CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Conceptualising Feminist Activism and Digital Networks

Feminist and queer activism are guided by strong visions of social change in which digital and network communications feature prominently. The invisibility, normalisation and ubiquity of media in our everyday lives, and the strong influence of imaginaries, make it important to question their role and impact on contemporary political identities and action. What does it mean for network technologies and network logics to become incorporated in the everyday lives and spaces of activists, as a preferred and often even default mode of interaction? Are these technologies just tools used concurrently with media and cultural forms of political expression that were dominant prior to Web 2.0,[1] e.g. protest marches, mailing lists and zines? Or do they reconfigure feminist politics and cultures in more fundamental ways?

In this book, I approach these questions by delineating digital networked culture as a space of tensions and contradictions. There are contradictions between inclusion and exclusion in new communicative environments; between representation and materiality; between articulations of opportunity and realisations of impossibility; and, perhaps the most important tension for activists in the digital era, between vulnerability and empowerment. These tensions and contradictions are prescribed by the ways in which our lives increasingly take place in digitally saturated environments – and by this I refer to both online spaces and the widespread digital saturation of virtually all aspects of our lives. But far from

A. Fotopoulou, *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks*,
Palgrave Studies in Communication for Social Change,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50471-5_1

assuming that digital technologies are the most central aspect of our cultural and political lives, and resisting the myth of the internet as a priori democratic, I maintain a focus on the embodied, lived, material and socially situated aspects of feminist and queer activism. Such attention involves a reflection on the intersections of age, class, race and disability in specific social and cultural contexts, and as they operate at larger scales online. Media technologies, social media and the internet do not exist as a space beyond and independently of the situated practices of feminist activists. They inform and shape each other. In fact, as I argue in this book, *doing feminism* and *being feminist* implies enacting ourselves primarily as embodied and social subjects through media practices and imaginaries of technologies and the internet, but also as citizens and users of these technologies.

In examining what forms of feminist and queer political engagement are culturally and historically specific in the context of networked communication, I find it necessary to think about political subjectivities and agency, and the media practices that inform them. What does it mean to be a feminist in the digital age and how do we understand being political? Posing this question entails resisting the assumption that feminism is one movement, or one unified identity. When talking about gender and sexuality politics, we need to be reminded of the immense diversity of feminist cultures, and the passionate commitment to self-reflexivity that characterises feminism as a social movement with a long history. These are key aspects of feminism that are especially neglected in accounts clinging to a taxonomy of waves. Feminist activism is not one thing. As I show in this book, it is a complex set of identities and cultures, whose different investments in, and practices with, media technologies mean different organisational structures and even political priorities. For some, social media and other new media technologies are strategic – they provide opportunities for direct engagement with civic life. For others, digital media delineate a space where certain gendered bodies, such as those of older women or trans people, experience new forms of precariousness and marginalisation. For example, in Chapter 2, I examine how women's groups, like other contemporary civil society actors, participate in the online public sphere (Downing 2001; Gordon 2007) to different degrees; age, lack of resources and media literacy are the three most important factors that modulate this participation, and in some cases become new types of exclusions of access to publicity and recognition. Being neither hackers nor artists, these activists could not really work 'through protocol'

(Galloway 2004) to achieve recognition. They lacked the necessary skills and resources that would allow them to resist the ubiquity of protocol. But the picture is very different for the so-called digital natives in many women's organisations that have emerged after the domestication of internet technologies and social media, and for whom media technologies are a form of cultural and social capital. Meanwhile, postporn transnational networks, geeky feminist cultures that use selfies as a political tool, queer feminists who create a pedagogic activist media practice and academic feminist networks whose focus is the production of knowledge are all different political formations entering the discussion of this book with different stakes and expectations from the digital. And we must not forget that this diversity of feminist cultures and identities operates within a wider cultural and political context of neoliberalism, in which discourses of autonomy and choice challenge any kind of collective identity.

Theoretically, the book sits within recent debates in critical social theory and network politics, which have well identified a decline in representation and traditional political life. Approached as part of technoscientific capitalism, digital network culture is often seen to contribute to this decline, because it is becoming increasingly difficult to form collective and sustained forms of politics in a culture that is characterised by ephemeral – though abundant – content production and circulation of media texts. However, it is not enough to denote such decline. I find it essential to identify and account for forms of organisation that have within them the potential for a progressive politics of social equality. In my project of mapping such politics, and the entanglement of feminism with communicative practices and paradigms, I rework notions of biopolitics in digital networks, mainly through the work of Hardt and Negri, and Terranova; while I am informed by key concepts in feminist science and technology studies from key theorists, including Barad, Braidotti, Colebrook and Haraway. In thinking about feminist politics and digital media, I start my exploration in this book with emphasis on

- situated activist media practices,
- the relationship between activism and communicative capitalism and
- the cultural/historical contexts and social visions shaping this feminism and their digital media practices.

My aim is twofold: first, since this is an empirically informed project, I seek to provide a substantial but by no means exhaustive account of

contemporary gender and sexual politics, and to understand how ideas of networks, citizenship and community are perceived by activists. Second, the book theorises the interchange between digital media and feminism and develops a set of interdisciplinary analytical tools for future research, by drawing critically from existing innovative research in the fields of media theory, political science and feminist science and technology studies. The first one, *networked feminism*, describes the collective identities and communicative practices of activists as they are shaped by the social imaginary of the internet (understood as *the* network) and digital engagement. The concept of networked feminism helps us rethink media technologies and their role in feminism by reflecting on how activist cultures negotiate five key aspects of digital media technologies: access, connectivity, immediacy, labour and visibility. Through these negotiations, activists critically rethink and problematise rather than accept digital media as intrinsically exploitative or empowering technologies. *Biodigital vulnerability* helps us understand the complex dynamics of content production and control that constitute online networks as contradictory spaces of both vulnerability and empowerment for feminist and queer politics. In particular, my argument is that corporeal vulnerability, and the new forms of governmentality that appear due to technoscientific acceleration, when made public can have great political potential and can be empowering for communities and individuals that have been marginalised or victimised due to sexuality or gender. But let me start by clarifying some of the key theoretical premises of the book.

Digital Feminism?

Following the more generalised optimism about the role of social media in uprisings around the world such as those in Tunisia and Egypt, many writers have celebrated digital feminist activism as a turning point for feminism as a social movement, particularly because of its seeming horizontality and capacity to facilitate intersectional debate.[2] An article in *The Guardian* has gone as far as to exclaim that digital media technologies are so important to building a strong and reactive movement that they signify a 'fourth wave' in the feminist movement (Cochrane 2013). The hopefulness regarding social media and their capacity to facilitate feminist activism is by no means unsubstantiated. There are, indeed, many examples of feminist activism happening online since 2010 to draw from: Twitter actions and hashtag feminism in relation to the actions of PussyRiot are perhaps the most

popular and recognisable ones. But even less prominent cases, such as FEMEN, have been considered to operate as reflexive critical spaces where tensions such as those arising from white privilege can be revisited. In an examination of Slutwalk Berlin, FEMEN, and Muslima Prida, and the associated hashtags, Baer (2015), for instance, notes how these digital feminist campaigns make visible the tensions that have characterised feminism as a social movement for years. But Baer (2015) goes as far as calling this a 'redoing of feminism', because of the interplay between local embodied struggles, protest and the more discursive and disembodied activity online. One may here recognise a response to Angela Mcrobbie's (2007) key argument that neoliberalism and post-feminism in particular are 'undoing feminism'. This optimistic response to a bleak diagnosis is attractive, but this book is neither 'redoing' nor 'undoing'; my interest is rather in the 'doing' of feminism *in* digital media. As I argue throughout the book, *doing* feminism and *being* feminist involves enacting ourselves as activists – as embodied – and political subjects through media practices, technologies, the imaginaries linked to these new technologies and the internet.

