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# Confronting connectivity: Feminist challenges to the metropolis

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**ABSTRACT**

Google suggests that connectivity is the new paradigm for politics in the digital age. I argue that the effect of connectivity is a shift in the operation of power from the centralized institutions of the state to the decentralized logistics of inclusion of the digital metropolis. Explaining this power's features, I elaborate a media theory of inclusive disjunction and a feminist theory of pornographic exposure. Locating cultural resistance to connectivity, I look to feminist artistic responses to the city, from which I explore the feminist imagining of connectivity through the metaphor of the storm to reclaim their bodies as sites of contestation.

The future is "connectivity," or so say today's tech execs. "Soon everyone on Earth will be connected," they declare, followed by worn promises of increased productivity, health, education, and happiness.[1] On its face, they are simply echoing the old trope of the level playing field repeated by empire builders from Niccolò Machiavelli to Thomas Friedman. What then is new? How connectivity forges horizontal connections between the virtual and physical worlds. As a consequence, the digital logic of combinatorial difference is now used as a tool of governance to "intensify, accelerate, and exacerbate phenomena in the world so that a difference in degree will become a difference in kind."[2] In sum, connectivity is the new techno-utopian business strategy that braids the physical with the virtual to create a sociopolitical empire of difference.

Google's connectivity thesis is a sign that power is logistical —its authority resides in roads, cellphone towers, and data centers, which are overseen by legislators who keep the flows moving. There are political consequences for this shift; principally, connectivity names a power not primarily controlled by institutions associated with the state.[3] The transformation carries through power's abstract form and material expression. The abstract form of logistical power is not exclusion but inclusive disjunction (inclusive exclusion, inclusive omission, selective inclusion, etc.).[4] The material expression of logistical power is not the centralized state but the decentralized neighborhoods of the city. To reference this new type of power more easily, I call it "The Metropolis." The name "Metropolis" draws on a term first used in Italy, and whose sense of struggle Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri clarify by stating that "the Metropolis" is to us today as "the factory was to the

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industrial working class."[5] Scholars of the "infrastructural turn" usually locate resistance in blockades or counterinfrastructure, such as the disruption of Google buses in the San Francisco Bay Area or the development of new computational tools for activists.[6] My argument is that these scholars fail to appreciate the intersection of infrastructure and culture, such as "pharmaco-pornographic regime," which is the techno-sexual mixture of stimulation and exposure embedded in connectivity's liberal dreams of revealing transparency.[7] In this paper, I relocate culture through the formal politics of asymmetry and feminist artistic practices. Abstractly, I suggest that, through connectivity, "power has become the environment itself."[8] Materially, I identify how feminist approaches to technology enact novel forms of embodiment to weather the Metropolis as a bad storm.

Combining the digital and the city is not new to media studies. The booming 1990s inspired scholarship that was limited to measuring the effect of communication technology on urban development and the infrastructure of "digital cities."[9] Wider geographies of information as well as more recent work in postcolonial contexts have expanded these previous studies to new media objects and media effects in complex urban settings.[10] There have been fewer theorizations of the intersection of culture and technology on a planetary scale.[11] One example is Benjamin Bratton's project on the nomos of the cloud, in which he studies how planetary-scale computing reconfigures global geopolitics through six interpenetrating levels of "The Stack": Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, and User.[12] This paper takes up the challenge posed by Bratton to find the ambivalences of a "new civis romanus sum" that moves beyond "blood or land" of sovereign power and is instead constituted by a "commonly held relationship to infrastructure"—in this case, "the composite infrastructure of a metaglobal city that is simultaneously concrete, glass, steel, energy, water, information and the promiscuous combination of the above substances."[13]

I begin with a first part, "An empire of difference," where I explore the Metropolis as the manifestation of connectivity. I continue this line of inquiry by outlining the process of inclusive disjunction, whereby difference is dispersed through inclusion. I ultimately find that as a media object, the Metropolis operates through a process of polarization that results in a politics of asymmetry. I proceed with a second part, "The space of bad encounters," where I analyze feminist artistic responses to the city that resist the liberal desire for exposure. I continue by showing how materialist feminism confronts the Metropolis as a storm —not as a subject but an environment of general hostility. I conclude by examining feminist art projects that enact the principles of the politics of asymmetry by selectively engaging with technology.

