

Digi-Spaces and Newcomer Youth Encounters:
Considerations for Place|Making in Educational Spaces

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Secondary Education
University of Alberta

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Abstract

In order to consider the conditions upon which education is currently situated, a period of socio-political uncertainty and technological re-‘tool’ing, re-structuring, and self-world-machine-other acclimatizing, this research considers the question: *Where and how might youth, in particular Newcomer/Immigrant (N|I) youth, develop counter-responses in the digital and offline spaces they transverse, both alone and in connection with others?* The following study employs a philosophy of desire alongside the schizoanalytic ontology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987) to contemplate the impacts that the social digi-spaces of TikTok can have upon a N|I subjectivity. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, this project maps how the online works upon a N|I youth body to code, modify, consume, and block their subjective desires and, in doing so, aims to find potential spaces of rupture whereby creation might occur. In other words, by thinking through, and *with*, youth desiring-production in online spaces, this study interrogates how these spaces constitute a N|I subjectivity so as to experiment with the conditions for a “minoritarian becoming” online. A minoritarian becoming is one that works against the representational or standardized spaces of the digi-sphere (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986). In the process of observing and mapping (i.e., exposing and analyzing), there is the potential for avenues of “singularization” (i.e., rupture) to emerge from within the vehicles of subjectivity formation (e.g., external influences of capital or media) to produce new and creative expressions or enunciations (Guattari, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008).

This research is inspired by a form of posthuman ethics influenced by new materialist media theory that displaces the centrality of the human and, instead, analyzes agency astride an array of interconnected forces (i.e., affects), beings, or online material spaces (Clough, 2016; Deleuze, 1990/1995; Eaton, 2016; Mazzei, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). The collection of research data is based upon the exploration and analyses of public digi-spaces using virtual online ethnographic techniques and methods (e.g., passive observation of postings, likes) as inspired by netnography (Fenton & Proctor, 2019; Kozinets, 2015) in order to: i) conduct an overall analysis of online social spaces, in particular, TikTok; ii) observe and collect examples of youth enunciations online (e.g., posts, comments, images); and, iii) conduct a focused case desire analysis on TikTok as a social media space in connection with N|I youth. By interfacing the aforementioned approaches with the emergent data findings, this dissertation seeks to better understand how N|I youth are using digital spaces to construct potentially new on and offline subjectivity expressions for themselves and others. In following this process, I aim to develop a public pedagogy and digital media literacy that opens upon the questions of how N|I youth are negotiating the complex terrain of social media. By way of observation, exploration, and engagement, there is a potential for a *becoming-with* or *becoming-other* (a yet-to-be-determined potential) to emerge in connection with N|I youth as digital subjects online (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1992/2006; jagodzinski, 2014; Hickey-Moody, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Keywords: newcomer and immigrant youth, digital media literacy, schizoanalysis and desire ontology, public pedagogy

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Adriana Maria Boffa. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “DIGI-SPACES AND NEWCOMER YOUTH ENCOUNTERS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLACE|MAKING IN ON AND OFFLINE SPACES,” Pro00102184, July 24, 2020. Renewed on July 6, 2021.

The following forthcoming chapter is to be published as a result of this study before defence:

Boffa, A. (2022). Transversing digi-spaces and newcomer youth encounters: Considering a minoritarian politics online, In Jessie L. Beier & Jan Jagodzinski (Eds.), *Ahuman pedagogy: Multidisciplinary perspectives for education in the Anthropocene*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Dedication

This is a love letter

to my past, present, and yet to come.

A mis queridos padres,

Amanda and Antonio

who are my greatest loves, inspirations, and supporters.

Acknowledgments

I am at a loss to adequately express the tremendous gratitude that I feel towards my academic advisors and mentors Dr. Jason J. Wallin and Dr. Jan Jagodzinski. Both of your scholarship and teaching are what provoked my *thinking with* philosophy, new media, culture, education, and youth *differently*. Thank you for your mentorship, patience, and guidance throughout the many phases of my work. I would also like to recognize and appreciate the important contribution of Dr. Marc Higgins. Your mentorship as a researcher, academic, and educator have pushed me to become a stronger writer and researcher. Thank you to Drs. Jake Burdick, Dia Da Costa, Olenka Bilash, and Norma Nocente all of whom have directly contributed their time and feedback towards this dissertation. Their perspectives have not only provoked new modes of thinking my own work, but of existing with self and others. In addition, a special thank you to Dr. Dwayne Donald, whose research, teachings, and collaborations have influenced my work immensely and contributed to my own learning, growth, and thinking throughout my graduate school years as an educator and being a better human in this world.

I must also gratefully acknowledge the entire staff and faculty of the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for your generous financial support of my research. To the incredible content creators, mentioned herein, that inspired a genuine *learning* and *healing with* as I connected with their content and ideas, thank you.

I would also like to express appreciation for all those who helped and supported me on this seemingly endless journey in so many ways. To Drs. Monica Chahal and Mandy Krahn, thank you for encouraging me onto this path, your bright lights shone the way. Thank you to my

wonderful friend and colleague, Dr. Cathryn van Kessel. As a woman and mother in academia, you are an inspiration to me. To the incredible friends and all-around amazing humans that graduate school has introduced me to, PhPeeps represent! Special mention to Dr. Adriana Oniță, Dr. Ellen Watson, Dr. jessie beier, Nick Jacobs, Kim Edmondson, and Trish Jagger you all have soul and music-fed, motivated, focused, energized, supported, and grounded me in a multitude of ways. To all my dear friends, near and far, who believed in me, supported me, and recognized that I had a story to tell, thank you: Special thanks to Andrea Kendall, Annissa Brodie, Dave Scott, Darcie Johnson, Mitchell Rowe, Rochelle J. Loewen, and Ron Wigglesworth.

My deepest gratitude goes to my loudest cheer team, my amazing children—Antonio and Amanda—you have put up with my moods, long writing days|daze, mounds of books, and relentless research/media talks. To my loving Gizzy who kept me company throughout this journey. To my sister, Dr. Jody Boffa-Xala, thank you for listening, advising, and loving me through the toughest years of my life with compassion and understanding. I am grateful to my encompassing support system and family from across Canada and the globe that have supported me through this journey: Ernie, Joe, and David Boffa, Boffa Mvelase Xala family, familias Parker y Sanchez (Michelle y Juan, gracias), y mi familia Vergara y Merino en Chile.

A deep abiding love and gratitude *a mis queridos padres*—Rolando y Adriana—who have supported me with an endless supply of love and sustenance when I was too busy to do it for myself. As educators, political activists, music teacher, and journalist you were the ones that helped to form my thinking and being in this world from an early age. It was your love of learning and teaching that inspired me to go into education. I am grateful for all that you have given me in life and what you continue to bring to my life and that of my children.

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Digi-Spaces and Newcomer Youth Encounters:

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“The emphasis is no longer placed on Being . . . it is placed on the manner of being”

(Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 109).

Humans are collectively *sensing* and experiencing a shift in their “manner of being” upon this planet (Guattari, 1992/2006). With the proliferation of COVID-19 and the entrenchment of pandemic life around the globe, it would seem that the technological and online world has taken a further leap towards establishing itself as a way of being, rather than existing as a mere technological tool. Even though the digi-sphere is often conceptualized as a liberatory and democratized space defined by flexible or permeable borders, interactivity, and user-friendliness, the online world is nevertheless a space controlled and standardized through specific means and ends. Determining forces that act upon digital bodies are especially felt by those who are marginalized, racialized, ethnicized, and/or minoritized within the communities or spaces with which they connect. This is especially the case for newcomer and immigrant (N|I) youth¹ who engage with online and social media spaces consistently. While these digital spaces and platforms may simultaneously provide a sense of community and connectivity with the world, both digital and offline, they concurrently standardize images of who or what they ought to be, what they might want, where they might be, and what they ought to do as individuals and online users. That is, N|I youth², as digital subjects, are being continuously affected and

¹ Youth, in this document, are young adults online from the perceived ages of 18 to 25~. The approximation (~) is necessary since age is not always explicitly given. Also, it is difficult to gauge age online due to many factors—e.g., audio and visual filters and purposeful misrepresentations in their ‘Bios’, to name a few.

² And youth in general.

impacted³ by the imperceptible yet very real and intensive flows of influence or *desires* that dynamically act upon a body in the spaces they navigate (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). Given this situation, the major pedagogical question that comes to mind is: *Where and how might youth, in particular N|I youth, develop counter-responses in the digital and offline spaces they transverse⁴, alone and in connection with others given the contemporary techno-digital educational transformations?*

With this question in mind, this dissertation will engage with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972/2009, 1975/1986, 1980/1987), both together and apart, in order to observe, map, and analyze the digital spaces (digi-spaces) that N|I youth *connect with⁵* and navigate. This study will primarily focus on TikTok as a social media space and platform. In addition, it will attend closely to the desires (i.e., intensities that modulate, code, categorize, consume, and modify a subjectivity) that flow through and between its innumerable, often unseen, and yet-to-be-created niches. As a postqualitative⁶ project (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1989/2013; Higgins, 2016; Higgins et al., 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) and work of public pedagogy

³ For the remainder of this dissertation “affected and impacted” will be used interchangeably with ‘affect|effect’ or ‘affect and effect’.

⁴ Transverse or transversing, in this dissertation, is defined *differently* than its denoted English meaning; that is, to lay or to extend across, or to cross in any given direction (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/transverse>). For this project, *transverse(ing)* is used in relation to Félix Guattari’s (1992/2006, 2009) concept of *transversality*, which means to extend across ideas or concepts (discussed further in Chapter One). Specifically, it is used in relation to a diasporic and digital subject as it pertains to their extension across digi-spaces, time, and their connection with other digital subjects, users, things, or other human minds.

⁵ In this dissertation, the words *connect*, *connecting*, or *connections* in configuration with the word ‘with’, extend beyond the definition of a simple “linking” two things, animate or inanimate, together (Barber, 1998). Rather, a *connect/-ing/-ion with* happens *through* their co-constitutive relations in a reflexive, responsive (affect|effect), and potentially productive manner.

⁶ I call forth the postqualitative in order to signal towards the ways in which my research extends across multiple research spaces—ethnographic, textual, philosophical/theoretical, cartographic—and works against “pre-tailored” methodologies as a meta-model (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; 1972/2009; Higgins et al., 2017; St. Pierre, 2018). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

(Biesta, 2014; Burdick, Sandlin, & O'Malley, 2014; Hickey-Moody, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; jagodzinski, 2014; Wallin, 2014), this work explores the question of whether there exists a *place* for a minoritarian or N|I infused politics online. Perhaps more importantly, the study asks what such online spaces and their politicizing powers might *do for transversing* multiple spaces and times—both on and offline—and for generating *place* in educational spaces for N|I youth?

My aim is that this research project will attend to the pressing need to accommodate and understand an ever-growing N|I youth population in Canadian educational spaces. Being an immigrant who arrived at a young age and who has been through the Albertan K to 12 public education system, I understand the importance of being seen, acknowledged, heard, accepted, and included in the spaces one is presently in, as well as the place one currently resides. Therefore, my aspiration is that this study will inform curriculum design and pedagogy, and actively include N|I youth voices and agency, including their ability to affect|effect in the classroom and beyond (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

Placing in Solidarity | in *Fuerza*

Writing as one who has migrated to Canada from Chile, become a Canadian citizen, a woman of colour⁷, and a daughter of political refugees, I have had to contend with challenges of place and displacement all my life. That is, living with tensions of identity, with often fabulated⁸

⁷ I acknowledge that the concepts of race and whiteness are constructed differently in varying contexts, for instance those of Chile and Canada. My immigrant subjectivity in Canada has been constructed as a non-white individual, either explicitly or implicitly, by various human and media encounters throughout my lifetime.

⁸ Discussed in Chapters One and Five. For Deleuze (1985/2013), Fabulation is a form of storytelling that can either close or open up the potential for a yet to come. Memories attached to photographs or past historical events that one was not present for, for instance, are fabulations. As a daughter of forcibly displaced parents, I grew up knowing, relating with, and embodying the stories, the traditions, and the struggles of a culture and a country that

memories of lost lives and unwanted and inherited traumas stored upon the body, heart, and mind. As forcibly displaced migrants in a foreign place—a space one occupies, yet may not necessarily be a place of one’s own choosing or making—there is a need to have one’s ‘truths’ acknowledged by their respective hosts. For instance, the challenge of the Chilean exile community was to have their stories heard in such a way that would affect their hosts and anyone that may come into contact with them. The objective was for those stories to propel an action of solidarity from their Canadian hosts towards their cause. For the many refugees who arrived in the ’70s, for instance, one of their aims was to stop human rights abuses from happening in a geographically ‘long and thin’ country thousands of miles away and to effect change in order to prevent history from repeating itself for future generations.

As a born and, at home, raised *chilena*, *naturalized* Canadian, brought up within the social, political, and educational structures of a settler-colonial, nation-state society, living upon stolen Indigenous lands of Treaty 6 Territory in *Amiskwacîwâskahikan*⁹, and over a period of learning or, rather, unlearning, I acknowledge and appreciate the Indigenous communities who lived there before me¹⁰, those who live there currently, and those who will come after me. As a guest and potential relation on this land, I am in a continuous process of learning *with*¹¹ this land, and all those upon it in order to stand and act *with* rather than for. Such an existence is an act of solidarity, defined as a "communion of mutual responsibility" (Solidarity, 2021).

no longer existed or was present in my immediate place. My story did not begin at birth, it began with my parent’s struggles and an event that shook Chile on September 11, 1973.

⁹ Currently known as Edmonton, Alberta. This is the place my family was displaced to without choice.

¹⁰ Territory 6 is the traditional gathering place, homelands, and current home for many Indigenous Peoples. Encompassing 17 Nations that include the Nehiyawak/Cree, Tsuut’ina, Niitsitapi/Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Haudenosaunee/Iroquois, Dene Suliné, Anishinaabe/Ojibway/Saulteaux, and the Inuk/Inuit (<https://www.ealt.ca/indigenous-connections-blog-list/amiskwaciy-wskahikan-edmonton-history>).

¹¹ Open to the multiplicity of flows of the “whole of life” (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 57).

Solidaridad was a word I learned as a child from my parents through their work with *la comunidad*¹² and their choices of how to live and act in a place that was not their own. As a concept, *solidaridad* lives in me¹³ embodying community, *familia*, and a show of *fuerza*¹⁴.

University of Toronto scholar Ruben Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) expresses a more thorough pedagogy of solidarity for anti-oppressive and decolonial projects, and relations, based on three understandings. First, there is an implied relationship that binds individuals or a collective together; second, there is an implied sense for thinking about what is “just or equitable,” and; third, there is an implied set of actions, treatments, sacrifices, expectations, and duties within the said relationship (p. 50). While the framework of solidarity is not grounding my project, *solidaridad*, as *fuerza* and as an idea for mutual collective action is imbued into the spirit of my work and life.

The Indigenous | immigrant | settler¹⁵ relationship is complex and, consequently, one cannot compare N | I and Indigenous forms of displacements as they are each their own singularity¹⁶. That stated, there are shared challenges relative to which one might build bridges of collective connection for mutual understanding and potential action (Chatterjee, 2019). Therefore, building bridges for mutual understanding and action is an ethos¹⁷ I wish to carry

¹² The Chilean community in Edmonton, circa 70's-80's, was mostly made up of exiles and political refugees that arrived in the early 70s or 80s. However, this also extended to anyone who worked in unison or solidarity with the Chilean community at that time. Currently, the community demographic is more varied.

¹³ Since I moved away from Edmonton, my connection to *la comunidad* became mostly severed, however, I remain connected in many ways.

¹⁴ *Fuerza* means ‘strength or force’. You might say this to someone in Spanish when you want to show that you are either ‘there for’ or ‘with them’ or standing together in strength.

¹⁵ Included here is the colonial settler as well.

¹⁶ A unique expression and enunciation, each with experiences and multiplicities of their own.

¹⁷ This idea of an ethos that is embodied in one’s thought and bodily actions is, conceptually speaking, discussed as nomadic thought—first by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) and later extended on as nomadic thinking by Rosi Braidotti (2013).

throughout my work for all who *connect with* it and as a practice of *becoming*. Even though this dissertation work focuses specifically on N|I youth subjectivity and minoritarian politics, the struggles of Indigenous communities and N|I communities are interrelated and interconnected, what impacts one will impact the other.

Contemporary Context & Immigration

Due to socio-political, world health (COVID-19), economic, and ecological crises occurring worldwide, humans are witnessing record levels of migration and population displacement (UNHCR, 2022). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that by the end of 2020, there would be 82.4 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. Within the 82.4 million are included, 48 million internally displaced, 26.4 million refugees, and 4.1 million asylum-seekers (p. 2). The effects of this displacement are being felt all over the world, and, as such, countries are confronting the challenges of accepting and sustaining the influx of new immigrant families, whether wanted or not. The reasons for migration and immigration are many. For example, the ongoing regional conflicts in the SWANA¹⁸ region are made worse by internal (i.e., within a State or country) and external (i.e., outside of a singular State or country) volatile situations. The civil war¹⁹ in Syria, for instance, is responsible for approximately 6.8 million displaced people (UNHCR, 2021, p. 3). Another is the war in Afghanistan that initially began as an internal conflict, which later became international in 2001 with the involvement of the US, Taliban, and Al Queda. According to UNHCR (2021), this

¹⁸ I replaced the term Middle East with SWANA that geographically represents South West Asian and North African regions and communities. SWANA is a decolonial term to replace geographically ambiguous terms such as, “the Middle East” and “Arab World”, which are colonial, Eurocentric, and Orientalist in nature (SWANA Alliance, n.d.).

¹⁹ What began as an internal conflict later directly involved many foreign countries, such as Turkey, Russia, and the US.

ongoing war has displaced 2.8 million people (p. 3). The latter are two examples of many. In addition to these crises, there are the ongoing threats of climate change that spur such ecological disasters as erratic and increasingly intensifying storms, namely hurricanes and human instigated disasters (i.e., forest fires, fracking induced earthquakes) that have created the climate refugee (Andrews, 2017; Geisler & Currens, 2017).

According to the Statistics Canada Census (2016a), approximately 7.5 million immigrants, one-fifth (21.9%) of Canada's population²⁰, from more than 200 places have come through Canada's immigration process. Immigrants who enter and apply for permanent status fall under four main categories: economic immigrants, family-sponsored immigrants, refugees²¹, and other²² immigrant statuses. Although most immigrants and recent immigrants choose to reside in Canada's larger cities (i.e., Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal), there is an increasing settlement on Prairie provinces. These numbers speak to an emerging ethno-cultural-linguistic diversity in the population, which has been apparent for some time now and will become increasingly widespread in the future. Families and individuals who immigrate to Canada, or otherwise, cannot be categorized easily into one group. Despite their homogenous treatment by hegemonic institutions (e.g., government, education boards, capitalist systems), they each comprise singularities of their own (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Conversely, while needing recognition, acknowledgement, and representation of their own, immigrants need to be cognizant of the existent Treaties, relations, lands, and ways of living articulated by

²⁰ Statistic Canada (2016b) projects that Canada's foreign-born population will be somewhere between 24.5% and 30.0% by 2036.

²¹ Under the category of refugee, there exists the category of "Asylum Seeker" (Statistics Canada, 2016b, p. 12).

²² It is an immigrant granted status under a category that does not fit any of the other categories (Statistics Canada, 2016b, p. 12).

Indigenous communities and cultures. In addition, immigrants need to work against the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the perpetuation of colonial settler dominance over their bodies and expressions (Chatterjee, 2019; Maitra & Guo, 2019, p. 14; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In *Revisiting the New Politics of Immigration*, Catherine Dauvergne (2020) comments that immigration policies and politics have hardened over time and have become “even more mean spirited” since 2015 (p. 106). As a result, the global pandemic has provided the “fiercest justification” for closing borders around the world. In the Canadian context, with the introduction of Bill C-31²³ in 2012, there was a shift towards a two-tiered immigration system and a change in the “meaning of permanence for immigrants, newcomers, and refugees” (Ellermann & Gorokhovskaia, 2019, p. 57). Bill C-31 took any notion of permanent settlement away from newcomers and recent immigrants. Therefore, the idea of ‘permanence of place’ or ‘what it means to settle in a place’ for an immigrant or migrant is left to unknown and behind-the-scenes forces (e.g., policy, legal, governmental decisions). How, then, does one find the space to create *place* for the new to emerge when the new is often felt unwanted or is contained|constrained? According to Dauvergne (2020), until the mythologies (or stories) of

²³ Bill C-31 was tabled by Jason Kenney, then Conservative MP, receiving Royal Assent and becoming law in September of 2013. Bill C-31 was labelled the “Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act” and was enacted to amend “the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Balanced Refugee Reform Act to, among other things, provide for the expediting of the processing of refugee protection claims...to authorize the Minister, in certain circumstances, to designate as an irregular arrival the arrival in Canada of a group of persons and to provide for the effects of such a designation in respect of those persons, including in relation to detention, conditions of release from detention and applications for permanent resident status” (<https://openparliament.ca/bills/41-1/C-31/>, 2013, para. 1).

“settler state” or colonial logics can be bested, little will change (p. 97). Logics that are often imbued into the socio-political structures and representational imaginary (e.g., images, offline and online media) of a constructed nation-state, as will be discussed in the following section. It is against the digital realm where a response will be mapped.

Unwelcome Aesthetics | Welcoming Aesthetic

As humans, we collectively exist in worlds (i.e., territorialized ecologies) that are becoming more resistant to welcoming new immigrants through their constructed State borders and National aesthetics every day. In the chapter, *The Aesthetics of the Territory-Nation-State and the "Canadian Problematique"* (2014), Rob Shields explores the idea of what composes a nation. Specifically, Shields asks what are the forces that make a nation visible? Shields is not trying to define or represent what “Canadian-ness” is, rather, he is preoccupied with how a nation is composed in connection to, and in the tension between, the state and its actual territory, or what he refers to as the “Canadian political *problematique*” (p. 188).

Although Shields’ chapter begins by asking what a nation-state looks like, he subsequently problematizes this question and instead asks: “[w]hat representations and visual practices lend it visibility and allow it to be spatialized²⁴ or cast as a specific type of place, community, and state?” (p. 188). In other words, it is not what a nation represents or is represented by that makes it a nation-state. Instead, it is all that comes together, in place and experience, to make it visible as a nation. Shields draws from the concept of aesthetics—that which is “experienced together” (p. 189)—to talk about a national aesthetic or “collective

²⁴ Spatialisations are those “intangible yet real entities” that can space and place a subject | object (Shields, 2013, p. 1).

experience[ing] of nation-state-territory” through representations that emerge from numerous sources (p. 190). These representations extend beyond visual art and such cultural markers as images, songs, literature. As Shields develops, they include markers of place and nature, such as maps, flags, a horizon line, “geographical imaginations,” and “relations of sights/sites” (p. 190), as well as that which is unseen and unheard, what Shields refers to as “visual silences” (p. 190). These visual silences are purged or privileged in the nation’s “social drama” and are what mediums, such as media, reflect and perpetuate politically and ideologically as the national aesthetic (p. 190). For instance, anti-immigration rhetoric, as visual silences, make their way onto a political party platform or an individual’s social media thread, thereby investing the individual within national sensibilities.

Drawing from the philosophy of Deleuze and Proust, Shields works with the concept of virtualities, as *visualities* (see p. 190; see also, Shields, 2013). *Visualities* are forces that are not visible, yet are real and have an impact upon the world, and where the visual is understood alongside the invisible, thus stating that a “visuality draws attention to the operational processes, techniques, and technologies that support visibility and invisibility in their everyday senses” (p. 190). Using the example of digital media as the “visual apparatus” or image-text²⁵, for instance, visuality would emphasize the feedback from users (e.g., likes, shares, comments, Retweets (RTs), bots, and algorithms), as the means of visibility that renders the invisible visible (e.g., subjectivity formation, production, and connection with others). In the case of the invisible intangibles of what a nation, ethnicity or community might produce in-real-life (irl) versus the

²⁵ Some digital social media spaces are more visual than others, such as TikTok (vlog platform), Instagram (image and story platform), and YouTube (vlog platform) versus Twitter (microblog) and Reddit (r/spaces with varying blog and discussion forums).

online world are yet-to-be-known through their affects and effects, however, their impacts will vary. Whatever the “visual apparatus” is that which brings forth the visualities, its significance is to “articulate the unseeable with the seen” allowing us to see what is “easily overlooked” or rendered “invisible” (p. 190). Astride focusing on what constitutes a territory-nation-state, this study aims to consider how N|Is might approach a national aesthetic and, specifically, how they might position themselves in direct relation to a territory-nation-state aesthetic to be seen, heard, and *connected with*.

Over the last ten years a growing wave of anti-immigration sentiment is being observed and felt in the United States, Canada (within some provinces and groups of people), and in some regions of Europe, exacerbated by the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (Béland, 2020; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Goodman, 2017; Kern, 2018). For instance, the world collectively witnessed the extreme measures taken during the period of Donald Trump’s presidency in order to keep immigrants out. According to Daniel Béland (2019), Donald Trump, as a populist Republican candidate in 2015 used fear and a “politics of insecurity” to “vilify” and *Other* outsiders, both within the US and anyone seeking to enter the US (p. 163). According to Béland, a politics of insecurity is “how perceived collective threats are framed and acted upon” (p. 163). Trump sought to frame and construct immigrants²⁶ and undocumented immigrants as “folk devils” (i.e., “deviant outsiders”) and perceived threats in order to set himself up as a protector and provider against them (Béland, 2019, p. 167). This would result in his justification for the punitive actions that were taken to stop the flow of migration. A few of the actions taken were: to decrease admissions into the US, in particular from SWANA countries, Mexico, and Central

²⁶ Specifically, those who were non-European and non-white.

American countries, to increase detentions of undocumented immigrants within the US and of those attempting to enter their Southern border, to fortify the US-Mexico border, and, finally, to use harsh rhetoric (e.g., thugs, drunks, or rapists) to describe mostly Mexican or Central American migrants to fuel xenophobic and anti-immigration sentiments amongst his voter base (Béland, 2019; Goodman, 2017). Trump effectively demonstrated this through statements as spoken in political speeches and tweeted out on his Twitter account, such as calling for the expulsion of “the gang members, the drug dealers and the criminals who prey on our people” (Trump as cited in Goodman, 2017). Statements such as these are then distributed among various media platforms, from news networks to multiple social media platforms, feeding the perceived threats to all who are willing to engage (Béland, 2019; Goodman, 2017; Scott, 2019).

The abovementioned expressions are at once examples of *visualities* of an *unwelcoming* Canadian anti-immigrant *aesthetic* by political leaders of all levels as expressed by similar xenophobic and racist rhetoric to mobilize their base. Similar to their neighbours to the South, anti-immigrant discourse is echoed in right-wing and mainstream media as it further perpetuates damaging representations of N|I and marginalized communities (Domise, 2019; Fiřtová, 2019; Levitz, 2019). One example of this is Conservative MP Michelle Rempel referring to refugees and immigrants as “abusers” of the system (Domise, 2019, para. 30). Another example, is of Trump and other Conservative leaders’ description of Coronavirus as the “Chinese Virus” that led to a wave of anti-Asian hate crimes across North America and around the globe (Reja, 2021). The words and actions of leaders, and those in positions of power, have direct and indirect impacts (consciously, unconsciously, and nonconsciously²⁷) on individuals' perceptions

²⁷ Felt on the body on a molecular level before being processed by the mind.

and, consequently, have direct and indirect effects on N|I lives. These impacts are most overt during national and provincial elections, when the perceptions of immigration and immigrants are purposefully skewed and used for political gain.

An Angus Reid Institute special report entitled *Immigration: Half back Current Targets, but Colossal Misperceptions, Pushbacks Over Refugees, Cloud Debate*, authored by Daniel Korzinski (2019), discusses how public opinion and perception on immigration policy does not often correlate to reality. This article was written the day before the 2019 Federal Election debate when political posturing around immigration increased. The survey found significant confusion and misperceptions amongst people in Canada in regards to: how immigrants settled in the country, how they arrived (e.g., by legal channels), where they arrived from (e.g., 64% say most immigrants are from SWANA countries, reality is 12%), how they should behave once in the country (e.g., 62% saying they should speak one of the official languages upon arrival), and the circumstances that brought them to Canada (e.g., refugee (overestimating representation) or economic immigrant (underestimating representation)). In order to determine how perception differed from reality, Angus Reid asked Canadians the following question: “How many new immigrants do you think arrived in Canada last year?” (p. 4) At the time of the question, the immigration targets for Canada were at ~300,000 immigrants per year (0.8 per cent of the country’s total population). However, when the survey was conducted, only 20% of Canadians estimated correctly and just over half (53%) under-estimated the number of immigrants new to the country (p. 4). The latter shows a discrepancy in Canadians' information regarding immigration and immigrants to Canada, either from media or political figures, influencing their views (and acceptance) on the issue and the group.

A few issues observed in the survey process were the categorization and sorting of immigrants into ‘kinds’ (e.g., economic, ethnicity) and the positioning of immigrants as ‘tools’ or ‘instruments’ for political and economic gain or use. The article summed up this sentiment by asking, “what do people want?” (p. 9). This question implicitly asks what society wants or needs from an immigrant, thus connecting immigrants to individual, national, and economic desires. Critiques aside, engaging with the perceptions alone, this poll points to the fact that Canadians have to wade through a plethora of disinformation and mal-information²⁸ regarding immigration (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018). Whether or not this information is intentionally misleading or constructed with ideological or economic messaging, it has a specific political (e.g., bolster a political agenda) and economic affect|effect for those in positions of power (or wishing to be in positions of power).

Politically speaking, politicians have the power to strategically shape, “draw attention” to, and construct “perceived collective threats” of immigrants—as a “politics of insecurity” (Béland, 2019, p. 166)—in order to bolster and mobilize their political agenda (Béland, 2019; Fiřtová, 2019). Fiřtová’s (2019) case study conceptualizing the various strategies used by the Canadian Conservative government (2006-2015) to frame immigration discourse demonstrates how they were able to slowly shift and implement an immigration policy reform away from the traditional form of multiculturalism²⁹. They accomplished this in 2006 by using a form of “neo-liberal multiculturalism” (p. 276) that is reflected in name only for the purpose of selling to an

²⁸ According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2018), disinformation is the deliberate falsification of information to manipulate perceptions and outcomes. Mal-information is the use of information to intentionally “inflict harm on a person, organization, or country”, such as hate speech and rhetoric, smear campaigns, and harassment (p. 46).

²⁹ A traditional multiculturalism promotes socially inclusive and diverse Canada with the integration of immigrants into the existing framework (Fleras, 2015).

ethnic voter base while simultaneously constructing N|I's as economic citizens to be fully integrated into a constructed nation-state. In regards to *Discover Canada*, the Citizenship Study Guide of 2009, Jason Kenney, then Minister of Immigration, stated (as cited in Fiřtová, 2019, 276):

[when you become citizen] you also inherit certain obligations and responsibilities. And one of those responsibilities is to know who we are, where we came from, what values define us, to live in accordance with those values and be inspired by the example of our predecessors. And that is what we have tried to *Discover Canada*. (Kenney 2009b)

According to Fiřtová, this integration approach was called out by some scholars “as an inheritance of nineteenth-century European nationalism” (Blake, 2013, p. 84 In Fiřtová, 2019, p. 276). In 2011, with the Conservative's *Here for Canada* campaign platform, the focus became less about the economics of immigration and, instead, focused on creating the image of the “undesirable immigrants” (p. 277). Examples of rhetoric being used were “bogus claimants”, “illegal immigrants”, “dangerous foreign criminals”, and queue jumpers in order to maintain their base (p. 277). In addition, refugees and asylum seekers were often the most negatively impacted, as the use of “refugee” and “asylum seeker” were often connected to the above-mentioned words (Fiřtová, 2019, p. 277).

Taking into consideration the data from the Angus Reid report above on Canadian's perceived knowledge of immigration, in combination with what is being constructed for Canadians in media and the political stage, in addition to a *politics of insecurity*, one can see why a strategy of othering proved to be ‘successful’ for the Conservative party in 2011.

Representations and perceptions, as a result, have a strong aesthetic force for constituting N|I subjectivity in real world experiences and spaces.

Curricular Mis/Perceptions

Just as concerning as the misinterpretation of immigration in politics are the perceptive filters enmeshed into curricular design, with either the inclusion of, omittance of, or selective re/telling of ethno-racial-cultural and Indigenous group histories to fit a white, Christian, and Euro-settler dominant narrative. Such machinations are currently witnessed with provincial curricular rewrites in such Canadian provinces as Manitoba (MacIntosh, 2021) and Alberta (French, 2021). Dr. Dwayne Donald echoes these concerns during a March 30, 2021 online interview on *Real Talk* with Edmonton radio host Ryan Jespersen

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfsuVY4gLY0>) explaining that the stories told in the *NewLearnAlberta (2021)* curriculum draft are reifying a specific worldview. He explains;

This curriculum is an expression of the ideology of this [Alberta] government, which is basically a moral success story of liberal worldview and how it arose. You know, there's detours through Greece, Rome, Christian Europe, on into the enlightenment. And so, what it results in, from their point of view, is this society that we live in now, and this is the inheritance or the legacy that they want Alberta students to know in much detail... this love for this story, that the curriculum developers have, is laid out in a very timeline fashion and they plug in every event that they think is so important. (16:22)

Furthermore, he states that we must today ask how to generate a new story and ethic of what it means to live that is not already being told in the dominant curriculum. Donald laments the Alberta government's "refusal to accept that we need a new story to live by" and is

embarrassed by the government's inability to rely and draw upon the resources and people that exist in the very place they are meant to represent.

Thinking with the notion of aesthetic capture and contemplating what various representational forces might physically *do* for binding a subject to a space that is not of their own making (e.g., being sorted into TikTok niches based on race or ethnicity), this research wonders how one can break from overly standardized spaces and create place anew. Put differently, this research asks how a story might be told *differently* in connection with others, the digital, and the material world around them?

Guattari (1992/2006) stated that;

the important thing...is not only the confrontation with a new material of expression [in this case digital media], but the constitution of complexes of subjectivation: multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine [assemblages]. These complexes offer people diverse possibilities for recomposing their existential corporeality [recomposing how others interact/see/and engage with them], to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to resingularise themselves. (p. 7)

Guattari did not live long enough to see what the Internet, Web 2.0 (i.e., user participation) and Web 3.0 (i.e., user collaboration and decentralization³⁰) would eventually become or continue to do. What Guattari (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008) did see, however, was what a technological machine could *do* in connection with others—be it human or otherwise—and, as such, what could potentially be created in the socio-digi-political realm as a result. His work as an ethico-aesthetics considered what it might mean to connect and interact with the multitudinous

³⁰ Decentralization in Web 3 is a utopic point of view (Rand-Hendriksen, 2022).

intensive forces that might produce a subjectivity (Guattari, 1992/2006). Guattari recognized the enormous influence of popular culture and mass media on the machinic productions of subjectivity (Guattari, 1992/2006). Specifically, Guattari identified how a “capitalistic culture” (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008, p. 33) that occupies all semiotic fields (e.g., digital media) unconsciously captures, standardises, and produces individuals under systems of power, of oppression, and value. Apart from being a scholar and psychoanalyst, Guattari was also an activist and explored possible modes of liberation that he called “processes of singularization” (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008, p. 23). Félix Guattari’s (1980/2009, 1989/2013, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008) work on machines, technology, and subjectivity production and enunciation is foundational, in particular for thinking *with* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987; Mazzei, 2013a, 2013b), through, and about subjectivity. In addition, Guattari’s work allows one to contemplate the process of being and becoming *differently* regarding N|I subjectivity in connection with the various digi-spaces and places of the contemporary techno-digital era. In addition, Guattari’s work enables educators to contemplate the process of being and becoming of N|I youth in the various educational spaces they encounter—on and offline—for the consideration of place|making in connection with others.

Impacts and Relevance for Education

This research project will be relevant for educators and all who work with youth or young adults who are being over-coded, categorized, consumed, co-opted, and transformed by the forces of advanced neoliberal capitalism, digital media, and educational institutions. In particular, this project is germane for N|I youth who are specifically affected, captured, and impacted by the representational forces of curriculum, and over-codified multi-media. This

includes N|I's modified or transformed by harmful rhetoric connected within the socio-digital-political realm, such as the hurtful words and actions of local and national political leaders. Digital and 'virtual' media spaces, for instance, can fuel misguided and hurtful perceptions and actions, resulting in unexpected and unwanted 'real world' effects. These incongruent perceptions can emerge from an array of online|offline productions, such as memes, rhetoric or hurtful expressions experienced on platform comment boards, timelines, or "Stories³¹", to name a few. Being aware of the material affects and real-world impacts of the online in the various offline educational spaces is significant for education researchers, curriculum developers, education policymakers, and educators. Each, in their own way, have the capacity to affect|effect how N|I youth are constructed and connected with in the educational realm.

School Affects|Effects

Schools and teachers³² can play a significant role in the wellbeing, resettlement, adjustment, and educational success of immigrant and marginalized youth (Bennouna, Khauli, Basir, Allaf, Wessells, & Stark, 2019; Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2011; Liversage et al., 2021; Makarova et al., 2019). Emblematic of this is Gaztambide-Fernández and Guerrero's (2011) examination of the complex dynamics that shape the experiences of Latine youths in Toronto schools. One of the themes they explored were the stereotypical and discriminatory perceptions of Latine youth in schools. Specifically, the negative effects that stereotypes can have upon Latine students' self perceptions, how others (e.g., peers and teachers) come to perceive them, and how these perceptions can impact their chances for success in school and

³¹ Here I am thinking of digital stories, such as Instagram stories.

³² Schools and teachers are not the only factors fostering N|I youth wellbeing, resettlement, and educational success. There are a variety of reasons and it is complex. This exploration is better suited for a separate study on its own with online spaces.

society. It demonstrated that the consequences of negative stereotypes were indeed harmful and unbearable for some of the youth. On a wider scale, Bennouna, Khauli, Basir, Allaf, Wessells, and Stark (2019) discuss the literature, from 2000 to 2019, surrounding school-based programs aimed at improving the wellbeing of "forced migrants" (p. 2) in different high-income countries, of which only a small percentage are allowed to relocate. They discuss the many challenges that asylum seekers and refugees face, and continue to struggle with, in adjusting to a new place, aside from learning a new language, a new way of living, and a new societal context. In regards to newcomer and immigrant youth in the educational realm, they have other difficulties to face, such as strict limiting factors imposed by a rigid educational system (Mikulecky, 2013 In Bennouna et al., 2019); difficulties measuring up to their local peers (Wong & Schweitzer, 2017 In Bennouna et al., 2019); unwelcoming and discriminatory perceptions that foster hostility and, at times, acts of violence (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015 In Bennouna et al., 2019).

A separate and more comprehensive study and contextual review on acculturation conducted by Makarova, 't Gilde, and Birman (2019), specifically examining how teachers work to either support or hamper the process of "school adjustment" for "minority youth" in schools of their respective relocating countries (p. 452). They discuss their findings under three thematic categories: i) Teaching practices, such as not having the appropriate training or qualifications or "knowledge about minority students' lives and experiences"³³, all of which can negatively impact student learning (p. 455); ii) Teacher attitudes and behaviours, such as their feelings

³³ Makarova et al. (2019) go on to explain how this may be due to teacher's unwillingness or inability to cope with the challenges of a diverse classroom.

towards cultural diversity or multiculturalism, and their beliefs and unconscious biases towards “minority” and immigrant youth, all of which can have either positive or negative effects on N|I youth (p. 460); and, iii) Teacher expectations, such as their “prognostic expectations” of “minority” and immigrant youth in regards to their academic achievement and attainment in the future (p. 462). Drawing upon various scholars’ work, this review demonstrated that teachers expected students to have low school achievement, not to pursue any future academic studies, and had preestablished stereotypes and hierarchies of “minority” students based on their ethnicity or class origins. For instance, teachers buying into the model minority³⁴ myth and acting upon their biased notions towards them³⁵. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, teachers, as part of the greater educational institution, are one of the many standardizing forces with which N|I youth bodies must contend.

A Map for the Yet-to-Come

Considering the contemporary context of uncertainty and technological re-'tool'ings upon which education is situated, I would like to restate my research provocation: *Where and how might youth, in particular N|I youth, develop counter-responses in the digital and offline spaces they transverse, alone and in connection with others?*

By intersecting Deleuze and Guattari’s (1972/2009, 1980/1987) philosophy of desire and schizoanalytic cartography, this study contemplates the digi-space(s) of TikTok in order to observe and analyze the numerous impacts it can have upon a N|I subjectivity. Specifically, this

³⁴ The image or notion of the ‘model minority’ is a damaging stereotype that positions communities of differing cultural, ethno-racial backgrounds against one another. It places communities on a hierarchy by assigning labels, such as Asians are all studious and successful, while other ethno-racial communities are seen as “challenging” or “difficult” (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities) (Omadeke, 2021).

