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Queer Disconnections: Affect, Break, and Delay in Digital Connectivity

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ABSTRACT

In this article, my intent is to theorise the intricate relation between technology and affect by considering questions of digital vulnerability – of disconnections, breaks, and delays – as a way of rethinking our affective attachments to digital devices. By extension, I also connect this argument with a framework of queer theory, as an opportunity to think differently about relations through questions of technological ruptures and deferrals. My baseline for this endeavour is the idea of the break as formative for how we can both sense and make sense of digital connectivity, in so far as the break has the potential to bring forth what constant connectivity means, and how it feels. Similarly, the break can potentially make tangible relational norms around continuous, coherent, and linear ways of relating and connecting, and thus provide alternative models for ways of being with digital devices, networks, and each other. If constant connectivity provides us with a relational norm of sorts, then disconnection could function as a queer orientation device with the potential of creating openings for other ways of coming together, and other ways of staying together.

KEYWORDS

Affect theory; digital connectivity; disconnection; Spinoza, queer relationality

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Digital connectivity produces a relational geography in which we are constantly – while at the same time never completely, or securely – reachable. In this article, my intent is to theorise the intricate relation between technology and affect by considering questions of digital vulnerability – of disconnections, breaks, and delays – as a way of rethinking our affective attachments to digital devices and networks. By extension, I also wish to connect this argument with a framework of queer theory, as an opportunity to think differently about relations through questions of technological ruptures and deferrals. In particular, queer theorists have paid close attention to the queer potentials of “the break” in terms of refusal and failure, but without carefully considering the technological qualities of such failures. My bassline for this endeavour is the idea of the break as formative for how we can both sense and make sense of digital connectivity, in so far as the break has the potential to bring forth what constant connectivity means, and how it feels. Similarly, the break can potentially make tangible relational norms around continuous, coherent, and linear ways of relating and connecting, and thus provide alternative models for ways of being with digital devices, networks, and each other. If constant connectivity provides us with a relational norm of sorts, then disconnection could function as a queer orientation device with the potential of creating openings for other ways of coming together, and other ways of staying together.

The argument will be fleshed out in three parts. Firstly, as a theoretical point of departure for understanding how affective intensity entangles bodies, networks, and digital devices, I introduce a Deleuzian and feminist reading of Spinoza on affect (cf. Sundén “Corporeal Anachronisms”). In particular, I focus on how Spinoza differentiates between “sad” and “joyful” encounters, as a way of understanding differences in affective power and pace that seem crucial to digital affectivity. Secondly, I consider how relations and relational ruptures have been theorised within queer theory in terms of a movement and a tension between relational and antirelational understandings of queer lives. Finally, I further the discussion of disconnection in digital media, as a way of critiquing the norm of constant connectivity, and as an attempt to contribute to queer theory a more decidedly technological take on the idea of alternative or queer connectedness. I focus, in particular, on the intense layering of anxiety and anticipation within networked connectivity, and how a break may feel different from a delay, or a postponement.

While seemingly building on the binary connection/disconnection, the article plays off of queer (as a verb) to trouble such simplistic divisions every step of the way. The first stepping stone is an understanding of how disconnection forms an intimate part of connection and connectivity in ways that considerably shifts the relations and boundaries of these terms. I build on Sara Ahmed’s work to soften and challenge the Spinozian binary between joyful and sad, as well as on the work of Laurent Berlant to critique the relational/anti-relational divide in queer theory. I show how joy and sadness, anticipation and anxiety intermingle in digital connectivity in ways that make them bleed and blend into each other. I also discuss forms of non-binary break-ups in terms of glitch, a breakup which is not necessarily a break with a

relational line, or the end, but more of a reorientation. I end with an invitation of sorts to queer collaborative world making, by opening up for a different relational vocabulary that would include notions of broken relations that are still relations, or relations that take the shape of a postponement and a future promise. Digital disconnections here come to function as the backbone of a queer, non-normative, or anti-normative relational logic, one with a different kind of flexibility compared to the idea of uninterrupted relationality and connectedness.