## An empire of difference

### *The Metropolis as a media object*

My theorization of the Metropolis begins with Empire, a paradigmatic model of contemporary power beyond the centralized nation-state. Customary definitions of Empire follow from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's reintroduction of the term in their 2000 book *Empire*, and they usually focus on a polycentric sovereignty of global governance as it intersects with the postmodern production of informatized, immaterial, and biopolitical products.[14] Empire has the same earthly existence as any other capitalist abstraction,

such as the market and other forms of exchange. The abstraction itself is irrevocably split into a separate ideal essence and material existence that together underwrite social interaction.[15] However devoid of existence, Empire is one half of a real abstraction of contemporary power —its formal constitution—that persists as the force behind a concept for organizing and directing the capitalist world market.[16] As a result, Empire operates through management and circulation, but it is not extensive with its product: the Metropolis.

My proposal is that the Metropolis is connectivity, as it is Empire's solution to the problem of communication. The architecture of the Metropolis follows a mathematical theory of communication, as Claude Shannon would have it, and actualizes it according to the cybernetic dreams of Norbert Weiner.[17] The Metropolis does not flatten, make subservient, or impose anything common to its many constituent parts —it performs the rather shallow task of "putting-into-communication" to create a "discordant harmony."[18] What the Metropolis concretizes in its expansive network of connections is not information but relation. It is the material existence of a technical diagram drawn up to establish communication to establish control that spans the distance between heterogeneous elements. Although the name "Metropolis'" makes it appear to be a grand city, the Metropolis is not a city at all. The Metropolis is not urban, it is posturban —it replaces the city after the abolition of the distinction between town and country.[19] The Metropolis does not do away with nation-states, it annexes them as parts in patchwork of different pieces.[20] To put these otherwise foreign elements into communication with one another, the Metropolis connects through inclusive disjunction: the mutual connection and contagion of unrelated elements (as opposed to the simple gathering of the selected).[21] The process of inclusion follows a neoliberal path that does not require pieces to operate through a shared logic but unfolds their interiors through exposure. This harsh opening-up process makes the Metropolis a hostile expanse that is subjectively experienced as deepening alienation.

Connectivity frustrates traditional modes of social engagement. In the streets of the Metropolis, political power both spreads and concentrates —*spreading* as global corporations, international bodies, and private interests bypass the forces of traditional political institutions, and *concentrating* as information systems employed in government and industry enable the surveillance, registration, and control of populations.[22] Even without complete media convergence, the Metropolis is driven by "strategies" characteristic of prevailing media cultures.[23] Actions driven by modernist notions of novelty, authenticity, or truth are easily "overwhelmed by the open network ecology" of oceanic difference or get marooned on "a self-contained and self-referential archipelago of the like-minded."[24]

Digital studies' provocative contribution to urban studies is the "computational layer" and the subsequent relationship between code and surface appearances.[25] Extending already existing work on computation, perhaps we can theorize the Metropolis as a media object by following the McLuhanite suggestion that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium."[26] Here, the physical and the virtual are intersected, but now recoded as materiality and culture. In this task, the German materialist school gives helpful guidelines: the analyst should treat signs as signals and semiotics as physics, and back again.[27] It may be tempting to eliminate culture altogether, but hardware alone appears meaningless. When one gazes into an electric circuit, nothing gazes back.

Software's visual environments seem to be the real point of access—in particular, operating systems populated by desktops and recycling bins.[28] Transistors are not represented on the screen here. This is not to say that software exists independent from hardware. In fact, the basic function of hardware is to emit "signifiers of voltage differences."[29] What connects hardware and software is then a "functional analogy to ideology."[30] Like the ideological effect of the commodity form, concrete is made abstract when hardware is made visual through software; or as Althusser defines ideology, software provides "a 'representation' of the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[31] Beyond the surface of software is its depth: code, which is part language and part machine, both scriptural and executable.[32] The role of language thus peers behind software's false appearance as pure function. Software's representational function emerges out of meaninglessness only through the ideological act of interpretation.[33] As such, media objects can be both technically diagrammed and studied according to their cultural expression. Every media object similarly contains both a diagram and an expression that make up its emergent environment.[34] Media and literary studies have outlined theories for such a multidimensional analysis, demonstrating the different operations of speech, writing, and code.[35]

The Metropolis should then be described in similar terms to network culture—its mode of governance relies so heavily on information that its vectors of change result from an abundance of information and accelerate its informational character.[36] Bringing together digital telecommunication flows and physical corporeal flows, urban geographers have created images of the contemporary process of urbanization.[37] Yet a purely computational solutions "tends to be aligned with relatively authority-seeking, hierarchical, and often politically conservative forces —the forces that justify existing forms of power."[38] So within the context of network culture, the political challenge of media theory is to identify how culture resists becoming subservient to the ever-growing power of the network.

