

St(r)uck by Feminism: The Implications of Engaging a Text of Resistance

TARA EVE SCHWITZMAN
Teachers College, Columbia University

BUT, I ALSO WONDER AT THE PATH THROUGH THE THEORY. The introduction seems to order the theories, proposing perhaps that each is expanding that which came before. While there is reiteration and articulation across sections, there is also distinction, a new way of seeing/experiencing, that most attempt to produce.

—Education Professor, *Comments on an earlier draft of this paper, 2017*

I first identified as a feminist long before I identified as a scholar. Yet, for both, my relationship is simultaneously significant and tentative. I wish to be a feminist to the extent that my politics do not marginalize those outside the consideration of the second wave. I wish to be a scholar to the extent that my work somehow remains both humble and accessible to those outside the academy.

When I came across this image in a New York City subway car, I started to understand the interconnectedness between my two identities:



“‘This oppresses women’ sticker” on subway advertisement. Gray, E. (2015).

Of course, I had many questions. Which women are oppressed? Models? Models for plastic surgery? Women who have had plastic surgery? Women who want plastic surgery? Women in the subway car looking at the advertisement? All women? What about women who are plastic surgeons? What about me? Am I being oppressed right now? What exactly, in this image, is oppressing women?

I am less interested, however, in concretely answering these questions and more interested in tracing the path(s) through which these questions were/are mapped. I look at the image as a woman who is able to look—who has physical access to the sight of the image and cognitive, affective, imaginative access to the multiple discourses it potentially evokes. I look at the image as a scholar trained to unravel an image with my eyes, to expose its supposed core(s). Certainly, a lot has happened in the two years that I have been looking at this image. The election of Donald Trump, for one, makes any feminist project feel both more necessary than ever, yet also completely useless. An inquiry into why I obsess over this image fills me with guilt—the same guilt I felt as Hillary Clinton was espoused as a feminist icon for a unified sisterhood that will never exist as long as the United States is simultaneously plagued by white supremacy and patriarchy.

This guilt, however, has not stopped this image from haunting my graduate studies, in which I have been exposed to multiple ways of unraveling images/ideas. Even seemingly unrelated ways of seeing/reading somehow find their way into my thinking about this image. I start wondering about this image when I probably should be thinking about something else—like my dissertation. For whatever (non)reason, this image has provided some anchor as I have wrestled through various other texts throughout my experience as a graduate student.

In this paper, I explore my affective experiences of being st(r)uck by this image—not only as a subway passenger, but also as a graduate student. I am simultaneously struck by the potential it offers for thinking about feminism and capitalism and stuck because I cannot help but wonder to what extent my affects and ways of seeing/reading the image are bound by the tasks and desires of a graduate student, such as writing a final paper for a course or trying to get published in a journal. My goal, then, is to explore a possible avenue for understanding the impact of graduate studies on reading images/cultural texts by integrating my graduate school experiences into the multiple ways of seeing, reading, understanding, and feeling this image.

I hope to respond to the comment included at the outset of this paper and depart, to the extent that I can, from the path of theory that produces something “new.” Instead, I hope my reflective stance interrupts the (new) ways in which I read images/cultural texts. I start by defining the image and offering a conventional, surface reading of it. I then use exemplary methods (MacLure, 2010) to read the implications this image has for feminist theory and use feminist non-representational geography (Colls, 2011) to map how the space of graduate school—intentionally, defined vaguely—collided with the space of the subway and allowed certain thoughts and feelings to stick to my reading of the image. To echo this feminist reliance on theory and affect, I use quotes by women authors to provide both pause between sections and examples of texts that collided with my reading of the image. In this paper, I ultimately reflect on why I have tied together the strands of my inquiry through nomadic (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) conceptualizations of: (Woman) subjectivity, space (of the subway and of graduate school), and desire (of the image and of academic articles). I wonder to what extent (some) discourses of anti-capitalist resistance make possible and sustain particular social relations that continue to oppress women.