³⁵ This article is an excellent resource for teachers on what they can do to assist marginalized and N|I youth in their classroom. In particular, a “Summary of Key Findings” lays it all out. See Table 3 (Makarova et al., 2019, p. 465).

project maps how these spaces work upon a N|I youth body to code, modify, consume, and block their subjective desires and find potential spaces of rupture whereby creation might occur. In other words, by *thinking with* youth interaction in online spaces in terms of desire (i.e., capitalism or cultural expectations), I interrogate how these spaces constitute a N|I subjectivity to experiment with the conditions for a “minoritarian becoming” online. That is, a becoming that works against the over-representational or standardized spaces as those experienced in the digi-sphere, as discussed in Chapter Two (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986).

As an immanent ontology (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009; Guattari, 1989/2013; Holland, 1999/2001; Maurin & McNally, 2008) and “ethico-aesthetic” project (Guattari, 1986/1998, 1989/2013), schizoanalysis allows me to explore, disturb, and include the micro and macro power relations that flow through and are in flux in the online spaces that youth temporarily inhabit and navigate. Consequently, exploring and recognizing these relations is especially pertinent when *engaging with* newcomer|immigrant groups that are often-but-not-always considered to be a marginalized group (discussed further in Chapter Three). Moreover, in the process of observing and mapping (i.e., exposing and analyzing), there is the potential for avenues of “singularization” (i.e., rupture) to emerge for those vehicles of subject formation (e.g., external influences of capital or media) to produce new and creative expressions or collective enunciations (Guattari, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008).

This research project is also informed by a posthuman ethics influenced by new materialist media theory that displaces the centrality of the human and, instead, analyzes agency astride an array of interconnected forces (affects), beings, or material online spaces (Clough, 2016) (discussed in Chapter One and Two). This decentering of agency and hierarchies

informs how data is engaged with, collected, and *thought with*, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. The collection of my research data is based upon the exploration and analyses of public digi-spaces using virtual online ethnographic techniques and blended-methods. For instance, the passive observation of N|I youth TikTok spaces in order to gather data from their creative expressions online, such as, postings, comments, likes, shares, duets, and stitches. The data gathering techniques used are informed by netnographic and technographic methods (Fenton & Proctor, 2019; Kien, 2009; Kozinets, 2015) (see Chapter Three) in order to:

- i) observe and collect examples of creative youth enunciations online (e.g., posts, comments, images);
- ii) conduct an analysis of TikTok spaces (see Chapter Four); and,
- iii) conduct a focused case desire analysis on TikTok as a social media space connected with N|I youth (the study's design is discussed in Chapter Four and the analysis appears in Chapter Five).

As a *transversal* project, the case desire analysis draws upon and bridges a variety of disparate concepts to *think with* the N|I digital subject (Guattari, 1992/2006). From Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987), it intersects machinic and assemblage theory (see Chapter Two), the concept of deterritorialization (i.e., becomings), schizoanalytic and desire philosophy, and the concepts of the minority|majority and minoritarian|majoritarian (see Chapter One). By mapping N|I youth subjectivities in the digi-spaces of TikTok in this manner, I am assembling, connecting, and placing into conversation all that I have *engaged with* as a desiring researcher and user of TikTok, such as philosophical and theoretical concepts, ethnographical observations on TikTok, content creator and user expressions collected (e.g., comments, content), and any

textual research gathered. This approach allows me to write a case desire analysis of four N|I youth that examines the following questions: *What is blocking each of these youth's desires on TikTok?* and *What are the emergent counter-responses that are being produced in their respective digi-spaces?* (See Chapter Five)

By interfacing the approaches above with the emergent findings (see Chapter Five) this project is a work of public pedagogy and could be a potential resource for *learning with* N|I youth. That is, *learning with* is initiating an escape (Nail, 2017) or opening to potentially produce new ways of thinking or manners of *being* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1992/2006; Hickey-Moody, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; jagodzinski, 2014).

An Invitation

This dissertation requires a shift in engagement as it not only offers a virtual ethnographic, cartographic, and textual glimpse into the digi-spaces of TikTok and what such spaces may *do* when in connection with N|I youth, it is a work that actively interrogates the potentials of what N|I youth *might yet become* when intersected with a reader's desires as public pedagogy. As such, I extend an invitation and welcome you into this complex and multilayered textual space of thought where connections might be made concurrently within and outside of its written borders. As the reader, active witness, and single part of a desiring assemblage you are connecting with the stories and concepts within to *think with*, unground thought from what is given or already known, and perhaps transform it into something new *with* N|I youth.

As a postqualitative inquiry and transversal project that bridges multiple research spaces and times online, its structure does not necessarily follow the length patterns or linearity of

what is observed as a standard qualitative project design. The literature review, for instance, is extended over three in-depth chapters—theoretical frameworks, methodological, and methods—each encapsulating the various concepts and ideas with which are used to *think with* in the case desire analysis in Chapter Five. While not usual, after Chapter One, one could jump ahead and read Chapters Four and Five, if one so desired, then return to Chapters Two and Three as needed. I have also placed sign posts throughout as conceptual ties and points of rest and contemplation, offering the reader an option to move backwards or forwards through the determined sections of this dissertation³⁶. In all these ways, this dissertation “displaces and unhinge[s] one’s own understanding” of what educational research could be and might become and imagine a future *learning with N|I* that is yet to come (Higgins et al., 2017, p. 27).

³⁶ These sign-posts are portrayed as (see Chapter Three), for instance.

Chapter One – A Transversal Project

How does one set up a Guattarian inspired transversal project? According to Gary Genosko (2002), professor of Communications and Digital Media Studies and interpreter of Félix Guattari's work, a transversal project establishes new organizations (e.g., groups, digital platforms or spaces) and access to new media (e.g., modes of communication), allowing opportunities for "resingularization" by opening up new spaces of connection to others (p. 91). In regards to my research, transversality functions to understand the relations between pedagogical, educational, and socio-political forces, and as a tool, works to map N|I youth place|making in digital online spaces (and beyond) (Guattari, 1992/2006; Genosko, 2002). Such a mode of mapping works to contend with the unconscious desires that exist in and around individual and group subjectivities and the in-between³⁷ spaces of potentiality (e.g., digi-spaces, interactions or connections between people or machines, virtual and aesthetic connections) that work to rupture or open up space for creativity and collectivity to emerge (Genosko, 2002, p. 71; Guattari, 1992/2006).

As a whole, this dissertation functions transversally (Guattari, 2009, 2014) by intersecting and working together with numerous disparate concepts (i.e., new organizations), such as those of N|I youth subjectivity, transmigration and transmigrant becoming, the online|offline subject, the idea of displacement, diaspora and diasporic subjects, (new) media

³⁷ The "in-between" is developed throughout this project when thinking with the concept of diaspora (Awan, 2016; He, 2010); the concept of the enmeshed subject on and offline (Schultze, 2014; Taylor & Pitman, 2013; Turkle, 2011); the concept of the transnational model (Fleras, 2011, 2015; Schiller et al., 1992). From these concepts, in-between, is conceptualized as between places, worlds, identities, cultures and portrays a sense of unsettled impermanence (Awan, 2016; He, 2010). The in-between is a state and a verb, to be fluid, ambivalent, in connection with, bridging, linking, and networking (Fleras, 2011, 2015; Schiller et al., 1992). The in-between is also used to refer to the gap or moment of potential that exists between a territorialization- deterritorialization- reterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

trauma, affects and desires, minoritarian politics, and digital media spaces (digi-spaces). By doing so, this project acts to provoke and liberate thought while *engaging with* the digital media realm as a site of learning to see what *might* be revealed from content creator and user experiences as a form of public pedagogy (Biesta, 2014; Burdick, Sandlin, & O'Malley, 2014; Guattari, 1992/2006; Hickey-Moody, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; jagodzinski, 2014).

This chapter specifically bridges together the following concepts for your consideration:

i) The conceptualization of N|I's as heterogeneous and complex individuals that are to be connected with beyond representational schemas; ii) The uncoupling of the term 'newcomer' from its various connotations to re-conceptualize and contemplate a *becoming-with* newcomer; iii) The concept of diaspora and diasporic subject in order to consider a contemporary diasporic and digital subject in connection with N|I youth; iv) The concept of transnationalism to decentre the idea of borders online and consider models of relationality between space and place online; and v) The exploration of 'what is place?' online. First, in order to consider what N|I youth might *become*, it is necessary to examine the ways in which newcomer and immigrant are being connected with, as terms, individuals, and subjectivities.

Re-thinking *Newcomer*

Through a Public Health Agency of Canada & Centre for Communicable Diseases and Infection Control (2014) report, the Government of Canada officially defines 'newcomer³⁸' as "a recent landed immigrant who has been in Canada for five years or less" (p. 98). This hegemonic term is multilayered (in its use), complex (in its meaning and approach), and comes fraught with

³⁸ This was the only instance where newcomer was defined by the Government of Canada, found in a paper to do with HIV/AIDS in youth.

complications. To begin, the term newcomer is laden with connotations and assumptions regarding individuals and collectives for which the term is assigned. Youth arriving to Canada and into educational spaces, for instance, often find that they are defined by their “new immigrant” status (Selimos & Daniel, 2017, p. 92). For those individuals and communities who carry the burden of the term ‘newcomer’³⁹, it can mean never truly belonging as they are always considered ‘new’ arrivals to defined places. As Rishma Shariff (2021) argues on Twitter;

Muslims have been in Canada since 1871, Sikhs since 1897, Hindus since 1911. We are NOT newcomers. We are NOT unfamiliar. We ARE your neighbours, friends, farmers, teachers, fellow citizens. We are NOT ‘others’. (n.p.)

Shariff’s comment critiques the term ‘newcomer’ plied in the *NewLearnAlberta* 2021 Draft K-6 Social Studies Curriculum rewrite released this year by the United Conservative Party (UCP) in Alberta, Canada. Shariff, in particular, is referring to the six times that ‘newcomer’ is used within the Social Studies K-6 Curriculum rewrite draft. Of those six times, three referred to European settlers as newcomers (p. 14, p. 17, p. 27). The other three mentions were in regards to the hardships that “Black, Chinese, and Hutterite” newcomers faced and overcame on the prairies (p. 18); in regards to the language and educational qualifiers required for newcomer conditional acceptance into Canadian society (p. 33); and, finally, in regards to connecting newcomers with words such as “sadly,” “unfamiliar,” and “unknown” (p. 33). The use of newcomer in the rewrite is troublesome and has little regard for the complexity of immigrant experiences in Canada,

³⁹ I say this, since often “newcomer” is used as a catch-all term to refer to any person that is an immigrant.

such as treating immigrant communities as a monolith and conflating European settler communities with immigrant⁴⁰ settler communities.

For those often imposing or overcoding systems who use the term (e.g., government and educational agencies), the use of newcomer can mean a way of distancing belonging, permanence, and of ‘Othering,’ as is exemplified in the 2021 Alberta curriculum draft. What the draft demonstrates and is germane to my work is how important the affect|effects of such a document can have upon the national aesthetic, as spoken about in the introductory section. It is not solely about what a newcomer *is*—i.e., what they are defined as by hegemonic forces—but what the term newcomer can *do* (i.e., the affects and effects it can produce). That is, what can the term ‘newcomer’ *do* to and for those who connect with it and what can a newcomer *do* as an individual and subjectivity to affect and effect the world around them. The perceptions produced from the oversimplification and denigration of ‘newcomer’ (and ‘immigrant’), for instance, can have genuine impacts on how N|I understand and place themselves within the space of schools and the community at large (Selimos & Daniel, 2017). How a nation feels towards immigrants and immigration has an enormous impact on the experience of acculturation. The experience of discrimination, according to Berry & Hou (2017), was the “single most” important factor that negatively impacted an immigrant youths’ wellbeing and, thus, influenced belonging and attachment to place (p. 30). Where is the space for N|I voice within the curriculum document? Where is the space within the classroom and society? Within this work, the aim is to transform how the term newcomer (and immigrant) is *interacted with* as

⁴⁰ Ethnic groups are sometimes called immigrant groups to demonstrate that they are not either Indigenous or colonizers, and they were admitted under the Canadian immigration policy, but is a term that is just as monolithic as newcomer (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010).

a term and, in turn, affect|effect how it materially impacts (e.g., through media and education) the local and national collective aesthetic, individual, and subjectivity. More specifically, I aim to assist with place|making for N|I youth in the all the spaces to which they arrive.

For this project, there is an understanding that newcomers are *both/and, and*. In some cases, 'newcomers' are representative of a group of people that are new to a space and place both on and offline. In an other, newcomers are migrants crossing borders and *transversing* time and space such that they are simultaneously constructing and bridging connections from self|place to other places and living beings. This process of construction is what Guattari might have called building "transversal bridges" (1992/2006, p. 109). Newcomers are also immigrants that have arrived to a place from elsewhere. This project also interacts with the newcomer as a philosophical construct and concept to *think with* and consider new ways of being and *becoming with*, in the minoritarian sense of becoming, as it challenges the dominant or privileged standard (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). The dominant standard that stands in alterity to N|I youth, in and arriving to Alberta, are the negatively perceived perceptions of misinformed Canadians placed upon immigrants and immigration as portrayed in the media and by politicians (Korzinski, 2019), the "nineteenth-century European infused nationalism" (Blake, 2013, p. 84 as cited in Fiřtová, 2019, p. 276) infused into the Canadian aesthetic, and a "liberal worldview" (Donald as cited in Real Talk Ryan Jespersen, 2021, 16:22) ideology embedded into the NewLearnAlberta (2021) curriculum draft. As it conjoins with the transformation of place and its subjective expressions, such a minoritarian politics might be expressed across modes of becoming-other/digital/minoritarian (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

Finally, this project considers the intersections of newcomer and immigrant (N|I) together since the notion of newcomer can involve any one of the positions or a mixture of positions related to the notion of immigrant. An immigrant, being one that has come from elsewhere or has found themselves in a new place (Immigrant, 2021) was at one point in time a newcomer and hence, will always have a connection to being a newcomer and can potentially become a newcomer once again. That stated, N|I youth in this project are named as such to begin with, however, it does not make them who they are. As one will become aware, while each youth creator engaged with may identify as newcomer or immigrant, or one, or none, or both. They each are their own singularity bringing their own experiences to the fore, and together with their users, they become much more.

Thinking with the N|I—Considerations for a Minoritarian Politics

According to Clare Colebrook (2002a), “all effective politics is a becoming-minoritarian, not appealing to who we are but to what we might become” (p. xxv). In other words, while a minoritarian politics may begin as an expression of a people, it is focused on the invention, or fabulation⁴¹, of a people to come (Bogue, 1997; Colebrook, 2002a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1985). Therefore, thinking the ontological, political, and ethical question of what a N|I youth *might* become when connected with the digital world, with Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987, 1991/1994), is what is effective not only for this project but for the consideration of a N|I minoritarian politics on and offline. In other words, when connected with the concept of the minoritarian, to observe and expose the majoritarian forces within the digital sphere, one

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) describe fabulations as “the fabrication of giants” (p. 171). That is, the becomings produced by “larger-than-life images that transform” (Bogue, 2005/2010, p. 100) and initiate a *thinking with*, which enables the creation of a people to come.

could analyze how digital spaces might affect |effect N|I youth, as digital subjects, and N|I subjectivity for the consideration of a *becoming-other*.

When thinking becomings in relation to and *with* the concept of the minoritarian and a minority subject, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) state that one must not mistake minoritarian—"a becoming or process"—with minority—"an aggregate or a state" (p. 291). For example, immigrants may be a minority in specific contexts. However, their being a minority does not make what they *do* minoritarian in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari intend it. While in the digi-sphere N|I youth may transform themselves by reconfiguring (or reterritorializing) themselves as a minority by assuming a performative state like taking on other identifiers on TikTok, such as #thirdculturekid, #Muslim, #AsianLivesMatter, or attaching links to their profile. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming means to be "deterritorialized" (p. 291). A deterritorialization is a break or "disassembling" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986) from the territory of the coded subject (i.e., the concrete assemblage) where it is free to seek other connections beyond itself. This breaking opens up to the potential or power to produce relations (i.e., becomings) and not simply a set of forcibly produced or arranged relations beyond itself (Colebrook, 2002a). Becomings, as such, are heterogenous, contextual, with no specific intention or focus, guided by desire, and the immanent flows of life alone (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). For N|I digital subjects online, as content creators on platforms such as TikTok, it is about their power and potential to produce connections beyond themselves with what they are producing in the form of content, as demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five. Furthermore, a becoming-minoritarian for a N|I youth, as a digital subject, might involve

becoming deterritorialized from one's "major" (given or standard) identity, language, gender, qualifier, or code online (p. 291).

Modes of Difference

When considering a politics of the minoritarian, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) are advancing a politics of difference (i.e., alterity politics) that works against the majority. They define the majority as "the determination [or expression] of a standard" (p. 291) inclusive of the smallest numbers within that group, to which all that are unlike them will adhere (the minority). Therefore, holding a state of privilege or "domination" (p. 291). For instance, the most common example given is of men, since they are often considered the majority for the reason that they are the standard that society⁴² is structured for, rather than being the greatest in number. In the digi-sphere, what the expression of the standard *is*, in relation to a digital subject connected with it, will change depending upon its context (e.g., digi-spaces), time connecting with, and all things and users transversing and emerging in the space(s) at any given time.

The minority or minor language, on the other hand, is the one that has "no grounding standard" (e.g., image or identity) and it mobilizes and transforms itself with each new member or iteration (Colebrook, 2002a, p. xxv). The minority, as such, exists in alterity to the majority and ceases to be a minority if it has found a set or standard expression, at which point it becomes 'majoritarian' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). As Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) state, all "becomings are minoritarian" (p. 291). When considering the N|I digital subject online, one might ask: What is the standard discourse or image that a N|I youth is confronted with,

⁴² In the North American Context, the standard that society is structured for would be white, cisgender, heterosexual, men with European ancestry.

based upon the groupings and platform (territory) they are engaging with (e.g., TikTok)? Moreover, what are the expressions or enunciations produced from the emergent grouping of N|I digi-subjects? N|I youth, as digital subjects, who connect with a specific digi-space (e.g., TikTok platform or niche), TikTok algorithms, or particular users or content, for instance, as a potential grouping (i.e., assemblage) could potentially produce a variety of expressions demonstrating a deviation from a standard. That standard will vary for each digital subject depending upon the grouping. One example is Leila⁴³, a self identified first-generation daughter of South Asian immigrant parents, who attempts to deviate from the traditional South Asian discourse and expectations placed upon its eldest daughters, a deviation which she then uses to bridge across and resonate with other immigrant communities connecting with her TikTok spaces of #browntiktok #brown #SouthAsian #mentalhealthmatters #oldestgirl #Desi #firstgen #immigrant #daughter #drama #psychology (see [Figure 6](#) for more). These standards (e.g., coded representations) for N|I youth will be developed further in Chapters Four and Five.

Transforming the Underlying Aesthetic

According to Colebrook (2002a), Deleuze makes a distinction between “subject” and “subjugated groups” (p. 60). Subjugated groups are “governed by an identity of units” whereby an underlying quality or condition is required for membership, such as being a particular nationality, a specific ethnicity, prescribed gender, or specific language-speaker, for instance. Colebrook states that “there is an identity that precedes and underlies the assemblage, group or multiplicity” (p. 60). This identity may be a country’s “national aesthetic” and collective experience constituting a nation-state-territory through emergent media representations

⁴³ This is a pseudonym for one of the N|I youth content creators observed and analyzed in Chapter Five.

(Shields, 2014, p. 190). These representations then form the aesthetic of the majority or what is considered a part of a majoritarian discourse to which subjugated groups would be compelled to conform (Colebrook, 2002a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

On the other hand, 'subject groups' transform with the alteration of force/s (i.e., desires), and they do not have a pre-given identity or image. In other words, what a subject *is* in that group would also be altered with each transformation and new expressions of that group or grouping (i.e., assemblage) (Colebrook, 2002a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). According to Colebrook (2002a), "[m]inority groups...are constantly in transformation: they are not governed by an image or identity" (p. 61). Thinking with Shield's (2014) concept of a national aesthetics, those who are a part of the Canadian 'majoritarian' nation-state-territory would appeal to the perceived, created, and given collective identity as their basis for coming together as a country and, as such, for immigrant acceptance and belonging. Concerning the aforementioned national aesthetic, those who form a part of the 'minority' could include N|I's, individuals who are a part of racialized or marginalized communities, and anyone who breaks from the majoritarian aesthetic. Such individuals would have their subjectivities (individual or collective) transformed by their respective groupings and the collective expressions produced within and from other potential groupings. Taking this example onto the digital realm, the 'majoritarian' would be akin to the finite and perceived unit (e.g., coded language) of those forces that seek to group these spaces. For example, the boundaries and rules of the platform, algorithms feeding and maintaining user interest, an affect economy that is driven by a discourse of popularity (e.g., likes, shares, and corporate sponsorships), and corporations that own social media platforms. Under these majoritarian forces, those who are a part of the 'minority' will transform in its

wake. In the context of a digital social space, the determination of who is the majority | minority or what is majoritarian | minoritarian will depend on how groups are assembled⁴⁴.

Considering a Minoritarian Becoming

Some may imagine that a rupture or a deviation is a momentous occurrence, however, it might involve a small action that occurs at the intensive and micro-levels. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) do not suggest a complete rupture as it can destroy the subject and may lead to a figurative and, for some, a literal death. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari suggest approaching subjective experimentation through small actions like those executed by a chisel or "fine file" rather than a "sledgehammer" (p. 160). For Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings are minoritarian since they deterritorialize from the coded territory (or body) to produce connections with other orders "to transform and maximise" itself by extending beyond a singular expression (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 57). This formation of connections ties becomings to a politics of difference that is not seeking to differentiate (e.g., us versus them), but rather, to constitute and build productive connections with others and the world (Buchanan, 2021a, 2021b; Deleuze, 1968/1994). As a result, becomings are co-produced and reciprocal in their emergence and as such constitute a double ontological movement (Buchanan, 2021a, 2021b; see also, Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), a minoritarian-becoming must include everyone, even those who are part of the majority, which makes becoming-minoritarian a molecular

⁴⁴ It should be noted that being in the majority or minority does not come with a positive or negative qualifier attached to them, however, it is associated with power. Recalling that the minority | majority positionality is one of alterity, where one imposes a privileged or dominant, majoritarian, standard, while the other, the minority, is seeking to transform it.

transformation that affects both the minority and the majority (p.110). First, as a pedagogical move, in order to consider a becoming-minoritarian, one must comprehend what could potentially constitute a becoming and create a molecular transformation for all. Let us consider as a thought experiment a transversal move connecting a classroom full of students to a concert and a mosh pit full of music enthusiasts. A classroom is more than just the physical presence of the students, the teacher, the curriculum. Similarly, a concert is more than just the physical presence of a band, stage, music, and concert goers. Rather, they are the presence of those nonconscious forces of affect that are like a “change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact” (Colman, 2005/2010, p. 11), which are in addition to everything else that can make something emerge.

A Collision of Desires

For a teacher, ‘collisions’ of affect are messy and often chaotic moments, much like a mosh pit at a rock concert. The mosh pit is a chaotic place, full of sweaty, overexcited bodies crashing into each other. Mosh pits are spaces of affect, much like a classroom. Attending a concert is a visceral experience where one gets pulled and moved by the energy—music—pulsating around them, much like a classroom can be or could potentially be. The mosh pit is about “losing” oneself to the music, the moment, and the pit (Wilcha, 2002). One is influenced by many variables, and by adjusting those variables, one can and will vary the potential outcomes; the music intensifies, the bodies move faster (Silverberg et al., 2013)⁴⁵. Once one is in the middle of a mosh-pit, the idea of the ‘bounded’ self drops away. One becomes part of the

⁴⁵ Silverberg et al. (2013) is a great read if you want to know how a mosh pit is affected by music, bodies, and its environment. They had a working link to a simulator, but that is sadly no longer working.

assemblage (a greater whole), an assemblage of "haecceities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 261) where the "body is defined by...the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness...the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential" (p. 260). With every push, collision, flash of the strobe light, and electric riff, you are *becoming-mosh-pit*. Affect is what determines your next move in the pit and whether or not you can navigate that space effectively without being crushed or severely hurt.

While a completely different context, the classroom is a space often overpopulated with student bodies each with their singular experiences and circumstances, with external noises and environmental occurrences (bright luminescents, strange odours, viruses), with administrative and teacher bodies moving about, with curriculum being taught, and with material artifacts (e.g., texts, chairs) laying about. In such a space, with every neurological or personal connection made, with every lesson given, with every question asked, with every response, one might imagine a potential becoming-minoritarian emerging, a *becoming-class*. However, a *becoming* is immanent to the intensities present *in situ*. It has no specific direction or propulsion except that of the collective assemblage of enunciation (e.g., collective expression) that moves it forward, if there is one. According to Ian Buchanan (2021), becoming and intensities are synonymous (p. 37). What teachers might hope for in the classroom is for the curriculum, students, content expression to come together and affect|effect in order to collectively connect with their class and move some-learning forward.

To consider a minoritarian politics with N|I youth as digital subjects online, one might ask what sort of 'collisions' and transformations affect and effect both the minority and the

majority? What is it that is being created in the transversal spaces online? To consider the becomings that are yet-to-become, let us first consider how N|I youth could position themselves within digital spaces and transverse them *differently*.

Considerations for a Digital & Diasporic Subject

What does it mean to be displaced when the very meaning of *place* is continually disrupted and re-negotiated simultaneously in the online and offline spheres? To consider this question, let us draw upon the concept of diaspora (Awan, 2016). Although this term was once used to describe a specific migration and dispersal of a people (i.e., Jewish people), the term has evolved to include diverse definitions magnified by the circumstances of migration (Awan, 2016). *Diaspora* historically went from including specific groups of people to including ‘types of’ diasporas, such as cultural diasporas or trade diasporas (Awan, 2016). In regards to understanding displaced populations and their second and third generation offspring, Awan uses the term diaspora to describe them as “‘diasporas without homeland,’ where the relationship to an original home is not only contested or refused but is simply not there” (p. 8). Here, Awan describes the “diasporic condition of [being] ‘without home’” (p. 8). This condition of without home or place is bound to the subject itself. In Awan’s article, *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise* (2016), she considers the diasporic subject as being “always in-between, always becoming and heterogenous,” requiring a different approach to how one must think urban spaces and how agencies are being “played out” in those spaces (p. 4). The consideration of digi-spaces as places of subjective singularization plied in this dissertation suggests a different kind of diasporic subject that might be called a *diasporic digital subject*.

A diasporic digital subject is often found in-between digi-spaces. That is, they not only act within digi-spaces, but in on|offline spaces, always becoming in the connections they are making, and heterogeneous in their ability to occupy multiple spaces and times (Awan, 2016). As touched upon earlier, broad and, at times, severe ramifications of climate change and technological advances (to name a few) have led to diasporic movements, and the emergence of techno-ecologic networks where belonging and identity are no longer necessarily tied to a nation-state or bound by traditional boundaries (Appadurai, 1996; Fleras, 2011, 2015). In the Canadian context and in-real-life (irl), this situation is part of a postmulticultural era of the “‘here,’ ‘there,’ and ‘everywhere’” (Fleras, 2015, p. 65). This postmulticultural era challenges the current idea of “diversity-in-unity” (Fleras, 2011, p. 22) and the ‘unified mosaic’ of multiculturalism 1.0 as a national framework for immigrant integration into the national aesthetic (Shields, 2014). Immigrants exist in and occupy (physically and emotionally) multiple spaces, times, and places at any one time. For example, they may live in one place, have family in another, build homes in both, all the while their hearts and minds are living in one, the other, both at once, or none at all (Fleras, 2011, 2015; Hébert, Wilkinson, Ali, & Oriola, 2008).

There are many reasons for diaspora and displacement. For the forcibly removed, unwillingly displaced, and refugee, for instance, the moments of tension, placelessness and “in-betweenness” are ever-present (He, 2010, p. 473). Considering the aforementioned in the digital realm, a diaspora and, by extension, a diasporic digital subject (and identity) could occur when individual subjects or subjectivities are dispersed outside their homogenous space(s) of personal comfort and belonging (e.g., home, a social media platform). Once dispersed, they are

then situated as a minority subject (i.e., newcomer) elsewhere to build new connections with space, place, and other objects.

Transversing Digital Spaces as Diasporic Subjects

What does it mean to be a N|I transversing the technological and digital online and offline spaces—separately and simultaneously? The notion of a diasporic identity that is not bound by place, digital online, new media spaces or otherwise is explored in *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* by Taylor and Pitman (2013), who state that the online is a realm that is no longer separate from the offline ‘real’ world. Instead, the online is “fully integrated into the offline life” (p. 4) (see also, Schultze, 2014). The lines between the two worlds are blurred and, in some cases, eliminated, allowing for ease of movement from one space to another. Sherry Turkle echoes this sentiment in her *TEDx Talk Alone Together* [Video] (2011) when she confesses to her audience that;

[w]hat I didn’t see coming [in all the years of her research] and what we have now is that mobile connectivity, that world of devices always on and always on us, would mean that we would be able basically to bail out of the physical real at any time, to go to all of the other places and spaces that we have available to us and that we would want to. (5:48)

Turkle (2011) goes on to explain how humans are living multiple lives. Such “multi-living” exists simultaneously in the real and the digital worlds, comprising what she calls the “life mix” (6:35). This simultaneity is referred to as a “cyborgian entanglement” by Schultze (2014). They are otherwise known as productions across multiple locations that are experienced by many when managing and interacting with numerous online spaces at once (as self or other), yet maintaining an utterly different connection in real life (irl).

The idea of entanglement might be connected to the notion of “embodied identities” in virtual spaces, wherein individuals’ digital and physical selves are so enmeshed that their on and offline identities are indecipherable depending on who is on and who is in front of the screen (Schultze, p. 94). This enmeshment speaks to the permeability, fluidity, and heterogeneity of the online digital subject and their ability to transverse multiple spaces and times at once. The digital online consumption, modification, transformation, and production of content in connection with what, where, and whom-ever, complexifies the notion of space and place as well as how one might transverse and navigate said spaces individually and collectively—both on and offline (Taylor & Pitman, 2013). Therefore, an understanding that on and offline spaces are simultaneous, enmeshed, inter-and intra-related is an important starting point in our understanding of the question of *becoming-other*. The following section places the diasporic digital N|I subject in relation to the concepts of transmigration, desiring-machines, and Guattari’s (1992/2006) concept of transversality.

Transnationalism, Transmigrants, and the Desiring Machine

As a conceptual model for thinking about migrants and immigration, transnationalism blurs the governmental boundaries set in place, fosters movement across borders, and could work to decentralize what is thought to be “conventional” nationhood (Fleras, 2011; 2015; Vetrivel, 1999). *Transnationalism* is defined by Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton (1992) as “the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (p. 1). The transnational model allows immigrant identity to no longer be limited or fixed to a singular identity. Instead, the transnational immigrant identity is interlaced within a network of social relations and is fluid between multiple-locales and multiple

identities (Fleras, 2011, 2015; Schiller et al., 1992). In other words, a transnational immigrant identity is constantly being negotiated and is in flux, which is especially true when the individual is removed or disconnected from their geographical location of birth, yet reconnected across borders (Fleras, 2011, p. 28). Transnationalism, for example, could be applied to the moment when a *newcomer* digital subject is in contact with their place of origin through various networking mediums such as social media, travelling in-between places, and negotiating their identities within them all.

A transmigrant is created when an migrant “neither severs ties with the home country nor passively assimilates into the host country, yet revels in the positives of such ambivalence” (p. 28) and their identities and consciousness are negotiated within an ecology of social networks that include bonds of loyalty, attachment, and belonging (Fleras, 2011; Schiller et al., 1992). That said, it is not always the case that those who are displaced ‘revel’ in the ambivalence, such as individuals and communities who have had no choice in their displacement, namely refugees, children of immigrants, or forced migrants. As a result, Fleras (2011) suggests a movement towards seeing the conceptualization of immigrants and immigration as ‘verbs’ rather than ‘nouns’ (p. 29). That is, the immigrant's significance pertains not solely to what they are (e.g., a fixed representation or identity) but what they might *do*.

Thinking the immigrant as a ‘verb’, one needs to go back to Schiller et al.’s (1992) development of transnationalism that states “the transmigrant experience is inextricably linked [to] the changing conditions of global capitalism, and must be analyzed within that world context” (p. 5). This necessity is most apparent in governmental immigration policy and reform and how educational programs are structured and executed (e.g., TOEFL). Similarly, the forces

of capitalism effectively flow through the digital realm working upon any who connect with its interface, therefore requiring a way of examining the connective forces and bodies together.

N|I as Transversalist Bridge

As a concept discussed above, transnationalism could work to decentre how we come to think models of relationality and networks between subject and place across borders. This is particularly germane to the online sphere, which is a potential vehicle for reimagining how we can relate to place and others. In other words, transnationalism urges us to consider how one might interact *differently* with the diverse ‘network’ of connections made on and offline and across borders, allowing N|I to maintain or transform self and place, thus, demonstrating a shift in how N|I are to be seen and *engaged with*. In order to examine and analyze the multitudinous connections that could occur upon these prolific and permeable spaces with a diasporic and digital N|I subject, I draw upon the Deleuzeoguattarian concept of social and technological machines in order to consider N|I connections and potential gaps for transformation.

For Guattari, technological machines are a part of the mass media, “commodity culture” (as cited in Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008, p. 24), socio-cultural realm that “operate at the heart of human subjectivity” (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 4). They function as machines of “desire abolition” (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008, p. 37) (e.g., deterritorialization) rupturing or breaking a subject by way of sensations (e.g., *visualities* (Shields, 2014)), affects or unconscious and nonconscious intensities in order to transform, construct, or produce a subjectivity (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 4). However, a multiple emergence emerges from the deterritorializing processes of technological machines (as discussed in “Escape from the Algorithm” in Chapter Four). They possess a dimension of alterity that seeks to differentiate from its structure, seeks to create

disequilibrium, and a “reconversion” of sorts (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008, p. 37). Guattari (as cited in Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008) states:

The machine always depends on exterior elements in order to be able to exist as such. It implies a complementarity, not just with the [person] who fabricates it, makes it function or destroys it, but it is itself in a relation of alterity with other virtual or actual machines—a ‘nonhuman’ enunciation, a proto-subjective diagram. (p. 37)

When examining or analyzing machines (see Chapter Two) and the machines attached to them, Savat (2010) states that focusing on the types of machines alone will not explain much about society or those who live within it. Instead, machines must be placed in *conversation with and in relation to* its connective parts (Deleuze as cited in Savat, 2010; see also, Deleuze, 1990/1995).

The N|I or diasporic digital subject, then, becomes a “transversalist bridge” (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 108), living (physically or ethereally) in one place, their minds and hearts living in another, all the while attempting to reach out and build connections with the world around them.

In *chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (1992/2006), Guattari speaks about the “transversalist bridge” (p. 108-109) as that which occurs when an entity *connects with* and “inhabits” two, or more, “domains” (i.e., spaces and places) such that;

the incorporeals of value and virtuality become endowed with an ontological depth equal to that of objects set in energetico-spatiotemporal coordinates. It is less a question of an identity of being which would transverse regions, retaining its heterogeneous texture, than of an identical processual persistence. (p. 109)

In transversing these spaces, digital or otherwise, an individual or digital entity (made up of 1's and 0's) is not retaining their *Being* (e.g., representation, identity, given signifier) as affirmed by self and others—i.e., “heterogeneous texture”—rather it is their “*manner of being*,” or the machinic processes that produce being, that have been informed by their affirmed Being, that is their “processual persistence” (p. 109). To apply this in digital spaces, one is not necessarily retaining their given or 'real' identity (e.g., I am Adriana and a researcher from Canada). Instead, it is the manner in which their digital subjectivity (e.g., tiktokker @userhm1⁴⁶) is coproducing and connecting in said digi-spaces that affirms their *manner of being* in the online realm (e.g., Has a private account, no content, has 12 followers, follows 1898 accounts and 0 likes). This transversal movement occurs in relations of alterity as difference and desire. Yet, such movement begins with an auto-affirming Being that exists “for-itself” and “for-others”, as a set or given identity, perceived representation, or subject as a ground for thinking difference *differently* (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 109). We might rejoin this ostensible site of transformation to Deleuze’s caveat in *Postscript on Societies of Control* (1990/1992) that while technology provides a sense of fluidity and continual opportunity for change and movement, one is constantly being captured, modulated, and consumed by the various codes of capital that flow through the digi-spaces with which one connects. One cannot wholly tell what these spaces will produce.

A Transversal Chilean Experience. Speaking from the Chilean⁴⁷ refugee and exile experience in Canada, many who arrived to this place refused to put down roots for the hope of

⁴⁶ This is a pseudonym.

⁴⁷ Chileans who arrived in Canada either before or just after the military coup in Chile on September 11, 1973.

returning 'home' one day. Nevertheless, some-but-not-always-all new *chilenos* who arrived at that time were reaching out and attempting to create connections with the broader Canadian, *chilenx*, South and Central American, Indigenous communities, and beyond in an effort of survival and spirit of solidarity⁴⁸. This attempt to connect was accomplished through community, social, educational, and political events held across their respective host cities and various other countries with the Chilean diaspora spread across the world⁴⁹. It could be said that for all who took part in these networks and events, there was a becoming-*chilenx* occurring in the "cross through" (i.e., transversal) spaces where barriers and borders were broken down for all who came together in an unfamiliar place. Becomings were singular for all who arrived. For some *chilenos*, their becoming was one of hardship (e.g., those who could not adapt and sank into depression, divorce and suicide). For others (e.g., those who dreamed only of return), it was all about *el retorno* to a place they once knew yet no longer existed in the present time. For others, it was a way forward and opportunity to embrace their new place and establish new connections to make their current space, a place they could build upon, even if the opportunity was not originally one they wanted (Wright & Oñate Zúñiga, 2007).

Augie Fleras (2015) acknowledges and discusses societal dynamics concerning the notion of (trans)migration and (hyper)minorities, whereby one's translocal identities and belongings are no longer fixed to boundaries or permanent locales. In other words, the world of the (trans)migrant and (hyper)minority is "de-spatialized" (p. 65), where place is decoupled from

⁴⁸ While I witnessed the intention of solidarity and many acts of it. I also witnessed the tension that existed within the Chilean community socially and politically, between communities (e.g., South and Central American communities), between those who arrived as exiles and those who arrived as economic immigrants, and expressions of racism, classism, anti-2SLGBTQIA sentiment, and machismo.

⁴⁹ The Chilean diaspora was all seen all over the globe and not localized to one country.

identity and belonging is conceptualized at a global scale. For the refugee, the exile, the displaced, the immigrant, the migrant, the contemporary digital citizen of the world, and the diasporic digital subject, place can represent something more than a geographical or physical location. Instead, it becomes an abstraction of time, space, memory, emotion and is no longer static but in constant movement and flux. Therefore, displacement presents a paradox of sorts since it can be very disorienting in that there is no one location to which one belongs. Such a scenario can, on the one hand, be confining in that one is tied to the time and space of their homeland. In addition, the displaced is bound by the expectations, restrictions, and impositions of their new host land, yet at the same time their displacement could provide a new space for potential becomings or continual productions to occur (Colebrook, 2005; McClennen, 2004). That said, one cannot count on those new spaces to be “libratory” in nature, for they will not necessarily “save us” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 500). Alternatively, how one connects with the machine will determine its production. A machine, social or otherwise, is nothing more than its connection and its productions; *it is what it does*. As alluded to earlier, how individuals or communities that are displaced (i.e., N|I) *do* in a new place is irrelevant to the forces of capitalism (e.g., corporations, Canada’s economy). However, what is relevant, for those who seek to connect with N|I’s as forces of production (e.g., social media platforms or advertising agencies), is how they interact with the flows of capital to produce something for the global market economy (Bakir & McStay, 2021). This harsh ‘truth’ of ‘the displaced’ or ‘newcomer’, while not unique to this particular group but exacerbated in the offline world, is similarly carried forth into the online realm, as shown through the case desire analysis in Chapter Five.

Situating the N|I in Place When Out-of-Place

The study of N|I subjects' use of social networking platforms necessitates that I attend to processes of place|making. As previously developed, place|making is both an integral and challenging aspect of N|I becomings in new places. Yet, the idea of place is complex. What is evoked when one thinks of *place*? While the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) has more than twenty definitions of "place" as a noun alone, the most prominent is "place" as "a particular portion of space...occupied by a person or thing...a position..." (p. 1107). This definition gives space, physicality and geography. By *Googling* 'place', what first appears is a map of where one is possibly located, connoting a city or country, somewhere with defined borders, and a point of reference. Gazing upon these images, one sees buildings, homes, and structures, thus implying place as something one can exist 'in', occupy its space for a time, claim to own, belong to⁵⁰, and inhabit. For Indigenous peoples of North America and in specific, communities situated on Treaty 6 territory where the University at which I study stands and where I settled as an immigrant, place gives power and connection to narrative consciousness and reality, and the "landscape shapes and molds the way in which the people understand the world" (McLeod 2002, p. 39; Donald, 2009).

