

**FEMEN AND ASSEMBLAGE POLITICS OF PROTEST IN
THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

by

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ABSTRACT

Transgressing norms and barriers of mundane digital spaces to seize spotlight in the name of social change is breathtaking. Such are modern-day protest groups as they utilize a special mix of skills, tactics, and resourcefulness to become forces of disruptive tensions in the spectacular seas of image-whirls, sound-waves, and incredible storyscapes in which we live. *“Femen and Assemblage Politics of Protest in the Age of Social Media”* examines these disruptive tensions as created by the topless female activist group Femen. Specifically, I am interested in how human and nonhuman elements in Femen activism create lasting impressions in the fleeting everyday life of the millions of internet-connected individuals around the globe. I conceptualize these processes under the name of media-activism assemblage and illustrate the work of Femen protest politics through three different case studies. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, we see the dynamics of the Kiev 2012 cutting down of the crucifix by Femen, Facebook censorship of Femen in 2013 and 2014, and the Copenhagen 2015 terrorist shooting at a free speech event featuring a Femen speaker. Because of the primarily digital nature of media-activism assemblages of Femen, I provide close-textual audio-visual analysis of multimodal artifacts such as images, videos, user comments, social media posts, and traditional media stories. I argue that processes of media-activism networks of Femen unveil emerging horizons of transformative activism that simultaneously bridge the divides and create new divisions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ASSEMBLAGE¹ POLITICS OF PROTEST

Catching a Glimpse

“No religion!” “Naked freedom!” “Topless jihad!” No matter what language you use to search “Femen” on the internet, in seconds, you will be flooded by links to images and videos depicting young, attractive female activists with similarly aggressive slogans on their bare breasts, flower-crowns on their heads, some iconic urban spaces in the background, and policemen trying to subdue them in the foreground. In their protests against “the fundamental institutes of patriarchy – dictatorship, sex-industry, and church” (Femen, n.d.), Femen activists subversively utilize their bodies, iconic urban spaces, and multimedia to create unexpected and highly affective events.

A group founded by a few teenage girls from small Western Ukrainian provinces grew into a popular and controversial activist organization, and it still continues to expand from its headquarters in Paris to northern Africa, Latin America, and Canada. Over the past few years, several full-length documentary films, books, and scholarly

¹Assemblage is an interconnected decentering system—which proceeds in a nonlinear fashion and “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relevant to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). This linking of mediatized assemblages to various entities does not demonstrate spontaneity as much as contingent affirmation of particular flows vis-à-vis an interrelation of times, spaces, and processes. These parts of assemblages are wholes characterized by relations of exteriority and interiority (DeLanda, 2006). Parts of the whole, unlike seamless totalities, are detachable from the assemblage and pluggable into a different assemblage (DeLanda, 2006).

articles have been written to explain the Femen phenomenon from cultural, moral, religious, ethical, and activist points of views, but most of them, unlike this project, end up taking for or against stances.

I see Femen as a part of a larger trend of social movements around the globe, which are moving from rational, physical, prolonged, concentrated actions, toward transgressive bursts of protest made eternal through dispersed images, social media interactions, and affective drives. The goal of this dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive study of every aspect of the Femen activism and its entwinement with media, but to shed light on intricate catalytic moments that illustrate the work of images, sounds, technologies, objects, and digital crowds of activism-networks in action. Each chapter, except the concluding one, provides specific background information about Femen that supplements the particular case study at hand. The scope of this project does not tether Femen to the issues of morality, identity, and linear progress. On the contrary, the goal is to look beyond rationality and often binary-driven ideas to examine the transgressive tactics of Femen as they transform discourses pertaining to hidden, taboo topics and controversies. The discussion of Femen from this multimedia and posthuman perspective illuminates major shifts in new media and societies that become evident in such discussions. In the following sections of this chapter, I overview the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the project and then provide summaries for the remaining chapters.

Foundational Assemblages

The entwinement of media and activism in the communication field resonates with the intersection of rhetorical and cultural studies with French poststructuralist philosophy, which share perspectives on image, affect, movement, and transformation. Before delving into the discussion of the main arena of this project—digital networks and activism--I overview the key strands in the literature on rhetoric of social protest.

Since the 1950s, social movement scholarship within the field of rhetorical studies has developed in tandem with technological and cultural changes, but it still maintains some of the initial ways of thinking about protest, people, and change. For instance, Griffin (1952) saw public address at the center of the studies of the rhetoric of social movements, which, according to him, were sprawling around its orator. Per Griffin (1952), such studies should have clear temporal demarcations, and should be guided by consistency, patterns, and intervals. Such a framework, quite logical for the time when it was published, addressed the rhythm of 50s society, which was punctuated by sharply delineated spaces and times of media broadcasting, newspaper publishing, and the nuclear family.

Later, as the protests rose in the U.S. and acquired radical character, scholars (Haiman, 1967; Scott & Smith (1969) of social movements started examining nonrational tactics of activism. While doing so, they acknowledged disruptive potentials of radical protest, but maintained their strong beliefs in the power of rational dialogue and communication. Haiman (1967) wrote about “uncivil disobedience” of street protests of Vietnam War and students in the U.S., but when discussing those forms of protests, he used the word “rhetoric” in quotation marks explaining that what those radical protests do

is well beyond traditional, civil, and rational rhetoric. As a solution for de-escalating such protests, Haiman (1967) suggested that society should help create conditions for everyone to participate in the deliberative process, and that “we will not attain those conditions by closing our eyes to the realities of the world about us and condemning out of hand the contemporary rhetoric of the streets” (p. 114). Scott and Smith (1969) extended the idea of radical protest further by elaborating on the “use of confrontation as a tactic for achieving attention and an importance not readily attainable through decorum” (p. 7).

Simons (1970), who later became one of the largest markers of the functional approach to the study of social movements, also acknowledged radical militant protest tactics. Similar to other scholars of his time, Simons (1970) does not take into consideration the nonhuman aspects that bring radical activism into action. Simons (1970) classified a social movement similarly to a corporation, or a government agency, with the only substantial difference being its “uninstitutionalized” nature (p. 3). For Simons (1970), a social movement is an “uninstitutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to implement a program for their constitution of social norms or values” (p. 3). The primary driving force of such a collectivity, according to Simons (1970), is its leader who is being tested on his “capacity to fulfill the requirements of his movement by resolving or reducing rhetorical problems” (p. 2). The use of the male and singular form in regards to the leader is too remarkable to skip over. Such language denotes that at the time of Simon’s writing, a radical protest group with multiple and primarily female leaders was hard to imagine. More importantly, Simons’ functional approach to social movements is based on “generalizations” about the movement’s rhetoric (Stewart, 1980,

p. 298), which conveniently reduces incongruous strands of activism under specific strategies, questions, and tactics.

Critical change in regards to social movement conceptualizations came with McGee (1980, 1990), who confronted previous theorizations with several piercing points. McGee (1980) acknowledged a social movement as sets of meanings rather than a phenomenon, which is not a pure, clear-cut entity moving on a linear progressivist terrain. According to McGee (1980), “there is a ‘swim of things’ which catches each of us in the impulse to demonstrate how secure we can be in the comfortable confines of collectivity” (p. 241). In order to escape confines of reductive views on social movements, McGee proposed the concept of the ideograph, which is an everyday word in political discourse, laden with “high-order abstraction,” power, and belief (1980a, p. 15) without a trace of public scrutiny. This tool can be used to study sets of meanings a social movement generates, modifies, or weakens by doing its analysis synchronically and diachronically. Such a shift in the rhetoric of social movements did not yet directly advocate for the inclusion of more than human elements in rhetoric, but strongly hinted at those and opened up new spaces for the later scholars to track and develop further.

This shift from the rational and functional, to the irrational and “uncivil” behavior of social movements branched out into explorations of the force of violence (Browne, 1996), images (DeLuca, 1999; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003; Hasian, 2012; Hill & Helmers, 2004; Mirzoeff, 2012), and affect (Abel, 2007; DeChaine, 2002; Massumi, 1995; Ott, 2010). These openings significantly impacted the direction of later social movement studies (Bruce, 2015; DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004) including this dissertation, which is tuned to the ideas and modes of

images, affects, and networks.

Before going into the discussion of media studies, it is important to explain my choice of theorists and how that differentiates this project from common approaches in cultural studies and rhetoric. In particular, a consideration of Marxist and humanist influences in cultural studies and rhetoric will highlight this project's emphasis on posthumanism, assemblages, and networks. In this respect, I am moving from Marx and cultural studies to Deleuze and Latour. In making this shift, I am not suggesting that dominant cultural approaches are illegitimate. Instead, I think that while cultural studies approaches influenced by Marx offer certain types of analysis, posthumanist scholarly approaches influenced by the thinking of Deleuze and Latour offer new possibilities for making sense of activism and social media. Overall, analysis of activism and social change often drives research through Critical Theory, British Cultural Studies, and Critical Cultural Studies, which share concepts derived from Marxism. These concepts of class, hegemony, ideology, and power are fitted exclusively to the modern human subject and culminate in the identity politics of race, gender, and sexuality.

Marx's explanation of hegemony of the ruling class structures much of Critical Cultural Studies, material rhetoric, and even Media Studies: "The misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and volume of his production; that the necessary consequence of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands" (Marx, 1844, p. 322). So, according to Marx, people submit themselves to the few empowered individuals, or, in other words the ruling class, who utilize labor in a way that alienates people from the product/s of their labor, the feeling of fulfillment that comes from labor, their own self, spirit, nature, other people, the process of labor, and their own bodies and

senses. In Marxist thought, economic determinism appears as the major motivational force for the ruling class to create a disempowered working class. In the Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, and others, the focus shifts from economic determinism to the dominant ideology, produced and perpetuated by the culture industry, which whips masses into docile consumers of capitalism.

With the inception of British Cultural Studies and specifically the Birmingham School of thought of Stuart Hall, the idea of docile consumers evolved into audiences capable of decoding media messages. Hall's seminal theorizations of encoding/decoding, signification, representation, and ideology provided new avenues for developing cultural studies centered on human communication through language and text. Such a perspective divided the study of media according to a production-texts-audiences triangle, grounded in humanistic and moral determinism critiquing the hegemony of dominant code of communication.

In rhetoric, too, humanism has long been a canon of scholarly discussion in regards to social change, with charismatic rhetors leading social movements. More recent rhetorical scholarly analyses of social movements are predominantly enmeshed in ideological frameworks and power structures stemming from Marxist moralist critiques (Cloud, 1994; McKerrow, 1989, 1991; Wander, 1983, 1984). From the linguistic poststructural perspective, Philip Wander and Raymie McKerrow argue that hegemonic ideologies can be demystified via analyses of contemporary language use (McKerrow, 1989; 1991; Wander, 1983, 1984). Cloud (1994) complements this vein by strongly retaining a Marxist influence:

...an emphasis on the individual human agent should not obscure the ideological power of dominant economic and political interests in structuring, framing, and

setting the limits for rhetorical action. One way for the materialist to acknowledge human action is to conceive of rhetorical acts as strategic deployments of symbolic resources within an ideological frame. (p. 158)

This excerpt clarifies the boundaries of a rhetorical subject only as centered on humans, moving along the grid of morals and ideologies pertaining to humans. This boundary is crucial for this dissertation as it intends to challenge humanistic and moralistic ways of thinking by bringing into focus nonhuman elements that destabilize human subjects. In this effort, the work of rhetorical scholar Barbara Biesecker is helpful. Biesecker (1989) utilizes Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* and offers to see that the rhetorical subject is "always differing from it-self, is forever in process, indefinite, controvertible... [and] continuously open for change" (p. 125). This unstable nature of the rhetorical subject does not depoliticize it, but on the contrary, entangles the nimble traces of change that are not limited to human actors, but expanded to posthuman assemblages. In other words, the subject is always political and the role of critical scholar is not to unveil and confront hegemonic power structures, as McKerrow (1989) suggests, but to trace the contingent contours, junctures, and knots of political intensities as they are in flux.

As mentioned, I do not want to dismiss the dominant cultural studies approach to studying social movements. Such an approach, although not the method of this project, offers useful insights. For example, a dominant cultural studies approach to studying FEMEN might focus on the dominant centers of power that reproduce the patriarchal oppression of women. This orientation would lead the critic to study the political economy of media that reproduces subjugated and objectified images of women as well as the economic structures of Western industrial cultures that overwhelmingly limit women to the private sphere and the lower axons of the public sphere. Another important

center of power would be dominant religions, so a Marxist inspired cultural studies critic would pay special attention to how women are conceived and represented in Catholicism and other dominant forms of Christianity as well as Islam. This study will not perform such a critique, but will instead unfold the possibilities inspired by Deleuze, Latour, and echelons of posthumanistic networked understandings of the world.

Media Studies, wherein the medium is analyzed at least as seriously as content, is important within communication as well as in other disciplines. Emerging from the unlikely trinity of economist Harold Innis (1950/1972; 1951/1964), Joyce scholar Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1964), and Jesuit priest Walter Ong (1982), media studies exploded in concert with the transformational impact of the television in the 1960s. Grippled by the question of stability, Innis argued that new media creates new forms of knowledge and therefore new forms of social hierarchy. For him, communication can be biased in terms of control over space or time. For instance, space-binding mediums promote dissemination of stories and messages over vast distances with great accuracy, but they also suppress time-binding media (orality). Since time and space are in a relationship, which allows only one of them to be progressively present at a time, they produce instability in society. If simultaneous preservation of temporal and spatial orientations of societies is impossible, as Innis assumes, then this now-here-and-everywhere presupposition of societies drives them to the "brink of nihilism" (Carey, 1967, p. 14).

Salvation is instant if we embrace our technological extensions, suggests Innis' successor McLuhan. Often called a prophet, a poet, and a mythologist of technology, McLuhan (1964) argues that media serve as extensions of humans and that media

technologies are complicated vehicles for structuring the way we understand the world. He believed in the biological interdependence of human senses and adds that media functions as the sixth sense. Considering media as extensions of humans, McLuhan compares it to senses such as vision, the loss of which sharpens the senses of hearing and touch. Thus, he argues, media blunts other human senses and makes people overly ineffective without their sixth sense—media.

For both McLuhan and Innis, a world of oral tradition, where communication is easily controlled by people, is romantic, and as impossible as the Garden of Eden. McLuhan, like Marx, argues that currently, people are alienated from self, others, and nature. However, for McLuhan, the alienating force is not labor, but the inappropriate use of media technologies. The only way to become the "whole man" is to detach totally from traditions that require submission to automatism, the complete dependence on media technologies.

A student of McLuhan, Ong studied how transitioning from orality to literacy transformed cultures and education. According to him, in oral cultures “spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another real, living person... at a specific time in a real setting which always includes much more than mere words” (Ong, 1982, p. 101). Such utterances are bound by particularity of time and place of events that cannot be reenacted. The written word, on the contrary, disembodies the speaker and unhinges the text from its spatial and temporal situation. According to Ong (1982), media technologies implicitly structure patterns of human perception and ways of life.

Scholars such as Neil Postman (1985), Ian Angus (1984), Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1990), and Frederick Kittler (1986), among others, elaborate on ways in which media-

specific patterns of perception destabilize beliefs in linear, rational, and progressivist human-centered communication. The concept of human-machine assemblages—cyborgs—by Donna Haraway (1991) opened up new provocative ways of thinking and writing about human subjectivity and communication in the electronic age. The posthuman argument by Kathryn Hayles (1999) demonstrated that “the emphasis now is on the mutually constitutive interactions between the components of a system rather than on message, signal, or information” (p. 11). As John Peters (1999) suggests, “meaning is an incomplete project, open-ended and subject to radical revision by later events” (p. 267). Such an open-ended view provides spaces for the closer consideration of more than human elements and their roles in harnessing rhetorical forces of digital communication and social change.

The Internet has become the central structuring element (enabler/ disabler /enhancer / mediator) of everyday communication. The advent of the computer and the Internet destabilized the human subject and its relation to texts, contexts, times, places, and intensified media studies. Everyday communication moved to the realms of posthuman networks and their powerful and unpredictable forces of association (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2013, 1996; Kadushin, 2012; Latour, 1993, 2005). Yochai Benkler (2006) in his book on *The Wealth of Networks* demonstrates three main types of changes the “Internet Revolution” (p. 1) established. Those changes are noticeable in amplified power of individuals, peer to peer sharing platforms, and the emergence of nonproprietary modes of communication online. Open and free platforms not only enable individuals to speak up/act up, but also to share their thoughts and feelings with others, engage them in decentralized digital interactions, and create nonproprietary content that before the advent

of online media was only possible in the much more rehearsed, reductive, and refined way of traditional, centralized media organizations. Such radical decentralization and democratization of media is reflected in Benkler's words that "we are in the midst of a technological, economic, and organizational transformation that allows us to renegotiate the terms of freedom, justice, and productivity in the information society" (2006, p. 27).

To many, in such a decentralized, fragmented, and prone-to-constant-interruption information society, social media and blogging deserve analysis, as "bloggers have demonstrated themselves as technoactivists favoring not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic sociopolitical intervention" (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Bloggers and activists are only able to do such sociopolitical interventions through their technological extensions, as McLuhan argued when referring to media amplifying and amputating forces. For O'Reilly (2005), digital media is "a kind of global brain," with the equivalent of "constant mental chatter in the forebrain" (para. 11). Due to "spreadability" (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013) of media, those chatters acquire agendas and agencies of their own and prove in action the fragmentation McGee (1990) was writing about before the "Internet Revolution."

There are two main views on new media technologies: optimist - the utopian / technophilic; and pessimist—the dystopian/technophobic. Optimists believe in the power of direct and decentralized communication, where participation and maximum information flow constitute the main components of a more democratic society (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004; Rheingold, 1993, 2002). With regard to digital media's probability of reviving direct democracy, what Habermas calls "extension of fundamental rights in the social welfare state" (as cited in Durham & Kellner, 1989, p. 107) remains

relevant for some scholars.

The pessimistic perspective focuses on how the "public sphere" could not be realized, because of voracious interests of capitalist domination (Brown, 1997; McChesney, 2002; Wilhelm, 2000). Under this analysis, it is hegemony and not democracy that dominates the Internet, which is increasingly fortified by multinational corporations and nation-state actors (Hindman, 2008; Morozov, 2011). Deibert et al. (2010) are concerned about peoples' "implicit (and perhaps unwitting) consent to the greatest invasion of personal privacy in history," which is taking place even in democratic countries where "surveillance systems penetrate every aspect of life" (p. 44). Thus, the dystopian view urges that new media platforms cannot fully promote individuals' autonomous participation in development of civil society, but rather merely uphold commodification, commercialization, censorship, and state ideology.

Yet as Benkler (2011), Castells (2013), and others suggest, the decentralizing technologies of the Internet create opportunities for individuals and activist groups to undermine centralized governments' and multinational corporations' power grips:

Ubiquitous low-cost processors, storage media, and networked conductivity have made it practically feasible for individuals, alone and in cooperation with others, to create and exchange information, knowledge, and culture in patterns of social reciprocity, redistribution, and sharing, rather than proprietary, market-based production. (Benkler, 2011, p. 462)

Cyberspace becomes a place where humans merge with technology to gain abilities for conducting multidimensional transactions in cultural, economic, and social aspects of life. The realm of the Internet becomes a posthuman space of transformation with "no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and

human goals” (Hayles, 1999, p. 3). As Jean Baudrillard (1983) was urging all along, “whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum,” which is based on uninterrupted circuit of interactions through the mediums that favor visibility, spreadability, and hyperreality (Baudrillard, 2001/1983, p. 173). This is the system where “nothing is inert, nothing is disconnected, uncorrelated, or aleatory. Everything, on the contrary, is fatally, admirably connected” (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 185). Poststructuralist thought advanced by Derrida, Baudrillard, and Deleuze served as a precursor to the new media frenzy we live in nowadays. In this interconnected fluid media landscape, a completely new reality is lurking and inviting us to question, act, and invent. Responding to this invitation, I will elaborate on the concept of media-activism assemblages and then turn to specific strands of scholarship that run through the entire project, often in implicit ways.

Media-Activism Assemblage

As a nonsystemic effort to accommodate the dynamics of interactions between protest groups and media, I trace this constellation of concepts and ideas. This media-activism-assemblage helps understand the processes that images, texts, and events undergo as they travel through the networks of public screens. This theoretical assemblage does not predict movements of activism groups, but helps study their dynamics.

The idea of media-activism assemblages that I utilize comes from Bruno Latour’s (1993, 2005) Actor-Network Theory, which highlights how human elements are often entangled in networks with nonhuman elements that they cannot control completely. A

good example of such entanglement is a human body, which consists of billions of microbes carrying out their day-to-day activities without our knowing and instructions. Similarly, human immersion in digital communication technologies structures our lives in often implicit, but powerful, ways. The word network in this theory is also illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualization of rhizome and assemblage. Therefore, I will use assemblages and networks interchangeably throughout the rest of the manuscript to underline their slippery distinction.

One of the main ideas of Actor-Network theory is expressed by the hyphenation between the two elements in its name, which renders them fully interchangeable. An actor may well be a network, and vice versa. New media and its entwinement with activism is one of the good examples of Actor-Network theory in action. This theory bears notable traces of the concept of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), which runs on ideas other scholars have elaborated on. These ideas of unpredictability, decentralization, multiplicity, and dissemination (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Derrida, 1987; Peters, 1999;) are well represented in new media technologies as they continue to shift the human subject, the so called rhetor/orator, from the center of social movements' *mise en scène*, as the digital does not have a center.

The characterization of interactions on the web as "endless proliferation and scattering of emissions without the guarantee of productive exchanges" (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002, pp. 130-131) supplements the conceptualization of assemblage politics of protest via media. In the interconnected digital environment, framing is an emergent and multicontext process favoring multiplicity-enriched, dynamic ambiguities rather than rigid storylines. A frame represents "the mutable and fuzzy boundaries, within which for

a cycle of protest the interplay and interlocking of various repertoires can occur” (Steinberg, 1998, p. 860). Nowadays, the interplay occurs from multiple decentered knots to the peripheries sending “nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization” that then go from new peripheries to new centers and knots “falling back to the old center[s] and launching forth to the new [ones]” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 44). Such movement illustrates the operation of the Femen-network well, which often starts on the margins and then permeates into centers of political discussions, warping speeds, contexts, times, and spaces.

Daily interactions of media activism involve moments of convergence, where old and new media collide and “the power of [the] media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). The unpredictable nature of these interactions increases even more in the age of “presencing,” where “keeping in touch” or just “hanging out” in a digital sphere “becomes a necessity, not a choice” (Couldry, 2012, p. 51). This idea of presencing is in line with rhizomatic principles of connection and heterogeneity: “any point of a rhizome [digital network] can be connected to anything other, and must be” (p. 7). In this rhizomatic web, interactions are “overflowing in all directions” defying any hidden, structural force of a central, presupposed context (Latour, 2005, p. 202). These interactions form traces of Nietzsche’s “joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, ... without origin which is offered to an active interpretation” (Derrida, 1978, p. 368). It is this adventurous trace of interactivity, interpretation, and transformation that puts media activism in motion.

From this perspective, rather than the direction of this motion, media activism is

concerned with the speed, intensity, medium-specific features, affects, and effects of the actors they carry along. Looking at the multitude of digital threads, likes, shares, tweets, posts, and comments aggregated by smart algorithms, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) proposition about the speed of this intensity becomes clearer:

...it is in the middle where things pick up speed. [The space] between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (p. 25)

A recent framing study of Facebook comments shaping social protest mobilization in Guatemala illustrates how media activism picked up speed on various pages, how “quickly [the group] gained momentum, prompting more than 50,000 people to protest,” and how it initiated offline protest that then “took to the streets” (Harlow, 2012, p. 227). Within the interconnected circles of stories, the movement and speed becomes only a matter of the adventurousness of a trace of affect, translation, transformation, rupture, and connection.

Another study of a student movement in Italy further demonstrates the diffusion and velocity of media activism as its actors “travel quickly from one circle of friends to another thus, also reaching individuals who were not originally involved in the student mobilization,” thereby utilizing social media platforms as “brokers in the diffusion of ideas ... having the potential to increase the participation rate in the mobilization” (Mattoni, & Treré, 2014, p. 263).

An example of the media-activism assemblage is found in how mediations of Femen image events swirl around the globe via various platforms. The media-activism assemblage enacts new possibilities that hinge on their posthuman, contingent, and

decentralized nature. Such conceptualization of entwinement between social movement and media challenges the preconceived notions of morals, ethics, values, identities, pragmatics, and ideas about progress. Thinking in terms of media-activism assemblages trouble reductionist approaches as it unveil the incredibly dynamic and contingent nature of posthuman transformations.