Conceptualizing the Surface

On the surface, the act of placing the sticker on this advertisement looks like an act of (second wave) feminist resistance. The advertisement implies that having bigger breasts, which are available for purchase from this (man) doctor, will make (all) women happy. (I use parentheses here to signify that the normalized assumption that doctors are men is oppressive in a patriarchal society and to wonder if the sticker would have been placed if the doctor in this particular advertisement were a woman.) By calling this image oppressive, the sticker brings attention to a fundamental claim of feminism that women are oppressed by men in a patriarchal, capitalist society. Interestingly, the sticker was first used in 1969, at the height of second wave feminism. This movement emphasized “androgyny” (Evans, 1995, p.13) or “absence of differences” (p.14) between women and between women and men. This historicizing of the sticker suggests that whoever placed it might still believe in a “certain universality of and commonality among women” (p.18) and that all women feel oppressed by the (assumed) commodification of breasts. Recognizing this surface reading as one of a potential many, I include it here as a way of looking that prompted my deeper gaze and visual analysis.

Theoretical/Methodological Framing of the Stare

Rose (2012) reminds us that there are many sites and aspects from which to theorize the effects of an image. In this work, I theorize from the site of the audience and the aspect of the social, or “the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used” (p.20). I do this because my affective st(r)uckness would not have happened without the sticker, a part of the image contributed by an audience member. Similarly, I believe this audience member was responding to the advertisement’s social modality, or cultural production. As the “social is [...] the most important modality for understanding the audiencing of images” (p.31), I am interested in the “ways of seeing” (p.31) this sticker imposes on the advertisement.

In this deeper look, or stare, of the image, I use exemplary methods (MacLure, 2010) and feminist non-representational geography (Colls, 2011) to map the theory and similar affects produced by the image in the spaces of the subway and graduate school. In my surface reading, the image evoked particular understandings of both feminism and the woman subject. To explore the multiple ideas of my deeper look and provoke a multiplicity of alternative understandings beyond the ones I “present” in this work, I lean on “exemplary practices, in which theory proliferates” (MacLure, 2010, p.277) from this discursive and material example. As described earlier, this image is discursive, given that placing these stickers is part of a larger (second wave feminist) movement. In my position—specifically as a white, privileged, nondisabled, cisgender, heterosexual woman who has had plastic surgery—the image is also a material, embodied example—a “single instance that nevertheless ‘stands for’ other instances” (p.281) of a type of oppression on the (female) body.

To echo MacLure (2010), “[...] the value of theory lies in its power to get in the way: to offend and interrupt” (p.277). While the image itself may not “have” any power—a debatable idea I explore later in this work—the theory and knowledge that is produced from it might offend and interrupt the knowledges that provoked someone to place the sticker on the advertisement. Importantly, I believe this theoretical mapping is integral to exploring the intersection between sexism and capitalism, as “both [feminism and Marxism] also see the development of theory as a means of achieving such progressive change rather than as an end in itself” (Bryson, 2004, p.13). Further, I engage with the theoretical proliferations from this example as “hybrid assemblages” (MacLure, 2010, p.279) that are not neat, linear stages but instead follow a loose “logic of ramification” (Bal, 1999, as cited in MacLure, 2010, p.279) that remain open. Exemplary practices, then, might allow the engagement of theories that are not typically read together. I intentionally tear “concepts [...] from their ‘usual connections’ in other disciplines [...] [to] open [them] to new connections” (Massumi, 2002, pp. 18-19, as cited in MacLure, 2010, p.282). I also consider how my affective experiences (with theory) in graduate school have influenced the theory I see/read as proliferating from this example.

Given the “*affective* component (in the Deleuzian sense)” (MacLure, 2010, p.282) of engaging with an example, the theoretical connections on which I focus come about through a feminist non-representational mapping of the spaces of the New York City subway and graduate school. I engage the image with a critical feminist nomadic stance that “negotiate[s] between unconscious structures of desire and conscious political choices” (Braidotti, 2011a, p.38) and map this negotiation to emphasize its dependence on the interconnected spaces of a New York City subway car and graduate school. I understand this mapping as fluid and unsettled, touching on not only the politics of visibility but also on the “politics of [the] imperceptible” (Grosz, 2005, as cited in Colls, 2011, p.441).

“[T]he woman question’ is always reduced to some other question, instead of being seen as the question, calling for analysis on its own terms” (MacKinnon, 1989, p.12).