### The polarized politics of asymmetry

How does connectivity reconfigure antagonism? This question is important, as many political theorists place antagonism, dissensus, or even agonism at the heart of political life.[39] The Metropolis's reconfiguration of antagonism comes from its architecture of connection—a common space that simultaneously differentiates and diverges. A familiar media object with the same architecture is the Internet, which connects divergent elements while also sustaining walled gardens and hostile media. The basic function of this architecture is communicative: the overcoming of incompatibilities to enable cooperation, which can be extracted for profit, collaboratively shared, or tied to conflict.[40]

Abstractly, connectivity operates through *inclusive disjunction*, a process that puts otherwise foreign elements into communication with one another through an encounter that does not require those pieces to operate through a shared logic.[41] Rather than infolding some common term, such as the introjection of an imperial dictate, The Metropolis unfolds. It exposes interiors through a mutual opening up (to name a few: the privatization of economic risk through increased debt obligation, the removal of tariffs that protect national industries, or the exemption of citizenship rights against government assassination).[42] In this sense, those who condemn capitalism as a homogenizing force are incorrect —inclusion can spread through divergence. The Metrpolis retains differential relations of parts by selecting "a particular zone that varies with each" that will make

possible its integration of the "sum of infinitely tiny things."[43] Furthermore, by being more than inclusion based on a common term (the law, a nation, a people), disjunction is pure relation, a movement of "reciprocal asymmetric implication," that expresses only difference itself (and not imposing equivalence, resolving into a general category, or synthesizing into a superior identity).[44] The Metropolis hence shares Deleuze's "most profound insight" that "difference is just as much communication, contagion of heterogeneities," which means, "to connect is always to communicate on either side of a distance, by the very heterogeneity of terms."[45] The effect of this contagion does not result in a unity, combination, or fusion; inclusive disjunction maintains a "politeness"—"an art of distances."[46]

Deleuze is pessimistic about connectivity. With Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, he argues for distrusting communication, as "commercial professional training" has made philosophy subservient to marketing and transformed concepts into advertising slogans.[47] He ultimately argues that "continuous control and instant communication" constitutes a new form of power that must be evaded.[48] This leads him to find refuge in "vacuoles of noncommunication," which can serve as "circuit breakers so we can elude control."[49]

Inclusive disjunction gives the Metropolis a categorically different relationship to difference. It spatializes difference, which allows the Metropolis to outmaneuver the traditional politics of difference, such as liberal freedom or multiculturalism. This is why many metropolitan spaces expand without what appears to be pregiven patterns or rules, such as The Third Italy or Australia's Gold Coast.[50] The primary strategy of the Metropolis is thus to diffuse differences through inclusion rather than confront them through antagonism. Within this system of inclusion, difference is not a threat but the means by which contemporary power maintains a hold on the perpetual present. The effect of this temporal modulation is that historical time disappears as "contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning."[51] The accelerated speed of media increasingly makes networked media, such as the Internet, a breeding ground for conspiracy and insinuation, as the sheer volume of participants and incredible speed of information accumulation means that in the time it takes to put one conspiratorial theory to bed, the raw material for many more will have already begun circulating.[52]

Such a system of power cannot be escaped by simply celebrating the differences that grow out of life in the Metropolis, for inclusive disjunction allows the Metropolis to connect otherwise incommensurate subjects, flows, temporalities, and visibilities without suppressing their differences. In assembling them, the Metropolis does not leave those incommensurate things unperturbed. Rather, connectivity follows the database logic of positivity that was metaphysically prefigured by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*.[53] Here, things are introduced into the Metropolis through a plane of positivities that unfolds secured elements, exposes them to risk, and eliminates their futurity. Unlike Debord's "society of the Spectacle," where the management of society is still dominated by the human eye, we have entered the machine-readable era where information flows circulate outside the reach of human perception. We are thus given the impression that "the more things change, the more they stay the same." The inclusion and proliferation of difference is thus not a motor for change but stasis. The political potentials made available through inclusive disjunction are the familiar channels of liberal capitalism, such as public influence, legal privilege, and market power. All of these

work through a principle of capture often described as "communicative capitalism," which expands through circuits of exploitation and submission.[54]