From sad to joyful and in-between

There is a particularly salient affective tendency within digital connectivity, one that intensely interlinks anxiety and anticipation. Such affective entanglements are played out differently on different social media platforms and applications, mainly due to variations in how they reveal and conceal the presence of users. For example, iMessage has the possibility of “read” receipts, unless these have been disabled, whereas Snapchat and Instagram tell the user who has watched their stories or videos (but with Instagram only if someone has “liked” the video). A particularly interesting example in terms of a fairly intense interplay between anxiety and anticipation is the construction of the Facebook Messenger application. I may see “her” logging on for a moment, marked as connected (the green light is on), but perhaps without responding to my message, and then only to immediately slip out of sight, breaking the connection. The traces left behind of this transitory connectedness are unambiguous: “Active XX minutes ago” (or hours, never days). Messenger not only indicates that someone is typing, but in fact, as David Auerbach points out in an article in *Slate*, “goes one [step] further and tells you whether or not your friend has *seen* your last message, letting you know exactly when you can start worrying about why she hasn’t responded to you yet.” If you were not worried before she saw your message, now is the time! This is a kind of worry that may make your heart race, along with your imagination. But it is also a worry that comes with its own pleasure or forms of enjoyment. In other words, the openness of the not yet may not only be tied to anxious knots in the stomach, but also to a particular sense of hope and anticipation in the direction of a near future yet to unfold.

To conceptualize such anxious yet joyous modes of connecting and relating, as well as how affect moves between and entangles bodies and technologies, Spinoza is an interesting place to start. As Gilles Deleuze shows, Spinoza’s philosophy is vitally concerned with bodily relationality in ways that involve human bodies, but also body parts, nonhuman animals, and inanimate objects (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 127). This very uncertainty of bodies and boundaries opens up possibilities of exploring the affective relations and the in-betweens of bodies and networks, subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans. It opens up for an understanding of the digital as something that has the potential to affect and mobilise bodies, and to variously move them and put them in motion.

In particular, I take inspiration from how Spinoza speaks of differences in affective power and pace as either “sad” or “joyful” encounters. Bodies in

Spinoza are understood as vibrant relations, which involves ideas of the body in movement and as movement, as well as its capacity to affect and be affected. Affect, in turn, is understood as a body's continuous variation, transition, or passage as either an increase or decrease in the power of acting. The Spinozian understanding of affective bodily relationality is grounded in the realm of physics (in an attempt to capture the laws of bodily encounters, as harmonious or conflicting). Then again, as Deleuze argues, Spinozian physics is interestingly entangled with questions of power to the extent that affects are variations in power of acting (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy* 257). The question of power in Spinoza, of what a body can do, is thus intimately related to a body's capacity of being affected.

The affective capacities of bodies depend on whether an affect threatens the body, weakens its power, or if it strengthens, expands, and amplifies it. Spinoza speaks of these differences in relational power as either "sad" or "joyful." A joyful encounter would be one in which my body encounters another body (individual or collective, human or nonhuman) that resonates with mine, my power of acting amplified or intensified through compositions of new relationships, new bodies. A sad encounter, on the other hand, would be one in which the other body does not resonate with mine, combining with my parts in ways that diminishes my power, decreasing or preventing my power of acting. In a less than evident transition from physics to ethical practice, there is a striving in Spinoza of individuals to increase their power of acting, expressed as an effort to accumulate joy and avoid sadness. The ethics at play here is an ethics of joy – of becoming joyful – which entails a movement from encounters dominated by sadness to those in which sadness, somehow, is overpowered.

