



Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue “Rethinking Artful Politics: Bodies of Difference Remaking Body Worlds”

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“Rethinking Artful Politics: Bodies of Difference Remaking Body Worlds” is a robust Special Issue comprising 11 scholarly articles on the nexus of art and politics. Together, the collection aims to demonstrate how critical scholarship/artistic praxis, which affirms difference within difference-attuned contexts, can carve out change-making pathways and build new worlds wherein non-normativity itself materializes differently—as political, as artful, and as vital. Such work is critically important as imagining worlds desirous of difference provides members of justice movements with multiple and potent directions for transformational change. Attentive to this desire, we begin with a question posed by one of us (Carla Rice) prior to the start of this project: “How do we create a world where difference is not merely tolerated, but anticipated and welcomed as basic to life and as critical to the story of humanity itself”? As we developed our Call for Proposals (CFP) and began working directly with contributing authors, we realized anew how an important part of the answer to this question lies in the worldmaking potential of art. As such, the collection of manuscripts that make up “Rethinking Artful Politics” animates worlds made by those living with difference via art, art-based research, and research creation methods. We conducted what we refer to as ‘friendly reviews’ of all articles prior to kickstarting the official peer review process. We also worked with each of the authors and their manuscripts until we agreed (found consensus among us) that the pieces were ready for anonymous review. All articles were reviewed by at least two peer reviewers. Where there was discrepancy between reviewers and authors, we provided authors with the opportunity to respond to the reviewers’ comments and sent the revised articles to reviewers for re-review. A compelling collection was compiled through this multiple review process.

Art, as a method for prefiguring and imagining worlds, is a political intervention (Haritaworn et al. 2018). Art orients to (re)worlding in affective, cultural, imaginative, and justice-attuned (re)ordering ways (Chandler 2018; Cachia 2022; Fatona 2014; Kupperts 2022; Rice et al. 2024; Weber 2024). In so doing, art (re)visions, activates, produces, and propels cultural and political transformations with ripple effects through assemblages (the coming together of art with human bodies, technologies, relationalities, physical spaces, audience meanings and affects, cultural and social institutions, economies, etc.) at multiple scales—local, regional, national, and transnational. Art that leads with, centres, and desires difference prefigures and materializes an infinite array of lived experiences into new aesthetics and possibilities for worldmaking (Rice and Mündel 2018). Art practices, performances, exhibitions, curatorial framings, and documentary artifacts become spaces for artists, critical theorists, and creative methodologists to engage directly in cultural expression and resistance, imagining and enacting social justice as praxis, and offering rich spaces for political possibilities for difference. Art expresses and ciphers diverse and divergent materialities and futurities. Therefore, accessing art is necessary for accessing



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life. This issue understands art broadly and expansively, as including the creation of new aesthetics; methodologies/artful methods of inquiry; and new futurities, politics, and political possibilities. Moreover, activist art also enables us to open up performance, installation, curation, and audience reception practices. Similarly, we understand “politics” broadly and expansively, as in opposition, resistance, redistribution, movement(s), intervention(s), or assemblages within relations of power visible and invisible for equity and/or world-(re)making.

This Special Issue is inspired by “Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology and Access to Life”, a research project based in Canada at the University of Guelph with projects at Toronto Metropolitan University and Trent University, among many other universities and arts organizations in and beyond the northern part of Turtle Island. Research within “Bodies in Translation” is animated by two guiding propositions: First, we incite and catalyse generative collaborations among artists and academics across disciplinary, sectorial, cultural, and other divides. Second, we centralize diverse artist practitioners culturally, cognitively, affectively, and physically as members of communities whose perspectives, agency, and self-representations have been marginalized from mainstream social discourses, cultural landscapes, and art institutions across the land now called Canada (the northern part of Turtle Island) (Bobier and Ignagni 2021; *Bodies in Translation* n.d.; Changfoot 2016; Gold 2021; Mohr-Blakeney and Changfoot 2018; Swain 2019). The perspectives and communities within these articles proudly include the following: Anishinaabeg, Black, d/Deaf, people of colour, disabled, fat/thicc, low income, mad, neurodivergent, queer, persons living with dementia, and persons living with mental differences and distresses.

