUGH A FIELD-BASED CONCEPTION OF AFFECT AND PERCEPTION, THE QUESTION OF "MAKING-SENSE" TAKES ON A PERVASIVE YET POTENTIALLY MORE INCLUSIVE AND ACTIVATING DIMENSION OF FUTURE FORMS OF MEDIA-INFUSED MODES OF RESISTANCE.

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## Introduction

Protest against the G7/8/20-summits might be the remaining and most visible remnant of the anti-globalisation movement which took a transnational and media-infused form from the 1999 summit in Seattle onwards (see Reed, 2019). Its cry "another world is possible" still haunts the discursive sphere of the movement and inspires contemporary forms of protest (see Pignarre & Stengers, 2011). Seattle and the following major summits of the leading industrial nations accompanied by the inventive force of public protest by social movements were steadily infused by a more aesthetically enhanced and media-versed trajectory (Holmes, 2008, 2009; Raunig, 2007). At the same time, we have witnessed a specific awareness concerning the development of communication strategies of so-called alternative media (Lievrouw, 2011) and the "logic of connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Up until the Arab Spring and the twitter revolution, the use and power of social media has steadily gained appraisal from the heirs of social movements and indeed, they have shaped modes of organising, sharing information (see Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Hands, 2011) and, most crucially, *creating a counter-aesthetics or rather alternative distributions of the sensible* than the ones advertised by mainstream media (Rancière, 2005). While there has been a strong treatment of aesthetic practices related to activism in the art field (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011; Raley, 2009), the more recent conjunction between activist modes of organising, their tactical media and their fusion with aesthetic strategies often remains on the margins of either more social movement-oriented research (Milan, 2015) or more art-focused inquiries (a striking exception is Holmes, 2009).

Already in 2008, Brian Holmes named the issue at stake when he emphasised the shift from "tactical media" (Garcia & Lovink, 1997) as the "organizational aesthetics of the networked movement" becoming co-opted by the "neutralizing languages of academia and the show rooms of the electronic art festivals" (Holmes, 2008, p. 525). Since then, the celebration of media practices as activism are an integral part of art-related events (like *transmediale*) becoming a genre in the taxonomy of late modern aesthetics. However, the organisational aesthetics of networked movements have shifted grounds around the dynamic "manifestation of digital connectivity and networked engagement" of contemporary social media and digital platforms that "help activate latent ties that may be crucial to the mobilization of networked publics" (Papacharissi, 2014, pp. 7–8). Such networked publics (Boyd, 2011) have recently been discussed as "affective publics" focusing on affect as "pre-emptive intensity" capable of activating the "in-between bonds of publics" (Papacharissi, 2015, pp. 4–5) and thus forming crucial relays in their overall fabric of media ecologies within social movements.

While many studies of social media and their relation to political movements stress the different discursive, affective and technological dimensions as interlaced in the fabrication of mobilisation, they pay less attention to the aesthetic aspects of an overall politics of perception. Rather than referring to a genealogy of art and activism (Thompson, 2012) or drawing on the discourse of *artivism* (De Cauter et al., 2011), I want to stress the affective politics of activating the sensuous as part and parcel of contemporary forms of a politics of aesthetics in media activism. Such an affective politics of activating the sensuous depends not only on specific technological affordances for the "distribution of the sensible" as contemporary mode of power formation, the way Jacques Rancière (2010) suggests through his analyses of aesthetic regimes. Aesthetics relates immediately to ethics in affective politics. While Rancière's deployment of the concept of *partage du sensible* contains both the distribution and the sharing of sensation, it tends to locate perceptual experience in the human subject and confines aesthetics to the realm of art.

Engaging with Gilbert Simondon's notions of the field and information, I will elaborate on the techno-affective relays which inhabit contemporary forms of media activism and emphasise the intricacies between social, mental and technological affective ecologies as "impersonal" and "autonomous" yet in-formative for the production of subjectivity and its articulations of resistance (Massumi, 2002). As a field operation, affect is neither attributable to discrete individuals nor is it something that can be directed. It is not an attribute but rather the relational ground from which social formations arise with and through specific techno-material, bodily and perceptual operations. Affective politics as politics of perception alter the very notion of perception, rendering it a field activity of resonating tendencies that activate through bodies and create a sense of collectivity beyond the individual. Such affective politics of perception have been explored through the notion of fear (Massumi, 2005), the preemptive politics immanent to processes of premediation (Grusin, 2010) and through the sentient activities of media ecologies within social movements (Gilbert, 2014; McCosker 2015; Papacharissi 2015; Reestorff, 2014, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Looking at some of the aesthetic and affective modalities of the alternative media centre FC/MC from the perspective of an active participant, I want to develop a field-based account of affective infrastructures of resistance. Such an account foregrounds the

"organizational aesthetics of networked movements" (Holmes, 2008) as part and parcel of what I term activist sense. Such activist operations of sense and making sense adhere to the organisational aesthetics Holmes points at rather than aesthetic regimes in the art world. Activist sense hints at the field of experience through which affect operates, capable of forging encounters between heterogeneous elements and thus engaging in a continuous practice of making-sense with and through the sensuous. In such a setting, the very conception of media becomes part and parcel of fabricating aesthetic counter-powers, or as Gerald Raunig suggests:

"media are not just a means, they are part of production of sociality, they become social media in a new sense. These forms of social media defy any simple instrumentalization as couplings between active and passive, production and reception. They are technopolitical dispositives, which radically expand the possibilities of mediality and sociality in a self-organized way" (Raunig, 2016, p. 189).<sup>2</sup>

## Laying the ground: the alternative international media centre FC/MC

The image in Fig. 1 was published two days after several police cars burned down in a fenced parking lot in Hamburg. It shows two partly veiled men jumping on a car, while a police car is burning in the background. The headline reads "G-20 Summit in Hamburg: What is ahead of us?" The image actually derives from the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010. The tabloid newspaper MoPo, notorious for its styling of scandalous stories, embarks on a short but succinct depiction of how violence might hit Hamburg in three months' time, with subsections of what the protesters are planning and if the police are ready to respond with appropriate measures.

Of lesser interest in the image is the reiteration of an encompassing media discourse ruled by violence and riot porn whereas the temporal torsions it engages in appear more promising. Using an image from the G20 in Toronto undergirds the historical trajectory of violence in the form of material damage that defines one main focus of mainstream media representations of public protests. But it also preempts future events, sucking them into the affective vortex of a narrative that cannot escape the endless stream of violence, thus manifesting an atmosphere of threat and fear preparing the field and legitimising future action. The activating power of the image lies in its capacity to relay times of a past and a future beyond the immediate present. Its capacity resides in opening up a field ready for affective modulation by wildly cross-wiring perceptual events and their situated histories.



**Fig. 1**  
Screenshot  
from the  
tabloid MoPo  
29 March 2017



The Hamburg G20 summit took place from 6–7 July 2017. During the days of 4–8 July the city council and police declared a 38.5 square kilometre large area as a special zone, where people could be strip-searched without any reason, roads could be blocked for indeterminate periods of time, and any meetings involving more than two human subjects could be declared an illegal assembly. Over the period of five days, the city was permanently covered in the penetrating sound of at least four hovering military helicopters. Road blockages and infinite rows of police trucks, water cannons and armoured vehicles cut through the inhabitant's daily routes and routines, rendering the city not only into a "state of exception" (Agamben, 2003), but shifting its overall "state of perception" (Masumi, 2015a).



**Fig. 2**  
*Entry of the  
FC/MC media  
centre at the St.  
Pauli football  
stadium*

Housed at the 2,500 square metre ballroom of the Sankt Pauli Stadium, the FC/MC was the result of much preparation and the confluence of many local and translocal activist networks. Its aim was to "reinvent critical journalism in times of affective populism!"<sup>3</sup> It facilitated 400 work stations for journalists, media activists and bloggers, two professional studios for interviews, ten video and audio working stations for media production and maintained a 96-hour live-stream, an information centre, an active website, a Youtube channel and a Twitter account. During the five days of its existence, it hosted five press conferences with key organisers of various demonstrations, the Solidarity Summit,<sup>4</sup> and specific guests such as lawyers, NGO-activists from around the globe and researchers. More than 300 people were involved in keeping the infrastructure up and running (from building it to taking it down) and over 800 international media practitioners were accredited and used the space. The technological infrastructure was provided by the Chaos Computer Club while much of the more studio-based technologies came from local theatres, art schools, befriended rental services for film sets and social centres. The overall structure included a soup kitchen, different lounges, resting areas and a café/bar. In its conception it was conceived as a space for work and production as much as a social space.

Much more than just a work space for media activists and journalists from around the globe or a self-sustaining media outlet accompanying the events on the streets, the centre was a material and social confluence of heterogeneous relations, beliefs, desires, practices and interests. Far from having a uniform mission, the centre was an experiment in collaborative and collective articulations of resistance against a highly differentiated array of power formations – from structural and state supported forms

of violence, to the suppression and oppression of minorities, and dominant forms of representation of multiple expressions of dissent and outrage in the face of neoliberal capitalism. The centre provided the material and spatial ground which Judith Butler calls "support for action" necessary for bodies to sustain and to be cared for in practices of political protest (Butler, 2011). The centre's infrastructure allowed bodies to be held, nurtured and, if needed, fixed. It provided rest for the exhausted and generated instances of laughter and joy in a situation of omnipresent threat. Part and parcel of these "ecologies of care" (Bärtsch et al., 2017) and support were the centre's server infrastructures for the storage of footage from the streets, the production technologies and their respective setups, both enabling immanent aesthetic experimentations in sync with the evolving events outside the centre. This support of the infrastructural, which then merges into the sensuous and relays bodies to the fabrication of sense through media practices and their politics of perception shows the continuum of human, more-than-human, organic and inorganic strata that populate fields of experience. I want to further think of these entanglements as key element of the overall aesthetics of resistance at stake. Rather than mimicking the forms of information and the channelling thereof through the discursive and audio-visual silos of mainstream media and their platforms, the FC/MC produced all sorts of hybrids, from DIY news productions and amateur professionalism operating a live broadcasting system (OBS) to the instalment of public "artworks" in the form of neon-lights at the centre's entry (Fig. 2) that could also be seen on top of the autonomous centre Rote Flora (here it said "NO G20"). It is this trans-material affective field that forms the ground for aesthetic counterpowers to be shared and felt collectively.

