Article

Connectivity in times of control: writing/undoing/ unpacking/acting out power performances

Whitney Stark (iD)
Independent Researcher, The Netherlands

Beatriz Revelles-Benavente
University of Barcelona, Spain

Olga Cielemęcka (iD)
University of Turku, Finland

Abstract

In this collectively written article, the authors interrogate contemporary power con-
stellations that run between control and connectivity. Regimes of individualism, hierar-
chies of assumed classifications and imperialistic subjectivities sustain the basis for
political control that organises connections and divisions used to justify hierarchical
dominations and distributions. This makes anti-oppression practices that value differing
forms of connectivity and intra-dependence (between humans, more than humans,
disciplines, all things considered to be of different bodies) nearly unimaginable.
The authors offer/reconfigure/understand connectivity as a practice acting in and at
odds with those controlling political regimes that organise and classify matter(s), while
experimenting with their own writing methodology aimed at staying connected.
Informed by new materialist feminist practices and ideas, the authors discuss the polit-
ical stakes of multiple ideas of connectivity within three empirical scenarios: academic
labour practices, social media and a digitally established mutual aid community. We
trace entangled forces of separation and control shaped by global imperialism, process-
es of individuation and technological apparatuses and how they perform within these
scenarios. This approach is mirrored in our practice of writing together. In an alterna-
tive to traditionalised ways of writing, we expand upon an embodied praxis, elaborating

Corresponding author:
Whitney Stark, ICON and BAK, Utrecht University, Pauwstraat 13a, 3512TG Utrecht, The Netherlands.
Email: stark.whitney@gmail.com

on multiple engagements while offering our own connections with these differing situated knowledges. In light of this, the authors write in a diffractive, collective fashion that lies somewhere between a conversation and the strict linearity of typical narratives.

Writing connectivity together

Today's dynamic changes and the multiplication of crises – political, environmental and concerning public health – redraw the material-discursive lines of power relations while new definitions and conceptualisations of connectivity proliferate from here. Isolation, individualisation and the expectations of endless productivity create the conditions for how we work and connect with each other as feminists, researchers, activists and academic teachers. In the diffractive writing experiment that has become this article, we are looking for a collaborative, caring feminist practice grounded in situatedness (Haraway, 1988), which learns from The Combahee River Collective's commitment to collectivity and continual reflexivity (Combahee River Collective, 1978), and which allows for 'notes without absolute conclusions...marks of a struggle to keep moving, a struggle for accountability' (Rich, 1984: 210). This article was created over a long span of time, between multiple places, and grew with us. It became a connecting exercise, a dance between connectivity and separation, in which the interconnectedness between us, writers, marks the entanglement of what a situated feminist researcher, activist and teacher becomes nowadays. Weaving our thoughts and mobilising new materialist, feminist, queer and anti-imperialist perspectives, we offer differing points of feminist activation in order to highlight how knowledge, digital spaces and imperialistic practices are joined together.

We look into regimes of individualism that keep us apart, hierarchies of assumed binary classifications and imperialistic subjectivities, and how these sustain the basis for a controlling political regime that organises what are considered to be human, more-than-human and less-than-human conditions of being. Violently established and vehemently maintained assumptions regarding the body, labour and value are imposed in imperialist practices, used to justify hierarchical dominations and distributions, and attempt to render anti-oppression practices that value connectivity and intra-dependence (between humans, more than humans, disciplines, all things considered to be of different bodies) nearly unimaginable. Amid the digitalisation that late capitalism imposes, as well as ever more precarious working conditions, border regimes and environmental crises, the problem of connectivity needs to be given thoughtful and careful attention. It is

precisely here, within contemporary paradoxes of being so connected yet mired in an individualistic competition that crises supposedly evoke, that we need to find feminist points of activation that move beyond any sort of traditional designation or boundary of subject of analysis. We argue that one possible way to do this is through a new materialist critique of the concept of connectivity. We present it in three different scenarios: mechanisms of academic control, social media and a digitally established mutual help community. We then identify how connectivity and/or separation are working within, amongst and around these from feminist positions.

Precarity and violence seem to increasingly control human understandings of human and more-than-human lives. They are affects and conditions that help construct the material-discursive phenomena that propagate what are considered valuable bodies and successful conditions of being (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). Currently, at the time of one of the final stages of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted, among many things, what it means to be connected, to organise, to gather. The practices we build this article on, that have been brewed, tasted and enacted, and that have come from work in and experiences of those organising movements, gatherings, research, safer spaces, education, festivals, workshops and demonstrations, of course now radically shift. Connections generally, and between the three of us, have been altered materially; they change depending on our subjectivities, material circumstances and forms of proximity (in Barad's [2014] words, 'cutting together-apart'). It is teaching many of us to become a researcher elsewhere, an activist elsewhere, a teacher elsewhere – working remotely, online, at metres' distance. The coming times demand blunt yet thoughtful refigurations. With our personal networks of collaborators, colleagues and friends scattered around the world, and with some steep learning curves, we strive to stay connected. This writing experiment is an attempt at this. For us, and what we believe are the messages of and inspirations for this article, it is important to attend to the different moves that interfere in our contemporary lives. They change how we engage with situations of control. The diffractive mode of writing we use in this article opens up myriad paths for engaging with the process of becoming; re-writing becomes a sensitive process of reacting to the dynamically changing reality and to our own positionality in it. Writing together in this ongoing method that does not prioritise linear and set conclusions is inseparable from the analysis itself.