There are a number of important questions that dim the optimism of digital feminism accounts. First of all, is it media technologies, old or new, digital or analogue, that are doing feminism (or redoing or undoing it)? Can we not detect in such a claim a cultural bias, in our 'culture of connectivity' (Van Dijck 2013), that places social media or otherwise visible-on-the-screen networks as the vanguard of feminist political action? Because of their celebration of the technological rather than the social, accounts of digital feminism largely disregard questions of cultural specificity and do not allow an investigation of agency in the multiple sites where it develops and gets expressed. But the relationship between media institutions and social life is dialectic and complex rather than causal, as it is captivated by the concept of mediation (Couldry 2008; Silverstone 2002). Mediation is

> the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalized media of communication (the press, broadcast radio and television, and increasingly the world wide web), are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life. (Silverstone 2002: 762)

Feminism is not merely a matter of representation, as I explain in the next section, but is enacted through these mediation processes.

Another key critique here is the reduction of the political to the personal and individual, which has been raised both by Lisa Duggan (2002) in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) politics and by Angela Mcrobbie (2007) in relation to feminism. Choice and empowerment through consumerist practices are key discourses that circulate in popular media, and actively undermine the important gains of feminist and identity politics of 1970s and 1980s (Mcrobbie 2007). It is well documented that neoliberalism works by promoting self-management, self-monitoring, empowerment and individualism. These are the discourses that circulate in mainstream media, even for feminist events such as SlutWalk. Karen Darmon (2014) analysed the framing of SlutWalk in both online blogs written by feminists and in mainstream media news reporting, and saw that, indeed, post-feminist neoliberal discourses profoundly guide how the word 'slut' is translated in mainstream press. It is not surprising then that Darmon problematises how far the work that feminist activist cultures do to reclaim the word 'slut' actually benefits from the use of social media, if mainstream media continuously anchor feminist identity back to neoliberal discourses of femininity. This is namely as bodily property, as individualism, choice and empowerment (including self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline) (Gill 2007). Similar scepticism is expressed in a recent study of how, in digitally emerging countries such as India, for a successful feminist campaign (e.g. #victimblaming), hashtagging is only effective when it is combined with mainstream news media (Guha 2015).[3] This shows the difficulty in understanding what digital protest and media technologies mean for local cultures. The problematic relationship between mainstream media and local or marginalised activist cultures and social movements is perhaps only slightly eased with digital media technologies.

On a more moderate side of the debate are accounts of contemporary feminism and digital media that have used resource mobilisation theories[4] to stress how social media have enabled the speedy dissemination of information across borders, and have helped feminist organisations to form transnational networks. For example, Hande Elsen-Ziya writing recently about Turkish feminism traced how in the second decade of the 2000s, women's organisations moved from traditional media forms, such as leaflets, posters and faxes, to social networks, which 'gave speed and force' to their lobbying efforts (2013: 868). This is something that also stood out in participant accounts in my research on women's organisations based in London (Chapter 2). Among the participants in my study at a

time of transition to new resources for political expression and lobbying, it was accepted that some form of digital connectivity was necessary in a competitive media environment. First, women's organisations have to compete with established structures of institutional power, for instance, by responding to governmental consultations, where agenda issues are already defined by powerful actors; second, they had to compete for political voice, recognition and publicity in online spaces where other social actors campaign. They were thus deeply concerned about their role and their capacity as situated political subjects, when the default mode of campaigning and communication for activists seemed to have become digital and networked. One important finding in this chapter is that technological imaginaries of horizontality and networked connectivity shape feminist activist cultures. Although hacking and self-empowerment through technologies are key technological imaginaries that shape geeky feminist cultures of the internet, these are strong visions of the internet for less tech-savvy feminist cultures. This case sets the tone of the book and some of the key questions for me here. How does our understanding of doing feminism and being feminist, and ultimately of being political, change in the digital age?

Embodiment, Labour and Practice

Early feminist theoretical engagement with network culture focused on identity experimentation and fluidity, but mostly overlooked how *collective* political identity develops (see Plant 1997; Stone 1995; Turkle 1996; Wakeford 1997). Meanwhile, research on social movements has been completely oblivious of gender and sexuality as sites of political struggle.[5] Media theorists examining the impact of digital networks on social movements have predominately looked for evidence of new public spheres, for example by looking at alternative media forms, such as Indymedia, anti-globalisation activism and online counterpublics (Atton 2002; Downing 2001; Papacharissi 2002; Ruiz 2014), or new media and citizen journalism (Gordon 2007; Dickens et al. 2014). Although this influential work offers vital insights into the transformation of publics and the opportunities for direct democracy, accounts about the embodied and social aspects of these publics remain underdeveloped. As a result, gender and sexuality, as embodied practices, have been invisible in both research about communication systems and studies of collective action, despite their centrality.

Yet we need to account for bodies and practices when thinking about feminist and queer politics, digital media and activism, not least because this is the site of immaterial or affective labour. Women have traditionally been assigned the role of caring, and despite important critiques of affective labour and digital media (see Hardt and Negri 2000; Fortunati 2007; Jarrett 2016), they still seem to be in contemporary seemingly leaderless social movements such as Occupy. In social media, women contribute what has been described as 'connective labour' in order to sustain the movement (Boler et al. 2014).[6] What is particularly problematic in this reflection is how, although second-wave feminism has been acknowledged as a historical influence for contemporary social movements, key gender issues and feminist vocabulary (such as 'patriarchy') seldom cross over, and gender equality is never raised as a central issue for social justice. Part of the problem is how, in the era of post-feminism and feminist backlash, feminism is assumed to have met its aims and to have gone past a stage of popularity; in other words, a 'pastness of feminism' is presupposed (Cohn 2013: 153). As digital media users are engaged in unpaid consumer labour in their everyday lives while social media platforms profiteer by harvesting their data, key questions of exploitation arise (see Fuchs 2014; Jarrett 2016).[7]

This invisible yet embodied labour in both everyday media and activist practices is part of the paradoxical aspect of digital media. Although in this book my interest is with the labour of producing activist media content *by feminists and queer activists for feminists and queer activists*, the implications of producing free labour are still relevant. I will explore this and other paradoxical characteristics and the usefulness of labour as an analytical tool in two chapters: the case of postporn cultures and online content production (Chapter 4) and the example of reproductive labour and transnational feminist networks (Chapter 3).

Labour is not the only aspect of materiality in relation to the digital that I am interested in this book. The concept of practice is also central for me here: the very conditions of political organising, and how we understand what it means to be political as feminists, are inextricably linked to communicative practices in network digital culture. In her analysis, Alice Mattoni (2012) draws primarily from Nick Couldry's (2004) theorisation of media practice, and from the work of John Postill (2009), to define activist media practices as, first, the knowledge-making practices and learning spaces for media production, and second, those practices that redefine the relationships of activists (as individuals and as groups)

to mainstream media. Taking practice theory and citizen media a step further, in an exploration of the World Social Forum, Hilde Stephansen (2016) argues that citizen media practices do not just publicise issues and matters of concern. They also empower citizens to collaborate and form 'thick' social bonds and networks of solidarity across national borders, which allow them to formulate and disseminate their ideas and versions of social reality. What is important about Stephansen's provocation is the emphasis on the social significance of media practices that are at the same time pedagogical and political. Similarly to what we have explored elsewhere (Fotopoulou and Couldry 2015; Stephansen and Couldry 2014; Couldry et al. 2016), activists learn to use digital media technologies in informal networks. What is more,

> adopting a practice-oriented perspective involves rethinking the concept of (counter) publics, focusing on how citizen media practices can contribute not only to making public previously unreported issues and perspectives, but to the making of publics. A practice framework – by highlighting the material, embodied and social aspects of processes of public-formation – exposes the limitations of perspectives that see publics as constituted purely through the circulation of discourse. (Stephansen 2016: 38)

Although not strictly about citizen media, this book is about activist practices, both digital media based and more traditional forms of community building and identity formation. This combination is particularly illustrated in relation to queer activist cultures based in Brighton (Chapter 5) where the circulation and generation of activist media texts, such as printed fanzines and Facebook photographs of meetings and parties, make it possible for those who participate to build a safe community and to sustain a local social space. What is central here is that the mixture of digital media practices (such as wikis and corporate social networking platforms) with physical do-it-yourself (DIY) spaces do not just facilitate cultural meaning-making by sharing ideas and information; as I argue, these practices constitute a project of social world-making that is vital for queer politics. Activists see these spaces and technologies as pedagogic and as opportunities for learning how to live and how to be political. In this example, and also in the cases of London feminists (Chapter 2) and postporn networks (Chapter 4), digital media bring activists together in shared spaces to learn and experiment not only with technologies, but also with concepts and ideas, and serve as opportunities for forming networks, community and

political subjectivity. An exploration of activist media practices in these examples involves both the symbolic and the material: the formation of collective identity and projects of symbolic world-making on the one hand; and on the other, all the material processes of setting up infrastructures and maintaining them in terms of technical expertise.

