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Remediating politics: feminist and queer formations in digital networks

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Thesis submitted September 2011 in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Acknowledgements

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:………………………………………

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Aristea Fotopoulou

Doctor of Philosophy

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines feminist and queer actors emerging in highly mediated environments and the forms of political organisation and critical knowledge production they engage in. It indicates that older debates around gender and sexuality are being reformulated in digital networks and identifies alternative understandings which are being developed. The study foregrounds a performative conceptualisation and argues that political realities are produced in dynamic configurations of communication media, discourses and bodies. It suggests that network technologies constitute sources of vulnerability and anxiety for feminists and stresses the significance of registering how embodied subjectivities emerge from these experiences.

To achieve its aims and to map activity happening across different spaces and scales, the project attended to context-specific processes of mediation at the intersections of online and offline settings. It employed ethnographic methods, internet visualisation, in-depth interviewing and textual analysis to produce the following key outcomes: it registered changing understandings of the political in relation to new media amongst a network of women's organisations in London; it investigated the centrality of social media and global connections in the shaping of local queer political communities in Brighton; it complicated ideas of control, labour and affect to analyse emerging sexual identities in online spaces like *nofauxx.com,* and offline postporn events; finally, it traced feminist actors gathering around new reproductive technologies, at the crossing fields of grassroots activism and the academy.

Today, women's groups and queer activists increasingly use networked communication for mobilisation and information-sharing. In a climate of widespread scepticism towards both representational politics and traditional media, questions about the role of digital networks in enabling or limiting political engagement are being raised. This thesis aims to contribute to these debates by accounting for the ways in which feminist and queer activists in digital networks reformulate the relationship between communication media and politics.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to outline the theoretical framework of the thesis and to consolidate the methodological choices of the research. First, it provides the rationale for the research design and highlights the principle conceptual and methodological interventions that this research project seeks to make. Next, the chapter provides a summary of the main argument and outlines the content of each main chapter of this thesis. It then moves to formulate how the concept of mediation is being used in this thesis, with reference to debates of representation and performativity. The chapter explains how the framework of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) is employed in this thesis and further defines the concept of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) and its analytical relevance to the research undertaken. In the second part of this introductory chapter, I delineate the methodological intervention that the thesis aims to make by justifying how and why a combination of cases from feminist and queer politics have been selected; and by specifying the necessity of digital and ethnographic research methods for the collection and analysis of the material.

This thesis examines the forms of feminist and queer political engagement that are culturally and historically specific in the context of networked communication[1]. It asks how political praxis and thinking around gender and sexuality changes and what kinds of political subjectivities and relations appear in a highly technological world. The aims of this research project are then: primarily, to provide a situated but non-exhaustive account of contemporary forms of gender and sexual politics emerging in digitally saturated environments - and by this I refer to online spaces, as well as to the widespread digital saturation of all aspects of our lives; secondly, to theorise the role of digital communication technologies and culture in politicisation processes; thirdly, to empirically approach how ideas of networks, citizenship and community are perceived by the participants in these politics; and finally, to critically draw from existing innovative research in the fields of media theory, political science and feminist science and technology studies in order to develop interdisciplinary analytical tools, which can address wider questions of mediation and representation.

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1   More than 75% of the total population in the UK has access to the internet, according to UK Office for National Statistics, 2010.

a) Rationale for the research design

In order to achieve these aims, in this research project I bring together multiple gender and sexuality related political struggles, which have diverse scopes and operate on different scales. Briefly,[2] these are networks of women's organisations mobilising around the theme of violence against women; local queer political communities; politics emerging in relation to pornography; and feminist assemblages forming around new reproductive technologies. Good reasons led me to draw material from such diverse cases and guided me to the research question. Primarily, my experience of being invited to participate in queer and feminist politics today mainly happens through social media, like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, online petitions and subscriptions to email lists. For instance, at the time of writing I have been asked, variously, to attend an anti-Valentine's day dinner coordinated by the Brighton Queer Mutiny group; to celebrate the 35th birthday of the Feminist Library in London; to participate in a demonstration organised by the Feminists Against Cuts. By some of these organisations, new communicative platforms are being used in order to connect, in event organising and for information exchange. In other cases, groups abstain from adopting these technologies in their organisational routines but still use them on an individual basis. It is thus necessary to explore multiple, technologically-saturated political sites. An examination of how multiple actors adopt, resist or remain indifferent to communicative technologies in their everyday life will enable an understanding of the new meanings of political participation in network environments. Secondly, bringing together cases from different spaces and scales relates to the ways in which network media cross these spaces and seem to transgress traditional perceptions of space and time, public and private, presence and absence*.* At the same time, the overwhelming feeling of being *in medias res* as a political and sexual subject and of politics as mediated makes it decisive to investigate the common understandings of the political that prevail in these diverse networked spaces. Thirdly, I arrived at this research by my own political investments in queer feminism and my current location, as a white, queer, non-British woman with a working class background, living in Brighton, the alleged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) capital of Britain.

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2   An elaborate outline of each chapter is provided later in this chapter.

Thus by providing an account of the selected intersecting political formations in the context of this thesis, I foreground the heterogeneity characterising feminist and queer politics today, as well as the uncertainty about the future of identity, representation and mediation, which is shared by both academics and activists today. The urgency of posing these questions in the current climate of global economic crisis applies to a wider concern about what leftist and democratic politics may mean. However, gender and sexuality often become secondary analytical categories in critical accounts of the financial crisis - and the crisis of capitalism - with class being the primary category. On the one hand, women are the big losers of the current economic crisis; with regulatory shifts affecting them nationally, as well as on a level of international governance, for example shifts in policies regarding immigration, reproduction and mobility (Walby, 2009). It is therefore of key significance to investigate what shape feminist interventions have taken in the climate of post-2008 recession. On the other hand, sexualities and identity politics have played a central role in challenging and critiquing contemporary global and local expressions of neoliberalism (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Seidman, 2001; Weeks, 1998). Pertinent here is the widespread use of network communication technologies by LGBT-identified people today, for the dissemination of ideas and political mobilisation, as well as for the purposes of forming alternative sexual communities (see Mowlabocus, 2010b). A key task then is to study how queer communities negotiate the commercialisation of identity politics in neoliberal Western societies but also how social media and network technologies may impede or enrich queer political projects. Since feminist and queer theory have developed side by side since the late 1980s, and have informed each other in the academy and activism (see Warner, 1993a), cases from queer and feminist politics are brought together in this research in order to mark the on-going affiliations and tensions between these political projects today.

Questions of embodiment are paramount in an exploration of feminist and sexual politics. Cultural studies of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have posed challenging questions around embodiment and have noted how gendered and sexed identities are constructed in marked everyday politics of space and time (Balsamo, 1996; Consalvo and Paasonen, 2002; Hayles, 1999; Karl, 2007; Munt *et al*., 2002; Youngs, 2003), and how gender roles remain hugely unchallenged (Bassett, 1997; Kennedy, 2005; van Zoonen, 2002). Largely speaking, early feminist theoretical

engagement with network culture has concentrated on identity experimentation and fluidity (Plant, 2000; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1996; Wakeford, 1997) but has often overlooked the formation of *collective* identities as political identities. This thesis adds to this discussion by elucidating the ways gender and sexuality politics form in networked media.

At the same time, my thesis seeks to contribute to debates in media studies about how the internet and new media more generally may offer opportunities for democratic politics by enabling the articulation of critiques to the dominant order and the formation of alternative organisational structures. For example, media theorists examining the impact of digital networks on social movements have predominately looked at alternative media forms, like *Indymedia*, anti-globalisation activism and online counterpublics (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002); or alternative news sources, like mobile phones and citizen journalism as evidence for new public spheres (Gordon, 2007). This influential existing research is primarily interested in the transformation of publics and the opportunities for direct democracy but to a lesser extent in the embodied aspects of these publics. As will be further elaborated in the following section, my project understands both sexuality and gender identities as embodied subjectivities which are central but often invisible in the post-industrial production system (Haraway, 1991). In the following sections, I engage with a series of debates around what technology is and does to culture, questions of mediation and the role of networks in public and political cultures. In doing so, I problematize ideas of materiality, technology, embodiment and discourse in order to rethink the conditions that constitute foreclosures or possibilities for feminist and queer politics in digital environments.

At this point, it may be useful to clarify that this thesis does not seek to create a taxonomy of feminist and queer identities and the particularities of political organisations. It is rather structured on the basis of a metaphorical activity, that of "looping threads", in other words of creating connections and sharing conceptual threads between disciplinary fields. This follows from Donna Haraway's (1997) prompt to conduct research like playing a cat's cradle game - that is, collectively and with the goal to create interesting but open-ended knowledge patterns (p.268). Thus, as I explain below, this thesis offers an account of situated, context- and medium-specific sites where political realities are produced.

b) Summary of argument

Networked communications drastically change the mode of capitalist processes and technologies, but they also play a central role in what the political and the social mean today. This thesis poses a major research question concerning the relationship between networked media and the political, specifically for gender and sexuality. It seeks to make the following conceptual and methodological interventions:

⚔   Firstly, the project stresses the importance of analysing context-specific processes of mediation by attending to the dialectic relationship between socio-political life and the digital. Rather than offering a generalised theory about how the media as a new powerful institution change politics, the thesis proposes to trace processes of mediation in specific locations. Thus mediation enables an understanding of how network technologies become incorporated in the everyday lives of activists today and how sexuality politics become material, commodified objects in online culture. At the same time, my application of the concept of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) indicates that both mediated experiences and political debates of the past are today being re-framed in new networked environments in ways that occlude the continuity of media forms and the importance of identity in political struggles of the past respectively. But from this consideration of the dialectic relationship between media technologies and the political, and the significance of making the medium visible, I contend that it is the concept of performativity which inaugurates an effective way of negotiating the key question of representation and materiality.

⚔   Therefore, the thesis foregrounds the relevance of the notion of performativity as this has been developed in feminist studies of science and technology (Barad, 2003, 2007; Haraway, 1997), for understanding politics in relation to digital media today. It suggests that feminist and queer politics and forms of organising materialise in dynamic, intersecting configurations of network technologies, circulating discourses and human bodies. Considering the emergence of queer and feminist politics through the concept of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007), this project traces in each case the dynamic configurations through which multiple, diverse political realities are being produced.

⚔   Thirdly, the thesis argues that network technologies and feminist/queer

formations are not extensions of one another, but they constitute for each other sources of vulnerability and anxiety. Digital media technologies and culture are understood as discursive practices; alongside other apparatuses and institutions, they make up contemporary biopower, the power which regulates and governs bodies, information and life (Hardt and Negri, 2000). By analysing how these anxieties are experienced and what kinds of embodied subjectivities emerge from these experiences, each chapter of this thesis identifies the political implications of shared "biodigital" vulnerability (O'Riordan, 2010). At the same time, it indicates the politically productive aspect of these new conditions; in other words, digital technologies and culture become the possibilities and opportunities for new political spaces and realities.

⚔   Finally, the thesis seeks to contribute a critical and creative exploration of methodological and analytical possibilities for the examination of feminist and queer politics in technologically and media-saturated worlds. It is necessary to combine methodological approaches in order to follow political activity which takes place at the intersection of online and offline spaces. Hence the research, by applying ethnography, online textual analysis and web mapping and visualisation, shows how politics today emerge in multiple sites; different, intersecting spaces and scales inform the shaping of identities and practices. At the same time, this creative methodological assemblage allows me to account for the role of nonhuman actors in shaping models of political activity and opens the possibility for accountable feminist knowledge production.

II.   Structure of Thesis

As women's organisations in the UK increasingly employ new media technologies in their campaigns, it becomes necessary to explore how new understandings of feminist politics emerge from this use. In Chapter 2, I focus on the network forming around the conference 'Feminism in London', an event of increasing centrality in British grassroots feminism, in order to examine feminist groups' everyday uses of communicative technologies. I provide an account of online and offline ethnographic research combined with weblink analysis to make two points in this Chapter. Firstly, I argue that feminist subjectivities and models of political action emerge from experiences of uncertainty and vulnerability which are specific to digital culture. At the

same time, they are shaped by hopes and metaphors about online networking. Secondly, I suggest that the re-articulation of violence against women as a key feminist issue in both online and offline media forms is central here because it enacts the boundaries of feminist identity within the mapped network. By engaging with the concept of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007), this chapter renders an analysis of human and nonhuman discursive practices through which the mapped network of women's organisations was produced, and develops a wider discussion about the role of nonhumans in materialising the conditions for public engagement.

In Chapter 3, Queer counterpublics and referential metaculture: Negotiating locality and connectivity, I am concerned with the relationship between digital networks and the ways in which local queer political communities and understandings of belonging take shape. Queer communities extensively use email lists, discussion forums and social media to organise events, to set up alternative queer/trans friendly communal homes, and to move from place to place around the world. It is necessary, then, to pose a question about how the discourses of mobility, queer cosmopolitanism and global connectivity intersect with practices, both online and offline, of sustaining and building cultural and political territories. By combining ethnographic methods with textual analysis at the crossings of online and offline spaces, I address the understandings and uses of network technologies by, and through, the Brighton-based constellation "Queer Mutiny". I identify how social network technologies are key for the production, circulation and archiving of cultural references, with locality being of cardinal importance. Network communications become the forefront where the tensions with both the imaginary queer global community and Brighton's LGBT community manifest. By tracing how queer subjectivities are enacted in local scales, this chapter enables an understanding of how significant geographical locality, friendship and social media are for contemporary queer politics.

In Chapter 4, Postporn networks: Making scarcity and forming affective intensities, I turn towards the new forms of pornography produced online by women, particularly radical sex weblogs and alt queer production companies. The abundance of porn circulated online by producers and users who articulate some kind of feminist or queer political rhetoric makes it important to ask how practices and understandings of political participation change today; how the pornographic object takes shape in digital visual culture; and how the queer body is produced through these practices. By

analysing the framing of feminist politics in the webpages of a number of porn companies, in this chapter, I argue that digital networks operate as regulatory practices which advance certain forms of branded sexual identities and neoliberal expressions of feminist identities. Secondly, by attending to porn networks that operate across academic, commercial and art spaces and by delineating a process of collective meaning making during the tentative focus group screening of the film *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000), I engage with the concept of affective "intensity" (Massumi, 2002). This discussion offers a different understanding of embodiment, representation and collective political identity in technologically shaped networks. Through these two complementary conceptual routes, this chapter offers an investigation of biopolitics in informational environments.

The fifth chapter, Feminist biopolitical assemblages: Responding to global flows and the 2011 HFEA[3] consultation, extends the discussion about biopolitics to the field of reproductive technologies, an on-going concern for feminism and politics more generally. Here, I attend to the ways in which, on a global scale, questions and policies about the flows of bodies and informational bits intersect. My analysis concentrates on the online circulation of texts relevant to the 2011 HFEA consultation for the review of payment for egg donors and the feminist networked publics forming around this circulation. Through this examination, I trace how anxieties of bodily and informational autonomy invite certain modes of engagement both in grassroots activism and the academy. First, I identify the re-articulation of liberal ideas of choice, and secondly, I trace a network of feminist biopolitics which directly intervenes with the conditions of knowledge-making about biomedical technologies and their regulation. This network appears to further evolve organically within and through communicative technologies as it operates cross-nationally and disrupts academic/grassroots binaries. On a conceptual level, this chapter brings together the notions of shared corporeal vulnerability (Butler, 2004) and the biodigital (O'Riordan, 2010), in order to frame how new forms of vulnerability may advance the formation of new publics and subjectivities in biotechnological worlds.

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3 This is the British Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which is both a policy-making and a licensing body.

III. Theorising affect, communication and politicisation

a) Mediatization, mediation and medium theory

In what follows, I elaborate the theoretical framework of the thesis, by initially thinking through and putting pressure on the concepts of mediation, mediatization, media ecology and remediation. I then move into the wider debates of representation and performativity currently evolving in the intersecting fields of media theory, political science and social science of science and technology, which inform the conceptual context of this thesis. I consider how the theoretical strand of performativity in science and technology studies (STS) and, in particular, the ideas of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) might enrich discussions about digital technology and politicisation.

Network media have been thought to transform everyday life, communication and identity, and to shape democratic processes and relations of power. Mediation and mediatization are two main conceptual frameworks in contemporary media theory used to describe the relationship between the media and social change. Mediatization has been employed by mainly German and Scandinavian scholars to describe a historical shift in which power moves from institutions like the family, education or the parliament to the media (Hepp, 2009; Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007, 2009). For Friedrich Krotz (2007), it is a metaprocess, in other words a long-term development operating at a macro level and across cultures, which alongside globalization, individualization and commercialization, imposes new rules and constrains on our everyday, social lives (Krotz, 2007). Although I understand the necessity of thinking about transformations in our social and cultural lives from a macroscopic perspective, as the mediatization school of thought proposes, I have reservations when it comes to its pertinence to my research. This is because, first of all, there are developments related to digital networks and information technologies in the late twentieth century to which it does not directly speak (for instance the consolidation of social media as a crucial element of social interaction or internet participation as an indispensable component of contemporary political campaigns). My study also demands a close, micro-level scrutiny of organisational practices in order to understand how feminist and queer politics change, if at all, due to network communication. Therefore I find that there is need for conceptual frameworks which work on different scales, that is, both in regards to

everyday life and at the level of institutions. Additionally, the concept of mediatization seems more suitable for describing a one-way process, that of people accommodating the logic of the media. However, it is necessary to ask how digital and networked media also change to accommodate user needs or the needs of civic society. Can we think of digital media as material and dynamic processes, whereby "old" media forms like television "converge", to use Henry Jenkins' term (2006), with "new" media; and what would this mean for politicisation?

Similar questions grow out of an exploration of medium theory, which largely views media technologies as extensions of human facilities (McLuhan, 1967; Meyrowitz, 1985). This strand of scholarly thought is more useful than mediatization in my exploration of sexuality and gender politics for two reasons: Firstly, the acute concern of medium theory with the human and embodiment enables a conceptualisation of emerging subjectivities as embodied subjectivities. Secondly, it points us towards medium-specific analysis; in other words, this theory allows us to ask what it is about the digital and what it is about networks that make a difference today. It has been argued for example that the digital defines the content of communication (Hayles, 1999). In her account of posthumanism, Katherine Hayles (1999) depicts an epistemic shift in contemporary societies from physicality and issues of absence/presence to patterns/randomness, which she understands as pressure towards "dematerialization" (1999, p.29). For Hayles (1999) this shift indicates more than changes to text production and dissemination: it is based on different assumptions about the relationship of signified to signifier. Elsewhere, Hayles (2004) has further justified the need for a medium-specific analysis and further conceived texts as material, embodied entities. These insights are arguably decisive for studies examining how the medium changes and how interpretation advances this process; however, I am sceptical to the relevance of focusing on textuality (Hayles, 2004) for fully addressing how understandings of information, materiality and embodiment shape political subjectivities and practices, which is my interest in this thesis.

Taking a different approach to medium theorists, Friedrich Kittler (1990, 1999) argues that commands and data processing, storage and transmission (in other words, informational dynamics), determine our communicative environments. In his historical analysis, Kittler argues that social and cultural shifts do not result from the power of ideologies embedded in texts but precisely from the ways they change our perceptions

of reality. Moreover, in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900,* Kittler (1990) brings together Michel Foucault's notion of discursive practices with Claude E. Shannon's information theory. As a result, he formulates "discourse networks" to describe networks of institutions and technologies which produce certain discourses, at any given time. What in Foucault's formulation were texts, power and knowledge, Kittler extends to include electronic media systems, senders and receivers (Fuller, 2005). As Kittler (1990) suggests in his critique of interpretation and textuality, in the case of digital culture we might turn towards the network of different institutions and technologies which are both the sources of discourses, and which determine the ways these discourses are stored and circulated in contemporary Britain and beyond. Following Kittler's (1990, 1999) attention to the ways discursive practices are historically bound, in this thesis we might identify how certain models of feminist and queer politics are produced within the discourse network of digital culture and how digital culture becomes the regulatory apparatus which allows certain political expressions to happen but hinders others. Having said that, my thesis does not offer a historical, macroscopic analysis of networked media as institutions but instead considers how feminist and queer politics materialise in the current historical conjuncture.

Moreover, I am interested in how activists, as users, disrupt the expected uses of network technologies (those defined by technical standards) and media products. Indeed, civil society and gender politics are more than mere reflections of the technologies they use; similarly, activist politics often try modes of organisation that are more than just adaptations to the computer logic. For instance, examples of tactical media use in anti-consumerist and anti-globalisation politics (Lovink, 2002; Klein, 1999) can signal how, although largely operating within media logic, activists invent new ways of data production and transmission or appropriate existing ones in subversive ways. Furthermore, feminist and queer activist interventions have often translated into practices of counter-discourse production and interpretation through representation. Examples of such practices explored further in the following chapters are kiss-ins, circulation of print and audio ephemera, exchange of pornographic online material, or the setting up and maintaining of online databases and forums of alternative knowledge production regarding the biomedical industry. Thus, we need to think about discursive practices and the production of discourse in network culture less in terms of the autonomy of new media technologies, as Kittler (1999) suggests in *Gramophone,*

Film, Typewriter, and more in terms of their social usage, and the social shaping of these technologies.

As the media are both an institution, operating at a macro level, and a set of material infrastructure and everyday practices, operating on a micro level, it is necessary to empirically access what kinds of value new media products have for activists. This is because the incorporation of digital networking technologies in the everyday practices of women's organisations and activists shapes contemporary meanings of politics, as well as the visibility of the medium in this process. The experiences of people's use of communication technologies and social media and their perceptions of "networking" and web presence are conclusive in this thesis for another reason. Activist and political agents from various fields and with diverse political aims engage with digital media as producers and media consumers. However, it is often unclear whether they respond as audiences, consumers or citizens. For instance, in Chapter 4 of this thesis, my questions concern how the cultural meaning of porn and sexual politics is changing online, and how the new political and consumer subjectivities emerging in this case are inseparable from the media. I other words, they involve a process of mediation. Of course, there is on-going debate around which term, "mediation" or "mediatisation", is more suitable for describing the changes in our social lives brought about by the media (see Lundby, 2009). What distinguishes most clearly the two theoretical approaches is how mediation has been used as a theoretical framework in empirical studies that take a closer look at people's everyday use of technologies (Hartmann, 2009; Livingstone, 2009). Silverstone describes "mediation" as

> 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 (2002, p.762).

Here I am most interested in the non-linearity, asymmetry and discontinuity of media processes. In an article about digital storytelling, Nick Couldry (2008) traces how the concept of mediation has developed to address the complexities of what the media are and how they shape the social and cultural world. Couldry's stress on the

"dialectic" (as not signifying causality between media institutions and social life) is relevant to my conceptualisation precisely because it allows for an investigation of agency in multiple sites: social, political, human and non-human. The appeal to digital mediation does not, however, assume that there is a third entity, in the form of websites and social networking platforms for example, which mediates between offline embodied, feminist and queer groups and their audiences. This would reduce the notion of the "dialectic" to an instrumental exchange between on the one hand, a pre-conceived space of the political and, on the other hand, digital networks (essentially the internet) as a nebulous but powerful formation. If we were to argue that the very notion of mediation is shaped by the idea of the dialectic as a relationship, we would have to move beyond the cause and effect model of socio-political life and communicative technologies. In this sense, mediation is used in this thesis to emphasise the inseparability of the media with politics and embodied subjectivities. Political subjectivities and perceptions of the digital (as an institution and a set of technical standards and competencies) emerge from this relationship, this engagement with the technologies.

Media theorists Scott Lash and Celia Lury (2007) have thought mediation in a different way. For them, mediation is a process significantly different in our media saturated environments after the 1970s – which they refer to as the "global culture industry". They describe a process whereby the media become *things* and/or acquire operationality - a process in which they get exchange value and use value beyond their initial cultural value. Lash and Lury's critique is useful when thinking about the regulative aspects of digital culture, a discussion which is accordingly undertaken mainly in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In Chapter 4, my attention is directed to the ways in which commercial bloggers integrate queer politics into branded sexualities and, subsequently, transform political values into commercial value. Although this approach promises to move from questions of representation to take into account the materiality of the media, perhaps it also creates a binary between representation and materiality, which as I argue in the next section, needs to be questioned rather than intensified.

Here, it is relevant to note a prominent strand in contemporary media studies which reaches the idea of dialectic relationship by a different route. Media ecology combines medium theory with the philosophy of Felix Guattari to propose that digital media constitute dynamic systems or ecologies (Fuller, 2005; Goddard and Parikka,

2011). In the special *Fibreculture Journal* issue "Unnatural Ecologies" (2011), Michael Goddard and Jussi Parikka define media ecologies as offering a way to get at:

> understanding the various scales and layers through which media are articulated together with politics, capitalism and nature, in which processes of media and technology cannot be detached from subjectivation [...] 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, p.1).

Indeed, when it comes to the communicative practices of feminist and queer political assemblages, the flow of communicative material crosses different scales. Historically, from international conferences like FINNRAGE, mentioned in Chapter 5, to smaller gatherings, like the 'Feminism in London' 2009 conference analysed in Chapter 2, media technologies are key for mobilisation, networking and identification. However, Goddard and Parikka (2011) make a bolder claim here which moves my theoretical exploration a step further. In setting out to ask new questions about what changes the media bring to political organisation, they define media ecology as a practice. Media as practice and *doing* decisively repositions a tradition of understanding the medium as active, rather than as a vessel for informational messages. The question which arguably arises from this approach is the following: how is matter, both human and nonhuman, produced in network media? Does this becoming apply equally to all actors who are a part of the media ecology? Or is this approach simply adding a question about materiality to the mediatization thesis, which is also concerned with long term processes but without the rigorous historical dimension of Kittler's intervention? These questions are beyond the scope of this introduction; however it is useful to note that there is a need for empirical studies which can support or challenge the underlying philosophical ideas of the media ecology thesis, those concerning the generative, affirmative aspect of new media networks. In this thesis, I draw from a framework of performativity, for reasons I explain below, to frame the dynamic interaction between political networks, humans and nonhumans across different spaces and scales. In Chapter 2, the weblink mapping of civil society organisations and the questions this mapping raises are perhaps the most fruitful and lucid sites for empirically approaching

the interaction between humans and networking machines. However, my conceptualisation of mediation is not based on an understanding of merging between human and machine and immanence. To clarify this point further, and to elaborate how questions of information, embodiment and politicisation are tackled in my conceptual framework, I will now turn to representation approaches and theorisations of performativity.

b) Representation

To restate, the principle aim of this thesis is to examine the mediated relationship between gender and sexuality politics with network communication media. This introductory chapter complicates concepts of mediation, representation and performativity in order to develop analytical tools for addressing this question. As noted in the previous section, I use mediation in this research (rather than mediatization) to investigate the dialectic, non-linear relationship between digital networks, political subjectivities and cultural understandings. The concept is particularly useful in my empirical study of everyday experiences, practices and understandings of networking and political community which relate to the implementation of network technologies by local queer politics in Chapter 3 and women's organisations in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, I indicate how new definitions of the pornographic object and new takes on the scope of sexual politics emerge from user practices. However, beyond the study of discourse and cultural meaning-making, we need to attend to materiality, both in relation to media technologies and feminist actors. By this, I mean that communicative practices in network digital culture are processes whereby the conditions of political organising as well as the understandings of the political are remade.

The question of political or ideological representation and materiality has received significant attention within feminist theory and the distinction (in the form of sex/gender dichotomy) has been accentuated since the second-wave movement (Colebrook, 2000, p.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 (for example Braidotti, 2002; Creed, 1993). These interrogations cannot be ignored, not least because they

provide a rich ground for debate regarding how women feature in political imaginaries. At the same time, the question of cultural representation has also been problematic because it positions women as passive victims of male-owned production, making the production of counter-representations a key 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. At the same time, it is also not surprising that representationalism has been challenged by approaches in political science and media theory which put weight on the political possibilities offered in informational and networked milieus. My purpose in this section is to highlight the ideas offered in these two strands of thought (those who challenge representationalism by orienting to the political and those who attend to materiality), exploring the first possibility through the work of Tiziana Terranova (2004) and Jodie Dean (2009), and the second mainly through the work of Karen Barad (2007). At the close of this exploration, I examine "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) as a way of thinking about embodiment in digital networks beyond the matter/representation binary.

To begin with, Tiziana Terranova (2004) has argued that there are limitations in representational approaches, precisely because network connectivity makes our real life milieus informationally rich, heterogeneous and complex. These changes that digital networking brings constitute a "divergence between a representational and an informational space" (Terranova, 2004, p.36). Terranova (2004) built 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, p.8). Indeed, my project takes seriously 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, p.9). It does so primarily in its attention towards open-ended, informational relationships (what I call "horizontal" throughout the thesis) that develop within and between various assemblages; secondly, by adopting "mapping" as a methodological attitude,[4] my research puts emphasis on the connections and encounters between actors, rather

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4   Mapping as a methodological approach is explained in the following section.

than their ideological positions. However, my concern with relationships, encounters and emergences (in other words what can be thought as the affirmative and productive aspect of informational milieus) complements an analysis of representational politics. As I further contend in the following section with reference to the notion of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), although new media forms and network technologies permeate the individual and collective lives of feminist and queer actors, 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. Thus, here I embrace the political potential which Terranova (2004) finds in the ways information flows change meaning-making processes, but I also identify the continuity which characterises political communication processes.

Similarly to Terranova's (2004) position on network culture, other post-representational analyses have foregrounded experimentation in forms of organising and the potential of social relationships (for example Juris, 2005; Millioni, 2009). These studies have variably engaged with the idea of the "multitude", a model developed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), to describe collective bodies. 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, p.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). Thus resistance for Hardt and Negri is within labour, in the new subjectivities offered in the "living labour in contemporary capitalist society" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.29), which has both revolutionary and exploitative potential. This is clearly a Foucauldian reading of power as immanent - productive rather than repressive. Nonetheless, and although Hard 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.

Feminist philosophers who have approached questions of the body in non-representational ways (Braidotti, 2002; Colebrook 2000, 2008; Gatens, 1996; 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, p.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 suggest an "ethics of mutual interdependence" (2002, p.226) in which biopolitical ethics are more important than identity politics as we know them. For the purposes of my research project, recognition of positive and multiple differences in contemporary feminist and queer politics would entail attention to the different scales these struggles operate. It would consider the sets of communicative practices which different actors adopt in their "becoming" political. However, the emphasis on practices of production, connection and discursive events, rather than embodied subjectivities as such, would impede an account of vulnerability – of how the material conditions of post-industrial network culture contribute to the disappearance of women as social agents (Haraway, 1997). Hence, 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, but I don't adopt Deleuzian thinking in this thesis. As the experience of being a body and understandings of being queer or feminist is mediated by pornography, the internet, science and medicine, this thesis identifies how politics and political bodies are on-going, unfinished processes which are shaped in an interchange with their non-human environment and context. This is not to say that there are no pre-existing gendered and political bodies prior to their encounter with the technologies and with connections; this would erase political history and continuity of identity. But as I argue below, it rather shifts emphasis from positions about the failure of democratic politics (see Chandler, 2009; Dean, 2009) today to global governmentality and biopolitics. To clarify, I next explain how I diverge from certain critiques of immanent power and politics.

One of these critiques, occupying the other side of representational - informational friction, sustains that representation is the central process for politicisation. The critique of *Empire* undertaken by Ernesto Laclau (2001) focuses on

the multiple positions which, according to Hardt and Negri, are produced in informational and networked environments. These positions, Laclau (2001) argues, are not inherently political. Indeed, what remains unspecified in immanence approaches to network technologies and culture are the practicalities of articulating collective political responses and, more crucially, what difference gender and sexuality make. In other words, the question of different bodies and different identities requiring different struggles keeps returning, perhaps with even more urgency. It is precisely the challenges of constructing a "we" - of strategic difference - in new informational and communicative environments which are worthy of investigation. As I convey below, drawing from Judith Butler (2004), once the notion of politics is re-oriented towards shared conditions of corporeality in post-industrial worlds, new understandings for non-oppositional politics are possible.

In contrast to what Terranova (2004) and Hardt and Negri (2000) understand as a space of potentiality, Jodi Dean (2009) in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* describes a space of fragmentation and lost political causes. The volume of communicative content which disperses political struggles into a "myriad of minor issues and events" (2009, p.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, p.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.

Although I find it essential to ask critical questions about the volume of activist media products and about the desire to participate, interact and produce in digital networks, I reach different conclusions to Dean (2009), as I explain below. A key critical point which is relevant to my study concerns 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, p.9). Dean is right to argue that

> [r]hetorics 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, p.23).

Indeed, women's groups and queer groups reorganise according to what they see as the demands of network conditions and, for many, the struggle for representational space in network communication environments can be characterised as a quest for popularity. For example, in my examination of London feminist networks in Chapter 2 of the thesis, this struggle sometimes involves a project of symbolic extinction of other political voices, like those of sex work activists, more than it signifies an alliance-building project. In other cases, for example in Chapter 4 and 5, I find it more useful to analyse political discourses used online by drawing on Foucault's (2003; 2008) ideas of neoliberal entrepreneurship (see Gajjala *et al.* 2010; Shakhsari, 2011 for other important examples). Moreover, in these two chapters, 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 emergence of LGBT mainstreaming in Chapter 3, sexual politics bloggers in Chapter 4, and consumer identities related to reproductive technologies does not, in my understanding, signify the end of politics, or, as Dean would have it, the failure to act or to elicit political responses (2009, p.29). In my research, formations of feminist and queer politics appearing around issues, events, practices, both at street level and in transient online public spaces. They are embodied and medium-specific. Take for example Reclaim The Night marches, queer Muslim publics in an email list and publics politicising around the experience of viewing a pornographic film. Dean's wider framing of politics as action and communication as passivity is not helpful in this account; it reduces digital communication to an exchange of encoded logical messages between civil society and the government (indeed a Habermasian model of politics), and, moreover, re-inscribes binaries between discourse and materiality, logos and action[5]. Indeed, historically, the semantic side – the rational side - has overshadowed

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5   In liberalism, politics are a rational, and primarily individual, pursuit of private interests. The inability of liberal politics relies partly on the attempt to "domesticating hostility" (Mouffe, 1993, p. 108). For Mouffe, the task is to mobilize these passions and give them democratic outlet (1993, p.109). This idea, apart from challenging liberalism's principle of a progression towards a rational harmony, questions its strict public/private division in that it extends democracy to all fields of the social. Furthermore, it understands political identities as collective, but at the same time resists the

the embodied aspect of political voice (Cavarero, 2005). Judith Butler's discussion on violence, mourning and feminist politics (2004) 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, p.20).

For Butler, our own bodies have a public dimension and are constituted as a "public phenomenon" (Butler, 2004, p.26) and for this, it is possible to imagine community and politics. The public recognition of corporeal common vulnerability is, for Butler, the precondition for articulating ethical, political claims. We might thus understand how digital (and biological) technologies constitute new and overlapping material conditions of corporeal vulnerability which at the same time offer possibilities for new political subjectivities. As I explain in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, biopower, or the management of living matter, including genetic material (Rose, 2001), is central to this thesis. 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 biopower (1978), eloquently called "technobiopower". Culture in global information networks, permeated today with fantasies (or illusions) of individual autonomy is indeed biotechnological (Kember, 2003). The integration of information and biotechnologies in both culture and science, what has been termed as the "biodigital" (O'Riordan, 2010), further means that new kinds of vulnerability are generated. It is thus crucial to trace the small-scale, specific discursive practices through which political realities and new feminist and queer subjectivities emerge in this biodigital context. Rather than repeating reductive attitudes to what the political may be and where it can take shape, thinking through the notions of mediation and, as

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possibility of totality and unity.

I explain below, through a performativity framework, we might attune to the ways information, political communication and indeed political realities are embodied and contextual. We can thus think in this thesis about how gender and sexuality politics form partly as direct (bio)ethical responses to the intersections of the digital and the biological, and partly as negotiations of the felt anxieties and fantasies of informational/bodily autonomy and abundance; in other words, as responses to what might be framed as "biodigital vulnerabilities".

c) Posthumanist Performativity

The second path that might be pursued in thinking about the materiality of bodies and technologies in digitally mediated environments is through notions of performativity. This thesis engages with performativity in two ways; the first, which I address here, is ontological; the other, regarding the epistemological framework and methodological choices of the research, I flesh out in the next section. The two inform one another, not least since one of the central emphases of the earlier strands in social constructivism, followed in several Actor Network Theory (ANT) and feminist studies, was to show the inseparability between objects of study and research practices, institutions and apparatuses. In this thesis practices of knowing and the object of study come together in multiple, complex ways; new media are used as methods for mapping the web life of feminist networks, but they also constitute new spaces and new relationships - for instance porn exchange networks and sexual politics bloggers in Chapter 4. In other words, they are not merely representational, but they have material effects. As I argue shortly, by turning towards the concept of performativity, it is possible to re-figure the political as context-dependent, and therefore to develop an understanding of feminist and queer politics in digital networks as situated and multiple, operating on different scales and producing different and multiple political realities.

Historically, we can trace performativity through Judith Butler's poststructuralism, as it is developed primarily in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and then in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). In Butler's (1990) formulation of performativity, Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation and Foucault's genealogical account of discourse are reworked to explain how sexed and gendered bodies are produced. Repetitive acts

of iteration are vital in this production; the sexed body is constructed within a set of regulatory discourses within the signification process, which determines what is socially permitted (Butler, 1990). It is not surprising therefore that criticism directed at Butler's framework (and which is relevant here) concerns the materiality of bodies, as a consequence of her overt attention to discourses, signification and language. Claire Colebrook (2000) focuses on what she reads as a "radical opposition between materiality and discourse" (p.79) in Butler's conceptualisation. The first problem, argues Colebrook (2000), is that Butler insists on a constitutive outside, in perceiving resistance as something outside to power. The second problem for Colebrook (2000), is that Butler insists on focusing on conditions of signification or how the body cannot be pre-textual and can only be known through representation, even as she attempts, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) to examine materiality as ontology.

At the same time, a number of feminist scholars within the fields of social science of science and technology (STS) and Actor Network Theory (Callon and Law, 1995; Latour, 1999, 2005; Law and Hassard, 1999), often working from a cultural studies[6] tradition, approached performativity as mid-way between realism and constructivism; discourse and materiality; epistemology and ontology (Herzig, 2004). They undertook an investigation of the ways material practices reproduce existing sociocultural and economic agendas (Jasanoff *et al.*, 1995; Jordanova, 1989; Law and Singleton, 2000). What can be identified as a tendency in these studies is the attention to the productivity of discursive practices, which however does more than analyse language framing and signification; it also indicates how practices, like those taking place in the microcosm of the lab, produce different versions of reality. When Donna Haraway (1997) then 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. In more recent scholarly work, for example Annamarie Mol (2002) considered how the body (or multiple versions of the body) is produced, performed and enacted through the engagement of the user with biomedicine. Thus 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 (see Barad, 2007; Law and Mol, 2002; Lawrence and Shapin, 1998; Thompson 2005), they variously engage with

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6 See Juta Weber (2006) "From Science and Technology to Feminist Technoscience" for an overview of the field.

the question of immanent power, resistance and biopolitical life. By orienting to performativity in this thesis, I am thus concerned not with how digital communication technologies create representations of the political but rather how they create socio-political structures and material realities.

When thinking about what the media do and how they change in their materiality as technoscientific objects, a sticky point remains; the media can easily be perceived as "things". 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. Unlike Colebrook (2000) however, who as noted above problematizes the notion of constitutive outside and immanent power, Barad directs her focus to the agency of nonhumans. 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 poststructuralist thinkers and increasing by feminist STS scholars. Thus, Barad takes two crucial conceptual steps relevant to my study: firstly, she frames discursive practices or apparatuses as nonhuman based practices which 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 subatomic level, Barad (2007, p.354-364) traces the making of new materialities and a new kind of expert (the nanotechnologist). In an earlier and acclaimed 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 other words, 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.

Although Barad's concern is with phenomena happening on a smaller scale (that of the lab) than those I analyse in this research project, her insights about nonhuman agency enable the possibility for thinking about digital media and network communication technologies in a non-objectifying and non-instrumentalising way. By this I mean that following Barad's framework, we might think about digital media as

part of an on-going relationship with politics, knowledge systems and technology. Digital media, including screens, cables and keyboards; smart phones and GPS devices; online financial transactions, file sharing and virtual credit; social networking and digitisation of archives; digital research methods and databases of visualisations, and so on, can be seen as discursive practices which produce socio-political realities. By attending to specific, contextual sites, we might mark how this process works without producing new kinds of "master narratives", or narratives which would hope to encompass all kinds of digital media activity with a general rule, like "mediatization". In this way, this thesis hopes to be part of a wider project of "material feminisms" - the contemporary scholarly field informed by Barad's agential realism which addresses questions of the political in new technoscientific worlds (see Alaimo and Hekman, 2008).

The rationale behind using the term of "remediation" in the title and throughout the content of the thesis is precisely to re-introduce (and make visible) digital media as meaning-making agents in politicisation processes. "Remediation" according to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) who coined the term, 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. Thinking about these processes in conjunction with "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) is productive. This is precisely because digital culture and network politics (and the digital research methods prepared to study civil society within these contexts) seem to respond to older forms of gender and sexuality politics; that is, they incorporate their themes and strategies. However, studies focusing on these new political articulations often neglect the materiality of the media, the versatile roles and situated practices which the media fulfil in the everyday lives of activists. Secondly, as media studies and its future as a discipline becomes precarious (Livingstone, 2009) there are good reasons to re-orient our attention towards a version of mediation in which the medium is present as materiality, as apparatus. Therefore in the ensuing chapters I use the term "remediation" in order to re-instate the media as constant material agents in the process of politicisation (and the incorporation of prior media forms in digital media experience). In some cases, for instance in Chapters 2 and

4, I am concerned with the ways in which remediation becomes an open invitation to certain ways of engaging with a cultural text in a mediated experience, as an audience and as a political body. In other cases, I am interested in how certain feminist concerns which were central in second-wave and LGBT identity politics, for instance "violence against women" or pornography, seem to be re-articulated in a new medium, yet this thread with historical memory is lost. Through these different uses of the term, I appropriate a media studies term alongside Barad's larger philosophical project.

To return to Barad's (2007) project however, the second significant aspect of the intra-action conceptualisation is the framing of "phenomena" (2003, p.818) as entanglements of objects of study and apparatuses. The concept of phenomena concerns observational practices and the concepts informing these practices, while it aims to respond to persistent cause and effect questions contained in epistemologies of discourse/materiality. Rather than focusing on what came first (materiality or discourse, the observer or reality), Barad concentrates on how technoscientific practices produce "the very phenomena they set out to describe" (1998, p.105). Technologies are thought to be produced within phenomena according to this idea and not to pre-exist meaning making. This idea makes Barad's theoretical contribution indispensable for a reconsideration of the reciprocity between culture and technology and, as I explain next, informs my theorisation of how subjects and objects emerge in digital networks. Posthumanist performativity above all stresses the importance of questions about "how", in other words, process; how matter, politics and subjects are produced and how knowledge is produced. I develop this point in the next section about methodology, but let me now start by clarifying this point about context and media specificity.

In the wider sociocultural and historical context of this thesis, the post 2008-recession crisis era, network technologies are part of "technobiopower" (Haraway, 1997), that is practices, apparatuses, institutions and discourses which regulate and govern bodies and life. As discursive practices then, digital media contribute to what makes for meaningful political articulation by materialising the boundaries of legitimate political identities. This "dominant digital culture" can be loosely thought of as the dominant white, masculine, heterosexual, neoliberal capitalist culture. Feminist and queer politics can only organise within network technologies, in the sense that there is no outside to the discursive and technological universe in the given socio-

political conjuncture. Indeed Barad's conceptualisation draws on analytical tools which register the material dimensions of such regulatory practices and not just their discursive limits. In my study, I am concerned with how feminist and queer publics form in response to the political interpellation of dominant digital culture, by noting in each instance the material consequences of these materialisations. To say that "discursive practices are continuing agential intra-actions of the world through which local determinacy is enacted within the phenomena produced" (Barad, 2003, p.80), is a way to say that political formations are produced through a coming together of network media which, in their own right, are produced within culturally- and historically-specific webs of meaning. It is this process, in its locality, which this thesis analyses. In the various cases examined here, feminist and queer politics materialise in dynamic configurations of network technologies and human bodies. Digital mapping is perhaps a lucid example of how, by producing web maps of networked queer and feminist publics, a technoscientific reality is produced. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, Issue Crawler visualisations constitute both an enactment of connections and an object invested with political understandings.

IV. Methodology and Topology

Feminist and queer politics materialise in different contexts, online, offline, across different scales. They are context and medium specific. They therefore require research methods which are suitable for these contexts and also sensitive to the way these contexts are relational. This means that methods and apparatuses of study need to be suitable for the objects of study – but also that they need to find ways to interact with the representations these objects are creating. One example of this, indicated by John Law (2008) in an outline of the current state of STS and sociology, is the use of "digital tools" like Issue Crawler (more on this in Chapter 2) to trace patenting strategies of pharmaceutical companies, which are only visible by electronic means. Indeed, as today more than ever scientific objects, like global warming or hormonal treatment, are matters of concern, apart from looking into the conditions that made them possible, they require the employment of inter-disciplinary tools "to detect how many participants are gathered in a "thing" to make it exist and maintain its existence" (Latour 2004, p.246). What Latour (2004) means by "thing" in *Why has critique run out*

of steam: from matters of fact to matters of concern is matters of concern. Drawing from Martin Heidegger's dichotomy between 'thing' and object *(Gegenstand),* Latour (2004) conveys that 'things' have a capacity to bring actors together; they are gatherings, issues or space of assembly. Although this attention to issues, as I argue in Chapter 2, takes us away from identity politics, it is necessary to study how feminist and queer identities and networked publics are formed and performed in highly mediated environments, by studying how they come together around certain events.

However, my research design did not just transpose ethnographic methods to online settings; doing what has been called "lived cyberethnography" requires attention to how subject and objects are produced in everyday life at the intersections of online and offline (Rybas and Gajjala, 2007). Thus I engaged in activities with the various organisations, groups and individuals in both online and offline contexts. Taking in-depth interviews, going to parties and agenda-setting meetings and combining this with textual analysis of *Facebook* profile pages and the *La-didah* email list, allowed me to understand the complex process of building a collective local identity for the Queer Mutiny groups in Chapter 3, for instance. In other cases, tracing the life of women's organisations and queer formations, their connections and journeys in offline physical contexts made it possible to understand the processes of negotiation which makes certain issues publicly visible and led to online spaces of assembly. These processes of negotiation linked to intersecting categories of oppression for the participants of this study, like class, sexuality, ethnicity and gender, and to the more general socio-cultural context of the post-2008 economic recession where they found themselves. Further inspired by intersectionality studies (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008; Erel, 2007; 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 thesis, I was also a user, a producer and consumer of digital media. This thesis is thus a production of embodied knowledge, reflective of my own position – as someone with intersecting identities who also will, through a successful doctoral process, become an "expert".

Of course, Haraway (1997) has convincingly advised against "reflexivity" and in favour of "diffraction". Diffraction is an optical metaphor which 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, p.268). 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). Taking Haraway's (1988, 1997) advice on board, my ethnography and application of digital research methods (Rogers and Marres, 2000; Marres, 2006) seek to provide research of feminist and queer politics which is partial, in other words, does not claim to speak for the object of study; which is accountable, that is, registers my position as a researcher; and which is sensitive to the vulnerability that the research account can generate.

Clearly then my understanding of research is that it doesn't just produce a representation, but instead an ontological event which is both material and semiotic. As indicated in the previous discussion, digital media are here understood as apparatuses of knowledge production, which in between others, produce the political as an object of study, in a similar way that an imaging apparatus produces the foetus. Activist networks and political realities in this research are not, then, just the effects of a naming act – I am not describing what is already there. They become real, i.e. ontological, as they come together in different sites, in a set of relationships with the media, the observational apparatus and other actors. The question which arises is: is it different *versions* of feminist and queer politics, in their contemporary form, that this thesis offers?

To answer this question, let me restate that in this research I seek to find where political spaces, subjectivities and issues appear; how they appear; and what shape they take. These questions, where, what and how, can be thought to correspond to three ontological coordinates or dimensions, which (borrowing from the theory developed from the overlapping fields of geometry and logic) can be understood as "topological". 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 which focuses on continuity between objects,[7] it has

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7   As explained under Algebraic topology in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy a "*topologist is
    someone who imagines all objects to be made of unbreakable but very pliable play dough, and
    therefore does not see the need to distinguish between a coffee cup and doughnut because either

informed numerous studies in network architecture (Elahi, 2006; Naimzada *et al.*, 2009), music (Mazzola *et al.*, 2002) and art (Kalajdzievski, 2008; Martinot, 2001). Here I am only alluding to topology as a methodological approach, for the ways it may help to conceive changeable and abstract objects and their connections, as is the case with politics in informational and networked spaces.

In my research, the topological aspect of "where" therefore refers to locations which are dynamic and at the intersection of web and offline spaces, flows and scales. "What" concerns the material/semantic shapes these politics take in culture, in other words the metaphors, visualisations and figures that circulate. Finally, an examination of "how" they emerge relates to the web as an actor shaping political issues, but also to the everyday connections and mediated experiences that actors engage in. Hence, to return to the question posed above, in the cases investigated in this thesis, multiple versions of "the political" emerge. These are indeed multiple political realities, both material and semiotic (the "what" dimension of this topological account); emerging from media specific discursive practices linked to network connections (the "how" dimension); in context specific spaces, online/offline (the "where" coordinate of this topology). In each of the chapters, I identify the discursive practices and conditions of biodigital vulnerability to which feminist and queer politics can be thought to formulate responses to.

Therefore, in Chapter 2 a political reality is produced through a women's movement metaphor by the activists themselves. Being connected online through social media was a key component of this metaphor. To understand how this metaphor is enacted and what kinds of everyday realities it creates for women's groups today, I had to trace understandings of networking and connecting by interviewing people about their experiences. In addition, I needed to map these connections and to visualise, using web mapping, how this political network is enacted online. In this sense, it could be said that my methods (ethnography and web mapping) followed the different actors and their materially heterogeneous relationships online and offline, in an analysis that could be described as compatible with the Actor-network approach. As John Law (2008) makes clear, actor-networks are "scaled - down versions of Michel Foucault's discourses or epistemes" (p.629). ANT concentrates on material-semiotic analysis of small-scale actor-network and their production of discourses. My analysis in

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can be turned into the other" (Pratt, 2008, np).

this case focuses on the different actors implicated (circulating campaign material, legislation, journalists and weblogs) but also how "violence against women" is produced as the central issue of concern for the groups which participated in the conference 'Feminism in London 2009'. My ethnographic study allowed me to understand the semiotic and material logic which kept this the network together and excluded its "others", whereas the web mapping account offered a visual understanding of the core and periphery of the networks – and clarified that the actors were also newspapers like the *Guardian* and governmental organisations. However, my analysis in this case is a "light" variation of ANT in that it takes me so far in tracing how the 'Feminism in London 2009' conference network extends in history and time (for instance, to second-wave radical feminist identities) or space (for example, beyond metropolitan London). Moreover, in this chapter, the representations of feminism produced by the activists interacted with those produced by the social scientists behind the development of the Issue Crawler (Rogers and Marres, 2000; 2002, Marres, 2004; 2007). I do not however perform a more radical version of relational analysis, one that would bring human and non-human actors to the same level and weight them symmetrically (see Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Latour, 1999, 2005). Instead, my methodological examination in this chapter re-works ideas of the political (what is political and who can be a political actor) and makes strategic choices over which political reality, or whose political reality to foreground.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, the discursive practices examined and the generation of differences are specific for the Brighton queer community, however the semiotic-material production of difference operates through social media and mailing lists as much as it operates in the Brighton Pride, a local annual event. The version of queer politics which is produced from these practices re-works a certain sense of the local and the cosmopolitan, the queer community, the history of identity politics and the role of social media and mailing lists in solidifying these relations. What this case tells us is that queer politics are produced in context-specific ways. Although in this case for example, there is an appropriation of Queer Nation strategies and rhetoric by the local Queer Mutiny group, it is in relation to Brighton's history as a gay capital and life in Brighton as an everyday experience that queer politics develop. However, there is another key factor here which I take into account; the lack of primary references for this particular counter-culture. Therefore in this case, my attention turns towards social

media and mailing lists which are central social and material practices in the performative production of these politics.

Similarly, in my examination of pornography and feminism in contemporary networked environments in Chapter 4, there are more than one political reality which is being enacted into being and these relate to internet-specific discursive practices. In this case, an analysis of discursive framing of online websites combined with in-depth interviews was appropriate because it offered an understanding of the political rationale of organising post-porn events; how different circulating ideas through a chain of media can be performative. In this case, the key idea which circulated matches online entrepreneurialism with sexual liberation. My analysis identifies how the circulation of this idea in a handful of websites owned by queer alt porn and women-owned production companies, simultaneously produces versions of feminist politics, a "real" version of the queer body and post-porn blogger branded personas. In a tentative focus group screening which operated as a small-scale post-porn event, I additionally attempted to push the idea of performativity towards a more corporeal direction. This means that by inviting participants to collectively make meaning of *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000), a sci-fi art/porn film with a non-linear form, I tried to understand how a political space can emerge from embodied, sensory experience. Although this single and small-scale focus group cannot afford to provide generalizable findings, it serves well for other reasons: it provided a first-person experience of a political reality being realised; and gave an indication as to how non-rational, sensory experience can be a motivating force for such politics.

In Chapter 5, I attempt a larger-scale analysis of connections and political histories around reproductive technologies. This is because the actors operating in this field are trans-national, but at the same time dependent on local, national policy contexts. In this exploration, it is decisive that the global governance of flows of bodily material and information is shaped on a national scale, in other words that biopolitics are enacted in local practices like the HFEA 2011 consultation. It was therefore necessary to trace feminist articulations in these different scales, namely the campaign No2Eggsploitation and its relationship with audiences and with other feminist actors; and existing networks of reproductive rights and organisations who mediate understandings about reproductive technologies. By identifying these relationships, I further analysed the framings and themes prevalent on the websites. This analysis

enables an understanding of how authoritativeness is constructed, how difference is performed and what political and ideological representation may mean on such a scale, i.e. beyond the nation-state. Although the discourse analysis of websites offers an understanding of the political subjectivities produced in this context, the outcome of this Chapter is different to the rest of this thesis. This is because the emerging assemblage (and its version of feminist politics) is largely an academic one and does not operate in the modes of engagement which perhaps are familiar from the other three cases of the thesis. What would thus make for a richer account, but was beyond the scope of this thesis, is a digital mapping of the epistemic networks (for example in the form of cross-referencing of academic papers and encounters) and a closer study of the ways these networks generate alternative versions of biomedicine and biotechnologies.

V. Conclusion

To sum up, in this introductory chapter I have defined the main theoretical concepts used in this thesis and have narrated how I critically navigated, appropriated and put pressure on them in order to construct my conceptual framework. The key aim of the thesis is to analyse the role of information and communication technologies, and the new media forms enabled by them in the processes of political engagement and identification, specifically for contemporary gender and sexuality politics. Since digital and network culture is highly technological but also part of the biological in ways that couldn't be imagined ten years ago, its study demands analytical tools that can address these intersections and complexities. At the same time, questions about representation and mediation are central for an examination of gender and sexuality politics today because they enable different possibilities for imagining and enacting political and technological futures. In this introductory chapter, I have brought together ideas of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) with the idea of remediation and explained how, in this way, I seek to study mediation processes in scale and medium-specific contexts. By pulling threads from different theoretical positions and epistemological fields, I have followed Donna Haraway's (1997, p.268-271) invitation to convey my research as if I participate in a collective project of producing responsible and accountable feminist knowledge; the metaphor of the cat's cradle game.

Consequently this chapter explained how this game of looping threads between disciplinary fields of political science, cultural studies, media theory and science and technology studies does not only regard a theoretical attitude; it is an inherent part of the methodological and topological exploration of this thesis. This is not least because new objects, like emerging political subjectivities and relations, demand new, combined and versatile methodological approaches which suit digital networks and enable a better understanding of the performative production of political realities.

CHAPTER 2

<u>Feminist digital networks: remediating issues and identities</u>

I. Introduction
II. The 'Feminism in London 2009' Conference
a) Methodology
b) Participants
c) Versions of contemporary feminism
III. Network imaginaries: making meaning of digital media and changing organisational practices
a) "A building with women through its veins": The network and the movement
b) Catching up with technologies and changing organisational routines
c) "That's our own *Facebook*, we meet face-to-face": New media literacy and offline networking
d) Dominant digital culture as a regulatory apparatus: Challenges and responses
IV. The issue of "violence against women": Remediating feminist identities
Constructions of "violence against women" and anti-prostitution politics
V. Materialising online networks with Issue Crawler
a) Issue Crawler as a technoscientific entity
b) The "violence against women" hyperlink-network
c) The materiality of Issue Crawler
VI. Conclusion

I. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the relationship between digital network technologies and feminist organisations in contemporary Britain. Women's groups in the UK increasingly make use of networked media in order to stay connected and to engage new participants in their actions. The web has been understood to be part of civil society politics (Atton, 2002; Lovink, 2002; Papacharissi, 2002), not only in terms of efficiency when it comes to sharing information, but also in its capacity to frame public concerns and therefore shape political agendas (Latour, 1999; Marres, 2006). Although recent internet-based surveys have provided evidence about new forms of feminism between younger women in Britain (see Redfern and Aune, 2010), it is important to delineate how these emerging political identities and issues are tightly inter-woven with new network technologies. This chapter indicates that we need to trace processes of mediation in specific locations by looking at the incorporation of network technologies and network logics in the everyday lives of women activists. Such an approach allows us to attend to the embodied practices and subjectivities that emerge in particular contexts at the intersections of online/offline. Therefore in this chapter, I examine communicative practices and concerns in relation to a network of women's organisations forming around the conference 'Feminism in London 2009' (FiL09). I draw one mapping account of this network using traditional ethnographic methods and another using the web research and visualisation software Issue Crawler. Approaching this material through the conceptual framework outlined in the introductory chapter to this thesis, I convey how in this case, feminist political realities emerge as they come together, or "intra-act" (Barad, 2007) with digital network technologies. In particular, I formulate how gender politics are produced from negotiations of the felt anxieties and fantasies of participation and abundance in new network environments. Understood as a combination of infrastructure, nonhuman and human-based cultural technological practices, networked media in the FiL09 case shape ways of imagining social change and modes of engagement. Secondly, I want to suggest that mediated experiences and political debates of the past are today being re-framed in new networked environments, in ways that often occlude both the historicity of the medium and the importance of identity and affect in political struggles.

Three main questions are addressed in this chapter. Firstly, although women's groups, like other contemporary civil society actors, participate in what has been framed as an online public sphere (Downing, 2001; Gordon, 2007), they acquire different degrees of media literacy and variously adopt network technologies in their organisations. One of the main purposes of this chapter is thus to gauge how women adopt or resist networked technologies of public engagement, and what this adoption or resistance means for their political activity and identity. Such an examination helps us recognise how these practices relate to fears and hopes, such as the capacity of technologies to empower or to bring women's marginalised voices to the mainstream. This is an important question precisely because affective responses might motivate certain political practices. By focusing on perceptions and attitudes towards networked technologies, the chapter therefore seeks to give an insight into how perceptions of vulnerability to the digital influence political formation. This discussion consolidates the argument, outlined in the introductory chapter, regarding the performative production of political realities in which non-human actors are. Furthermore, it moves forward a key theme of this thesis, that of biodigital vulnerability and its political implications (in my engagement with Butler's theorisation of corporeal vulnerability).

Secondly, networked technologies are central for contemporary feminist politics today not solely because of changing perceptions and affective responses to the digital. Their incorporation also means that key concerns like sex work, pornography and violence against women get re-formulated in new communicative venues and, as a result, find new audiences. At the same time, new concerns linked to these new media environments and practices may emerge, like for example the issue of gaining popularity in what seems to be a condensed, competitive and "noisy" web space (Dean, 2009). Another crucial question addressed in this chapter is how older feminist issues are mediated today, what this means for feminist identity and how this new cultural experience links to prior forms of communication - that is how they are "re-mediated" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999).