Departing from our situatedness (Haraway, 1988) and what relates the three authors of this article means departing from research and academia as the common ground we continue to share, though our locations, un/employment and practices have shifted significantly throughout the writing of this article. In this final stage of writing, Beatriz is working from the South of Europe, Spain, from confinement and virtuality, individually and collectively, spreading a message of sorority and care to her students colleagues and community and reflecting on the affectivity of a virus that, even if it is not seen, is undoubtedly affecting contemporary structures. Olga is a Finland-based feminist philosopher who writes about environmental

crisis and collaboration from her situated perspective of a post-socialist feminist working within the constrictions of hypermobile and temporary academic labour conditions. Based abroad, she oftentimes feels on the side-lines of the feminist and anti-oppressive struggles going on in her home country, Poland, whilst simultaneously feeling out of place in the world of Western academia. Whitney is, at the current time, based in the Netherlands, using their experience in organising and youth work to work on theoretically and politically informed pedagogical, gathering and organising practices with an arts institution that is steeped in rehearsing ways of being together and of working along and with struggles against oppressions and fascisms. Our connection was made through a shared European-funded project (COST IS1307) that has made us realise how precarious the connection in academia might be.

   We have used a collaborative writing style that lies somewhere between the individualised back-and-forths of conversation and the linearity of a typical academic narrative in order to weave the multiplicity of our backgrounds together with a common goal, which is the pursuit of less oppressive and violent forms of being and academic practices. Pursuing less violent realities and accounting for differing forms of life and agency are not easy tasks when moving within structures established and adapted to regimes of control. These regimes of control (that will be further discussed in the following sections) involve creating scientific canons that control knowledge production and creation, including when moving within academia; crafting hegemonic discourses by means of rapidly expanding algorithmic conditions that model digital subjectivities (Colman et al., 2018); as well as shaping core values and beliefs that help to construct political ideologies that secure the orders of human and non-human ways of being. As researchers, we often can perpetuate, through our own labour conditions or the connections that we make in our work, behaviours and forms of being that help to construct these hegemonies. We believe that in order to work towards political goals of behaving a world less violent, we need to begin to work differently, and produce critical reflections on and affirmative critiques to how we develop our own subjectivities in relation to the world that we are part of. This article is a materialisation in the pursuit of 'workable solutions' via 'mutual experimenting, mutual compromise, mutual engagement' (Galloway, 2008: 934). Through what we consider a diffractive writing process – meaning understanding differing insights without presupposing an ontological division between them, that is, prioritising the relation as a minimal unit of analysis (Haraway, [1992] 2004; Barad, 2007; van der Tuin, 2016) – we weave our work together in smooth and less-smooth ways. Connecting and re-writing, we attempt to find within multiplicity and within practices of 'cutting together-apart' (Barad, 2014) in our research some strategies that disturb imperialistic practices, the regimes penetrating so much of culture and society.

   In the first step of the writing procedure, we singled out core concepts that carry a special meaning for each of us. In the second step, we invited one another to build around and upon these concepts; to wrap them with our ideas, thoughts and conceptual frameworks. To situate and to dislocate, organise and disorganise.

To point out and embellish the entangled nature of our encounters. In the third step – yet another whirl – we organised disorder into a relative order while highlighting disturbances, concepts, ideas or phrases that particularly resonate with us. We presented at a conference and thought on the performativity of the process and content to reformulate. We kept the thoughts and practices brewing as we worked together in other projects, caring for each other's practices through these attempts at the connection of writing together. This kind of care was extended in the praxis of creating this special issue itself, as we led and took part in workshops, panels and processes oriented at creating an academic review process that reflects the theory we, the writers and those in the COST working group, incorporate and practices we advocate. This resulted in the editors creating an additional collaborative review process as part of the journal issue's formation. All contributors reviewed others' articles, producing a differing sense of co-authorship and allowing for a sensitive reading before entering in the academic publishing system. This allowed for a diffractive process, in which the interferences and pattern changes that were produced have made the article engage with a dynamism and spread in ways never intended at the beginning. That is, offering itself as a feminist intervention in the academic system. We went through the review processes of publishing in this journal and move through these processes in differing ways again. This builds up a methodology of affectively intra-acting (Barad, 2007) in order to situate our experiences and practices. We want to pursue a genealogical approach through connection within multiplicity, that embodies practices and thoughts even if our areas of expertise (philosophy, language and politics) differ from each other. This method allows us to account for temporal and spatial disconnections and discontinuations in the collaborative writing process as well as dynamic changes in our own power positions throughout. As a result, this article traces and performs the complex realignments of connection and separation as mutually entangled forces. But we know these are large claims. Mostly, we aim at a praxis of dislocating assumed linearity in writing processes in order to propose a text that needs to be actively interfered with. We invite our readers to move inside and outside the text in order to complete its meaning.

