Community and Belonging in the *Body Politic* (1971–87), Canada's First Gay Liberation Newspaper

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ABSTRACT

The cover of the second issue of the *Body Politic* (1971–87), Canada's first gay liberation newspaper, featured a photograph of a large house that would become Toronto's Gay Community Centre. In retrospect, the house foreshadowed what the *Body Politic* would become in the years to follow — not a house made of brick, but a house all the same, a shelter, a refuge, a 'meeting spot' for the gay community in Canada and beyond. The *Body Politic* and/as community is at the center of this article, which attends to the physical copies of the paper as well as unpublished correspondence between the readers and the Collective to argue that, through their editorial activism, members of the *Body Politic* Collective and the *Body Politic* itself fostered affective readerly communities locally, nationally, and transnationally. In my thinking of affective readerly communities, I draw on Sara Ahmed's theorizing of 'affective economies' and Fionnuala Dillane's discussion of affect, 'periodical encounters', and 'affective ruptures' to show how editorial labour at the *Body Politic* encouraged affective relations in and outside the physical pages of the paper.

KEYWORDS

Canadian print culture, the *Body Politic*, gay liberation movement, Canadian newspapers, affective readerly communities, community, editorial activism

Community and Belonging in the *Body Politic* (1971–87), Canada's First Gay Liberation Newspaper

It is 1971. On 28 August — a rainy day in Ottawa, the capital of Canada — a group of people from Canada's earliest LGBTQ groups and their supporters gathers on Parliament Hill to demand 'changes to discriminatory federal laws and policies concerning gays, bisexuals, and lesbians in Canada'.[1] The demands are listed in ten points and presented in a brief that will come to be known as the 'We Demand' brief. This event, though it may not feel like it at the time,[2] will go down in history as the beginning of the gay liberation movement in Canada.[3] Present at the rally are the future founders — themselves gay rights activists — of the first gay liberation newspaper in Canada, the *Body Politic*. Jearld Moldenhauer, who initiated the founding of the first university-affiliated homophile association at the University of Toronto (UTHA), was the driving force behind the paper in its early years, and he was the one to invite a group of men involved in Toronto Gay Action (a local activist group) to start a newspaper of their own.[4] This step was necessary, considering that Canada had no gay newspaper at the time and that access to gay papers published in the US was limited,[5] but it was

1 Ron Levy, 'We Demand', *The Canadian Encyclopedia,* 21 August 2020 <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/we-demand> [accessed 10 June 2024].

2 John Wilson, one of the activists who participated in the rally, recollected: 'On the bus ride from Toronto to Ottawa, I remember being a bit nervous, but we certainly didn't think of it as a historic occasion at the time. When we got to the Hill, it was pouring rain. There were about 100 to 125 of us, a couple of news photographers and the RCMP. The police stayed as far away as possible — as if they thought we would contaminate them. There were a few speeches, and within an hour it was over. We went to the bar at the Lord Elgin Hotel for a drink, and took the bus back home.' Stéphanie Verge and Sarah Liss, 'Marching brave: 50 years of gay rights in Canada', *Maclean's,* 21 June 2019 <https://macleans.ca/marching-brave-lgbq-rights-canada/> [accessed 10 June 2024].

3 Michael E. Graydon, '"We Had Become a Community": Gays of Ottawa (go) and the Birth of Community, 1971–7', *Canadian Historical Review*, 99.4 (2018), pp. 594–622; Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2002).

4 Rick Bébout, 'On the Origins of the *Body Politic*. Chapter 2: Conception and Birth', January 2000 <http://www.rbebout.com/oldbeep/intro.htm> [accessed 10 May 2023]; see Bébout's website for his account of the early history of the *Body Politic* and the names of all members of the *Body Politic* Collective. Also, see the website devoted to the journal — 'Anatomy of the Body: An Exploration of the *Body Politic* 1971–1987' — for more information <https://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/bodypolitic/bphistory/history.htm> [accessed 20 June 2024]. For more work on the history of the *Body Politic* written by people directly involved with the paper or otherwise active in the gay liberation movement, see Gerald Hannon, *Immoral, Indecent & Scurrilous: The Making of an Unrepentant Sex Radical* (Cormorant Books Inc., 2022); *Flaunting It! A Decade of Queer Journalism from the Body Politic,* ed. by Ed Jackson and Stan Persky (New Star Books and Pink Triangle Press, 1982); Mark L. Robertson, 'AIDS Coverage in the *Body Politic*, 1981–1987: An Annotated Bibliography', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 32.3 (2002), pp. 415–31; Warner, *Never Going Back*.