Apart from questioning how networks are perceived and used by women's groups today, it is crucial to advance the role of the digital in materialising models of participatory politics and public engagement. Today, online software applications are progressively employed as methods of civil society research and visualisation, to scrutinise the "social dynamics of reputation" (Marres, 2011, p. 7). Digital research

software, such as Issue Crawler (the principles of Issue Crawler are defined later in the chapter), can be used in order to map civil society networks around specific public issues (Rogers, 2009). The development of these engines has been informed by framings of the web as an actor in democratic processes, in the sense that user traffic and weblinks can be indicative of how important an issue is for people (see Latour, 1999; Marres 2006). It is thus necessary to consider how nonhuman based technoscientific practices, like Issue Crawler, contribute to the production of political realities. By turning to the epistemological implications of new digital methods of social research, this chapter takes up a third major concern which relates to the production of knowledge about feminist politics today.

In order to address these three questions, in this chapter I draw on both online and offline ethnographic research and weblink analysis of a network forming around an event of major standing in UK grassroots feminism, the conference 'Feminism in London'. This research took place between September and December 2009, coinciding with the period of the final Parliamentary Readings of the Policing and Crime Bill 2009 (now an Act)[8]. The issues prominent in the agendas of the activist groups participating in the FiL09 conference seemed to concur with the reforms proposed in the Bill. These were, namely, the regulation of lap dancing clubs, creating Brothel Closure Orders and introducing the new criminal offence of paying for sexual services of a prostitute controlled for gain (Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, 2009, p.37). A combined ethnographic and weblink analysis of the event at this historical conjunction is significant because feminist activism operates in disparate, multiple modes across levels and spaces - that is online and between civil society organisations, at the level of national politics and in physical, off-line spaces. Ethnography and web mapping complement each other in addressing the dynamic connections of actors moving at the intersections of these sites, but are additionally important because of the speed of technological. Thus, by mapping how these actors gathered together around the common concern of violence against women in two scales, that of the everyday and the scale of the web, I identify media-specific discursive practices through which new feminist subjectivities are produced.

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8   The reforms proposed in the Bill (now an Act) concerned the regulation of lap dancing clubs, creating Brothel Closure Orders and creating a new criminal offence of paying for sexual services of a prostitute controlled for gain (Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, 2009, p.37). For further information about the Bill, see Appendix A.

In particular, by way of ethnography I concentrate on the communicative practices and the social interaction between the women's organisations and the individuals participating in the FiL09 conference. This analysis reveals attitudes towards networking technologies and draws attention to the imaginaries underlying forms of engagement in this case. For example, for many of the interviewees, using the internet or other digital media was underpinned by a sense of participation in an active feminist movement which had seemingly migrated online. As a result, women's groups appear to be changing their modes of organisation according to what they perceive to be the demands of networks. In this examination, I illustrate how older divisions in feminist politics around the theme of "violence against women" (namely as representation and as material reality) are being re-framed in digital networks. Nevertheless, the ethnographic research indicates that feminist modes of engagement emerging in digital culture change what can be done with networked communication technologies, for instance by using social networking platforms as spaces of assembly.

In the second methodological route of the chapter, I employ the server-side software Issue Crawler in order to trace the online connections of the FiL09 conference participants. Issue Crawler can be used to locate and visualise networks on the web. It consists of crawlers, analysis engines and visualisation modules and, in principle, crawls specified websites so as to capture the incoming and outgoing links from them. Issue Crawler is here put to the task of mapping the network of women's groups forming around the conference event. This mapping exercise produces evidence that the circulating campaign material for Demand Change, one of the cardinal campaigns advocating changes in the Crime and Policing Bill 2009, played a key role in bringing these women's groups together. As a result, the weblink exploration provides an account of the actors participating or missing from the network, which is different from the one derived with ethnographic methods.

The theoretical discussion of this chapter is positioned within contemporary scholarly discourses about the digital and the social/political. This is because questions about digital research methods and the creation of knowledge are inherently political. One current strand in social research of civil society has developed out of an Actor Network (ANT) tradition and in parallel with web research methods, applied in real-time. I challenge this approach in terms of what I understand as its overemphasis on the web as an agenda-shaping actor, but also as a space distinct from offline contexts.

Instead, I suggest that we need to attend to the social and historical dimensions of public formation and approach digital methods with non-instrumentalist attitudes. Consequently I engage with "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) as a perspective which enables a rich understanding of digital networks and feminist political realities which do not pre-exist but take shape as they come together in this case.

In Chapter 1, I noted that performativity has been developed in feminist studies of science and technology studies (Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1997) and social studies of science (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Law, 2004) and has informed scholarly work which often closely follows the research process in the lab. In these instances, the interest resides with the materiality of non-human actors, the role of the researcher and with the ways in which social realities and power structures are reproduced through knowledge production. In a way, performativity studies can be thought to bring Michel Foucault's framework of "governmentality" (the set of biomedical and administrative practices which shape social life) to a smaller scale (Law, 2008). This particular strand of performativity proposes that distinct realities, and not just representations of reality, are produced and generated in the situated entanglements of technological apparatuses, researchers and objects of study. It is this ontological aspect that this chapter wishes to foreground in considering digital networked media, and particularly weblink visualisation, as material discursive practices informed by various intersecting systems of power.

The above discussion raises interesting questions about the materiality of digital networks, which in this chapter I seek to answer. Primarily, this materiality concerns how, as a researcher, I am implicated in the production of the account of feminist politics I offer in this chapter. Secondly, networks are devices, commodities and artefacts including servers, cables, smart phones and computer terminals, spatially located in homes, streets or on laps. Thirdly, materiality means the historical contingency of networked technologies, which in this chapter mainly concerns the way Issue Crawler developed as a technoscientific entity. Finally, the most important aspect of materiality here relates to how networked technologies can produce the conditions for public engagement by contributing to the visibility of some actors and their feminist politics on the web.

In the immediately following section, I provide an overview of the FiL09

conference, the participants I interviewed, and a background of contemporary expressions of feminist identities. Next, I move on to consider how various women's organisations perceived digital networking. My examination concentrates on transformations in organisational practices that result from fears of being left out and hopes of being connected and focuses on the discursive practices of participation and connectivity amongst London-based feminist groups. I then go on to provide a hyperlink account of the network forming around the issue "violence against women" and consequently consider the epistemological and political implications of using Issue Crawler and digital network-mapping technologies. In particular, I ask what it means to think about feminist politics as network politics, and to research political activity as network activity. Bringing the two research approaches of this chapter together, the conclusion raises questions about their disparity in relation to understandings of feminist network politics today.

II. The Feminism in London 2009 Conference

The FiL09 conference was organised by the London Feminist Network (LFN), a women-only[9] campaigning organisation established in 2004. The LFN aims to "unite feminist groups and individuals based in London" and had, at the time of the conference, 800 members on their mailing list, and at the time of writing, 1600. It organises the annual London Reclaim The Night (against violence) march and has also organised the Bin The Bunny campaign and the Anti-Porn London group. The main focus of the LFN is "male violence against women in all its forms, such as rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, pornography, prostitution and the wider 'sex-industry'" (Feminism in London Policy Statement, 2009). The FiL09 Conference was funded by the Maypole Fund[10] and was the second conference to be organised in London. It took place at the Conway Hall in Holborn, Central London. Echoing the primary concerns of the LFN, the flyers and posters of the conference were subtitled "Pornification, the pay

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9   Prior to the conference, the LFN did not clarify their policy regarding the attendance of trans-women. After the *F-word* collective prompted whether trans-women could participate in women-only workshops, the LFN amended their policy as shown online. However, "female born women only" could attend the workshop on rape and sexual violence (Woodhouse, 2009).

10 The Maypole is a UK fund for activities by individuals and groups for peace, justice, and environmental safety.

gap, eating disorders... Where do we go from here?"

Figure 1: Photograph from the FiL09 Conference.

a) Methodology

For the ethnographic component of the study, I interviewed (face-to-face and recorded) eight people, whereas I had email and telephone conversations with four others, between the end of September and end of November 2009. Four of the respondents were speakers at the FiL09 conference (see Appendix A, Section 4 for a complete list of interview participants, requests for interviews and question guides used during interviews). During that time, I participated in various events organised by women's organisations, including the FiL09 Conference, the Women's Resource Centre Annual General Meeting, and in March 2010 the 'Women's Liberation Conference@40' at Ruskin College, Oxford. My questions to participants concerned the organisational and networking practices of the interviewee or their organisation, if they belonged in one. In order to gather information more widely about their communicative practices and attitudes towards digital media, I did not define the term "network" for them. I did inform interviewees that my scope was to compare the network map emerging through ethnographic methods with a network map rendered by web research tools. I offered the option to actually draw a map on paper (in a sense, their personal network or how they perceived their position in a feminist network) but only one participant, Beatrix Campbell, responded positively to the exercise. The key themes of my interview questions were priorities for action, the regional aspect of actions, networking practices, media strategies, and links to the academic sector.

I requested interviews from groups that had a stall (See Figure 3) at the FiL09 conference, or were speakers/facilitators. This way, I approached organisations and individuals who had a lived experience of the day, apart from being virtually linked

through the conference website (See Figure 4).

Some of the interviews were done on the day of the conference under time limitations and stress conditions, on the street, in a car and on a pavement where children were playing. These accounts were vivid, not least because the event was emotionally charged. They were also brief, lasting for a maximum of half an hour. The interviews that were taken after the conference lasted from a half to two hours. They took place at the British Library café, at the respondent's couch over tea, biscuits, and the occasional cat and husband, and at the cocktail party of an annual general meeting.

Figure 2: Overview of the conference Hall and stalls – the Feminist library stall.

	STAGE			1. Women's Resource Centre (WRC)

			1. Women's Resource Centre (WRC)
1		11	2. Pink Stinks
2		12	3. Equality Trust
3		13	4. Feminist Library
4		14	5. Clean Break
5		15	6. Solace Women's Aid
6		16	7. London Feminist Networking
7		17	8. Abortion Rights
8		18	9. Fawcett Society South London Group
9		19	10. Fawcett Society
10		-	11. Womankind

1. Women's Resource Centre (WRC)
2. Pink Stinks
3. Equality Trust
4. Feminist Library
5. Clean Break
6. Solace Women's Aid
7. London Feminist Networking
8. Abortion Rights
9. Fawcett Society South London Group
10. Fawcett Society
11. Womankind
12. Scarlet Centre
13. Eaves
14. Object!
15. White Ribbon Campaign
16. Vday-Until Violence Stops Campaign
17. Central America Women's Network (CAWN)
18. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
19. Older Feminist Network
20. Empty Stall

Figure 3: Stall Setting at FiL09.

Abortion Rights	Imece	Single Parent's Action Network
Anti-Porn London	Imkaan	SOAS Student's Union
Central America Women's Network (CAWN)	London Centre for Personal Safety	Solace Women's Aid
Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP)	London Feminist Network (LFN)	South London Fawcett Group
Eaves	Mothers Against Violence	Southall Black Sisters
Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize	Moyo wa Taifa	Tibetan Women's Association
Equality Now	Million Women Rise	White Ribbon Campaign

The Equality Trust	North London Fawcett Group	Women and Girls Network
Fawcett Society	North London Fawcett Group	Womankind
Feminist Coalition Against Prostitution (FCAP)	Object - Challenging Objectification	Women Asylum Seekers Together
Feminist Library	Older Feminists' Network	Women for Refugee Women
Forward UK	Older Women's Co-Housing	Women in Black
The Glass Bar	Pink Stinks	Women's Design Service
Growing Old Disgracefully Network	The Poppy Project	Women's Environmental Network
Housmans Radical Booksellers	Rape Crisis England and Wales	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
		Women's Resource Centre (WRC)

Figure 4: The participating organisations that appeared in the FiL09 website.

b) Participants

I will now move on to briefly introduce the interviewees of the study.

Beatrix Campbell is a journalist, broadcaster and playwright who was also a Green Party candidate during my research. She has been active in the Women's Liberation Movement and a member of the Communist Party (Campbell Weblog, 2009). Campbell was a keynote speaker in the opening session of the FiL09 conference.

Figure 5: Beatrix Campbell at FiL09.

Finn Mackay is a founding member of the London Feminist Network. She chaired the "What's wrong with prostitution?" panel and was a keynote speaker in the closing session.

Figure 6: Finn Mackay (left) with Kate Smurthwaite (*Cruella blog* and Abortion Rights) at FiL09.

Rebecca Morden is the artistic director of Scary Little Girls, a London and Cornwall based artistic collective with a radical feminist agenda, aiming to promote women-centred stories. They have collaborated with various feminist organisations including the London Feminist Network, Reclaim the Night march, Bin the Bunny campaign and lap-dancing campaigns by the LFN, Object!, and Abortion Rights. At the Feminism in London 2009 Conference, Morden led a media training workshop targeted at activists.

Susie Orbach is an academic, psychoanalyst and author who has written about body image and the construction of femininity. She has been a consultant to The World Bank and is currently consultant to the NHS and to DOVE (Unilever).

Figure 7: Slide from Susie Orbach's opening speech at FiL09.

Orbach was a keynote speaker in the opening session of the conference. She spoke to me as part of *Anybody*, an organisation aiming to promote diversity in the ways bodies are represented in the fashion industry and the media. *Anybody* collaborates with the NHS and the Royal College of Nursing in order to challenge the diet industry and change attitudes to child obesity.

The South London Fawcett Group (SLFG) is a local group of the Fawcett Society. In our interview on the 30th of October 2009, their spokesperson noted that, as a group, they campaign nationally "on issues of particular interest and concern to women living in South London, i.e. in the Greater London Authority boroughs south of the river" (SLFG, 2009). They have lobbied the Greater London Authority and local councils about public transport issues and, at the time of the interview, were interested in the report on Primary Rape Crisis centres. They were involved in the campaign against lap-dancing, and usually have stalls at summer fairs in South London.

Figure 8: Anna van Heeswijk receiving an award for Object! (Object!, 2009).

Anna van Heeswijk responded as the Grassroots Coordinator of Object!. According to the website, "Object! is a human rights organisation which challenges the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture" (Object!, 2010). Formally established in 2003, they are a charitable organisation, with a constitution and management committee.

Object! works closely with grassroots organisations across the UK and they have campaigned against lads' mags and lap dancing. With Eaves[11] they cooperated on the Demand Change Campaign. Van Heeswijk started up monthly activist meetings in London in December 2008 and at the conference led the Activism Training workshop. According to the FiL09 website, she has helped to set up a regional branch in Leeds,

> organising National Days of Action for activists around the country who oppose the licensing of lap dancing clubs like cafés, working with student unions to oppose beauty pageants in universities, speaking at trade union and student union events and conferences about the links between objectification, the mainstreaming of the sex and porn industries and sex discrimination and violence against women, and instigating monthly national Feminist Fridays to develop grassroots activism around the issue of lads' mags (Feminism in

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11 See Appendix A for information about Eaves.

London, 2009).

Leah Williams responded as the communication's officer of the Women's Resource Centre (WRC). This is a charity that supports women's organisations with training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. They also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Figure 9: Women's Resource Centre stand at the conference.

Apart from the participants of the conference, I interviewed Carrie Hamilton on the 31st of October 2009, a sex work activist, academic and anarcha-queer feminist, because I wanted to include a voice external to the mapped network. Hamilton organises x:talk, a project that has been endorsed by the International Union of Sex Workers. According to the weblog, it is "a space to organise and empower workers in the sex industry and to encourage critical interventions around the issues of migration, gender and labour" (x:talk website, 2009).

Figure 10: Overview of the conference hall and stands

c) Versions of contemporary feminism

My ethnographic mapping clearly illustrates that "violence against women" was the most prevalent concern for women's groups that participated in the FiL09 Conference. As I discuss, central to the identification process for these organisations was the definition of this issue as connoting anti-prostitution and anti-pornography.

The positions of objectification through which divisions between contemporary feminists get re-framed in digital networks are guided by a long history of second-wave feminist struggles. In the 1980s, fierce debates between feminists revolved around the political importance of pornography as a cultural product. In the US, the anti-pornography campaign led by Andrea Dworkin and Katherine MacKinnon tried to shift the legal definition of porn from obscenity to women's subordination (Cornell, 2000, p.4). Gayle Rubin (1993a; 1993b), as a proponent of sexual rights, objected to the restrictive legislation suggested by anti-porn feminists at the time. Rubin (1993b) argued that MacKinnon and Dworkin's, views against lesbian sadomasochism (SM) limited female agency and confirmed women's powerlessness[12]. The basis of identification for the network of organisations gathering around the FiL09 Conference was the reworking of these old oppositions around understandings of violence as symbolic or "real", and the implications of such understandings.

The contemporary feminist strand of anti-pornography and anti-prostitution that I map in this network gained much currency in mainstream media during the time of the research. For instance in the *Guardian* article "Why Kat Banyard is the UK's most influential young feminist"[13], written about the Demand Change campaign, it was suggested:

She isn't content with working on a single issue, but aims to tear down the entire spider's web of sexual inequality. When I ask what most fires her, what

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12 I return to the pornography debate (or "sex wars" in feminism) in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

13 Kat Banyard received coverage for her book *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* in Spring 2010, and for *UKFeminista*. The latter was a website serving as a "one-stop shop for activism" built around the themes of the book (Banyard, 2010, p.241). For more information, see Appendix A.

she would concentrate on if she could attack only one issue, she slowly, ardently, argues – true to form – for two. The first is the sex industry. [...]The other issue that Banyard is most passionate about, she says, "is men". She bursts out laughing, then elaborates. She says that the future of feminism "depends on men's engagement – it needs them, and it also helps them . . . (Cochrane, 2010).

Object! and other participants in the FiL09 Conference received considerable publicity by featuring in the 3rd part of the BBC4 documentary *Women: Activists* (Engle, 2010), broadcast on the 22nd of March 2010. The BBC 4 website featured a photograph from the Reclaim the Night March (See Figure 11) and described the documentary as follows:

The concluding part looks at a small group of passionate and committed young activists, who believe that the need for feminist politics is now more urgent than ever. The film follows them as they prepare for their first ever conference as well as a march through central London (BBC 4, 2010).

In addition to the publicity of that anti-pornography and anti-prostitution network, some members of the London Feminist Network (LFN) were, during the time of my research, themselves researching UK contemporary feminism as doctoral students, creating their own accounts of history. Julia Long who is active with the LFN, Object! and Anti-Porn London, was writing a thesis about anti-porn feminism in these same groups and had presented positioned accounts of her participation/research both as an activist and as an academic researcher.[14] Similarly, Finn Mackay, founder of the LFN and co-founder of the Feminist Coalition Against Prostitution, researched Reclaim the Night marches, which she organises.

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14 Her activist identity was not always clearly registered in academic events, as I observed for instance at the presentation "It makes me feel like nothing: young women and citizenship in the age of porn", in the panel Representation, media and citizenship panel, Beyond Citizenship: Feminism and transformation of Belonging Conference, July 2010.

Figure 11: Photograph at the BBC 4 website of the documentary *Women: Activists* showing Anna van Heeswijk at a Reclaim the Night March.

Carry Hamilton (2010) commented on this publicity in the *Guardian* article, "Enough middle-class feminism":

Violence against women is rightly a major focus of any feminist movement. But this serious problem cannot be understood, or challenged, in isolation from other forms of violence and oppression, such as racism, restrictive labour and migration laws, and poverty. Yet the groups featured in "Activists" – Object! and the London Feminist Network – treat violence against women largely in isolation. They have lots to say about the media objectification of women but, bizarrely, little to say about consumerism or capitalism (Hamilton, 2010).

Although referring to the third part of the documentary *Women: Activists,* and not to the conference I examine here, Hamilton (2010) succinctly summarises the tension between feminist identities and issues.

'Activists' promised to celebrate the resurgence of feminist activism in the contemporary UK. How disappointing, then, that this new feminism turned out to be nothing more than a small group of London-based women who have attracted media attention over the past couple of years with their single-issue campaigns on violence against women (Hamilton, 2010).

Critical voices in grassroots feminism today, like that of Hamilton, largely

responded to anti-pornography and third-wave feminism. Indeed the project of "other", counter-voices is all important since it re-aligns feminism with socialism. Unfortunately, although these feminist voices stress historical and material continuities of gender inequality, they tend to announce themselves as new and interesting as well, by publishing manifestos. I do not claim that Manifestos are politically meaningless, but rather wish to stress the popularity and abundance of such texts. For instance, Nina Power's (2009) book the *One Dimensional Woman* approaches gender inequality as a phenomenon bound to capitalism. In March 2010, Nina Power and Lindsey German[15] launched the *Manifesto for the 21st Century* at the Housmans bookshop in London. At this talk but in earlier work[16] too, German traced the history of women's liberation in the civil rights and the working class movements in the US and the UK. She noted the need for feminist politics to go beyond self-help and individual empowerment, to collectively respond to capitalism today and fight back. This militant movement for German would draw links between economic recession, climate change, war, and their implications for women today. The Manifesto stressed class stratification:

> Although all women suffer oppression and face discrimination, their life experiences are radically different. Women are not united as a sex but are divided on the basis of class. Middle and upper class women share in the profits from the exploitative system in which we live and use this benefit to alleviate their own oppression (German, 2010, np).

However, Power and German's socialist feminist positions on objectification strikingly corresponded to that of anti-pornography/anti-prostitution cultural feminism:

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15 Lindsey German is the convenor of the Stop the War Coalition and a former member of the central committee of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) for 37 years. Her role was instrumental in the politics of the SWP regarding women, and in relation to a central debate for WLM in the 1970s, that of the role of working class men in the oppression of women. The SWP in the 1970s set up a socialist feminist women's organisation, Women's Voice, which produced its own paper. Women's Voice was shut down after an internal debate in 1981, in order to control the leaking of women members from the party. In 1989, German wrote *Sex, Class and Socialism* which attempted a class-based approach, rather than a radical feminist one, to gender inequality (Higgins, 2008).

16 See for instance the article "Women's liberation today" in *International Socialism*, Issue: 101, 25 November 2004; also "21st century feminism" in the *Socialist Review*. See also Nina Power, "Capitalism, Consumerism and Feminism", 25 February, 2010 in the *New Left Project.*

Women are more than ever regarded as objects defined by their sexuality. The commercialisation of sexuality with its lad and ladette culture, its pole dancing clubs and its post-modern Miss World contests keeps women being judged as sex objects as if nothing has changed since the 1950s. This objectification, alongside women's role as supposedly the property of men, leads to domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse. This abuse is under recognised and under reported.

The difference in approach was thus how for them violence was divisive for feminists. Instead, they framed the emancipation of women as a necessary component of a socialist revolution and vice-versa[17].

Any genuine liberation has to be connected to a wider movement for human emancipation and for working people to control the wealth that they produce. That's why women and men have to fight for liberation. Socialism and women's liberation are inextricably connected [...] Every great social movement raises the question of women.

A central media event that crystallised the different positions various groups and individuals occupied during the time of my ethnographic research is a controversy around an article written by Nick Davies (2009), and to which Hamilton and many of the research respondents referred. This concerned the implications of statistics and academic research (Nick Mai's research[18]) for the amendments proposed at this time in the 2009 Policing and Crime Bill. Nick Davies in his article and the research policy report disputed that there was any exploitation. Responding to this, Rahila Gupta (2009) and Catherine Bennett (2009) expressed acute anti-prostitution positions, but the case generally stirred considerable buzz in feminist circles. If we consider how terms like exploitation, prostitution, sex work and violence against women were

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17 I find the way Nina Power's book starts (with the phrase "Where have all the interesting women gone?") very condescending – and in general the tone of the book is dismissive of contemporary feminist activism, and reductionist in its own right.

18 "The research evidence strongly suggests that current attempts to curb trafficking and exploitation by criminalising clients and closing down commercial sex establishments will not be effective because as a result the sex industry will be pushed further underground and people working in it will be further marginalised and vulnerable to exploitation" (Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry: Final Policy Relevant Report, 2009).

strategically used in this case, it appears that these ideological debates are politically unhelpful. While feminists debated in the media about whether trafficking is a reality of numbers or a moral panic, other issues remained unaddressed – how would the Bill actually be implemented? How would the criminalisation benefit trafficked women, when at the same time funding for trafficked women refuges was being cut[19]? What were the implications of this Bill for sex worker rights? And thinking more broadly, what civil liberties were at stake with this Bill? These questions are clearly beyond the scope of my research, but I raise them here to indicate how remarkable feminist mobilisation around the 2009 Crime and Policing Bill closed down opportunities for alliance building across political fields.

In what follows, I explain how in networked conditions these older divisions are re-invoked, and how doing politics is remediated through digital networks.

III. Network imaginaries: Making meaning of digital media and changing organisational practices

a) "A building with women through its veins": The network and the movement

My participation at the 'Feminism in London 2009' Conference and the interviews I conducted set out to understand the symbolic and functional value of networking practices for women's organisations. Central to the ways many participants read digital media, and their own engagement with them, is the idea of being "active" in online social networks and of re-connecting with the feminist movement. This ideological reading of digital media as an *activist and social opportunity* considerably shapes the organisational decisions for the groups studied here. There is a wider rhetoric of digital networks as sites of non-hierarchical modes of connection (Terranova, 2004) and as elementary components of democratic participation. For instance, Lincoln Dahlberg (2010, p.334), in his theorisation of "cyber-libertarian 2.0" rhetoric, identifies US futurist technology "gurus", intellectuals, entrepreneurs and media reportage as the sources of these discourses.[20] These ideas seem to operate

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19 At the time of writing, the POPPY project has had its funding withdrawn (Townsend, 2011).
20 See also Bassett (2008) about the imaginary modes in which ICTs and "web 2.0" models operate.

beyond academic discussions, amongst many of the groups that are analysed here.

To illustrate how network discourses influenced the organisational and communicative restructuring for feminist groups, I begin my close review with the Women's Resource Centre (WRC). Of the groups participating in this study, the WRC at most promoted the idea that online networking between women's organisations is necessary. To this end, it set up an online social networking platform called The Café, which in its two month pilot phase involved 150 women's organisations. In the survey they conducted about how women's organisations use the internet, they found that 25% did not have their own website. Aiming to address what they understood as technophobia amongst women's organisations, the WRC decided to provide training for them. When the platform was launched at their Annual General Meeting, a step-by-step guide for using the Café was provided. A persistent effort to overcome the scepticism of women's organisations towards social media platforms was made by the communication's officer of the Centre, Leah Williams. As she noted in our interview on the 19th on November 2009:

> I've been talking about social media a lot, you know, so kind of introducing them to the idea of using things like, using *Twitter*, *Facebook*, things like that, and like I said, I went to the meetings of like the working group [of the Café pilot phase], I'd go to that meeting, introduce the Café to them and answer their questions, that way.

During this interview Williams (2009) also indicated that *Twitter* had been significant in terms of discovering funding sources, learning about policy consultation, setting up new memberships and sharing information. Williams' enthusiastic account of *Twitter* and the Café signalled how the former, and more generally digital network media, were perceived to be transparent modes of communication. She remarked:

> *Twitter* has been really amazing, we've had new members coming through, we've had people wanting to donate to women's organisations, we've had women's organisations finding out things about each other that they didn't know about, we've had [..] blogs based on the fact that they got to us through *Twitter*, then we've had job adverts or policy consultations. [We've had] as

many people through *Twitter* as we've had through email lists and newsletter. I really hope to transfer some of this enthusiasm to the Café (Williams, 2009).

Figure 12: Women's Resource Centre campaign material.

Echoing the open architecture aspects of digital networks[21], but likewise discourses of interactivity and participation, the Women's Resource Centre spokesperson stressed that online communication media facilitate horizontal ways of connecting.

It's so much more interactive, I mean for me, it's more than having a new tool. It's a total new way of communicating. I think that a lot of charities are picking up on that. You know, it's so much more open way to...you know you have really

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21 Open architecture is the design principle of the internet, introduced by Robert Hahn and Vincent Cerf at DARPA. It denotes that individual and autonomous networks connect to the internet through common bridging protocols (for instance TCP/IP, URL, FTP, IRC). The basic problem that open architecture aimed to confront was that of incompatibility stemming from localisation and autonomy – which resulted from the request for decentralisation of individual networks and the different protocols they used (See Terranova, 2004).

open conversations [...] It is a bit like opening the roof of an organisation. People can dip in and out (Williams, 2009).

Interestingly, in the same event, the building metaphor was used by the Chief Executive of the Centre, when in her speech she described their offline action plans. She envisioned a building in London that would host women's voluntary organisations, "a building with women through its veins" (WRC AGM, 2009). This latter vision of openness and collaboration then corresponds to a concrete version of the digital media open-roof organisation. Although the building was physically placed in the centre of London, whereas The Café was virtually anywhere, both maintained the Women's Resource Centre as the central node. This means that organisations using the online platforms or the building would have the Centre mediating between them and other groups. Clearly, such a pattern corresponds to a closed, controlled and selective network since the Centre would have to oversee the registration process and the membership of individual women's groups. In this sense, the metaphors of the life-form building essentially translated to a client/service provider model of relationships. Whilst acknowledging that the online platform or the building were helpful and valuable initiatives, I wish here to draw attention to the notions of transparency, openness and horizontality. In this account these appear to be injected as a boost into existing organisational structures with the intention of reviving, bringing them up-to-date, and ultimately, making them more popular.

Accounts from other feminist organisation put similar emphasis on participation in an active movement. It appears that "networks" constituted an imaginary form of organisation according to which decentralised women's groups connected in an optimum way. Apart from connectivity, other aspects of this network imaginary were ubiquity and belonging. Being part of "the network" for many interviewees implied belonging in a wider movement, a timeless superstructure. At the same time, this network imaginary posed a challenge to understandings of belonging and identity. When Finn Mackay (2009) described the action of the London Feminist Network and feminism more broadly in an email interview, she thought of it as a continuation of the Women's Liberation Movement, alas significantly less coherent[22]. Online media for

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22 Despite Mackay's perception of the Women's Liberation Movement as coherent, earlier conferences (but also the National 'Women's Liberation Conference@40', in Ruskin College, which I attended in March 2010), were full of contestation (Ms Understood: Women's Liberation in 1970's Britain

Mackay (2009) facilitated communication between different networks. A national Women's Liberation magazine or conference would, however, more fully connect feminists today for her. As she remarked in our email communication on the 22nd of November 2009:

> We have no national Women's Liberation magazine any more for example, but a lot of info is shared online nowadays. We have no national Women's Liberation conferences any more. There is a lot the movement needs to do to get back on track and make ourselves a coherent movement once again, it is quite desperate at the moment […] I would like to somehow bring back the national Women's Liberation conferences for the UK. I would also like to see a new Radical Feminist national magazine or newsletter, but these are quite aspirational targets!

In this regard, the value of digital networking, and by and large new media technologies, were negotiated and brought side-by-side with that of older media forms. In calling into question the usefulness of online media for feminist activism, Mackay (2009) contested the very characteristics of informational culture, heterogeneity and decentralisation. In a similar way to Finn Mackay and Leah Williams, speaking for the London Feminist Network and the Women's Resource Centre respectively, other participants in the study appeared to negotiate the lack of a centre and homogeneity. In other words, they seemed to negotiate the very elements contained in the notion of the network. Their accounts narrated a persistent effort to know and be part of events that ostensibly happened somewhere else, somewhere central. Rather than perceiving their position in a feminist network as a local or micro-struggle in a horizontal assemblage (as for instance a "multitude" reading would have it), participants imagined a centre that seemed elusive. At the same time, this centre seemed to constitute a physical place, London.

b) Catching up with technologies and changing organisational routines

Instant communication and interaction were the most prominent qualities of

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Exhibition, 2010).

"the network" imaginary in interview accounts. Yet catching up with technologies and gaining technical knowledge of the medium appeared to be another intense anxiety in participant responses. This anxiety stemmed from a sense that a knowledge gap was augmenting and synchronising with a generational gap. For example, Rebecca Morden of Scary Little Girls talked to me about the need to "be hooked up" and to be more "cyber-connected". During our interview on the 10th of October 2009, she noted:

> I feel we're not doing as well online, we need to catch up, how much we're doing [offline] as I'd like to...I'd like it to be the same amount of interaction as a workshop or an event, I'd like it to be just like that.

An analogous weight on interaction, and aligning the online with offline activity, was placed by Susie Orbach. Speaking to me as part of *Anybody*, she recounted her ambition for a "big project" linked to the website. This was a vision of an online network aiming to lobby politicians. Seemingly more comfortable using the word "community" than "network" during our interview on the 10th of October 2009, Orbach noted about the *Anybody* website:

> If somebody finds it, they can feel understood and that there's a community of people who have an oppositional view. And the fact that, you know, just at this conference some guy came up to me about doing body image, that's good, that's great, and that happens all the time.

Nonetheless, in her interview account Orbach explained that the website, in its form at the time, was not designed to create a community of people:

> It doesn't invite you to do that in that way. I think it invites you to think about things that are happening and take them to the places that you are already. I don't think it says - join this group" (Orbach, 2009).

The line Orbach drew between "community" and "network", and the comment about the potential of the *Anybody* website to draw people together, is noteworthy here because it illustrates how the "network" as a form of engagement, seemed to

connote mobilisation (for instance, lobbying).

Since Beatrix Campbell responded as an individual, rather than as part of an organisation, she offered a different view of new media literacy. To her, this was both a requirement for meeting up with the demands of digital audiences and a transformative experience. My question about her connections to other feminists and organisations initially elicited a personal account of technical literacy. In our interview on the 21st of November 2009, she noted:

> The first thing I should say to you is that I am just now coming to terms with the new network. And I think there are two reasons for that. One is political and one is technical. I'll do the technical one first. The technical is that...I'm a kind of ambivalent...web person. So historically I've had a utilitarian approach to it, I used it to do research, I used it to write [...] I'm on *Twitter* but I never use it, but I assume that I will. And I've always felt tired[...] I know that that's generational, and I know that that's not useful....so it's kind of ambivalent, slightly technophobic, slightly utilitarian approach to new means of communication.

She went on to remark:

> However, I'm in the process of changing my disposition in relation to all of that, partly because I've been blogging for the *Guardian*. For example, regularly, I realise I can't intervene, I didn't know my way around the kind of debates...so I do my thing and that's it. So I thought, Oh my God, I have to become technically literate [...] I'm just going to change. So you are meeting me at a moment of change [...]...So I thought, right, I'm gonna reinvent myself. So in six months' time [...] my relationships to communicating, networking, campaigning will change.

Campbell's change of attitude towards online communication and her decision to adapt to the new technological circumstances of producing media signals the hold that digital technology – and in this sense the discursive practices of "dominant digital culture" - has today amongst older feminists. Media training seemed to them essential for acquiring representational space online.

c) "That's our own *Facebook*, we meet face-to-face": New media literacy and offline networking

Seeking to address new media literacy, the South London Fawcett Group (SLFG) and others invested time and effort in making digital media part of their organisation. Clearly the Women's Resource Centre, whose members already had an everyday pattern of use of mobile media technologies and were twittering from the FiL09 conference, required less energy and time to adopt the new Café platform. The older women of the South London Fawcett Group (SLFG) nevertheless strived to incorporate email technology in their organisational mode of operation. Since the SLFG was affiliated with the Women's Resource Centre, its members received training from them. Notably, their spokesperson informed me that:

> A lot of our access to what is going on is through the email lists of women's organisations. We receive the Women in London reports and the report from the London Feminist Network. So our involvement in campaigns can come through that. There may be an appeal to us from another women's organisation to support a particular project (SLFG, 2009).

Implementing a social online networking platform, for example the Café or even *Facebook*, was valued equally with the domestication of email technology and email lists for the SLFG. Indeed, this became clear during our interview, on the 30th of October 2009:

> The Café, the platform […], it's something that perhaps we could get involved. Again I think in the way it's constructed it would be one person, would be the contact, the *liaison*. Which…I can understand that's how you do it, but it's just one person who is reporting back to the group. I was interested that they [the WRC] appeared to be making a space for groups. And the Devon, the Fawcett Devon Group, I think work entirely through email, because, again, they're so scattered, in the whole country, you have to, you have to use something like email to keep in touch. We have talked about having *Facebook* group, we don't

have a *Facebook* group [...] but again to the older members it's a novelty, which we have to get accustomed to. In a way, we meet once per month, we have good discussions, that is sufficient. That's our own *Facebook*, we meet face-to-face.

This account elucidates how there was a blurred understanding of what belonging to a network entailed and how this was distinct to being subsidiary to an organisation. For the South London Fawcett Group digital networking represented a communicative practice, which was seemingly irrelevant to the type of relationship between organisations. Nonetheless, the spokesperson explained about the group:

It has developed with the evolution of digital communications. When we started going, when was that, it's 1998 I think, of our first, our first meeting. And, what did we have back then? Well...I don't think that we communicated. I think probably...by mail, by post. And, I have to say we have still now a few members who are not on email. So we have to be careful that we keep them informed, at least not, we cannot inform them about everything, but we cannot allow ourselves to forget that some people are not on email, just, just a few people [...] But now, I'd like to say it's younger people, our younger members, and they expect to communicate all the time, particularly by email [...] For the older members that was what we needed to come in grips with. It happened so fast...And it is, quite a difference of experience between older members and younger members [...] But on the whole *we try to keep up, we can't, we can't, if we didn't people would not be interested in us* (SLFG, 2009) (my emphasis).
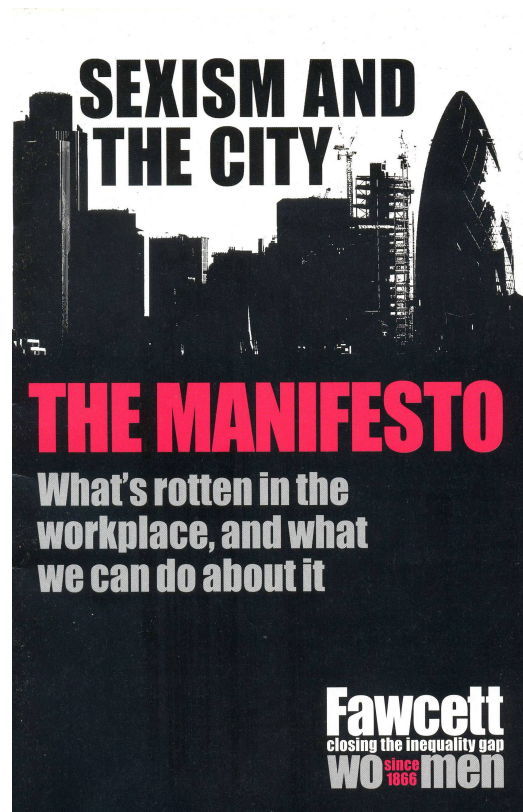
Figure 13: Fawcett Society campaign material

Complex attitudes to digital networking permeated the stories that various participants told me about the feminist groups they belonged in. On the one hand, participants embraced the discourses of participation, openness and connectivity that inform network imaginaries but also those of an imagined contemporary feminist movement. On the other hand, they sought to address the uncertainty created by heterogeneity and decentralisation in appropriating digital media as an add-on to existing practices and structures. The practicalities of this attempt at appropriation seemed equally complex. For example, the organisation *Anybody* did not have a volunteer role exclusively for website moderation, which in turn affected the amount of interaction with the people using the website. Susie Orbach, speaking to me as the organisation's spokesperson, stressed:

It's all informal and voluntary. So you might get a twenty-year-old, who comes and says she's going to set a zine up, she's going to do this, but then it doesn't deliver necessarily (Orbach, 2009).

Similarly, in the case of Scary Little Girls, the website, *Facebook* profile page and weblog were designed and maintained by two people, who updated the group's email list and sent out promotional emails. While maintaining a multiple web presence was challenging for organisations that did not change their mode of operation on a wider scale, for the LFN the email list was their constitutive activity. It was created through two previous and now discontinued online mailing lists, the *UK Feminist Action* and the *London 3rd Wave*. Finn Mackay in our communication explained how they "spread the word personally through contacts in Women's Aid, Eaves Housing for Women, women's peace groups such as Women in Black, Codepink, WILPF" (Mackay, 2009). With approximately 600 members on their list at the time of the study, they mainly focused on disseminating information from the Women In London calendar of events. It appears then that even organisations like *Anybody*, Scary Little Girls and the London Feminist Network who did not centrally coordinate their communicative strategy in this instance, placed a decisive emphasis on producing an abundance of online representations and connections. The imaginary of being technically connected and horizontally, digitally-networked underpinned this preoccupation.

In contrast, Object! demonstrated a succinct communicative strategy with the website playing the role of a resource site (with template letters to send to MPs for example). Additionally, they run a Yahoo! Group, targeted specifically towards activists and further sought to develop a blog that would engage even more readers into activism. During our interview on the 10th of October 2009, Anna van Heeswijk, their spokesperson explained:

> Many times when we do protests we tried to get a look that we knew would attract the media, so we would make it very visual, […] we set up a strip café, for example, outside the parliament, and we had a strip pole and we had a massive menu saying like, coffee two pounds, thong, fully-nude lap-dancing two pounds […] Getting hooks like that that would attract the media to come to so that they would report for the issue has been important.

Designing their campaigns in a way that would attract maximum media attention was central to their communicative approach.

Figure 14: Stop the Traffic campaign material by Object!

While participants enthusiastically accounted for their digital media practices when asked about networking, they generally seemed more reluctant to speak about networking offline. For most groups, networking offline seemed mundane since it was done informally and selectively. For example, for *Anybody*, the community was sustained with regular meetings, collaborations with fashion schools and talks in universities. Likewise, the London Feminist Network held monthly meetings where women of different ages met. Older, mainly white middle class women gathered monthly to organise social events with the South London Fawcett Group.

Again in a distinguishable pace from these groups, Object! put a lot of weight on partnerships and, as a result, had as much to narrate about their offline activity as they had about their online presence. Their grassroots coordinator informed me that they worked with Student Union officers, women's groups, Trade Unions and feminist networks around the UK. Their aim was to "share skills and build unity within the women's movement" (Object!, 2009). This took many forms, but as a network, Object! was predominately supportive in terms of expertise. During the interview on the 10th of October 2009, van Heeswijk explained:

> [We receive a lot of emails] So asking us to come and speak at different events, or to put on a workshop about objectification, about the lap-dancing campaign, about the prostitution campaign, and we do that with many different types of groups, you know, with women's organisations, like 'Rights of Women' this

week, with Trade Unions, with the Student Union, with activist groups, so we spend a lot of time doing that.

Part of their activist support was to supply evidence for community groups to use in court hearings or in council targeted motions against lap-dancing clubs opening in their area. The interviewee remarked:

So for example with Eaves now, who provide more direct service provision for women who have been in prostitution, who have been trafficked, who have experienced this kind of abuse, and Object! As a campaign organisation, we don't provide service provision, so we provide activism and networked campaigning […] We sort of complement each other that way (van Heeswijk, 2009).

In this respect, Object! saw themselves as organically immersed in a network of women's organisations which focused both on social cohesion and on developing campaigns around certain issues. Hence we may say that they operated horizontally by lending activist support to Eaves and Fawcett. In addition, they operated vertically as a coordinator for grassroots feminist groups who were starting up from zero level activity.

Figure 15: Demand Change campaign material

d) Dominant digital culture as a regulatory apparatus: Challenges and responses

From this exploration, it is evident that attitudes towards communicative activity are changing, albeit operating differently in relation to the distinct goals of various groups. Technologies have profound implications for feminist organising: the women's groups analysed in this instance set up websites and email lists; were passionate about *Twitter*; introduced social networking platforms and prioritised new media training. These developments speak of a turn towards digital network technologies as material practices, and as part of wider principles of decentralisation, openness and informational abundance. In other words, imaginaries of networks, participation and connectivity guided the communicative practices of women's groups in this study.

In my understanding, these imaginaries constitute an invitation by dominant

digital culture to participate. This request of participation at the same time hides a threat - that of being 'left out'. It is not just that feminists could be producing plenty of communicational texts, like social online platforms or newsletters, but that they *ought* to be producing them, or else the world will pass them by. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Jodi Dean (2009) has eloquently argued that contemporary communicative milieux are of the result of technological fetishism which manifests in neoliberal fantasies of active and participatory citizenship. Interactivity, democracy and activism in this framing are fantasies of communicative capitalism. Yet thus far my examination of feminist groups' fantasies concerned less abundance, which underpins Dean's (2009) theorisation, and more fear and anxiety[23]. Imaginaries of the network and the women's movement contained these anxieties as women's groups navigated through the uncertainty of an unknown communicative environment. In other words, what I intend to suggest is that these imaginaries are a form of affective response to the felt conditions of vulnerability that dominant digital culture creates for feminists today. We may thus understand dominant digital culture as a regulatory apparatus, which addresses certain forms of doing politics. In my analysis of the Issue Crawler as a digital mapping tool, I further suggest how this apparatus produces the conditions for doing politics.

Vulnerability and uncertainty then, rather than empowerment, are the conditions that digital networking presented for the participants of this study. In response, the model of interaction, open sharing and reconfiguration that digital communication mediated was met by some of the participants with resistance. For example, I noted how Beatrix Campbell eventually espoused the logic of providing audiences with more *choices*, despite her initial scepticism. The Women's Resource Centre incorporated existing platforms, like *Twitter* and *Facebook,* and additionally contributed to digital culture with a software platform of their own design.

It is in these ways that an ideological reading of digital media as an activist space of opportunity influences the communicative and organisational structure of women's groups in this study. Still, aside from impacting on organisational routines, in the next section I illustrate how the discourses implicit in dominant digital culture inform the ways women's groups acquire and voice a political subjectivity.

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23 A critique of how free market principles intertwine with democratic aspirations is more prevalent in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, where a discussion of forms of labour attends to the wealth of communicative/activist choices.

IV. The issue of "violence against women": Remediating feminist identities

What does "we" mean for feminism within network dynamics in the contemporary UK? The primary challenge for feminist groups forming in this context is to inhabit a collective political position, maintain their differences and articulate a response from this position. In what follows, I return to my ethnographic research (including women's organisations participating in the 2009 'Feminism in London' Conference), to analyse how feminist identities were re-constituted in relation to the debate of "violence against women" during autumn 2009, and through networks. Although this was not explicitly stated in the conference publicity, I indicate here how "violence against women" was its overarching theme. Apart from the apparent reductionism entailed in single issue feminism, what distinctly interests me is how old divisions in feminist politics are being re-articulated in relation to digital networks.

To start with, it is vital to note that groups had different agendas and were surely not all focused on a single issue. For example, the South London Fawcett Group is loyal to the Fawcett Society but its agenda is determined on a local level. As the spokesperson explained during the interview:

> We are bound to regard the Fawcett society as the leading organisation in taking up issues that affect larger groups of women, like employment, women in the criminal justice system, sexual exploitation of women, low pay among women, sexism in the city, […] and at the local level we pick up what is happening in our neighbourhood but we also campaign for Fawcett. About the Equal Pay Day at the end of October […], groups of women, Fawcett branches all around the country and our particular group, the South London Fawcett Group, a few people were out at St. Paul's Cathedral getting signatures for the petition on Equal Pay, handing out leaflets. So sometimes we campaign directly with Fawcett, though what we local groups do is the way Fawcett can express itself (SLFG, 2009).

Stressing their undeniably different heritage to the North London group, the South London Fawcett Group noted how their tactics were disparate as well. The

preference of the Suffragettes to direct action and of the Suffragists' constitutional reformism[24], informed their current agendas and variation in pursuing them.
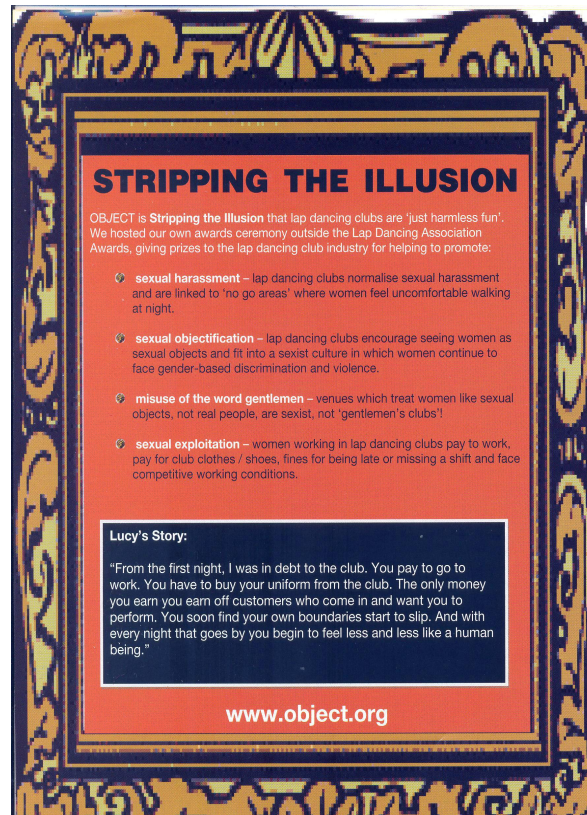
Figure 16: Stripping the illusion campaign material.
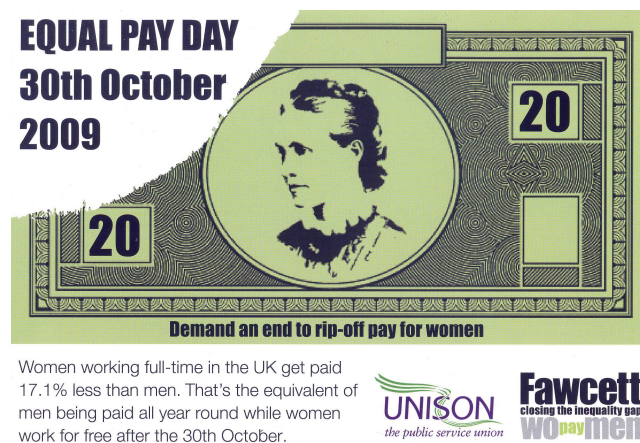
Figure 17: Fawcett Society campaign material.

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24 The Suffragettes was a term given by the Daily Mail to militant campaigners of the vote, led by Emmeline Pankhurst who founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. The Suffragists on the other hand were moderate and aimed at constitutional campaigning, like petitions and meetings, and were led by Millicent Fawcett who was active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (See Van Wingerden, 1999).

They [the North London group] operate in this [militant] way and that can be very effective...We're all coming from somewhere else and we operate in a different way, but that doesn't seem to matter. And still if there were to be another Fawcett group, you'd probably find that they're quite different. So I think that is a strength, that there is no one form, no one pattern and people operate in ways that suit them (SLFG, 2009).

For instance, the North London Fawcett Group did direct actions with regard to the Rape Crisis development commitment by the London Mayor Boris Johnson[25]. The interviewee noted:

We certainly agree with them [the NLFG] about holding the Mayor into account [...]. It's more a matter of how they're carrying out this particular campaign [...] I think they may possibly have started out as a student group, I'm not sure, but they seem to be a group that know each other and work with one another quite closely, whereas we come from all over the place. We've cohered now, we're a cohesive group but we've worked with each other over ten years, so it's a sort of an organic evolution (SLFG, 2009).

Unlike the London Fawcett Groups, Object! focused on a single-issue in the same way that other anti-prostitution and anti-pornography groups did. In its campaigns, Object! fixed the meaning of "violence against women" to pornography, the sex industry and media objectification (lads' mags, lap dancing). Their website stated:

Object! challenges the objectification of women by the media, porn and sex industries and their damaging messages about women's status and function" (Object!, 2009).

The emphasis Object! placed on objectification echoed changes in the 2009 Crime and Policing Bill. With the 'Stripping the illusion' campaign (See Figure 16),

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25 The North London Fawcett Group launched the "Boris Keep Your Promise" campaign. This aimed "to put pressure on Boris and remind him that we were listening when he pledged a large funding boost for Rape Crisis provision across the capital" (Rape Crisis, North London Fawcett Group, 2009).

Object! lobbied MPs in order to include legislation changes for strip clubs and prostitution under the "violence against women" framework[26]. Significantly, the Home Office concurred that "violence against women" related to matters other than physical violence. As Object!'s spokesperson explained to me during our interview:

With the Demand Change Campaign it was an obvious issue for us because we campaign against the objectification of women, and prostitution is the ultimate form of objectification of women, based on the idea that you can buy and sell women's bodies like commodities (van Heeswijk, 2009).

Figure 18: Demand Change campaign material

Possibly worrying that their anti-prostitution and anti-pornography focus would stereotype them within a 1970s and 1980s image, that is, as men-hating, boring, ugly, anti-sex feminists, Object! tried to cultivate a less militant identity. They engaged with Scary Little Girls, a pro-sex, anti-porn burlesque collective, perhaps in an attempt to attract more middle-class educated young women. Scary Little Girls had previously collaborated with Object! in the campaigns Bin the Bunny and Demand Change (in which the London Feminist Network, Fawcett and other groups mapped in this study had taken part as well). These partnerships were based upon the common

26 This appeared in the document *An Action Plan for Tackling Violence 2008–11, One Year On* (Home Office, 2009). See Appendix A.

understanding that media objectification is a form of "violence against women", and that violence against women is *the* pivotal issue for feminism today.

Nonetheless, apart from forming alliances with one another, these groups were not in dialogue with feminist groups that defined themselves in terms other than anti-pornography. One example of this tactic is how Object! refused any discussion about pornography or prostitution in a presentation of their campaign at the 'Women's Liberation Conference'[27]. To clarify this point, I will here illustrate how during the 'Feminism in London Conference' 2009 (FiL09), "violence against women" was constructed to signify pornography and prostitution. Accounting for this construction is necessary because the prevalence of this issue in the media, and the way it has been presented to correspond with feminism as a whole, is in disagreement with the variety of identities that I observed in this study.

Constructions of "violence against women" and anti-prostitution politics

In the opening speech at the FiL09, Susie Orbach showed images and figures (See Figure 7) that framed the beauty industry in terms of "violence against women". She explained how body hatred is primarily internalised and accordingly projected by the media. A similar symbolic equation between prostitution, rape and violence pervaded the talks of the panel *What's wrong with prostitution?* which comprised of the blogger and self-identified ex-prostitute Rebecca Mott and a spokesperson of the Poppy Project[28]. During this panel a personal narration about Mott's entrance to prostitution triggered anger and other emotional responses from the audience. Personal accounts like this signal the significance of affect in processes of political identification.

> I speak as a prostituted woman - not as a sex worker, not as a happy hooker. That is what is what is wrong with prostitution. [...] Prostitution is where any man can perform their porn fantasies on real women and girls. In my life, my body was forced into whatever was fashionable with porn. I knew *Deep Throat*, without seeing one clip. I knew as I was choked, I knew as I was made sick, I

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27 This view is based on my own observation as a participant at the 'WLM@40 Conference', Ruskin College, Oxford in March 2010.

28 See Appendix A for more information about the Poppy Project.

knew as I lost consciousness. I knew as Johns forced their penises to the back of my throat. Anal sex is a constant in porn. Johns love it because it is unnecessary, and often causes the woman or girl a great deal of pain. Imagine being forced against the wall, legs together, hand on your throat - then you are anally raped. That is the kind of thing that many Johns think they have the right to do. That is what is wrong with prostitution. Johns know that they can do any violence to prostituted women and girls - knowing that the majority of our society will refuse to care. After all, it cannot be rape if the man has paid for it [sic]. I so would love that this view was just came from the users and producers of the sex trade [sic]. No, it is a common view of the Left and too many feminists. This excuse makes any and all violence done to prostituted women and girls invisible, or of very little importance (Mott, 2009).

Responding to a question about criminalisation of sex users, the panel suggested that sex offenders, punters and criminals should be categorised accordingly. The arguments of sex-work activists about the necessity of Trade Unions were presented in a simplified manner, and sex-worker activists were demonised as non-representative (privileged "ex-workers with PhDs" or Cambridge degrees in the account of the Poppy Project spokesperson). The emotionally charged discussion that followed Rebecca Mott's account generally created the conditions required for mobilisation around the Demand Change campaign. Undoubtedly, the conference was a place where the causality between "violence against women" and pornography/representation could not be challenged. Additionally, the semantic anchoring of "violence against women" to prostitution/pornography during the discussion symbolically constructed other feminist identities as inherently anti-feminist and, indeed, as harming women as a whole.

As Mackay, founder and spokesperson of the LFN and the Reclaim the Night marches, called at the close of the conference:

Let's close down the streets for women. Let's send a message to all those rapists and abusers who unfortunately may never see justice served, let them know, in the strength and visibility of our movement; that they have not broken us, that they can never stop us. Let's send a message to all our silent sisters,

carrying their abuse and their history like shame; let them know, in the strength and visibility of our movement, that they are never to blame for men's violence and that we always believed them. March for your sisters, your friends, your daughters, march for yourselves. March for our movement. Thanks very much, see you at 'Reclaim The Night' on Saturday 21 November 2009 (Mackay, 2009).

In our communication Mackay explained to me:

The London Feminist Network contributes again [in changing attitudes] in that we normalise debates about prostitution being a violence against women, we normalise the idea that men should take responsibility for this and by having these discussions openly on the list and lots of women joining in and agreeing it normalises that side of the debate, that is not normally heard... (Mackay, 2009).

Figure 19: The Panel *What's wrong with prostitution?* at the FiL09 conference.

Perhaps it is relevant at this point to note that the London Feminist Network has been criticised by other feminists about its exclusionary tactics. Many blogs, including *Penny Red* by Laurie Penny, *Bird of Paradox* and *F-word*, called the LFN to publicly clarify their position regarding the participation of transwomen in 'Reclaim the Night' marches. Policing public spaces and expressions like 'Reclaim the Night' marches is

problematic because primarily such exclusions imply ownership and policing of a public expression. Consequently, policing practices within feminism impede the opportunities for dialogue precisely about the scopes of feminism. According to the open letter *Reclaim the Night: a space for all feminists?* circulating in blogs and email lists[29], the Red Umbrella contingency were questioned by police and physically and verbally abused by other feminists at the Reclaim the Night march in London, on the 21th November 2009. The contingency of the Feminist Fightback, X:talk and the International Union of Sex Workers marched in solidarity with sex workers. According to Carrie Hamilton in our interview, a similar occurrence at the 2008 London march concerned the public shaming[30] of a woman wearing a button with the sign *"I love Porn"* (Hamilton, 2009). This confrontation triggered an alternative March 8 event that aimed to celebrate women's sexuality that same year. Hamilton told me:

> I don't want the sex industry to become [...] the most important issue. The sex industry is not, by a long shot, the most important issue facing the majority of women in this country. [...] all the other things that you think are important like, you know, poverty, discrimination in the workplace and heterosexism, ah, you know, the long list, migration issues, stigmatisation of single mothers, who knows, and this goes on and on and on, which are points that I probably I agree with most anti-pornography anti-prostitution feminists with, you know, we don't get to talk about this because the sex industry becomes the issue, and it's crazy (Hamilton, 2009).

The necessity of claiming a feminist political position across distinct fields and issues was accentuated by Hamilton (2009). She noted that, although it dominated the feminist public sphere at that particular moment, "violence against women" when matched with "selling bodies" entailed a semantic reduction.

> They become symbolically crucial, so when people say your position in this issue defines your entire political identity and almost like an ethical moral being, then it's very hard to operate outside of that [...] Feminist campaigns to

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29 The Open letter circulated in the Feminist Activist Forum, the Feminist Fightback blog and to the London Feminist Network Yahoo!Groups email list.

30 Julie Bindel during her ending speech called that woman an idiot.

eliminate sex work by claiming that it is the same as violence against women are not only bad for the sex workers they aim to protect. They're also bad for feminism. What's most depressing about this sense of history repeating itself is that groups such as Object! and the London Feminist Network ignore the wealth of feminist theory on representation, desire and sexuality, as well as the scholarship on the intersections between sexism, racism and class produced over the past few decades (Hamilton, 2009).

As an alternative, in her interview account, Hamilton proposed that feminists should examine prostitution and sex work as a complex, material reality within women's lives.

In this chapter, I have so far traced a network gathering around the conference 'Feminism in London 2009', with identity as my guide. For this purpose, I adopted traditional tactics to question informants on their sense of their own identities, using ethnographic interviews, and through my own attendance at the FiL09 conference. I focused on how *historically* informed feminist identities and personal**,** embodied politics emerged under the overarching issue "violence against women". These primarily targeted the 2009 Crime and Policing Act amendments relating to the licensing of lap dance clubs and the criminalisation of men who seek the sexual services of trafficked women. But more widely, the network I examined understood the objectification of women's bodies in terms of representation. In this instance, anti-prostitution and anti-pornography groups like Object!, Fawcett Society, and Eaves, seemed to dominate in the media and to succeed in acquiring government funding. At the same time, they appeared to police public forums and events (FiL09, Reclaim the Night marches) excluding in the process different versions of feminist identity (namely those offered by Feminist Fightback, the anti-capitalist Feminist Activist Forum or informal and ephemeral liaisons, for instance, that between Nina Power and Lindsay German, noted earlier). In this sense, contemporary debates around violence against women, as these were re-framed in networked conditions, invoke older conflicts and exclusions between feminists about what the appropriate focal points for feminist activity are and how violence is framed as symbolic or operating at street level.