Place becomes something that guides how you interact with the world, influences you, unifies you with others, and is where one begins and, for some, ends their story. According to architect and architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980), place is concrete or given. It is akin to an environment, yet it is more than a locality. It is a "total qualitative phenomenon" and an integral part of existence (p. 8). One of the concepts regarding place that Norberg-Schulz

⁵⁰ This sense of belonging gives 'homes' connection to the adage that 'there is no place like home'.

draws on in his work with place and architecture is that of *genius loci* or spirit of place. *Genius loci* is a Roman concept that works upon the idea that every independent Being has its genius or guardian spirit, which gives “life” to people, places, and things, determining their essence or character (p. 18). In ancient Rome, humans would be aware of a *genius’* importance in the locale where ‘life’ was taking place for them, knowing that their survival would depend on their ‘good’ relationship to the place they came to occupy (in a physical and psychic sense) (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). What *genius loci* did for architects was allow them to create meaningful places for humans to dwell with this spirit in mind. However, this spirit was based upon a “concrete reality” (Norberg-Schulz, 2015, p. 5) that humans had to face daily. In regards to this inquiry, what if that reality is no longer concrete? Will the *genius loci* remain? Andreas Siess and Matthias Wolfel (2017) of Karlsruhe University have examined this very question in the virtual realm. They use the concept of *genius loci* with architecture in connection with the digital online sphere to create a framework for social interactions—displaying virtual architecture in a behavioural context (e.g., social media space like Reddit) that generates or creates virtual places (e.g., r/spaces). According to some scholars in spatial humanities, digital space cannot be thought about using the same definitions and terms used for “humanistic space,” one that occupies and is bound by the limits of experience and perception (Dunn, 2019, p. 2). This conceptualization makes sense since the digital is not a physical space that can be touched, physically experienced, or perceived in the same way. What, then, is place in the digi-sphere?

Place in the Digi-Sphere

Is there such a ‘thing’ as place online, or is it some ‘thing’—i.e., virtuality—that is made? Engaging with the ideas of Virilio (2001), Savat (2010) alludes that digital space-time is

experienced *differently* by users in the online and offline realms. This engagement pertains specifically to how reality is perceived, constructed, and experienced. However, Savat furthers that when considering the digital realm in connection with the user, there is no such thing as place online. Savat writes, “It is perhaps more appropriate to ask not what sort of space you occupy and how you occupy that space but, rather, a question of when and how you are” (p. 432). Following his thinking, within the digi-sphere the user might exist when a user is present, in time and space, and when an action is performed, either upon them (e.g., by streams of algorithmic code) or by them (e.g., social media posts). This conceptualization is congruent with machinic theorization that considers the connective social⁵¹ (and technological) components that work to produce a subjectivity in digital spaces (Buchanan, 2014a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1988; Guattari, 1992/2006; Savat, 2010). Savat’s (2010) work is significant for thinking about how digital codes of capital and, in particular, unseen affective algorithmic codes of digital space are working upon a body to produce a subjectivity (see Chapter Two on “Turn to Affect”).

Savat’s conceptualization of place, however, does not account for what occurs once user actions are carried forward by others and what happens once the user logs off momentarily⁵² (e.g., RTs, re-posts, comments that are responded to in the offline, hashtag movements that are started as a result of one’s post, viral memes, collective projects). To address this overlooked dimension, Paul William Eaton (2016), engaging with Baradian posthuman ethics, “entangled with” 7 college students across diverse social media spaces (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube,

⁵¹ A machine is first and foremost social (Guattari, 1992/2006; Savat, 2010).

⁵² Who knows what logging off means for each user? It could be a temporary shutting down of a phone or a complete shutting down of an application.

Facebook) to explore and implicate these platforms as “agentic,” “intra-acting,” “multiple,” fluid, and “material entities” (spaces) to produce a becoming (p. 168). Eaton goes on to state that “[s]ocial media spaces often infiltrate one another’s supposed domains: tweets appear as status updates; photos from Instagram creep into Twitter, Facebook or blogs...In these ways, social media spaces themselves become agentic within spaces outside their ‘afforded’ boundaries” (p. 169). Eaton demonstrates that digital spaces do not require a human presence or observance for becoming to continue. Rather, becoming is situated in the intra-actions or “entanglements” (p. 170) that occur in the spaces. Eaton’s article accounts for the physical design, architecture, and material objects found within the digital space (e.g., photos, GIFs, comments, Tweets) that contribute to becoming. However, there is an inattention in Eaton’s work to the affective, inhuman forces (e.g., neoliberal capitalism) that flow through to affect and effect a user. The digi-space continues with or without the user. In addition, while the user may not be engaged with a screen or social digi-space, other human users may be engaged with their user-profile thinking that they are ‘on.’ This form of user engagement takes us back to Savat (2010) and the relation of time to the digital realm, specifically how a digital space acts upon a user when they are ‘present’ and in connection with the machine (i.e., the screen, the platform, the digital technology itself)⁵³.

Place is conceptualized differently online. For this study, it is not that digi-spaces are a place in the “humanistic” sense. Instead, they are moments made in the connective spaces of the digital sphere. Place |making online is an action constitutive of the machinic components in

⁵³ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

relation to a user's 'presence' online in connection with others. The question then becomes, how can these digi-spaces work for N|I youth for generative place|making?

Towards Little Digi-Publics

The concept of "little publics," conceptualized by Anna Hickey-Moody (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), is significant for my work with N|I youth in the realm of digital social media spaces as it is a tool for considering "the political significance of marginalized youth" (Hickey-Moody, 2016, p. 58). While not all N|I are marginalized or, in some cases, racialized, they are often considered a 'minority' or nondominant group in whichever country they arrive. As touched on earlier, who a N|I is, where they are from and their migration circumstances, are complex and not represented by a single ethnocultural group or socio-economic status. Little publics, as a concept, offers a potential for exposing the emergent connections of youth action and agency as they constitute their life choices and circumstances in whichever social realms—or "publics" (p. 59)—they might inhabit.

As a cultural and public pedagogy theorist in arts and media, Hickey-Moody is most concerned with youth voice. In particular, she is concerned with "publics" (e.g., spaces) where youth are the most invested and how youth might obtain a voice within specific realms. In observing this, we might gauge youth agency, if any, in the political and social sphere. The concept of little publics as a theory of "counterpublics" has evolved for Hickey-Moody (p. 58). She examines the formation of 'counterpublics' by marginalized groups as a way of "speak[ing] back to, or critique[ing]" in the public sphere and, in particular, those spaces that youth inhabit through the creative and collective force of art (p. 63). For this research study with newcomer youth, her work provides a line of inquiry that sees "youth events as legitimate sites of cultural

inquiry and sources of knowledge about the lives and opinions of young people” (p. 64). Also, and most important for those new to Canada (and any new nation-state), *little publics* provide a potential avenue for understanding and articulating youth voice in various educational and social (digital) spaces. Concerning this project, the concept of *little publics* becomes about the collective expressions or creative productions that emerge in digital spaces for “public making” in the form of place|making (p. 64).

A Space for Considering Place|Making with N|I Youth

The above conceptualizations of place are essential for this project with N|I youth in order to observe what becomings might emerge in place|making and subjectivity creation within and outside digital spaces. Within the last ten years (2009 to 2019)⁵⁴, the research completed with N|I youth and digital media in education falls into the following categories: social media as a tool for empowering marginalized youth in education (Ng-A-Fook, Radford, Yazdanian, & Norris, 2013; Ranieri & Bruni, 2013; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Valdivia, 2017); examining technology or social media use by ‘minority’/immigrant students (Ololube et al., 2013; Buzzetto-Hollywood & Aledo, 2018; Lam, 2009); and, digital media technology as tools for learning and literacy development for nondominant or immigrant groups (Weis et al., 2002; Razfar & Yang, 2010; Lin & Bruce, 2013; Zimmerman & Milligan, 2008). What is helpful for this project are the studies that have looked at social media spaces as participatory spaces or that demonstrate how youth navigate online spaces (online|offline spaces concurrently) and, in turn, how online spaces modulate subjectivity and create identity (Ranieri & Bruni, 2013; Shaw & Krug, 2013; Richardson, 2016; Ringrose et al., 2013; Merkel & Sanford, 2011). What is missing

⁵⁴ I began my offline doctoral research in 2019.

are how these modulations, creations (if any), transformations (if any) in the online sphere affect how N|Is connect online and those may impact in the offline world (e.g., in the classroom, with peers, with community, with the political realm, and dominant forces like capitalism) to transform place for themselves and others.

A Public Pedagogy | Considerations for *Becoming-With*

In *Problematizing Public Pedagogy* (2014), Burdick, Sandlin, and O' Malley state that: public pedagogy has been largely constructed as a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond or outside of formal schooling. Public pedagogy involves learning in institutions...in informal educational sites...and through figures and sites of activism. (p. 2)

Public pedagogy is a pragmatic and valuable concept for this inquiry, given that it is working on the premise that subjectivity is produced and modulated in the socio-political realm (Guattari, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008). I am specifically drawing from the work of jagodzinski (2014), and in particular, his engagement with “true learning” (p. 71). According to jagodzinski (2014), learning is connected to “the *problematic of Ideas* and to *desire* itself.” Thus, learning works with images while “going beyond what is known or can be done in a given situation” (p. 71). Learning is more than what can be seen, observed, or consumed in terms of knowledge or skills, instead, it is about the process and the event⁵⁵. jagodzinski is critical of theorists that dismiss popular culture as sites of public pedagogy as being “irrelevant, nonserious and trivial” and of those in the critical pedagogies that rely on “representational

⁵⁵ Reynolds (2007), explaining Deleuze, states, “the event never actually happens or is present; it is always that which has already happened, or is going to happen” (p. 145). It confronts the past, in the present. Never static, always moving towards a future yet to come. Explained further in Chapter Two, the section on “Turn to Affect.”

thought” to bring about a form of emancipation for the subject or group (p. 66). He argues that representational thinking is an action that ends up preventing the freedoms these theorists are trying to promote, as it works against the subject. On the one hand, representational thought makes it so the future of any given subject is closed due to its pre-determination, while on the other, the neoliberal system has captured the subject in an endless loop of consumption and exploitation, preventing any escape (jagodzinski, 2014). The knowledge of this cycle is relevant for youth who are consistently being captured by any standardizing force (e.g., capitalism), as well as for marginalized, racialized, or ethnicized newcomers and immigrants who are caught by the representational media images and rhetoric of the socio-political realm (Besley, 2009; Boffa, 2015; Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill & Livingstone, 2013). This capture and exploitation are especially apparent in the digital realm on social media platforms (e.g., TikTok and Instagram), where unseen algorithms analyze, codify, and categorize digital subjects for consumption and control. Instead, jagodzinski (2014) states that in order "to live up to the promise of a remapping of public pedagogy within this mediated society of control requires a posthegemonic approach that radically rethinks the place of resistance, knowledge, learning, and the teacher as a subject position" (p. 69). Following jagodzinski’s provocation, this research aims to take up the N|I youth position, as a digital subject, against hegemonic forces that flow through the overly mediated spaces of the digi-sphere to rethink space and place | making online, and potential avenues for “true learning” to occur.

What is particularly helpful about jagodzinski’s public pedagogy regarding this inquiry and content analysis is that it works with the time of the present where something happens, something catches, and something propels from the unconscious and unseen. This ‘present’ is

one that “has already either passed or is about to come, it is never present (never conscious), and hence as an incorporeal event it leaves a profound memory” (p. 71). In other words, it is always fleeting and never entirely in one’s grasp as one is experiencing and living it in continuation. In the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994), it is to work with desires and affect, and it is a notion of being affected by the moment, the object, the subject, the experience, and, perhaps, being compelled to do something more—as “sense-events” (jagodzinski, 2014, p. 71). Sense occurs the very moment that a subject comes into contact with the world in which they are situated (May, 2005). Sense also exists before the coding and the given and projected representations; it is the becoming before it is named, and it is what propels the body (e.g., digital subject) forward into a new direction (May, 2005; Rajchman, 2000). Recall the mosh pit earlier in this chapter.

Returning to Savat (2010) and thinking about how users engage with the digi-space, the sense-event is especially meaningful. *Sense-events* materialize in the digital realm, and social digi-spaces in diverse forms, including posting and commenting on Twitter, Instagram, or Reddit feeds. These *sense-events* manifest as affects, desires, virtualities (multiplicities), and numerous forms of collective enunciations (Guattari, 1992/2006). They are not only crucial for how N|I youth interact with social media. They are relevant for how I, as a researcher, interact with the project itself as my desires impact my online ethnographic choices and analysis⁵⁶. A *sense-event*, according to jagodzinski, “implies a being-with” that is essential for this research, as it requires

⁵⁶ In addition, how you, as a reader, interact with the project as a work of learning and potential becoming (as observed in Chapters Four and Five).

“conscious concern” and being “sensitive and attuned” to the excesses that are present and which emerge at the moment (p. 71).

The digi-sphere is a space where learning can occur as encounters and potential *sense-events*. Returning to the aforementioned concept of little publics as theorized by Anna Hickey-Moody (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) as one of the ways that youth can create spaces and place|make for themselves and others. Correspondingly, Wallin (2014) states that “[n]iche online formations [can] constitute ‘publics’” (p. xxxiii) in the way that these communities can be engaged with as a form of public pedagogy. These are singular and unique territories in which one cannot anticipate how a subject may organize and interact. As a result, they are niche “territories” which are concerned with the “singular or unique emergence of interests, patterns, modes of connection and intensities of organization” (p. xxxiv) that may emerge. These “territories,” then, behave as group-subject formations within social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) to generate a variety of enunciation or expressions of identity, interests, modes of connection, or further formation of groupings. As demonstrated in later chapters, these niche formations are constantly under threat by standardizing forces that seek to appropriate and consume them.

Ungrounding Thought | Thinking With

This chapter presents several different concepts for transversal connection and consideration. First, the conceptualization of Newcomer|Immigrants as complex, multi-layered, and heterogeneous individuals that are not only engaged with representationally but in terms of their actions. Second, the term newcomer is uncoupled from its various assumptions and rethought as a philosophical concept to contemplate a ‘becoming-with’ using the vehicle of

minoritarian politics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Third, the notion of diaspora and the diasporic subject is engaged with to consider how the contemporary digital subject, particularly N|I youth, moves in online spaces. Fourth, the concept of transnationalism works to decentre and rethink the notion of borders in the digi-sphere and to reconceptualize models of relationality and networks between subject and place online. Fifth, the chapter contemplates how a place cannot exist online. Nevertheless, it can be made online in the *in-between* spaces of potentiality (e.g., digi-spaces, interactions or connections between people or machines, virtual and aesthetic connections) to open up space for creativity and collectivity to emerge (Genosko, 2002; Guattari, 1992/2006).

Chapter Two – Assembling a Machinic Socio-Digital Literature Review

This chapter undertakes a review of the literature on the exploration of assemblage and machine theory pertaining to the digital realm and N|I diasporic digital subjects. Ultimately, this review will support subsequent arguments related to the questions: What can a technological or digital machine *do*? and further, What can a digital subject (N|I youth subjectivity) *do* when connected with a digital machine? Félix Guattari's ethico-aesthetics helps explore the relationality between subjects and machines, considering the multitude of inter-and intra-relations and processes that could bring forth emergent and immanent creative productions in spaces on and offline. This aspect of my research project considers the various ethical implications of the potential connections made in digital spaces and where they might go (Guattari, 1992/2006). Thereby engaging with an *ethos* of the collective that aims to expose and make visible potential spaces of rupture⁵⁷ for possible creation⁵⁸ and new modes of thinking and becoming to emerge.

I explicitly examine the yet-to-be-determined collective and/or individual aesthetic productions (e.g., TikTok vlog posts, timeline comments, video duets, stitches) generated by N|I youth when transversing online|offline spaces as diasporic digital subjects. It is crucial to be aware that N|I youth are not alone in digital media spaces and are in simultaneous connection and co-production with other 'humans' (in the form of digital subjects), nonhumans, and inhumans as biomediated bodies⁵⁹ (Clough, 2008). Nonhuman connections involve anything that might have a material impact on a body at a cognitive, affective, or social level (e.g.,

⁵⁷ Where there are potentials for deterritorialization and/or de-subjectification to occur.

⁵⁸ Creation is not guaranteed.

⁵⁹ Biomediated bodies will be taken on later on in this chapter.

language, texts, artifacts, gestures, representations in media, microaggressions) (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 35-36). Inhuman connections are the impacts from technology, such as connecting with a screen, laptop, algorithms (Jagodzinski, 2018a, p. 13). Such transversal relationships may lead towards collective enunciations or becomings that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a minoritarian-becoming or minoritarian politics (1980/1987). Such becomings are important for considering what N|I youth could potentially become in the various digi-spaces they might negotiate and bridge. This particular research project concerns the multitudinous connections made amongst the human|nonhuman|inhuman⁶⁰ machinic assemblages and, consequently, what might be produced from interactions in and out of time and space (on and offline). As a result of the observed connections and productions, this project is concerned with the many desires working through digi-spaces and upon youth subjectivities to obstruct, codify, modify, and potentially transform them⁶¹.

By addressing the connective and constitutive forces of desire, I explore the question: What makes a subjectivity a desiring (machinic) subjectivity? This is accomplished by delving into the following key concepts: i) machine and assemblage theory to explore what the digital realm can *do* when connected with N|I digital subjects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987); ii) digital media affects and its impacts on subjectivity as traumas or wounds cutting into digi-spaces (Clough, 2016); iii) technology working as different types of social machines to produce an expression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Dyer-Witheford & de

⁶⁰ Nonhuman connections involve those ‘things’ that might have a material impact on a body at a cognitive, affective, or social level (e.g., language, “a-signifying semiotics”, texts, artifacts, representations, gestures, media, racism) (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 35-36). Inhuman connections have to do with technology (Jagodzinski, 2018a, p. 13).

⁶¹ This will be discussed further with the case analyses in Chapter Five.

Peuter, 2009); iv) the capitalist machine as it flows through digital spaces to code, categorize, manipulate, and control digital subjects (Deleuze 1990/1995); and v) the pedagogical implications are of a control society & digital media for N|I youth.

In addition, toward this question, I will be considering jagodzinski's (2014) public pedagogy in which learning occurs when one is caught or captured through sites of learning. Intersecting jagodzinski's scholarship with Shields' (2014) idea of *visualicity*, where invisible yet real forces have tangible impacts upon the world⁶², N|I youth becomings might be considered and taken up as virtuals or potentials that are yet-to-be rendered visible. Hence, N|I youth becomings are a force to be discovered and engaged with as an index of a *becoming-other*.

Assemblage Theory

The contemporary technological world is one of constant on|offline connectivity composed of multi-spatial (Diogenes, 2017), multi-temporal (Savat, 2010), multi-dimensional, and multi-modal (Burke, 2013; Hickey-Moody & Wood, 2008; Zemmels, 2012) digital existence(s). It is a reality where non-truths and alternate truths, posing as fact⁶³, overtake social media 'feeds' and 'timelines' in various content forms, such as images, vlogs, memes, posts, comments, 'Stories'⁶⁴, tweets, to name a few. As a result, it is more important than ever to have a conceptual tool to "disentangle and render visible constitutive threads" of reality as they are perceived, sensed, or experienced by a person(s), thing, or place (Buchanan, 2014a, p. 126). This ability to disentangle is especially pressing for youth engaging daily with digital screen technology and new media platforms.

⁶² Examples of visualicities are the haptic technological feedback in gaming, algorithmic loops, affective economy, and 'like' clicks that lead to sudden serotonin boosts.

⁶³ These are otherwise known as disinformation and mal-information (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018).

⁶⁴ Temporary snippets of life that are shared on Instagram.

In the article *Assemblage Theory and Schizoanalysis* (2014a), Ian Buchanan provides a clear working definition and proper genealogy of the assemblage as a conceptual tool for social scientists. An assemblage, or “machinic assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 71), are the planes, milieus, or territories upon which an expression or enunciation is organized or composed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1992/2006). Digi-spaces, for instance, are the complex assemblages where N|I youth are being composed. In other words, they are the spaces where both the digital realm and N|I youth as digital subjects, acting as machines, connect to produce “some-thing”—N|I youth subjectivity—through an encounter.

Ian Buchanan (2014) lists three elements of a working assemblage. First, it should “always benefit someone or something outside the assemblage itself” (p. 130). For instance, online corporations and neoliberal capitalism use digital bodies through an affective economy (Andrejevic, 2013; Savat, 2010, 2013). Similarly, those individuals engaging as users and content creators with social media platforms, like TikTok, benefit from the content they consume and create. Online digi-spaces are marked by a both/and constitutive connection. Second, assemblages should be “purposeful” (p. 130) rather than chance encounters. By existing in social media spaces, users actively or passively participate in those spaces, even through the act of disabling certain interactions in their settings. Finally, assemblages should be “a multiplicity,” meaning that its “components are both known and undecided” (p. 130). For instance, as potentially “active” (Zemmels, 2012, p. 18) consumers, creators, and users of social and digital media, we may knowingly bring ourselves into the social media equation, knowing to some extent who or what we are connecting with (e.g., the platform and its rules), yet there are parts of the assemblage that are unknown—e.g., the users that connect to your space, content

produced, and the types of algorithms working behind the scenes. Hence, we do not yet know what a digital space could *do* when connected with a body. That is, even though N|I youth may have a purpose in mind for a particular vlog, what actually emerges from it may not necessarily result in the movement they wanted or intended, as demonstrated in the case studies to come in Chapter Five.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987), assemblages are inherently social, connective, and are immanent to the desires (intensities/affects) that flow through them. Assemblages, as such, have to do with the various machines (e.g., technical, capitalist, and desiring) and how their “components are arranged in relation to each other” as they do not act alone (Harper & Savat, 2016, p. 17; see also, Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Therefore, technologies must be considered and examined within the social assemblages they find themselves in (Harper & Savat, 2016). As an example, if we connect a smartphone, a social media platform and its users, capitalism, a nation-state, and ethnocultural markers as separate machines, we might examine and map a variety of enunciations. The above-listed machines are each inherently social for the fact that they reach beyond themselves, are connective, and while also in relation with another, can work to produce something else.

On the one hand, these connective forces can come together to produce a racialized and minoritized N|I subject in the digi-sphere and beyond, whereby racist comments are made on a N|I’s thread, or they are shadowbanned⁶⁵ from TikTok due to excessive reporting or blocking as

⁶⁵ Shadowbanning silences user-content creators without their knowledge (Mulliner, 2020). Users will often not be aware they are banned until they are told by their followers or they notice that their views are down. This banishment means their videos are tagged as “Not for Feed” (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020, p. 7). This is discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.

a result of speaking out against hate⁶⁶. Conversely, the same forces can come together to produce a collective movement that extends beyond the N|I's subject, taking their expressions beyond their expectations. These collective movements, such as those beginning with TikTok's duets and stitches, can become larger causes or hashtag challenges going viral and resulting in real-life actions, such as #BlackLivesMatter, #TulsaFlop, and #AsianLivesMatter (see Chapter Four, "Escape from the Algorithm").

According to Bogard (2009), Deleuze's conceptualization of the assemblage has a dual form: a form of content that is composed of "fixed matters and energetic components" or set language or code and a form of expression that consists of statements and articulated functions or "enunciations" (p. 15). Stated another way, it is not simply about what assemblages *do*, but also about what they express and how they express it (p. 16). When observing TikTok as an assemblage, for instance, I will not only be concerned with what it *does* to impact N|I youth as a techno-political assemblage through the various intensities that flow through. I will also be concerned with the embedded and indirect discourses that N|I youth are connecting with while on the platform, as expressed through various modes of "speech-acts" (e.g., vlogs, comment texts) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 79) or "semiotic coordinates" (p. 76) (facial expressions, gestures, rules, algorithmic recommendations).

By contemplating the connective social relations, or forces, that N|I youth might encounter in the digi-spaces they transverse, I can begin to articulate the various micro and

⁶⁶ An example of this was observed with an N|I youth named Sasho (see Chapter Five). Sasho is Korean-American youth on TikTok speaking out on hate speech and anti-Asian hate. Sasho is a pseudonym, and I have anonymized all my sources, except for those who have either been published by media, I have obtained permission to use their name and content, or who are a part of the TikTok business machine (Bruckman, Luther, & Fiesler, 2016).

macro power relations that exist in the digi-socio-political realm that are being constituted and reconfigured in relation to other bodies, spaces, and/or things (living and non-living) through a schizoanalytic or desire mapping⁶⁷. The question to have in mind when thinking about the various connective flows within an assemblage is: *Who or what does the assemblage serve?*

What Can Technology and the Digital Realm Do as a Machine?

Imbricated within the constitutive and transformative forces of online spaces and relevant to my research are humans' and capitals' consumptive appetites, desires, and needs for connectivity across the globe. This sentiment has been extensively examined and discussed by media theorist Jussi Parikka (2011, 2015; Parikka & Richterich, 2015) concerning the concept of the *anthrobscene* and the *geology of media*, or rather, the study of media regarding its material and temporal effects upon the Earth. The *anthrobscene* alludes to the "obscene" components of technology and the human. Specifically, it refers to those "unsustainable, politically dubious and ethically suspicious practices that sustain and maintain technological culture and its corporate networks," such as the geological and mineral components needed to produce the screens (e.g., laptops, smartphones) that are tethered to humans (Parikka, 2015a, p. 6). Parikka's (2015a) concept of the *anthrobscene* was a precursor to his work on media materialism in *A Geology of Media* (2015b). His concepts are provocations for how interdisciplinary researchers and scholars might *engage with* media and media studies in ways that bring forth the unseen impacts that media might have upon this planet. Parikka brings attention to not only organic and inorganic materials but also the numerous ecological and

⁶⁷This will be explained in Chapter Three in "Schizoanalysis | Desiring Ontology".

socio-political impacts technological media can unleash (Parikka, 2015b; Parikka & Richterich, 2015). In his interview with Richterich (2015), Parikka states that:

Media is not merely about mediation but involves issues of technologies of knowledge, as well as, for example, recently, the infrastructures in which media become understood as objects. It's in the intermedia components that one finds a subliminal 'under the hood' history of media that is not merely of media as the object but as an assemblage of different technologies and techniques. (p. 220)

Adrian Parr (2018) echoes the idea that the 'under the hood' components are not often thought of in regards to neoliberal capitalism's effect on the environmental impact of this planet. She argues that, "the direct cost of economic growth [or technological production for consumption, in this case] to the environment and the often indirect costs to communities living in the vicinity of environmental hazards are not factored into the overall cost of a commodity or service (p. 3)"

The idea of technological consumption and usage is especially relevant today with digital technology's immediate environmental and human impacts. The most pressing consequence of technological production is that of human migration which is a direct result of climate change (Abbasi-Shavazi & Kraly, 2021; UNHCR, 2020), linked to the mining of minerals needed to build technologies. For example, the exploration and mining of cobalt for lithium-ion batteries, Indium for displays, and platinum for fuel cells (Parikka, 2015a). This effect is amplified with the increase of blockchain technologies and cryptocurrency mining⁶⁸, particularly with Bitcoin in terms of the significant energy such technology consumes and produces, as well as the carbon

⁶⁸ According to de Vries, Gellersdörfer, Klaaßen & Stoll (2022), "[m]ining is the process of adding new blocks to the Bitcoin blockchain to validate transactions. It involves a process of trial-and-error that resembles a competitive numeric guessing game in which a correct "guess" completes a block and only the winner obtains rewards in the form of both newly minted Bitcoins and transaction fees" (p. 1).

footprint and waste that is left behind. The energy produced by Bitcoin miners is measured in electricity, which is then used to measure their carbon footprint globally (de Vries et al., 2022). For comparison, according to the Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index (n.d.), the total Bitcoin carbon footprint for 2021 was measured at “114.06 Mt⁶⁹ CO₂”, which is comparable to that of Czech Republic; Bitcoin’s electrical energy use was measured at “204.50 TWh⁷⁰”, which is comparable to that of Thailand and Vietnam; and, its electronic waste is “31.90 kt”, which is comparable to the “small IT equipment waste” in the Netherlands (section, 2). Digiconomist⁷¹ states as a result of their findings that “Bitcoin’s biggest problem is perhaps not even its massive energy consumption, but the fact most mining facilities in Bitcoin’s network are powered by fossil fuels” (section, 7). In addition, the intensified impacts of globalized technologies are further exacerbated by the mining of personal online ‘user’ data stored within hidden ‘cloud’ server farm infrastructures (i.e., exploitation of personal data, land and energy consumption, atmospheric satellite crowding and pollution) (Parikka & Richterich, 2015) and the very personal and human (e.g., familial, social, and mental) impacts as a result of an increase of digital usage since the pandemic began in 2019. The unseen and often unthought-of components of technology have undeniable impacts upon this Earth and all who are upon it. Aside from the often-overlooked material *effects* that technology and the digital world have upon the Earth, there are the material *affects* that new media and technology have upon the body and objects. These material *affects* are the intensive and desiring forces encountered that impact how one

⁶⁹ Mt is a Megaton.

⁷⁰ TW/h is a Terawatt/hour.

⁷¹ *Digiconomist* (2022) was founded by Alex de Vries in 2014 to expose “the unintended consequences of digital trends... from an economic perspective” (para. 1).

might react or become propelled to act as a result of coming into contact with them, such as media and technology.

Media A/Effects

Social media and digital technology are a pervasive part of our lives, and their many affects and effects cannot be ignored since they are intimately tied to how youth locate and create place for themselves within society and the world in which they live. As Parikka states, “we do not so much have media as we are media and of media” (as cited in Clough, 2016, p. 78). We not only interact with media but enter into a dialogic relationship with its diverse forms of representation, in whichever form they may present themselves (e.g., image, commentary, audio, click, monetary). As touched on in Chapter One, our digital selves are so enmeshed with our real-life selves that it may be hard to separate or recognize “who is on and who is in front of the computer screen,” interacting, responding, and creating (Schultze, 2014, p. 94). As such, Schultze (2014) argues against a representational engagement with an online identity since it fails to grasp the complexity of experiences that contemporary new media users have in the virtual realm. Since this study works with other forces and objects within the digital space beyond the human, I extend Schultze's approach to include the nonhuman and inhuman in order to engage with their respective desires and affects. Before delving into the idea of affect in greater detail, there is first a tension that needs to be addressed with representational and fixed identity formations.

Identity & Representation *Differently*

Following Guattari's (1992/2006) provocation to displace a focus on Being for a more nuanced understanding of “the manner of being” (p. 109), this research project wonders how

we might talk about N|I youth subjectivity in today's contemporary technocapitalist⁷² (Suarez-Villa, 2009) spaces. The idea of identity beyond Being has been addressed at length by many. In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic explain the various stages of producing a Self in the world (Protevi, 1999). Foucault's (1997/2003) ideas on governmentality and the use of biopower on the 'docile body' articulate how the mechanisms of power function to create identities in order to control and subjugate the subject (see also, Besley, 2009). The school is a perfect example of such a mechanism of power that functions to create 'useful' identities in youth. In *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces* (2003), Roy argues that schooling and "the pedagogic encounter is an overcoding of the child...in which are inserted various transcendental and powerful unifying images of identity, conformity, nationalism, work, achievement, competition, success/failure, and many others" (p. 29). In a similar vein, Homi Bhabha (1994) talks of identification in relation to the Other⁷³. Specifically, when relating to the colonial identity, he states that "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness" (p. 44) and "the question of identification...is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (p. 45). This position, however, suggests that one is only identifiable by way of its differentiation from the Other, whereby there is a demand for identification and representation, for an Other, that involves the subject representing self in alterity to the other⁷⁴ (p. 45). This assumption then attributes our identities

⁷² Technocapitalism, conceptualized by Luis Suarez-Villa (2009), is "heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity" (3). It feeds off the intangible yet real commodification of human creativity as its most precious resource.

⁷³ The Other is perceived as different, or distant, from self or the group.

⁷⁴ Here, 'other' is the group that is doing the *othering*.

to specific power structures and dynamics that can exist in our immediate world, dynamics that can be ethno-racial, classist, cultural, governmental, parental, educational and so forth.

According to Bhabha (1994), to exist in our world means to be named. If we must be named, then how can one avoid "fixity" that "is a paradoxical mode of representation [that] connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition"(p. 66)? Although Bhabha is speaking in terms of colonial identity, 'fixity' can relate to all identities. In "fixity" lies the danger of Being, when one becomes stuck in a given frame of reference or enclosed within certain boundaries and is blinded to the world and possibilities outside of their immediate surroundings. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/2004), Frantz Fanon states, "the colonist is right when he says he 'knows' them [the colonized]. It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject" (p. 2).

This *fabrication*, for Fanon, pertains to the identity and presupposed notions imposed upon the colonized subject to maintain hierarchies of power and access. This situation produces the Other through an 'us' versus 'them' discourse. This *fabrication* can be seen in schools when students are assigned a label that becomes a part of their identity from year to year—a fixed identity that may be hard to break from and prevent any potential for growth or transformation. While a fixed identity might make it easy for schools and some teachers to plan and teach towards, it equally works to categorize, stream and control youth. For N|I youth that are often racialized, ethnicized, or marginalized, representation and recognition is essential. Yet, when N|I identities become fixed, categorized, modified, and consumed in ways that work against them, representation becomes a mechanism of power that binds youth within borders that are not of their own making. This mode of capture is seen on and offline (Foucault, 1982).

This "daemonic repetition" (Bhabha, 1994, p.66) that leads nowhere without divergence is a challenge for all. There is a need to approach identity and representation *differently*, especially when engaging with digital realms whereby the fixity model is hidden and is embedded into the structures of the programs that fabricate youth interactions, identities, movements, ideas, and productions yet all the while giving off an illusion of freedom.

Subjectivity | in Situ, as Singularity

Instead of identity, this research works with subjectivity to examine how individuals engage *in situ* (on and offline), *as singularities*, in connection with others and the world around them. As a result, this makes the question of subjectivity a political and ethical one (Deleuze, 1990/1995). For Guattari (1992/2006; see also, Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008), subjectivity is located at the intersection of the semiotic and the machinic, that is, at the crossroads of representative structures of language and representation (i.e., identity), as well as those contextual and material encounters in the social realm. According to Guattari (as cited in Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008), the process of subjectivation brings forth the unconscious and conscious socio-political, familial, economic, and material— "collective"—forces that work to produce a subjectivity. In other words, subjectivity is produced in the register of the social, or the nexus, where social forces connect and constitute collective enunciations. Hence, subjectivity differs from the individual in that the individual is categorized and registered. For Guattari & Rolnik (1986/2008), there is no given "subject," rather collective "assemblages of enunciation" which can be registered or composed on the individual or a group as subjectivity in the process of subjectivation (p. 43). Therefore, I consider subjectivity a part of the collective assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; see also Savat, 2010).

According to Savat (2010), the interface of the internet functions to “regulate difference...differences in language (from analogue to digital and back again) ...differences in speed...[and] to ensure such differences are smoothed out” (p. 431). Put differently, it eases one’s connection to the digital realm while simultaneously eliminating a user’s awareness of the interface itself as well as of their own embodied self in that space (Savat, 2010). It is for these reasons that it is effortless not to think, let one’s guard down online, and believe the illusion that one is free to ‘be’. Thinking the digital subject in connection with digital technology as a machinic assemblage allows the digital subject to potentially become an active actor in that world and beyond, knowing that “different technologies...can alter one’s sense of being an actor in the world” (Savat, 2010, p. 426).

The digital and online realm is a machinic realm composed of connective networks, each with its own sets of desires (i.e., desiring-machines) that take different representations (e.g., images, comments, audio files, videos) and identities (human and nonhuman). It then converts such representations into impulses, codes, and desires for consumption and modulation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). While at times invisible in the digital realm, these desires can have real impacts in the digi-spaces they transverse, in the form of affects or visualities (Shields, 2014). Recognizing this idea and thinking with jagodzinski’s (2014) understanding of public pedagogy, it might be said that the digital realm permeates and resonates in the various spaces one inhabits through diasporic digital subjects as the “Outside” (jagodzinski, 2014, p. 71). The “Outside” is defined here as the excess, or affects, that cannot be fully occupied. That is, the “Outside” is composed of the unthought-of or unseen non-representational forces that become integrated into any of the spaces N|I youth may occupy

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Grosz, 2001). In other words, the digital realm *affects* and effects a diasporic digital subject, in this case, N|I youth.

Turn to Affect

Affects are the preconscious, non-reflexive, and non-articulated intensities or forces that, according to Clough (2008), have the ability to “augment[t] or diminis[h] a body’s capacity to act” when in connection with, and activated by, someone or something else (p. 1; see also Clough, 2016; Deleuze, 1988; Massumi, 2002). This silent activation means that we, as humans, are often unaware that we have been *affected* until it is made conscious in our minds later on (Clough, 2008, 2016; Deleuze, 1988; Massumi, 2002). In his book *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Brian Massumi explains that our brains cannot process affect until after the fact. As such, what we feel, as affect, is non-linear and without qualification, and while we may viscerally sense some-thing during these disjointed and intensified moments, our brains cannot keep up. Massumi explains that it first occurs in the virtual or that which has not yet been actualized⁷⁵ before we will mindfully feel it in the actual. As Massumi (2002) states, “the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived” (p. 29). In generating these affective moments, one breaks the continuity of the narrative and brings forth what was never thought of or experienced before. In these moments of excess, we interact with these intensities and become with them (Massumi, 2002). These intensities work at a molecular or micro-level upon the body, in the digital realm and offline.

⁷⁵ This comes from Deleuze's philosophy of immanence that sees *a life* as a positive [positive in the sense that it enables the possible encounter of de-subjectivation] source of becoming (actualizations) that draw from all our potential virtualities —a collection of potentials for becoming that draws from a whole world of multiplicities (Colebrook, 2002a; Deleuze 1968/1994). Therefore, affect is always actual-virtual/virtual-actual, making it a force of convergence, an Event, where a becoming might emerge (Deleuze, 1968/1994, 1969/1990).

These forces or intensities vary from psychoanalytic affects in that they are "pre-personal" or pre-individual and are not based on a pre-given image, identity, or subject. Affects, however, produce subjects, or what Clough (2008) calls biomediated bodies or bodies with the capability of giving form to affective responses. Affects in this framework are not to be taken as an emotion, although they can prompt a response or produce an emotion (Andrejevic, 2013; Clough, 2008; Deleuze, 1988; Massumi, 2002). For instance, you might watch a TikTok video *duet* with a cat meowing side by side to a pianist and guitarist simultaneously playing a tune. You giggle, prompting a dopamine boost at the molecular level that allows an overall good and 'happy' feeling in your body. The affect produces an emotion of happiness, propelling you to share the video with your closest friend that loves cats. Massumi (2002) states, "affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But... emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (p. 27). The critical aspect of an affect is that it is a productive force of an "immanent becoming" (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 52). Here, immanence describes emergent, connective, creative, and productive becomings. The following section delves into what these affects might *do* for constituting N|I subjectivities, referring to affects as forms of trauma or wound that "cuts" into a space or subjectivity (Clough, 2016).

Traumatic Impacts or Wounds That Cut

What can new media technology *do* to reconstitute a N|I subjectivity and open up space for a *becoming-other*? One such affect|effect is that of an imposed trauma. The intention here is not to fetishize or disrespect individuals or communities who have been affected|effected by any of the traumatic practices or experiences induced by migration, especially since the ways in

which trauma has been engaged with, both in psychoanalysis and in the digital realm, has become problematic (Levine, 2014).

Considering Trauma

According to Howard Levine (2014), the term trauma is complex to define since it has been constructed over the years from various forms of usage that extend across differing domains of psychology and psychoanalytic theories. For instance, some forms of trauma that exist in psychoanalysis are adult or childhood trauma, cumulative trauma (Khan, 1963), shock trauma (Kris, 1956), micro-trauma, or massive psychic trauma (Furst, 1967) (as cited in Levine, 2014, p. 215). According to Levine, it is difficult to unite or define the traumatic experience, there are, however, some commonalities. First, there exists an “overwhelming” of the nervous system or the producing of a painful feeling or sense of helplessness in an individual (Freud, 1920, 1926 In Levine, 2014). Second, trauma is an individual, “context dependent and highly subjective” experience even though many humans can experience similar events—e.g., war, rape, childhood harassment or abuse, or diaspora (Levine, 2014, p. 215). Third, and final, traumatic experiences are varied and cannot be spoken of generically “as if or with the implication that one was speaking about unitary phenomena with specifiable generalizable characteristics” (p. 216). As observed by Anna Freud in 1967, and as further explained by Levine (2014), the term *trauma* is in “danger of being emptied of meaning through overuse and overextension” (p. 215). Levine also explains that the confusion behind trauma’s meaning stems from the various contexts of use, connotations, and differences in meaning. This phenomenon becomes particularly apparent on TikTok in the #MentalHealthTok niche⁷⁶, where anyone who

⁷⁶ As observed.

connects with the space can self-diagnose⁷⁷ and the overgeneralization that Levine speaks of appears to be a common occurrence. This overgeneralization is made apparent in the language used by some content creators to speak about daily events concerning trauma. As a researcher, I need to be cognizant of this and, therefore, in this study not engage with N|I youth trauma itself, although recognizing that it forms and constructs a N|I subjectivity, as demonstrated by Vince's experience with the Atlanta Shooting on March 16, 2021⁷⁸. Consequently, I will think with the non-psychoanalytic definition of *trauma*, developed by Patricia Clough (2016), to consider the affects and effects of desires upon the spaces they flow through.

