

Beats Per Minute (2017)

Unplugged - Voices

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Research in management and organization may only gain by being inspired from arts, culture and humanities in order to rethink practices but also to nourish its own perspectives. Life in organizations is artificially separate from ordinary life: all of mundane objects are thus conducive to astonishment, inspiration, and even problematization. The unplugged subsection “voices” gives the opportunity to academics and non-academics to deliver an interpretation about an object from the cultural or artistic world. Interpreted objects are or not directly related to organizational life, resonate or not with the moment, but share some intriguing features. These interpretations suggest a patchwork of variations on the same object.

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DOING POLITICS IN THE FIRST PERSON

Sean did politics in the first person. These are the words his friends used to describe Sean's engagement, which constituted his life. To do politics in the first person, to fight in the first person, means to fuse political engagement with life, to merge them into a whole from which it is impossible to separate the parts. I believe that the movie *120 Beats Per Minute* moved me so much because I, too, fight in the first person.

Among the films that I watch, there are two main categories: those I like and those I don't like; that is to say, those that make me cry and those that don't move me. Although I can be moved to tears by a whole range of emotions, I have a particularly cathartic relationship to fiction, and therefore an emotional relationship to movies. That said, I don't consider myself to be a film buff, since I'm mostly unable to verbalize why I like something or not, let alone formulate an informed (or rational) opinion on films. To write a "film critique" is next to impossible for me, seeing that the canons of the genre would challenge me to go beyond the stage of a gut reaction (which is the starting point for me in all my analyses). Yet here I am today, writing about a film that was definitely among those that have made me cry the most ever. This allows me to advance a first assessment: The film resonates in a particular way with me and with my life. It speaks to me. I have an intimate and intense relationship with what is told and with the characters and the theme. The rest of this article is an attempt to put into words the emotions that welled up in me when watching *120 Beats Per Minute*.

In doing so, it is not my wish to rob the gay Act Up activists of their particular story, in other words, to make it sound as if the film were primarily about an overall approach to doing politics. I do not want to deny the specificity of the protagonists' fight against HIV/AIDS and the urgency that this epidemic imposed on their lives. It is not a question of exploiting the topic for myself and of grabbing the opportunity to write about this film to speak only about me. Nonetheless, the tone of this article will deliberately be very personal, for one because I know of no other way to be, and secondly because ultimately the self is what most people talk about anyways, even if their way of expressing themselves is more formal. In other words, how can I explore what it means to be a "first-person activist" without speaking in the first person? To assume a more or less autobiographical character of any text, regardless of the type, also seems important in order to counter the eminently disembodied tone of most academic writings. I am (inevitably) making a political statement by rehabilitating the *I* in this article. I will leave it to the reader to see if what I am talking about resonates with the film that prompted this reflection. I am not trying to put a feminist spin on the film, and much less focus on an activist experience that I did not experience and which—as someone who is HIV-negative—I take no part in.

To analyze what it means *to do politics in the first person* seems important to me in order to show the commonalities between struggles, or certain struggles, and to show that the fight of Act Up is part of an activist history that lives on to this day.

As a lesbian feminist activist who is involved in a feminist group run by lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (LBT) while also working on a thesis on feminist groups, the boundaries between these different segments of my life are inadvertently somewhat blurry. Like many other activists, activism is not an activity, profession or way of spending one's pastime when seeking to make sense of one's life and or to look at oneself in a mirror. Rather, to be an activist refers to the struggle to exist as a

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whole being and not just the struggle to survive, even if it doesn't have to exclude the fight to survive.

To be able to go out into the street without fear of being assaulted or raped, to ensure that the assailants and rapists are convicted in court, to be able to walk on the street holding my girlfriend's hand without a guy making sexual remarks every couple of yards, or hurling insults at us, or breaking a bottle on my skull. To have access to jobs and housing without being discriminated against because I have a shaved head or because I'm not in a relationship with a white hetero guy who earns five times the rent. Being an activist means to fight so that it's not the government that gets to decide whether or not I can have a child, and that the justice system can't give anyone the right to rub against me on the subway due to the length of my skirt. So that there's an end to women being beaten, or killed, by their husbands; and that dudes who kill or rape stop making the covers of *Les Inrocks*. To have the right to be a lesbian chick without society possessing any power to make my existence unbearable. And without it being able to force me into its rigid and oppressive straitjacket as a condition to accepting me, or without me being in the position to "have to be accepted" in the first place. To no longer be ashamed of myself. So that it's the society that changes rather than me constantly feeling like I have to change.

The lives of most women are less of a "matter of life and death" than are the lives of those participating in the Act Up movement—although the women who've been beaten to death by their husbands might disagree. That said, seeing that the AIDS epidemic has peaked and that it is today possible to live with HIV or even AIDS, many people assume that the plight of the members of these oppressed groups is now less critical or urgent than it was before. Yet here trans women and men would tend to disagree, as would blacks, who are being killed by the police. So, it's not a question of comparing who's worse off but of recognizing, for one, that there are many of us fighting in the first person and, secondly, that fighting out of conviction and fighting to exist are two very different things.

I chose to do a thesis on feminism when I realized that I was a lesbian. While waiting my turn in front of a coffee vending machine, I remember saying to one of my friends: "I finally get it: 'Lesbians aren't women.'" Quoting Monique Wittig, I realized that I wanted to understand the meaning of this sentence, and to think about the implications of this identity for my place in society. When I came out, the conventional social world began seeming strange to me. Foreign. And I realized that it seemed strange to me *because* I was now living on the margins of femininity. I felt the need to reconstruct the meaning of all the institutions around me, and of all the goals I had previously set out for myself. I also needed to understand why I was feeling bad every so often now, and to do something to fight against that feeling. And I wanted to know what to do with this immense force that was now moving and empowering me, that of knowing who I was.

Thus, to write a thesis on this subject—how to be lesbian and feminist in this society—seemed to be the only thing that I was capable of doing with my life. Then I met M., who introduced me to the feminist group in which I've been involved for more than two years now. (I went out with her for a year and a half.) As I became politically active, everything changed gradually: my friends, my hang-outs, where and how I got my news, my way of viewing coupledness, the family, friendship, career, life—everything. I finally found room to breathe, and my anger and my rebellion progressed to new heights.

Being an activist gives me the tools to understand the discomfort that I began to feel when I left heterosexuality and gives me the strength to assume my daily existence with all that this implies in terms of challenging the heteropatriarchal order, and to persevere in my resolve to change everything that permits the maintenance of that order. Being an activist allowed me to transform my initial malaise into strength and anger, through collective engagement, and to understand that this collective strength is worth more than anything I had known until then.

For me, fighting in the first person means to politicize your private life, to turn your private life into a space of activism, and to immerse your entire being (body, emotions, etc.) in that activism.

“The personal is political.” This statement by Carol Hanisch encapsulates the feminist agenda of the 1970s that was to change our approach to being politically involved. Women came together and realized that the problems they faced in their daily lives were not personal problems but political ones. It is by coming together as a non-mixed (women’s) group, by exchanging about their lives in consciousness-raising groups, or by joining one of the many organizations or associations that were sprouting up from the ground that they were able to realize the systemic nature of the oppression they were subjected to. This collective consciousness allowed them to politicize their personal lives such that these became the main focus of their political field of action, whereby the extent to which these lives had been the scene of oppression came to the fore. Collectively, these women unveiled the mechanisms and proceeded to fight to dismantle them. I’m not the only one who had to have an illegal abortion, under sanitary conditions that led to irreparable damage to my health, and be castigated by my family on top of it. I’m not alone in having the impression that I had no part in choosing my existence, locked into a function of producing offspring and doing domestic work. I’m not the only one who felt like I had no say in when I sleep with my husband. I’m not the only one to have been raped. In short, I’m not the only one! By talking to you about it, we can hopefully come to understand our oppression and bring an end to it, together. These are more than just the trials and tribulations of the typical woman complaining of her domestic chores while nonetheless being supported by a husband. The problem is not that I put on my makeup a tad too provocatively and that I shouldn’t have gone out alone at night. My personal life is a political issue. Politicizing suffering enables us to get away from the victim role and to acquire the means to fight.