My point in this case is that collective identities were articulated primarily in relation to the anti-porn discourses that circulated, and likewise notably in relation to

understandings of participation in ICTs. For the groups discussed here, digitally connecting, but also competing for representational space, re-fashioning their mediated image, and revising the means of producing this image (for example through branding and communications management), were key activities that resulted from understandings of new media environments. This indicates how, in digital network environments, doing politics is being remediated through cultural imaginaries of "the network" and through transformations in communicational and organisational activities. Importantly, my focus is on how these activities aimed at producing a branded new feminism, that is, new, popular and interesting, with distinct web presence and efficient outward reach. In my view, such forms of engagement comprise responses to dominant digital culture and, primarily, to free market trends. It is in this sense that dominant digital culture, as an apparatus (Barad, 2007, pp.145-153) or assemblage of human and nonhuman-based discursive practices, materialises the conditions for certain forms of political engagement. In the next section, I focus on nonhuman based discursive practices and how these mediate what is involved in doing politics.

V. Materialising online networks with Issue Crawler

One could approach the conference in ways different to the ethnographic method I used for this research. Clearly, it is necessary here to investigate how an informational reading would constitute the feminist network gathering around the 2009 'Feminism in London' Conference. This network, as I understood it, evidently linked particular groups and individuals, but also produced meanings by prioritising certain issues over others.

Thus in order to understand if that single issue of "violence against women" was more central than other issues in connecting the groups participating in the FiL09 Conference, my research turned to online mapping. How did the groups link with one another and what connected them? Was it their common predisposition to prioritize violence? And what could the social life of a feminist network on the web tell us about the ways politics transform in digital environments?

To produce this second and different account of the network around the same

Conference I used a web mapping available for free online, Issue Crawler. This is an online tool that maps networks of actors gathering around specific issues of public concern, or put simply, "issue-networks". It crawls websites, webpages, blogs provided by the researcher in order to establish which actors receive most links, in other words, which actors are more authoritative on the web. The quality of the outcome depends on one simple condition, which is made explicit in the *Scenarios of Use* (2009) of the software: it is suggested that "deep-link" webpages are used as starting points for the search, rather than "front page" websites. "Deep links" are those pages which are found in a deeper level in the website structure. These are usually issue-related webpages, whereas "front-page links" are typically the home pages of a website, at base URL level. Accessing a page (which is specifically about an issue) rather than a website (which is more generic and usually includes many pages) is significant for the results of the crawl.

The resulting maps offer an image of the abundance of circulating messages and horizontal modes of engagement around Demand Change, the campaign targeting the 2009 amendments of the Policing and Crime Bill. I understand this emerging assemblage gathering around this circulation to be "free-floating and impersonal" (Jameson, 1991, p.16), in the sense that it is alienated from the *personal politics* that produce violence as an exceptionally significant issue for women in the first place. Hence, I suggest that this new network occludes the historical, ideological and material dimensions of violence, and limits the possibilities for identification.

a) Issue Crawler as a technoscientific entity

I will start with an overview of Issue Crawler as a techno-scientific entity and a brief encounter with recent scholarly work employing it as a research tool. Issue Crawler developed from a chalkboard visualisation into software. It was initiated in 1996 by Richard Rogers, his students and colleagues at the Universities of Maastricht, London and Amsterdam (Rogers, 2009). Rogers (2007) narrated how this effort brought about the Netlocator (also called De-pluralising Engine), a weblink analysis software which provided maps of hyperlink patterns. Put simply, the Netlocator was used to locate networks around specific issues and helped researchers to reach understandings

about the "social life" of those issues on the Web (Govcom, 2001: np). In this sense, the creation of the Netlocator reflected the hope that web linking behaviour determined which organisations participated in democratic dialogue, and that the web was a pluralising space (Rogers, 2009).

Soon, the Issue Crawler machine was launched and its research team started mapping issues online.[31] The issues under examination were generated from topics shared by major portals like the UN, World Bank and OneWorld. These issues were "Climate Change", "Sustainable Development", and "Landmines". They were then narrowed down "from interest and intuition" (Govcom 2001: np) to issues like "HIV/AIDs in Africa" or "Child Labour (Sweatshops)". One of the questions researchers asked was, for instance: "Do the organizations engaging in the issues recognize others as meaningful participants, debate partners and/or combatants in the Issue Networks?" (Govcom, 2001, np)[32].

These questions stemmed from the origins of the "issue network" concept in the Dutch tradition of "debate mapping" (*de sociale kaart* and *de brede maatschappelijke discussie*), a practice that sought to depict debates on the web and their geographical correspondence on global maps (Rogers, 2007, p.2). The term "issue network" was coined by the academic Hugh Heclo[33] to describe alliances between various actors, like interest groups and advocacy organisations, which push a single issue of public interest into the governmental agenda (Marres, 2006). Clearly then the move from the conceptualisation of "issue networks" as debates to alliances entails a shift in the vision

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31 In 2001, the team, under the name Govcom.org, received funding from the Soros Internet Program and the Issue Crawler machine eventually went online in 2004. It now works with three servers physically located at the Amsterdam Internet Exchange. From 2001 to 2006, the Govcom.org project has organised the seminars 'The Social Life of Issues', developed complementary digital methods tools and taken part in publications and exhibitions. The software is free to use and, in return, saves the crawls of all users and makes them publicly accessible. It is economically supported, amongst others, by the Soros Group, the Ford Foundation and several universities. From the 1000 world-wide users that Rogers accounts in his 2007 paper, the 298 are commercial users, though public relations users are turned away.

32 Other questions were: What are the features of these networks and do they correspond to their particular network type? What are the differences in terms of actor composition, link patterns and life cycle between the different network types? These issue-network-maps were then situated in the contexts of: issue coverage by the mass media, social research of issue-life on the web, and global civil society. Other questions concerned the kinds of politics and democracy that can be traced in issue-networks, and in network-maps. But also the specificity of doing social analysis of hyperlinks in relation to other social research of the Internet or mass media coverage of the issues mapped.

33 Heclo was critical of "issue networks" and thought that the presence of "issue people" or the people who formulated issues and political affairs outside governmental officials, politicians, and the general public was democratically deficient. Issue formation he thought, should be happening outside institutions in order to reflect public concerns (Marres, 2006).

of democratic politics: the former assumes consensus whereas the latter more closely corresponds to an agonistic model of democracy. After all Govcom.org insist on the importance of issue professionals, rather than the wider public. Rogers noted that Issue Crawler

> [c]ontributes to the development of new political and social theory suitable for the contemporary period, with its emphasis on the importance of non-state actors (issue professionals), using new media. The Issue Crawler may be used as an instrument of empirical analysis as well as critique (Rogers, 2007, p.2).

Nonetheless, Noortje Marres (2006) and others working in the issue-network paradigm, maintained that the latter offers a model that advances articulation and antagonism – instead of proliferation and collaboration. Since often collaborations and debates between different actors form online, Marres (2006) contended that the web should be analysed as part of civil society politics in its capacity to format issues – in other words to frame, define and label public concerns – as an alternative to its social or information sharing role. Central to this formulation was that the web was approached with the "circulation model" in mind (Latour, 1999), whereby websites were analysed according to how they are "indexed, linked, referenced, syndicated and tagged" (Rogers, 2007, p.4) and not in terms of content[34]. The fundamental idea here is that the democratic potential of the internet is issue-networking, because it encourages mobilisation between social movements with diverse agendas.

Although the issue-network framework presents an innovative shift of focus in the research of civil society and the role of information technologies in politics, it raises questions about various aspects of communication. Most obviously, the assumption in the Issue Crawler theorisation is that publicity, transparency and democratic participation are unproblematically fused. Accordingly, the visualisations produced by Issue Crawler and Issuegeographer are, by proponents of this theoretical account, argued to be accountable because they are based on transparency, "rather than informal, quiet or old-boy relationships" (Rogers, 2009, p.10). These assumptions of transparency and accountability bring up pertinent themes of scientific accountability

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34 Recognising that links and references have varied degrees of importance, Govcom.org further took into consideration "Authority" and developed Web Metrics tools, in order to expand its analytical field to weblogs, news space and folksonomy.

and mediation. Finally, attention to single issues indeed tells us little about how these have come to be labelled as public concerns and by whom. Who does the naming and who sets the agenda for feminism as a whole? What does an issue-network tells us about the hegemonic relationships between the actors and the historical trajectories of their identities? In the next section, I offer a way of thinking about these questions through Barad's (2007) "posthumanist performativity" framework.

Although I distance myself from the issue-network theoretical model, Issue Crawler can be implemented outside this framework. Prominent research from diverse fields has utilised Issue Crawler in mapping online networks so far. Marres (2004) in a web-based ethnography of a controversy around the World Bank and the Development Gateway indicated that both extra-institutional actors and institutional ones worked indirectly. The Issue Crawler visualisations in this project worked as mirrors of political processes of issue formation, already implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements. Others (Bruns, 2007; Gillan, 2009; McNally, 2005) evaluated Issue Crawler as a digital research method tool but have not addressed the web as an agenda shaping actor.

To be precise, Axel Bruns (2007) mapped the blogshpere that discussed David Hicks, a Guantanamo detainee. He observed how Issue Crawler *jumps issues* resulting in a generic network of blog interlinkages at the base URL level (the website URL) rather than the specific conversation across blog posts at a "deep link" level[35]. To me, Bruns' (2007) observation suggests that the software may fail to map an issue-specific network. Instead, it may provide a network of blogs that have assembled due to their wider convergence of political positions, rather on the basis of their common orientation to that issue.

In mapping the UK anti-war movement online, Kevin Gillan (2009) compared the offline anti-war and peace movement networks that resulted from in-depth interviewing with the online issue network provided by the software. The online network was found to be wider and to transcend national and political boundaries, whereas the offline networks appeared to be internally divided. Although the study argued that the internet is a constitutive force of activist identities and central to the ways activists experience the world, it looked at technologies largely as tools.

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35 When it comes to weblogs, one needs to use static pages rather than blogrolls for a crawl, which is mentioned in the Issue Crawler manuals.

Accordingly, Issue Crawler was used by Gillan as a tool to make sense of the anti-war online networks. As will be shown below, my framing is different to Gillan in that I did not use web mapping as a triangulation method. Although the potential of Gillan's approach is clear, I rather understand Issue Crawler and digital technologies not just as tools. Rather they mediate models of political engagement and materialise the conditions in which this engagement takes place.

In these studies, Issue Crawler appeared to represent the reality of public engagement whereas the role of the researcher was reduced to translating visualisations into words. This illustrates how Issue Crawler studies, even those keeping relative distance from the issue-network theorisation, persist on a people versus data binary. It is noteworthy that the developers of the platform define the object of study as people (NGOs, CSOs): despite accessing websites, the crawls were claimed to be something different to an analysis of issue coverage by the "mass media" (Govcom, 2001)[36]. From these distinctions between the "tool" and the researcher, data and "the people", many difficulties arise in relation to knowledge production, embodiment, materiality and the role of information technologies. These binaries already entail exclusions on the basis of what counts as human and machine and seem to keep the category human relatively intact (institutions and CSOs) from the Issue Crawler platform. Is Issue Crawler itself a stable, unmediated and objective technoscientific entity? And is the researcher's role merely interpretative or is it additionally performative? I will return to these questions in my analysis of the hyperlink network around the 'Feminism in London Conference 2009' where I suggest that the apparatus of Issue Crawler is itself a nonhuman "material discursive practice" (Barad, 2007, p.146) producing meanings about politics.

b) The "violence against women" hyperlink network

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36 Another example is the Web issue ticker and the Web Issue Index for Civil Society. These watch campaigning behaviour and gives indications about the attention span of NGOs. Here, the set of initial actors is stable and the issue analysis is based on analysing the frequency of linking. The process goes as deep as three levels (significant issues, sub issues per issue, most significant URL per issue) with the first layer remaining relatively steady and the other two changing on a monthly basis, and around pre-summit periods. This means that the core issues or the umbrella that makes up the identity of an organisation or set of organisations remains unchanged.

With the Issue Crawler exercise (see Figure 20 for an idea of the interface) I sought to understand better the online relationship between the women's organisations that participated in the 'Feminism in London Conference 2009', and those who did not. The hyperlink mapping process was an attempt to discover these connections and the kinds of identities they constituted[37].

As with the ethnographic route, the starting point of the Issue Crawler exploration was the conference 'Feminism in London 2009', which took place on the 10th of October 2009. Issue Crawler performs co-link analysis. This means that it crawls URLs specified by the researcher. These URLs are the starting points (or seeds) of the crawl. After the crawl, Issue Crawler retains only the pages that receive *at least two* links from these starting points. The idea of mapping the life of an issue online is that the starting points relate to this issue in some way. For my crawl, strictly speaking *the* conference itself operated as *the* issue for the Issue Crawler, since my aim was to map the conference event network. Firstly, I visited the websites of the organisations that took part in FiL09, as this emerged from the event website and from my field-notes. I used my field notes because the website account of participating organisations was partly inaccurate. Several speakers, stalls and visitors in the actual event were missing from it, like for example Beatrix Campbell. Then, I navigated within these webpages in order to find their Links pages[38]. These Links pages were used as starting points for the Issue Crawler Harvester.
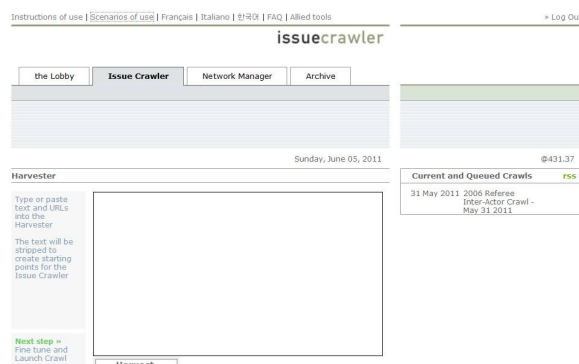
Figure 20: Snapshot of the Issue Crawler website.

The maps presented here should not be regarded as comprehensive blueprints of the relationships of feminist actors around the event. They are a selective depiction of

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37 The results of the pilot issue crawl, with "feminism" as the issue, can be seen in Appendix A.

38 Issue Crawler strips webpages of URLs. It works more efficiently when it is provided with webpages, like Links pages, that contain many URLs.

one aspect of their ways of relating: namely web-linking to one another. As already indicated, a reflective approach is required in relation to Issue Crawler and digital research more generally, since the steps that lead to the final map assume that a series of choices and exclusions will be made by the researcher.

The resulting network[39] has a compact core that consists of women's organisations sites and is slightly star-like in shape. This suggests that some actors are more critical and others more peripheral in the network than others. The visualisation provides a sum of the top feminist actors in the UK that satellite around the most paramount node, Women's Aid. Women's Aid is a key national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. It supports a network of over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK. It is along with the Sexual Assault Referral Centres, the main link for further information provided by the Home Office's VAW part of the Violent Crime website.

The Actor Profiler Tool[40] was used in order to rank the actors in relation to the main issue (violence). Women's Aid remains the most important actor (most inlinks and outlinks) in the network. The Fawcett Society follows, Rape Crisis, Object!, End Violence Against Women Campaign, Eaves4Women, Rights of Women, Refuge, Southall Black Sisters and Childline. This ranking is distinct to the Actor ranking without the issue in mind (See the ranking in Appendix A).

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39 Maps in large format and a complete list of actors set out in Figure 21 and Appendix A. Interactive maps are provided with the portfolio CD of this thesis.

40 This works in tandem with Issue Crawler and calculates the top ten actors on an Issue Crawler map, and profiles each of them (Digital Methods Initiative, 2009).

LFN_03

Co-link Map Details:
Author: Aristea Fi
Email: qsputnik@hotmail.com
Crawl start: 30 Oct 2009 – 22:13
Crawl end: 31 Oct 2009 – 00:02
Privilege starting points: off
Co-link Analysis Mode: page
Iterations: 2
Crawl Depth: 2
Node count: 51

Map generated from issuecrawler.net by the Govcom.org Foundation, Amsterdam.

Legend:

(.org.uk)   (.org)   (.gov.uk)   (.co.uk)   (.com)   (.ac.uk)   (.info)

Statistics:

womensaid.org.uk

Destination URL: http://www.womensaid.org.uk/
Page date stamp: 30 Oct 2009 – 22:52
Links received from crawled population: 103

Links from network (1 – 20)

1. childline.org.uk
2. cwasu.org
3. eaves4women.co.uk
4. endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk
5. fawcettsociety.org.uk
6. fil.btik.com
7. gldvp.org.uk
8. homeoffice.gov.uk
9. ldnfeministnetwork.ik.com
10. millionwomenrise.com

11. niaproject.info
12. object.org.uk
13. refuge.org.uk
14. rightsofwomen.org.uk
15. southallblacksisters.org.uk
16. thefword.org.uk
17. thehideout.org.uk
18. thewnc.org.uk
19. truthaboutrape.co.uk
20. whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

Links to network: 16   < | >

Figure 21: The FiL09 network - Cluster map.

To establish if the emerging network was an issue-specific one, I checked whether the nodes were "deep" links (issue-specific links) or base-URL ones (front webpages). The ten main actors in the LiF09 network link around their common interest ("violence against women"), and their relationship seems to be the exchange of documents and resources around this issue – specifically Demand Change campaign documents. The presence of documents that circulate add to the cohesion of the network. Primary actors like the End Violence Against Women site and Childline correspond to campaigns and the organisations behind them can easily be traced (Amnesty International and National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). In other words this is a network of "deep" links. Many other nodes however are not issue-specific links but usually front pages, at base URL level. Although the Southall Black Sisters' site, for example, is not a deep link, the front page contains the report of their main action, the SBS No Resource Fund[41]. A similar briefing (but a different document) is shared by the Rights of Women site, which is likewise at base URL. The

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41 The SBS No Recourse Fund is a last resort for women who have experienced domestic violence and have insecure immigration status with no recourse to public funds.

Rights of Women node is a base URL page but also contains the documents related to VAW. Similarly, the Women's Aid front page features the *Survivors Handbook*, a 107-page document with resources for women who are experiencing domestic abuse. The Fawcett Society, at the time of the analysis, was celebrating the Government's pledge to end VAW[42]. Both Eaves and Object! have the Demand Change Campaign in their front page. Although this campaign strictly speaking is another issue (prostitution and the Policing and Criminalisation Bill 2009), it symbolically falls in the "violence against women" category[43] for these two groups.

For triangulation purposes, I visited the actors/websites in the ensuing hyperlink network and confirmed that the most crucial issue for them was violence against women. To further substantiate this with the use of digital tools, the Issue crawler file (.xml) was fed in the Issue Discovery Tool[44]. The major agenda issues that were given this way (meaningful results) were: violence against women, crime bill, lgbt dv (lgbt domestic violence) and London feminist network[45]. This exploration shows that "social"[46] (front-page links at base URL level) and VAW- specific-relationships were both present in the resulting network.

To restate, my starting websites for this mapping were organisations that took part in the FiL09 Conference. The ensuing mapped network shows what connected these organisations – in other words the common links that they had in this instance. From visiting the nodes that appear in the map (in Figure 21) and from analysing the content of these websites, it appears that the circulating material related to the theme of violence against women and particularly to the campaign 'Demand Change'. This means that the mapped network was more than plainly a depiction of alliances between civil society organisations – it was also issue-specific.

Through this process, the Issue Crawl exposed that, in network terms, "violence against women" was the key issue. A strictly issue-oriented interpretation here,

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42 This followed the consultation which ended in May 2009 and findings from Women's National Commission focus groups. See Appendix A.

43 The Object Website (2009) states that "Sex object culture has been driven by the mainstreaming of the porn and sex industries and has been highlighted as a "conducive context" for VAW (End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2008)".

44 The Issue Discovery Tool makes a phrase list of noun phrases, then adds to the phrase list a list of significant words or phrases extracted from a larger source set of content by using the Yahoo Term Extraction Web Service, then adjusts the output, and ranks.

45 See Appendix A for other issues that appeared.

46 I use "social" here in accordance to the Gateway study criteria (Marres, 2004): An issue hyperlink network forms around the specific issue of interest whereas a "social" network linking plainly indicates a non- issue-specific social relationship,

however, would definitely exclude nodes like Object! and Eaves from contributing to an issue-network. This is because their relationship would be considered irrelevant (in the sense that "sex work", and "violence against women" would be two different issues of concern). Clearly then, I, the researcher, being informed by the semantic and ideological investments that go into these terms, performatively named this outcome to be a "violence" network. After all, no counter-voices, like those of socialist or anticapitalist forums noted in my ethnographic account earlier, were recorded here. Moreover, what counts as violence against women and what informs issue-formation is the outcome of antagonisms, informed by strong historical trends of anti-pornography feminism. Demand Change and, more generally, campaigns which were at this point framed under the "violence against women" umbrella term, are tied to personal, embodied politics. The key limitation of the Issue Crawler implementation then is that the emerging hyperlink network occludes these tensions, or the embodied, historical aspect of feminist politics. The Issue Crawler map analysis however is useful precisely because it signals this complex entanglement of issues and identities. It also illustrates that "violence against women" is performatively produced by the mobilisation of certain signifiers, a process concealed in issue-oriented approaches. We can also recognise that digital maps identify the tendencies of the offline network to appear homogeneous. As I discuss next, these limitations open up questions about the agency of nonhuman actors in creating understandings about what politics are at a certain instance, but also perhaps about what they should be.

c) The materiality of Issue Crawler

To address the questions raised in the digital mapping exploration in the previous section in relation to materiality, performativity and embodiment, I wish to turn to Michael Warner's (2002) model of publics. For Warner (2002) the circulating text or public discourse is central for the formation of publics. Considering Barad's (2007) theorisation of "posthumanist performativity" in tandem with Warner's circulation model, and in relation to the Issue Crawler exercise, I want to suggest that we need to account for the role of nonhuman discursive practices in circulating meanings and, consequently, in the formation of publics. Barad (2007) explains how nonhuman practices, or technoscientific apparatuses, are material. At the same time, she stresses

that technologies of knowledge-making are not "things" waiting to be used but, significantly, themselves historically contingent. Thinking in these terms, we can critically approach the production of knowledge and meaning by nonhuman apparatuses like Issue Crawler. Here, this production of meaning concerned primarily how violence emerges through the digital analysis as a key issue. Beyond the specific application in the FiL09 conference however, what was produced is also an understanding about what doing politics entails. By this, I mean that doing politics appears to be a matter of connecting digitally, and not just at a base-URL level, but at a deep link, issue level. In other words, the Issue Crawler produces a network as a meaningful political relationship *per se*.

At first, we might attune to the ways Issue Crawler, as a material dynamic entity, evolves, and how it is constituted through "intra-action" (Barad, 2007) within the mapping activity. "Intra-action" is a neologism introduced by Barad to signify

> [t]he mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action (Barad, 2007, p.33).

Issue Crawler then intra-acts with theories, assumptions, user contribution, other online software, the materiality of its four servers around the world, and the physicality of the researchers and developers. The Issue Crawler platform is reconfigured primarily with the contribution of user maps (in a growing database of user crawls) and, furthermore, with the practical directions in the *Scenarios of use* pages on Govcom.org. Largely, it is the ideological reading of the internet as a democratic site that fuels its existence. Finally, its interaction with other similar apparatuses (digital research tools, databases and search engines) renders Issue Crawler open to nonhuman interventions. In particular, when performing the crawl, the software disregards those actors which are not linked at "deep-level", in other words, at issue level. Those feminist actors, like socialist feminists whose critique is an identity-based one and not directed through a specially designated campaign webpage for example, were not present in the network visualisation. In studying real-world network dynamics, Issue Crawler renders

authoritative those actors who engage with a campaign, a theme, an issue. In this sense, Issue Crawler as a technoscientific entity makes issues the spaces and conditions of assembly – in other words turns Latour's (2006) theorisation of issues as things (mentioned in Chapter 1) into a concrete reality.

As it has been recounted, the underlying assumption is that the identifiable recognition of the linker-linkee relationship is the sole indicator for political participation[47]. Issue Crawler was designed to avoid attributing authority to actors merely on the basis of their inlinks, like citation analysis may do, by introducing themes (Marres, 2011). However, what this real-time analysis of the dynamics of connection overlooks is both identity and bodies. Communicative exchange and identification in feminist politics is more than a matter of opinion and debate - it is largely an embodied, affective, material process. As I have illustrated in my implementation of Issue Crawler, the hyperlink network of women's groups could not be strictly characterised as an "issue-network". By that I mean that the social links of emailing, supporting one another, and in some cases hating each other, along with the informational content of these exchanges, inform how issues get defined and hence the pattern of these networks. In paying attention to issues, horizontal relationships and the flows of information rather than identities, the model of politics that Issue Crawler mediates overemphasises communicative acts. As such, it takes us away from the material specificity of local, personal and embodied struggles and the urgency of a generalised political response.

Central to thinking responsibly about the production of knowledge in applications like the Issue Crawler is the role of the researcher and Issue Crawler as mediations. By focusing on the redefinition of human and nonhuman actors taking place in these applications, my overview demonstrated the interchange between, on the one side, the representation of a feminist network as a depiction of a social reality and on the other, concepts of digital media as apparatuses of analysis and observation of such a social reality.

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47 In some cases it makes sense to treat links as social relations. For example in their study of sociomics, Ruth McNally (2005) treated websites as people and used Issue Crawler to search for the groups responsible for a paradigm shift. Understanding the objects of study (feminist groups, CSOs) as humans has also ethical implications. For a contestation of the human subjects research model see also (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002).

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew on Barad's (2007) theorisation of "posthumanist performativity" and Warner's (2002) model of public formation to offer a way of thinking about emerging feminist forms of engagement in digital networks. I argued that feminist networks constitute embodied forms of organising which result from the felt vulnerabilities and insecurities of new digital environments. Through network imaginaries, feminists perceived dominant digital culture, simultaneously, as a request to participate and as a threat of being left out and forgotten about. The double aspect of this address and other challenges to feminist politics are also noted in the next chapters. Notably, in Chapter 5 I return to discuss how policy moves and new global conditions of inequality that objectify women's bodies demand other kinds of responsiveness to technoscientific capitalism.

Further, this chapter looked at the implications of using digital mapping technologies like Issue Crawler in the context of the specific research setting to visualise the communicative activity of women's groups around specific issues. I thus approached Issue Crawler itself as a technoscientific apparatus which crystallised a set of relationships: that between researcher and the emerging network; and the online linking between women's organisations. I suggested that network mapping, on the one hand, enacts political relationships and, on the other, foregrounds certain modes of politics over others.

In this sense, digital mediation was not approached as a "thing", a tool distinct from what it tries to describe or a technology that replaces doing politics in its entirety. Such an approach would be arguably closer to Martin Heidegger's (1977, p.9) understanding of technology as "enframing", according to which technological activities reveal a presumed real essence, ultimately supplementing a pre-existing (human) body. Instead, here Issue Crawler, as a distinct communication technology, digitally remediates modes of political engagement. I framed this process as constituting part of the political body, rather than coming from an "outside". In other words, digital networks did not form as a third entity (for example, an interface) between the political body of feminist groups and digital technologies, like Issue Crawler.

I would like to conclude by considering the implications of the disparity between the two network accounts recited. These were the hyperlink network of women's organisations and the network emerging from the more traditional ethnographic approach. I expect that this dissonance of research outputs indicates a wider tension between a space of flows (Castells, 1996) and a space of embodied, everyday politics. This tension is not necessarily politically disabling but can be thought dynamically as a constellation of horizontal and vertical relationships. We can think of the political potential of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness in this case - what Judith Butler (2005, p.63) in a different discussion calls "the truth of the person"[48]. The disparity of the two narratives provided in this study, the one given by the "we" of ethnography and the other being a "they" account of maps, could be thought to represent a "failure to narrate" (Butler, 2005, p.63) a coherent and closed feminist identity (around the signifier of "violence against women", or any other signifier for that matter). By this, I mean that the two narratives when brought together represent an interruption in their own right; and signal the interchange between a) the representation of a feminist network, as a depiction of a social reality, b) concepts of digital media as apparatuses of analysis and observation of such a social reality, c) the people and their stories and d) concepts of network politics and information theories. This interruption can be understood productively as an invitation to reconsider boundaries between human and non-human, and importantly, the political consequences of prioritising an understanding of "we" as corporeal and human[49].

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48 This focuses on the relational character of language, and how one is already addressed and addresses an audience when giving an account. At the end of "Against Ethical Violence", Butler concludes "I am only in the address to you, then the ''I'' that I am is nothing without this ''you,'' and cannot even begin to refer to itself outside the relation to the other by which its capacity for self-reference emerges' (2005, p.82). Although Butler's interest here is language, I consider the performative production of bodies in material discursive practices.

49 I elaborate this point in my engagement with "corporeal common vulnerability" (Butler, 2004) in Chapters 4 and 5, and my framing of *biodigital vulnerability*.

CHAPTER 3

Reterritorialisation and queer counterpublics: Producing locality and referential metacultures in digital media networks

I. Introduction

    a) Theorising the remediation of locality in digital media

    b) Gay pride, the "village" and consumption

II. Methodology

III. Queer Mutiny and anti-capitalist politics

    a) Queer Mutiny Brighton as a counterpublic

    b) Commodification and Brighton Pride

IV. Digital Media, local politics and mobility

    a) "Brighton is incredibly white..." Creating locality on the *La-didah* mailing list

    b) Reterritorialisation and queer cosmopolitanism

V. Queer metaculture and queer consumer citizenship

    a) "I'm not the kind of person who would put on my hood and fight the police..." Understandings of activism

    b) Creating references: parties, "education" and cultural capital

VI. Conclusion

I. Introduction

This chapter investigates the role of networked technologies and social media in shaping queer political communities. It aims to address primarily how territories are produced through situated communicative practices as understandings of belonging and politics change for local queer activist groups. The chapter thus poses questions about the effects of mobility and global networked connectivity in the formation of queer political spaces and identities. To approach this leading question, I investigate two intertwined, transient queer activist groups in Brighton, Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, in terms of their communicative acts; their attitudes towards networking technologies, and their critical sense of "the local" and the "past" as political sites. Drawing from ethnographic analysis, in this chapter I argue that, as networked media become integrated into everyday activist practices, they function as modes of creating cultural references and archives of a living, physically present and local political community. I identify how preserving locality as the primary reference for the groups under scrutiny at all times comes into tension with their efforts to construct a queer cosmopolitan identity, and their project of countering local LGBT politics and history. Social network technologies play a crucial role in mediating these tensions because they constitute a forum for connecting to a non-local, identity-based community; at the same time, they set this community apart as a distinct territory, in time and space. Furthermore, digital media acquire a social life of their own, with a past, present and future which is materially present and accounted for by the activists. Through this exploration, the chapter offers a way of thinking about the importance of geographical locality and friendship for queer identity and community in networked environments. As a distinct but interwoven case of this thesis, the study of a local queer politics formation in this chapter contributes to an understanding of the historically and socially situated ways in which networked technologies and politics "intra-act" (Barad, 2007), that is, come together with and through discursive practices.

Historically, forming alternative affective communities and understandings of space has been a central project for queer activism. Today most areas of our everyday lives in general, and the lives of queer activist in particular have become digitally saturated and this saturation carries with it certain discursive practices, such as those

of globalisation, cosmopolitanism and the elimination of distance. The implications of mediated distance and proximity (Silverstone, 2006) have been examined in relation to regulation and humanity. However, here my question is less about the regulation of private/domestic culture in mediated environments generally and more about the anxieties and regulatory practices of a queer political culture in relation to the digital. In other words, it is of interest here to explore how queer visions and materialisations of counter-social configurations emerge in the biopolitical context characterised by global flows of information, capital and bodies which shape dominant digital culture.

This main aim of the chapter is to raise three important issues. Firstly, the effects of global flows, both informational and economic, on smaller scales (i.e. the national, local and the personal) have been described since the early days of the internet (see Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996). However, social media today alter our sense of community, friendship and the social in new ways. This is because networked media provide platforms where the social and the political seem to form in real-time. This comes into tension with older understandings of the social as a site of the past, or even as processes of negotiation (Williams, 1977) and, respectively, perceptions of the political as the site of the future. As queer activists form political communities in which networked media appear to be central, it is of interest to analyse what this use means in terms of temporality. In other words, how do queer political assemblages emerge in the here and now, which is arguably the site of digital networks, and how do they connect with the history of the LGBT movement?

Secondly, queer activists around the world have long sought to disturb the production of heteronormative space, with interventions like annual Pride marches, but also happenings like kiss-ins and campaigns for unisex toilets. Since today networked media are increasingly integrated in the everyday localised cultural practices of queer activists, and since there is a general tendency to appropriate new media technologies by deploying notions of space (see Munt, 2001), a question that arises is how far understandings of space, politics and safety change with mediation. Scholars who are critical of cyberqueer positions and the supposed fluidity and playfulness of online identities (Wakeford, 1997; O'Riordan, 2007) have noted how these positions have undermined what happens to the off-line queer body after it has left cyberspace. However, as we move across online, offline and mobile spaces today, these spaces lose their clear boundaries and become more and more hybrid (de Souza

e Silva, 2006); in other words we are practically never really 'off-line'. Thus my interest here is not with the construction of queer identity in what has traditionally been thought as online space or cyberspace. Rather, I am concerned with the production of queer collective queer identities and communities through certain power struggles, in which networked technologies are fundamental.

A third task for me in this chapter is to question constructions of queer identity and belonging in relation to consumerism and cosmopolitanism. Jasbir Puar's has used the critical concept of the "cosmopolitan queer subject" (2002, p.109) to describe practices of consumption in queer tourism and global NGO activism. In my research, the notion of queer cosmopolitanism is invoked to challenge certain practices of mobility and consumerism (the "pink pound"[50]), which have come to be widely understood as signs of gay transgressiveness. Additionally, it is necessary to access what can be thought of as a process of LGBTQ[51] "mainstreaming" (Bell and Binnie, 2004), that is, a process of commercialisation and institutionalisation of LGBTQ politics, supported by local governance and community organisations. This process is evident in the well-documented reduction of queer public presence into acceptable expressions of sexuality and in foreclosed consumption spaces (Duggan, 2002) and "zones" (Rubin, 1998), both in the media and in everyday life. It is necessary to raise questions of queer mobility and mainstreaming tendencies in LGBTQ politics in this chapter, in relation to the bedfellows of urban governance with commercial imperatives, with the academic and community sectors in Brighton. This is because Brighton-based groups like Queer Mutiny seem to operate precisely against this backdrop.

To address these identified and overlapping central themes, in this chapter I concentrate on queer cultural and political activity within the local geographical area of Brighton. Brighton has played a cardinal role in LGBT rights in Britain and is regarded to be the country's (and by some even Europe's) gay capital. My attention turns to the communicative activities of the two intertwined local groups, Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, because they are at once part of, but also highly critical of, the

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50 By "pink pound", the media and advertising have widely referred to the supposed high income of gay men, usually disposed for entertainment.

51 The use of LGBTQ v. LGBT is guided by the following rationale: I use the acronym "LGBTQ" throughout the chapter in order to note how queer theory has impacted on contemporary activism and community action and not because I think of "queer" is one more category of non-normative sexualities. I maintain the use of "LGBT" for when participants or organisations use it as such, or when referring to historical times prior to queer theory; that is before the 1990s.

broader LGBT culture. Their critical position constitutes these groups as unquestionably key actors in negotiations of space, history, community and belonging. Hence it is necessary to understand how the city of Brighton, Brighton Pride and online forums like *La-Didah* become the loci where these tensions surface, and how network communication technologies contribute to transformations of belonging and political community. Ethnography in both online and offline spaces, as I explain in the methodological section of this chapter below, offers a productive way of researching these issues because it speaks directly to the ways communities and social practices in everyday life change alongside the fast pace of technological change. Thus, my account explores lived interactions within the local LGBT and the non-local queer community and the ways in which queer cultural activist communities change with digital networks. It includes, firstly, research into the local LGBT history of Brighton and the role of Pride in the shaping of its current character; secondly, an exploration of the ways in which queer activist groups based in the city organise events and create what they term "safe spaces"; and thirdly, an exploration of everyday electronic social networks and email lists use by members of the two groups, and the meaning of this use for them in relation to their activist practices and political identity. This approach facilitates an understanding of situated and networked communicative practices.

From this empirical analysis I identify that because friendship is a mobilising force for the queer communities considered in this chapter, digital networks play a central role in regulating the dynamics of belonging but also in sustaining relationships. There is a dialectic relationship between queer political identity and the city of Brighton - as a place with particularities and complexities where the past meets the present. Queer politics and queer cosmopolitan belonging are produced here through a process that involves mediated space and connectedness. On the one hand, digital media are vital in forming connections between queer cultural activist communities with Brighton and its history, with the wider queer community and the world. On the other, the high level of connectivity possible due to the proliferation of network and information technologies creates certain insecurities for communities, to which they respond. Hence, I argue that the local formations examined here can be conceptualised as follows: they partly form "queer counterpublics" (Warner, 2002), since they engage in a queer micropolitics which revolves around claiming public space both from heterosexual and from mainstream LGBT culture. This micropolitical activity constitutes

these formations as queer "referential metacultures" (Berlant and Warner, 1998). It is productive in that it creates primary cultural references which circulate in social networks like photographic memories and affective traces of connecting and socialising. In other words, identity and sharing of commonalities through digital networks is not just instrumental for transient political actions but has long term implications in creating political communities. In this way, the chapter shows (as noted in the introductory chapter to this thesis), that queer politics are not necessarily rhizomatic; or at the same time autonomous local units and organic parts of a larger struggle. As I elaborate later here, although Queer Mutiny manifests an anti-capitalist attitude, the group and its satellites are not operating as part of the anti-capitalist movement. Moreover, queer politics were not thought to constitute a social movement by the participants. My examination thus challenges understandings of local politics as necessarily tactical and oppositional, as is suggested in Empire (2000), and relevant ethnographic accounts of situated practices (for instance, Carpentier, 2008; Lovink, 2002; Milioni, 2009). Instead, I convey how the digital and embodied practices of producing and circulating queer metacultural references signifies a response to the vulnerable conditions posed by increased connectivity. In this way, the chapter illustrates the overarching argument of this thesis that digital network technologies can be understood as discursive practices which materialise vulnerable conditions for gender and sexuality politics, but offer the possibilities for the materialisation of new political realities.

In the following section, I elaborate on these points and clarify the theoretical concepts of referential metaculture and queer counterpublics. I then move on to provide an account of Brighton's activist past and commercial present, which is the context where the studied groups form. The chapter then moves on to an overview of the methodology, before tracing how the identity of Queer Mutiny has developed since 2005; this exploration focuses on the group's anti-capitalist politics in relation to discourses of LGBT mainstreaming, commodification and Pride. In the second part of the chapter, I perform a closer analysis of digital media discursive practices of mobility and global connectivity to suggest how these are linked to perceptions of safety, home and community for the groups Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever. I draw on a discussion evolving in the *La-Didah* email list to illustrate a process of reterritorialisation, through which Brighton's queer community is produced. Finally, in

the third part of the chapter, I concentrate on the cultural practices and understandings of cultural politics like parties and educational workshops to illustrate how queer identity and community is not only produced as a counter-response to the local LGBT community and commodification, but also as a production of primary references and signifiers which circulate mainly through social networks.

a) Theorising the production of locality in digital networks

The primary argument that I seek to make in this chapter is that queer networked publics are performatively/materially produced through certain place-specific communicative acts, both online and offline. It would be helpful then to frame the analysis of the ethnographic material that follows by starting with questions of place, queer and public.

In the previous chapter, I drew on Karen Barad's (2007) "posthumanist performativity" and Michael Warner's (2005) framework of publics in order to theorise how models of political engagement, political practices and indeed collective political bodies are produced by discursive practices, which involve both humans and nonhumans. Here, I will analyse such discursive practices, which are additionally place-specific. In addressing this place specificity it is necessary to note that, like bodies, places and communities are not static and waiting to be addressed. Doreen Massey (1994) in her work on local/ global and gender, explained how relationships, physical experiences, memories and social interactions are all processes that inform our sense of place. Spatiality is the product of these intersecting, dynamic social relations – a place is a particular articulated moment in those networks of social relations (Massey, 1994, p.5). We can view Brighton then as an enactment of social relations and a product of its history, connected to imagined as well as experienced histories. The internal, local connections of queer political constellations, but also global connections through digital media, co-produce the identity of Brighton activism in this instance. So, I would like to delineate how this locality is co-produced through certain digital media communicative acts, and specifically through a process of "reterritorialisation" (Morley, 2001).

My analysis thus focuses on the two main sets of communicative practices in which local networked publics are constituted – one that is counteracting, and one that

is generative. The set of counter-responses concerns, on the one hand, the wider LGBTQ Brighton politics, especially those involved in Brighton Pride.[52] On the other hand, the groups in question respond to what I have called dominant digital culture, specifically in a remediation of home and community. To reiterate, dominant digital culture in my thesis is conceptualised as a set of regulatory discursive practices that bring together the values and identities of neoliberalism[53] (Foucault, 2008) with those of "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2009). In Chapter 2, these practices pertained mainly to connectivity and participation and performatively-produced feminist formations. In the current chapter, dominant digital culture provides points of identification with fluidity and mobility, not only on an individual level, but also for local struggles seeking global representation. Mobility in my view is a different expression of the same address, specifically in the context of urban micropolitics and queer activism. I will suggest that there is a tension between this invitation for mobility and the participants' experience of digital networks as unsafe environments. This tension results in reterritorialisation practices, which involve new media technologies and through which the groups produce locality.

To clarify, the constitution of counterpublics is not merely an issue of oppositional discourses that disperse at a specific time and place. Warner's (2002) discussion of Nancy Fraser's (1990) "subaltern counterpublics", explains that counterpublics are constituted because of their awareness of subordinate status against hegemonic identities. In this study, hegemonic identities are taken to be both those offered by the local LGBTQ institutional community, including Brighton Pride, and the wider more abstract structure of dominant digital culture. In my ethnographic analysis, I will thus illustrate how discursive practices of mobility, reterritorialisation and consumerism in digital networks produce a collective body, which in this case is an embodied queer counterpublic.

The second set of communicative acts through which Brighton queer formations are constituted is the generation of non-heterosexual primary references, which are both memories and models of being queer. In this research, I understand queer publics

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52 I expand on Brighton Pride later in the chapter.

53 In the 1978-79 lectures, collected under the published volume *The birth of biopolitics* (2008), Foucault lays out an understanding of neoliberalism as an economical and socio-political system which creates conditions of inequality and insecurity. Central in this process is the transformation of society as a whole into an enterprise, with competition for personal gain prevailing in all social relationships.

to be performed affectively, with reference to what Berlant and Warner (1998, p.198) have called a "referential metaculture", a process of queer world-making. In an article on queer counterpublics, Berlant and Warner argued that because for queer cultures there is no primary register, as is the case for heterosexual culture and its set of practices, they create this register themselves with reference to non-standard intimacies.[54] Queer counterpublics in this work are defined as:

> a world-making project, where "world," like "public," differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birth right [...] World making, as much in the mode of dirty talk as of print-mediated representation, is dispersed through incommensurate registers, by definition unrealizable as community or identity (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p.558).

In my study, participant accounts that stress belonging and transformation, and practices of temporary "safe" spaces make up for these primary references of a queer world-making project. Additionally, as elaborated next, Brighton itself, because of its historical characteristics of hosting and activism, operates as a metaculture rather than as a locality. Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever are thus shown to be transient publics, produced with reference not to an institution (nation, property, or fixed place), but to relationships and collective communicative practices.

b) Gay pride, the "village" and consumerism

It is important to get a sense of Brighton's LGBT activist history, but also the prominence of lesbian and gay communities in this urban space, in order to understand how current activist assemblages contribute to Brighton's momentum. Brighton, alongside London and Manchester, has been one of the three metropolitan areas in the UK with a considerable number of lesbian and gay spaces like saunas and bars (Casey, 2004, p.447), but also gay and lesbian-friendly policies. In particular, the Brighton and

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54 By non-standard intimacies they refer to relationships that are not necessarily linked to couples, domestic spaces, nation, property, kinship and institutional relationships.

Hove Council has actively promoted the Civil Partnership Bill proposals for legal status for same-sex couples (granted under the Civil Partnership Act, 2004), and has an official strategy for housing that aims to establish better LGBT community safety.[55] A survey conducted in 2008 showed that more than half of the respondents had moved to Brighton and Hove because of the LGBT community and scene, which further illustrates how the city is widely conceived by LGBT identified people to be a gay centre ('Count Me In', 2001).

In other cities around the UK, the LGBT community combined forces with councils and the business sector and formed their own gay "villages." In Manchester, some venue owners thought this development was a response to hate crime and Section 28.[56] There, as reported in the *Guardian* newspaper, two-thirds of the venues eventually came into heterosexual and corporate ownership, attracting mainly "hen" parties and straight men (Campbell, 2004). As these commercial spaces gained popularity in the 1980s, notably also amongst heterosexual women (Skeggs, 1999), they prompted significant critical work about identity, commercialisation and depoliticisation of lesbian and gay subcultures. Alan Sinfield (1998), analysing lesbian and gay identity in the current phase of capitalism, traced the marketing styles that were predominately used in the media after the 1980s. He noted how, initially, covert marketing strategies, and then in explicit address to the "pink pound", led to the growth of London's gay "village". Gay was promoted as *cool*, and multinational corporations were expanding to new niche markets. Indeed, according to a recent article in *Marketing Week,* brands such as Heinz, IKEA, Lloyds TSB and Pepsi have launched advertising campaigns specifically targeted towards gay audiences (Costa, 2010). This focus on consuming leisure experience in order to claim a lesbian and gay identity, and the concurrent opening up of lesbian and gay spaces to heterosexual consumers has also raised issues of safety and comfort for lesbians. For example, Mark Casey (2004), in a study of Newcastle's small gay scene, observed how lesbians felt they were the target of homophobic judgemental attitudes from heterosexual women who claimed a presence in gay venues.

Similar issues of safety and visibility, besides the commercialisation of LGBTQ

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55 The strategy falls within the wider Equalities and Inclusion Policy 2008-2014 for the Council (Brighton and Hove Housing Strategy, 2009).

56 The 1988 law prohibited councils and schools from acknowledging "the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

spaces, have been decisive for the groups presented here. Pride is such a commercial space, constructed around an annual, often week-long event in many cities around the UK. In Brighton, the Council does not regulate Pride; however, it gives permission for use of Preston Park, where the Parade terminates.[57] Brighton Pride as a charitable organisation aims to financially support local LGBTQ community groups. Even so, in 2009 the organisation received considerable criticism about how the event had lost its former political 'edge'. They responded with a statement stressing that Brighton Pride aims to empower LGBTQ people and businesses to express themselves politically if they chose to. In the same year, a debate took place about the planning of the 2010 and 2011 events.[58] At this point, various commercial stakeholders pushed for the establishment of an entry fee to the Park. The dominant attitude towards Brighton Pride, as it appears in local media and consultations, sees the event as a carnival which needs to be economically viable.[59] Pride and the various local venues oriented towards LGBTQ clients and visitors appear regularly on the Brighton and Hove Council website. The official tourist website, *VisitBrighton.com*[60], also promotes civil partnerships, lesbian and gay clubs and bars, saunas, hotels, and gay shopping. Although the commercial LGBTQ club scene attracts visitors throughout the year, Pride is considered by locals to be a major annual attraction for visitors. The Leader of Brighton & Hove

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57 The main Preston Park event provides entertainment and dance tents and activities. Official estimates indicate that the Pride Parade and Main Park event in 2009 attracted 150000 visitors, and the time period before and after the parade is thought by the council as "the busiest of the year in the city" (Brighton Pride Campsite, 2010).

58 This debate led to the resignation of the Chair Yvonne Barker in November 2009 (Tuesday 17, at Queens Hotel, Brighton), following an open consultation meeting about Pride in 2010. An aggressive attitude towards the Pride trustees during the meeting marked the difference of approaches between commercial sector and the community sector. Pride at this point had put forward a plan not to provide financial support (as opposed to in-kind-support) in the form of grants to LGBT community groups; not to encourage, fund or support all of the infrastructure, entertainment and dance tents and activities previously provided at the main park event; and not to organise a Winter Pride 2010. These were seen "as short term decisions for 2010 reflecting the current financial position of Pride" ('Pride Places the Community at the Heart of its Future Plans' Friday, 30 October 2009). The debate was widely covered in *Gscene*, the Brighton Pride website, but also in the Facebook group "Save Brighton Pride as We Know It". In 2010, some of the Brighton Pride participants, like The Women's Performance Tent, announced their unwillingness to work again under the current organisational regime. In 2011 Pride introduced an entry fee to Preston Park.

59 See, for instance, the "Gscene Editorial Comment: Where is our Pride?" by James Ledward, Nov 26, 2009; "Wilde Ones, A rescue package for Brighton & Hove City Pride 2010"; and "A business & community partnership 2009" reports.

60 *Visit Brighton* is one of the *Visit Britain* websites, the official sites of the British Tourist Authority. According to *Marketing Week* (2009), the gay market forms part of a strategic marketing plan for *Visit Britain*.

Council, Conservative Cllr Mary Mears recently commented in *Gscene* (2011, np): "Pride is the biggest event in the social calendar and brings more business into the city than any similar occasion, as well as giving Brighton & Hove a global platform".

This comment distinctly illustrates the growing emphasis that local governance places on Pride as an economic venture. We could also here bear in mind the re-branding from "Gay Pride" to "Brighton Pride", which tightly weaves the event *in* the city itself. Thus, Brighton Pride can be viewed as a depoliticised event that limits rather than enables expressions of political identity. This becomes clearer if we consider that lesbian and gay activism has been central for Brighton in the past. The first Brighton Pride March took place in 1991, and was introduced by the assemblage Brighton Area Action against Section 28. The campaign mobilised local lesbian groups and disrupted Princess Diana's address to the International Congress for the Family in Brighton in 1990. The Brighton Lesbian Group (BLG) was active from 1976 till 1982, but radical lesbian and feminist politics continued to be strong in Brighton throughout the 1980s. Achievements of this period are the Brighton Women's Centre, which still operates today, and the Brighton Lesbian Line.[61] More generally however, Brighton had prominence in LGBT rights activism since the establishment of the Sussex Gay Liberation Front (SGLF)[62] at the University of Sussex in 1971 (a timeline of LGBTQ political activity is set out in Appendix B, Section 4).[63] It was not until 1997 that Pride became a Council-supported event and gradually attracted major sponsorship from other sources. Since 2000, the LGBTQ community, commercial stakeholders (pubs, clubs, and drag artists) and statutory services (the police, primary care trust, and the council) have been working in collaboration to support Brighton Pride. During the 1990s, Brighton also saw the establishment of a strong commercial nightclub scene around the Kemptown "village", and the publishing of its own free gay magazines,

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61 Lesbians also got involved in the National Abortion Campaign and Greenham Common.

62 The London Gay Liberation Front started in 1970 and by1973, GLF had effectively dissipated and had given way to its spin-off organisations. Some of these (like London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard) still thrive today. GLF followed the GLF of New York City which formed after the Stonewall riots of June 1969 - that Pride days continue to mark. In the early 1970s, American and Canadian groups and publications were in the vanguard (Hodges, 2000).

63 The Brighton Ourstory Archive, established in 1989, was a source of information for my research. I visited the archive and Linda, the trustee, who kindly agreed to an interview about her experiences as a local LGBT activist. Brighton Ourstory is a local charitable organisation which collects material about lesbian, gay and bisexual past, in the form of oral history interviews, exhibitions, publications, performances. It aims to increase awareness and visibility of LGB history and lives, and to establish a lesbian and gay history archive in its own premises.

GScene and *3sixty*. During that time, indications of hate crime increased in the transgender population, which led to special provisions by Brighton Council, like the Police and Public Safety Committee.

These developments took place whilst a discursive shift from lesbian and gay to "queer" was happening. During the 1990s, "queer" became a distinct scholarly and political field as an alternative to lesbian and gay politics (see for example Michael Warner, 1993a). There are different approaches about the meaning of "queer" and its productiveness for politics. For instance Max H. Kirsch (2000) suggests that queer constituted a lifestyle choice: an acceptance of dominant culture and consumerism by the lesbian and gay community in order to gain higher social status (p.73); consequently, it becomes what has come to be thought as a niche economic force, the "pink pound". Yet Sharon Smith (1994) in a Marxist critique of identity politics argued that ideas of autonomy characterised the left and the practices of anti-AIDS activism at the time. The politics of difference, i.e. those of queering for Smith made it difficult to imagine and realise a unified, lasting, militant movement that could fight oppression. Other genealogies of queer focused on the role AIDS activism played in forming queer politics of alliance between lesbians and gay men. These alliances were often perceived as resulting in lesbians "going fag"[64]; in other words adopting attitudes and behaviours of gay men like role-playing and non-monogamy (Queen and Schimel, 1997). Queer feminism in this work was presented as a "lustful identity" (Schwartz, 1993 cited in Henry, 2004, p.121) that opposed what was seen as a de-sexualised lesbian-feminist politics.[65] For Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (1996), the political project of queer as expressed in kiss-ins, gender-fuck performance and "mock weddings" was indeed a continuation of the critique of heterosexuality that second wave feminism initiated. For them, queer demonstrated how gender and sexuality are products of discourse rather than given realities, and it continued from a tradition in the field of work which views female sexuality as a social construction. But more broadly, "queer" in queer studies in the last twenty years (Davies, 2005; Giffney, 2004; Halberstam, 2005), operates as a way of contesting homogenizing and normalizing practices, whether these come from hegemonic heterosexual discourses, from mainstream LGBT politics (Seidman, 1996),

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64 Sheila Jeffreys saw queer studies and queer politics as a threat to lesbian feminism, because of the appropriation of gay male cultural forms like drag.

65 Astrid Henry (2004) argued that "queer" offered to feminism the outlaw status, the unsanitised, non-simplistic element which the lesbian family unit and lesbian citizenship lacked.

or from the desexualised spaces of academia (Warner, 1993a, p.xxvi).

It may perhaps be helpful to clarify here what "queer" means for me in this thesis. It is firstly the way participants identified with a political position, not always in accordance with mine. For some of the participants it signified fluidity, for others trans-activism, and/ or a call to anti-capitalist politics. Secondly, I understand queer, or to be precise "queering", as an active process of making boundaries visible and stressing their artificiality (Browne, 2006) - a way "to challenge and break apart conventional categories" (Doty, 1993 cited in Giffney, 2004, p.73). In this thesis, then, I more generally seek to "queer" the dualism information/materiality by examining the production of embodied local political formations through digital network practices.

The various discordant accounts recited so far, of "queer" as a) a critical and political tool, b) lifestyle and personal empowerment, c) exploitation and oppression, importantly open up questions about the place of queer activism today within wider politics of resistance. Looking at Brighton in particular can additionally address the role of local politics in countering (or adding a complex over-layering to) global tendencies of homogenisation as these are expressed through dominant digital culture. In what follows, I scrutinise how queer political identities are re-instantiated through their intra-action with the city's political past; the commercialisation of LGBTQ-identified spaces, including public ones like Preston Park (the host of the Pride event) and digital media technologies. In the next section I outline my methodology and then move to give an account of the Queer Mutiny constellation.

II. Methodology

I chose to study two Brighton groups, Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, at an early stage of my research, when I imagined my project to be closer to a celebratory approach to DIY (do-it-yourself) cultural politics[66] and everyday queer resistance. At the time, Queer Mutiny was attempting to form again after a long pause and it was accessible to me since members of the group also had links to the academic postgraduate community where I belonged. What is more, I felt sympathetic to the

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66 DIY ethics and ideology were central in 1960s counter-culture, in punk culture in the 1970s, and in the 1990s movements of green radicalism and rave culture (McKay, 1996; 1998). The Riot Grrrl movement and its zine production is also an expression of the 1990s DIY feminism (Reger, 2005; Downes *et al*, 2007). These movements practised anti-consumerism, anti-copyright and non-hierarchical organization.

anti-consumerist, anarchic attitudes of the groups. I assumed that my experience of participating in various grassroots queer/feminist actions in Athens (and my solidarity to radical politics more generally) would grant me an insider status – which however, was not the case.

My approach to the group was tentative and I allowed the interview material and the observation notes to guide the theory. Initially, I requested permission to attend meetings with the intention to observe general attitudes to communication technologies and sharing of information online. At this point, I was interested in gaining insight about what "activism" meant for the two groups, and how they perceived ideas of community online and offline.

The questions guiding the interviews were:

1. How are the concepts of community and connectivity changing and what is the relationship between online and offline communities?

2. How is the meaning of space and place changing for mobile and online queer identities?

3. How do these shifting discourses of space, community and queerness transform political action?

4. How do contemporary queer activist groups use digital networks to negotiate the history of Brighton activism; commercial practices such as Brighton Pride; and how do they counter homogenised views of lesbian and gay sexualities?

For the recruitment of participants, I joined the Queer Mutiny e-mail list and sent out personal emails to Queer Mutiny members who were active in the list during 2005-2007. Only one person, Martha, who still lived in Brighton responded, and also took part in the study. The member who set up the wiki responded but did not eventually participate in the research. This involved negotiating some issues of methodology and ethics – including questions of anonymity and accountability.

Members of Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever agreed that the group names could be identified but all individual names have been changed. Additionally, the chapter uses gender neutral pronouns when referring to participants (See table in Appendix B, Section 5). This is in respect to the importance of gender pronoun use for the participants, some of whom were transitioning. The people I interviewed also organised Brighton Wotever at the community space Westhill Community Hall. They

had, from May 2007 to March 2009, organised 6 events, mainly of music and drag king performances and several workshops about gender and sexuality. According to a zine by Club Wotever (2008, p.18), Brighton Wotever operated independently of the London Wotever World[67] but "use the Wotever name and ethos".[68] I interviewed Christian, Drew[69] and Francis who were members in the 2009 formation and had attended Queer Mutiny meetings in 2006. I also asked three people to fill in an open questionnaire online from the new Queer Mutiny group, and one (Stephan) delivered responses (In total seven interview accounts - see Appendix B for a full list of respondents). From the wider network of the three main interviewees I contacted the organisers of the parties "Slut Disco", "Out of the Bedroom and Into the Streets" and three people from 'BiFest Brighton 2009' Conference. These were gender bending, alternative music and dance parties that happened monthly or more sporadically at the Cowley Club.

In addition to interviewing, the study involved participant observation at the Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever events and organisational meetings, and online ethnography for a period of three months, between February 2009 and May 2009. Online, I became *Facebook* friends with most of the members I met at the gatherings. I accessed their network of *Facebook* friends and groups, their web links, their photographs and the events they attended or organised. The group met at Drew, Christian and Penny's house, and then at a café in Kemptown "village" called The Hub. During the course of the interviews I shared reflections and some personal information with some of the participants, as part of a feminist approach to research (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). I increasingly became aware of my outsider status to the group, which I attribute to my identity as a mature, non-British doctoral student from a working class background studying a younger middle-class network of friends. It was also my interest in digital media and queer theory that signified a conflict of interests, since the group

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67 The London Wotever World organised its own monthly nights at the Marlborough Theatre, in Brighton. The first Wotever Club night happened in London on August 2003 and has, since then expanded to the Wotever Bar, Film Wotever, Klub Fukk, Wotever Brighton and Wotever Glasgow.

68 The story of Brighton Wotever at Westhill seems to end with the "Queer Ceilidh" event at the Winter Pride 2009, after which the Crew organised an event at the Cowley Club and henceforth operated under the name Brighton Wotever Crew.

69 Drew and Christian were a queer couple. Drew was a transgender pre-op man and worked as an administrator at Gender Trust in Brighton. Christian was a *femme* lesbian who read queer studies and sociology. With Drew and Francis, they started the Brighton Wotever in May 2007.

by and large found both of these areas as distant from their action. When the group moved their meetings to the Cowley Club[70] in April 2009, I had already terminated the offline fieldwork after two incidents that significantly shaped the course of the study: Firstly, the power dynamics of the research setting became fairly challenging for me when one of the participants decided to use the group for their own academic project about the future of queer politics. Secondly, the group invited me to participate in a queer porn photo shooting for their upcoming zine, which I interpreted as a disruption of the research relationship.[71]

In the following parts of the chapter, I look closely at the communicative tactics of the Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever groups, their understandings of space and activism as these emerged from my ethnographic study.