In a feminist reading of Spinoza, this very distinction between joyful and sad is both critical and productively unclear. Or, as Sara Ahmed argues in relation to what she thinks of as a weak legacy of Spinoza in affect theory, "Capacities are not simply about the joy of opening things up. Capacities also make some things possible at the expense of others." (*The Promise of Happiness* 245). Following Ahmed, there is the possibility of using Spinoza in ways that do not separate as clearly between joy and sadness, but rather build on a more unstable mixing of affects and intensities that trouble the emphasis on this binary. For quite obviously, there could also be sadness, or less than joyful affects in opening things up, or in opening some things up and not others, in ways that intermingle the joyful and the sad in unpredictable ways. There is also the ever-present possibility of taking pleasure, or gaining strength through sadness, and conversely being saddened by feelings of joy, to for example feel sad about the reasons for or the source of one's joy. Such shuttling between sadness and joy – and the degrees of feeling in-between or at the same time – is consistently foregrounded within digital connectivity; as an unpredictable echo that vibrates through networks and bodies, reminiscent of how Alexander Cho offers "reverb" as a temporal metaphor for understanding force, intensity, and the flow of affect in online settings.

Queer ways of connecting and relating

One way of grasping how the disconnect in digital connectivity shapes ways of sensing and relating is through the mobile phone, a device often close at hand and close to the heart. A mobile phone is more than a medium or a facilitator of (human) connections, it is also a vibrant part in such connectivity, its technological peculiarities actively shaping our affective fabric. Connections are broken and signals are lost in ways that make cell phone reception perpetually volatile. Such technological sensitivity makes our digital devices much less object like, or perhaps more to the point, it demands an approach to digital affectivity which seriously considers the technological (see also Hillis, Paasonen and Petit). For if our relational technologies are fractured and unreliable, what does this do to how we feel and think about the relations “themselves?”

Compared to the affective tendencies of Messenger, regular SMS may have a greater sense of calm, but also less obvious involvement in ways that raise questions when the response is absent. Is she not messaging me back because the battery is out? The device is switched off, or set on silence with no vibration, or even left behind? Or is it because she simply does not want to, or wants me to wait? “I ran out of battery” points at the impossibility of distinguishing the technological from the affective, since we can never know for sure that the battery was out. To be running out of battery (“I am now at 4 %”) is also to be running out of time, approaching the threshold when the connection most definitely will break. What in one instance can be a power game may in the next be flipped toward feelings of powerlessness, as the power of the device, literally, is running out. SMS, with its relative boundedness to a single device, becomes more vulnerable to such power breaks than multi-platform applications (like Messenger) and their capacity to operate across devices: phones, computers, tablets, watches... Such multiplicity may make for a different kind of anxiety, and one that is more diffuse and spread out, since there is no way of telling on which platform your message will land.

This volatility of digital connectivity – how the break in terms of a pause or a deferral lives in every connection – could be productively put to use to question relational norms and expectations around linear and uninterrupted ways of being together. Relations and relational ruptures have been theorised quite intensely within queer theory, as alternative modes of relating, connecting, and resisting the pressure on queer subjects to conform to particular forms of linear relationality: through assimilation, marriage, reproductive sexuality, and family-making. Queer relations have been discussed by Jack Halberstam and Renate Lorenz in terms of alternative temporal forms, which by investing in present tense intensity disrupt heteronormative linearity. For Halberstam, queer temporality becomes an embrace of the present, of nocturnal desires and “inappropriate” or “irresponsible” ways of living that are at odds with dominant ideas of intergenerational stability and a re/productive capitalist logic. Queer relationality has also been approached as alternative modes of orientation and deviation from straight lines of direction, as a form of breaking with or

bending the straightening devices of heterosexuality (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*).

