Towards a politics of whimsy: yarn bombing the city

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Whimsy describes the capricious, playful and fanciful, and designates something irrational or without an immediately obvious reason to exist. I argue that this frivolity and illogicality are precisely what can make whimsy a significant, if fleeting, ground for micro-political change. To demonstrate this claim I use the example of yarn bombing – a contemporary form of street art in which knitted and crocheted items are attached to parts of the urban landscape. Yarn bombing, I argue, does more than feminise the city, for the whimsy with which it is imbued has the capacity to increase our attentiveness to habitual worlds in a series of micro-political gestures. Yet it is impossible to fully recognise and harness a politics of whimsy, for doing so defies its character as frivolous and without motive, and supersedes these traits with intentionality and utility. As a result, a politics born of whimsy is always-already a paradoxical politics. The broader question thus becomes one of how to dwell in whimsy's ungraspable moment in order that we might remain open to new political and ethical potentialities. To explore these issues, this paper draws on performative ethnographic fieldwork, wherein 30 yarn bombs were made and displayed in the city of Bristol during 2011.

Key words: *Bristol, yarn bombing, whimsy, knitting, materiality, urban habits*

Somewhere in Bristol (I won't say where, just keep your eyes open!) someone has stood at a bus-stop with some pink wool and a crochet hook. They have then crocheted a kind of sleeve tightly around the bus-stop sign. They have then added three little claw shapes at the bottom (also in crochet) to transform the post into the paw of some mysterious pink beast. Whoever the culprit is, please do some more – it made my day! (Ann Martin, *Bristol Evening Post* 24 June 2011)

Introduction

When I saw something whimsical, I was amused; but whenever I tried to reason out the nature of whimsy, I felt bemused. How could it be that something could give me so very much pleasure yet I could never grasp it? I tried, I failed. I tried again and I failed again. Over and over and over. (Poland 2010, 235)

Defined by its capricious irrationality, whimsy seems out of place in the adult world. Intrinsically joyous, whimsy exceeds the ways in which life is variously calculated, assessed, specified, managed and otherwise intervened in (Anderson 2014). Indeed, whimsy arises in between our familiar conventions to present itself as disconcertingly both recognisable and obscure, without any obvious reason to exist. Despite, or perhaps because of, its out-of-placeness, I argue that whimsy can function as a powerful political force that is able to alter bodily dispositions and foster new ethical spaces and modes of political action. Following Shaw and Meehan's (2013) Rancièrian under-standing, I use 'political' here and throughout the paper to denote the distribution and contestation of presence and absence in a world by mediating objects referred to as the 'police' (Rancière 2010). In contrast to Foucault, the police is not a technique of governance nor an institution for the disciplining of bodies, but rather an ontological law that configures the appearance and distributions of bodies in asymmetrical orders (Shaw and Meehan 2013). My argument is that curiously unexpected and joyful forces of whimsy can act to disrupt these policing distri-butions, thus offering a significant ground for micro-political change. However, I also argue that whimsy's efficacy emanates from its elusiveness, for once whimsy is used in an intentionally political way it evaporates as

other forces come to the fore. The question thus becomes one of how to realise the political potential of whimsy without undoing the seemingly apolitical way in which it operates.

In this paper I draw on ethnographic experiences with 'yarn bombing' as a conduit to illustrate what a politics born of whimsy might look like. Yarn bombing is a technique that merges street graffiti with the fibre work of knitting or crochet. Also known as 'yarn storming', 'knit graffiti' and 'guerrilla knitting', yarn bombing involves stealthily attaching handmade fibre items to street fixtures or parts of the urban landscape. These could be small and discreet installations on a bench handle or railing, or large and audacious pieces such as a tree wrap, or a cover for a bus. The practice of yarn bombing is said to have emerged in 2005 when Magda Sayeg knitted the 'alpha piece': a door handle cosy for her clothing shop in Texas (Moore and Prain 2009). Since then, blogs and social media have aided the spread of yarn bombing around the globe, ultimately resulting in thousands of individual and collective practitioners enthusiastically working to decorate the landscape with fibre. Some of these practitioners refer to themselves as 'craftivists', and merge their craft and activist interests to fight for a better world, often by knitting or crocheting political statements as a form of protest. The majority of practitioners, however, indulge in yarn bombing without these motives, and create installations just for a fun way to use their craft skills, because they can. It is here that I argue a different form of politics is unintentionally being enacted through the presence of whimsy.