Materiality and Representation

Now let me outline my more general approach to the question of materiality in this book, which informs the focus on the material, social and embodied aspects of digital media technologies and activist practices. There are different routes to get to the question of materiality, and different disciplines have historically been interested in matter for different reasons. Within feminist theory, which is relevant for me, and especially since the second-wave movement, the distinction between political or ideological representation and materiality has received significant attention; this has primarily manifested as a debate around the sex/gender dichotomy (Colebrook 2000: 77). Gender representation and the state of woman as 'other' in media and cultural texts (including science fiction, science communication and news media) has been a central concern in feminist media studies (see Braidotti 2002; Creed 1993). Although these interrogations are significant and provide a rich ground for debate regarding how women feature in political imaginaries, the question of cultural representation is also problematic because it positions women as passive victims of male-owned production, making the production of counter-representations the primary task for feminists (Bray and Colebrook 1998). It is not surprising, then, that recent interventions of material feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2008) move once again towards the question of materiality, aiming to place it at the centre of feminist philosophy. Meanwhile, representationalism has also been challenged by writers in political science and media theory focusing on the political possibilities offered in informational and networked environments. Let me highlight the ideas offered in these two strands of thought: first, I will look at the work of Tiziana Terranova (2004) and Jodie Dean (2009), both of whom in different ways challenge representationalism by orienting to the political; then, I will move on to examine 'posthumanist performativity' (Barad 2007) as a way of thinking about embodiment in digital networks beyond the matter/representation binary.

There are other scholars than Terranova to explore the limitations of representational approaches, but it is Terranova who has identified the 'divergence between a representational and an informational space' (2004: 36) that network connectivity carries. Terranova (2004) builds her framework on both Kittler's media environment theory and the theory of cybernetics and communication (developed by Claude E. Shannon, Norbert Weiner and John von Neumann) to propose a series of affirmative positions about cultural politics in informational milieus (Terranova 2004: 8). Terranova's aphorism that we need to 'move away from an exclusive focus on meaning and representation as the only political dimension in culture' (Terranova 2004: 9) is an important call to action. For me, taking on-board this prompt means that I have attended to the open-ended informational and social relationships developing within and between various groups and individuals, and second, that I have adopted mapping as a methodological attitude.[8] In addition to an analysis of representational politics and ideological positions, this book foregrounds the connections and encounters between actors, and their media practices, which I consider to be part of the affirmative and productive aspect of informational milieus. As I suggest in this book with a number of examples, it is these encounters and social relationships that present political potential in the digital spaces of informational flows. But older media forms remain powerful and find their way to us through digital media – precisely because older ways of experiencing the world are still important.

In the same vein as Terranova's position on network culture, other post-representational analyses have foregrounded the potential of social relationships and experimentation in forms of organising (e.g. Juris 2005; Milioni 2009). These studies have variably engaged with the idea of the 'multitude' to describe collective bodies – a model developed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2005). The multitude delineates multiple, distinct struggles, like short-lived assemblages around single issues, which gather together actors from diverse political positions and nations, and are non-hierarchically linked (2000: 103). In their influential work *Empire,* Hardt and Negri (2000) engage with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Foucault, to theorise resistance as potentially present anywhere and everywhere, in 'a new context, a new milieu of maximum plurality and uncontainable singularization – a milieu of the event' (p. 25). Resistance is thus within labour for Hardt and Negri; it is in the new subjectivities offered in the 'living labor in contemporary capitalist society' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 29), which has both revolutionary and

exploitative potential. This is clearly a Foucauldian reading of power as immanent: productive rather than repressive. Nonetheless, although Hardt and Negri's attention is with post-representational politics, potentially happening in all parts of our everyday lives and in all sites of the social, their gender-blindness makes their philosophy difficult to apply within a situated analysis of embodied gendered subjects.

Of course, feminist philosophers, who have approached questions of the body in non-representational ways (Braidotti 2002; Colebrook 2000, 2008; Grosz 1994) and found appeal in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, have done so with the purpose of offering feminism 'the possibility of a positive, active and affirmative ethics' (Bray and Colebrook 1998: 36). They have thus moved beyond Lacanian negation, in which the feminine is defined as lack or 'other' of the masculine order, and have formulated discourse as a bodily expression. In applying Deleuze's concepts of intensity, flow and machine to the example of anorexia for instance, Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook (1998) interpret dietetic practices like weighing as modes of positive self-production of difference. Similarly, Braidotti's philosophical nomadism suggests an 'ethics of mutual interdependence' (2002: 226) in which biopolitical ethics are more important than identity politics as we know them. Indeed, we need to recognise the multiple differences in contemporary feminist and queer politics by attending to the different scales at which these struggles operate, as well as consider the sets of communicative practices that different actors adopt in their 'becoming' political. But, although I see the necessity of inventing new ways of thinking about politics in post-representational ways and in ways that bring Foucauldian understandings of biopower (or regimes that manage life) to contemporary technological environments, my thinking about biopolitics is different.

Today, being/living as a body is increasingly mediated by pornography, by internet memes, selfies and hashtags, by technoscience, medicine and celebrity culture. This process of mediation is ongoing and unfinished, shaped by non-human environments and contexts. Feminism, with its calls to seize the means of reproduction, to control one's body, to situate bodies and practices intersectionally, is a quintessentially biopolitical project (Murphy 2012: 10). As Michelle Murphy argues, bodies, flesh, suffering, pleasure and life are at the centre of feminist politics, and this focus has also signalled the significance of sex to contemporary forms of governmentality. The acceleration of digital and biotechnological innovation and the dense connectedness that characterises our lives are today shaping

such forms of governmentality, by changing the very material conditions in which life takes place. In this book, I account for how feminism and queer critique challenge these new forms of governmentality, while their political project is performed within digital capitalism. These, I argue, are inherently contradictory conditions for a biopolitical project. My focus on corporeal vulnerability, as an enabling rather than limiting element for politics, aims to tackle such contradiction and paradox.

This is also how I diverge from certain critiques of immanent power and politics. One such major critique (on the other side of the representational–informational friction that I outlined above) comes from Ernesto Laclau (2001) in a critique of *Empire*. Laclau argues that representation remains the central process for politicisation. The multiple positions, he writes, produced in informational and networked environments are not inherently political, as Hardt and Negri suggest. Laclau's insight is important here precisely because of the challenges of constructing a 'we' of strategic difference in new informational and communicative environments. Indeed, what remains unspecified in immanence approaches to network technologies and culture are the practical realities and pragmatic aspects of articulating collective political responses and, more crucially, what difference gender and sexuality make in these actions. In other words, the question of different bodies and different identities requiring different struggles keeps returning, perhaps with even more urgency. But once the notion of politics is re-oriented biopolitically towards shared conditions of corporeality in post-industrial worlds, as we will see, new understandings for non-oppositional politics are possible.