Current materialisations of power keep separation (between humans, differing species and materials) and connectivity (manifested through virtual platforms, affectively, connecting more-than-human lives in transforming paradigms) alive, serving the aims of contemporary neoliberal control regimes. Neoliberalism in this text is a situated concept defined as 'a form of management [to] control subjects based on economic and political premises, as well as moralistic ones' (Cielemęcka and Revelles-Benavente, 2017: 1). We recognise neoliberal control regimes as sustained principally through the operations of three main concepts, which are global imperialism, individuation and technological apparatuses.

The liberalist separation that we refer to is exemplified via the three empirical scenarios that we propose and a conceptual definition of what it means to be subjected to a neoliberal regime of control. Again, departing from our own situatedness, these scenarios are precisely the ones that have produced connections

between us, while at the same time promoting isolation between us. Thinking through specific academic and neoliberal practices, we see how *divide et impera* has become the neoliberalist mantra that dominates the spheres used as empirical examples in this text. First, academia and how it controls 'cognitive labourers' through the creation of 'excellent researchers' and competitive environments of scarce resources and positions, while diminishing the knowledge that is created collectively; second, gendered perspectives of social media (Coleman, 2018) and digital spaces often designated to construct communities, while monitored at the same time in order to construct classificatory profiles; and finally, we provide an example of a community created to overcome isolation in a reality shaped by 'social distancing' measures. As a feminist new materialist response to this hegemonic wave that transverses all spheres of life, disciplines and human and more-than-human ways of life, we mobilise different feminist and queer approaches (e.g. Mohanty, 1984; Barad, 2007; Colman, 2010; Holvino, 2010; Ahmed, 2017) to reflect on possibilities for connectivity in our digitalised and atomised societies, undergoing rapid transformations. We use new materialist thinking to analyse and challenge the structures that enable and legitimise various kinds of oppressions, and to search for novel organisational models and collective praxes.

Conceptualisation and political development of contemporary imperialist regimes

Western ideas of Cartesianism and classical Newtonian physics exploded in popularity at the time of the European Enlightenment (Barad, 1998: 94), not coincidentally also the time of the expansion of Western colonialism (Merchant, 1980). The creation of these hard sciences, as well as things such as physical anthropology, cartography and what came to be considered evidentiary practices and modern scientific practices, classified things as separated bodies or objects moving in the world, based on a 'clarity fetishism' or the desire for a clarity based on, preferably, visibly established distinctions recognised within these sciences (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 11; Spivak, cited in Braidotti, 2011: 204).[1] This kind of Cartesian, humanist approach assumes a particular priority of what is considered as (most) closely connected, generally through visible, linear spatial closeness or temporal closeness. In this, multiple, quantum, nonlinear, 'less' physical connections are considered as not (to) matter. This assumption allows these seeming 'things' (whether considered people, things, disciplines or phenomena) to be set up as separate, in categories and with specifically recognised borders and linear connections to each other through space and time, often as a historical category. This practice bounds, identifies and in many ways stagnates objects and peoples, behaving as if they were/are solely individual, existing in consistent and singular spacetime. And it attempts to secure them into places in hierarchies. This logic is naturalised through a 'Western narrative of progress' (Levin, 2010: 5). This narrative of progress was/is established through Western concepts of modernity, in

which the Western humanist ways of doing things are always at the most modern place, and any other practices (whether deemed nonhuman or non-Western) are considered as underdeveloped, on a linear path towards this legitimate (European) modernity (Chakrabarty, 1992; Mohanty, 1995; Chakrabarty, 2000; Brown, 2001).

This is part of an ideological practice that Karen Barad, whose work in quantum physics from a feminist perspective has helped create a new materialist language and epistemology for thinking connectivity, phenomena and linearity differently, terms 'thingification' (2003: 812). It is reified in the assumptions embedded within many practices deemed as legitimate through their violent, imperial imposition (sciences, medical practices, singular or prioritised identity markers, unified-liberal subjectivities), as Gayatri Spivak and others from the Subaltern Studies Collective have discussed in depth. It is an apparatus that allows for and justifies hierarchical valuation and distribution to exist so rampantly. These particular understandings of separation, the prioritisation of connection as establishing a singular object or category or as established through visible, linear spatio-temporal closeness and the refusal of multiple forms of connectivity between humans and between a life/nonlife binary serve the aims of modernist control regimes because: 1) if things are separate, then they can be Other; 2) if they are Other than they can be indifferently better or worse; and 3) if Others are separate, they (maybe) cannot (recognise they are already in) connect(ion), thus organise or hold agency. In this we identify Trinh T. Minh-ha's warning of the equating of difference and division within apartheid thinking, its 'semantic trap which sets us up against each other as expected by a certain ideology of separatism', a tool of conquest (Minh-ha, 1989: 82).