Resistance to connectivity may require the other side of disjunction, exclusive disjunction: the forced choice between two options. What exclusive disjunction offers is a path for evading the capture as "just another difference." The first obstacle to exclusive disjunction is liberal pluralism, which is so deeply intertwined with the politics of difference that the very notion of exclusivity may be a tough pill for some to swallow. Forced choice is not the enemy of difference, however, as it does not reduce the world to a simple binary. There are certainly moments of exclusive disjunction that should remain the cause of intense political suspicion, such as the trans-phobic claim that masculinity and femininity are exclusive. Exclusive disjunction does not force a choice between two homogeneous forms; rather, it intensifies whatever incommensurability exists between worlds of difference —on each side of a network, on each side of a multiplicity. This is how Deleuze and Guattari can simultaneously affirm "a thousand tiny sexes" and that all radical gender politics begins through "becoming-woman."[55] In fact, the illusion that there is only one possible world is a lie perpetuated in the Metropolis to maintain a perpetual present. Exclusion's difference-making potential only appears paradoxical from the perspective of pluralistic liberalism. If one begins instead from the perspective that the difference of the Metropolis is a repetition of the same, then exclusivity simply clarifies the difference between reform and revolution. To put it suggestively but crudely: instead of convergence culture that puts everything into communication, exclusive disjunction seeks a divergence culture that spins things off to pursue their own paths. There are already instances of this divergence, as seen in various subcultures of glitch and noise, but they do not politicize incompatibility. It is thus postcolonialism that should be our guide, as it has already politicized the incommensurable and has laid a blueprint for global delinking.[56]

Conflicts in the Metropolis are overdetermined by the aestheticization of power, which gives them an added cultural dimension; yet even when aestheticized, older forms such as the wide appeal of mass movement or the asymmetric power of guerrilla operations do not pass away. The old still leaves residual traces that inform the strategic principles that dominate this new terrain. What remains primary in the Metropolis is *the process of polarization* —the motor of capitalist urban development.[57] This polarization drives the politics of digital culture, what Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker call the "politics of asymmetry," which appears when conflict becomes a struggle between formally distinct diagrams of power and their effects.[58] The politics of asymmetry is in contrast to conflicts between symmetrical forces, such as policy conflicts between two political parties. In symmetry, powers appear as mirror images of each other as they enact comparable strategies. The forces of asymmetric conflict are usually "grassroots networks posed against entrenched power centers."[59] Throughout the twentieth century, asymmetric strategies rose with the influence of guerilla war in decolonial struggles and expanded into other spheres of life with the new social movements of the 1960s, the computational revolution in industrial production of the 1980s, and networked societies of the 1990s to today. The difference in formal organizing principles is not just an effect but also the cause; the diagram is the tactic. Mao's insight is that guerrilla war succeeds not on the open field of battle but by wearing down its enemy through protracted war, which eventually makes warfare so costly that occupiers have no choice but to eventually withdraw their own forces. A formal consideration of asymmetric conflicts reveals that each side is

opposed, yet they do not meet on equal footing —"it is not simply that feminism is opposed to patriarchy, but that they are asymmetrically opposed."[60] The strategic question for politics of difference, then, is how to identify something formally asymmetric to the Metropolis and its process of polarization.

What makes the Metropolis a significantly different strategic environment, then, is that not only its polarized asymmetry but the forces of digital culture and urbanization that would not otherwise be present. The Red Army Faction notes, for instance, that "neither Marx nor Lenin nor Rosa Luxemburg nor Mao had to deal with *Bild* readers, television viewers, car drivers, the psychological conditioning of young students, high school reforms, advertising, the radio, mail order sales, loan contracts, 'quality of life,' etc."[61] As a result, struggles emerge in the Metropolis not against "an openly fascist" enemy but as a "system in the metropole" that "reproduces itself through an ongoing offensive against the people's psyche."[62] Moreover, the cause behind the problems that people face is increasingly nonhuman —from the algorithms governing Wall Street financial transactions to the Obama Campaign's voter prediction models, material objects are interpreted like information on the Internet: inhuman movements "recorded in a myriad of different locations (log files, server statistics, email boxes)" treated as "the clustering of descriptive information around a specific user" and devoid of a real identity.[63] Once fully rendered within this new strategic environment, escape no longer opens spatial avenues for resistance. Escape paradoxically comes from confrontation; yet those conflicts will not look like former struggles, which found clear enemies in robber barons or corrupt politicians. What is left is the struggle over information theory's concept of communication: the accurate reproduction of an encoded signal across a media channel (telephony, radio, computing), which reintroduces basic material questions over the production, transmission, and disruption of power.

## The space of bad encounters

### Embodying the Metropolis

The Metropolis advances connectivity's liberal principles of communication, language, and cooperation as their capitalist appropriation is becoming "the life of the city itself."[64] Behind these disembodied abstractions hides sexual exploitation. Although the Metropolis is networked and informatized on the computational layer, it operates through the "pharmaco-pornographic" soft technologies that initiate cycles of excitation-frustration at the intersection of technologies of the body (biotechnologies, surgery, pharmaceuticals) and representation (film, television, new media).[65] These technologies commodify labor through a contract of service that gives a sexual double meaning to the liberal ideals of access, free expression, and transparency —the pharmaco-pornographic regime offers access to bodies, puts a pricetag on sensual expression, and guarantees ever-more-penetrating forms of exposure.