The famous expression “the personal is political” was coined by a white feminist from the United States, where it primarily served the feminist white movement. However, it has also been applied by a wide range of struggles as a strategy of transforming private and individual situations into political issues, and oppressed people into subjects of a struggle. The civil rights movement in the United States is but one example, as is the undertaking by black feminists to politicize their plight at the intersection of patriarchal and racist oppression. In France, trans people are today fighting for the state to stop claiming total control over their bodies and for them to stop being considered as psychiatric cases and instead as identities—something which an endemic transphobia has thus far denied them.

So, it’s not just about creating new topics that any activist might want to tackle. The goal is not for women’s lives to become a new theme of activism, but rather to produce new *subjects* of activism. On this condition only is it possible to fight in the first person. Yet the various oppressive, sexist, racist, transphobic, lesbophobic, homophobic and biphobic systems deprive the people they oppress of their capacity to be the subjects of their

own emancipation. Since we are not allowed to be subjects, it is up to us to dismantle this status. Collective mobilization makes it possible to construct and assume that status. In other words: Don't bother liberating me, I'll do it myself!

When I joined a LBT feminist group, I realized that being a lesbian isn't just about individual sexuality. Lesbians aren't considered to be women, because the very notion of woman evolved as part of the heterosexual social relationship between women and men. As an entity, women are seen as no more than the other half of men in the heterosexual couple. Lesbians are thus seeking to disrupt this heterosexual social contract. Nevertheless, it is precisely because I'm a woman and perceived as such by society that I suffer the oppression attached to my belonging to this social group. These reflections allowed me to construct my position and to continue building it on an ongoing basis. It is what allows me to say *I* and to understand that this particular position in society, while concomitant with oppression, also provides me with a certain anchor and groundedness and comprises a source of strength in combatting this oppression.

Once we understand that the problems we encounter in our personal lives are not only personal, insofar as they uphold patriarchal oppression, and once we conceive of ourselves as the subject of our own emancipation, then we can turn our personal lives into a place of resistance. The collective strength of participating in an activist movement (such as by attending just one meeting or being involved over a number of weeks) prevents us from feeling alone in a situation over which we have no control. Everyday life then becomes a political arena in which we are empowered to act. In that way, the choices we make as to how we live are invariably political.

Among friends, that's what we call feminist practice, or practical feminism, in short, a feminism that does not exist only in books or in demonstrations but that is lived every day and that evolves in a collaborative manner. It's about building new solidarities between us, a sorority. About recognizing the bond between women as a patriarchal resistance strategy. About creating friendships that have nothing to do with those that have historically been assigned or granted to women, in particular heterosexual white women. Under the heterosexual hegemony, women have been isolated from one another in their homes and have been set up to compete against one another in the sexual and romantic conquest of men, by way of which they are prone to distrust one another and to develop a tendency to judge themselves very severely. In other words, heterosexuality, as a political regime, prevents us from building real bonds with one another. The feminist agenda, then, intends to gradually break up all of this and to replace mistrust with sorority. According to Adrienne Rich, these new relationships between women, this sorority, take place somewhere along the "lesbian continuum." In that they no longer interact emotionally and/or sexually with men (at least not with regard to those aspects of life that they have control over), the dynamics of competition and mistrust among lesbians are greatly diminished, leaving room for many opportunities to reinvent personal bonds. Caring for one another, creating their own communities, or taking it a step further by living together (e.g., in women's lands, understood as land that is collectively self-managed by women only and that is intended to create a non-patriarchal society) all contribute to creating spaces between us where we can circumvent the heteropatriarchal norms that oppress us. Indeed, there are many ways of doing politics in the first person that go beyond traditional activism and that debunk the male conception of doing politics

wherein only that which is public, or visible, has value. This enhancement of the status of the private sphere, by integrating it into the political sphere, allows one to deconstruct practices that have become so ingrained in our habits that they seem natural, and to develop other ways of being and existing.

Finally, to fight in the first person involves not only bringing activism and politics into the “personal” sphere, but also bringing one’s entire private life into activism. In other words, to bring one’s entire personal life into activist organizations and to stop acting as if our activist self were disjointed from our bodies, emotions, woes and joys, or friends and lovers. I therefore believe that each one of us has to commit to what we might call a “total activism,” that is to say, an activism that demands proximity and immediacy and that won’t let any part of our being remain on the sidelines. This translates, for example, into the recognition that emotions—and not just rationality, logic and level-headedness—have their place in an organization. Expressing anger and sadness by screaming and crying, for example, are ways of communicating that can be difficult to manage collectively but that have their legitimate place in organizations where you fight in the first person. To erase the boundary between our personal and our activist self also means to resist the standards of neutrality, uniformity and the mainstreaming of life within organizations, most of which are places where people are reduced to rational and nearly inhuman actors, as if they didn’t have an existence outside the organization. In feminist groups, by contrast, it is the participants’ personal life that comes to the fore. A good number of these groups were created by women who share amicable and loving bonds, yet they fold once these personal relationships become fragile and deteriorate. It is regrettable that the deterioration of these bonds becomes so detrimental to the sustainability of such organizations. However, insofar as these bonds are the *raison d’être* of these organizations in the first place, it would be fallacious to view their fragility as a problem. In a feminist organization, the participants engage with one another, yet are prepared to go their own way if need be, with either one or the other person leaving. Moreover, discussions are fueled by much more than ideas. The conflicts between the activists do not *become* personal because of the emotional ties; instead, they *are* personal because we talk of nothing other than our lives in the first place. The physical distance characteristic of most organizations is absent: affection is likely to be displayed openly, and at meetings we’re likely to be engaged rather than sitting listlessly around a table. Bodies can be close by or far away, with the distance always signifying an emotion or an emotional dynamic between two people. Insofar as patriarchal oppression is inscribed in our bodies, feminist activism tries to create spaces to subvert these deleterious inscriptions. It allows other bodies and other interactions between bodies. I can rock on my chair, rest my feet on the knees of my neighbor, or lean into the arms of my ex without this interrupting the meeting and without it affecting my ability to participate in the discussions and to be taken seriously. Bringing my body into a meeting allows me to become aware of and realign it, if you will, to unlearn everything it has been told to do and not to do since I was born. Emotions and bodies have their place in first-person activism. They change the norms that govern organizational life, and this allows one to reappropriate these norms and to turn these places of inscribed oppression into tools of resistance.

To do politics in the first person therefore means to turn one’s personal life into a political *object* while establishing oneself as the (only) political *subject* able to act on this object. This new political object is not only the *object of political demands* at times external to it (e.g., at

demonstrations or meetings) but also constitutes a *field in and of itself* in which it is possible to act and to live one's personal life, the whole becoming synonymous with resistance. The moments in which a political transformation takes place are thus multiple, and there is no separation between those moments consumed by (political) activism and those of our (non-political) personal lives, which implies that activist organizations are no longer neutral, disembodied spaces. Organizational life is a political arena as well as a space that allows activists to reclaim their bodies, their emotions, and more broadly to exist more freely, to liberate themselves, if only for a moment, from the norms that oppress them. To give themselves moments of respite.