In a liberal narrative and in line with European self-aggrandising ideas of how modernity works, 'progress' is expressed in individualised terms of representation, participation, hard work and success, the rugged 'pull yourself by the bootstraps' kind of narrative. It may also be expressed in a form of a transhumanist dream of a body which, thanks to techno-creativity, transgresses limitations of its fleshness, its weariness, even its mortality. But against such a progressive ideal another powerful narrative has emerged to impact the possibilities to think through the knotted relation between embodied subjects and power regimes: critical thinkers and theory makers have been 'foucault-ised'. In this paradigm of thinking, influenced by the works of Michel Foucault, what appears to be more freedom is in fact more oppression. It means the kind of entrapment that may be hard to grasp at first, because it has been internalised, inscribed not on the surface of the body but running in its bloodstream, enacted by the neurons, sitting in the very gut (see: Foucault, 1979).

In the cracks and seams of such already worn-out narratives there are others more promising, in which spaces of negotiation, translation and encounter germinate: in the something-more-connected-than-contact zones of lively creatures and the material-discursive regimes of control. These narratives have always existed, for example in community building, care work, mutual aid and solidarity,

challenging individualistic separation and mobilised concentrically by a different economy of relations – one which underpins connectivity and co-dependence.

A feminist objectivity (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2007) helps to destabilise the ways of ordering as singular realities and allows for an elevation of differings, even in similar discursive manners and apparatuses. In Barad's words, '[o]bjectivity, then, is about being accountable and responsible to what is real' (2007: 340). That is, we cannot separate ourselves from what is real, just as we cannot situate ourselves anywhere else than where our practices materialise. Accounting for what is real means accounting for separability, difference as different from division, to echo Minh-ha again. Or 'reproducibility and unambiguous communication [are possible] because the agential cuts', which can be understood as contextual and intentional understandings of difference, 'determinate boundaries, properties and meanings' (Barad, 2007: 340). At the same time, they account for 'a causal structure in the marking of the "measuring agencies" ("effect") by the "measuring object" ("the cause") within phenomena' (Barad, 2007: 340). Thus, we need to recognise how particular measuring agencies are accounting for what it means to have a liveable life, a 'body that matters' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). That is, we pursue 'an intra-actively enacted agential separability' (Barad, 2007: 340).

We argue that it is no coincidence that it is exactly that which is blatantly interdependent, multiple and non-centralised – for instance, in human activisms, often practices by women, queers and/or people of colour – that is so often devalued, disallowed or deemed as 'not real' or illegible by hegemonic regimes and institutions of liberalist control (Stark, 2017).[2] Even in activisms, heterogenous, non-hierarchical, self-organising, careful and caring practices are often considered as 'not productive' according to masculinist, capitalist understandings of productivity. They are not 'productive', because they take time, they are not focused on particular, pre-recognised outcomes. They are personal and not always about direct 'political' bodily present interventions into certain spaces like streets, which many have pointed out are the kinds of spaces and interventions often more available to those who are considered able-bodied, economically sufficient, those who do not do regular care work for family members and/or people with varying degrees of mobility, those who are not at a disproportionately high risk of incarceration or police violence, etc. They may also be made invisible because 'existing within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and the empty (*sic*) spaces between ... is a location whose very nature resists telling' (Crenshaw, cited in Hammonds, 1994: 133).[3]

In neoliberalist practices, these kinds of connections, as later discussed, are co-opted and guided into economic flows that feed isolation, individualism and exhaustion. This is precisely what this performative hegemonic system, which shapes what is considered things, boundaries and of value and which is embedded in racist, colonial imperialism, was built to enable. It is exactly the connectivity, the alliance, the multiplicitousness that is dangerous to the entire logical underpinning that maintains current global-imperial power dynamics, as it has radical potential to allow for organising and collective force across and fuelled by difference (Stark,

2017: 75). In this sense, intra-dependence – by which we mean: proximities and alliances which require time and care in order to unfold; a recognised co-working; a more horizontal respect; a needing community; many things feminised or considered in-between, in non-space – is always already in anti-oppressive relation.

This is not to say that connectivity is the same as intra-dependence or that connectivity cannot, in certain contexts, also work as a tool of oppression. Imperialistic practices enforce a global material-discourse of fear uniting different organic lives against particular others considered a threat, such as white and Northern Europeans against racialised migrant workers or refugees. Connectivity is not inherently anti-oppressive, but rather radical 'exteriorities within' (Barad, 2007) can be anti-oppressive, mattering how practices relate and constantly (as with this article) reviewing and assessing them through one another. Objectivity is a matter of responsibility and accountability; a feminist connectivity responds precisely to that.

We recognise in quantum-based feminist new materialisms, like those we reference in Barad's work and those to follow here, an alliance towards disintegrating these imposed, illogical assumptions of unified, non-porous borders (through the non-linear movements and gathering like in diffraction, quantum exchange, quantum entanglement). And this is why we find it important to speak through and with these new materialisms when addressing the topics at hand. Not only can this help to show the inappropriateness of an imperial individualising logic from within its own coveted knowledge, 'science'. They also value and practise a connectivity and intra-dependence often found in practices by the marginalised, while embedding tools for recognising their differentiation from the hyper-individualisation of neoliberal networking-as-connection.