Trauma as Media Affects

Digital media technology, according to Patricia Clough (2016), is a medium that transmits a “unique form of trauma” that has an impact upon subjectivity and the milieus we inhabit (p. 75). In her article, *Trauma Expanded/Aesthetics Expanded* (2016), Clough builds upon Marshall McLuhan's (McLuhan, 1964/2013) notion that new media has a violent and overly stimulating effect on the human sensory and nervous system whereby trauma acts similarly to affect. Trauma can conjure up negative connotations and reactions, especially for people who are contending with, healing from or have experienced the effects of displacement, creating an impact—visible or not—on a subjectivity. The etymology of the word trauma (2021), points to the Sanskrit root “*turah*” meaning “wounded, hurt” (n.p.). One could conclude that digital media creates a wound upon a subject, which might be understood as a rupture. Employing the concept of the wound as an effect and not a cause occurring at the surface is similar to

⁷⁷ In the TikTok mental health niches, the issue of self-diagnosis is highly debated between psychologists (with accounts) and users. As observed, self-diagnosis is about accessibility for some who cannot afford psychological services, while for others it is about gatekeeping knowledge, and for others it is about ‘proper’, or mis-, diagnosis.

⁷⁸ Read more about Vince in Chapter Five.

Deleuze's (1969/1990) idea of the *event* or cut in time. Reynolds (2007) explains the connection Deleuze makes between the wound and the event in his article, *Wounds and Scars: Deleuze on the Time and Ethics of the Event*:

Deleuze treats the event as synonymous with the wound. The wound is both temporal and transcendental rather than an empirical event. For him, the event never actually happens or is present; it is always that which has already happened, or is going to happen. (p. 145)

Colebrook (2002a, 2002b) further explains Deleuze's event as a confrontation that allows for perceptions from the past to 'cut' into the present, showing us time's potentiality and its movement from the virtual (e.g., unthought-of forces or that which is invisible) to the actual (e.g., in-real-life). One such example is hearing a song from one's childhood in a coffee shop and deciding to listen to it on one's digital streaming service on one's phone (e.g., Deezer or SoundCloud), then sharing it on one's Twitter account, which then gets liked and retweeted or cross-posted to another platform, then played by someone else on their Bluetooth speaker in their home. Herein, the virtual past is drawn into the actual then back to the virtual, then actual and, perhaps, to the virtual again and so on. This to-and-fro between actual|virtual is not accidental, as the event is always so. According to Deleuze (as cited in Reynolds, 2007), this conception of the event builds upon the Stoic maxim "my wound existed before me, I was born to embody it" (p. 149). This form of a wound is the explication of the effect without cause or the expression that is untouched and "does not obey the logic of anticipation," as the ticklish individual feels the tickle before it happens and anticipates the action (p. 149). Reynolds, therefore, states, "it is the future and the past that wound us; that is the time of the event." The

time of the event is an ethics that considers what is not presently embodied, the virtual wound (e.g., affects, intensities, forces, desires) (p. 149).

For this project, media is not limited to the digital-technological realm that we might imagine, it also includes material objects found in nature, in a classroom or occupied places (e.g., artifacts or texts). Clough (2016) states that “media is extended to various platforms—organic, inorganic, chemical, and neurochemical” (p. 78). Therefore, she emphasizes the need to rethink media technology and its trauma (or traumatic effects) by looking into how it “can extend matter or intervene in matter’s materializing itself” (p. 76). In other words, Clough speaks to the importance of including intensities into what constitutes media affects. In the educational context, it is vital to consider how digital technologies and digital media have effectively, and affectively, traumatized, or opened up the spaces individuals inhabit in the form of intervention (by external or Outside forces such as social media), by way of manifestations of subjectivity (through creative or non-creative productions), by conceptualizations of knowing (through processes of subjectification), and by potential creation of future learning and knowledge or social spaces as referred to by Janelle Watson (2012) as “portable homelands.” These portable homelands are also conceptualized as “existential territories” by Félix Guattari (1992/2006; see Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008). Such potential ruptures as wounds or traumas working upon the diasporic digital subject can be carried forth into offline spaces in a manner that seeks to transform their openings into expressions of connection with other places and individuals.

Returning to the work of Levine (2014), a psychoanalytic trauma is seen to foreclose and become cut-off from connections, whereas for this project, trauma is seen to cut open and

rupture spaces for potential becomings and connections to occur. How digital subjects' content expressions are *connected with* is determined by those—users or algorithms—who interact with them. These connections are not foreseen or planned. These social and “portable” spaces are not tied to any one individual’s ethnicity, place of origin, or any geographical location for that matter. Instead, they are spaces reinventing and reconstituting a subjectivity—collective or individual (Guattari, 1992/2006; Watson, 2012). When speaking of a collective in relation to subjectivity, Guattari (1992/2006) is referring to “the sense of a multiplicity that deploys itself...beyond the individual” in the realm of the social (p. 9). Guattari refers to the collective enunciations or becomings that are part of an immanent formation of collective desires that come together in a space or existential territory.

The Wound of COVID-19 in Education. These spaces and their traumatic, or exposing, impacts can also be considered with the recent changes in educational learning, at all levels, and how it has been affected and effected by its drastic and “emergency” transformations to synchronous and asynchronous virtual/online learning since the global spread of the COVID-19 virus. The impacts of COVID-19 have touched the lives of all who engage with the educational field at a professional and personal level—teacher educators, teachers, students, and parents (Abedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2020). Technological manifestations that have had stressful and adverse effects on students were influenced by a myriad of factors experienced differently by individuals. For instance, having free, uninterrupted, and safe access to the internet (e.g., data or Wi-Fi) and screen technology (e.g., laptop, smartphone, desktop) was directly impacted by a variety of personal—internal and external—factors, such as an individual student’s socio-economic status, their physical and digital geographic location, their home-

family life, their previous cultural, technological and digital experience (or lack thereof), the incorporation of corporate bodies like Google and Zoom into the educational learning platform, the student's self-motivation for study, the student's compatibility with online learning, and, finally, the student's mental and physical health (Abedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Altogether, these factors conjoined to form a potentially disastrous or productive enunciation for a digital on|offline subject under COVID-19 conditions, dependent upon varying circumstances. This assembly of desires for a/synchronous learning to occur constitutes the existential territory to which Guattari (1992/2006) speaks and opens space towards a potential collective enunciation. For example, a synchronous learning territory assemblage might involve an online learner as multiplicity – digital platform (e.g., Zoom) – a teacher teaching – an offline place and all who are in it and their multiplicities-online users (i.e., classmates) – nonhuman artifacts (e.g., lack of face to face time, use of images, sound) – inhuman enunciations (e.g., AI machinations or technological interruptions).

Expanding on Guattari (1992/2006), Watson (2012), states that subjectivity needs territory to survive, however, those territories need not be tied to a geographical location⁷⁹. An existential territory might include digital media spaces of today or the digi-spaces of digital classrooms or social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit). These singularities (i.e., manifestations, existential territories, collective enunciations) are not limited to an individual, collective, or even a human becoming—they can be a-signifying and not necessarily involuted with the conscious, nonconscious, or unconscious (Guattari, 1992/2006).

⁷⁹ There is a shift to a post-media era in which culture is opened up onto a portable existential Territory that is not necessarily based on one's ethnicity or place of origin (Watson, 2012, p. 325).

In other words, existential productions can be in the form of images, bodily reactions, data entries, or machine communication, including, for instance, computers talking to one another. This work specifically examines the yet-to-be-determined potential of collective or individual aesthetic productions, interactions, modifications, negotiations, and experiences in the digisphere as experienced by N|I youth in assemblage with other human|nonhuman|inhuman bodies and forces. In this study, N|I youth are understood in terms of the desiring-machines they connect with (i.e., the existential territory or zone of subjectivation) for thinking and learning. Before one might even begin to understand what potentiality there is for a collective and positive production in connection with others, one must map out what those forces are doing to a subjectivity, and in turn, consider how to think about subjectivity in the first place.

Machinic Subjects in Gaming & New Digital Media

Digital and technological screen culture is profuse with experiences ranging from the everyday utilitarian and pragmatic use of applications for communication (e.g., emailing, texting, phoning, viewing world happenings) to more engaging social uses (e.g., social media platforms, multiple player or individual gaming, blogs, or vlogs) to the murkier or shadow engagements with the deep web, Tor-browser, or backchannel chat sites. This project engages mainly with the social media platform TikTok, which is more thoroughly investigated in Chapters Four and Five. Even so, in this following section, the machinic subject is constructed in connection with technological machines—or social media spaces as machines of their own.

Screens can be considered as devices, tools, or technology, as technical machines, that turn into social machines when we, as humans, connect with them, as the internet and social media. We, therefore, become desiring subjects that produce something as a result of that

connection. For Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), a 'machine' is not to be taken at face value or as a metaphor for a technological machine (e.g., a laptop). According to Colebrook (2002b), Deleuze and Guattari understood machines—e.g., social, capitalist, and desiring—as nothing more than the connections and productions it creates with something other, in difference, to transform and maximise itself and to become. Machines have no set identity—*a priori* or given image, end, or intent—hence, they are what they *do*. Without subjectivity or an organizing centre, machines are in a constant state of deterritorialization that, for this project, is related to a movement, rupture, line of flight (i.e., trajectory away from), expression or enunciation in digital space, which might produce or force a potential change (Parr, 2005) and consequent becoming (Colebrook, 2002b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). To explicate what machines could do when connected to a human body, Colebrook (2002b) uses the example of a bicycle. As a machine with no 'end' or intention in itself when connected with the human body, the bicycle becomes its own "self-enclosed system" (p. 57), producing a double enunciation due to the mutual connection between machine and body. The cyclist is produced when the human body connects with the bicycle, and the bicycle becomes a vehicle. That stated, multiple yet-to-be imagined connections could be speculated beyond these two possibilities, producing different machines of these two. For instance, the bicycle could become art if hung up on a wall or a weapon if picked up and moved in a jabbing motion (p. 56).

As machinic—diasporic and digital subjects—users are co-produced online when in *connection with* other machines (e.g., technological screens). Online, no matter the technical machine for connection (e.g., laptop, phone, or desktop computer), users become a machinic subjectivity, that is to say, a collection of enunciative forces in digital spaces and part of a social

machine (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). In these moments of connection, something acts through and *with* the subject—call it an intensity, force, or desire—in essence, a productive force of potential becoming for the subject (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). However, the direction of becoming is yet-to-be-determined. Do machinic subjects become consumed by the capitalist machine? Do they deterritorialize—by becoming uncontrollable or unrecognizable to the system, hence becoming their own “war machine”⁸⁰, which Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) define as the resistance or deviation from the norm (see also, Holland, 2013)? Or, do their becomings not happen at all? When engaging with this research and with digital technology, it is essential to keep in mind that “subjectivities are not natural or given but assembled from biological, societal, and technical components in an incessant process of ‘becoming’ that produces new alignments of bodies, cognition; and feeling” (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009, p. 70). In other words, one’s “manner of being” (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 109) is to exist in a continual process of becoming in connection with the world one is *becoming with* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

In their book *Games of Empire* (2009), Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter discuss the rise of the gaming console, and, more specifically, the rise of the Microsoft X-Box⁸¹, gamer culture, and the subjectivities attached to it. Eleven years later, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2021) revisit, update, and critique their book in the context of a pandemic lockdown, taking into account the new world realities, that of a world that has been through “austerity, precarity, and intensifying inequality” since it was last published (p. 372). They acknowledged that their initial analysis was

⁸⁰ According to Holland (2013), the “war machine” (p. 122) is also the State apparatus and is also used to refer to the “nomad machine” (p. 122), even though war and nomads are only tied to one another in specific circumstances.

⁸¹ Currently, the newest console is the Series X. This article is dated in this respect.

overly optimistic in regards to the possibility of “anti-capitalist counterforces—what [they] termed games of multitude” (p. 373). Were they to redo the project today, they would refocus and amplify other issues of importance, such as the climate crisis, platform proliferation, the organization of bodies, and the violent intersections of video gaming, in particular those reactionary, racializing, and gendering forces that exist in the digital gaming culture. That stated, their engagement with console gaming as a machine is still relevant in how it works to produce subjectivity in connection with capitalist forces. It is important to note that console gaming is different from digital online spaces. They have, however, evolved to the point that they are just as connective and interactive as the online universe and have become spaces of creation, connection, and relationality. Online games have been evolving, gaining popularity, and, for the online gaming industry, increasing in profitability steadily since the 1980s (Hou et al., 2011). For instance, according to a games market overview on *Statista* conducted by Christina Gough (2018), for mobile app gaming alone, there is a projected \$74.6 billion revenue by the end of 2020. Games that fall into the online gaming category are the following: mobile app games (i.e., the many ‘time-killer’ games downloaded onto smartphones like Tetris or Candy Crush), Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs) that have subgenres like MMORPGs (-Role Playing Games) (e.g., World of Warcraft) or MMOSGs (Strategy Games), and Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Games (MOBAs) (e.g., League of Legends). These games mentioned above are played online concurrently with a large number of gamers, are player-to-player, can be played as an individual or group, and can occur in Real-Time (MOBAs & MMOs) (Gough, 2018, 2019; Statista Research Department, 2017).

What Can a Console or a Social Media Platform Do?

Returning to Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter's (2009) research, they are not only interested in what gamers become while playing console games. Instead, they also seek to understand what these consoles *do* on their own and in connection with the gamer. Their theorization can help one visualize what digital screen technology might do when connected with a youth subjectivity, specifically with a N|I youth subjectivity. Through the Deleuze-Guattarian lens of machine and assemblage theory and with slight mention to Lewis Mumford (see 1970), they sought to unfurl the various connective "machinic" parts at work by asking "What is a machine?" (p. 70). In regards to gaming, they noted the following machines at work when thinking with the Xbox system:

Open up the Xbox and its console rivals as state-of-the-art *technical machines* made of chips and circuits; as components of giant *corporate machines*; as *time machine* for profitably using up software and other virtual commodities; as generators of *machinic subjects*, mobilizing the passions and practices of hard-core gamers; as contenders in the competitive *machine wars* of video game capital, but also at the same time of the transgressive, subversive *war machines* of nomadic gamer hacking and piracy; and last, through all these preceding machine moments, as part of the *global biopolitical machine* of Empire. (p. 71)

The above-listed machines are not related to one another, nor to the technology (e.g., Xbox) in and of itself. They also do not say much about each component spoken of independently. Machines are their connections and, as such, should be examined and analyzed in relation to them—their connections and productions (Deleuze, 1995; Savat, 2010). Dyer-Witheford and de

Peuter's (2009) example demonstrates the various kinds of machines at work in an assemblage to compose, produce, and modulate a subject. For instance, there are *technical machines* that are composed of "artifacts," "instruments," or "tools" that have moving parts or power sources that humans use or engage with to "transform" their surroundings—usually "nature" (p. 70) or their inhabited space. There are social machines that are an assemblage of human subjects and related objects in the social realm, also known as "desiring machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009; see also, Massumi, 1992). Together, these have the potential to produce "abstract machines" or "modes of self-organization [that]... are intertwined processes of differentiation and consolidation" (Holland, 2013, p. 22). In other words, these are the potential processes of becoming, also known as collective assemblages of enunciation or concrete machinic assemblages (p. 22). For the Xbox above, as a console, it is not what these machines are independently, but what they are doing in combination.

In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (2006), Galloway defines gaming as "the entire apparatus of the video game" that involves the processes and actions of the game (its components) and the operator of the game (the player) (p. 2). Both the actions of the technological machine itself (the video game) and the operator are just as necessary, although not always required. The software and controllers, for instance, can work independently from the human operator due to the "grammar" (p. 4) that is written into the code of gameplay, according to Galloway (2006). Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter (2009) claim that hardcore players interact with the console, and the controllers effect the play itself. Further, it affects their play and the actual subjects playing the game. The hardware and software influences, for example, the Xbox game *Guitar Hero*, where one can choose to play with a Fender or Gibson guitar

controller. In real life, these two guitars are very different for different styles of music and players. Therefore, it is assumed that when one chooses a particular controller, it might imbue that player with a certain affect | effect while playing. The software or platform can accomplish similar affects with its design. For example, playing Pokémon on a stand-alone console system (e.g., Xbox or PlayStation with online capabilities) will be vastly different from playing Pokémon GO on a free-to-play (F2P) augmented reality (AR) application on a smartphone (e.g., Pokémon GO) that will take the player to ‘real-life’ locations to “catch’em all”⁸². Thinking about new media online, this would be akin to the social media platform that a user chooses to engage with and the rules and parameters of any given platform that is working behind the scenes to *inform*⁸³ how that user will interact with said platform. Consequently, these encounters will then affect and effect how, when, and if a user will engage with the platform itself.

According to Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009), machine subjectivity is connected to the digital social machine. While in the following quote, they initially referred to plugging into the Xbox online console, this applies to being plugged into the online social media network. Instead of using the Xbox or Wii player, I have replaced the words *online social media user* in the following statement: “to become an [online social media user] is to plug oneself into a network of techno-human relation, which even as it offers cognitive skills and affective thrills also inserts subjects into a commodity web” (p. 93). The commodity web for the Xbox and Wii is very different for online users, but it is a web nonetheless. Returning to the F2P gaming apps on

⁸² This is part of the most common catchphrase or slogan for the anime and game of *Pokémon* (Hoffer, 2017).

⁸³ Inform - to act on and “to form” - manipulate

smartphones, these games consistently commodify their users and are not free. Dal Young Jin (2017), in *Critical interpretation of the Pokémon GO phenomenon*, examined the new kind of capitalism brought forth by Pokémon GO's AR game, Pokémon GO. This game actively creates value by interacting with a smartphone screen to capture monsters at real-time locations around the globe. Pokémon GO is a game that offers no monetary rewards to its players—only “virtual valuables” named Poké-coins—feelings of “excitement, satisfaction, and happiness,” yet offers in-app purchases to assist users in the catching of these monsters at location sponsored by corporations. In exchange for the F2P, the game collects data from its users, such as their gender, age, and location information. Jin states that;

Pokémon GO fuses play to labor... *playbour* is an emerging form of real work that augments the economy... in which some corporations garner profits from ... the money earned from the free time and energy of users and gamers, challenges our understanding of modern capitalism. (p. 57)

Building on Hardt and Negri's ideas, Maurizio Lazzarato (1964) states that we produce “immaterial labor...that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” (p. 133). Instead of being tied to hardware and software buy-ins as they exist for online users, there is also the affective economy (Andrejevic, 2013), where there is a directed affect working together with a productive affect in a circle of capital flow. Thus, the goal is to “affect and effect” online (Clough, 2008, p. 57), where online users are tied to capitalist production by becoming a part of its flow through their emotional labour. Andrejevic (2013) explains that “the more emotions are expressed and circulated [online], the more behaviour is tracked and aggregated [by algorithms], the greater the ability of marketers to attempt to channel and fix

affect in ways that translate into increased consumption” (p. 58). For instance, one might open Facebook and be affected by a picture they like, to which they respond by clicking the ‘like’ button. Then, the program logs that data as a preference and information to know their affect—evidenced by the user’s emotion—before feeding that preference back to the user as a filter bubble, initiating the cycle again. This time predicting their next move. The concerns with this affective economy are the role that we, as users, play (i.e., our complacency) and the little thought given to the path that the internet and technology are taking (e.g., Internet of Things, Self-driving Cars).

Interpassivity

What happens to a subject in the technological and digital spaces as they interact with the various digital objects and other on-screen users? In Chapter One, Schultze's (2014) enmeshment of the on and offline realms was discussed, particularly concerning how individuals’ identities became entangled and often indecipherable when moving between the multiple and multi-dimensional spaces. Now, what happens when the online realm begins to take over the offline self by mediating its life for it *interpassively*, where the machine is enjoying our affections through the digital avatars that represent us (jagodzinski, 2004, 2018b; Pfaller, 2003)? In *Looping Back to Video Games: The Question of Technological Interpassivity* (2004), jagodzinski addresses how cyberspace “agents” (e.g., the controller, avatars, microphones) are an extension of a console user's ego, that is increasingly mediating user lives in the cyber-spaces they occupy. jagodzinski likens this to the emojis used in chats that are emoting, externalizing, and embodying our emotions to the world.

Robert Pfaller (2003) originally discussed the concept of 'interpassivity' in relation to artwork, as well as the ritual of culture and religion. However, the idea is specifically important in the consideration of a digital ontology. Interpassivity is the inverse of interactivity. It sees the observer as an active participant in the overall creative completion of the unfinished artwork, in that the artwork is finished and does not require any additional activity from the observer, thereby making them an interpassive observer: "The artwork would be an artwork that observes itself" thus excluding the need to be observed (para. 2). Here the artwork is the medium of interpassivity, but that medium could easily be digital technology—e.g., Internet of Things (IoT) wearables like a 'smartwatch to measure walking steps or a console controller or the interface of a smartphone. With interpassivity, the passivity is delegated by the person by choice, for instance, when we set up a PVR⁸⁴ to record shows for us to watch at a later time. Pfaller is arguing that interpassivity is becoming a norm in our society.

Following the example of the PVR, Pfaller notes its job is to record a show and, in doing so, it is "as if the machine had watched the program instead of the observers, vicariously." Ergo it is a "delegated passivity" (para. 5). All who subscribe to wearables, VR controllers, and the Internet of Things, by this account, would then be "Interpassive people...who want to delegate their pleasures or their consumptions" (para. 5). Delegated passivity gives subscribers permission to 'check out' of their interactions and not notice what is happening right in front of them. If you have found yourself playing a video game and 'zoning' out only to find your avatar enjoying the spoils of its bloody rampage a little too enthusiastically while you look on, then you

⁸⁴ Pfaller used the example of a VCR, but I updated the reference to a PVR here.

may have experienced delegated passivity. Alternatively, if you have found yourself mindlessly scrolling through your FYP (For You Page) on TikTok and ‘hearting’ everything posted only to wind up as an armchair activist for #BlackLivesMatter and #EveryChildMatters, then you also have experienced delegated passivity. The digital “agent,” as jagodzinski has aptly named it, has done all the work, has felt all the emotions, has dealt with all the problems, and has liked all the posts for you or, rather, your online you. This interpassivity relates to Savat’s (2010) engagement with the internet to smooth out difference and the user experience online, making it a seamless and ‘thought-less’ experience. According to Pfaller, the “interpassive person and [their] medium are...connected...by a representation” (para. 8). The medium (e.g., digital technology or video console) performs for the person. The gaming console is what the person responds to and engages with, and it is not the world in which they physically roam. If they are interacting with a social media space, that is what the person is responding to and *engaging with*. They essentially become disconnected from the world and all that is happening before them.

Returning to Schultze (2014) and the idea that as users of digital media, we are enmeshed in both the on and offline worlds simultaneously, then this engagement becomes more complex. Interpassivity assumes that the person gives up awareness and, hence, a form of agency (Pfaller, 2003). However, Schultze’s study with virtual subjectivities in online worlds found the following:

As users experience the virtual world and themselves in it through their avatar, that is, an embodiment relationship, the avatar becomes a cyborgian user–avatar

entanglement, which makes identities performed in-world available to other settings for example, RL [real life] and other social networking sites. (p. 92)

The inseparability of this embodied user from their digital selves makes it so they are entangled with their “digital bodies (e.g., blogs, tweets, social media profiles and avatars)” (p. 93).

Therefore, they are treated as virtual and intensive bodies, or, in other words, subjectivities. For this research project, diasporic digital subjects that transverse digi-social spaces are to be seen as such. Subjectivities have the ability to act and be acted upon in these spaces and yet still have the choice to be inactive and passive when in connection with digital screen technology and digital media spaces. There is another ever-present machine in the gaming and digital online realm that flows through and connects with other machines, that of the capitalist machine, which I will discuss in more detail in the following section.

Capitalist Machine

Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009, 2021) discuss how capitalism works and maintains capitalism through the gaming industry through the creation and recreation of upgrades, proprietary hard/software, surplus value, desires, and needs. In the digital online realm, this idea is discussed in the form of the affective economy, also known as the “economics of emotion” (Bakir & McStay, 2021, p. 263) explored later in this chapter. Capitalism works in a paradoxical and schizophrenic⁸⁵ manner for Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987). They write:

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009) think with the concept of “schizophrenia” (p. 7), not as the mental illness and way of life, but to describe the “process of production” (p. 34) and “the absolutely free de-coded flows of desire” that occur with capitalism (Holland, 2013, p. 8).

through its process[es] of production, [capitalism] produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge [that decodes and deterritorializes flows], against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear [from standardizing mechanisms like a neoliberal State that seeks to capture or reterritorialize those flows, for instance], but which nonetheless continues to act as capitalism's limit. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 34)

Following the above example, capitalism simultaneously feeds off the desires and “decoded flows” of a produced capital and labour—i.e., the “free [online] worker[s]” (p. 33). As a social machine, the capitalist machine functions to strip away an individual's “intrinsic value” such as their identity or creativity as expressed through desires and, since it cannot code everyone the same, “replaces it with strictly quantitative, monetary value,” otherwise known as capital (Holland, 2013, p. 7). In other words, the capitalist machine seeks to commodify the individual for consumption. However, when stripping away one's intrinsic value, capitalism simultaneously frees the individual, deterritorializing them away from “social codes” (p. 7), such as an imposed socio-ethno-cultural-racial identity. Once deterritorialized from the social code, these desires then have the potential of not being re-captured by capital or the forces of consumption, leaving them free to *become* something or someone else.

Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987) term this process of rupture and re-capture, or movement of flows, as a process of deterritorialization-reterritorialization of desires. However, in the digital realm, capitalism manifests differently than in real life. According to Luis Suarez-Villa (2009), corporatism, the power that business corporations hold over society, colonizes and degrades all who exist upon the planet—i.e., human society and nature—turning

all the most precious qualities and resources into commodities. Suarez-Villa argues that this form of corporatism is not grounded in the technology (e.g., phones, computers) in and of itself. Instead, it embeds itself into the character of this type of corporatism and the authoritarian hold that it exerts over technology and its overall design (e.g., the algorithm code). He labels this recent hold in technology as *technocapitalism* and defines it as a new form of capitalism “heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity” (p. 3). As a human “intangible” quality, creativity is captured and harvested as technocapitalism’s most precious resource (e.g., Twitter post, Instagram Story, Facebook comment, and blog entry). If one couples technocapitalism with an economics of emotion or affective economy, the result is a machine that feeds off all that is tangibly (e.g., creative productions) and intangibly (e.g., affects) produced in the digi-sphere. That means those who choose to connect with digi-spaces, the diasporic digital subject.

The Subject and Subjectivity

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the current ailment that plagues life today, Franco “Bifo” Berardi (2011), in *After the Future*, delves deep into the “social and cultural roots” of human life and has laid bare for us the bleak effects of modern-day capitalism on the future of the subject and subjectivity (p. 123). In his chapter entitled “Exhaustion and Subjectivity” (2011), Berardi provides a brief philosophical-historical account of the notion of “subject.” Of importance is his idea that there are two concepts embedded within the idea of “subject,” action and consciousness (p. 124). He makes crucial the idea of two concepts embedded within a subject in order to amplify the importance of the word “action” as it applies to the subject and would rather see that word replaced with “actor” (p. 125). It appears that Berardi (2011) places

importance on the subject being seen as an actor with an imbued sense of agency rather than as a passive entity, as would historically be understood before his work. Berardi states:

I speak of agency, of a collective actor, of singularity in the Guattarian sense, and, finally, I speak of 'movement'. Movement is the process of society: the cultural process that makes possible the political unity of different social actors who are in conflict in public space. (p. 125)

For Berardi, "movement" is both "conscious and collective" due to the many effects of modern capitalism upon society. Regarding the social subject specifically, he laments that "the actor is absent: you see actions, but you don't see an actor" (p. 125). For Berardi, the problem that arises is that we, as humans, are no longer conscious actors of our actions. An example is the case of technology communicating in the background or algorithms gathering data to produce an affective reaction. Hence, as non-conscious actors, we cannot reconcile thoughts and emotions and bring them into consciousness. This action, according to Berardi, means that the subject cannot be "recomposed," and if this becomes the case, then society follows suit, and the process of "subjectivation" (according to Guattari) is not possible, and a human future is lost.

One of the reasons for this inability to recompose is due to the digitalization of labour and the "global digital network" whereby "labor is transformed into small particles of nervous energy picked up by the recombining machine" (p. 129). This understanding is apparent in social media use with the affective 'like' economy and how digital media and marketing engines will capitalize on youths,' or anyone's, engagements with their social media platforms, be it Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Discord, Twitch, Steam, Facebook or YouTube, as mentioned previously

(Koughan & Rushkoff, 2014). The Frontline documentary, *Generation Like*, produced by Koughan and Rushkoff (2014), accurately portrays online youth 'like' culture by demonstrating how marketing and algorithms work through youth in their interactions with YouTube, Facebook, and Internet V/Blogging. Rushkoff (Koughan & Rushkoff, 2014) explains how users' likes, friends, follows, retweets, and the like, are the social currency of youth, where the more you have, the better. Through youth statements and social media exemplars, the documentary demonstrates how digital social media provides a sense of an instantaneous gratification, along with a sense of empowerment, voice, representation, and a mode of expression. As one female teen commented on the 'presence' granted by social media, "it's a way of letting people know you're there" (line. 76). The documentary did an exemplary job of showing how "seamless" digital media and marketing are incorporated into the everyday life of a youth, making consumers and producers of them all. Rushkoff states, "the paradox of generation like. These kids are empowered to express themselves as never before, but with tools that are embedded with values of their own" (Koughan & Rushkoff, 2014, line. 337), that is, values of a technocapitalist machine that works to commodify and consume.

Due to the digital network, Berardi (2011) states, we are "dealing with a different reality: the living brains of individuals are absorbed (subsumed) inside the process of network production and submitted to a system of technolinguistic automatisms" (p. 129). The Internet can effectively "recombine" all individuals in its sphere and, as Berardi explains, at a social and affective level, there is an inability to recompose their subject in order "to find common strategies of behaviour, incapable of common narration and of solidarity" (p. 130). He reasons that this inability to recompose is due to the disconnection that digital media produces from

being physically separated from one another. Further stating that there is a shift in how the individual interacts and connects its association of language with emotion. According to Berardi, language has changed and is torn from its organic association with “the body of the mother,” its relationship between signifier|signified, sign|meaning, and word|affection (p. 131). In other words, it is not merely a spoken language but one attached to a more extensive web of signs, significations, and digital codes. Being removed from the relationship of mother and child, he states, “language is made precarious, frail, unable to grasp the emotional meaning of words...the generation that is now entering the social sphere seems psychologically frail and scarcely fit to link emotion and verbal exchange” (p. 131). Language is caught in the digital flows. Thus, for Berardi, today’s generation is an affected one that feeds an affective economy, and when it comes to interpersonal communication in the ‘real’ world, they are “scarcely” capable of affecting and being affected.

My thinking diverges from Berardi’s regarding user or actor agency online. Harkening back to Schultze’s (2014) Second Life study that examined “how embodied identity is performed in virtual worlds,” we have come to understand that users experience the virtual realm and themselves in it through an “embodiment relationship” with their avatar (p. 92). Hence, users implicate themselves into their social media profile’s representation and performativity. The implications of this study demonstrate how entangled internet users are with their digital selves and how capable they are of acting and being acted upon (Schultze, 2014).

Berardi is correct in stating that individuals are subsumed in the digital realm. That stated systems of identification and language applied in real life cannot be applied in a world that strips individuals of their identity and structure once logged on and composes them as

intensive flows and desires. He speaks to the reality of the affective economy and recognizes its potential effects. However, he does not see the ability for subjectivity to recompose itself once there. Has the actor become a parasite of the operations of the internet? Is there an escape?

To address this tension, I am returning to Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter's (2009) optimism where they state, "just because capitalism generates new machinic subjectivities does not...mean they are fully controlled" (p. 84). This resistance or deviation from the norm is related to the Deleuze-guattarian concept of war machines (1980/1987). As mentioned earlier, war machines are not exclusively military machines as one might initially think; instead, they are related to those who could subvert a system or make unexpected connections to disruptive lines of flight (e.g., piracy or hacking). For instance, in the digital online or virtual world, one could find a way of nullifying the importance of 'likes' and 'dislikes' and finding ways of becoming more powerful than the social media platform itself. This nullification was accomplished by well-known and polarizing YouTube vlogger PewDiePie—Félix Kjellberg—in 2017. PewDiePie gained success by encouraging his followers (a.k.a. his "bro army") to mess with YouTube algorithms by starting a series of campaigns⁸⁶ for likes, dislikes, and subscribers since 2012 when he achieved one million subscribers and continuing until 2019 when he achieved "100 million subscribers" (Griffin, 2019).

Algorithmic Manipulations

Manipulating platform algorithms is not a new practice, and it is one way that users and content creators have gained power within the system. There are, however, concerning

⁸⁶ A quick search on Google of PewDiePie and One million likes or dislikes will bring up the videos that helped launch these campaigns.

influential movements in the social media realm, such as the rise of astroturfing by political bots on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook (Dubois & McKelvey, 2019). Bots are automated agents in the online sphere that mimic human behaviour and can work to perform many functions, among those potentially disrupt structures—be they social, economic, or political—by undermining trust in them (Dubois & McKelvey, 2019; Gorodnichencko, Talavera, & Pham, 2018). Astroturfing, the least benign of the four types of bots⁸⁷, works specifically with amplifier and dampener bots to carry out fake grassroots campaigns online and various activities under its guise, such as posting ads in the form of ‘news,’ paying for supporters, targeting online polls to skew results, and amplifying propaganda (Dubois & McKelvey, 2019). Gorodnichencko et al. (2018) examined Twitter data to determine the role that bots played in shaping the publics’ opinion in the 2016 US Presidential Election and 2016 EU Referendum (“Brexit”). They found that bots were most impactful at affecting human perceptions if the information the bot tweeted was consistent with the humans’ preferences. Furthermore, they found that bots’ messages with a particular sentiment would generate human messages with that same sentiment (Gorodnichencko et al., 2018, p. 21). The manipulation of perceptions and algorithms is prominent behaviour in social media spaces like Instagram and TikTok, discussed in Chapter Five. What does this mean for digital subjects and how they interact with the digi-sphere moving forward?

Control Society and Digital Media

⁸⁷ Four types of bots are amplifiers, dampeners, transparency, and servant bots (Dubois & McKelvey, 2019).

In *Postscript on Control Societies*⁸⁸, Deleuze (1990/1995) conceptualizes a control society that supersedes the disciplinary society theorized by Michel Foucault. For Deleuze, the societies of control are digital, digitized, and hinged upon a “soul”-less business model where capital codes all and modulates subjectivity to control the flows of desire (p. 181). For instance, when we engage with contemporary digital social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), there are algorithmic *forces* that are working behind each browsing or viewing experience, collecting and consuming our every haptic and affective move (i.e., ‘like’, comment, Retweet, click). These moves are being used, looped, modulated, and commodified for neoliberal capital’s advantage—whether it is for marketing or political gain (Andrejevic, 2013; Buchanan & Savat, 2020; Savat, 2010, 2013). This process is especially pertinent when thinking about youth (ages 14 to 25) who spend an average of 2 hours of their time a day on a variety and a multitude of digital media spaces at once, which marketers see as a “target” or a market to “penetrate” (Fisher, 2019, p. 6; see also, Dolliver, 2019).

Steven Shaviro (2010), in his article *Post-cinematic affect: On Grace Jones, Boarding Gate and Southland Tales*, explores the “post-cinematic manipulation and modulation of affect” (p. 5) in neoliberal capitalism, giving his readers a sense of what it might mean “to live in the early twenty-first century” (p. 2). He examines this manipulation and modulation of affect through a music video and two films. Shaviro's analysis of Grace Jones’s “Corporate Cannibal” music video⁸⁹ is most helpful for this project. Shaviro discusses how digital technologies, in conjunction with

⁸⁸ This is a version of the essay *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1990/1992) published in *Negotiations* (1990/1995). They are similar, just different Translators.

⁸⁹ The video for *Corporate Cannibal* (July 4, 2008) can be seen on GraceJonesTV on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgMn2OJmx3w>

neoliberal capitalism, have created new ways of living and being in this world, especially “new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience” in relation to a subjectivity (p. 2).

This video and the films discussed have a “free-floating sensibility” to it that is akin to the flows of capital that seek to modulate, consume, capture and code a subject by way of affects (desires). Grace Jones's image throughout the video is in constant flux; it is liquid, malleable, ubiquitous, and amorphous, with a slight desire to take form, and as Shaviro states, becomes a "singularity, without identity" (p. 14). The beat to “Corporate Cannibal” captures us as listeners, and the lyrics, like the digital code itself, will ‘eat’ you up. Jones (2008) sings⁹⁰: “Your meat is sweet to me...I can’t get enough prey, pray for me, I’m a man eating machine”. The video itself is a digital manipulation, transforming and morphing Jones’s body into unrecognizable entities. She becomes the background and the flow itself. In digital manipulation, the medium is both transformed and transmuted, whereby this video is about "modulation [that] is schematic and implosive...requir[ing] an underlying fixity, in the form of a carrier wave or signal that is made to undergo a series of controlled and coded variations" (p. 14). This video is similar to how capitalism works upon the body⁹¹ in that it attempts to free one from representations and coding, yet at the same time captures subjectivities for modification, categorization, and consumption. In terms of N|I youth, I think specifically of the racialized, ethnicized, and minoritized subjectivities coded, captured, modified, and consumed in digital

⁹⁰ The lyrics to the song can be attained at the following link: <https://genius.com/Grace-jones-corporate-cannibal-lyrics>

⁹¹ In Shaviro’s (2010) article he speaks more specifically to how Jones pushes the boundaries of objectification, commodification, and “thingification” (Césaire, 1955/2000, p. 42) in her video, which is often imposed on the bodies of black and racialized people in the socius and digital realm.

spaces. Subjectivities then become real entities offline as perceptions, as perceived and adopted identities engaged with, in educational spaces and beyond.

As touched on earlier, Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009) speak of capitalism as a deterritorializing and reterritorializing force or machine that is “faced with the task of decoding...the flows [that run through the] very fabric of existence” (p. 33). Yet, capitalism contradicts itself to restore all the “residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities...to recode [and] to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities [of capital]” (p. 34). However, since capitalism cannot code everyone the same, it relies on capital as a substitute for that code. Therefore, it is capital and its mechanisms (e.g., corporations, governments, law, algorithmic code) that deterritorialize and reterritorialize the flows and the subject in order to “extract surplus value from them” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 35). This reterritorialization becomes amplified when thinking about marginalized and racialized subjectivities in online spaces. For example, subjectivities on platforms like TikTok are grouped into niches by ‘race’, ethnicity, cultural markers or self-identifiers (i.e., hashtags). I develop this idea further in Chapters Four and Five. As a result, this is a control society where machines are more than just tools of labour and for pragmatic use. Instead, machines play an active role in controlling the masses through algorithmic codes that flow through all that engage with them by collecting what is of most value—information.

Deleuze’s (1990/1995) control society is one that is fluid, continually changing and has no clear or specific end goal for production, except to serve the needs of the corporate mechanism based upon the flows of capital. Instead of serving the needs of the corporate

mechanism, people become engulfed into the “soul” (p. 180) of the business itself, losing form like Grace Jones in the “Corporate Cannibal” video.

Pedagogical Implications of Control Society & Digital Media

In terms of thinking digital literacy for students who are currently engaging with new media, the assumptions are that youth are digital natives who know what they are doing online, and thus, understand what digital media is doing when they ‘plug’ into it. However, do they know what it means to think like a ‘dividual’ and beyond? In David Savat’s (2010) chapter, *Deleuze’s Objectile: From Discipline to Modulation*, he explores the various mechanisms, techniques, and instruments that work to modulate the various productions of the coded individual. Knowing what these are might be a first step⁹² towards anticipating potential future pre-speculated productions. For example, algorithms work to anticipate your wants, needs, worldview, style, to name a few. This results in marketers, media outlets, and politicians creating and targeting personalized ads, news, and platforms to you specifically. Hence, if “modulation is about the anticipation of events” (p. 56), then individuals online must become the first to anticipate and “instead of you actively adjusting your behaviour in order to conform to one or another norm, it is now the environment that adjusts to you” (p. 57).