Theorising knitting and crochet as political is nothing new; both have been posited as sites of feminist politics, historically and within contemporary culture. Fibre arts such as knitting, crochet and embroidery are deeply intertwined with the history of women and women's work, with both long designated as marginal in relation to cultural production and social status (Parker 1984; Turney 2009, 176). In articulating knitting as a feminist practice, writers and scholars suggest that contemporary knitting is actively redefining and reclaiming a traditionally domestic feminine craft as empowering and creative, particularly in its technological, online and more public forms, such as 'stitch "n" bitch' knitting groups (see Pentney 2008; Minahan and Cox 2007; Kelly 2014). Many readings of yarn bombing adopt and further these overtly politicised readings of knitting and crochet. Claims that such acts work to 'soften and domesticate' the city while simultaneously 'stitching a stereotypically feminine practice into the urban fabric' (Crang 2014, 234) are certainly valid and necessary. But, the focus of this paper is on the affective significance and less intentional micro-political implications of yarn bombing that are generated by its whimsical nature.

Broadly speaking, theorisations of whimsy sit within the realm of 'ludic geographies', a developing body of work concerned with the everydayness of play throughout the human life course (Woodyer 2012). As I will discuss, however, despite being similar in many respects, whimsy exceeds categorisations of play in ways that are intrinsically 'more-than-playful' – essential even to understanding habitual change in urban environments. The following section thus begins by explaining how the concept of whimsy differs from play, and how we can specifically theorise whimsy as being political. These ideas are then explored through a performative methodology of yarn bombing the city in order to illustrate the possibilities of whimsy for daily life. At its heart, a politics of whimsy is always-already enacting a paradoxical politics, for whenever we try to grasp whimsy, its very essence is destroyed; 'melting in the fire of battle' (Poland 2010, 240). This notion of paradoxical politics is elucidated in the final section, where I show how yarn bombing is being put towards increasingly instrumental ends, thus diminishing the efficacy of whimsy. Rather than creating a scenario of hopelessness in its impermanence, I argue that we can learn from the whimsical event as it opens up performative means to think differently about change, longevity and our relations with collective futures.

Deviations from play: explorations into whimsy

Whimsy makes little appearance in geographical, or indeed academic, debate. In many respects, there is little reason why it should. Whimsy is understood to run counter to the very ethos of scholarly analysis, wherein rigour and precision, not play, spontaneity and caprice, are the touchstones of truth and respectability (Ruggill and McAllister 2011). Woodyer and Geoghegan (2013), however, claim that this preoccupation with reason has served to imbue critical thinking with scepticism and negativity. To counter this they turn to look at play and enchantment, drawing on a tradition of scholarly thought that takes the fanciful nature of play seriously (Caillois 2001; Handelman 1974; Ruckenstein 1991; Sutton-Smith 1997). Play is of particular interest to this paper, for it shares certain conceptual characteristics with whimsy. As I will go on to argue, however, although whimsy may present itself as a quality of play, the two terms are not synonymous.

In a recent review, Woodyer (2012) outlines how play has traditionally been conceptualised in two conflicting ways: as non-instrumental and utilitarian. From a non-instrumental perspective, play is simply a behaviour positioned in opposition to seriousness, morality and productive work – 'an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, [and] skill' (Caillois 2001, 5–6).

Conversely, in the utilitarian perspective, play is framed as a process of socialisation that assists with moral, social and cognitive growth, and is therefore primarily about development rather than enjoyment (Sutton-Smith 1997). Play is accordingly aligned with children, and typically positions them on a linear trajectory towards a fixed point of adulthood via discrete developmental stages (Woodyer 2012). Despite much insightful and productive work on play being produced in the realm of children's geographies (see Thomson and Philo 2004; Matthews and Limb 1999; Holloway and Valentine 2004), Woodyer (2012) convincingly argues that associations of play with children constrain our ability to appreciate play as a significant geographical concern. As such, she moves the literature towards examining the everyday practices, politics and embodiments of play throughout the life course in order to address emergent concerns in geographical literatures with the complex, contingent and relational character of social life (Woodyer 2008).