Attempting to open a “proliferation of connections” (MacLure, 2010, p.282) regarding subjectivity, I read the subjectivity of the image using conflicting understandings of desire—in the Deleuzian sense as “positive and productive” (Ross, 2010, p.65) and in the negative sense that undergirds capitalism as wanting what we lack. In doing this, I work to forefront both the theoretical affordances of “Woman” in understanding subjectivity and the materiality of women

in thinking about ways of resisting sexism and capitalism. It is also my attempt to wrestle with the dissonance of simultaneously studying and using these competing ideas in graduate school.

I read the woman in the advertisement as a metaphor for Woman—not a member of a constituted, coherent, group (Mohanty, 2006/2003), but a “sexually differentiated subject as the provisional coming together of a range of forces that are material, affectual, temporal, social, political, economic, technological, and so on” (Colls, 2011, p.430). Woman offers a “possibility in ambiguity” (Beauvoir as cited in May & Ferri, 2005, p.121) and (Deleuzian) monism in thinking about subjectivity. Difference is “deconstruct[ed] and re-orient[ed]” (Colls, 2011, p.432) such that it is “not grounded in anything else” (Stagoll, 2010, p.75). Put another way, nomadism works to liberate difference from its relationship to sameness so that no subject exists in the center. Rather, we are all nomads wandering along the margins of subjectivity, never settling into a particular discourse and instead remaining open and split along multiple axes of identity and becoming (Braidotti, 2002, 2011a, 2011b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Braidotti privileges Woman and sexual difference in theorizing subjectivity on the claim that sexuality is the main source of power (and oppression) in the West (Braidotti, 2002, 2011a, 2011b). Before the placement of the sticker, the woman in the advertisement is not directly labeled as a woman, hence this is why “she” might evoke Woman, or nomadic monism. Breast augmentation makes her more sexually differentiated, or that through which nomadic theory conceptualizes proliferations of difference, power, and desire.

I also read the woman in the image as a metaphor for images themselves. Or put differently, I see an “image *of* [a] wom[a]n” that is an “image *as* [a] wom[a]n” (Mitchell, 2005, p.35). Mitchell (2005) writes that the “default gender of images is feminine” (p.34) while also stating: “. . . it may be time to . . . scale down the rhetoric of the ‘power of images’” (p.33), as they do not seem to produce any “visible effect on . . . political culture” (p.33). Interestingly, Mitchell was writing before images, or screenshots, of Donald Trump’s tweets flooded (social) media; however, his argument might still make sense. Does writing about these tweets actually *do* anything to change the current political culture in the United States?

Mitchell’s understanding of images seems to be rooted in dualistic assumptions of subjectivity and power. The power of images is relative to the power of non-images. Further, femininity, rather than sexuality, takes away the power of an image. Put differently, the sticker imposes some type of desire for women’s liberation through an assumption of what she lacks—autonomy over (feminine, aesthetic interpretations of) her breasts. It might be the sticker, then, that feminizes both the woman in the advertisement and the image, rather than “her”/its “default” gender, especially considering that a “default” as it relates to gender might be impossible to define.

The sticker represents the “desire [of] the beholder” (p.44) to resist sexism. The desire of the image itself is “not disclos[ed]” (p.44). As an emerging, reading scholar, I find Mitchell’s overall questions on the power of images and texts significant; however, he seems to liken women to images, or powerless objects, when he talks about desire: “The question of what pictures want, then, is inseparable from what women want” (p.35). Furthermore, he invokes the negative, deficit understanding of desire—we want what we lack—that feeds capitalism. Mitchell’s work in thinking about images themselves is rooted in problematizing capitalism, yet he does not seem to problematize sexism. When equating women to objects via femininity, he does not consider the sexist objectification of women under capitalism and the ways in which capitalism is embedded in patriarchy.

Significantly, the sticker does not define “this” or explain what—patriarchy or capitalism—is oppressing women. Many anti-capitalist movements insufficiently consider

feminism as a necessary component, rendering sexism a secondary struggle to class struggle (Bryson, 2004; MacKinnon, 1989) while ignoring the embeddedness of social (re)production in economic production (Leonard & Fraser, 2016). Similarly, many feminist movements inadequately consider the ways in which the privileges of some women are constructed via the marginalization of other women, ignoring the embeddedness of economic production in social (re)production. The sticker seems to reinforce this separatism, as it does not explicitly denounce the unidirectional assumption that patriarchy is a *consequence* of capitalism, which implies that dismantling the latter will dismantle the former. Patriarchy, however, is “[not] a ‘system’ in the same sense as capitalism, for it does not have [its] equivalent of the drive to profit. [Thus,] oppression is not a *necessary* feature of male-female relationships in the same way that exploitation is for capitalism” (Bryson, 2004, p.18).