Beyond the postmodernization of production, Hardt and Negri characterize the Metropolis in two additional ways, the first of which is that the Metropolis *organizes a space of encounter* by providing a shared structure for the interaction and communion of people and perceptions.[66] These encounters are spaces of contingency, and regardless of how space is used to structure these encounters, their emergent effects remain unpredictable

and surprising. As Manfredo Tafuri argues, because power "speaks many dialects," then it is "the construction of physical spaces" that is "certainly the site of 'battle,'" as it is accessed through the "borders, remains, residues" it leaves after the "collision" of the encounter.[67] Also striking about these encounters is that they organize "brief metropolitan contacts" rather than "frequent and prolonged association."[68] However aleatory and brief, encounters contribute to the third dimension of the Metropolis: *material histories*, which pathologically prevent good encounters through their hierarchies, divisions, and polarizations that "bombards you" with negative encounters.[69] These hierarchies and divisions are the marks of colonial relations, racism, patriarchy, and other exploitation that flow through the veins of the Metropolis and pour out onto its streets, and the pathology often runs so deep that Hardt and Negri declare: "the Metropolis is a jungle, and the form of the common and encounter it presents are ones you should run from!"[70]

What if the Metropolis is not a jungle, however, but a storm "that does not confront us like a subject, facing us, but like an environment that is hostile to us?"[71] The pornographic transparency of connectivity denudes subjects by exposing them to the dangerous forces of the outside. Imagining the Metropolis as a storm matches the reality of its harshly gendered landscape of fear and violence, one that restricts women's access to resources, inhibits their ability to find dignified work, and delivers the daily assaults of catcalls and other violences.[72] The term risks naturalizing the oppression that women face, a concern reflected in the adage "everybody complains about the weather, but nobody *does* anything about it!"[73] Yet the traditional depiction of crime as the occasional result of bad actors is not sufficient. The metaphor of the storm powerfully signals the structural conditions of ongoing urban hostility as a space of bad encounters and fraught material histories. The ecological dimension of the metaphor thus strengthens the links between the city and earlier feminist methods for studying structural violence not isolated to a single individual.[74]

Innumerable feminist collectives have used the city as an object of inquiry, many taking cues from Italian feminism and the feminist social center movement, such as Madrid-based Precarias a la Deriva, which "wanders" the city to find the "fragmented, informal, invisible work that we do,"[75] Pittsburgh's SubRosa, which uses "site-u-ational" art that "centers on the uses and implications of biotechnology as it applies to sexual difference, race, and transnational labor conditions,"[76] and Feel Tank Chicago, which works to "depathologize negative affects so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action."[77] What these feminist media projects reveal is the unavoidable commonality between women who weather the daily assault of patriarchy like a bad storm, which is a consequence of the gendered way in which the Metropolis is embodied and experienced. Such negative encounters stick to bodies as frustrations and feelings and is later channeled into grief, outrage, or simply suffered in seclusion.[78]

Most sober-minded critics find the uglier of our shared feelings unfit for something as noble as liberation, which may be why so few political projects outwardly declare that they draw their strength from envy, irritation, paranoia, and anxiety. Sianne Ngai argues that although these negative affects are weaker than "grander passions" and thus lack an orientation powerful enough to form clear political motivations, the unsuitability of weakly intentional feelings "amplifies their power to diagnose situations," and those "situations marked by blocked or thwarted actions in particular."[79] From this perspective, ugly feelings provide epistemological access to the bad encounters organized by the Metropolis—

especially those that are cruel replacements meant to inspire only enough optimism to discourage the search for a better alternative.[80] Ugly feelings may be not just the result of bad encounters, then, but a form of resistance enfolded by the body that can be used as a public resource.

Art and media projects fruitfully demonstrate the diagnostic potential of negative affects in an urban context. The feminist project Public Feelings responds to the urban experience of depression with scholarship, art, and media objects. After decades of a political work on queer activism, the AIDS crisis, antiracist advocacy, electoral campaigns, and antiwar mobilizations, these feminists undertook a program of diagnosis and self-care. The positive valence of a depressive attitude seemed lost, as all that seemed possible was full-blown depression. Recognizing collective burnout, they questioned dominant diagnostic paradigms, which look for causes in neurochemical imbalances or damaged psyches. Hardly convinced by solely clinical explanations for their shared anxiety, exhaustion, incredulity, split focus, and numbness, they began investigating how the already-alienated life in the Metropolis was compounded by the trauma of national crises, beginning with 9/11 and continuing with the war in Iraq, the Bush reelection, and Hurricane Katrina.[81] This is not to say that they find psychiatry or psychoanalysis wrong or counterproductive, but these feminists were determined to turn feelings into collective forces against the Metropolis; and from that struggle, Feel Tank Chicago was born.