Despite this shift in emphasis, the role for discourse and representation in understandings of play is not foreclosed, particularly when considering play with toys or digital mediation. This is where I argue the first core difference between play and whimsy emerges. Although both play and whimsy exceed signification, whimsy resists being grasped, represented and utilised. Whereas play can be employed for developmental objectives and packaged up in games and toys, any such attempt to seize on whimsy sees it melt away in the very act of recognising it. The second significant difference between play and whimsy is in their expression. Although play is often associated with pleasurable and happy behaviour, it may also present itself in a darker form that might involve meanness, pranks or playful violence. Whimsy is distinctive in this regard, for it is always intrinsically joyous.

Furthermore, throughout the play literature, an impression persists that there must be an active agent who is in some way 'doing' the playing. In this sense, play is used to denote a behavioural characteristic that emanates from an intentional, and knowing, body. This idea of a mind deciding to play is reinforced by Ruckenstein's argument that 'all play is voluntary' (1991, 239). Whimsy, on the other hand, is a force in the world that strikes the body with a call to action, emergent from encounters *between* bodies and independent of the subject. As such, the politics whimsy instils is a certain form of affective politics, concerned with that which is forceful, excessive and difficult to pin down. Orderings within an affective politics are less about intentional counter-representations and more about the sensations that can be generated through the active outcome of an encounter (Thrift 2004). A whimsical encounter, then, is an avenue to synergy, offering access to openness, exploration and experimentation (Ruggill and McAllister 2011).

Instances of whimsy are performative and fleeting, and not solely confined by scalar logics. Take, for instance, the performances of Royal de Luxe. Armed with mega puppets, including a 20-foot high 'little' girl and a 40-foot elephant, the group visit cities around the world to enact surprise performances. Commonplace urban spaces will suddenly become the stage for puppets to act out stories and scenarios, as well as engage in mundane urban activities, such as catching a bus or walking to work. The uncanniness of scale contributes to an aesthetically and affectively othering experience of space, where people are invited to imagine 'other impossibilities that might become possible, other dreams that might become realities, and other hopes that could come to be actualised' (Hroch 2011, 265). Unsurprisingly, events by Royal de Luxe entice large crowds where, collectively, passers-by witness the unexpected and unsettling. At the other end of the whimsy scale are small, much more individualised acts. For example, take the work of Mick Sheridan. He is Wales' 'Guerrilla upholsterer' whose aim is 'to make the world slightly more comfortable' (Sheridan 2014). An upholsterer by trade, Sheridan uses waste products from his business to furnish public spaces, particularly bus shelters, in more comfortable ways. He reflects on his work with the repeated catchphrase, 'and why not?', to capture the ethos of his practice wherein 'the game is afoot for the fun of the game' (Sheridan 2014; Poland 2010, 237).

Knitting the city: guerrilla methods

Since its emergence in 2005 the secret and subversive (and illegal) act of yarn bombing has been construed as political in various forms (Turney 2009). The practice has, for example, been credited with bringing knitting and textile work out of the home and onto the streets in an overt display of hidden labour and talent. This feminist angle is further elaborated on by those who theorise yarn bombing as an activity that sits in contrast to 'traditional' masculine street graffiti and the spray painting of tags, symbols and slogans. Yarn bombing is accordingly seen as an ironic response to much of the overtly politicised graffiti murals displayed in the city. Many yarn bombing practitioners further this representation by taking on tongue-in-cheek anonymous street names, for example 'Knitta', 'Purlesque' or 'Dropstitch', which are displayed on physical tags attached to the work, often alongside a web address, Facebook page or Twitter handle. Whereas the realm of spray-painted graffiti tends to be dominated by individual male artists, the yarn bombing revolution has been led largely by women, many of whom collaboratively create and display work in collectives. Turney (2009) claims the effect of knitted interventions is to create spaces in which the masculine urban space is

itself vandalised, transformed and re-appropriated by a feminine touch. What such accounts tend to ignore, however, are the more micro-political and visceral effects that yarn bombing can have in everyday urban life. Looking at these re-affirms the openness of what a body can do, while interrogating the ways in which bodies may be re-formed, refined, disciplined and guided by the world around them.