Socialism, then, is understood by many feminists as a precondition for (cis) gender equality (Bryson, 2004; Leonard & Fraser, 2016), but it is no guarantee. [I use (cis) as a reminder of the potential consequences of invoking a stable “woman” category, as the sticker might imply, in feminist issues.] How does feminism, then, understand subjectivity in relation to socialism? Woman as the monistic, sexually differentiated subject, in which (bodily) difference is not in relation to anything else, might also be a precondition for dismantling both patriarchy and capitalism. For if socialism is enacted under dualistic assumptions of (feminine) subjectivity and power, “male domination. . . would not automatically disappear” (Bryson, 2004, p.21).

I cannot help but interrupt my reading and wonder, however, if nomadic theory proliferates from this example, because at the time I saw the image on the subway, I was engulfed in Braidotti’s text, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. I ended up taking a course with Braidotti and wrote a different analysis of this image that relied almost entirely on nomadic theory. Reading her positive remarks on that paper provoked feelings [shaped by the power differential between (famous feminist) professor and student] of ‘success.’ Still, perhaps these happy affects are why I cannot let go of this image. I am not sure if it is the image in which I am affectively invested, the theory, or some combination of both. I wonder, then, if my investments in theory lead me to consider nomadism relevant to this image, or if it really can provide insight into the dualism that prevents the reconciliation of feminism and Marxism.

“[Poststructural theory] is unable to make itself transparent or remove itself from the field from its own operations so that reality might speak for itself” (MacLure, 2010, p.280).

Perhaps because I cannot let go of reading nomadic theory into the image, I feel compelled to use Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conception of space as both striated and smooth—as a constellation of both the material and the affective. Here I work through the ways in which the constellation of the subway car is similar to the constellation of graduate school, thus invoking similar affects sticking to the image. I show how the image politicizes these spaces as well as how the spaces politicize the image.

The “rigid striations” (Lagermann, 2014, p.578), or material compositions, of the subway car and graduate school feel very similar to me. In both spaces, I sometimes feel confined. In the subway car, the metal poles, hard seats, curved roof, and sliding doors that remain closed except at the station confine me under the streets of New York City. In graduate school, the partitioned desks in the library, the long narrow corridors, the lack of natural light throughout the building,

and few places to take a break from studying similarly confine me (to the pressure of always being a good graduate student) within the ivory tower.

These similar striations of the subway car and graduate school make possible a common affect of silence and separation in both spaces. On the subway, travelers talk to whom they know and usually take the seat or stand in the spot farthest away from anyone else upon entering the train. Even when multiple bodies are packed into a single car at rush hour—a condition that is becoming worse as the subway system continues to deteriorate (Fitzsimmons, Fessenden, & Lai, 2017)—the space is often quiet, and travelers are still affectively separated from one another. Importantly, while the subway can also be read as a space of tension and messiness—for example, with people asking for money and/or dancers moving through the car—there are appropriate ways to respond that reinforce these instances when the space changes as interruptions of this common affect, such as quietly giving the person money without spending too much time looking in his/her/their eyes. In graduate school, students spread themselves out in common areas and hide among piles of books. Even when multiple bodies are packed into the library, the space is often still and isolating. Similarly, there are appropriate ways to respond to moments of tension and messiness—such as confusion with a theory or negative feedback on a paper—that are bound by the power differentials between faculty and students and the “institutional machinery of schooling” (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014, p.23).

The striated space(s) and the affects it produces bind (for me) the ways in which the image is received on the subway/in graduate school. Receiving the image is bound by the time of the passenger’s commute/that the student has to analyze it and the passenger’s position within the car/the theoretical and analytical lenses available to the student. It is also bound by the material conditions—the presence of physical barriers and/or visual impairment.—of the passenger’s or student’s ability to see. A smooth “line of flight” (Woodward, 2007, p.68, as cited in Lagermann, 2014, p.578) that is made possible by the striated spaces—the similar material and affectual boundaries—is thinking about the unsettled discourses of capitalism and resistance that characterize (academic) life in New York City. Relating to my earlier surface reading of the image that embedded it in a certain type of stable, second wave feminist, anti-capitalist resistance, I move to conceptualize these smooth spaces as a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) that both contests and (re)produces the competing, unsettled discourses of capitalism and resistance that characterize both New York City and academia.