Even though I propose that media-activism assemblages trouble preconceived morals and ideologies, they should not be considered as depoliticized, since nothing can exist outside of discourses, which always already bears traces of various politics. I believe that one should study assemblage politics rather than identity politics but with due respect to existing scholarly conversations in this regard.

Visuality

Posthuman assemblages and networks are produced through heterogeneous alliances between activist bodies, images, online discussion threads, journalists, and so on. Images frequently act as those “unexpected things,” which accomplish their goals of media dissemination through ruptures, connections, and translations. It is not possible to spend a day or even an hour without a certain extent of visual mediation, where images cause sensations and act as prompts and references to various events or trends. DeLuca (1999) coins the term “image event” to describe a tactic of oppositional movements as they use visual rhetoric in advancement of their political goals. However, it is not particularly the power of images that causes social change, but their processes, affects, and desires through which images acquire the agency of a “living being” (Mitchell, 2005). Such an approach to images can be explained by media effects, which as Marshall

McLuhan (1964) says, “alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance” (p. 31). In the current environment of new media, patterns of perception become highly fragmented, distracted, and decentered. In such a disposition of senses towards mediatized daily life, thought becomes even more dependent upon the contingency of an encounter (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139). Those encounters could be of anyone viewing a picture of a Femen protest online, with its various human and non-human elements such as painted slogans, nipples, fishnet tights, cameras, digital screens, and urban landmarks encountering not only viewers but also each other. These encounters are responding to each other without signifying anything, but producing certain affective forces (Abel, 2008; Massumi, 1995, 2009). These affective forces give rise to presubjective curiosity, confusion, and abjection in their viewers.

Affective Turn

Gregg and Seigworth (2010) define affect as “the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” as they pass through human, nonhuman, and otherwise bodies (p. 1). It is beyond emotion, as it is presubjective, but it moves, suspends bodies “across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability” (p. 1). The usefulness of these concepts for my project is distinctly effective in two main ways. First, affect renders human bodies on the same terrain as their technological extensions and counterparts. Second, it allows studying the work of social movements through intensities that are beyond good and evil.

Comments on Femen pictures and videos across the web are marked by affect and

resentment by the spectators. Those comments are trying to persuade viewers that the actions of Femen are offensive and vulgar. According to W. J. T Mitchell (2005), such comments provide eloquent testimony about the life of images (p. 93). Ron Burnett (2004) also grants images with agency: “it is not so much the case that images per se are thinking as it is the case that intelligence is no longer solely the domain of sentient beings” (p. 221). Latour would agree with Mitchell and Burnett, as he considers images to be actants that possess forces of contingent linking within vast networks.

Various nodes of shock values and dissonances create “lines of force” (Latour, 1993a, p. 172) that subvert an ordinary image into an affective one. “Sensation is that which is transmitted directly, and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 36). Causality and linearity is irrelevant to the value of sensation as it is not fixed to any particular sedentary meaning. The relevance of the sensation and affect correlates with the intensities, speeds, and connections that it generates.

Controversies

The immanent processes of mediation and translation mark trials of strength. Staying in the media spotlight is one of the major trials of strength for contemporary activists. As “screens become new ways of seeing and understanding” (Burnett, 2004, p. 44), affective imagery along with the articulate texts of activists help them maintain media prominence. The greater the number of the network actors that reacts to it, the more real the node is. Latour (1993a) saw this web of power coming before the appearance of the first social networking sites: “Discourses and associations are not equivalent, because allies and arguments are enlisted precisely so that one association

will be stronger than another” (pp. 168-169). But what does such underlining of the real alliances give us today in terms of activism? Calculating connections does not guarantee predictability of a course of action. Moreover, sudden controversies enable not the predictability, but the tracing of networks. Thus, in the case of Femen, it is not common sense that creates multiple connections, but decentering controversies.

The swarming of multiple controversial accounts and opinions around Femen’s events provides another connection to Latourian networks. In Latour’s (2005) conceptualization, “an ‘actor’ in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it,” (p. 46). Controversies make possible translation and transformation of fixed statuses. Controversies occur at the point of relation between a social movement and the surrounding world and show the irreducibility of networks. In the example of Femen, webs of controversies hinge on visual and affective perceptions of female sexualities.

Sexualities

Femen effectively utilizes its conventionally feminine bodies as mediums to affectively disrupt and move their audiences as they draw their audiences’ attention to the activist messages painted across their naked bodies. According to John Berger (1977), “nakedness has a positive visual value in its own right: we want to see the other naked: the other delivers to us the sight of themselves and we seize upon it...” (p. 58). One of the most evident visual dissonances or ruptures that Femen causes is contradiction with the forms of female depictions in mass media and advertising. These are the norms of specific female appearance and performance researched by Erving Goffman (1979) and

elaborated since then by other scholars. Susan Bordo (1997) for instance builds off of Goffman's work and claims that in the contemporary visualized and mediatized environment, "the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through standardized visual images" (p. 94). Femen does comply with the norms of depicting "slimmer, younger, taller, blonder, and 'better' looking" women (Goffman, 1979, p. 21), but breaks away from the performative part of those norms. If female sexuality in mainstream media and advertising is portrayed as passive, submissive, happy, and servile, Femen re-essentializes it into "sextremism" (Femen, n.d.; Larsson, 2013) with the purpose to show that the Female body is not an object for patriarchal order, but a tool of nomadic, unpredictable social change.

Urbanity

The theme of sexualities in cities recurs in various disciplines (Brown 2008; Hubbard, 2013) and contributes to the analysis of radical protest groups such as Femen. Hubbard (2013) talks about how city lightings and advertising screens create the expectation of sexuality and "effectively remind viewers that the city is a sexual marketplace" (p. 10). Screens of this sexual marketplace are dominated by bodies similar to those of the Femen members that are young, mostly White, and slim women (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999).

The relation of a public place with Femen activists creates a gendered dissonance. Historically, public space has been a domain for masculine actions, while feminine actions were mainly restricted to domesticity (Lefebvre, 1991; Sennett, 1994; Wigley, 1992). Sennett (1994) traces the histories of human bodies in relation to cities from

ancient Greece to Medieval Europe. He explains the “naked body” as the “naked voice” that becomes a “force of disunity in urban space” (p. 66). The high number of predominantly male police workers trying to control many of Femen’s protests still manifests this principle of masculine dominance over public spaces. By attacking the public space of European cities landmarked by iconic symbols, Femen is “subverting uses of urban space” (Sennet, 1994, p. 24) and becoming a “force of disunity in the urban space” (p. 66). In short, Femen is trying to bring dissonance and disruption to the norms of visual perception regarding urbanity, femininity, sexuality, politics, and religion.

Subversion/Transgression

Subversive use of sexuality by the Femen activists augments sensual dissonance and engenders affect. In contemporary settings, submissive female sexuality saturates many urban scenes and screens (Brown 2008; Hubbard, 2013). “Through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality,” Femen protestors via conventionally attractive appearances and scandalous actions are trying “to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance” (Foucault, 1978, p. 157). By writing slogans on their topless torsos, Femen activists create image events (DeLuca, 1999), which not only attract mediated attention, but also force spectators to read Femen’s slogans and interrupt the world as it is, thus potentially opening spaces for alternative worlds.

Comments on the videos of Femen activism reference the subversive and affective use of imagery in Femen protest. Various nodes of shock-values and dissonances entangling visuals of Femen create “lines of force” (Latour, 1993a, p. 172) that subvert

an ordinary image into a transgressive one. The subversive/transgressive forces of Femen mostly hinge on the interplay and rupture between factors such as sexuality, urbanity, conventional expectations for half-naked female bodies on public screens, and Femen member's radical violation of those expectations. The subversive nature of activism posits its tactical arch around the principles of provocation, disruption, connection, rupture, and transformation.

Event

When it comes to thinking disruption and transformation in the contexts of social movements, Badiou's theorization of event is provocative. Badiou (2001, 2006) develops a theory of the event, which is an effective tool for theorizing the catalytic moments that induce completely new ways of thinking and being in the world. For him, an event can happen in the areas of love, politics, art, and science.

This project looks at events in the realm of politics, which is one of the key elements for understanding activism. First of all, the event, according to Badiou, is not a one-time occurrence that is pinned to a specific time and place, but comes together as a culmination of various aspects, developments, and ideas brewing together. Second, the event creates changes in terms of new possibilities and subjects, which attain their subjectness by being faithful to the immanent affirmative truths of the event: "when we experience the process of fidelity to an event we have the progressive construction of something which is the truth of the situation because it is in its ontological truth the void of the situation" (Badiou, 2006). Badiou (2006) brings up the example of May 1968 in France, which was the event in his and many of his compatriots lives, by which they were

transformed into the new subjects of fidelity and truth to the event of May 68’.

DeLuca (2010) in his article “The Performance Space Playing in the Mud” wrote “in the moment of encounter with the political/art event, in inhabiting the paradoxes, in loving the tree, we risk being transformed and living new subjectivities in fidelity to the event, thus creating new truths that transform the world” (pp. 225-226). He then goes on to quote Badiou’s call for action: “When we feel that a truth-event interrupts the continuity of ordinary life, we have to say to others: ‘Wake up! The time of new thinking and acting is here!’” (Badiou, as cited in DeLuca, 2010, pp. 225-226). Wake-up calls are often delivered in provocative ways by the topless activists of Femen, who interrupt ordinary life and force us to think and act in new ways.

""Methodology: Ways, Modes, and Styles of Seeing

Critical poststructural theory serves as a multifaceted and messy, yet immanently organized, array of techniques that guides my multimedia approach. I will sift through the abundances of digital nodes and traces in a nonlinear way that is full of detours, deferrals, falls, jumps, and flights through and with the theories I love. With Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblages, Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network theory, and Jacques Derrida’s² poststructuralist lenses as an overarching methodology, I accept that the lines between human and technological, virtual and actual, present and absent, as well as visual and nonvisual, are dissolving. What is at stake is the constant process of technologically mediated transformations through connection and rupture. This heterogeneous mediatized

² Application of Jacques Derrida’s ponderings on media and communication, mainly knotted around such ideas as *differance*, *trace*, *dissemination*, and *pharmakon*, among others, serve as lenses for exploring how new media are differing and deferring, disseminating and connecting, tracing and reversing elements of mediatized assemblages.

process deterritorializes connections between human and nonhuman entities, making non-mediatized modes of connection the exception. Femen's work as a case study is especially well-suited for the framework of mediatized assemblages, because their image events (DeLuca, 1999) connect "mediatization" as a concept to the production of desire to interact, connect, rupture, and (re)connect.

The selection of artifacts for this project was motivated by the goal to include nonhuman elements of activism and communication into the discussion of social change. Such nonhuman elements are digital images, comments, texts, and networks, which are inextricably tied to human actions. These nonhuman elements end up acquiring agencies and agendas of their own. Such autonomy of nonhuman digital elements is often manifested by their deviation from human purposes, meanings, and contexts.

The texts this dissertation studies are of the digital, networked nature, a significant portion of which are media interactions of and pertaining to Femen on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. On those social media platforms, my attention is directed toward the accounts that gather significant intensities in terms of the responses of and to the Femen media assemblage. I study those responses in forms of comments, shares, tweets, re-tweets, likes, flags, and deletions. The tracing process of such texts is one of the most important aspects. The intensity of a text is what drives my scholarly attention. I trace this intensity through its prior iterations, subsequent re-iterations, and remediations, as far as digital methods allow. In particular, I utilize advanced search options of search and reverse search engines, Google Trends and Analytics, and media-specific platforms, such as Advanced Twitter Search. Often, texts on social media platforms are tied to or lead to traditional media outlets.

To trace the correlation between mainstream media and social network discourses, I study digital sites of major news media platforms in English, Russian, and French. Those sites include English and Russian services of *Radio Free Europe/Radio, Govort Ukraina*[*Ukraine Talks*]Ukrainian TV talk show, *BBC* English service, online platforms of mainstream British print media *The Guardian, The Daily Post, and Daily Mail, Russian News Agency Itar-Tass*, the TV channel *Russia Today*, online news sites for remote places such as *Sevastopol.su*—ForPost, the Russian language news portal, online versions of French *Le Monde, Figaro, and Elle, as well as Washington Post, NBC News, CCTV, and Rubin Report* of the *Ora TV* in the U.S. The texts I study on those sites include news stories, viewers' comments, and social media links to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

When conducting close-textual, audio-visual analysis of a text, I go through it frame by frame, reviewing interactions and the webs of human and nonhuman elements in those. I pay particular attention to the modes of (re)mediation in regards to the topless female body, its visibility, interactions with other elements in the frame, and users' responses to the dynamics of photo/video frames. Similar to visuals, I study sound in a video or an audio clip closely and then trace its connections to other media outlets and social media discussions.

The emphasis on the digital in this project excludes direct interviews with the leaders of the Femen activism. Such is the decision not to tilt the frame of this research as it aimed to bypass human, moral, and ethical arbitrariness. A shift from an anthropocentric perspective to the digital one in this dissertation allows tracing of the politics of the Femen activism without reducing it to specific times, places, and humans,

but exploring them within the assemblages that open up new spaces for activist movements.

The openness of a communication assemblage to the possibilities of rupture, interruption, displacement, and modification also undermines hierarchical binary ways of thinking about media, technology, and humans. Every mediatized assemblage contains multiple links that function as traces that constantly weave and unravel various mediated entities. Each chapter in a way illustrates this process of weaving and unraveling through rupture, connection, and transformation.

Overview of Chapters

In the following section, I provide an overview of the following chapters by discussing their major ideas, themes, artifacts, and research questions. In the descriptions of the case studies, I also discuss the particular frameworks, and methodological choices I have made in order to best approach the research questions and artifacts under analysis. This project utilizes three case studies to explore the rhetorical force of the media-activism assemblages of Femen protest.

The first case study, presented in Chapter 2, studies the 2012 Femen cross-sawing event in Kiev to answer the following research questions:

- How does FEMEN utilize visual rhetoric of their bodies to create mediated ruptures and connections of networks?
- What is the role of affect in the translations that FEMEN enacts?
- How do those translations relate to transformations?

The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersections between images, the

use of the body, sexuality, and urbanity in protest, as well as postmodern modes of resistance and transgression. With the subversive use of their partial nakedness, sexuality, colorfulness, and multiple remediations, this Femen case study provides ample material to elaborate on the rhetorical force of activist images and their impact on the processes of media-activism assemblage/network development.

This event fits well as a first case study chapter in this project, because it does not mark the beginning, which was in 2008 and in a much less radical form. The event marks a place close to the middle (not in a temporal sense though), where “things pick up speed” (Deleuze & Guattari, p. 25). As Latour (1993a, 1996, and 2005) suggests, we should always begin in the middle and trace the imperceptible web of connections and ruptures from there. This case study illustrates the concept of media-activist assemblage well, because such assemblages/networks are not concerned with origins or finalities of social movements, but the intensities that mark their middles.

This case study explores the use of the transgressive bodily and virtual aspects that challenge depictions of female activists on public screens (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002) and with the threads of digital interactions sprouting from them. The chapter analyzes their mediation of the cross-sawing event in the Ukraine, Russia, France, the UK, and the Netherlands. The analysis of the crucifix-chopping event in Kiev on August 17, 2012 aims to demonstrate that the network of activism is not a pure, transparent process, but is a movement that relies on ruptures, connections, and translations. The aim of this case study on mediatized activism is to argue for the contingency of digital ‘everyday life,’ which is the decentering and intermingling of geographically dispersed nodes.

The second case study, Chapter 3, utilizes Femen as a case study for tracing the

dynamics of interrelation between abject, affect, censorship, and social change.

This chapter focuses on the censorship of mediatized bodies of Femen's topless activists.

The chapter discovers how the same images that were censored on Facebook have permeated commercial culture via the advertisement video of Replay jeans and broke away from the abject circle. The chapter addresses the following research questions:

- What does the rhetorical force of visual censorship look like?
- What are the intensities, speeds, and cross-cuttings associated with it?
- How do the censored actors persevere through the myriad translations and transformations of their actions?
- How do redistributed, borrowed, and betrayed activist actions play into their transformations?

The purpose of this case study is to examine the variety of censorship marks as manifestations of affective abject-creation in a smooth activist space. In 2013 and then in 2014, Facebook deleted Femen's account with its multiple links, likes, followers, shares and Femen-Facebook assemblages. Since then, Femen has had several anticensorship campaigns against Facebook, but the group still continues to self-censor its images to avoid potential deletion of its account.

The chapter considers the reasons for deleting Femen's Facebook accounts, which often lead to their affect-induced audiences flagging and reporting Femen activism content. Such a collective censorship affordance of participatory media culture creates abject bodies from Femen and calls for the Facebook administration to censor their images and pages in an attempt to counter their transgression. The study considers not only current self-censored images of Femen on Facebook, but places them in an

assemblage of all the other similarly transgressive images of breastfeeding, post-mastectomy scars, transgendered people, free the nipple activists, and unconventional art being censored on Facebook.

The fourth chapter introduces a case study of the 2015 Copenhagen shootings during a free speech event. This case study is important for several reasons: first, the shootings took place when the Femen leader, Inna Shevchenko, was speaking at the event. Second, the absence of visual material and exclusive audio-phonetic account of the event propels a less considered aspect of media—sound, thus adding to the multimedia aspirations of the entire dissertation. Third, this event allows us to study the unplanned, eventual nature of activism with unusually high mobilization of solidarity around Femen. Through close-textual and audio-visual analysis of media artifacts, the chapter addresses the following research questions:

- How does the audio recording of the shooting influence Femen’s eventual activism of the 2015 Copenhagen shooting?
- How does the Twitter sonic (eye)witness reporting of Inna Shevchenko factor into the mediatized discourses surrounding the event?
- What themes, images, and topics re-emerge in Twitter discussions of the Inna Shevchenko and Copenhagen shooting?
- What transformations did the event produce for Femen and its movement?

This chapter takes a close look at the mediatized witnessing of Inna Shevchenko’s in the 2015 terrorist attack on the Copenhagen free speech event. The chapter considers the case a Badiou event, which was made possible through the interrelations of multiple layers of activism and its surrounding situations. With the bundle of various media elements,

Shevchenko's faithfulness to the event in the forms of live-tweeting, multiple media interviews, and her own columns about activism, the event came into being and mobilized vast groups into collective solidarities. If the first case studies are mostly dedicated to the examination of ruptures and connections around transgressive and controversial activism tactics, this case study shows the major transformation of Femen, the media-activism assemblage, from exiled, marginal, and abject into a credible defender of free expression.

The final chapter provides multiperspectival elaborations on media-activism assemblages in those case studies, where I discuss conclusions and implications. I also revisit the literature reviewed in the study as a means of highlighting how my dissertation contributes to methodological and theoretical conversations relating to the contemporary workings of digital media, in particular media-activism assemblages, and more largely the visual rhetoric of social movement studies. I argue that in the light of Femen and other recent social movements around the globe, entwinements of human and nonhuman networks have become increasingly visible. The emergence of visually affective social movements and their mediatized struggles transform the status quo and disrupt hegemonic power structures while offering opportunities to see and act anew. These potentials for acting and thinking otherwise hinge on transgressive and affective forces. Networks/assemblages always exceed the human, extending to a multitude of things.

I conclude by pointing to new areas of research, such as the insatiable movement desires of digital images, mainstreaming of the abject, and nomadic femininity of digital protest. I address additional questions that arise through the analysis of case studies as they illustrate the heterogeneity and dynamism of media-activism assemblages. Finally, I

draw conclusions regarding the instability of human subjects, which are in circuits of mutual-transformations between technologies and other mediatized humans. In this heterogeneous transformative process, it is possible to chart new territories of research, activism, and f(l)ight.

CHAPTER 2

SCREAMING NODES OF FEMEN: ENTANGLING VISUALLY AFFECTIVE MEDIA-ACTIVISM ASSEMBLAGES

Amid a constant influx of visuals on our digital screens, the space of activism has become a dynamic web of ruptures, connections, and transformations. My analysis of Femen assemblage offers an initial charting of the mediatized activist network. By examining Femen's protest event of cutting down a crucifix in downtown Kiev, I study the processes of a mediatized activist body linking across media outlets and geographic borders, breaking off of territorial and cultural contexts, and producing new material and digital interpretations swarming around it. The emergence of visually affective activist groups such as Femen disrupts hegemonic power structures and unveils potentials to see and act anew.

Twenty-two-year-old Shevchenko, holding a chainsaw in one hand, briskly follows other Femen members up the hilltop overlooking downtown Kiev. Her long blond hair dangles beneath a large, black, knit hat. Her slim bare legs contrast with her heavy boots and black overcoat. The video frame cross-dissolves into a full-size shot of half-naked Shevchenko in front of a tall wooden cross with a statue of the Archangel Michael, the landmark of Kiev Liberty Square, as the backdrop. She is wearing a colorful

flower-headband, associated with the Ukrainian national costume, translucent goggles covering her green eyes, black-leather motorcycle gloves showing her red-nail-polished fingers, nicely fitting red denim shorts and the slogan “Free Riot” painted across her naked torso. She kneels, crosses herself as an Orthodox Christian would, and adjusts her gloves, mask, and headband. Inna turns on the chainsaw and starts sawing down the tall wooden cross. We see a small group of journalists with cameras and microphones move into the frame, approaching Inna as she continues to saw the cross. With this affective “image event” (DeLuca, 1999), Femen saturated multiple digital screens and drew polyvalent attention to its activist causes.

It does not matter what language you use to search “Femen” online; in seconds, you will be flooded by multiple links to news, photos, videos, blogs, and even merchandise that depicts young, attractive female activists crowned with colorful flowers and marked with aggressive slogans on their bare breasts: “No religion,” “Naked freedom,” “Fuck your morals,” “Do not play with human rights,” “Topless jihad,” “Obscene because of you,” “Fuck Dictator,” etc. In their protests, Femen effectively utilize multimedia production and PR skills to create unexpected and affective events. The Davos World Economic Forum, the Vatican, the Madrid parliament, the Vilnius Summit, Belarus (“the last dictatorship in Europe”), Notre Dame de Paris, and the Tunis Judiciary System in Tripoli are among their multiple protest actions that were staged to attract large-scale media coverage. Founded in Ukraine in 2008 by teenage students from provincial towns, Femen initially used pink erotic clothes, balloons, paper banners, and leaflets. Having seen no media or public attention, the group went topless in 2009 and immediately attracted much craved attention (Ackerman, 2014).

Atlantic in its review of a recently published book about Femen (Ackerman, 2014) aggrandizes the movement:

With Femen, we are dealing with something new ... Its activists are charting a new route for public discourse about women and religion, and making it an unabashedly universal discourse, venturing into realms where they may be hated, and they may yet pay a high price for this. But that they have gotten people talking, even shouting and crying, is undeniable, and it is good; only through debate and discussion, sometimes painful, often unsettling, will we progress. (Ackerman, 2014, back cover)

In addition to multiple media stories, one of the leaders of the movement, Shevchenko became the new Marianne³ for the national stamp of France (Sulzer, 2013). This event caused outburst of discussions and even twitter-mediated violent threats directed toward one of the designers of the stamp, Olivier Ciappa. “Woke up to discover somewhat violent messages of hate on Twitter”⁴ tweets Ciappa, calling some of the social media messages violent.

The Russian Foreign Ministry joined those provoked by Femen. In its press release following the court hearing on the case of Femen protest inside the Notre Dame de Paris, Russian Foreign Ministry accuses the French court of political bias in support of Femen, who violated the rights of believers in the cathedral: “For the sake of political expediency the feelings of believers were ignored and offended, thus leaving them perturbed by the desecration of one of the most revered temples in France” (BFM.RU, 2014).

How does Femen manage to receive such media resonance, while having only 3 to 10 protestors per event? Using Femen as an example of ANT and activism, I am not

³Marianne is the bare-chested pictorial symbol of the French Revolution in the famous painting by Eugène Delacroix “Liberty Leading the People” (1830).

⁴My translation from French. Original text: “Réveil un peu violent en découvrant les messages de menaces et de haine sur Twitter. Parfois violents, parfois...”

gearing this analysis toward judgment of this popular movement. On the contrary, my goal is to show the dynamics of their assemblage. In particular, my objective is to look into Femen actions, reactions, and transactions by responding to the following set of questions: How does Femen utilize visual rhetoric of their bodies to create mediated ruptures and connections of networks? What is the role of affect in the translations that Femen enacts? How do those translations relate to transformations?

In order to explicate ANT and Activism, I will examine the event of chopping down the wooden crucifix in Kiev by Femen. This event does not mark the beginning of the movement or its most recent development. However, in order to proceed to the event, I need to elaborate on the theoretical approach that will guide my analysis sections.