Savat (2010) states that this transformation produces a subtle form of “control” whereby one is merely managing the “turbulent flows” that emerge around them because they have been pre-programmed for these codes in advance. For example, the system knows us so well that we only adjust for the uncomfortable anomalies. However, this does not account for deep

⁹² Online privacy and security require a multilayered approach whereby the onus is shared amongst web tech designers and developers, policymakers, users of the internet, corporations, nation-states, or anyone with interests in the Webspaces.

learning systems, such as Google Brain, an artificial neural network that combines the power of 16,000 CPU core processors with 1 billion interconnections and is built to simulate the abstract learning of the human brain (Dean & Ng, 2012). As mentioned earlier, subjectivities composed on digital online spaces can act as a subject on their own that can then form a connection with something else, be it human, inhuman, or nonhuman. Due to the digital network (i.e., Google Brain) that is working and learning in the background, whomever and whatever comes into contact with these spaces or subjects become absorbed and a part of the network learning process, consumption, and production as part of the affective economy as “technolinguistic” automatons (Berardi, 2011, p. 129). In other words, individuals in the very act of participating online are effectively giving up their freedoms and are participating and contributing freely to an economy that they might not understand. This anticipated and affective participation is most apparent with the filter bubble, an effect where individuals are fed information consistent with what they already relate to, feel, and know about their immediate world (Lim, 2021; Bakir & McStay, 2021). This effect then evolved into echo chambers once machine learning (Artificial Intelligence (AI)) emerged and algorithms began gathering information behind the scenes, allowing for more effective and personalized groupings of individuals to content consumption. Such a scenario has been implicated in the functions of Facebook echo chambers, as with the case of Cambridge Analytica and TikTok filter bubbles (as will be discussed in Chapter Four) (Bakir & McStay, 2021; Flaxman, Geol, & Rao, 2016).

What are youth to do online if there are no signs of liberatory escape from such standardizing structures? If one wants to be a part of the online world, one is essentially working for free and at the high cost of privacy and security. For some scholars in this field

(Berardi, 2011; Deleuze, 1990/1992; Suarez-Villa, 2009), the writing is on the wall, and there is no escaping the governing system, be it the social, political, technological, or economic. While Savat (2013) recommends staying one step ahead, Berardi states that it is futile since the Net is itself too powerful—as it recombines all individuals in its sphere too effectively. Suarez-Villa (2009), however, recognizes the force of technocapitalism but states that it is “not necessarily a destiny but a platform of struggle, where the hegemony of corporatism is to be questioned, opposed and overturned...toward an emancipative trajectory...the fundamental objective of a just society” (p. 1). On the flip side, the accelerationists seek to repurpose the forces of capitalism into a form of post-capitalism, unleashing its latent productive forces and tapping into the awaited potentials of technology that have yet-to-be developed (Williams & Srnicek, 2013). It is difficult to imagine where a rupture might emerge. Channelling Deleuze (1990/1992), both at an individual and social level, there needs to be an awareness and acknowledgement of the systems and structures one is immersed in when choosing to connect with digital technology. Once one is aware, one can decide how to engage with it and work to transform it for themselves and others. In doing so, potentially produce a collective and creative transformation for a new way of thinking or manner of being to emerge—i.e., a people yet to come (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986; Guattari, 1992/2006).

Chapter Three – A *Desire Focused Research Approach*

Given the affects and impacts of technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa, 2009), entrenched neoliberal market governing policies, and rapid advances in digital and new media technology, a new framework is required for acknowledging and understanding the assemblages in which humans are enmeshed online. This chapter begins by exploring a *desire focused* research approach that considers what digital technology and new media are *doing* to, and for, a subjectivity. This approach takes into consideration the context of a contemporary digi-technological society as it intersects with the newcomer|immigrant (N|I) as a displaced and diasporic subject both on and offline (as discussed in earlier chapters). Focusing on a crucial aspect of the research problem, that is, the vast and ubiquitous capability for digital technology and new media social spaces—implicitly or explicitly—to affect N|I subjectivity and the various spaces they may transverse or potentially create when in connection with some-thing or someone else. To do so, I engage with a Guattarian (1992/2006) ethico-aesthetic and the schizoanalytic sensibilities of Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987). These concepts allow me to construct a mapping of the various desiring forces that are working upon and flowing through a N|I subjectivity, as well as the many spaces and places they transverse, inhabit, and consequently create in order to free thought from the predictable, ‘ready-made,’ and over-coded spaces that are comprised by the *socius* and digi-techno online world.

While the previous chapter engaged with Deleuzian and Guattarian concepts of subjectivation, machine and assemblage theory in connection with a new materialist media approach (Clough, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1989/2013, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008; Parikka, 2015), this chapter, articulates the study's

research design and fit into a postqualitative, posthuman, and transversal digital-spatial framework. The approaches are i) schizoanalysis as a mapping sensibility; ii) a desire imbued techno- and netnographic method for online observation and data collection; and iii) a new materialist approach for *thinking with* (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Eaton, 2016; Mazzei, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Together, these approaches outline an online ethnographic project explicated in detail in Chapter Four, leading to a case desire analysis into the world of TikTok with N|I youth in Chapter Five. As it will explained in chapter Four and observed in Chapter Five, the collection of emergent observational experiences and expressions of N|I youth online will be understood through the theoretical framework of the project in connection with my desires as a researcher.

Schizoanalysis | Desiring Ontology

Schizoanalysis is a non-institutional and immanent ontology that emerged from the collective and individual works⁹³ of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst and political activist Félix Guattari at a time of political and social unrest in France, which culminated in the May 1968 riots⁹⁴ and the general “crisis of the 70s” (Buchanan, 2014a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009; Guattari, 1989/2013; Holland, 1999/2001; Maurin & McNally, 2008). Throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s numerous seminal works, schizoanalysis is conceptualized as a “meta-model” (Guattari, 1986/1998; Guattari, 1989/2013), a collective “ethico-aesthetic” project (Guattari, 1986/1998, 1989/2013), an “ecosophic cartography” (1992/2006), and a politics of alterity (Guattari, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008). Moreover, it has been

⁹³ While I could go into more depth about both philosophers’ academic backgrounds, as well as listing all their collective and individual works, that could take a while. I have written a historical account of the two and an introduction to schizoanalysis as a separate chapter in my Master’s thesis (Boffa, 2015).

⁹⁴ I wrote a section detailing the driving forces behind the riots and the role that both Deleuze and Guattari played in Chapter Two of my Master’s thesis (Boffa, 2015).

described by readers and scholars of Deleuze as a renderer of the invisible (Biddle, 2010, p. 19) and a political philosophy of *desire* (Biddle, 2010; Holland, 1999/2001). The previous iterations of schizoanalysis are pertinent to this work as they inform how I, as a researcher, connect with the world and all things—living and nonliving—in it. In addition, it impacts how I *think with* concepts, ideas, and issues that emerge from the gathering of digital online observations and artifacts (e.g., images, comments) and how I think with this approach towards content capture and analysis.

Schizoanalysis is not considered a methodology as it works to critique, analyze, read, map, subvert, or transform traditional models or structures already in place. Due to the reasons mentioned above, schizoanalysis is often referred to as an anti-methodology (Biddle, 2010). The schizoanalytic project, as Guattari calls it, reads other systems or structures of modelization or representation (e.g., power or knowledge structures), and in this way, it works as a “meta-model” (Guattari, 1986/1998). As a meta-model, it works as an instrument or bridge for analysis. Therefore, it is transversal in its orientation. Unlike traditional methodologies that analyze structures, Objects or Subjects ^schizoanalysis works with the analysis of flows, forces, connections, and relations that act upon and through a subject, object, and milieu (ecology or context). Ian Buchanan (2013) explains that;

the task of schizoanalysis today is not to multiply the points of difference in every case they encounter, so as to build a picture of every case as being both unique and finally uninterpretable, but to figure out the new patterns of repetition (or assemblages as Deleuze and Guattari would come to call them) and learn to understand them in an agile

and flexible manner, rather than in Freud's fixed and authoritarian fashion [i.e., interpretative and transcendent model]. (p. 12)

Thinking back to Chapter One, there was a call to engage with the immigrant as verb rather than a noun in order to be able to connect with enunciations and actions produced by or from immigrants as potential agentic forces (Fleras, 2011). To consider 'immigrant' as a verb allows one to look past representational, superficial, and identitarian engagements of N|I and, instead, allows one to *connect with* N|I youth subjectivities. That is, when doing research with N|I youth and digital media spaces, a schizoanalytic meta-model allows for N|I youth to stand as singularities, with multiplicities, that are not only acted upon, but can act upon others and, as such, the analysis would not only regard what a N|I *is* when in contact with digital media, but also what a N|I youth might *do* when in contact with digital media. Finally, a schizoanalytic meta-model explores what N|I youth might *become* in those spaces and beyond. Thus, such an approach understands N|I youth not solely as passive users of the digital sphere but instead as active "actors" and participants (Berardi, 2011; Savat, 2010; Guattari, 1992/2006).

Likewise, schizoanalysis also involves the analysis of blockages of flows and how one might work to dissolve those blockages. As touched upon in Chapter Two, by contemplating the connective social relations or forces that N|I youth might encounter in the digi-spaces they transverse, schizoanalysis allows me to articulate the various micro and macro power relations that exist in the socio-techno-digi-politico realm that are being constituted and reconfigured in relation to other bodies, spaces, and/or things (living and non-living). Schizoanalysis is, therefore, nonrepresentational as well as subjectivity producing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1986/1998). As Biddle (2010) states, schizoanalysis is "where

no/one is the subject, everyone is a subjectivity” (p. 20). Adding to Biddle, particularly in the digital realm, ‘where no/one is the subject, everyone and every-thing is a subjectivity.’ In her article entitled *Schizoanalysis and Collaborative Critical Research* (2010), Biddle grapples with the tension of schizoanalysis as a methodology in critical and qualitative research and states that it is “a way of ‘subverting or perverting traditional methodologies for critical engagement rather than a methodology itself” (p. 19). For instance, in this project, one application of schizoanalysis is to read, interpret, and transform netnography and technography in order to create a process for analysis that will analyze N|I youth desires in connection with digital online spaces. It is used not only to critique or read, but to mobilize latent potentials and expose those invisible or imperceptible forces (i.e., “visualicities” or virtuals) that are potentially ready to emerge for new modes of subjectivation and place|making for N|I youth (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008; Shields, 2014).

According to Biddle (2010), schizoanalysis differs from traditional methodologies by critiquing power and knowledge structures and by including all collective forces as long as they are involved in the emergent assemblage. In doing so, hierarchies between the online user, or perceived actor-participant, and the researcher break down, since “we are all participants in the production of a reality that is never static, but always becoming” (p. 19). For instance, schizoanalysis would interact with knowledge as something that is lived rather than something that is to be possessed, hence, learning occurs in becoming and in “praxis”⁹⁵ (Freire, 1970/2000). The possibility of becoming is always immanent and there exists a ‘potential’, a yet-

⁹⁵ Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) expressed that learning and transforming the world can be accomplished through dialogue and praxis that which entails action-reflection.

to-*become*, or what might be seen as a positive force of creation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 6; Deleuze, 1968/1994). Remember, an immanent becoming is a deterritorialization or rupture from what is thought to be known, a standard, or ascribed image. In a formal education setting, a teacher cannot know when learning—a becoming—will occur for a student, as it may happen in the classroom as a lesson is happening, or perhaps an hour, a day, a year later—or maybe not at all. Something will activate that potential at some point and produce a becoming, whether or not the student is consciously aware of it.

Within schizoanalysis, one does not seek to interpret⁹⁶ according to given models as is the fashion of traditional qualitative methodologies (Biddle, 2010; Buchanan, 2013). It is what something *does*. Instead of seeking meaning or looking to know, one is detecting the gaps or blockages in a structure in order to determine where the potentials for composition or rupture are possible. Within the schizoanalytic project, what emerges never ‘represents’ a given model as the schizoanalysis aims to understand the singular processes at work of specific events, phenomena, and subjectivation (or becoming) (Biddle, 2010; Buchanan, 2013; Buchanan, 2014a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Guattari, 1992/2006).

What Might Schizoanalysis Do?

Schizoanalytic theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987) allows one to produce the unthought in order to enable different ways of thinking or doing (Mazzei, 2013a, p. 97). For instance, in *Desire Undone: Productions of Privilege, Power and Voice* (2013a), Lisa Mazzei draws upon Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of desire and schizoanalytic mapping in order to examine the “lack of awareness that led to noticeable silences” that

⁹⁶ Nor present a ‘better’ model for doing it.

emerged from teacher's interactions related to "race, racial position and racial identity." Such an approach is particularly important when dealing with a "white" individual's (e.g., white teacher) response to their own racial identity in relation to that of a non-white Other (p. 97). In other words, Mazzei considered the forces, drives, or intensities that caused her white teacher participants to produce silences, as well as what those silences might produce. During her research, the silences were "both purposeful and meaningful in reaffirming the espoused perspective for participants" (p. 96-97). For example, when a teacher was asked about white privilege, a non-response would result. Mazzei (2004) noticed that "even the very idea of white as privileged was resisted (and thereby silently articulated) by some participants" (29, In Mazzei, 2013a).

For Mazzei's research, it was vital that she address the silences produced as data and what they *do* in terms of "circumscribing identity" (p. 97). In order to identify and examine the meanings "inhabiting the silences" she turned to Derrida's concept of the "absent present" and voice . However, Derrida's ideas failed to explain why there were persistent silences in her data and failed to shed light on any emergent productions. In her study, Mazzei was interested in how language was being strained and if different modes of thinking were being produced. To address this she turned to Deleuze's "concept of the 'image' of the speech-act in cinema" from *Cinema 1* (1983/1986) and *Cinema 2* (1985/1989) (p. 98). Specifically, the ways in which silent voice is conveyed in film through "actions, inter-titles, and out-of-field cues" (p. 98). This concept allowed for the "re-imaging of voice" (p. 98), that is, to think of the speech-act (e.g., a silence or gesture) as an 'image' or visual, as in silent films. Considering the speech-act in this way allows one to observe silences in order to examine how they work and to analyze what they

might produce (Mazzei, 2013a). An excellent example of this in the day-to-day would be mapping body language in a conversation. In the digital realm, it would be the non-response or non-verbal interaction like a re-post, like, or by pausing a video clip. This non-response mapping is exemplified when expressing N|I youth enunciations in the Chapter Five case studies.

It is essential to consider the silences⁹⁷ that Mazzei (2013a) addresses when considering the contemporary socio-political context and social media spaces that N|I youth transverse. That is, navigating a Canadian nation-state-aesthetic (Shields, 2014) as a predominantly ‘white’ space and a North American or “Western” influenced digital media context, for the most part⁹⁸. A question to consider is: What might these silences do to affect|effect N|I youth subjectivity online? For example, what can images (e.g., photographs, memes, videos), commentary (e.g., chat posts, trolling), and algorithmic actions online (e.g., blocking, shadowbanning) *do* to produce and modify a N|I youth online.

Working with Desire

In her research, Mazzei (2013a) is concerned with the production of silence through the concept of desire as laid out by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987). Desire, for Deleuze and Guattari, is understood as a force or intensity that produces something⁹⁹. Desire, is not, as defined in psychoanalysis by Freud, a “drive” or by Lacan (building upon Freud) as a “lack” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 335; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). According to Zembylas (2007), Deleuze and Guattari are against the “traditional [psychological] logic of desire” because it positions “desire as lack, and, as such, is idealist” (p. 335). In such an instance,

⁹⁷ In Chapter One, these silences are referred to as virtualities or *visualities* (Shields, 2014).

⁹⁸ An individual’s social media space, on TikTok, will depend on upon how they curate their algorithm (more on this in Chapter 5).

⁹⁹ As discussed in Chapter Two.

one is constantly longing for something or someone that they do not have in an imaginary or fantasy world. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this drive and following lack is “what denies the materiality of desire and treats desire as a simple longing for pleasure or fantasy, fulfilled only in dreams” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 335). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari see desire as a productive, autonomous, and affirmative force that can shape the social realm (Zembylas, 2007).

Mazzei (2013a) argues that working with desire allows one to ponder, “[w]hat ... machineries of desire... are constantly 'churning stuff out' to produce connections?” or *becomings* (p. 100). In the context of this particular research project, the exploration of desire would entail considering the forces that are acting through, and *with*, N|I youth online users as observed in the many spaces they transversed. Therefore, the task of this project will involve observing and *thinking with* the forces that construct, modify, categorize, or constrict youth desires online. In the digital realm, these silences can manifest in many ways, from the forces of capitalism that drive the algorithms and data banks to gather and feed information for capture and consumption to the affective forces flowing from other users within their shared spaces¹⁰⁰.

Online algorithms, specifically on TikTok, are fueled by desire. For example, in the digital realm of TikTok, one could ask why a specific user’s For You Page (FYP) is filled with only white content creators, dance challenges, or animals? While it is true that the TikTok algorithm is working behind the scenes to bring those images and content to the user, it is the user’s desires combined with those of capitalism, among other intensities, that are feeding the algorithm and teaching it to bring specific content and users to them. This analysis does not seek to interpret

¹⁰⁰There are more examples demonstrated in Chapter Five Case Studies.

what the desires mean. Instead, it seeks to observe what the desires are *doing* and attend to the actions and productions that emerge. Such a task will require a specific tool—a map of desires.

To Draw a Map

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987), Deleuze and Guattari what it means to construct a map. They speak of it as an “act of creation” using the French word “tracer,” which in English the connotation is ‘to draw’ or could also mean to blaze a trail or open up a road. However, this word should not be confused with the English word “to trace,” in French meaning ‘decalquer,’ which means to copy from a model. For Deleuze and Guattari, “schizoanalysis rejects any idea of a pretraced destiny” (p. 13). As such, tracing (in the English sense of the word) would mean mimicking a static map that has already been drawn. The elements of a map, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are the following: i) “it constructs the unconscious” thereby is immanent to the intensities *in situ* as a part of an assemblage; ii) it is “open”, “connectible”, and “susceptible” to modification; iii) it can be reworked, adapted, transformed, or torn apart by any individual, group, or social formation; iv) it can be “conceived of as a work of art, constructed as political action, or as a mediation”; v) “it has multiple entryways” or approaches for engagement (p. 12). Diversely, traditional qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods, for instance, focus on interpretation that is based upon an *a priori* image or model, which often amounts to a ‘tracing.’ In qualitative methods, there are different ways of gathering data, such as conducting interviews in many formats, participant observation (e.g., ethnographic) and data analysis (e.g., of stories, photographs, etc.). This data is gathered with a specific human-centred image in mind whereby the researcher’s question needs to be answered

or addressed as well as taking into account their own collective multiplicities. This chosen question not only helps to guide a qualitative methodological approach and methods, but it can also determine the how, who, what, where, when, and why of what occurs in one's study. Aside from this guiding factor, built into the ethos of qualitative methods is a desire 'to know' and interpret the project, the participant, and the data for meaning and for researcher understanding. In this scenario, one is working within a representational framework which progresses from a pre-traced destiny, that of answering a question¹⁰¹ that may already have an answer (e.g., educational standardization). On the other hand, for Deleuze and Guattari, producing *a tracé* would mean drawing a map immanent to the connections being made or blazed ahead.

That is, one is working with the singularities in connection with one another. Since this research is interested in N|I youth becomings alongside the question of how subjectivities are composed and constituted by online virtual spaces, it is fitting to produce a materialist mapping or cartography. Thus, it is meaningful to interact with N|I youth as singularities, where each is affected and effected, and conversely, each with the ability to affect and effect in the spaces they transverse. This sort of engagement with requires a map of desires. As Mazzei (2013b) writes, this form of mapping places observations in relation to the platform itself: the public that has engaged with potential youth productions, N|I youth as digital subjects and how they interact with content and other users, and those becomings which are potentially co-produced between collected expressions and researcher. This approach provides a way of engaging with

¹⁰¹ One is not better than another. It is what it does. Each framework serves a purpose depending on what one wants to do.

and “thinking with” the emergent enunciations or productions in order “to open up new ways of producing thought” (p. 777). Other researchers in the social sciences and humanities have drawn on Deleuze and Guattari’s materialisms to think through mapping in their own ways. For instance, the conceptualization of cultural topology by Rob Shields (2013) attends to those emergent social space[s] that work with placing as “spatialisations” with “recurrent orders of spacing and placing or virtualities” where there is the potential for accessing the virtual in both senses of the word. For example, accessing virtuals as *visualities* that pull from experiences or memories from the unconscious that may emerge through intensive and affective encounters, or as virtuals that emerge from the conscious ‘real’ and actual world in the form of encountered semiotics, for instance (p. 10). When engaging with *spatialisations* of a given ‘world,’ one connects with a given context or space and all who are within said parameters. Engaging with *spatialisations* is to understand the “sense of place” (p. 30), which according to Shields (2013) are expressed through a process of meaning-making. These *spatialisations* similarly extend beyond that which can be immediately seen, touched, or measured, such as measures of time and space. In online digital social spaces like TikTok, one might look toward understanding how the platform works, knowing how to selectively ‘like’ content creators so as to curate one’s FYP in a certain way, engaging for a specific or unlimited amount of time, adjusting one’s privacy settings so that advertising bots are not tracking one’s offline movements, and potentially “multi-living” (Turkle, 2011, 6:35) and engaging in multiple spaces and places at once.

Schizoanalysis also allows me to explore, disturb, and include the numerous power relations in the study. Such relations are all pertinent since power relations are constantly in flux

in the online and offline spaces that diasporic digital youth transverse, for N|Is are an often-but-not-always racialized, ethnicized, and marginalized group.

Thinking Beyond a Netnographic Approach for Data Collection

This section explores the use of netnography (Kozinets, 2010, 2015) as a tool for observing "niche online communities" (Wallin, 2014, p. xxxi) or public, online "territories of use" (p. xxxv) in social media spaces. Niche formations connote a specific connection, unity, or fealty to a certain aesthetic, much like the online communities described by Robert Kozinets in his book, *Netnography: Redefined* (2015). Of interest for this research inquiry is Wallin's (2014) engagement of niche formations¹⁰² as not only "territories of use" (p. xxxv) but as "territories of social reference" (p. xxxiii) where there are "implications for both subjective and social organization" (p. xxxv). In addition, however, I wish to extend the definition of niche formations to include the description of these territories as transitory and diasporic digi-spaces that might potentially be constituted through spaces or zones where subjectivity is transformed or created through human|inhuman|nonhuman interactions. This is what Watson (2012) refers to as "portable homelands"¹⁰³ (p. 306).

In addition to the consideration of online digi-spaces as "portable territories", one could also view digital spaces as being animated by the motion of bodies and forces that transverse and flow through to connect and potentially *become with*. For this, one can *think with* Michel de Certeau (1990, as cited in Auge 1995) and view these spaces as frequented and active places where moving bodies or forces intersect in order "to be other, and go over to the other" (p. 83).

¹⁰² See also Chapter One, section "A Public Pedagogy | Considerations for Becoming-With".

¹⁰³ See also Chapter Two, section "Trauma as Media Affects".

As a result, these spaces are where bodies are affected and effected. Further, drawing upon Anna Hickey-Moody's (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) conceptualization of "little publics," as discussed in Chapter One, whereby "little publics" are seen as collective spaces that generate a potential for learning to occur, offering a voice and space for creative expression to emerge for those feeling marginalized or are in the margins.

What is Netnography?

Netnography is a humanist qualitative research method and methodology that emerged in the late 1990s for consumer market research and socio-cultural analysis in the digital humanities and cultural fields (Kozinets, 2010, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2018; Sandlin, 2007). Robert Kozinets (2010, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2018) is a leading researcher in this area and, in his most recent text, *Netnography: Redefined* (2015), speaks of netnography as both an interdisciplinary methodology and, most currently, a sensibility that is being applied in Geography, Business, Sciences, Game Studies, and Education to name a few. As a methodology and method, netnography works to reveal an array of information concerning the following online practices: personal narratives, interaction styles, social exchanges, interpretation and categorization of images, linguistic translation (including code), online rituals, structures, practices, and rules, discursive styles, innovations, creations, and manifestations of creativity (Kozinets, 2015, p. 3; Kozinets et al., 2018). Netnographic methods adapt ethnographic research techniques for studying communities and cultures on computer mediated platforms. As described by Kozinets et al. (2018), "a netnography is a kind of selfie...saving a slice of social reality as it is reflected in your [the netnographer's] life and your thoughts" (p. 236). That stated, there is an immediate contention with the human and representational focus of this methodology for this particular

research project as this study works with a posthuman and materialist framework that displaces traditional human hierarchies and the location of agency. This tension is addressed by using netnography as a tool for content gathering rather than adopting it as a full methodology.

Over the years, netnography has developed many neologisms as it has been developed and engaged with by various researchers, such as internet-based ethnography, virtual ethnography, digital ethnography, auto-netnography, more-than-human netnography, or web/smartphone/mobile/ICT ethnography (Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2018; Lugosit & Quinton, 2018; Sandlin, 2007). On the other hand, it has also received many criticisms from those stating that netnographic methods are overly simplistic and reductive in their understanding of the networked world, thus proposing “more-than-human” approaches that recognize the complexities of the technologically-mediated social world (Lugosit & Quinton, 2018). The founders of the methodology, Kozinets, Scaraboto, and Parmentier (2018), acknowledged netnography’s limitations in obtaining knowledge from online human experience, especially regarding the ethics of data gathering. What they do assert is the following, “to stay relevant, netnography must change...the contemporary netnographer considers human connectivity to be transforming and transformative ... dealing explicitly with cultural realities in technocapitalist times” (pp. 231-232). Their suggestion is to subvert explicit cultural reality by using posthuman approaches that focus on “agentic objects, such as bots, algorithms and intelligent agents...and deploying a netnographic sensibility and using an auto ethnographic introspective wisdom [or lived experience]” (p. 232). While I agree with the authors in terms of using a posthuman approach, for this project, I find their engagement with agency and objects using Actor Network Theory (ANT) problematic for approaching the role of

objects and their agentic relationships to one another (Kozinets et al., 2018; Lugosi & Quinton, 2018).

Departure from ANT

In *Assemblage Theory and Schizoanalysis* (2014a) and *Assemblage Theory and Method* (2021b) Ian Buchanan sets out to explain and differentiate Deleuzian assemblage theory from its other conceptual versions, such as Actor Network Theory (ANT) and its application in the works of Manuel DeLanda, Jane Bennett, and Willian Connolly. His critiques focus on the oversimplification of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking on assemblage theory which avoids the concept's overall complexity and application. For instance, Buchanan critiques the mistranslation and misinterpretation of the term 'assemblage' such that "any" and "every kind of *collection of things* is referred to as assembling" (Buchanan, 2021b, p. 3). This misappropriation gives one the perception that what is presented by a particular assemblage is generated by the materials in the assemblage (p. 56).

Buchanan goes on to identify two main casualties in the use of ANT as a way to describe the Deleuzeoguattarian assemblage. The first casualty is the exclusion of the concept of desire, which ANT understands as "unnecessary" or "too messy" (Buchanan, 2021b, p. 5). More specifically, according to Buchanan, the elimination of desire reduces assemblages to nothing more than "apparatuses" or mechanisms (p. 5). In distinction, Buchanan avers that the productive and intensive force of desire is central to the schizoanalytic project, the formation of assemblages and the production of subjectivities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). Desire, as Buchanan (2021b) states, is that which "selects materials and gives them the properties that they have in the assemblage. This is because desire itself is productive" (p. 56).

Desire is the force that forms connections to give life to an assemblage, modify it, and propel it to become some-thing else.

The second casualty is that the multidimensionality of the assemblage is forgotten (Buchanan, 2021b, p. 5). Within ANT, the assemblage is treated as a “stand-alone concept” resulting in a version that is stripped of its complexities, its various conceptual developments and contributions over time by Deleuze or Guattari, and is disconnected from the other necessary components that together form the schizoanalytic project. One such example is the disconnection from desire, as mentioned above. For DeLanda, the assemblage is perceived as having only one “kind” of component in that the assemblage is conceptualized as solely machinic (p. 5).

Buchanan (2014a) argues that ANT’s notion of assemblage is used to explain complex dilemmas that cannot be reduced to a single or discernible truth. One such dilemma was explained using John Law’s “Gold” example of the Ladbroke Grove train crash of 1999, where it was impossible to find a definitive explanation of the crash due to the death of both drivers in the crash and there being too many factors influencing the outcome (pp. 128-129). What sets Deleuzian assemblage theory apart from ANT’s engagement with the assemblage is that Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that there *is* a single reality: the train crashing. However, said reality is multiple in and of itself (p. 129). In other words, a singular event may be experienced *differently* by different people and things all at once. However, the trick is unravelling the reality for each to understand the whole assemblage or, as Buchanan prefers, the “living arrangement” (p. 130).

Another of ANT's misappropriation involves how material objects are taken up in an assemblage. That is, assemblage theory in ANT is taken at "face value" and not being used as the critical conceptual tool that it is (Buchanan, 2014a, p. 127). What is largely being ignored and omitted when engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory is the fact that it has a direct link to "Freud's complex" or "Oedipal complex"—translated directly from the German "Komplex" (p. 127; see also Buchanan, 2021b, p. 20). This link, as explained by Buchanan, is specifically connected to the meaning and application of the term assemblage, as we know it, derived from Deleuze and Guattari's translation of the word 'agencement' or "rearrangement" (p. 20). As explained by Buchanan, the sense of the Freudian 'complex' according to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) is:

- 1) 'a relatively stable arrangement of chains of association'; 2) 'a collection of personal characteristics—including the best integrated ones—which is organized to a greater or lesser degree, the emphasis here being on emotional reactions'; 3) 'a basic structure of interpersonal relationships and the way in which the individual finds and appropriates his place'. (p. 21)

Through Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), Buchanan (2021b) explains that all individual behaviour is modified or shaped by an underlying structure that is latent and unchanging and, as such, there is a 'complex' for each psychological type. When thinking of 'complex' in this form, one is not required to give consideration to any material object (p. 21; see also 2014a). Rather, it is desires in connection with the material objects that prompt creation, transformation, and production. In other words, while material objects can be a part of an assemblage, they do not define the assemblage or behaviour. ANT, however, makes material objects the central point of

their analysis and gives them agential power. If this study were to use ANT, the research project would look different, whereby digital technology would be centred as the sole acting and defining power over the subjectivity (e.g., TikTok defines or makes the subject), eliminating the consideration of other forces that are acting upon N|I youth digital subjects online.

This agential power is not a good or bad thing in and of itself, however, the focus of agency is misplaced. Buchanan (2014a) states that “the search for non-human actors...should be seen as a solution rather than a cause” (p. 128). For this dissertation project, the solution might be to contribute to some-thing productive for N|I youth rather than a cause with no ‘real’ answer or definitive resolution. Watson (2012) makes the point that “the technology itself...is less important than the subjective and social mutations that go with it” (p. 315). N|I youth on TikTok produce potential hashtag challenges, trends, and potential movements, for instance. For this research project, netnography will not be used as a methodology instead as a vehicle for online data collection and a part of what is enacted online when observing online niche communities, or digi-spaces, in a desire focused manner.

Online Observation Techniques

As a tool for observation, netnography can either take a “purely observational form” (p. 1271) where the researcher is a type of “lurker” (p. 1271)—participant-observer (Kozinets, 2015)—or it can take a more “traditional” (Bowler, 2010, p. 1271) approach which is more participative and immersive (i.e., ethnographic, interviewer). As a desire focused researcher, I use a combination of techniques, such as “observation,” “observation as [actor-]participant,” “participation as observer,” or “just ‘being around’” (Gray, 2011, p. 82). These diverse observation techniques are essential when interested in how people might “interact and relate

to one another within given sites or spaces” (Gray, 2011, p. 82). Here I elaborate on my role as an “observant participant” (Roy et al., 2015, para. 3), or rather, an observer that is an ‘active’ participant in the spaces they are observing.

The act of being present in a social media space makes one an active user. When actively present on these platforms, one can have an unknowing and unintentional impact—the power to affect | effect—upon these spaces, the individuals, and the material content. As an active user, one participates by scrolling, liking, clicking and possibly commenting—performing activities online—thus, prompting and shaping algorithms. Sometimes one's presence, as a researcher, will be imperceptible by other users¹⁰⁴ (e.g., not responding to content), while at other times, it will be noticed (e.g., engaging content creators). For instance, on TikTok, I observed and interacted with posted content that often-but-not-always reflected the lived experiences of the content creators (e.g., vlogs, memes). As an “insider” (i.e., having access to public spaces and public accounts as a platform user) and an active observer, one can participate in these experiences and become affected, therefore, having one's desires emerge and impact the space. This experience is consistent with netnographic tools for research (Kozinets, 2015). However, as an observer, one aims not to interfere, as the main goal is to observe and gather content. Kozinets (2015) reminds the netnographer;

what we see as naturally emergent [online], spontaneously shared and unobtrusively collected manifestations of consumer behaviour data is actually a selection of content carefully curated for us and tailored to our taste and preferences by collections of human and non-human agents. (p. 238)

¹⁰⁴ Not necessarily to the algorithms.

The latter is crucial to remember moving forward with this research (Kozinets, 2015, p. 238). As a desire focused researcher, one must be aware at all times that desires are being manipulated by technocapitalist and social media algorithms (see also, Suarez-Villa, 2009). Therefore, this work requires that field notes be taken of any observations that might emerge¹⁰⁵.

What is Data Online?

In *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (2010) by Kozinets (2010), Gary M. Bowler Jr. (2010) speaks of netnography as an adapted ethnographic approach as an ideal mode for gathering online data. According to Kozinets (2015), netnographic data can be produced in many ways: by an individual or collective, or each of the latter co-produced with machines (in the literal sense), software agents, and bots; through interactions between a real-life user-researcher or by sitting in digital archives online, which can be interactive like a conversation or noninteractive like observing or reading; and, through polished or raw artifacts/texts, which can be in the form of more-than-words (e.g., images, sound files, or other digital artifacts). What is missing from the list are the observable and quantifiable “silences”, such as body language, what is left unsaid, and the statistics of a TikTok video (e.g., likes, shares, comments) (Mazzei, 2013a, 2013b). As well as the invisible, imperceptible, or often unthought-of material and immaterial elements and forces that may act upon a subjectivity, for example, the preconscious intensities (affects and desires), algorithmic data gathering, Artificial Intelligence programs, “machine to machine communication,” or “vibratory media” (Hansen, 2015). Also missing are the “Outside” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) interactions of nonhuman | inhuman | human that

¹⁰⁵ A more in-depth description of the ethical considerations of this study appears in Chapter Four.

become a part of the spaces at any given moment. In this research study, these folded moments will account for all perceptible (to the desiring researcher and viewer) forms of inter-and intra-actions of forces and relations that will connect with a N|I youth subjectivity in social media spaces (on and offline).

Online Social Experiences

Kozinets (2015) proposes that there are four types of online social experiences as they might occur on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram): mingling, bonding, sharing, and organizing. *Mingling* includes the more informal media experiences that are superficially social, short-lived, form weak relationships, and fulfill or satisfy a recreational desire (e.g., TikTok, Twitter, MMO or MOBA game spaces, certain virtual worlds or chat rooms). *Bonding* or *hyving* comprises the experiences that result in longer lasting and more meaningful relationships, except participants are not necessarily focused on a shared activity, purpose, or interest (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, virtual worlds like Second Life or other MMORPGs). *Sharing* refers to those experiences online where groups share content without the promise of deep social engagement. These are mainly friendly environments of interaction for sharing social expressions and targeted information (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, b/vlogs, wikis, YouTube). *Finally, organizing* refers to online experiences that create a social tie between people while sharing information on mutual interests and activities (e.g., blogs, wikis, interest groups, MMOs, Twitter, Twitch, TikTok, Meetup.com, LinkedIn, forums) (Kozinets, 2015). In order to work towards a desire focused approach and engagement with N|I youth, this project's online observations focused primarily on the more accessible social media online

experience modes of *mingling, sharing, and organizing* where data is gathered from the spaces of TikTok¹⁰⁶.

A Technographic Nod

Since this inquiry interacts with online communities as a text for analysis, it makes sense to use netnography as an approach for collection. As a researcher, I take on an active observer participant role in order to detect, map, and analyze the multitudinous connections produced in the online realm. However, since those digital and networked spaces are a part of a wireless screen technology that is portable and can be experienced intermittently in diverse spaces and times, this project necessitates a virtual ethnographic perspective that also takes these “unbordered...and unmanageable” aspects into account (Kien, 2008a, para. 3). Such an approach involves using technography as conceptualized by Grant Kien (2008a, 2008b), a communications scholar and former student of Norman Denzin, who states that “people now take the chat room with them everywhere they go, never really entering or exiting the environment” (Kien, 2008a, para. 3). For Kien (2008a, 2008b), technology is not one-dimensional or something that takes a background role, rather, it contributes to everyday life. That stated, there are issues with Kien’s work that prevent me from fully engaging with his methodology.

To begin, as stated by Kien (2008b), technography as a term was first coined by Bernie de Koven in the 1980s. Technography, at that point in time, was linked to computer-based methods for keeping social conversations organized, productive, and accountable (Savory,

¹⁰⁶ The desire approach is explained in depth in Chapter Four.

2012). Kien (2008a, see also 2008b), however, combined two philosophical strands to create his technographical approach and methodology. First, Bruno Latour's (1988) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) that is premised on the idea that machines are used to build and "enact social programs" (as cited in Kien, 2008a, para. 6). Second, Heidegger's (1997) phenomenology and philosophy of technology, asserting that "humans are engines of technology" and, hence, are "inseparable" from their reliance upon it (as cited in Kien, 2008a, para. 6, see also Kien, 2009). In addition, he drew upon Denzin's (1999) approach to ethnography and his own experience as a "technologically savvy" global citizen as expressed through auto-ethnographic vignettes through time. For reasons explained earlier, there are strands of this methodology that will not be connected with, for instance, Actor Network Theory (ANT). In addition, Kien does not allow for other possibilities beyond the written word to be included as online data, thus, eliminating other possibilities for content—for example, an image, video, and actions such as liking or disliking (Powell, 2010). Another critique of Kien's methodology, as reviewed by Powell (2010), is that there is little space for incorporating other voices, nor is there a sense of the collective potential for change in his work. Instead, in Kien's (2009) book, *Global Technography: Ethnography in the Age of Mobility*, technography became an individual project of disconnection from wireless spaces as one travels from area to area, as Allison Powell (2010) states:

These projects can be much less about getting online and much more about expressing a shared identity and improving a local place...Merely being mobile and networked does not imply that one's connections are unmoored from places and the multiple, complex

identities they can solicit. Even in an age of mobile connectivity, we can and do belong in places, and use our technologies to express that belonging. (p. 1027)

Powell makes a significant and relevant point tied to my research, specifically in regards to the notion of place and displacement. It is not that one does not belong in the places from which they have been "unmoored," instead, it is the ability to express a shared identity and improve one's *sense of place* in the context in which one currently inhabits.

Techniques to Use from Netnography and Technography

Kozinets offers six steps in his netnographic methodology: "research planning, entree, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation" (Bowler, 2010, p. 1272; see also Kozinets, 2010). However, of those stated, there are three areas of divergence in my research as influenced by an ethico-aesthetic and schizoanalytic framework. Those three areas are interpretation, ethics, and research representation. As mentioned earlier, this project intends to map the flows of desire and creation that might occur in and through the online and offline spaces affecting N|I youth subjectivity. That stated, of the two approaches mentioned above—technography—does not account for the assemblages that include the nonhuman|inhuman|human|digital space|offline place where emergence might occur. In 2016, Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman applied and adapted a Deleuzeoguattarian desire approach to "critically examine the role of technocapitalism in the realm of consumptive passion" (p. 662). Their approach was a bricolage that added ethnographic and interview-focused dimensions to the realm of consumptive desire networks surrounding food cravings through technology. Kozinets et al. (2016), however, have taken apart desire as a concept to use "as an adaptation" (p. 661). They state, "[w]e critically and reflexively focus on particular

elements of their theory to suit the needs of this research project” (p. 661). For instance, they focus on “D+G’s theory of desire...[as] energetic, connective, systemic, and innovative” and engage with desires as “emancipatory” (p. 661). The forces of desire within this study are channeled through technology and work with technocapitalism to maintain its interests. Whereas, in this project the aim is to find ways to counter-respond.

In distinction to Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman (2016), this dissertation interacts with desire as an ethico-aesthetic project and sensibility for data collection and analysis in the social sciences. This project not only involves decentering power structures within a technocapitalist digital space, it also involves focusing energy on digital subjects that are overstructured, highly surveilled, overcoded, considered invisible, and are yet-to-be-discovered or created.

A Schizoanalytic Approach for Online Interaction and Analysis

As a schizoanalytic project, the purpose of my dissertation is to construct a map of desires to observe what a subjectivity can *do* in an online environment, avoiding the traditional forms of analysis that seek to interpret what a subjectivity *is* in the online environment. As a meta-modelization project and tool for transversal analysis, it runs contrary to netnographic methods of data collection and analysis as espoused by Kozinets (2010, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2016; Kozinets et al., 2018) involving coding analysis and the contextualization of communicative acts (Kien, 2008a, 2008b). Furthermore, as an ethico-aesthetic project, schizoanalysis works in opposition to a method that is codifying, classifying, and which seeks to identify structures and institutions (Guattari, 1992/2006). That stated, the concept of contextualization used in Kozinet’s (2010, 2015) netnographic methodology is compatible with a schizoanalytic framework (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), as one must not seek to interpret

the unconscious or preconscious desires or intensities. Instead, the intention is to acknowledge and map desires as they emerge in a given context (e.g., ecology, zone of subjectivation, or existential territory) *in situ*. These emergent productions appear in these digital and offline spaces through produced expressions, such as interactions, modifications, and negotiations experienced by N|I youth in assemblage with human|nonhuman|inhuman. How will this mapping be accomplished?