## Affect and time

Calling itself a "material semiotic device", the centre underlines the intricacies between infrastructures as support for action and the generation of meaning or rather sense. In that way, the scope and aim of the centre exceeds its function of producing alternative facts in the form of information and the development of appropriate media outlets in an overall struggle over the voice or visibility on social media platforms (Couldry, 2010). Different from more traditional activist media platforms, the FC/MC aimed at a multi-layered engagement with the media coverage of the actual events, intervening directly on the streets through its own media channels and means of production. Its struggle revolved less around the concern for the right or better information but was rather concerned with modes of *making-sense* through forms of "affective engagement" (Fritsch, 2009). Affective engagement "enables the maker, the spectator, and the critic to engage with the non-linear and non-narrative elements of media" (Zarzycka & Olivieri, 2017, p. 529). Affective engagement requires a specific attunement of different elements in order to make sense, that is, to be felt and experienced. Activist sense inhabits the threshold of such an attunement and its capacity to become active and thus to make sense. I propose to conceive of the centre's first press release on alternative politics as deeply involved in practices of affective engagement:

"While Hamburg's Senator of the Interior Andy Grote would like to prevent camps against the G20 Summit, we are glad to announce another building block of the infrastructure against the G20 not far from the Red Zone. The FC/MC is connecting street activities with the dialogue behind them. We would like to use the G20 Summit in Hamburg to intensify the debate in society about alternative politics."<sup>5</sup>

The focus on intensity or practices of intensification is not arbitrary here. It can be directly brought into resonance with what Zizi Paracharissi terms "affective publics" where the cognitive, affective and conative overlap and create new forms of sense, beyond the divide of reason and irrationality (2014, p. 12). Affect, which she differentiates from emotion, drawing mostly on the work of Massumi, is the impersonal realm that nonetheless can be suggestive of the "in-between bond" in social relations. For her, affect emphasises a collective and confluent rather than oppositional mode of engagement. Papacharissi further explains that "affect informs our sensibilities, theorized in *sense making* processes of the human body and in relation to the *sense-making technologies* that are affective driven" (2014, p. 15, my emphasis). While scholars discussing the topics of social movements and social media stress the relation of "(digital) embodiment to user content and feelings" that "support the enactment of social interactions and online collective action", they often link them back to an "overall altering of the discursive terrain" and a

terminal conception of the human subject as agent (Milan, 2015, p. 55). Such an understanding, even if it includes the entanglements between content and sensation, sticks to a rather classic conception of information in activist media practices. These approaches treat information as entities moving through different media assemblages and becoming communicated between subjects. However, as Papacharissi emphasises, affect precedes the potential of action (the act of communication or transmission) and is based on a shared field of intensities before actual expression or articulation (2014, p. 13). Affective politics operate through intensity and exceed the semantics of meaning structures and discourse, while not being detached from them either. Intensity is not a measure or a degree – as it sometimes seems when it is tied to media assemblages or bodies which receive or emit affect measured by intensity. It is "a difference-in-the-making" as distinguished from an "already emerged, already defined, determinate quality" (Massumi 2002, p. 261, n. 9). The operational value of intensity resides in sensing potentialities that inhabit a situation. Neither affect nor intensity can be singled out into affects or intensities in degree. They are shapeshifting operations of an overall texture which resonate with bodies in their capacities to sense and feel.

Thinking of the FC/MC as a material semiotic device provides a conception of engagement beyond the human subject. Massumi clarifies that having a body means to always already engage in the processes of affective activity from which intensity emerges. His reading of affect takes the material ground of bodies as the composites of other bodies that form these composites by their varying yet oriented capacities to affect and to be affected (Massumi & McKim, 2009). This orientation is *sens* in the French use of the term, meaning of the sensuous, sense-making and direction (see Deleuze 1990). Such an interlaced notion of sense concerns the human body as such a composite as much as any other material and conceptual bodies – a point often missed in the casting of affect as too intersubjective. An expanded conception of the body renders it into an assembled and shifting ground, where different forces move across and coalesce, (in-)forming quasi-bodies in becoming. *Affect is a temporal dimension in the overall polyrhythm of bodily compositions*. Instead of externalising itself in space as a given, it denotes the constitutive field of becoming. If we think of the human body, Massumi has shown that the organic and inorganic materiality of this body facilitates a relational capacity of moving with its environment (see Massumi, 2002, pp. 29–30). This foundational relationality which exceeds a clear divide between body and environment conceives of the different tendencies and their ability to affect and to be affected based on movement (or duration) rather than substance or location. In other words, our bodies are of a future that only recursively becomes part of our conscious experience while constantly relaying shades of pastness. Massumi (2002) writes:

"This requires a reworking of how we think about the body. Something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually, is *virtual*. The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness [...] The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt – albeit reduced and contained" (p. 30, emphasis in the original).