Feel Tank Chicago seeks access to political life through the affective register. The project names their malaise "political depression," which they define as "the sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better."[82] To further their investigation, Feel Tank holds conferences, exhibitions, and International Days of the Depressed. As a camp celebration of depression, they dress in bathrobes and protest with banners, signs, stickers, and chants emblazoned with slogans diagnosing the environment of hostility produced in the Metropolis: "Depressed? It Might Be Political"; "Exhausted? It Might Be Politics"; or just "I Feel Lost."[83] Contrary to cynical ideology's denunciation of those who are apathetic as complicit with the status quo, political depression identifies the Metropolis and not selfishness or individual illness as the cause of apathy. Causes for this suffering are numerous and easy to identify —the racism of white supremacy, the exploitation of global capitalism, the sexism of patriarchy, the degradation of the environment, and the violence of heteronormativity to name a few —while the course for their abolition is not readily apparent. Political depression thus demonstrates how the Metropolis spreads depression under the beating sun of exposure, causing subjects to seek the internal refuge of social isolation. The group has found a less restricted route through the Metropolis as a "feel" tank, which works to turn private feelings into a public resource for political action. And to this end, Feel Tank operates in the nexus of activism, academia, and art. Such an approach reveals different paths to politics, animated by perspectives that still imagine alternatives to the Metropolis and are careful to avoid those channels long mastered by exploitation.

By making depression political, many of the Feel Tank projects challenge a deeper and more pervasive blockage: the interiority of the subject. With its attention to the affective dimension of politics, Feel Tank upsets the Lockean notion of a dark room of the self. Affects point to a circuit of power whereby external forces impress themselves on the biological imperatives of bodies, which makes emotion an emergent quality of the

interrelational exteriority that constitutes the Metropolis even if a necessary biological component exists in the body.[84] And although a certain body may be predisposed to depression, its affective cause emerges as a political event in the life of the Metropolis. Identifying such a cause may be difficult, as depression often arises due to something as diffuse as bad weather or accumulative time spent in an adverse environment, but it is in this sense that patriarchy appears as a storm or a desert. It can therefore be said that affect not only demands that the emotions of subjects count as politics but also demands a political account of emotion exterior to subjects; as Ann Cvetkovich writes, politicizing feelings requires "the same historicization that is central to Foucauldian and other social constructionist approaches to sexuality" because "Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis applies as much to affect as sexuality, warranting a skeptical approach to claims for interiority or emotional expression as the truth of the self."[85]

## Mediating feminist futures

What exactly does feminist struggle look like in the context of the Metropolis? One image of thought comes from the problematic posed by Donna Haraway in the early 1980s: what is more powerful, the eco-goddess or the cyborg feminist?[86] An eco-feminist response to the Metropolis is obvious: it would amplify the already existing "natural resistances'" of the body. Recent work has identified sites of resistance. Sleep, for instance, wages a passive war against digital capitalism's attempts to every second into a productive moment.[87] While the digital aspect of these studies is explicit, they rely just as much on the German sociologists of the city (Simmel, Weber, Benjamin) as much as Marx. The feminist dimension highlights how sleep is a time of vulnerability. In sleep's temporary disengagement from the bustling time of the Metropolis, we abandon ourselves to the care of others. The cyborg feminist response is perhaps more queer. Rather than pulling the handbrake, the cyborg would chart an ecstatic rhythm out of orbit. The problem then becomes a question of how to achieve escape velocity. Cyberfeminists argue that gendered bodies have long been central to technology, whether as typists, telephone operators, the first coders, or other laboring subjects.[88] Forcing women to choose between themselves and technology would then be asking them take away a part of their history. The revolutionary cyberfeminism of the Metropolis may instead be "accelerationist." [89]

Instead of finding shelter from the most destructive tendencies of capitalism and other social processes, accelerationism expands them to the point of revolutionary transformation. An example is Paul B Preciado's high-speed study of a "feminist hooked on testosterone," *Testo-Junkie*, whose self-documentation of nonmedical experiments with hormone gel is meant to operate as "a manual of gender bioterroism undertaken on a molecular level."[90] Explaining resistance to the pornographic gaze, Preciado mentions an interview with porn actress Nina Roberts who explains that, "certain porn actresses fatten up to a high degree when they stop making films, to avoid being recognized and to desexualize themselves."[91] Advancing a trans-feminist alternative, Preciado wonders if "it would be easier for them to take testosterone and change genders."[92] Both Roberts and Preciado suggest strategies of selective engagement, each charting a path through the pharmaco-pornographic regime. As such, they offer an essential feminist corrective to divergence-based strategies for resistance, such as "unplugging." While there has been considerable discussion of the negative impacts that recent technology has on the

body—anxiety, panic, exhaustion—the common prescription is to sign off.[93] Embodied feminism instead suggests a dialectical remediation captured by Margaret Atwood's suggestion that "It isn't running away they're afraid of," as "we wouldn't get far," and feminist revolt instead works through "those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge."[94] Bodies conceived as such are not simply the object of technology but essential nodes in the struggle for divergence.