While having in common an interest in the critical potential of queerness (as well as in the critical potential of the break with norms and normativity), ways of theorising the relational in queer theory tend to be rather polarised. Initiated by Leo Bersani in *Homos*, and further propelled by Lee Edelman, the antirelational (or antisocial) trajectory invests in particular forms of present tense intensity and negativity. To Bersani, oppression is not only something that structures society, but in a more fundamental sense something which constitutes the social. In his view, there is no subversive potential in queer relations, as these are already forged by hetero-normal assimilatory forces (Bersani 171). Departing from this fundamental turning away from the social, which could also be read as a turning away from, or breaking with particular ways of becoming joyful, Edelman uses in *No Future* a similar argument by focusing on a turning away from the figure of the child as the heteronormative promise of the future. He argues for a firm refusal of such futurism, and in its place for an embrace of queer negativity. Antirelationality, then, is quite literally a negation of social relations, a matter of turning away from, or breaking (up) with the social. Such a fundamental break, here, becomes the only trajectory for queer relations.

In response to this embrace of anti-relationality and queer negativity, José Muñoz argues instead for “anti-antirelationality,” as a more critically hopeful queer position, one which turns to the queer pasts in order to rethink the present order. In his *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz approaches relationality as intimately connected to futurity and hope, arguing compellingly for the “not yet” of queerness. Queerness to Muñoz is not a rejection or a negation of the future, but something that strives to rework the present and its straightening mechanisms by insisting on the potentiality for other ways of living, other lives, and other worlds. This is a considerably more joyful way of sensing and making sense of queer potentialities, while at the same time living with and moving through the significant sadness of the straightening forces of assimilation. Sara Ahmed finds perhaps more hope in Edelman’s negativity, but similarly insists on how hope anticipates a future to come as “a thoughtful way of being directed toward the future, or a way of creating the very thought of the future as going some way.” (*The Promise of Happiness* 181-181). For who has the privilege of saying “no” to the future? To Muñoz, “the antirelational in queer studies was the gay white man’s last stand.” (“Thinking beyond Antirelationality” 825). In contrast to the gay white man who has the privilege of breaking with relations and connectedness, Muñoz insists on the importance of collectivity and community for understanding queerness and of a queer of colour critique.

An in-between possibility of thinking queer relations and sociality in a more explicitly affective vein can be found in the work of Lauren Berlant. To Berlant, relationality becomes more of a rhythm of the social, a manner of thinking ways of being in the world in terms of affective relationality. For example, in an interview (together with Michael Hardt) with Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, she discusses how the rhythm of the social may have everything to do with one’s habits of managing the rise and fall, or the

increase and decrease of affective intensity. Furthermore, in *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Berlant's dialogical book with Lee Edelman, they explore relationality as a rather risky affective business which entangles our fears of loss and rupture – the presence of negativity – with our hopes for repair and a momentary solace that reduces the anxiety of the intrinsic break in relation. Within such unstable affective relations of sadness and joy, which simultaneously compose and de-compose bodies in their relations, the outcome is always less than certain. But while Edelman insists on the presence of negativity and rupture in every act or practice of repair, a decomposition of bodies and relations, Berlant is perhaps more cautious to fully align the inherent break in relation with the negative. She discusses, for example, how we may find relief in detachment, or even in dissociation, in ways that foster new affective rhythms.

I read Berlant as a way of making possible a form of disintegration which is not necessarily aligned with sadness, but rather figures as the underbelly of joy. It forms a possibility of finding liberation in the disconnect as a momentary breathing space, even as a way of becoming joyful. In this sense, there is a possible opening toward a reframing of ruptures in (queer) relations, not necessarily as forms of negativity, but rather in ways that may acknowledge the formative qualities of relational breaks. To this, I would also add that the break or the disconnect is not only fundamentally social, it is also fundamentally technological. It simply makes no sense to approach affective relationality, or the rhythm of the social, without thinking such affects and rhythms in a register which brings together bodies and networks, human subjects and technological objects. The pace of our digital devices blends with the rhythms of our bodies, as a speeding up, or a slowing down, of how our bodies compose with those of others, fostering new rhythms and relations.