Another important critique of immanent politics and digital media comes from Jodi Dean, particularly in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (2009). In contrast to what Terranova (2004) and Hardt and Negri (2000) understand as a space of potentiality, Dean's grim account describes a space of fragmentation and lost political causes. The volume of communicative content that disperses political struggles into a 'myriad of minor issues and events' (2009: 24) is for Dean not just problematic, but essentially depoliticising. While institutional politics continue no-matter-what, activists, contends Dean, 'struggle for visibility, currency, and in the now quaint term from dot-com years, mindshare' (2009: 20). For Dean, instead of resulting in heterogeneity, this productivity occludes antagonism between various political actors and eventually hinders political action – especially that coming from the left. It is essential to ask critical questions about the volume of activist media products and about the desire to

participate and to interact in a book about feminist activism and digital media, although I reach somewhat different conclusions to Dean, as I explain below. A key critical point here is the role of abundance and productivity for the thriving of capitalism as a whole. 'Communicative capitalism', Dean poignantly argues, is in essence a free market achievement, which incorporates democratic aspirations – those of the 'active, emancipation-hungry consumer' (Frank cited in Dean 2009: 9).[9] Dean is right to argue that

> rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people. (2009: 23)

Indeed, as my empirical research shows, women's and queer groups reorganise according to what they see as the demands of network conditions in the digital era and, for many, the struggle for representational space in networked environments can be seen as merely a quest for popularity. For example, in my examination of London feminist networks (Chapter 2), this struggle sometimes involves a project of symbolic annihilation of other political voices, like those of sex work activists, perhaps more than it signifies an alliance-building project. In other cases, for instance in relation to feminist porn production (Chapter 3) and feminist networks organising around reproductive technologies (Chapter 4), the impact of neoliberal entrepreneurship is evident in online political discourse.[10] In Chapter 3 in particular, we will see how commercial feminist porn integrates queer politics into branded sexualities and, subsequently, transforms political values into commercial value. This is a process of mediation that is essentially a process of value creation, whereby symbolic content gets exchange value and use value beyond their initial cultural value (see Lash and Lury 2007). Moreover, in these two examples, scarcity and abundance are useful concepts for understanding how the global and uneven traffic of bits of women's bodies and information is regulated.

However, the increasing phenomena of LGBT mainstreaming and consumerism (Chapter 5), the emergence of sexual politics bloggers (Chapter 4) and post-feminist consumer identities related to reproductive technologies (Chapter 3) do not, in my understanding, necessarily signify the end of politics, or, as Dean would have it, the failure to act or to elicit

political responses (2009: 29). We need to be careful not to re-inscribe binaries between discourse and materiality, logos and action in digital media. We cannot simply frame politics as action and reduce digital communication to an exchange of encoded logical messages between civil society actors and the government. In other words, the assumption operating here is that because the internet is all about abundance of information and user-generated content, activism and politics are necessarily locked within a causal relationship with this information glut, as Andrejevic (2013) calls it. But doing politics – doing feminism – in digital media is not just about generating and circulating content, messages, images, bits, data and metadata. It is, as I noted earlier drawing from Stephansen (2016), about social processes of community formation and transformation of subjectivity, enabled by digital media practices. Historically, the focus on the semantic side – the rational side – has overshadowed the embodied aspect of political voice (Cavarero 2005). But democratic progressive politics, which includes feminist and queer politics, is a matter of articulating passions and extends to all sites of social life, as Chantal Mouffe (2005) has argued. For Mouffe, the task is to mobilise these passions and give them democratic outlet (1993:109). Natalie Fenton (2016) also reminds us that the 'politics of being' are characterised by passion, anger and hope, which need to be accounted for when studying digital media and radical politics. But the figure of the feminist has historically always been passionate and angry, seen in need of taming and rationality, from the Suffragette who furiously shakes her legs in the air, to the Women's Lib hippy who publicly burns her bra. The inability of liberal politics to encompass political passions relies partly on the attempt at 'domesticating hostility' (Mouffe 2005: 108), of persisting to reinstate conditions of rational harmony. In this book, hope about digital networks and feminism, anxiety about the commodification of women's tissue and other bodily material, anger about the commercialisation of gay Pride and the experience of viewing a pornographic film are all examples of embodied and medium-specific conditions in which affective relations and passionate politics emerge in digital media today. As I explain with these illustrations, feminist and queer activist formations appear around issues, events and practices, both at street level and in transient online public spaces. Therefore, shifting the emphasis away from debates about the failure of democratic politics and digital networked capitalism that mainly focus on scarcity and abundance of information and data in the digital era to include affect, embodiment and sociality helps me reach my particular interest in biopolitics and global governmentality.

Biodigital Vulnerability

From this interest in biopolitics, and my understanding of feminism as a historically biopolitical project that *does* as well as evaluates technoscience (Murphy 2012), it is necessary to introduce another central dimension that links activism, digital media and embodiment in this book (in addition to the important focus on practices): that of vulnerability as a pre-condition for enabling feminist and queer political subjectivity. I use here Judith Butler's discussion on violence, mourning and feminist politics (2004), which is concerned precisely with the materialisation of embodied publics, alliances and other political relationships. She writes:

> each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (2004: 20)

Butler's argument has a great asset: unlike any other account, it makes the public recognition of corporeal common vulnerability a pre-condition for articulating ethical, political claims. Our own bodies, she writes, have a public dimension and are constituted as a 'public phenomenon' (Butler 2004: 26) and it is because of this that it is possible to imagine community and politics. Why is this useful in a book about feminism and digital media? Vulnerability has been a stumbling block for feminism because of its connotations with passivity and victimisation. But consider how feminism against rape culture (sexual violence, street harassment and misogyny in the everyday life of girls and women, especially on campuses) has transformed with social media. Today, the popularity of Twitter and other microblogging social media platforms offer great opportunities for articulating responses to rape culture. 'Hashtag feminism' as it is often called, allows feminist to challenge representations of sexual violence and discourses around rape in music and popular culture. Examples of hashtag activism such as #AskThicke and #safetytipsforladies, and many others, expose victim blaming and the shaming of women in social networks, often by using humour as a political tool for building resilience (see Horeck 2014; Loza 2014; Rentschler 2014, 2015). But there is another

significant aspect in this form of feminist activism that has to do with affect and temporality of digital media:

> There is now an unprecedented speed and immediacy to affective responses to rape and its hyper visible circulation online; it is the radical potentialities and limitations of this new temporal regime – epitomized by the hashtag – that we as feminists must consider when strategizing how to actively re-shape the cultural consensus on questions of gender, violence and power. (Horeck 2014: 1106)

Immediacy, as a key characteristic of digital media, and the bias towards the new temporalities it enables are however in this book raised as a 'sticky' point. This is because in many examples presented in this book, the everyday experiences of doing activism is far from immediate; meetings and parties are long, and process is essential for formulating voice for feminists and queer activists in this study.[11] According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's (1999) model of remediation, immediacy however also refers to the logic of making the medium disappear so that the experience from one setting or reality to another appears unmediated.[12] But as this book shows, the media are constant material agents of politicisation and digital networks are essential in imagining and enacting feminist and queer subjectivity. Thinking about the different overlapping temporalities, those defined by historical traces to the past, those of the new and immediate and those of the slow and long-lasting of everyday processes, through the different empirical examples that the book presents, helps us not only maintain the media visible, but also understand how feminism and queer activism operate in multi-layered networks and relationships across time, scales and technologies.

In addition to the changing understandings of vulnerability that the example of hashtag feminism against rape culture offers however, there is another reason to rethink vulnerability as a productive concept when it comes to digital media. Recently the affective turn in queer cultural theory has recognised the political potential of negative emotions and experiences. Particularly, the work of Sarah Ahmed, Heather Love and Sally Munt has reframed queer as a shameful identity and offers a fundamental insight into the historical importance of gay stigma for contemporary identity. In *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame*, Sally Munt (1998) argues that shame is not necessarily a negative feeling; its political potential has led to collective action, claims for recognition,

political presence and legitimation and has been proven historically with the examples of the Black Civil Rights movement, Gay Liberation Front and Women's Liberation. Shame is embodied and inscribed in our bodies – especially when the body is the source of shame, for example when there is disfigurement, or any other shame of 'non-conformity'. Meanwhile, as Munt notes, shame does not only operate on an individual level, but it also operates at a national level; think, for example, how Germany and Japan were committed to a post-World War II project of national reconstruction and rebuilding of their national identity. Indeed, shame can lead to 'radical, instigating, social, political and cultural agency amongst the formerly disenfranchised' (Munt 1998: 3). Ahmed (2002) also sees emotions as central to politics, because of the attachments and investments required in order for people to become subject of power. If we think about how a range of negative feelings, including regret, despair, self-hatred and loneliness, can result from mediation, for example from the circulation of negative toxic and tragic messages about same-sex desire in film, pop culture and digital cultures, it become even clearer how the embodied and affective, the political and the personal, overlap. Heather Love in *Feeling Backwards* (2009) suggests that the media texts that inspire such feelings are tied to the experience of social exclusion and the impossibility of same sex desire, which is why they can have such much more intense effects than when we watch relatively positive representations. Recognising this link publicly can be immensely empowering.