5 Contrary to Canada, the US had a thriving scene of gay newspapers, especially on the west and east coasts. The origin story of the *Body Politic* and its initial local focus were shared by gay newspapers in the US, most of which — like *TBP* — would broaden their scope to cover national and international news of relevance to the gay community. However, this was not always the case. *Bay Windows*, for example, has been a primarily New England-oriented publication since 1983. Also, similarly to the *Body Politic*, most American gay newspapers were established by collectives that included people involved in gay liberation activism. Some of the most recognizable titles published in the US include the *Advocate*, the oldest gay newspaper established in Los Angeles in 1967, *Gay Sunshine: A Journal of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco, 1970–81), the *Gay Community News* (Boston, 1973–99), the *San Francisco Sentinel* (1974–95), and *Fag Rag* (Boston, 1971–ca. 1987). A look at copies of the *Body Politic* and its sister publications from the US suffices to see many similarities when it comes to regular features and general aesthetics, e.g. the layout, the use of drawings and photographs, the community pages, book review sections, letters to editors, etc. Each publication, however, would prioritize the content 'closer to home', attending to the news and covering events that would be of interest to their respective local and national readerships. The *Body Politic* was recognized and respected in the US, with the *Advocate* and the *Gay Community News*, among others, covering the *Body Politic*'s court battles (see e.g., the November 1978 issue of the *Gay Community News*) and encouraging readers to support the Canadian newspaper via the Free the Press fund. For more information about gay and lesbian newspapers in the US, see Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Faber & Faber, 1995); for a more personal account of the history of the *Gay Community News*, see Amy Hoffmann, *An Army of Ex-Lovers: My Life at the* Gay Community News (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

also driven by the feelings of frustration and unbelonging on the part of editors-to-be[6] who wished to counter a prevailing absence and misrepresentation of homosexual people in the media and the Canadian social fabric.[7] A long-time member of the *Body Politic* Collective, Rick Bébout, reminisced about Moldenhauer's anger at having his article on the 'We Demand' rally significantly rewritten by the people at *Guerilla* — an '"underground" tabloid of the day' — without his permission. 'We felt', said Bébout, 'this [the rally] is a really important thing; we [members of Toronto Gay Action] had all approved the article and thought everything should be in it that we put in it'.[8] As was the case with many non-commercial periodicals established at the time and in the years to come — feminist newspapers, feminist literary magazines, lesbian periodicals — the *Body Politic* was conceived to counter exclusion. To use the words of Barbara Godard — one of the founders of the pan-Canadian feminist journal *Tessera* — in the making of the journal the editors were 'taking the floor to themselves'.[9] As gay men, activists, and members of the gay community, they took the narrative into their own hands, creating a vital platform for underrepresented voices that not many wished to hear.

This article contributes to existing scholarship on the *Body Politic* by zooming in on selected episodes from the history of the magazine and editorial practices that broaden our understanding of how members of the *Body Politic* Collective performed editorial activism and how they went about fostering affective readerly communities — locally, nationally, and transnationally — via the pages of the journal as well as backstage editorial work. In almost two decades of publishing, members of the *Body Politic* Collective engaged in editorial activism to act on behalf of the individual and the collective, giving platform to unheard voices and neglected issues, exposing injustice and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and speaking loudly about rampant 'police repression and judicial homophobia'.[10] Striving to advance homosexual people's liberation from oppression, the *Body Politic* gave voice to a world-wide movement of homosexual people fighting for visibility, recognition, respect, justice, and equality. For many, the very existence of the *Body Politic* was a testimony to their own validity as human beings, the validity they saw celebrated in the pages of the paper. Homosexual people from Toronto, from Canada, and from around the world, could feel part of a global community that knew no borders.

There is another dimension to the complex story of belonging and community building at the *Body Politic* to which this paper attends only in passing. This dimension is discussed meticulously in the work of Juan Carlos Mezo-Gonzalez, Kelly Phipps, Nicholas Hrynyk, and David S. Churchill.[11] All of them examine the paper as significant for community formation but complicate what could too easily be deemed a story of success by analyzing the dynamics of unbelonging and exclusion at play in the *Body Politic* Collective's editorial practices and ideological preoccupations. Those practices

6 The word 'editor' is used throughout to refer to people who produced and edited the *Body Politic* even though they did not refer to themselves as 'editors' because of the label's allegedly hierarchical resonance.

7 See, for example, Roy Cain, 'Disclosure and Secrecy among Gay Men in the United States and Canada: A Shift in Views', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2.1 (July 1991), pp. 25–45; Kathryn Campbell, '"Deviance, Inversion and Unnatural Love:" Lesbians in Canadian Media, 1950–1970', *Atlantis*, 23.1 (Fall/Winter 1998), pp. 128–36.

8 Bébout, 'On the Origins of the *Body Politic*'.

9 Barbara Godard, 'Feminist periodicals and the production of cultural value', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25.2 (2002), pp. 209–23 (p. 211).

10 Warner, *Never Going Back*, p. 108.

11 See Mezo-González, 'Contested Images: Debating Nudity, Sexism, and Porn in the *Body Politic*, 1971–1987', *Left History,* 23.1 (2019), pp. 28–61; Kelly Phipps's '"Look over here, look over there, lesbians are everywhere": Locating Activist Lesbians in Queer Liberation History', Unpublished PhD Dissertation (2019); Nicholas Hrynyk, '"Pin the Macho on the Man": Mediations of Gay Male Masculinity in "*The Body Politic*", 1971–1987', Unpublished PhD Dissertation (2018); and David S. Churchill, 'Personal Ad Politics: Race, Sexuality and Power at the *Body Politic*', *Left History*, 8.2 (2003), pp. 114–34.