In the summer of 2007, Feel Tank Chicago convened a group art show entitled Pathogeographies. The point of the show was to perform a geographic survey to get a reading of "the emotional investments, temperatures, traumas, pleasures, and ephemeral experiences circulating throughout the political and cultural landscape."[95] Among the many artists, scholars, and other participants, one group exhibited their striking project called "Psychological Prosthetics." Bringing together public art, media objects, and street surveys under the guise of the corporate entity Psychological Prosthetics, artists Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman take their message to urban spaces across the world. Dressing in white lab coats and sporting sleek suitcases, they look as if they had just walked off the page of a big pharma magazine ad onto the streets of Chicago. Cloaked in the institutional authority and depersonalized professionalism, the artists approach potential clients with a well-rehearsed pitch asking them if they would like to try various products.[96]

The point of Psychological Prosthetics is to explore people's so-called emotional baggage. To do so, they arm themselves with provoking rhetoric and glossy handmade art objects to engage potential collaborators. While on the street, the veil of corporate medical authority allows them to start a conversation with strangers, and many strangers' early suspicions melt away to be replaced by an interest in determining whether Psychological Prosthetics is earnest or a parody.[97] As the artists enter strangers' personal space, they discuss how best Psychological Prosthetics can "help handle your emotional baggage in political times."[98] Psychological Prosthetics (PP) develops a number of products and protocols, each designed to elicit a different type of response. Four of their products are: one, the 30 Second Rant Recorder, "an electronic hand-made device to activate your outrage;" two, the PP Band Aid, "to bandage shame and soothe apathy;" three, PP Lean On Me, "to lean back and control your anxiety through a series of resin forms, shaped for your body to lean on;" and four, custom designed-luggage, "made to handle your emotional baggage."[99]

PP's cultural-material response to the Metropolis proceeds by way of the McLuhanuseque method of probes. For McLuhan, the probe is meant to conjure up images of exploratory scientific devices inserted into bodies or environments. Probes simultaneously search and disrupt, prodding at materiality to find its laws and limits, perceptively revealing exactly what it will take to make something transform. The "sting of perception and the shock of recognition" delivered by probes, however, are just as literary as they are scientific.[100] This is because McLuhan's probes are not scientific instruments made out of metal but intellectual provocations fashioned from words. To him, every one of his aphorisms is a probe. PP further expands the senses beyond McLuhan's probes, which are largely confined to various genres of public address. They instead develop the notion that "the human body is now a probe, a laboratory for experiments."[101]

There are two important outcomes of the many other encounters organized by PP: an affective reconfiguration of how to talk about feeling, and a new diagram for mapping divergent paths. First, the affective reconfiguration turns feelings into a publicly shared

substance by affirming the notion that "emotions run the other way, too: sometimes start-ing 'out there'" so that they can begin "linking up with something in us so that we feel drawn in and become personally involved."[102] Their media devices thus materialize the outside-in model of emotion common to crowd psychology by signaling and directing the affective flow of feeling. They further blur the distinction between inside and outside by making emotions into a public resource. Feelings that we are told to hide away in isolation, like the sadness of depression, were not stuck to an individual person but surfaces as "an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs."[103] Made collective, affects were then evaluated on the social register while still being felt on a personal basis, which revealed that feelings are the individuated realization of the relation between subjects.[104]

Women already embody divergence in the split identities they perform in the mean streets of the Metropolis. Such divergence is necessary to ward off routine street harass-ment, which is often slung at women under deceptively cheery requests for women to appear happier. Sara Ahmed contends that because happiness has been historically given as an emotional reward to women for submission to gendered demands, especially those of the family, the struggle over happiness "forms the political horizon in which fem-inist claims are made."[105] Treating affect as a point of disagreement is one way to maintain its ambivalence and a crucial aspect of that disagreement is the struggle over happiness. Ahmed's account of happiness shows that the affective landscape of the Metropolis is sealed by a sadistic contract that fuses the cruel thrill that comes from exploiting others with the self-destructive delights of being oppressed, bossed around, hopelessly addicted, completely dependent, and knowing your place, which creates a split subject that desires happiness but only experiences limited pleasure.[106]