These reflections have helped me better understand why Sean was "doing politics in the first person" and how this short phrase encapsulated a number of salient truths. It seems to me that Act Up's fight as described in the film shows how fighting in the first person can constitute a major break with the more traditional ways of being politically active, with society's expectations of HIV-positive gays (who are to be sick and not activists), and even with expectations by some members of the Act Up community (who may have modes of action or demands that are too "extreme"). The AIDS epidemic has revealed the extent to which homophobia has been rooted in France across the political and economic spectrum and within society itself. Thus, the fact that this epidemic has since been shown to be more than just a health issue, and that the government's handling of the epidemic has been revealed to have been imbued with latent homophobia, is something we owe to activists who politicized their private lives and who implicated their own bodies and lives in activism. Beyond the media activities and the zaps and die-ins, the film also shows other places of resistance, such as bedrooms in private homes or hospital rooms, where bonds such as love affairs and friendships are woven and take shape in first-person activism. The film also explores the way in which the outburst of bodies, emotions and suffering in the meetings, in other words, in the organizations, are not a disruption but a reminder of the *raison d'être* of the latter.

I'm talking about activism but I could just as well be talking about research, although I try not to separate the two in the first place if I can. Moreover, while writing this article, I wondered if I was writing more as an *activist* than a researcher, given my choice of tone and the absence of the formalism common to research articles. Yet in the end, this question doesn't have that much significance, or relevance. Of course, the form of the text is not the same, but is it form that determines whether a communication is activist or academic? Many activist texts are effectively rejected by academic journals because they do not comply with the protocol. Yet this dichotomy based on form assumes that academic formalism invariably dilutes the activist dimension that a discourse may have—something which I do not believe to be the case. In fact, I believe that all my writings are ultimately a revolt against an order of things that constrains my existence, regardless of the form. There are, of course, standards specific to the world of research, which sometimes serve as a painful reminder that the performative scope of my aspiration to not be an activist researcher but a feminist has its limits.

However, it seems to me that certain epistemological reflections have the effect of gradually blurring the dividing line between activism and academicism. In this perspective, claiming *to do research in the first person* seems to me a welcome option. In other words, we should stop acting as if we were two different people: academic, intellectual, disembodied beings on the one hand, and beings of flesh and blood, full of

emotions and contradictions on the other. In the same way that the feminist movement conceived of the idea of fighting in the first person, feminist epistemologies have questioned the academic counterpart of this way of thinking about social change.

These epistemologies were constructed as the history of feminism evolved and are driven by the need to articulate activist engagement and academic engagement, since most feminist writings, including academic ones, were written by academics who were also activists. From the outset, therefore, the question of the epistemological justification of feminist claims was articulated with the desire to denounce the epistemological canons that dominate research, and disclosed the “situated” nature of the production of knowledge. As mentioned earlier, we all do research in the first person, whether we admit to it or not. It follows that if we were to admit that, we would, paradoxically, achieve more scientificity—an important criterion especially for many researchers who castigate activist involvement. It is therefore a question of bringing to light the *standpoint* from which we are doing research.

In my own feminist practice, doing politics in the first person and doing research in the first person are merged, or conflated. I tend to believe that the notion that research is not political can only come from someone who does not have to struggle to become a subject recognized as being able to produce knowledge, or doesn't have to fight in order to identify the topics that concern them in order to become a legitimate object. To deny that doing research is doing politics simply reflects a dominant point of view.

But while talking to one of my friends, who is also a member of the group I'm a part of, about the possible and necessary link between academism and activism, she pointed out to me that it annoyed her a lot that people confuse the engaged researcher and the activist researcher. According to her, an engaged researcher has political convictions and does politics *as a researcher*, while an activist researcher does politics *as an activist*, in other words, by having practices that do not belong exclusively to the world of research. Being an activist researcher is not simply about writing articles, participating in academic conferences, and engaging in certain fields of research from a feminist perspective, but also about developing an activist practice: spending entire weekends demonstrating or tagging slogans on sidewalks, making banners, writing press releases, replying to emails when organizing such or such action, as well as taking physical or legal risks in some of these actions. This friend thus makes a clear distinction between academic practices and activist practices, both of which can be feminist and thus political, but which do not forge the same life trajectories for those who engage in one or other of these pathways.

It's clear that my practices are not the same when I read an article of M@n@gement than when I attend a demonstration. Granted, a certain set of practices is common to the worlds of both research and activism (e.g., reading, writing, thinking, answering emails, organizing events). However, beyond that I don't entirely share her opinion, in the sense that the distinction between engagement and activism does not depend on the practices someone has developed but rather on the status and privileges they hold in society. The status to which she refers, of an engaged researcher who develops radical opinions but does not ultimately immerse her body, reputation and time in the political struggle, can only be a status, or position, for someone for whom involvement is *one* option among others. For example, a black woman, even if she is not engaged as an activist outside the university, would not be able to enjoy the status of engaged researcher to which my friend refers if she wanted to adopt an

intersectional feminist perspective in her work. Instead, that would necessarily involve a set of activist practices, as she would be challenged from all sides. The university, like any institution, reproduces oppressive norms which imply that those who want to fight against them adopt practices of resistance. These practices consume their lives, careers and bodies in the struggle to exist in an institution that tolerates them only if they do not question it. This struggle can involve feminist associations of researchers, leaflets, rallies or the public denunciation of sexist practices ... typically activist actions. This struggle is also reflected in lecture halls, where speaking as *a dominated being* goes contrary to the etiquette of students, who often expect objectivity and expertise from professors. For example, I teach strategic management, and as long as I stick to the canons of the discipline, then being a woman, having piercings and tattoos, and saying that I work in feminist organizations as part of my research does not pose a problem. If, on the other hand, I propose to make a critical reading of the postulates underlying the discipline of strategic management, if I argue that the criteria that define leadership condone the exclusion of women and perpetuate sexist oppression, then I suddenly run the risk that forty students no longer consider me as their professor and someone whose aim is to facilitate their learning of strategy, but as a hysterical feminist, probably lesbian, who has no legitimacy to teach them strategy. The potential violence of the reaction of these students, who, being in business school, tend to be socially privileged, is inevitably what I expose myself to if I do not pretend to adhere to the capitalist, sexist and racist ethos at the root of the mainstream vision of strategic management, as a discipline. For the dominated, engagement is only a *possibility* if they accept oppression. Once we question this oppression and try to fight against it, engagement becomes activism, whether within the university or outside.

Researchers who want to fight against the racist, sexist, LGBT-phobic norms that govern the production of knowledge, its criteria of scientificity and the university institution must necessarily do research in the first person, that is to say, to do politics in the first person. In scientific production, considered to come from a mythical place where the subject expressing itself is so neutral that it has vanished into thin air, the *I* does not have the right of residence. By contrast, in feminist research, the researchers are permanently brought back to their *I* that disturbs. Even though the notion of academic engagement aims to criticize the positivist canons that govern scientific production, and to conceive of science as a political enterprise, it recreates a distinction between the private and the professional. Academic engagement is conceived as *engagement as an academic* to a cause that is certainly political but may not touch the intimate. If I engage myself as a professional, then the idea of professionalism is rescued. Of course I engage politically, but by using my professional skills, in other words, by using a neutral and dispassionate *I*. I do not engage myself because I am personally concerned but because my academic and rational thinking drives me to criticize this or that subject. Feminist epistemologies have politicized two domains conceived as apolitical—science and intimacy—but it seems that the notion of academic engagement continues to expel the intimate out of the realm of politics.