To Affect and Effect | Tasks of Schizoanalysis

This section will assist with considering the research design and assemblage, particularly the human, inhuman and nonhuman affective forces that flow through and *connect with* a N|I youth diasporic digital subject online in order to consider their potential desire productions and blockages. To do so, I will need to break down the process of schizoanalysis.

In Chapters One and Two, Clough's (2016) work was drawn upon in order to speak on the traumatic and imposed “wounds” that media, digital or otherwise, can have upon a body. Those wounds, as events (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009), are what impact and cut in—i.e., rupturing—creating space for the rendering of what was unthought to come to the surface or to intervene and act upon the world, and all things in it as “sense-events” (jagodzinski, 2014). In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972/2000), Deleuze and Guattari specifically speak to the Oedipalizing¹⁰⁷ forces of society—i.e., standardizing and codifying forces—that work to capture, categorize, and consume a body. In the introduction of *Anti-Oedipus*, Mark Seem articulates the “revolutionary” tasks¹⁰⁸ that one must take in order to break from the

¹⁰⁷ “Oedipus is the figure of power” (Seem, In Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. xx).

¹⁰⁸ According to Seem (as cited in Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009), “the goal of schizoanalysis through its tasks is “the transformation of human relationships in a struggle against power” (p. xxi). He states, “[o]nce we forget about our egos a non-neurotic form of politics becomes possible, where singularity and collectivity are no longer at odds

Oedipalizing structures in order to “flee from it in all directions” (p. xx). The rupture created when applying the three tasks for a schizoanalysis, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009), forms a part of an intended desire focused research approach towards examining and *thinking with* the emergent online content as discussed in the following sections. According to Deleuze and Guattari, one destructive task is followed by two positive tasks. While they are explained separately here, and in my data analysis, these tasks are “in no way separable” from one another as they are initiated at the same time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 322).

The Task of Destruction. The first, destructive task, is that which destroys the idea of “desire ha[ving] an intrinsic script it is supposed to follow” (p. 13). The task is to break from territorializing structures, such as the Oedipal figure or standardizing or representational forces of the Internet in the case of this research. For N|I youth who are often, but not always minoritized or marginalized in some form or another—e.g., racialized or ethnicized—and often engage with social media content and platforms that seek to impose their standards or codes, this rupture is essential. As a researcher, the task for decentering oneself means not placing my expectations for an outcome upon my interactions with digital users, being open to receiving their content, being flexible and responsive to the flows of time and the nuances of the spaces that N|I youth might navigate. This approach includes choosing to interact with N|I youth encountered, *as singularities*. In addition, I would see myself as a desiring and machinic subject and online actor-participant in connection with the digital spaces I am observing.

In *Schizoanalysis and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014b), Ian Buchanan states the

with each other, and where collective expressions of desire are possible. Such a politics does not seek to regiment individuals according to a totalitarian system of norms, but to de-normalize and de-individualize through a multiplicity of new, collective arrangements against power” (p. xxi).

need to move away from representational models of knowledge that pre-suppose emergence must be learned in advance. Instead, he calls for a pedagogy of desire that is flexible, in flow with the learner, in this case with the space and diasporic digital subjects, and which has no pre-determined destination.

Positive Tasks of Schizoanalysis. The first positive task discovers the “desiring-machines,” or connective and constitutive assemblages, which are at work composing the N|I youth subjectivity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 13). Observing *in situ, as singularity*, and as Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009) state, “discovering in a subject the nature, the formation, or the functioning of [their] desiring-machines, independently of interpretations” (p. 322). In order to discover the *formation* or *nature* of the desiring-machines, this study examined TikTok as a social media platform connected with N|I youth subjects to map the desire blockages and potential collective expressions produced over a period of a year¹⁰⁹. According to Buchanan (2014b), when one works with desire, one is not seeking to resolve a problem. Instead, one is seeking to perturb the problem by way of desiring forces to rupture it and “propel it in directions it would not otherwise want to go” (p. 13). This propulsion then leads us to the second positive task, that which discovers the “mental matrices” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 13) created by desire to trap, divert, and interrupt N|I flows of desire, which then are examined and mapped. Therefore, *thinking with* N|I youth desires on TikTok to gauge the forces that are impinging upon their ability to express themselves fully. Stemming from this approach, we might ask what forces are blocking creative productions or becomings for a N|I youth subjectivity?

¹⁰⁹ This is demonstrated in Chapter Five.

A Postqualitative and Desire Focused Approach for *Engaging With*

This postqualitative and desire focused research project extends across multiple research spaces—i.e., ethnographic, textual, philosophical/theoretical, and cartographic—working against “pre-tailored” methodologies as a schizoanalytic meta-model to observe, analyze, and map the digi-spaces of TikTok when connected with N|I youth digital subjects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; 1972/2009; Higgins et al., 2017; St. Pierre, 2018). As a project that is informed by a posthuman ethics influenced by new materialist media theory it displaces the centrality of the human. Instead, it analyzes agency astride an array of interconnected forces (affects), beings, or material online spaces (Clough, 2016). This decentering of agency and hierarchies informs how data is engaged with, collected, and *thought with* by the desiring researcher (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2010, 2013a, 2013b).

As a postqualitative inquiry it “displaces and unhinge[s] one’s own understanding” as a desiring researcher (Higgins et al., p. 27). Instead of the researcher observing and interpreting the online subject, the diasporic digital subject is produced in assemblage *with* “researcher – data – ‘user’ /participant – theory – analysis” (Mazzei, 2013c, p. 733; see also Lather, 2016). Mazzei (2013b) states that “knowing is never done in isolation but is always effected by different forces coming together” (p. 778). This *thinking with* therefore manifests when one is observing and interacting with a user and content creator online in the various spaces N|I youth transverse¹¹⁰, inclusive of the connections they make. For example, one assemblage might look like: TikTok content creator – a digi-space (e.g., TikTok niche) – user commentary – algorithm design – researcher – Outside forces (e.g., capitalism).

¹¹⁰ This approach is developed fully in Chapter Four.

As “little publics” or existential territories, online assemblages are the sites of potential mapping. To map digital sites of desire, researchers need to shift how to think about agency so that it is “distributed between and among the human and nonhuman” (Mazzei, 2013b, p. 778). That is, when one is reading “data” through these spaces with a theoretical lens connected to social media productions (e.g., images, comments, likes), it will produce an “emergent and unpredictable reading of data” (p. 778). These assemblages are themselves unpredictable and not limited to the human|human relations. Instead, they are human|nonhuman|inhuman and work with the invisible and unknown, and are connected and disconnected by forces of desire. Included in this contemporary reality are technological and other machines with which one interacts, such as the screens and digital spaces which humans carry, communicate with and transverse daily, as well as those “visceral perception[s] and preconscious affect[s]” which are working upon all matter to modulate and transform them (p. 44; Massumi, 2002).

Postqualitative approaches support this study by demonstrating how the subject is enmeshed with the technological apparatus requiring that ‘non-interpretation’ entail a *thinking-with* the theory, thus, embracing theory for imagining the complexities of the assemblage (Deleuze, 1995).

Chapter Four – Towards a Desire Focused Digi-Encounter

Overall, this research project is the product of a transversal experiment that combines schizoanalysis—i.e., a desire ontology—with techno-netnographic methods in order to map newcomer | immigrant youth experiences and potential collective becomings online. This desire focused digi-encounter involves three parts. First, a desire focused online ethnography that observes the social media platform of TikTok¹¹¹ driven by a Guattarian informed ethico-aesthetics, ethics for ‘data’ gathering explained in Chapter Three, and infused throughout this dissertation. Second, a desire focused case analysis of collected online data on TikTok, to be developed further in Chapter Five. Third, the project is a contemplation on a people yet-to-come and a potentiality for a minoritarian politics of the N|I that is explored in Chapter Five.

For this particular chapter, the focus is on what makes this research project a *desiring* one for the researcher, for those encountered online (e.g., the content creator (actor) and social media user), and the spaces and content that I engage and *think with*. As discussed in the Chapter Two section titled “Assemblage Theory”, *digi-spaces* are assemblages, milieus or planes where an expression is organized or composed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). Such digi-spaces are the territories upon which N|I youth are being constructed and where the digital social realm (e.g., TikTok) and N|I youth act as machines connecting with another to produce ‘something’ rather than ‘nothing’¹¹² through an encounter. As such, for the second half of this chapter, a glimpse into the socio-technological and political assemblage of TikTok will be provided in order to give the reader a sense for its algorithm, its history and

¹¹¹ Formerly known as Douyin in China, then Music.ly. ByteDance created it in 2016 (Hautea et al., 2021; Zhao, 2020, 2021).

¹¹² All who I observed produced something in these spaces. Even non-creators, such as myself or non-users by just being and participating on the app.

business practices, and an overview of the platform's users (i.e., digital subjects). All this is to give the reader a foundation for the case desire analysis that will constitute the focus of Chapter Five.

A *Desiring* Online Researcher

As previously discussed in Chapters Two and Three, this study applies a schizoanalytic approach that seeks to break down and critique power and reifying socio-political-cultural structures within the digital realm by analyzing the connective and collective forces as they appear in emergent socio-technological assemblages (e.g., on digi-spaces like TikTok). According to Biddle (2010), there is an understanding that within this process, any objects involved within these assemblages are equal participants and actors in the “production of reality that is never static” and always in the process of becoming (p. 19; see also Buchanan, 2013, 2014a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). This process suggests a degeneration of the hierarchy between participant and researcher by allowing both to be potential actors and co-producers of enunciations upon, and within, online “territories of use” or digi-spaces they might encounter (Wallin, 2014, p. xxxv). As actors and users of these spaces, N|I youth and researchers are desiring subjects and machines to be connected with, acted upon, and co-produced with.

Infused with, and within, this desiring focus, I engaged with Kozinets' (2015; see also Bowler, 2010; Kozinets' et al., 2016; Kozinets' et al., 2018) netnographic tools for observation and draw upon netnographic methods to observe and gather N|I individual and collective enunciations on TikTok as explored in Chapter Three (see section “Online Observation Techniques”). By drawing upon the methods of netnography, I immersed myself in the space of TikTok as an active observer and participant—i.e., user-with minimal interference (Kozinets,

2015). This immersion meant taking on the role of *tiktoker* by establishing a user account with a generated username and avatar. It also meant deciding from the beginning to engage with the account, the space, users, content creators, and the algorithm as a digital version of ‘myself’¹¹³. That is, it was Adriana, the researcher with desires and all, but it was not an entirely ‘actual’ (‘real-life’) version of ‘myself’, but rather a diasporic digital ‘self’ and TikTok user moving through the spaces of TikTok and the Internet.

I treated this user profile as a research account from the beginning, knowing to some extent the potential of what TikTok could *do* going in. That is, I recognized that the TikTok algorithm was capable of ‘knowing’ me and farming my private data. I henceforth approached with some trepidation and care. Consequently, this also meant that I needed to navigate ethically as a user, potential actor and researcher, not only for myself but also for those youth I was observing and *engaging with*¹¹⁴.

A N|I Specific Process for Desiring Online Research

The process for conducting a desire focused search in the digi-spaces of TikTok meant scrolling, transversing spaces, exploring, and being an "observant-user" (Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2018) in order to gather emergent productions, expressions, or enunciations in the form of publicly shared experiences or content. In addition, field notes¹¹⁵ were maintained to gather any emergent reflections during the research process. Once youth expressions were

¹¹³ An ‘embodied identity’ (Schultze, 2014) and diasporic digital subject that is always ‘in-between’ on and offline realms.

¹¹⁴ An ethics for how one might approach and *engage with* digital subjects in the contexts with which they are connected are addressed in Chapter Two in the section on “Subjectivity|In Situ, As Singularity,” and in later sections.

¹¹⁵ Notes were also kept in digital format, as some were in screenshot format, images, or downloads. These notes are in a particular folder on my laptop that was encrypted and then transferred onto an encrypted external hard drive for long-term storage.

observed and collected, the spaces could be mapped¹¹⁶, and the case desire analysis could be conducted.

There exist methods for farming large amounts of data in the form of hashtag identifiers, such as the “seed and snowball approach” (Section, 3.1)¹¹⁷ in combination with an Application Programming Interface (API)¹¹⁸, which can be used to create specific datasets for gathering hashtags for specific topics, as was done for #TulsaFlop by Bandy and Diakopoulos(2020) and #OnlineClass by Literat (2021, p. 4). A desire approach afforded an engagement with the user and content creators that went beyond representation and categorization. However, a desire approach *engages with* the connections and constitutive forces that impact content creators in said spaces, allowing researchers to observe what they *are doing* to them or with them. For example, while hashtags led me to N|I digital subjects on TikTok, they alone did not tell me anything about them and the spaces in which they transverse. However, by following an engagement of *in situ, as singularity, I could observe* N|I youth, as digital subjects, in the spaces of TikTok, inclusive of all desires and materialities (living and nonliving) that would connect with them. In addition, by observing and analyzing, one can locate the forces that produce, modify, code, categorize, control, and consume a N|I youth subjectivity.

¹¹⁶ For further explanation see “To Draw a Map” in Chapter Three.

¹¹⁷ The seed and snowball approach was accomplished by Bandy and Diakopoulos(2020) by taking a small sample of hashtags (a seed) of seven TikTok videos to start. Then, they used the hashtags from those seven videos to run a chain of searches (snowball approach), using an open-source API, that produced a total of 619 call-to-action videos for their study.

¹¹⁸ These are used to get programs to talk to one another and to allow one to obtain information from a platform using its coding language.

Towards a Digital in Situ Ethics

In Chapter Two, I argued that online users, as individuals and diasporic digital subjects, are ‘dividuals’ in the technocapitalist and highly codified, commodified, and standardized spaces of the Internet (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Suarez-Villa, 2009). According to Deleuze (1990/1995), individuals in these digital spaces can become entities, data to be collected, markets to be sampled, modified, or rendered into “banks” of information (Deleuze, 1990/1995). To achieve this, the subject that is being modulated and captured is “composed of code” (Savat, 2013, p. 34). The dividual, according to Savat (2013), is not constructed through binaries or dualities, as would an individual, but formed out of code to “[find] itself aligned with any [identity]” depending on the “immediate context” (p. 40). This understanding allows one to position users in direct alterity with the forces that seek to control, block, manipulate, and categorize their subjectivity online (Guattari, 1992/2006; Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008). In other words, this approach and understanding online allows one to examine digital users, in this case, N|I youth, within the context (*in situ*) of their immediate assemblages to observe what machines are working upon their subject— as desiring machines themselves—to block their creative flows of desire on TikTok, for instance.

In a technocapitalist realm, examining a digital subject *in situ* means considering what algorithmic power forces might have on diasporic digital bodies online and observing what they can *do* to a body and, conversely, what a body can *do* in return. As actors in their own right, users require that researchers use a responsive ethics. Such an ethics is attuned to the perceived forces that move through and act upon the digi-spaces and bodies. This responsiveness is critical since the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other

socio-cultural identifiers act upon youth subjects in these spaces¹¹⁹. While the latter identifiers, like race and gender, are molar formations, they can have ‘real’ material impacts (e.g., affects) (Rai, 2013; Saldanha, 2006). Molar formations can have the potential to cut into digi-spaces—as comments, videos, hashtags, blocks—and wound or traumatize a digital subject and effectively modulate and control a N|I body on and offline¹²⁰. When thinking of subjectivities that belong to groups who are often oppressed, marginalized, minoritized, racialized, and/or ethnicized, one must be cognizant of how one engages with material encountered in public spaces, on or offline. That is why such an ethics is essential.

For this research project, online participants are referred to as online *users*, *actors*, and *digital subjects*. In contrast, any offline participants included in *real life* (irl) are referred to as individuals or subjects. Users do not play an active role in the sense that they have planned or scheduled direct contact with the researcher, as with scheduled interviews. Instead, the user and content creator play a passive-active role as an active user and *actor* of the platform that might or might not have a sense of a researcher’s presence in the digi-space with them. As previously mentioned, the research space of TikTok was approached, by myself, as an active observer and user with a passive and active presence on the platform. For example, as a TikTok user, I actively participated by watching, following, liking, possibly commenting, downloading, and scrolling. However, as a passive user, I refrained from sharing, dueting¹²¹, stitching¹²², or creating content. All the content and content creators engaged with in this study were from

¹¹⁹ While they also act in spaces offline, it appears amplified in the spaces of social media where all forces can converge at once (e.g., in chat spaces).

¹²⁰ This was discussed in Chapter Two in section “Traumatic Impacts or Wounds That Cut”.

¹²¹ Allows a content creator or user to make a side-by-side video with another creator.

¹²² Allows a creator to add to another creator’s video.

publicly shared accounts. Therefore, users connected with were either followers¹²³ of my research account or ‘liked’ or responded to my comments; otherwise, I was invisible to them.

Who is On TikTok?

Anyone that has access to technology and can access the website can be a user of TikTok. All one needs to do is open the app onto their laptop or smartphone and begin watching, sharing, and uploading videos¹²⁴. That stated, if one wishes to perform actions such as ‘liking’ content, commenting, connecting with users, or creating content, they need to sign up for a TikTok account¹²⁵.

According to a TikTok internal marketing document published by *Ad Age* in October of 2019, there were “800 million” monthly active users of TikTok as of June of 2019 (as cited in Williamson, 2019, p. 6). To provide a snapshot of TikTok’s user base, as reported by a Global/Web Index Study that surveyed 139 658 users worldwide for a combined audience of Douyin¹²⁶ and TikTok in 2019, they found that TikTok’s user base is focused in the Asia-Pacific region, while North America made up 12% of their users, ages 16 to 64 in 2019¹²⁷. In addition, researchers found that their worldwide users “skewed male” and young with a 54% weighting male and 48% in the 16 to 24 age range (Williamson, 2019, p. 7).

This research project, however, is explicitly focused on N|I youth. It was difficult, as a researcher, to statistically quantify or even qualify each of the users based on their country of

¹²³ I only had three followers. It is not easy to gain followers as a non-content creator with a private account. However, many appreciated the non-content creators because they were the ones that would often interact with their content by liking, commenting, and sharing.

¹²⁴ Due to this, users' public information is available to everyone beyond the app.

¹²⁵ To sign up, one needs to be over 13 years old. Anyone younger needs parental permission.

¹²⁶ What TikTok was known as in China before moving to North America in 2017. Douyin continues in China and the Asia-Pacific region.

¹²⁷ I realize that these numbers and demographics have changed since the start of my project.

origin, immigration status, or ethnocultural background, as this information was not always readily available or easy to obtain. How TikTok gathers and chooses to represent information on its users by employing their algorithmic categorizations in combination with user engagement and use of sounds, hashtags, locations information, bio markers, physical markers (in some cases), and use of third-party apps (more on this in late sections) (Zhao, 2021). This data is not all available to the public as privacy and security protection exist in their *Terms of Service* (TikTok, 2021a). For research purposes, hashtags were the quickest way of locating potential content creators¹²⁸. While this was a good start, it was not always the most reliable, as I quickly learned that some hashtags are skewed on purpose in order to avoid detection from TikTok algorithms or active searches. For instance, misspelled words were common, as were using hashtags that did not ‘fit’ the topic of the video, or by omitting hashtags altogether. These actions would grant access only to a select few individuals who knew about the hashtags as a secret password, or were otherwise direct followers of the creators (e.g., FYP).

Even though I avoided collecting data from users under the age of 18 for this research study, it is worth noting and troubling how TikTok engages with the youngest on the youth spectrum (age 13), as this reflects directly on how TikTok addresses other groups on its platform (e.g., BIPoC¹²⁹ and 2SLGBTQIA+¹³⁰ creators). TikTok has been in the news for a variety of reasons. A few of those reasons concern issues on child exploitation (e.g., sexual exploitation), privacy and security (e.g., what happens to user information), different forms of abuse exhibited in its spaces (e.g., bullying and harassment), as well as dangerous trends gone awry leading to

¹²⁸ For reference, please see the section on “Desiring Enunciations” in Chapter Four.

¹²⁹ Black Indigenous People of Colour communities.

¹³⁰ Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus communities.

untimely deaths of minors (e.g., the “pass-out” or “black out” challenge¹³¹ (Charlton, 2021; see also Williamson, 2019). The consensus by those who wish to see more controls placed on the app—i.e., European Consumer Organization (BEUC, 2021)—is that TikTok breaches many consumer rights through their copyright terms to distribute and reproduce user content without remuneration, for instance. As a result of the various infractions, there have been calls for an older age limit of 16 years to join, for more transparency in dissemination, content moderation, and continual changes in regards to the TikTok *Community Guidelines* and how the algorithm works to collect user information (Williamson, 2019). All this stated, according to De Leyn, De Wolf, Vanden Abeele, and De Marez (2021), empirical research with tweens (ages 8 to 12) finds that there is a misconception and “technopanic” or societal fear around their technological use, in particular when it comes to their privacy and security (p. 5). While there is a justified concern around their privacy, it found that young people are indeed concerned and capable of protecting themselves online (De Leyn et al., 2021). That stated, is it solely up to the individual to worry about protecting themselves online? What measures are policymakers, governmental agencies, corporations, and social media companies taking to regulate privacy and security online? Leslie Regan Shade (2021), in *Nudging Interventions in Regulating the Digital Gangsters in an Era of Friction-Free Surveillance Capitalism*, addresses these questions emphasizing the need to address the “systemic and structural problems endemic to the tech industry” (p. 325). Most importantly, such an approach highlights a need to critically attend to the capitalistic forces that drive the business model of social media¹³².

¹³¹ Pass out, black out, or choking challenge refers to a trend that went viral on TikTok. The challenge was to film yourself choking to the point of losing consciousness.

¹³² For further explanation, see the section on “TikTok as Techno-Political Assemblage” in Chapter Four.

Desiring Enunciations

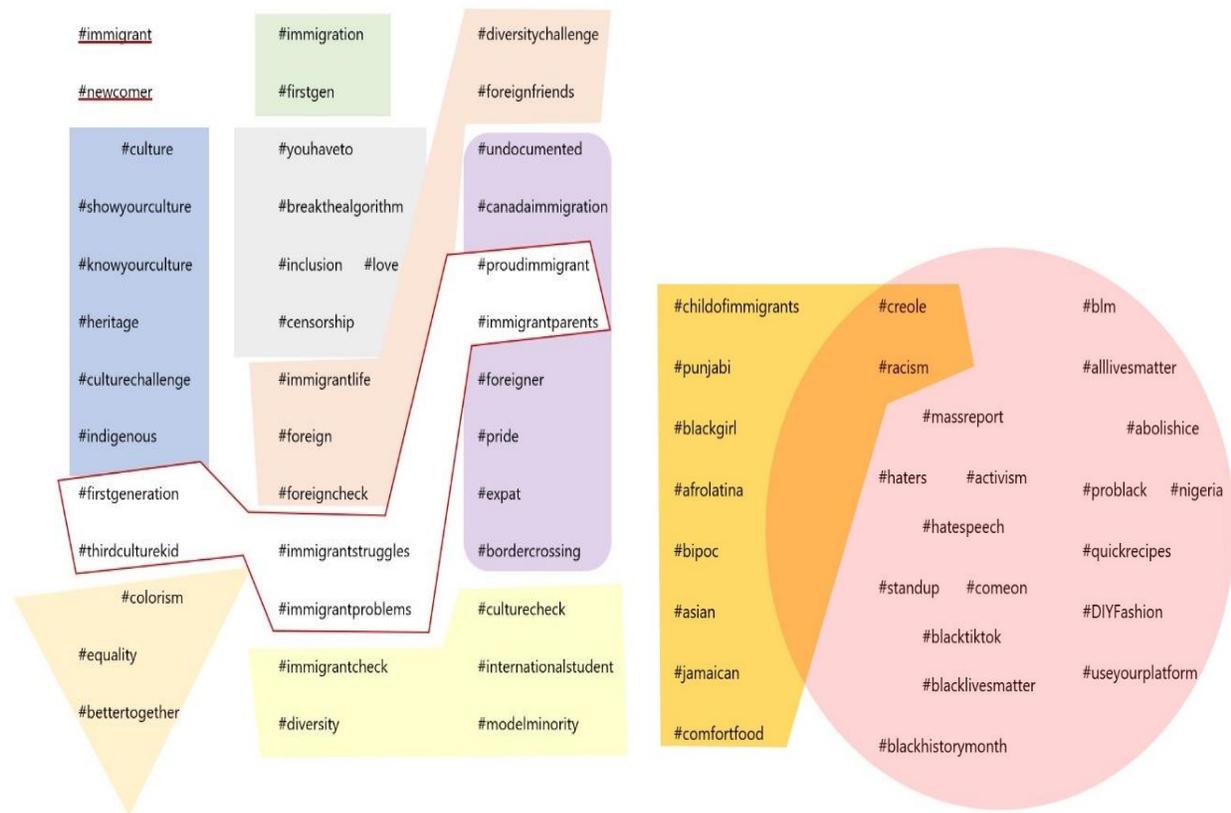
To collect this study's online ethnographic observations (e.g., expressions), participants (i.e., users) were not actively sought out. Instead, they emerged through exploratory content searches directed by researcher desires combined with the platform's algorithm. I began by conducting initial seed searches on TikTok with the hashtag identifiers #immigrant and #newcomer¹³³. These were entered separately into a TikTok search box on separate occasions (e.g., visits), whereby I would follow the desiring lines¹³⁴ of each search for as long as a session lasted¹³⁵ on the app (see Figure 1). The following visits were guided by the 'For You Page' (FYP) algorithm plying my feed with videos of what it thought I wanted to see, based upon the algorithm's "multi-layer screening method" and learning system (Klug et al., 2021; Zhao, 2020, 2021), as explained in later sections. If the FYP did not show me anything related to the project on that visit, I would enter two more qualifiers collected from my initial encounter—i.e., engaging with a TikTok content creator—such as #culture, #thirdculturekid, and #firstgeneration. This process would keep going until my FYP would be 'trained' or curated¹³⁶ enough that the algorithm began to take over.

¹³³ I recognize that I have to initially work with representative categories (molar identifiers) to begin my search. Therefore, you need some structure with which to begin.

¹³⁴ These lines would follow content creators of interest to the study. Hashtags they listed on their videos. Recommended tiktokkers by the creators. In some case, they would follow duets or stitches.

¹³⁵ A session would vary in time. 15 minutes to hours.

¹³⁶ I would curate my FYP by liking content and following content creators.

Figure 1*Desiring Lines*

Notes. Hashtag groupings are the desiring lines followed by the researcher.

#DesiringLines

The hashtags listed in the above Figure follow a few, but not all, of the desiring lines (shown as coloured groupings), observed from February of 2020 until May 2021. The bulk of these, however, are from February 2020 to December 2020, since after that time, the ‘For You Page’ took care of itself since it acted like it ‘knew’ me, or the version of me, that I allowed the TikTok algorithm to get to know. The search began with the two topics underlined in red. Even though scrolling through TikTok is linear, one’s searches and interactions might not necessarily work in a direct or causal way. Chasing hashtags meant that specific content creators would

compel me to stop scrolling, watch, and want to learn more. Any hashtag(s) attached to the video would be observed and collected, leading me to more content creators and a new set of hashtags. As a snowball approach, it allows one to know where one begins and progressively gather more data. Observing Figure 1, one can see pockets of similarities and hashtags were used in tandem, potentially connecting creators, as demonstrated by colour groupings on the chart. While they look separate, these groupings often overlap and lead back to another¹³⁷. A more thorough diagram would include all the lines drawn from one to another, making it look like a tangled web. While I engage with the content more specifically in chapter 5, what is significant in this figure is not necessarily who these content creators are or what these identifiers mean, but what these groupings might be *doing* to generate desire. For instance, by glancing at the chart, one observes what is driving N|I youth¹³⁸ in these digi-spaces. Activism, counter-voice, solidarity, culture pride, and subversion stand out as primary modes of desiring-production.

Time Killer

The process of searching for content creators, specifically N|I youth, took time, with hours of scrolling and following specific desire lines invested as a tiktokker. However, time in these spaces is nebulous, and what appears to be one hour might turn into four. This apparent loss of time on the platform is no accident, it is a matter of design (Duffy et al., 2021; Zhao, 2021). Some critics deliberately name “Douyin” (aka TikTok) a “Time Black Hole” for the very reason that “it kills people’s time, distracts people’s attention, and it makes it difficult for them

¹³⁷ This chart was limited by the MSWord’s lack of design features.

¹³⁸ I could identify these were N|I youth due to the hashtags they used, as well as how they self-identified in their videos and bios.

to concentrate on serious things. Users seem to be caught into a vortex of entertainment” (Zhao, 2021, p. 3; see also, Duffy et al., 2021). The issue of time is both a boon and a hindrance for users and content creators on this app. This situation is a blessing since it offers visibility for those who need it and wish to monetize or mobilize their feeds (Duffy et al., 2021). However, it is a disadvantage for those who need to be off their electronics for work, school, or any other personal reason (e.g., mental health) (Zhao, 2021). Time is too vast a topic to cover for this research project, however regarding the effects and affects that time has upon youth in these spaces, it bears mentioning and is a topic worth following up on in the future.

Online Privacy Guidelines & Risk Management

In regards to online research, Bowler (2010) notes that when gathering content from online users, "the researcher should take a cautious position on the issue of whether the online environment is a private or public medium" (p. 1274). Therefore, only public user sites were used for "collecting" observational and passive emergent data. For example, posted comments, monitored and noted threads, numbers of likes, shares, and comments, public bio markers, posted content, and attached links. It is necessary to minimize the potential risk for harm to the creators online, even though they post content publicly and 'freely.'

The user is somewhat protected due to platform privacy, usage, and distribution policies that are in place for their protection regarding their publicly posted content. Therefore, reading the individual platform privacy and Terms of Service documents before accessing information from the platform is required (e.g., TikTok). Doing so assisted in narrowing my platform search and determining if I could download, share, or distribute the gathered content in the future (Roy et al., 2015). Considering that all data collected from publicly posted content, formal

informed consent was not required, however, steps were taken to consider user and content creator privacy. This project received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “DIGI-SPACES AND NEWCOMER YOUTH ENCOUNTERS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLACE|MAKING IN ON AND OFFLINE SPACES,” Pro00102184, on July 24, 2020. Whenever possible, I sought user permission to engage with user content in a more detailed manner (Fiesler, 2019; Fiesler et al., 2016; Fiesler & Proferes, 2018). All expressions engaged with and collected are anonymized and privacy protected (e.g., user-actor images are blurred or covered with an emoji) upon posting or publication. In addition, each creator is assigned a pseudonym. These practices are based not only on the netnographic ethics of Kozinets (2015) but on those who have researched with social media and specifically with TikTok content (De Leyn et al., 2021; Duffy et al., 2021; Fiesler et al., 2016; Fiesler et al., 2019; Fiesler et al., 2020; Fiesler & Hallinan, 2018; Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Hautea et al., 2021; Klug et al., 2021; Scalvini, 2020).

As mentioned in earlier chapters, if I am to engage with TikTok as a machinic entity, I cannot say that TikTok is necessarily good or bad as a platform or space. Instead, I observe what gets produced when particular individuals or forces like capitalism assemble into connective machines. To do so is to consider the ethical implications of these connections. For TikTok users, such implications begin with how people enter into the app through the Terms of Service (TOS).

TikTok’s TOS—Does Anyone Read It?

For anyone who joins TikTok, their first task, as with joining any social media platform, is to agree to the Terms of Service (TOS). Unfortunately, the TOS and legality of this app are a long, complex, and tedious read. According to Fiesler, Beard, & Keegan (2020), who delve into

the quagmire that a social media platform's TOS can present in research explain how these legal contract documents are: highly incomprehensible, are inconsistent from one social media platform to another, lack transparency, are open to misinterpretation, and have “terrible readability,” as in they do not get read (p. 189).

In a separate study with social media users, Fiesler et al. (2017) state that there is an assumption that those who have posted publicly online have read the privacy guidelines. Their study demonstrated how social networking sites (SNSs) are a mixture of public and private selectively shared posts, especially on Facebook sites, allowing for multi-level control privacy settings. Where there exist single privacy settings—e.g., Twitter, Instagram or Tumblr— Fiesler et al. found that content could cut across different platforms, thus blurring the understanding of what could be considered private and public content and behaviour online. They found that the individuals studied did not comprehend how public they were being on social media spaces, particularly on spaces like Facebook, for instance. They also established that users tended to only self-censor themselves and manage their user friend lists rather than set their privacy settings appropriately. Instead, the researchers noticed that the studied users would use the Facebook default settings for the most part and that users were reasonably comfortable sharing their anonymized data. One might infer that this passivity is carried forth into other social media spaces like TikTok.

Returning to Fiesler et al. (2020) and their work on how researchers might approach online ethics with social media users, they state: “just because you can do something [in terms of collecting public online data] doesn’t mean you should. Even well-intentioned research or application might be seen as harmful by the public, regardless of legality” (p. 194). That said,

going back to thinking with an ethico-aesthetics and the notion of *in situ, as singularity*, it is more important than ever in digital spaces to consider the user and their privacy when thinking about how their subject can be so easily be manipulated by corporatized forces if they so passively, yet actively enter into an agreement with them. The intention for this research project was to engage with content creators who appeared to be over 18 and approximately 25 years old, however, it is difficult to gauge by appearance only. At times age is portrayed on a user's profile. What one displays online is something to be questioned as often what one presents online as their persona is different from who they are offline and in real life (Andrejevic, 2013; Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017). Where possible, I approached content creators for permission¹³⁹. If no contact could be made, the creators engaged with for this study were ones that had publicly available platforms on TikTok, as well as other social media platforms. In addition, I anonymized their profile names and images.

TikTok as Techno-Political Assemblage

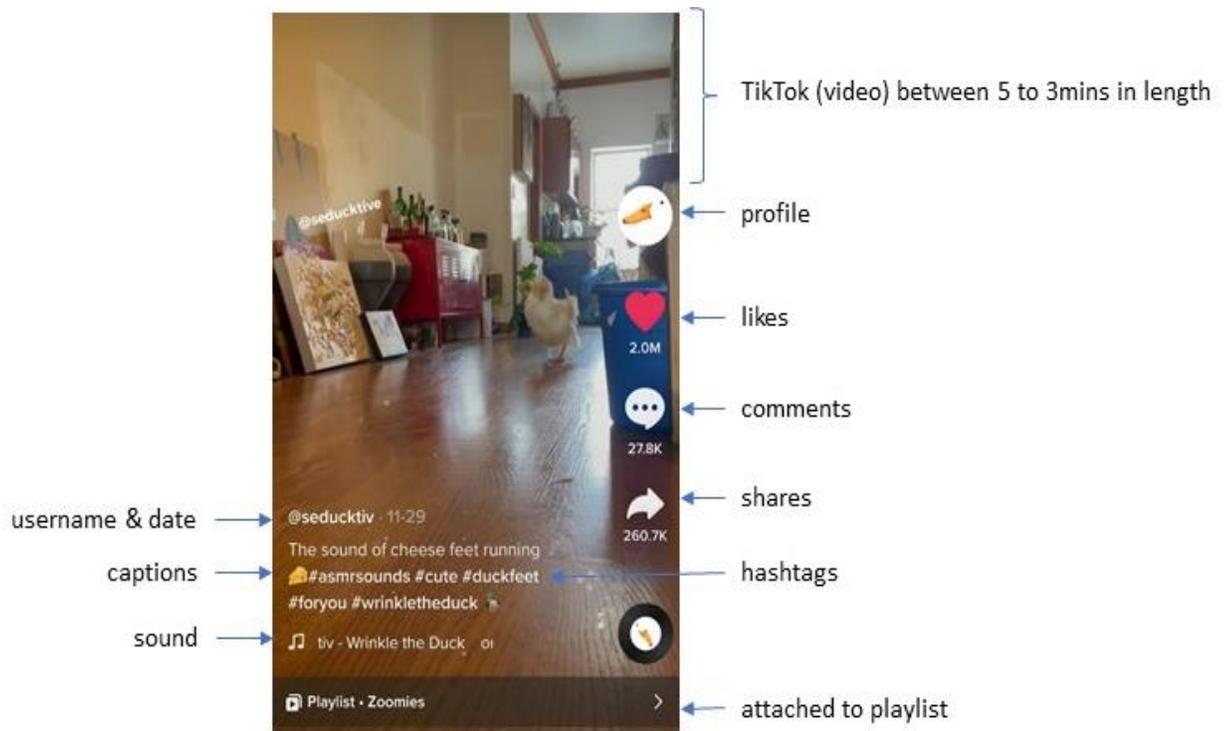
In Chapter Five, I map TikTok as a desiring machine connected to N|I youth subjectivities. However, for this chapter, I delve in more depth into the company's history, politics, and business practices, while providing a sense of its algorithmic intricacies and discussing it as a techno-political assemblage. Before commencing, for those who are not yet familiar with the experience of TikTok, I provide a labelled image of a TikTok (see Figure 2) that one might encounter. This diagram will also provide the terminology used in the following two

¹³⁹ I received permission and response from one creator. The rest never returned my messages. To keep consistent, I anonymized all content creators.

chapters. Also, I provide a welcome paragraph to give readers a sense of what it might be like to enter and become immersed in the world of TikTok.

Figure 2

TikTok Interface



Note. @seductiv¹⁴⁰. To scroll past videos on TikTok you glide your finger up!

Welcome to TikTok¹⁴¹...

“Hey! Welcome! Check out this content. I have so much to offer you. Do you like to dance? Here are some fun #dancechallenge(s). Animals? I have lots of funny animal videos. Cooking? Check out these great recipes. How about #woodworking? No? OK. How about a guy

¹⁴⁰ Permission given.

¹⁴¹ Written as if TikTok was an entity unto itself and had a voice. This excerpt is an embellished bricolage and is part based on my own FYP, part imagination, and part textual research into what the TikTok algorithm can and could potentially do.

hitting his girlfriend or this one with the Confederate flag? [hits BLOCK] OK, that was quick! You hated those. Forget that. I'll be sure not to go there again. Ahhhh, do you hear that? A soothing violin interlude, perfect. Yeah, I thought you would like that. The music is good. Noted for later. And, we are back to food. You seem to like that. Oh, hold up... wait, this recipe video is not *really* about food, a message about BLM protests??!! You didn't see that; we'll take care of it [shadowbans creator content from feed] How about some more food or nature videos? Daily affirmations? It seems like you need those, you seem stressed. You OK? #MentalHealthTikTok is just for you. You need some people to uplift you, I brought you some #empoweredwomen, yeah! I hope they helped. Hold on. I said, ignore the #BLM stuff, they're just trying to incite violence. Oh, you actually like the political stuff. I see, you are following more #BIPOC voices. OK, here you go. It seems you have found your side of TikTok. Hmmmm. I think I have figured you out. Welcome to BLM, Indigenous, Immigrant, #BIPOC, Food, funny animals, sea shanties, progressive, LGBTQ+, empowerment, wait, what...frogs, foraging, plumbing, dadtok¹⁴²? How'd you get there? You don't seem to *belong* here. How about some more dancing, everyone loves the dancing. How about cats? OK, now you are liking this, great! Welcome back! Just remember, don't say or do things I don't like and we will get along just fiiine. I mean, all is great. Here's a funny video of a lawyer with a cat avatar on a Zoom call. Hi-lar-i-ous! Want to try something new?"

¹⁴² Loosely based on the "Well, how did I get here?" question posed to @therealtapps on February 2, 2021 (Answer to...it's complicated. I made a chart. #tiktokmap, 54.9K likes, 3905 comments, 3058 shares).

To Understand TikTok is a Political Act

According to Thomas Nail (2017), “all assemblages are political” (p. 21). It is not just the application of the assemblage, but the construction of it that is political or practical, says Nail (p. 21). Therefore, to expose what lies behind its construction—the gaps, structures, and intensities—and begin to understand them is a political act. In this case, to explore and understand how TikTok works as a political assemblage, one needs to examine its structure (e.g., history, boundaries, and rules), its typology (e.g., algorithms, linguistic structure like hashtags), and its processes of change (e.g., potentials for escape). In comprehending these, one might then begin to “direct or shape the assemblage toward increasingly revolutionary [in this case, minoritarian] aims,” as will be attempted in Chapter Five (p. 37).

In *What is An Assemblage?* (2017), Thomas Nail details Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980/1987, 1991/1994) assemblage theory by outlining the basic structure of all political assemblages. That is, they first include an “abstract machine” (p. 24), such as the conditions or set of external relations that hold an assemblage together, like technocapitalism. Second, they are composed of “concrete” (p. 26) or working machinic parts, and third, they are composed of “personae” (p. 28) or agents that connect the working relations in the assemblage. In this study, a political assemblage might be TikTok as a platform, TikTok’s algorithm, N|I youth digital subjects, and other unknown components. These elements are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they work in tandem and in “reciprocal determination” (p. 26). In other words, if one element were to change in the assemblage, it would impact “the set of relations” the impacted element was in (p. 26). Finally, since all in the assemblage are “immanent to one another,” they work with unknowable connections ahead of time and yet-to-be-determined outcomes (p. 73).