Hierarchies in knowledge creation and dissemination

According to Felicity Colman, '[t]he way you are made up, speak, and act, and the ways you make yourself up, speak up and act—over the duration of your body's lifetime—enable how you can or cannot move in your cultural-state' (2010: 548). The affective configuration between technologies of control and human bodies produced under an academic neoliberal regime becomes particularly problematic considering the driving imperialistic forces. An example of this would be the moment that, as Sara Ahmed (2017) explains when talking about racism in academia and the negative responses she received when speaking up, 'you find something problematic, you have a problem. If you find something problematic, you become a problem'. For the 'ir/responsible feminist researcher' (Cielemęcka and Revelles-Benavente, 2017), one that takes a risk of being 'problematic' by having an unpopular opinion, getting angry or refusing to accept what is not right, this means a control that acts in three particular dimensions: according to the acceleration of the knowledge production (canon), (un)practices of self-care and neoliberal forms of capitalism. Thus, 'as co-opted under capitalism, certain ways of knowing, certain possibilities of being, certain configurations of the body are

bound by the labour of the military refrain to which the self, within its communal group, remains tethered' (Colman, 2010: 547), a tethering or connection to established norms based on the assumption of pre-existing individuals, subjects or objects tethered together.

The affectivity that entangles with labour in current day academia mercantilises humans' feelings within cognitive capitalism in an isolating form of connective value. That is to say, the neoliberal market has blended professional and personal life, requiring profession to be a passion and producing a continuum between these two in a way that takes affect into a hyper individualised mode. As Cristina Morini indicates, 'cognitive capitalism tends to prioritize extracting value from relational and emotional elements' (2007: 40). For instance, we, like so many others, have been participating as free labourers, working academically towards the objective of specific projects and strongly believing that the goal was a feminist social transformation and, precisely, because of that, an activist protest. Nevertheless, at the same time, caring for a project, and that in turn meaning the provision of free academic labour for funded, institutionally supported projects and publications that often generate income from this labour, is also perpetuating the neoliberal imposition that sciences (overall in the humanities) perform against individual researchers. A paradox of mercantilised desires.

Butler and Athanasiou define the neoliberal regime in higher education as 'a conception of knowledge as property, commodity, and a measurable commercial asset that needs to be immediately available to the managerial agendas of global business elites' (2013: 188). Knowledge workers perform their labour as if it were their personal passion (González, 2019), and technological investment in the controlling apparatus of academia plays a crucial role in this passion-filled entanglement. Emails, video conference meetings, e-calendars and other devices allow the blending of physical space and labour time. The globality of the academic system crosses geographical spaces and chronological time and one can be sending an email at 4 pm and the other receiving it at 9 pm. At the moment, the private home of a professor is the public space of a virtual call in order to perform their classes and it is their passion that motivates them to perform well elsewhere and change the physical channel to a virtual one. In this globalising availability-through-passion, entangled with the portabilisation and technologisation of communications, the time to answer an email is when you receive it. These relations intra-act through the mainstreaming neoliberalist performance-based work-as-passion discourse that assumes that (this capital) passion demands a large amount of unpaid hours and immediate availability (via technological apparatuses) to always perform (for) this passion. The performance of this passion is then also always set into individualising hierarchy by a neoliberal academic system that distributes the knowledge created into excellent and non-excellent.[4] This becomes one of these examples in which connectivity falls in the realm of imperialistic forces, and one of those instances in which we need to perform a feminist review in order to find interference and activation points.

This affective relation produces an effect on the human body that requires it as to-be-ready-to-work from any space at any time, transforming previously separated spheres (though fictitiously 'separate') into a conglomerate of neoliberal relations that takes advantage of – without quite acknowledging – feminist, anti-imperialist, queer calls, desires, work and need for cherishing and articulating differing forms of connectivity. That is, even in neoliberal projects, the arbitrariness of what is considered separate or inextricably bodily, of one nature, is rampant as long as it serves what the regime or apparatus desires as legible and logical, echoing again that connectivity is not anti-oppressive by 'nature', but by and within affective. Thus, being part of this cognitive capitalism has highlighted the need for connections for pursuing feminist research (always at the margin of the creation of hegemonic knowledges), while employing them for and as capital and constructing particular, economical pathways of reasonable connection; as well as the need to savour the connection of our own bodies to materialising acts of resistance.

Technological subjectivities created in digital spaces

Feminist new materialists have argued that it is impossible to theorise the present without taking into account past and future (Barad, 2010; van der Tuin, 2016; Coleman, 2018). Additionally, some researchers describe contemporary socio-cultural material-discursive practices as entangled with 'the like economy' (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013; Coleman, 2018). It is an economic system that is interfered with by and interfering virtual communities such as those on video streaming websites, social media networks and other platforms. When it comes to technology and connectivity in relation with bodies and imperialistic global practices, it seems that the most straightforward relation is social media in general, and enterprises such as Facebook in particular. These 'interfaces' (Galloway, 2008) pose questions about modes of existing: being controlled and resisting control, bodily resilience, agency and vulnerability, violence and objectification. Talking about the ludic component of technology, Galloway affirms that it is 'a call for violent renovation of the social fabric from top to bottom using the most nefarious techniques', equating the interface with a 'control allegory' (2008: 935). Traditionally, many have encapsulated virtual communities as tools of neoliberal and imperialistic practices, but contemporary emergency situations and company affinities with politically motivated parties or policing bodies demonstrate that these virtual communities are able to generate new forms of neoliberal practices.