'ANT and Multimedia Activism

With this chapter, I depart from moral, technological, and political determinations and propose three main processes of network activism. In particular, I propose that the activism network is comprised of decontextualized visual and textual nodes that are entangled with processes of rupture and connection, where affective forces link transformation and translation. This approach helps us move away from a consequence-oriented gaze, while also articulating the processes social movements undergo or spring from. The Femen example in this case will not yield any definitive statements on their achievements as potential social change agents, but on the process of their multilayer mediation.

The development of new media provides the possibility of reaching vast numbers of readers, viewers, and listeners who are enabled to engage in multimedia discussions

and various feedbacks. As Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue, there are a growing number of citizens "using the new media to become informed, to inform others, and to construct new social and political relations" (pp. 87-88). Such networking is a process of creating heterogeneous alliances between activist bodies, images, online discussion threads, journalists, and other actors. According to Latourian ANT, "the network does not designate a thing out there that would have roughly the shape of interconnected points," but instead qualifies the "ability of each actor to make other actors do unexpected things" (Latour, 2005, p. 139). Images frequently act as those "unexpected things," which accomplish their goals of media dissemination through affects, ruptures, connections, and translations.

Affective forces let Femen image events produce ruptures, connections, and translations of their activism network. For instance, Femen's affective cross-sawing image event in Kiev produced a multiplicity of ruptures for Femen in Ukrainian and Slavic Orthodox Christian communities as it effectively violated the norms of female appearance, actions, and location in relation to religion and the city. Massumi (1995) refers to such rupture as a shock—"the sudden interruption of functions of actual connection" (p. 97). He connects those interruptions to Benjamin's (1969) writing on shock as the media effect of film, which "like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind" (p. 238). Heightened presence of mind yields polysemic translations, some of which rely on and produce connections. Femen's ruptures with Slavic culture connected them with anti-Russian, Western discourses. This is evident in the cross-sawing event, since it was dedicated to the protest group Pussy Riot, which in the West is persistently utilized for vilification of Russian leadership. This connection

helped Femen to utilize affect and extend their network in the West. Networks such as Femen's are breakage resistant and connection enhanced, similar to rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), but the process of connection sometimes relies on rupture. Such heterogeneity of networks constitutes their fragility and strength simultaneously:

There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that re-stratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject—anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9)

There are no presupposed origins for networks as they are immanent. Connections and ruptures emerge as a result of exchange and battle in the network. As Latour (1993a) says, “the freest of all democracies reigns between instants” (p.165). In Latour's philosophy, actors are immersed in instantaneity and immanence. The immanence of Femen's protest actions does not mark an illusory epiphany of transcendental essences of feminism, democracy, or egalitarianism, but an unfolding actuality of multiple visible and/or invisible elements, such as affective activist body parts, paints, flower head bands, city views, cameras, screens, and the eyes of viewers and their environments that are interconnected in decentralized ways. This decentralized interconnection of the visible and invisible elements would not be possible without a visual media matrix. Ron Burnett (2004) coined the term “image-words” to describe the similar phenomenon of images creating contexts for embodiment. According to Massumi (1995), this embodiment is simultaneously actual and virtual as it provides potentials for “what are normally opposites [to] coexist, coalesce, and connect” (p. 91). Ergo, distribution of Femen network's elements is “turbulence across a smooth space, in producing a movement that

holds space and simultaneously affects all of its points, instead of being held by space in a local movement from one specified point to another” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986/2010, p. 20). Deleuze and Guattari point to two types of spaces: smooth and striated. The difference between the two is that striated space is “immovable (immeuble)” (p. 57), seized by a state apparatus of fixed hierarchy, while smooth space is occupied by nomads of fluidity and change.

Distribution of a network’s elements often look like social battle, in which some sedentary discourses use contexts to wrongly tether actors’/actants’ actions to moral labels and values, and thus territorialize and submit them to striated spaces. In other words, some efforts wrongly try to fix contexts, and establish a right-versus-wrong binary way of thinking. Such thinking that strives to determine substance and/or essence is unlikely to suffice. Instead, in *Prince of Networks* (2009), a guidebook to Latour's philosophy, Harman suggests that actors are "trying to adjust or inflict its forces, not unlike Nietzsche’s cosmic vision of the will to power” (p.16). This dynamism is stripped of an inherent morality and is entirely dependent upon “trials of strength” (Latour, 1993).

The immanent processes of mediation and translation mark those trials. For Shevchenko, staying in the media spotlight is one of the major trials of strength, as she pointed out in the documentary “Femen: Exposed” *Russia Today* (2013). As “screens become new ways of seeing and understanding” (Burnett, 2004, p. 44), affective imagery along with the articulate texts of Femen help them maintain media prominence.

Latour (1993a) argues that some actors are stronger and some are weaker: “For an entelechy there are only stronger and weaker interactions with which to make a world” (Latour, 1993a, p. 185). But what distinguishes the strong from the weak? Harman (2009)

considers realness to be a barometer of strength. He thinks that the more connections an actant has, the more real it is. This translates well in the modern social media-driven world where no event, no experience, is real unless photographed, recorded, and shared. Even Sontag (1977), who criticized photography, admits that “the picture may distort, but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s on the picture” (p. 5). Such a picture of Femen protest forms a node that in turn connects to other nodes and thus forms a network.

Castells (2013) believes that nodes can increase their importance for the network “by absorbing more relevant information and processing it more efficiently” (p. 20). For Femen, maintaining media prominence is a constant process of absorbing relevant information, such as political developments or upcoming holidays, and responding to that information in activist ways. Their official website could be a good example of processing information efficiently⁵.

However, the efficient processing of information by a network node alone does not guarantee its “realness.” The greater the number of the network actors that react on it, the more real the node is. Latour (1993a) saw this web of power coming before the appearance of the first social networking sites: “Discourses and associations are not equivalent, because allies and arguments are enlisted precisely so that one association will be stronger than another” (pp. 168-169). But what does such underlining of the real alliances give us today in terms of activism? Calculating connections does not guarantee predictability of a course of action. Moreover, sudden controversies enable not the

⁵ Like a successful commercial organization, Femen changes its welcome flash banner from its regular topless activist picture to a picture of their topless member turned into a witch as Halloween approaches.

predictability, but the tracing of the networks. Thus, in the case of Femen, it is not common sense that creates multiple connections and spinning frames, but de-centering controversies.

Controversies and Networks

Controversies make possible translation and transformation of fixed statuses. Controversies occur at the point of relation between a social movement and the surrounding world and show the irreducibility of networks. In the example of Femen, webs of controversies hinge on visual and affective perceptions of female sexualities.

The theme of sexualities in the cities is recurring theme in various disciplines (Brown 2008; Hubbard, 2013). Hubbard (2013) talks about how city lightings and advertising screens create the expectation of sexuality and “effectively remind viewers that the city is a sexual marketplace” (p. 10). Screens of this sexual marketplace are dominated by bodies similar to those of the Femen members who are young, mostly White, and slim women (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Femen effectively utilize their sexual bodies as mediums to affectively disrupt audiences and draw their attention to the activism messages painted across their naked torsos. According to Berger (1977), “nakedness has a positive visual value in its own right: we want to see the other naked: the other delivers to us the sight of themselves and we seize upon it...” (p. 58). Sennett (1994) traces the histories of human bodies in relation to cities from ancient Greece to Medieval Europe. He explains “naked body” as “naked voice” that becomes “force of disunity in urban space” (p. 66). Similarly, Femen is trying to bring dissonance and disruption to the norms of visual perceptions regarding

femininity and its relations to politics and religion.

Disruption has become one of the common media frames for Femen, as we can see in the example of lifesitenews.com. The headline states, “Topless Femen activists disrupt Mass at Swedish cathedral” (LifeSiteNews.com, 2014). The article tells a news story and provides a link to the video of the event with the note “Viewer discretion advised,” which verifies the intensity of visual imagery and explains why the story received over ten thousand views. The video is taken without a tripod by a hand-held low-resolution camera and has shaky frames, which adds effects of rough material and authenticity. Despite the occasional shakiness, the visual prominently shows three young, tall, slim, blond, topless women in high heels, blood painted across their long legs and hangers on their short shorts. Their naked model-looking breasts bear slogans dedicated to the freedom of abortion, which are well exposed as their hands are raised up holding banners with more slogans. They are chanting in English "Catholic Church out of my body" and "my body, my rules." This chanting lasts only a few minutes as a group of provoked church personnel and church-goers starts to push them out of the church jerkily.

Spectators’ emotional comments on Femen pictures and videos across the web create an affective field marked by dissensus. Those comments are trying to persuade viewers that the actions of Femen are offensive and vulgar. Still and moving images of Femen activism are among actants that “translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it” (Latour, 1993b, p. 81).

Betrayal similar to disruption reoccurs in the discussion of Femen (O’Keefe, 2014, Zychowicz, 2011). One example of betrayal is related to Femen and its Tunisian activist Amina Tyler, whom Tunisian Muslim women accused of wrong feminist politics.

“Femen stole our voice” was the slogan of Tunisian Muslim women as they were demonstrating their radical disapproval of the form in which Femen was acting to promote women’s rights in Tunisia. Their argument against Femen’s image event could be read in Luce Irigaray’s (1985) way: “Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies” (p. 25). Since those sexual imageries are visual, one can also approach them in James Elkins’s (1998) way: “Contemporary images rarely have single or primary meanings... .instead they court ambiguity and obscurity...” (p. 214). Ambiguity as part of controversy yields different translations of the same image events. Thus, by contrast to Tunisian Muslim women, liberal Western European communities applauded Femen’s form of activism as effective and pledged support for Amina. Such clashes in the translations cause not only transformations of Muslim women’s perceptions in the West and the infiltration of Muslim traditions in Tunisia, but also perforate previously impermeable boundaries that constitute pseudo-purities (religion, femininity, morals, and rights).

Controversies fuel ANT and activism with the force of confusion and curiosity. According to Latour (1993a), making connections alone does not guarantee realness: “The real is what resists” (p. 174). Confusion supplements resistance in the form of contradictory interpretations. As Berger says (1977), “the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (p. 7). Thus nodes and actors never stop negotiating their place in the networks and the specifics of their interconnectedness. Images as parts of the networks are tied to the question of desire “desire generating images and images generating desire” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 58). Desire is what from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986/2010) viewpoint composes assemblages and networks. Intertwining and unfolding

networks persevere through earthly immanent controversial events.

Rupture

With the dynamic chainsaw sound, a black-and-white long shot of a tall wooden cross quickly pans down to show the slim, white body of a half-naked protestor standing on the ground and sawing the cross. This is the same image event I described in the beginning of the chapter. This time, the image is remediated in a 25-minute *Russia Today* (2013) documentary about Femen. The black-and-whiteness of the image frames the event as gruesome historical past, a kind of flashback. Above the head of Shevchenko, two black straps tied to the cross stretch out of the shot, naturally framing and accentuating the activist's figure. In the next two-second (7:17-7:18) medium close-up shot, Inna's torso from the left side appears on the screen with a blurry circle imposed to cover her bare chest as she actively continues to saw the cross. The marking of the word "sextremism" is partially hidden under her long hair and the blurry circle of censorship. In the next extreme long shot, Shevchenko saws down the cross. The cross falls completely, revealing the busy urban view of downtown Kiev. At the sound of the cross hitting the ground, Femen activists holding the black straps tied to the cross and journalists recording the event quickly step back, distancing from Shevchenko and the fallen cross. In the next moment, Inna raises her hands up holding the chainsaw that is still in motion.

Because of the gray-scale visual, most of the background marks of the image appear much more fluid and homogenous than in the color picture described earlier. Overall, fluidity and natural framing with the black straps above the activist show her and

the censorship mark on her body more prominently. “The ontological instability of the mark is a double and conflicting condition” (Elkins, 1998, p. 42). This mark of censorship not only serves as signal of a potentially offensive visual, but also acts as an assemblage. This assemblage generates new marks, coalesces with the surrounding marks, and tries to striate the smooth space of the activist body. With this striating of the space, the censoring mark itself appears as a symptom of rupture between the activism and the competing orthodox Christian discourse showcased in the documentary and viewers’ comments on it.

The complex web of affective ruptures between the Femen activism and the orthodox discourse is traceable to the aspects of bodily sensations and powers of Christian places. As Sennett (1994) explains, for Christians places, of martyrs and victims carry immense power, which according to the Christian ideology, are not meant to be challenged by the force of human flesh. By cutting the Christian cross, Femen ruptured this relationship by flipping the hierarchical binary between place and flesh. Thus, becoming iconoclast, Femen generated “fresh icons, rejuvenated mediators” (Latour, 2002, p. 17). With this action, Femen set up a new game where “provocateurs and those they provoke are playing cat and mouse” (Latour, 2002, p. 29). A short interview with Ukrainian writer and journalist Oles Buzina, right after the black-and-white censored depiction of the cross-sawing event, emphasized this cat and mouse game rhetoric: “When the girls went ahead and cut down the cross, they really let themselves down for good. I think that if they wanted to go to the West, they meant to cut down the cross” (Russia Today, 2013, 7:25).

In Ukraine, and similarly in Russia, where the Christian Orthodox religion

structures every aspect of political, social, and economic life, a half-naked woman who chops down a crucifix creates multiple ruptures. The act of chopping down the crucifix alone does not achieve the same effect without the outfit of Shevchenko. Her naked torso inscribed with the English-language slogan "Free Riot" and "Sextrimism" across her chest and arms. Her short red shorts and heavy boots create an appearance that the Orthodox Church considers vulgar. This outfit intensified the desire of the orthodox Christian community representatives to attack the image. "When it [image] asks to be shattered, disfigured, or dissolved, it enters the sphere of offending, violent, or sacrificial image, the object of iconoclasm, the pictorial counterpart to the death drive, or ecstatic shattering of the ego associated with the orgasm" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 74). This affective reaction is easy to find in the comments and blog entries dedicated to the image event.

Below is one such example:

The cross was installed in dedication to the victims of hunger and political repressions in Ukraine. I am not able to wrap my head around, how could anyone raise a hand against this holiness. And why is that these 'monsters with boobs' are running around and putting together such unreasonable actions... ..Excuse me for my emotions, but it's utterly painful for me to watch this unbounded [violent vandalism] actions. Clearly, the event caused more hype and sensation than they [femen] could have counted on. It's just the methods that those 'actors' utilize go beyond the acceptable normal behavior...(Nechiporenko, 2012, para. 2)

Many Ukrainian and Russian journalists and bloggers, who frame this event as a deliberate rupture with the Ukraine's mainstream way of thinking, are trying to impose a fixed meaning to the image of cross chopping. Some bloggers and journalists, such as Oles Buzina, label the cross-sawing image as legible sign of Inna's desire to emigrate from Ukraine and expand the movement of Femen internationally (Russia Today, 2013).

The quest of those to fix the meaning and make the event transparent does not take into consideration the processes of the image event itself, but the solidified-over-

time history behind the object being chopped. According to media accounts, the cross was installed during Ukraine's 2004-2005 Orange Revolution in the memory of the victims of communism. Soon after the first brief news stories about the event, there followed articles and comments with stories behind the crucifix Femen chopped. One of the numerous commentators on the RFERL article, Vitaliy from Kiev on the second day of the event wrote: "It is a monument [dedicated] to victims, to three million Ukrainians, who have died of artificially created hunger by a Stalin mode in 1933" (RFERL, 2012). A comment "Ukrainian Sluts Pledged Support to their Moscow Colleagues by Destroying the Prostration Cross in Kiev" (Sevastopol.su, 2012) stands out with its aggressive tone and represents the majority of the event's virtual audience. Femen are "not only dummies, but also provocateurs. Their support of Pussy Riot was a sad mistake, meaning that they sawed not the right cross" (YK1, 2012).

Such swarming of multiple controversial accounts and opinions around the cross-chopping event provides another connection to Latour's elaboration on networks. In Latour's (2005) conceptualization, "an 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it" (p. 46). "This is what we wanted to achieve," said Shevchenko during her Skype mediated participation in the Ukrainian TV talk-show *Ukraine Talks* (govoryt-ukraina.tv, 2012), "we did not want people loving or supporting us. All we wanted is to stir the debate, which is happening in this TV show." At the time of this TV show, Inna was already in Paris, far from the "powerless power of social inertia" (Latour, 2005, p. 85) in mediatized Ukraine. This "social inertia" hides "the real causes of social inequalities" (Latour, 2005, p. 85). Thus, on the one hand we have cross-sawing image

event transfixed in negative contexts in media, which ruptures mainstream society into groups of people with various affective responses to Femen's activism. On the other hand, we have the sets of visually triggered controversies and debates over religion, the place of women in society, and the ethics of protest (govoryt-ukraina.tv, 2012).

Connection⁶

Approximately three fourths of the *On n'est pas couché* TV talk-show's purple fluid screen is filled with a color, uncensored moving image of a young topless Femen activist, who is about to saw a cross in Kiev. On the right side, about one fourth of the screen is filled with a close-up frontal shot of Shevchenko with her long blond hair, dressed in a white Femen t-shirt, with flower-headband, sitting with her gaze fixed to the left. Inna is watching herself as she is going to cut the cross in Kiev about a year ago. The video is projected on a large screen in the talk-show studio, filled with dozens of people.

Kiev urban traffic noise is lost in a cacophony of quick camera-clicking sounds. Shevchenko silently crosses herself in an Orthodox Christian way, as she is standing on her knees in the three-fourth angle medium close-up color shot. Still standing on her knees, she bows in front of the cameras as she finishes crossing. Meanwhile, in the background, another Femen activist ties a black strap to the cross. Through a quick white flash dissolve cut, we see Inna's back behind the back of another Femen activist in a grey

⁶ Debates caused by ruptures are unimaginable without connections. Perhaps this is the reason "Connection" should not be a separate section. Having a separate section for the connection aspect of network activism is contradicting the overarching argument: the heterogeneous nature of networks does not allow separation of rupture from connection and the two from translation/transformation. However, for the sake of conventional clarity, it makes sense to ponder the specifics of connection in relation to the network allies, forces, and their "trials of strength" (Latour, 1993, 2005).

pullover holding the strap tied to the cross. The other Femen activist is standing further in the back holding the other end of the strap tied to the cross. Inna's figure appears framed by the two black straps above her head. As she turns on the chainsaw, the camera pans up to reveal the crucifix up on the wooden cross and the downtown urban landscape of Kiev. In the next quick white-flash-dissolved close up shot of Inna, we see her struggling to cut the cross, twice as thick as her torso, which bears a slogan "Free Riot," partially hidden under her loose hair. As the cross falls with a heavy sound in the next extreme long shot, Shevchenko victoriously raises her hands up holding the chainsaw that is still in motion.

In this video, it is evident how "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 55). This entire remediation of Femen's cross-sawing event on a popular French TV show serves as an example of Femen's new connections transgressing multiple geographic and visual rhetorical lines. This TV show signposts Femen's growing popularity in France and Europe generally. It also demonstrates how the cross-sawing image event continues to have its own life event after a year. Such images have "a parallel existence to the social life of their human hosts, and to the world of objects that they represent" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 93). On the double screens of *On n'est pas couché*, present-day Inna is juxtaposed to her own image of the past event, which is out of her control, disseminated and dispersed in the web on the network of Femen activism.

The image of the cross sawing has "entered a feedback loop" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 238), which does not allow fixing of any errors related to activism causes, context, or meaning. But who cares about such incoherence and errors in postpostmodern society? It

certainly was not clarity and unity of meaning that promoted media circulation of the cross-sawing image event. From the previous section, we see that the more controversy, the more attention. This is not only desire of visual elements in the image, but also the desire of the lay spectator, who imagines pictures through “ideals of dissonance, incoherence, and chaos” (Elkins, 1998, p. 214). In the image I described above, it is possible to see these postmodern ideals manifest themselves and generate connections that enhance Femen’s network of activism.

One of the most evident visual dissonances or ruptures that Femen has caused with the cross-sawing event is contradiction with the forms of female depictions in mass media and advertising. These are the norms of specific female appearance and performance researched by Goffman (1979) and elaborated since then by other scholars. Bordo (1997), for instance, building off of Goffman’s work, claims that in the contemporary visualized and mediatized environment, “the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through standardized visual images” (p. 94). Femen does comply with the norms of depicting “slimmer, younger, taller, blonder, and ‘better’ looking” women (Goffman, 1979, p. 21), but breaks away from the performative part of those norms. Goffman (1979) points out that the majority of women in advertisements tend to demonstrate “feminine touch” by “using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle or to caress its surface” (p. 16). In the cross-sawing event, Inna Shevchenko’s hands do the extreme opposite of this norm, as they are not caressing, but destroying a religious object. The process of destruction also shows serious engagement with the object, which breaks the norms of “licensed withdrawal,” or of “mentally drifting away” usually manifested by a tender smile or averted eyes

(Goffman, 1979, p. 65). On the contrary to advertising norms, in the cross-sawing event, the activist's facial expression is belligerent and the eyes are fixated on the object of destruction.

The relation of a public place with the main actor of the chain-sawing event creates a gendered dissonance. Historically, public space has been a domain for masculine actions, while feminine actions were mainly restricted to domesticity (Lefebvre, 1991; Sennett, 1994; Wigley, 1992). The high number of predominantly male police workers trying to control many of Femen's and other activism protests still manifests this principle of masculine dominance over public spaces. By attacking the public space of downtown Kiev landmarked by the crucifix, Femen is "subverting uses of urban space" (Sennet, 1994, p. 24) and becomes the "force of disunity in the urban space" (p. 66).

Subversive use of sexuality by the Femen activist in the urban space of Kiev augments sensual dissonance and engenders affect. In contemporary settings, submissive female sexuality saturates many urban scenes and screens (Brown 2008; Hubbard, 2013). "Through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality," Femen protestors via Shevchenko's conventionally attractive appearance and scandalous action are trying "to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance" (Foucault, 1978, p. 157). By writing slogans on her topless torso, the Femen activist creates an image event, which not only attracts mediated attention, but also forces spectators to read Femen's causes as they are looking at her body. Comments on the videos of Femen activism reference the subversive and affective use of imagery in the Femen protest:

Another example of contemporary media being merely a vehicle for entertainment, non-news. These groups HAVE incredible messages and goals in their protest... They do want attention and shock value, but that's NOT their end goal. They want that because that's the only way to get these entertainment news outlets to cover their cause! (maychocho, 2014)

Various nodes of shock-values and dissonances I have touched upon in this section create “lines of force” (Latour, 1993a, p. 172) that subvert an ordinary image into affective one. Images such as Femen’s cross-sawing event are subversive “when it is pensive, when it thinks” (Barthes, 1981, p. 38). Burnett (2004) in *How Do Images Think* explains images as “intelligent arbiters” (p. 221), which are “parts of the ‘seer’ and of “everything that one could define as sensual” (p. 75). “Sensation is that which is transmitted directly, and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 36). Causality and the value of sensation is almost irrelevant as it cannot be fixed on any particular sedentary meaning, such as the meaning the cross that Femen cut down was the wrong cross or that the form of Femen’s activism is perpetuating objectification of women. The relevance of the sensation and affect is salient only to the extent of the intensities, speeds, and connections that it creates.

Translation/Transformation⁷

The large chainsaw in motion is generating sawdust as it is cutting a tall wooden cross. Behind the grey-red chainsaw, there is a young blond topless woman with huge breasts, red parted lips, long hair, and a small red flower wreath headband with its multiple colorful long ribbons flying in all directions. Behind the woman and the cross,

⁷Having those two words next to each other and separated by a slash can be understood as translations lead to transformations, the end. But there is no end; transformations lead to social change, social change leads to new ruptures, ruptures lead to new connections, and thus cycling, entangling, and disentangling infinitely. This would make sense following Latour since for him translations are everywhere.

there is light orange illumination and Femen typed in cartoonish grassy green font narrowing into perspective. When hovering over the image with a mouse, it is possible to see even more details close up. Out of all four t-shirt designs referencing the cross-sawing event in Kiev, this one has the most dramatic look. Along with three other similar-themed t-shirts, it is sold on the neatly organized Femen shop that is part of their official website (Femen.org). As I am writing this chapter today on October 7, 2014, this “Handmade T-Shirt Sextremizm” costs \$39.90, almost half of its original price due to “final sale 50% off” discount. I will not go into details about other merchandise, such as cups, caps, and activist-signed boob-prints that are sold on this website, since it is beyond my current focus in this chapter. However, I should point out that Femen members in their media interviews and social networking posts frequently reference the Femen online shop along with their online donation link, as means of financial support and development.