Massumi argues that doubling the moving body as actual-virtual tunes it right into the "pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body's capacity to act" (1987, p. xvi). This operational interval of the doubling defines the temporal sphere of affect. In its temporalising activity, the affective interval resonates with digital media technologies and their own temporalities. Making sense through sense-making technologies pertains not to a mere use of media based on human perception or deploying the technology as tool but directly taps into a politics of perception that interlaces temporalities through the affective texture of an event, which I will now explore further through Simondon's notion of information and the field.

## Information and fielding sensation

Communication strategies and dissemination of information strongly determine how events become felt and experienced – especially at a distance. For this reason, affective publics are linked to forms of communication and social connectivity (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 8), mediality (Grusin, 2010), connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), and modalities of storytelling (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 12). The general challenge to either associate affect with emotion and intersubjectivity, or to



conceptualise affect as impersonal, intensive and time-based shapes and conditions how the nexus of subject-body-environment-perception is conceived. While more and more writings on affect emphasise its preindividual and temporalising nature (Ash, 2015; Braidotti, 2009; Massumi, 2011; Resstoff, 2017), its use as a prefix, rendering everything 'affective', potentially overcodes the autonomy of affect (Massumi, 2002). Massumi's claim of rendering affect autonomous turns it into a field of potentialities that are not necessarily actualised or conceived in a body, in time and space. If the autonomy of affect as a field operation is autonomous, then we have to consider it as being in-formative of bodies resonating through affective textures or envelopes, but we cannot think of these bodies as having affect – what they have is the capacity of affecting and being affected; that is, they can relate through rhythms, speeds and slownesses (see Massumi & McKim, 2009). Time becomes the contested ground through which processes of perception, and their politics, mobilise the temporalities through the techno-social shaping of the overall (media)aesthetics of events. Put differently, the quest for authority over a media event is guided by contracting perceptual activations through the process of tapping into the temporal operations which define the realm of affect.

The FC/MC's main goal resided in offering alternative infrastructures for the production, dissemination, verification and archiving of information during the summit. The self-understanding as alternative media platform in the spirit (yet different from) Indymedia becomes apparent in the centre's second press release underlining its key function:

"The police has announced that with 25 'Social Media Agents' they will control the interpretation of the G20 on Twitter and co. The FC/MC is ready to break this overbearing claim and to react calmly and with precise detail to counter police disinformation, like that previously spread during the 2007 G8 in Heiligendamm for example."<sup>6</sup>

Practices of contestation and the aim for verification of information on social media was but one part of the activities of the FC/MC. Information in itself took on a more varied and nuanced function in the centre's activities, exceeding both the chronological logic of news feeds or live-news broadcasting and the equation of information with verified media content.<sup>7</sup> In other words, information is neither solely based on content, nor is it only shaped by the medium that carries it. The quest for counter-information also needs to address the terms of such information; that is, the socio-technical and affective milieu through which it is produced and communicated. In that sense, the more singular aspects of the FC/MC resided in the different modalities and the temporalities through which information occurred. Other than the Twitter channel, the centre did not aspire to mimic live-news as large broadcasting outlets did. Nor was it interested in the instant live-feeds facilitated through apps such as Periscope. It maintained a live-stream, which at times was actually live, i.e. the press conferences and some interviews. For the main part, however, it broadcasted smaller and larger ad-hoc produced mediations around the actual events on the streets but also many insights into specific discussions commenting on the political stakes at the heart of the summit and the various nuances of protests. Moreover, these varied productions emerged instantaneously through a practice of collaboration and sharing and were held together through a multiplicity of intensities. These intensities are immanent to the material and bodily infrastructures, as well as the semiotic expressions, computerised processes and conceptual as well as aesthetic inventions. From that point of view, one can conceive of the entire structure of the FC/MC from its initial idea to the encrypted data storage system as a field. A field defines the overall affective envelopment that draws together materials, bodies, and sensations which all shape and are being shaped by the event of the FC/MC. Considering the FC/MC as a field turns it into a confluence of tendencies held by the joy of making-sense through affective envelopes across bodies, sensations and networked media.

Gilbert Simondon's conceptualisation of the term information casts it as a relay between heterogeneous elements to emerge in resonance with each other – to "co-produce" each other in their very participation in the same event (Simondon, 2005, p. 544). Information, different from classic information theory, is not the instance to be transmitted between sender and receiver but defines a "tension" between "a structural germ" and an "informable, metastable domain carrying a potential energy" (Simondon, 2005, p. 544). The structural germ can only unfold its potential development into a concrete expression (the taking of a form) through a milieu charged with a potential energy, or rather, a potentiating energy. This processual understanding of co-emergence differs significantly from the classic understanding of already defined chunks of information passing from sender to receiver in a causal and chronological logic. Affect in relation to networked media turns such media assemblages into techno-social ensembles where information occurs in the very process of tendencies resonating across domains. Such tendencies are of heterogeneous modes of existence, ranging from unformed matter to more complex technical objects to bodies,

perceptions and thoughts. For Simondon, the occurrence of information from a tensed field between a structural germ and an informable, metastable domain is based on energetics (or forces) operating transversally across modes of existence rather than being tied to specific apparatuses or forms of communication. Similar to affect, it takes on a temporal form as a "quality of information" that can crystallise into concrete "concentrations" of "differences into a unity" while verging on a "disruptive boundary" (Simondon, 2005, p. 543). The temporalising contractions of information into quasi-forms of expression are the affective relays through which bodies are shaped and which renders them resonant with each other in specific events. Resonance arises not as a shared feeling or emotion (or a prior shared ideology) but through the prior participation in an affective process of information. Sense occurs once there is a veritable expression and formation bound to its informational ground. However, such an expression never generates a finite form, it verges on a disruptive boundary, meaning it is self-acknowledging its very perishing and transformation as immanent to the process of taking form. Affect in networked media operates through the informational temporalities of tendencies from their very emergence to their perishing. Modes of expression, such as a live-stream or a YouTube video, are defined by their specific movement through which they engage the tensed field of affect and through which perceptions shape between content and form.