The 'like economy' refers to the transformation of the web from informational to social and it is defined as a material connection with many different users through 'social buttons' (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013) that transform affective responses. Therefore, it 'draw[s] attention to the multiplicity of the present; immediacy and liveness indicate the animation and vibrancy of the "now" – the present is active – an on-going and open-ended [practice] difficult to draw boundaries around' (Coleman, 2018: 604). This multiplicity becomes something more like a

quantum leap in which teleological logics of cause and effect are queered (Barad, 2010) – it conflates past, present and future; virtual and digital, 'West' and 'East', etc. A suspension of the present is enhanced (Coleman, 2018) that blends any kind of physical boundary (geographical, chronological, affective) and materialises an exteriority within (Barad, 2007), the ontological impossibility of separation, in which possibilities are opened in these platforms. Identities become a reconfiguration of the relationality between affective selves in these platforms, providing themselves as examples of how practices of connection can become feminist acts of resilience at odds with the imperialistic neoliberal forms described above (as we can see in the many different feminist movements and associations that organise their collective help via platforms such as Facebook or Twitter).

Today, in the spring of 2020, as we continue writing this article, the reality around us has changed in ways we could not have predicted when we first started working on it together some four years earlier. Four years in which we have practised a slow academy (Cielemęcka and Revelles-Benavente, 2017); going through the combination of chosen and standard processes we described earlier in this article, our practices of connectivity have been dramatically altered.

With the spread of a novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2), intense social distancing measures were introduced in most countries to control the spread of the pandemic. As a result, the meaning of social isolation acquired a new embodied, lived dimension, while connecting became recognised as both threatening and vital for survival. To illustrate the ways in which connectivity emerges in an algorithmically organised reality, we turn to an example of one of many online groups created to carry practical help in times of an epidemic. In March 2020, a group called *Visible Hand* (*Widzialna ręka* in Polish) was created on Facebook for users to post offers of calls for help, such as in shopping for groceries and medicine during the quarantine. The group grew quickly, with over 100,000 members, and many local subgroups in various neighbourhoods and cities across Poland and an international section in English was also created. Hashtags such as #helpneeded and #readyhelp were used to organise help and facilitate searches. Soon, the platform became a site where food delivery for frontline workers and laptop and tablet collection for students were organised, where psychologists and lawyers offered pro bono advice and where strangers offered a friendly call to those who needed emotional support and company.

The name of the group goes back to a Polish TV show for children broadcast in the 1960s in which participants anonymously performed good deeds 'signed' with a symbol of a hand. A 'visible hand' signals a reversed logic of capitalism – the opposite of the invisible hand of the market metaphor proposed by economist Adam Smith. Against the logic of the invisible forces created by individuals' self-interested pursuit of profit, here mutual aid is always free and grounded in the ideals of solidarity and interdependence as a basis of survival. For many, a symbolic helpful hand became a lifeline in times when touch became synonymous with a threat of contagion. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the group is a conflict- and judgement-free safe space – some of the more contentious

issues included, for example, parental custody arrangements in the context of a pandemic. Nevertheless, it is a community that at its very core opposes the capitalist prerogatives of profit and self-sufficiency. Leaderless and grassroots platforms such as this one are, however, not detached from capitalism; their activities could be described, as per Anna Tsing, as 'pericapitalist' – a term that refers to a process of creation of capitalist value outside of capitalist regimes (2015: 63, 128). *Visible Hand* defies the pro-profit logics but, at the same time, the free labour offered by its members boosts data traffic and, ultimately, translates into revenue for Facebook, a company whose motto 'Connecting People' acquired a nefarious edge to it when the data breach in 2019 resulted in compromising the personal information of millions of users. In this sense, mutual aid communities such as *Visible Hand* can be understood as what we referred to as an exteriority within; seated within the regimes of power and profit, separability, algorithmic optimisation and (mis)use of connectivity as an element of corporate ideology, while also resisting it.

Such practices allow for opening, thinking together and creating a network of micropolitics that connect people to organise themselves around a goal. From a new materialist perspective, these platforms embrace a univocal approach by constituting the exteriority within – vibrant disruptions of the hegemonic systems that nevertheless materialise within it. They embrace the measuring agencies (imperialist approaches to certain technological devices) and the measured agencies (the effects or materialisations that determined connectivities perform). These effects can develop new ways of control; for instance, through social media companies owning and forming the platforms through which these changes occur and thus controlling, in many ways, the possible forms of mediums of resistance and of course much of the data. While no doubt a de-privatised, non-data-extractivist format would better serve these purposes, at the same time, these platforms explode ways of resistance into millions of readily accessible affinities, as it is fairly easy for people to connect and share across spacetime. Contained within the framework set by a company, its designers, investors, programmed algorithms, etc, the take-up of group organisation across spacetime works in interesting, dangerous and transformative ways.