The power of the delay

In her groundbreaking *The Telephone Book*, Avital Ronell notes that the logic of the call relies on the question of answerability, “You picking it up means the call has come through.” (Ronell 2). What happens, then, if you do not pick up? The disconnect in the shape of bad reception (“I can't hear you right now”), or a device that simply has been switched off, makes possible a break with a relational script built on uninterrupted availability. This disconnect in answerability reads as a refusal to answer, to be (sexually) available, or to be held accountable. In the very absence of picking it up, of answering the call, there is instead the presence of an alternative, an elsewhere, a queer futurity perhaps to speak with Muñoz, an opening to a space built on a different relational logic. The broken line is in this sense a rather queer technology, and one that makes possible a relational rhythm that holds more flexibility and openness to independence and parallel lives. It makes possible something other than answerability and accountability, a kind of dis-charge or release. Then again, it could also be the case that this possibility is there merely for a moment, fleetingly, and then it is gone. For this freedom to move, to breath, to desire differently, remains conditioned by a relational technology rarely fully switched off. No matter how

deconstructed the positions of caller and receiver might be, as well as the acts of making and breaking connections, mobile devices are still relationally binding. Sooner or later you need to re-charge and re-connect.

Questions of power (as affective force or domination, but also as electricity) when it comes to connectivity and digital relatedness are tightly linked to technological delays and deferrals, in which we are kept or keep others hanging. Such dynamics, which tend to punctuate our intimate experiences of networked connectivity, could be thought of as something that moves swiftly between modes of connection and disconnection, as digital devices accentuate a rather slippy, or at least unreliable kind of attention. To connect may imply a form of prioritising, which builds on disconnecting from something else. Ronell points out how to answer (a phone call) not only implies that the call is indeed through, but that it also means that you give something up, that you are willing to answer to the one calling, willing to take an order. In order to form a connection with someone, or something, we need to turn our attention in a particular direction, which in turn entails a turning away from someone or something else. Then again, this way of thinking connection, as being formed by a re-orientation of one's attention, away from other connections (that are cut off), seems to rely on a fairly dichotomous understanding of connection and disconnection.

When moving from the seemingly binary relation between connection and disconnection that structures Ronell's phone call, to the more volatile terrain of digital connectivity, a shift in vocabulary is needed. If to connect necessitates a disconnect (elsewhere), how could we then conceptualise modes of divided attention that make possible several connections in parallel? Or more low-intensity frequencies of attention mixed with distraction? How could we make sense of a multiplicity of simultaneous connections that do not demand our full attention, but nonetheless make their marks? It could be a sexually charged message, vibrating through the phone during a staff meeting. It could be the ever-present buzz of social media, shifting between background and foreground, intimately threaded into the affective fabric of everyday life. To turn to something may mean turning away from something else, at the expense of something else. But it could also mean turning away partly, or turning toward merely momentarily, to then move on, in more fleeting forms of attention and connection. To Susanna Paasonen, in writing about those brief moments of attentiveness in social media economies of distraction, "rather than mutually opposing concepts, attention and distraction are better understood as variation in the intensities and zones of perception and experience" (Paasonen, "The value of distraction"). Distracted – or for my purposes *disrupted* – attention could, thus, be understood a form of attention itself, if yet slightly out of focus.

Affective tendencies of the disconnect

Disconnection is a form of connection, an absent presence which continues to be generative, no matter how low the frequency, or the activity. The signal simply cannot be switched off. A concrete example of this is how a social media platform like Facebook keeps track of the movements of its users (for

the sake of algorithmic capture), even when they are not actively using the platform. When speaking of a break in digital connectivity, this is not a break from or with technology. Even when seemingly turning away from technology, as in taking a break, or switching off the device, we are still affectively and technologically linked to our devices, to how they extend us, even in our seeming absence.