Consider also how affect and social relations are becoming central in social media data mining for predictive analytics and marketing (Kennedy 2016; Andrejevic 2013). As Ingrid Volkmer (2014) has argued, global communicative spheres and networks are no longer just digital; they are beyond social communities of friends. 'They have become platforms for subjectively "lived" public spaces' (2014: 1) that challenge our very understanding of media and civic identity. And as we are moving to an era of the Internet of Things, where our phones, our cars and domestic appliances are connected, 'we not only do things with words but also do words with things' (Isin and Ruppert 2015: 2). Isin and Ruppert explain that connectivity has not only transformed the ways we live, but because of the connective webs between things and people, and the increasing reliance of public authorities on these webs for data collection, it is transforming politics. Meanwhile, today new media technologies and digital culture, alongside biological technologies, constitute a historically specific set of regulatory practices, discourses and institutions but also

forms of participation; this is what Haraway (1997), by appropriating Foucault's (1978) biopower, called 'technobiopower'. This means that new kinds of vulnerability are generated. Culture in global information networks is indeed biotechnological (Kember 2003). I prefer the term 'biodigital', not so much to point out the integration of information and biotechnologies in both culture and science (O'riordan 2010), but rather to focus on the lived, embodied and experienced aspects of the digital, in the coming together of *bios* (life) and the digital. Butler's argument, alongside a consideration of affect, is especially valuable because it allows us to consider how digital (and biological) technological acceleration constitute today new forms of governmentality, and how these paradoxically can offer possibilities for articulating new political subjectivities.

Life with digital media technologies results in certain distinct vulnerabilities for women and queer people. I noted earlier the invisibility of embodied and affective labour specifically by women in relation to the material media practices in social media and activism. We can also think about the increased expectations for visibility for teenage girls, women, trans and queer youth who are claiming a voice in a culture where they risk being the target of misogynistic trolling and gay cyberbullying. The supposed shift of power to the user in the digital era comes hand-in-hand with the inevitable vulnerability of exposure, and as Andrejevic (2009) argues, the naturalisation of surveillance as we learn to watch and be watched. Recognising these new types of biodigital vulnerabilities publicly has been politically enabling for many feminist groups recently as I explain by drawing on many examples – from the cases of queer teenage suicides linked to cyber bullying, to the vilification and monitoring of teenage girls who engage in sexting, and the marginalisation of women in geeky technological cultures. Today many geeky feminists cultures, for example feminist hacking spaces and Quantified Self[13] women-only meetups, which I discuss in Chapter 4, have moved beyond plain questions of online access to issues and negotiations of visibility of difference. Feminist hacking spaces in particular are concerned with redefining the presence and visibility of marginalised groups in technology production (Fox et al. 2015). We may also note the harassment of women in the gaming culture, and the feminist organising around the Gamergate controversy.[14] In this case, geek masculinity merged with anti-feminist discourse to create a 'toxic technoculture' on the community site Reddit.com (Massanari 2015). Trolling and rape threats on social media define public life in conditions of biodigital vulnerability for these women and

feminist cultures because they introduce new forms of control, not only of bodies and their movements, but also the circulation of discourse and their production of knowledge. In response, these cultures organise politically or form political subjectivities of marginalisation and increasingly turn to creating feminist spaces of mutual awareness and cooperation.[15] This is not to say that vulnerability and corporeal risk are inherently political. Instead, I suggest that the conscious practice of making the vulnerability public by placing it into its sociopolitical and historical context, a process that feminist and queer activists have historically undertaken, drains these conditions of their harmfulness and can be empowering.

A More Philosophical Discussion: Posthumanist Performativity

Beyond thinking about the circulation of communicative messages and representation vs. practice, and how central these are for the formation of feminist political subjectivity and queer identity, there are other significant questions to be asked at a deeper philosophical level. How do digital media technologies contribute to the creation of new material realities for feminist and queer activists? Are digital media just things, or can we attribute some kind of agency to them? And how are matter, knowledge, politics and subjects produced in digital media? One obvious way to approach such questions is via political economy. But my focus on the social, embodied and material aspects of digital media technologies and feminist activism has also been informed at a conceptual level by contemporary feminist scholars in science, technology, society (STS) and the contemporary scholarly field of material feminism, which address questions of the political in new technoscientific worlds (see Alaimo and Hekman 2008).

These take a different route to the question of technology and social equality: they concentrate on technoscientific practices and technologies that produce knowledge. Attending to the productivity of discursive practices, work in this strand indicates how practices, like those taking place in the microcosm of the lab, produce different versions of reality (see Barad 2007; Law and Mol 2002; Lawrence and Shapin 1998; Thompson 2005). So when Donna Haraway (1997) talks about discourse, she includes all the material/semiotic arrangements and practices that make up an object of knowledge – for example a cell or gene. Although in these studies the focus remains with discourse, technologies of knowledge making, and the ways

in which observational media construct what they aim to describe, they variously engage with the question of power, resistance and biopolitical life. But how can we apply this framework to digital communication technologies and the ways they create socio-political structures and material realities?

As noted, studies focusing on feminism and digital media often neglect the materiality of the media and the versatile roles that they fulfil in the everyday lives of activists. But the media, either new or with the incorporation of older media forms, are constant material agents in the process of politicisation. This is a good reason to re-orient our attention towards a version of mediation in which the medium is present as materiality, as apparatus. As recent media ecology approaches have noted, 'technology is not only a passive surface for the inscription of meanings and signification, but a material assemblage that partakes in machinic ecologies' (Goddard and Parikka 2011: 1). What the media do and how they change in their materiality as technoscientific objects is important but we must be careful not to perceive them as 'things'. In feminist STS scholarship, this concern is particularly emphasised by Karen Barad (2007) in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* where she brings together Michel Foucault's theorisation of discursive practices and the ideas of quantum physicist Neils Bohr, to develop the concept of 'posthumanist performativity'. Barad is uneasy with both Butler's notion of performativity and Foucault's discursive practices in relation to the production of material bodies and directs her emphasis to the agency of non-humans. Focusing specifically on the materiality of scientific apparatuses and technologies of knowing, Barad (2003) questions the attention that human discourse and language has received by post-structuralist thinkers and increasingly by feminist STS scholars. She frames discursive practices or apparatus as non-human-based practices that in their own right produce local and physical conditions. For instance, in an analysis of how the scanning tunnelling microscope was used to create the IBM logo on a subatomic level, Barad (2007:354–364) traces the making of new materialities and a new kind of expert (the nanotechnologist). In an earlier study, she analysed how the sonogram, a technology used to follow the progress of a human pregnancy, gave a new status to both the foetus and the politics of life (Barad 1998). In these studies, Barad is not interested in the meanings and cultural ideas around technoscientific practices, but rather in the material/semiotic effects that these have, the realities that they performatively produce and their socio-political implications.

While Barad's concern is with phenomena happening on a smaller scale (that of the lab) than those I analyse in this book, her insights about non-human agency enable the possibility of thinking about digital media and network communication technologies in a way that does not instrumentalise them. Digital media, including screens, cables and keyboards; smartphones and GPS devices; online financial transactions, file sharing and virtual credit; social networking and digitisation of archives; digital research methods and databases of visualisations, can all be seen as discursive practices that produce socio-political realities. It is through our use, engagement and entanglement with these technologies that we become feminists and perform feminism. As I have argued, this performance is not just a matter of words and discourse, it is an embodied practice; it is the things we do online. My focus on how we enact ourselves as feminists through these connective technologies, while at the same time, we create digital networks. This approach does not pre-suppose that a particular feminist subjectivity and activist practice, existing in physical social spaces and on the streets, is then merely juxtaposed on a digital environment. As is the case with Gerbaudo's (2012) analysis in *Tweets and the Streets*, social actors form and act in physical spaces and through their use of social media and other platforms. Posthumanist performativity above all stresses the importance of process. This makes Barad's theoretical contribution indispensable for a reconsideration of the reciprocity between culture and technology and informs my theorisation of how subjects and objects emerge in digital networks.