In these sites, identities are relational and become part of a group, in which something becomes recognisable, like the platform *Visible Hand* or the one created by *15M* – the Spanish anti-austerity movement, which started on the social networks in 2011. Essentially, these platforms are materialisations of different relations, able to produce a certain collective identity (insofar as it becomes recognisable) that more often than not is not governed by one person, but by everybody participating on the platform. In the case of those platforms created with the purpose of producing political agitation, the origin and the end are not known because it is a permanent process of re-creation.

In some ways, an internet identity that belongs to multiple groups, pages, etc. is an operation of an intersectional assemblage, a materialising, dispersed multiplicity of a body. Affinities and member statuses are listed to create, for instance, a person's profile (pages liked, groups, events, friends, profile descriptions, tags).

A seeming individual is cyborged through the technological devices they use, witched through the crystals sending signals, translated into series of 1s and 0s, participating in multiple spacetimes beyond the linear via hyperlinks. Through such readily present, infinitely shifting identity assemblages, even the ways that internet personas, algorithms and social media have been mobilised to increase neoliberal and fascist regimes, rhetoric and organising cannot contain the connectivities that flow through and with each other. Through this (reluctant) occupation and transformation of these platforms, in this infinite multiplicitousness and situatedly assembled possibilities, these platforms become spaces (in the Baradian sense of spacetimemattering) in which 'no identity' and 'recognition' take place. The dangers of such being (co-option, catfishing, digital blackface) are to be expanded.

To be connecting/separating/continuing/transforming

We believe that feminist politics propose precisely to connect, in order to prevent isolation, because isolation is, has and will always already be inextricably entangled, part and parcel with domination.[5] Connecting means producing the feminist activation points mentioned, reviewing our practices and how we interfere within oppressive modalities. Because relational forces, embedded with and beyond these neoliberal regimes, are always already present across spacetimematterings in ways not only linear, they do not assign only one category, one grouping, one identity as primary. At odds with neoliberal patronisation and trafficking of networks, respect, acknowledgement, care and work with relational forces allow for strengths of alliances, for intra-dependencies, for the consideration of what is considered to be weak, small, feminised, bad to inevitably not have value or agency as a nonsensical conclusion; for the amassing nonlinear transformations of situatings, contexts, needs and strategies and a constellation of other and not-so-other 'things' we are not recognising at this point. Practices exist that do not necessarily entail the unidimensional practice of control regimes, modernity regimes or neoliberalism.

   Can we offer a feminist connectivity in times of (dis)control, in times of chaos, with/in imperialist technologies and productive economies? In this article, we have tried to propose a constellatory alliance and political assemblage through what might seem like separated spheres of life: feminist and new materialist takes on imperialistic regimes, cognitive workers, technological dimensions and so on. Presenting imperialist forces, how our subjectivities need to act and re-act within them (academic subjectivations) and how contemporary times are affecting our present conditions (technological platforms), we have presented ways in which we try to stay connected. We examine how connectivity and its neighbouring paradoxes are present in violent hegemonies, subversive forms of organisation and alliances, in digital platforms and in mutual, critical thinking. Writing within and out of this article, we have attempted to demonstrate and affectively communicate a need to build a transversal solidarity that, though produced within the

imperialist regimes we cannot quite yet remove from our guts, can hope to cause interference by connecting feminist activation points.

To produce these feminist activation points, it is important to review our practices, being clear that this work has experiments and seedlings, but it is not to be considered any set guide or object-like finished product. It is a diffractive dialogue which entails reading insights through one another, an experimental writing style and less-linear connections, so that we can relate beyond the performative act of writing and connect in a joint task of dismantling oppressive modalities that continue to condition us and our work. The purpose of trying this out is in the hopes that some find it a helpful offering. We feel a need for critical assessment and material transformation. The constellations presented here aim at assessing contemporary figurations in which bodies are individualised and categorised, in order to ease structurally oppressive control over them.

The article is a plea for experimentation in our practices; for opening questions at odds with offering closed answers, embarking on thoughts at odds with promoting explanations and pursuing agential relationalities at odds with individual subjectivities. The article has been written and re-visited from at least three different perspectives, not only by those of us who were supposed to 'master' their field, but also through the eyes of others connected to each other in their research practices and holding different backgrounds, or points of departure. Connecting reading, writing and research opens up the space to start working in and around, as exteriority within, a system that enhances individualism, hegemonic powers, Western scientific canons and social injustices. We believe that an alliance, here, with these ways of operating that are much 'more akin to how electrons experience the world than any journey narrated through rhetorical forms that presume actors move along trajectories across a stage of spacetime' (Barad, 2010: 240), has always already been in coalition with transformative potentials.

Funding

ORCID iDs

Whitney Stark ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4227-550X
Olga Cielemęcka ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8022-7971

Notes

1. Also related to and at odds with this desire of visibility is Édouard Glissant's (1997) work on the right to opacity, as interviewed in *Édouard Glissant* (2009): 'Why must we evaluate people on the scale of the transparency of ideas proposed by the West?'.