III. Queer Mutiny and anti-capitalist politics

Queer Mutiny Brighton first came into existence in 2005. They were a DIY community attached to the ethics of anti-copyright, veganism, squatting, not- for-profit events, anti-hierarchical organisation and sharing of skills. The online forms of communication established at that time were consistent with open source culture. To be sure, open source software is non-proprietary software, supplied with licence to use. As a movement and distinct political culture, open source and freeware predicates practices of sharing source code and content. Groups are spread around the globe and challenge production and ownership norms, which has clear economic impact. At the same time, they comment on free speech issues, as these emerge in relation to code and digital replicability (Berry, 2008). [72] In the case of Queer Mutiny, the email list was hosted at the autonomous Seattle-based *riseup.net*[73] server, and their website was in

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70 A lot of Brighton's leftist action takes place at the Cowley Club. Information about actions around the UK disseminates through the weekly independent A4-format newsletter *schNEWS* (schNEWS, 2009).

71 A complicated dynamic was created in this case, which I felt was inconsistent with my ethics. My non-participation in the photo shoot symbolically placed me in an outsider status, which would also be that of a voyeur if the zine was eventually produced. It is not the sexual content that would be problematic in this case but the unequal power relation created in this setting.

72 I return to discuss open source in relation to online porn in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

73 *Riseup.net* is hosted by the Riseup Collective, an autonomous Seattle-based body with worldwide members. They provide communication and computer resources to social movements and activists (Riseup Collective, 2009)

wiki form.[74] This first configuration created three zines and various cultural events like film viewings. This may not come as a surprise since zines have been an essential medium for the dissemination of ideas and news beyond mainstream and corporate owned communication channels, especially in the 1990s, and also took up a large part of DIY activity in various groups (see Atton, 2002). Queer Mutiny used the Cowley Club, Brighton's autonomous social centre as a meeting space. It also supported campaigns by the wider queer community which at the time formed around Queeruption[75]. The first Queer Mutiny zine came out in spring 2006 and had a "Fuck authority" sign on the front page (Figure 22). In the first page of the Queer Mutiny Brighton Zine (2006, p.1) the group stated:

> Queer Mutiny is a random group of radical queer activists who get together to: Meet each other. Share ideas. Work together. Challenge norms of gender and sexuality. Plan/organise actions and campaigns. Create a safe space for likeminded people to gather.

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74 The *Queer Mutiny Brighton Wiki* is an open source based page. Its links include *Facebook* Groups of various sub-formations like "In Every Home... a Heartache", and Webpages of Queer Mutiny groups throughout the UK, Queeruption London, *Indymedia* (Queer Mutiny Brighton Wiki, 2009).

75 The first Queeruption gathering took place in London in 1998 and was announced as "[t]Three days of Action, Art and Anarchy for queers of all sexualities". It had a strong anti-consumerist agenda.
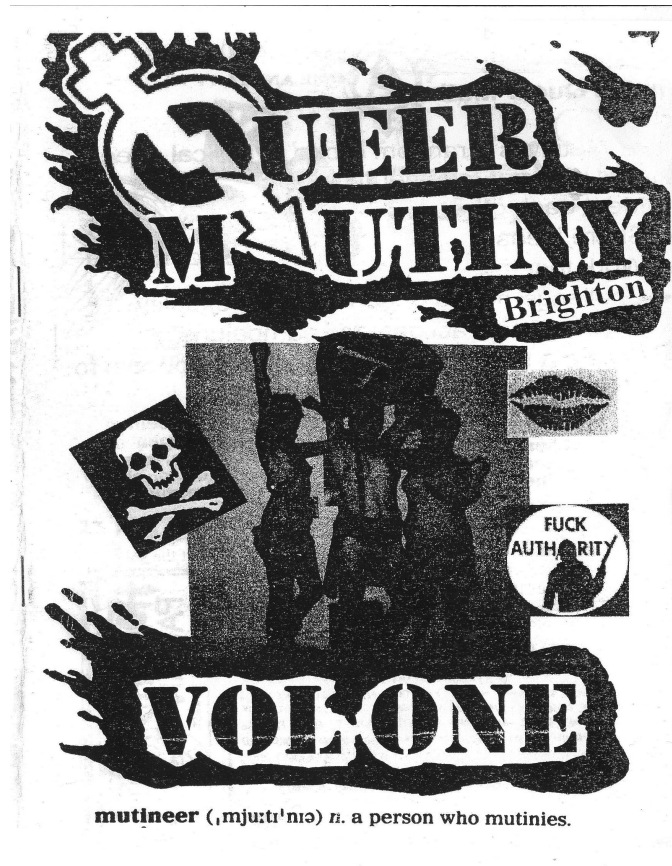
Figure 22: The front cover of the first QM zine.

From the polemic attitude of the zine it is evident that Queer Mutiny was inspired by key queer activist groups in the US like Gay Shame and Queer Nation. Queer Nation[76] in particular shifted the meaning of "safe" nation from that of juridical safety (from discrimination) to that of safety to demonstrate and be visible in national publics (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). However, Queer Nation incorporated consumerism and invaded spaces which they thought to be heteronormative but apolitical, for example, by doing kiss-ins in shopping malls. Though Queer Mutiny was involved in a direct action, as I discuss later, generally they did not adopt Queer Nation's tactics. They concurred with Queer Nation's non-assimilationist politics.[77]. For example, in a Queer Mutiny Brighton Zine (2006, p.1) it was stated: "Against consumerism, assimilation, representation and the rest of shit that claims to be the

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76 Queer Nation formed in 1990 in New York and mobilised against job discrimination, in the abortion rights movement and AIDS activism.

77 Notably, the Queer Mutiny Brighton zine published in spring 2009 reproduced the 1990 Queer Nation Manifesto in its last page.

'gay lifestyle'. Against capital, patriarchy, racism and business as usual". Nonetheless, for Queer Mutiny the target of opposition was primarily Brighton's LGBT mainstream culture, rather than a national LGBT agenda. This emphasis on a single interest -, Brighton's gay culture -, constituted their identity. In this sense, Queer Mutiny was quite distinct from Queer Nation, who opposed to US heterosexual values and was supported by a broad section of the lesbian and gay community (Smith, 1994).

a) Queer Mutiny Brighton as a counterpublic

The local direction of the group's activity was centred primarily on creating a safe community that set it apart from the rest of the LGBT scene in Brighton. One of the most aggressive communicative ploys that contributed to building a distinct counter identity for the group was the pornographic photo session entitled "Black Bloc Porn", featuring the group members holding machine guns and wearing masks.[78] This depiction was arguably inconsistent with the group's anti-war position, as this had been previously communicated in a divisive intervention at the 2005 Pride. Then, Queer Mutiny had invaded the march and disrupted the recruitment stalls of the British Army and Navy. According to Francis who took part in the first formation but not in the Pride action, the action was not the result of consensual decision-making and caused tension within the group. The action was described in the Queer Mutiny Brighton Zine (2006, p.22):

> We invaded their march, we disrupted their recruitment stalls and we reminded
> the participants of the spectacle that there *is* suffering 'and resistance' in the
> world and that not all of us are content to stand by and watch. We couldn't be
> pulled from the march as the RAF requested as the police would have shown
> themselves exactly for what they were dragging queers kicking and screaming
> from the parade. But though the day was successful on some levels, it seems
> that the public didn't really get it. Queers protesting within Gay Pride was
> perhaps too subtle. Certainly the police were confused and we were warned by
> one camp officer that we had a right to protest, but that if we started making

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78 See Heckert and Cleminson (2011) for a collection of essays about anarchism, sexuality and ethics.

any racist comments there'd be trouble. Racist comments. Against the military.

Figure 23: The Black Bloc Porn in the first issue of the QM zine.

Placing Brighton at the centre of their attention, Queer Mutiny in this first zine stated that "Brighton is a transient village" (2006, p.3), where wealthy gay people spend money and move away. As queer mutineers, they aimed to object to LGBT privileges and create a local queer community that was prepared to contest gay unity – as it would be the case with the inclusion of the military stalls, for instance – in favour of political intervention.
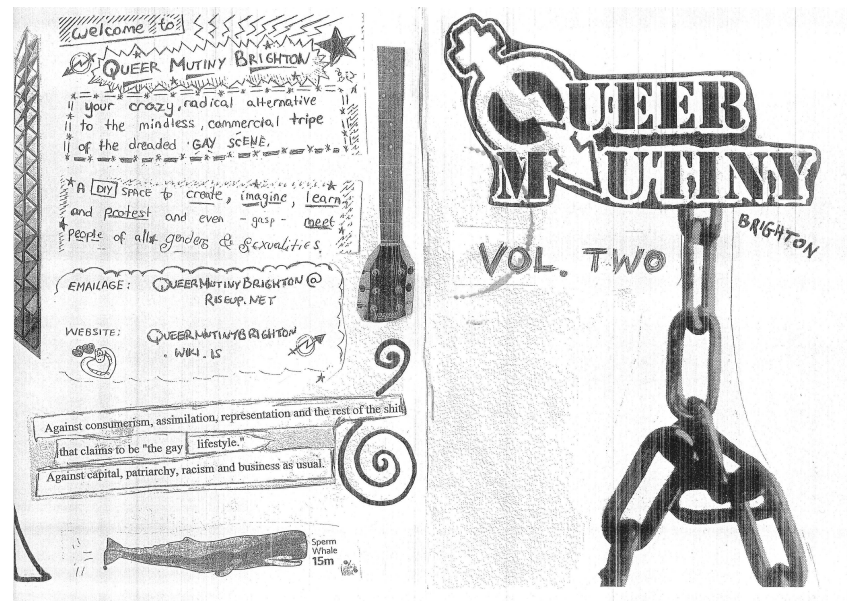
Figure 24: The front and back cover of the second QM zine.

The 2009 Queer Mutiny Manifesto (2009, p.1) explicitly argued against what they felt the local LGBT scene represented:

We experience feeling marginalised and fetishized within LGBT spaces, within which we are "supposed" to feel safe. We give two fingers up to happy clappy gay culture. We want to participate in and ourselves create DIY independent culture.

According to the first Queer Mutiny Zine (2006, p.4), "queer" as a political position was clearly linked to anti-capitalist politics: "Queer is not just about your sexual identity, it is anti-identity politics, queer is anticapitalist revolution." The group did not aim at integration with heterosexual dominant culture, through recognition of the right to marry or through acquiring commodities: "Queer is not married and middle-class and consuming just like everyone else" (2006, p.18). In the zines that followed, the group gradually shifted their focus from building a community, to creating safe spaces of their own (rather than taking the city for a "safe space"), to building a movement and getting ready for *the revolution*. For instance in the third issue, a text entitled "Which direction revolution? (Or confessions of a career queer)"

discussed life choices and everyday life dilemmas. Another article, "Activist Energy", problematized mystical ways of thinking and urged towards "sound political reasoning and arguments to want to be involved in a movement" (Queer Mutiny Brighton Zine, 2006c, p.11). As the first page of the third and last zine of this formation, subtitled "Slave to the Revolution", indicated this movement would be a queer, anti-authoritarian, and anti-capitalist.[79]

Moreover, the group drew links to non-local happenings, like the Argentinian queer-anarchist squats, and increasingly became less Brighton-focused. This development coincided with several members moving away from Brighton. Subsequently, only few of the people who initiated the January 2009 formation were associated with this old group. Nonetheless, the queer anticapitalist identity of Queer Mutiny remained a counter response to the commodification of the local lesbian and gay subculture.

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79 Similar arguments, explicitly positioned as anarchist, have appeared in Queeruption texts and other pink-black bloc texts. See for example Tom Thomson's *Envisioning an anarchist alternative to queer political co-optation*, where the Philadelphia ACT UP! is presented as exemplary in terms of activism.

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Queer Mutiny is a loose bunch of queers of all sexualities who meet regularly in Brighton to talk to each other, socialise and get active.. We are the sum of parts, not just one box to tick. We are a collective. We have differing opinions, yet we are united in fighting for a queer understanding of gender and sexuality, DIY and not-for-profit culture If you agree or disagree with anything you read, please contact us via email, queermutinybrighton@lists. riseup.net and/or come along to one of our meetings.

D.I.Y, a call to Arms!

Brighton can sometimes seem a bit shit, right? How often have you sat there thinking "why's there no clubs that play my kind of music?" or "why are all the free publications (with a few mutinous exceptions) so un-inspired?" or even "why's no one projecting films onto blank walls round here?"

Well, you know how to change it, right? Do It Yourself! Or with a group of like-minded friends. Or with whoever. When you get down to it, it's a lot easier than you think! Take this zine for instance. A friend of mine had been talking about making one for ages, and Queer Mutiny as a group thought it'd be good to have some alternative, free literature around the place, and so, before we knew it, our zine was born!

Everyone from the group is welcome to write for it, so if someone has something interesting they just have to get out there, they have the option to do so. We can raise issues and get them out into the public world as they arise too, publishing monthly as we do!

DIY culture is important. It gives voices and expression to those who would otherwise be silent, and it is only limited by you own imaginations. Where there is a will, there is always a way. And, due to its very nature, encourages boundless creativity! So don't just sit there complaining, get out and do something about it. Write! Paint! Film! Record!

T.

Figure 25: The 2009 issue of the QM zine.

b) Commodification and Brighton Pride

Queer Mutiny then, in its early formation, raised decisive questions about commodification and Brighton's LGBT scene. Given the long history of LGBT activism and community action in the city, and the growing links between the community and the academic community, such questions are increasingly complicated and digital media is integral to this.

For instance, today various local LGBTQ-led[80] media and Brighton-based newspapers like the *Argus* and the *Leader* operate as forum of discussion around local issues, like Brighton Pride. At the same time, community-focused research projects like 'Count Me In' (2000)[81] try to influence local policy by accounting for those usually excluded from survey research, like bisexual and trans people.[82] Joint action that brings together universities and community-sector organisations has been a dominant mode of pursuing social change for LGBTQ people living in Brighton.[83]. The LGBTQ community sector, commercial imperatives, academic projects and local governance are closely intertwined in the production of spaces in the city.

Moreover, understandings of commodification and depoliticisation of LGBTQ cultures result from the assumption that consumer publics are passive. Consumers of Pride have in some cases been thought to be politically motivated and in fact resisting dominant ideologies (Kates and Belk, 2001). In an ethnographic study of five Pride events, Steven Kates and Russell Belk (2001) interpreted the experience as a "multilayered form of consumption-related cultural resistance" (p.393). Lauren Berlant

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80 These include *GAYBrighton.com* and *RealBrighton.com*, which are partnered web directories of event and business listings; magazines *Gscene* and *3sixty.*

81 The 'Count Me In' survey was carried out in 2000 and lead to a 5 year LGBT Community Strategy 2001-2006, auctioned by Brighton & Hove City Council, the local Primary Care Trust, and other local service providers and LGBT groups. The survey continued in 'Count Me in Too' (2007-2010), a participatory action research project which identified "marginalisation, exclusion, disenfranchisement and need amongst the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people (LGBT) in Brighton & Hove" (Browne and Lim, 2008, p.3).

82 It examined 20 focus groups and 819 questionnaires. It was a joint project involving the University of Brighton and Spectrum4, supported by Brighton & Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange with funding also provided by Brighton & Hove City Primary Care Trust and Brighton & Hove City Council.

83 One major network, of which I am also part, is the Brighton and Sussex Sexualities Network (BSSN), "an inter-university research network aimed at supporting research and researchers who work on issues of human sexuality within the Universities of Brighton and Sussex and the wider Sussex area" (BSSN Website, 2010).

and Elizabeth Freeman (1992) also argued in relation to Queer Nation tactics, that consumer pleasure was central for the transformation of public culture. Yet does this everyday consumer resistance actually change social relations of subordination? What does it mean, for example, for exclusions on the basis of race, ethnicity, class and gender (and intersections thereof)?

David Bell and Jon Binnie (2004), and Binnie (2010) offer a way in addressing these questions. They argued that the incorporation of "gay villages" and commodified gay spaces into the agendas of local urban governance is a symptom of neoliberal ideologies. This work echoes Lisa Duggan's (2002) claims of a "new homonormativity", a tendency in North American LGBTQ politics to "purify" progressive and radical democratic politics. Duggan suggested that diversity claims for sexual dissidence have transformed into claims for recognition of a "domesticated, depoliticised privacy" (2002, p.190). The article was highly critical of LGBTQ politics conforming to the cultural politics of neoliberalism, which Duggan understood as outcomes of the "third way" rhetoric of the early 1990s.[84]. In *Authenticating queer spaces*, Bell and Binnie expressed similar fears for the mainstreaming of LGBTQ politics, and placed sexual citizenship at the heart of urban entrepreneurialism (2004, p.1807). To be sure, recently Binnie (2010) in the book chapter *Queer theory, neoliberalism and urban governance*, emphasised the ambivalent relationship between non-normative sexualities and neoliberalism. He suggested that an ethical and political consumption and tourism is possible, and it can even be understood as solidarity activism.

In these respects, Pride can be approached as one of the commodified sexualised spaces, produced through urban governance in Brighton and Hove – and moreover as an event that stands for a broader policy in Brighton. Where does such an approach leave queer cultures like Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever? Seeking to answer this question, I next discuss the online communicative practices of the 2009 Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever formation, before moving to illustrate how the groups create offline spaces. This research suggests that dominant digital culture is expressed in certain forms of middle class queer mobility and territorialisation.

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84 As it appeared in Tony Blair's Labour and Bill Clinton's' New Democrats, this rhetoric occupied the political mainstream and advanced politics which were "reasonable, centrist and pragmatic" (Duggan 2002, p.176).

IV. Digital Media, local politics and mobility

To restate, the thesis overall argues that dominant digital culture creates anxieties, vulnerabilities and insecurities for feminist and queer publics, through certain discursive practices. Here, I concentrate on the discursive practices of mobility and global connectivity, to delineate how, for Brighton queer activist groups, these insecurities revolved specifically around safety, home and community. In the following section, I illustrate how these anxieties were felt by the groups, and how they invited affective responses and modes of engagement. Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever responded by producing a *locality*, through a process of "reterritorialisation" (Morley, 2001), which involved both new media and offline practices. In this process, a queer "referential metaculture" (Berlant and Warner, 1998) was also made, which can be thought to have potential for engendering different forms of politics.

To start with, the assemblage created around the two groups of the current study, Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, were members of email lists and social networking platforms - a combination of independent media, like *riseup.net*; commercial ones like *Facebook*; and, in some cases, community media, like the program of Pride. As I discuss next, the groups mainly used these platforms for the announcement of news and events. It appears that their online communicative activities did not seek to create dialogue with other queer groups or links with wider parts of civil society. In this sense, they seemed to use digital media platforms less for alliance building and more for personal empowerment. Generally speaking, participants expressed hostility towards network technologies and remained focused in their Brighton-centred action – despite their dislike of the area's dominant gay politics. Instead of opening up to the world beyond the local, digital media served to build a public image that distinguished these formations from the rest of the LGBTQ community in Brighton.

By the time I started my research, Brighton's radical leftist culture had already adopted Facebook (rather than independent media) as a platform for disseminating information about events. Drew, who was a member of the Cowley Entertainment Collective, used *Facebook* extensively in order to promote Westhill Wotever events. In our communication on the 25th of February 2009, ze mentioned that the idea behind

this venture was to attract more "mainstream" people into the Cowley Club. Similarly, the organisers tried to make Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever events appealing to heterosexual and LGBTQ cultures. The move to commercial platforms like *Facebook* were not perceived as selling out by the respondents. Instead, it was heralded as a marketing strategy that additionally constituted a form of *activism* for the two groups. In our conversation on the 25th of February 2009, Drew suggested:

> Well, activism. Ahmm...I think *Facebook* is the most important thing to talk about[...] In terms of kind of activism, it means that I know that person is interested in that particular type [...] of political ideas and sexualities and all sort of things like, so I can invite hir and see what these people … networking that's what it's for. And in terms of what I do with Wotever, because of *Facebook* we have, not so many, actually 112 of Wotever Crew, but it means that these people find out every time we have an event, and it's just pretty good for marketing and stuff like that so...

Throughout the duration of the study, I received advertising texts from one of the participants, Francis, regarding Wotever nights, but also about other events ze was involved in, like Climate Camp. Although to me this felt like I was added to a customer's database rather than someone's contact list, Francis didn't stress the marketing logic underpinning these practices. In our conversation ze noted:

> And I don't really do it to promote or anything, I do it 'cause I would like to know! And sometimes I get annoyed, cause I think, why don't people text ME, so that I know about things, like...I just do it cause I think I would like to know about things that are going on.

Since Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever members were *Facebook* Friends with people from the Wotever World, Transfabulous, Bi Fest and other organisations, Drew, when setting up the Kingdom Come Drag King collective, primarily created a Note in *Facebook*. Drew explained to me during our interview why ze then sent emails to various email lists:

I think *La-didah*, is a list, there's certain lists and I think *La-didah* is one of them, not necessarily in this particular instance. But there things like *La-didah* which then connect to other people...am...so in terms of activisms generally, when you want to do something, when you got like *La-didah*, there's other ones, there's the Queer Mutiny list obviously, when you want to contact people you just get into these lists and send your email, and if people find it interesting they forward it to another list they have. The word spreads but there's limitations to it because not everyone has access to it, not everyone is online and not everyone has access to these lists. But you do actually reach a lot of people if you intend to reach all the activists, cause all the activists are on the lists...yeah...so it's incredibly helpful because of that.

Mobile texting, and the participation of Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever members in email lists, discussion forums, *Facebook* and the wiki came down to announcements rather than invitations for involvement in dialogue. This type of activity signals that the groups aimed at visibility in and differentiation from the wider LGBT community in the city. Their engagement was driven more by a politics of personal empowerment rather than constituting a project of broader political critique. Some common communicative practices were indicative of the members' quest for popularity in the sense of social capital. For example, after events, *Facebook* updates were filled with comments, usually regarding a wonderful and successful party. Members also uploaded photographs and "tagged" one another on *Facebook*. For them these practices and, generally, their digital media interaction enabled a sense of belonging. In an interview on the 6th of March 2009, Francis outlined:

I mean before Wotever, and Wotever has very much been, I think the Internet has been used for that, there was no queer community and like, now there is and like, we've created that, like putting on Stephan's nights, putting that in Wotever, I do feel like we've created, it was sort of there before, but it was like brought all these people together [...] and they've become friends or lovers or whatever, it's created a community, and you've got community you're more able to do, create more things, because I think you have that trust, like you get to know each other and all that kind of thing. And so I really think that the

Internet has helped because that's how we advertise a lot of the time.

Moreover, technological know-how was a form of capital within the groups. Provided that some of the members did not use email lists[85] and that others, like Francis, had little knowledge of basic facts about going online, Drew seemed to be a key member. Ze used various software to edit the zine, [86] was the administrator of the Queer Mutiny email list, some of the *Facebook* groups and the wiki[87].

Insisting on the publicity function of online platforms, participants overlooked the potential of these technologies to open up links to the rest of the world. Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever organiser Christian did not think of email lists as designated platforms of dialogue or "virtual" versions of their communities. In one of our discussions on the 25th of February 2009, ze rather thought that these forms of communication belonged in what ze named "textual disembodied cyberworld". The distinction between physical world as embodied and information as disembodied clearly signals the dualism identified by Katherine N. Hayles (1999) as the basis of "virtuality" in the 20th century. Hayles (1999) noted how, according to this generalised understanding (and epistemic shift), meaning does not lie within the system of dissemination. Indeed for Christian and other respondents, digital media technologies were not understood to be integral in the ways they interacted. Similar questions are problematised in relation to postporn activism and understandings of posthumanism in Chapter 4. Here, it is useful to turn to an incident that occurred on the *La-didah* online mailing list in order to further illustrate how face to face communication, everyday

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85 There were two ways to be added in the list. Either the administrator added someone (in that case Drew), or, one could just create an account with the *riseup.net* server and then subscribes to the list. It is interesting how ,for example, Martha assumed that I was given her personal details by the administrator of the list, when these data are available to all who have access to the list through *riseup.net*. Previous emails are publicly available in the archive as well.

86 Yet the rest of the group had some practical knowledge of graphic manipulation programs. For example, in one of the meetings I attended the programs Adobe InDesign, Word, Adobe Reader and Writer were mentioned, in terms of their powers and limitations for the zine.

87 Drew explained to me that ze had an enthusiastic relationship with computers and digital technologies in general. Ze acquired his/her first computer in the late 1980s as a child and this gave him/her a sense of authenticity. Learning to program in BASIC in a "primitive" green and black Amstrad screen, was part of his/her identity today. Since her/his mother went to University to study computer science when ze was 11 years old, ze became fascinated with new generation machines. So even though Drew could no longer afford following the trends of computer technology, ze still had this same fascination with the "new".

friendship and living in Brighton constituted the loci of identification for the QM and WW formations.

Figure 26: Graphic from the QM Brighton website.

a) "Brighton is incredibly white...": Creating locality on the *La-didah* mailing list

In November 2008, one of the Westhill Wotever organisers announced in the *La-didah* list that a "Westhill Wotever v. Sex" party would take place on the 6th of December 2008. On the 27th of November 2008, a user, Momo responded to the posting: "I wish this wasn't clashing with EID,[88] otherwise I would be there. It might be an idea next time to bear that in mind?"

From then on, a rich discussion grew on the list, around issues of race and exclusion, anti-Muslim attitudes and alternative religious celebrations for queer people and their families. This included narrations of personal experiences by Muslim people and an acknowledgement of the need to be aware of cultural/religious festivals when organising events. Naz, responding to the same thread on 27 November 2008 wrote:

I belong to a small Islamic sect and our biggest festival is ALWAYS on the same

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88 Eid al-Adha (EID) means "Festival of Sacrifice" or "Greater Bairam". It is a religious festival celebrated by Muslims worldwide. It happens approximately 70 days after the end of the Ramadan and festivities last for three days or more.

weekend as Pride. In the years when I have found being around religion and family very hard, like this one, it was the fact that I was able to leave at the end and make it to some pride/anti-pride celebration with friends that kept me going.

In calling into question the predominance of whiteness in most queer spaces, this long list discussion eventually linked to a 3-day-event in Bristol, called Race Privilege, Identity.[89]

The Brighton Wotever Crew did not participate in the conversation that evolved around their event announcement. Ingo, the organiser of Wotever World in London sent a response, which cannot however stand as taking responsibility for the Brighton group. The Brighton group followed the discussion and held a meeting about what the right response to the list comments should be. Failing to reach a common decision, they never said anything. In the interviews, participants interpreted the discussion on the *La-didah* list as a personal debate rather than a public engagement with issues central to the queer community as a whole. In our interview on the 25th of February 2009, Drew suggested:

I don't like debating things on the Internet. I don't know, I just think it's impossible, how do you make that happen when you can't see anybody's eye contact, haven't got any physical body language you have got any, for me I think that the Internet is for either, yeah, more advertising stuff or for like maybe one to one contact.

In our interviews, Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever members, found that anonymity in the list was problematic. Unlike the idea of hiding behind anonymity, *La-Didah* list members who exposed themselves in the context of the EID issue emphasised the courage it took to write about these concerns for a wider public. During their narrations of the *La-didah* incident, both Francis and Drew expressed suspicion to digital media, as if the technology was inherently divisive. The contrasting

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89 It took place between 24-26th April 2009, in St. Werburghs Community Centre, Bristol. The event was itself strongly criticised for specific instances of racism by people of colour and white anti-racist allies (Race, Privilege and Identity Gathering weblog, 2009)

demands of face-to-face communication on the one hand, and the practical benefits of using the internet for publicising events on the other, made this instance a stumbling block for Francis. In our conversation on the 6th of March 2009 ze noted:

> I'm into using *Facebook* and internet to bring people together, rather to draw them apart, and I think the Internet can be used as a substitute for communication, which I'm really not into. I prefer communicating on a more personal level. I think it's great for telling people about things... [...] And generally, I just rather see people in reality [laughs]. I'm not one of these people who spend hours on the Internet [...]. I don't spend hours emailing people and stuff like that.

The EID discussion was interpreted by the members I interviewed as an attack from people who, since not local to Brighton, should not criticize the way events were organised. Voices that did not come from Brighton were discredited by the Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever people. Drew explained to me during our discussion:

> Two weeks before the event, someone says, it's a shame, it clashes with EID. Which is a Muslim Festival. Yeah, this is a shame, but there's nothing we can do about it and...Then someone else said, shame it clashes with EID and we just got accused of loads of things. Ahm... we were accused of being racist and Islamophobic and stuff like that, which wasn't true at all...And they just, there isn't, *Brighton is incredibly white* and I would love it if it wasn't incredibly white, which is a consideration for us, and no one knew as well, which is the thing, like you never got 'oh you should have found out', it was just ...but you know all these queer nights that go on a Friday night, do the Jews get upset? There is so much issue now, but the thing that really upset me, not the actual debate but like just the way it was handled. That it more came from people that weren't part, that weren't local to Brighton. And like I [unclear] a night for Brighton. It's nice to have people from other parts, but I do it for people who live in Brighton, so it's yeah, it's upsetting, to get criticism from people that weren't part of Brighton in any way, so...Errrgh, it made me really angry.

Indeed, in Queer Mutiny meetings, participants were mainly white and British (and middle class). Nonetheless, the Westhill Wotever parties often gathered a diversity of ethnic groups. Thus in claiming a *local* identity, participants emphasised what they thought they had in *common* with the rest of Brighton, like "being predominately white". The persistence of the organisers on the Brighton-based character of the events constructed a shared identity of locality for the queer people who, like them, came to Brighton from other places around the UK in order to be queer. By this I mean that, as noted earlier, Brighton is a place relatively safe from homophobic attitudes,[90], and the wide LGBTQ community serves as a safety net for people who are coming out or transitioning. Participants who had moved to Brighton from other places recognised the safety that Brighton provides for LGBTQ- identified people (partly because of the Council policies). At the same time, the racial character attributed to Brighton operated as an "othering" for those who did not belong in this space. In this sense, locality and sexual citizenship (*who* is included in their definitions of queer) signalled a contradiction in participants' narrations. On the one hand, ideals of sexual citizenship guided the activities of the groups and aimed to create an open queer culture that was publicly accessible. On the other, this belonging was safeguarded and anchored to a stable reference - Brighton as a LGBTQ haven and whiteness.

b) Reterritorialisation and queer cosmopolitanism

One way to approach the tensions evident in the *La-didah* mailing list example, but also more generally in the communicative practices of Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, is through the notion of "reterritorialisation", developed by David Morley (2001). In his work on belonging, Morley (2001) expressed scepticism about the destabilising effects of globalisation, and instead proposed a materialist focus on physical movement. By With this, he sought to address both patterns of mobility and patterns of settlement. Processes of physical and communicative deterrirorialisation

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90   According to the 'Count Me in Too' report 76% of the respondents felt unsafe because of homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia (Browne and Lim, 2008).
 See also *Tackling Homophobia on Brighton and Hove buses,* an article reporting 11 incidents in Brighton and Hove Buses during the last 3 years, according to the Anti-Victimisation Unit at Brighton Police Station (Pink UK, 2010).

for Morley have been happening alongside "reterritorialisation" processes, whereby boundaries are being re-constituted. These boundaries can address the need to regulate, for example, home use of technologies, and may signify a return to traditional forms of place-based identity. Morley's framework can explain how Queer Mutiny and Brighton Wotever have been producing a locality through new media technologies. In this regard, reterritorialisation relies on practices that signify exercises of power over what seems an increasingly unsafe environment for these cultures.

Other media and cultural studies writers aiming to understand cultural processes, like the complex connectivity that results from mobile media use, have focused on globalisation, networks and connectivity. In an earlier influential analysis, Arjun Appadurai (1995) examined territories where tourists and locals intersect, and argued that the instability of social relations in such spaces hinders the creation of "neighbourhoods". He thought of neighbourhoods as actual situated localities which provide the context for their subjects' production and reproduction, and render social action meaningful. Neighbourhoods in Appadurai's work produce contexts, often in the form of "ethnoscapes", but they also themselves constitute a set of contexts. Appadurai placed these transient communities between the local and the beyond-the-local (the "translocal").[91] The production of locality is, in such spaces, an exercise of power over a hostile environment. This framing is useful in the current examination of the Queer Mutiny digital media and cultural practices because it helps us understand how these comprise transformative spaces where ideas about home and belonging circulate.

The tension between reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation in the case of Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, can be more fully understood if we recognise the queer dimensions of mobility and settlement in Brighton. To be sure, mobility has historically been significant for LGBTQ identified people, not only as the ultimate action of leaving a homophobic environment behind, but also as an action of resistance, that

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91   In more recent frameworks, the concept of the "translocal" was re-introduced and applied as an analytical tool in digital network studies (Carpentier, 2007; 2008, Hepp, 2008). Andreas Hepp (2008) stressed the significance of local and the everyday aspects in contemporary intensified connectivity. For Hepp, translocal connections across various territories signified the emergence of communicative "deterritorialization". This is not necessarily physical deterritorialization, since everyday face-to-face communication still happens at the local level. Nico Carpentier (2008) on the other hand examined community media and local urban communication to be the result of rhizomatic connections. Although I see the consistency of these framings of the "translocal" here my attention is with the understandings of community and activism, rather than macro-processes and metaprocesses.

of claiming space within such environments. For instance, Sally Munt has noted how lesbian mobility, as this manifests in various subcultures, "continually stamps new ground with a symbol of ownership" (1998, p.120). Nonetheless, for the participants of the study Brighton has mostly been a final destination. For example, Francis said that ze always wanted to live in Brighton. Christian talked about the sense of being in the middle of the gay scene and feeling relieved, in the sense that ze could take zer time to stabilise zer lesbian identity. Stephan, in an email on the 17th of March 2009, wrote that Brighton is a "liberal, charming place" and contrasted it to the working class area ze grew up in. According to zir email, that was a "socially conservative place […] strongly connected to military/Royal Navy with a very different attitude to life and things". In individual narratives of this study, queer identity was predominately determined by mobility. Central to this appeal to mobility were references to the participants' current and previous localities. Thus, this queer scene in Brighton was performed through the circulation of two competing sets of discourses: narratives that stress mobile identity and transformation; and territorial claims like those prevalent in accounts about what happened on the *La-didah* list.

Apart from the forces of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation operating in physical and digital communicative environments, Brighton's specificity as a queer tourist and visitor destination is central here. Jasbir K. Puar (2002), writing about practices of consumption in queer tourism, traced the figure of the "queer cosmopolitan subject" (p.109). She delineated how the development of the gay tourism industry links to the "out" consumer and argued: "What signals as transgressive is not just the right to sexual expression but the right to mobility through that sexual expression" (Puar, 2002, p.111). Consumption power, as this is expressed particularly through practices of tourism and "mobility", has been often conflated with queer liberation, emphasised Puar[92].

We can think as "queer cosmopolitan" the practices that surfaced in the narratives of participants, not so much when they talked about their own status as formerly visitors and currently residents in Brighton, but more in accounting for previous members who had relocated. When this was the case, queer cosmopolitanism had a positive air and connoted "real", non-local activism. Queer cosmopolitanism

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92 This work also focuses on activist and tourist projects, especially the global NGO practice of LGBT activists, where "pleasure tourism" and "political travel" merge in a problematic amalgam.

however, also seemed to be the discursive practice that called into question the wealthy, gay lifestyle and the "pink pound", as I examined earlier in this chapter. Hence I next propose that, in responding to the felt anxieties about belonging and safety, the groups studied here engaged in a mode of politics - , which I will tentatively call "queer consumer citizenship" – to describe a combination of activism, mobility, locality and consumerism. Secondly, I formulate how through their mediated practices they produced a queer "referential metaculture" (Berlant and Warner, 1998).
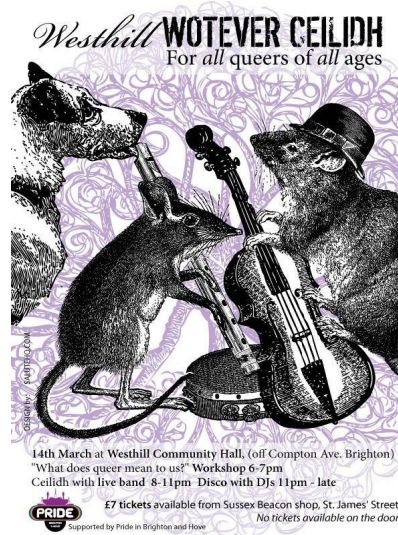
Figure 27: Publicity material for a Westhill Wotever event, part of the 2009 Winter Brighton Pride programme.

V. Queer metaculture and queer consumer citizenship

a) "I'm not the kind of person who would put on my hood and fight the police..." Understandings of activism

It is useful to commence here by drawing attention to understandings of "activism" more generally for the groups Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, and beyond their digital media practices. Participants emphasised the differences between

the 2009 Queer Mutiny formation and the one that took shape in 2005. Insisting on the non-local dimension of actions, respondents had a common perception about what "real" politics was about. In their narrations, confrontation on the street was contrary to waiting around, being inside, discussing texts and ideas. Older members understood political action to have breadth beyond local issues. For example, Martha, a member of the first QM formation, in an email response received on the 14th of March 2009, explained:

> Have always been involved in activism – come from an activist family – remember being on anti-Vietnam war demos as a kid in the late 60s/early 70's. First major involvement as adult was Greenham Common/March for Jobs/Miners' Strike in the early 1980s. Other activism on-going & including anti-apartheid movement, Irish solidarity, CND, anti-nuclear movement, WAVAW (women against violence against women), amongst others.

In Martha's response, participation in wider activist culture was part of queer politics.

> Current activism reflects this – I help run an LGBT martial arts club & am trying to build-up an LGBT self-defence network in Brighton. I have also been gardening allotments organically for the last 20+ years, have been mostly veggie for the same time & am in the process of giving up my car and taking up sailing…

Similarly, Francis, in an interview on March 6th, 2009 talked about direct action, including squatting and sabotaging at a local level, and support to wider political events like No Border actions. Ze noted:

> I was involved in Manchester, [...] and lots of Reclaim the Streets[93] and lots of

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93 Reclaim the Streets is "a direct action network for global and local social-ecological revolution(s) to transcend hierarchical and authoritarian society, (capitalism included), and still be home in time for tea..." (Reclaim the Streets, 2009). Their online archive dates actions since 1995. The movement aims to regain free access on the streets from cars and it follows the Situationist ideas about public space. As stated on the website "Reclaim The Streets is not a send-off-the-cheque sit-in-front-of-the-spectacle organisation. It's a participatory disorganisation. The best way to make good things happen

environmental and peace activism and anti-capitalism and that sort of stuff. I did a Reclaim the Night in Melbourne [...] I was going to do that action, that woman action, I don't know if you've heard about that, about the Camp for women, which is like, asylum seekers, but it was in the middle of the dessert and I didn't go in the end but I did some training for it.

Francis, during the same conversation, narrated zir participation in the first Queeruption in London 1998[94]:

And at that point in time, I don't know, first Queeruption, I don't remember having much stuff around gender and sexuality, it was much more around general activism stuff, it was stuff, like zine making, guitars, self-defence and don't know, something like sex work. So I guess it was like, but yeah, it was more sort like queer *activists* than queer activism, if that makes sense. And that was quite how I got into...there wasn't, I don't remember there being so much on things like polyamory and trans stuff. It was much more about... like general sort of activist culture, and that was really awesome.

Growing up in the nineties and moving to Brighton in 1999, Francis lived through the echo of the squatters' movement.[95]. When ze arrived in Brighton, Francis felt that activism with a queer orientation was absent in the town. To be sure, Queeruption had workshops like "Action for queer visibility", "AIDS - Challenging orthodoxies", or

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is to take part . . . get a group together to organise a street party or whatever, wherever where you live". Apart from parties, often called Festivals of Resistance, monthly Critical Masses are held in various cities, including Brighton. Their suggested reading list includes Peter Kropotkin, Guy Debord, Harry Cleaver, André Gorz's *Social Ideology of the Motorcar,* Freddy Perlman *The Reproduction of Everyday Life*, and others.

94   The first Queeruption happened at the 121 Centre, in Brixton and was announced as "[t]hree days of Action, Art and Anarchy for queers of all sexualities". It had a strong anti-consumerist agenda: "We believe that there is more to being queer than what is offered to us at the moment, and want to create a radical alternative to the commercial, and a-political gay scene. The festival is open to all, and is about us all taking initiative, creating and participating, instead of just consuming a lifestyle sold to us" (Queeruption, 2009).

95 The squatters' movement launched in Britain in 1968. The movement slowly died out for a while, after the South side of Villa Road was, with the squatters consent, demolished in 1977 (see Eagle, 2006) but was soon revived when social centres started to appear with the anti-globalization struggle and Reclaim the Streets demonstrations.

"Internet activism for cyber queers", so it clearly was not focused on general activism. This distinction that Francis drew between "queer activism" and "activism made by queer people", and the fact that ze did not interpret the interests of the first Queeruption as specifically queer *activism*, guided their perception of politics. Francis also differentiated between direct action activism, which ze thought of as confrontational, and other forms of activism, which operate in a supportive way. To illustrate what ze meant by supportive activism, in our interview, Francis in our interview referred to the women's groups in Brighton. Ze namely talked about the 'Hair-raising Anarchist Girls', a group that split up into the still running 'Feminist Health Collective', and the 'Sewing Circle':

> That was just people meeting up and making things [laughs]. So it was quite different to what we were doing, a bit more hard-core, kind of, a bit more fluffy or whatever [...] we did the sabotaging and stuff. It was more about having the squat and doing workshops about different things.

Other participants understood activism as something that happens in the "real world", while their group performed a form of "soft activism". For instance, in our meeting on the 11th of February 2009 Christian in our meeting on the 11th of February 2009 stated:

> What we do with Westhill is a bit...I find it like...a soft activism in that kind of sense. And I'm not the kind of person who would put on my hood and fight the police...even though I want to maybe...

And added:

> I haven't done much at all, but the little that I have I'm quite disillusioned by, and sometimes I think that holding back and not putting yourself out and making a difference in the real world, I think I'd rather sit around and discuss things than I have that feeling that this is more valuable for me [...] And when it comes to queer specifically, I think it is very much about the head space and the attitude. And if we can sit around and talk about it and we get like a new person

every now and then, you know, people will get that head space along with them, and when they're with other people, and this is how it may spread in that sense.

Ze explained:

I think that one reason that I might call that soft-activism say, suits me better cause I'm often, I don't often have that strong opinion about something [...] I've always wished that I'm more fired up about something, strong like on the barricades of things, but I've always had quite an analytical mind.

This hierarchy of modes of activism that came out of participants' accounts indicated a public/private division, where wider political issues and international actions constituted *the public*, political world. According to this schema, their own actions and events were situated locally, almost privately, outside the space of "real" political struggle. Despite this perception, in meetings Queer Mutiny actually discussed the North American/USA Proposition 8,[96] California's 2008 ballot proposition that restricted same-sex marriage. Queer Mutiny also took part at in a G20 protest; discussed[97] the online petition against the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust, which obstructed NHS funding for genital reassignment surgery;[98] and considered to supporting Sussex University LGBT Society around the campaign to remove limitations on blood donation by gay men[99].

If we were to create an imaginary grid of political identities, the construction of

96 California's State Constitution put the clause "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California" into effect on November 5th, 2008 but did not affect existing domestic partnerships. Campaigns for and against were launched and protests occurred around the country.

97 Eventually the group decided to work on gathering information about the issue and contacted Oxford-based groups.

98 The report *The Failure of Gender Dysphoria Treatment in Oxfordshire* was issued by Sally Outen, Rachel Payne, Sharly-Clare Busuttil and Alina Whiteman and published in the TransLondon website. It showed that, since December 2006, only one patient had been funded for gender dysphoria treatment and granted GRS, and only after taking legal action. The petition closed on 07 April 2009 with 1,060 signatures (Number10.gov.uk, 2009).

99 The organisation Stonewall put pressure on the National Blood Service to lift the discriminatory blanket lifetime ban on gay men donating blood. An online petition was launched on February 16th, 2009 online. See also a relevant article in pinknews.co.uk (Grew, 2009).

binaries like public/private, local/cosmopolitan, and soft/real gives a sense of how Queer Mutiny members perceived their own position in it. The groups performed a counterpublic by responding to the local LGBT lifeworld with their versions of personal empowerment and cosmopolitan activism – what I think of as "queer consumer citizenship". This mode of engagement was full of conflicting attitudes, namely the idealisation of international queer activism and the concurrent defensiveness of Brighton. Nevertheless, as I analyse next, these same series of material and discursive, media and everyday practices produced what Berlant and Warner called a "referential metaculture" (1998, 2005, p.198).

Figure 28: Brighton Wotever Crew banner.

b) Creating references: parties, "education" and cultural capital

It may perhaps come as a surprise that I think of queer Brighton cultures to be constituted in discursive (online and offline) material practices other than their counter response to the wider LGBT Brighton community. But even though Queer Mutiny in its 2005 formation was a queer counterpublic mainly oppositional to Pride, more recent formations were less responsive to *any* single dominant discourse. For example, the Wotever Crew accepted funding from Brighton Pride and the 2009 "Queer Ceilidh" event was advertised in the official Pride program. As Christian suggested during our interview on the 25th of February 2011:

Another reason to be part of Pride is that you get a Pride advertising, which means that we have a wide audience, which means that we can have a more diverse night and therefore activism reaches further.

Thus the groups studied here, at least in their 2009 formation, seemed confused about where they stood in relation to queer activism and race/class politics more generally. Awareness of a collectivity's own status in the site of hegemonic struggles is crucial in claiming its voice (Warner, 2002). In this sense, we need to conceptualise the activity of Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever not only in terms of their opposition, but also in terms of their affirmative, generation of discursive practices.

My attention hence turns to parties and workshops organised by Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever, as these attempted to produce a transient world. Through references to non-standard intimacies, the groups were active in a project of making a queer world:

[...]a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p.558).

As noted earlier, queer cultures create their own primary registers of reference, using non-standard intimacies (Berlant and Warner, 1998) because they do not have what is usually given in heterosexual culture and its set of practices. According to this formulation, these collective activities are not just lifestyles, counterpublics of opinion or privatised zones, but should rather be regarded to as produce producing "transient public worlds" (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p.199). For Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever a primary register can be thought to be their 2005 forerunners, Queeruption or other collective expressions. I think that the formations studied here however, belong themselves in this primary register. Having said that, they did also produce lifestyles, counterpublics and privatised zones, alongside the creation of transient worlds. Central to this metaculture is Brighton as a reference point that makes this culture meaningful. Brighton in this register is not a locality, but for all the reasons explored earlier in this chapter, *a queer transient public world* itself.

Figure 29: Publicity material for a Westhill Wotever event.

From attending some of the parties and workshops, it was clear to me that these were gatherings for LGBTQ young adults who experimented with DIY practices. Apart from the absence of a clear structure or accuracy in timing, in these events there was an implicit dress code for eccentricity and often there were home-made cakes for a nominal price. Diverse groups attended these events, for example students, dykes and femmes, and at the Cowley Club, also frequenters, homeless people and people who mistook Cowley Club for a dance club. The organisers thought their parties were eccentric, and, in a way, created their own opportunities for cultural capital investment and production. In his email on the 17th of March 2009, Stephan in his email on the 17th of March 2009 commented:

> We are a little elitist with our music policy, but we have to be a bit strict to prevent it becoming another mediocre "gay alternative disco" of the kind churned out by Ghetto.[100].

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    Ghetto is a dancing club which hosts "diverse nights for boys and girls and their straight

What contributes to my conceptualisation of these events as queer referential metaculture, in the sense that Berlant and Warner (1998, p.558) define it as world-making, is the emphasis the organisers put on *educating* those involved. They wished to create knowledges and spaces (both physical and spaces to think) that didn't previously exist. The Queer Mutiny Manifesto in February 2009 proposed:

> How do we want to do it? We will educate people that there is more than the binary between heterosexual and homosexual, male and female. We will educate people so they understand queer is not just a sexuality, but a way we live our lives. We will critique LGBT culture, not the people who identify with it. We will critique the politics of sexuality, but also work to provide an alternative. We know that alienating some people is inevitable, but we endeavour to create possibilities for dialogue too. We will be subversive rather than obvious. We will be purposeful and anchor our actions in our political beliefs.

Participant narratives also stressed the educational aspect of gatherings and how this served as a means to social change. As Francis suggested on the 6th of March 2009:

> ...The whole point is that it's meant for these people to come in and learning [sic], I mean for me that's part of the point for doing this, is somebody comes along to one of our nights and goes 'Ooh! a zine, I've never heard of that' and picks up a zine, but then also get a bit frustrated that there's not enough [unclear] and stuff, but then it's great if people come from the more mainstream and learning about politics and zines and queer...I don't know, like broadening their minds, like I don't know, if we're just having a party...for like... anarchists-queers it's a bit pointless. Almost part of it is like educating people, it sounds a bit evangelistic [laughs] but you know, I mean...it's kind of...and I suppose I do feel quite evangelistic about it, I do feel quite like it's like....I feel that's the way that the world's going to change, by educating people.

friends", like lesbian mud wrestling (Ghetto Brighton, 2009).

In a similar tone, Christian noted on the 25th of February 2009:

> But more generally what it is I think, it is spreading information, showing people that there are other possibilities through relating to each other, that's what we're trying to do with Westhill, like now on Saturday, because it's a queer Ceihlid, Ceihlid has always been men and women and now we are going to have cats and dog.

The group's accent on education also brought forth cultural capital hierarchies subtly operating within this culture.[101]. In one of the performances by the Kingdom Come Drag King Collective, a big paper-made pink phallus was used and there was disagreement as to whether the phallus should be destroyed at the end of the act. Christian explained to me during an interview on the 25th of February 2009:

> ... It was super important to destroy that in the end, 'cause we're not gonna be drag kings and go ...'Aaahh, the phallus', oh, and we were having arguments about that, because it has to have a feminist background to it, you can't do queer things without having a feminist awareness in it. When some people, go like, why should we do that, what's the point, and that kind of thing, so if we started again it would be with people who actually want to say something with it, I think, more or less.

Entertainment without politics and entertainment with a queer studies component in this instance indicates how disparate class identities came together in these physical spaces. Sandie and Christian in this respect stood out from groups as they tended to encourage theoretical explorations. In our discussion with Christian on the 11th of February this was explained.

> Interviewer: "You talked about discussions as an integral part of the organisation. But you also have an academic background. Do you see a tension in the way discussion happens? For example, if you are used to reading texts

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101 See Ward (2003) on Pride and queer cultural capital – for queers with cultural capital.

that have an academic language and you talk about these things with other people who don't read these things, do you think there is a tension, or that other people should be reading too, in a reading group or something like that? Christian: "I do find it problematic, it might be the problematic that might be very positive, come to think about that. I find it, I sometimes find it hard to formulate myself in an easy enough language like now, I was inspired by the idea of the marriage themed zine, and I was yeah, I'll compare Michael Warner and Hannah Arendt, and I was like, no I can't do that in a zine, it's way too theoretical, so I find it quite hard. I also find it very real in queer activism, I don't know if it's the same in feminist activism – maybe - that you're supposed to have a certain theoretical knowledge to be good activist and that becomes a pressure to people and I really don't want to reinforce that. On the other hand, I'm quite happy, if someone is interested in reading, pointing out books, lending books etc., because for me theory is really important, it's given me a lot in terms of thinking, so if other people want to engage with it, it's not something that I find they have to, but on the other hand or rather I find it so valuable to talk to people who have a life experience and not a book experience, cause quite often I feel that I talk from book rather from any kind of emotional point of view, which makes it a bit dry[...] So it can be more that I'm actually lacking any real life experience and all I'm doing is going on about theory, but....

Cultural capital also manifested in some of the members' fashion fetishism. For example in regards to the Zinefest[102] Christian commented during the same interview session:

I look at the people at the Zinefest and I'm like, oh my god everyone just looks so, I'm really attracted to that visibly political look, it's really stereotyped, have a little bit

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102 Apart from the Zine shop, the Zinefest included various workshops. One of the workshops I attended was organised by a feminist woman from Austria and Christian and it concerned the DIY scene and sexuality. The concept of safe spaces was discussed while the organisers circulated manifestos from the queer groups: *Eurofaeries II*, *folleterre eurofaerie sanctuary*, *gay shame*, *bash back San Francisco*, *Edinburgh QM*. This workshop brought together feminist activists and the groups I studied. For example, a woman had taken part in an action by the *Radical Femeinist* i*(sic)* in Seattle, a direct intervention in response to the sexual assault of a woman. For her, DIY spaces were safe spaces in the sense that they made up communities guarding their own people from institutions like the police or the justice system. For the Austrian feminist, talking about "safe" required setting up boundaries, especially men/women ones. For queer activist participants, neither the "enemy" was clear nor the need for safeguarding. They talked more about vague "power structures".

of red, have a little bit of non-reds, look a little bit unwashed and then you're an activist, and I'm completely aware of that norm, but I'm still attracted to people who are like that, because it is a bit, in a very personal kind of way, you're wearing your politics kind of visibly.

Figure 30: Publicity material for a party organised by 'In Every Home a Heartache.'

The difference for Christian between Queer Mutiny and Wotever was not noteworthy in terms of politics, but rather in terms of outward reach. The aim of the groups was to create spaces alternative to the LGBT mainstream. Ze noted:

I think that what we do is create spaces for people to come together and I find it really important to have information, like we talked about having the manifesto, having discussions and things, that you do widen people's views and you do educate and you do exchange ideas...and that is going to live on people's minds and you know hopefully give them some kind of queer sensibility about people, because queer I think is much about the way you relate to people in your everyday life all the time, and if you are with someone that have not met this idea before, it doesn't matter if you know the theory not, kind of, oh yeah, the way you're using pronouns and being respectful and kind

of heteronormative people. I think that's what I'm after with Wotever specifically. While I see that Queer Mutiny is much more a group, that's much more pronouncedly political and where I have the chance to develop my politics, while Westhill is more a place on an easy low level to include more people to some extent.
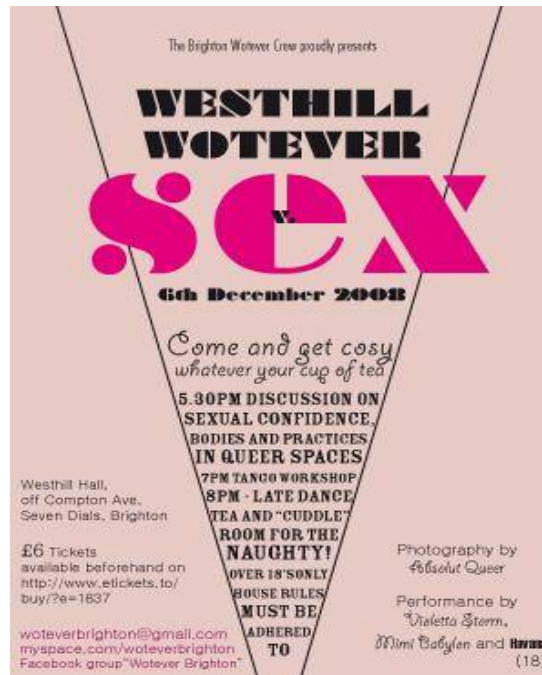
Figure 31: Publicity material for the Westhill Wotever v. Sex event.

These narrations of how parties and gathering were educational, and about creating relationships and collective practices alternative to those offered by the LGBTQ mainstream culture illustrate attempts to generate points of reference beyond an institution, nation, property, or place. We can thus think that these references contributed to the production of a queer metaculture, in other words, a transient public memory for queers to use later as a common register. This is not to say that Brighton formations were constituted beyond place and institution – as it was illustrated, they distinctly created their identities as racialised and class-based knowledges, lifestyles, in zones, and in relation to urban governance and the "pink pound". Participation in email lists, updating the group's webpage, sharing photographs and thoughts, is additionally a free resource for datamining and other

profit making strategies by businesses that target LGBT-identified users (Gamson, 2003; Terranova, 2004) and can arguably be exploitative. Still this type of labour can be thought to be empowering because it leaves textual traces of a queer (meta) culture through the creation of transient online/offline spaces.

VI. Conclusion

The chapter suggested that queer activism in Brighton is caught between the figure of the cosmopolitan queer; the official promotion of life in the city as a transformative and liberating experience; and technophobic attitudes. Reflected in the participants' narrations, was the sense of increased instability and anxiety about social relations due to communicative connectivity, and the fact that people constantly move in and out of the city. The participants' nostalgia for *home* and security was prevalent in repetitive references to "safe spaces" but also online acts of reterritorialisation.

Unlike other networked publics in the current thesis, here anti-technology sentiments surfaced during narrations. For instance, in Chapter 2 publics engaged with digital media hoping that online platforms would offer opportunities for open and anti-hierarchical communication. For the respondents in Chapter 4, digital culture entirely reconfigures politics. Queer Mutiny and Westhill Wotever in this chapter employed digital media, like social networks and email lists for publicity purposes and in order to gain social capital amongst non-local queer subcultures. Although the studied assemblage did not accept that online connectivity was relevant to queer activism, I suggested that the groups were addressed by dominant digital culture. Particularly, queer networked publics were performed in place-specific communicative acts. The discursive practices of mobility, autonomy and cosmopolitanism, as they materialised in the *La-didah* mailing list and in the creation of offline safe spaces, were central for the production of this locality. Controversial as it may seem, these mediated Brighton as a transient and transformative city, and constituted the place-related political identities of the constellations analysed here.

I proposed that queer formations in this instance are articulations of the dynamic relationships between local and non-local physical and online spaces. One of the relationships recounted in the chapter evolved between the LGBT community in

Brighton and the wider mainstreaming pressures posed by global capitalism; another was the relationship between local queer politics and the wider UK contemporary queer postcolonialist movement. These relationships materialised in two sets of communicative acts, one negative and one affirmative: firstly the circulation of counter-discourses to Brighton's local LGBT politics and Pride; and secondly in the creation of meta-references, which importantly have an affective, horizontal, dynamic dimension, especially since they revolved around friendship and other non-standard intimacies.

Yet my view is that the political identities performed in these communicative practices largely correspond to a mode of engagement that blends *cool* lifestyle activism and mobility – what I have tentatively called "queer consumer citizenship". These politics focus on differentiation and personal empowerment, rather than alliance building. Even so, I have noted how capitalism benefits from the promotion of sexual diversity since this creates new, niche markets (Weeks, 1998). In this sense, the multiplicity of diverse, small-scale and fragmented identity politics creates a communicative abundance (Dean, 2009) that further nourishes the neoliberal project. We may then need to reconsider the capacity of such modes of political engagement (lifestyle activism) for a wider critical project and re-orient towards the importance of responding to global scale inequalities. In the next two chapters, I attempt to instantiate the connections of local queer and feminist politics with the biopolitical consequences of network culture technologies.

CHAPTER 4

<u>Postporn networks: making scarcity and forming affective intensities</u>

I. Introduction

      a) "Sex wars" and radical sex art

      b) Posthumanism and postporn politics

      c) "Porn 2.0", affective labour and gift economies

II. "Real" bodies and the making of scarcity/abundance in commercial porn

      a) Genderqueer online porn production companies:

      Nofauxxx.com and *FurryGirl*

      b) Women-owned porn production companies: Anna Span and Petra Joy

III. "Collective orgasms" and "intellectualised unpleasure": ways of viewing and affective intensities in non-commercial spaces

      a) "Should I be aroused by this?" Watching *I.K.U.* and making meaning collectively

      b) Affective intensities at the skin of the social body: the political potential of viewing with others

IV. Conclusion

I. Introduction

This chapter aims to examine feminist and queer politics emerging in relation to pornography in contemporary networked environments. There is an abundance of porn-related productions today, including radical sex weblogs and production companies run by women, especially US based bloggers who, in some cases, have worked in the sex industry. Internet porn production and porn networks specifically have been thought to comprise alternative exchange economies and to enable sexual politics (Barbrook, 1999; Jacobs, 2007). It is thus important to question such porn-related practices and spaces in digital networks in relation to politics and mediation. What might be politically enabling about these spaces and networks, and what form does control and regulation of bodies and sexualities take in these contexts? And how are "old" debates in feminism and sexual politics about pornography articulated in new media environments? To approach these questions, in this chapter I examine two distinct sites. Firstly, I visit the websites of four women-owned and alt[103] queer porn production companies and analyse their discursive framing of feminist and queer politics. I identify a process of capitalisation of feminist and queer political values in commercial networks of porn distribution (including alternative ones). In particular, I argue that, through emphasis on overlapping discourses of "real" bodies and experiences, queer visibility and authenticity; sexuality is constructed both as a disciplinary site and a site for value extraction – one that creates new needs and desires for politically sensitive lesbian consumers in neoliberal societies. Secondly, I map networks which have come to be known as postporn; these are crossing online and offline spaces, academic, art and commercial activity, for which porn and its politics are strong connecting threads. Network technologies are central to the development of postporn political formations, not only because they facilitate the flow of ideas and bodies; they also constitute extensions of the (figure of the) queer non-reproductive body and, I suggest, new spaces of exposure and vulnerability. Furthermore, I draw on a focus group screening of the art-porn film *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000) in an attempt to understand how new ways of viewing and old forms of cinematic experience converge in such spaces. By engaging with the concept of

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103 "Alt" is the short for "alternative" to mainstream, which arguably has its roots in the *alt* internet
Usenet newsgroups in the 1990s– though the latter were not exclusively around pornography.