Notes on Methods

My research design involved engaging in activities with various organisations, groups and individuals in both online and offline contexts. My choice of case studies was motivated as much by my desire to better understand key aspects of digital networks (access, connectivity, immediacy, labour and visibility), as by the need to account for themes central in feminist and queer politics (bodily autonomy, pornography, reproduction and quality of social life). Conducting in-depth interviews, going to parties and agenda-setting meetings and tracing the connections and journeys of feminist and queer formations online and offline allowed me to understand the complex processes of building individual and collective identity and online presence; and the processes of negotiation of digital technologies. These processes were shaped by the intersecting categories of

oppression for the participants of this study, like class, sexuality, ethnicity and gender, and by the more general socio-cultural context of the post-2008 economic recession where my research took place. Further inspired by intersectionality studies (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 2008; Erel 2007; Fotopoulou 2012; Mccall 2005; Mohanty 1988; 2003), I attempt a self-critical production of knowledge, by registering my own intersectional location throughout. This is necessary precisely because, by moving through both online and offline spaces as a researcher in each of the cases examined in the chapters of this book, I was also a user, a producer and consumer of digital media. This book should thus be seen as a production of embodied knowledge, reflective of my own position, as someone with intersecting identities, such as white and cis-woman.

One of these identities was that of a PhD student. As academic and activist spaces frequently crossed, I would meet in conferences people known to me from my fieldwork. These encounters were an important part of negotiating my own researcher and feminist identity through this project, as I attempted to differentiate my political opinion from the positions various feminist and queer groups articulated, whilst remaining supportive of their struggles. My other identity was my national identity, as a Greek living in the UK. When I started my fieldwork in 2009, the worldwide economic crisis was still unravelling, but had already released unprecedented economic and social misery in Greece and other underprivileged countries of the European Union. When Athens was burning in the 2008 riots, or when Syntagma Square signalled the promise of direct democracy once again, along with the Indignados and other mobilisations around Europe, the pain of *nostos* and the agony of not-belonging could not have been more intense. To add to the complexity, moving from a working class background to the environment of the academy, where everyone is imagined to be middle class almost magically, made my research journey an adventure – especially when I interviewed working class people. Then, being my working class self sometimes felt almost like passing, I just wasn't working class enough anymore. These overlapping identities, and the experience of being and doing feminism in digital networks, have made it clear to me how my account is partial, in that it does not claim to speak for the object of study; it is accountable, by registering my position as a researcher and sensitive to the vulnerability that the research account can generate. These three important steps follow Haraway's (1997) advice against 'reflexivity' and in favour of 'diffraction',

the optical metaphor that describes the research process as an attempt not to repeat something that is supposedly authentic, but to produce 'difference patterns in the worlds, not just the same reflected – displaced – elsewhere' (Haraway 1997: 268).[16]

Feminist and queer politics happen in different contexts; they take place online, offline and across different scales and overlapping layers. They are context- and medium-specific. To maintain this multiplicity of feminist and queer forms of activism, the way that I have written each chapter and the examples that illustrate my key arguments in this book are indeed topological,[17] in the sense that they attempt to conceive changeable and abstract objects and their connections (as is the case with politics in informational and networked spaces). This topological approach has also allowed me to account for the complex multi-layered relationships between different forms of feminism and queer activism and their histories, across time and space – sometimes antagonistic, sometimes supportive. Hence the three dimensions of this topology are 'how', 'what' and 'where'. We may think of the topological aspect of 'where' as something that describes dynamic locations, at the intersection of web and offline spaces, flows and scales. 'What' concerns the material/semantic form that feminist and queer activism takes in this context, such as the online content, but also imaginaries and metaphors. And 'how' relates to the processes and practices of emergence, such as online media as actor shaping political issues, everyday connections and mediated experiences.

Itinerary

The book is organised as follows. Chapter 2 begins to investigate new activist media practices by drawing on ethnography with various feminist organisations and individuals based in London. I focus on how these actors understood the role of digital media in contemporary feminism. My fieldwork shows how activists negotiate access, connectivity, immediacy, labour and visibility, the key characteristics of digital technologies, while they raised important points of critique about technical expertise and unpaid labour in the context of post-2008 austerity. Of particular interest here is how activist practices are influenced by libertarian promises that make up a shared social imaginary of the internet as an empowering technology. There is a wider rhetoric of digital networks as sites of non-hierarchical modes of connection and as elementary components of democratic participation. My argument is that this imaginary influences what

counts as legitimate political engagement for feminists today and is instrumental in shaping the form and agendas of women's organisations. The findings demonstrate that indeed, the internet presents an alternative way of engagement for many London-based women groups as it provides spaces for rapid circulation of their campaign material, and connection with one another. At the same time, it becomes a space where older feminists, who are not 'digital natives', experience an uncomfortable sense of being left behind and forgotten about. With this discussion, the chapter portrays how the web becomes a new mediated context of increased visibility and connectivity, part of the wider media ecology, where political opinions about old and still unresolved feminist issues are being reformulated whilst vulnerability and empowerment are experienced in new mediated ways.

In Chapter 3, I move on to examine the tensions and contradictions that characterise feminist and queer pornographic production and self-exposure practices in the era of 'selfie' culture. Here I begin to untangle some of the past and present feminist debates on pornography by addressing issues around web visibility and communication technology more generally, and by contextualising them in light of contemporary postporn politics. Moving away from questions of representation, my question is: what is political about these practices? My analysis first focuses on how postporn cultures raise critical questions about communicative capitalism, about what it means to be human and how we can live with digital technologies, and how they reflect on profound anxieties about what constitutes authenticity and individuality. Then I continue to explore two exemplary cases: nofauxxx.com, a queer and women-owned porn production company that claims a feminist identity; and Shu Lea Cheang's 2001 film *I.K.U.*, a Japanese sci-fi postporn/artporn film, and make special mention of explicit selfies and the so-called 'selfie feminism'. By employing a biopolitical framework of network capitalism, I offer a substantive account of the complex relationship between feminism and the online porn market, to show how queer and feminist identities are becoming increasingly diffused. Although scholarly work in queer and postporn studies has variously conceptualised bioart and sex-positive blogging as expressions of resistance to a normative sexual order, I argue that content generation by both artists and companies is largely guided by neoliberal discourses of consumer choice and sexual agency, in the same way as any other porn production without a specifically feminist or/and queer agenda. At the same time, producers of queer porn and participants in

postporn networks are aware of their subordination and the new forms of biodigital vulnerability, which differentiates them significantly from heterosexual amateur porn cultures. It is because of this awareness and negotiations of vulnerability, I suggest, that the networked connections, events and practices of these actors can be politically empowering.

In Chapter 4, I revisit the concept of networked feminism within the wider context of debates in contemporary feminism about forms of gendered and reproductive labour (Dickenson 2007; Franklin and Lock 2003; Thompson 2005). I turn here to account for feminist projects of knowledge production about reproductive technologies and their regulation in digital media, focusing specifically on the example of fertility policy around egg donation and fertility tracking with smart technologies. The significance of reproductive labour for global capitalism, and the biodigital vulnerabilities that are created in relation to reproductive technologies are my key interests in this discussion. Reproductive labour and the changes in the political economy of reproduction brought by new reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilisation and egg extraction, are controversial issues that have invited numerous feminist interventions around the world. A conceptualisation of gendered labour is vital for an understanding of the reconfigurations of the 'political' in our digitally mediated worlds. Second, I move on to analyse the communicative acts that contribute to a layperson's knowledge production about reproductive rights, and note how these cut across academic/grassroots, online/offline and national/local spaces, whilst challenging these boundaries. Feminist networks attempt to create alternative but credible sources of knowledge that question dominant understandings of biomedicine and its policy. My examination shows how these actors establish their credibility and how their participation in mainstream digital media legitimises them as representatives of affected groups in society. The central pre-occupation with subjective experience and seizing control over one's body in contemporary feminist mobilisations indicates continuity with the Women's Health Movement. As with the other chapters in this book, there are deep contradictions that characterise feminist politics of reproduction, as neoliberal discourses of individual choice, sexual agency and empowerment shape the conditions in which they emerge. I argue that these politics can be better understood in relation to embodied, material practices of knowledge production, mutual learning and self-experimentation with digital media and smart technologies.