2. The concept of intersectionality helps to analyse the invisibilisation of labour of e.g. women and (other) queers of colour; see Fowlkes (1997) on the practices of the Combahee River Collective.
3. For more on different feminist practices and their non/integration in organisational studies, see: Holvino (2010).
4. It is worth noting that these dimensions are framed under what is considered to be excellence, in which particular outputs are considered productive and valuable and which are not, according to a masculinist conceptualisation of science, as well as a colonialisation of the scientific by a universalising, singular category of excellent (European) science, homogenising the canon (Readings, 1996).
5. See, e.g., Michelle Alexander's (2010) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* for discussions on how segregation, Black exceptionalism and strategic divisions of precarious groups uphold (racial) caste systems.

References

Ahmed, Sara (2017) 'Snap! Feminist Moments, Feminist Movements'. A lecture by Sara Ahmed, Stockholm, 11 May. *Feminist Killjoys* [blog]. Available at: https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/ (accessed 13 November 2018).

Alexander, Michelle (2010) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

Barad, Karen (1998) 'Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality'. *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 10(2): 87–128.

Barad, Karen (2003) 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter'. *Signs: Journal of Western Culture and Society*, 28(3): 801–831.

Barad, Karen (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

Barad, Karen (2010) 'Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come'. *Derrida Today*, 3(2): 240–268.

Barad, Karen (2014) 'Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart'. *Parallax*, 20(3): 168–187.

Braidotti, Rosi (2011) 'Images Without Imaginations'. In: Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects*. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, pp. 189–212.

Brown, Wendy (2001) *Politics Out of History*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou (2013) *Dispossession: the Performative in the Political: Conversations with Athena Athanasiou*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (1992) 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?'. *Representations*, 37: 1–26.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Cielemęcka, Olga and Beatriz Revelles-Benavente (2017) 'Knowmadic Knowledge Production in Times of Crisis'. In: Beatriz Revelles-Benavente and Ana M. González Ramos (eds) *Teaching Gender: Feminist Pedagogy and Responsibility in Times of Political Crisis*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 25–41.

Coleman, Rebecca (2018) 'Theorizing the Present: Digital Media, Pre-emergence and Infra-structures of Feeling'. *Cultural Studies*, 32(4): 600–622.

Colman, Felicity (2010) 'Affective Self: Feminist Thinking and Feminist Actions'. *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 14(5): 543–552.

Colman, Felicity, Vera Bühlmann, Aisliin O'Donnell and Iris van der Tuin (2018) 'Ethics of Coding: a Report on the Algorithmic Condition' [EoC]. H2020-EU.2.1.1. Industrial Leadership—Leadership in enabling and industrial technologies—Information and Communication Technologies. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207025_en.html (accessed 19 October 2020).

Combahee River Collective (1978) 'A Black Feminist Statement'. In: Zilla Eisenstein (ed.) *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 362–372.

Édouard Glissant: Un monde en relation (One World in Relation, 2009) [Film] Directed by Manthia Diawara. USA: Third World Newsreel.

Foucault, Michel (1979) *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Fowlkes, Diane L. (1997) 'Moving from Feminist Identity Politics to Coalition Politics Through a Feminist Materialist Standpoint of Intersubjectivity in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza'. *Hypatia*, 12(2): 105–112.

Galloway, Alexander (2008) 'The Unworkable Interface'. *New Literary History*, 39(4): 931–955.

Gerlitz, Carolin and Anne Helmond (2013) 'The Like Economy: Social Buttons and the Data-intensive Web'. *New Media & Society*, 15(8): 1348–1365.

Glissant, Édouard (1997) *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

González, Ana M. (2019). *La aguja y el camello: Mujeres en la Ciencia Contemporánea*. Icaria: Barcelona.

Hammonds, Evelynn (1994) 'Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality'. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6(2–3): 126–145.

Haraway, Donna ([1992] 2004) 'The Promises of Monsters: a Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others'. In: Donna Haraway *The Haraway Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 63–124.

Haraway, Donna (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3): 575–599.

Holvino, Evangelina (2010) 'Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies'. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 1(3): 248–277.

Levin, Amy K. (2010) 'Introduction'. In: Amy K. Levin (ed.) *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–12.

Merchant, Carolyn (1980) *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper One.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. (1989) *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington, IN and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1984) 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses'. *boundary 2*, 12(3): 333–358.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1995) 'Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience'. In: Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidmen (eds) *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 68–86.

Morini, Cristina (2007) 'The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism'. *Feminist Review*, 87: 40–59.

Readings, Bill (1996) *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rich, Adrienne (1984) *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. New York: Norton.

Stark, Whitney (2017) 'Assembled Bodies: Reconfiguring Quantum Identities'. *Minnesota Review*, 88: 69–82.

Tsing, Anna (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

van der Tuin, Iris (2016) 'Reading Diffractive Reading: Where and When Does Diffraction Happen?'. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, 19(2). DOI: 10.3998/3336451.0019.205.

Yeğenoğlu, Meyda (1998) *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.