"intensity" (Massumi, 2002), I suggest that bodies and technologies coming together in these transient public settings and events can be productively thought as "affective intensities"; or, to put it simply, collective bodies leaving affective traces across networks. In this way the chapter contributes to the map of political realities produced in this thesis, and further clarifies how digital network technologies and culture constitute material conditions of vulnerability, which enable certain forms of feminist and queer politics and hinder others.

Today, people involved in sexual politics frequently become sex bloggers or just amateur online users who add to the wealth of porn already disseminated online by commercial producers. These people belong and move across traditionally incompatible fields, for instance internet studies and porn studies, the art-porn movement, the sex blogosphere, online amateur porn networks and commercial porn. This movement between worlds and the new relationships that emerge might be thought of as an osmotic process between worlds of meaning and words of doing, worlds of reading a sexual text and worlds of producing a text – or even becoming one – in intersecting online/offline spaces. An attention to these overlapping worlds and emerging relations demands that we ask questions about the kinds of publics which are enabled in this context and the kinds of political responses being formulated.

At the same time, feminist politics around pornography have been long contested in terms of representation, symbols and meanings. As was the case in previous decades, today certain critical approaches to commercial pornography from the field of postporn and internet politics, like for example the performer Annie Sprinkle (1998) and the academic/performer Katrien Jacobs (2007), are oriented towards the production of alternative representations. Because media products become part of our everyday environments and since the internet develops hand in hand with the porn industry (Paasonen, 2010), issues of representation and interpretation are less pertinent in processes of mediation (Lash and Lury, 2007). Accordingly, my primary concern here is not with the representation of genderqueer bodies in a new medium - the internet in the web 2.0era – but with mediation as a process drastically altering space, connections, bodies and politics.

Firstly then, I engage with the political projects proposed by postporn networks and the centrality of networked media in these projects. Such an examination helps

determine how models of political engagement, internet technologies and sexual cultures inter-relate. In particular, by focusing on networks that generate and distribute pornographic material as part of a specifically queer and feminist politics, the chapter registers a shift of focus amongst these activists, from notions of representation to those of connection and encounters. Secondly, I concentrate on the websites of *Nofauxxx*, *FurryGirl*, Anna Span and Petra Joy, which are women-owned alternative commercial porn production companies, incorporating sexual and feminist politics in some way. My discourse analysis of the websites addresses what labouring means in this case and identifies the ways in which queer and feminist sexual politics become themselves branded, commodified, material objects in online porn culture. The emphasis in this case is on understandings of authenticity, particularly "real" bodies and queer visibility.

This discussion raises important questions about the body, not as a cultural product or a representation, but as a materiality in postporn understandings and practices. The task here is to explore theoretical approaches which re-introduce the body as life, emotion and flesh in the digitally mediated environment. One fruitful way of thinking about material bodies, porn production and internet technologies, is through the concepts of affect and labour. As I elaborate in the following sections, these two concepts have come together in Marxist driven frameworks of affective and immaterial labour (Lazzarato,1996; Terranova, 2004). Scott Lash and Celia Lury (2007) describe a process in our media-saturated environments whereby the media are becoming things and/or acquire operationality; a process in which they acquire exchange value and use value beyond their initial cultural value. Certainly, pornographic texts have always had exchange value in the online porn industry. However, here my argument is that political values about gender and sexuality are also becoming commodified. My analysis therefore conveys how branded sexualities and personas emerge online.

Additionally, internet porn production can be understood to involve a set of discourses, institutions and practices which regulate the labour of material bodies and the flow of affects, experiences and images; in other words, as a biopolitical practice (see discussion about biopower and biopolitics in Chapter 1, below and again in Chapter 5). As lived and material, porn/ internet labour represent the possibility for individual wealth by porn bloggers and the possibility for exploitation of feminist and

queer activist subjectivities by capital for the production of wealth. On the other hand, this labour can represent more than potential monetary value – it may also correspond to political potential. So the question here is how networking technologies can contribute to sexual and gender equality and what actual forms this labour, this "undetermined capacity" of subjects (Terranova, 2004, p.83), takes. This chapter considers scholarly debates of affective and immaterial labour, most notably gift economy approaches to amateur and realcore practices, to foreground queer online porn as a form of labour and a site of value extraction. I indicate how postporn production and exchange create new sites where certain bodies are regulated with subtle types of control or "soft control" (Terranova, 2004), suitable for the creativity and fluidity that characterises online production.

Secondly, arguments about the body and internet technologies implicate mediation and representation. In queer and women-produced porn platforms, older debates about the body are being re-articulated, particularly in relation to discourses of the "real" (and not the virtual or fantasy) which principally signify different-to-porn-stereotypes. The blurring between "real" and "representation" has had a prominent place in porn studies (Attwood, 2010). The real/virtual binary as it is played out in assumptions of fluidity and performativity in queer studies has, however, been criticised (see Wakeford, 1997; O'Riordan, 2007). In the ensuing analysis, I determine how concerns about the real/virtual, human/machine are today reformulated by postporn producers, who have an acute awareness of both the particularities of networked media environments and, in some case, queer theory. Online alternative queer porn often explicitly, through the parole of its producers, gives reference to earlier media forms and genres as it responds to the ways in which queer bodies have been traditionally represented in pornographic texts. Therefore here we can claim that this reference signifies a process of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin 1999). What is more, remediation predicates new forms of digital porn production as "better", somehow more "human", more political and ultimately un-mediated experience than the one offered by old media forms, as if queer subjects are supposed to exist only in and through these media. Since porn in my analysis seems to be permeated by the logic of making the medium disappear (strangely enough by appealing to "reality"), the concept of "remediation" allows for a rich discussion about the medium specificity of new political subjectivities. Besides, as explained below, it allows an understanding of

authenticity, bodies and networked media beyond issues of user control and governmentality.

A third key debate which relates to bodies and networked technologies revolves around the themes of connectivity, potentiality and emergence. As noted in the introductory chapter to this thesis, there is theoretical tension between affirmative or immanence approaches to politics and networks, mainly informed by Deleuze and Guattari (for example Colebrook, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Terranova, 2004), and transcendence perspectives (Butler, 1991; Laclau, 2001; Dean 2009). Although this thesis is positioned in these debates with a clear argumentation about the significance of strategic political articulations linked to gender and sexuality identity, my research project critically explores questions of political representation and mediation; that is, how these two processes change in our digitally-mediated contemporary lives. Hence, in seeking to empirically map different emerging political realities, in this thesis I also open up to those conceptual possibilities in affirmative positions which are useful for feminist thinking. To enable these possibilities means pulling threads from more than one conceptual field – especially since it is the political implications of the immense productivity of communicative capitalism under debate in these two theoretical positions, rather than this productivity itself.

In this chapter, my selective interweaving aims to approach the question of emergence in scales smaller than in previous chapters (by which I mean smaller than the everyday): that of affect. This is because emotions have the potential for change; they can motivate us to political action (Grotz, 1994; Munt, 2008), but they can also transfer a set of social and cultural meanings to marginalised people, in a way that makes them "sticky" (Ahmed, 2004). In her analysis of how shame is enacted, Sally Munt (2008), for example, has illustrated how class, sexuality and ethnicity (in the face of the intersecting groups that have been read as the poor, the queer and the Irish Catholic), have historically constituted "communities of injury" (p.15). Experiencing social injury and vulnerability, whether this takes the form of hate speech acts or physical loss, is vital for politicisation and I advance this theme in Chapter 5, in relation to reproductive technologies. Here, I only partly engage with Butler's (2004) formulation of vulnerability and political mobilisation - to question how public exposure, vulnerability and pleasure are perceived within porn cultures. Nevertheless, my focus on affect, politics and the digital takes a slightly different conceptual turn in

this chapter: it concerns the way the digital specifically transforms the organisation of political community around shared experience, affect and perception. To put it simply, my question is what difference does digital experience and networked connectivity make in terms of affective relations (in other words, beyond the changes it brings to economy, organisation and everyday life), and what implications can these affective mediated experiences have for feminist and queer politics? Consequently, in my consideration of political thinking and formation beyond rational processes of meaning-making and representation, I find it useful to engage only with one of Brian Massumi's (2002) conceptualisations, in which he places affect and corporeality at the very heart of perception. What is significant here for my research is the distinction between affect (or intensity) and emotion; affect is for Massumi (2002) shared, transient and unexpected, rather than personally "owned", linguistic and logical.

I apply Massumi's (2002) conceptualisation to address how meaning-making and political imagination may emerge in postporn settings (spaces which are intrinsically networked), drawing on a small scale focus group screening of the film *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000). This focus group involved six doctoral researchers aged between 25 and 45; one gay-identified man, one straight-identified man, one straight-identified woman, two bi-identified women, and one queer-identified woman. Although not exhaustive or aiming to be generalised, this focus group analysis functions as a model for thinking about issues of affect and political motivation in encounters between digital technologies and bodies, where porn is the shared discourse. Two interviews with postporn event organisers Katrien Jacobs and Marije Janssen complement the focus group outcomes by providing first-person experiences of large-scale screenings and encounters, as well as the rationale behind organising such spaces in the first place. Of course, the framework of "posthumanist performativity" (Barad, 2007) still informs my exploration in that the digital, porn and feminism (implicated as discourses, physical bodies and technologies) take shape as they come together in these encounters. It is precisely the aspect of affect that I seek to explore in "the material conditions for meaning making" (Barad, 2007, p.335) which *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000) and larger-scale screenings/encounters may create.

As I noted above, the methodological approach of this chapter, aside from the focus group and interviews, includes the textual analysis of online "mission" statements and non-member webpages by selected feminist and gender-queer porn

bloggers and production companies. My investigation identifies a model of engagement offered in these sites which emanates from notions of the queer (that of visibility) and of the digital (that of interactivity). The queer and digital come together here in the ways "reality" and "authenticity" are framed to revolutionise porn practice and production. Yet, I propose that central to the request for being shown and being seen is an understanding of the queer body (most notably the trans-body) as a site of intervention and control. Through the emphasis on queer visibility, revolt and authenticity, sexuality is constructed both as a disciplinary site and a site for value extraction in these platforms – one that creates new needs and desires for politically sensitive lesbian consumers in neoliberal societies. Additionally, this exploration conveys how queer/feminist porn blogger/brands re-stage older debates in sexual politics about pornography in a new mediated environment.

The following section commences with transformations in modes of production and distribution happening today in online environments. I focus on how these changes re-animate porn debates, and result in a re-signification of the pornographic object, whilst I visit various radical sexual politics and art cultures. I then move on to engage with theoretical framings of amateur online porn production, paying particular attention to posthumanist conceptualisations. Turning to my fieldwork, firstly I ask how a series of alt gender-queer and feminist commercial porn producers incorporate a rhetoric of feminist and queer politics in their websites. I challenge the framing of community and politics in relation to notions of authenticity, individual choice and responsibility. Secondly, I note how the request for queer visibility, and for a (post)feminist presence in dominant digital culture invites certain modes of engagement, as well as discussing the complex understandings of embodiment (queer bodies as human, unmediated and real) in digital networks. The chapter then goes on to explore non-commercial settings of porn circulation. By reflecting on a focus-group screening of the science fiction film *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000), I rethink the potential of affective connections in relation to the digital. This analysis informs a broader discussion about the political potential of connections; of ways of viewing; and of vulnerability in dominant digital culture.

a) "Sex wars" and radical sex art

As Chapter 2 of this thesis indicated, porn and sex work are issues that continue to gather multiple forms of engagement and strongly link with debates about what constitutes violence against women. Pornography has historically occupied an important space in feminist and lesbian politics - it has been a site of contestation between different forms of feminism and its implications for women's oppression or empowerment. It is in relation to these debates, and more broadly to the question of the political, that I want in this chapter to examine how re-conceptualisations of porn in conditions of digital media relate to the constitution of contemporary forms of engagement.

In the 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement challenged existing representations of women in film and aimed to produce alternative positive images of older, black women or women in work-related roles (Becker at al, 1981, p. 1). Laura Mulvey's (1975) canonical text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* argued that in narrative film the figure of the woman invoked fear of castration, and for this women characters were symbolically punished. Apart from women in general however, many lesbian cinema producers tried to address lesbian invisibility in conventional cinema by creating a lesbian cinema.[104] For example, British experimental cinematographist Barbara Hammer (1993) combined radical content and form to express lesbian experience.[105] In the 1980s, the polarization between the urge to explore sexual issues versus "shock, righteousness and prohibitiveness" (Ardill and O'Sullivan, 1989, p.128) was intense in feminist and lesbian cultures. At the time, the first SM texts were published in the US. In the UK respectively, the first public screening of the British film *She Must be Seeing Things* (McLaughlin, 1988), stirred considerable discussion[106]. The

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104 For more about how lesbian filmmakers called for a cinema which makes lesbian experience its central project and against feminist film discourses, see (Becker at al, 1981).

105 Barbara Hammer's case is interesting (despite her essentialist clingings to an autonomous lesbian sexuality) because she links abstraction with physical sensations ("deeper emotions"), like pain and perceptual pleasure and sees this as a form of play. This demand for active engagement from the audience and the call to play, is relevant to Shu Lea Cheang's film I.K.U (2000) which asks audiences to engage in a "pussy point of view" and at the same time to discover a plot.

106 She Must be Seeing Things was the first film which explicitly addressed internal tensions in lesbian relationships. Critical engagement with the film moved around heterosexuality and dominant codes of representation. The director Sheila McLaughlin (1993) thought that her work treated lesbian anxieties about heterosexuality in ways similar to the publication *On Our Backs* (Bright, 1984) in New

film and the SM anthology *Coming to Power* (Rose and Samois, 1982) and Joan Nestle's (1988) *A Restricted Country* were thought of as opportunities to revisit lesbian-feminist discourses about sexual issues, beyond censorship and pornography (see Ardill and O'Sullivan, 1989).

Pornography as a genre however, and not just the representation of explicit scenes, was a divisive object. Some feminists were critical of the way it was produced, others were critical of porn itself. For instance, some feminist theorists and producers sought to "generate debate and criticism of sexist images" (Wilson, 1992, p.17), rather than ban explicit content altogether. Lynne Segal (1992) differentiated between fantasy as the setting for desire, and real life to argue that pornography produced by women producers (such as Candida Royalle of *Femme Productions*) could offer symbols alternative to the idealized phallus and therefore empower women's sexuality. Anti-pornography campaigns in the UK not as much of a right-wing moralist issue, as it was an issue that attracted the attention of Labour Party MPs (Assiter and Carol, 1993, p.9).

In the 1990s in the UK and US, queer politics placed sexuality as the primary site of oppression rather than gender. At this time, various media texts and artists pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in lesbian and gay communities as well as in feminist cultures. Photographers Della Grace (later Del Lagrace Volcano) and Tessa Boffin published sexually explicit photography and stories, including SM and butch/femme themes, in the magazines *Quim* ("for dykes of all sexual persuasions")[107] and *Serious Pleasure,* at a time when display of pornographic material was restricted to licensed shops (Healey, 1996). Volcano (1991) documented the dyke-culture, framing it as underground, and contributed to a production of "radical anti-gender narratives" (Armstrong, 1999, np). Other expressions of the queer art scene were Suzie Krueger's Clit-Club[108] and the first London drag-king Club Naive[109]. Volcano's photography offered

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York. Certain scenes, like for instance Agatha's visit to a sex shop (gauging the possibility of buying a dildo), stood as a dramatisation of the debates which evolved within lesbian communities at the time, namely around sex-positive attitudes and SM as opposed to "vanilla" sex (Quimby,1995). McLaughlin attempted to find a new language of dealing with heterosexuality, by dealing with the fantasy of having sex with men (See Butler, 1993).

107 *Quim,* edited by Sophie Moorcock and Lulu Belliveau, was a forum for artists of the avant-garde scene where, according to Armstrong (1999), for the first time "lesbians and female sex-adventurers could experiment and play freely without being exposed to the straight gaze".

108 A fetish dyke club-mainly leatherwear, featuring an alternative *cabaret* with a short sexual performance where the artists would use hard-core techniques, like real bodily fluids (Armstrong, 1999).

109 See also the feature film *Dandy Dust* (Scheirl, 1998), bringing together sexual club performance spaces and cyborg fantasy. This is an experimental film which involves the character Dandy Dust who is a "split-personality cyborg of fluid gender" (BFI Mediateque, 2011).

a challenge to some of the prevailing politics of feminism in the sense that, as Reina Lewis noted,

> SM is not politically correct in many circles (and indeed SM sees its job as being to challenge the hegemony of feminist moralities) and is often opposed to the critical activity of feminist theorists (1994, p.90).

As I point out next, from these representations of London's dyke-culture in the 1990s, to contemporary radical sex performance and online writing, the framing of sexual issues and the relationship between art and the porn industry appears to have changed significantly.

b) Posthumanism and postporn politics

Today, in the 21st century, there is an abundance of porn-related production, including radical sex weblogs and production companies run by women. Moreover, the direct involvement in the porn industry of women who are in some way informed by feminism means that the focus of previous debates has also shifted as have old divisions between forms of material. This abundance makes it difficult to think of any single production as a political event – in the sense of a discontinuity around which substantial political activity and competing articulations gather, as the first SM publications did in the 1980s, or Grace's material did in the 1990s. I elaborate this point later, and suggest that the political potential of contemporary porn-related circulation is found not in its "shock value", or representation, but largely in its invitation to certain ways of viewing. I refer to these potentials and how they may be realized in terms of "affective intensities".

Radical sex art nowadays, broadly thought of as an expression of a "postporn" movement, takes both the form of a direct critique of mainstream, commercial pornography and of pornographic practice. For example, Della Grace appeared in photographs and also provided audio narratives which accompany the models and their photographs. I use the term "postporn" throughout this chapter to broadly describe art and porn production that comments on the exploitative conditions of

pornography. I do not differentiate between art performance, gender-queer porn, and porn produced by women as I aim to describe an era of practices, co-produced within digital visual culture. Performances by Annie Sprinkle,[110] for instance, have been interpreted as reclaiming control over the sexualised body (Schneider, 1997). There is significant traffic between the academy (feminism and queer studies), artporn, sex weblogs, online amateur porn networks and commercial porn. Although, largely, postporn conferences happen in academic or art spaces, they are increasingly organised in conjunction with commercial porn in mind, as is the case with Berlin PornFilm Festival. Other expressions of this movement include weblogs, especially those of US based bloggers who, in some cases, have worked in the sex industry and consider themselves to be sex educators. For example, Violet Blue[111] named her weblog *Open Source Sex* (*tinynibbles.com*), with allegedly 4 million readers a month, "for the intersection of technology and sex, and the free-flowing information exchange of the open source software movement" (Violet Blue About Me, 2011). "Postporn" in this case thus refers both to an earlier era of pornographic cultural production (the porn industry of the 1980s/1990s), but it importantly makes a case for the altered ways of understanding the body, technology and "the human".

Concepts of posthumanism seem to develop alongside postporn performance and politics. To be sure, discourses of posthumanism/posthumanist emerge from various theoretical fields, including the humanities and feminist STS. For instance, Rosi Braidotti (2008, p.178) uses the term "posthuman" in order to contest the phallogocentric, white, male, property owning and standard-language speaking citizen, which is connoted by the name "human". In the same volume, *Bits of Life: Feminism at the intersections of media, bioscience and technology*, Karen Barad (2008, pp. 172-173) defines posthumanism as "a commitment to accounting for the boundary practices through which the 'human' and its others are differentially constituted" - rather than an account of the human as "he". On the other hand, in the collection *PostPornPolitics* (Stuttgen, 2009), where texts originate from a postporn symposium in Berlin with the same name, the engagement with posthumanism is largely about the body and

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110 In *Public Cervix Announcement*, audience were invited to look at the performer's vagina using a flash light (See Sprinkle, 1998).

111 She has been named *Wired*'s "Faces of Innovation" and interviewed,, in between others, at *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She has also published *The Smart Girl's Guide to Porn* and given lectures at UC Berkeley.

technologies as extensions of the body. Hence, Lee Edelman (2009) understands queer to be opposite to the very concept of "the human" in liberal democracies, in the sense that queer is the "structural embodiment of resistance to normativity" (p.35). For Edelman (through an engagement with Alain Badiou), queer porn is a posthuman *event*, around which (and in which) social order and unified identity are disrupted. Katja Diefenbach (2009) also makes a case for posthumanism and postporn politics as interruptions, by arguing that "the political cannot be substantialised in something subjective, human, or living" (p.4). Diefenbach is also critical of Beatrice Preciado's *Contrasexual Manifesto* and its fetishism of the dildo and non-reproductive organs. Preciado's Manifesto has a cult status, not only in this collection, but widely in queer performance cultures around Europe (Total Art Journal, 2011). It advocates the use of dildos, as non-reproductive sexual organs, through a series of exercises that aim to "resist the normative production of the body and its pleasures" (Total Art Journal, 2011, p.2).

So postporn as a movement engages in various ways with posthumanism – but importantly makes a case about the politics of events or situations and the contingency of unpredictable connections. It should thus come as no surprise that anthologies and essay collections theorising postporn and netporn stem out of face-to-face conferences and meetings[112], the conditions of which the focus-group screening of this research tried to recreate. Katrien Jacobs has framed the organising of 'Porn Ar(t)ound the World Festival', and other postporn events more generally, around Hakim Bey's (1991) early vision of *Temporarily Autonomous Zones* - which can be loosely understood as utopian structureless sites where people meet and try out economical and sensual alternatives to capitalism (See also Lovink, 1992; Jacobs, n.d). As one of the 'C'lick Me' conference organisers, Marije Janssen noted in our email interview on the 26th of April 2010, artists and participants in radical sex workshops share concerns about how "to sustain, control the body or force/morph the body". They use their own bodies and

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112 For example, such events are the 2005 conference *The Art and Politics of Netporn* and the 2007 *C'lick Me* festival, both in Amsterdam (See Jacobs, 2005; 2007). Also the *Vivo Arts School for Transgenic Aesthetics Ltd*, the *Berlin Porn Festival*, the *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* in KCNona, Mechelen, Belgium, *Artivistic* in Montreal, and *Arse Electronika* in San Franscisco. Other central events are *Impakt Festival Utrecht*, 2006 and 2008, *Post Porn Politics Symposium,* Berlin, October 2006, *Pinched Festival,* Amsterdam, June 2008, *Ladyfest* Dusseldorf, August 2008, *Rated X Festival* Amsterdam, January 2009, *Stoute Dromen* (Belgian feminist) Festival Antwerp, October 2009, *TurnOn Artivistic Festival,* Montreal, October 2009, *Viva la Vivo,* Amsterdam, November 2009.

bodily material as sites of intervention. For Janssen (2010), the encounters of BDSM-pornographers, like WARBEAR of 'Phag Off', and bio-artists like Kira O'Reilly constitute attempts to challenge disembodied learning and networking. For example, Kira O'Reilly employs performance, video and installation to consider the body as a site for narrative threads of the personal, sexual, social and political. Her work *inthewrongplaceness*, for instance was a four-hour session with the artist lying and moving naked across the carpet with a dead pig. The overlap of pleasure, homoeroticism and suffering also are prevalent in the work of live artists Ron Athey, Franco B, Orlan and Stelarc where bodies are the site of technological intervention. Although such performances cannot be considered as explicitly radical sex activism, they create situations in which both human and non-human bodies are questioned. Being at a specific time and place with certain people enables the redefinition of such performances as pleasurable or obscene, art or porn. We can thus think of such affective encounters and their potential not in terms of content as such, but in terms of connectedness.

My argument in this chapter is that dominant digital culture builds on anxieties about what constitutes humanity in sites where authenticity and individuality can no longer be maintained. In this thesis, another expression of such anxieties is the vulnerability felt by the feminist networks mapped around the event of the 'Feminism in London 2009' conference (see Chapter 2) and the reterritorialisation tendencies of queer formations in Brighton (See Chapter 3). I return to non-commercial postporn assemblages in my empirical analysis and indicate how, in attempting to organise affectively, they signify responses to dominant digital culture. These spaces have, however, developed not only in opposition to heteronormative ideas about sexuality, and negotiations of the role of nonhumans in acquiring pleasure; they are also negotiations of embodiment in online networks and informational capitalism, not least since, in Western culture, information is largely thought as immaterial (Hayles, 1999). The fantasy of erasing the reproductive body in postporn networks seems to correspond with the idea of disembodied information. However, the body is re-introduced in ways that undermine this binary construction, particularly with the prosthesis of mechanical parts and artificial organs, that do not overwrite the biological body but construct a hybridised machine-body. We can thus think of postporn networks as spaces where the intersections between the biological and the digital are negotiated. In this chapter, I explore this idea, and in Chapter 5, I return to further

develop it through an engagement with the "biodigital" (O'Riordan, 2010) in relation to reproductive politics.

c) "Porn 2.0", affective labour and gift economies

Ways of thinking about bodies and about the spaces or ecologies these bodies occupy are significantly influenced by changes in porn production, distribution and reception. Before turning to my empirical examination of porn production companies, it is thus necessary to point out how both online and offline queer postporn "events" can create economic and other kinds of value. Historically different practices and sets of arguments relating to porn have emerged alongside the development of media technologies and forms of distribution (Attwood, 2009; Paasonen, 2007; Williams, 2004). Thus, in the 1970s, film-based pornographic material became increasingly available due to the proliferation of VCR format technologies and the consequent drops in the cost of producing porn (Williams, 1989). Today, the conditions offered online are favourable both for small ventures and amateurs, and for larger companies. E-commerce appeals to new entrants due to low entry costs while it constitutes a safe environment for exhibitionism (Cronin & Davenport, 2001). Additionally, the diversity of distribution channels offered online allows adult entertainment companies to sidestep some of the legal and sociocultural constraints that are related to traditional markets, such as exporting to countries with different regulations.

The internet, from its early days to recent "web 2.0" technologies,[113] significantly transforms media economies in terms of content generation and distribution (Paasonen, 2010). Growing technological convergence has made it possible for companies to distribute pornographic material in different formats, online and offline (Paasonen and Nikunen, 2007). In the 1990s, slash[114] fandom cultures moving from VCR technology to the internet were enthusiastic about the possibilities for sharing porn material (Penley, 1997, pp.115-116). Today, new claims are being made about web 2.0

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113 "Web 2.0" is a term which usually refers to wikis, social networking platforms, weblogs and other user generated content. It is however not unproblematic. As Caroline Bassett (2008) has argued, it is both a descriptive and a performative model, in the sense that it guides certain ways of mapping contemporary convergence.

114 "Slash" is a fiction genre that depicts same-sex romantic or sexual relationships between fictional characters, for example from *Star Trek* (see for example the website *slashfic.org*)

and its potential for democratisation and "hactivism"[115] (for instance, Jacobs, 2007; Slayden, 2010). Katrien Jacobs (2007) thus describes the exchange of links and pornographic content online using a "gift paradigm." Using George Bataille's ideas to understand the excess and surplus that these "gifts" among users make, Jacobs argues that excess does not only concern the amount of texts that are being produced, but also the "morality of the mainstream viewer" (Jacobs, 2007, p.57). She further argues that home-made porn production, amateur and peer-to-peer (P2P) porn exchanges constitute activist practices and create non-commercial counter sub-cultures (Jacobs, 2007, p.49). Accordingly, David Slayden (2010) traces pornographic commercial production alongside advancements in technologies like 3G, DVD and web 2.0 and how these developments consequently make the internet accessible to amateur porn producers. For Slayden, the proliferation of user-generated and alternative porn[116] constitutes a field where consumer tastes and demands change too quickly for the commercial porn industry to catch up with and, in this sense, signals a democratising "power of consumers" (2010, p.66).

However, such approaches do not take into account the reliance of late capitalism on the extraction of value for "free" and "affective" labour (Terranova, 2004). In this chapter, I use the term *"affective labour"* to broadly describe the unpaid investment of time, voluntary work and connections of users[117]. This understanding builds on Tiziana Terranova's (2004) theorisation of the role of user labour in new information economies – which itself stems from the Italian Autonomist Marxist tradition (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996). In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2000) used the term "affective labour" as a new tool for historical materialist analysis and to describe intensities, emotions, internalised feelings and the production of meanings[118].

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115 Hactivism is "hacking for a political cause [...] a policy of hacking, phreaking or creating technology to achieve a political or social goal" (metac0m, 2003).

116 He uses "Porn 2.0" (2010, p.55) to refer to user sites like Xtube and YouPorn.

117 "Immaterial labour" is additionally being used by Mauricio Lazzarato (1996) who examines how working to produce informational commodities is spread across classes. To be sure, new forms of gendered and sexualised labour, like unpaid domestic work done by women, have been revisited in recent feminist scholarship. This work attends to emerging global inequalities recorded in the expansion of the care sector for instance (Fortunati 2007; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003), whereas others have focused on reproductive labour (See Chapter 5 of this thesis for a relevant discussion.

118 Many scholars have been critical of neo-Marxist (often also referred to as "post-operatist") economic theories (Weeks, 2007) and have commented on Negri and Hardt's renunciation of empirical research (Atzert, 2006).

What Terranova additionally offers is a link between the unpaid technocultural production of user content with contemporary capitalism. According to her framework, digital economy[119] channels new types of collective labour that have developed due to the expansion of cultural industries. "Free labour" is thus the

> [e]xcessive activity that makes the [i]nternet a thriving and hyperactive medium […] - a feature of the cultural industry at large, and an important, yet unacknowledged, source of value in advanced capitalist societies (Terranova, 2004, p.73).

The creation of online communities and content is one of the ways this type of labour manifests. Terranova's (2004) critique of "gift-economy" paradigms and open source communities additionally points out how such phenomena do not signal the "re-emergence of communism within the cutting edge of the economy" (p. 77) .[120] Indeed, online commercial porn sites today (like *SuicideGirls.com*) incorporate gift values to make profit. Recently, empirical projects studying social networking websites, like *Myspace* (Cote and Pybus, 2007), and netporn amateur production in web 2.0 platforms (Mowlabocus, 2010; Paasonen, 2010) have attended to these new forms of labour. In particular, by analysing *Xtube*, Sharif Mowlabocus (2010) highlighted the formation of subjectivities through these labouring practices online. So it appears that gift economy approaches to amateur and realcore practices accentuate the autonomy of exchange cultures and disregard the association of such cultures (and freeware/shareware strategies of companies) with the economic thriving of capitalism as a whole. Additionally, as suggested in Chapter 2, for women's networks the discursive practices of open and networked (or horizontal, non-hierarchical) connectivity transform organisational and communicative routines and consequently shape feminist identities.

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119 "Digital economy" broadly refers to the emergence of computer networks, informational economies beyond the internet, and forms of labour which have developed in relation to the expansion of cultural industries (Terranova, 2004, p.79).

120 Terranova analyses gift economies in an engagement with Richard Barbook (1999), who first coined the term. He argued that "in the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas" (Barbook, 1999 in Terranova, 2004, p. 76).

As increasingly online networks, both commercial sites and amateur ones, engage in queer, feminist, "postporn" politics of some form, it is imperative to address the question of what politicisation means in this context. This is because amateur porn with an activist disposition and commercial production with a feminist component alike operate within dominant digital culture. I next analyse these encounters between network, feminist, queer politics and porn in digital culture.

II. "Real" bodies and the making of scarcity/abundance in commercial porn

To reiterate, my question is how we can think about gender-queer and women's bodies in digital porn culture as mediations of social meanings about queer and feminist. What kinds of publics are forming around this mediation and what forms of political participation are enabled? In the next two sections, I first draw on commercial areas and discursive practices that I understand to constitute disciplinary sites, before moving to non-commercial sites and their political potential as productive, enabling, affective intensities.

a) Gender-queer online porn production companies: *Nofauxxx.com* and *FurryGirl*

Here, I examine websites of queer and women-owned commercial porn production companies which incorporate sexual and feminist politics in some way. My analysis concentrates on understandings of authenticity, interactivity and queer visibility; and how these understandings are part of a process that makes scarcity/abundance in digital networks. I suggest that the making of scarcity and abundance is a regulatory discursive practice (the material conditions for making meaning) central in dominant digital culture. Understandings of authenticity, interactivity and queer visibility legitimise the consumption and distribution of porn in new areas of social life and create new sites for value (economic, cultural and social) extraction. Further, I propose that discourses or "real" bodies re-inscribe information/embodiment binaries.

The websites under scrutiny are those of production companies *nofauxxx.com* (from now on *Nofauxxx*) and *FurryGirl*, two sites from the field of queer alternative porn. I have chosen to concentrate on *Nofauxxx* because in previous writings by

postporn organisers it has been considered as a "business with a sexually correct spin" (emphasis in the original) (Pasquinelli, 2010, p.4) that destabilises gender binaries (Jacobs, 2007). Another reason for focusing on *Nofauxxx* is that, upon my first visit to the website, it struck me that its visual style resembled that of softcore website *Suicidegirls.com*. [121]I hence was interested to see if and how gender-queer websites were a variation of heterosexual generic ones, or how far "queer" was plainly an additional consumer category.

FurryGirl on the other hand stood out for me for different reasons. While most sex weblogs are "geeky" and techno-oriented, *FurryGirl* seemed to target vegan, naturist and eco-friendly audiences. This made it a good place to potentially trace rhetoric other than that of personal empowerment through technologies and sexual expression, since my interest was to identify ways of thinking about politics in collective terms, or to identify links with broader politics of resistance.

Nofauxxx belongs in the growing field of female-to-male (FTM) and gender-queer pornography which generally is thought to involve "a variety of ethnicities, body sizes and cultural expressions, the unifying element being their sexplicit transmasculine content" (Waxman, 2006, p.1). Courtney Trouble, the creator of the *Nofauxxx* company, presents herself as a "queer feminist pornographer/photographer" (2009) and the website features "performers of all genders, sizes, races, sexual orientations". On the front webpage the project announces "alternative girls, hot boys, transfolk, gender queers, and real life couples" (Nofauxxx, 2011).

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121 *Suicidegirls.com* is an allegedly post-feminist production company that claimed to empower women models through their work. Models predominately featured a punk style, piercings and tattoos. It has been reported that 40 models exited the man-owned company due to its misogynistic attitudes (McCabe, 2005). According to a post by Matteo Pasquinelli on the *Netporn-l* mailing list, on the 13th October 2005, there was an interesting culture-jamming action by a model who signed RealSuicideGirl and set up her profile with information from a Palestinian suicide bomber (See Appendix C for the full profile).
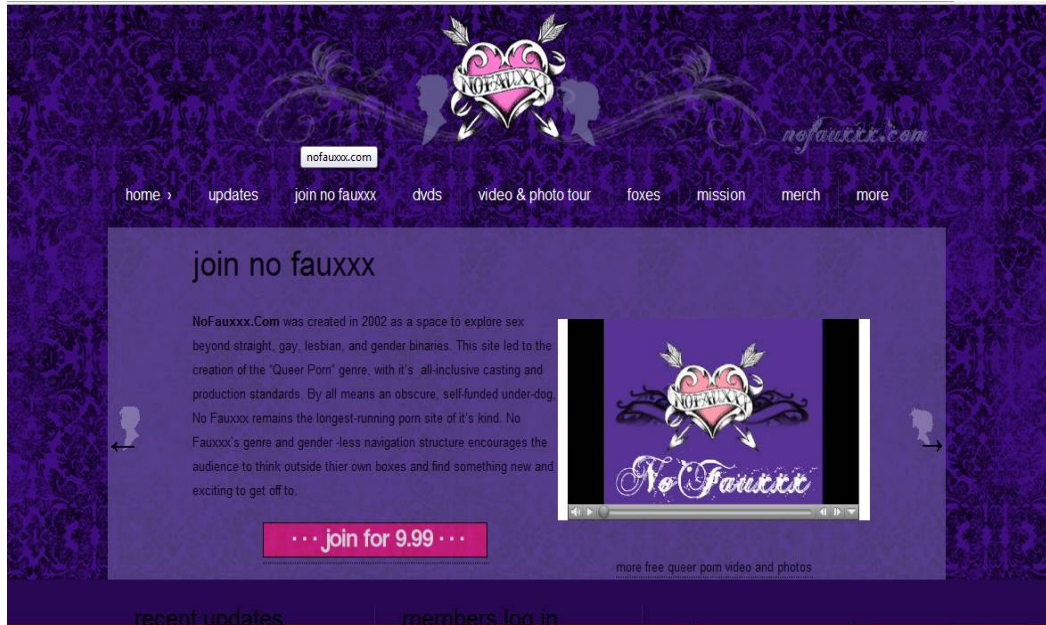
Figure 32: Snapshots from the *NoFauxxx* website.

The company's emphasis on "making porn that's refreshing, real, and authentic" (Nofauxxx, 2011) according to the website, points to the alternative character of the platform with regards to not only what is shown, but also to production practices. In this regard, audiences are considered to be familiar with mainstream porn genre conventions, in terms of iconography, themes, narratives and style (Neale, 2000). The website claims to transgress these generic boundaries, beyond the introduction of new iconographic signifiers. As already mentioned, its visual style is similar to other indie porn sites like *Suicidegirls.com,* which is not specifically gender-queer. It additionally claims to challenge the norms of the pornographic industry (bodies enhanced by plastic surgery, FTM absence, maximum visibility of genitalia and male ejaculation as evidence of pleasure) and adopts a revolutionary rhetoric for that purpose.

A persistent effort to imbue political breadth in the website is apparent in naming the membership link "Join the Revolution."[122] Seeking to contend that becoming a porn producer is emancipatory, in an interview with *Ssspread Magazin*, the owner of *Nofauxxx* provides a personal narrative:

By 2003 I had been working as a phone sex operator full time for a few years

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122 A first time, non-member visitor only has access to taster videos.

and was feeling a burnout associated with being men's fantasies all day. I thought that working on my own fantasies and my own body as a source of fantasy would be a great way to work through those emotions. The photos of my friends and myself ended up being the first incarnation of *NoFauxxx.com* (Trouble cited in *Plato*, 2009, np).

In this narrative, conditions of work characteristic in neoliberalism, for example the blurring between producer and consumer; commercial relationships and friendship; working time with leisure time; are translated specifically for the context of online porn companies. However, what is mainly of interest to me here is the appropriation of revolutionary rhetoric.
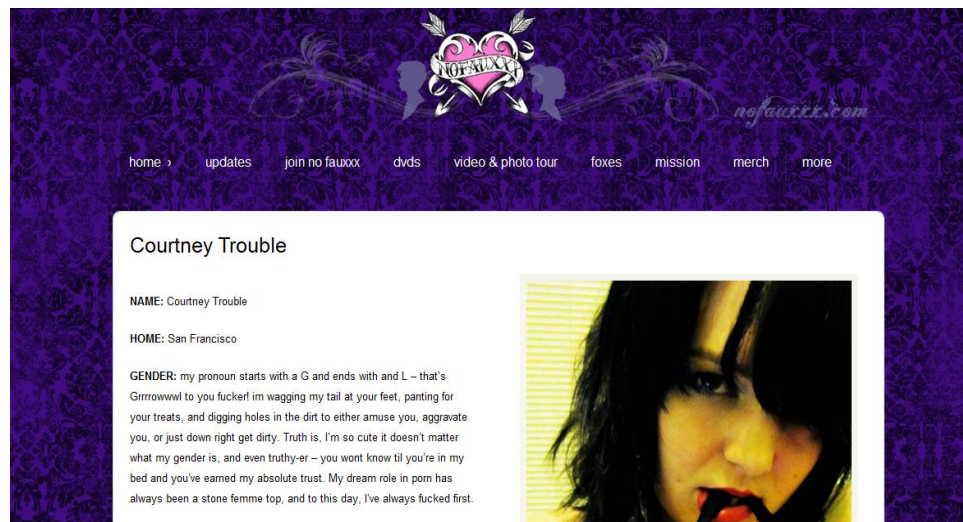
Figure 33: Snapshot from Courtney Trouble's webpage at the *NoFauxxx* website.

The idealisation of queer sexual pleasure as inherently revolutionary often characterises queer studies (Berlant and Warner, 1998), and the internet has often been declared as a queer liberation front: "Breaking into cyberspace parallels breaking out of the closet, and queer space opens up as invitingly as does screen space" (Marchetti, 2001, p.413). As Sarah Ahmed (2004) has noted however, this field has sometimes presented queer social life as uncharted territories, in ways reminiscent of the pleasures of colonialism. Secondly, popular myths about the internet and its history, namely as an information system built as part of the Cold War (Rheingold, 1994) have a performative force (Bassett, 2007, p.138). Indeed the way *Nofauxxx*, in its

mission pages, demonstrates its all-inclusive casting attitude tempts audiences to glimpse into unknown bodies and receive exotic pleasures:

> We draw from many sources to create a community of varied identities. We do not take gender, size, race, or any other consideration into consideration when choosing our models. We do not have quotas or any ideals about what a porn star should look like. Additionally, we do not separate the girls from the boys on our site, as many of our models fall somewhere in between (Nofauxxx: Mission, 2011).

What then *Nofauxxx* presents as proof of authenticity, and a political project of including marginalised sexual and "race" identities, in my view performatively produces these identities and, at the same time, legitimises them as pornographic objects.

Arguably, this revolution rhetoric reflects a desire on the part of the website to expand visibility of sexual practices and queer desire in public realms. Although *Nofauxxx* and other websites analysed here try to establish themselves on the internet as economic entities, *Nofauxxx* in particular also produces counter-spaces and autonomous zones. Other commercial porn producers who have entered the internet generally, have attempted to destigmatise the pornographic market (Cronin and Davenport, 2001). *Nofauxxx* seeks to denounce low-value connotations of porn by additionally addressing audiences who perceive porn as having cultural and political value. For example, in the 'About me' page of Trouble's personal website it is noted:

> She has successfully mixed her lo-fi , do-it-yourself indie-art aesthetic with an accessible, understandable, yet female-forward porn formula that the average porn consumer (whoever that is!) as well as the subversive, political, and inquisitive crowd can enjoy (Trouble, 2009, np).

Figure 34: Snapshot from Courtney Trouble's website.

In this account, "the subversive, political, and inquisitive crowd" is the ideal audience of non-normative representations. Insisting on the "real" and political character of the production, Courtney Trouble here also essentially refers to a move from lesbian sex productions to FTM, or in her words, what "queer folk" like and do. From this narration, it also emerges that Trouble promotes the company as an active part of a queer community whose lifestyle includes queer and trans-politics (such as the Brighton formations studied in Chapter 3). In other words she creates a niche different to that of the lesbian and gay mainstream consumer.

> When I started *NoFauxxx.Com*, one of my main goals was to create an all-inclusive community, where anyone would feel comfortable expressing their desires through film (Trouble, in Plato, 2009).

The recurrent emphasis on inclusivity, expression, participation and experimentation can be thought to signal a broader characteristic of digital media – that of "interactivity". "Interactivity" has been theorised as a model of engagement and citizenship in digital media environments, rather than a property of the digital media artefact or a possibility offered by the technology (O'Riordan 2010, pp. 16-18).

In this sense, a dominant digital culture can be thought to invite certain modes of "creative" labour and interactivity and at the same time extract profit, and offer empowerment to users and audiences.

To be sure, the interactive elements of the pornographic text and the mixing of cultural forms in queer online porn sites shape practices of exchange between users. New media is a "remix" of earlier cultural forms and software conventions, particularly interface (Manovich, 2001). One example is the way new media "image maps" still consist of representations (images) but also include interactive hyperlink fields. These kinds of differences in porn interface modalities, like P2P for example, allow for interactions different to earlier ones (which consisted mainly of downloading static, non-interactional web images). However, thinking critically through "interactivity" elucidates the interests at stake in the address of *Nofauxxx* towards audiences, but also in its own materialisation. "Queer folk", the "political" and "inquisitive crowd" are, by the website under examination, encouraged to interact as niche consumers. At the same time, we can understand *NoFauxxx* itself to be an expression of an interactive mode of engagement with digital media.

Stylistically more elaborate than *NoFauxxx*, the website *VegPorn: Titillating Tofu Eaters* and other sites by *FurryGirl*[123] are examples of emergent subjectivities which integrate feminist, neoliberal and dominant digital culture values. *FurryGirl* is part of a network of alternative netporn producers like *Anna The Nerd* and sex-columnists and bloggers like Audacia Ray of *Waking Vixen*, Violet Blue of *Open source sex* and Melissa Gira Grant of *sexerati*. They combine "geeky" identities (they talk about the internet and new media technologies) with sexual politics, feminist politics and porn production. Key in the branding of the *FurryGirl* website is how the producer is "an amateur gal with a full bush, fuzzy legs, and hairy pits" who runs a "homemade porn site" (FurryGirl, 2011). Yet, she also keeps a sexual politics blog at *Feminisnt.com*.

A pornographer, sex worker, atheist, and former "sex-positive feminist" who grew tired of trying to shoehorn my life into a feminist analysis. I have liberated myself from women's liberation, and it feels glorious. I'm now sharing my observations as a politically-minded smut peddler, ethical slut, and staunch

123 Other sites by *FurryGirl* include *Cocksexual: Strapons, EroticRed: Menstruation* and the store *The Sensual Vegan.*

skeptic. I despise people who project their insecurities onto others, or force sex workers into only two roles: helpless victims and evil patriarchy-colluders (Feminisnt, 2009).

This statement seems to respond to feminism that opposes sex-work (either as porn, or as prostitution) and in a way demotes feminism to its anti-porn and anti-prostitution strand. The reduction comes perhaps as no surprise, since as was indicated in the chapter about 'Feminism in London 2009', these seem to be dominant voices of contemporary feminism today - in the sense that they are the most prominent in mainstream media and culture.

Feminisnt

I'm an atheist who's been a full-time pornographer and sex worker for over 8 years. I'm a former "sex-positive feminist" who tired of trying to shoehorn my reality into a useless ideology like a pair of ill-fitting high heels. I oppose the modern feminist idea that women are inherently victims, brainwashed by "the patriarchy," and in need of a matriarchy to dictate the correct ways for us to behave. I operate SWAAY.org, the only American sex workers' rights project aimed at doing public outreach. I want to prove that supporting sex workers' rights is not just a cause for feminist hipsters, leftists, and sex radicals. My philosophy is informed primarily by Patrick Swayze in Roadhouse: "I want you to be nice until it's time to not be nice."

Frequent Addressed Accusation: "Why not work to make feminism better?"

by Furry Girl   08.02.11

I was catching up on online reading last weekend, and one of the links I'd saved from a couple of months ago was this piece on a feminist blog, pearl-clutching over Dr Brooke Magnanti (aka Belle de Jour) saying that she is no longer a feminist in the press materials announcing her new book, Sexonomics. Like me, Brooke is not a feminist, though that's hardly news for readers of either of us.

The feminist blog lobbed two pieces of standard-issue criticism over Magnanti's nonfeminism, which reminded me of things people say to me. (Though, no doubt less often, since she is way more famous than I am.) Here are two of my own rebuttals to the things feminists say to whine about me not being a feminist.

> It's disappointing that despite the open opinions within feminism, Magnanti feels ostracized from the community and would rather renounce the name than contribute to debate as a proud member.

I am constantly pestered by well-meaning, bright-eyed feminists as to why I don't just *stick around and work to change feminism from within*. They are quick to acknowledge that yes, I have valid criticism of feminism, but surely, it would only be declaring defeat for me to give up now, as though I "threw it all away" in an angry drunken moment where I wasn't thinking clearly. I could be such a productive an valuable member of the community! They point out all the things I have in common with most feminist thought: I believe in things like a woman's right to vote, to abortion access, to own property, and to not be raped to

Furry Girl: a good time not yet had by all.

▷ About me / some FAQ
▷ Email (remove extra @ signs)
▷ Introduction to Feminisnt.com
▷ Journalist? Read before emailing

Activism

Figure 35: Snapshot from FurryGirls's *Feminisnt* website.

Similarly to *Noofauxxx.com*, FurryGirl's *VegPorn* website makes a case for the variety of human bodies it features. It states that it is:

[t]he first and only adult site made by and for plant-eaters! This is a very unique

site in that the theme isn't based on size, age, weight, color, etc, it's based on lifestyle/ethical choices (VegPorn, 2009).

Figure 36: Snapshot from FurryGirls's *VegPorn* website.

I would like to make a case for this pursuit of variety, diversity, authenticity, abundance of choices and products and argue that it is part of a process of making artificial scarcity*,* which consequently commodifies these bodies. Firstly, the making of scarcity today is linked to the extraction of natural resources, and the global environmental distortions and inequalities in capital distribution caused by this extraction (Sassen, 2011). Thus the concept of scarcity explains how capitalism creates the preconditions for satisfying new needs and, in the interim, legitimises certain practices. The concepts of scarcity (and abundance) relates to the needs and the satisfaction of those needs in a given society. In Marxist theory, capitalist economic process artificially reproduces scarcity and at the same time creates needs (See Panayotakis, 2003; Perelman, 1993). In Chapter 5, where I analyse networked publics gathering around the commodification of human eggs, scarcity (both as a rhetoric and a material practice) appears to be linked to the sourcing of eggs from non-Western and working class women.

Secondly, although scarcity is used primarily in connection to raw natural material resources, it is relevant to digital products and their cost in the "creative" industries, not least because of digital replicability. Thus for example, the open source and freeware movement responds to the supply restrictions posed by copyright legislation and comes in direct conflict with intellectual property right holders (Berry, 2008). By building on the premise that code can be infinitely copied, reviewed and altered, it frees programmers from labour.[124] David Berry (2008, p.7) notes how online businesses constantly try to adopt open source modes of working in order to harness user free labour and make easy profit through subscriptions, social networking and so on. To approach open source and freeware practices critically in another way, we could also consider how such practices are integral to what Dean (2009) theorises as the fantasy of digital abundance. The fantasy that informational abundance is democratising, argues Dean (2009), is what drives neoliberal subjects today. I have already noted how revolutionary rhetoric in *Nofauxxx* and *FurryGirl* websites problematically fuse online porn commerce, queer politics and internet myths. When this fantasy of abundance is combined with that of disembodied information (Hayles, 1999), a complex understanding of the (labouring) bodies of sex workers emerges.

By this I mean that there is a complex over-layering of fantasies of "real" and authentic bodies in queer porn websites, through which the human, labouring body oddly vanishes. Discourses of "real" (and not virtual or fantasy) have been principally understood to signify different-to-porn-stereotypes.[125] However, the concept of authenticity*,* which is prevalent in both *Vegporn* and *Nofauxxx*, fundamentally predicates that this kind of porn production is un-mediated, and for this, more "human". The blurring between "real" and "representation" has had a prominent place in porn studies (Attwood, 2010). Here, it seems that additionally digital culture hides its capacity as a medium. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's (1999) model of remediation has persuasively proposed that new(er) media recreate older media forms in a process which they have called "remediation." Remediation involves "immediacy"

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124 For instance, Richard Stallman's GNU Manifesto (1993) explained that "[a]rrangements to make people pay for using a program, including licensing of copies, always incur a tremendous cost to society [...] only a police state can force everyone to obey them.[...] Copying all or parts of a program is as natural to a programmer as breathing, and as productive. It ought to be as free".

125 See Jacobs (2007) for a discussion of the 2001-2004 magazine *Ssspread.com* of Barbara DeGenevieve and *Nofauxxx.com.*

and "hypermediacy." "Immediacy" refers to the logic of making the medium disappear so that the experience from one setting or reality to that of the audience appears unmediated. At the same time, digital cultural texts integrate other multiple texts and create a condition of "hypermediacy" or, as Bolter and Grusin (1999, p.47) put it, "refuse to leave us alone". 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.

We can understand how a process of remediation is taking place in relation to the queer porn undercurrents of "reality" and "authenticity" with reference to earlier media forms and genres. In this sense, a re-signification of the pornographic object operates alongside an invitation for publics to engage as feminist, queer, politically-engaged consumers and audiences. This means that the notion of remediation calls into question how queer bodies have been represented in previous media texts. As Eugene Thacker (2004) observed in an engagement with Bolter and Grusin, "remediation" implies the capability of digital forms to encode and "transcode" (to use a term by Lev Manovich) other media objects. For Thacker, the question was how far the human body can be remediated. If it is the communication of senses and desires that digital porn culture seeks to undertake, and if, as Bolter and Grusin (1999) argue, the body is already a mediation, what about the queer pornographic body?

I think that authenticity discourses in this case connote that queer pornographic bodies (particularly trans), have some inherently, non-commercial and un-mediated qualities that heterosexual bodies lack. Consider also that there is no cost involved in being a "furry girl with fuzzy legs" (FurryGirl, 2011), like in the example of the *FurryGirl* home-made porn website. Hair is not a limited resource for most people - yet hair on women's bodies, at least in mainstream porn, is not the norm. Because porn is being produced with low cost in digital media today, the discourse of "real" bodies makes alternative queer porn production an economic good. Membership of these sites gives monetary value to things that could be free, for example images of hairy legs - in a market where sex is already a form of labour. In other words, the visibility of "real" bodies integrates free market principles and subsequently makes these products available to middle-class, politically alert, lesbian and gay consumers. At the same time, even though it promises to add transparency into the working conditions and the human experience of being involved in a porn production (adding this way a "human" dimension to what has been thought of as immaterial information), it essentially

accentuates and reinscribes the binary information/embodiment.

In sum, both earlier online environments and web 2.0 porn platforms at large appear as sites of experimentation and as opportunities to construct *brand(ed)* new sexual identities. Queer and feminist porn as cultural productions of political importance have emerged through the discursive structures of queer and "cyber" subjectivity. The incompatibility between embodied actuality and ideal fluid cybersubjectivity has brought up questions around the "authenticity" of the user (Mowlabocus, 2010b). Mowlabocus's work concentrates on gay men's subcultures and argues that digital cultures and offline physical spaces are mutually constitutive.[126] As I have argued however, apart from user control, issues of authenticity in online alternative porn can be more fruitfully thought as forms of labour. I proposed that the prevalence of authenticity and discourses of non-mediation in these sites relates to the economic capital process of making abundance and scarcity, as this is being rearticulated in fears and fantasies of disembodied digital networks – and as it results to the creation of new needs and desires for lesbian and gay consumers in neoliberal societies.

b) Women-owned porn production companies: Anna Span and Petra Joy

I have suggested so far that dominant digital culture creates scarcity by building on anxieties and fantasies of authenticity. I analysed how these anxieties are expressed in discourses of "real" bodies by looking specifically at the websites of gender-queer porn production companies. I emphasised that these sites are structures of dissemination for porn products that legitimise queer visibility. Here, I will continue my analysis of commercial sites, and move on to suggest that scarcity and abundance in dominant digital culture are additionally made through the mobilisation of anxieties of individuality. I will focus on discourses of choice in women-owned porn production companies to explore the model of feminist politics these sites mediate.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, contemporary women-produced

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126 Wakeford's work is the starting point for Mowlabocus (2010b), in understanding queer online and offline spaces as parallel sites. Nina Wakeford (1997) was one of the first internet theorists to problematise claims made about online performativity and symbolic aspects of representation, and bring them closer to the cultural and economic conditions underlying their production. Assumptions of fluidity and performativity which guided queer studies approaches, Wakeford (1997) argued, could not address offline embodied reality (See O'Riordan, 2007 for other discussions of cyberqueer).

porn in the UK has emerged from the sex radicalism of the 1990s queer feminist politics and the changes in the political agenda of lesbian and SM identities. I have chosen to analyse the online presence of new generation directors Anna Span and Petra Joy, the most prominent producers in the UK at this point.[127]

Petra Joy's work belongs in the tradition of US producer Candida Royalle who first made films with camera angles that aimed to praise women and were committed to the she-comes-first axiom (Cicchelli, 2009). To get a sense of Candida Royalle's production scene, consider the example of porn director Venus Hottentot, who tried to appropriate the exploitation of women's bodies. An art school graduate, Venus directed Candida Royalle's first "Femme Chocolat" film, *Afrodite Superstar* (2006). She named herself after Saartje Baartman, known as Hottentot Venus who was exhibited around Europe, during and after her life.[128] Producing films under this name can be seen as perpetuating the objectification of Baartman and black women's sexuality. Nonetheless, according to the director, this was an attempt "to reclaim her sexual voice, and the voice of all of us. Although women of color are over-sexualized in our society, our own voice is absent" (Venus, 2010).
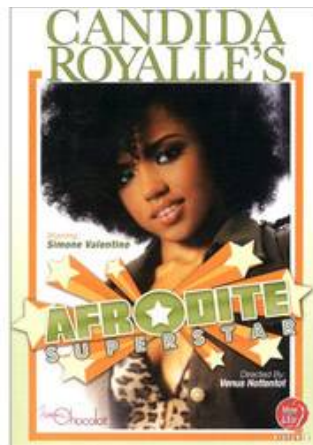
Figure 37: Snapshot from *Afrodite Superstar* (Venus, 2006).

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127 Alongside Swedish director Erika Lust, they featured in Catalina May's (2011) article "Porn made for women, by women", in *The Guardian*. Additionally, Anna Span was a Liberal Democrat candidate for Gravesend in the 2010 general election (See Arrowsmith, 2010).

128 Baartman was a slave exhibited for her labia and buttocks, while her remains (dismembered labia, brain and skeleton) were exposed in museums and are finally being returned to her home land 200 years after Baartman's birth (Verna, 2010).

The legacy of Candida Royal and the emphasis on empowerment through sexuality and voice can also be traced in Petra Joy's website. Joy defines her work as "erotic" rather than pornographic, and states that porn for women is revolutionary. According to her online statement: "[i]t gives women permission to have pleasure. It makes them independent of any sex partners they may have" (Joy, 2009). She notes how she attempts to subvert the image of women's sexuality as homogeneously gentle and romantic. Clearly then what guides Joy's production is primarily the rhetorical re-engineering of the pornographic text as erotic, in order to appeal to women audiences, and secondly, the suggestion that its consumption is empowering.
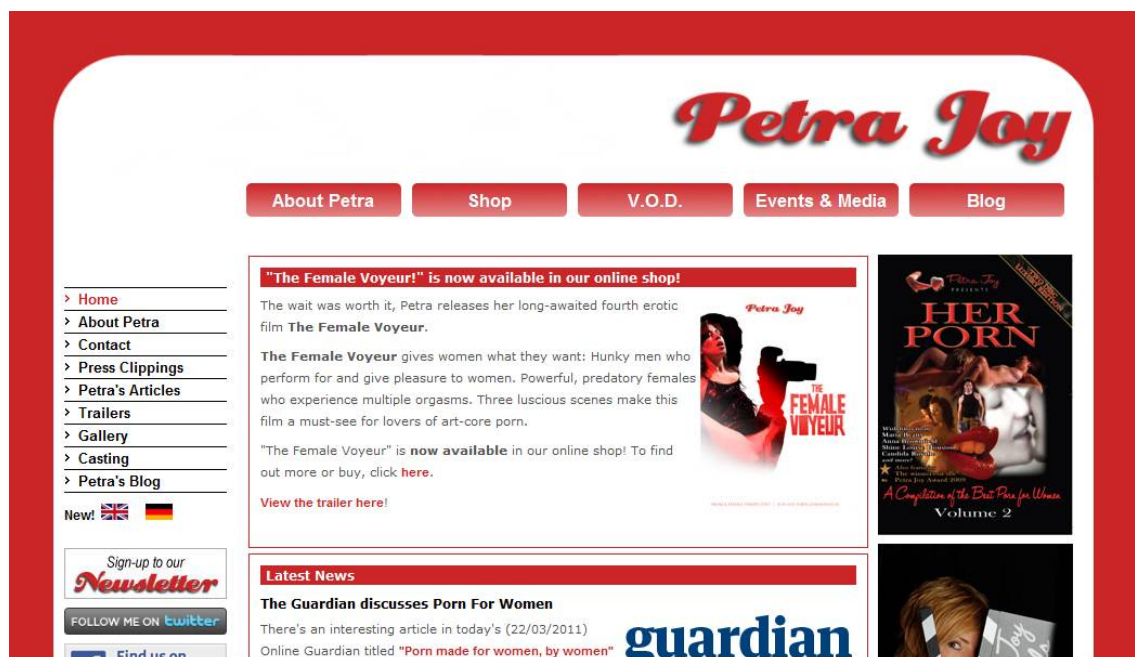
Figure 38: Snapshot from Petra Joy's website.