A veritable act of information requires a tensed field of relational activity in order to concretise into a "dynamic form" (Massumi, 2015c, p. 23). However, it is not a dynamic form that the structural germ takes (the germ always exceeds physical matter) but the "dynamic form of the situation", that is, of the encompassing event" (Massumi, 2015c, p. 77 – similar to Simondon's "concentrations" of "differences into a unity"). The tensions are crucial for the development of a non-homogenising conception of information beyond its mooring in content. Information is the movement of engaging an informational milieu rich in potential energy in a process of expression of a situation rather than a reductive speck of content. In other words, what might come across as a mere quarrel over the verification of a tweet actually encompasses diverting power relations as part and parcel of the entire assemblage of technologies, techniques, semiotics, senses and memory, all of which are continuously contracted in different manners with the aim of producing truth-claims.

Following Simondon, one can term such an assemblage of informational movement a *field*. Information cannot be conceived without a field which it can traverse in order to generate a certain concentration (Simondon, 2005, pp. 534–551). The field here is a dense and tensed field of potentials which allows for expressions to manifest themselves as dynamic forms around concrete situations. In the following I would like to conceive the FC/MC as exactly such an expanded field of potential, rich in information as concentration of differences verging on the edge of disruptive boundaries. Such boundaries, I suggest, are the boundaries of how to perceive forms of protest through modes of media expressions. In that sense, the FC/MC could be understood as an aesthetic "counterpower" to conventional media coverage of the G20 (Massumi 2015b, p. 42-43, 82). For such a counterpower to emerge, the field has to transcend the technological idea of media and include the social, technical and sensuous relations circulating and in-forming the genesis of the FC/MC throughout the event of the G20-summit.

## Distribution and Sharing of the Sensible

In the context of the FC/MC's relation to media and their sensuous infrastructures, information operates between the material grounds as structural germs, like the technological infrastructure or bodies with their sensuous capacities, and an energetic affective field through which the structural germs relay with processes of sense-making, of activating the sensuous and thus generating sense as state of meaning under very specific conditions. The field and its potential energy are not determined by the structural germs but both field and germ draw on each other in order to actualise what becomes felt, sensed and thought of as *real*. These compositions of the real exceed notions of truth and fact. They are expressions which derive from a tensed field and its singular affective operations occurring along the resonances between tendencies and their temporalities. Through such fielding operations, the modes and modalities of expression cannot be prefigured in the way they engage an affective field and thus contract into perceptual events. While there are technological affordances of specific technological infrastructures, their very resonance with the modes of perception they compose varies vastly. As a field operation, perception in the making is a contraction of time-forms which takes on a dynamic form through which a direct relaying to the encompassing affective field becomes possible. Sense occurs as the very participation in an affective fielding which puts bodies in alliance across times and

spaces. It is a process of activation through intensity which operates through digital media technologies and their platforms particularly well, because they are time sensitive, meaning they extend the variation of temporalities from long-term storage to instantaneous modulation in processes of production. A key difference between more progressive and more conservative attempts to engage in such politics of perception relates to the difference between creative resonance and reductive redundancy. Both lines of actualising perceptual events are immanent to contemporary social media platforms (Milan, 2015, p. 62).

With a more field-oriented conception of information, the modulation of affect takes on a crucial role, moving between the relaying of material capacities – such as bodies or technologies – and their spatio-temporal condensation into actual events. Simondon's notions of information and the field directly link to the prior discussion of affect's relational and temporal character tied to embodied experience with and through different media-enforced expressions. Starting from an emergent and field-based conception of perception and sense-making underlines the mutual immanence of perception and thought with and through its sensuous milieu. The technical harnessing of subjective perception into specific power relations also means to relocate the sensuous from the human embodied confinement into a more encompassing "perceptual field" (Crary, 2001, p. 9). This "fielding of perception" (Brunner & Fritsch, 2011) contains both elements of Rancière's *partage* – the ordering and the sharing. While the modes of ordering, guiding, and controlling perception might pertain to a more structural analysis of power relations (see Crary, 1992), the sharing pertains to an instantaneous relationality, or a participation through affect and the fielding processes which give rise to certain counterpowers against structuralised orders. Both structuration and its counterpowers are not a mutually exclusive binary but nuances of a perceptual continuum (the field).<sup>8</sup> Each perceptual assemblage, such as the body moving through time and space infused with media technologies of sensing and expressing, is as much a structured and structuring engagement as it is techno-social in the way it produces platforms for sensation that are shared (*partagé*). From a Simondonian perspective the processes of information, occurring along the disruptive boundary of a field of potentials, and the distribution of the sensible both unfold as an interplay between structural germ and an informable, metastable domain. The prior marks the possibility of perception to bring different matters into relation by way of engaging in potential energies inhabiting an informable milieu.