and preoccupations tended to prioritize sexual liberation above all else, frequently universalizing the homosexual experience to that of a white gay male, neglecting the perspectives of lesbians and gay people of color experiencing gender- and race-based oppression. In 'Contested Images: Debating Nudity, Sexism, and Porn in the *Body Politic* (1971–1987)', Mezo-Gonzalez discusses internal tensions and divisions at the *Body Politic* by analyzing visual imagery in the paper and bringing to light debates over representation, sexism, objectification, pornography, and feminism held between collective members, contributors, and readers. Churchill, on the other hand, examines racism in personal ads published in the paper, revealing race-related tensions within the gay community and the *Body Politic* internal structures. Hrynyk explores how the *Body Politic* shaped the thinking about gay male masculinity while prioritizing white male voices and marginalizing others. The topic of marginalization is also explored by Phipps in her magnificent work of 'excavation' of the voices of 'activist lesbians who wrote for the journal'. Their voices were continuously sidelined at the time of the paper's publication and have remained unacknowledged in the broader queer historical narrative.[12] All these examples showcase the heterogeneity of the *Body Politic*'s community, including that of the Collective whose members would frequently clash, disagreeing on the aspects of the journal's internal politics or other fundamental issues, e.g. race and sexuality, pornography, nudity, the age of consent, or the goals of gay liberation.[13] Hence, a 'community' discussed in the context of the *Body Politic* should not be understood as 'monolithic', for the notion of a community was frequently adapted and contested from within.

Did I mean it, then, when I said that the *Body Politic* helped '[h]omosexual people from Toronto, from Canada, and from around the world […] feel part of a global community that knew no borders'? I think the answer is yes. However, this was certainly not the case for every gay man or lesbian woman, let alone transgender person, because the community that the *Body Politic* attracted and supported, especially in its early years, was that of white gay men. Created to counter exclusion, the *Body Politic* would frequently replicate it. With that said, the intention of this paper, which highlights selected cases that focus on gay, and predominantly white, men, is not to perpetuate a narrow and exclusionary narrative. Rather, I believe that as much as we must expose and criticize the *Body Politic* for what it failed to do, and who it failed to include, we cannot lose sight of all the good work performed by the editors in the name of marginalized people (and this group, at the time, included white, gay men). The editors genuinely believed the *Body Politic* could become a space of resistance, visibility, and solidarity.

Affective Communities and Affective Ruptures

A look at selected letters sections of the *Body Politic,* as well as unpublished letters available in the *Body Politic* fonds held at ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2S+ Archives in Toronto, suggests that the readerly attachments engendered by the *Body Politic* depended on the reader's feeling of belonging to a real community of people who were like yourself, who cared about you and could be reached. As we read in one of the letters in the *Body Politic* 7, 'I'd like to thank the whole bunch of you for just the fact that a paper exists that expresses our views. […] Just finding out that you're not alone, you're not the only one that feels that way, that you're not wrong makes you a little stronger.'[14]

12 Phipps provides an illuminating argument to counter the misconception that lesbian women were absent from the *Body Politic*, arguing instead that their contributions were 'absented'. Throughout her work, she justifiably critiques the male-centered focus of the *Body Politic*.

13 See especially Phipps, '"Look over here"', chapter 6, part II.

14 Charmaine Lafoust, 'Lesbian at the Clarke', *Body Politic*, 7 (Winter 1973), p. 23.

In my thinking of the *Body Politic*'s affective readerly community, I turn to the work of Sara Ahmed and the concept of 'affective economies'. In 'affective economies', says Ahmed, 'emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities — or bodily space with social space — through the very intensity of their attachments'.[15] This alignment of individuals with communities, the 'sticking that creates the very effect of a collective' follows Brian Massumi's understanding of affect as 'transindividual' and inherently 'social' and 'relational'.[16] In turn, I see affective economies as linked to affective communities, the concept employed primarily in the field of world politics and international relations.[17] The transposition of 'affective communities' to print culture studies and periodical studies can be productive, however, if we consider that, to call a community affective is to think of it as a 'form of community distinguished by widely-held and collectively understood forms of feeling', a community 'constituted […] through shared patterns of emotional meaning and understanding'.[18] The importance of these 'shared patterns' manifests itself already in the above-quoted fragment from one of the readers' letters — many of which were similar in tone. To introduce 'readerly' to 'affective community' is to foreground the importance of print, the existence of a physical object capable of generating forms of community. For many, the reading, the touching of the paper, the writing of a letter to the collective, receiving a response, and seeing one's letter or personal ad in print was the only way to feel part of a community that was unapologetically real.

In attending to affective economies, it is also useful to consider the format of the periodical, which in itself — with its 'open-ended, multi-textured, serial form' — allows for what Fionnuala Dillane has referred to as affective 'periodical encounters'.[19] Considering such encounters in the realm of the *Body Politic*, I have been especially interested in, and aware of — following Dillane — the periodical's 'capacity to micro-manage feelings' via 'discursive disruptions', i.e., for example, unexpected structural changes, 'the contrast between anticipated repetition and actual swerve from the expected that creates affective intensity'.[20] These intensities are linked to, and result from, 'affective ruptures' within the pages of the periodical invoked by, e.g., the 'inclusion of specific content that can be read to run counter to the typical material found in the run of a periodical's pages'.[21] The editors at the *Body Politic* were no strangers when it came to 'engineering' 'affective ruptures' in an effort to provoke readers' (affective) responses.