From the international biopolitical networks of reproduction and pornography, I cross over to consider the specificity and importance of locality and space for queer political cultures in digital networks in Chapter 5. I am motivated here by the need to understand how the meaning of belonging, community and politics are changing with digital networking technologies. I draw from ethnographic analysis of an anarcho-queer activist group in Brighton called Queer Mutiny, and examine how reterritorialisation and community building were key elements of their political project. Through a combination of pedagogic and cultural activist practices, where peer support and learning are central, activists built a strong sense of place, and maintained an active connection between the past, the present and the future. These practices involved workshops and parties, as well as the production of DIY zines and online content, and aimed at creating a community life with thick and strong ties. Through a discussion of the group's resistance to digital media technologies, I show how social networking was in this case key in a project of world-making, as a means for documenting and promoting assets of community and strengthening embodied affective relations on the ground. Meanwhile, the chapter shows the tensions between how participants imagined global activism and how this activism materialised locally, against this backdrop of neoliberalism and the 'pink pound'. With an attention to intimacy, friendship and belonging and their centrality for local political communities and cultures, the chapter returns to a key concern in this book: the ways in which, in the digital world, feminist and queer activism are today performed and enacted through affective relations and material, embodied practices.

A key focus in this book are the contradictions, tensions and often-paradoxical aspects of feminist and queer politics in a digital world of dense connections. How can feminism and queer activism articulate a political response to the new forms of governmentality that result from digital technologies, while using these same technologies in order to circulate their counter-narratives and inhabit their versions of the world? By crossing through the themes of bodily autonomy, pornography, reproduction and queer social life, I visit some of the inherent contradictions of this political project and stress that, between empowerment and vulnerability, feminism remains today a necessary and passionate struggle for social justice.

Notes

1. 'Web 2.0' is a term used to describe contemporary convergence and it refers to wikis, social networking platforms, weblogs and other user-generated content platforms and practices.
2. Intersectionality is the systematic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other sociopolitical and cultural categories interrelate. See Fotopoulou (2012) for an overview.
3. Guha (2015) explains how the campaign hashtags never really took off, or as they say, trending, and this for them is indicative of how the campaign did not manage to engage concerned citizens and policymakers.
4. Resource mobilisation theory is a theory of collective action, which focuses on organisational dynamics and the importance of resources such as time, money, technical and organisational skills for social movements. It has been employed in order to understand the role of social networking and other digital media technologies as new resources for activism, not only in terms of organising protest, but also for collective identity formation and fostering community bonds. See Eltantawy and Wiest (2011).
5. There are a few notable exceptions, such as Touraine (1981) who wrote about the women's liberation movement as a new social movement.
6. The authors extend Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) notion of 'connective action' here.
7. As Gill and Pratt (2008) explain, precarious employment in neoliberalism has a double meaning: on the one hand, it creates uncertainty, and on the other, the potential for new subjectivities and political possibilities.
8. Mapping as a methodological approach is explained in the following section.
9. In a later analysis, Andrejevic (2013) also notes how the internet has been understood as an empowering technology precisely because of its capacity to allow information production and distribution.
10. For other important examples employing Foucault's [what?] (2003; 2008), see Gajjala et al. (2010); Shakhsari (2011).
11. See also Barassi (2015) and Kaun (2015) for a discussion of how this operates in other activist and protest contexts.
12. According to the theory of remediation, visual digital culture presents itself as an improved version of older media in an effort to respond to them. Remediation is a process in which new cultural and media forms carry in and with them conventions, practices and ways of thinking which belonged to older cultural forms. They call the encounter and collocation of multiple cultural texts within any given digital text 'hypermediacy', whereas by 'immediacy' they refer to the concurrent invisibility of the medium in these texts. See also Kember and Zylinska (2012).

13. The Quantified Self (QS) is a community of people who use wearable devices in order to log personal information and improve various aspects of personal life, such as mood, physical and mental performance, or other aspects of everyday life, such as air quality.
14. The Gamergate controversy relates to the misogynistic campaign that was launched with the Twitter hashtag #GamerGate and involved the direct targeting of game developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu, as well as cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian. The case sparked a feminist response and examination of issues of sexism in the video game industry.
15. A good example here is how the 2014 YouTube video about a woman who got 'catcalled' 108 times while walking in New York went viral with 43 million views (10 hours of walking in NYC as a woman). Although not directly linked to gender, the use of mobile phone cameras to expose police brutality against black people in the USA is at the time of writing another illustration of how publicity can empower marginalised communities.
16. For Haraway (1988), one task is to reveal the claims of power concealed in claims for objectivity. Central in this ethical and political project, particularly through the 'modest witness' figure, was of course registering gender exclusions in the making of scientific knowledge (Haraway 1997).
17. Topology derives from Greek, where it means an account of a conceptual structure or space, or according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), it is simply 'the way in which constituent parts are interrelated or arranged'. However, as a distinct mathematical field that focuses on continuity between objects it has informed numerous studies in network architecture (Elahi and Elahi 2006; Naimzada et al. 2009), music (Mazzola et al. 2002) and art (Kalajdzievski 2008; Martinot 2001).

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2002). Communities that feel: Intensity, difference and attachment. In E. Larreta (Ed.), *Identity and difference in the global era* (pp. 414–448). Rio de Janerio: UNESCO.

Alaimo, S., & Hekman, S. J. (2008). *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Andrejevic, M. (2009). Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of user-generated labor. *The YouTube Reader*, 413.

Andrejevic, M. (2013). *Infoglut: How too much information is changing the way we think and know*. London: Routledge.

Anthias, F., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1983). Contextualising feminism: Gender, ethnic and class divisions. *Feminist Review*, *15*, 62–75.

Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative media*. London: SAGE.

Baer, H. (2015). Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 0777(January), 17–34.

Barad, K. (1998). Getting real: Technoscientific practices and the materialization of reality. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, *10*(2), 87–91.

Barad, K. M. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, *28*, 801–831.

Barad, K. M. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Barassi, V. (2015). Social media, immediacy and the time for democracy: Critical reflections on social media as temporalizing practices. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boler, M., et al. (2014). Connective labor and social media: Women's roles in the 'leaderless' occupy movement, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*.

Bolter, D., & Grusin, J. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Braidotti, R. (2002). *Metamorphoses: Towards a materialist theory of becoming*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.

Bray, A., & Colebrook, C. (1998). The haunted flesh: Corporeal feminism and the politics of (dis)embodiment. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *24*(1), 35–67.

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. London: Verso.

Cavarero, A. (2005). *For more than one voice toward a philosophy of vocal expression*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cochrane, K. (2013) The fourth wave of feminism: Meet the rebel women. *The Guardian*, December 10. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women

Cohn, J. (2013). Female labor and digital media: Pattie Maes, postfeminism, and the birth of social networking technologies. *Camera Obscura*, *28*(2), 151–176.

Colebrook, C. (2000). From radical representations to corporeal becomings: The feminist philosophy of Lloyd, Grosz, and Gatens. *Hypatia*, *15*, 76–93.