“Handmade T-Shirt Sextremizm” demonstrates how images “are now capable of being transformed as well as acting in transformative fashion” (Burnett, 2004, p. 59). In this t-shirt, we see not only Inna Shevchenko transformed into a caricature drawing, but also transforming Femen allies into potential customers or turning potential customers into activism supporters. This t-shirt is one example of the cross-sawing image event translation. As Latour (1993) says, “nothing is by itself, the same as or different from anything else. That is, there are no equivalents, only translations” (p. 162). Such translations exemplify how “the disassociation of action from context is a central and continuing feature” of activism (Gitlin, 1980, p. 238). However, on the contrary to Gitlin’s concern about disassociation of context from protest cause, Femen’s cross-

sawing event demonstrates dissociative translations/transformations as forces of contemporary networking.

Femen's cross-chopping event had intensive translations in Russia, where four crosses were chopped. Even though Femen on its website and social media was urging its followers to cut crosses to "save Russia" (Femen.org, 2012) the actual cutting of the cross should not be rendered as a mere cause-effect relation. Cutting crosses in Russia following the cross-sawing event in Kiev is similar to "a relation that does not transport causality but induces two mediators into coexisting" (Latour, 2005, p. 108). Looking at the translations of the cross-sawing event into similar actions in Russia through the perspective of association helps see intricate details of the networking process, details such as Russian mainstream media deliberations, hybridity of opinions, and further extensions of Femen's network.

The debates about who cut the crosses and why took several hundred stories, posts, and comments. Vadim Karasyov, director of the Institute of Global Strategies, draws a parallel between different types of translations in his discussion during the political talk show *Velika Politika* [grand politics]: "if these events were in Germany or some other secular places, there would not be such a storm [of furious discussions] in the mainstream societies [of Russia and Ukraine]" (Grand Politics with E. Kiseliiov, 2012). Karasyov's comment proved correct. Netherlands' chain-sawing of the crosses by topless activists during the GOGBOT festival in support of Pussy Riot showed a festive, fun-loving, and playful tone as they were chopping down crosses without any religious signification.

The news section on Femen's website dedicated a post to Femen's participation in

the GOGBOT Festival. This page provides multiple pictures taken from various angles and distances where topless Femen members have “FREE RIOT” and “sextrimism” slogans painted across their torsos, glitter under the stage lighting, talk into microphones, saw crosses, pleasantly react to audience applause, and so forth. “The hybrid nature of the elements of pictures is an impediment to interruption—it slows the gathering of meaning...” (Elkins, 1998, p. 47). To help viewers with the meaning-gathering, Femen provided verbal supplement in the form of a news story to the eclectic image event in Holland:

Last night sexy sawflies Femen took their chain saws and broke the patriarchal silence of the town Enshede, Holland. Femen activists with their anti-religious performance opened the second day of the eighth Dutch art-GOGBOT Festival, dedicated to the group Pussy Riot. Under the stage Sextremists of Femen cut down three art-crosses. The performance got full support of the audience of the Festival. The cross-crashing workshop was preceded by a speech of activist Inna Shevchenko. She compared crosses with splinters that are in a body of society. Inna called everyone to take chainsaws as surgeon's scalpels and to help democracy. Femen are going to continue to destroy religious idols that support developing of patriarchy in the world. (Femen.org, September 9, 2012)

This verbal attempt of Femen to fix the meaning of their visual protest in Holland did not work for traditional orthodox communities, for whom Femen’s action was a flagrant blasphemy. Tatiana, who commented on the news story about cross-sawing in Holland, demonstrates the breadth and rhetorical force of Femen’s visual spectrum: “Someday, these dummies will get crushed quite literally. But, god, forbid that they would do this [saw crosses] in Siberia... We are waiting for this to happen [to get revenge]” (Tatiana, 2012). This comment is an example of an oppositional translation of the Dutch cross-sawing event, which itself was a translation of the Ukrainian cross-sawing event.

These examples show that translation does not happen once and in one place, but everywhere, near or far, now or then. The multiplicity of translation layers of the cross-

sawing events in Kiev demonstrate the multiplicity of the ways/mode of seeing and being. Latour (2011) explicates on modes of existence “through its [actor’s] own way of differing and obtaining being by way of the other” (p. 17). The Femen actor of the cross-sawing event in Kiev produces its mode of existence through translations and mediations of other actors such as the aggressive Siberian commentator, the downtown urban landscape of Kiev, camera angles, intensity and relativity of the color of the protestor’s shorts, and so on.

A “space metaphor” Sennett (1994) writes about in his elaboration on human flesh and urban concrete, in the case of Femen cross-sawing event, is related not only to Kiev downtown, or other places where crosses were sawed, but a world-wide web of these and many other places, where these actions were redistributed. In this sense, the Web becomes “a place in which people can join unlike elements. They do so through how they use their bodies, rather than through explaining themselves” (p. 79). It is through the bodies of protestors and their spectators who are virtual and actual at the same time. “The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential” (Massumi, 1995, p. 91). This landscape of mediatized potential is “bringing about distortions, folds, discomforts, and innumerable category mistakes” (Latour, 2011, p. 17).

Ways of seeing those processes enables different modes to exist and sustain networks of activism. As Berger says (1977), seeing establishes our place in the world: “we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (p. 7). Abel (2007) suggest that different modes of seeing yield different “rhetorical

actualizations” (p. 192) of image events. Such modes of seeing I tried to illustrate were apparent in the examples of Russian, Ukrainian, Dutch, and French interpretations and mediations of the cross-sawing event. The multiplicity of translations of the cross-sawing events in Kiev shows a “vast chain of meaning that is circular and never ending” (Burnett, 2004, p. 78). Those meanings in mediatized worlds act as spinning frames that swirl within and around controversies.

Implications

The visible is never in an isolated image or in something outside of images, but in the montage of images, a transformation of images, a cross-cutting view, a progression, a formatting, a networking. Of course, the phenomenon never appears on the image, yet it becomes visible in that which is transformed, transported, deformed from one image to the next, one point of view or perspective to the next. (Latour & Hermant, 1998, p. 29).

In light of Femen and other recent social movements around the globe, entwinements of networks with images have become increasingly important. In the seminal chapter “Irreductions,” Bruno Latour conceptualizes actor-network theory and writes: “forces [forming networks] are always rebellious” (1993, p. 198). These forces are not limited to human systems, extending beyond them to include trees, locusts, cancer, mullahs, and more. “The acrylic blues that consume other pigments, the lion that does not follow the predictions of the oracle—all of these have other goals and other destinies that cannot be summed up” (Latour, 1993, p. 198). In a world with multiple truths, with polyvalent events, with unfolding margins, the concept of visually affective network activism is a tool people can use to understand social movements.

The challenges and advantages of these movements stem from the web-enhanced flat and uneven distribution of their visual efforts. Femen’s visually driven network of

activism relies on “seeing as an experimental mode—not as a creative discovery of what is but as an ethical production of the yet to come” (Abel, 2007, p. 192). Latour’s (1993, 1996, 2005) theorization of networks suggests a flat ontology for the polyvalent tangled world and shows how such an approach can help people better grasp resistance and activism.

This multifaceted rupture creates connections. One such account of connection is well represented in an extended radio program of the Moscow bureau of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe. In the program *Beyond Barriers/Cultural Diary* with the headline “FEMEN Phenomenon,” journalist Drmitry Vorlchok discusses in detail Femen’s protest actions with various experts (Volchek, 2012). Despite most of the experts in the program seeing Femen as a negative and degrading phenomenon, each of them admits that the group earned unprecedented levels of media coverage in the history of activism in the Ukraine. Latour says that in the networks “it is no longer possible to distinguish an actor from the allies which make it strong” (Latour, 1993, p. 174). Have those people who spend hours criticizing Femen become their allies? Are Femen’s fierce opponents making Femen stronger just by discussing them and drawing attention to them? Those are not the only potential allies of Femen.

The trend of cross-sawing stirred discussions about Femen being “good or bad” on mainstream Russian and Ukrainian language channels, which served as “trials of strength” for Femen. Along with opponents, Femen started to gain supporters. “I think they are a group of sincere and desperate women, who are fed up with the religious demagogy,” said popular Russian journalist and media expert Alexander Nevzorov (nevzorov.tv, 2012). According to him, religion in Russia is an “abscess, which Pussy

Riot helped open up.” He parallels religious rigidities in Russia and Ukraine: “The question of religion was always an unquestionable, taboo theme, which thanks to those provocative girls opened up for public discussions.”

Alexander Nevzorov, Pavel Sheremet, Dmitry Bykov, and other allies of Femen are in line with Latour’s principle of irreduction, which is supplemented by ruptures and connections of activist groups. Thus, we discover not only Femen opponents, but also unusual allies. Those unusual allies of Femen represent intertwined networks of people, comments, and associations in Ukraine and Russia, which have joined together with radical orthodox forces without being contaminated by them. Latour (1993) describes this condition:

There is enough room. There is empty space. Lots of empty space. There is no longer an above and a below. Nothing can be placed in a hierarchy. The activity of those who rank is made transparent and occupies little space. There is no more filling in between networks, and the work of those who do this padding takes up little room. There is no more totality, so nothing is left over. It seems to me that life is better this way. (p. 191)

Is this flat ontology better for us? Using the word “us” would be quite reductionist, because there are multiples of “us” and multiple conceptions of “better.” However, for Femen, flat ontologies with plenty of empty spaces and voids are “better.” As Shevchenko says, “If people were not reacting then our protests would be pointless” (Larsson, 2013). Inna and other Femen activists consider the provocative nature of their activism as a sign of change. Without provocative ruptures, there would be no connections and transformations. The emergence of visually affective social movements and their network struggles to transform the status quo disrupt hegemonic power structures, and unveil potentials to see and act anew.

CHAPTER 3

SPECTACULAR CENSORSHIP: FLEETING TRACES

AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF ABJECT, AFFECT, AND ACTIVISM

Abjection/objectification of femininity is a trend that implicates not only activism, but also the everyday lives of many women. Images of rape, violence, as well as sexual objectification of women have long been adopted by mainstream culture. What is new is the woman, whose visuality complies with the norms of female depiction, but deviates from them in their actions and purposes. Images of women using their bodies for activist and artistic purposes easily translate into the realms of the affective abject. Censorship of their bodies in social media brings this abjection of femininity to public attention. In this chapter, I study femininity in this context of activism to provide a poststructuralist perspective of mediatization at the intersections of affect, censorship, and social change. In particular, I will focus on how Femen images are censored on Facebook, how activists regain followers after having their accounts deleted, and how their images are replicated in the commercial clip of Replay jeans. Through close textual and visual analysis of images and texts pertaining to the artifacts, I explore the versatile potential of mediatized, abject, sexual bodies of topless activists by tracing their affective forces within activist and commercial cultures.

Femininity is troublesome. Even without tapping into the realms of activism, it is a minefield. Invisible grids of normativity regulate visage, body shape, skin exposure, and logistics of hair-growth/removal/coloring, proper posture, demeanor, action, and purpose. In short, femininity “asks” for censorship. One “wrong” step and the feminine may become abject (Kristeva, 1982). Becoming this othered / othering other, who does not fit into the order of things and yet is implicated in it, is spectacularly problematic. What makes crossing of an invisible line of feminine normativity so significant is its web of affective forces around it. Chasing a result-oriented train of thought, trying to define cause and effect between abjectification of the feminine, its censorship, or affective net-weaving, is futile. What matters is the constellation of those three processes and the intensities of their interrelations in the mediatized world, where changes happen.

In this chapter, I focus on the affective intersections of mediatized sexual bodies of topless activists, their otherness to mainstream cultures, and their censorship on Facebook. Through the close textual and visual analysis of the set of multimodal artifacts, I will address the following questions: What does the rhetorical force of visual censorship look like? What are the intensities, speeds, and cross-cuttings associated with it? How do the censored actors persevere through the myriad translations and transformations of their actions? How do redistributed, borrowed, and betrayed activist actions play into their transformations? The purpose of this study is to examine the variety of censorship tactics as they run through smooth activist spaces and tackle the transgression of normativity within Facebook.

The Femen International page on Facebook now has over 8,000 followers, which is one tenth of what the number was before their page was deleted, along with all the

information it held, in June 2014 (Femen.org/news, 2014). This was the second instance of their page being deleted for posting “pornographic” material. The first time Facebook removed Femen International was in June 2013 (Femen.org/news, 2013), in the midst of the Tunisian Femen activist Amina Tyler’s protest and imprisonment controversy. Before its deletion in June 2013, the page had around 170,000 followers. The censorship of the female body on Facebook is not a new trend. The policy outlined in Facebook’s Community Standards has been in place since its inception. The digital document states:

We want people to feel safe when using Facebook. ... We restrict the display of nudity because some audiences within our global community may be sensitive to this type of content - particularly because of their cultural background or age. In order to treat people fairly and respond to reports quickly, it is essential that we have policies in place that our global teams can apply uniformly and easily when reviewing content. ... We also restrict some images of female breasts if they include the nipple. (Facebook.com, n.d.)

What Facebook’s Community Standards document is articulating is redirecting our attention from its administration to the worldwide community. It acts on behalf of culturally diverse groups to ensure that their sensitivity is respected. This document also illustrates the blurring of the line between online and offline, acknowledging the transgressive nature of online communication. As Ibrahim (2012) explains in his chapter about Facebook’s censorship of breastfeeding photos, “there is an element of continuity between the offline and online contexts. Invariably social norms are often negotiated through the intertwining of the two environments (i.e., online and offline) and technological capabilities” (p. 44).

The negotiation/battle over what is appropriate and what is not in virtual public spaces has been going on for the past few years with some victories, drawbacks, and ambiguities. Long lists of groups and actors being censored by Facebook, ranging from

breastfeeding moms to activists raising awareness about breast cancer with post-mastectomy scarring, have been recently joined by *The New Yorker* magazine with its cartoon of the nude Adam and Eve. Having its Facebook page temporarily disabled due to the violation of the community standards on “Nudity and Sex,” *The New Yorker* published a column titled “Nipplegate” (Mankoff, 2012). Commenting on this piece, Gawker wrote “the social network mercilessly hunts down and censors pictures of bare breasts like Iranian computer scientists going after Stuxnet” (Chen, 2012).

Celebrities, such as Rihanna, Chrissie Tiegen, Scout Willis, Miley Cyrus, and Cara Delevingne among others, have been posting their bare breasted photos on social networks in support of the Free the Nipple movement after the release of its documentary film in December 2014. The mediatized intensities surrounding U.S. celebrities and the Free the Nipple movement create a hope that “by allowing for the radical potentialities of the rhetorical, new understandings can be developed of the ways in which the body, affect, and desire disrupt the normative discursive logics of publics” (Deem, 2002, p. 448).

The most recent subversive campaign against antifemale nipple censorship includes pasting of a male nipple to cover a female nipple. Last summer, an artist and an Associate Professor of Art at Chapman University, Micol Hebron posted on her website and on Facebook a cropped male nipple with a comment:

Here you go – you can use this to make any photo of a topless woman acceptable for the interwebs! Use this ‘acceptable (male) nipple template’, duplicate, resize and paste as needed, to cover the offending female nipples, with socially acceptable male nipples (like a digital pasty). You’re welcome. (Micol Hebron, n.d.)

In the summer 2015, her male nipple went viral. As Huffington Post notes, “male nipples

are having a moment, and it's surprisingly all in the name of freeing the female body from censorship" (Pittman, 2015). The image of the male nipple remediated on the musical band LaSera's page has over 167,000 shares (La Sera, 2015). "I got 1500 new Facebook fans today and they are ALL in it for the nipples and only the nipples," says a musician of La Sera (Aubrey, 2015). The popularity of a male nipple among those arguing for the freedom of female nipples illustrates Grosz's (1994) argument that "women [still] are somehow [perceived as] more biological, more corporeal, more natural than men" (p. 14). The idea of women being earthier than men highlights their susceptibility of becoming an abject.

Despite the battles that were won over the postmastectomy (Scorchy Barrington, 2013) and breastfeeding (Facebook.com/help, n.d.) images on Facebook, there remains a long way ahead for activists to achieve similar results in regards to censorship of female bodies. In order to explore the relations between censorship, abject, femininity, and affect, I will first provide a theoretical framework and then move on to a discussion of artifacts. In the concluding part, I will bring together the findings of the artifact analyses as seen through the theoretical framework provided below.

Affect and Censorship Online

We may not be puppets. Still, the image of strings and their movements are not far-fetched metaphors. Everyday life is laced with invisible, yet strong connections to multiple digital screens that are imbued with the potential of liberation, and positive social change, as well as control, repression, and subjugation. To problematize the liberatory potential of decentralized webs is not a new endeavor. The overwhelming

majority of scholarly literature explicates how the threats to freedom of expression come from nation-states and authoritarian regimes that are tied to specific geographic spaces, usually far from the democratic Western world. What is missing from such scholarly pictures is the censorship of European and North American activist pages that occur through the complex interrelation of human, technological, visual, and affective actors. This interrelation is a part of the larger process of mediatization, which implies not only immersion in media, but also an entangling mesh of its transformative forces. The mobilization, activation, and propelling of these transformative forces are fueled by problematic, controversial topics/themes such as femininity. In this chapter, I study femininity in the context of activism to provide a poststructuralist account of mediatization at the intersections of affect, censorship, and social change.

To start this discussion about the processes of abjectification of the feminine, its censorship, and affective net-weaving within the mediatized world, one should first define mediatization. Hepp, Hjarvard, and Lundby (2015) in their most recent treatise define mediatization not as “a media-centric postulate about the media’s direct ‘causal influence’ on every aspect of society” (316), but as a complex network of interrelations between various cultural, technological, political, and economic aspects and their transformative potentials. Lundby (2014) sees those various aspects as “media ‘textures’ through which cultural practices and everyday life materialize” (p. 11). One of the ways this materialization manifests itself, in the case of Femen’s activism, is the deletion of their accounts by Facebook. The deletions of Femen pages signpost complex intersections of various visible and invisible processes including comments, (re)actions, and flaggings by their viewers. In this partially (in)visible environment, it is easy to

forget that “mediatization is not a zero-sum game in which either the media or, ...politics come to dominate the other” (Hepp, et al., 2015). Contrariwise, Femen, Facebook, radical anti-Femen Facebookers, and other actors operate “in tandem, enabling a simultaneous mediatization of politics and a politicization of media” (p. 318). How those actors are “relating to one group or another is an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties” (Latour, 2005, p. 28).

Such relating/encountering of groups and actors happens more and more in the decentralized networks of flat, digital, “public screens” (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002) such as computer monitors, tablets, smartphones, billboards, etc. The ubiquity of these visual realms in everyday life denotes our immersion in what Debord called “integrated spectacle” (1998). This phenomenon per Debord (1998), “shows itself to be simultaneously concentrated and diffuse” (p. 9). In the age of mediatization, such a double nature of “integrated spectacle” translates into the potential of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. More specifically, various actors have the ability to mobilize and intensify around particular images/causes, but also to disperse, dissipate, and scatter beyond various geographic, political, and cultural borders. As Debord says “anyone can join the spectacle” (p. 10), or as Benkler (2010) argues, the decentralized nature of mediascapes offers “individuals a greater participatory role in making the culture they occupy” (p. 277). Even though this participatory role may not necessarily be as transparent as Benkler claims, sites such as Facebook do allow “loosely connected individuals” to cooperate for “commons-based peer production” (Benkler, 2010, p. 60). In case of nipple-driven activism, such “commons-based” peer collaboration produces what Julian Asange calls “privatized censorship” (OsloFreedomForum, 2010)).

According to Deibert and Rohozinski (2010) “many of these controls have little to do with technology and more to do with inculcating norms, inducing compliant behavior, and imposing rules of the road, and they stem from a multitude of motivations and concerns” (p. 50). This multitude of motivations in the case of Femen activism is implicated in visual encounters, affects, and their “driving forces” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 321). As Gregg and Seigworth (2010) note, such forces are affective, “visceral forces,” that go beyond emotion and consciousness, as they “drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations” (p. 1). Every “like,” “post,” “share,” and “flag” can be a sign of such force relations. Dean (2010) calls such force relations “affective networks” and situates them “as a constitutive component of communicative capitalism,” where movements acquire circularity/spinning, repetition, and decomposition (p. 42). In this unstable mediascape, Facebook censorship cannot be considered as a single, technology-centered process.

Censorship of female bodies on Facebook is a “node” (Latour, 2005) we cannot ignore, within the vast networks of visibility, sensuality, desire, abjection, and transformation. In Kuhn’s (1998) words, censorship is a process of “unevenness, resistance, conflict and ongoing transformation.” Yes, censorship, as we will see from Eloise Bouton’s open letter, sometimes appears as a homogenous, singular action, aimed at “disciplining” activist bodies and maintaining the borders of normalcy. Childs (1997) suggests that “we may begin by defining censorship narrowly as a ‘regulative’ operation—that is, as a process by which works of art that have entered the public sphere are controlled, repressed, or even destroyed by the representatives of political, moral, or

religious authority" (p. 13). At the time Childs wrote this, our daily lives were not so mediatized as today. Now every single person, a religious/moral actor or not, can become an authority via the participatory nature of the mediascape. This makes movements of affective networks much faster and less predictable.

In this unpredictable realm, anyone can seize the spotlight of affective networks and become spectacularly censored. As Debord (1998) noted, “‘media status’ has acquired infinitely more importance than the value of anything one might actually be capable of doing, it is normal for this status to be readily transferable; for anyone, anywhere, to have the same right to the same kind of stardom” (p. 11). This stardom may not necessarily be ultimate success or liberation, but a difficult path in this direction. This path, in Femen’s and other activists cases, involves becoming abject, entering the vicious “circular economy” (Ahmed, 2005) of becoming the other, that attracts attention and ruptures the status quo to achieve greater transformations. In order to illustrate this process, I will first analyze the open letter from Eloise Bouton, which she wrote to Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, where she voices the issues Femen has been combating since the inception of its networks. Second, I will study the images Femen posted to address removal of their account by Facebook. Lastly, I will trace the lines of traversal between Femen activism and an ad campaign film of Replay featuring Femen-style activism. The purpose of this multimodal approach to the artifacts is to highlight the contingent, poststructural nature of flat networks of mediatized affect and its role in making small, but tangible strides toward social change.

What Do Activists and Jeans Have in Common?

(Ex)Femen censorship

Searching for images of Bouton on Google illustrates the decentralized nature of networks, subjectivities, and spectacles, which is prone to ruptures, connections, and transformations. Images of Bouton, along with other Femen activists during protests, screenshots of Femen's leading member Shevchenko, photo-montages highlighting resemblances between an alleged escort girl [lizaliz] and Bouton, images of her book cover showing her naked torso covered with the large typeface of the book title: "Confession D'une Ex-Femen" [Confession of ex-Femen], links to different digital places, these are news, social media, and blogging websites, but none of these are linked to her Facebook profile. After Facebook deactivated her account in January 2015, images of her book cover, protests, and controversies can be found in multiple different digital places, but not on her Facebook page.

Unlike Bouton's previous account, this one is scarce. It shows no "comments," "friends," or "likes." There is no "Add Friend," or "Like," only a "Message" tab. There is not much to see on this page. For the cover image, there is a black background and white text saying "free the nipple"; as for the profile image, there is a close-up shot of her face smiling gently, and a tattooed shoulder, a glimpse of her red dress, and a knee. Four of the other images show the LGBTQ flag with the text "MARRIAGE EQUALITY. Now the law of the land," and Eloise sitting on a curb, in a black T-shirt, black leggings, and a red bandana on her neck. Another version of the same image has Facebook's LGBTQ-flag filter on. The fourth image is a black and white photo of her standing in a black sleeveless top staring back at her viewers with a calm disdain.

In her open letter to Zuckerberg, Bouton raises many of the concerns that Femen members and other topless activists have in relation to Facebook's censorship of their images. In the letter first published in the French version of the Huffington Post and then on its English website, Bouton provides an account of how the cover image of her book "Confession D'une Ex-Femen" was taken down along with her entire account. She writes: "I received a message from your kingdom stating that my account had been blocked for an undetermined period of time. The reason? The cover of my book had been judged as 'inappropriate' due to nudity (even though you have to stare at it for 10 seconds to notice the two breasts which are covered with a large typeface)" (Bouton, 2015). The censorship of her image resonates with what Olszanowski (2014) describes as "censoring of the senses," the "sensorhip." In her article about censorship of women's images on Instagram, Olszanowski, referring to the works of Bordo (2003) and Chunn and Lacombe (2000), argues that social media via censorship delivers ideologies regarding what is appropriate and inappropriate depiction of women's bodies. She brings uncensored circulation of the images of sexual and gender violence as examples and points to the arbitrariness of the dichotomy between appropriate and inappropriate images. Bouton (2015) asks similar questions:

Tell me, Mark. Doesn't it seem like you're doing things in reverse? You, who allow groups which glorify rape, to remain open on your website for months before shutting them down? You, who allow images of decapitations, torture and eviscerated animals to slide, and seductive, crude and inept advertisements that use the naked female body for commercial benefit? You, who remain idle while openly pornographic profiles terrify us as they flood our inboxes with pictures of enlarged phalluses, urging us to become "friends" with them, in order to regale us with other obscene hogwash (perhaps an insult to our porcine friends)?