Editorial Activism in the Pages of the *Body Politic*

After just a few weeks of intense work, five thousand copies of the first issue of the Body Politic were printed and sold on the streets of Toronto.[22] The 'three-fold' mandate, or 'purpose', of the paper was to inform the gay community about news and events of interest to them, to provide a forum for individuals to 'express their views on sexual

15 Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text*, 22.2 (2004), pp. 117–39 (p. 119).
16 Ibid., p. 219; Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Polity Press, 2015), pp. 204–15.
17 See Emma Hutchinson, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions After Trauma* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Emma Hutchinson, 'Affective Communities and World Politics', *E-International Relations*, 8 March 2018 <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/03/08/affective-communities-and-world-politics/> [accessed 5 May 2024]; Karin M. Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice: Agency, Body and Emotion in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
18 Hutchinson, 'Affective Communities and World Politics'.
19 Fionnuala Dillane, 'Forms of Affect, Relationality, and Periodical Encounters, or "Pine-Apple for the Million"', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.1 (2016), pp. 5–24 (p. 10).
20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Ibid., p. 12.
22 The cost of printing was covered from the collective's pockets. Bébout, 'On the Origins of the Body Politic'.

politics' but also to meet like-minded people, and to 'publish prose, poetry, book and film reviews, and graphics relevant to gay liberation'.[23] This introductory note on the goals of the *Body Politic* ended with the collective's direct address to the readers. In saying 'Gay Community is what you make it' and encouraging the submission of 'news, editorials, personal accounts, letters, philosophical meanderings, poems, interviews, book & film reviews, graphics, photos, etc.', the editors established the *Body Politic* as a communal endeavor. Published for fifteen years (a total of 135 issues), the *Body Politic* remained true to what the editors believed was the task of any gay publication — to print 'material which not only detailed the ways in which homosexuals were discriminated against, but which also defined gay oppression as a product of society's overall attitudes about sexuality and non-conformist behavior'.[24] However, the paper's fixation on sexual liberation and the liberationist outlook of many collective members resulted in the marginalization of groups of feminists and people of color who also were part of the gay and lesbian liberation movement for which the *Body Politic* advocated. According to Hrynyk, for example, the 'sex wars' debate revealed a significant divide between gay liberationists and some feminists, who criticized the *Body Politic*'s prioritizing of sexual freedom over gender equality.[25] Moreover, the pursuit of sexual liberation and the right to sexual expression and desire often took precedence over addressing racial inequalities or the experiences of groups who faced interlocking oppressions.[26]

Prior to 1971, the 'diverse and scattered gay population' of Canada 'had no means of communication'.[27] The *Body Politic* Collective set out to change this state of things, but in a country as vast as Canada, publishing a paper with an aim to build a nationwide community was a challenge, to say the least, primarily due to problems with distribution — the problems not exclusively related to money, but also reflective of rampant homophobia in the publishing industry. Hence, initially, the paper would be local in scope, covering news and events from Toronto and the province of Ontario. From 1974 onwards, as the paper's network grew as a result of increased subscription numbers, more distribution spots, word-of-mouth advertising, and editorial efforts, the *Body Politic*'s primarily local perspective started to become more national 'with articles on the gay and feminist movements in the west'.[28] Alongside these efforts to provide more comprehensive coverage of nationwide news, the editors worked to encourage local community building by, for example, providing listings and maps of gay spots in Canada's major cities like Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. Community building was further encouraged via the journal's regular features — classifieds, news of the gay (a play on news of the day), community pages, community forums, and editorials — which could, and did, endow the readerly community with the sense of belonging.

In the pre-Internet era and at the time of prevalent hostility towards and discrimination against gay people, sections such as classifieds allowed gay men and lesbian women to seek companionship and establish connections in a safe space. For example, an ad from Stafford B. Bright, a prisoner about to finish his sentence, was published in one of the issues of the *Body Politic*. Bright, who knew the paper and

23 'The Body Politic', *Body Politic*, 1 (November–December 1971), p. 2. When it comes to the third aim, prose and poetry were not published regularly, contrary to book/film reviews and graphics, of which there were many.

24 Tom Warner, 'Canadian Gay Polemical Literature. We Have Only Just Begun…', *Body Politic* 12 (March-April 1974), pp. 18–19 (p. 19).

25 Hrynyk, '"Pin the Macho on the Man"', pp. 61–63.

26 Churchill, 'Personal Ad Politics', pp. 123–25; for Hrynyk's discussion of the controversial 'houseboy' ad published in 1985 see Hrynyk, '"Pin the Macho on the Man"', pp. 249–51.

27 Bébout, 'On the Origins of *the Body Politic*'.

28 Editorial Collective, 'Editorial: never going back', *Body Politic*, 8 (Spring 1973), pp. 2–3 (p. 2). The Collective would contact activists from the west and invite them to join the Toronto-based team in editing the journal.

subscribed to it while in prison (the *Body Politic* offered free subscription to prisoners interested in the paper), sent a letter to the collective following the appearance of his personal ad in print. In the letter, he expressed his gratitude to the collective for making him feel accepted and included, adding: 'and though I will re-subscribe once I'm settled […] maybe you can send whatever balance of my subscription to someone else who may get as much enjoyment of it as I did'.[29] The classifieds were central for socializing, dating, and finding sexual partners, yet, as Phipps observed, 'they contributed significantly to the perception that the gay liberation movement represented the rights and perspectives of white gay men'. [30] These perspectives were often racist and sexist and they were voiced in submitted ads, something many readers of the *Body Politic* would protest in letters to editors.[31] In the 1980s, all classifieds sent to the paper would be reviewed by staff in light of the policy that 'the ads could not be published if they were in violation of the Canadian Criminal Code or if they made explicit exclusions of particular groups or individuals'.[32] Sometimes, however, the members of the Collective would openly disagree on whether or not an ad was racist, exposing fundamental divisions within the Collective.[33]