Colebrook, C. (2008). On not becoming man: The materialist politics of unactualized potential. In S. Alaimo & S. J. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Collins, P. H. (2000). It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race, and nation. In U. Narayan & S. Harding (Eds.), *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising media as practice. *Social Semiotics*, *14*(2), 115–132.
Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society*, *10*, 373–391.
Couldry, N., Fotopoulou, A., & Dickens, L. (2016). Real social analytics: A contribution towards a phenomenology of a digital world. *British Journal of Sociology*, *67*(1), 118–137.
Creed, B. (1993). *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *14*, 538–554.
Darmon, K. (2014). Framing SlutWalk London: How does the privilege of feminist activism in social media travel into the mass media?. *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(4), 700–704.
Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword. *Feminist Theory*, *9*, 67–85.
Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and other neoliberal fantasies: Communicative capitalism and left politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Della Porta, D., & Mattoni, A. (2012). Cultures of participation in social movements. *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, 170–181.
Dickens, L., Couldry, N., & Fotopoulou, A. (2014). News in the community? Investigating emerging inter-local spaces of news production/consumption. *Journalism Studies*, *16*(1), 97–114.
Dickenson, D. (2007). *Property in the body: Feminist perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Downing, J. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements*. California: Sage Publications.
Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Elahi, A., & Elahi, M. (2006). *Data, network, and Internet communications technology*. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.
Elsen-Ziya, H. (2013). Social media and Turkish feminism: New resources for social activism. *Feminist Media Studies*, *13*(5), 860–870.
Eltantawy, N., & Wiest, J. B. (2011). The Arab Spring|Social media in the Egyptian revolution: Reconsidering resource mobilization theory. *International Journal of Communication*, *5*, 1207–1224.
Erel, U. (2007). Constructing meaningful lives: Biographical methods in research on migrant women *Sociological Research Online* 12.
Fenton, N. (2016). *Digital, political, radical*. Cambridge: Polity.
Fortunati, L. (2007). Immaterial labor and its machinization. *Ephemera*, *7*, 139–157.

Fotopoulou, A., & Couldry, N. (2015). Telling the story of the stories: Online content curation and digital engagement. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(2), 235–249.

Fotopoulou, A. (2012). Intersectionality queer studies and hybridity: Methodological frameworks for social research. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *13*(2), 19–32.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality. Vol. 1: The will to knowledge*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Foucault, M. (2003). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*. New York: Picador.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fox, S., Ulgado, R. R., & Rosner, D. K., (2015) Hacking culture, not devices: Access and recognition in feminist hackerspaces. *ACM*, CSCW 15, 14–18 March 2015.

Franklin, S., & Lock, M. M. (2003). *Remaking life & death: Toward an anthropology of the biosciences*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. New York: Routledge.

Gajjala, R., Zhang, Y., & Dako-Gyeke, P. (2010). Lexicons of women's empowerment online. *Feminist Media Studies*, *10*, 1.

Galloway, A. R. (2004). *Protocol: How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Gill, R. (2001). *Gender and the media*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Gill, R. and Pratt, A., 2008. In the social factory? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work. *Theory, culture & society, 25*(7–8), 1–30.

Goddard, M., & Parikka, J. (2011). Editorial: Unnatural ecologies. *Fibreculture Journal*, *17*.

Gordon, J. (2007). The mobile phone and the public sphere: Mobile phone usage in three critical situations. *Convergence*, *13*, 307–319.

Grosz, E. A. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Guha, P. (2015). Hash tagging but not trending: The success and failure of the news media to engage with online feminist activism in India. *Feminist Media Studies*, *15*(1), 155–157.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*, 575–599.

Haraway, D. J. (1997). *ModestWitness@SecondMillennium. FemaleManMeets OncoMouse: Feminism and technoscience*. New York: Routledge.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2005). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. Penguin.
Horeck, T. (2014). #AskThicke:'Blurred lines', rape culture, and the feminist hashtag takeover. *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(6), 1105–1107.
Isin, E., & Ruppert, E. (2015). *Being digital citizens*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
Jarrett, K. (2016). *Feminism, labour and digital media: The digital housewife*. London: Routledge.
Juris, J. S. (2005). The new digital media and activist networking within anti-corporate globalization movements. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *597*, 189–208.
Kalajdzievski, S. (2008). *Math and art: An introduction to visual mathematics*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
Kaun, A. (2015). 'This space belongs to us!': Protest spaces in times of accelerating capitalism. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
Kember, S. (2003). *Cyberfeminism and artificial life*. London: Routledge.
Kember, S., & Zylinska, J. (2012). *Life after new media: Mediation as a vital process*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Kennedy, H. (2016). Why study social media data mining?. In *Post, mine, repeat*, 19–39. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
Laclau, E. (2001). Can immanence explain social struggles?. *Diacritics*, *31*(4), 3–10.
Lash, S., & Lury, C. (2007). *Global culture industry: The mediation of things*. Cambridge: Polity.
Law, J., & Mol, A. (2002). *Complexities: Social studies of knowledge practices*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Lawrence, C., & Shapin, S. (1998). *Science incarnate: Historical embodiments of natural knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Love, H. (2009). *Feeling backward*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Loza, S. (2014). Hashtag feminism, # solidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the other# femfuture. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, *5, np*.
Martinot, S. (2001). *Maps and mirrors: Topologies of art and politics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
Massanari, A. (2015). # Gamergate and the happening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society* 1461444815608807.
Mattoni, A. (2012). *Media practices and protest politics: How precarious workers mobilise*. London: Routledge.
Mazzola, G., GöLler, S., & MüLler, S. (2002). *The topos of music: Geometric logic of concepts, theory, and performance*. Boston, MA: Birkhauser Verlag.

Mccall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, *30*, 1771–1800.
Mcrobbie, A. (2007). Post feminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the new gender regime. In Y. Tasker & D. Negra (Eds.), *Interrogating postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture* (pp. 27–39). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Milioni, D. L. (2009). Probing the online counterpublic sphere: The case of Indymedia Athens. *Culture and Society*, *31*, 409–431.
Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review*, 61–88.
Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. London: Duke University Press.
Mouffe, C. (2005 [1993]). *The return of the political*. London: Verso.
Munt, S. (1998). *Queer attachments: The cultural politics of shame*. London: Ashgate.
Murphy, M. (2012). *Seizing the means of reproduction: Entanglements of feminism, health, and technoscience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Naimzada, A. K., Stefani, S., & Torriero, A. (2009). *Networks, topology and dynamics theory and applications to economics and social systems*. Berlin: Springer.
O'Riordan, K. (2010). *The genome incorporated: Constructing biodigital identity*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New Media & Society*, *4*, 9–27.
Plant, S. (1997). *Zeros + ones: Digital women and the new technoculture*. New York: Doubleday.
Postill, J. (2009). What is the point of media anthropology?. *Social Anthropology*, *17*(3), 334–337.
Rentschler, C. (2015). # Safetytipsforladies: Feminist Twitter takedowns of victim blaming. *Feminist Media Studies*, *15*(2), 353–356.
Rentschler, C. A. (2014). Rape culture and the feminist politics of social media. *Girlhood Studies*, *7*(1), 65–82.
Ruiz, P. (2014). *Articulating dissent: Protest and the public sphere*. London: Pluto Press.
Shakhsari, S. (2011). Weblogistan goes to war: Representational practices, gendered soldiers and neoliberal entrepreneurship in diaspora. *Feminist Review*, *99*, 6–24.
Silverstone, R. (2002). Complicity and collusion in the mediation of everyday life. *New Literary History*, *33*, 761–780.
Stephansen, H. C. (2016). Understanding citizen media as practice: Agents, processes, publics. In M. Baker & B. Blaagaard (Eds.), *Citizen media and public spaces: Diverse expressions of citizenship and dissent*. London: Routledge.

Stephansen, H. C., & Couldry, N. (2014). Understanding micro-processes of community building and mutual learning on Twitter: A 'small data' approach. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(10), 1212–1227.

Stone, A. R. (1995). *The war of desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Terranova, T. (2004). *Network culture: Politics for the information age*. London: Pluto Press.

Thompson, C. (2005). *Making parents: The ontological choreography of reproductive technologies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Touraine, A. (1981). *The voice and the eye: An analysis of social movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turkle, S. (1996). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Volkmer, I. (2014). *The global public sphere: Public communication in the age of reflective interdependence*. Cambridge: Polity.

Wakeford, N. (1997). Cyberqueer. In S. Munt & A. Medhurst (Eds.), *The lesbian and gay studies reader*. London: Cassell.R.