Hence, one cannot know what the assemblage *is* since all of its parts may not be known a priori. Instead, we might observe what it will *do* and consider what it might *become*, as explained in Chapter Two.

The three above-mentioned aspects of an assemblage are arranged into four political assemblage types, of which all assemblages, including TikTok, exhibit to varying degrees. Ultimately, these types describe the various ways in which the conditions, elements, and agents of an assemblage are organized. The four types are the territorial assemblage, the state assemblage, the nomadic assemblage, and the capitalist assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987; Nail, 2017). For the purpose of this project, TikTok is explored as a socio-technological assemblage as it functions primarily as a business machine to capture and produce youth in its many digi-spaces.

Given that the forces of capitalism occupy an enormous and pervasive presence online, they need to be acknowledged and understood. Specifically, as affects—i.e., wounds (Deleuze, 1969/1990), *traumas* (Clough, 2016) or *visualities* (Shields, 2014)—that cut into the various digi-spaces from the virtual that can have profound impacts on youth. Once again, I conjure Deleuze's (1990/1992) *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, which adumbrates the full-blown online digital world, maintaining that "individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" (p.5). Therefore, it is up to those caught in the "telos" or "coils" of the corporate digital systems to discover "what they're being made to serve," thus, discovering new and creative ways of being and thinking within systems of control (p. 7).

TikTok as a Business Machine¹⁴³

This section explores the “set of relations” (p. 25), or desires, that are working or flowing through TikTok in order to bring digital subjects and other external forces together on this platform. Here I ask: How does TikTok function as an abstract machine?

A Bit About TikTok

TikTok is a user-generated content space and social media video streaming platform owned by Beijing-based company ByteDance Ltd (2021). It was founded as a corporation in 2012 by Yiming Zhang, CEO and Chairman of the Board and TikTok is one of its subsidiaries. TikTok was first established in September of 2016 in China as Douyin before it was extended beyond its borders in May of 2017 as the brand most people currently know (ByteDance, 2021; Hautea et al., 2021; Williamson, 2019; Zhao, 2020, 2021). It started getting noticed once it joined with the lip-syncing app Musical.ly in 2018¹⁴⁴ (Williamson, 2019). It then went from a platform that barely existed on people’s radars in North America, more precisely the United States, to one projected to have 65.9 million monthly US users¹⁴⁵ in the year 2020 alone, and in July of 2019, it made between \$200 and \$300 million in revenues worldwide (Enberg, 2020).

Moreover, the TikTok platform evolved in its use after the pandemic hit in March of 2020. Since then, TikTok has become a magnet for users of all ages and with corporate interests vying for ways to “activate” youth¹⁴⁶ and anyone on the platform for consumption and monetization (Dolliver 2019; Williamson 2019). TikTok became a new frontier looking to be

¹⁴³ This is not a ‘mechanical’ term nor a structural one, but a more machinic or dispositive term (Foucault, 1997/2003).

¹⁴⁴ Acquired by ByteDance in 2017 (Williamson, 2019).

¹⁴⁵ The number factored out accounts considered fake, duplicate, nonhuman, and business (Enberg, 2020).

¹⁴⁶ Even though it was considered as a place to try out new ideas, marketers were warned to tread lightly since this TikTok was “teen turf” (ages 12 to 17) (Dolliver, 2019).

conquered by most and a space to try out new ideas for all. TikTok functions, first and foremost, as a socio-technological business machine working with and through the desires of an established money market and neoliberal capitalist infused political system that works through the machines of an affective labour economy requiring an affect and user-driven algorithmic data-harvesting system—i.e., technocapitalism and surveillance capitalism (Andrejevic, 2013; Bakir & McStay, 2021; Clough, 2008; Lim, 2021; Shade, 2021; Suarez-Villa, 2009).

As discussed in Chapter Two (“Assemblage Theory”), Ian Buchanan (2014a) contends that an assemblage “always benefits someone or something outside of the assemblage itself” (p. 130). Here it is demonstrated how TikTok, as a corporation and business machine, in connection with the forces of neoliberal capitalism and technocapitalism, works to produce digital subjects that connect with them. They precisely accomplish this by placating marketers' needs, silencing dissent, and uplifting the voices of those TikTok allows being a part of the Marketplace or Creator Fund program. TikTok, as a platform, exists solely to maximize profitability for the company and its partners.

Affective Economy

As Nail (2017) explains, capitalism is an assemblage arranged in a way such that “the conditions, elements, and agencies of the assemblage are divested of their qualitative relations and codes in order to circulate more widely as abstract quantities” (p. 31). It strips any qualitative value from a given subject or object and replaces them with quantifiable codes (e.g., capital or digital code) in order to modify for circulation, production, and consumption, thus converting individuals to dividuals for instance (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Savat, 2013). In the social digi-spaces, such as TikTok, affects are the drivers of code and producers of subjects (Clough,

2016). As discussed in Chapter Two, affects, as preconscious, non-reflexive, and non-articulated intensities, have the capability to “augment or diminish a body’s capacity to act” when in connection with someone or something else (Clough, 2008; see also Clough, 2016; Deleuze, 1988; Massumi, 2002). In the digi-sphere, affects as traumas (Clough, 2016) cut into and open up its many spaces (e.g., TikTok niches) from the virtual. These traumas, as wounds, have the potential to intervene and prompt responses when digital subjects—as biomediated bodies (Clough, 2008)—connect with the various media artifacts found online, such as images, sounds, texts, haptic feedback, account statistics, to name a few. According to Andrejevic (2013), the affective economy that digital subjects are a part of does more than solely mobilize their emotional engagement, it enhances their consumer participation.

When individuals connect to the online as users and actively participate in social media spaces by acknowledging content through clicking, hovering, liking, commenting, following, or on the flipside blocking, they produce data and are similarly produced as data. This data, gathered by algorithmic datasets, is then filtered and mined through keywords connected to topics and brands—or niches in TikTok’s case. These words do not tell a story, instead, they are a capture of affects that “reveal patterns...[with] predictive powers” (Andrejevic, p. 45; see also Zuboff et al., 2019). These affects reveal patterns that can predict consumer consumption, movement, and potential life choices (Shade, 2021). According to Andrejevic, “what is important [for this economy] is not so much the content of the conversation or the expression, but the fact that it can be registered, archived, and mined” (p. 43). In other words, the goal is not to *know* personal human emotions produced. Instead, it is to take a general probe in order to predict patterns so the desiring machine—TikTok—can affect better in those spaces (i.e., its

platform) so the flows of capitalism are maintained and maximized. The gathering of data and information by social media platforms on its users in order to predict and modulate digital subject behaviours is what Shoshana Zuboff (2019, In Shade, 2021) has conceptualized as “surveillance capitalism” and what Shade (2021) terms:

Dataveillance, the surveillance of selves through data collections, blurs the boundaries of our public and private lives, with such collection suffusing our professional, educational and domestic uses through diverse modes: social media platforms, mobile apps, the Internet of Things, the Internet of Toys, educational technology (ed-tech) ventures, wearables and smart cities. (p. 314)

As a business machine and technocapitalist assemblage, TikTok interacts and connects with its users and content creators as algorithmic codes in order to optimize circulation and monetary production for themselves and their corporate affiliates. It works through the desires of neoliberalism, technocapitalism, and surveillance capitalism to produce and modulate a subjectivity.

A Connective Sense of TikTok

Once one understands the desires that drive TikTok as a machinic business assemblage, one can turn to the forces that draw and maintain digital subjects on the platform. Thus, responding to the question of what might be the connective and constitutive machinic parts of TikTok as a techno-social assemblage?

TikTok is an entity and a machine that morphs and adapts with every user and impulse (i.e., desires) with which it connects. As if in a relationship, TikTok engages the user by sharing

everything that is fun about its world through 15 to 180-second videos¹⁴⁷ made and pushed by content creators and influencers¹⁴⁸ that are ‘everyday’ individuals. Videos are fun, weird, off-beat, at times, informative. They incorporate music samples, filters, quick edits; they may seem repetitive and rely on meme culture. Users use hashtags and music ‘sounds’ to upload, personalize, and trend their videos (Williamson 2019). TikTok makes ‘you’ feel special since no two feeds are the same (Matsakis 2020; Zhao 2021).

According to Zhao (2021), the algorithm works on a multi-levelled and hierarchical system of filtering to guarantee quality views and exposure for its users (Klug et al., 2021; Matsakis, 2020; Zhao, 2021). This filtering system, in large part, is what makes TikTok so addictive to users. It is an app dependent on an AI to distribute recommended content to users based upon personalized collected data from them. Furthermore, Zhao (2021), who has extensively researched the Douyin (aka TikTok) algorithm, states that it is an addictive combination between the algorithm and a user’s passivity. On the one hand, users receive ready-made personalized feeds that are matched to their personalities, content labels and environmental characteristics, while on the other, their effort is alleviated by the mechanistic ease of choice—i.e., scroll and choose. According to Zhao (2021), this was;

a huge revolution to the way people [were] used to obtaining information on the Internet. This [Douyin] greatly alleviates the effort that people have to pay to get the information they want, and frees people from massive amounts of

¹⁴⁷ This was the case. Currently, as of 2021, the videos went up to 3 minutes in length, a game-changer for those requiring maximum exposure. In February of 2022, video length increased to 10 minutes in length.

¹⁴⁸ Kapitan, van Esch, Soma, & Kietzmann (2021) explore how influencers are perceived in social media spaces. By the marketing machine, “content creators” are seen as either brands that can be outsourced to or as “paid promoters” who take the products and advertising script directly to their followers (p. 1).

information...Unfortunately, it meets the needs and wants of the users so readily, it leads to users spending endless hours...becoming addicted. (p. 1-2)

This ease and willingness to be a passive user speaks to the notion of *interpassivity* as explicated in Chapter Two (Pfaller, 2003). Users can willingly give up their freedoms and time in exchange for ease of mind and use. From the beginning, as one interacts with the app by reacting¹⁴⁹ to videos¹⁵⁰ on their device of choice—be it an Android or Apple Smartphone or laptop—on a potentially *hashtagged* post that comes across a user’s ‘For You Page’ (FYP), TikTok gets to know ‘you’, or an online version of ‘you’, *really* well.

The process of becoming acquainted with 'you' happens over time since one keeps going back due to the positive feedback¹⁵¹ loop that the algorithm creates on one’s ‘For You Page’ after sharing that same video with a larger group of people. Suddenly, ‘you’ are no longer unique (Matsakis, 2020; Zhao, 2021). Then, it happens. TikTok *knows* ‘you’ in ways that most people do not. TikTok, to the user, *feels* comfortable, inviting, soothing, even reassuring and, then extremely frightening all at the same time. As a digital subject, 'you' are drawn in, hooked, and time spent with the app becomes irrelevant (Klug et al., 2021; Zhao, 2021). Moreover, time on the app evaporates until the TikTok ‘Sleep Guy’¹⁵² (see Figure 3) (@tiktoktips, 2020a) interrupts one’s scrolling to gently, yet annoyingly, let one know:

¹⁴⁹ Reactions are done by liking, pausing and listening, skipping over the video quickly, watching a video to the end or not at all, sharing the video with friends or other social media, *dueting*, *stitching*, or commenting in chat.

¹⁵⁰ The app also collects user personal information, contacts, location, phone or screen type information, metadata, usage on other apps, and times of use. Anything that you do on the app and potentially beyond. It is all in the TikTok (2021) *Privacy Policy* under “What Information Do We Collect?” (See also Zhao, 2020, 2021).

¹⁵¹ TikTok is careful to try and not show you what you do not want to see based on the negative feedback one gives—e.g., skipping videos, stating “not interested,” or by “blocking” someone.

¹⁵² I named him the “sleep guy” because that is what 'he' is to me. The 'guy' (bot) that reminds me to get some sleep after scrolling into the wee hours of the night.

I understand it is easy to keep watching videos, and *trust* me I've been there before.

Those videos will still be there tomorrow, so go get some extra sleep, turn your phone off, do yourself that favour, and have a great night. (@tiktoktips, 2020a)

These breaks were incorporated into TikTok (Douyin) on purpose and out of necessity due to their high addictiveness (Zhao, 2021). In actuality, in April of 2018, developers were forced to add an “anti-addiction” notification in the original form of the app in China for Douyin. After 120 minutes of continuous use, the system would automatically lock, and users would have to enter a password to re-enter. This notification later morphed into break warnings after 90 minutes of use that took the form of ‘Sleep Guy’ or other gendered variations similar to 'him,' such as the “Scroll Too Long” person (@tiktoktips, 2020b).

The Promised Niches of TikTok

It did not take marketers long to figure out that they needed to work with the algorithm to get their content across (Dolliver, 2019; Enberg, 2020; Travis, 2020; Williamson, 2019). With the addition of *TikTok for Business* as of June of 2020 (Travis, 2020), marketers no longer had to figure out how to work with youth who were influencers or content creators in order to advertise (be “activated”). Instead, they could skip that step and solely have them be “activated on” (Dolliver, 2019). Then, all it took was one interaction with an “in-Feed” ad, a “Brand Takeover,” or a “Branded Hashtag Challenge,” and the algorithm would *do* the rest with the 2 billion plus users that downloaded the app (Dolliver, 2019; Enberg, 2020; Travis, 2020; Williamson, 2019).

As explained earlier, the algorithm works on a multi-layered and hierarchical filtering recommendation approach to ensure that users have the most personalized and highly

addictive experience possible with minimal searching (Zhao, 2021). In order to properly match content to the user, it must construct personalized interest labels for individuals based on content themes. TikTok does this by using “user’s interest characteristics” such as niches, creators, and hashtags they gravitate to; “identity characteristics” such as gender, age, occupation, and location gathered from where they are logged on; and “behavior characteristics” such as their time habits on and off the app (Zhao, 2021, p. 4). In addition, the algorithm counts on users to be active “senders and producers” of content on this app in order for them to be distributed effectively into the proper spaces of TikTok for optimal content “matching” to occur (p. 5). The spaces where content creators and users will be recommended personalized content for their #ForYouPage #FYP.

FYPs are different for everyone, and they further categorize individuals into areas otherwise known on TikTok as niches or ‘Toks.’ Similarly, creators further categorize themselves by curating their fan and follower base. For example, there is a TikTok meme that asks “Which side of TikTok are you from?” whereby some creators then use a DisneyGlennB sound¹⁵³ to lip-sync and tell the users of TikTok where they belong or do not belong, and why they should be ‘friends’ with them. One demonstration of this is by a creator named Sidonio¹⁵⁴ on February 2,

¹⁵³ Sounds are just as crucial as hashtags for locating TikToks. They are used to help videos trend and help them achieve meme status. You can search videos by sound, hashtags, or user’s name.

¹⁵⁴ Due to online research ethical considerations (Bruckman, Luther, & Fiesler, 2016; Fiesler et al., 2016; Fiesler et al., 2017; Fiesler et al., 2020) and my ethics, as discussed through this work, I have decided to anonymize all TikTok content creators regardless if I have obtained permission from them. For those youth that I have obtained permission from, I will explicitly say so. Using a random name generator found online, I have assigned a name: <https://www.behindthename.com>. I will not include content creators in the final reference list. However, they are a part of a master list of contributors that I have kept separately in encrypted form for future reference and potential future connection. To contextualize each creator and video, I state their video taglines, some of their connected hashtags (most relevant), any information given in the video byline, video statistics (e.g., likes, shares, and comments), and any non-traceable bio information related to them in the form of a footnote.

2021 (“Here’s the side of TikTok I’m from! Which side of TikTok are you from?”, 21.9K¹⁵⁵ likes, 265 comments, 276 shares¹⁵⁶):

¹⁵⁷Sidonio (S): Well anyway, we’re going to be here a while, so I guess we should get to know each other, huh? Which side of TikTok are you from?

Ghost user 1(GU): *Leftist TikTok*

S: Oh really? Me too. Where are you guys from?

GU2: *LGBT+inclusive TikTok*

S: Oh really? Me too. Where are you guys from?

GU3: *Progressive Christianity TikTok*

S: Oh really? Me too. Where are you guys from, in the back, on the left, over here, my left.

GU4: *Conservative TikTok*

S: I’m sorry. Ha ha. [side eye].

[Video over and loop begins]

Once TikTok knows the user, categorizes them, and places them where *it* thinks they belong (and they will feel like they *belong*), it can begin feeding them optimized content with little deviation. Recalling Deleuze’s *Postscript on Control Societies* (1990/1995), one can now begin to see TikTok as the digitized and “soul”-less business model that codes and modulates all subjectivity in order to control the flows of desire (p. 181). Users on the app are entities for

¹⁵⁵ K = a thousand

¹⁵⁶ For each anonymized TikTok creator, I insert contextual information instead of a citation. The first part is the hashtags or topic of their video (if one is listed). The second part is their bio identifiers and statistics. Finally, I removed their names and anything that could be used to trace them.

¹⁵⁷ Grammar and orthography are a representation of what was observed from creators, the app captions, or user statements, as is.

capture, categorization, and monetization. The codification and capture of users are particularly apparent as TikTok functions as a business machine to extract maximum profits from them.

As discussed earlier and in Chapter Two, the TikTok algorithmic recommender model in combination with neoliberalism and technocapitalist forces together form and use an “economics of emotion” (Bakir & McStay, 2021) or an affective economy and politics that feeds off of user’s and content creator’s affective responses and creative productions (Andrejevic, 2013; Bakir & McStay, 2021; Clough, 2008; Suarez-Villa, 2009). The algorithm is very good at what it does. Moreover, the recommender algorithm not only gathers information from the user’s experience on the app, but it uses visual filters to evaluate and categorize its users by external factors such as race, age, facial features, and body type, to name a few (Mellor, 2020; Scalvini, 2020).

Where Do You Belong?

According to recent studies, algorithmic datasets are often purposefully designed and structured with corporate interests in mind (Jo & Gebru, 2020). However, inadvertently and by design, datasets can also benefit many hegemonic powers (e.g., political, social, and law enforcement) intertwined with the forces of the corporate machine (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). For instance, AI algorithms have been proven to be biased against race and gender and can discriminate by grouping individuals by phenotypic subgroups (Bolukbasi et al., 2016; Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Gebru et al., 2020; Raji et al., 2020).

Discrimination and bias are very apparent on TikTok through the actions of content filtering (i.e., filter bubbles), shadowbanning, and blocking (Chen, 2021; Kozma, 2020; Mellor, 2020;). In *Why is TikTok Creating Filter Bubbles Based on Your Race?* (2020), Maria Mellor

discusses how TikTok's algorithm creates biased feedback loops (i.e., filter bubbles) that sort individuals by physical appearance, race, age, and gender. For instance, users found that TikTok was recommending accounts based on the physical features of the accounts that they had already liked. For instance, Marc Faddoul, an AI researcher at UC Berkeley School of Information, followed an Asian man with dyed hair, and the TikTok algorithm fed his FYP with more videos of Asian men with dyed hair. This similar premise is applied to age, perceived disability, and overall aesthetics (e.g., -with a dog, -with a flag). Mellor's (2020) research demonstrates how visual TikTok is as a platform and how its visual filter factors into the algorithm and a user's experience of the app as a whole. The most glaring factor is how the app can work to include and exclude content from a particular users' niche, or specific FYP, through the algorithms' created filter bubbles as well as a user's participation in maintaining those biases, bubbles or niches (a.k.a., sides of TikTok) by their very act of accepting and liking the content (Mellor, 2020, para. 12).

Caught in the Bubble

TikTok is a corporate entity that morphs and adapts with every individual that connects with it. There is a machinic connection, created in difference to transform and maximise one another and potentially become (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). As machinic entities—both TikTok and users as digital subjects—are co-produced online when connected *with* other machines (e.g., one another or other niches). I noticed this co-production as an active participant and researcher. The more #BIPOC, specifically #firstgeneration and #newcomer creators that I followed, the more I was introduced to on my For You Page. By glancing at [Figure 1](#), under “Desiring Enunciations” in sections prior, one can notice how the algorithm led me to

content creators without much effort, aside from my own dedicated scroll and response (e.g., liking, following) time.

Due to the recommender algorithm's design (Zhao, 2021), you are shown what you most interact with on the app as a digital subject and user. Hence, one's desires (affects and impulses) connect with the platform's algorithm to inform their experience on the app. If one is affected, their actions are gathered and categorized by the algorithm. Actions such as watching a video all the way through, liking, sharing, commenting, following, or, conversely, blocking, disliking, and scrolling quickly past a creator. During my observations, seldom was I introduced to something outside my world, and when I was, I welcomed it to receive more difference. If one wants a diverse feed, one needs to 'like' an array of creators.

It is easy for one to be caught within a world of sameness and standardization that caters to 'you' and only 'you.' One tiktokker named Jeanna¹⁵⁸ went as far as creating a pseudo persona, that of a 40-year-old man named Rowan so she could be on #theothersideoftiktok. She used this account to demonstrate how the algorithm creates filter bubbles. She *dueted*¹⁵⁹ a clip of Rowan (her male alter ego) that a perceived woman follower of 'his' similarly dueted. In this video the woman follower called Rowan a "self-proclaimed beta male feminist...we don't need more of them". Jeanna used this opportunity to duet Rowan's TikTok to simultaneously respond to the woman and to teach her followers about the algorithm. Jeanna states the following after showing the clip of the irate follower insulting Rowan:

¹⁵⁸ Video uploaded July 6, 2021. Her caption reads: "**this one took me for a doozy lmao**" #theothersideoftiktok #hellofromtheotherside #malefeminist #feminism #usausa #dividedwefall, 49K likes, 1102 Comments, 679 shares, BLM 🇺🇸 lg(b)tg 🇺🇸.

¹⁵⁹ To duet a video is to respond to a TikTok by 'quoting' it directly side-by-side, picture in picture. You can talk over it, caption it, or sit next to it to respond to it.

I don't understand the whole let's side with the oppressors, thing. The whole I'm going to go against people that are actively fighting for my rights

[Jenna crinkles her nose and stares into the camera].

And, of course, these are the videos that are going to who? Straight, white men. So, TikTok kind of creates this echo chamber around each individual person, and it's only booming their own beliefs back to them. So, the left is looking at the right, like wow [with emphasis], how could you possibly think that? And the right is looking at the left, like oh my gosh [exasperated], how could you possibly think that? So, it makes sense that everyone is divided now more than ever. I can see all of this leading to a civil war.

Jeanna's commentary is not wrong about the division and sorting occurring on the app. It is by design. As discussed, the recommender algorithm works to sort individuals by many factors, such as users' interests, political views, hashtags, age, location, ethnicity, and race, to name a few (Zhao, 2021).

User Suppression and Banishment

The algorithm visually sorts and actively works to harvest specific hashtags to sort, categorize, suppress, or delete altogether¹⁶⁰. The algorithmic sorting is done in the name of various security and protection reasons, as listed in TikTok's (2021b) *Community Guidelines*. As a result, the algorithm actively searches and silences some voices over others, appearing to focus on, ignore, or favour specific 'kinds' of creators. Filtering can be beneficial, as it works to protect users from extremist and hateful content and shield the younger side of TikTok from graphic

¹⁶⁰ This is not a new phenomenon and has been around on various platforms, like Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr, in order to flag and remove offensive content (Gerrard, 2018).

and exploitative content. However, the app's definitions of what it constitutes as graphic, hateful, dangerous, and extremist views are up for debate. TikTok bases its definitions on the opinions of a panel (i.e., Content Advisory Council) made up of approximately a dozen experts and academics on topics of child safety, free speech, politics and video forensics chaired by a Law professor, Dawn Nunziato and led by their current CEO, at the start of this research, Vanessa Pappas. Their purpose is to maintain a safe space for users on the app. However, reports from users speak otherwise.

One of the most insidious forms of censorship for its lack of transparency on social media¹⁶¹ is the act of "shadowbanning" (Mulliner, 2020). Shadowbanning silences user-content creators without their knowledge in many cases, although sometimes they may be told they are outright banned. Users will post their videos thinking they are searchable and viewed on their follower's FYPs. Meanwhile, they are not. This banishment means their videos are tagged as "Not for Feed" (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020, p. 7). Hence, creators find themselves in a nowhere space and are undiscoverable. In addition, TikTok has categorized them as non-existent and coded them in the same ways as creators who are considered terrorists, who show graphic or violent content, who do or promote illicit and dangerous substances, and those who swear profusely (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020).

These users are silenced and, in some cases, banished to another side of TikTok where they do not belong. For example, a Black #BLM activist will end up on the racist side of TikTok, or a 2SLGBTQIA+ will end up on white male conservative TikTok. According to many black

¹⁶¹ Seen, experienced, and acknowledged by CEO Adam Mosseri on Instagram (Mulliner, 2020).

creators, silencing occurred during the #BlackLivesMatter and #GeorgeFloyd protest period when specific hashtags¹⁶² related to the movement were said to be hidden from users' FYPs. The hiding or removal of hashtags was not the first time TikTok was said to be suppressing black content creators or the voices of the BIPOC community in general (Banjo, 2020; Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020). As a researcher, I have observed accounts of creators blocked, shadowbanned, or taken down for no reason other than speaking out against racism on the app, such as Kasi¹⁶³ on November 25, 2020. In her video, Kasi demonstrated how she was ignored by TikTok when she tried to report anti-black hate speech against her on her feed. However, there was no accountability for those responsible for breaking *Community Guidelines*, and, in the end, TikTok took her post down for inciting "Hate Speech." Creators similar to Kasi, such as Marleen¹⁶⁴ and Clark¹⁶⁵, were banned under identical circumstances. Other content creators are banished or have their content removed for educating on #BLM or any social issue involving marginalized groups, such as Avah¹⁶⁶. Punitive measures apply to most creators trying to call attention to problems with the app or what is occurring in the world. While the final decision to remove content lies with TikTok moderators, content reporting can come from various sources (e.g., anonymous users) and, as a digital space, this platform responds to the desires of the digital subjects it connects with.

¹⁶² #BlackLivesMatter, #GeorgeFloyd, #BLM

¹⁶³ Caption reads, "im just here to prove tiktok is racist" #tiktok #racism #blm #blacklivesmatter, 286K likes, 786 comments, 1754 shares.

¹⁶⁴ Video uploaded on March 11, 2021. Caption headings read: Reply to @userttk. #activism #ban #massreport #trolls #haters #bipoc, 5873 likes, 330 comments, 709 shares.

¹⁶⁵ Video uploaded on December 16, 2020. Caption headings read: Please spread awareness, and support POC content creators, FIX THE ALGORITHM 🙄🙄🙄, 124.8K likes, 9513 comments, 32.2K shares.

¹⁶⁶ Video uploaded on December 13, 2020. Caption headings read: Like it feel real racist when they do it" #ComfortFood, 32K likes, 285 comments, 1674 shares, she/her.

The most notable example occurred on July 6, 2021, with a known comedy tiktokker by the name of @ziggityler¹⁶⁷, who effectively demonstrated how the TikTok algorithm was actively working to filter out black content creators from the Creator Marketplace and, thus proving the existence of racial bias on TikTok to the world (Colombo, 2021). He uploaded a video capture of himself filling out an application for the TikTok Marketplace. In the process of filling out the application form, he changed the qualifying phrases at the end of the paragraph from “supporting white supremacy” to “supporting black lives matter.” Then from “supporting white success” to “supporting black success.” Then from “pro-white” to “pro-black.” Then, finally, from “white voices” to “black voices,” and the responses from TikTok were always the same. For all the applications filled out with the qualifier of ‘white,’ he received an “accepted” response from TikTok. For the applications filled with the qualifier of ‘black,’ TikTok’s response was “to continue, remove any inappropriate content” (@ziggityler, 2021). @ziggityler’s post hit an affective wound for him, his followers, and all who interacted with his video. Tyler's video cut into his follower's FYP’s prompting responses to like, share, comment, stitch, and duet. The affect produced through this TikTok was so impactful that @ziggityler’s video went viral with 1.1 million views that very day, forcing TikTok to take notice and issue a public apology, although it was not exactly clear to whom their apology was directed (Colombo, 2021). This apology was not the first time TikTok had to answer for discrimination issues on their app.

TikTok’s active discrimination has also happened to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in many regions (e.g., Russia, Bosnia, Estonia, and in many Arabic regions) when any account with the

¹⁶⁷ No pseudonym was used since he was published online with a significant media outlet.

hashtags containing the words “gays,” “lesbians,” “transgender,” or any iterations of them, were removed (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020). For both censorship cases, TikTok was forced to acknowledge and apologize for their actions, and in each case, they denied any wrongdoing and claimed they would do better next time, although not much has changed. According to a comprehensive research study into the censorship and privacy practices of TikTok and WeChat, initiated in 2020 by The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)¹⁶⁸ titled, *TikTok and WeChat: Curating and Controlling Global Information Flows* (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato), TikTok is a powerful governmental and political tool. It engages in acts of surveillance through data gathering (as discussed in prior sections), voice and content suppression, and the censorship of various political and social issues to construct a specific worldview. According to ASPI, it began as a “techno-authoritarian” extension of the “Chinese regime” to “reach into the lives of its citizens and non-citizens in the diaspora” (p. 3).

Nevertheless, it now works locally with specific geographical zones engaging in the moderation of global (and local) flows of how knowledge, socio-cultural views, political perceptions, and information are mobilized (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020). In other words, TikTok works as a techno-socio-politico-propaganda machine due to its “heavy-handed approach to content moderation” (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020, p. 3). Whether or not it is an extension of the Chinese government, there is no denying TikTok’s ability to moderate content and people. Given how these standardizing flows can work upon the user-creator

¹⁶⁸ ASPI is an independent and non-partisan think tank that informs the Australian Government on matters of defence, security and strategic policy (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020).

bodies connecting with the app, the question is whether there is a way to create a space of one's own for creative expression to go un-hindered and grow?

User-Creator & N|I Desires That Counter

While some users may undoubtedly be content to sit back and let the algorithm pick and choose for them, content creators take a more active approach and guide the algorithm purposefully¹⁶⁹. In a qualitative study conducted with 28 TikTok users and a collection of over 300,000 videos to analyze, Klug, Evans, and Kaufman (2021) were looking to challenge specific criteria that they assumed influenced the platform's algorithm. They found that users who were actively using the platform for consumer gain, for instance, were very much aware of the algorithm's "tricks," such as knowing when and how to engage with videos as well as manipulating hashtags for maximum visibility. Thus, knowing how to "optimize" and "please" the algorithm for their purposes¹⁷⁰ (Klug et al., 2021, Section 5). The study by Klug et al. suggests that users can be active agents and co-creators on this platform.

TikTok is an app of contradictions. As shown above, it is a platform composed of different spaces—i.e., niches or 'Toks.' These are spaces of belonging and of exclusion. Spaces of destruction and of creation. Spaces of solidarity, collaboration, and those of isolation. Finally, spaces that include a range of all 'human' and nonhuman emotions and emoting, and those that seek to void them altogether. All that stated, depending on how a user connects with TikTok, it can be an experience that is also positive, connective, collaborative, engaging, creative, potentially financially lucrative, and self-affirming.

¹⁶⁹ Those who are part of the Marketplace.

¹⁷⁰ I wish to acknowledge that there is a lot to say about how youth desires are captured in the Content Creator Fund of TikTok; however, that is not the focus of this research. The Fund is also limited to users in the US, and it is an enormous topic unto itself.

Re|Directing & Transforming Algorithmic and Desiring Flows

What conditions do youth, specifically N|I youth, need to create counter-responses on TikTok and beyond? The second chapter discussed how Franco “Bifo” Berardi (2011) saw a problem arise with human subjectivation online. He argues that humans have a problem as digital subjects and users of a space online since they are no longer conscious actors due to algorithms gathering data while they produce affective reactions. As a result, digital subjects are non-conscious actors in these spaces and cannot reconcile thought and emotion to bring it forth into consciousness. This action, or rather, inaction, according to Berardi, means that the subject cannot be “recomposed,” and the process of “subjectivation” (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008) will therefore not be possible. Hence, a human future is lost.

Thinking about TikTok and how users are willing to give in to the ease of the algorithm's experience, passivity, and power (Zhao, 2021), perhaps Berardi was initially right. The process of loss explained by Berardi might apply to some digital spaces where the digital subject is coded and structured to the point where they cannot create for themselves. With TikTok, however, Berardi could not account for the machinic subject and how a user can plug into the platform as a user and creator. According to Han (2017), “under the de-medialization trend in the digital media era, users are no longer just passive receivers and consumers of information, but also active senders and producers” (as cited in Zhao, 2021, Section 3.1.3). As observed through content analysis and online ethnographic research, some creators are actively learning the algorithm to use it for their gain. A few such examples are creators in the Marketplace to push and make their content more visible (Klug et al., 2021). Another suggests working with the algorithm to diversify their FYPs, such as the #Breakthealgorithm movement as started by

Mari¹⁷¹, who asks users to “get to know a creator that doesn’t look like you or may have content differently than you [to] incorporate or follow. Let TikTok know that we want diversity and inclusion on our FYP, we value the content of others” (n.p.). Finally, there are creators who seek to subvert or circumvent the algorithm somehow, such as Alexa¹⁷², who raises awareness on immigration issues in the US by disguising her video as a cooking tutorial. She begins her video while cooking tofu and saying, “What’s up you goofy goobers, I’m an immigrant and I’m making a fucking video about immigration...”. Then Klemen¹⁷³ speaks about deportation and ICE in the US under the ruse of learning how to draw an angel.

Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) remind us that “just because capitalism generates new machinic subjectivities does not...mean they are fully controlled” (p. 84). There needs to be a space for pushback; even capitalism needs this, otherwise, it would not survive itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987). No matter how minuscule the deterritorialization, the space in-between the flows of desire is where the potential lies.

Escape from the Algorithm

To describe how a transformation or an escape occurs within each assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009,1980/1987) use the concept of “deterritorialization,” of which there are four kinds, as explained by Nail (2017). The first is the “relative negative” (p. 34), a “superficial” response to change that, in reality, works to “maintain and reproduce an

¹⁷¹ Video uploaded on February 24, 2021. Caption heading reads: Repost Lets keep this going, #BreakTheAlgorithm #corpmom #diversity #inclusion #love #blacktiktok #blackhistorymonth, 908 likes, 182 comments, 61 shares.

¹⁷² Video uploaded on August 20, 2020. Caption heading reads: Industrialization =/= civilization, #Marxist #leftist #immigration #abolishice #blm #usa #uk #eu #problack #nigeria #quickrecipes #healthyrecipes #chef, 189.3K likes, 1857 comments, 12.1K shares.

¹⁷³ Video uploaded on August 7, 2020. Caption heading reads: Clouds, Cherubs, Billboard pt. 10- Greencard Backlog in America #useyourplatform #strictlycurls #DIYFashion #ThisIsBliss, 52.5K likes, 869 comments, 31.6K shares.

established assemblage” (p. 34). Such a deterritorialization, states Nail, would be akin to governments placating specific social movements through political representation or party support and not taking any impactful action on the movement’s initiatives. For instance, the empty TikTok “apology” to shadowbanned #BIPOC or #2SLGBTQIA+ creators. The second is the “relative positive” (p. 35) escape which “does not reproduce an established assemblage,” however it is “ambiguous” since there is not a defined idea of what will become of that escape or rupture. It has the potential to *become* something, or it might be co-opted, such as the example of Mari seeking to #Breakthealgorithm. Will the hashtag be connected with and carried forward? Or, will it be transformed for a different purpose?

The third is the “absolute negative,” which is a complete “rejection of all old and new assemblages” (p. 35). However, in this rejection, it becomes fractured, and there is a possibility of easy recapture by other forces. Nail restates Deleuze and Guattari’s warning of this particular escape in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987), where they argue that “staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever (ATP199/161)” (p. 35-36). This utter breakdown is why shock and disaster capitalism¹⁷⁴, for instance, is so effective. It is a form of capitalism that advances by destroying a country’s infrastructure and collective subjectivity to the point of disorganization and disorientation in order to recompose it into whatever form the state wants without much objection (Klien, 2007). The fourth and final is the “absolute positive” that is a rupture “that

¹⁷⁴ A neo-liberal economic “exploit” created by Milton Friedman and tested for the first time in Chile after the military coup on September 11, 1973 (Klien, 2007).

does not reproduce an established assemblage”. Instead, it seeks to create new ones in order to produce “a new kind of world in the shell of the old world” (p. 36). This escape is a minoritarian-becoming. It is constructive and seeks to build something other or “an alternative” beyond itself, building upon itself¹⁷⁵.

As much as TikTok aims to control youth, or any user, desires on its platform, there are instances where user-creators have used or taken advantage of the algorithm. Such manipulations have either directly benefited creators or led to the beginning of potential movements (e.g., #BLM, #stopAsianhate), a fight for a cause (e.g., #GeorgeFloyd, #justiceforsemarion), calls to action (e.g., #TulsaFlop), and a variety of challenges, regardless of outcome, that became trends (e.g., #blackoutchallenge¹⁷⁶, #TidePodChallenge¹⁷⁷, #knowyourculture, #eatabowlofrigatonipastaonmay24¹⁷⁸).

One of the most notable and, perhaps, the most ‘successful’¹⁷⁹ in terms of collective force and “absolute positive” deterritorialization occurred before the US Election on June 20, 2020, at the Tulsa, Oklahoma rally for the Trump campaign (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020; Brown, 2020; Solender, 2020). Teens on TikTok rallied their followers to share their videos asking people to register and reserve the first-come, first-serve seats to create empty seats. Well-known creators picked up this message (e.g., K-Pop fan club members who hold an enormous reach), whose reach allowed for ticket purchases by families in the UK, Australia and other parts

¹⁷⁵ This becoming is explored in more depth in Chapter Five.

¹⁷⁶ The blackout challenge involved choking oneself to the point of passing out.

¹⁷⁷ A trend that had many youths eating laundry detergent pods.

¹⁷⁸ A trend to eat a bowl of rigatoni pasta on May 24th, 2021, created by Jimmy Rules on January 14th, 2020, to “spread love and positivity” (Yomary, 2021).

¹⁷⁹ What successful means here will vary depending on who reads this. That said, in terms of what a collective can *do* online, this was successful.

of the world. The Trump election campaign had mistakenly expected a large turnout of more than a million due to a large number of ticket requests. Since the venue was meant for 19,200 people, they decided to plan a second outdoor speech to anticipate the enormous crowds. On the evening of the event, they had to cancel the second speech due to the 6,200 that showed (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020; Brown, 2020; Solender, 2020). Some speculate that this event was the catalyst for Trump's desire to ban TikTok a couple of weeks later. However, that is only a theory (Brown, 2020). This event was a confluence of machinic parts and forces colliding together to form a momentary collective movement—e.g., TikTok platform + recommender algorithm + users from across the globe + upcoming Tulsa rally + technology of smartphone + sentiment towards Trump + upcoming election in US + K-Pop fanbase. What began as a call-to-action quickly gained momentum, turned viral both on and offline, and generated a *becoming-#TulsaFlop*.

Bandy and Diakopoulos (2020) conducted a study with a dataset of 80,000 videos from over 600 users that published at least one video on the Tulsa rally. Their study explored and demonstrated how effective the recommender algorithm was at influencing collective action by doing what it does best: “increasing visibility of call-to-action videos” to those who needed to see them (Section 1). That stated, the authors recognize that there are limitations to this, that of the “power dynamics in platform technologies” (Section 5.2). Furthermore, they acknowledged that TikTok's *Community Guidelines* and lack of transparency around its algorithm might act as countermeasures for these collective enunciations and could “potentially turn TikTok into a more ‘authoritarian’ technology with central points of control” (Section 5.2). From this example,

one can see how the process of becoming can so easily be co-opted and re-territorialized by standardizing forces once again (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987).

There is always the potential for a creator to ‘break’ from or manipulate the TikTok algorithm. However, the algorithm is constantly learning with every move in the digital realm, regardless of the platform. If a minoritarian politic were to emerge and remain, youth (or any user) would have to make tweaks or adjustments to their videos or hashtags each time in order to stay ahead of the majoritarian standard (i.e., the omnipresent algorithm). It requires endless energy, a constant stream of creative ideas, and a connection to other users to help “push” and “boost” their content forward. Staying ahead might be accomplished by interacting with each post— whether by following, liking, sharing, dueting, or stitching to reach beyond the borders of TikTok. Although TikTok wants content creators to succeed, it paradoxically does not want them to succeed. TikTok, as a business machine, needs there to be just enough success that users get noticed to bring other users into the affective flows of its world. Thus, keeping the algorithm and market functioning, but not enough that content creators gain control over the monetary means and the algorithm. In this way, TikTok is always working against the user behind the scenes, one step ahead and one step behind.