To say *I* when one is not a man, when one is not white, when one is not heterosexual and when one is not cisgender is a reminder that in science there are things that are unspeakable. It also serves as a reminder that the scientific conversation is open to all, provided that nothing is done that could upset the neutrality of the discussion. How might we say *I* when we are not granted the right to speak *as dominated* and when our lives are

invariably considered to be irrelevant and off topic? In the great scientific conversation, those who do not have a voice must do politics in the first person in order to be heard and to show that the speakable is only the reflection of domination and not of scientificity. This activist stance does not pretend to confine the intimate to the apolitical, and to assert a professional *I*, but intends to fight against the systems that want to silence certain *Is* in order to produce *Is* that are all similar, professional and reflections of objectivist criteria of scientificity. Speaking as a *dominated being* means to fight against the identity division implied by the conception of an involvement as a professional as well as against the standardization of *I* towards a mythical rational male, white ideal. By insisting on the impossibility, when producing situated knowledge, of separating the intimate from the professional, the activist standpoint contributes to the fragmentation of the knowledge-producing subjects. This constitutes a double movement of sorts in which the refusal of fragmentation produces fragmentation.

I do politics in the first person, I refuse to split myself up out of a duty to scientificity or credibility, and all that I write is political, that is to say, it is as intimate as it is scientific.

Just as the anger of Act Up has enabled and helped to advance the fight against HIV/AIDS, it is the anger of all or any oppressed groups that allows to fight for the destruction of the systems that oppress. And this anger knows no distinction between the private and the political, or between the activist and the academic spheres.

BODIES AND COMMUNICATION: HOW ACT UP REDEFINED WHAT AN “ORGANIZATION” IS ABOUT

Robin Campillo’s acclaimed movie, “120 battements par minute” presents us, organizational management scholars, with a thought-provoking opportunity to reexamine our conceptions of what we mean and what we think of, when we say “organization”.

Act Up certainly is not the first organization with innovative features. History (and more particularly the history of social movements) is full of unorthodox groups and collectivities, questioning the Weberian ideal-type of hierarchical bureaucratic structures. Feminist movements for instance, as early as in the 1930s, had already developed symbolic performances to demand the right to vote (Molinier-Boyd, 1995) and has led an enduring reflection on alternative organizations (Ashcraft, 2001; Dorion, 2017; Freeman, 1972). What makes Act Up unique is how the concrete conditions of its struggle and its cause created a specific and innovative organization – or, to be more precise, how unusual organizing processes happened to adapt to extreme circumstances, pushing the group outside of traditional organizational tropes.

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BODIES IN ORGANIZING, ORGANIZING BODIES

Campillo’s movie captures immediately what’s at stake in Act Up’s struggle: bodies. And, above all else, sick and dying bodies. In the very first scene, the whole story is announced: activists commemorate their recently deceased friends and colleagues. Their deaths, and the following demonstrations using their deaths and dead bodies, punctuate the entire film, up to the very end when Sean’s ashes are spread on insurers to shame them and to concretize the consequences of their decisions. Bodies represent an unveiling visual and symbolic resource for Act Up, in “die-in” performances, during which activists let themselves fall on the ground to figure the AIDS epidemics (Patouillard, 1998), but also in the intense use of fake blood, spread on their adversaries to reveal the invisible deaths caused by their inaction.

At the heart of Act Up’s actions is the issue of time: more than anything those bodies are dying. This is the essence of Act Up’s fight, the core motivation of its members and the central explanation for their radicality. Because they are dying, activists have no time for negotiations, for polite chit-chat or for political diplomacy. Putting themselves at physical risk is not a choice, but a forgone conclusion: they have nothing to lose but their lives, which are already in great danger. The imminent death has direct organizing consequences.

The last scene, in Sean’s apartment, shows how even death itself contributes to the organizing process, by gathering the mourning activists and already projecting them towards coming actions. In this regard, a deeply moving image of that scene brilliantly expresses how organizing and grieving processes are intertwined: on the right side, Sean’s dead body alone in his room, on the left side friends and family share coffee and breakfast, discussing of the future.

Finally, one of this movie’s many merits is to also display those bodies as desiring, happy and unapologetically alive; of course through intimacy (whether sexual or simply affective), but also through dancing in night-clubs or during the Gay Pride Parade. This joy constitutes the bright and complementary aspect of the anger that activists live in. These emotions play a central motivational role for activists, for which performances represent not only a way to express their claims, but also

moments to exult and to vent stress, rage and frustration (Broqua & Fillieule, 2009; Hildwein, 2017).

Bodies are an organizing force. Sick bodies as resources to express a claim, dying bodies as imperative to act and to act radically, exulting bodies as a mean and a motive to take action: Act Up has an undoubtable corporality, it exists through the very flesh of its members, way before more abstract structures.

COMMUNICATIVE STRUGGLES

Visual performances and symbolic uses of bodies: like many social movement organization, Act Up cannot be understood without the messages it aims to convey and the cause it defends.

Above all, communication is Act Up's first means to its end: attacking the public images of medical, political and religious organizations, attracting media attention, gathering and diffusing valid information about HIV and AIDS, changing public opinion on homosexuality, safe sex, HIV and HIV-positive people; all of these to obtain cultural, legal and political changes. Thus the importance of spectacular performances: in a time when there is no time and when activists die on a monthly basis, striking performances that require only little resources are an imperative necessity. That's why Act Up had to develop spectacular and visual events, to convey immediately and without ambiguity its message.

In this communicative fight, the group seeks in particular to break the newspeak of its adversaries ("Melton Pharm" representatives of course, but also governmental agencies and teachers), made of deadly silences, of hypocrisy, of dangerous euphemisms and of rhetorical traps (accusations of "violence" towards Act Up while HIV-positive people are dying). A telling moment is the scene in which Act Up's president, Thibault, calls on his medical expertise, to escape from the Melton-Pharm's argument authority; this heralds the numerous (and sometimes problematic) movements to reclaim scientific knowledge from experts (whether in medicine, biology, ecology or even economics) to serve civil society. Thus, Act Up's objective is not only to legitimize a certain message, but also to force other actors to adopt a more open communication, and to destroy a certain oppressive order of discourse (in Foucault's terms, 1971).

However, this struggle over communication represents only the visible face of Act Up. This movie is especially precious because it shows the internal work and meetings of an organization usually better known for its public performances. Internal communication represents an even bigger issue. The movie is structured with scenes of meetings during which Act Up members discuss their next actions, learn and debate. In particular, they comment and try to evaluate the pertinence and the impact of their performances. For this, they reflect on their principles (what non-violence is and how they should use it), they call on the judgment of external parties (such as less radical associations also fighting the epidemics), they try to make sense of the action, of each-other reactions, of how they were perceived. These discussions show the deliberate strategy that activists deploy to further their goals. This is far from the conservative and condescending views that consider social movements as irrational crowds (Le Bon, 1895), which are still widespread nowadays.

Activists are also deeply conscious of the danger of debates and, while they try to give the floor to everyone, they also develop rules to structure those debates, such as moderators, the ban of debates outside of the meeting while it lasts or the clicking of fingers to express one's

approval. The tensions that arise around debates show how, to a certain extent, internal communication can exacerbate ideological divisions and disorganize an existing group.

Communicative processes, like bodies, play a much more central role in an organization such as Act Up, than rules or hierarchy (Thibault's leadership is often questioned in this regards). The role of communication as an organizing process has been developed intensely in the last decade by CCO (for communicative constitution of organizing) scholars (Giordano, 2015; McPhee, 2015; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014; Taylor & Cooren, 1997) including in unusual organizations such as Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) or al-Qaeda (Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2010, 2012; Stohl & Stohl, 2011).