To consider micro-politics when devising a method for enquiry demands we neither presume that socio-material change is an exclusively human achievement, nor exclude the human from the stuff of fabrication. As Whatmore argues, such modes of enquiry must

> attend closely to the rich array of the senses, dispositions, capabilities, and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces assembled through, and involved in, the co-fabrication of socio-material worlds. (2006, 604)

For my investigation into the ways whimsy might enact a micro-politics, I chose to adopt a performative methodology that actively shaped that which I was seeking to study. Early in 2011 I learnt to knit and crochet in order to create my own yarn installations. In the months that followed I created and affixed 30 yarn bombs in the city of Bristol. A photograph and narrative of each yarn bomb was also posted on a dedicated blog.[1] Creations included furry monster paws for signposts, snuggly scarves for statues, a five-foot-tall cover for a tree trunk and fibrous hot-air balloons for school gates (see Figure 1 for examples). The majority of the pieces were made in advance and then covertly attached to items of urban furniture in the early

Figure 1   Examples of the yarn bombs installed around Bristol

hours of the morning. I mostly used synthetic fibres, chosen specifically for their lurid colours and material strength; acrylic yarn is relatively resilient to the Great British rain. To enable passers-by to 'identify' the creator and leave comments on the blog, each of my yarn bombs also had a laminated tag attached to it sporting a website address. Further public reaction was gauged through covert observation near the larger installations. This enabled an understanding of the role the works came to play while in situ, and to see the reactions they instilled: whether it was a desire to come closer, the need to tell a friend or to simply ignore it. Like Richardson-Ngwenya (2013), I found that the methods I employed were thus not post-human as such, but instead encouraged me to adopt an attitude that attended to the vital material relations that surrounded me, and indeed others.

Breaking the blasé: whimsy in practice

In performing the habits and routines of everyday urban existence we are apt to overlook the vast array of vital material relations around us (Edensor 2013). The sociologist Georg Simmel (2010) attributes this to the density of the surroundings, for the city is a place in which inhabitants are constantly bombarded with new mental stimuli in such quick succession that it would be impossible to react to, and process, them all. The urbanite therefore responds to the 'collective saturation of the senses' by building a metaphorical protective shell that enables them to negotiate and deal with everyday life (Stewart 2011, 449). Simmel refers to this shell as the 'blasé attitude', and uses it to designate

> an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived [. . .], but rather that the meaning and value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homogenous, flat and grey colour with no one of them worthy of being preferred to another. (2010, 106)

Although Simmel's urban dweller is a homogenous, most likely middle-class white male from the early twentieth century, aspects of the blasé ring true in contemporary society. Most modern urban dwellers establish habitual routines, walk the same paths, see the same sights and do the same things, while in the process shutting off parts of the city from conscious awareness. This gives rise to bodily tendencies wherein movements no longer have to be cognitively considered, but instead take place with increasing automacy (Bissell 2011). Following Simmel's account, then, we might understand these 'grooved kinaesthetic routines' of urbanites to have gradually become incorporated into the human body as habits: a set of capacities that provide the body with a consistency and

prevent it from being worn down by continual shocks to thought (McIlwain and Sutton 2013, 2; Bissell 2011).

Interventions such as yarn bombing have the capacity to create an affective atmosphere that penetrates the blasé attitude. By using elements of humour and surprise, yarn bombing foregrounds aspects of the urban environment that are otherwise overlooked, their appearance restricted by policed and habitual interpellations. Illustrating this is an account written by someone who stumbled on my largest yarn bomb installation – a six-foot-tall tree wearing a crocheted stripy sleeve:

> I do that same walk many times a week and am always on autopilot just dying to get home to my man, my cats, and my tea. When I spotted this woollen wonder, it shook me out of my post-work daze. I had a good walk around the tree, took some photos, walked away with a smile on my face and found myself actually LOOKING at the park I had been taking no notice of for the past seven years. Not bad for a piece of crochet.[2]

In an everyday situation, one tree looks little different from the next as you dash through the park. We live in a world that encourages flow and discourages pausing (Bissell 2011, 2651), yet the vitality of matter can carry such an affective charge that it may well initiate a slowing-down. In stopping to look, touch and interact with the work, urbanites are struck by an oddity that lies just outside the cusp of convention and familiarity.

Textile work is ubiquitous in daily life, not only in clothing, but in decorative aspects too: chairs, cushions, blankets and throws. Yet to see something as familiar as knitting adorning urban furniture is, in the first instance, somewhat disconcerting, and certainly surprising. The sheer out-of-placeness of the yarn strikes the body, and injects a sense of possibility. One imagines what it would look like if all the trees in the park wore jumpers. Or what it must be like to anonymously give skilled work to the cityscape, without acknowledgement or expectation. It highlights the volatility and arbitrariness of any ordering in the world, showing that what we thought we 'knew' always has the capacity to become otherwise (Anderson and Harrison 2010). A change to the police order is therefore not only possible, but already in progress.