Joy also organises an award aimed to urge ordinary audiences to produce porn films. In the award website, she notes:

I would like to inspire first time female film-makers to take control, get behind the camera and show erotica – from a female perspective [...] I use pjur[129] [sic] lubricants during my shoots as they enhance the sensual and safe sex experience of my performers. Just like me – pjur focuses on female pleasure. I

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129 "Pjur" is the name of the product, a lubricant.

hope that together we can help to make female fantasies and desires visible –
in a world that up until recently was firmly in male hands (Petra Joy Award,
2009).

Understandably, this statement advertises a product and addresses women as a
consumer category. Aside from claiming that films represent a distinctly woman's
fantasy, Joy also aims to challenge traditional ideas of femininity. For example, in a
Youtube channel interview, Joy described her imagined audience and the settings in
which they consume her films: with a favourite sex toy and a glass of wine, the films,
according to the producer, provide the missing visual stimulation - so far only provided
by gay men porn (Petra Joy Award Channell, 2009). In this framing of porn, the
distinction between choice and need is blurred, in the same manner that marketing
strategies usually promote other commodities.

Figure 39: Snapshot from Petra Joy Awards website.

Responding to anti-pornography feminist arguments in their weblogs, Span and
Joy speak to an audience with some awareness and sensitivity to these issues. As they

provide statements about how feminism has influenced their work, they claim shared ground and hence legitimacy. For example, Joy notes in the *About Petra* section of her website:

> I agree with the opinion of many feminists that a lot of mainstream porn is degrading to women and glorifies violence. This is the reason why I was active in the anti-porn movement in Germany in the 80's. But these days it is not enough to just be against something. I would like to create alternatives. I do not want to leave the production of sexual images completely in male hands. The time is right for women to reclaim the genre of erotic films and create images that we perceive as sensual, that inspire and excite us, even if they might leave men cold. I choose to work with female performers that the female viewer can identify with (Joy, 2009).

This view, in line with liberal feminism, interestingly locates responsibility for equality with women and their actions. Individual choice and responsibility discourses in Anna Span's statements further show such an alignment with liberalism.

Span as a member of *Feminists Against Censorship*, indeed identifies as feminist. In her production website she states:

> I know enough about the movement to know that it's OK for me to call myself a feminist and for someone who's completely opposed to the work I do to call themself [sic] a feminist, too. It's a broad church (Span, 2009).

The reference to "broad church" potentially works to include all consumer categories. However, what is interesting here is how in Span's weblog about porn industry issues, the emphasis placed on personal achievement and empowerment through porn is part of a wider narrative in which the producer succeeds in a male-dominated industry. For example Span's last entry read: "I have managed to notch up another first for the industry - the first film released in the UK and passed by censors that shows a woman clearly ejaculating" (Span, 2009). In her statement as Liberal Democrat candidate in 2010, she wrote:

I have fought long and hard for women's right to sexual expression and consumption, as well as for freedom of speech. I have long since felt vindicated about my choices back at college and know my pro-sex feminist argument is based on sound principles and logic (Arrowsmith, 2010).

In these narratives of individual success, the passage from anti-porn feminism to porn production appears to be "a moment of clarity" (Span, About Me, 2009). Walking in the London Soho red light district, Span deconstructed her feeling of anger towards masculinist society, where according to Span, women's desires are neglected whereas men's are worthy of attention.

Why shouldn't a woman have the subconscious confidence to know that even if she doesn't personally want to use porn, the world in which she lives recognises that she might want to and has a right to do so? (Span, About Me, 2009).
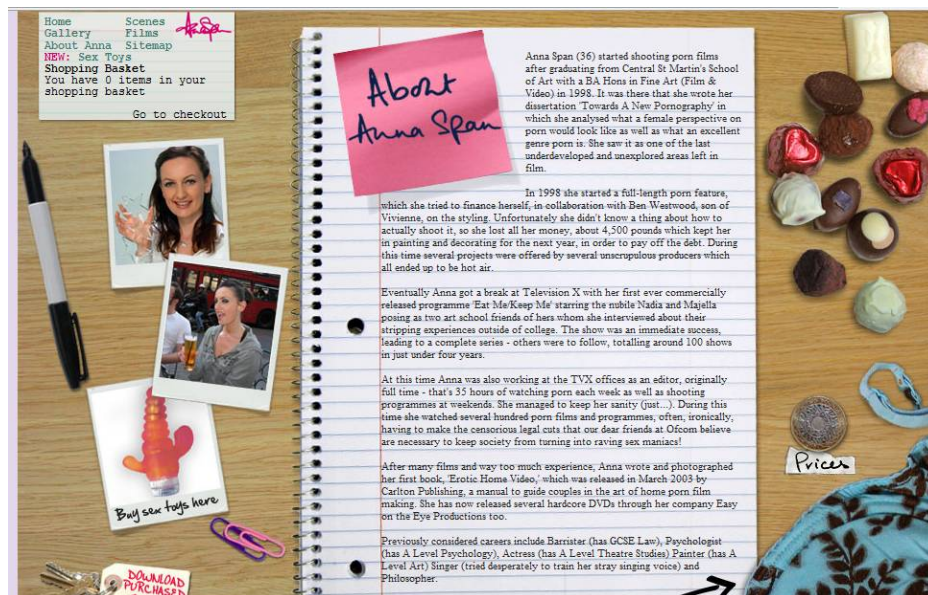

Figure 40: Snapshot from the About Anna Span webpage.

In combination with personal achievement and empowerment, the language of *rights* (to sexual expression) incorporates free-market values with liberal feminist ideas of individual sexual choice and freedom. Similar to other women porn producers who

have entered the industry after 2000, Joy and Span distribute their films in DVD form through the internet. Williams (1989) signalled the broad reach of porn into the traditional female sphere in relation to the VCR revolution. Today, digitization and the subsequent decrease in distribution costs facilitate the increase of small production companies (Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007). Interface modalities, like P2P, shape the practices of exchange between users and they specify to a great extent the structures of dissemination. For example, P2P and social networking signify a conflation between consumer and producer in digital media environments (Cote and Pybus, 2007).

Additionally, the mobility permitted by digital media technologies, like wi-fi and laptops, means that porn can be consumed in spaces that are neither strictly public nor private, for instance internet cafés. In addition, how pornography is being conceptualised within digital markets influences how producers and distributors will position their products, and consequently, the legitimation strategies of this placement (Cronin and Davenport, 2001, p. 287). In my analysis of porn events in the next section, the framing of the pornographic object as art form, academic endeavour, feminist, erotic or queer has direct consequences as to its legitimation. However, the presence of women porn professionals who have adopted neoliberal discourses of freedom of choice and individual responsibility does not necessarily suggest that feminist elements are integrated in the pornographic texts themselves.

Can we think of these production sites as empowering for women or as enabling some sort of political engagement? Both Magnet (2007), in an analysis of *SuicideGirls* and other member-only alt porn websites, and Jacobs (2004) have argued that digital networks are ultimately sites of empowerment. Linda Williams has also argued that porn can provide a space where non-hegemonic representations of desire could emerge (1993, p.262). There are several points to make about the material published in Joy's and Span's porn production websites which challenge this perception. In Span's and Joy's websites, pornographic images are produced for private consumption and in restricted zones (at home), which perpetuates notions of feminisation of private and individualised spheres. In assuming an inherent difference in women's sexuality and perspective, they recycle dominant discourses and eventually point to distinct consumer categories, something which has previously been identified in relation to women internet users in general (Paasonen, 2003). Similarly, Shoshana Magnet (2007) in her analysis of *Suicidegirls.com* also argued that "diversity" marketing practices of

the website do not successfully accommodate critical race feminist ideas. Moreover, the production websites reproduce naturalised gender and sexuality identities. The films (and the production companies themselves) are mainly commercial choices for distinct consumer categories, for example women with a certain political awareness, cultural capital and disposable income.

What is of interest here is the way that the signification of the commercial ventures under examination as feminist not only impacts on their legitimation but also invites certain political identifications. Joy and Span, in their weblogs, *Youtube* channels and websites, address women as feminist consumers. "Feminist" here signals the incorporation of personal empowerment and "choice" practices through consumption. In my analysis of mainstreaming in relation to queer local activism in Chapter 3, I pointed to consumer pleasure as a strategy for activist groups like Queer Nation. In the case of companies, like Joy and Span's production, consumerism is not the means to political ends, but clearly the means to making profit. Hence, in my view, this address of liberation and empowerment invites a depoliticised, *"*feminist*"* consumer public. Since this address does not point to any broader social critique, I think that it lacks potential as a collective political identity, not least because porn is not the sole factor for how sexuality is lived. By this I mean that there are issues about experiencing sexuality in ways other than viewing porn that can constitute loci of a politics of pleasure.

To conclude this analysis of gender-queer and women-produced porn websites, I would like to suggest that discussions about the politics of digital culture need to shift from issues of representation. To be sure, apart from porn theorists, other scholars have framed the generation of content and the quest for pleasure as a form of entitlement and visibility both for women and queers. For example, Sommer has envisioned "counter-bodies to the body of pan-capitalist spectacle" (2002, p. 131) and imagined bodies that can be represented in ways other than commodities. This visibility has been thought to oppose hegemonic views of shame/guilt, or symbolic purification and this way to oppose to the social values of neoliberalism (Seidman, 2001). Nevertheless, Anne Balsamo (1999) has explained how, in visual digital culture, gendering the body is a process of marking the world and the self -"an ideological tug-of-war between competing systems of meaning, which include and in part define the material struggles of physical bodies" (Balsamo, 1999, p.5). In women-produced porn,

the process of constructing gender takes place in prescribing a female perspective and sexuality. Queer online porn on the other hand moves "otherness" to the trans-body. It legitimises queers (and again women) as yet another category that needs management by the market. At the same time it does little to challenge binary gender categories – women's and queer sexuality are still constructed as different, placed outside the realm of the heterosexual family.

This is thus an indication of how the biopolitics of digital visual technologies work through self-surveillance and control of the intimate. Biopolitics here refers to the new subjectivities and liberal "choices" offered, and not to issues of the state and governmentality (Rabinow and Rose, 2006). Contemporary biopolitics[130] can also be thought of as exposing vulnerabilities and creating the need for management (by the market as the ultimate government) (Agamben, 1995; Butler, 2004; Dean, 2010). In the porn websites of queer and sex work activists, the control of digital visual culture is obscured and takes the form of responding to discursive practices of interactivity, participation, authenticity, individual choice and empowerment. Creativity and fluidity of online production is combined with types of control suitable for them, or what Terranova calls "soft control" (2004, p. 117). In sum, it appears that online porn production that mobilises feminist and queer politics of choice needs to be framed as part of a wider global biopolitics, reproductive politics and population control. In Chapter 5, where I look at feminist biopolitical assemblages, I further point to the ways dominant (bio)digital culture develops new sets of constraints and, simultaneously, provides an opportunity for political involvement in ways that are different than deliberative democracy models enunciate.

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130 See Chapter 5 for an elaboration of the concept of biopolitics.

III. "Collective orgasms"[131] and "intellectualised unpleasure"[132]: ways of viewing and affective intensities in non-commercial spaces

I have so far analysed identities and forms of engagement in relation to commercial practices of digital porn production. However, as noted earlier porn activism often builds unconventional networks across commercial, academic and art contexts. So postporn practices manifest sometimes in long-hours of cuddling and kissing workshops or collective weddings, and attract, among in between others, scholars, bloggers, performers, and porn producers. What kinds of politics are enabled by these kinds of non-commercial circulation of cultural texts and around such events? The research account that follows is based on a focus group screening, and the interview accounts of two organisers of porn conferences. At the end of this exploration, I conclude that the political potential of postporn is that it enables collective meaning- making and ways of viewing as a collective body, or what I call "affective intensity".

With the hope to of creating and critically thinking about the challenges posed by screening material that has been claimed to be simultaneously pornographic, political, and queer/feminist within an academic environment, I organised a focus group. The screening emulated the conditions of postporn events in that the members of the group, all Doctoral students at the University of Sussex, were acquainted with the text, previously to the event, and, to a certain extent, consciously engaged with issues of sexual politics. The focus group engaged with Shu Lea Cheang's 2001 film *I.K.U*[133]. *I.K.U.* is a Japanese sci-fi porn film, about a virtual human named I.K.U Coder, developed by the GenomGenome Corporation. The film website provides the synopsis:

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131 Shu Lea Cheang notably commented about *IKU* (2001): "I did not make this film for masturbation. I made it for collective orgasm" (Ting, 2005).

132 I refer here to Laura Mulvey's comment about her article 'Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure': "Not in favour of a reconstructed new pleasure, which cannot exist in the abstract, nor of intellectualised unpleasure, but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film" (1989, p.16).

133 The word "iku" is slang for "having an orgasm" in Japanese.
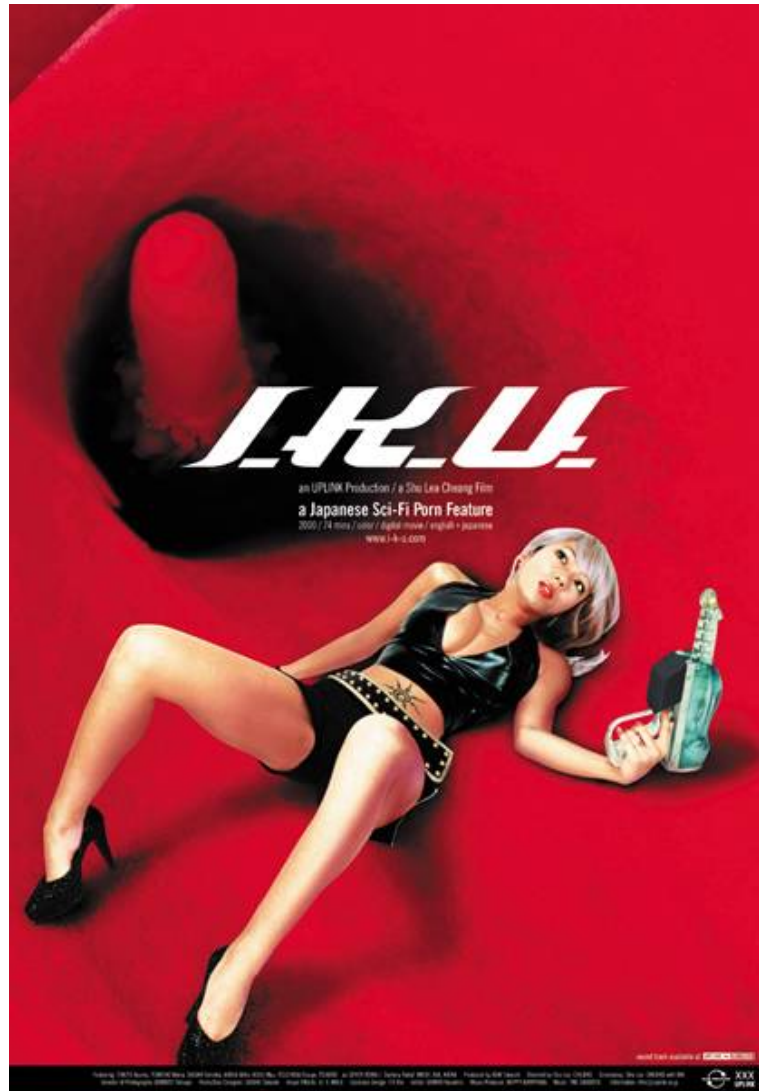
Figure 41: Snapshot from the *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2001) DVD.

The GEN-XXX I.K.U. Coders were superior in their harddrive bodies, and at least equal in insatiability, to the programming engineers who created them. I.K.U Coders were used in the night-world as XXX data hunters, in the orgasmic exploration and sexualization of other couples. After a non-stop sexing journey by a GEN-XXX I.K.U. Coder team in the night-world, Coders were declared fulldata - ready for retrieval. Special data collectors - I.K.U. RUNNER UNITS- had orders to fuck to retrieve, upon detection, any full data I.K.U. Coders. This was not called love, this was called sex (IKU The Movie, 2009).

Figure 42: Snapshot from the *I.K.U.* Website.

The rationale behind using *I.K.U.* in this tentative audience research relates to the inventive ways the text highlights the interchange between ideologies, digital technologies, pleasure and cultural politics. Moreover, Shu Lea Cheang is a multi-media artist exploring themes of trans, postporn, cyberfeminism[134] and *I.K.U.* has caught the attention of scholars from various disciplines. For example, in Eve Oishi's (2007) reading, Cheang's feminism gathers around the concept of the transhuman quality of the body, how it is a site of information extraction. New forms of consumerism offered by the internet also result to seeking pleasure, so commodity culture has for Oishi redefined sexual pleasure. Cheang's cyber-art, including *I.K.U.* (2000), deals with issues of exploitation of physical bodies for erotic pleasure and natural resources, through commercial and technological networks. In this sense it can be considered as anticapitalist and compatible with ecofeminism (Oishi, 2007). From a cyberfeminist perspective, Yvonne Volkart (2002) has argued that sex in *I.K.U.* shapes the cyborg's subjectivity. It embodies digital technologies and dissolves gender dichotomies.

To me, *I.K.U.* is contradictory. It is unclear, for example, how *I.K.U.*, by not showing human bodies *per se* having sex, is different from mainstream male porn or how Cheang's identification as trans- actually transcends both hetero- and

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134 Her net installation works are in the permanent collections of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, NTT[ICC], Tokyo and the Guggenheim Museum: (Bowling Alley, 1995; Buy One Get One, 1997; and Brandon, 1998-1999). Her net installation "Milk at 56KB Bastard TV" and the porn cast call installation "'Fluid"' for Norway Detox festival (2004-2005) explored issues of exploitation of sexual bodies and visibility in digital economies and post AIDS societies.

homonormativity (Sullivan 2001). I agree that the idea of "natural" sexuality is challenged in *I.K.U.*, I am however sceptical as to how far the hardcore pornographic elements of Cheang's work "transform the value of these images from a simple monetary one to other forms of exchange and utility" (Oishi, 2007,p.24). The use of porn conventions in *I.K.U.* has been interpreted as a feminist critique of corporate mainstream porn (Jacobs, 2003). For Jacobs (2003), the 3D digital penis that is shown in the film intentionally depicts women as coders, hence active agents, in contrast to how they are represented in Japanese porn (i.e. forced sex). Seen in this light, the "pussy as matrix"[135] (2003, p.202) is for Jacobs the alternative to male-centred pornography. However, I find interesting how the film pursues themes of extraction and commodification. Orgasms in the film are selected, collected, categorised and transformed into information which can subsequently be sold. Here, Cheang developed a critique of capitalism's ability to modify emotions and sensual responses into data. "The human body in IKU, she argued, is a gigabyte hard drive" (Sullivan, 2000 cited in Oishi 2007, p.30). Cheang's project thus addresses the female body, as the site of information extraction in new biotechnological and digital economies. Issues around digital and bio-material are further explored in the performance piece Milk 2, according to Jacobs (2009), in our interview on the 7th February 2010. Although in *I.K.U.* the critique concerns the commodification of immaterial and intangible labour, like those in arousal and orgasm, the notion of capitalist extraction relates with to feminist biopolitics and reproductive technologies, which are elaborated in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

a) "Should I be aroused by this?" Watching *I.K.U.* and making meaning collectively

Participants in the focus group screening, in contrast to Jacobs' (2003) reading of the film as breaking male-centred pornographic conventions, differentiated between the digital (3D) penis and the "real" human penis. The 3D penis (which in the film is also the female penis), was not decoded as a penis. Participants only identified a penis scene when men had sex with one another. Showing penetration from the "pussy point

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135 The film uses a subjective view, the "pussy point of view", which is deep in people's vaginas.

of view" seemed funny to them and they clearly did not interpret it as empowering or subverting male-centred pornographic conventions.

In fact, a straight man evaluated that the film was violent in its depictions of sex. According to the respondent, the unrealistic depiction of how people make have sex was what constituted *I.K.U.* in accordance with pornographic codes, despite the absence of close-ups. Consequently, the women in the group found that the penetration scenes were violent and heteronormative. Contemplating about the frequency of masturbation and ejaculation scenes, respondents noted how male ejaculation was shown but not a single clitoris. Yet in other respects they described shifts of power between men and women in the film, which, they observed, is not the case were not depicted in straight mainstream porn. Interestingly, the film was not perceived as queer porn, and as one of the respondents put it, "it was *always* about a heterosexual couple" (FG Participant, 2010).

I.K.U. asks audiences to discover a plot because it does not follow a linear narrative; in this sense, it is closer to a digital installation than narrative cinema. The cinematic narrative is interrupted by the mundane repetition of pornographic scenes. At the same time, the pornographic aspects are disrupted by the efforts to actually follow the narrative and make sense of the context of the film. Indeed, I think that the context of the film (as the product of an artist who challenges capitalism) partly offers the screening political potential. To clarify, for me as a viewer, the experience of seeking arousal erotically was at all times interrupted by trying to make meaning of the narrative, and maintain some political perspective. Indeed, the focus group participants contended that watching pornography in an academic setting, de-sexualised the experience. Moreover, they found that talking about the screening as part of a research, on *Facebook* or with colleagues before attending the meeting of the focus group, was a political act.

This indicates how participants constructed a binary between "political" and "emotional/sensational/embodied". Central to this process was their resistance towards having emotional responses. Instead, in several instances they intellectualised the film. Having watched *I.K.U.* in an university seminar room, they had diverse uncomfortable impressions: a woman felt sleepy, one man "overloaded", another man felt like reading, and one woman did not feel aroused "at all". Watching a film that claimed to be art and porn at the same time was, for them, challenging in many

respects. One of the respondents, who identified as a gay man with scarce encounters with straight porn texts, felt that it was:

> [a] bit refreshing to see a range of sexualities and to see them interlink because this is how things really are, rather than this boxing in gay/straight binary, so enjoyed that from a personal perspective (FG Participant, 2010).

During our interview on the 7th of February 2010, Katrien Jacobs suggested that audiences form a pornographic identity by exploring what practices, images, and genders they find arousing. According to Jacobs, there is a causal relationship between content and identity. During our conversation she argued: "It is because of the porn, it's in the porn that this type of people meet and exchange each other's products and you can look at it in a screen" (Jacobs Interview, 2010).

Although Jacobs in our discussion focused on the importance of the text, the focus group participants emphasised the context of the viewing. For example, one of the respondents reflected on the screening setting. She had worked in porn production as an editor and hence had a broad experience of watching porn. She noted the unappealing carpet on the floor, the semi-dark room inside the academic building, and her own sense of identity in all this. The participant told us that she felt she was starting to physically resemble her mother and that she feared she was becoming her mother. However, while watching *I.K.U.* she realised that, as much as she may had started to *look* like her mother, her mother wouldn't ever be in a focus group watching porn. It seems that watching porn, as part of a research/meaning making/political project, operated for her as an act of independence and self-realisation, in a rebelling moment against the morality of her mother.

This narration made everybody laugh, loosened the atmosphere of the discussion and, accordingly, other personal tales ensued. For example, a straight man stated: "it was liberating for me" (FG Participant, 2010). For him, the experience and expectations of watching porn included watching heterosexual or lesbian themes (in porn for straight men). In this regard, watching a transgender person and unpredictable liaisons in *I.K.U.* became a "reality call". Mainstream commercial porn appeared not to represent reality for him anymore but rather an imaginary world.

During our discussion on the 2nd of December 2009, Jacobs similarly noted how the body images of transgender people in films that combine documentary, artistic and pornographic elements are different to those appearing in commercial porn. As an example, she mentioned the transgender film *Enough Man* (Woodward, 2007)[136] which blends personal narrative and unexpected sexual scenes. Jacobs explained to me how being shocked (or just surprised) has, in this case, an educational value for the viewer. This way, she noted, independent, artistic porn production often creates new genres, while at the same time constituting spaces for sexual arousal and self-reflection. She stated:

> The biggest distinction to be made is around the fact that in less-commercial films people can take bigger risks about what kinds of bodies they are going to portray (Jacobs Interview, 2010).

In these explicit films, Jacobs suggested, the fact that the audience's expectations of specific body types are not met makes the films political. This is a point worthy of attention, because here politics are associated with negation, withholding and resistance – in contrast to understandings of politics as diversity and abundance, which emerged from my earlier analysis of commercial online queer porn.

The focus group audience indeed commented on their own expectations and thought that porn had the pedagogical component of how other people have (or do, or make) sex. Using porn as a sexual education tool, and as a means for gender equality, meant for the participants de-naturalising dominant perceptions of sexual practices. For instance, a woman working with sexual violence victims believed that straight porn re-enforced men's violent behaviours. She therefore thought that porn could be used educationally in order to avoid such behaviours. She suggested that it would have to show "different ways of getting pleasure", to which she added: "It doesn't have to be nice and soft, it can be rough" (FG Participant, 2010). Another respondent thought that talking about porn in public rather than doing it privately is a good way to introduce ideas to people. Others agreed that watching porn at home re-affirms taboos and that

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136 *Enough Man* (Woodward, 2007) is a film of explicit sexuality in a documentary about body image, relationships, sex and sexuality from the perspective of nine female-to-male (FTM) transmen and their partners (Frameline Distribution, 2010).

being in academia automatically implies that one has no connection to porn. Challenging established gender roles in a tangible way was thus what seemed to constitute the political potential of explicit material shown in public and institutionally.

Responding to my email on the 26th of April 2010, Marije Janssen, co-organiser of *Netporn politics* conferences, explained that festivals and conferences host audiences already aware of the production, distribution and content differences between artistic and commercial explicit material. These audiences were also prepared to think and discuss the texts. She pointed out that:

> Most of the times festivals are more days, so you meet more people and create a sense of community. There's more awareness when you show films, documentaries, etc. when being at a festival than at a regular cinema screening. Which is good, because sometimes the content can be strange, out of the ordinary, thought provoking or maybe even shocking and it's good to have it embedded in a broader context (Janssen Interview, 2010).

In this respect the Focus group audience was different to networks forming around bigger events.

Still, one woman thought "hopefully I will not feel like masturbating" (FG Participant, 2010) before attending the film screening. It is interesting how another participant kept asking herself the question "should I be aroused by this, should I be?" (FG Participant, 2010) during and after the film. She made comparisons with "a very arousing film" (FG Participant, 2010) she had watched, which was not porn "at all", and how it was arousing without being explicit. With anger and disappointment, she stressed how she wanted "more things to go on" and how she was annoyed with the long repetitive "fuck me-I want you-take me" conversation pauses between explicit scenes. Admitting she did not consume pornography, she nevertheless demanded from the director: "If you want to do porn, make porn" (FG Participant, 2010).

Apart from precise expectations that the respondent had from an alternative porn production, she gave some insight of how she made sense of herself within the screening setting. She suggested that having a mirror in the room to know how others were feeling would have been useful. This request indicated for me that it is the experience of viewing with others, rather than content, through which publics make

sense of sexuality in this case. In the epilogue of *Hardcore* (1989), Linda Williams argues that the blur between high art and low pornography has meant that arousal in public has become part of legitimate culture. Audiences may manifest their cultural capital by *not* being aroused. This negotiation of arousal for this participant and for others in the focus group can be thought as a negotiation of definitions of the pornographic object, and also social negotiations of acceptable ways of feeling at a corporeal level. As I suggest next, the political potential of such settings is to be found in ways of viewing and in making sense of bodily vulnerability in this context.

b) Affective intensities at the skin of the social body: the political potential of viewing with others

As I elaborate next, this tentative audience research enables two significant understandings. Firstly, it can provide an indication as to what difference the digital makes in the ways participants in larger scale postporn encounters feel and make meaning about porn. *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000) is precisely such a digital text, in that it disturbs the linear narrative form which is familiar to us in traditional cinematic experience. In the film, the interruptions of the pornographic narrative disrupt what could be a familiar experience of arousal. This happens in a way similar to the disruption of downloading or streaming porn online and what Cheang has done elsewhere: in *Milk,* "[t]he experience of seeking erotic pleasure through online porn[...]is transformed into a conduit of political awareness and connection to a global health issue [AIDS] and a global activist community" (Oishi, 2007, p.21). Here, sharing the experience of watching *I.K.U.* with others makes following the narrative even more challenging – however, how is the feeling different from viewing with others in a traditional film setting and does the digital produce a new space, a space of flows where the body and sexuality are made and unmade? Secondly, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, affective experiences like pain, arousal, joy or shame can motivate us to act politically (see Grotz, 1994; Munt, 2008). The focus group gives a first person account of the range of emotions that participants felt during the screening of a controversial text, within an academic setting. Although audience accounts can be said to have undergone a process of rationalisation by the participants themselves, in regards to what was acceptable within the context of the research setting, they

nevertheless represent an active negotiation of meaning and a process of creating a common political platform. The question is then here, and in relation to the problematic raised above, how affect, which emanates from the digital as a distinct experience, can be political.

In postporn encounters outside the unavoidable enclosure of the audience research, participants experience various desires and emotions (Jacobs, 2010). In addition to the experience of viewing with others, which was the case in the focus group, participants in large scale events like the BerlinFestival are usually also involved in the production and dissemination of their cultural products. We may think then that "affective labour" in their case embraces the whole range of contemporary forms of labour: both the embodied, gendered and sexualised labour that Marxist feminists have challenged (Fortunati 2007; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003); and the unpaid, voluntary, informational labour which post-operaist thinkers (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996; Terranova, 2004) have foregrounded. If, as I have accepted in the introductory part of this chapter, labour has a political potential, how could we describe the potential of the affective labour in the case of postporn participants?

One way to grasp affective labour in this context is through a question, which the organiser of Netporn conference Katrien Jacobs posed to me during our interview, on December 7th February 2010. She asked "are you doing this yourself?" referring to gender bending, cross-dressing, and/or postporn performance, while being a researcher.[137] Jacobs stressed: "It's not enough to write an essay about it or to be an academic celebrity. You can do more, you can actually change the productivity" (Jacobs Interview, 2010) – by which she meant producing pornographic performances through non-traditional channels like the academy. As this was the second time an invitation to produce was made by research participants (the first being the *Queer Mutiny* porn zine, in Chapter 3), I wondered about the intensity of feelings that are being invested in these networks and the potential vulnerability that this exposure creates. Why add to this sense of vulnerability by creating more situations of exposure through postporn?

Viewing together, intervening on the body on a physical level and being exposed together in these events creates a complex affective network of communicative

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137 The question served the following purposes as I understood it: firstly, it de-naturalised the research setting of interviewer/interviewee. Most importantly it operated as an invitation to participate in a ritual of initiation to a community of unorthodox art/research practices. At the same time it was a question about voyeurism, and the power structures operating in such a setting.

technologies and humans. I would like to suggest that exposure in postporn settings may enable a space where people share this sense of corporeal vulnerability – a politically enabling space. Our bodies are invariably constituted in the public sphere, they are already exposed to touch, gaze and violence and thus vulnerable (Butler, 2004, p.26). When Butler (2004, p.27) argues about imagining community in her account of loss and violence, she talks, of course, about the threat to life itself; one could argue that the threat of the exposed, sexualised body in porn merely implicates representations and symbols. This is risky territory, especially because, as I have already registered earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the debate about whether violence against women (and therefore pornography) operates on the plane of the symbolic or the material remains unsettled in feminism. However, if we consider affect as an intrinsic component of making meaning, we could begin thinking of vulnerability in porn beyond the binaries of material/representational, symbolic/real, body/mind, as it operates biopolitically.

Brian Massumi's (2002) understanding of affect as intensity has done precisely that: it has offered a way of approaching the signification of the text in relation to emotive and physical reactions. In "Parables for the Virtual", Massumi (2002) frames intensity to address a state of tendency, emergence and duration between potential (affective) states and actual, structured, subjective emotions. Affect and emotion are thus not equated in Massumi's (2002) work; affective intensity is the site of the unexpected, the happening (in this sense the body itself is framed as an event). This formulation is useful in thinking about the affective states which can emerge from the digital – and consequently, modes of connecting, embodied politics that are not necessarily linguistic and rational. To explain how this distinction appears, Massumi (2002) recounts an experiment and argues that there is a gap between the effect, the perception of viewing, and the content, or differently put, between the autonomic reactions of sensory organs to the image.

> Intensity is [...] a nonconscious, never to be conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function (2002, p.25).

Seeking to grapple the political implications of intensities in network culture,

Tiziana Terranova (2004) contended that this gap or what Massumi calls "autonomic remainder" (2002, p.25), signals that there is not a direct link between the image and the ways it is perceived. Although I agree with Terranova in her understanding that we experience the world as members of relations, I am sceptical about her discussion of informational politics, especially in regards to how exactly affect produces relationships and leads to action. But more generally, Massumi (2002) only takes us so far in generating tangible responses about sexuality, the body and their politics in a space of intensities and flows[138].

I will thus now move back to the small scale context of the focus group research in order to analyse how this tension, between, on the one hand, actual/meaningful/expected states and on the other, potential/affective/unexpected states, played out. As I identified from the focus group interviews, during and after the screening the participants negotiated meanings, but also feelings, sensations and desires, beyond decoding the story of the film. They also collectively negotiated the text's purpose, importance and value (as an artistic/educational/pornographic experience). Even before talking about it, participants negotiated their own physical responses to the film in relation to signification – for instance, with the request for a mirror. However, during the screening they were systematically confronted with the unexpected, which is an intrinsic part of the film's editing and structure. After the screening, participants made sense of *I.K.U.* (Cheang, 2000) and their own identities by communicating their expectations about the cinematic experience, the form, the event setting, and intellectualising their feelings. This second negotiation might be thought of as what Massumi calls (2002) "owned and recognised" (p.28) emotion, in other words, what could be narrated and linguistically shared, also taking also into account the conflicting social roles of the participants. It is precisely the disparity between these two states, the physical, corporeal one during the screening and the perceived emotion, after the screening, which is of interest here, because it makes possible a different conceptualisation of the political.

The playful exchange between the expected and the unexpected, which was inscribed in the text in this case, is not what the text was made to do. Cheang made

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138 This is perhaps the case with other theoretical discussions re-visiting the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, with the exception of material feminist accounts (see Colebrook, 2000; Gatens, 1996; Grotz, 1994).

I.K.U. (2000) for collective orgasms (Ting, 2005), which to my understanding, is a call for viewing together and for sharing emotions, perceptions and experiences with others in physical spaces. In other words, the *raison d'être* of the film was to connect those who shared a cinematic experience or, at most, the thrill of the pre-cinematic dark room. Indeed, viewing pornography moves and touches people at a corporeal level and is a sensory experience beyond just vision[139]: "Gaze theory in film studies has often seemed to be too much about the eye and not enough about the body" (Williams, 1989, p.291). However, here I am not celebrating watching porn with others; rather my concern is with the constitution of an imagined, collective body in relation to the digital and the sensory experience of the individual. Watching *I.K.U.* (2000) in this case was at the same time a cinematic experience, in other words an interaction with an older media form, and an experience of interacting with a digital and networked form. The latter links to the non-linear narrative and the consequent interruption of sexual arousal, as well as the multiple screen interfaces appearing within the main screen, the linking website and textual information available from the DVD menu. This process of remediation invites the viewer to watch the film with full awareness of the different overlapping media forms; even in our most intimate moments, as Bolter and Grusin (1999) point out, the media do not leave us alone. This is what makes this experience, this mode of viewing in new media, distinct.

What is of interest politically is how and why participants in postporn events and websites allow and organise this experience, despite knowing that, like *I.K.U.* (2000), other texts are similarly multiple in form, and possibly non-arousing. To get back to Massumi (2002), for an audience it is precisely the undetermined state, between the digital text and its perceived meaning, which I think constitutes this experience as an intensity. An affective intensity in this sense can be thought of as a mode of engaging with a digital text and with one another in a shared setting. Because the text is pornographic, the possible emotions can be either arousal or injury. Knowing these possibilities before entering a screening makes this a community of shared possible emotive states, where everybody is susceptible to injury (from the porn industry or by each other). Networked cultures emerge precisely in this field of biopower, that is,

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139 Linda Williams (1989) cites David Freedberg about how art historians try to avoid the mention of sexual and sensory response to images and to moving images in general. Also cf. Vivian Sobchack's call for a phenomenological analysis of how people are moved, and Carol Clover's psychoanalytical theory of horror film spectatorship.

"power of inducing perceptions and organizing the imagination, of establishing a subjective correspondence between images, perceptions, affects and beliefs" (Terranova, 2004, p.152). We can thus claim that this collective negotiation of pornographic texts in postporn settings may constitute intensities, as a way to avoid victimisation from a male- dominated, profit driven porn industry. Massumi's (2002) framework is thus helpful in addressing the potential of affect in collective events and a useful alternative to analysing pornography beyond representation. However, as the digital is also potentially harmful, it is difficult to see how a collective gender and sexuality politics can be realised without an acceptance that these same encounters can cause injury. Additionally, the question regarding how this potential can be actualised in ways that change the conditions of work for sex workers, for example, or other precarious gendered workers in the informational age of porn remains unaddressed.

IV. Conclusion

The thesis, as a whole, asks how anxieties and fantasies, vulnerabilities and imaginaries that manifest through certain discursive practices in digital network environments, impact on feminist and queer politics. In this chapter, I concentrated on the resignification of the pornographic object and approached the ways this remediation informs the constitution of contemporary political subjectivities. A critical account of queer and women-owned porn production companies illustrated how discourses of *authenticity and individuality* imbue the invitation to produce in dominant digital culture. I have noted that networked porn culture offers the same kinds of material as mainstream porn (content which is not politically subversive, with the promise of empowerment) to new consumer audiences. The emphasis on productivity and empowerment occludes the centrality of digital media as technologies and economies. Although lesbian and gay porn existed in earlier media forms it is dominant digital culture, which through the discursive practices of "participation" and "interactivity", invites these publics to engage as politically aware consumers and as sexually empowered subjects. Labour of this form on the one hand may be empowering because it questions ideas of private and public and creates physical, bodily contexts where people can come together. On the other hand, it provides

profitable income for porn companies and creates other forms of value.

Apart from the process of remediation observed, I have suggested that discourses of "real" bodies, as opposed to the bodies shown in mainstream commercial porn, produce a scarcity. The queer body in these sites embodies the request to refashion oneself. In the process of claiming visibility, queer alt porn construct the trans-body as a new "other" and re-inscribes hierarchies of sexualities. Along with processes of self-surveillance in postporn networks, and the integration of capitalist values of abundance under the guise of gift exchange, open community, and interactivity, digital porn culture produces new subjectivities of consumption and commodifiable connections. Far from being liberatory spaces, then, networks of queer/feminist porn production and dissemination open up new markets in academic and other settings. I have suggested that affective labour in postporn networks and events further legitimises capital extraction from queer bodies, women's bodies and FTM bodies.

Nonetheless, beyond the fear of the colonisation of queer sexuality, and within the enclaves of informational capitalism, I indicated that there is still political potential in the formations that emerge in network settings. In the analysis of postporn events, the pornographic object emerges through the communicative acts of the participants, the collective body that carries the "affective intensity" of porn. Thought as a form of networked public, affective intensity constitutes both an interpellative relationship with the digital text, and a horizontal affective relationship of collective meaning making. Queer and postporn networks are not identical to heterosexual amateur porn cultures – they are aware of their subordination and their vulnerability due to exposure. It is because of this awareness that they can create networked connections and form around ways of viewing. This model thus offers a way to rethink the complexities of network connectivities; temporary, open-ended politics; the biopolitical implications of exposure and bodily vulnerability in dominant digital culture.

CHAPTER 5

Feminist biopolitical assemblages: Responding to global flows and the 2011 HFEA consultation

I. Introduction

      a) Revisiting biopolitics

      b) The background of the HFEA Consultation

      c) Egg scarcity and new forms of labour

II. Constructing credibility and connecting local struggles

      Challenging the academy/grassroots binary: The No2Eggsploitation campaign

III. "Why is the commodification of my eggs so bad?" Representativeness, choice and responsibility.

IV. Differentiation and articulation of "we".

      a) The Corner House

      b) CORE

V. Conclusion

I. Introduction

This chapter addresses a series of questions around women's politics and mediation specifically surrounding new reproductive technologies[140]. Reproductive rights have been a key issue for feminist politics. From the first publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* by the Boston Health Book Collective in 1970[141], the feminist health movement has moved from consciousness-raising practices to formulate a wider critique of technoscience. This has been accompanied by scholarly projects in the field of social studies of science and technology (see for example Fox Keller, 1996; Haraway, 1997; Harding, 1991; Thompson, 2005), which address the mediation of gender and sexuality through technoscientific practices. Today, biomedical advances, like the Human Genome project and new reproductive technologies, like IVF and stem cell research, proceed concurrently with those in digital technologies and computer science (Mitchell and Thurtle, 2004; Thacker, 2004). A series of critical social, political and ethical issues and questions around reproductability, affective labour, mediation, exploitation and property rights arise from the intersection of these new fields. These demand approaches that take into account the inseparability of information and biotechnology today. Hence within the context of a thesis about the mediation of political life and the digital, it is crucial to pose questions about reproductive politics. What form might contemporary feminist interventions take and how does the intersection between biological and digital shape these interventions?

This chapter has two aims: Firstly, reproductive rights policies, especially those relating to egg donation, address women as both responsible, rational citizens and as engaged consumers. However, audiences often engage with a multiplicity of identities, for example as patients or as potential donors. Such identifications, reformulate, instead of transgress, gendered and other social expectations, for example those associated to caring and being a mother. This complex process of identification and

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140 Throughout the chapter, I use "reproductive technologies" interchangeably with ARTs (assisted reproduction technologies) to refer to abortion, assisted reproduction, preimplantation genetic diagnosis and experimental medicine, like embryonic stem cell research (hESC) and "therapeutic cloning".

141 The book was initially published by New England press in 1970 and republished in 1971, then widely adapted and circulated in many languages. Although it tackled issues like abortion and self-examination, it was initially criticised for overlooking issues of ageing or intersectionality. It subsequently became more diverse. See Kathy Davis (2007) for a history of the book and its influence on medical practice.

negotiation of roles indicates the complexity of articulating political voices in relation to reproductive technologies and science today. In other words, it is not enough to consider what a responsible collective subjectivity would mean in this case, based on a model of oppositional politics in the sense that Dean (2010) or Laclau (2004) would suggest (see relevant discussion in Chapter 1). As indicated in other chapters of this thesis, what has traditionally been thought of as representational space has shifted and mutated (Terranova, 2004) because of the prominence of digital networks and technoscience in our everyday lives. If we are to attend to the global flows of information, services and bodies, we need, inevitably, to raise questions about political representation, mediation and biopower. Hence, the first question that this chapter poses relates to transformations of modes of feminist engagement and the mediation of reproductive technologies. How, if at all, is it possible to talk about political identity, about "we", in this context?

Secondly, policy documents and health information have become increasingly available online from both official and alternative sources. When it comes to reproductive technologies, new lay-person knowledges appear online, which are variously positioned within a spectrum of feminist identities (ranging from grassroots to feminist bioethics, for example). These spaces offer the possibility of facilitating new modes of engagement with biomedical knowledge and, therefore, new political realities. Thus a second aim for this chapter is to map such spaces of critical and alternative knowledge production online and the ways in which they re-instate expertise.

In order to address these two objectives, I concentrate on mobilisations around the consultation process on egg donation, which was launched in April 2011 by the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority[142] (HFEA). The HFEA consultation concerned the review of payment for egg donors and links to the ways value is created from the global flows of women's bodily material (See Waldby and Mitchell, 2006). This case enables an insight into feminist mobilisations around policy shifts relating to egg donation and trade, for reproduction and genetic research in the UK. In particular, I map online sites and offline interventions by feminist actors, including the campaign

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142 "The HFEA is both a policy making and a licensing body. [...] Mostly policy takes the form of guidance to clinics [...] At other times, the Secretary of State might ask the Authority to consider a policy area and to make recommendations for policy and legislative developments [...] Finally, the Authority might be a stakeholder and might express its policy view as part of a political process that is driven by the Government (HFEA, 2010).

No2eggsploitation, The Corner House, Core Ethics, Reprokult, and scholars from the Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics (Cesagen) (Lancaster and Cardiff Universities). These appeared to be key actors articulating a response to this proposed policy move at this particular time, prior to the launch of the consultation (that is between December 2009 and December 2010, when the material for this research was collected). By way of discourse analysis, I visit the texts offered online by implicated actors and register the different subject positions offered in relation to the implications of the proposed policy shifts. Through this exploration, it becomes clear that multiple political subjectivities emerged around the review of payment for egg donors. I especially focus on the campaign No2Eggsploitation, which mobilised through small-scale actions in spaces like the Feminist Library in London and the internet. Secondly, tracing these networks alongside a historical account of their connections across national boundaries enables an understanding of the challenges feminist politics meet in post-representational spaces and the necessity of bridging small-scale struggles with large-scale ones. Moreover, since the networks under examination operate offline in predominately academic spaces and highly dispersed ways, internet research provided access to the knowledge produced and disseminated by these actors. The investigation of how these actors refigure notions of expertise furthermore provides an account of new forms of engagement with reproductive technologies and science which proliferate in networked environments.

a) Revisiting biopolitics

In this chapter, I further develop a biopolitical framework (following from my discussion on the biopolitical implications of online porn culture in Chapter 4). This is precisely because national reproductive policies today, and the politics which emerge around them, need to be conceptualised alongside questions about the flows of bodies and informational bits on a global scale. As introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the concepts of biopower and biopolitics are significant for my analysis because they can be used to describe how digital network technologies and culture are part of an apparatus which regulates social life and constitute new forms of control. It is not surprising, perhaps, that in a chapter about reproductive technologies and feminism, I place further attention on biopolitics and biopower; after all, reproduction has been

thought as "a bio-political space *par-excellence*" (Rabinow and Rose, 2006, p.21), in the sense that it has become a site of systematic legitimate intervention. There seems to be an agreement between scholars from different traditions about how biopower operates in dispersed ways (see Haraway 1997; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Terranova, 2004); however, there are different readings of what form politics can take in this context – or what "biopolitics" mean. In what follows, I explore the question of biopolitics by navigating through the work of Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway and Hard and Negri, and subsequently indicate how Judith Butler's (2004) notion of "corporeal vulnerability" is employed in order to address some of the issues that arise from this reading.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) traced the historical process through which homosexuality appeared as the pathological "other" of heterosexuality. In his later lectures, in the years 1978-1979[143], Foucault (2008) further theorised governmentality as a mechanism of neoliberal governance which pertains social life[144]. Governmentality explains how social relations changed in the 18th and 19th century with the emergence of certain biomedical and administrative practices. Biopolitical power, or biopower, appears here to be constituted by the institutions, practices and discourses of the Victorian Era, which regulated life through the control of the biological and the corporeal on two sites: the personal body and the public, for instance through population control (Rose, 2001). It is important that, for Foucault, the emergence of biopower signifies the historical transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control; however, his analysis does not address technoscientific advances of the late 20th century and early 21st century, like for example the internet and genomics.

It is precisely to this historical conjuncture (the same one that this thesis finds itself addressing) that both Hardt and Negri's (2000) political philosophy in Empire and Donna Haraway's (1997) cultural study of science and technology directly speak. In addressing the specificity of contemporary capitalism, Hardt and Negri (2000) turn to the question of corporeal productivity, in other words, the production of life and the manipulation of affect. They have read Foucault's biopower as a form of power

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143 Published in English as *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2008).

144 See also Lazzarato's (2009) reading of Foucault and the new type of individual (homo oeconomicus) in neoliberalism: "the individual as an 'entrepreneur of oneself', maximizing himself or herself as 'human capital'" (p.111).

[t]hat regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it […] Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.23-24).

What this approach enables in regards to reproductive technologies, is thinking about policy and biomedical intervention on women's bodies or, on an even smaller scale, their eggs and embryos at the level of lab. Of course, in *Empire* it is not clear how the production of life can be approached empirically, especially as reproductive labour (and its difference to living, productive labour) is more or less invisible in what could be thought as the neoliberal working day (Schultz, 2006). However, the question of biopower in Hard and Negri's (2000) work and their attention to Foucauldian societies of control does more than propose ways to perform a historical materialist analysis (this is perhaps its weakest point); it also indicates how the exercise of power operates today through the interlinking of information systems (the digital) and welfare systems (the biological). Thus, although in the societies described by Foucault the differentiation between biopower and biopolitics is clear (in that biopower concerns more the interventions on the biological body whereas biopolitics concern knowledge and technology), this distinction becomes blurred in *Empire*. The struggle of living labour becomes the struggle over language and technology for Hard and Negri today (2000, p. 406). This position has important implications for how we can imagine feminist politics; by this I mean that, if knowledge production, the production of gendered labour (reproductive, precarious, flexible) and the management of life and death are thought to constitute different expressions and form part of an all-encompassing machine, there is little space for identity politics – let alone for a politics of gender and sexuality.

Indeed, as Donna Haraway (1988) suggested even before the advent of the internet, feminist politics need to be reframed in post-industrial technoscientific capitalist societies. At this point, she suggested the figure of the cyborg as a way to negotiate the question of machine and embodiment but also, importantly, as a way out of the universalising tendencies of feminist politics at the time. Of course, the cyborg metaphor has been variously taken up, with Rosi Braidotti's (1994) application being

perhaps the most interesting one for me here. In Braidotti's (1994) exploration of embodiment and biotechnologies, it is precisely this aspect of the body as part of a capitalist production machine, and particularly women's bodies as biopower (in the form of genetic material, eggs, organs, foetuses) which produces new kinds of global inequalities. Braidotti's (1994) reading of Haraway's cyborg figure suggests a feminist politics which are built around this shared myth (the cyborg). However, the reading of Haraway alongside Deleuze, which Braidotti (2002) undertakes again in more recent work, problematically merges the human and the technological in her symbiotic framing of body and machine. Although it promises to privilege the embodied subjectivity of women (as discursive, corporeal and technological), Braidotti (2002) essentially erases gendered identity altogether. Of course, Braidotti's (2006) posthumanist ethical project is precisely to challenge a unified identity and to render visible how gendered, racialised and ethnic oppression is produced through global systems of biopower. I see the validity of this project and the necessity of ethical responsibility – it is Braidotti's (2002, 2006) call to abandon identity altogether, and with it the struggle for recognition and visibility, which I am sceptical about.

Tiziana Terranova's (2004) framing of the human/nonhuman relationship, as it appears in her account of biopolitics for the informational age, is different to Braidotti's (2002) posthumanism but similar in that it, too, does without identity. Terranova (2004) articulately canvasses how biopower works through communication and envisions network culture as the site of strategic and tactical struggle (p. 138) where the networked multitude emerges as a different mode of politics (pp. 152-153). Even as this approach promises to account for the social constitution of subjects in networked spaces, its commitment to the multitude tells us little about the specificity of embodiment and gender. Similarly, although Hardt and Negri (2000) theorise that interactions between bodies can create politics, this is always expressed through "the multitude", which I find unhelpful for an examination of situated body politics around reproductive technologies.

A more productive way of reading biopolitics and gendered embodied subjectivities is through Haraway's (1997) emphasis on articulating realities and representations which are responsible to vulnerability. This is in relation to the metaphor of "diffraction", which I have outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Of course, the purpose of this metaphor was to address the production of knowledge;

that is, the material-semiotic practices of science and how they can be accountable. Nonetheless, Haraway's (1997) rationale is precisely our susceptibility as embodied subjects to risk and vulnerability. This attention to vulnerability, I want to suggest, can be productive in addressing the question of material feminist politics and embodiment in contemporary biodigital capitalism – in a way different to Braidotti's (1994, 2002, 2006) philosophical nomadism and critique of liberal individualism. What is more, neoliberal governance is increasingly articulated through discourses of risks (see Beck, 1992; Sunder-Rajan, 2006; Rabinow, 1999) and the mobilisation of fear (Dean, 2009). This makes it important to turn risk and vulnerability around and conceptualise them in ways that don't victimise women.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, in Judith Butler's (1993) *Bodies that Matter*, the materiality of discursive practices remains obscure; in other words, it is unclear how regimes of "truth" produce sexual differences and shape social life (Barad, 2007). However, in later work, Butler (2004) makes materiality and embodiment her key concern. She formulates the concept of "common corporeal vulnerability" (Butler, 2004, p.42) in relation to public recognition, ethical responsibility and political mobilisation. In her discussion about politics, violence and mourning, Butler (2004) notes how making claims about self-determination has been a central project for feminist and queer politics. However, since the concept of the body is constituted in public discourse (in the media for example), she suggests that body politics needs to articulate a "we" besides ourselves and orient towards the geopolitical distribution of vulnerability. Butler's (2004) emphasis on the physicality, sexual passion, political rage and emotional grief in this formation (p. 24) defines public recognition and the translation of this physical vulnerability across cultures as the condition for forming international feminist coalitions.

In a project of rethinking feminist identity and embodiment in relation to technoscience and reproductive technologies, we may read Butler's (2004) interpretation of the body as a fruitful framing of biopolitics and biopower. Butler reads the body

[a]s the site of common human vulnerability, even as I have insisted that this vulnerability is always articulated differently, that it cannot be thought of outside a differentiated field of power, and specifically, the differential norms of

recognitions (2004, p.44).

Here Butler (2004) can be understood to re-articulate the humanist concern which permeates all her work: how we are constituted as "we", that is as collective political subjects, in relation to a "you", an outside. It is that attention to multiple responsible articulations, debates and encounters, and the project of finding common language to connect with one another in Butler's (2004) conceptualisation which offers an alternative understanding of feminist biopolitics. Of course, writers from the fields of science and technology studies, for instance Latour and Wiebel (2005) in *Making Things Public*, and Marres (2004; 2006; 2007) have also stressed the importance of publicity for the making of responsible technoscientific worlds. However, in this work Butler (2004) identifies a relationship between exposure, recognition and physicality in relation to politics, which is relevant to my project. That is, the physicality and affectivity of being a living body, and qualifying as a human body (and not a hybrid body-machine according to Braidotti) in the public sphere through the media are, in this work, the conditions that can make women come together politically in the first place. Politics is not the result of publicity in the sense of transparency.

Butler's (2004) consideration of corporeality alongside publicity is moreover relevant here because public bodies today are constituted at the intersections of information theory, media studies and biotechnologies, or what can be understood as the "biodigital" (O'Riordan, 2010).[145] For Kate O'Riordan (2010), the biodigital provides an understanding of audience responses to biotechnological and digital convergences. Indeed, feminist publics, some of which are examined in this chapter, make meaning about the role of markets and the state (and supranational institutions) in regulating women's bodies, and secondly, about the role of technologies in their lives. Online platforms facilitate this exchange and negotiation of ideas; however, if we approach the internet through a biodigital understanding, it appears that there is more to the ways bodies and information intersect than merely new screen interfaces. In this chapter I particularly note, for instance, how scarcity and replicability are invoked in public discourse and how, in this process, the vulnerabilities created for women crucially relate to the informatisation of bodies.

Finally, Butler's (2004) account of precarious life indicates a way of bridging those

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145 Kate O'Riordan is a supervisor to this thesis, as well as active in feminist networks examined here.

situated, multiple political realities produced in technoscientific worlds, which Haraway (1997) advocates through the diffraction metaphor. That is, it provides a way to refigure the links between feminist mobilisations regarding reproductive autonomy operating in small-scale spaces, with a feminist political community which connects through digital networks beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

Through this exploration, in this chapter I indicate how a biopolitical approach of reproductive technologies and their regulation enables an understanding of how multiple embodied subjectivities and political realities might emerge in the biodigital assemblage (O'Riordan, 2010). Particularly, my analysis of responses to the HFEA consultation identifies how liberal ideas of choice and autonomy are voiced, alongside positions which resist or negotiate biotechnologies and reproductive technologies. Thinking through the concept of biodigital vulnerability, that is the recognition that women share certain vulnerabilities when it comes to egg donation, further conveys how the mapped feminist biopolitical networks can operate in non-oppositional ways, emerge across national boundaries and challenge traditional notions of expertise.

In the following section, I commence by providing background information about the HFEA consultation process, alongside a brief history of policy moves around reproductive technologies and research. I then move on to analyse how some feminist actors from the studied networks construct themselves as credible sources of knowledge. Building on Steven Epstein's (1998) exemplary work on AIDS activism, I indicate that this mediation creates the conditions necessary in order for various feminist publics to challenge official framings and perceptions of power of biomedical institutions and subsequently influence policies. My examination presents feminist assemblages through three analytical axes: Firstly, I look at the strategies these activists use in order to establishing themselves as credible sources of knowledge in this debate. Secondly, I observe how their participation in mainstream media legitimises them as representatives of affected groups in society, namely women. And thirdly, I note how these publics differentiate themselves from other early actors (to be precise, CORE and FINNRAGE). Finally, I advance how understandings of participation in dominant biodigital culture, underpinning discourses of individual choice and rights, pose challenges to feminist politics.

b) The background of the HFEA Consultation

In January 2011, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) published a consultation document outlining the policies under review[146] and the Authority's position (see Appendix D for the latest IVF statistics). The public consultation took place between January and April 2011. One of the policies under review is the payment for donors. In the current legislative framework, licensed *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) centres may give money to a donor as reimbursement for expenses or compensation for loss of earnings up to an overall maximum of £250 for each course of sperm donation or each cycle of egg donation (HFEA, 2011). In contrast to the US, and in accordance with the EU regulatory framework which bans payment for human tissue, payment is banned for biological donation in the UK. The proposed policy changes signify shifts towards the US model, where compensation for genetic material is normalised and there is an established medical market in place (Almeling, 2007).

The regulatory move following the 2006 – 7 consultation and the one happening in 2011 took place within the context of changing political regimes in the UK (from a Labour Party to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government). Changes in policies relating to reproduction are also informed by the political shifts in the US and the historical competition in the area of stem cell[147] research between the two countries. For example, the first clinical trials using embryonic stem cells has recently been announced by Advanced Cells Technology (2010), which needs to be placed in the context of the late Obama policy reversals regarding stem cell research in the US. At the same time, the HFEA, which has been responsible for the licensing of centres of embryonic stem cell research in the UK, is about to have its regulatory functions

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146 The policies being reviewed by the HFEA include: the number of families donors can donate to; expenses, compensation and benefits in kind donors can receive for donation; donation between family members; the conditions which donors can place on the use of their gametes or embryos; the upper age limit for sperm donation, and the release of donor codes to parents of donor conceived children (HFEA Donation Review, 2010).

147 Stem cells are biological cells that can divide (through mitosis) and differentiate into diverse specialized cell types and can self-renew to produce more stem cells. In mammals, there are two broad types of stem cells: embryonic stem cells, which are isolated from the inner cell mass of blastocysts, and adult stem cells, which are found in various tissues. Stem cells research has been successful so far in using adult stem cells for medical therapies, but human embryonic stem cells (hESC) generated through cloning only have theoretical potential for regenerative medicine. Human embryonic stem cells (hESC) result from: a) embryos created for IVF purposes, but not implanted (discarded embryos), b) cloned human embryos created through Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer, c) "therapeutic cloning", and d) cloned human/animal hybrid embryos (Plows, 2010).

transferred to other bodies (HFEA, 2010)[148]. This development further complicates the prospects of clear regulation and public debate.

To be sure, there have been earlier shifts in the UK policy, with the introduction of "egg sharing" schemes for treatment (authorised in 1998) and "altruistic egg donation" for cloning[149] in 2006-7 (Plows, 2010). It has been argued that these earlier changes in fact represent an exception to the payment ban, as far as egg sharing for IVF treatment is concerned (Roberts and Throsby, 2007). In the past, legislative shifts have followed from, and have led to, controversies about the ethical, social and legal implications of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). The one common element in the feminist scholarship and politics in this area from the 1980s is their critique of the heterosexualised, consumer-oriented family setting (Thompson, 2007).

Variations in state regulations, which often aim to limit the use of reproductive technologies and the feminist responses to them, relate to the socio-political contexts of each country – for example, in Germany and Italy restrictive models are influenced by eugenics history and the influence of the Vatican[150] respectively (Alkorta, 2006). In the UK in the 1980s following the birth of the first "test-tube baby", Louise Brown in Britain in 1978[151], several feminist writers expressed hostility towards what was perceived as male-controlled reproductive technology (Corea, 1987; Crowe, 1985;

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148 Since the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats was formed in May 2010, over 80% of the public bodies funded by government, often known as "QUANGOS" have been abolished under the conservative plans to reduce the size of the public sector, as a route to reducing the overall budget deficit. The focus has been on bodies that facilitate arts, health, business, education, policing and the environment. The HFEA announced in April 2011 that they will be functional until 2013 (Morris, 2010).