The ways in which I see the image are embedded in what Soja (1989) would call the “socio-spatial dialectic,” in which “social relations are simultaneously and conflictually space-forming and space-contingent” (p.126). Put differently, the social relations above ground in New York City and in academia make possible the smooth space of the subway car and graduate school. In both spaces, the social relations (that affect how the image is received) are complicated by a “politics of capitalism” (Harvey, 2012, p.5), (neo)liberalism, and resistance through the practice of “commoning” (p.73) a social space.

Deemed the “most unequal metropolis in America” (Elliot, 2013), the social relations of New York City have become the “center for the invention of neoliberal practices” (Harvey, 2012, p.32). The “socio-spatial control” (Soja, 1996, p.272) of New York City operates from a “politics of capitalism” (Harvey, 2012, p.5) that attempts to tame the beast of consumption— a “singularity,” a “common mode of life” that is “chaotic, unpredictable, and uncontrollable” (Harvey, 2012, p.36), the “great nomad” (Braidotti, 2011b, p.26) that mutates in a way that our desires are simultaneously and never fulfilled by creating a constant cycle of supply and demand that is undergirded by a (negative, nonproductive) desire to obtain something we lack.

Harvey argues that (neo)liberal, “economic processes in which cultural production is embedded” (Rose, 2012, p.24) affect how the image is received. He continues that “contemporary capitalism. . . [compresses] and [collapses] time and space” (p.24) and has become increasingly flexible to accommodate “the increased mobility of capital and information” (p.24). Importantly, the qualities of the mobilization of images are, for him, “ephemeral, fluid, fleeting, and superficial” (p.24). Similarly, for me, the image collapses the separated, striated spaces of the subway and graduate school in a way that allows me to see a parallel between the mobilization of images, of academic articles, and of similar “social and/or political identities” (p.25).

Academia is not immune to this politics of capitalism. The worth of an academic is measured by quantity of publications/products, or the number of times the name of the author and university are cited. The life of the graduate student can also feel chaotic, with an emphasis on producing work that leads to a degree or credential, while being paid very little. The graduate student is constantly looking to secure more gigs, unable to dwell in projects for too long for fear of being “unproductive.”

In both New York City and the academy, (neo)liberalism mystifies the inequality that results from the perpetuation of capitalism, permitting many New Yorkers and scholars to espouse liberal, open-minded, and ‘woke’ identities without attention to the ways in which they are implicated in and perpetuate larger systems of inequality. People in these spaces talk about social justice and inclusivity as strong stances they take. Yet, the isolation and stratification of the “successful” people/students/academics from the “unsuccessful” indicates that New York City and academia are neither immune from, nor outside of, the politics of capitalism (and maybe by a non-secondary extension, the politics of sexism). In both spaces, a person’s wealth/success is contingent upon another’s failure. If everyone could “make it,” these spaces would lose their prestige. New York City and the academy are therefore highly invested and dependent on these politics that create and maintain problems to be solved. For example, if the “achievement gap” between students of different races were closed, then one less area of scholarship would exist from which academics could further their own careers.

In their stance of inclusivity, both New York City and the academy may be perceived as some type of “commons” (Harvey, 2012). For instance, Mayor Bill de Blasio’s affirmation of New York City as a sanctuary city after the 2016 presidential election assumes a shared, unified vision of the city as belonging equally to everyone. Within a politics of capitalism, however, the commons becomes appropriated and commodified through abstract, leftist demands for “‘local autonomy,’” (p.71) which Harvey (2012) conceptualizes as “a demand for some kind of enclosure” (p.71). De Blasio’s claim that, “We’re going to defend all of our people [...] regardless of their immigration status” (as cited in Robbins, 2017) does little to counter the ways in which marginalized groups have been enclosed in necessary positions of defenselessness that maintain white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, such as excluding people with criminal records—who are disproportionately Black and Brown—across employment, education, and housing (Alexander, 2010).