Apart from classifieds, the 'Community Page' — published regularly in every issue and open to 'group[s] or organization[s] who support[ed] the aims of Gay Liberation' — had both local and national community-building potential as it provided information about organizations across the country (gay alliances, women's centers, university associations, legal aid, clinics), but also events such as lectures, dances, meetings, and conferences that could be of interest to gay people and their allies.

The editorial activism in which the collective engaged through the pages of the journal took different forms across the years, but I would like to discuss two cases that reveal quite a lot about editing as a form of activism and an empowering, educational, liberating tool that — to borrow from Emma Hutchinson's theorizing of affective communities — 'in particular circumstances, and through particular activating representations or frames' can awaken 'emotions […] in ways that make possible collective, political ends'.[34] One step towards this productive mobilization of emotions was taken by Ed Jackson in the fourth issue of the *Body Politic* published in 1972. Having gone through the long and complex process of coming out to his parents, Jackson decided to share his experience with others in the community via the pages of the paper. 'Liberation begins at home or dad, I have something to tell you…' opened with Jackson's introductory statement about how he decided to come out to his parents in a letter. The decision to have his letter — and the parents' response — published in the paper did not come easily, though. As Jackson said: 'Frankly I have been hesitant to publish the exchange, since it appears to expose a private matter in a harshly public way. But I do it in the hope that it will be of some help to others […]. The challenge of re-education is vast. Why not begin it at home?'[35] Jackson's mentioning of the 'challenge of re-education' and the phrase 'liberation begins at home' showcased Jackson's, and the *Body Politic*'s, belief that change could be enacted on an individual level. Jackson

29 Stafford B. Bright, Letter to the *Body Politic* (7 April 1977), *The Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-007).
30 Phipps, '"Look over here"', p. 224.
31 Ibid., p. 224.
32 Churchill, 'Personal Ad Politics', p. 116.
33 Revealing editorial debates took place following the controversy surrounding the publication of the 'houseboy' ad, which in the eyes of many objectified black men and represented a white man's twisted and fundamentally racist fantasy. See Phipps, '"Look over here"', pp. 233–36.
34 Hutchinson, 'Affective Communities and World Politics'.
35 Ed Jackson, 'Liberation begins at home or dad, I have something to tell you…', *Body Politic*, 4 (May–June 1972), pp. 14–15.

believed in the necessity of coming out 'to dispel the miasma of silence and guilt and fear' that 'infected' the lives of gay people, but in his encouraging of coming out of the closet he recognized how the experience would not be the same, or even possible, for everyone.[36] In making the personal political despite the reservations, Jackson could potentially empower closeted gays and lesbians to throw off the shackles of shame and invisibility. His letter to his parents was interspersed with fragments from the parents' response laid out in italics. Jackson's tone was confident, unapologetic, and patient, but the parents' initial reaction was that of shock, sadness, and denial. The last word in the 'exchange' is given to the parents, and it does make one hopeful, because it shows a growth, a certain common pattern of thought and reasoning that ultimately ends with acceptance:

> I have just been reading your letter again. I guess I must be getting to understand your way of life better, as I can read it without getting all upset, so as long as you are happy and it doesn't interfere with your getting work, we have no right to condemn your way of living. I hope you will feel free […] as the big obstacle between us has been removed.[37]

Change does not come immediately. It needs time. Jackson's bold decision to have his intimate correspondence put in the spotlight for a greater good is a testimony to his feeling of responsibility for the community, his wish to see the members of the community free and respected. As a member of the collective, Jackson made a crucial editorial intervention in encouraging the community to follow in his footsteps, to face the fear of rejection, stand up for themselves, and take a step towards their liberation and the liberation of all gay people. That such coming out, especially to one's parents or close ones, remains a challenge to LGBTQ people around the world only strengthens the validity of Jackson's intervention. His helping hand, his experience, can still — sadly, but also luckily — help people trying to find a way to release themselves from the dark depths of the closet.

The concern expressed by Ed Jackson's parents that their son's homosexuality could make him susceptible to discrimination in the workplace was not unfounded. Canada in the 1970s saw a number of publicized cases of people, primarily gay men, who lost their jobs because of their sexual orientation. Three years after the exchange between Jackson and his parents was made public in the pages of the *Body Politic*, the twenty-first issue of the paper did not open with a usual editorial page, but instead offered its readers an 'affective rupture', opening with a news feature bearing a pronounced headline that said: 'Discrimination: A teacher fights back'. In the feature, Doug Hellquist told the story of Doug Wilson, a University of Saskatchewan student who was denied participation in an educational program for teachers because he was gay. In opening the issue with the feature, putting a large photograph of Wilson's face on the cover, and writing a long, politically engaged editorial, the collective took the two weapons at their disposal — the words and the paper — to take action against injustice, give more visibility to the case, and open the eyes of the community and Canadian society to societal double standards that ruined people's lives. In the editorial entitled 'JOIN US', the editors referenced another case of workplace discrimination (the case of John Damien, who was fired from work because of his sexual orientation), opening with the question: 'Two down. How many more to go?' 'There are some interesting lessons in the Wilson case', said the Collective: 'One is that certain liberal elements in executive