RETHINKING MANAGEMENT BOUNDARIES

Act Up is thus far from what we usually consider as the substance of organizations. Bodies, death, sickness, emotions, performances, communicative constitution of organizing and social struggles: all of these themes, while they have emerged a long-time ago in organizational studies, remain less understood and studied by management sciences, and force us to radically rethink our assumptions on what an organization is made of, what its structures are (in particular to trigger motivation and adhesion) and what its real objectives are. The stunning example of Act Up is a concrete call to push the boundaries of management sciences (Germain & Josserand, 2013) and to leave the comfort zone of traditional organizations. This approach has scientific and heuristic benefits. First it leads to cross-fertilizations with other fields to renew our approaches, in particular for HR issues such as sense-making at work, motivation and mobilization (Hildwein, 2017; Tremblay, Chênevert, Simard, Lapalme, & Doucet, 2005; Wils, Labelle, Guérin, & Tremblay, 1998); second it leads to stimulating questions such as what roles do bodies play in companies and what does it mean for management? or how can healthy debates take place in the work place? Finally it represents an occasion for us to contribute to the social and political world outside of academia, by applying our practical and analytical tools to social movement organizations, by helping them grow and develop, and thus offering insights and participating in ongoing social debates.

Not only is "120 battements par minute" a major piece of cinematographic art, it also describes from the inside an unusual kind of organization, and should be regarded as a central and eye-opening pedagogical work, for organizational scholars, young and experienced alike.

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF ACT-UP PARIS: A RADICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT STILL THROBBING (AND SO IS AIDS)¹

At cantu commotae Erebi de sedibus imis
umbrae ibant tenues simulacraque luce carentum,
quam multa in foliis avium se milia condunt
vesper ubi aut hibernus agit de montibus imber.

Virgil, *Georgics* IV, 471-474

PREAMBLE: INTENTION AND CRITIQUES

"People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does." Dreyfus and Rabinow mention Foucault saying, in a conversation (2014: 187). To me, this is what politics and social movements are all about. This is about knowing how the world works as one changes how the world works. It seems ACT-UP activists tend to know a lot on that matter. What they know, mind you, they learnt the hard way. Precisely, one critique wrote that the movie *120 beats per minute* shows us how: « *Act-Up is (...) on the back of each image, how ACT-UP must always make an image, that is, be political in the world.* »².

I first present the intention of the movie as it expressed by its director, then the limits seen by some critiques and my own investigation as I try to ascertain if the widely-shared emotion in the audience corresponds to the present reality of a radical social movement which used to be much less consensual in the past. I conclude on some findings about the role of frame and apparatus in a social movement and a movie celebrating it.

At its world premiere at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival, director Robin Campillo made this intention explicit : "*(It) is above all a film I wanted to make where the force of words transforms into pure moments of action*". More specifically, he explained the method of his collaboration with fellow ACT-UP members: « *I tried a reconstitution of many debates and actions that took place back then, and I edited historical truth in a free style (...). To construct the characters, the inspiration comes less from the re-enactment of real persons, than from actual tensions in our movement at the time.*³ » To show the life of the social movement from the inside, the shooting used techniques familiar to documentarists, especially for the scenes in the amphitheatre, during the debates. With his director of photography, Jeanne Lapoirie, Robin Campillo would use three cameras and film in extenso in the flow of action: « *I would get all the spectrum of rushes from shot one (...) and then edit (...) free from the fetishism of the frame.*⁴ »

As for the general atmosphere, it orchestrates a contrast between intimate scenes and some of the most vivid effects in the street, for instance such shock actions as zaps, devised to challenge officials in public and attract public and media attention (Shepard and Hayduk, 2002).

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2. In Johan Faerber, *Diakritik*, August 22, 2017 (<https://diacritik.com/2017/08/22/120-battements-par-minute-une-histoire-de-fantomes-pour-grandes-personnes/>), retrieved on February 5, 2018.

3. Interview with Didier Péron, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/08/20/robin-campillo-chaque-action-d-act-up-etait-deja-enrobee-par-la-fiction_1590949, retrieved on February 5, 2018, our translation from the French.

4. *Ibidem*

The soundtrack by Arnaud Rebotini is in the spirit of the house music from the 90s, a time « *(b)oth festive and anxious*, Campillo says, *(when) they would dance to it in nightclubs* » after all their actions⁵. Although the movie caused a standing ovation in the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, some critiques found the movie unconvincing for mostly three reasons which I kept hearing as I investigated the matter further with activists.

One criticism seen in the movie is a mere anecdote. Because Robin Campillo and Philippe Mangeot (who co-authored the script) were ACT-UP activists, they (would have) « *acted as if they owed their comrades in struggle and the dead (...) and come up with a catalogue of functional scenes : ACT-UP agit prop in high-schools, ACT-UP against big pharma, ACT-UP looking for the right Gay Pride pride slogan.*»⁶ This made the plot of the movie instrumental and its scenes fastidiously illustrative of each action, missing the point. In other words, the movie misses the real political dimension of ACT-UP. In other words, the movie misses the frame, central to any social movement.

The second type of criticism finds the movie full of clichés. Accordingly, the movie is attached to the « gay communitarianism », providing the ready-made « cosmetics » of a « clip » about an imaginary « gay lifestyle ». It can be said that it merely imitates its visibility tactics central in ACT-UP activist practices (zaps, die-in (lying down in the streets) but it avoids more controversial dimensions, such as outings. Because of that, some argue the movie fails to convey the true meaning of its foundations, civil disobedience, since: « *(...) the movie is less a product than an apparatus, a lachrymose tear film, an epic meant to make everyone break down; only in that dimension does it display a form of mastery.* »⁷ In other words, the movie is moving because it uses easy effects.

The third critique finds the movie overwhelmed by nostalgia. This claim is voiced by the new president of ACT-UP, Rémy Hamai, who regrets a tendency to “pantheonize” the dead: « With 120 beats, people talked about aids ... but in the past tense, as if it were behind us (...) the epidemics is still eating away our lives, if less staggeringly. The goal is to be cured, not to be on antiretroviral for life. » He considers now the reality of activism is possibly less graphic because « it is more about reading technical reports on treatments » than about « wielding the fake blood bags and whistles ».⁸ In other words, the heroic past in the movie tends to weight on the present.

MY INVESTIGATION

I had been moved by the film. I found it « made the image », a source image. When reading the critiques, I wondered if my impressions were true. This made me want to know more, to investigate the situation of AIDS and ACT-UP today and also go back to the archives Robin Campillo mentions as a source of inspiration in the fashion of an activist-ethnographer-movie-maker when he refers to the 1990s. At that time: “*With Act Up, I can get a hold over my life again as I am devastated by the fear of being sick, completely petrified, including aesthetically. Act Up is very incarnate, in politics, but also in pleasure, a constant humour. I see it as a group where we all learn collectively to love who we are, including in the*

5. *Ibidem*

6. Stéphane Gobbo, *Le Temps*, May 23, 2017 (our translation), <https://www.letemps.ch/images/video/culture/critique-120-battelements-minute-stephane-gobbo>. Retrieved on February 5, 2018. Our translation from the French.

7. Thibault Croisy, *le Monde*, Septembre 6, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/09/06/thibault-croisy-120-battelements-par-minute-ne-fait-helas-que-normaliser-les-representations-du-sida_5181623_3232.html#x4SY3Sag00STJ8yZ.99. Retrieved on February 5, 2018. Our translation from the French.