Based on these techno-social entanglements, the FC/MC provides a rich ground for addressing the interplay between different perceptual regimes at the root of the media politics around the G20-summit. While mainstream media such as MoPo propagated a frontline logic of violence and spectacle, the FC/MC wanted to foreground a nuanced and diverse "image" of the event. Following a field-logic of information, such a diversified image does not exclusively rely on the content itself but the conditions of its emergence and the ways it circulates; the way it activates the sensuous. The FC/MC was far from gaining the same degree of media attention and outreach. The centre's YouTube channel (Fig. 3) was probably the most active site for an encounter with the manifold productions generated in the course of 96 hours.<sup>9</sup>

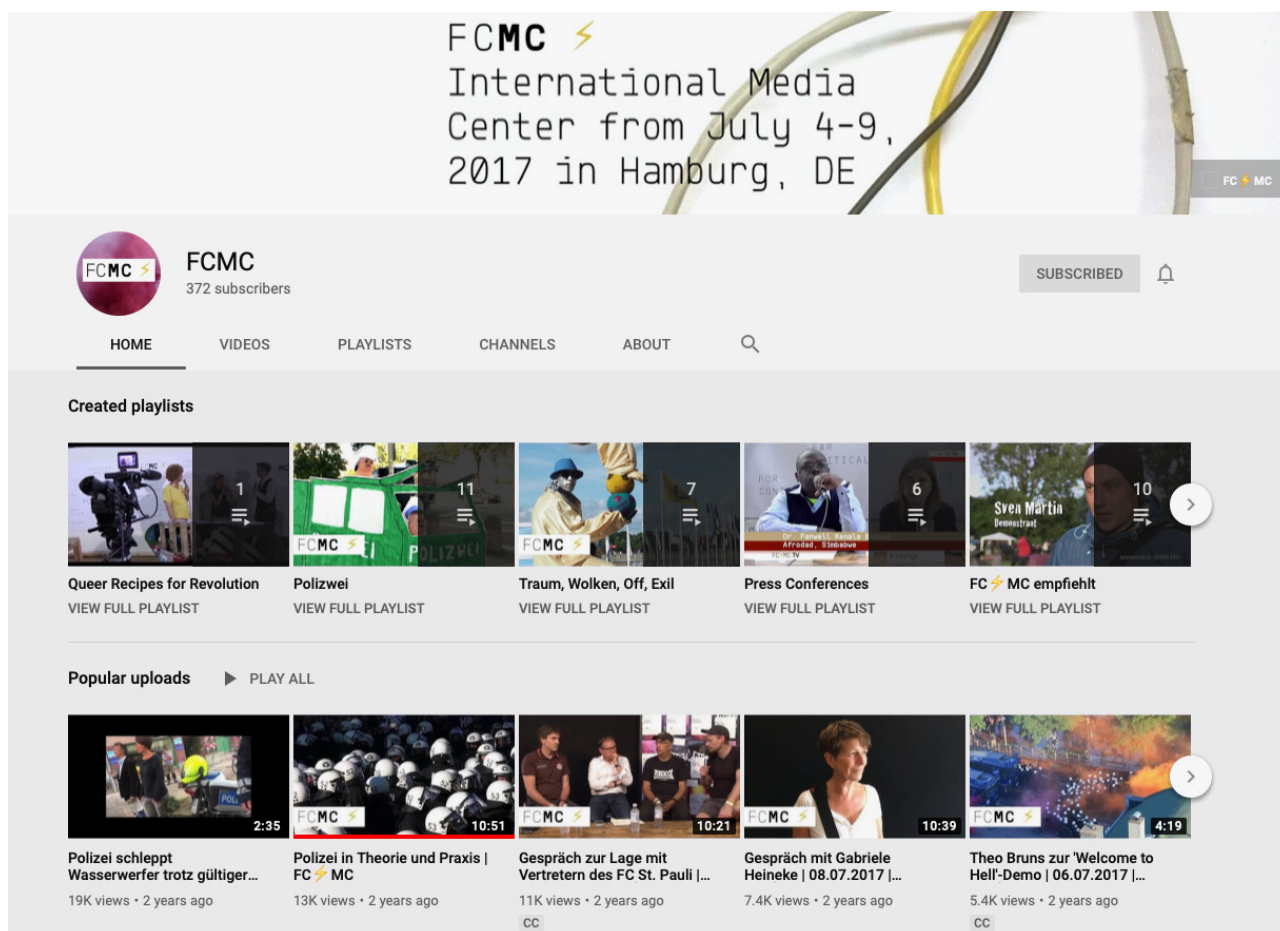


Fig. 3 Screenshot of the FC/MC YouTube channel

The power to contract specific potentialities into actual events, banking on the activating powers of perception (distribution and sharing), leads to a crucial question in contemporary politics of social movements and their media ecologies: *how to “counter-act” against the predominant channelling of information through police and mainstream media perpetuating narratives based on binary logics, such as violent protests and state order?* This question, however, cannot be addressed by oppositional strategies, such as counter-information which nonetheless does not alter the overall perceptual regime, that is, the media-social assemblage of perceiving events of political struggle. For a better grasp on future affective politics as part of social movements, it is important to acknowledge the overall shift from a mere distribution of information qua content to an affective stimulation and probing that hits emotional response rather than rational argument.