We solicited and welcomed proposals that address the methodology and process, including inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to art as a methodology and to methodology as an art. The impact of the work included is felt broadly and at diverse scales. For example, the manuscripts have impacts for artists/art generators themselves, communities and audiences, and curators and curational approaches, including collaborations, partnerships, and policies. We especially welcomed articles that include and/or incorporate perspectives and voices of non-academic partners because we understand that partnerships are often at the centre of art generation, curation, and production.

Common to all the articles in “Rethinking Artful Politics” is the diverse worldmaking well underway from diverse localities of difference. Worldmaking emerges from the realization that complex relationalities propelled by uneven power relations (including both power to and power over) shape spaces, places, notions of time, humans, cultures, and human responses to/interactions with the more-than-human world (technology, the built environment, living environments, land, animals, and plants). Through putting these and other human/more-than-human relationalities under question, critical scholars and artists create microworlds for difference to become and to flourish—in research processes and ideas generated, in the relationalities enacted and extended, and in the artistic works created (Simpson 2017; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2022; Rice et al. 2022). For bell hooks, this entails “imagining possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently” (Hooks 1994, p. 61). Worldmaking encompasses many imagined possibilities.

Decolonizing and indigenizing worlds led by Indigenous persons is crucial (Lavallee 2020; Stonefish et al. 2019). This is especially the case for us writing from the Anglo-Franco settler colonial context of Canada where Indigenous peoples and settler allies continue to make political strides to hold Canadian governments accountable to the 94 Calls to Action recommended by our national *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015). This world building can be achieved artfully and collaboratively. As Evadne Kelly, Carla Rice, and Mona Stonefish (Bear Clan) demonstrate, rethinking movement by a “coalition of co-resistors” (2023, p. 1) is itself a critical methodology that reveals at once the eugenics entwined with settler movement practices *and* the decolonizing interventions that reclaim/enact the Anishinaabe understanding of the inseparability of our bodies and worlds—or the connectedness of the human with land, water, and sky that affirms our “mutual difference.” They do this with and alongside their co-curation of the award-winning

exhibit “Into the Light” (Stonefish et al. 2019; Kelly et al. 2021), which examines how eugenics thinking continues to influence education, healthcare, culture, and politics. With their movement practice, they demonstrate that meaningful decolonizing/reclaiming/enacting of Anishinaabe knowledge cannot be achieved without attention to eugenics in the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism in quotidian life. This is a powerful example of an artistic and artful rethinking and enacting of politics.

All the articles in “Rethinking Artful Politics” employ art-based methodologies and research creation methods informed by a range of critical theories and activist research practices, including critical disability and access studies, critical race theory, fashion studies, fat studies, posthumanism, feminism, participatory action research, human-centred design, and auto and ethnomethodology, etc. These theoretical and methodological approaches not only become sites from which to imagine possible futures, but these ways of thinking and doing also *materialize* them—that is, bring futures just out of reach into the thick present through co-created, collective efforts (Rice et al. 2024). Part of this imagining comes from identifying possibilities in diverse places and everyday life anew. This can be, for example, at a d/Deaf-centred jam session dinner table where improvisation brings into being a desired, crippled collective assemblage (Jones et al. 2023). Possibilities can also emerge through a social media call that brings together Black Deaf persons who then collectively and inaugurally materialize Black Deaf Canadian identities using community-based research to (re)discover and affirm “relating” Black Deaf persons in Canada (Rouse et al. 2023). When neoliberal timescapes become crushing, crip agency enacts crip time and possibilities that bring together work, care, and community to create workable and caring spaces (Chazan 2023).