8. In and Interview by Marie Slavicek, *Le Monde*, October 10, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2017/10/10/remy-hamai-president-d-act-up-le-vih-bouffe-encore-nos-vies_5198845_3224.html. Retrieved on February 5, 2018. Our translation from the French.

most virulent contradiction. There are shouting matches, when nobody agrees and we do not even understand the nature of the debate at stake. Yet we think historically in the present, we take down notes in meeting minutes which, unfortunately, slightly 'branquignol' that we are, we will lose.⁹ What remains of that fight today? Is its spirit still alive? More specifically, I wondered if, for people in the field, the movie was true to the facts of fiction, in other words, if it went beyond the « so what? » effect and it was honest work. By « honest work », I mean « did the people who made the film accurately "picture the frame" of ACT-UP. Creed, Langstraat and Scully (2012) identify a form of "signature matrix" for any social movement which is a form of material enactment of activists' value investment. It involves metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images such as can be found in a movie.

To get to know more on the issue, I first attended the Fight Aids Paris Week in the Halle des Blancs Manteaux. I was then invited to attend a weekly meeting of ACT-UP Paris in the famous Le Mürier Amphitheatre in the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts. In parallel, I conducted some interviews with researchers and doctors working on the AIDS virus today. Here are my findings, each starting with images that struck me in *120 beats per minute*. Each picture illustrates a specific notion central in the critiques: the frame, the politics behind the tactics, the present engagement in relation to the past.

A RADICAL FRAME FOR AN (INITIALLY) SPONTANEOUS SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Flows, flows the River Seine, and it is red, in the colour of blood, running in the veins of the living, running away from the dying ones, carrying the dead away under the sky, the sun shining.

In the streets of the Marais, nearby the Halles des Blancs Manteaux, I can see small red ribbons on walls, in shop windows, on people's coats as I walk around. At the small bar of the Halle des Blancs Manteaux, this is the image that first comes to mind, when I ask activists to pick one. One of them says: « *I think this is the picture everyone remembers, isn't it?* ». The four or five of them around nod in agreement. This sounds so true we all turn back to Doctor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi who is standing before a picture of blood cells at this moment. She is a historical figure: she was part of the French team of Professor Luc Montagnier who first identified the AIDS virus in the early 1980s. And she is still here, commenting power points on a large screen before a sparse audience. As she is explaining with minutiae the last advances and the combination of therapies, I recall the imagery of cells under the microscope in *120 beats* as an echo of the pulsing music and the tremor of actions. At 10 this Saturday morning, the place is still very quiet. More people come it by 11 o'clock. They had been at a party until 5 as part of the Fight AIDS event. As visible in the movie, for many, in ACT-UP, partying goes with activism. This is a form of « *carpe diem* » on borrowed time as Campillo himself pointed out in interviews commenting his movie.

For someone who had had very little sleep that night, Xavier is very sharp. We hardly ever had met when he comes up with the essentials: « *In 2017 in the world, one person dies of AIDS every 30 seconds so 8000 people die every day, there are still 3150 contaminations the same day, 1,2 million people died of AIDS this year, 36 million live with AIDS today. In million, there are still 6500 contaminations every year and about 40 000*

9. Interview with Didier Péron, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/08/20/robin-campillo-chaque-action-d-act-up-etait-deja-enrobee-par-la-fiction_1590949, retrieved on February 5, 2018, our translation from the French.

HIV-positive are unaware of it."

I am thinking "this is a professional": a perfect pitch. Then he sees I have more than two minutes to spare him, and he takes his time. He explains the events of the AIDS Paris Weeks, the debates, the prevention campaign, the auto tests, the shows, the patchwork of names workshop and the dance in collaboration with the Dance National Centre in Pantin. He also tells me about his everyday activities, meeting all the politics and working on files as he did when he studied in the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA)¹⁰. That involves each and everyone's political positions and keeping records as well as being in the field for organizing prevention campaigns. Xavier and Hugues, who acts as a scientific expert on medical matters, both say ACT-UP was down to 30 members, on the verge of bankruptcy, when the movie brought more newcomers, many of them young. Now they are about 100. Since that summer, they were able to re-open some commissions as when they were more than 300, back in the 1990s. Xavier is especially concerned with people who age with AIDS and old transsexuals. He works well with the new deputy major and he has more time to deal with it. He proudly mentions the names of the commissions (pharma greed kills, drugs, social rights, equality and homophobia, epidemiology, migrants, women, international, prevention, prison, sex work, treatment and research, trans, youth). He is glad they are all active again. That way they can be true to their slogan in the 1990s: *"The fags, the junkies, the whores and the convicts"* namely the more vulnerable people. As much as possible, they are engaged in a movement where they have a voice. This is all the more impressive since the movement helped them complement their unique situational knowledge with scientific and political knowledge as a true form of empowerment. Aids created a collective where classes disappeared in the face of the deathly threat and from what I could see at the occasion of my fieldwork, it still stands true today. This provides a key to the frame of ACT-UP as a social movement.

ACT-UP was founded in the US in 1987 to protest against health and disability insurance companies with HIV exclusions in their policies forcing more and more AIDS patients to turn to Medicaid. Six years after the virus was identified, activists engaged in street-theatre actions to gain visibility. This soon also involved the attack of research centres and drug companies to get speeded-up drug trials, pharmaceutical price reductions and more money for research. So ACT-UP is a radical social movement which targets all actors who are part of the health care system. The social movement is radical in the sense that it uses provocation as part of its disruptive contentious politics to break the silence of influent actors. ACT-UP activists believe many actors use their invisibility in the public eye to remain passive in the face of the epidemics. This is why their actions are also based on a highly documented research on the value chain of the industry and on the role and influence of institutions and private organisations in their strategic action field. For instance, in 1991, ACT-UP-New York targeted New York's insurance an Access Committee in a publicity campaign. The movement issued the following statement: *« Lack of insurance kills people with AIDS: Lack of insurance means lack of access to health care, and lack of health care means death. »* (Hoffman, 2008: 10). This movement was initially built by people dying from a rapidly expanding disease in the face of a general indifference. And later, when so many were on their last legs, they could see procrastination on the part of key actors coolly speculating on their benefits instead of looking for the fastest ways to provide treatment for all.

10. The National School of Public Administration is the French school where the highest rank of civil servants and many politicians are trained. It has often been criticized for building an elite.

This rapid historical background of ACT-UP may provide a much-needed contextualisation for some of the most visible, and controversial, tactics of ACT-UP in the past.

Indeed, this is what makes ACT-UP unique as a social movement as part of a wide nest of contentious politics (Tarrow, 2011) relative to such complex embedded issues as health, sexuality and social rights. It also conditions its tactics and its frame of action. As specified by one experienced activist at the occasion of the weekly meeting I attended, ACT-UP is specifically engaged in radical action to denounce institutional silence and inertia in the face of the AIDS epidemics. He burst out angrily, as a young member suggested they provide drug-addict needles: « *No, no no, this is not the role of ACT-UP. Our role is to publically denounce the pharmacists who do not respect their legal duty, we visit each of them in Paris, and we still have 4 to 5 districts left. This survey is a huge job already.* » (Activist, December 14, 2017 meeting). The passion and the tension of such meetings is quite well rendered in *120 beats*: so are some of the most controversial “actions”.

CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND RADICAL TACTICS

In the very end of the movie, the ACT-UP group can be seen spreading their friend Sean’s ashes on the petits fours of a large conference organized by an insurance company. They dance and dance like demons between guests and tables, just as they danced in the shower of confetti during the Gay Pride, only the colours are darker than the sun in the streets of Paris. Still, in the end, they die-in.