## Aesthetic counterpowers – activist sense and making sense

*How do the organisational aesthetics of the FC/MC as affective field generate aesthetic counterpowers?* Working through the temporal relays immanent to affect in relation to media technologies, the material, the bodily and the perceptual are not just intertwined but co-emerge from their primordial participation in the fielding operations of the affect. In relation to alternative media, the question remains as to whether media as a techno-social nucleus for the FC/MC became technopolitical dispositives, capable of expanding what we understand by mediality and sociality. The FC/MC was a material semiotic device. Its inventiveness resided in its refusal of separating the technological from the social and thus generating intense relays held together by the potentials for creative process and expression in order to make sense. With the notion of activist sense, I investigate how such practices of making sense exceed the discursive and thus become an aesthetics capable of relaying bodies and their

perceptual resonances through affective fields and through processes of in-formation. Such operations pertain primarily to the temporality of activation and move through and affectively engage perception as immanent to a field.

During one of the FC/MC planning sessions, the question arose whether we were going to be able to live-broadcast for 96 hours from the frontlines of protest. It became clear that such temporal regimes cannot and should not be matched. The refusal of certain dominant time regimes (while being constantly haunted by them) set the tone of the operational structure at the media centre, leading to a multiplicity of encounters in person and through media expression which worked through the temporal layers of digitised footage pouring into the server space. Such temporal multiplicities, of the stored and archived, the immediately felt and lived, as much as the imagined and speculative in many more experimental films produced during the centre's existence all foreground the affective fielding at the heart of its operational aesthetics. Such activations across domains, matters and bodies are not homogenising but embrace heterogeneity in resonance. The differential processes of information are intense in their capacity to constitute disruptive boundaries that are able to resist the subsumption of perception under dominant time-forms.

Such heterogeneity in resonance is an art of making sense in the face of dominant temporal modes of capture and value extraction. From this point of view, it is striking that the info-centre, whose job consisted of verifying or falsifying the spread of information on social media by the police through the FC/MC's Twitter account, felt like a separate sphere in the overall enterprise. It was the section that had to operate in sync with the pulsation of the dominant time regime of the frontline logic of action. Such a regime has repercussions with Italian futurism in its praise of speed, action and violence – a masculinist and proto-fascist narrative of continuous warfare that is very different from the temporality of activation. The same time regime occurs in the tabloid's deployment of an image from a prior G20 summit coupled with the actual event of burning police cars, marking the beginning of the newspaper's own narrative of the G20 tied to violence, fear and menace. It is the same temporality that occurs in challenges over ever faster flows of information on Twitter, actual showdowns between police and different activist groups, with the aim to move or inhibit movement. Here speed becomes measured time, and not qualitative time of the event.

The time-conditioning practices are crucial for a future potentiality of activist media practices and their potential aesthetic counterpowers. Parallel to the recent development of discourses on affect and networked media or networked affect (Hillis et al., 2015), Massumi explored the contemporary "state of perception" in relation to modern warfare strategies (Massumi, 2015a). With the term "politics of preemption", he analyses military strategy papers developed under the George W. Bush administration targeting modern forms of the so-called "war on terror." Preemptive logics and politics become part and parcel of contemporary strategies of population management and potential threats to it, such as large-scale protests. Different from strategies of prevention and prediction based on statistical measurement, and more recent tactics of deterrence, as a realisation of the "concretest of possibilities in the present, holding threat in futurity" (Massumi, 2015a, p. 8), preemption does not abide by the logics of linear time. It is therefore fully engaged in the temporal dynamics of the affective field, deploying an "operative logic of power" that is "defining a political epoch" where such a logic combines an epistemology with an ontology (Massumi, 2015a, p. 5). Preemption operates "not in the sway of any particular existing formation but sweeps across them all and where possible sweeps them up in its own dynamic" (Massumi, 2015a, p. 5). Put differently, it self-generates its own form of threat (like the potential terrorist) while "endowing itself with powers of self-causation" (Massumi, 2015a, p. 200). Preemption is a particular mode of activation constitutive of a politics of perception engaging the ways a field of potential is activated towards specific sensuous events. It concerns how human body's capacities to "make sense" are not a given but become composites in an extended media ecology of affective operations, of forces and relations constantly modulating matter and memory to become this or that perception.

A preemptive politics generates content and expression hooked onto different modalities of sensing and relaying sensation (ontology) to sense making (epistemology). Based on a field-approach, where the relaying of affects defines the crucial movement for the emergence of experience, the sensing body becomes the central "platform" between thought and feeling, without being the origin of either of them. Such ontogenetic movements with and through the sensuous produce a specific kind of sense, not a mere epistemology based on (prior) knowledge and discourse but an affective and partially self-causing logic of sensation. The self-causing logic at stake in preemptive politics is not a mere invention or imaginary of sorts. Its effective powers reside in the nudging of an extensive field of potentials towards specific perceptual events. It is neither completely ahistorical nor plainly factual. On the contrary, it generates the time and space of the event which in turn activates through felt experience.