Bouton complains that gory images depicting violence and visuals objectifying

women have fully established themselves as normalcy, which is evident in numerous popular TV shows, movies, and news programs. As Kristeva (1982) reminds us, “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (p. 4). In the case of Bouton, what disrupts the grid of normalcy is re-essentialization of her body without victimizing or objectifying it. However, what makes it abject is her striving for social change and critical thinking, which according to mainstream culture can by no means be attributed to the naked or topless female body. An image of Bouton’s body on her book cover challenges the system by disrupting the identity of the intellectual, activist, and even feminist body and therefore is being banned, hidden, and excluded. Such exclusion of abject bodies from Facebook or other media platforms is a vivid example of “integrated spectacle” (Debord, 1998), where visibility has “integrated itself into reality to the same extent as it was describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it” (p. 6). In other words, images that adhere to the grid of normalcy have no trouble being part of the spectacle, but the images that deviate from those norms are considered abject.

Images of rape, violence, as well as sexual and reproductive objectification of women have long been adapted by the mainstream cultures and mass media (Gordon, 2008). What is new is the woman whose visibility complies with the norms of female depiction but deviates from it in its actions and purposes. Therefore, images of women using their bodies for activist and art purposes easily translate into the realm of the affective abject. Such a transgressive image is what Kristeva calls “the jettisoned object” that is “radically excluded” from the regular order of normal things as it draws towards “the place where meaning collapses” (p. 2). Images that Bouton highlights can easily be

ascribed to that abject realm. Clémence Veilhan's "Chewing Girls," naked pregnant woman with postmastectomy scars, the poster of topless Pauline Delpech urging women to screen for breast cancer, and a painting "The Origins of the World" by Gustave Courbet—the association of those images with Bouton's book cover illustrates how the abject is simultaneously within and outside of mainstream culture. From a Latour's perspective, these images may explain the “association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together” (Latour, 2005, p. 56). In the case of Bouton and the other images deviating from mainstream normativity, what makes them reshuffle together is being censored by Facebook.

Another significant point Bouton's open letter brings up is the concept of openness and accountability. In December 2014 following the topless protest in the Madeline Church in support of women's right to abortion, Bouton was “sentenced to one month in prison with a suspended sentence, a 2,000-euro fine for interest and damages, and another 1,500-euro ‘justice tax’ for sexual exhibitionism” (Bouton, 2015). She compares this court decision to the deletion of her Facebook account. In actual life, Bouton was able to appeal the court's decision, but in the virtual space of Facebook she could not find a clickable “appeal” button. A similar concern is voiced by experts and scholars in this field.

Gene Policinski (2009), Vice-President and Executive Director of the First Amendment Centre, underlines how citizen's right to know and appeal are ensured in the actual world governed by a nation-state, while the same principles are less relevant in the cyber world governed by various private organizations such as Facebook. Policinski

(2009) claims that “our task now is to discuss and decide how – and even if – those [judicial/constitutional] protections should apply to those who govern virtual ones [communities]” (para. 16). Facebook, similarly to other social media platforms, governs its virtual realms through a set of Community Standards, which are often the subject of debate and controversy. In January 2015, Zuckerberg condemned “Charlie Hebdo” violence, which was soon turned into a criticism of Facebook’s censorship policies. As *Guardian* points out, “Zuckerberg’s status update on January 9th promising ‘a service where you can speak freely without fear of violence’ sparked a debate about Facebook’s own censorship ...that questioned the value of ‘insulting’ speech” (Dredge, 2015). In this live-streamed Q & A from Bogotá, Colombia, on January 14, 2015, Zuckerberg defended Charlie Hebdo’s freedom of expression and declared: “We really stand up and try to make it so that everyone can have as much of a voice as possible” (Facebook.com/qawithmark, 2015). Bouton (2015) in her open letter to Zuckerberg says that his “cute,” “sweet talk” in relation to the freedom of expression is a form of “wavering.” Bouton (2015) accuses Facebook of allowing “sexualized advertisements,” while “having trouble distinguishing [between] pornography and violence (directed towards women, amongst others) from art and political messages.” Bouton’s point here resonates with Jacobsen’s (1991) feminine view of redefining of censorship:

Ambivalent defenses of free speech convey a wavering position on the very real devastation that censorship continues to inflict upon gender-as well as race, class, and sexual heterodoxy. To evade issues of women's sexual and social freedom when faced with the culturally disturbing material by which they may be expressed not only implies a fear of nonconformist images, it isolates them, leaving them vulnerable to expulsion and the freedom itself to attack. (p. 44)

Jacobsen’s redefining of censorship more than 2 decades ago still holds true in some

respects. Nonconformist, culturally challenging images still continue to be outcast and abjectified as illustrated in Bouton's open letter. Nonetheless, a few changes, such as a loosening of censorship against breastfeeding and postmastectomy images, reveal a less radical and devastating picture. Another aspect to the censorship of topless female activist images is that "censorship incites our desire to see the very pictures that it simultaneously insists must not be shown" (Meyer, 2002, p. 5). Censorship's incitement of desire to see Femen photos propels the intensity of dissemination and circulation of their images on the web, which is evident in their ability to regain followers after having their accounts deleted several times. In this way, abjectification, censorship, and controversies associated with those images propel Femen's movement to persevere in Latourian "trials of strength."

If we translate those "trials of strength" into the struggles to keep up the number of "friends," "likes," and "followers," we may see that the network of Bouton did not prove to be as successful as Femen's network. Bouton's current Facebook account does not show any "friends" and "followers." As for her twitter account, she has fewer than 5,000 "followers." The Femen International page was deleted twice during the past 3 years: first, in June 2013, and then, in June 2014. Every year, the number of their "followers" on Facebook has been dwindling. It went from 170,000 in 2013 to 80,000 in 2014. In comparison to the Facebook page of Free the Nipple Movie, Femen after losing all the "followers" was still able to regain 30,000 more than Free the Nipple Movie page. However, after the second deletion of its account, Femen International's numbers went from 80,000 in 2014 to 8,000 followers in 2015. Despite such withering of Facebook allies (those in a Latourian sense include not only supporters, but also those actors who

actively criticize and react to Femen), Femen's network proves certain resilience. "We will be here again. No matter how many times Zuckerberg blocks you," reads a Facebook comment on the Femen page. Oliviera's comment of Femen member Iana Zdaneva's picture was posted soon after the third Femen International account was created. The number of followers is not nearly close to a million, but it is still significant.

None of the photos on Femen International's current page show nipples. All of those images are self-censored. The ways in which those images are censored varies. The first image they posted is a photo of a young, topless woman and a man both wearing black flower headbands. The young White blond man's naked, uncensored torso bears a hand-painted text in all capital letters "Why is this okay." "When this is not?" the sentence continues on the woman's naked torso. This White nonsexual woman of a similar age is standing next to the man, her pear-shaped torso is topless, but in place of her nipples, we see digitally inserted blue rectangles with a white "F" inside it. Her hair is purple and the overall look does not comply with mainstream norms of visually feminine depiction, like most Femen members. The Facebook logotype, as "a sharp-edged mark is reminiscent of sharp thinking or sharp attention" (Elkins, 1999, p. 91), which emerges as a node in the networks/assemblages of affective marks. Those marks are part of the image and also its extensions into the affective responses of their viewers.

The digitized body of the women with Facebook logotypes on her nipples "has become a process, which not only invites the user's interaction but rather requires the human body to frame the ongoing flow of information" (Clought, 2010, p. 212). The topless photo of "Why this is okay when this is not" affective commentary suggests intensive interaction with the image. A blogger of Daily Stormer, Anglin (2015)

remediated the photo on its page and posted an offensive answer to the question asked in the image: “Because female breasts are a sexual organ, you dumb bitch. Well, maybe they aren’t for you – you look like a bit of a dead fish – but they are for normal females who haven’t pathologized their sexuality.” This comment of Anglin shows that the intensities of affective nodes such as this image “pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1). These resonances between the commentator and the criticized, abjectified image try to delineate challenged borders of normalcy and appropriateness. The commentator condemns the young woman in the photo for “pathologizing her sexuality” because her image is an abject that “disturbs identity, system, order,” it is “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The image “Why this is okay when this is not?” is a composite of sorts. It is a mix of femininity, androgenity, artsiness, sexuality, and activism, with each of those teetering on the affective margins, surrounding normalcy.

A contingent composite or a montage of images is never isolated from the network of other images. A controversial image of activism is “a transformation of images, a cross-cutting view, a progression, a formatting, a networking” (Latour, & Hermant, 2006, p. 29). Such openness of an image for transformation through networking, on the one hand “seeds disequilibrium, fragmentation, uncertainty, churn, and relativism” (Kelly, 1998, p. 159). On the other hand, it also provides new opportunities that could go either way.

Replaying Femen

The way of a Femen image going into a permeated commercial culture via promotional video of the Replay jeans is a good example of the image openness to replication, travel, and transformation. In a little over 2 weeks after Femen International's Facebook page was deleted, Italian jeans brand Replay launched a new ad campaign centered on a short film *A Laserblast L.I.F.E.* featuring Femen-style topless women and men rebelling for the protection of the environment. The goal of employing Replay's short film in this chapter as an artifact is to demonstrate the adventurous, nonlinear movement of affective image-networks. This movement relies on ruptures, connections, and transformations (not necessarily that order though). Soon after the release of the video on social networks, the Femen International posted an image with a caption: "An Image of FEMEN used for commercials. Activism is not for sale." The montage of two photos the Femen International posted below this caption has a striking resemblance. The top image shows topless and screaming Iana Zdaneva, Femen activist, forcefully pressed against the ground while policemen handcuff her. The bottom image shows Aleksandra Orbeck-Nilssen, Norwegian actress, impersonating a topless activist in the Replay film. This Replay rebel, similarly to Inna, is blond, thin, pressed against the ground by some special military/police men so that we can hardly read what is inscribed on her bare chest. These two images show how Femen's visual assemblage has passed into the commercial assemblage of Replay jeans. This passing from one assemblage to another shows the autonomy of the affective forces that lace both Femen and Replay in a deterritorializing loop.

The in-betweenness of Femen-Replay assemblages becomes a Deleuzian-

Guattarian (1987) refrain, an “intra-assemblage,” where “sexuality may appear as a territorialized function, but it can just as easily draw a line of deterritorialization that describes another assemblage; there are therefore quite variable relations between sexuality and the territory” (p. 347). The juxtaposition of commercial and activist territories in the two images described above may be distinct, but they are at the same time blurring, merging, splitting, and deterritorializing. This destabilizing intersection of affect, activism, and commercial culture in the photo-montage of Femen and Replay shows that “what is considered abject changes over time” (Harold, 2000, p. 884). Femen’s image of a topless rebel flagged, reported, and censored on Facebook finds an opening and slides into the mainstream of something as conventional as commercial culture. Abject’s escape from its “circular economy” happens as a “slide of affect” (Ahmed, 2005). This affective sliding within the “circular economy” of abject not only “involves the sociality of encounters,” but also “sticky effects, a stickiness that surfaces as skin as the surface of bodies” (Ahmed, 2005, p. 101). What sticks well to the surface of the bodies are activist slogans. The naked, vulnerable body becomes a most effective message-board that not only speaks for itself, but also calls for attention.

In a little over 2 minutes, the Replay film spotlights bodies of good-looking young men and women to raise awareness about the need to protect the Earth and sell eco-friendly jeans. The film opens with shots of deep green wood, birds chirping, insects shuffling beneath the fallen leaves, sun shining bright through the tall trees, dew dripping from twig to twig, and a young blond topless woman standing in the middle of the shot with the word “EARTH” painted on her back. When watching and rewatching this video, “the possibility of attending to what I glance at lurks nearby; each time I attend to

something, I have been led there by a glance, or can glance at it now that I am attending to it, and I can always glance away at something else” (Casey, 2007, p. 119). There is a web of human and nonhuman objects scattered within the shot asymmetrically, but scaled neatly according to their proximities to the vanishing points of perspective lingering deep in the openings of the luscious forest. Following a moving frame of two young men and a woman leaping forward, my glance unevenly divagates from one surface of the skin to another, grasping the words “RISE” and “ECO” painted on the bare backs of the rebels. As the frame moves forward following the activists, we notice accompanying music slowly gathering rhythm. The three topless rebels join a noisy crowd of demonstrators in the midst of the forest while a heavily equipped armed force threateningly marches toward them. The voiceover sounding like an unbiased male news anchor says: “Certainly a war may threaten a survival of our civilization... Warming of the planet?...” Then, a cacophony of male and female anchors pour in and the sound of their words becomes almost indistinguishable. Certain phrases, such as—“Global warming? It’s a hoax” —become audible. Demonstrators wave their green and white flags with “Pro-Earth” slogans written on them. The young rebels modeling Replay jeans are raising their fists in the air, screaming and chanting, but instead of their voices, we hear loud, rhythmic, overpowering electronic music. In the middle of the video, we see one of the main topless female protestors being unchained from a tree and taken away by several armed men, almost like Femen activists dragged away from one of its protests. This image shows how an action of protesting topless bodies “is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, and translated” (Latour, 2005, p. 48). The bodies of a topless young woman (Aleksandra Orbeck-Nilssen) and a man (Enok Groven)

being arrested are shown in slow-motion, so that we notice the gathering of the intensifying forces of their facial expressions and the smoke enveloping their unruly bodies.

These “bodies are enmeshed in a turbulent stream of multiple and conflictual discourses” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 12). These discourses seem dichotomous: femininity versus masculinity, activism versus slacktivism, fakery versus authenticity, dissent versus obedience, optimism versus pessimism, etc. Looking at those dichotomous discourses laid flat, one cannot help but notice the gradations, entwinings, cross-cuttings, and encirclings between, across, and within each of those. One such aspect of discourse in Replay’s film is its optimism, which does not stand in opposition to pessimism, but is implicated in it.

In the film produced by Replay, the sexual, half-naked, slogans-bearing bodies of activists are not only wearing the jeans they aim to promote, but the jeans are also wearing the activist as they acquire activists causes in forms of invisible, but powerful “optimistic attachment” (Berlant, 2011). According to Berlant (2011), “all attachment is optimistic, if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene” (p. 1). In the case of Replay’s film, it’s not only the denim, but an assemblage-idea it carries. The jeans in the video are featured as a gear/uniform for “eco warriors,” because of the way they are manufactured. These garments are “dyed with natural mineral pigments” for a trendy, faux vintage look and instead of harmful and water polluting chemicals they use laserblast technology “for the whiskering” (Pavarini, 2014)

In short, the eco-friendly manufacturing process sets (or is supposed to set) these jeans as more appealing to those who strive to be environmental activists in their hearts and with their wallets, but lack time or ability to commit to the cause directly. Additional elements of Replay's optimistic activist assemblage are the main characters of the film. A young woman unchained from a tree, Aleksandra Orbeck-Nilssen, is a Norwegian actress, who also happens to be the founder of Nanofasa Conservation Trust that works for "preserving and conserving the culture, wildlife & ecosystems" of San communities (Nanofasa.com /what-we-do, n.d.). As for the male protagonist, Enok Groven is a Norwegian model and the founder of Fashion Against Climate Change (n.d), a closed Facebook group that promotes environmental causes through people from the fashion industry. At the time of the film's release, for just around 150 Euros, it was possible to purchase the jeans and get a part of the look of eco-conscious, beautiful, and sexy rebels depicted in the Replay (2014) video.

If only everything was so simple and clear-cut, there would be no room for cruelty within the optimism. But as Massumi (2002) notes, "the event of image reception is multilevel;" those moving images of "eco-warriors" in Replay jeans and their affective forces suggest a palpable gap between the contents of the film and its effects. Replay, similarly to Femen, is no exception. YouTube comments suggest a diversity of affective responses to the film:

"This makes me sick, all modern fashion companies particularly denim labels such as replay involve production for their garments which is highly destructive to our environment and ecosystem. utter hypocrisy" — Circe Bloom

"What an unbelievable SHAME and HYPOCRISY! fuck off! It's disgusting to make money off real people's problems! You'll go to hell for this" — Production Error.

"Why SHAME? I see it as AWARENESS for both Eco Activists and Replay.

Replay still makes its money with other generic ad campaign. So, why not being beneficial for ECO? Think about it” — Ingenium App (REPLAY, 2014).

Comments such as these act as “‘driving forces’ of transformation” that “are related to media and communications, including the ‘inertia’ of certain fields and institutional contexts against this and other ‘driving forces’ of importance” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 321). These “driving forces” fuel the movements of affective networks. These networks, according to Dean (2010), “are the expression of the circulatory movement of drive—the repeated making, uploading, sampling, and decomposition occurring as movement on the Internet doubles itself, becoming itself and its record or trace” (p. 42). Tracing the outlines of affect within the Facebook comments on the film reveals an interesting dynamic that might help explain the censorship of pages associated with Femen on this social media platform:

“Really loved this x” —Carol Goldring

“What a load of rubbish. I too wish to get rid of it” —Penny Baldwin

“Waste of space. Get rid!” — HafwenGlynne Roberts

“Greenpeace is the way to go... a courageous and very effective organization. Oh ... and by the way, please, in include a ‘hide’ option in your next ad. Taa!!” — EwinaAbrook

“Facebook, why do you let these adverts through” —Tony Osborne

While none of the comments mention bare-breasted activists in the video, many of those comments resemble the comments of Femen’s protesting images that at least partially explain the reason for deleting their main account twice. Facebookers’ comments and flaggings shows the nature of censorship on Facebook, which does not derive from its center (the administration), but from its users who regularly demand and expect that certain content be removed from Facebook. As Kuhn (1998) notes, censorship is not just a “cutting-out” of content, but an "ensemble of power relations." The power of censorship

is not simply negative, but “runs through, and produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

Circling Back and Out

Abjection/objectification of femininity is a trend that implicates not only activism, but also the everyday lives of too many women. Censorship of women’s bodies in social media brings this trend to public attention. Although groups such as Femen, in a way, perpetuate some of the arguments about objectification of women by using the conventional sexuality of their bodies to seize the wondering glance of patriarchy, they still manage to draw attention to and trouble the issues that are at stake.

By having their accounts deleted, remade, self-censored and redistributed, Femen are “making visible of the invisible, ... making perceptible of the imperceptible or, ... the harnessing of forces” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 130). Their action on Facebook being ruptured and homogenized under the fleeting traces of self-censorship incites movements, talks, debates, arguments, and images in different places. In this chapter, I illustrate how Femen images were censored on Facebook, how they were able to regain followers after having their accounts deleted, and how their images were taken up and replicated in the commercial culture stirring debates not only among Femen followers, but also viewers of the commercial clip. Their actions are like a rhizome that “may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). This perseverance is an uneven process of going through the

multiple critiques, abjection, and threats of disappearance. It is being outside of the mainstream culture and being abject that arms their images with affective forces, enabling the intensity of their media circulation and dissemination.

Like most social movements, Femen activism is a target of multiple critiques and counter movements. Rather than studying the dichotomies of antagonistic relations and reactions, I chose to study the adventure of unpredictable traces of topless activism as it travels from ruptured Facebook pages to the images of dissent through self-censorship to commercial denim products.

Pezzullo (2003) in her article “Resisting ‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month’: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances” describes the intensity of affective reaction to the image of a woman in a red dress exposing her mastectomy scar in public—“Disgust? Intrigue? Shock? Admiration?” (p. 356). Perhaps, it is a similar visceral response that Femen images provoke. One thing is sure. Affective images, like an image of a woman in a red dress with a mastectomy scar, are “difficult to ignore and perhaps even more difficult to forget” (p. 356). With the intensity of affective images

one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311)

This opening could possibly hack homogenous and oppressive ways of thinking about the feminine as an abject manifested through its participatory censorship on social media. The driving forces of mediatization hinged on affective senses are entangled in the

“desires, blindnesses, and implication in the subject” (Elkins, 1999, p. 103). This shows the contingent nature of censorship and the transformative forces of interrelation between different human and nonhuman actors that contribute to social change.

CHAPTER 4

LAYERS OF EVENTAL ACTIVISM OF @FEMENINNA: WITNESSING, SOUNDS, TWEETS, AND SOLIDARITIES

The 24/7 news cycle is dominated by images, yet it folds in such elements as freedom of expression and vulnerability, sound and solidarity, voice and witnessing, interaction and multiplication. Discussion of Femen activism around the 2015 shooting at the free speech event in Copenhagen unveils the layering and interlacing of often hidden elements. This chapter charts salient topics and concepts relating to the audio account of the attack, live-tweeting of the aftermath, and international media and Twitter discussions swarming around Femen leader Inna Shevchenko's involvement in the event. Analysis of media artifacts relating to Shevchenko in the 2015 Copenhagen shooting event shows the thickness of actor-networks. Particular attention is paid to how Femen activism perseveres and makes effective use of event, vulnerability, witnessing, and social media. Layering upon layers of (re)mediation through the close-textual, audio, and qualitative Twitter analysis reveals that activism is almost equally dependent upon the contingencies of chance-encounters, as well as the persistent trail-blazing through multiple digital screens towards its own ethic of truths.

Questions of truths and ethics of feminist and other blasphemous actors even in such secular countries as France and Denmark are not bloodless. The Charlie Hebdo deadly attack by Muslim terrorists on January 7, 2015, elucidated that those transgressing borders of religious ethics are not protected by their secular or political locale. Their actions simultaneously occur in places near and far, now and then. The risks, debates, and activism pertaining to freedom of expression and feminism become acute, especially in the light of recent Islamic terror attacks, the rise of ISIS, and the influx of Muslim refugees in Europe.

The major task of this chapter is to bypass abstract generalities and zoom into the concrete case of Femen activism within the larger socio-political picture of free expression, and terrorism. The case at hand is the Muslim terrorist attack on a Krudttoenden café hosting a free speech event on February 14, 2015, exactly at the time when Femen's leading activist Inna Shevchenko was delivering her speech on the illusion of free speech in Europe.⁸ This case study stands out with its instantaneous switch from usual Femen-disapproving rhetoric to the rhetoric of support for Femen and its leader Inna Shevchenko in particular. The fact that Shevchenko not only witnessed and survived the attack, but also became a popular spokesperson for the event and the issue of free expression, signposts a major transformation of Femen activism, which calls for scholarly thought and conceptualization.

The hook of the entire case and the major transformation is well represented by the political commentator, Lalo Dagach's (Dagach, 2016) tweet under the video

⁸ The event titled "Art, Blasphemy and Freedom of Speech" was also attended by the "controversial" Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks, and the French ambassador to Denmark Francois Zimeray, among other journalists, artists, and activists from Europe.

interview of Inna Shevchenko in Rubin Report of Ora TV, recorded on March 6, 2016. The tweet reads: “You write 3 words on ur body or draw cartoon, they want to kill u. Isn’t it ridiculous.” This text represents the pathos of the plethora of media artifacts analyzed in this chapter. Most of those artifacts show how vulnerability in the light of Islamists associates Inna Shevchenko with the other actors such as the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists who became victims of the brutal terrorist attack in January 2015. This association is also a powerful connection Shevchenko herself subscribes to. In her almost hour-long video interview with Rubin Report, a year after the Copenhagen attack, Shevchenko talks about the constant threats she has been receiving since the Femen movement went topless. She goes into detailed accounts of other dangerous and painful experiences she has endured in the past years and advocates for more people to speak against the oppressors of free speech: “If you stop you will fail and your ideas will fail. Even those cartoonists who died, who were killed, they did not lose and their ideas are not a failure, they will always remain as winners and those who continued to do what they believed in. ...They were contributing to very important thing such as freedom of expression” (The Rubin Report, 2016).

It is as though, through the pain she endured by losing her “ideological brothers” (The Rubin Report, 2016) in Charlie Hebdo, and surviving other hardships, such as the Copenhagen terrorist attack, Shevchenko authenticates her existence and provides a reliable basis for her justice claims (Ahmed, 2004). Such claiming of justice via invoking her feminine vulnerability and activist wounds runs as a leitmotif through all of her media interviews, columns, and Twitter-sphere interactions relating to the Copenhagen 2015 shooting. “Liberals, let's make our voices louder than the sound of their bullets! Let's just

simply win, and show them the power of freedom of speech!” —she writes at the end of her Huffington Post column about the Copenhagen attack (Shevchenko, 2016).