36 Ibid., p. 14.
37 Ibid., p. 15.

positions are quite willing to have us on the job. If we keep quiet'.[38] The editorial finished with a call to action, 'join us! […] as we march shouting through the streets of Canadian cities'. The 'discursive disruption' of the regular and the expected was clearly meant to affect the reader, to 'summon the reader […] optically, and psychologically' in an effort to protest on behalf of Wilson, Damien, and many others who could find themselves in a similar position.[39]

On page 9 of the same issue, under the telling headline 'The 16 cent Life Insurance Policy', the collective printed two letters of protest, one on behalf of Wilson and one on behalf of Damien, encouraging the readers to send them to the president of the University of Saskatchewan and the Chairman of the Ontario Human Rights Commission respectively. By appealing to the readers' sense of community and belonging — 'if they win, it's not simply a victory for them. You — all of us — are suddenly closer to the day when we will not have to hide what we are when we leave the house and go to work' — the editors hoped to mobilize the gay community to take collective action:

> Write two letters. If you can't […] clip the letters printed below, sign, and send them […]. We are asking you for 10 minutes of your time and 16¢ in stamps. Think of it as one of your cheaper life insurance premiums. Because if Damien and Wilson lose, it's going to cost you a lot more.[40]

The editorial appeal to the audience's responsibility to take action not simply to support and fight for the two men, but to support and fight for themselves — to look at their involvement as investment in their lives and their futures — had the potential of bringing together the community by joining its individual members in the struggle for the common good and encouraging them 'to actively contribute to social change'.[41] The editors would frequently resort to this strategy as they tried to mobilize their readers to take collective action. For example, in the editorial 'Free the living!' published in the *Body Politic* 15, the collective protested Canada's abortion laws, saying that 'the abortion laws and the laws that oppress gays are cut from the same cloth'.[42] And so, in their effort to draw the community's attention to discriminatory laws that were 'profoundly anti-female and anti-sexual', the Collective argued that even though gay men might feel like abortion laws do not apply to them, they still should realize that there is a lot 'at stake for gays' when the rights of women are limited.[43] This kind of editorial activism promised to build bridges and engender allyship, even if it remained in stark contrast to sexist attitudes and undertones palpable in the *Body Politic* on different occasions.

Fueled by the sense of belonging, shared struggle, and collective responsibility, the *Body Politic*'s editorial activism was not limited to Canada. In fact, the *Body Politic* Collective saw itself as part of a global gay liberation movement, regularly publishing news from abroad, including Sweden, Hawaii, Italy, the U.S., Denmark, West Berlin,

38 Editorial Collective, 'Join Us', *Body Politic*, 21 (November–December 1975), p. 2.

39 This is a paraphrase of an observation Sabine T. Kriebel makes in her essay on the affective resonances of John Heartfield's photomontages in the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ). Sabine T. Kriebel, 'Touch, Absorption, and Radical Politics in the Magazine: The Case of John Heartfield', *kritische berichte,* 4 (2012), pp. 21–31. Kriebel talks about the photomontages 'summon[ing] the viewer haptically, optically, and psychologically in order to agitate on behalf of the radical Left […] with a goal to create a community of radically-minded citizens who would actively contribute to social change' (p. 24).

40 'The 16 cent Life Insurance Policy', *Body Politic*, 21 (November–December 1975), p. 9.

41 Kriebel, 'Touch, Absorption, and Radical Politics', p. 24.

42 Editorial Collective, 'Editorial: free the living!', *Body Politic*, 15 (September–October 1974), p. 2.

43 Ibid., p. 2.

Argentina, South Africa, Australia, Spain, and others.[44] Feature articles published in the paper throughout the years would include pieces on, for example, the gay movement in Germany (which included a directory of German gay groups and associations) or the oppression of gay people in Mexico.[45] Reception of these types of texts was positive, for they were considered fundamental to the growth of gay consciousness in North America. As one reader wrote to the Collective: 'News and analysis of the struggles and oppression of gay people around the world and their participation in revolutionary movements is necessary for our understanding of the tasks here'.[46]

Despite the Collective's modest financial resources, the editors supported non-Canadian publications and organizations with donations, but also — apart from covering the news related to the liberation movement in other countries and being in touch with activists from these countries — took direct action to counter discrimination against gay people beyond Canada. In 1980, Tim McCaskell, a member of the collective at the time, sent a letter to the president of the Spanish Congress of Deputies on behalf of the *Body Politic* and 'hundreds of thousands of lesbians and gay men across this country', protesting the refusal of the Spanish government to legally recognize the Catalan Gay Liberation Front.[47] What comes to the surface here is how the hard-won status of the *Body Politic* and its profile in the community were used as legitimating factors that spoke to the *Body Politic*'s power to influence public opinion. In saying that 'We at TBP will continue to do our utmost to alert our readers across Canada and the US to this violation of human rights until FAGC and all such organizations are legally respected by the Spanish state', McCaskell utilized the journal as a tool and a means for social change.