One activist tells me to watch documentaries and movies who were an inspiration for Robin Campillo, since he declared he mixed different actions organized by ACT-UP to make the movie. This points at a form of fabrication that is unappealing to some who would prefer to think of authentic social protest as spontaneous. This is not specific to ACT-UP as a social movement: « *Frame articulation involves the connection and coordination of events, experiences, and strands of one or more ideologies so that they hang together in a relatively integrated and meaningful fashion. It constitutes a kind of collective packaging device that assembles and collates slices of observed, experienced, and/or recorded “reality.” Frame elaboration refers to the process in which some events, issues, and beliefs or ideas are accented and highlighted in contrast to others, with the result that they become more salient in an array or hierarchy of group-relevant issues, perhaps coming to function as significant coordinating symbols or mechanisms.* » (Snow, 2004: 400).

The construction of the frame is more visible in ACT-UP because it is staged with provocation to attract media attention: ZAPs, die-ins and outings impairs activists’ legitimacy in the eyes of society. It makes it difficult for them to collaborate with reformist movements (Den Hond and de Bakker, 2007) because they (first) scare others away by claiming they make no compromise. They are dismissed as hysterical and sycophantic, but they are avidly echoes by the media. Six months after its foundation, ACT-UP Paris wrapped the towers of Notre-Dame in a banner to expose the positions of the Catholic Church. In 1993, activists wrapped the Concorde obelisk in a large condom. In 2004, they spread a private laboratory in blood after it had stopped developing an anti-HIV molecule for financial reasons. As pointed out by Elsbach and Sutton (1992), their illegitimate action made them legitimate in the face of public scandal, because the tactics were part of a strategy. It was informed by a very clear

political vision in favour of social justice (Creed, Langstraat and Scully, 2012), which made the frame of action consistent.

Consequently, ACT-UP tactics are radical and specific in that they deliberately orchestrate provocation as a response to a general indifference which may qualify as collective hypocrisy for those who feel abandoned to their fate. This situation may explain Campillo's project as he relates his ashes scene to a memory by an activist part of one of the ZAPs that inspired the scene in 120 beats : « *Christophe Martet told me that when they threw Cleews Vellay's ashes [president of Act-Up-Paris from 1992 to 1994, before Martet himself] on the petits fours of the congress of the Insurance Union, first people did not understand what was happening, then when they did, some went on eating, drinking their champagne and laugh it out. So, in a way, these actions, even when have been a participant, seem quite unreal, as if each moment were already coated by fiction.* » The movie is consistent with the ACT-UP style of actions, just as ACT-UP Paris was consistent with ACT-UP New York and San Francisco.

This is a form of pedagogy Robin Campillo advocates for in his movie when he declares: « *It took me quite a while to acknowledge (the) actual pedagogy of the movie, in one action: a man being bullied, humiliated by the fake blood thrown in his face. It consists in making this action legitimate as the story introduces us to the frame of the group and the difficulties met by people faced with the epidemics as political solutions are slow to come.* »¹¹ Campillo is reflexive as a movie-maker who reflects on his past as a reflexive activist staging actions. As in preparing a scene in a movie, to be effective, provocation involves a great deal of preparation in anticipation to the reception by the audience. One must see oneself act first. In the movie and in documentaries, Act-Up actions tend to remind me of both Buto theatre and martial arts. Victoire Patouillard, an ex-ACT-UP president, mentions Goffman's « impression management » to make this tactics and aesthetics more explicit. ACT-UP theatricalized its actions to make them more graphic and also to distance actors from their role. Activists used their body in a choreography as a language, acting out in a staged anger. This is why during the training sessions, all those who did not manage to be in control of their anger were banned from public action. One needs to « *work on oneself* » to be « *reach the utmost intensity of radicality* » as « *an obvious link ties bodies and politics during the ZAP* » (Patouillard, 1998: 34). I could see this training was still central in ACT-UP actions. During conversations at both the Blancs Manteaux and the Du Mûrier Amphitheatre, Hugues Fischer, an activist from the beginning in Act-Up-Paris, mentions the ZAPS as a strategy of communication: « *AID treatments did not interest the media. So, we set up an operation to make an impression. We all know what sells, what images work.* ». He speaks in the present, mentioning recent actions they are currently organizing and the need for funding. He shows me their last newsletter. On the last page of the December 2017 Action 140 (ACT-UP Paris newsletter), the last verdict of the trial against ACT-UP Paris is documented. A very active ultra-right association, « La Manif pour Tous » had sued the movement after its Zap against the Lejeune Foundation on August 4, 2013. As the verdict is still pending, the report mentions the important costs of such trials after activists are first arrested and taken in custody. All ACT-UP members are aware that radical activism can take place if and only if activists who engage are completely backed up by the movement. This involves very strong bonding (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), such that involve unique life commitments on an everyday basis.

11. *Libération*, August 20, 2017, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/08/20/robin-campillo-chaque-action-d-act-up-etait-deja-enrobee-par-la-fiction_1590949, retrieved on February 5. Our translation from the French.

EVERYDAY COMMITMENT AS ACTIVISTS

Two men meet. Sean and Nathan just sit next to each other at the weekly meeting, the famous « RH ». They whisper to each other in the amphitheatre, like students during a lecture. Nathan asks: « What do you do as a living? ». At this, Sean replies: « *What do I do as a living? I have AIDS as a living.* ». I am sitting in the Amphitheatre du Mûrier next to the young activist who just told me, in the Halle des Blancs Manteaux, two weeks ago, that this was his favourite scene. He is of the same age as Kosta, the young researcher on AIDS I met to know more about the present situation in research.

When I meet Kosta in la Butte aux Cailles, he points at the many anarchist tags on the walls (a reference to the history of the place) and he is proud to say he just joined a workers' cooperative for Ph-Ds "like in Greece where I come from, like Proudhon, you know". He smiles quietly. He has been out of job for a while after he worked for several post-docs in the Inserm Institute. He mentions several of his peers I also met, and their common fate: they worked intense extra-hours in the best French laboratories in France working on AIDS yet they knew they would never get a job there. He says because funding is declining, research is externalized and done by project. Crowdfunding like Sidaction every year determine what projects will take place or not. Because of the pressure on budget and timing, to beat other laboratories in outing results, there is no time to meet with patients. He also mentions short-termism harms both fundamental research and its application. They all know of researchers who made a career by falsifying results because of the lack of time to falsify and check. He hopes he can make research closer to patients again, and for this reason, he thinks ACT-UP can still have a pioneering role by cooperating with researchers and democratizing science.

ACT-UP is now proud to say that thanks to its action in favour of the rights of patients, treatments improved in the last forty years. Self-teaching and collective learning are a complement to direct action in radical social movements: activists and patients led the way to better care with life expectancy with aids being pushed back from 36 to 55 years since 2000. Because better cure is available now, ACT-UP has changed its methods of action: it has become less visible. That worries some of the activists, who regret 60 % of the world still does not have access to this treatment because of its cost. During the Weekly meeting I attend, this is one of the items neatly written on the board as part as the agenda for the evening: last summer, a global meeting on led to intense speculation about the level of international funding to AIDS. The US and France, the main contributors, are decreasing their funding. One of the reasons is that part of the money raised on specific taxes such as planes and financial trading is now reoriented towards climate change. *120 beats* and its success in Cannes were perceived as an important event to support the cause this summer as it seemed to be competing with other priorities in the media. Mikaël Zenouda (ACT-UP president when the movie was out) insisted that the movement had to spend more and more energy to move forward the files¹². During the weekly meeting, activists were quite angry they were about to get an unexpected 10 000 euros grant for their archives (from the Paris city hall) as they might be losing the 30 000 euros needed for their local union office. One of the speakers said it would be more convenient for a lot of people if ACT-UP would become "pantheonized", since no one here wanted to die a glorious death but still fight.