The uniqueness of Shevchenko’s association with the larger battle against terrorism is in its unusual bypassing of the extreme differences such as her provocative and iconoclastic style of activism for which Femenis usually criticized. Instead of critiquing Femen, the forces of online communities in the West gathered around one goal—to support her in her fight against the common enemy, Islamic terrorism. The solidarity toward Femen is evident in the discussions of the event on Twitter, many TV and print interviews, where journalists sympathize Shevchenko’s shaken voice (CCTV America, 2015) and ask her to elaborate on what was she going to say right before the sound of bullets interrupted her (BBC, 2015; Töpper, 2015). Such focus on Inna’s plight blends the movement of Femen into the Western mainstream along with its unconventional “sextremist” baggage. Therefore, when people re-tweet and like Lalo Gadach’s or other similar Femen-supporting tweets, they are displacing the issue of Femen from antagonism to European standards of appropriate activism and moving it toward the battle against a greater threat: terrorism.

All it required for such a switch from antagonizing to supporting Femen to occur was an event that opened up new ways for thinking and being in the world (Badiou, 2001). The Copenhagen terrorist attack on the free speech event became an event in Badiou’s sense, but also a Latourian node that amplified the debate, dislocated it to sets of the geographically dispersed places, and connected it to arrays of actors moving in ideologically distinct directions. This, at first glance, accidental and effortless enrollment was formed through the articulations of the event based on the complex interaction

between nonhuman and human elements such as the sound recording, witnessing, writing, tweeting, networking, supporting, sharing, capturing, and speaking.

In this chapter, I focus on the intersections of sound, sonic (eye)witnessing, feminine vulnerability, networked solidarity, and mediatized transformations of Femen activism network within layered and interlaced networks guided by the concept of Badiou's event. Through the close-textual and audio-visual analysis of the set of multimodal artifacts, I will address the following questions: 1) How does the audio recording of the shooting influence Femen's "eventual" (Badiou, 2005) activism? 2) How does the Twitter sonic (eye)witness reporting of Inna Shevchenko factor into the mediatized discourses surrounding the event? 3) What themes, images, and topics re-emerge in Twitter discussions of Inna Shevchenko and Copenhagen shooting? 4) What transformations did the event produce for Femen and its movement? This chapter provides a glimpse into the 2015 terrorist attack on Copenhagen free speech event with its bundle of media elements, Shevchenko's layered mediatized activism, and the mobilization of attention around her in social networks, TV stations, and digital news. This case study also shows that all these layers are mediatized forces around the event that served to validate Femen's provocative activism, and acknowledge its freedom of expression causes, vulnerability, and eventual social solidarity even from those opposing them.

The Theoretical Framework of Event and Its Multiple Layers

Quite often, we talk about events and how they transform our ways of thinking or being by dislocating us into new worlds. What are often lost in such discussions are nonhuman layers and their roles in articulating transformative truths arising from such events. These layers are situational details ranging from sounds to digital attunements for multiplication and re-mediation. In order to analyze those and many other details and conceptions that bring the event of the 2015 Copenhagen shooting into being, I propose a layered and interlaced framework of evental activism. The event as proposed in this chapter illustrates an instance of actor-network theory in action (Latour, 1993, 2005) and stands on the junctures of the nomadic subject (Braidotti, 1994, 2011), sound, witnessing, vulnerability, writing (Cixous, 1976), solidarity, freedom of speech, and blasphemy.

Sound is a violent sense that penetrates our bodies and relays power, vulnerability, and witnessing. Witnessing channels vulnerability, transformation, and credibility. Within the 24/7 news cycle, such a sound also creates expectations for a testimony, a speech on truth and justice. Speech, invited by the power of witnessing, calls for and implies writing via the body. The body, in this case being female, calls for feminine writing that breaks up phallogocentric realms (Cixous, 1976). In doing so, her body, being from more-than-one place, calls forth the power of the nomadic subject (Braidotti, 1994, 2011) that creates transformations across borders. The unique concentration of these and other Latourian mediators brings about specific evental conditions for the situation of the 2015 Copenhagen shooting event and Femen's presence there. Not in order to delineate, but to trace the intensities around those human

and nonhuman mediations, I will go through each of those one by one.

Before going any further, I need to explain Badiou's event and its relevance for this project. One of the aspects about the event in Badiou's (2001) sense is that it is neither natural nor neutral, but an assemblage of multiplicities that forms a singularity. For this reason, it is often hard to delineate and find clear edges to an event. Badiou brings up the example of the French Revolution—it was an important event, full of intensities, but it is hard to reduce it to just one day, place, or a person:

The event is thus clearly the multiple which both presents its entire site, and, by means of the pure signifier of itself immanent to its own multiple, manages to present the presentation itself. That is, the one of the infinite multiple that it is. (Badiou, 2005, p. 180)

Such an event, with all its moving parts being in the process of emergence, “is committed to chance. It is unpredictable, incalculable” (Badiou, 2005, p. 46). It is an “abrupt creation not of a new reality, but of a myriad of new possibilities” (Badiou, 2012, p. 109). These possibilities often induce affects, feelings, thinking, and actions. Another key word along with the possibilities in Badiou's event theory is truth, which manifests itself through subjects that are formed in the process of being faithful to the event. According to DeLuca (2011), “truths are created through the articulation of events” (p. 420), which require “communication acts” (p. 422). Hawes (2010) writes about the evental ethics of truths, which often assume form of monologues, allowing discursive interventions, dialogues to be interjected into them: “It is during processes of intervening into narratives with dialogue (i.e., utterances of those witnessing a narrative) that affirming multiple ‘evental’ truths of partisan, singular and absolutely distinct universalities become possible” (Hawes, 2010, p. 277). The communicative capacity and the force of events appears later in this section, when I discuss speech, spokespersons, and Twitter. As I

mentioned earlier, an event is nothing if not the emergence from a specific eventual site, or a situation that arises from intersections of multiple factors.

Sound is one of the most potent elements of an event in this framework. It is the fastest and often considered the first. Sound certainly is one of the most important elements in the case of 2015 Copenhagen shooting. When the breaking news about the terrorist shooting hit digital screens and networks, the first element relayed, after lead or anchor announcements, was the audio recording of the event. As Altman (1992) writes, “every sound initiates an event” (p. 23). Inna Shevchenko’s voice discussing the illusion of freedom of speech in Europe being interrupted by the gunshots did not become an event in Badiou’s sense on its own, but contributed substantially to an eventual situation. According to John Peters (2004), “the most revolutionary developments in modern media may lie less in the visual than in the acoustic register” (p. 4). Part of it being revolutionary has to do with its “physical force” (Goodale, 2013, p. 220) of penetrating, piercing an outline of a body.

Another significant aspect of sound is its aura of almost-tactile presence, which makes itself known by touching and reverberating in our eardrums. As Ihde (2007) describes in his phenomenological contemplations, sound “fills’ the space between us” and it is yet another instance of the experience of the invisible” (p. 80); “listening makes the invisible present in a way similar to the presence of the mute in vision” (p. 51). Digital media contains magnifying and amplifying effects, as it brings closer details often neglected in visual-dominating encounters. Sound plays a role of a “unique identifier” (Peters, 2004, p. 7). For the most part, once we hear someone speak, we know his or her gender, sexuality, and, sometimes, even nationality, or race. As Peters (2004) puts it,

voices “drip with erotic and political power” (p. 14). Cixous (1976) provides a compelling description of a woman speaking at a public gathering:

She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body for-ward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. (p. 881)

In line with this point of Cixous', speaking, writing, and acting through the body have been driving mottos of Femen since its creation. Thus, anyone who recognized Inna Shevchenko's voice speaking before the gunshots, was able to connect it to the topless activism and realize her presence, feminine vulnerability, and potential for change.

Since sound recording implies a sense of presence, at least of those whose voice we are hearing, it invokes the idea of witnessing. The sound of voice becomes all the more important if it helps identify the witness. Having Shevchenko as a witness adds an additional layer to the eventual situation, even before the articulation of the event takes place.

Shevchenko, with her provocative, anti-Muslim protests and ties to Charlie Hebdo activists and another highly targeted artist from Danish cartoon controversy, Lars Vilks, makes her witnessing an even more intense “event-generator” as Thomas (2009) would say. In his chapter “Witness as a cultural form of communication: Historical roots, structural dynamics and current appearances,” Thomas (2009) traces the legal and religious roots of witnessing and claims that there is a significant potential for transformation via witnessing:

Against the background of this instability, every act of witnessing is tied to a ‘transformation’ that can be expected or even 'triggered'. In the act of witnessing, something is added to the witnessed 'event' (be it either 'inside' or 'outside' the witness), thereby changing the event itself. (p. 96)

What Thomas is suggesting here is that a witness may not only transform the event by becoming part of it, but also feel/bear the transformations on her/his own self. Many media scholars writing about witnessing mostly tie it to journalism and new media technologies. They often rely on the ideas of Peters and his elaboration on bodily aspects of witnessing. He writes, “to bear witness is to put one’s body on the line”⁹ (Peters, 2010, p. 256). Such a precarious and vulnerable state of a witness often brings much more than the idea of truth¹⁰ and trustworthiness. Peters (2009), similarly to Thomas (2010), when tracing the religious connotation of the word, brings up the connection to the idea of martyr:

In theology the notion of witness, especially as martyr, developed in early Christianity and rabbinical Judaism, though it is embraced in other religious traditions as well. The most recent sense dates from World War II: the witness as a survivor of hell, prototypically but not exclusively the Holocaust, who lives on to tell the world about the untellable. The procedures of the court, the pain of the martyr, and the cry of the survivor raise basic questions about what it means to watch, to narrate, or to be present at or re-present an event. (p. 249)

Powerful notions of witnessing interlaced with affective forces of survival and martyrdom make a witness not only reliable, but also a necessary, truthful mediator who provides an account of the event at hand. Thus, the witness is a surrogate for the absent from an event. The process of the surrogacy of witnessing is highly technologized and mediatory. With the rise of mobile witnessing technologies (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013) and “perpetual crisis-awareness” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009), expectations for journalists, citizens, and activists to report lively from hot spots have become implicit.

With new media tools come such affordances as searchability (Boyd, 2010),

⁹ The idea of putting a body on the line is also quite reminiscent of Badiou’s description of an event, which takes place on the edge of void.

¹⁰ Such would be a conventional, mainstream understanding of truth, which is different from the truth in Badiou’s sense of event and faithfulness to it.

spreadability (Jenkins et al., 2013), shareability, and affective engagement (Papacharissi, 2012, 2013). Those affordances enable “nomadic subjects” to function

as a relay team: she connects, circulates, moves on; ... The nomad is a transgressive identity whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why she can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 42)

Of new media technologies that enable “nomadic subjects,” Twitter is one of the most noteworthy platforms, especially in the case of the Copenhagen shooting. Twitter has been part of organic, instant, live reporting, commenting, and discussing. It was the platform through which Inna Shevchenko, a good example of a “nomadic subject,” provided her live testimony right after fleeing the room under the attack.

Since launching in March 2006, Twitter has mediated numerous eyewitness testimonies and live-reporting. According to Burns and Burgess (2012) “it is through the social network that news and information spread: Twitter is both a social networking site and an ambient information stream” (p. 803). Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012), in their study of the Egyptian revolution and Twitter, dub those streams affective as they “describe how news is collaboratively constructed out of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion within an ambient news environment” (p. 280). Twitter operations based on follower-followee and hashtag-linked relationships are essential to its functioning (Burns & Burgess, 2012). Both types of relationships are relevant to Inna Shevchenko (@femeninna) as she has over 22k followers and actively uses hashtags.

Before live-tweeting of an eyewitness, or in this case of a sonic (eye)witness, there is a contemplation of risks and translations of seen, heard, and experienced into

spoken and/or written words, into testimony.¹¹ Peters (2010) calls this a precarious juncture between the experience and the world: “No transfusion of consciousness ever takes place. Words can be exchanged, but experiences cannot. Testimony is the discourse of another whose universe of experience diverges from one’s own” (p. 251). This juncture is even more precarious in the case of female speakers such as Inna Shevchenko, who due to her provocative sextremist protests, is often perceived as marginal, if not an exile even from the country that has given her political asylum. Cixous’s (1976) description of a similar feminine precariousness in speech still maintains relevance as it applies well to the case of Shevchenko’s live-tweeting and media interviews:

An act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process. (p. 181)

In this passage, the speech and writing of women are both present as they both have been almost equally in precarious and politically disadvantaged states. The artifacts this chapter analyzes are comprised of Inna Shevchenko’s speeches, writing on Twitter, and other peoples’ interactions with her around the Copenhagen shooting event.

Another layer of precariousness has to do with the risk of speaking truth to power, parrhesia. In the case of this chapter, parrhesia pertains to Shevchenko challenging power, which put her in harm’s way to begin with. A Muslim terrorist interrupted the Copenhagen free speech seminar. In the eyes of Western media and its audience, this

¹¹ Peters traces the etymology of the word testimony and reveals its close relation to the word “testicle.” This, testimony is not just a bodily act, but also very virile. However, in the light of this chapter and multiple of instances of trustworthy female witnesses, which subvert virile roots of witnessing by feminine witnessing and feminine writing, perhaps there should be a new word invented to counteract testicle-trace of masculine dominance on public space and public discourse.

religion is predominantly associated with the suppression of freedom of speech and deadly terrorist attacks. Therefore, Femen speaking against the Islam's suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of expression is challenging its power, utilizing parrhesia. I should point out here that by truth I do not mean universal truth, but truth in Badiou's sense of being faithful to the event and to persevere.

Margaret McLaren (2002), building upon Foucault, explains parrhesia as a relevant political, ethical, tool that carries the power of morality:

In terms of telling the truth to oneself, parrhesia is similar to, but not the same as, conscience; it is a virtue, a quality, a technique. ...you tell the truth in order to be cured, in this case to become more ethical. (p. 154)

Its promise of cure brings morality to parrhesia. Such parrhesiastic truth-telling co-creates a moral subject with a helpfully compelled and moved audience. An interesting detail that applies well to Femen here is the divorce of ethics and morality from law and religion. "Ethical action is determined not by the imposition of universal rules, but by individualized procedures, techniques of the self" (McLaren, 2002, p. 164). Such a non-conventional approach to ethics and morality is evident not only in theory, but also in praxis of how audiences reacted to Shevchenko's testimony against the repression of free speech. It is notable that such a divorce of morality from powerful religious norms does not come merely from speaking truth, but from its "nomadic consciousness," which "combines coherence with mobility" (Baridotti, 2011, p. 64). The coherence, in this case, is manifested by the unique layering and mobile interlacing of details such as precariousness, witnessing, sound, pain, media, and solidarity. Even though it is clear that precariousness, pain, and resentment (Berlant, 2000; Brown, 1995; Butler, 2004) often entrust subjects to speak up, they do not achieve much without the solidarity of

audiences. Sara Ahmed (2004) writes about the “sociality of pain” and its “contingent attachment” (p. 31), which requires ethics of being with others and feeling. Such a feeling moves through us and moves us. When relating to this pain and imminent danger of death as heard in the audio account, the effects become all the more powerful. As discussed earlier in this section, the sense of sound is one of the most sensual and therefore transformative. It “operates at a level of recognition rather than verbal logic. It taps something more primordial, the existence of a creature who shares the same mortal fate you do, a being that breathes through a throat” (Peters, 2004, p. 7).

The sound of the human voice has a visceral ability to induce fear. In his highly Deleuzian book on sonic warfare, Steve Goodman (2010) theorizes “affective mobilization and contagion” (p. 11) with the potentialities for “the production of the ecology of fear” (p. 13), which emerge out of audible vibrations and sonic experiences:

In the ecology of fear, however, threat becomes spectral. Effect becomes autonomous from cause. Unlike earlier modes of management of the future such as deterrence, preemptive security does not prevent but rather induces the event, no longer warding off its arrival in a negative anticipation; preemption positively actualizes the future in the present, or at least the effects of events yet to come, to the extent that the cause of the effects, that is, the event, need not necessarily happen. (p. 71)

In the case of the sonic event (Goodale, 2013) of the terrorist shooting at the Copenhagen 2015 free speech seminar, the cause of fear does not have as much to do with sounds of gunshots at the event, as with the anticipation and nervousness due to past and future Muslim terrorist attacks. Many scholars have elaborated on the affective sense of fear associated with Muslims terrorists, especially since 9/11. Anne Norton (2013) traces the problematic aspects of such fear and calls its larger manifestation a “Muslim Question”:

There are two fears in the fear of terrorism: fear of the many and fear of the one. The fear of the many sees the West (or the Western) besieged by an Islam that,

this time, breaks through the gates of Vienna to occupy the heart of Europe. The fear of the many encompasses both "demographic problem" and the arrival of the boatloads of the economic and political refugees. The fear of the one is a fear of the damage that can be wrought by a single man or a woman: the terrorist or a suicide bomber. The battle is fought not only for the cities of the European heartland but for the hearts and minds of East and West. (p. 82)

In her extremely challenging and provocative book, Norton compares the Muslim question with the Jewish question pre-Holocaust and calls for setting our fears aside.

Fear induced through the sonic experience, as Goodman (2010) explains, could be even more intense as it becomes part of an affectively activated network: "The human actor triggering an alarm merely plays a catalytic role, enveloped in a self-effecting networked agency. In such a capillary network, the sonic security nexus is subject of the event, and the induced collective fear is object" (p. 72). Collective fear grows to create a sense of "us" versus "them," often known as a noble pathos of solidarity. Extending Ulrich Beck's (1992) work, Ahmed (2004) claims that solidarity is based on "insecurity" rather than "need," thus "it is through the perception of shared risk that communities become a 'binding force'" (p. 72). This will become evident in the analysis section, where I describe how online communities bind around Inna Shevchenko in the light of the terrorist attack.

From Latour's actor-network perspective, there are several explanations for such solidarities and their dynamics. Actors deploy their forces in ways that make others do things and produce unexpected events that trigger other actors and mediators to follow them (Latour, 2005). In order to maintain a group, or a network, there must be a set of antigroups: "It is always by comparison with other competing ties that any tie is emphasized" (Latour, 2005, p. 32). In the case of the Copenhagen 2015 shooting, the ties delineate liberty-loving Europeans from Islamist terrorists. Following Latour (2005), in

order to sustain itself, a group needs a spokesperson, an actor “defining who they are, what they should be, what they have been. These are constantly at work, justifying the group’s existence, invoking rules and precedents and, as we shall see, measuring up one definition against all the others” (Latour, 2005, p. 31). Such a spokesperson acts as an actor, turned into a node, turned into a network, and all this mostly amplified and speeded up via digital media affordances that help transport agencies of change across vast distances and fragile bridges.

Spokesperson actor latches onto tensions, controversies, and crises and articulates them and her own self through them. In the case of this chapter and in Badiou’s eventual framework, such a spokesperson is a subject that is moved by the event and becomes a subject by staying faithful to the goal of articulating the event. Such a communicative act, articulation, is not a one-directional, unified movement, but consists of multiple moving parts and deviations.

The key point, as Latour (1996) explains, “is that every entity, including the self, society, nature, every relation, every action, can be understood as ‘choices’ or ‘selection’ of finer and finer embranchments going from abstract structure –actants- to concrete ones – actors” (p. 373). The distinction Latour makes here between abstract and concrete runs through his social theory and marks crucial difference between general and specific. Actor, in this chapter, is an activist-survivor of a terrorist attack, who writes and speaks based on her own experience, from her concrete body. She, as a true nomad, crosses the boundary of her own self, other people, objects, and things. She becomes a rhizome with other people, hashtags, sounds, and tweets that pledge solidarity and affectionately support the idea of free expression. Concrete mobile media devices become part of

Shevchenko's nomadic assemblage as those devices and technological affordances allow her and others to connect and grow together.

Andén-Papadopoulos (2013) calls smartphones a “personal witnessing device,” which “entails the swift translation of a private sensory experience into public mediated testimony that can be infinitely reproduced and shared worldwide via wireless communication networks” (p. 5). Chouliaraki (2010) argues that such an instantaneous interconnectivity in posttelevision news possesses a moralizing force. Notably, this moralization trend affects not only audiences attending to witnesses as they are recovering from the shock of witnessing, but also the scholars writing about witnessing.¹² Chouliaraki (2010) links discussions of journalists and their mediatized witnessing with James Carey's “ritual communication,” which applies well to live-tweeting of sonic (eye)witness:

...Under a ritual view, then, news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic focus and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it. (p. 21)

The key words from Carey's (1989) theorization of ritual communication—“sharing,” “participation,” “association,” and “fellowship,” bear a striking resemblance with the key aspects of new media and Twitter in particular. With the affective news streams on Twitter, communities are formed, reformed, and moved (Papacharissi & Oliviera, 2013).

As Latour (1993) writes, “each network makes a whole world for itself, a world whose inside is nothing but the internal secretions of those who elaborate it. Nothing can enter the galleries of such a network without being turned outside in” (p. 171). It is

¹² One example of such moralizing scholarly work is Rentschler's (2004) piece on “Witnessing: US citizenship and the vicarious experience of suffering,” where she calls for people not to fall into the trap of “us” versus “them,” all the while ignoring the causes of the violence.

through such “outside in” movements that emotions enter into our bodies and make us do things. Ahmed parallels this “outside in” model with crowd psychology, which argues that an individual may assume the feeling of the crowd and be moved with it. Goodman (2010) also theorizes the crowd aspect by bringing in Elias Canetti’s physics of population. Drawing on Canetti, Goodman (2010) sees affective attachments, enrollments into crowds, as a way collective fear transforms itself into “attractive power” and “eradication of differences” (p. 98). Eradication of differences in the case of the Copenhagen shooting happens in relation to Inna Shevchenko’s evental activism as various groups pledge support for her and her fight against suppression of free speech. Having gone through all those conceptual knots and junctures layering Badiou’s event that brings nomadic subjects into being, I will now turn to the analysis of the artifacts relating to the Copenhagen 2015 shooting.

Tracing Sounds and Movements

When it comes to breaking news in the age of new media, everything whirls, warps, and remediates so fast that identifying first iterations of events is hard, if not useless. What matters is to find iterations that caught traction and trace these iterations as they gather together transformative forces. As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, the sound is the fastest and therefore considered first; for that reason, I will start the analysis with the raw audio account of the event that was remediated in multiple media.

On February 14, 2015, several hours after the attack on the free speech event in Copenhagen, *BBC* published a brief online news story with a headline “Danish shooting: Audio of moment gunman struck in Copenhagen café.” The story starts with a still image

of the café pierced with numerous gunshots and two law-enforcement agents working in front of it. As the page loads, the audio part of the media starts and one has to click pause in order to read the rest of the story first:

An audio recording obtained exclusively by the BBC captures the moment a gunman struck a free speech debate in the Danish capital, Copenhagen. A manhunt is under way for the suspect who targeted the event at the Krudttoennen cafe in the Oesterbro district of the city. Controversial Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks, who has drawn caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, is understood to have been present at the debate, as well as the French ambassador, Francois Zimeray. A speaker at the event is interrupted by a volley of shots. (BBC, 2015)

The text does not mention the leader of the Femen movement, Shevchenko, but it is her voice that we hear first in the media clip above the news. She says, “I realize that every time we talk about activity of those people, there will always be ‘yes, it is freedom of speech, but...’ And the turning point is ‘but.’ Why do we still say, ‘but’ when we...” At this moment, 17 seconds into her speech, we hear rapid gunshots. In a few seconds, there are sounds of chaotic movements of chairs, tables, frantic footsteps all the while gunshots continue. Then gunshots stop and something metallic falls on a hard surface. People murmur in haste, move hurriedly and there is a new ambience of a quieter, smaller room or corner. This 45-second clip was taken up by the major media outlets and shared on social media.

Before writing its own stories, *The Guardian* (2015) republished the same news from the *BBC* news. American *ABC* (2015) *News* when reporting from Copenhagen the following day also played the audio. “Listen as the horror unfolds,” says reporter, Terry Moran in a voice over, over the b-roll of bullet-riddled café before playing the audio recording of the attack featuring Shevchenko’s interrupted speech. The sound clip, as played on *ABC News*, is shorter and includes only the portion of Shevchenko being

interrupted by the gunshots. The clip is cut as soon as the shots end. The entire remediation of the audio clip is accompanied with the graphic of a moving sound wave. Behind the sound wave, images change to match the sound. While Shevchenko is talking, the shot zooms into the name of the café, but as soon as the shots begin, the images cut abruptly. In rhythm with the sound of shots, the visual cuts to closer shots of a police officer in front of the café and the bullet holes in the window. *ABC News* (2015) does not elaborate on the person in the audio, but cut to the archive footage of Lars Vilks, briskly walking toward the camera. “The host, Lars Vilks is a Swedish cartoonist and he is on Al Qaeda’s “hit list” for drawing the prophet Mohammed,” announces the reporter and goes on to say that Vilks survived the attack as his bodyguards rushed him out of the room. The reporter mentions that a 55-year-old man attending the event died and plays an audio-interview with a local eyewitness.