The subway car and graduate school become “contradictory, [...] contested” (Harvey, 2012, p.71), “unstable and malleable” (p.75), and “under assault. . . through commodification and enclosure” (p.72). Motivated by one set of “feminist” values, the person who placed the sticker on the advertisement in the image similarly closed off the smooth space of the subway by assuming stable categories of “woman” identities and that women who have plastic surgery on their breasts are oppressed. If resisting and naming the commodification of breasts as oppressive is supposed to liberate women from this politics of capitalism, how this liberation is supposed to happen

remains “vague” (p.81). Similarly, academia might provide vague responses to societal problems that practitioners find ambiguous and frustrating.

The person placing the sticker was “objectify[ing] the world by setting themselves apart, [...] creating a gap, a distance, a space” (Soja, 1989, p.132) from the capitalist machine that produced this individual advertisement. The sticker alone, however, does not necessarily leave room to consider the ways in which the person placing it contributes to society’s aesthetic preference for certain breasts—such as wearing clothes that accentuate breasts, wearing bras that push them up, and/or any other practice that draws attention to “nice tits.” In other words, simply naming something oppressive does not distance one from engaging in an oppressive act. Similarly, writing about social justice topics as an academic does not create a (theoretical) space between the author and the problem that absolves them of a responsibility to act outside the task of writing, especially if their writing remains inaccessible to the people who ‘need’ to read it.. Capitalism, then, might be deeply embedded in common spaces of resistance, such as New York City and academia, that have developed identities for speaking out against the oppression of marginalized groups.

In understanding the striations and smoothness of a space as influencing the ways in which the image politicizes/becomes political, another space influences how I read the image. After the comment included at the outset of this paper, my professor also asked me, “Why not a feminist critique of capitalism? Why the turn toward male theorists who are critiqued by their feminist peers?” The response that made the most sense at the time I read her question was, “Because I haven’t had a chance to read any feminist critiques of capitalism in graduate school.” Reading Harvey and Soja in the space of her course as a graduate student had mapped a certain understanding and critique of capitalism onto a radical postmodern feminist understanding of the subject (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b). It was as if the idea of a feminist critique of capitalism became unavailable to me as I was trying to meet the final paper’s course requirements. I further wonder what other questions are closed off through acts of analysis that are bound to institutions of schooling and demands for producing academic work. Yet, the way she posed her question allowed some type of affect to stick. In focusing not just on the content of the sticker but also “the way in which [the] critique is deployed and what [it] does” (Colls, 2011, p.432), I felt her suggestion was integral to reading the image/text.

“[S]ince no woman is unaffected by whatever creates and destroys women as such, no woman is without stake in women’s situation” (MacKinnon, 1989, p.38).

Keeping in mind how my experiences (with theory) in graduate school are not separate from my experiences living in New York City, I engage in a visual analysis of the image. I work to relate this analysis to the possibilities and limitations of feminist, anti-capitalist resistance in the spaces of New York City and academia.

Only the model’s face and the fruit are available for the audience’s gaze in the advertisement. The white tank top and angle of the camera make it hard to tell her own breast size. Her hair is pulled back. She wears minimal make-up except around her eyes, possibly emphasizing the primacy of vision in constructing a subject. Similarly, the ideology of youth is emphasized through the fruit. Fruit represents sweetness and ripening. Breast augmentation is supposed to make her look both younger and sweeter, two traits that make her more sexually desirable/different (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b) and perhaps more feminine (Mitchell, 2005).

Tuan (1984) writes that one way to play with plants is to uproot them and move them to a new and alien setting. The fruits that replace the model's breasts have been uprooted from their normative or expected visual context of a garden—the oldest example of a heterotopia, or “counter-site”/“enacted utopia” that “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault, 1984, p.3)—and moved to the advertisement. By association with the fruit, the breasts in the image are associated with objects of play. The alien setting in which she is becoming this object is (the) New York City (subway).

Fruit, however, dies. She cannot stay young and sweet forever—although the image of her can, as well as the images of the fruit. Mitchell (2005)'s work—which seems to primarily influence my reading of the sticker—implies that subjectivity is something granted by humans (and humanity). If subjectivity is a human endeavor and oppression is a dualistic experience between (human) subjects, then the sticker does not seem to be able to imply that the actual image/advertisement *itself* is oppressing anyone.