149 It appears that the EU Tissues and Cells Directive (CEC 2004) avoided dealing with the legal and ethical anxieties accompanying the creation and use of hESC, by passing this responsibility to individual country-members. In the 2006 Consultation *Donating eggs for research: safeguarding donors* (HFEA 2006) and the eventual 2007 policy change, the HFEA enabled the sourcing of human eggs from women specifically for the creation of hESC (with cell nuclear transfer). As far as exchange practices are concerned, eggs can be derived by "egg sharing" (women trading eggs for IVF treatment), and "altruistic donation" (outside an IVF treatment process). The European Union Tissue and Cells Directives (EUTCD) set out to establish a harmonised approach to the regulation of tissues and cells across Europe. The Directives set a benchmark for the standards that must be met when carrying out any activity involving tissues and cells for human application (patient treatment). The Directives also require that systems are put in place to ensure that all tissues and cells used in human application are traceable from donor to recipient (HTA, 2010).

150 Britain is increasingly closer to the US model of reproductive medicine in the sense that it is very wide and permissive towards embryo research and hESC. In the rest of Europe, reproductive medicine regulations mainly deal with IVF and prenatal diagnosis. See Itziar Alkorta (2006) for a comprehensive account of fertility medicine policies.

151 Sarah Franklin (1995) has noted that, the birth of the first baby with IVF marked the emergence of "a new kind of public debate about conception, in which unprecedented procreative possibilities raised moral uncertainty and political controversy" (p.323).

1987; Spallone and Steinberg 1987; Wajcman, 1991)[152]. By the end of the 1990s, instead, the payment of donors and the introduction of egg sharing was the main issue of controversy for feminist actors. Likewise, in the rest of Europe there was intense feminist involvement with the ethical, economic and social dimensions of reproductive technologies. This involvement crystallised as opposition at the FINRRAGE 1985 conference (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive Technologies and Genetic Engineering) that drew together scholars and activists from different political terrains.[153] In the US, and in the context of more complex political developments, what shaped regulation at a national level (when for the first time a human Embryonic Stem Cell was differentiated and Dolly the sheep was cloned at the Roslin Institute) was on the one hand the status of the embryo, and, on the other, women's reproductive rights, for instance that of access to abortion. Feminist discourses specifically around reproductive "choice" have thus affected policy changes, but they have also been mobilised in order to legitimise certain practices of governmentality, expressed in global reproductive politics (Murphy, 2010).

c) Egg scarcity and new forms of labour

One of the key discourses instrumental in the way the 2011 HFEA review for payment was framed in the press is that of scarcity - constructed around eggs for the fertility treatment of British women. On the 22nd of August 2010, a *Guardian* article announced "Egg and sperm donors may get £1,000s in fertility plan", which was edited to read "Egg and sperm donors may get thousands of pounds in fertility plan – Significant shift in policy aims to stop more childless couples seeking treatment

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152 This hostility makes sense, considering the discourse of the 1984 Warnock report, and the presence of women in it. The Warnock Report (of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology, requested by the government of Great Britain) highlighted the "special status" of the embryo and defined the "primitive streak", which enabled scientists to use embryos (termed blastocysts or "pre-embryos") up to 14 days old. Patricia Spallone (1986), analysing the report, noted the Inquiry's preoccupation with the meaning of motherhood and population control. She observed the absence of women from the text and argued that this was an attempt to police women's sexuality through reproductive control.

153 FINRRAGE was a network of women who organised the Women's Emergency Conference on the New Reproductive Technologies in Vallinge, Sweden, in March 1989. The conference provided a first formulation of common standpoints between more than 140 women from 35 countries (a majority of them from Asia) and established the transnational character of the network. Since then, FINRRAGE has cooperated with different local or national organisations in conducting a number of national, continental, and international conferences.

abroad". The article appeared in the Life & Style section of the newspaper, under the theme of Fertility Problems, and it was published coincidentally with an article entitled "Destination Spain: the rise and rise of fertility tourism- UK's waiting list for donors pushes couples abroad, where thanks to payments for donations there is no shortage". [154] As noted in the analysis of postporn production in Chapter 3, but also with reference to Dean's (2009) work on communicative abundance, the making of scarcity is a process central in capitalist economy and, as also noted, is something that is made differently within a biodigital political economy.

Here, abundance and its tempering (the making of scarcity) relates to creating needs and establishing the legitimacy of sourcing practices for the satisfaction of these needs. Reproductive technologies have been resorting to women mainly outside the UK for the sourcing of eggs for IVF. Egg sourcing can be thought of as extraction of raw material, in a Marxist sense, and it often relies on the labour of poor women in non-Western countries – which are differently regulated to the UK. This differential regulation therefore calls attention to the new forms of unequal exchange relations introduced by reproductive technologies between countries with already different economic and political powers.

Marxist political economy analysis from the field of reproductive technologies has adequately addressed these new gendered, classed and racialised inequalities of contemporary global economies. More specifically, Donna Dickenson (2002) argues that women as a particular social group (or "class") produce surplus through their labour in the processes of overovulation or abortion. Sarah Franklin has discussed how resource extraction ("bioprospecting") resembles agricultural technologies and engineering (2007). Other studies (Pateman, 1988; Mies, 1998; Dickenson, 2007; Franklin and Lock, 2003; Thompson, 2005) see women's bodies as generators of biovalue, property rights and as sites of exploitation. It should be noted here that scholars from an ecofeminist tradition[155] have long connected ideas of progress with capitalism and the estrangement of humans from nature (Merchant, 1980; Mies and Shiva, 1993). Although different to the concepts of affective/immaterial/free labour in digital economies, the frameworks of reproductive labour developed by feminist scholars of this Marxist tradition illuminate the similarities between these forms of

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154 Both articles were written by Dennis Campbell, a health correspondent, and did not explicitly mention donation for research.

155 See Mellor (1997) for an account of the variations.

labour and their centrality in global capitalism.

However, here I want to draw attention to the theorisation of "new" forms of labour developed by Catherine Waldby and Melinda Cooper (2008; 2010). This is because, apart from the inseparability of bio and digital technologies and their economic strategies, Waldby and Cooper's work contributes to an understanding of how the regulation of egg donation today is inherently linked to the making of egg scarcity in the public imaginary. Waldby and Cooper suggested that the labour of egg production and vending cannot be analysed alongside other kinds of feminised labour (domestic, care, affective and sexual work). Instead they propose the concepts of "regenerative" and "clinical" labour and place politics within the laboratory domain rather than everyday macropolitics[156] (see also Waldby and Cooper (2008; 2006). Although a discussion about labs is beyond the scope of my project here, this work is useful to me because it illuminates how stem cell industries capitalise imaginaries of self-regeneration and create future markets. To clarify, I have so far thought of technologies, both digital and biological, as co-evolving with social life. Capitalism is in this thesis perceived as a historically continuous, yet contingent, set of power relations – rather than a brand new set of structures. It is in this sense that the concept of reproductive labour helps to gain an understanding of the gendered specificity of eggs and other tissue material. Even as the lab domain is central to new global economies, the domestic domain has not ceased to exist alongside. Thus alienation discourses on the one hand can still adequately describe everyday materiality and productivity. Women are at the forefront of biomedical and reproductive industries, like they are in digital porn industries in Chapter 4. To return to Waldby and Cooper's (2008) argument however, future markets are increasingly concerned with issues of intellectual property (in the case of ownership of eggs or embryos in stem cell research). The regulation of intellectual rights, as noted in Chapter 4, has been a key mechanism for the making of artificial scarcity in digital media environments, characterised by replicability and

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156 They argue that the contemporary re-workings of "reproductive labour" are less relevant to today's emerging economies, because today's Fordist/Keynesian socio-economic relations don't govern states any more. Reproductive and "regenerative labour" completely determine neoliberal global capitalism for Waldby and Cooper. Post-Fordism, they contend, unlike the post-war welfare social state, exposes women to new sets of global market demands. These global markets are increasingly shaped by life science economies (biomedicine) and rely mainly on the contributions of women from migrant and racial minority groups. In this study they note that "women's contribution to the biotechnology industries as labour, in historical continuity with earlier colonial forms of female bodily labour" (2008, p.2). Using Kempadoo's (1999) ethnographic account of the labour of women Caribbean slaves, they essentially parallel contemporary economies with colonialist economy.

apparent abundance.

We can think then about how this mechanism overlaps with that of creating egg scarcity in public discourse – and how, in this process, embodiment, materiality and vulnerability (both in the sense of gendered physicality and structural conditions) are occluded. For instance, both women *and* men are included in the 2011 consultation; however, egg donation involves pervasive and risky procedures for women, unlike sperm donation. At the same time, the review of the payment ban appears to create a national market of eggs, which contains existing (and creates new) inequalities at a national level. Interestingly, Alison Murdoch, the former chair of British Fertility Society and a primary mover, spoke with Lisa Jardine on Jane Garvey's *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4, 2009) in favour of compensation. She named eggs and sperm as "effectively, bodily waste products", and added "they are produced in billions, and most of them end up in the sewer" (Murdoch, 2009). She stated that compensation for egg donors is only fair, since everybody else involved in the process makes money out of it. A similar position is reflected in the 2011 consultation under the principle of "fairness" (HFEA consultation, 2011). This remarkable statement at the same time elicits understandings of women as providers of raw material in abundance and completely dismisses the invasiveness of sourcing procedures. Such official framings in mainstream media draw on liberal values of fairness and reproductive rights but still disregard women's bodily vulnerability within the process of egg extraction. Although here the issue is less a matter of making value out of intellectual property (as in the work of Waldby and Cooper), it still constructs a figure (Haraway, 1997) of women as sources of replicable, immaterial data - indeed a cyborg figure.

We may then ask what kinds of identities are invoked in the 2011 HFEA consultation, realised in the form of an online multiple choice platform but also other texts circulating in mainstream media like the BBC, and who benefits if people are addressed as consumer publics, as rational publics or as tax-payers and vulnerable bodies. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine how the issues under review have changed between 2006, when another consultation attracted a lot of feminist attention, and today. In 2006, the HFEA consultation *Donating eggs for research - How should donors be best protected?* asked for views on how much donors should be compensated and whether egg donors should be compensated at the same level as sperm donors. In a close reading of the 2006 consultation documents, Kate O'Riordan

and Joan Haran (2009) elucidated how women were addressed as agents of choice and how this address occluded the structural and contextual conditions in which women make choices concerning biomedicine (p.194). The prominence of the issue in the media in 2011, the mode of the online platform, and the gender-neutral framing arguably seeks to neutralise the feminist arguments expressed in the 2006 consultation and discourage public engagement of a political character. Clearly, it would be of interest to observe the impact of feminist voices on the policy process and policy outcomes, by noting media coverage, however this is beyond the scope of my research.

As much as it is significant to note continuities in theorising biosciences in feminist literature and praxis, this thesis asks how the politics and forms of organising emerging in today's media environments are different to those before the proliferation of digital network technologies and why. Feminist activism from academic backgrounds and the grassroots intersect, as is shown in my analysis, but they have different strategies. Feminist theorising, in particular, has evolved hand-in-hand with reproductive technologies in the last two decades[157], according to Charis Thompson (2007). This opens up the question of how the proliferation of media technologies, and especially the increasing reach of the internet[158], has changed feminist engagement with these technologies – and particularly the power of feminist activism to influence regulation. Does the publicity around reproductive technologies and ease in networking enable new forms of involvement and solidarity? More precisely, how do feminist assemblages forming around the egg donation debates articulate a politics of "common corporeal vulnerability" (Butler, 2004, p.42), whilst avoiding to claim that they speak for *all* women?

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157 Charis Thompson (2005), writing for the US context and focusing on infertility from an STS tradition, has provided a rich overview of STS scholarship and feminist scholarship of reproduction and ART. The difference between the two trends for Thompson is that STS studies "up", relatively high-status scientists and knowledge production, whereas feminist scholarship of reproduction focuses on women as users of technologies, and is concerned with their practices of resistance and agency.

158 Internet access in the UK was lowest among households with a single individual over the state pension age and lone parent households. Interestingly in 2009, 43 per cent of individuals in the UK who had used the Internet in the last three months had interacted with public services via the Internet (the UK had 100 per cent public service online availability). The activity carried out over the Internet by the highest proportion of individuals was sending/receiving emails. The reasons for using a social networking site reported by the highest proportion of individuals in 2009 were talking to friends/family that the individual sees a lot or rarely (78 per cent and 75 per cent respectively). While a higher proportion of individuals use social networking to maintain contact with people they already know, one in ten users use the sites to talk to people they don't know (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

II. Constructing credibility and connecting local struggles

I would like to examine how some feminist networks seek to gain public recognition of these biodigital vulnerabilities in order to politicise them, and how this entails building cross-cultural alliances in digital networks. In doing so, these actors attempt to establish themselves as credible sources of information on the implications of egg donation policy changes. I propose that this communicative activity directly challenges the conditions of meaning-making about and through biodigital technologies and culture and this way expands how and where politics is done.

Scientific credibility has been defined by Steven Epstein (2000) as:

> [t]he capacity of claim-makers to enroll *(sic)* supporters behind their claims and present themselves as the sort of people who can give voice to scientific truths. […] It is a form of authority that combines aspects of legitimation, trust and persuasion (p.15).

Epstein (1995; 1998; 2000) identified a diversity of routes to credibility in patient activist groups in the US, particularly around AIDS, which questioned research practices and the quality of care they received. Establishing credibility for these actors was more than a strategic use of educational degrees and institutional affiliations. As Epstein (1995) illustrates, it involved empowering of laypeople's voices and a project of legitimising these voices as credible participants in the production of certain types of scientific knowledge and, thus, democratising knowledge.

Returning to feminist critiques, there has been an on-going preoccupation with the themes of risk, ethics, rights and justice; however, it is on "risk" debates that feminist networks have predominately concentrated in the last decade. During this time, several networks have formed connecting local politics and "situated knowledges" around the world, by which I refer to the broad, open scientific literacy that challenges the material-semiotic practices of technoscience (Haraway, 1997, p.11). The move towards global reproductive politics and international feminist alliances links to a recognition that legislation changes at a national level impact beyond the minority of western women who use reproductive technologies (Widdows, 2006). For example,

laws about embryo rights affect abortion rights[159], whereas risky clinical practices for egg sourcing that cannot get licensed in the west are being performed in poor countries with more permissive legal frames (Cooper, 2008).

One example of a localised network that has produced knowledge and connected local struggles is the German Women's Forum on Reproductive Medicine, Reprokult. Founded in 1999[160], ReproKult is according to their website:

a nation-wide feminist network of women from the social and natural sciences, politicians, and women from professional organizations involved with women's health and counselling centres (midwives, gynaecologists, psychologists, social workers), activist groups, and the media (Reprokult website, 2009).

The network dealt with egg donation for research purposes and framed their anxiety about commercialisation on the basis of global politics and ethics.

It is a basic ethical principle that body substances, regardless of whether they stem from regenerative or reproductive organs, should not be bought and sold (Reprokult position, 2005).

For Reprokult as one collective voice, the main concern was the risk to women's health due to the large numbers of eggs needed to produce stem cell lines. They were also worried about the indirect pressure (social, cultural) on poor women to donate, especially when the terms "donation" or "reimbursement" essentially covered hidden commercialisation (in the case of trading eggs from Romania to the UK, for instance).

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159 The view that ARTs is a form of exploitation of Southern women by some Western feminists has been criticised as neo-colonialist and paternalistic (Widdows, 2009). Nevertheless, Heather Widdows argues that Northern feminism should condone the practices of egg donation for stem cell research and prostitution which she views as exploitation of women.

160 Three years later, in Germany the Stem Cell Act in 2002 legalised embryonic stem cell research and the import of embryonic stem cell lines. In the UK in 2001 the HFEA (Research Purposes Regulations 2001/188) permitted stem cell research, including cell nuclear replacement ("therapeutic cloning"). At the same time, the Human Reproductive Cloning Act made human reproductive cloning illegal.
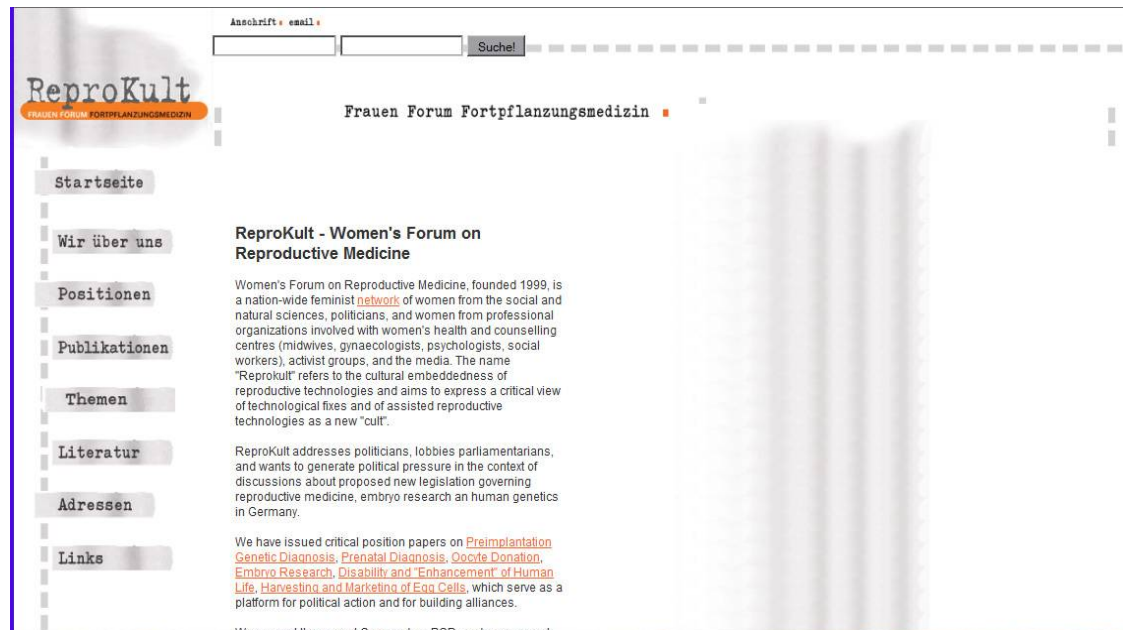
Figure 43: Snapshot of the ReproKult website.

Although the critique of Reprokult has been directed at legislation governing reproductive medicine, embryo research and human genetics in Germany, their arguments share common ground with British feminist actors that I examine in this chapter (namely with Donna Dickenson, No2Eggsploitation and The Corner House). Reprokult has also had a presence in various international activist/academic meetings[161] and it has a comprehensive online database with position papers, articles, informational material and conference records, written both in English and German. Despite the fact that these texts express a strong position (for example they refer to the "instrumentalisation" of women's reproductive capacities for research purposes), they can be considered as alternative sources of scientific knowledge about egg donation and genetic/reproductive research practices more broadly.

In the UK, actors who came together in the seminars held at the Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics (Cesagen) in Lancaster and Cardiff Universities formed a feminist network that challenged the legitimacy of policies stemming from the 2006 HFEA consultation (Plows, 2008). Scholars from this academic

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161 The network was present in the US, at the 2004 conference 'Gender and Justice in the Gene Age: A Feminist Meeting on New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies', in New York. This brought together the Center for Genetics and Society, the Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, and Our Bodies Ourselves, aiming to respond to biotechnologies from critical feminist and global social justice perspectives. In 2005 they participated at the 'Femme Globale-Gender Perspectives in the 21st Century International Congress', at Humboldt University, Berlin.

network criticised the framing of egg donation as reproductive freedom and commented on implications this had for public engagement (O'Riordan and Haran, 2009). One of the key issues at this time was that of informed consent and the conditions under which human eggs could be sourced.

> Women are most likely to be approached to provide some of their ova for research when they are seeking or undergoing IVF treatment … asking women to donate their eggs whilst they are concentrating on managing the IVF process is problematic. We question, therefore, what 'informed consent' would mean in this context (Plows *et al.*, 2006 cited in Plows, 2010, p.*143).*

The attention to consent issues at the time relates to the public controversy around the case of the Korean scientist Woo Suk Hwang (Plows, 2010), where female researchers provided eggs for his research.[162] Structural inequalities, global economic and gender injustices, in other words the social context in which women make these choices appear to defy free-choice. Other networks have also commented on the issue of informed consent (see also Beeson and Lippmann, 2006; Sexton, 2006; Alkorta, 2006; Dickenson, 2007). 'Hands Off Our Ovaries' (HOOO) adopted a hard line and suggested a moratorium in sourcing and research until risks are known. Sarah Sexton (2005), from the organisation Corner House (discussed later) indicated that ultimately structural inequalities always put women in a weaker position within a consensual agreement setting with organisational parties.

What is important to note in Cesagen's interventions is how this network, by focusing on informed consent and the conditions under which human eggs could be sourced, moved the discussion away from liberal discourses of autonomy, rights, choice and the advocacy of individual reproductive rights. This critique requires openness in the ways bioscientific research is done and regulated and is targeted towards policy makers. In this sense, we can think of this network as producing situated knowledge (for example Dickenson, 2002, 2007; Haran, 2008, 2009; Plows, 2010), perhaps not so much by aiding grassroots involvement, but rather in acting as a safeguarding structure. However, as I note next, this feminist academic network intersects with

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162 Hwang in 2005 claimed to have succeeded in creating hESC via cloned human embryos, only to be found fraudulent in 2006. The public controversy around the case also concerned the coercion of female researchers amongst Hwang's own staff to provide eggs for his research (BBC, 2005).

other, more grassroots-oriented networks, and creates spaces that enable political engagement.

Challenging the academy/grassroots binary: No2Eggsploitation campaign

Expertise has historically been held in the hands of elite groups who had power over the making and dissemination of knowledge. Although print and now new media technologies undoubtedly contribute to the proliferation of scientific knowledge to lay-persons, making claims of knowledge remains a contested field. For example, in the case of AIDS-related knowledge, these claims have been generated out of relationships of conflict and cooperation in the US since the early 1980s (Epstein, 1996). Other networks, including those with which my empirical research engaged, have also strategically mobilised social markers of expertise, namely university affiliations, prestigious positions and academic degrees in order to foster their authority. In doing so, they have resisted a clear categorisation as academic or as grassroots. Notably, Donna Dickenson and Alex Plows are both academics and involved in the informal feminist network No2Eggsploitation, which first appeared in 2009 and in response to the 2011 HFEA review.

No2Eggsploitation is a network of activist and academics who oppose women's egg trade. My involvement with the campaign included attendance to one meeting and registration to the mailing list. The participation of activists and academics makes this network bear similarities to the Cesagen feminist network and the scholarly work tangential to it; however, No2Eggsploitation is not institutionally hosted and has a predominately grassroots orientation. It published a weblog and circulated leaflets in feminist conferences and gatherings, for instance the 'Women's Liberation Movement@40' in Oxford 2010, and the 'Feminism in London 2010'.
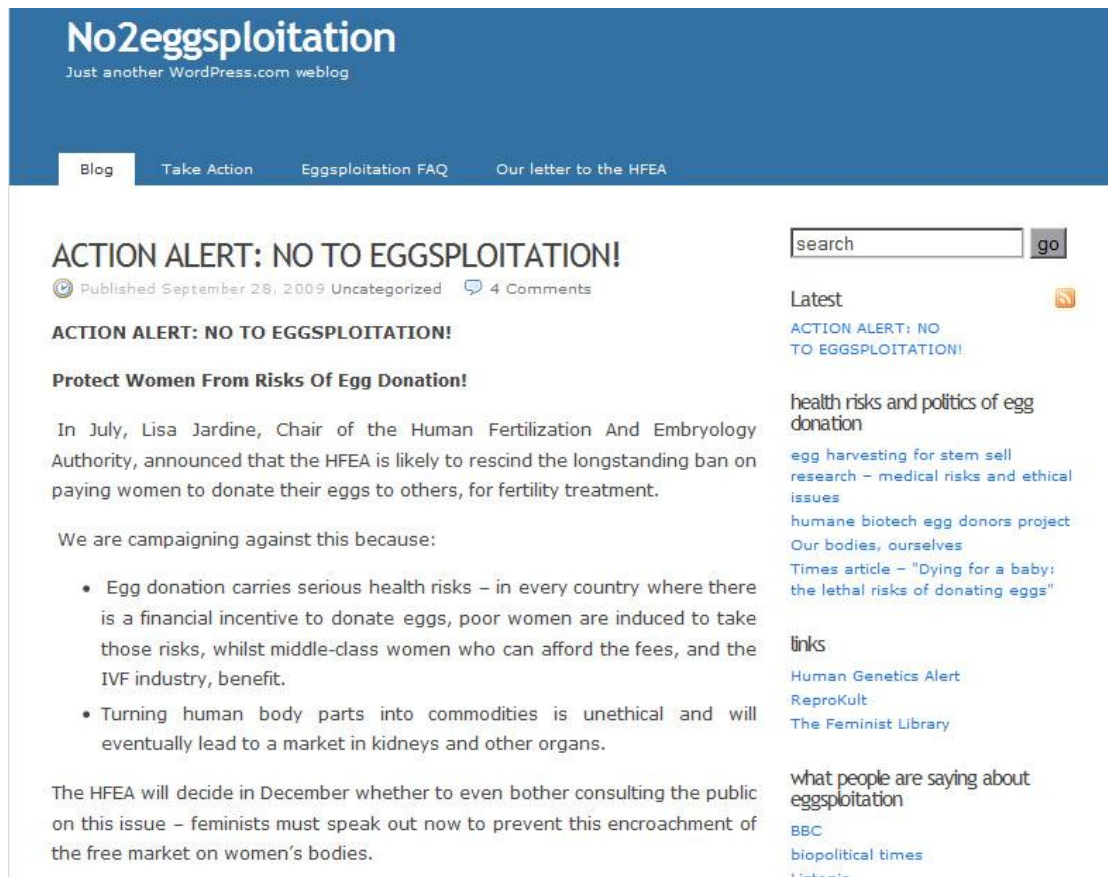
Figure 44: Snapshot of the No2Eggsploitation campaign website.

Alex Plows, who is the spokesperson for No2Eggsploitation has been involved, both as a researcher and activist, in environmental direct action. She has written about the different publics that engaged with human embryonic stem cell (hESC) research during 2003-2007. Plows' (2010) latest book researches the emergence of feminist networks engaging with reproductive and genetic technologies, and the new forms of collective identities being shaped in this process.[163] The book is itself a credible source of knowledge and a challenge to the figure of the "expert" as someone "objective" who does not get involved. For example, Plows extensively explains the use of women's eggs and processes of hESC derivation. Speaking with the chief executive of a fertility clinic at BBC Radio 4 on behalf of the No2Eggsploitation campaign, on Thursday 10 December 2009, Plows expressed anxiety about women undergoing invasive procedures for egg donation without themselves benefiting from IVF. On the 10th of

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163 Plows (2010) has written how campaigns like those of ReproKult, but also informal networks of ecofeminist, academic and anticapitalist feminist actors, shed light on the controversies surrounding the use of women's eggs during 2006.

December 2009, she noted: "Women who are in a financial difficulty are certainly the losers in the fertility market". She reminded audiences about how the HFEA has recently been criticised for not properly regulating fertility clinics, and the difficulty of operating best practice after economic incentives are introduced. Besides, Donna Dickenson is an academic working in the field of medical ethics. Dickenson is Professor Emerita of Medical Ethics and Humanities at the University of London, she coordinated research projects for the European Commission, and is part of various advisory committees, namely the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Ethics Committee (2010). These two figures thus create a vantage point from where it is possible for the No2eggsploitation campaign to contest the policy makers and other stakeholders as experts.

III. "Why is the commodification of my eggs so bad?": Representativeness, choice and responsibility.

The No2eggsploitation campaign issued a press release and was mentioned on the 17th of January 2011, when the HFEA 2011 consultation launched in the wide circulation newspapers *The Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the BBC and the *Guardian*. BBC News (2011) quoted Alex Plows as saying:

HFEA plans to allow financial compensation for egg donors will lead to the exploitation of young women in financial stress. These financial incentives will induce women students with massively increased debts, and others, to take serious health risks and it is inevitable that many will be harmed.

By addressing the wider public, and not just the readers of a feminist blog, the campaign assumed that their intervention had value for society at large, and not just the social groups that would be affected by changes in the policy about egg donation.
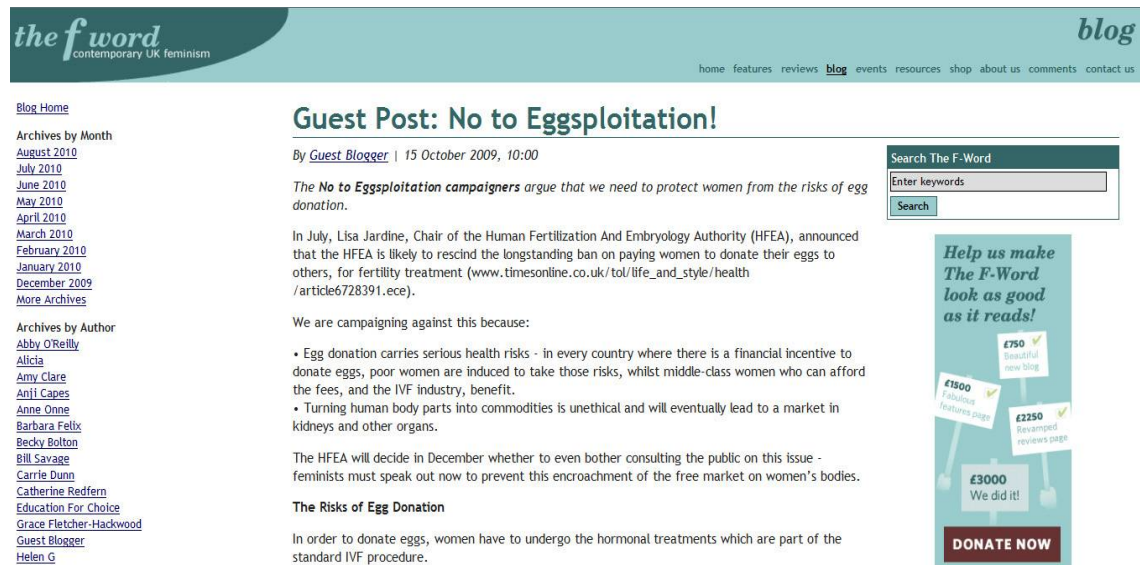
Figure 45: Snapshot of the F-word blog guest post: No2Eggsploitation.

This is also evident in the language the campaign uses in a guest post to the *F-word* blog. The guest post was published in July 2009 in reaction to the announcement of the HFEA consultation which read *Should people be paid for donating their eggs, sperm or embryos?*. It focused on risks for donors, such as Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome, and attributed the shortage of eggs to these risks: the "reason why relatively few women offer to donate eggs for others, leading to a severe shortage of donor eggs in Britain" (N2E, 2009). It also made a case for the dishonesty of the HFEA without, however, targeting its publicity strategies. Instead, the dishonesty argument builds on an ethics basis: "The argument that a 'regulated' market in Britain is better than fertility tourism is fundamentally bad and dishonest. Since when is it acceptable to argue that: "Here is a bad thing which we have always opposed, but since people are going abroad to do it, we might as well cave in and let it happen here"? (N2E, 2009). The post is analysed here mainly because the debate that evolved in the comments area gives some indication of the complexities of speaking for affected social groups, issue-formation, legitimacy and scientific knowledge. The authors of the post refer to "the whole of society" and foreground "what's best for society at large, including women's health" (dsking, *18 October 2009*), and in this way undermined the priority of women's exploitation as the central issue of this intervention.

Although the blog post - and the campaign more generally - infers the issue of egg donation to the wider society, the main No2eggsploitation campaign text addresses readers as feminists. It advocates how feminists should respond to the HFEA announcement: "feminists must speak out now to prevent this encroachment of the free market on women's bodies", and "feminists must make it clear that there is strong public opposition to the HFEA's plan" but it is also a critical comment regarding how they have acted thus far:

> Sadly, the feminist movement in Britain has historically failed to campaign on these issues, leaving an open field, for, of all people, the pro-life lobby to carry the banner of protection of women and against commercialisation of reproduction.

By making these sweeping and arguably divisive claims[164] in the No2eggsploitation blogpost, the writers construct a division between elite/knowledge-able on the one hand, and grassroots/feminists on the other. This is most striking in the way Donna Dickenson is acknowledged as a source for information about the commodification of body parts in the comments area, but not as part of the No2eggsploitation group. Donna Dickenson (2006) had also responded to the 2005 DOH Review of Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act by stating "I strongly support the position that payment for gametes should be prohibited in all circumstances, including research (such as stem cell research) that is currently outside the scope of the Act. I share the Government's concern about possible exploitation in egg 'harvesting'". In addition, in the text it is assumed that readers have some knowledge about the state of the HFEA legislation at the time. Nevertheless, some readers seemed to ignore that non-payment for donors has been the rule since 2006 (at the time of the post, compensation policy was not under review yet). Hence the No2eggsploitation text invoked informed readings as well citizen responsibility for the common good. In other words, not only the general public, but specifically feminists were addressed as part of civil society, with duty to respond to the HFEA. As it appears in the comments area of the blogpost, this appeal to citizen responsibility is unproductive, arguably because

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164 Presumably David King, judging from the nickname *dsking*. David King is associated with the Human Genetics Alert, a watchdog group on genetics issues, and was the founder of GenEthics News, an independent newsletter on genetics issues.

readers perceive egg donation as an issue linked to personal choice and politics.

What is more, the No2eggsploitation post referred to a characteristically British set of ethics. This reference potentially contributes to the group being recognised by the British young women readers of the *F-word* blog as representatives of the nation. They write: "Britain would do better to uphold its ethical principles, and resist the encroachment of the free market into every aspect of human life" (N2E, 2009). However, in my view this appeal to a nationally-bound set of ethics limits the possibilities for a critique that connects the 2011 HFEA policy shifts with the global traffic of eggs and women's body parts. Although these British ethical values clearly relate to the Keynesian values of altruistic donation and social cohesion, such positions are also risky because they may construct un-ethical "others" which are, importantly, non-Western. For instance, India's IVF industry and Thailand's sex tourism services need not be thought as unethical, through a Western ethics point of view. Instead these phenomena could be seen as part of a global economy, which is based on the exploitation of non-western labour. As Butler (2004) suggests through her engagement with Chandra Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes*, the possibility of building feminist transnational coalitions depends precisely on avoiding the recreation of a homogeneous version of women and their subjectivities in relation to their locations. Thus, whilst readers are grounding egg donation issues in women's individual choice and rights, and the No2eggsploitation text frames these issues in terms of the ethical collective responsibility of British citizens, my view is that an entirely different route would be more politically productive.

Although the No2eggsploitation post was authored to highlight the themes of the ethics of the compensation and the risks of the biomedical intervention, namely for IVF, readers approached the debate through the lens of two other themes: IVF as reproductive choice and egg trading as income source. Stem cell research, however, totally eludes the discussion of the N2E post. It does not explicitly address reproductive cloning and it is rather by one of the commentators (who has been researching therapeutic cloning for Parkinson's disease) that the link between egg donation and research is introduced. The commentator Daniela Vincenti stated on the 19th of October 2009 that she was worried about "coercion" as a way to secure bigger numbers of eggs and includes this in the possible risks for women. For commentators, risk, reproductive freedom, consumer choice and exploitation were central. Women

who considered selling their eggs, understood going through a risky procedure as a *choice* when informed consent was in place. For instance, the commentator JDZamir, noted on the 15th of October 2009:

> Yes I know the risks that are involved in egg donation. But they are my risks to take. You may class me as economically disadvantaged but that doesnt *[sic]* make my choice any less valid.

Some were sceptical of the fears that the No2eggsploitation document expressed. For example, a reader, Daniela Vincenti, pointed out on the 19th of October 2009: "The issue I have with your stance here is that you are taking a very absolutist view on what is morally a grey area". Other commentators interpreted the No2eggsploitation intervention as a rhetoric coming from a certain older, middle-class feminist perspective, which failed to grasp the materialities of poor young women. They identified a patronising tone in the post which, to them, limited reproductive freedom. For example, Helen noted on the 16th of October 2009: "Also, poor/=victim. Being poor, from a very poor family, this constantly annoys me. Seriously"; and another asked:

> Why is the commodification of my eggs so bad? And even if it is so bad surely I as a woman and feminist have the choice to make my own mistakes and successes (JDZamir, 15 October 2009).

The comments read and respond from a diversity of positions, which the text did not explicitly address. Apart from the choice-centred responses, readers did not bring forth their feminist identity. Only Kez, who nevertheless responded as a patient/consumer of IVF technologies, wrote on the 15th of October 2009: "Infertility is as painful for feminists as it is for anyone else". So even though the campaign text encouraged certain readings and addressed specific feminist identities (as engaged Western citizens), the comments show that readers responded as patients and consumers. This indicates that people chose to negotiate the role of the HFEA at making risks public from a patient and consumer position, and did not seem to be in antagonism with the governance of biomedicine, either as individuals or as groups. It is

these identities, rather than feminist ones, which gave them a sense of empowerment and security. This comes in agreement with a study of Ecuadorian *in-vitro* fertilization, showing how patients do not team up in a common identity, social group or antagonistic activism towards a medical establishment, but enjoy the benefits of patienthood (Roberts, 2008).

Responses to the blogpost signal the difficulty in creating audience identification for issues of reproductive politics that the No2eggsploitation campaign encountered. Collective mobilisation was hindered in this case especially because the prevailing readings brought forth liberal ideas of individual autonomy and overlooked the responsibility of the HFEA as a regulatory body. Framings of individual rights and personal responsibility communicated a negative attitude towards the view that such autonomy might not actually be in place, and for this generated hostility and foreclosed further dialogue about who actually is affected by this policy shift. Forming within dominant digital culture, these reader responses can be thought to express a broader understanding of participation in digital and biomedical technologies as empowerment and individual choice (See also Chapters 2 and 4). Although these readings focused on egg payment as a legitimate source of income for working class women, they did not necessarily enable a public to form around an axis of class. Today, the abundance of online sources of information about health issues goes hand-in-hand with the discourses of health choice. This makes it even harder to speak of health-related social movements or to draw comparisons with what the AIDS activist movement achieved, using the same terminology that applied when identity politics were prominent. Since ideas of rights, politics and the role of biomedicine are made within digital networked environments (Haran *et al.*, 2008), it is particularly challenging for groups like No2eggsploitation to address the multiple intersecting positions involved in the issue of payment for eggs.

IV. Differentiation and articulation of "we"

To reiterate, the main argument of this chapter is that an assemblage of feminist biopolitical networks is materially and performatively constituted in certain communic-ative acts as responses to biodigital vulnerabilities. Importantly, these communicative

acts relate to knowledge-making and cut across academic/grassroots, online/offline, and national/cultural spaces whilst they challenge these boundaries. I have explored so far how some feminist networks constitute alternative sources of knowledge in egg debates, and how they attempt to foster their credibility, and hence their capacity to speak for certain social groups. In the second component of the analysis, I looked more closely at the campaign group No2Eggsploitation and indicated the challenges various actors met in establishing themselves as representatives of affected groups. I will now move to a third axis that relates to the centrality of differentiation for the creation of contemporary feminist alliances across cultures and positions. In particular, I examine how the organisation Corner House differentiates itself from earlier feminist interventions – especially those of FINNRAGE - and from mobilisations that mainly draw on the ethics arguments (namely the pro-life group Comment on Reproductive Ethics, or COREthics[165]).

a) The Corner House

The Corner House is a not-for-profit company, founded in 1997. According to the website statement, it aims:

> to support democratic and community movements for environmental and social justice, whether they are locally-based struggles for land or water rights or better health care; campaigns against destructive mining, dam or forestry projects; or struggles against racial discrimination (CH, 2010).

The organisation's solidarity with movements for environmental and social justice involves the publication of analyses and advocacy "with the aim of linking issues, stimulating informed discussion and strategic thought and encouraging broad alliances" (CH, 2010).

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165 COREthics is associated with the Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity (CBHD), a Christian bioethics research centre of Trinity International University.
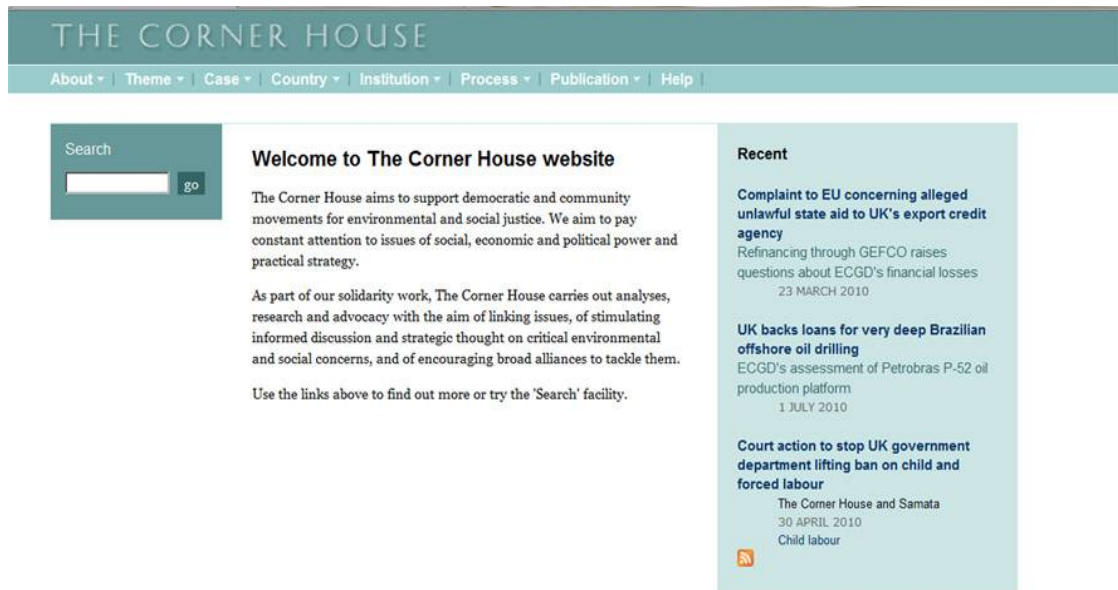
Figure 46: Snapshot of The Corner House website.

As an organisation, Corner House is concerned with a broader critique of global neoliberal economic models. Reports discussing the sourcing of human eggs, mainly written by Sarah Sexton, move away from the language of reproductive rights and the risks these practices pose for individuals towards a framing of their wider implications. The reproductive rights movement has fought for universal access to safe abortion and contraception. As the briefing *A Decade After Cairo Women's Health in a Free Market Economy* (2004) explains however, different countries have different priorities, that have come to include child bearing, for example. This distance in Corner House reports from the language of reproductive rights is intelligible. The commercial sector of new reproductive technologies has manipulated the aims of the reproductive rights movement and has taken its rhetoric out of its local contexts, for instance in the case of the legitimation of ultrasound use for sex selection purposes in India (Nair *et al.,* 2004). Nevertheless, the distance from the language of the global reproductive rights movement is not just strategic for The Corner House, but further reflects a broader political position. In the briefings and documents, egg sourcing has been framed in terms of economic and social justice with an emphasis on its implications for "health care, childcare, livelihoods, the public interest and gender equity and justice" (Sexton, 2005, p.9).

Of interest to me were those articles and Corner House Briefing Papers hosted on the website that were categorised under the themes Gender and Biotech (see

Appendix D for a full list of theme categories). In my exploration of The Corner House materials available online, including Sexton's (1999, 2001, 2005) rich and informative papers, I had difficulty, as a lay-reader, drawing explicit links between the issues of reproductive rights and technologies with regenerative medicine. Briefings listed in the website under the heading Gender predominately dealt with population debates[166]. Some of these documents have urged women's organisations to analyse the macroeconomic conditions of reproductive politics. For example, they suggest participation at the World Social Forum as a way to engage with the larger agendas of social movements (Nair *et al.,* 2004). In a briefing with the Women's Global Network of Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), which researched population control policies, it was clarified how public health and trade policies (in the arenas of food, water, sanitation, migration) impact upon women's reproductive rights. These briefings propose that population policies, such as forced contraception and sterilisation of non-white women, are concurrently a matter of rights, markets and power. Nonetheless, these papers do not draw comprehensive connections between population policies and the extraction of eggs for human embryo cloning or IVF (Sexton, 1999). Perhaps the language of reproductive rights is still very dominant in thinking about women's bodies as situated in local contexts.[167]

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166 They engaged with population control strategies which reflect a neo-Malthusian philosophy. Thomas Malthus' population theories administered that increasing human population is responsible for environmental degradation and poverty. As such they exclude the rich from responsibility for the state of the poor.

167 At the same time, in briefings where arguments emphasise environmental politics, global development the goals seem relatively abstract.
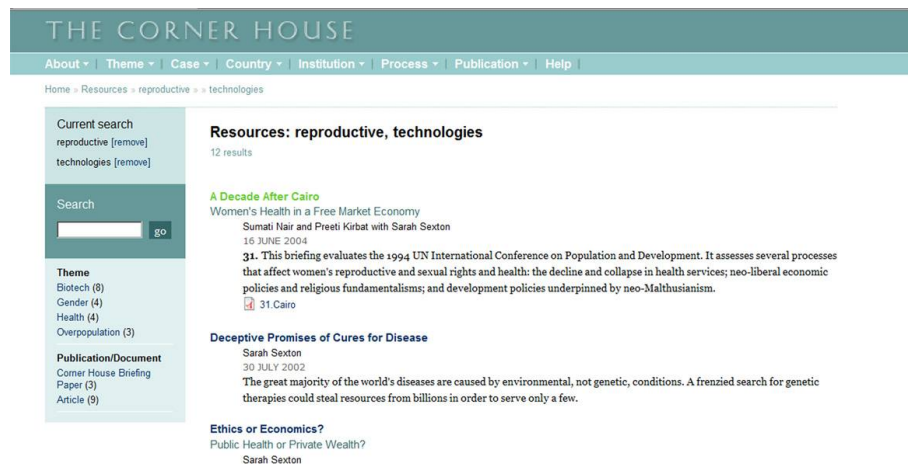
Figure 47: Snapshot of The Corner House website resources according to Themes.

The Corner House responded to the 2005-6 HFEA consultation and framed the undesirability of embryo creation for treatment in terms of health risks for women as individuals, and risks to marginalised groups (poor women in the UK and abroad). The document submitted to the HFEA review as response argued that there is a danger of encouraging ovarian over-stimulation practices in clinics that will aim to obtain maximum egg numbers. It advised against "unethical and unsafe practices" and advocated "wider consultation and decision-making process" (Corner House, 2005). In a similar tone, Sexton (2005), speaking as part of the Corner House in her presentation at a ReproKult workshop, proposed that issues of commodification and commercialisation of women's bodies were symptomatic of the wider commercialisation of healthcare and research.[168] Feminist interventions that do not take into account the implications of new reproductive technologies for the wider society (and the environment), argued Sexton (2005), would have limited results. So even though the Corner House tends to extrapolate egg commercialisation from an issue of universal weighting, they do so whilst maintaining an ethos that enables relationships with other political fields.

From this examination, it appears that the Corner House briefings and articles frame their readers as politically active beyond fixed positions. These documents, by stressing the socio-political implications of egg extraction and the wider conditions within which that takes place, encourage alliance building between different actors. By

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168 In this paper, Sexton (2005) questions who the research of embryonic stem cells serves and for whom potential cures, if developed at all, will be. One of the central concerns for her is that research supported by public funding provides "acceptability, legitimacy and the prospect of additional private sector finance" (Sexton, 2005, p.11).

pointing less to individual risks for women's health and more to the ways these policies evolve from fundamentalist and neoliberal agendas, this circulation creates a space of political possibility. This is not to say that individual rights and personal bodily autonomy are not important for feminist and queer politics – it is rather to propose what Butler (2004, p. 27) calls "another way of imagining community", one which accounts for the social conditions of embodiment. Central to a project of building coalitions between different social actors for the Corner House, as this appears from the online database, is a strategy of differentiation that does not involve the symbolic annihilation of others. It rather upholds difference of political positions and accepts the complexity of embodiment. This strategy is different to the local counterpublics examined in Chapter 3, who construct their identity in opposition to what they perceive to be Brighton's LGBT community. It is also distinct to the exclusions performed by the strand of antiporn feminism in the case of 'Feminism in London 2009', analysed in Chapter 2.

b) CORE

For the Corner House, the attitude of opening up routes for dialogue across political fields supplements their strategy of re-framing various issues and that of distancing from positions whose emphasis is ethics. It is useful here to give an account of CORE, the major actor in the UK articulating such ethics framings. CORE was founded in 1994 by Josephine Quintavalle (the co-founder of HOOO) and Margaret Nolan[169]. In the 'About' webpage, CORE (2010a) states that it is:

> a public interest group focusing on ethical dilemmas surrounding human reproduction, particularly the new technologies of assisted conception […] It aims to facilitate informed and balanced debate, to involve lay people in discussion of the issues involved, to encourage the broader participation of philosophers, theologians and social scientists in dialogue, and where necessary to bring about democratic reform to the legislation controlling these practices.

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[169] Its advisory team lists John Haldane (St Andrews University), Agneta Sutton (University of Chichester), Helen Watt (Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics), John Keown (Kennedy Institute, Georgetown), David Prentice (Center for Clinical Bioethics, Washington D.C.) and Jacqueline Laing (London Guildhall University).

To clarify, CORE, in the same manner as the Corner House and No2Eggsploitation, opposes the commercialisation of eggs; however, these three networks perceive their role in this debate differently, and as a result, allow different sorts of public engagement. CORE thus recently framed egg issues in terms of "women's rights and welfare in the field of oocyte harvesting and trading" (CORE, 2010). For example, reporting from an HFEA public meeting[170], CORE noted how there was little information available regarding the motivation, or welfare, of egg or embryo donors. The same post also stressed women's exclusion from public decision processes: "They are nearly always excluded from discussion, except when they are themselves patients prepared to share eggs in exchange for free IVF treatment". Mainly however, CORE's criticism revolves around public spending. So Quintavalle criticised the long-term plans of the HFEA and implied that the review of reimbursement of donors aimed to compensate for the spending of the HFEA. In a report appearing on the website on the 25th of March 2010, it is noted:

> With an estimated cost of over £82,000 for the exercise, we wonder whether it would not be more economical for the HFEA to simply announce immediately its inevitable policy to increase compensation for egg donation. How to justify the increase could come once payment for donor egg treatments in the UK starts pouring in.

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170 The meeting, mainly about fertility tourism was conducted by the Ethics & Law Committee (ELAC), took place in London, on February 24, 2010 (CORE, 2010b).

Figure 48: Snapshot of the CORE website.

The reports from publics meetings with the HFEA published in the CORE website predominately frame readers as informed citizens and tax-payers. Audiences are addressed as patients, clinicians and "lay people who had fertility problems" and generally as separate to the general public. Notably, in earlier interventions, CORE had stood as a protector of democratic principles and citizens as tax payers, which is in itself a problematic construction of citizenship. In the 2007 Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001 Amendment (CORE, 2007a) for example, but also in a critique of the Medical Research Centre (CORE, 2007b), CORE prompted for open parliamentary vote about definitions and use of embryos, and the redefining of parenthood (and not just for abortion). Accordingly, in the "egg raffle" case[171] in 2010, it expressed

> great concern for these women's welfare, as egg harvesting is by no means a
> risk-free process and many of those involved worldwide in the human egg
> market have suffered significantly as a result (CORE, 2010c).

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171 A £13,000 worth of IVF treatment was offered at the Genetics and IVF Institute, Fairfax, Virginia, America in a raffle at the Bridge Centre fertility clinic, London (Lois, 2010).

It appears, then, that the group constructs itself as a safeguard of morals and as a protector of vulnerable groups – both poor young women and wealthy infertile women, and the embryo. In short, although CORE holds some similar positions with the feminist actors mentioned already, its communicative practices are not aimed at mobilisation, but rather at safeguarding. By this I mean that they maintain the role of the "expert" relatively intact, in contrast to the Corner House and the Cesagen feminist seminars which, in different ways, allow readers and participants to make their own meanings.

In sum, these biopolitical feminist networks seek to establish how policy shifts, in particular here those proposed by the HFEA, impact women specifically and in doing so, they attempt to create new understandings about and through biodigital technologies, and the vulnerabilities these create. Differentiating from ethics framings, like those articulated by CORE, is crucial in this process but, as the case of No2eggsploitation pointed out, claiming representativeness is a complex strategy - especially when this appeals to a collective identity (British women) at the expense of another (non-British women). This exploration thus suggests that there is a need to bridge differences between feminist positions under a common articulation of women's body politics, a need to recognise cultural difference, and illustrates the role of digital mediation in this process.

IV. Conclusion

The central theme of this thesis is how the material conditions of meaning-making (and consequently, doing politics) transform due to the proliferation of digital technologies and network culture. In this chapter, I have taken an important conceptual step, the necessity of which was indicated in my analysis of postporn networks (Chapter 3). Here, I examined digital media in tandem with biomedical technologies. I have thus extended my understanding of women's vulnerability due to public exposure in digital visual networks to further include other kinds of anxieties and risks. Building on the concept of the biodigital (O'Riordan, 2010), I suggested that feminist groups are faced with challenging negotiations of intellectual and bodily autonomy, particularly through discourses of scarcity and replicability, in relation to

information and corporeality. I noted how the biodigital operates as a context of convergence between the digital and biotechnological and, specifically in this chapter, how it invites two modes of engagement. Thus, reproductive and information technologies in this analysis did not merely implicate matters of openness of knowledge and its regulation, but importantly mediated social and political roles.

So firstly, I discussed how feminist publics form around anxieties of individual reproductive freedom and (liberal) autonomy, as these are remediated in biodigital culture. Audience responses in the case of No2eggsploitation blogpost were subsequently framed around individual empowerment and choice. Additionally, women were addressed by the 2011 HFEA consultation as rational publics and engaged consumers. Secondly, I analysed how feminist biopolitical networks organise as wider long-lasting and cross-national mobilisations around global economic tendencies, biological and genetic research and reproductive technologies. These result from a recognition of the shared dimension of vulnerabilities posed to women and from directly engaging on a critical level with the challenging conditions of biodigital technology and culture.

Thus, I noted how this second mode of engagement enables knowledge-making and political involvement, through the establishment of online databases and through the creation of hybrid academic/grassroots spaces. The early feminist health movement, ecofeminism, feminist science and technology science and the reproductive rights movement have all in various ways challenged ideas of expertise and particularly focused on the role of women in decision-making. The AIDS activist movement has also used knowledge-empowerment between lay-people as its basic strategy and treated biomedical institutions with suspicion (Epstein, 1995). In the case of egg donation, knowledge-sharing took place through online platforms and was done in less formal and more inventive ways. For instance, the Reprokult database, and the Corner House online database both functioned as archives of alternative knowledge about biomedical sciences. In this sense, online media aid the democratisation of scientific knowledge and the dissemination of campaign material. More importantly however, digital networks operated as more than platforms. They remediate modes of politics, by creating spaces where dominant ideas of expertise and the dualism academic/grassroots were being challenged. We can think, then, of feminist biopolitical networks as organic biodigital networks that in their own right attempt to co-produce

the conditions where public and political engagement emerges.

Further, I looked at the ways in which these feminist biodigital assemblages that mobilise around issues of global commercialisation of bodily material, and the 2011 HFEA policy change, attempt to articulate a responsible and ethical position by developing cross-national horizontal links. Although for the networks forming around 'Feminism in London 2009' in Chapter 2, the project of recognition was fundamental to their communicative strategies, a single feminist identity was performed around a single issue (violence against women). The space that network occupied in an imagined grid of political positions is dissimilar to the space occupied by the biopolitical networks studied here. Primarily their scale of operation is different – feminist biopolitical coalitions develop vertical connections between local, situated, decentralised interventions and global alliances. Secondly, here differentiation between actors is a process central in the horizontal mode of operation of these struggles. By this I mean that mobilisation around particular policy moves does not imply that these actors undergo a process of reducing their political identities into one single expression of feminism. Instead they seek recognition whilst maintaining the multiplicity of positions and voices. Apart from sustaining difference, I have indicated that the biopolitical assemblages analysed in this chapter are faced with other significant challenges in their attempts to establish credibility and thus recognition.

To conclude, my emphasis here was placed on the ways women and activists are addressed as both sources of informational abundance, and as sources of raw bio material, and how these forms of labour seem to converge. As labouring to provide tissue or data appears to be the condition of participation for women in dominant biodigital culture, feminist networks make meaning about these processes. This is what makes me think that in readings of technoscience and network culture resides a possibility for a collective and responsible political articulation of "we", beyond localised individual struggles – precisely because this is the terrain where claims about the universal and the personal emerge. Recounting these mediations illuminates why it is so difficult to speak today of a representational space, but for this reason so important to think of collective identities and politics in ways different to liberalism and representation. In other words, feminist biopolitical networks not only operate on a different scale to other networks analysed in this thesis, but also signify a different mode of engagement, in that they attempt to intervene in the very co-production of

material conditions where meaning making happens in biodigital culture.

CONCLUSION
Looping threads

I started this thesis with a question about feminist and queer politicisation and digital networks – and an uncertainty about my own political identity and activity. This concluding section returns to the primary questions that drove this research, and states the significance of my contribution for the field of media and cultural studies. I also attend to the limitations and methodological issues of the current project, and conclude with one main further research trajectory that could follow from here.

In this thesis, I have attempted to address questions of politicisation in digital networks, particularly in relation to sexuality and gender. What is the role of digital mediation in doing and understanding sexual and gender politics? What kinds of feminist and queer formations emerge in digital networks? These are themes central to our wider understanding of the complex overlaps between digital media technologies, culture and politics, which have been approached differently by contemporary theorists. Thus, media studies scholars especially interested in the role of the medium, political theorists working in communications, queer studies scholars focusing on publics and activism, and academics from the field of feminist studies in science and technology have made important contributions on these issues. This thesis has sought to create a space between these intersecting disciplines as a distinct body of research.

The proliferation of digital networking practices, and the increasing saturation of our everyday lives with practices that entail some mode of connecting digitally, requires feminist and queer academics and activists to work through and position themselves in relation to these developments. This thesis has suggested that feminist and queer political modes of organising are transforming. It links this transformation with changes in the material conditions through which meaning-making takes place in digitally mediated environments. It sought to analyse these communicative practices and the contexts that enable them, in order to understand more about their theoretical and political implications. In particular, it has been concerned with the ways understandings and practices of embodiment and participation - in relation to information - enable or foreclose certain modes of feminist political engagement.

In attempting to better understand how politics are remediated in digital networks and why certain kinds of feminist and queer formations emerge in this

context, I have focused on the ways older issues and divisions within gender and sexuality politics are being re-framed today. Instead of foregrounding the particularities of individual organisations or activist groups, I have traced a topographic path that marks the relative positions of these groups and their dynamic relationships at a particular moment in time. This has allowed me to problematise notions of representativeness, identity and difference, as these are expressed across political fields, and to additionally make wider claims about what communicative practices and digital media technologies mean for feminist and queer politics more generally.

This thesis makes a distinct contribution in theoretical and empirical terms to a number of interlinking themes. Firstly, it extends Butler's (2004) conceptualisation of vulnerability and O'Riordan's (2010) framing of the biodigital to an understanding of biodigital vulnerability. Biodigital vulnerability hopes to foreground the complex intersections of culture with biotechnological and digital media in order to make a case about the material/discursive conditions where feminist and queer political articulation takes place. This way the thesis concentrates on the role of digital mediation in articulating a "we" for feminist and queer politics, and the need for differentiation. On the one hand, such a need for collective responsiveness to the conditions of vulnerability posed for women in contemporary environments is central, especially considering how multiple, autonomous, short-lived activist mobilisations in online and offline spaces remain unconnected. On the other, the project of differentiation is of importance precisely since within networked environments, the emphasis on horizontal relationships tends to homogenise the specificity of women's issues in this context. This thesis examines these developments in various contexts and scales.

Consequently, my primary claim is that feminist and queer political articulation in the context of this thesis takes the form of political responsiveness to a structure of address that I have named "dominant digital culture". To clarify, I did not frame this structure of address as a single and rigid source of discourses or as a faceless subject. Instead, following Barad's (2007) theorisation of apparatus, in conceptualising dominant digital culture I focused on the material conditions in which meaning-making takes place. I thus examined the ways doing politics in digital networks is remediated through certain material discursive practices. I suggested that feminist and queer politics form as embodied and networked responses to the felt anxieties posed by biodigital capitalism and dominant culture.