The Huffington Post (Sommers, 2015) reporting the same day as the attack writes “Copenhagen Shooting Audio Reveals Shocking Moment Gunman Opened Fire On Free Speech Debate” in a headline. The story includes both a link to the sound clip of the attack as well as its description, omitting the name of Shevchenko speaking in the recording. This story, similarly to others mentioned above, presumes Lars Vilks as the target of the shooting and links the event with Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack:

In an apparent attempt to repeat the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris last month, the man, who remains at large, fired shots at a cafe in Copenhagen on Saturday afternoon at a debate on free speech organised by Vilks, who has received death threats since caricaturing the Prophet Mohammad in 2007. (Sommers, 2015, para. 2).

Lisa Abend of *Time* elaborates on the Charlie Hebdo connection. Reporting from Copenhagen, Abend (2015) quotes French Ambassador to Denmark, François Zimeray’s

interview to *Agence France-Presse* (AFP): “They fired on us from the outside. It was the same intention as Charlie Hebdo except they didn’t manage to get in” (Abend, 2015, para. 6). *Time* interviewed Lars Erslev Andersen, a senior researcher on terrorism at the Danish Institute for International Studies, and explains that such an attack, especially in Denmark, was highly anticipated after Charlie Hebdo.

Richard Milne of the *Financial Times* elaborated on the background of Danish cartoon controversy involving Vilks and the terrorism connection to Charlie Hebdo shooting. “Denmark has been on edge ever since the attack at Charlie Hebdo in Paris last month,” writes Milne (2015, para. 8) and provides details about *Jyllands-Posten*. This Danish daily was the first newspaper to publish cartoons of Mohammed in 2005, causing violent protests in the Muslim world and several attempted attacks on the newspaper since then. Abend (2015) quotes Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Denmark’s Prime Minister: “As a nation we have lived through a few hours we will never forget... We have tasted the nasty taste of fear and powerlessness that terrorism would like to engender” (para. 11). The *Independent* included corresponding statements from the European political leaders: “David Cameron condemned the shootings, saying free speech ‘must always be protected.’ The French President, François Hollande, called the shooting ‘deplorable’” (Johnston & Merrill, 2015, para. 10).

These media reports providing background information, the Charlie Hebdo link, and the statement from political leaders and experts increased the salience of the event. Even though many of the media outlets reporting about the Copenhagen shooting 2015, similarly to the first audio account published by the *BBC* (2015), did not mention Shevchenko, they provided enough details to raise public interest around the event, and

invoke fears of Muslim terrorism.

Later news identified Shevchenko and included more details from the event. *The Guardian* (Booth & Chrisafis, 2015) begins the story by stating that “Inna Shevchenko, a leader of the Ukrainian protest group Femen, was addressing the audience of about 30 people on the danger of gunmen suppressing free speech when the bullets started flying” (para. 1). The article also identifies Vilks as the apparent target of the attack because of his 2007 cartoon depicting prophet Mohammed on a dog’s body. “Among the shooting I could hear Arabic: ‘Allahu Akbar!’” *The Guardian* quotes a participant of the event Agnieszka Kolek, the curator of the Passion for Freedom arts festival in London. The remediated version of the 45-second sound clip, capturing the moments of the attack, includes *The Guardian* logo over the slideshow of seven photographs. The images depict the café after the attack, the medical emergency team carrying someone on stretcher toward the ambulance, forensics teams working at the site, and a man laying flowers on the pavement in front of the synagogue, where the second terrorist attack took place the same day (Booth & Chrisafis, 2015).

The Washington Post (Witte & Adam, 2015), reporting a day after the attack, elaborates on the terrorism issues and also links the shooting to the Charlie Hebdo attack. Toward the middle of the article, Witte and Adam (2015) write about Shevchenko and include a link to *BBC*’s audio clip of the attack:

In audio of the moment the gunman struck that was posted online by the BBC, a woman can be heard speaking before she is interrupted by a volley of gunfire. ... The shots are steady and sustained. From inside the cafe, the sounds are of chairs sliding along the floor as people dive for cover. No one screams. (para. 27)

The article also mentions Shevchenko’s tweets saying that she was in the middle of her speech when gun shots began.

The Telegraph (Henderson, Ensor, & Alexander, 2015), reporting the next day after the attack, has the audio clip of the attack twice in the story, in the opening and in the middle. This remediated version opens with the *Telegraph* logo graphic animation, logo, and the slideshow of images from the attack site. The lengthy story provides detailed reverse timeline of the attack on the free speech event and later on the synagogue. Toward the middle of the timeline, after the second remediation of the audio clip from the attack, the *Telegraph* embeds Shevchenko's three live-tweets from the event. "I was at the point of my speech when I was saying that often it is an illusion that we have freedom of speech in Europe. Then we heard shots," says the first tweet and the others follow mentioning the French Ambassador and then the tweet about all of the attendants of the event being taken to the police station (Henderson, Ensor, & Alexander, 2015). This story, like many others, weaves in audio account of the attack and spotlights Femen, but most importantly, what it shows is the constellation of other actors and details that helped the event come into being.

The embedded audio clip in a new media story (Henderson, Ensor, & Alexander, 2015) manifests the ephemeral, temporal, fleeting nature of sound media. It affects audiences and moves reporters through its reproductive and remediative capacity. There is not much of a discussion of the sound clip itself, but of the fears, voices, and movements it represents. Clearly, the audio recording of Shevchenko being interrupted by the sound of gunshots during the 2015 Copenhagen terrorist attack on free speech event magnified Femen as one of the most, if not the most, important participant of the free speech event and therefore immensely aided Shevchenko's activism, which is in direct correlation with media attention toward them. One of the most important elements

of the 2015 Copenhagen shooting event unraveled via Shevchenko's live-tweeting of the immediate aftermath of the shooting and engaging audiences in discussions that were later cited by major media outlets. I will now turn to the Twitter discussion of the case study.

Tracing Tweets, Fears, and Solidarities

Social media is a vortex of multiple recalcitrant actors, places, times, and ideas, but most importantly, nothing if not a potentiality for instantaneous connection. The connection, precisely, the interconnection on Twitter and its potential for social change is imperative to study. Twitter provides affordances that blow up the importance of events, and in the case of the Copenhagen shooting in 2015, it aids @femeninna's witnessing, testimony sharing, discussing, attracting more media, and further sharing of media on Twitter, and so on.

Before going into the discussion of specific tweets and interactions, there are a few overarching movements and themes I need to point out. The large node in the discussion of Twitter in this chapter is Shevchenko, as she was one of the first people, if not the first, who started live-tweeting the aftermath of the attack. She was providing nonstop updates on whereabouts, details, comments, assessments, sharing media stories about the event, responding to people tweeting at her. This intensive twitter activity was broadcasted, shared, re-tweeted, and embedded into online news stories as credible first-hand information from the terrorist attack. Thus, in relation to this particular event and Shevchenko's involvement in it, there was movement from outside to Twitter, within Twitter, from Twitter to mainstream media, from mainstream media to Twitter, and

within Twitter. When saying that Shevchenko was the node of all those transactions, I do not mean that all the interactions about the Copenhagen 2015 shooting at the free speech event were around or touching upon the Femen activist, but she definitely garnered dense enough linkage to become a key node for this study. Those linkages were not just linkages connecting dispersed actors and actants, but formations of the linkages and branches around specific themes. Those themes were free speech and the free world, Charlie Hebdo, fear, Islamic, religion, protest, and solidarity.

The first tweet Shevchenko (2015j) sent prewitnessing announced that she will be speaking about the freedom of speech at a panel with Vilks in Copenhagen in a couple of hours. This tweet carried sparks of a potentially interesting event due to several details. One such spark is Vilks, who became a famous controversial cartoonist after drawing prophet Mohammad's head on a dog's body. Copenhagen itself was another spark of interest. It was the place where the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy unraveled. Another spark was Femen's friendship with such controversial cartoonists and the close temporal proximity to the Charlie Hebdo massacre, which already had Europe on a high Muslim terrorism alert. Shevchenko, in her tweets and interactions following the attack, played up all of those elements and ignited them into larger sparks.

@femeninna (in this part, I will refer to Shevchenko by her twitter handle in the discussions relating to Twitter) started live-tweeting the immediate aftermath of the attack at 3:50 pm, Copenhagen time. By 4:05 pm, Hackivist (2015), @SageHack, put together a spread of @femeninna's first four tweets (Figure 1). @SageHack has over 7,000 followers and describes him/herself as: "[Paladin of Anarchy] Information activist, #SJW & failed #leaderfag. Support and love all hackers, activists, whistleblowers and



Figure 1: Screenshot of Hactivist (2015) tweet.

freedom fighters.” Having her tweets recirculated by a user whose description hails activists and freedom fighters added credibility to @femeninna and attracted attention from other users who otherwise might not have seen her twitter-testimony of the attack. One of the first tweets of @femeninna that media picked up was “I did not see anything, I heard around 20 shots while speaking and then people started to run” (para. 20). *NBC News* (2015) cited this tweet in their story about the Copenhagen attack. Other media followed soon by citing her other tweets and referencing her Twitter timeline for more updated information. In their live phone interview with Inna Shevchenko, *CCTV America* (2015) showed her photo with a flower crown and a text above the photo “Inna

Shevchenko Witnesses Shooting.” Next to this image, there was her tweet with a photo showing all the survivors of the attack resting in the dim room of the local police station. While she is answering TV journalists’ questions about the event in a live-audio interview, the next tweet of hers appears: “I was at the point of my speech when I was saying that often it is an illusion that we have freedom of speech in Europe. Then we heard shots.” This tweet with 710 re-tweets and 250 likes ended up being by far the most popular among her live-tweets from the aftermath of the shooting. This and her other tweets from the event were published in the *Telegraph* (Henderson, Ensor, & Alexander, 2015), *Washington Post* (Witte & Adam, 2015), *Le Monde.fr* (2015), *Elle* (2015), and *Spiegel* (Töpper, 2015) among others.

Along with mainstream media, typical users with both large and not significant followings were interacting with @femeninna’s and media outlets’ tweets by sharing links to more stories about the shooting, asking @femeninna if she was well, pledging their support, and thanking her for her bravery:

“@femeninna Just saw news Inna. You ok?<http://news.sky.com/story/1427630/manhunt-after-shooting-at-free-speech-meeting>” (kevo, 2015)

“@femeninna heard the audio. So glad ur ok.”(Carruthers, 2015)

“@Ali_Jones89 @femeninnaInna, just read; hope you are all ok. People talk about your brave words which is unsurprising but great” (Goroya, 2015a)

“@femeninna Stay safe. Thank you for standing up for free expression” (Stephen Knight GS,2015)

“@femeninna The free world stands behind you in support! Never let the bully win.” Aren, 2015)

Along with these comments users were posting their photos with Inna (@ChrisMoos, @ElizaGoroya), tagging her in their tweets with the hashtags #SolidriteCopenhagen (chisAPteam, 2015), #jesuisInna, #LiberteDExpression (bierlein, 2015; TELLZETRUTH FQSP, 2015), #FreeSpeech (spratt, 2015) and #femen (Sargeant,

2015a).

Among typical Twitter users, there were journalists who were either trying to get in touch with her to record an interview, thanking her for the interview and sharing links to their media, or just pledging their support. A good example of this would be French journalist Audrey Pulvar (Pulvar, 2015), with over 50K followers, who tweeted:

“@femeninna take care Inna, and keep fighting for our rights #mybodyisapoliticweapon #femen.” This tweet of Pulvar received 25 re-tweets and 26 likes, which is an unusually large number for the solidarity tweets within this case study. An interesting category among those supporting @femeninna were people admitting to support her despite not liking her or her activism tactics:

“@femeninna @Femen_France I don't like you, but I hope you're safe, thanks God” (†CHOISIS TON CAMP ÷, 2015)

“@femeninna To tell U the truth, I think U women R a bit weird; but to be shot at????NO WAY!” (Eytan, 2015)

“@femeninna: Despite some disagreements on your actions, receive my full support and solidarity after the drama you lived in #Copenhagen.” (Pierre Yves Bureau ÷, 2015)

Tweets such as these ones were often referencing or replying to the conversations linking the Copenhagen shooting to the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack. Similarly to many of the print and TV news, Twitter users also elaborated on the chilling similarities between the Copenhagen shooting at the free speech event and Charlie Hebdo murderous attack. One of the first users, who tweeted on this topic, shared a news snippet associated with this theme: “@francedk [the French ambassador] says same plan as Charlie Hebdo but attackers couldn't get into building. @femeninna says police protecting event were hit” (Kirby, 2015).

A photojournalist from Hungary, Léa Lecouple, @LeaLecouple (Lecouple, 2015)

posted an archival drawing of Femen by Charlie Hebdo. The caricature depicts a bare-chested woman with Femen name and blue-yellow logo of the group painted on her breasts, passing by a press kiosk overflowing with images of naked or almost-naked sexualized women. A man sitting at the entrance into the kiosk has one hand stretched out to point at the activist, while holding a sexualized image of a woman under his other arm. He angrily yells at the activist through his sharp teeth, and long nose. The activist holds a sign above her head “MY BODY MY RULES.”

@femeninna herself posted an image from Charlie Hebdo’s magazine after the terrorist attack. The square image of empty whiteness has a frame and a thin handwritten font saying: “PLEASE ENJOY THIS CULTURALLY, ETHICALLY, RELIGIOUSLY, AND POLITICALLY CORRECT CARTOON RESPONSIBLY. THANK YOU,”

TerrorWatch (2015), @ConflictHubre-tweeted this image from @femeninna and added a line to it: “Seems even more relevant today. Scary times indeed.#Copenhagen.”

Such a vivid association with Charlie Hebdo, placed @femeninna on an even-more-precarious and vulnerable pedestal in the eyes of the Twitter users and journalists. As @femeninna was posting her updates on her and other witnesses’ whereabouts, her followers were responding back with news updates and compassionate safety warnings: “@femeninna be careful with a shooter still at large after shooting in #Copenhagen at a synagogue” (McCain, 2015).

Even though @femeninna was not the only well-known person at the event, with her voice in the recording, live-tweeted testimony, and people supporting her, she gained authority and seized the opportunity to speak up for the causes Femen has been fight for. These tweets below are not just @femeninna’s comments on the attack, but also the gist

of her talking points in the interviews with journalists and her own columns:

“1/2 ‘We don’t have to talk about freedom of speech, we have to practice it’ was the point of my today's speech.” (Shevchenko, 2015a)

“2/2 it was interrupted by someone who was practicing his ideology.” (Shevchenko, 2015b)

“If all secularists, humanists would be that brave as those gunmen, we would NOT live this now #Copenhagen #copenhagenshooting” (Shevchenko, 2015c)

“Let's NOT be scared! Let's fully enjoy our freedom. This is the best weapon against extremists.” (Shevchenko, 2015d)

“Don't fall into their game: by being scared you will not protect yourself..

#Copenhagen

There is no longer such a thing as ‘safe Europe’ #CopenhagenShooting

#Copenhagen

I wish all liberals have bravery to show their ideas as those terrorists are...”

(Shevchenko, 2015e)

“If Charlie Hebdo, Lars Vilks, Raif Badawi, Aliaa Elmahdy, FEMEN & others would NOT be alone in this fight, we would NOT become a target.”

“If you believe in free speech but with no offense to others, you don't believe in free speech.”(Shevchenko, 2015f)

“We are in the middle of ideological war in Europe. They fight us with guns, we have to fight them with cartoons, street protests, speeches, etc.” (Shevchenko, 2015g)

Many of @femeninna’s tweets were about fear and not being scared, while she in fact was sounding scared as one of her followers pointed out: “@femeninna I am listening to you speak to CCTV Susan Roberts. I am sorry...you sound really frightened” (The Global Investor, 2015). She herself in the interview with CCTV admitted having a shaken voice, but directed this vulnerability as a power against the oppressors of freedom of expression and insisted on continuing the fight for their rights despite the fear. Fear, shock, and horror formed a theme of its own among those discussing the event online in relation to @femeninna:

“@FEMENSWE @elisabethohlson @arnstad I'm still in shock.They shot at wonderful @femeninna and Lars!” (natschki, 2015)

“Heureusement @femeninnavabien.J'aieupeur pour elle. Maisçan'enlèverien à l'horreur.#Copenhagen.”(B de la VitreArrière, 2015)

“Ukrainian feminist @femeninna gave a speech in CPH today,when she was interrupted by shots. Horrifying #cphshooting.”(Foght, 2015)

“I think you need to stop calming yourself down. It is evidently #WWIII and we need to win it #BanIslam @ChrisMoos_@DRNyheder @femeninna.” (Raam, 2015)

Often, the theme of fear and oppression in Twitter discussions entwined with Islam and terrorism so closely it was hard to disentangle them. There is an array of comments in this vein (eigenscape, 2015; Figure 2), commenting on how Muslims are incapable of understanding free speech (Plantiko, 2015) and cannot joke (Mac, 2015). Others were calling Muslims “Islamofascist animals” (Traicher, 2015) and urging the world to get together and destroy them (kile, 2015). Some Muslims themselves were participating in the discussion and attempting to delineate their position from radicalized Muslims (Figure 2): “maybe it's time to the west to know a little bit about Islam and to know how people in the middle east suffer from it @femeninna” (شارليأكبر, 2015).

Former Muslims and those promoting secular ideas latched on to the discussion @femeninna sparked on Twitter. For instance Maryam Namazie (Namazie, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c) posted several tweets with links to her blogs written on the issues of religion, free speech, and blasphemy. One of the most interesting posts by @MaryamNamazie includes a link (Namazie, 2015c) to her earlier interview with Shevchenko about women, blasphemy, and activism. The tweet under the embedded video reads: “We must celebrate blasphemy until no reason to do so, i.e. when Islamism is pushed back to Middle Ages @femeninna” (Namazie, 2015c). In the interview, she discusses how Femen cut down a cross in Kiev in 2012 and how this was not the major blasphemous act of Femen. In the interview, Shevchenko says that their and most women’s everyday lives are acts of blasphemy, because most religions repress women through multiple regulations and expectations of timidity, submissiveness, and servility.

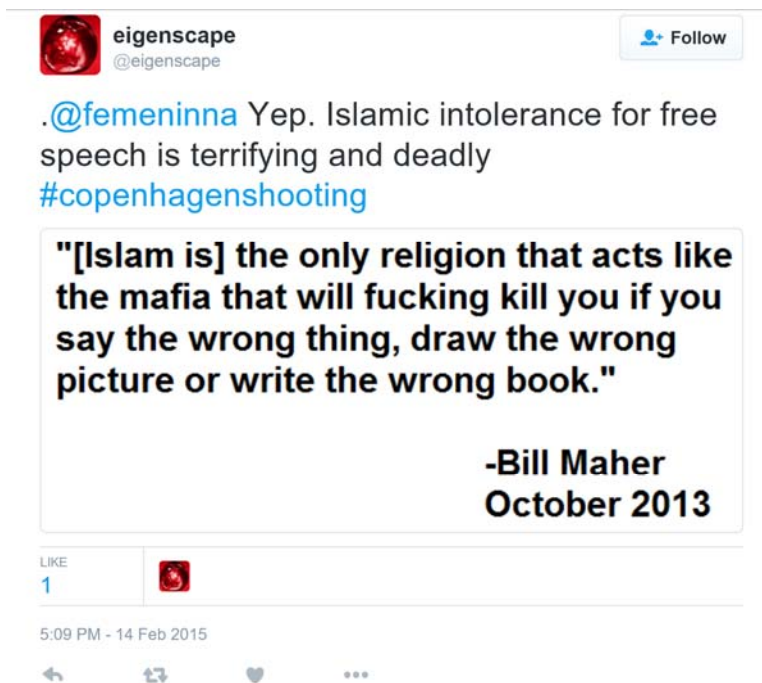


Figure 2: Screenshot of eigenscape (2015) tweet.

Forty-one users re-tweeted this post by @MaryamNamazie and 37 liked it (Namazie, 2015c). Some of those interacting were Muslims sympathetic to @femeninna and @MaryamNamazie: “I am a Muslim and find no difficulty agreeing with wholeheartedly! I would like to go on the record” (Elbarasi, 2015).

Comments such as the ones above were lost in the noise of fear, threat, and support, which was amplified by the Copenhagen attack, but also became the reason for reminding people about the past threats and hardships Femen had been enduring. The same day as the attack, @femeninna (Shevchenko, 2015h) posted a screenshot of an email wishing her a violent death (Figure 3).

A Twitter user, @ElizaGoroya, from Greece translated a letter of a similar content published in a Greek newspaper (Goroya, 2015b). Others reiterated their own aggressive

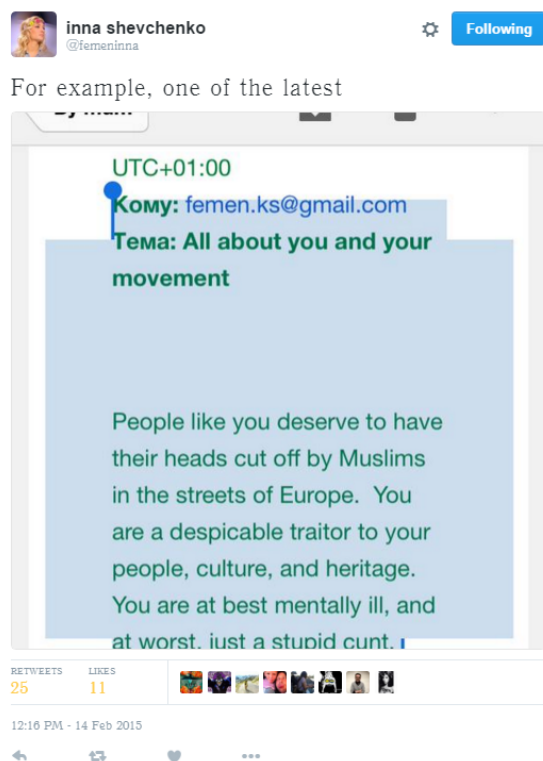


Figure 3: Screenshot of Shevchenko (2015h) tweet.

antagonism with Femen. @salipokor posted a photo of five women in Muslim attire holding a sign that read “FEMEN STOLE OUR VOICE!” The tweet under the photo reads: “@femeninna It is time for you to stop your provocation because your life is from now on in danger!!!”(NamDia, 2015).

As a nomadic subject (Braidotti, 2011), @femeninna affirms and embraces her precarious position with humor: “2011 Belarus, 2013 France, 2015 Danmark: i have no luck with death #copenhagenshooting” (shevchenko, 2015i). Making statements about free speech and free expression while still receiving threats puts @femeninna in the position of parrhesiastes. A person who speaks truth despite the risk: “@femeninna it brings home the risks of standing for the principles that give everyone freedom. Thinking

of you all” (Sargeant, 2015).

Even though in this activism event Shevchenko did not pose topless with slogans painted across her chest, the images of that nature resurfaced and recirculated once again. An image of Shevchenko photographed by Guillaume Herbaut for Internazionale in 2013 re-emerged in the timelines of Copenhagen shooting (Figure 4).

In this post (Puman, 2015), similarly to numerous interviews, tweets, and blog posts triggered by the Copenhagen shooting, Shevchenko’s name, body, and words appeared next to ideas of free speech, democracy, and Femen. It happened as though the words of Helene Cixous came into being through the nomadic affordances of new media, Shevchenko’s existing linkages, and current activism.

The image of Shevchenko flew within the digital realms of news followers, freedom of speech supporters, and those who find her existence offensive to mankind. Her resurfaced body within new contexts only strengthened the link of Femen with freedom of speech activism and related media discourses. Shevchenko’s body became “a springboard for subversive thought” (Cixous, 1987, p. 879) as it ruptured previous ways of thinking about female activism and free expression.

'Tracking Traces of Nomadic Ripples

This chapter provided a framework for a particular event and illustrated what layers are folded in and interlaced in order to bring such an event into being. The evental activism framework in this chapter illustrated how actants in actor-network theory work as nomadic subjects, which is not primarily human, but consists of a mediatized audio clip, witnessing and testimony disseminated online, vulnerability and feminine writing,



Figure 4: Screenshot of Puman (2015) tweet.

solidarity and divisive associations, freedom of speech and activism.