'I feel as if you're my lifeline sometimes': The *Body Politic*'s Affective Readerly Communitie

In his memoir *Immoral, Indecent & Scurrilous: The Making of an Unrepentant Sex Radical*, Gerald Hannon, a long-time member of the *Body Politic* Collective, said that '[a]ny young man or woman who came upon a copy of TBP would soon have no doubt that their gay identity was good'.[48] Recollecting that he was the journal's 'version of Miss Lonely Hearts', Hannon shared that the collective

> frequently received letters from closeted and frightened youth, often in small towns. It was my job to write supportive, encouraging letters, putting them in touch with local gay organizations if any such existed.[49]

Clearly, Hannon knew that correspondence from readers in a precarious position, from people coming to terms with their identity — most often speaking openly about their

44 A lot of it was original content based on the editors' or commissioned writers' extensive reading of the news that related to the gay liberation movement around the world. There were instances, however, when the *Body Politic* would publish reprints from other, primarily American, newspapers, such as the Detroit-based *Gay Liberator* or *The Gay Alternative* or compile stories based on texts from different sources, e.g. the story 'Chilean Fascists Terrorize Gays' published in *Body Politic* 14 was based on the coverage found in *Gay Sunshine*, the *Gay Liberator* and *Fag Rag*.

45 See Jim Steakley's 'The Gay Movement in Germany Today', *Body Politic*, 13 (May–June 1974), pp.14–15; Gerald Hannon's 'Anatomia del homosexual: Oppression in Mexico', *Body Politic*, 13 (May–June 1974), pp. 16–17. News on the state terrorizing gays in Chile and on the growth of the 'revolutionary' gay movement in Portugal was published in *Body Politic*, 14 (July–August 1974), p. 7.

46 'Letters', *Body Politic*, 15 (September–October 1974), p. 3.

47 Tim McCaskell, Letter to the president of the Spanish Congress of Deputies (May 1980), *Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-357).

48 Hannon, *Immoral, Indecent & Scurrilous*, p. 197.

49 Ibid., p. 120.

sexuality for the very first time in the letters they wrote to the *Body Politic* — had to be empathetic, supportive, and encouraging. The collective regularly received letters from readers, some of them were published in the journal, but many of them were not. Most letters were from gay men and lesbian women from Canada and the US, where the *Body Politic* enjoyed considerable readership, but there were also letters from people in Japan, Australia, South Africa, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Zimbabwe, to name just a few.

The two examples I wish to focus on exemplify the significance of the *Body Politic* as a place where many readers felt they belonged, where they felt comfortable confiding in editors, and used letters as a sort of therapy. I see readers' letters to the *Body Politic*, not only the ones discussed herein, but the hundreds of letters the collective received in fifteen years, as 'archives of feelings' — the term coined by Ann Cvetkovich, but transposed into the context of periodical publishing by Elizabeth Groeneveld in her essay on the lesbian magazine *On Our Backs*.[50] For Groeneveld, readers' letters to editors can function as 'archives of feelings'

> not only because they contain evidence of readers' emotional attachments to the magazine and the lesbian public [gay and lesbian public in the case of the *Body Politic*] it fostered, but also because of their emotional curation on the part of editors.[51]

At the *Body Politic*, the 'emotional curation' of the correspondence was a daily practice for the collective, especially Hannon, who used their own experience to teach, empower, console, and guide gay men and women from Canada and abroad, nurturing an affective community of readers that spanned borders and continents.

On 8 April 1984, the collective received a four-page-long, hand-written letter from an American boy in his early twenties, who opened up about having been depressed because of his sexuality, but eventually growing to accept his authentic self. In his letter, the young man asked a question: 'Why am I telling this to you, a group of people I have never met but to whom I am indebted?' He himself knew the answer to this seemingly unanswerable question, acknowledging the role *Body Politic* had played in his journey towards self-acceptance: 'Because I am indebted to you and I want you to see how much you have done for me, personally'.[52] Features from the *Body Politic* helped him understand the broader causes of his unhappiness that did not lie within him, but within society. 'All of you are responsible', he wrote, 'for contributing to this gay boy's getting his act together and starting off in the direction of what will hopefully be a good life'. Worth noting is the fact that the *Body Politic* and its communal outlook instilled in the young man not only the courage to fight for himself, but also the sense of collective responsibility. As he wrote: 'So, as of tonight, my battle will not be a personal one of me versus my being gay, but rather a societal one of me versus the [indecipherable] idea that there is something wrong with men loving men and women loving women. *From this day on, I will not regret being gay!*'[53] The joyous, even victorious, tone of the letter met with an equally positive, understanding and empathetic response from Hannon. Two fragments from his lengthy response deserve special attention as they present Hannon as, first and foremost, a human being and a confidante rather than a journal editor,

50 Elizabeth Groeneveld, 'Letters to the Editor as "Archives of Feeling": *On Our Backs* Magazine and the Sex Wars', *American Periodicals*, 28.2 (2018), pp. 153–67 (p. 159); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (Duke University Press, 2023).

51 Groeneveld, 'Letters to the Editor', p. 159.

52 Sperling, D., Letter to the Collective (8 April 1984), *The Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-012-020).

53 Sperling, D., Letter to the Collective (underlined in the original).

and on the other hand, refer to the collective's belief in the *Body Politic*'s community building potential.