This difficulty of switching off the signal becomes particularly clear in studies of social media based on disconnection. While social media platforms are designed to foster connections, there are ways in which such connectivity can be resisted (while perhaps paradoxically being reinforced). In his study of how people navigate digital media with disconnection, Ben Light argues that there is power in disconnective practices like unfriending, untagging, back channeling, editing, hiding, and selective sharing. While such activities play the game of networked connectivity differently, they still play the game. In a slightly different vein, Tero Karppi uses disconnection as a framework to challenge the very principles of networked connectivity and Facebook user engagement through that which is often understood as problematic, or the opposite of connectedness and participation. While disconnection as a mode of turning away, or breaking up with the platform is “a mode of power, a political act, and a technical solution” (Karppi 27), Karppi simultaneously shows how such modes of taking a break from social media reveal the premises of the system. By disclosing the boundaries of connectivity, such actions contribute to – while also reconfiguring – cultures of connectivity.

When considering more fleeting forms of connection and disconnection, in relation to which we constantly fall in and out of contact with networks and others, it becomes clear that there are different types of disconnection, attached to different affective tendencies. The type of disconnection described by Karppi can be difficult to handle. Users who disengage and remove themselves from the platform perform a fairly decisive break with networked sociality. Facebook is not easy to quit technologically speaking, nor is it easy to be cut off from one’s social network and connections, which may make leaving feel like a social amputation of sorts.

In contrast, the kind of disconnect that keeps someone or something hanging in midair is quite different. It may not even feel like a break, but more of a void, or a pause. It could be a place or a moment for breathing more easily, by consisting of a temporary slowing down of the pace with which affective connections and relations are made. But it could as easily be a place for holding one’s breath, by sensing the suspense in the turning away of the other, by experiencing the gap as a delay, as a form of postponement. Such processes or acts of postponing build on a shuttling between anticipation and anxiety, a heightened kind of tension as technologies and relations glitch, or momentarily get stuck. Neta Alexander speaks similarly of a form of “perpetual anxiety” invoked and exposed by such connective stuckness. We may ache for that which we cannot have, or that which is yet to happen, or has the potential to happen, firmly held in the grip of networked suspense.

Affect is often approached in terms of movement and sensation, intensity and transition in which something becomes partly something else, joyfully, sadly, or in-between. But there is also a particular kind of intensity which has to do with halting or capture, with working against or preventing movement. In her exploration of anxiety and drive in affective networks, Jodi Dean argues that as the uses of networked media intensifies, so does the anxiety around these forms of communication. The more we open ourselves up to networks, the more there is to worry about. While lacking an obvious object (unlike fear, or phobia), Dean follows Jacques Lacan and his understanding of anxiety as a form of excess or surplus enjoyment: “Anxiety about networked media is, in this view, anxiety about enjoyment.” (Dean 89). Within such anxious modes of communicating, in which joy and sadness are intensely layered, it is not only problematic links, content, and contacts that are anxiety inducing. What interrupts joy, or heightens as sense of sadness, could also have to do with the absence of contact and connection; the failures to comment, like, and share, or the refusal to re-connect. In short, “In a world of code, gaps and omissions can become knots of anxiety” (Dean 91), while at the same time bringing a form of enjoyment. In a somewhat disorienting blend of anxiety, anticipation, and joy, ways of worrying paradoxically become ways to enjoy.

A different relational vocabulary?

Queer relations are rarely over, as in full stop, complete breakup or breakdown, because we still need to spatially co-exist, sometimes quite intimately. We hardly ever have the luxury of moving on in the sense of leaving something or someone fully behind. These are breakups that rather read as a form of glitch. A glitch breakup is a binary complication and something that disturbs understandings of relations as linear and uninterrupted. It similarly disturbs the idea of breakups as that which break the line, indefinitely. Glitch is the spinning wheel on the computer screen, the delay between a command given and its execution, the kind of technological anticipation that makes us not only hold our breath, or pull out our hair, and thus forces us to pay attention to how we are affectively linked with digital media technologies (cf. Sundén “On Trans-, Glitch, and Gender”). To Legacy Russell, glitch is also that which makes us pay attention to the materiality of our bodies in sexual terms, as our interlacing with the machine is momentarily interrupted:

The glitch is the digital orgasm, where the machine takes a sigh, a shudder, and with a jerk, spasms. These moments have been integrated into the rituals and routines of our own physical action, impacting how we interact with our own bodies, and how we explore our deepest fantasies and desires, spurred forth by these mechanized micro-seizures. The glitch is the catalyst, not the error. The glitch is the happy accident. (Russell “Digital Dualism”)

A glitch breakup is a passage or a period of profound disorientation and disconnection, to bodies and devices, and then often a moment of re-

orientation and re-connecting, if yet differently, as bodies, technologies, and affects are re-aligned. I am using “queer” as a way of noticing or getting hold of how the affective relationality and vulnerability of digital media makes and shapes bodies and relations. It becomes a way of exploring the links between technological fragility and the fragility of queer connectedness. But it would be equally viable to think about the difficulty in general to be uninterruptedly, or continuously connected and aligned. Regardless of your sexual inclination, it is becoming increasingly impossible to have “clean” breaks, taking into account the lingering of relational traces on social media platforms. Dealing with such traces can be exceedingly difficult, technologically as well as affectively.

Ideas and ideals of hetero-normality consist of an ever-present pull or push to conform to relational norms of constant and continuous connectivity. The idea of linear, uninterrupted monogamy, as epitomised by the marriage (and as the prescribed mode of overcoming sadness to obtain joy), is interestingly parallel with the idea of uninterrupted digital connectivity. To be always reachable, always connected, always available, always together. The relational expectation or ideal is a form of linear continuity, a model and a quality which is reinforced through digital connectivity. The question is, what happens to the line, or the link, or the heart, if the foundation of such linearity is laid bare? Once we conceptualise or otherwise sense how the break, or the possibility of a break, is that which makes the signal, something happens to how relations can be conceived, and how they might feel. Disconnection, as something that lives within every connection, as the backbone of connectivity, may help us rethink connectedness and relations on a fundamental affective level. Put differently, the vulnerability and disruptive quality of digital media can help us envision modes of being together in ways that challenge the norm of uninterrupted connectivity and relatedness. The break may not be the end, but a new beginning. The disconnect may not lessen, but intensify the connection, as well as open up for other connections, in parallel.

To rethink or queer relationality through digital logics, metaphors, and technologies, we need ideas of broken lines and lost connections. We may also need a relational vocabulary that includes ideas and concepts of disconnection and delay, without constantly somehow displacing such ideas beyond the limits of the relation itself. For what is the word for a disconnected connection? Or a relation which reads as a delay, which consists of a postponement or a promise of a potentially different continuation? Or a broken relation, which is still very much a relation? Is there even such a word? A disrelation? A nonrelation? It would seem like relationality and ideas of connectedness are very much caught up in a binary: either you relate, you have a connection, a relation, or there is a breakup (or a breakdown, for that matter), which ends it. Such ideas put immense pressure on relations to conform to fit the mould of continuous linearity. And more often than not, such efforts end in failure.

Disconnection as intensity

Nonrelationality has certainly been theorised within queer theory. Edelman addresses the “nonrelation” within relation, as something internal to relation, but at the same time and always as something other than relation; a void, a negative, a force which threatens to disrupt and destroy, something which composes the affective relationality of the social by decomposing it from within (“An Ethics”). My attempt in this article is, instead, to think of such disruptions and interruptions as having a different productivity to them. Disconnection is not something within yet alien in relation, but something productive of relationality and connectedness itself.

I wonder, thus, if it would make more sense to think of disconnection, disruption, and delay as part of what it means to connect, to relate, to depend in the first place. It may certainly be painful to move, together, while out of joint. But what other ways are there? Without a notion of something broken, something not functioning, something completely out of order in the midst of how we conceive of relations and connectedness, these connections would be not only unthinkable, but ultimately impossible. Thinking the disconnect or the delay as something deeply relational may have the potential to provide us with other modes of moving through the world, other ways of being together. A delay may not be a rejection, but a space for catching one’s breath, for sensing things more deeply, for re-charging the re-connect when it happens with a built-up intensity.