The sound recording of Shevchenko being interrupted by gunshots relayed the power of fear and witnessing. The fear of terrorism incited discussions even before identifying Shevchenko in the recording. Her later identification as a witness of the terrorist attack supplemented by her sonic (eye)witness live-tweeting brought up powerful layers of the event into the light. The powerful layers of Shevchenko's vulnerability, and credibility, and online communities on Twitter gathered in solidarity to

her. The solidarity toward Shevchenko and Femen grew at the expense of perhaps alienating Muslim communities by means of association with terrorism. As Latour (1993) points out, “discourses and associations are not equivalent, because allies and arguments are enlisted precisely so that one association will be stronger than another” (pp. 168-169). In this case, the associations of Muslims with terrorists and Femen with freedom fighters was stronger than that of Muslims with liberals and Femen with vulgar provocateurs.

Shevchenko’s vulnerability-based credibility intensified by the threat of Muslim terrorism created new expectations and needs for her to speak. Her speech on truth and justice of free expression, invited by the power of witnessing, summoned her earlier iterations via body and text. Even though the Copenhagen shooting event did not produce any new visual of Shevchenko in her usual activist uniform of bare skin and slogans, the images from her earlier activism resurfaced on the Internet. Her writing via her body, feminine writing, and this time in a much more favorable and respectable contexts, broke up phallogocentric, religious, and legal morality leashes on female activism.

Braidotti (2011) writes that “nomadic subjects” are “transformative tools” as they enact metamorphosis by mobilizing untapped resources. Shevchenko, along with all her connections and networks, became such a nomadic subjectivity not by accident as suggested earlier in the chapter, but by the “faithful” (Badiou, 2001) work of various actors and actants that brought the Copenhagen shooting event into being:

To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by thinking the situation ‘according to’ the event. And this, of course—since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation—compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation. (pp. 41-42)

A Femen activist, articulating the shooting event, and the causes it has

supplemented to, drew together others who were not-yet-compelled to support freedom of speech and Femen. By becoming an accidental witness of the event, she did not automatically turn into a spokesperson for the event, but by live-tweeting, answering journalists questions, interacting with her followers on social networks, and engaging in discussions, she transformed the event and her own activist, nomadic self as well. As Latour (1993) writes, “since an actant can become greater than another only by being one of several, and since this association is always a misunderstanding, the one who defines the nature of the association without being contradicted takes control” (p. 169). In the case of the Copenhagen shooting, Shevchenko not only defined the nature of her association with the terrorist attack as one of the potential targets, but also amplified it by drawing stronger associations with the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists to whom she referred to as “ideological brothers” in her media interviews. This connection to Charlie Hebdo is one of many elements that brought about Femen’s evental activism in Copenhagen.

In doing so, Shevchenko’s nomadic writing emerged from more-than-one place and took a well-deserved spot as a free speech activist. This point can be further explicated by her TEDx Talk in Kalamata (TEDx Talks, 2015), Rubin Report Interview (2016), and multiple conference speeches on freedom of expression she gave during the year following the attack in Copenhagen. This case study shows that her multilayered and interlaced evental activism validated Femen’s provocative existence, drew solidarity even from those opposing them, and acknowledged their feminine fight for freedom of expression. Such disposition of actors around her brings us to the question of

instantaneity of social media connections versus gradual social change with no warranty and batteries included.¹³

¹³ Peters (2010) has a good point on this question: “‘Some assembly required’ and ‘batteries not included’ might be the twin mottos of the liberal public sphere” (p. 93). Perhaps, it is the need for persistent everyday struggle and unpredictable social change that can bring some hope. Meanwhile, scholars keep on theorizing and explicating.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROAD SIGN “KEEP ON GOING”:

DIGITAL WAYS OF PROTEST

On a plain, newly painted white surface of an old-textured wall, there is a woman crowned with a flower head-band, marching forward with colorful ribbons flowing from her hair. Her hand is raised in a fist and she is screaming something. She is wearing heavy boots, low-rise jeans, and “FEMEN” painted on her bare torso. As she keeps on going, the lines of her two-dimensional figure fluctuate between articulated, faint, and brisk brush-strokes. With every step, the features of her face change to represent completely different women. If we zoom in extremely close, we see that each line and dot creating her figure consists of images, videos, interviews, tweets, comments, and links to groups associated with Femen, as well as various Femen protests in Kiev, Tripoli, Rome, Madrid, Minsk, Paris, and other places. Each image is in constant motion with modifications as it connects to the new ones and rips away from others. With such motions and shifting links, thick lines are visualized. If we listen close enough, micro sounds of human voices, clicks of keyboards and mice, swooshes of emails being sent, and messages received become audible. None of this is noticeable when we zoom back out to see the entire figure. She still continues to move forward and she is still mute.

An image of a similar woman is painted on a wall in Femen headquarters in Paris, but the version of her I described above is my imaginary metaphor for Femen and its media-activism assemblage. Cixous (1976) wrote that such an assemblage-woman is in a process of becoming as she “occurs simultaneously in several places” (p. 882). Her “personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history” (p. 882). She is a farsighted militant, who carries her struggles into new liberations and networks. Braidotti (2011) calls this woman a “nomadic subject,” which is like a “road sign” that “enacts interventions of social imaginary” (p. 14). I see this woman as a posthuman femme, an assemblage of human and nonhuman elements interlinking in ways that make others do things in Latourian actor-network ways. In what follows, I will discuss the ways in which elements create protest assemblages and how this is analyzed in each of my case studies. I will then turn to particular theoretical implications and future directions as well as the speculations about future theoretical adventures.

Femenizing Networks

Every mediatized assemblage contains multiple links that function as a bundle of traces constantly weaving and unraveling various mediated entities. In the Femen-assemblage, the Internet, images, sounds, devices, apps, humans, and nonhuman others work as parts of a modern-day weaving machine. In this weaving process, it is not that opposites are merged seamlessly to dissolve essentialist binaries such as man/woman, religion/politics, resident /foreigner, mobile/immobile, present/absent, immanent/transcendent, etc. On the contrary, those binaries are irreducibly complicated,

or to use Derrida's (1981) expression, "co-implicated" (301). In this co-implication, opposites are opposed but also cross over to the other side through mediatized entanglements.

The movements of networks such as Femen are part of the larger weaving process, and are also maintained through the constant process of connection, rupture, and translation/transformation. Such theorization of networks we saw in Chapter 2 based on the case study of chain-sawing of the cross in Kiev. The main question this chapter asks is: How does Femen utilize visual rhetoric of their bodies to create mediated ruptures, connections, and transformations of networks? The trick of such events creating simultaneous ruptures, connections, and transformations/translations is in their immanent and transgressive utilization of female bodies, iconic places, and digital media.

The event of cutting down the cross took place in the proximity of one of the most politically and religiously charged locations in Ukraine. By utilizing the visual rhetoric of her body, the Femen activist transgressed multiple societal and religious norms in Ukraine. Thereby, it triggered intense ruptures of Femen with the local Christian Orthodox communities and even forced its leader to flee the country. The same event created connection in Western Europe. In the Netherlands, the event of cross-chopping was translated into a festive, freedom-loving event dedicated to Pussy Riot. In France, the leader, who cut down the cross in Kiev, received political asylum and became a new inspiration for a national postal stamp replacing the iconic Marianne. In Russia, Femen followers cut down the crosses and became blasphemous perpetrators and hooligans persecuted by the religious and state authorities.

Chasing those wildly varied remediations shows that (dis)connection and

translation/transformation resonate with affect. With its intensity of multiple transgressions, an image of Femen activists induces affective responses in its viewers and thereby deterritorializes them into Femen-networks. These affect-inducing transactions with an image or a video do not happen once and in one place, but everywhere, near and far, now and when someone accesses it. The multiplicity of these layers of interconnection between spatial, temporal, and ideological divides demonstrate the multiplicity of the ways/modes of seeing, being, and living.

Each rupture and struggle an activist group goes through can often be perceived as a “trial of strength” (Latour, 1993), which helps build unlikely alliances with people who criticize it and technologies that objectify it. In Chapter 3, we saw how a feminine element in protest is prone to becoming abject, exile, something that is in need of “normalization” and censorship. The chapter shows how mediatized bodies of topless activists become abject, how they are censored on Facebook, and how they join the list of others being censored for their female nipples. The rhetorical force of visual censorship illuminates how a ruptured network of a protest group can regain its strength and keep on going, all the while challenging mainstream ethics. Femen images censored, accounts deleted, do not result in disappearance of the movement, but show the resilience and adaptability of its network. Having their images replicated in the commercial clip of Replay jeans shows the peeling off of the abject layers from Femen. Seeing how Femen image travels from banned, exiled, and restricted domains into something as mainstream as commercial culture demonstrates the versatile potential of transgressive activist images. Such moving forward through ruptures illustrates Deleuze-Guattari’s rhizome and Latour’s point that “a ‘trial of strength’ can never be unfavorable to us, since even

when we lose, we may still be right” (p. 190).

In the current perpetually fragmented and distracted daily life, thought becomes even more dependent upon the possibly transformative encounter (Deleuze, 1981/2003; Massumi, 1995). These encounters are responding to each other without signifying anything, but forming linkages that make others do things. The spectrum of what media-activism assemblages are capable of making others do ranges widely and includes both oppressive censorship as well as powerful social solidarity. In Chapter 4, we see multiple layers of Badiou’s event of the Copenhagen shooting and how solidarity linkages are formed around Femen activist Shevchenko after the Copenhagen shooting.

Sound recording of the terrorist attack featuring Shevchenko’s speech before the gunshots verified her witnessing, which has its salience magnified via live-tweeting of her testimony, various media interviews, and the gathering of online communities around the ideas of vulnerability, freedom, terrorism, fear, and solidarity. Such an alignment and linkage of elements created “conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, [that] have replaced the world of the subject. Becomings ... have replaced history, individual or general” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 162). Those affective gatherings, assemblages, have amplified the human subject of Shevchenko by the intensity of becoming. These becomings have revealed “polarities not as static concepts but as mutating surfaces that transform into one another, much like the Mobius strip that Grosz imagines for her ‘volatile bodies’” (Hayles, 1999, p. 220). These “volatile bodies” are also “bodies without organs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that move freely in smooth activist space that rests on dynamic interactions between human and nonhuman elements.

The peculiarities of Femen's voice, appearance, actions, and entwinement of those with media deterritorialize its audiences. The deterritorializing effect of Femen depends on "the system of differences and the movement of différance, that the subject is not present ... constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral" (Derrida, 1981, p. 29). Such movement of Femen is dependent on its symbiotic relationship with digital media, which is noncontrollable, intuitive, free-flowing, persistent, and vulnerable. The posthuman nature of digital activism such as that of Femen and its digitally mediated controversies force us to look beyond sedimented moral and ethical binaries into the evolving plateaus of digital social change.

''' Evolving Avenues and Desired Destinations

This project illustrates the importance of moving beyond traditional conceptions of social movements to engage activist networks and trace movements of different elements constituting actors. These movements and events seemingly pinned to particular locales, if considered scrupulously, go beyond any pre-established scope or scale. These movements are scattered across vast distances modifying, creating, and connecting different networks. Within each case study, there are both theoretical and methodological implications for studying multimedia rhetoric and social change.

Methodologically, the project's close-textual audio-visual analysis of still and moving images, sounds, and social networks in relation to female activism and network studies invites us to consider the significance of tracing rhetorical forces. The study of particular events, actors, and their remediations across different media platforms and countries allows more versatility in qualitative digital methods. Studying social

movements via affordances of the Web reveals not only temporal and spatial aspects of activism, but most importantly the intensities of cultural spectacles and politics of associations/linkages.

Theoretically, each case study contributes to scholarly discussions on particular subjects, concepts, and ideas. For instance, concepts of the body have been played out differently in each chapter. In the first case study (Chapter 2), the spotlight is on female bodies transgressing norms of femininity, disrupting expectations of female sexuality in public spaces, and the clashing of female flesh with the powerful Christian icon—the crucifix. Each of those transgressions placed female bodies of Femen activists into the vortex of polymorphous contexts, which together ruptured the status quo of female bodies and connected it to evolving ideas about its place in society, protest politics, and religion. This chapter pushes forward existing discussions of the norms of corporeal femininity and sexuality by moving it into the direction of subversive/persuasive potentials of the body and its mediatization.

Rhetorical force of the body in peril (DeLuca & Harold, 2005), on the margin (Pezzullo, 2003), or in protest (Sutton, 2007) has been deemed highly potent tool for social change when employed strategically. Abby Peterson (2001) calls the protesting body the “interface of powers of resistance” (p. 69). In her writing, such a militant body is constructed through emotionally powerful embodied rituals, which gain the agency of an “embattled” subject. Such embattled subjects can be dead but acquire qualities of living via powers of digital multimedia. DeLuca and Harold (2005) write about the “shock waves” that the image of the severely mutilated dead body of a teenage boy, Emmett Till, generated via the rhetorical forces of the visual and the body.

Rhetorical forces of images of human bodies becoming subversive because of protesting or protesting because of becoming subversive fit in the economy of decentralized digital media assemblages. The author of “Naked politics: Nudity, political action, and the rhetoric of the body,” Brett Lunceford (2012), writes “a mass of protesting bodies can be an awe-inspiring sight, mainly because they exist as more than simply bodies at a particular place and time. Rather, they have mobilized for a cause to make a statement together” (p. 5). This mobilization, as Koukal (2010) explains, is synthesized and dynamic as it entails bodies dissenting and others joining them en masse (p. 109).

A substantial part of this mobilizing in the digital age has to do with nonhuman matter. An image of a protesting body itself is nonhuman. It consists of pixels, it is marked with embedded codes, altered by filters, graphics, and other traces of remediation, maintained by the digital structures of the World Wide Web, and tuned to search engines’ algorithms. The human element may be providing a spark to put such image-assemblages into motion, but they are not the only or the main actors in these processes. As Deleuze (2006) suggests

Is it not commonplace nowadays to say that the forces of man have already entered into or a relation with the forces of information technology and their third-generation machines which together create something other than man, indivisible ‘man – machine’ systems? Is this a union with silicon instead of carbon? (p. 74)

My dissertation considers femme-machine assemblages of Femen, and extends the interest from the visual rhetoric of protesting human bodies to the politics of posthuman bodies in dissent. The political value of such a posthuman body is only as high as the intensity of its digital interactions, linkages, movements, and remediations. With the advent of new technologies, and the quickening of the digital communication rhythms,

the challenge becomes to find effective ways of tracking, tracing, and analyzing movements of posthuman bodies.

Speaking of the mediatized protesting bodies and their forces, it should be noted, once again, that those bodies, similar to Femen bodies, are not tethered to any mainstream modes of ethical and moral activism. In fact, more and more, those words appear antithetical. Bodies such as Femen activists' attain potency of their rhetorical forces through controversies, conflicts, and threats of annihilation. In Chapter 3, we saw how the weaponized female body of an activist becomes abject, not merely by legal or technological regulations, but by the force of affect it induces in its viewers, who with their digital affordances try to "normalize" and tame it. Such mobilization around protesting posthuman bodies online happens for the purposes of its censorship, or removal, which provides another avenue for studying the force of digital visual rhetoric. In this chapter, we also saw the potential of bodies to travel from abject to mainstream by permeating the commercial clip of Replay jeans. Thus, we saw that the abject body has the potential to break out of the abject circle. Other scholars write about subversive powers of abject bodies (Ahmed, 2004; Butler, 1993; Harold, 2000; Kristeva, 1982) and their potentials for social change, but it would be interesting to connect this discussion more with the ideas of the decentralized "wealth of networks" (Benkler, 2013), spreadability of media (Jenkins et al., 2013), and affective news streams (Papacharisi, 2012). One of the main questions on this abject and multimedia intersection would be to seek ways in which activism-media assemblages reinforce, move, and change the posthuman abject body?

With the mediatization of the body, it is easy to bypass its physical corporeal

vulnerabilities, which in some cases attain higher powers of relatability and thereby are more effective in inducing empathy in its viewers/readers/listeners, and digital others. As we saw in Chapter 4, the vulnerability of Femen activist Shevchenko accompanied by its capacity to witness and speak up in the name of freedom extended the discussion of bodies into the mediatization of the human sensual field. We saw how a female body is capable of gathering solidarities via digital media if it assumes its traditional vulnerable position. In this chapter, we also realized that bodily presence may well be confirmed by the sound of the human voice, which reminds us of our own bodies as it pierces our body outlines, and carries affective forces of empathy, solidarity, or fear.

The discussion of visual rhetoric is evident in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, we see the capacity and desires of images to travel, change, and also act in transformative fashion. The ways in which an image adapts to particular media screens tells us a lot about the cultures where those screens structure daily communication processes. For instance, the way in which the cutting down of the cross in Kiev was remediated by Russia Today illustrated the assemblage nature of censorship technology. This idea of image censorship is taken up in more detail during the discussion of Femen's Facebook accounts in Chapter 3. These discussions of images point to the affective potentials of visual rhetoric that activist groups such as Femen may deploy effectively even when they are being censored and blocked. The insatiable desire of images to travel across vast terrains can be further explored by studying them within their own assemblages of sounds, texts, links, likes, comments, shares, remediations, and transformations. In other words, to isolate and privilege an image to study the "iconic" image outside of the flows and networks of the images (and many other things) is to view the world askew and to

miss rhetorical force.

The discussion of sound adds to the overall multimedia perspective of the dissertation and conceptualizes the phonetic forces of activism in Chapter 4. The capacity of a sound recording to carry the ideas of bodily presence, witnessing, fear, and solidarity shows its undiminished role even in this predominantly visual culture that we live in. With the developments of new media technologies, our senses extend from seeing and hearing to touching, smelling, tasting, and everything in-between. The challenge and incentive for poststructuralist media scholars, such as me, becomes a task of conceptualizing, detailing, and demonstrating the ways in which multiple media coalesce and intensify senses in the realms of a multisensorium. As McLuhan, Innis, Ong, and others suggest, different media favor and intensify different senses and ratios of the senses: “Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act the way we perceive the world. When these ratios change, men change” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 41). In our era of smartphones and social media, panmediation reigns wherein all media interact in a constant and complicated dance of relations. Though difficult, scholars need to tune into and trace the shifting relations of panmediation.

Feminine Ways of Conceptualizing

Multisensorial Future

With media devices becoming more and more interactive and smart, humans are being reterritorialized into new technologized assemblages, which cross corporeal, gender, spatial, and temporal barriers. The transgressive nature of new media

technologies attracts and awards transgressive actors such as Femen. Social media platforms empower activists to cross temporal and corporeal barriers and create a sense of presence within virtual realms, thereby weakening the need for physical actions. The location of Femen activism is simultaneously an actual physical place where cameras and smart phones record their actions, but also the virtual, digital space, where humans gather around them to protest, support, censor, or praise them.

Activist groups, such as Femen, no longer need to spend hours barricading streets or being on hunger strikes days on end. All they need is a few minutes of recorded scandalous, controversial action that will provoke media networks. These new networks are not based on any presupposed origins; they are evolving and emerging immanently.

Media and Implicit Femininity

The implicit qualities of digital media, such as interconnectedness, fluidity, multiplicity, and spreadability that run through the chapters of this dissertation, are also widely discussed in utopian cyberfeminist texts that stem from Luce Irigaray's conception of the female "Sex That Is Not One." Even though Irigaray's arguments stem from essential biological differences between women and men, her writing proves highly subversive and transformative. In a way, Irigaray, similarly to Deleuze, is trying to open up new spaces, coin new concepts, and invent new ways of thinking and becoming. She considers female sex to be beyond one, beyond phallogocentrism, which has been the main structuring grid of writing and thinking about communication. According to her, a woman's communication is plural, sensuous, contradictory, incoherent, and constantly touching upon itself. Irigaray(1985) writes that women's language is similar to a dot that

starts in one place and then moves in a nonlinear fashion, creating a circle-like shape, returning to itself, and then starting over, thus making her movement similar to remediation of an assemblage or actors in Latourian actor-network theory. The strong essentialist strand in Irigaray's theory does conflict with the beyond-identity-politics focus of Latour and Deleuze, but it provides a useful detailing of the differences that are important to both poststructuralist thinkers.

Sadie Plant (1997) forwards this argument of feminine sensuality and interconnectivity in the media studies. She argues that "touch is the sense of multi-media," which opposes scopophilic patriarchal economy by (re)assembling, multiplying, proliferating, and replicating its connections (p. 271). Borrowing from McLuhan, Plant (1997) argues that the 'integral sense' (p. 77) of multimedia makes the medium the message by putting itself and all the others in touch. In this tactile, contiguous loop, it is no longer possible to distinguish a subject from an object, an addressee from an addresser, etc. It is a different economy where "the movement from inside to outside, from outside to inside, knows no limits. It is without end. These are exchanges that no mark, no mouth can ever stop. ... Always in movement, this openness is neither spent nor sated" (Irigaray, p. 210).

This free movement described by Irigaray echoes the rhizome: "There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10). Such a rhizomatic movement is also nomadic, as it travels by the way of differences, networks/assemblages.

Posthuman Femme

The process of activist network formation is an unfolding actuality of multiple visible and invisible elements and their shifting linkages. Powered by the Internet and the processes of mediatization, Femen does not appear as a group of female activists, but an assemblage of human and nonhuman elements creating intricate, affective linkages beyond physical human bodies and minds. The digital realm of Femen is similar to what Plant (1997) describes in her radical cyberfeminist book *Zeroes and Ones*:

It is now for those who thought themselves so soulful who are having to adjust to a reality in which there is no soul, no spirit, no mind, no central system of command in bodies and brains which are not, as a consequence, reduced to a soulless mechanistic device, but instead hum with complexities and speeds way beyond their own comprehension. This is not a brain opposed to the body. This brain is body, extending even to the fingertips, through all the thinking, pulsing, fluctuating, chemistries, and virtually interconnected with the matters of other bodies, clothes, keyboards, traffic flows, city streets, data streams. (Plant, pp. 166-167)

Without those human and nonhuman connections, there would be no movement of Femen. For Femen, the way of becoming and persevering is obtained by way of encountering camera lenses, social media networks, a wandering eye of someone seeing Femen images, an algorithm marking its content as relevant, etc.

The decentralized interconnection of the visible and invisible elements of Femen or any other group would not be possible without the Internet matrix. Interestingly, the word “matrix” in its etymology is already marked by feminine connotations of womb and mother in Latin and early English. Claudia Springer associates cyberspace with feminine connotations of matrix as a place of “metaphoric escape into the comforting security of our mother’s womb” (306). Such tracing of the etymology of words associated with the Internet is not to help build a homogenized view of the Internet, but to argue for its

feminine qualities. It is obvious that the Internet, as Judy Wajcman (2004) notes, is not an inherently feminine domain, but increasingly starts to bear the signs of femininity. This feminine desire is not that of Femen activists only, but amalgamations of images, networks, users' interaction, and the desires that derive from such amalgamations.

Interconnectedness enables Femen to be a version of Braidotti's (1994) nomadic subject that is "dissolving 'woman' into the forces that structure her. The ultimate aim is to achieve not a sex-specific identity but rather the dissolution of identity into an impersonal, multiple, machine-like subject" (p. 116). To free women from explicit and implicit subjugated positions, Braidotti (2011) suggests that:

Transformation can only be achieved through de-essentialized embodiment or strategically re-essentialized embodiment: by working through the multilayered structures of one's embodied self. Like the gradual peeling off of old skins, the achievement of change has to be earned by careful working through; it is the metabolic consumption of the old that can engender the new. (p. 171)

For Femen, peeling off the multilayered structures happened quite literally when they took off their pink activist clothes to get people to pay attention to their causes in Ukraine. Their peeling off of their clothes revealed a new, "sextremist" way of female activism that strategically re-essentialized their bodies to provoke patriarchal system into the discussion hidden, unspoken injustices relating to women. With the slogan "My Body Is My Weapon!" Femen aims to strip the female body of objectifying sexualization, religious moralization, and patriarchal ethics.

Given that the feminine qualities of digital networks continue to power activist groups such as Femen, there will come a day when objectifying sexualization will be peeled off women's bare breasts and reveal a newer way of thinking, becoming, and fighting. And perhaps this newer way of becoming will have to do even more with the

development of artificially intelligent technologies and our attunement with those which will create new ways of seeing and utilizing posthuman bodies.

Femen is not the first or the last when it comes to activism, digital technologies, and femininity. There are growing numbers of female web users, activists, artists, and also “feminized” Internet “things,” ranging from female voice-activated digital assistants to house-management systems. Feminine qualities of interconnectivity, nonlinearity, spreadability, and intuition weave fabrics of everyday mediatizations and activism. Studying those qualities in action through the Femen case studies reveals the instability of human subjects, suturing them within the circuits of mutual transformations between technologies and other mediatized humans. In the loops of mutual transformation between human, nonhuman, and posthuman actors, it is possible to see the processes of reciprocal reshaping between various technologies and sexualities that affect our daily lives and bring about social change.

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