12. France Culture, <https://www.franceculture.fr/societe/de-la-capote-geante-au-faux-mariage-gay-quand-act-etait-activiste>, retrieved on February 5, 2018.

This fear echoes testimonies about an earlier situation about the US movement. « *There was always a hole when someone died. It was always in the middle of people.* » says an activist, mentioning the group « *filling in with demonstration and fact sheets; with pithy and poignant agit-prop, angry chants, and campy humour; with flirtation, sex, and another angry action.* » (Gould: 2009: 424) without stopping a seemingly ineluctable decline. After more than ten years of activism in ACT-UP, Barbara Gould mentions emotions as taking over collective action, because of the death toll in addition to the short life of social movements, particularly radical ones. When Gamson (1995) asked if they were doomed for self-destruction, he seemed to share the same impression. So is there a chance *120 beats* can save ACT-UP Paris from this fate? I was in the amphitheatre du Mûrier. That night, in the middle of the techno sounds of one of the Beaux-Arts students' famous raucous party, with the naked antique marble athletes sprawling under the wooden cataphalque of the restoration works, it was crowded and I could hear the doubts and the questions, but above all, I could feel the vibe of collective energy.

FINDINGS ABOUT FRAME AND APPARATUS: OVERCOMING DEATH IN MEMORIAM

Sean just died in the middle of the night. Four of his ACT-UP friends arrive. His mother offers the night mourners a drink. Sophie blurts out: « *I'd rather have something to eat.* ». In the next shot, we see her in the shadow of the corridor, eating a cookie with the gluttony, her eyes wide and wild like a child. Then in a composed voice, as she moved back in full light, she suggests they prepare the obituary for the next day. They all set up to it.

This is one of the last scenes of the movie. It may be so striking because it finds its inspiration in Robin Compillo's personal experience with the AIDS epidemic as he mentions: "*I've dressed up a boyfriend on his death*"¹³. Compillo also remembers his own experience of the actions as an ACT-UP activist: « *I used to be both very exciting and terrifying to make the action, we may even have been ashamed of the ways it could take. But there also was the common production of a striking image. We appeared like the heroes from the movie 'Vampire's by Louis Feuillade*¹⁴ ; *this was somehow evocative of a subversive and sexy mythology, that of clandestine groups.* »¹⁵ Here is the example of an activist group capable of using traditions in a reflexive way, of choosing the images it finds can best express their views, consciously building an apparatus. I head people insist several times on the plasticity and inventiveness of their movement as being key to its appeal to all of them and to the audience.

This is consistent with the use of frame in social movements. « (...) *insofar as collective action frames are connected to extant ideologies, they probably are rarely determined by or isomorphic with them (Snow and Benford 2000). Instead, they often, and perhaps more typically, appear to constitute innovative articulations and elaborations of existing ideologies or sets of beliefs and ideas, and thus function as extensions of or antidotes to them. This makes collective action frames somewhat akin to what the historian George Mosse (1985: 134) has called "scavenger ideolog(ies)."* » (Snow, 2004: 401) These scavenger ideologies partly reproduce and re-conduct the same discourse in relation to the present situation and ready-made scripts. What shows ACT-UP is still well alive is

13.The Hollywood Reporter, May 20, 2017,

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cannes-120-beats-minute-director-says-i-was-an-act-up-militant-1005789> retrieved on February 5, 2018. It should be added that in France, the Law of July 12, 2017 allowed people who died of AIDS to receive funeral care. It used to be forbidden.

14.A French movie starring Musidora as Irma Vep, when it was released in 1915, it got scathing reviews for its dubious morality, but it was a massive success with the wartime audience.

15.Libération, August 20, 2017, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/08/20/robin-campillo-chaque-action-d-act-up-etait-deja-enrobee-par-la-fiction_1590949 retrieved on February 5, 2018, our translation from the French.

that activists keep fiercely debating about the legitimacy of scavenging, and instrumenting the dead. I have very found conversations on historical books about the US origins of ACT-UP (France, 2016; Kramer, 1985; Shilts, 2007) as well as literature, photography and theatre (Bernard-Marie Koltès, Hervé Guibert, Jean-Luc Lagarce). There is no denying that many ACT-UP activists are very influenced by the past. But in our conversations, this past was not a stuffed corpse. It was alive, as, I believe, happens in the movie *120 beats*, a somehow ghostly tribute to the dead.

I quite like that ACT-UP activists, during the meeting I attended in the amphitheatre, were still fighting the “clichés” about their movements, that some were really annoyed at the success of *120 beats*. They were explicitly concerned that they were being pressured to engage in a “scavenger ideology” to conform to the past of the movement when the challenges now may require different forms of action. At the same time, in the Blancs Manteaux and in the meetings, they were happy with the new headcount. Both the young and the old were happy to hunt “the elephant in the room” (Zerubavel, 2006), of sharing the same actions, “invading the Beaux Quartiers” (as one of them guffawed) and making collective memories (Halbwachs, 1992) still alive as they constantly engaged in fact-checking and rectification of both past and present traditions. For instance, one activist angrily vented out (with little finger snapping, the official display of public approbation during meetings) against being nice and collaborative on hot topics. He, for once, would not try to be so polite. Commenting the choice of engaging in various protest marches in favour of migrants and other causes, he pointed at the importance of making strategic choices to remain focused: “*We have a problem. We do like everybody does. We do not speak about AIDS, AIDS as an illness, AIDS as being sick, why don't we speak about that ANYMORE. Hello people, this is our ONE and ONLY THING. This is why we get money for.*” For radical activists, there are many reasons to mock distant compassion as the emotion of the age (Boltanski, 1999) because of the comfortable consensual moral stand it immediately confers to bystanders in the public sphere. Didier Lestrade himself, one of the founders of ACT-UP Paris, had the same vituperative reaction to the movie (and to lachrymose movie goers) in a tribune barging out: “*After 120 beats, spare us your praise*”. Enumerating why he finds this surge of emotion “embarrassing”, he jokes about the innumerable enamoured messages on the answering machine “thank you for your action” Clews Vellay and activists had so much fun parodying in the past. He then mentions his age (nearly 60) and that of many activists with AIDS compared to that of the actors in the movie, adding: “*I must have been the only minimum social benefit recipient on the Cannes red carpet that night*”. Finally, he fondly recalls his younger years: “*Other people fucked, we spent our nights in meetings.*”¹⁶

Demonizing the movie for its easy success, claiming to be the real demons, still struggling, is quite what I would expect from ACT-UP activists. This proves their fight against the machine is not over. The movie makes it easy to be moved, but its less simple to really move and be free. For as Vilém Flusser aptly pointed out about technical images made by cameras: “*Apparatuses are black boxes that simulate thinking in the sense of a combinatorial game using number-like symbols; at the same time, they mechanize this thinking in such a way that, in future, human being will become less and less competent to deal with it and have to rely more and more on apparatuses. Apparatuses are scientific black boxes that carry out this type of thinking better than human beings because they are better at*

16. *Libération*, May 30, http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/05/30/apres-120-bpm-e-pargnez-nous-vos-louanges_1573285) retrieved on February 5, 2018. Our translation from the French.

playing with numbers like symbols. Even apparatuses that are not fully automated play and function better than the human beings that operates them." (Flusser, 1983: 32). From what I see, ACT-UP escaped the apparatus. Activists are out of the box. They walk the streets of Paris. They know what they do does.

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