> I came out at 24, didn't meet someone who would become a lover until I was 27. Mind you, it then lasted for 9 years. And we're still the best of friends. Every minute was worth it. You've still got all of that ahead of you — and *I hope you feel you have all of us behind you*. We can't be there in any direct and personal way, of course, other people will be that to you. But in the wider social ways … I think you can count on us.[54]

Referring to the young man's expectations of entering the gay community, finding the love of his life, and living happily ever after, Hannon thoughtfully shared his personal experience about his relationship with himself and others. In doing that, he gave the youth a valuable life lesson about patience and resilience that he wouldn't have received from anyone else. The sentence 'I hope you feel you have all of us behind you' is incredibly powerful and must have been of enormous value for the addressee who could rest assured of the unceasing support of a group of people he had never met and who lived in a different country, but whose presence and support felt tangible across space. Hannon added that the educational and awareness-raising potential of the *Body Politic* for which the young man was so grateful was 'one of the reasons [they] publish[ed]', even though they often had to 'take it on faith that it work[ed]'. The boy's letter served as a confirmation for the collective that their efforts to foster a transnational community were not in vain.

Another exchange happened between Hannon and a 31-year-old man who sent a letter to the *Body Politic* but did it without revealing his name. The original handwritten letter shows, however, that the man did sign himself, but ultimately crossed his name out so that it could not be deciphered. This act of self-erasure, of choosing anonymity over visibility, is in itself charged with incredible emotion — the emotion that one can still feel emanating from the man's writing. A homosexual man living in one of the cities in Ontario, Canada, decided to share with the collective his difficult experience of coming out to his parents and family. Despite the man's deeply buried hopes of meeting with acceptance and support from his parents, he met with neither. The mother surfaced in the letter as the key figure responsible for the man's unhappiness as he kept referencing her proclivity towards pressuring her son into developing a self-loathing attitude. Faced with family rejection, the burden of self-hate, and the suffocating feeling of loneliness, the man did not lose hope that he could regain control of his life, his vulnerability in the letter signaling a change in his attitude: 'Tonight I cried for the first time; maybe there is a part of me still alive and ready to fight for my nature. […] It is against the laws of nature to be alone'.[55] To this, Hannon replied:

> Dear friend, You didn't sign your recent letter to us, so I can't address you by name. But I'm really glad you wrote, because I think you're on the right track, and *I want to make sure you continue on it and don't fall back to the attitude you used to have*.[56]

54 Gerald Hannon, Letter to D. Sperling (24 April 1984), the *Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-012-020) (emphasis added).

55 Anonymous, Letter to the Collective (4 February 1985), the *Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-012-020).

56 Gerald Hannon, Letter to Anonymous (12 February 1985), the *Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-012-020).

Having reassured the conflicted man about the power he had to take control of his life without succumbing to the pressures of family and society, Hannon became a bridge between the man and the local gay community, providing him with addresses and names of friendly and accepting places in London, Ontario. As if foreshadowing the man's struggle to break from isolation, Hannon mentored him further, saying: 'Maybe you'll feel shy and uncertain at first, and maybe people won't seem as friendly and receptive as you've fantasized, but don't let that get in the way of building your own life'.[57] That Hannon would know of local communities across Canada was no accident. In fact, people at the *Body Politic* put a lot of effort into keeping track of and documenting gay and lesbian organizing not only in major Canadian cities, but also smaller cities, towns, rural areas, and even abroad. This made them capable of helping those in need to navigate their lives as members of local communities of gays and lesbians. Frequently, the collective would be contacted by aspiring activists from other countries, for example Argentina, who sought to know more about the existence of a gay and lesbian movement in their country as the people at the *Body Politic*. Tim McCaskell pointed out a potential reason for this in his letter to a gay activist from Buenos Aires, speaking of 'the difficulty of maintaining the hold on our history'.[58] The word 'our' stands out in this statement as it once again shows the vision McCaskell shared with others at the collective — the vision of a global movement of gay and lesbian liberation. Throughout the years, the *Body Politic* — while primarily Canadian in scope and focus — would be dedicated to documenting the shared history of gay liberation and remains a well of knowledge for generations to come.

Led by dozens of people who volunteered their time and energy to provide a shelter, a refuge, a meeting spot, and a home for the transnational gay community, the *Body Politic* was a tool of liberation, a symbol of gay resilience, tenacity, and strength. It was also a tool which replicated what it was made to fight — exclusion. The complexity of the *Body Politic*'s history allows us to zoom in on various moments and practices that can be criticized, praised, debated. In this article, while acknowledging the deserved criticism, I chose to praise, critically attending to examples that show us editorial activism at play and the affective readerly community the *Body Politic* fostered. The existence of this community sheds light on the potential of editorial labor to create 'proximities across space and time' — the proximities that could prove liberating, transformational, and lifesaving.[59]

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57 Ibid.

58 Tim McCaskell, Letter to Gerardho Gay (26 April 1981), the *Body Politic* fonds, the ArQuives, Toronto (Box & File no. F0002-02-357).

59 Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne, 'Labours of Love and Cutting Remarks: The Affective Economies of Editing', in *Editing as Cultural Practice in Canada,* ed. by Dean Irvine and Smaro Kamboureli (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), pp. 189–98.