From the articles in “Rethinking Artful Politics”, spaces of difference and otherwise worlds can also include fashion hacking workshops as well as online dance classes with persons living with dementia and in community-created neighbourhood spaces. For example, fashion researchers create a series of fashion hacking workshops inviting disabled, D/deaf, and mad-identified men and masculine non-binary people to explore how they might recreate existing wardrobe items “to support their physical, emotional and spiritual needs” (Barry et al. 2023). In an online dance class, persons with dementia and co-present facilitators use improvisation and reciprocal interaction-expanded and -transformed understandings of co-creation itself (Kosurko and Stevanovic 2023). Further, through the NeighbourPLAN photovoice project in Peterborough/Nogojwanong, downtown residents at the intersections of disability and low-income come together using photovoice to understand renewed connections with places meaningful to them and with one another (McBee 2023).

These articles artfully demonstrate how researchers use arts-based methodologies to refuse dominant understandings of normativity (norms premised upon mythical ableist, ageist, white, cisgender, heteronormative standards that become normalizing) associated with a range of norms that govern our lives: notions of what it means to “recover” from eating and body-related distresses, from contemporary ideals of fitness, from fat hate, and from the difficult intellectual-affective work of producing decolonial knowledge inside colonial institutions. Art making becomes a series of refusals to remain contained within the given lines through unpredictable expressive acts that seek to proliferate possibilities for care and repair. Artful recoveries move away from universalizing and standardized responses for recovery from mental health distresses that systemically pressure persons labelled with them in healthcare structures (LaMarre et al. 2023). A Fitness Community of Practice (CoP) comprised of gender diverse disabled, queer, fat, thicc, and racialized persons is thickened, crippled, and made queer when these bodies come together to co-create, celebrate, and welcome rest in a fitness world replete with micro-activist affordances (Bessey et al. 2023). Auto/ethnographic explorations into the archive (consisting of performance videos, posters, emails, administria, etc.) of the queer feminist fat performance collective *Pretty, Porky, and Pissed Off* show the “liberatory, life-affirming, and life-giving potential” of fat embodiment and activism (Taylor et al. 2023). Even relational spaces thought more

traditional, such as professor-doctoral student relationships, transform when students and professors centre difference, demonstrating that writing can become a creative conversation between supervisor, student, and guiding theorist, in this case, Gloria Anzaldúa, that opens onto new thresholds of Anzaldúa-inspired and informed queer Chicana knowledge (Alvarez-Hernandez and Flint 2023).

These places each have a vitality made intelligible by the authors and their research partners. How they are brought into the present and explored also demonstrates the extraordinary care with which the makers create their work, and the vulnerability and agency associated with their co-creation. Without collapsing difference within the worlds collectively prefigured across the articles, strong affective and reciprocal relations clearly come across in the research relationship evoked by each of them. Affect and reciprocity are entwined through the interactions of research partners/participants as well as research and art creation to materialize multidimensional affects and effects of joy, identity-creation and identity-validation, connection, community, alternative herstories/theirstories, and liveable lives. This represents life-giving and life-sustaining politics through art in the refusal and resistance to power “over” relations that control, extract, manipulate, and deny life (e.g., colonialism, racism, ableism, fat hatred, normative recovery). These articles do not claim that art in its political intent and activism is the only pathway to justice that is truly welcoming and sustaining of difference. While not directly policy-oriented, each article offers difference-attuned inspiration (Rice et al. 2021) for policy that is equity-focused rather than based on narrow, normative standards of neoliberal individualism. Such standards often assume and endorse mythical self-sufficiency, able-bodiedness and enmindedness, cisheteronormativity, successful aging, and being well resourced. The research specific to each article and the worlds brought to light are given a provisional “ending” that occurs within the framing of the genre of the “scholarly article”. Yet, there is important natality to them that researchers identify for continued research for worldmaking. Additionally, readers will wonder, hope, and support their continued flourishing and growth that is iterative for possibilities to carry and continue to enact these new worlds into the future. In doing so, we are excited for the continued and generative centring of difference with art-based methodologies in service of bodies of difference and the worlds they prefigure and create.

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