Hence, here I have analysed the material discursive practices of interactivity, participation and connectivity, but also mobility, in relation to the ways feminist and queer groups understand their own activity; political engagement more generally; and the role of network technologies in their lives. In the second chapter, I concentrated on the ways feminist groups felt that they were part of organic connections and the role of network imaginaries in transforming their modes of communication and organising. For London feminists, fears of being left out and forgotten about operated in alignment with the invitation to be part of communicative networks. I additionally noted how understandings of home, community, and mobility in digital networks comprised significant tensions for local groups in my examination of queer urban politics in the third chapter. I argued that Brighton formations, responding to anxieties of safety and locality materialised through their communicative activities as local queer counterpublics and referential metacultures. By forming friendships, networks of belonging, and primary references (of a metaculture) these queer activist assemblages made sense of their subordinate status and their feelings of unsafety in the context of changing communicative and highly economically competitive environments.

Similarly, I analysed postporn networks in Chapter 4 with regards to the exposure of queer bodies in online commercial spaces, and the concurrent circulation of gift economy ideas in relation to porn production across networked non-commercial spaces. I suggested that these constitute material discursive practices that mobilise and regulate the exchange of explicit material in these networks. Particularly, in this study I proposed the model of affective intensities as a form of organising in which ways of viewing are central. I framed affective intensities as modes of political engagement that enable collective meaning-making about digital media technologies and about the exposure of bodies. Furthermore, my discussion of visual digital cultures indicated that this exposure is part of a wider project of making biological and informational abundance and scarcity in our lives. The making of scarcity and abundance occurred on a different scale and concerned the exchange of physical bits of women's bodies, rather than digital bits in Chapter 5. However, I concentrated on how embodied vulnerability in this case mobilised women from different cultural backgrounds around egg donation debates. I suggested that biopolitical feminist networks form organically within biodigital culture and can disturb grassroots/academics binaries, and in this way create new spaces for knowledge-production and political involvement.

Hence in this thesis I have attempted to develop an understanding of how various formations resulted from vertical, counter actions, but at the same time from generative, affirmative, and horizontal activities. Communicative activities in both directions constituted responses to an apparatus that is itself both regulative and productive. In this attempt, there were several points of "stickiness" (Ahmed, 2004) for me, by which I mean points of emotional and intellectual attachment. These sticky points were, in some instances, productive sources of thinking politically. In other cases they represented "sinks" where further threads unravelled completely and figures simply vanished.

This emphasis on the dual and overlapping dimensions of productivity and control in the formation of queer and feminist politics tries to address one specific "sticky" point. It emerged on the one hand from my engagement with theories relating to politicisation in communicative capitalism (Dean, 2009) and network culture (Terranova, 2004); and on the other, from my analysis of the empirical material. To be sure, I acknowledged that there are significant challenges for systems of political representation in informational culture and technoscientific capitalism. However, I argued that these could be better afforded with a shift in the language of politicisation from representation (or lack thereof) to embodied materiality and mediation. Increased connectivity in computerised networks clearly adds complexity to forms of organisation (Urry, 2005; Fraser *et al.*, 2005). However attractive the idea of social change as emergence in network and systems theory may be, this thesis did not aim to understand feminist politics as part of a global ecology of activism, through a Deleuzian framework of becoming or new social movement theory (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Chesters and Welsh, 2005). Instead, I chose to focus on mediation as a way of thinking about this emergence of new forms of organisation and about responsiveness to biodigital culture.

Secondly, I found it crucial to frame feminist and queer politics as part of the address (in the sense that their communicative practices are, at the same time, forms of labour and processes that redefine organising) for another reason. This conceptualisation seeks to surpass what, in my view, signifies a "sinking" point in theory and praxis more generally: the framing of politics as ontological events. This is a particularly challenging point, not least because such framings seemed to sometimes prevail in participant accounts, especially in relation to postporn politics (see Edelman,

2009 in Chapter 4). Moreover, the issue-network models (Marres, 2007; Rogers, 2009) that are usually employed in relation to the mapping of civil society organisations with the Issue Crawler machine, propose an ontological framing of issues that sets them apart from the process of mediation. However, mediation is "why 'we' have never been separate from 'it'" (Kember and Zylinska, 2010, p.2). Hence I have understood such framings as closing down ways of thinking about continuity (and difference) in political identification, and especially the shared corporeal dimensions of feminist identities. Rather than thinking about the political potential of events as interruptions of the dominant order, I proposed focusing on the process of digital mediation and its centrality in understanding processes of politicisation and embodiment in technoscientific worlds today.

Embodiment and information were, perhaps for good reasons, particularly sticky objects, both in participant accounts, and in new framings of network technologies. My foregrounding of digital mediation in relation to feminist and queer engagement, seeks to propose an embodied and political way of understanding the materiality of human and nonhuman networks. Digital (and bio) technologies in this understanding are produced within, and produce themselves, meaning-making practices. Feminist and queer politics in the previous chapters were thought to materialise at the complex intersections of bodies and technologies, and took the shape of material, embodied forms of organising - they thus materialised foremost in networks, localities, affective intensities and biopolitical assemblages. In each case, these formations created their own meanings about what constitutes legitimate political communication in digital networks and developed their own material digital organisational practices.

In thinking of formation as a dynamic process, and formations themselves (as networks or publics for instance), I considered the performative role of circulating discourses and world views using the theoretical formulation of Warner (2002), but in conjunction with Barad's (2007) nonhuman meaning-making. This perhaps wild coupling was an attempt to approach the stickiness that the performative production of collectivities in digital networks represents. It was my way to account for the role of code, randomness, search engines, visualisation machines and other nonhuman agents in making meaning about politics. I thus suggested, in Chapter 2, that digital mapping produces a certain understanding of doing politics – one that finds publicity, informational abundance and web linking to be its key activity. Certainly, the circulation

of such an understanding is not central for the formation of any of the feminist or queer publics analysed in my thesis. Still, this discussion attempts to open up ways of thinking about performativity and embodiment beyond the human and the individual.

My thesis has framed materiality in a way that privileges humans, and particularly women and queer bodies, since these are here understood to be sources both of biological raw material (for example, eggs) and biodigital value through their labour (for example, online porn but also activist sites). It thus read the intersections of embodiment and information, human and nonhuman, and the political implications of these intersections, in an asymmetrical and feminist way. For this, I sought to think of ways that a collective articulation of "we" as human, vulnerable, autonomous bodies beyond individual choice and responsibility, or national community, is enabled in and through network technologies and culture.

Since I started this research project there has been a notable proliferation of online sites by feminist and queer groups, especially in web 2.0 platforms. Meanwhile, changes in biotechnologies and their regulations, but also austerity measures affecting feminist and queer academics and activists alike in the UK[172], signal how doing politics may be remediated in more fundamental ways than we imagined ten years ago. At the same time, the themes that this thesis raised, namely the complex intersection of mediation and politicisation, embodiment and information, technology and culture, are on-going concerns. When writing this conclusion in August 2011, the discussion on mainstream and social media revolved around whether the London riots were political or not. Debates about violence and neoliberalism eventually lead to the question of politicisation and mediation, in other words the question of who is recognised as entitled to political voice and what kinds of action are legitimate. At the same time, such questions close down ways of thinking about the wider implications of certain media events when they are posed in a binary mode - and digital platforms seem to contribute to that[173]. Moreover, political identities continue to be performed at these intersections between global flows of information and capital, and local relationships.

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172 What I have in mind here is educational cuts affecting particularly the humanities disciplines and gender studies in universities around the UK, but also the funding cuts affecting charitable organisations, like Rape Crisis Centres.

173 I mean to invoke the way London riots were represented in the media as either political, hence requiring some sort of involvement, or not, hence granting permission to stay in and have tea. Consequently, the *Facebook* Group, "Anti-Riot - Operation Cup of Tea" (Monday, August 15 at 8:30pm - August 31 at 11:30pm, In Your Own Home) had 332,083 members. This was promoted as a charity which would gather funds for the people whose business had been damaged.

Communicative and biotechnological capitalism continues to define the material conditions for making meaning about what politics and activism is, and for negotiating understandings of gender, sexuality, human and nonhuman. Thus, although my thesis is clearly situated within a historical and socio-political context, the problematic it raises is relevant and on-going.

Because networked media publics formed in crossing spaces in the preceding chapters, mapping them and telling a story about them has been methodologically challenging, and has brought up unpredictable methodological and political issues. Although when I started this thesis I did not think of my project as action research or creating grounded theory, my position within these technical and political networks has led me to rethink knowledge making and responsibility. I have navigated in very different spaces and scales with web crawling, discourse analysis, in-depth interviewing, participant observation and internet ethnographic methods. Through this empirical exploration, I have told a story that performatively/materially contributes to an understanding of feminist and queer politics, rather than narrates what was already there. My relationship with these publics (my intra-action with them) during the research and now, through this text, names them as feminist and queer, and additionally foregrounds certain questions and issues over others – serving this way as a catalyst for certain understandings of networks and feminisms. The difficulty has thus been how to avoid foreclosing political futures with this account but, at the same time, how not to undermine the complexity of a shared feminist present.

What I found challenging during my fieldwork was precisely differentiating from the positions various feminist and queer groups articulated whilst remaining supportive of their struggles. As academic and activist spaces frequently crossed, I would meet in conferences people familiar to me from my fieldwork. These encounters were an important part of negotiating my own researcher and feminist identity through this project. The most sticky point that stood out from my fieldwork (perhaps surprisingly, given the emphasis put in this thesis on porn themes), was the place of men in relation to feminism. Entering spaces where men were present and opening up to include them was the main issue in the agenda more often than I expected, resulting in mixed feelings. On the one hand, I felt strongly about the role of leftist and anarchist men in regulating feminist politics – especially in relation to violence and corporeality at street level. Although this does not come up in the thesis, it constitutes a context of

critical discussions that evolved online and in social spaces[174], during the unrest in Greece, France and the UK between December 2008 and August 2011. On the other hand, in other spaces discussions concerned the inclusion or exclusion of trans-identified people and were aimed at undermining sex binaries. There were thus strong undercurrents of different political traditions in various spaces, which demanded an equally strong reflexive approach on the question of men and feminism. Although these spaces are seemingly unlinked, I think that contemporary expressions of feminism and queer politics are largely haunted by the spectre of this question (the inclusion of men and the wider question of essential and strategic identity), however tangential that was to this thesis.

As this thesis drew together a network of publics that would not have run across one another otherwise (precisely because they emerged in such different scales and contexts, and because the thesis itself as a text is a political performance in a way), new theoretical threads originated. It is important then to note that my thesis is itself an emerging entanglement, a trace of my intra-action with questions and ideas, not based on a preconceived theoretical hypothesis or map. In the same way that my empirical methodology has responded to the difficulties and sticky objects in the fieldwork, my theoretical trajectory has crossed various disciplines and has navigated various critical approaches. These approaches, when brought together, often create tensions - not least because of their own different intellectual attachments. I am aware of these tensions, but still think that research needs to be conducted with a playful attitude and to transcend disciplinary rules for the pleasure of creating new connections and routes of understanding. Thus by not being faithful to just one disciplinary field, I hope that I have drawn new tangents, just like the formations presented in the various cases have crossed and re-framed boundaries between bodies and information, academy and grassroots, (mater-)reality and representation.

Thus, I would like to conclude this thesis by identifying one line of thought that would be of interest in future research. I have assumed that histories of feminist movements informed the formation of contemporary identities and I have indicated how identity is material and situated. The material practices of making feminist

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174 It also links to the question of anticapitalist politics and the "event". There has for a example been an extensive discussion about the Tarnac 9 publication *The Coming Insurrection* (COMITÉ INVISIBLE, 2009) which received the feminist response *Why she doesn't give a fuck about your insurrection* (Anon, 2009).

memory are changing, as personal narratives and ephemera are increasingly being digitally archived. These constitute new configurations of time, and new understandings of feminist pasts. At the same time, it has been pointed out how repro- and biotechnologies create new temporalities that challenge traditional understanding of time as life cycle. For me then, a trajectory from the current project is to find ways of thinking productively about these different temporalities created in biodigital worlds, in ways that conceptualise discontinuity and interruption in a political way. For instance, where exactly is the past in accounts of contemporary feminism? Where is the future and how is it spatially and materially constructed? Thinking about the flows of bodies and bits of information in networks through these new configurations of time would interestingly further "queer" binaries of new and old, but also of abundance, replicability and waste.

To refocus on the textual and material present of this thesis however, I have here examined the changing communicative and organisational practices of feminist and queer formations that result from their engagement with network technologies. Although earlier political formations have also been networked, I suggested that digital media technologies constitute a new set of challenges and opportunities for doing feminist and queer politics. I have argued that these technologies change the material conditions where making meaning about politics takes place, and focused on these various different discursive practices in the political contexts of this thesis. The spaces and assemblages produced through these material practices, and understood in terms of digital mediation, were embodied and dynamic forms of engagement. They constituted responses to the biodigital vulnerabilities, or the vulnerabilities that biodigital technologies and dominant digital culture generates for women today. For this, in some instances formations were one step behind, and in others, one step beyond capitalism. And this is also how this thesis has fluctuated between enthusiasm and scepticism about queer and feminist politics in digital networks.

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APPENDIX A (Chapter 2)

1) WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

EAVES

Eaves is a London-based charity. It is a member of the End Violence Against Women Campaign, a coalition of individuals and organisations who in 2009 called on the Government, public bodies and others to take concerted action to end violence against women. Eaves was formed in 1977 as Homeless Action. Its aim was to target the hidden homeless – single women without dependants who are least likely to have other means of support – by providing them with high quality, temporary homes. Eaves runs several different support and accommodation projects, like POPPY, as well as carrying out research and training on tackling violence against women (Eaves Website, 2009). During my research they supported the Demand Change Campaign, a joint initiative with Object!, which lobbied to challenge the demand for prostitution. Their other campaign at the time, Nothing Personal, asked London's local newspaper owners and editors to cease the publication of "adult" or "personal" ads.

POPPY Project

The POPPY Project is part of Eaves and was established with support from the Home Office in 2003. According to the website, "it is funded by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform (reporting to the Ministry of Justice) to provide accommodation and support to women who have been trafficked into prostitution or domestic servitude. It has 54 bed spaces in houses nationally. The POPPY Outreach Service works to improve the safety and well-being of women from all over the UK who have been trafficked and who are in need of short-term support and advocacy". To date more than 700 women have been referred to the POPPY Project.

Rights of Women

The Rights of Women is a women's voluntary organisation which advocates for women's legal rights. It was founded in 1975 and offers free confidential legal advice through an advice line, specialist advice in family law, divorce and relationship breakdown, children and contact issues, domestic violence, sexual violence, discrimination and lesbian parenting. They also provide training for organisations (women's organisations, voluntary organisations, lawyers, social workers, employers, trade union representatives, legal advisers)and others. They seek to influence policy by undertaking original research, by responding to policy documents from Government and other sources, organising conferences on women's rights, and holding public meetings. For education purposes they publish handbooks and various information sheets on key issues of family law.

South London Fawcett Group

The South London Fawcett Group (SLFG) had their first meeting 1998. Back then they used post, regular mail and there are still members which do not use email. According to the SLFG spokesperson, newer members are expected to communicate all the time, whereas for older members, technological development happen very fast. They set up a website after 2000 and have been using email for 4-5 years now. They are subscribed to the WRC newsletter, the FS alerts, the WiL newsletter, and the LFN email list. Also, they receive the City Hall's email list

(Lambeth), and often publish at the South London Press, the local newspaper.

UK FEMINISTA.

The site features various campaigns and has many resources for free – and "serves as a one stop for activism". In the summer of 2010, they held a two day Summer School of feminist activist training and inspiration. It also promotes the book *The Equality Illusion* (2010), by the UKFeminista founder Kat Banyard. UKFeminista describes itself as "a movement of ordinary women and men campaigning to end gender inequality". One of its board of trustees is Beatrix Campbell. The website has a webpage about London Local Activist Groups with links to the LFN, the SLFG and Third Wave.

2) THE CRIME AND POLICING BILL 2009

In the governmental document *Together we can end Violence against women and girls: A Strategy* (HM Government 2009), the issues to be tackled included: domestic violence, forced marriage, prostitution, honour crimes, sexual violence, trafficking for sexual exploitation, stalking, and female genital manipulation. It was planned as a strategy of actions for the police, local authorities, the NHS and government departments across three key areas: protection, provision, and prevention, whilst it includes education in schools, starting in 2011. The reforms proposed in the Bill at the time (now an Act) concerned "removing requirements of persistence from the offence of kerb crawling, the creation of Prostitution Referral Orders, regulation of lap dancing clubs, creating Brothel Closure Orders and creating a new criminal offence of paying for sexual services of a prostitute controlled for gain. These reforms are due to come into force by the beginning of 2010" (2009, p.37). These amendments were justified in the review "Tackling the demand for prostitution", published in November 2008 by the Home Office. The review recommended "measures to prohibit the purchase of sex from someone controlled in prostitution and action to tighten up offences that prohibit the purchase of sex on the street or in a public place" (2008, p.37).

As stated in the Home Office document *Violence Against Women and Girls strategy*, under the section "The protection of women and other vulnerable people from domestic and sexual violence", objectives included:
- Firstly, "[t]o drive forward work on sexual violence, with a particular focus on improving the investigation and prosecution of rape offences and protecting children from sex offenders" (2009, p.35).
- Secondly, "[t]o roll out the good practice we have developed in tackling domestic violence", with doubling the number of operating Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences. It also planned to "build on the increased number of SARCs [sexual assault referral centres] now operating across England and Wales" (p.29).
- Thirdly, "[t]o reduce street prostitution, human trafficking and all forms of sexual exploitation".

3) ISSUE CRAWLER SETTINGS

3a. The Pilot crawl

In the first strand (pilot) of the mapping, I tentatively identified the UK-wide feminist network around the issue of VAW. Initially, I followed the govcom instructions and consulted dominant organisations which mainly set the agenda for CSOs, called 'issue aggregators'. The 'issue aggregators' used were :

1. the European Social Forum,
2. the Network against Honor Crimes,
3. the European Feminist Initiative for another Europe,
4. the Gender and Development Network UK,
5. United Nations Development Fund for Women,
6. One World Action,
7. International Alliance of Women site (the indication of an older version of the Issue Crawler machine, the 'netlocator'.
1. The European Social Forum (ESF) page of September 2008 in Malmo indicated a network I followed, comprised of the actors:
8. IFE/EFI (http://www.ife-efi.org/eng/informations.html), concerned with sexual and reproductive rights (secularism issue in Poland concerning IVF rights, climaxed with petition in July 2009) and EU policies.
9. The network against Honor Crimes (International Campaign Against Honor Crimes (*facebook*), Kurdish women Action against honour killings (KWAHK) (London) petition (http://www.petitiononline.com/kurdish/petition.html)
10. GADIP of the Centre for Global Gender Studies (University of Gothenburg) (intended as a common platform for activists and researchers) and UK GADNET (http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/) (currently coordinated and hosted by WOMANKIND Worldwide).
11. UNIFEM (http://www.unifem.org/), with four strategic goals: Reducing Women's Poverty and Exclusion, Ending Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women), Halting the Spread of HIV/AIDS, Achieving Gender Equality in Democratic Governance.

Other 'issue aggregators' or 'issue portal sites' included One World Action, European Women's Movement and European Women's Lobby (EWL) (calling for 24 Weeks Paid Maternity Leave, trafficking for sexual exploitation).

A 2006 account of the 'netlocator' established all European women's issues of gender equality in this site) and the European Women's Movement and European Women's Lobby. The issues set by these portals were found to be: VAW, pay gap and reproductive rights. I subsequently performed Google searches for sites and Technoratti for blogs relating to UK feminism, IVF and reproductive rights, VAW and gender equality. The search outcomes were next filtered firstly in terms of location, and secondly in terms of activist agenda. After these steps of selections and reductions, I submitted the starting points for the first web crawl.

3b. The first co-link crawl, launched 30 September 2009

Starting Points:
http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/
http://www.catwinternational.org/campaigns.php
http://stoppornculture.org/home/
http://www.corethics.org/
http://www.wgnrr.org/
http://www.wonbit.net/readingroom/
http://www.handsoffourovaries.com/
http://www.wrc.org.uk/
http://www.womens-health.org.nz/
http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/
http://www.ourbodiesourblog.org/
http://womensspace.wordpress.com/
http://bppa.blogspot.com/
http://mindthegapuk.wordpress.com/
http://cruellablog.blogspot.com/
http://www.thefword.org.uk/
http://bloggingfeminism.blogspot.com/
http://www.oneangrygirl.net/antiporn.html
http://www.backlash-uk.org.uk/
http://facnews.blogspot.com/
http://www.feministactivistforum.org.uk/
http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net/
http://www.finrrage.org/
http://www.feministpeacenetwork.org/
http://womensgrid.freecharity.org.uk/

3c. Second Crawl (launched at 2 Oct 2009)

In the second strand of IC use, I mapped the network of London feminist organisations which

formed before and after the conference Feminism in London 2009.

Starting points:

womensaid.org.uk
object.org.uk
fawcettsociety.org.uk
rapecrisis.org.uk
thefword.org.uk
southallblacksisters.org.uk
endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk
wrc.org.uk
cwasu.org
asylumaid.org.uk
truthaboutrape.co.uk
abortionrights.org.uk
whiteribboncampaign.co.uk
thewnc.org.uk

womankind.org.uk
refugeecouncil.org.uk
forwarduk.org.uk
nawp.org
broken-rainbow.org.uk

The relevant Actor Rankings (core network and periphery, by page) of the network is shown

below.

1 endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk - 165	11 - rapecrisis.org.uk - 30
2 - womensaid.org.uk - 87	12 - cwasu.org - 29
3 - rapecrisisscotland.org.uk - 71	13 - object.org.uk - 27
4 - refuge.org.uk - 64	14 - welshwomensaid.org – 22
5 - tuc.org.uk - 45	15 - stonewall.org.uk - 12
6 - fawcettsociety.org.uk - 43	16 - truthaboutrape.co.uk - 11
7 - southallblacksisters.org.uk - 40	17- abortionrights.org.uk - 11
8 - unison.org.uk - 31	18 - unifem.org - 9
9 - thewnc.org.uk - 31	19 - womeninlondon.org.uk - 6
10 - nawp.org - 31	20 -thefword.org.uk - 6

3d. Third Crawl for the event Feminism in London 2009 (launched 27 October 2009)

Starting points

http://www.fil.btik.com/p_Useful_Links.ikml
http://www.abortionrights.org.uk/component/option,com_weblinks/Itemid,4/
http://www.abortionrights.org.uk/component/option,com_newsfeeds/catid,66/Itemid,108/
http://antipornfeminists.wordpress.com/
http://www.cawn.org/html/work.htm
http://www.crop1.org.uk/
http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Lilith_Research_And_Development/PeerProject.php
http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/index.php
http://www.emmahumphreys.org/links/links.htm
http://www.equalitynow.org/english/wan/wan_en.html
http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resource/links
http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=117
http://www.fcap.btik.com/links/all.ikml
http://feministlibrary.co.uk/
http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/resources/links
http://www.theglassbar.org.uk/links.html
http://www.housmans.com/links.php
http://www.imkaan.org.uk/pub/index.php?id=25
http://www.imece.org.uk/en/links/dvdirectory/
http://nlfg.wordpress.com/
http://millionwomenrise.com/about/about/supporters.html
http://millionwomenrise.com/aboutviolence/aboutviolence/usefulinfo.html
http://www.mothersagainstviolence.org.uk/links
http://www.ldnfeministnetwork.ik.com/p_NewLinks.ikml

http://www.pinkstinks.co.uk/news_links.php
http://www.owch.org.uk/owchpages/linx.html
http://www.object.org.uk/index.php/resources/links
http://www.spanuk.org.uk/index.php?page=policy-and-research
http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/resources.html
http://www.wgn.org.uk/campaigns.html
http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/links.html
http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/funders.html
http://www.slonfawcett.org.uk/default.asp?iId=LDFIG
http://www.solacewomensaid.org/services/index.html
http://soasunion.org/external-resources/
http://www.womankind.org.uk/links.html
http://www.womeninblack.org.uk/Links.htm
http://www.refugeewomen.com/partners.php
http://www.wilpf.plushost.co.uk/index.php?option=com_weblinks&Itemid=23
http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/useful_links.aspx
http://www.any-body.org
http://www.fil.btik.com/p_Speakers.ikml
http://www.scarylittlegirls.co.uk/about-us/online-associates

Issues other than violence-against-women (which appeared in more than 10 instances):

domestic violence, demand change, swa (Scottish Women's Aid), wnc partners (Women's National Commission), wen (Women's Environmental Network), radical feminism, the f-word, sexual violence, imece, environmental network, southall black sisters, resource centre, london metropolitan university, domestic abuse, nawp (Newham Asian Women Project), end violence, ealing council, reclaim the night, discrimination against women, abortion rights, camden centre, dna database, poverty, sudanese president, kate moss, eaves.

Actor Ranking for the top 50 actors without taking the issue into account.

Actor Rankings (core network and periphery, by page)	28 - slonfawcett.org.uk - 71
	29 - londonmet.ac.uk - 70
	30 - ldnfeministnetwork.ik.com - 70
1 - thefword.org.uk - 934	31 - childline.org.uk - 68
2 - feministing.com - 660	32 - womensaid.org.uk - 63
3 - refuge.org.uk - 531	33 - homeoffice.gov.uk - 57
4 - abortionrights.org.uk - 500	34 - rightsofwomen.org.uk - 48
5 - millionwomenrise.com - 500	35 - southallblacksisters.org.uk - 48
6 - guardian.co.uk - 450	36 - facebook.com - 47
7 - fawcettsociety.org.uk - 395	37 - thewnc.org.uk - 38
8 - object.org.uk - 347	38 - writetothem.com – 37
9 - endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk - 323	39 - petitions.number10.gov.uk - 36
10 - rapecrisis.org.uk - 303	40 - direct.gov.uk - 35
11 - wrc.org.uk - 298	41 - thehideout.org.uk - 35
12 - eaves4women.co.uk - 272	42 - nawp.org - 32
13 - cwasu.org - 241	43 - theyworkforyou.com - 31
14 - whiteribboncampaign.co.uk - 236	44 - reclaimthenight.org - 31
15 - ukwilpf.org.uk - 235	45 - equalityhumanrights.com - 29
16 - demandchange.org.uk - 234	46 - antipornfeminists.wordpress.com - 29
17 - mapofgaps.org - 234	47 - broken-rainbow.org.uk - 27
18 - catwinternational.org - 232	48 - nspcc.org.uk - 26
19 - gldvp.org.uk - 231	49 - tuc.org.uk - 24

20 - fcap.btik.com - 230	50 - asylumaid.org.uk - 24
21 - wen.org.uk - 228	
22 - crop1.org.uk - 228	
23 - niaproject.info - 227	
24 - womenlobby.org - 226	
25 - any-body.org - 223	
26 - rapecrisisscotland.org.uk - 79	
27 - womeninlondon.org.uk - 74	

3e. MAP LEGEND: Nodes are websites linked to by two or more feminist websites. Node size represents 'centrality' in the network which is the number of nodes that link to the website (links from network) plus the number of nodes that it links to (links to network). Direction of hyperlinking between nodes is indicated by arrows. Node size represents the number of nodes in the network that link to the website. Node colour represents the top level of the website domain name. See also legend panel on right hand side of figure.

Maps provided in A3 format:
- ⚲ Map (1). Top 100 nodes
- ⚲ Map (2). Top 50 nodes.
- ⚲ Map (3). Top 20 nodes.

4) INTERVIEWS - LONDON FEMINIST GROUPS

4a. Interview Question Guide

Priorities for Action (what is the issue?)
-What are you passionate about now? What feminist issues interest you mostly? Why? -Which issues would you like to collaborate with others next?

-Who represents the feminism in the UK?

-How will your actions serve women 50 years from now?

Regional aspect of feminist organisations
- Do you think London's feminism has been successful over time? Why? How do you compare it to other regions in the UK?

-What are the catalytic events that led to its development?

-What are the major barriers that have appeared (and been overcome) at critical events in the evolution of the London feminism?

-Is there a regional consensus on feminist network development issues at the moment?

Network Focus
-What sort of networks or connections have helped the group to develop?

-How have these networks helped?

-How have the networks evolved over time to meet the needs of the feminist community?

-Are there any networks that have been particularly important in attracting more participation or funding?

-Is there a strong feminist group of local support and strategic advising services for start-ups? How have they been helpful to you?

Media Focus

-What are the major sources of new ideas and information for action/organising/ writing ?

-What (technological/ cultural) factors are important to, or have an impact on, action for you? Has this changed from the past?

-What is your group's outreach policy? How much time do you spend on informal interaction with other groups? Who decides about media use in the group?

-Is there much interaction between you and different groups in different sectors (academy, media etc) and individuals?

-What mechanisms (formal & informal, network-related) help move activism from thought to action?

-Are there other organizations/ teams/ email lists/ web pages that support exchange of information to you or other groups?

-How effective is the site in changing attitudes? In changing laws or governmental policies?

-What media practices, apart from the site, directly impact your intervention process/results?

-How important are media activities compared to other (examples)?

Universities

-Do you have linkages with University feminist community? Points of connection?Are the

relationships formal/informal? Are university partnerships with activists prevalent?

-What are these partnerships focused around?

-How does the University support your group? (Providers of volunteers, researchers,

graduates)?

-How has this changed over time?

Mapping Sheet (Please note what is the most important issue for you/ your organisation:..)

Question 1: Who is involved?

—Who can influence the restructuring of your group/organization?

—Which groups and individuals are involved in this?

—Who has influenced this action/ decision/ change of policy?

Question 2: How are they linked?

Question 3: How influential are they?

Question 4: What are their goals?

4b. List of interview requests

I initially suggested participation to organisations and individuals on the day of the conference, and followed up with emails. I also contacted conference participants who did not have stalls at the event (or were difficult to locate after their talks) solely by email. I requested an interview from the following:

- Women and Girls Network (WGN)(presented the workshop Racism and sexism: what are the issues for black and minority ethnic women?)
- Sabrina Qureshi (Million women rise)
- Stop Porn Culture
- Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – International
- POPPY Project
- Abi Moore from Pink stinks
- Southall black sisters
- Kate Smurthwaite-Cruella blog
- Women against fundamentalism
- Women's Aid
- Laury Penny (PennyRed Blog)
- Abortion rights
- Anti-Porn Feminists
- Mothers Against Violence
- Older Feminists Network

4c. List of Interviews

- Beatrix Campbell *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] London, British Library, 21 November 2009.
- Carry Hamilton. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] London, British Library, 31 October 2009.
- Finn Mackay. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [Email questionnaire] Brighton, 22 November 2009.

- Rebecca Morden. 2009. *Interview with the artistic director of Scary Little Girls.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] Conway Hall, London, 10 October 2009.

- Susie Orbach. 2009. *Interview at the Feminism in London 2009 Conference*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] Conway Hall, London, 10 October 2009.
- South London Fawcett Group (SLFG). 2009. *Interview with the spokesperson.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] Home location, London, 30th of October 2009.

- Anna van Heeswijk. 2009. *Interview at the Feminism in London 2009 Conference as the Grassroots Coordinator of Object.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou. [MP3 Audio recording] Conway Hall, London, 10 October 2009.
- Leah Williams. 2009. *Women's Resource Centre.* [MP3 Audio recording] Annual General Meeting, London, 19 November 2009.

APPENDIX B (Chapter 3)

1) INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR QUEER MUTINY AND WESTHILL WOTEVER PARTICIPANTS

1a. Structured Questions for Francis

12. Tell me a story about you so I can know you better.
13. How are you connected to Brighton and what does it mean to you?
14. What political actions have you been involved in?
15. What is your experience with queer activism?
16. Take me through the typical organising procedure of an event. How do you go about it?
17. How did the *Westhill Wotever* come into existence? What happened during the first event(s)? What have been the turning points of Brighton *Wotever* life?
18. What kinds of media do you use for activism today? How is it different from the past?
19. What is your everyday experience with various communication technologies? How is your typical day?
20. What is community for you, online and offline? How are they related?
21. What is the relationship of Brighton Wotever Westhill and Queer Mutiny with the LGBT scene? What is the role of your group for LGBT rights beyond Brighton?

1b. Questions sent to Drew by email

- What does Brighton mean to you and how are you related to the LGBT scene in Brighton?
- How would you say you use the Internet politically? How is it important to you?
- What kinds of feminist/queer activist media and events have you been part of so far and how would you describe the most successful one?
- What is *Queer Mutiny* to you and how does it connect to other activist projects you are involved in?

1c. Questions for reflection session with Christian.

- After the first session, I interpreted her relationship with technology as a relationship with the 'other'. In session two, you corrected me. I wonder how far my reflection changed your attitude to that relationship. Was that a correction to me (to something that I misinterpreted, or did you actually rethink her relationship to technology?
- You've talked about 'hard' activism and 'soft' activism. At some point you said 'I'm not the kind of person who will put their hood on and fight the police'. And I wanted to know more about this idea of soft/hard activism, if there is such a thing, and what you think 'activism' is.
- What is the perfect shape queer activism could take, as you now practise this in the different groups you belong in? What kind of social change you envision and what would the best way to do it be?

2) LIST OF INTERVIEWS

- Drew. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording] Brighton, 25th of February 2009.
- Christian. 2009. *Session 1.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording] Brighton, 11th of February 2009. No transcript.
- Christian. 2009. *Session 2.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording]
- Christian. 2009. *Session 3: Reflection.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording] Brighton, 10th of March 2009. Brighton, 25th February 2009.
- Francis. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording] Brighton, 6th of March 2009.
- Stephan. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [Email questionnaire] Brighton, 17th of March 2009.
- Martha. 2009. *No Title*. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [Email questionnaire] Brighton, 17th of March 2009.
- Linda. 2009. *Brighton Ourstory Archive and Brighton's LGBT History.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio recording] Brighton, 9th of April 2009.

3) BRIGHTON LGBTQ ACTIVISM (Compiled with information from A History of Lesbian & Gay Brighton, Chapter 4: A Community Comes of Age, 1988-2001, *Ourstory*, and from Count Me In Too project information).

- ⚞ 1983: Brighton Gay Switchboard produces one of the first leaflets in the country about HIV/AIDS. The Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard has been operating since 26th April 1975 and is both a registered company and a registered charity. It provides a range of services to Brighton's LGBT communities, including low-cost counselling, relationship counselling to LGBT couples and hate crime reporting.
2. 1985: Sussex AIDS Helpline.
3. 1989: Brighton Ourstory Project, lesbian and gay history group.
4. 1989: set up of the AIDS Positive Underground Theatre Company.
5. 24th May 1988: Section 28 became law. It forbade local councils to 'promote homosexuality' or teach 'the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.
- ⚞ February 1988: First public meeting of Brighton Lesbian Action, Brighton Area Action Against Section 28 (BAAAS28)
- ⚞ 1990 "Five demonstrators promoting the cause of lesbian and gay parenthood disrupted the Princess of Wales's address to the International Congress for the Family in Brighton yesterday". The Times 13 July 1990
- ⚞ 1991: BAAAS28 - change the focus of the march from demonstration to celebration- first Brighton Pride March since 1973. Brighton's first lesbian and gay community safety survey.
- ⚞ 1992 first Pride in the Park, organised by a group of community activists called Pink Parasol. The Deaf Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people Club 'Punch and Judy' was established.
- ⚞ 1994: BAAAS28 Campaign end (new name OUTrights!). Punch & Judy Club hosted the National Deaf lesbian and gay club meeting at Sussex AIDS Centre.
- ⚞ 1995: Brighton Pride - first to attract major sponsorship from pubs, clubs and drag artists.
- ⚞ 1997: Change of government means that Council supportive of Brighton and Hove's LGBT community. New funding changes LGBT voluntary and community sector.
- ⚞ 1998: The Lesbian and Gay Community Safety Forum was set up as a multi-agency response to the problem and also formed a group called Diversity Alliance to tackle anti-gay bullying in schools.
- ⚞ Pride 2000 and 2001 reporting 60,000 visitors. Brighton's first free gay magazine, G-Scene, funded partly by advertisements pubs and clubs (http://www.gscene.com)
- ⚞ 2000 changes in attitude of local newspaper, the Argus supporting local initiatives to combat gay-bashing. Count Me In survey.
- ⚞ 2001 the Police launched their Anti-Victimisation Initiative funding two specialist workers from the LGBT community.

4) GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS USED IN THE CHAPTER

Adopted from BORNSTEIN, K. (1998). *My gender workbook: how to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely*. New York, Routledge.

Nominative (subject)	*Ze.* Example: *Ze* laughed
Objective (object)	*Hir.* Example: I called *hir*
Possessive pronoun	*Hir.* Example: *Hir* eyes gleam
Possessive determiner	*Hirs.* Example: That is *hirs*
Reflexive	*Hirself.* Example: Ze likes *hirself*

APPENDIX C (Chapter 4)

1) CULTURE JAMMING SUICIDEGIRLS.COM – REALSUICIDEGIRL
by Matteo Pasquinelli posted at [Netporn-l] Thu, 13 Oct 2005 04:20:54 -0700.

"A bit about me written by Mika Minio-Paluello:

Hanadi Jaradat, a 29-year-old lawyer from Jenin, blew herself up in the Haifa Maxim restaurant in early October, killing 21, including four children. Her younger brother Fedi was executed by an Israeli undercover unit in front of her, despite her trying to protect him. On June 12th, three days before Fadi's wedding, the family was in the courtyard of the house. Salah Jaradat, Fadi's cousin and a member of Islamic Jihad, came to visit his pregnant wife, Ismath, and their two-year-old son, who were living with the family.

MEMBER SINCE: October 2005
AGE: 30 (Sep 22, 1975)
LOCATION: Palestine
HOMETOWN: Jenin
SIGN: I've seen it.
OCCUPATION: Law, until that proved insufficient.
STATS: Don't commodify people.
BODY MODS: A few.
FAVORITE BANDS: Chrissy Hynde.
FAVORITE FILMS: Battle of Algiers.
FAVORITE BOOKS: The Qur'an, The Bible, Give Me Liberty: The Uncompromising Statesmanship of Patrick Henry
FAVORITE TV SHOWS: Xena the Warrior Princess.
VICES: Deadly revenge.
CURRENT CRUSH: Mordechai Vanunu.
INTO: Fighting oppression.
MOST HUMBLING MOMENT: You have to ask?
5 ITEMS I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT: I only wanted two: My brother and justice.
MAKES ME HAPPY: Family. The Act of Sacrifice.
MAKES ME SAD: Israeli colonial aggression. Your imperialist government. Your lying media. Your passivity. The need for sacrifice.
GETS ME HOT: You have a very crude culture, the way you talk of such things.
I LOST MY VIRGINITY: Not.
FAVORITE SEXUAL POSITION: My mother – who I actually talk about these things with – tells me she really enjoys something I can hardly wait to try – oh, no, I guess I'll have to
FANTASY: For you to understand.
CURRENT THOUGHTS ON SG: I hate it
WEBSITE: http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm"

2) FOCUS GROUP SCREENING OF "I.K.U. - THIS IS NOT LOVE THIS IS SEX" (10 FEBRUARY 2010)

2a. Questions

Thinking about the screening.

22. What did you like about the film? What didn't you? Why? (TEXT+ FEEL)
23. How does it feel watching such material with people with similar interests? (FEEL)
24. How is such material important for your own identity (academic – artist- activist- sexual)? (IDENTITY + TEXT)
25. How can such meeting be political? (*)
26. Have you participated in something similar before? Private – Public – semipublic. (HISTORY)
27. General interest in porn – queer/alt porn, feminist porn, festivals (HISTORY)
28. What did you expect about the film? Story – distribution – narrative - realism – alternative ending – production – similarities to web nonlinear narrative? Pussy point of view? (TEXT)
29. How is today's experience (public screenings of explicit material) different to cinema screenings (for the wider audience)? How are they different to private screenings? (FEELING - SPACE)
30. How do you feel this film has affected you? Other material that is circulated? ('what everybody knows' call to reproduce) (IDENTITY + TEXT)
31. Can such a space be a space for dialogue and connection? (SPACE)- Is it different to the politics of online encounters?
2. In what other ways are you involved in queer / feminist politics? (HISTORY)

2b. Notes handed to Participants before the screening

'CHANGING MEDIA CHANGING FEMINISMS? CONTEMPORARY QUEER AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN BRITAIN (AND BEYOND)'
Principal Investigator: Aristea Fotopoulou DPHIL Media and Cultural Studies
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Participant Notes about I.K.U. This is not Love This is Sex -

Focus Group 10 February 2010

I.K.U. (pronounced ai-kei-ju, abbreviated as iku) is a 2001 independent film directed by Taiwanese-American experimental filmmaker Shu Lea Cheang. It was marketed as "a Japanese Sci-Fi Porn Feature". The film was partially inspired by Blade Runner (1982). I.K.U.'s premise

involves a futuristic corporation sending shapeshifting cyborgs out into New Tokyo to collect "orgasm data" by means of sexual intercourse. The title is a pun on the Japanese word iku (行 く?) which, in sexual slang, is used to express an orgasm.

I.K.U. premiered at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival and was the first pornographic film ever screened in the festival. According to director, approximately 40 percent of the audience walked out over the course of the film, predominately during the sex scenes. The exodus was not repeated at subsequent screenings when Cheang "spelled [the film] out and challenged the audience to stay."

source: I.K.U. website

STORY: The ending of "Blade Runner" links to the opening of "I.K.U.". "I.K.U." differs from the former film that never had sex although there was love, in the latter movie in it, I.K.U. runner and Reiko have intense sex in the elevator, where was the stage of the ending of "Blade Runner".

The developement of I.K.U. system that the GENOM Corporation has been planning to offer for sale reaches its final stage. An innovative information technology enabled the development of the system. It will make people attain orgasm without having any touch between genitals, since the people will be able to receive the I.K.U. data directly to the brain by accessing to the I.K.U. server.

To complete the I.K.U. system, it is necessary to collect the orgasm data of every kind of person. So the GENOM Corporation sends out to New Tokyo seven sexy replicants "Reiko", who can transform themselves depending on prople's desires.

"I.K.U." is a sexy role-playing movie of orgasm hunting by the seven "Reiko".

The newest replicant of XXX Generation, Reiko, is set out for orgasm data hunting as the same as other replicants. Stimulated by her "Sex Drive" and engraved "XXX Tattoo" used for data collecting on her right arm, Reiko starts coiling around GENOM employee Dissy impatiently in the elevator of GENOM Inc. But Dissy knew her future because he himself had sent out many replicants.

Reiko's XXX tattooed right arm that was engraved with ultra ray is biotechnologically made of both electronic devices and artificial flesh. When a "Biomatic Drive" in Reiko's body is filled with coded orgasm data, it will be downloaded by the Shot-Gun-Shaped Dildo Retriever. After the download, Reiko will finish her mission and retire. Reiko was created as a female full of sexual curiosity and unrestrained. Roaming in "Sex-Space", Reiko looks like she is living in a free world. But in fact she is under observation by many cameras that GENOM Inc has set everywhere around her. In other words, she is just a sex machine of GENOM Inc.

Reiko collects various kinds of orgasm data through sexual affairs. She fucks with guests as a dance girl of the Harmony Club, and with young couple who are pretending to elope... Even sometimes she is addicted to have 3P sex with a drag dealer and a hustler who are in the middle of a car chase, or with a homeless man who is living in a cardboard box inside the 3D Dreamscape that sex dolls guide.

Reiko is not able to feel orgasm alone. Her right arm freely transforms digitally from a horn of the unicorn to a penis only when her partner attains orgasm. Plugging "it" into the partner's private parts, Reiko encodes orgasm data. The orgasm data are scanned by the ultra ray of Reiko's XXX tattoo, and it is showing up as patterns of coded mosaic.

"MASH" is a retired orgasm coder of the X Generation, and now is working in a strip club. She

always rides on a Super Motorbike. Although she has resigned, MASH helps Reiko in pinch as if she still follows GENOM Inc .

"Tokyo Rose" is a diva of the underground club "Pink", but in fact she is a virus encoder of BIO LINK Corporation which is a business rival of GENOM Inc. Her mission is to seduce the orgasm coders of GENOM Inc in order to infect a virus called "Tokyo Rose". Once the orgasm coder is infected with the virus, the system would be downed and the orgasm data would be stolen. Later Reiko is trapped by Aja, and her coder system is downed by the Tokyo Rose virus.

When Reiko is down, MASH on her Super Motorbike comes to help her. MASH teaches her masturbation. To restore her system, she has to indulge in sexual pleasure by herself. And the reset button that Dr. Tenma secretly installed is on the navel. Thus Reiko restarts her system before GENOM Inc throws her away. The orgasm that she attained by herself became the energy needed for the reset. Dr. Tenma was a salaried worker of GENOM Inc, and has secretly installed the reset button in the event of his creatures being scrapped. To set his replicants free someday.

Reiko resets herself, but the orgasm data in the Biomatic Disk is empty because it has been stolen by Tokyo Rose. To accomplish her mission she has to keep fucking. Reiko meets Akira in a tube hotel. He calls himself a hustler (hooker), and actually his sexual desire is rare for a man of the present day. Reiko and Akira start having sex in a Japanese restaurant. Akira has never attained orgasm because of his profession, but that night he orgasms by Reiko's sexual techniques because she is greedy for it. Akira gives a lot of his orgasms data to Reiko that night, and helps to fill Reiko's Biomatic Disk.

Finally when Reiko's Biomatic Disk is filled, Dissy appears to pull out her orgasm data and scrap. Going down in the elevator Dissy downloads Reiko's data with the Shot-Gun-Shaped Dildo Retriever. The fuck of the fuck. Thus the mosaic data of various kinds of orgasm data falls into the hands of GENOM Inc. The collected XXX data is encoded into I.K.U. database. GENOM Inc then produces the I.K.U. Chip that is to be plugged into the Net Glass Phone to access to the XXX database on the net. And the I.K.U. Chip is sold in the vending machines next to condoms.

The Making Of I.K.U.

Under the establishment of the stage in the near future Tokyo, the staff set out for location hunting to shoot scenery and places that are expected to exist in 2030. They chose the locations of the Metropolitan Highways which was also used in Tarcovsky's "Solaris" as a location in the future, the underground parking lot of Shibuya ward, high-rise housing developments near HanedaAirport, the yakitori stalls, a Japanese restaurant in Ueno, and a strip hall at Kabuki-cho in Shinjuku. Besides these places, they used the elevator among other things at the sets at the Studio Mao in Yokohama. This making of clip is made from the scenery shot in this studio.

Kamoto Tetsuya, the director of photography, mainly used the mini digital video camera for household use, the CANNON XL 1. Making use of his experiences as a photographer for music videos, he used elaborate lighting techniques in this studio to make it seem as though it was shot with 35mm film camera.

Sasaki Hisashi, the director of production design, created many artistic sets like the interior of elevator and the room of patch boards. The pink balloon made by Fujiwara Takahiro and the rope braided by Akechi Denki were beautifully used in the set which Sasaki has created.After 3 weeks of shootings outside and inside the studio and over half a year in post-production, "I.K.U." was finally completed in July 2000.

3) INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (Guide)

Thinking about events such as the Netporn Politics Conference, please answer the questions with reference to examples.

1. Please provide a few words about your personal history:
2. In which events and places have you participated in/ organised?
3. When and how did you first become interested in these events?
4. In what other ways are you involved in sexual – feminist – queer or other politics?
5. What do these events mean to you? What is special about them and why did you decide to participate/ help in organising them?
6. What is the importance of the material circulated and screened during these meetings for the construction of your identity (sexual, academic, artistic,etc)?
7. How are public screenings of explicit material in festivals and events different to cinema screenings (for the wider audience) for you? How are they different to private screenings?
8. How are these meetings political for you?
9. Are they different to the politics of online encounters? How?
10. What is your experience of sharing information and engaging in dialogue in such spaces? Please provide examples of connections and how they have been productive for you (for example in your personal, academic, professional life and so on).
11. Can you describe your feelings in specific situations? How did you feel sharing space with other scholars or artists while viewing postporn art
12. How have you kept in touch with the people (and their work) who turn up in these events?
13. Who have you kept in touch with and what do you share with them?
14. Do you feel there is a community/ network in which you belong to? What kinds of labour do you invest to support it – What are the practices you engage in, in order to support this community and how often?
15. What is the importance of this community/ network for you?

4) LIST OF INTERVIEWS

- ⚔ Jacobs, K. 2010. *No Title.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [Skype Voip recording] Brighton – Hong Kong, 7th of February 2010.
- ⚔ Janssen, M. 2010. *No Title.* Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [email] Brighton – Amsterdam. 26th of April 2010.
- ⚔ Thynne, L. 2010. No Title. Interviewed by Aristea Fotopoulou [MP3 Audio Recording] Brighton, University of Sussex. 22th of June 2010.

Email interview requested but responses were not received.
- ⚔ Fiona Attwood
- ⚔ Tim Stuttgen
- ⚔ Corpus Deleicti

APPENDIX D (Chapter 5)

1) Fertility legislation, Payment, "sharing" and Human Embryonic Stem Cells Timeline

- ✒ 1978 First baby (Louise Brown) born via IVF.
- ✒ 1984 Warnock report highlighted the 'special status' of the embryo - defines the 'primitive streak' enabling scientists to use embryos (termed blastocysts or 'pre-embryos') up to 14 days old.
- ✒ 1985 Surrogacy Arrangements Act: First law governing surrogacy arrangements. Makes commercial surrogacy arrangements illegal.
- ✒ 1990 - Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act allows the HFEA discretion over how much egg and sperm donors may be paid. When the HFEA assumed its powers in August 1991 it issued directions allowing clinics to pay up to £15 per donation plus reasonable expenses, reflecting what was then current practice.
- ✒ July 1996 the HFEA announced that it was opposed to donors being paid anything more than expenses.
- ✒ February 1998 a consultation document on the implementation of this policy was launched, which included questions about the future of egg sharing.
- ✒ 1998 HFEA approves egg sharing and poses a £15 limit to costs. 'Paid egg sharing to be regulated, not banned' announced its decision not to ban the system of paid egg sharing. Specific guidelines will be prepared for the next edition of the Code of Practice. In addition the HFEA announced that it will continue to allow payments of up to £15 for egg and sperm donors for the foreseeable future.
- ✒ 1998 US scientist first differentiates hESC (Thomson *et al.,* 1998).
- ✒ 1998 Dolly the sheep cloned at Roslin Institute.
- ✒ 2001 The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Research Purposes) Regulations 2001/188 Regulations extend allowable reasons for embryo research to permit research around stem cells and cell nuclear replacement.
- ✒ 2001 Human Reproductive Cloning Act Makes human reproductive cloning illegal.
- ✒ 2002 House of Lords debates stem cell research.
- ✒ 2002 HFEA press release which expresses concern about financial incentives for egg donation. It considers reports that young women students are being encouraged to sell their eggs in donation programmes based in the US, and encourages women to consider risks and possible side-effects from medication.
- ✒ 2003 hESC (derived from discarded embryos) reported as replicating in UK making 'stem cell lines'.
- ✒ 2002 Preimplantation tissue typing CORE Judicial Review of HFEA's decisions on HLA typing - CORE application succeeds at first instance—HLA tissue typing held to be unlawful. 2003 Court of Appeal overturns earlier High Court decision. It is within the powers of the HFEA to licence HLA tissue typing.
- ✒ 2003 hESC (derived from discarded embryos) reported as replicating in UK making 'stem cell lines'.
- ✒ 2004 HFEA grants first licence for cloned human embryos to be created specifically for hESC research.
- ✒ 2004 HFEA conducts a review of its policy on HLA tissue typing. A new, extended policy is passed by the Authority on 21 July 2004, giving up the distinction between inherited and sporadic diseases.
- ✒ 2004/5 Hwang 'breakthrough' – claimed to have created hESC from cloned human embryos.
- ✒ 2005 consultation ask for views on how much donors should be compensated and whether egg donors should be compensated at the same level as sperm donors.
- ✒ 2006 Hwang research found to be fraudulent - work of the Korean scientist Woo Suk Hwang, who claimed to have successfully derived hESC stem cell lines via CNT and whose peer-reviewed research was published in Science, and Nature, to global acclaim, was

subsequently found in 2006 to have been fraudulent (Nature 2006a). 'Hwang-gate' was the emergent public controversy over the source of the eggs used for his research. Some of the eggs had apparently been taken from junior female researchers amongst Hwang's own staff (HOOO 2006), and this consent process has been strongly criticised (Magnus and Cho 2006). Concerns about the acquisition of human eggs for hESC research generally became a 'line in the sand' moment for a number of feminists in 2005-7.

- ✠ Jan 2006 (Current guidance) states that "Donors will be able to claim reasonable expenses and compensation for earnings lost in connection with donation. Donors may continue to receive benefits in kind but these are now limited to treatment services (i.e. centres are no longer permitted to offer sterilisation as a benefit in kind)".

- ✠ 2006 Public consultation Donating eggs for research - How should donors be best protected?

- ✠ In 2007 Review of Hybrids & chimeras - the HFEA held a consultation on the ethical and social implications of creating human/animal embryos in research.

- ✠ 2007 HFEA policy makes it possible for women to trade eggs in return for IVF, or to donate eggs. Eggs are specifically for the creation of hESC.

- ✠ 2007 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill Major review of fertility legislation, updating and amending the 1990 Act.

- ✠ 2007 The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Quality and Safety) Regulations 2007/1522. Regulations to bring the European Tissue and Cells Directive into UK law. Amends the HFEA Act 1990, and requires the licensing of all establishments handling gametes for treatment (e.g. IUI clinics).

- ✠ 2008 HFEA Act passed in Parliament has exceptionally broad terms, allowing a number of reproductive and cloning techniques. Review of the governemts act (Dept of Health 2008).

- ✠ 2008 An HFEA Licence Committee has approved an application from the Clinical Sciences Research Institute, University of Warwick for the creation of hybrid embryos. In January 2008, an HFEA licence committee granted licences to Kings College London and Newcastle University to carry out research using human-animal cytoplasmic hybrid embryos.

- ✠ In December 2008 The High Court today turned down an application for a judicial review of the HFEA's decision to grant licences for two hybrids research projects.

- ✠ 2009 December the HFEA announce intent to review the reimbursement of donors for expenses and loss of earnings, and egg sharing which will be reviewed together with the reimbursement of donors.

- ✠ July 2009 HFEA Statement: Should people be paid for donating their eggs, sperm or embryos? In an interview with The Times this week, Lisa Jardine, Chair of the HFEA, opened discussions on two important topics: payments for donors of gametes (eggs and sperm) and intergenerational donation.

- ✠ 23 August 2010 HFEA statement regarding donor compensation. Press release:' The Authority welcomes current interest in the issue of how to tackle the shortage of sperm and eggs donated for IVF treatment in the UK. It is important that policy in this area – that is of so much concern to so many – is informed by as a wide a range of views as possible. It is also important to be clear about the facts. The facts are – the Authority has not made any decisions about changes to its current policy and the Authority has not made any decisions about which options to undertake consultation on. The Authority has decided to hold a full, public consultation into its donation policies and is currently researching the issues before deciding what to consult on. The public consultation will begin in January 2011 and will run for three months. The results of the consultation will be available in May 2011'.

2) IVF statistics and costs in the UK (data published by HFEA in 2009)

Most fertility clinics (even those located on NHS premises) only offer a fee-paying IVF service. The cost varies from clinic to clinic. A cycle of IVF, including medicines and consultations, can typically cost between £4,000-£8,000 pounds. This figure varies, depending on the consultations, drugs and tests that may be required for treatment. Procedures such as embryo freezing may also be charged separately. Private clinics operate in competition with each other, so prices tend to be similar in most areas of the country; usually an average of around £5,000 a cycle. Some fertility clinics offer egg-sharing schemes where can donate eggs collected from a cycle of IVF to another women in return for a reduced price IVF treatment.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines suggest that couples should be offered up to three cycles of IVF on the NHS if the woman is aged 23-39 years and the couple has an identified cause for their infertility, or have not conceived after 3 years. NICE recommend that it is appropriate to fund IVF treatment when the chances of success are more than 10%. The Government has said that, from 1 April 2005, all women with appropriate clinical need should have at least 1 cycle of treatment paid for by the NHS. Local health bodies will apply their own eligibility criteria. In August 2008, the Department of Health's's expert group on commissioning NHS infertility provision is looking at the barriers to the implementation of the NICE fertility guideline.(Source: NHS Website & HFEA Facts & figures for researchers and the media - Funding website).

One year (latest) data (published 30 September 2009-based on treatments carried out between 1 January and 31 December 2007.

They include all IVF, ICSI, PGD, and natural cycles, as well as treatments using donated eggs and those where fresh and frozen embryos were transferred in the same cycle).

- ⚲ 39,879 women had IVF treatment in 2008, an increase of 8.2% on the previous year. These women had 50,687 cycles of treatment in 2008, an increase of 8.2% on the previous year.
- ⚲ There were 12,211 successful births in 2008 (up 10.1%). Because some of these births were twin or triplet births, this means that 15,082 babies were born (up 10.3%).
- ⚲ The chances of becoming pregnant will depend on a number of factors, such as a woman's age and the cause (if known) of infertility. The latest figures (2008) show that 24.1% of all IVF treatments resulted in a live birth, up 0.4% on the previous year.
- ⚲ The latest figures show that 23.2% of treatment cycles resulted in a multiple birth, up 0.2% on the previous year.
- ⚲ Around 1.5% of all births and 1.8% of all babies born in the UK are the result of IVF and donor insemination.

Long Term Data

- ⚲ The number of women treated has increased steadily since the early 1990s. The number treated has increased over 2½ times between 1992 and 2007:
- ⚲ 1992 – 14,057 women received treatment.
- ⚲ 2007 – 36,648 women treated, receiving 46,502 IVF and ICSI cycles .
- ⚲ A total of 122,043 babies were born (live births) following IVF and ICSI treatment that was started between 1992 and 2006.
- ⚲ The number of babies born following IVF and ICSI treatment has increased steadily and has more than quadrupled between 1992 and 2006:
- ⚲ Treatment started in 1992 – 3,113 babies born.
- ⚲ Treatment started in 2006 – 12,589 babies born.

Changes in embryo transfer policy

• From 1991 onwards, clinics in the UK were expected to transfer no more than three embryos in each cycle. Over the 1990s it became more common for clinics to transfer only two embryos and the percentage of treatment cycles involving a three embryo transfer declined dramatically.

• In 2001 the HFEA introduced a two-embryo transfer policy for women under the age of 40 years. In exceptional circumstances only, three embryos were allowed to be transferred.

• In 2004 this policy was revised so that now a maximum of two embryos can be transferred to women under the age of 40, with no exceptions, and a maximum of three can be transferred in women aged 40 and over.

• Since 2004 only 4 in every 100 treatment cycles (4%) performed involved three embryos being transferred.

3) The Corner House Resources

a) by Theme	b) Type of document
⚐ Agriculture (5) ⚐ Biotech (15) ⚐ Climate (75) ⚐ Conflict (11) ⚐ Corporate accountability (20) ⚐ Corruption (104) ⚐ Dams (20) ⚐ Economics and finance (51) ⚐ Energy (19) ⚐ Ethnic discrimination, rights, democracy (20) ⚐ Forestry (21) ⚐ Gender (9) ⚐ Globalisation, state & deregulation (28) ⚐ Health (7) ⚐ International Financial Institutions (66) ⚐ Overpopulation (16) ⚐ Politics (18) ⚐ Refugees (4) ⚐ Trade (10)	Corner House Briefing Paper (41) Article (126) Audiovisual (8) Book (15) Legal paper (42) Power Point (6) Press release (34) Report (17) Submission (22)

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARTs: Assisted reproduction technologies
BDSM: Bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism
BLG: Brighton Lesbian Group
BSSN: Brighton and Sussex Sexualities Network
CESAGEN: Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics
CORE: Comment for Reproductive Ethics
CSO: Civil Society Organisation
DIY: Do-it-yourself
EID: Eid al-Adha
FiL09: Feminism in London 2009 Conference
FINRRAGE: Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive Technologies
and Genetic Engineering
FTM: Female-to-Male
GNU: "GNU's Not Unix" (recursive acronym)
HFEA: Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
hESC: Human Embryonic Stem Cell
HOOO: Hands Off Our Ovaries
ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies
IVF: In-vitro-fertilisation
LFN: London Feminist Network
LGBTQ: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer
NGO: Non-governmental organisation.
P2P: Peer-to-peer
QM: Queer Mutiny Brighton
SGLF: Sussex Gay Liberation Front
SLFG: South London Fawcett Group
SWP: Socialist Workers Party
SM: Sadomasochism/sadomasochist
STS: Science and Technology Studies
WRC: Women's Resource Centre
WW: Westhill Wotever
WGNRR: Women's Global Network of Reproductive Rights