Ahmed argues that feminism should end the tireless pursuit of pleasure and embrace the role of the killjoy. Killjoys, as she defines them, initiate a revolt against the promise of happiness through "acts of revolution" and "protests against the costs of agreement."[107] Feminists complete their conversion to killjoys when they abandon happiness and embrace affects as troublemakers. The face of their struggles may appear surprisingly common—queer novels that end on a sad note, or spoilsports who ruin the atmosphere of a room—but their aim is transformative: to not satisfy already existing tastes but to establish new ones. This requires dismantling the current architecture of the soul and the construction of a new one. Killjoys thus open escape routes from the Metropolis that "open a life" and "make room for possibility, for chance" by wanting not only "the wrong things" that we have been asked to give up but also to "create life worlds around these wants."[108] Yet such openings are only visible to those who have given up on the illu-sion that positive affects draw out the best in people.

Second, the prosthetic aspect of the project highlights the transformation of private feeling to shared feminist technology. As Marshall McLuhan argues, technology is like a prosthetic in that it serves as an extension of the human body.[109] Just as a walking stick is an indispensable part of a blind person's faculty of sight, PP creates a new way to extend feeling from private emotion to public resource. PP's custom luggage allows feel-ings to be contained by easily identified containers, which also makes it appear to exist external to the person who feels it. In other words, they demonstrate how affects escape possessiveness. Even visualizing fatigue as an object and treating it as such coaxes people to explicitly connect their internal feelings to external problems. Once externalized,

the baggage may remain property of the owner but can also be carried in a bag like tool, disposed of if it is toxic, or sent to intervene in another situation.

The externalization offered by PP need not be therapeutic, however, which only sets forth the modest goal of survival. The increased capacities afforded by prosthetics allow one to pursue an even greater externalization: an escape to a new environment. Such movement is the probing purpose of prosthetics, as they can be used to explore possible worlds not yet actualized. Although corporate in appearance, PP are troublemakers in spirit. For the troublemaker, life is not about survival but escape—escape from the causes of suffering, escape to a better world, and most importantly, escape as a form of struggle. The troublemaker dreams of freedom by imaging politics as a utopian space where "we could possibly go somewhere that exists only in our imagination."[110] Yet this freedom is without shape, as it is only the notion that things must change. Such belief is founded on the revolutionary demand to live a life without compromise, and in doing so, it sees demands to imagine a world after the revolutionary break as collaborating with the reactionary forces of the present. It is this veiled desire for something better that motivates the dreamer to gamble the transient pleasures of the present for the ecstasy of permanent revolution.

## Conclusion

The oversaturated streets of the Metropolis seem to announce that "we do not lack communication," but "on the contrary, we have too much of it," and in fact what we lack is creation, or really, "resistance to the present."[111] The centralizing power of the state has been overtaken by network culture, which keeps Winter Palaces only as tourist attractions. Power is logistical. As such, the prevailing strategy of power is now inclusive connectivity and not exclusion. The digital city sits at the critical intersection between virtual and physical worlds. Mobile communication, real-time web, and data-driven decision making have taken over the previously vacant time of the everyday. Turning on, plugging in, and staying connected has become a prerequisite for participation in contemporary society. In addition to technological transformation, urban development is equally constitutive of modern life. And as even techno-futurists admit, "everyone will benefit from connectivity but not equally."[112] New communities are now forged through the cruel forces of development: displacement, polarization, and stratification.

Numerous feminist art projects rise to the occasion by diagnosing the changing conditions and shaping new encounters with the digital city. Behind connectivity's liberal principles of transparency, feminism identifies a pornographic demand for access to women's bodies. The digital city thus engenders an emotional battle with a hostile environment. Materialist media scholars have suggested principles that may sharpen the struggle by allowing some to condense a generalized climate of enmity in the body's affects. Artistic charting of these negative affects engage with technology in a way that is formally asymmetrical to the logistical system of the Metropolis. As Feel Tank and PP show, technology can make anger, fear, and frustration into a resource for political action. Yet ugly feelings are not enough if they are only employed to battle the oppressive conditions of everyday life in the Metropolis just to live to fight another day. When naturalized, the storm is only weathered. As such, some critics look to the natural resistances provided by the body to unplug from the Metropolis. When politicized, the storm is a set

of conditions that can be fought through a confrontation of forces. Most exciting, but perhaps more risky, is the strategy of technological acceleration —riding negative affects like a drug to establish distance from the pornographic representation of gender and confront connectivity's promise of happiness. Only this approach maintains the utopian horizon of resisting the Metropolis, whereby the exhausting demands for complete, always-on, 24/7 availability are refused once and for all.

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