City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

To conclude, this book offers an invaluable insight into the complex queer cultural production in contemporary China. Empirically rich and methodologically interesting, it demonstrates distinct types of gender and sexual subjectivities unique to post-socialist China.

Sam Wong (iD)
University College Roosevelt, The Netherlands; University of Liverpool, UK

ORCID iD

Sam Wong (iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5001-0288

Reference

Bao H (2018) *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China.* Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

The Internet has historically been both feminism's friend and foe. From cyberfeminism, technofeminism and hashtag activism to networked feminism and xenofeminism, online feminists seem to agree that the digital realm offers new possibilities as well as familiar oppressions. *Glitch Feminism* presents a new negotiation of the two, but sides with Rosi Braidotti's (2001) call for the cultivation of joy and affirmation in cyberfeminism and Donna Haraway's (1991: 181) desire for 'a monstrous world without gender'. Building on cyberfeminism, queer studies and afrofuturist theory, and using artistic practice and creative production as an anchor, Legacy Russell argues for a new feminism of the digital that centralises queer and non-white voices and through this disrupts hierarchical power relations. 'We are the most fantastic and beautiful mistake', she writes. 'Never meant to survive, we are still here: an error in the algorithm' (p. 147). *Glitch Feminism* is a manifesto that seeks to embody the material of a decolonised, art historical text intended to empower artists to speak for themselves.

The book is organised in 12 chapters, each describing a characteristic of *Glitch Feminism*. Chapter 5, titled 'Glitch is error', for example, explains how Russell aims to repurpose and reimagine the option of malfunctioning, refusal and nonperformance. She sees glitching as a site of potential, resistance and, ultimately, a creative strategy through which queer, trans and nonbinary communities of colour can find meaningful forms of liberation online. Through this, *Glitch* is conceptualised as a political framework, offering an elastic term to describe a revolt against the status quo, which is explored through the creativity featured throughout the text. In unpacking such artistic practices, Russell illustrates the different applications of what a glitch can do, not only within a digital space or the landscape of a cyberculture but also out in the world. Each artist is deployed as a creative architect, generating new frameworks online, stretching the idea of the body to its limits, returning to the immaterial and celebrating its abstraction as a political tool.

Russell argues that it no longer makes sense to differentiate between the digital and analogue world in terms of realness, a concept which feels particularly pertinent within the contemporary times of COVID-19. The online world, according to the author, is as relevant as the offline world. They shape each other. Building on the work of Nathan Jurgenson, Russell refers to 'AFK' ('Away From Keyboard') instead of 'IRL' ('In Real Life') throughout her manifesto. Emphasising the continuity between digital and physical worlds, and critiquing 'the fetishization of "real life"' (p. 43), she gesticulates thoughts around digital play and self-actualization. Starting in her early years online and ending in the present, Russell explores how the Internet provided her a site of experimentation to explore a true self: stretching the limits of her 'Blackness, queerness and femmeness in ways that were not possible away from the keyboard' (p. 15).

In chapter 11, 'Glitch is remix', Russell proposes using technological tools to rearrange and add to what she calls 'the original recording' (p. 133). In terms of gender disruption, remix as a technique, or as Russell calls it: a tool for survival, allows for a less fixed and binary practice of world-building. This notion is especially integral to the artists Russell profiles in *Glitch Feminism*, most of whom are trans, non-binary, Black and/or queer. Through their work, these artists demonstrate how glitching through remixing can offer liberatory potentials to build new corporealities: 'despite the supremacy of the original recording, still, we rise' (p. 96). An example Russell uses to exhibit this is contemporary artist Tabita Rezaire, whose practice centres around challenging the legacy of colonisation and patriarchy through healing, activism, art and film. Focussing on Rezaire's (2015) video work, *Afro Cyber Resistance*, Russell shows how the artist challenges the representation of the African body and the ways in which the Western Internet has historically filtered the contributions of Black people:

> Black people have been protesting and imagining different ways – their own ways – of existing on the Internet. If we must still use the Internet, how can we use it in a way that is uplifting and inspiring for the communities affected by the Internet's racism? Afro Cyber Resistance is a pamphlet and a call for the decolonisation of the Internet. (King, 2018)

Tabitha Rezaire is one of the many artists whose work explores Blackness, being and resistance through networked virtual life that Russell features in the book. Another is contemporary artist, American Artist, and their algorithmic performance to legally change their name to American Artist in 2013. Through this use of search engine optimisation, and by appearing in Google search alongside the likes of Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock and Jeff Koons, American Artist works to challenge the racial bias within art history and claim space for the Black artists who have long been excluded.

This hijacking of the capitalist nature of online platforms, and how these seek to co-opt, sensationalise and profit from people of colour, female and queer bodies, is but one side of the story. Russell laments the endless lists of options in terms of gender and sexual identity offered by social media platforms to signal their inclusivity. These are examples of the harms done by neoliberalism, Russell argues. She convincingly shows how these platforms profess inclusivity in order to create more categorizations data capitalism can capitalise on. She urges readers to not cooperate with these practices, but make our

bodies strategically illegible instead – have our bodies be a text, a hyperlink, constantly moving, refusing definition and defying language. 'Forcing the failure of words, we become impossible. Impossible, we cannot be named. *What is a body without a name?* An error' (p. 75). *Glitch Feminism* aims to abolish capitalism by blocking it – by embodying an error.

Perhaps most relevant in the current moment is the chapter 'Glitch is virus'. Here, Russell re-envisions and embraces computer viruses as activist tools that cost capitalism: 'a computer virus is a threat to the function of the machine and its economy' (p. 111). By its breaking of expectations, and sometimes the computer or its functions itself, computer viruses deliver us 'into the time and space of brokenness' (p. 112). This can generate emancipatory potentialities: 'the presence of a virus prompts an awakening' (p. 82). The virus offers glitch feminists a vehicle for resistance, a tool to 'break the machinic gears of gender', 'to infect' and 'corrupt ordinary data' (p. 83). On page 116, near the end of the book, Russell argues 'the glitch is a tool, it is a socio-cultural malware'. *Glitch Feminism* offers a powerful manifesto filled with Otherness that refuses to renew the norm or acknowledge its validity. It wants us to embrace a more daring, creative and utopian feminism. It is a call to arms to start creating the world we want to inhabit instead of staying stuck in the one we received and asks us to ponder on this: how would that world look?

Glitch Feminism puts forward an updated and nuanced analysis of the radical potential of the Internet. Looking back on the more visible iterations of cyberfeminism, and taking writers such as Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant and cyberfeminist artist collective *VNS Matrix* as examples, the lineages are overwhelmingly white. *Glitch Feminism* highlights how the techno-utopian visions held by1990s cyberfeminists were indeed marred by their own exclusions: 'white women = producing white theory = producing white cyberspace' (p. 33). In contrast, by centring Blackness and queerness as communal identities, Russell aims to re-define 'the face of a movement, and amplify the visibility of historically othered bodies'. *Glitch Feminism* presents the online world as a complicated space, a space offering the capacity for both revolution and oppression, encompassing 'vastly different understandings of what utopia might look like' (p. 26).

Hannah Curran-Troop
City University of London, UK

Annelot Prins (iD)
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

ORCID iD

Annelot Prins (iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1686-0326

References

Braidotti R (2001) *Cyberfeminism with a Difference*. Rosi Braidotti Digital Publications. Available at: https://rosibraidotti.com/publications/cyberfeminism-with-a-difference/ (accessed 11 April 2021).

Haraway D (1991) A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the late twentieth century. In: Haraway D (ed.) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, pp.149–181.

King A (2018) Feel like a cyber slave? Meet Tabita Rezaire, Healer of Souls. Available at: https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/decolonising-the-internet-artist-tabita-rezaire/ (accessed 11 April 2021)

Rezaire T (2015) Afro cyber resistance. Available at: https://vimeo.com/114353901 (accessed 10 April 2021).