The sticker attempts to confine the spatio-temporal configuration of the advertisement, even though the image has the potential to ‘live’ beyond current discourses of resistance and capitalism, especially given the “increasing mobility of images now” (Rose, 2012, p.32). This particular image is not only mobile because it is on a subway. It is mobile because the sticker is part of an entire movement that labels particular images oppressive. It is also mobile because someone can take a photo of the image, as I did, and move it somewhere else (like this paper). Rose (2012) writes that, in audiencing, viewers “develop other meanings by producing their own materials—visual and in other media—from what they see” (p.33). It would be remiss of me not to mention that this work I am writing is a form of audiencing, in that I am creating new academic media that (re)produce “different social practices that structure the viewing of [the] image” (p.31).

If the advertisement itself cannot or does not oppress anyone, then what does the image—both the advertisement and the sticker—want? Is there a way to ask what this image—which might simultaneously evoke monistic Woman and women as oppressed subjects under dualism—wants with a Deleuzian, nomadic understanding of desire? Perhaps, then, Mitchell's dichotomy between visual and political cultures will be blurred, rendering images (part of the) political.

As Mitchell is not even sure if images can want anything, then I might invoke Deleuze and Guattari to think about desire as something productive and ask: what does this image *do*? Or rather, as Mitchell might ask, what *can* this image do? And how are the ways in which I ask this question bounded by my experiences as a graduate student, who has affective investments in believing that reading texts and images are of the utmost importance?

There are two stickers placed on the advertisement. One is placed over the price. The price of oppression, then, is not determined, but remains ambiguous. Perhaps the sticker implies that oppression can come at any price, or minimally at the price one pays to ride the subway and become exposed to the advertisement. Ironically, the sticker does not cover the part of the advertisement that has information about a “free consultation.” Like the silencing of class in feminist debates and of sexism in class debates, I wonder if the sticker silences the position of class in the context of breast augmentation. Not covering the “free” part might allow the claim that it is not oppressive to walk into a doctor's office and get a consultation about how your breast size can become more sexualized and/or more feminine. But some women cannot afford breast augmentation, restricting their access to cultural capital as woman, sexual difference, and/or femininity. Some might argue that restricting access to capital is oppressive. The less access there is to (cultural) capital, the more valuable it is. Thus, having more capital as a (feminized,

sexualized) woman comes at the price of oppressing other women—not via plastic surgery, but by making plastic surgery a restricted commodity.

If the woman in the advertisement invokes the nomadic theorization of difference, it is interesting to note that there is no sticker that covers her or her breasts. In fact, it might be that the fruit is protecting her breasts and providing a barrier from the sticker. Thus, it might not be this Western understanding of sexual difference that the person who placed the sticker finds oppressive. Rather, the sticker is placed between the two images of the same model, labeling the change in her appearance oppressive. Interestingly, her material breasts are likely the same size under the fruit. What changes is her facial expression. She has a smile in the second picture. Is becoming happier (as a woman) oppressive? Perhaps requiring her to smile is oppressive. Ahmed (2007) reminds us that if a marginalized person does not “show a sign of being happy” then he/she/they are “seen as. . .the origin of bad feeling” (p.127), despite the possibility that happiness maintains oppressive social norms. The viewer does not know how much money the model is making from the advertisement, nor does placing the sticker seem to consider that it was the model’s *choice* to be in the advertisement. (While Marx might argue that under capitalism no one has choices, I still evoke the concept to trouble how assumptions of agency are differentiated by gender and sex.) Similarly, in some professions—such as modeling—larger breasts might produce increased monetary capital. Furthermore, if this image in fact does stop women from having plastic surgery—something the sticker suggests is necessary for the dismantling of patriarchy—this might take (monetary) capital away from women who are plastic surgeons, thereby oppressing them.

Braidotti (2011a) writes that the public space (of the subway) is a “site of creativity. . . , a paradox. . .loaded with significance and profoundly anonymous.” To the traveler, the person who placed the sticker is anonymous and subsequently now a part of the space of the car. The traveler is simultaneously “No-where/Now-here” (p.49)—in no place on the aboveground map of the city and now in a subway car looking at the image. Through the silence and separation, the traveler receives the image through his/her/their interpretations of what it means to resist oppression and capitalism in New York City.