When the habitual and the mundane become marvellous, strange and uncanny, quotidian assurances can tremor with indeterminacy as the body is called to action by the world (Holloway 2010). Indeed, the majority of feedback I received from my yarny adventures focused on the embodied responses to the encounter. One instance was recalled to me in which

> My girlfriend was sat at this bench when a mother and her crying young daughter approached. On seeing this superb

work of yarn bombing she said, 'Look! A mouse!' The child was instantly quiet – captivated by the woollen creation.[3]

Comments such as 'these made me smile when I walked past yesterday! :)'[4] and 'I walked past this on my way home today and it really made me smile'[5] encapsulate how the yarn installations act as punctums in the urban everyday (Barthes 1981). Respondents' choice of language seems important here, particularly the notion that people felt they were 'made' to smile by the encounter. It wasn't an active decision, not a choice to smile, but an involuntary response forced on the body by the world. Other people I observed were annoyed – angered even – by the woollen displays, whereas most were riddled with confusion. It makes no sense to keep a bike rack warm, or put slippers on a statue. The material mismatch caused by the curious presence of yarn in the urban environment has the capacity to interrupt the everyday by virtue of its ungraspable character. As O'Callaghan (2012, 200–201) has highlighted, 'capitalism has been very successful in colonising cities in material and discursive ways, imbuing urban space with its inherent logic and occluding other visions. These visions exert weight, especially in their ability to retain an illusion of consistency while perpetually mutating'. Conversely, yarn bombing uses the lightness of whimsy to exploit the openness and circumstance of the everyday, and expose the contingency of discursive and material forces in a way that is not just conceptually ungraspable, but ungraspable in and of itself. For as soon as we begin to apply logic and sense to the encounter, the whimsy-the joy and caprice of the initial event-disappears.

The depoliticising of yarn bombing

Whimsy, then, can play an important political role in reclaiming and reconfiguring urban space through methods more subtle than placards and marches. By making city dwellers take notice of the spaces they inhabit, whimsy can restimulate the senses and instil a mood of possibility by inviting inhabitants to think differently. Key to this whimsy-as-politics, however, is its affective excess – that which circulates in and between bodies and cannot be pinned down. Using whimsy in a form susceptible to capture, such as yarn bombing, therefore reveals some interesting implications. Since the 'alpha piece' in 2005, yarn bombing has morphed from being a niche and alternative activity into something of a fashionable trend. Yarn bombs have appeared the world over and the internet is rife with blogs, 'how-to' guides and calls for participation with various yarn bombing collectives.

Yarn bombing is revered by 'craftivists' for its ironic character, for not only does it encourage freedom of expression, but it allows people to protest in a way that is

'out-of-place' without being 'in-your-face'. For instance, there have been anti-nuclear-energy yarn bombs displayed in Germany,[6] anti-tram crochet in Edinburgh[7] and wraps against tyre burning in Beirut.[8] As Robertson writes, this type of political action undermines 'ideas of protestors as violent, and offer[s], what is seen, at least to knitters, as a constructive approach to activism that encourages interpersonal interaction and everyday resistance' (2007, 210). Protesting through the medium of yarn bombing is done with the intention of provoking the affects a whimsical encounter instils – calling the body to action through the joyous and unexpected event. Yet, the very act of trying to grasp hold of whimsy serves to create a different sort of politics, one with purpose and utility towards a specified goal.

We can see these tensions at play in the example of the Big Breast yarn bombing event of October 2011. Having largely been promoted online, the Big Breast event urged yarn bombers to make creative and humorous displays of 'boob bombs' in urban spaces. Responding to the call, practitioners clicked their needles and wielded their hooks to whip up breast hats, boob bollard covers and bras for statues (see Figure 2). Ultimately, the Big Breast event sought to combine wit and surprise with a specific Political aim.[9] The boob bombs challenged the dominant 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2004) by making it acceptable to have conversations about breasts and disease in the public realm, allowing the topic to be less threatening, inappropriate or embarrassing through utilising unexpected interventions in the urban environment. Within the Big Breast event, however, whimsy was assigned the Political purpose of raising awareness of breast cancer. It was no longer light-hearted and without motive, for it had been put to purpose in the service of a cause. In the process of trying to grasp hold of what made whimsy politically effective, a different kind of politics was constructed, and the whimsy superseded by intentionality and utility.