Take the three dancing dots – or the so called “typing awareness indicator” – which provides the Messenger application with a temporal visualisation of such charged digital connectivity. The indication of someone in real time opening up a conversation, or crafting a response, may well be the most salient incarnation of anxiety/anticipation in digital connectivity. The dots moving are a clear marker of the moment building up to the delivery, a form of intensity which may take many forms: a slap, a letdown, a disappointment, but equally possible an electric stroke through the heart, or through the body otherwise, while simultaneously producing a sense of calm in ending the waiting, if only momentarily. The choreography of the dancing dots is complex. They may start to dance, only to stop for a moment, then begin anew, then stop again, in what may feel like an eternal build-up and suspense. And the longer they dance, and not dance, the more the anxiety/anticipation rises (cf. Bennett; Crair). Or as Maryam Abolfazli (in writing for *Medium*) puts it, “The three dots shown while someone is drafting a message in iMessage are quite possibly the most important source of eternal hope and ultimate let down in our daily lives.” (Abolfazli). They show us that something is happening, but leave us to wonder, to fantasise about, to ache for what that might be.

Within the Spinozian micropolitical feminism of Moira Gatens, feminism has the power “to imagine alternative possible forms of sociability. This power of imagining things otherwise, in concert with the imaginings of compatible others, has the creative power to decompose and re-compose the social field, bit by bit, molecule by molecule.” (72). Within this article, I have used disconnection, disruption, and delay to perform such decompositions and re-

compositions, as a way of queering and resisting normative understandings of relations and digital connectivity alike. I have approached our affective investments and attachments to the digital by exploring what happens when there is something that interrupts the flow, something that cuts the connection (or gives me pause). I have explored the intense layering of sadness and joy, anxiety and anticipation within networked connectivity, and how a break feels different from a delay or a postponement. But without a break, or a disconnect, or a turning away as it were, there would be no way of connecting, of forming connections. In this sense, every connection carries the mark of a cut, it is based on that very cut. From this follows that it is only through the brokenness of the line or the link, or the brokenness of the heart, that connectivity and relatedness can be felt. The disconnect is what makes connectivity and relatedness real.

Importantly, disconnection also has the power to produce intensity. The disconnect is not only what makes the connection real, but simultaneously what affectively intensifies connectivity. The very volatility of digital connections, the unpredictable quality of links and encounters, tend to heighten the intensity of the connection when it happens. It is precisely this evanescent quality of the connect that makes it all the more precious, all the more significant, all the more charged.

In letting the argument come to an end, I would like to clarify how the technological and affective points of breakage, delay, and electricity discussed in this article form a contribution to affect theory. The discussion of affective relationality is quite densely steeped in a language of capacity, enhancement, and increase, as if intensity cannot be produced in any other way. Within Spinozian understandings of affect more specifically, there is variation in terms of a movement between joyful and sad, expressed as shifts in tempo, shifts in the capacity of acting, be it an increase or a decrease, a speeding up or a slowing down. But what seems to be missing is an acknowledgement of the affective qualities of the disconnect. In the Deleuzian affect theory of Brian Massumi, disconnection “is not just negative: it enables a different connectivity, a different difference, in parallel.” (Massumi 25). He is addressing disconnection as that which inserts itself between affect and signification, but only to reconnect the two within a different order of connectivity and embodiment, in parallel.

In a gentle translation of Massumi, this way of thinking disconnection as productive in ways that bring together things that are supposedly separate, could be used to approach disconnection as something which underpins connectivity and networked intensity. It is precisely in these in-between spaces of the disconnect that networked affect becomes particularly intense. The disconnect, rather than operating as a decrease, a dis-composition, or a cool down, is what essentially makes digital connectivity heat up and, with a burning sensation, circulate through bodies and networks.

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