Preemptive politics with their operational logic of power target the tweaking of affective temporalities in order to condition

the modes of perception which can be felt. Such a shift disrupts any conception of aesthetics occurring between expressive media and human sense modalities. Since it sweeps across all existing formations, it becomes a field operation itself. It taps into the making of perception in order to make sense and thus self-cause its very own effects across bodies, time and space.

An aesthetic counterpower to the operational logic of preemption requires the activation of different potentialities moving through the sensuous in order to contest the harnessing into redundant narratives of violence. While this might be still a question of generating alternative media content, I want to emphasise the need for the activation of a different mode of sensing and sensation that banks on digital media technologies with the aim of keeping a multiplicity of times and potentialities actively open in the midst of a perceptual event (Barassi 2015, p. 79). A counterpower to the politics of preemption requires an ontological and epistemological logic capable of resonating with a different mode of producing and relaying affects through media platforms, non-linear but affectively engaged through the texture of intensity. One central aspect in such an aesthetic politics of experience is the collective and shared powers of a more nuanced and diverse expression of states of affairs at the heart of many alternative and activist media practices. In the case of the FC/MC, the particularity of its assemblage and capacity to field affects results from its collective constitution; of many practices coalescing and forming a temporary ecology, beyond any homogenising image or expression. Rather than a mere attachment to alternative contents in the use of digital media platforms, the main concern of contesting a reductive preemptive politics of perception requires a different understanding of aesthetics tending towards an aesthetical understanding of perception. While the logic of preemption wants to harness the field of affective temporalities and thus control intensity through the manifestation of action, aesthetic counterpowers cannot content themselves with promising a better grasp on reality on the same plane. Neither can they retreat into scenarios of imagined alternatives, as it happens frequently in the realm of the artworld's fancy for activism. While there is speculative and creative value in artistic modes of aesthetic experimentation, the stakes in the operational logic of power of preemptions bank on the activation of different modes of sense and sensation on a broader scale. Aesthetic counterpowers have to engage in the activating power through the temporal capacities of networked media as tied to its affective fields. This means to not only seek encounters and amplifications of different temporalities but to shift the mode of affective engagement towards the time of activation; that is, the need to embrace the relational and creative potentialities populating fields. It is this temporal relaying that begs the question of how processes of sensuous activation happen underneath rational meaning structures but with a "real sense" for what might happen. These modes of real sense are shaped by the traces of affective encounters which inhabit the spheres of social media and forge new alliances between heterogeneous temporalities. This is a really felt resistance to a present based on redundant control, foregrounding experimental engagement with disruptive boundaries as productive of differential resonance across times, spaces and bodies.



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## Endnotes

- 1 One might consider Brian Massumi's recent work *Architectures of the Unforeseen* (2019) as a (re-)turn to the conjunction of artistic and political practices.
- 2 The notion of technopolitics derives from the Spanish term *tecnopolítica* which emerged during the Indignados movement (also known as 15-M) in 2011. Its particularity resides in the interlacing of digital and analogue technologies and techniques of political intervention with a specific awareness for the politics of aesthetics of the tools and techniques for civil engagement (activation) that were developed. (See, Kurban et al., 2015; Treré & Barrnquero Carretero, 2018; Toret, 2013).
- 3 FC/MC first press release (May 12, 2017). Retrieved from [https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc\\_pm1\\_2017-12-05\\_en.pdf](https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc_pm1_2017-12-05_en.pdf).
- 4 The Solidarity Summit was an international conference that took place during the G20 at the cultural centre Kampnagel, hosting hundreds of delegates from around the globe providing valuable insights on the effects of a globalised market economy and its focus on supply chain management – a key theme for the summit of the G20-nations.
- 5 See FC/MC first press release (May 12, 2017). Retrieved from [https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc\\_pm1\\_2017-12-05\\_en.pdf](https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc_pm1_2017-12-05_en.pdf)
- 6 See FC/MC's second press release (June 18, 2017). Retrieved from [https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc\\_pm2\\_2017-18-06\\_en.pdf](https://fcmc.tv/pdf/fcmc_pm2_2017-18-06_en.pdf)
- 7 At this point one should mention that the news room (Infobüro) of the FC/MC consisted of a group of over ten people actively engaged in social media channels and being in touch with people on the streets, apt to release only one hundred percent verified information through the centre's twitter channel. That this aim appears almost illusionary in a situation that is built on ambivalences and contingencies moving across different media platforms and throughout the streets feels almost needless to mention.
- 8 The entire work of Simondon revolves around this processual production of novelty and the need for metastable structurations of fields of potential. The key operation for such a double movement resides in his elaborations of the notion of transduction (Simondon, 2005, pp. 32–33, 559). For lack of space, a more thoroughgoing treatment of the transductive dimension of the politics of perception could not be included in this article.
- 9 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHDTjtjyMFJqAhE4DxjAg9Q>