**Figure 2   Boob bombing for the Big Breast Event. Photo
reproduced with permission from 'Purlesque'**

In working to create new and memorable encounters, many activists have imbued yarn bombing with a politics it was never intended to have. Yet even this remnant of yarn bombing's radical edge has been stripped by major corporations such as AXA, Mini Cooper and Le Lait who have incorporated yarn bombing into their advertising campaigns, illustrating how craft can quickly be taken up and exploited by capitalist industries (Newmeyer 2008). Suddenly surfaces everywhere appear to be adorned with more of the same, knitting here, crochet there; all start to become part of our normal urban environment again. The body has not so much been liberated by the blasé as prescribed a new assemblage of habits that have, over time, superseded and eviscerated that which once came to still it (Bissell 2011). Ultimately then, yarn bombing has moved from embodying whimsy, through activist politics, to finally sit-frayed, faded and forgotten-back within the very systems it was trying to critique. It is as Georg Simmel once noted: 'as fashion spreads it goes to its doom' (1957, 547).

A politics born of whimsy is therefore always-already a paradoxical politics. Full of momentary promise, the attempt to grasp it destroys the whimsicality as it becomes superseded by logics of intentionality and utility. The broader question thus becomes one of how to dwell in whimsy's ungraspable moment in order that we might orientate ourselves to new political and ethical potentialities. It asks how we might craft longevity from the fleeting, and what methods could allow whimsy to circulate without capture. Doing so, however, requires that we negotiate a way of relating to potential events whilst remaining open to the sense of promise and interruptive, undefined futurity they might hold (Anderson 2014).

Conclusions

This paper contends that whimsy is an important and hitherto neglected topic that deserves further attention within geography. As a force that sits uneasily with academic values of reason, rigour and precision, whimsy draws strength from theorisations of play that valorise caprice and joy as ways of being otherwise in the world (Woodyer 2012). Whimsy, however, differs from play in several ways: firstly by being intrinsically joyous; secondly by emerging as an affective force *between* bodies, rather than being a behavioural characteristic performed by an intentional subject; and thirdly, by resisting representation and utilisation. Crucially, it is this final difference that makes whimsy a significant, if fleeting, ground for micropolitical change, not only in spectacular performances, but amid the mundane comings-and-goings of city dwellers.

The practice of yarn bombing exemplifies the micropolitical effects of whimsy playing out in such everyday

situations. By drawing on a performative engagement with yarn bombing, I demonstrated how whimsical yarn creations installed in the urban environment can have ethical, aesthetic and political effects by altering the configuration of sensual appearances. Yet, in recognising, and trying to harness whimsy's politics, whimsy unravels. That which made it powerful, indeed 'forcefull' (Shaw and Meehan 2013), quickly evaporates once assigned a purpose. We saw how this played out during the Big Breast event. In this instance, boob bombs attempted to utilise whimsy-as-politics for the means of raising awareness about disease. In so doing, however, whimsy defied its character as frivolous and without motive, and was subsequently brought back under the control of the 'police order' (Rancière 2004). It is important to emphasise that the alterations in logic of appearance (re)imposed by the police order are not the result of a transcendental arrangement imposed by humans, but are the outcome of the 'force-fullness' of bodies of all kinds and their capacities to affect each another (Shaw and Meehan 2013). This reinforces the notion that change in the world is not only willed by humans but comes about equally through the materialities of the world of which we are just a part (Dewsbury 2011).

Theorisations of whimsy are by no means limited to yarn bombing as a site of study, although as something of a fleeting trend in itself, the practice is well-suited to considering the ephemeral efficacy of whimsy-as-politics. Considering geography more broadly, whimsy is able to effectively highlight the importance of remaining open in research encounters to the momentary and peripheral events that are actively shaping social and political life. The paradoxical politics of whimsy is therefore neither intrinsically good nor bad, but instead provides a glimmer of hope that other ways and worlds are possible if we allow ourselves to be nourished by the energy their surprise affords (Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013). The task for geographers is to look for strategies to prolong the affective atmospheres induced by whimsy, and indeed to question the extent to which we may wish to do so. Trying to write, talk and enact the ungraspable is never easy. But to return to the quote from Poland (2010) with which I opened: perhaps all we can do is 'try and fail'. Over and over and over.

Acknowledgements

Notes

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9 The remainder of this article uses 'Politics' to denote 'Politics Proper' and 'politics' to refer to micropolitics and the spatial registers of affect.

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