Braidotti and Mitchell might come together in thinking about the (productive) desire of the image. Mitchell (2005) writes that “pictures may not necessarily want to be demystified or granted subjectivity” (p.48). Similarly, Braidotti (2011a) writes that “one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over” (p.254). Who has control over this image after the anonymous audience member who places the sticker is no longer there? To what extent is this control embedded in neoliberal commodifications of resistance? And is this control something the image actually wants, given the susceptibility to the oppression of subjects under capitalism?

I further cannot help but wonder if this reading of Braidotti and Mitchell can be applied to academic work itself, at least in the form of an article. Part of my guilty affect in doing this work stems from questioning whether the image actually means/does something and furthermore whether writing an article about it means/does something. Is an article about this image a manifestation of my own desire to contribute to society what I think it lacks? How does academic work become feminized, and is this feminization of academic work related to how much power it has in society? Does the image want me to write an academic article about it? Academic articles might also be commodities that grant one more monetary capital via opening job opportunities and social capital via claiming to resist the social order. Perhaps academic articles similarly do not want to be granted subjectivity. How is my writing this article not similarly putting some type of sticker over this image?

“[P]ractices of resistance are always tied to larger processes of capital and commodification and formed within spaces of contradiction that make easy evaluations of their success or failure nearly impossible” (Cox, 2015, p.230).

Engaging in this non-representational, feminist mapping has allowed me to explore the ways in which my understandings of feminism stick to the complementary and competing connections between subjectivity, space, desire, and anti-capitalist resistance both in New York City and in graduate school. I also worked to emphasize the possibility and limitations of these connections as perpetuated by a graduate student’s “incitement to discourse” (Pillow, 2004, p.175, as cited in Erevelles, 2011, p.2166)—the urge to apply whatever one is studying to reading cultural images/texts. I imply through my analysis that it is the sticker that strips women of (nomadic) subjectivity and renders the image oppressive and that the advertisement by itself cannot satisfy claims and experiences of oppression. The question for me as an audience member, then, is what is my response when looking at the advertisement without the sticker?

I look at the advertisement without the lens of a graduate student, to the extent that this lens can be displaced somewhere else. The advertisement alone evokes affects of objectification and violation. There is part of me that is relieved to see the stickers. Part of that relief may be due to my isolation in the subway car, a space in which I am already vulnerable because I am alone. And maybe part of that is due to affective investments in feminism that somehow seem removed from graduate studies, investments that have less to do with understanding entire systems of oppression. I wonder, then, if the questions I detailed at the beginning of this paper have more to do with the motivations of the audience member who placed the sticker.

I wonder if the audience member was a woman, and if so, what kind of woman was she? Fighting for ‘women’s rights,’ she might now be able to claim labels, like ‘socially conscious,’ that end up promoting herself and silencing women who may not find breast augmentation oppressive or women who do not have access to the discussion on the consequences of this plastic surgery. I wonder if the audience member was a man, invoking paternal discourses of caretaking. I wonder if the audience member who placed the sticker considered transgender women, in which top surgery is an integral part of transitioning and not (simply) an aesthetic, sexualized and/or feminized commodity.

I wonder how the subjectivity of the audience member influences the subjectivity of the image and the extent to which the image poses as a type of fictitious social capital. Harvey (2012) describes “fictitious capital” as a “fetish construct” (p.39), in which we invest money we do not have in people and places who will never see it. Perhaps the image is fictitious social capital that does not really ‘change’ anything, but instead sustains activism as a prop in the capitalist machine. The person who placed the sticker only has the memories of doing and will likely never see the same image and how/if it changes the space of the subway, given the giant metropolis that is New York City. The more one ‘resists’ the more social capital one has in left, elite circles that might have more access to jobs that make monetary capital. Or perhaps images will always be fictitious social capital, as Mitchell (2005) reminds us: “Pictures are a popular political antagonist because one can take a tough stand on them, and yet, at the end of the day, everything remains pretty much the same” (p.33).

Or is the academic article, the response, fictitious social capital? Ahmed (2012) writes, “We can get stuck in institutions by being stuck to a category” (p.4). Perhaps in the academy we get stuck to the ‘resistor’ identity in a way that perpetuates actions that wear the mask of ‘activism.’

And if it was this image that helped me unpack that, then perhaps it will help me become ‘unstuck’ in ways I never thought possible and effect change in tumultuous political times.

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