Chapter Five – N|I Case Desire Analysis¹⁸⁰

This chapter is a case *desire* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987) analysis of collected enunciations observed since February 2020 from the user-generated content space and social media video streaming platform known as TikTok. As a desire infused analysis, it intersects schizoanalytic philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987) with virtual online ethnographic observations that incorporate techno-netnographic techniques for online research (Fenton & Proctor, 2019; Kien, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Kozinets et al., 2016; Kozinets et al., 2018; Sandlin, 2007). As a user and non-content creator, I immersed myself fully into the experience as a *tiktoker* to observe, engage with, and *think with* collected newcomer|immigrant (N|I) digital subject enunciations and observations.

The previous chapter explored TikTok as a techno-political assemblage by examining and exposing its history, politics, business practices, and algorithmic intricacies—or digital *sense*. By drawing upon concepts from previous sections, TikTok will be examined as an example of a digi-space and desiring machine as it works with selected¹⁸¹ N|I youth digital subjectivities considering the three “revolutionary” tasks of schizoanalysis. These tasks aim to break desire from the Oedipalizing (i.e., standardizing) digital structures and potentially escape (i.e., deterritorialize) from them “in all directions” to seek out new connections and potential becomings beyond itself (Mark Seem in Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2000, p. xx).

Mapping the desires that emerge *in situ* in the digi-spaces of TikTok, in connection with N|I youth digital subjects, requires considering the blockages and the productions of desire

¹⁸⁰ Components of this chapter appear in Beier and Jagodzinski (2021), *Ahuman Pedagogy - Multidisciplinary Perspectives for Education in the Anthropocene!*.

¹⁸¹ I have chosen select N|I youth digital subjects to focus on for this case analysis. Those who appear in this analysis appeared most frequently on my FYP.

within those spaces. As such, this analysis explicitly seeks to map how desires flow through TikTok to capture, categorize, and consume N|I bodies (users and content-creators). Moreover, it requires mapping the desires that break, or deterritorialize, from TikTok's territorializing (i.e., standardizing) structures to produce potential escapes, or creative becomings, for N|I subjectivities. As discussed in Chapter Three, these tasks are not inseparable from one another as they are initiated simultaneously and work in tandem (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009).

The process for the case analysis is as follows: First, a short review is provided of the tasks of schizoanalysis (as discussed in Chapter Three) as they specifically pertain to TikTok as a digi-space. Second, as a researcher, I engage and *think with* N|I *desiring* as place|making and, in turn, consider four N|I youth content-creators as case studies to specifically expose the *desire* blockages and productions generated by them in the digi-spaces of TikTok. My analysis of these desiring cases will be assisted by *thinking with* Deleuze and Guattari's (1972/2009, 1980/1987) four kinds of deterritorialization¹⁸², as explained by Thomas Nail (2017). Third, I rejoin with the primary question of this dissertation, that is, *is there a potential for a minoritarian politics online|offline?*

TikTok | Towards Tasking a Scroll-volution

In no particular order, the tasks of a schizoanalysis (as explicated in Chapter Three) on TikTok work towards an understanding and identification of the hidden and underlying structures or forces seeking to block the productive flows of its users and content creators. The previous chapter demonstrated how TikTok's recommender algorithm functions within an

¹⁸² The four kinds are "relative negative," "relative positive," "absolute negative," and "absolute positive" (Nail, 2017, pp. 34-35), as explained in Chapter Four, section "Escape from the Algorithm."

affective labour economy and techno- and neoliberal capitalist flows to connect, compose, and consume digital subjects who engage with the TikTok digi-space as a part of a greater techno-social assemblage. It accomplishes this through coding, categorization, surveillance, and sometimes suppression (e.g., banishment, silencing, or shadowbanning). In the highly standardized and overcoded digi-spaces of TikTok, the task for its users and content creators who become aware of its blocking flows is to break (i.e., deterritorialize) from the territorializing structures and forces that are built into and flowing through it, from within and from the external world (Buchanan, 2014a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009). For instance, N|I and BIPOC¹⁸³ content creators exhibited breakages from TikTok's attempts to silence, block, or banish them, therefore responding to the territorializing and reterritorializing forces working against any produced breaks, escapes, or potential becomings in the various TikTok's niches they transversed. These breaks occurred in the form of pushbacks against hateful comments by other content creators or against TikTok for blocking or shadowbanning them or others. They also occurred in moments of subverting or manipulating its algorithm by finessing hashtags for imperceptibility or tricking its visual sensors. Also, there were observed escapes or deterritorializations that manifested into becomings travelling beyond the digi-spaces of TikTok to become a collective becoming as experienced with #TulsaFlop, #GeorgeFloyd, #BlackLivesMatter, #eatabowlofrigatonionmay24, #Tidepodchallenge, and #passoutchallenge.

N|I Desiring as Place|Making

Thus far, the term N|I has been engaged with in relation to an individual or group, a digital subject, a subjectivity, and a concept with which to interact and *think with*. As

¹⁸³ N|I and BIPOC often but not always intersect.

contemplated in Chapter One, *newcomer* is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional term. It is multi-layered in its connoted meaning and differing (mis)uses and multi-dimensional in that it blurs the limits of space and time. For instance, the term *newcomer* carries with it implicit and explicit assumptions, perceptions, and expectations connected to a space or place one arrives to in time. Furthermore, the term alludes to diasporic movement and a sense of 'unsettled' impermanence between places (Awan, 2016). Consequently, as individuals and communities, newcomers are seen as migrants crossing borders and *transversing* time and space such that they are simultaneously constructing and bridging connections from self|place to and with other places and living beings. The newcomer hence acts as a form of a *transversalist bridge* (Guattari, 1992/2006), straddling two or more worlds without belonging to either, and building connections between one time and space with another. For this project, it is a term that does not seek to define the attached subject. Instead, it is a term that impacts how a subject responds in relation to it.

For social media users, as digital subjects, a transversal movement within the spaces of the digital as *newcomer* might translate into the ability to move from one space and time to connect with others. When *thinking with* the idea of newcomer as a conceptual tool to think through the ever-changing digital machinic spaces online, one could say that the digi-space of TikTok, as a whole, as well as the niches it creates through its sorting algorithms and video introductions, might create newcomers of all its users in one way or another. The question then becomes: What might this *transversal* movement *do* to and for a the N|I as digital subject?

Through observations on TikTok, it was apparent that many content creators spend copious amounts of time establishing a connection with their audience. Those creators who put

in the effort are focused on connecting, relating, engaging, and potentially creating a safe space for themselves and others within the app while at the same time sharing curated bits of themselves with their followers. This effort is demonstrated by all four youth in this case study, particularly Leila, Sasho, and Vince. The ability for marginalized or minoritized communities to share one's experiences and "speak back to" oppressive structures and be heard connects to Anna Hickey-Moody's concept of "little publics" into the digi-sphere, as articulated in Chapter One (Hickey-Moody, 2016, p. 63; see also, 2013, 2014, 2015). Specifically, for this project, it is within the diverse niches of TikTok where N|I youth, as diasporic digital subjects, create digi-places to 'speak back to' majoritarian representations and discourses.

Let us recall Shield's (2014) exploration of what constitutes a national aesthetic—the "collective experience[ing] of nation-state-territory" through the representations or markers (e.g., cultural, geographical, visual silences) that emerge from numerous sources (p. 189). In the digital realm, the aesthetics of place|making in the digi-sphere is one of a collective experiencing that emerges between digi-space/s (territory/ies)-intensive forces (e.g., capital and state)-digital subject/s. Examples of markers that might emerge from this collective experiencing are hashtags, comments, likes, avatars, shares, reposts, algorithmic recommendations, and content creations and imaginations. From this collective experiencing a potential minoritarian becoming¹⁸⁴ may emerge.

N|I youth observed for the duration of this study accomplished place|making through community creation by sharing personal experiences, calls for action, and creating familiarity

¹⁸⁴ A minoritarian becoming is a collective becoming that seeks to go against the standard (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). This term is explained in depth in the section "Considering a Minoritarian Becoming" in Chapter One.

Through the act of hashtagging their videos, creators simultaneously constructed their online subjectivity and generated spaces where their content—i.e., expressions—could be shared with other users. Word clouds are used as a textual data analysis tool to visually demonstrate how each N|I youth creator, individually and collectively, has engaged with hashtags¹⁸⁶ (see Figure 4). The prominence of words (hashtags) in the world clouds reflect the incidence of their use by each creator. These tags, functioning as standalone categories (e.g., topics), can serve as locators and eventually lead users to certain niches or creators¹⁸⁷. Throughout this study, hashtags served as points of identification (for self, algorithm, others), points of location (for self, algorithm, others), as well as points of convergence, connectivity, and the transfer of energy and ideas (between self, algorithm, others). *Thinking with Shields* (2014) above, hashtags could work as representational markers of space and could work together to produce a potential collective aesthetic of a digital subjectivity that might together produce place.

The most notable expressions observed at the above-mentioned hashtags were of N|I youth seeking to change their immigrant and ethno-cultural-racial aesthetic by challenging perceived or stereotypical images of thought of “What does it mean to be an immigrant or [first-gen]?” in the TikTok publics’ minds. Challenging perceived images of thought were exemplified through creative and educational vlogs uploaded by N|I creators using diverse techniques to push their message forward, such as stitching or dueting¹⁸⁸. These tools were

¹⁸⁶ These hashtags were tallied from all the expressions gathered and used in the following case studies.

¹⁸⁷ For example, a short list of the hashtags observed and tagged by the content creators observed were: #firstgen, #firstgeneration, #heritage, #immigration, #[insert ethnicity of choice here], #ourculture, #culturechallenge, #whereamIfrom, # [insert ethnicity or religion]tok, #thirdculturekid, and #immigrant.

¹⁸⁸ Both stitching and dueting, as well as commenting, are ways that content creators can respond to followers by posing a question, provocation, or challenge that followers then can respond to.

used, in many cases, to incite calls-to-action, increase followers and likes, amplify a message through the algorithm, or ask for allyship or solidarity. N|I youth also used creative methods, such as music, food, comedy, poetry, and visual art, to educate and talk about important issues related to immigrants.

Mapping N|I Youth Desires on TikTok

The following section applies the tasks of schizoanalysis *in situ*, with four N|I youth encountered on the For You Page (FYP). The analysis is to understand and expose the desires flowing through their respective digi-spaces and those blocking their digital subjectivities. In addition, this analysis maps the desires of N|I youth, as digital subjects, that rupture the territorializing flows in the various TikTok space(s)—i.e., niches—they navigate to escape and produce something new for themselves and others.

Leila (522 Following, 134.7K Followers, 5.4M Likes, “True ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but the refusal to acquire it”, [link to podcast](#), [link to Instagram](#))¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ For each Content Creator I will list their biographical (bio) information, that is listed on their TikTok profile, next to their name or as a footnote. These sometimes include a list of the following: Tagline, links to other social media, age, identifying emojis, gender identifiers, location, how many they follow, how many follow them, and how many likes they have in total.

Figure 4

Leila



Leila is a self-proclaimed first-generation daughter of South Asian/Desi¹⁹⁰ parents. She is outspoken about her personal experiences as a part of the Desi community, being the eldest daughter in a South Asian household, and being a first-generation immigrant in North America. She is upfront with her many perspectives and is proud of her heritage, even though she is openly critical of its many shortfalls. For instance, in a video uploaded on October 29, 2020 (“Wow I just triggered myself. I’m so overwhelmed”. #mentalhealthmatters, 54.6K likes, 1145 comments, 1940 shares.)¹⁹¹, Leila discusses the many challenges of ‘first-gens.’ In the video

¹⁹⁰ Desi, according to the Cambridge Dictionary online (2021), relates to individuals who belong to the diaspora from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

¹⁹¹ Due to anonymization, in order to give the reader a sense of whom the creator is, I am providing contextual information from their profile captions. The captions will be given in text if an explicit example is given. Otherwise, I will be by footnote. The captions will at times give one a sense of what is in the video or a bit about the creator and the niches that the user might be in (sometimes).

titled “Why first gens struggle with emotions?” she lists various phrases that immigrant parents would say to diminish or dismiss their children’s experiences, such as:

... Don’t try to act American.

... There’s no such thing as trauma.

... Don’t ruin our reputation.

... That’s not in our culture.

... What would people say?...

As a result, she often gets criticism for her opinions from users, and from her community.

However, as later demonstrated through her comments section, she successfully creates a safe space for others in the South Asian community and other immigrant groups who have been through the same or similar experiences as she has. In addition, their creator-follower relationship is one of give and take. This relationship is made clear with the support and encouragement her followers show her, such as pushing her to take her perspectives beyond TikTok (e.g., YouTube) and into different dissemination formats, as a podcast. Leila uses her platform to inform and educate on issues that impact her community directly and similar issues that immigrants face in the home or society.

Leila’s videos take on various complex topics concerning the South Asian community. For instance, body shaming¹⁹² and the taboo nature of sexual assault in Desi culture¹⁹³; calling out individuals in her comment threads, such as Desi men talking about feminism and “finding a

¹⁹² Video posted on September 23, 2021 captioned as “Why do we do this tho?” #bodypositivity #bodypositive #brown #desi #confidence, 1202 likes, 95 comments, 52 shares.

¹⁹³ Video posted on September 22, 2021, captioned as “The inflicted shame on an innocent child is heartbreaking”, 3733 likes, 147 comments, 98 shares.

brown girl in 2021”¹⁹⁴; Desi parental relationships with their children (more on this later); and the expectations placed on Desi women and eldest daughters. Regarding the latter, there were many videos posted; however, one, in particular, said it all in a singular meme that she posted on October 9, 2021 (see Figure 6).

Figure 5

South Asian Daughters, a Meme



Note. Leila. October 10, 2021. “South Asian older daughters are the backbone of our society”.

Aside from discussing family issues, the experience of being an immigrant, and a South Asian woman, Leila also talks about external cultural issues. These issues include current events in South Asian countries, for instance, what occurred in Lahore, Pakistan with the rape of a young

¹⁹⁴ Video posted on September 11, 2021, captioned as “Sigh, this was such a nice version of the myriad of things I could’ve said”. #brown #desi #thoughts #omg, 8952, 463 comments, 113 shares.

girl by 400 men¹⁹⁵, as well as commentating on events closer to home and expressing her contention with ‘woke culture’¹⁹⁶. In particular, to paraphrase Leila, how ‘woke culture’ can work to deter people from having the “real” and complex conversations for fear of being shut down by “high-horse[d]” individuals who feel they have all the answers on a topic and are entitled to give an opinion upon matters where they have no ‘place’ commenting. In other words, according to Leila, ‘woke’ individuals are speaking out-of-place and in-place of others (e.g., community, individual, a group), rather than creating a space for the voices of often marginalized individuals for which they are speaking in-place. She gives an example to make this clear:

If you watch a video and you hear something that was offensive to you. Writing this offends me, and here’s why. That is constructive because you’re offering a perspective that the speaker probably hadn’t considered. But, if you aren’t even related to the topic, and you go, oh, this *could* be offensive to so-and-so group.

[exasperated]

Let that group speak for themselves!

She laments that the non-constructive ‘woke’ comments do not produce a meaningful or educational conversation. Instead, she states, these comments aim to put down and remove credibility from the content creator or speaker. She finishes off the video with an impatient plea:

¹⁹⁵ Video posted on August 18, 2021, captioned as “#greenscreen I legitimately felt like throwing up when I read this”. #brown #desi #pakistan, 11.9K likes, #978 comments, 770 shares.

¹⁹⁶ Video posted on September 4, 2021, captioned as “The amount of insults passed around and for what” #thoughts #brown, 888 likes, 24 comments, 16 shares.

I'm so annoyed of constant comments of people being like, this is offensive, and that is offensive, and that *could* be offensive, and that *might* be offensive. Like, just have a productive conversation.

[voice goes up in pitch]

We're supposed to be progressing in society. We're supposed to be having productive conversations so that everyone can feel included in this society.

[intensity rising]

But, by attacking and being at each other's throats, what do you think you're accomplishing? What do you think you're accomplishing when you insult somebody for being uneducated? Like, can we all just calm down, please? Just take a deep breath and calm down.

[visibly frustrated]

Leila demonstrated what she wanted her digi-space(s) to be like, engaging, productive, and educational. Her generated and most used hashtags are mostly representative of what she cares about, and they are the spaces that she wanders in and out—at times concurrently and apart: #mentalhealthmatters, #brown, #desi, #daughter, #thoughts, #browntiktok, #desitiktok, #trauma, #parents, #poc, #firstgen, #immigrant, #mentalhealth, and #women (see Figure 5).

The following section draws attention to a selection of Leila's videos showing how her digital subjectivity as a N|I youth and Desi immigrant is often blocked by societal and cultural forces flowing through her digi-spaces in the form of expectations from differing sources. For example, her TikTok space dedicated many videos to immigrant and South Asian parents' pressures and expectations upon their children, mainly their eldest daughters. Leila

demonstrates this in her TikTok uploaded on June 30, 2021, captioned as: “Felt soooo weird advertising myself at the end [wide eyes]” #desi #podcast #psychology, 2451 likes, 92 comments, 80 shares. She begins inquisitively:

If you grew up in a POC, immigrant, or lower economic status household. Chances are you grew up too fast, and I don't mean physically. I mean emotionally. At times, kids are told things by their parents that they really shouldn't know at that age. Whether it's financial matters or marriage issues, or some family drama. Things do scar you and cause you to grow up a little too quickly. Yes, a lot of our parents experienced this too, but wouldn't they want to be more cautious of what they tell you? Of course, then there's the responsibility of taking care of your sibling and taking on a second parent role, and then navigating the school system because your parents maybe don't know anything about it. And if you are a girl, then there are chances that you had to take on the womanly duties at a young age, despite [points at the screen] there being a male adult in the house. When you grow up too fast, you have all the emotional baggage you carry with you, and maybe it creates some distance, and you feel like you can't relate to your peers because they are not going through the same things that you are going through. And you have to be quiet about all the things that you are going through. You did the emotional labour for everyone, neglected yourself, and now you're probably having a crisis. Little plug, today is the day I release the first episode of my podcast. And today's episode talks exactly about this issue. Find the Instagram link in my bio. You can also find it on Spotify...If this video resonates with you even a little bit, then maybe you will enjoy the podcast.

In this video, she speaks to the issue of growing up too fast emotionally as a child of immigrants. Specifically, the video speaks to how children of immigrants take on their parent's traumas or assume translator roles for their parents in the school system.

Following the parental and first-generation thread above, she speaks on the topic of "intergenerational cultural dissonance" in a video on February 23, 2021. According to her explanation, it is the practice of immigrant parents imposing cultural traditions from their homeland, from a time and place that no longer exists, onto their children in a new setting (e.g., host country). She captions this video as: "of course, this will not be applicable to every person, but it's still common enough" #desi #immigrant #indian #mentalhealthmatters. This video resonated with many of her followers, attracting 938.3K views, and of those views, there were 197.3K likes, 3511 comments, and 13.7K shares.

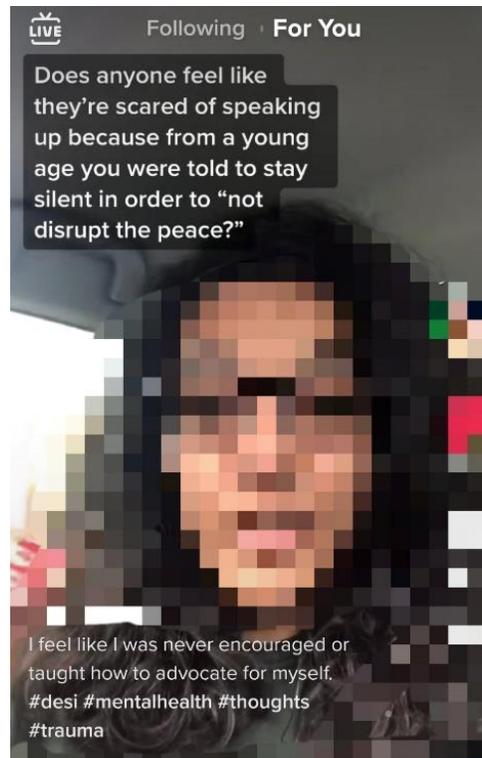
Flowing through these videos, we can see how N|I youth desires are not only stifled by their parents but those of an imposing host country that places specific expectations upon the parents. In their article, *What Do We Know About Interventions Targeting Ethnic Minority Children and Youth? A Literature Review*, Anika Liversage, Rikke Fuglsang Olsen, and Kira Solveig Larsen (2021) discuss immigrant parents' challenges. They conduct an extensive literature review examining the different effective or ineffective interventions for supporting families with ethnic minority youth in their respective host countries. They explain that N|I youth parents arrive in their host countries only to face their singular challenges. For instance, immigrant parents may arrive with their own traumatizing experiences. Upon arrival, they may have been provided fewer resources for resettlement and adjustment, putting them at a disadvantage. Depending on their arriving socio-economic status, language, and arrival circumstance (e.g.,

being forced to migrate), some may experience varying levels of poverty, unemployment, loss of skills, and social or familial network, leading to high levels of stress. These challenges comprise stressors that indirectly and directly impact their children in many forms (Liversage et al., 2021).

By watching Leila's videos, one can see how she is actively seeking to produce potential escapes (as explicated in Chapter Four, "Escape from the Algorithm") from the territorializing structures and forces that flow through the TikTok digi-spaces she is transversing as a digital subject. The very act of creating her account as a space of education, apparent since the beginning of her content creation in April of 2020, is a form of a "relative positive" (Nail, 2017, p. 35) escape from the territorializing force of her community and her parents. In one of her videos, she laments the fear of speaking up instilled in her from a young age (see Figure 7). For Leila, there was not a reproduction of an established assemblage. Instead, there were unknown and new components at play in her various spaces (i.e., hashtags or niches). However, she could not know what would be produced from this particular escape (e.g., the creation of educational space). Hence, it was an ambiguous space of potentiality for herself and perhaps those who listened to her.

Figure 6

Leila Speaking Out



Note. Leila. (March, 15, 2021). Expressing what it feels like when you are dissuaded from speaking up, therefore, staying silent to keep the peace at home and at school.

Another perceived escape is when Leila is celebrating a ‘good curl¹⁹⁷ day’, as demonstrated on September 3, 2021¹⁹⁸. On these days, she is being unabashedly herself and existing on her terms and not those of her parents or community. Another example illustrates her countering and pushing back against her haters by creating a TikTok spoofing them, as posted on January 29,

¹⁹⁷ This is about her curly hair that she both adores and loathes at the same time. She has many videos dedicated to her hair.

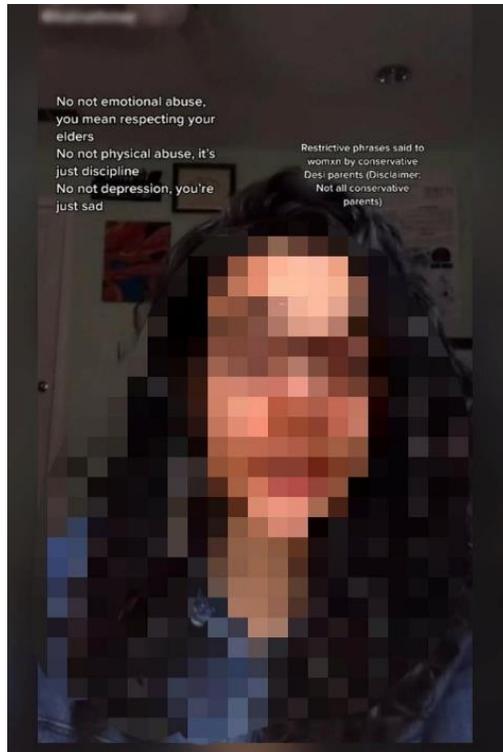
¹⁹⁸ Captioned as “Just really wanted to show them off because I didn’t realize until a year ago I had this type of hair” #curlyhair #curls #curly, 1925 likes, 30 comments, 2 shares.

2021 (captioned as, “Never gonna make anyone happy, so I’m just going to say what I want to and you can deal with it if you have a problem”. #mentalhealthmatters #desi, 5405 likes, 183 comments, 60 shares). In this video, she dramatizes a skit with herself on the topic of “What it’s like talking on TikTok...getting shutdown constantly by haters...” (in video caption).

Leila did not exhibit any evidence of negative escapes. While she actively sought to rupture an “established assemblage,” such as challenging the traditions of her culture and religion that were toxic for both genders. Instead of merely criticizing the practices on their own, she sought to produce something different rather than outright repudiation or abandonment of Desi cultural influence altogether. What she demonstrated in this action was an example of an “absolute positive” escape (Nail, 2017, p. 36). This can be seen in her response to conservative Desi parents and the “restrictive” ways they spoke to their daughters or women in general. The TikTok’s caption reads, “Restrictive phrases said to womxn by conservative Desi parents (Disclaimer: not all conservative parents)” posted on June 19, 2021, captioned as “Side note- finally started my podcast’s Instagram account 😊 link in my bio!” 47.3K likes, 911 comments, 2022 shares (see Figure 8).

Figure 7

*TFW*¹⁹⁹ *Conservative Parents...*



Note. Leila. (June 19, 2021). What conservative Desi parents are like according to Leila's experiences.

Her restrictive phrases go on for 57 seconds with other statements, such as:

No, not misogyny, those are a women's duties;

No, not sexism, that's a Western concept;

No, not equality, you mean compromise;

No not your opinion, just keep the peace in the house...

¹⁹⁹ TFW is short for 'that feeling when'. An expression often used preceding a post of a meme, gif, image, video, and the like, to express a general emotion, feeling, and/or state of being.

With each “No...”, her pace of voice becomes faster, her tone intensifies, and her hand gestures become more emphatic. It is apparent that this TikTok *cut* into her niches as an affective wound with her many followers and users, opening a space for discussion and potential learning to occur²⁰⁰ (Colebrook, 2002a, 2002b; Deleuze, 1969/1990). The post received 47.3K likes, 911 comments, and 2022 shares, which is significant for someone who has approximately 135K followers and caters to particular niches. The responses demonstrate that this TikTok has extended beyond her digi-space into other niches and, perhaps, onto other platforms²⁰¹. Next, engaging with the comment space of this particular TikTok, one can see a variety of affective responses. These responses offer the observer (and reader) a glimpse into expressions of gratitude, agreement, disagreement, and inspiration made by the users that entered and chose to engage with Leila’s content. Evidence of gratitude for providing education and a voice is seen here:

User L1²⁰²: “thank you I have always learned so much from you.”

User W1: “I felt so attacked by this for some reason because I’m still experiencing these things everyday. Thank you for being the voice that speaks for us! <3”.

Evidence of expressions of agreement is seen here:

User Ap1: “THIS WAS LOUD”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ I am basing this on her ‘woke culture’ video whereby she declares what kind of space she wants to create—i.e., an educational and productive space that is conducive to conversation.

²⁰¹ One can only assume this move, as there are no statistics on where the *shares* go. The direct links to Leila’s Spotify podcast and Instagram account demonstrate that she has moved beyond the borders of TikTok onto other platforms. There is a high chance that her followers are also on those platforms with her.

²⁰² User names are anonymized.

²⁰³ According to *Urban Dictionary*, “Loud” (SlangGuru1, 2015) is used to describe exceptionally high-quality marijuana or how exceptional, high quality, or cool something or someone can be. It seems that this user, due to using all caps, was extremely impressed by what Leila had to say or what she posted.

User r1: "I love this."

User Ty1: "This happens a lot in Hispanic households."

Expressions of disagreement are evidenced here in the form of triggers:

User Gm1: "I'm abt²⁰⁴ to explode, either from anger or frustration".

User Tv1: "Triggered me so much that I couldn't continue to watch it. So here I am commenting".

Evidence of users being inspired is seen here:

User Wsw1: "@usertz teze²⁰⁵ everything she says fits so well in albo²⁰⁶ culture...".

User SG1: "SAVED TO FAVORITES I hope one day I get the guts to speak out but they will never understand and uk²⁰⁷ what happens next".

User Imm1: "You encouraged me to seek out therapy and thank you [worried faces]."

As can be observed, by exposing how conservative parents function to block Desi women's subjectivities through restrictive parenting and the imposition of specific gender roles, Leila has opened up a space for the consideration of a new potential way forward for the new generation of N|I youth who have connected with her words.

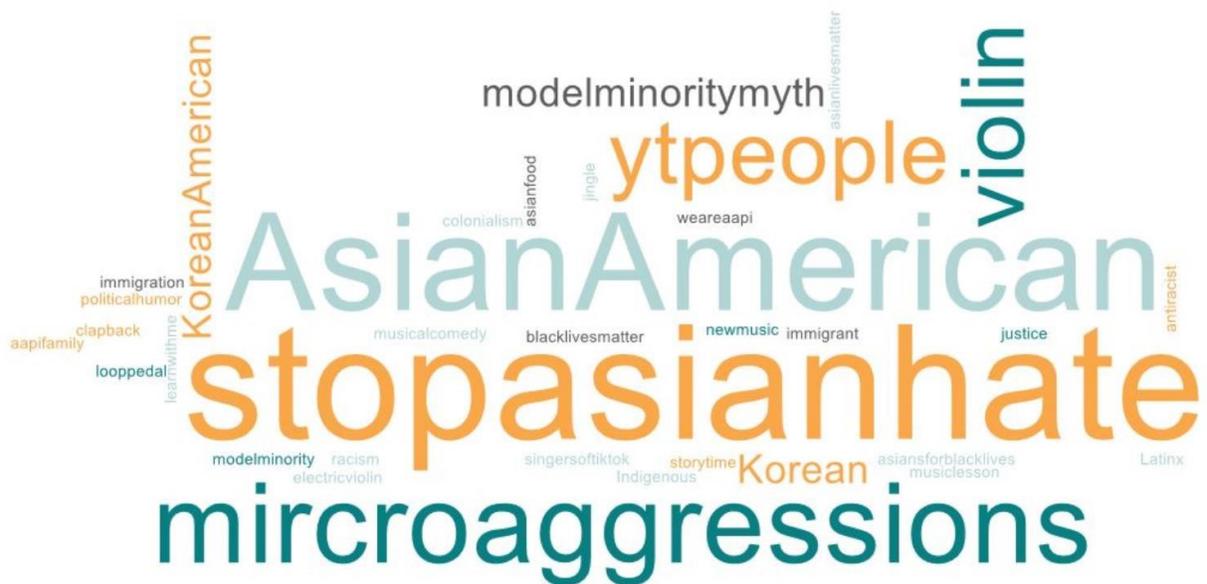
Vince (🎻 Violinist + Singer 🎤 KR Immigrant Musician US Follow me: YouTube & IG, linktree, 15.4KFollowers, 329KLikes)

²⁰⁴ about

²⁰⁵The user's name

²⁰⁶ Short form of her culture.

²⁰⁷ You know.

Figure 8*Vince*

Users of TikTok did not truly get to know Vince²⁰⁸ until his introductory post on February 16, 2021. Collectively we²⁰⁹ learned that Vince was born in Korea, immigrated to the United States with his family when he was six years old, and is currently living in Oregon. After graduating college, he taught High School English and is now an independent musician, singer-songwriter and producer. Among his extensive list of accomplishments, Vince has travelled the world to share his immigrant story with those who would listen. According to his bio and linktree²¹⁰, he has a public profile that extends beyond TikTok into the realms of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, a personal website, a podcast, and establishing collaborations with other

²⁰⁸ Vince was the only one of the four N|I content creators that gave me consent to use his real name, citations, and photographs. However, I chose to keep him anonymized for the purpose of this paper to keep consistent with the other case studies.

²⁰⁹ Myself, as a researcher, and the other users on the app.

²¹⁰ A link to an external website provides further links to anything the content creator is also involved in.

creators. His website, for instance, among other projects, displays his musical ventures, various creations, and collaborations. One dream musical project showcased on his website is his first full-length studio album. His album tells of his story as an immigrant and, according to Vince, is an album filled “with songs that deal with movement, (un)belonging, and rediscovering a sense of home. In these divisive times, I think it’s vital for us to share our stories—it’s those of us that live on the margins that can build new bridges and connect communities” (Vince, 2021).

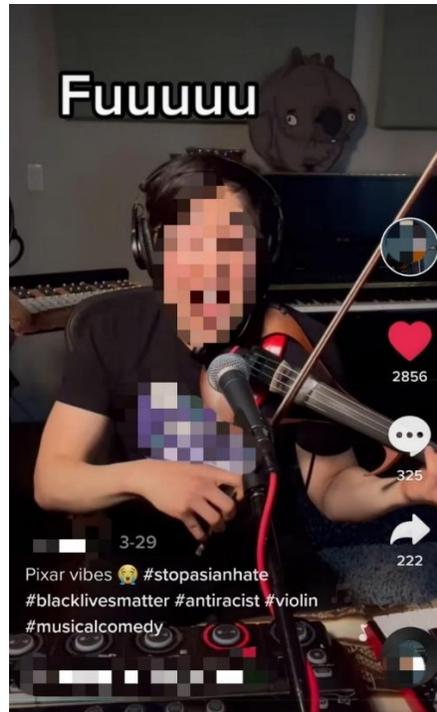
The following section delineates Vince as an example of an “absolute positive” escape (Nail, 2007, p. 36) accomplished by *thinking with* the concept of the wound as an affective event (Clough, 2016; Deleuze, 1969/1990). Specifically, I will be addressing how these concepts work in connection with Vince as a digital subject and the digi-spaces he moves through.

Vince first appeared on my FYP on March 29, 2021, playing a short musical loop of what appears to be a flying spiccato²¹¹ tune with his violin, interspersed with gentle xylophone taps, all the while singing a vitriolic critique against white supremacy and where it should go (see Figure 10). My attention, and that of another 7389 users on the app, was captured upon hearing his gentle voice singing in time with the anticipative bow strikes of his violin; “Fuuuuuck...whiiiiite suuu-pre-ma-cyyyy” [xylophone chimes lightly] “riiiight baaaack to HeIIII” and the loop begins again. This post was labelled as “Pixar vibes [sarcastic crying emoji] #stopasianhate #blacklivesmatter #antiracist #violin #musicalcomedy.” It received 2855 likes, 325 comments, and 222 shares. These statistics were considered on the high side for Vince.

²¹¹ The flying spiccato is a separated, jump-like bow-stroke produced in a single direction under a defined speed (Richardson, 2020).

Figure 9

Fuuuuu...



Note. Vince. (March 29, 2021). Expressing his feelings musically towards white supremacy.

Until then, his views were in the mid-hundreds, and his likes rarely went beyond the hundreds. Nonetheless, there is a demonstrated shift in Vince, and his account, which accounted for an increase in views and production of content. He owes his significant increase in followers, in part, to his mastery of the musical loop. A loop is a musical approach that he uses to affectively and effectively capture, critique, comment on, and educate his followers in a light-hearted and comedic way. On April 2, 2021²¹², Vince gave a TikTok tutorial on creating musical loops. His TikTok loops range from being 5 to 50 seconds long. They are primarily comedic, have a catchy

²¹² Video captioned as “Bonus points if you can name the sample” #electricviolin #musiciansoftiktok #musiclesson #loopedal #stopasianhate, 212 likes, 24 comments, 4 shares.

tune, and address a single topic that matters to him or others. As a result, users who engage with his work seem to be drawn in and captured as observed through his video statistics.

Whether Vince is aware of it or not, his desires and, in turn, affect flow through his work to connect with others. Vince's topics range from his own life experiences as a Korean and Asian American, on being a first-generation immigrant, his experiences with microaggression, racism, and the model minority myth, his experiences with trolls in his comments section, and educating his followers on history or social justice terminology (e.g., imperialism).

An Absolute Shift

Taking a closer look at Vince's overall account since it began on April 8, 2020, to the present day, one would notice how his overall content and his digital subject, as a musician and content creator, has evolved into an online musical activist. He began his TikTok account by playing his violin to his favourite anime and popular culture scores in order to speak about various random topics and to do some "goofing off." This playfulness is observed in his introduction to his followers on February 16, 2021²¹³. Currently, however, he uses his music and musical humour to educate and to respond, or #clapback, to hateful anti-Asian and racist comments, microaggressions, or aggressive trolls that emerge in his comments section. In addition, he also speaks about urgent topics that impact the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)²¹⁴ community in general.

²¹³ Video captioned as "Bout time I introduced myself." #intro #violin #koreanamerican #singersoftiktok #storytime, 659 likes, 43 comments.

²¹⁴ AAPI is a monolithic term that glosses over the diverse communities within, leading to invisibility and exclusion from policy and research. In addition, one cannot engage with AAPI as a term without mentioning how it uses as a tool of white supremacy to fuel and propel the model minority myth (Yi et al., 2020). More on this in the following sections.

At this moment I return to the concept of trauma as a wound, as discussed in the section “Trauma as Media Affects” in Chapter Two. A wound, as an effect and not a cause (Deleuze, 1969/1990), is a rupture or opening for affects to stimulate and act upon the world, inclusive of all living or non-living things within it. Tracking Vince’s journey on TikTok from the start to the present day, one notices the moment when a wound, from the external world, cuts into his digital space and digital subjectivity, rupturing his established assemblage and propelling him into a different role (Colebrook, 2002a; 2002b). This role involves taking active agency in the education of his followers against anti-Asian hate and all things related to the building of a socially just and aware society.

The wound is an event that is “both [a] temporal and transcendental” (p. 145) expression which is untouched and “does not obey the logic of anticipation” (Deleuze as cited in Reynolds, 2007, p. 149). In other words, the wound as an event considers and moves to and fro between the invisible forces or intensities, from the virtual and the actual (e.g., real-life) (Deleuze, 1969/1990; Reynolds, 2007). For Vince, this actual|virtual confrontation emerged from what is known in the United States media and collective imagination as the “Atlanta shootings” (2021).

The Wound of Atlanta

On March 16, 2021, in a massage parlour located in a suburb north of Atlanta, Georgia, a 21-year-old man shot and murdered eight people in a horrific act of terrorism, six of whom were women²¹⁵ belonging to the Asian community. This attack, labelled by many as an act of hate

²¹⁵ The victims' names are Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33; Xiaojie Tan, 49; Daoyou Feng, 44; Yong A. Yue, 63; Suncha Kim, 69; Hyun J. Grant 51; Soon C. Park, 74; Paul Andre Michels, 54.

against the AAPI community, left many frightened, heartbroken, shaken, enraged, and resolved to act and do something to stop the increasing hate-fueled attacks against their community. Many in the AAPI community feel that these attacks have been increasing steadily since the start of the pandemic, instigated and perpetuated by inflammatory rhetoric amplified in mainstream media and the socio-political sphere by influential figures (Cohen & Siese, 2021). From this one event, hashtags such as #StopAsianHate and #AsianLivesMatter emerged, capturing the attention of disparate digital users in the US and internationally, circulating the news of the attacks on all forms of digital media, with many inciting calls to action and solidarity among all who face racialization, hate, minoritization, and marginalization of some sort.

The day after the shooting on March 17, 2021²¹⁶, Vince posts²¹⁷ a TikTok labelled “Thoughts on Atlanta shootings” (in video) speaking directly to his followers, expressing the following personal response in a sombre tone:

Just getting the news from Atlanta, and I think...Asian Americans Asians are told, ‘Put your head down and work hard, and you’ll be acceptable to America. And it’s the model minority myth. The past few months have shown just how oppressive and dangerous that model minority myth is. We cannot be free to be our full selves: as soon as we step outside of what supremacy deems is acceptable and even if it has nothing to do with us, then how quickly that sidekick status can turn into the murder and violence that we have witnessed today. F*** white supremacy.

[shaking head]

²¹⁶ Captioned as “stopasianhate” #asianamerican #modelminority #asian, 289 likes, 66 comments, 13 shares.

²¹⁷ It is apparent that his post was filmed on the day of the shooting but uploaded the day after.

That could've been my mom. That could've been my sister. We need some help.

[staring straight into the camera, bows head into hand]

In this personal plea, one can see how the wound of Atlanta has effectively pulled from Vince's virtual past and desires as an immigrant and Asian American. From the start of his address, when speaking directly to the Asian American experience, the impacts on him and his community are palpable. His expressions of sadness, frustration, anger, disbelief, and helplessness are explicit for all to see. For this TikTok, he received some external support; 289 likes, 66 comments, and 13 shares. Comments from his followers were highly supportive, engaging, and expressed a lot of love towards him, such as the following responses on March 18, 2021 by:

usergg8: "You got a native brother here supporting ya brother";

userrgb: "I love you for who you are!!!!"; and,

usercc31410 (March 19, 2021): "We are strong together! Love and hugs to you, your family and all who are battling against hatred in this country [prayer hands]".

Vince's responses to the comments were just as encouraging and demonstrated a will for action, such as; "Yes! We have to speak out!", "Unite against racism," "One fight! [black heart emoji] let's go", and "We gotta fight the fight. If you're not fighting against white supremacy, you're protecting it". This momentum carried forward into his following post the next day.

The next day, Vince felt propelled into taking action beyond his words as the affective wound from the day before had deterritorialized him from his known territorial assemblage of anime and pop culture violin loops and opened up a potential becoming for him and those who would come to engage with his account. As a result of his deterritorialization from his known

assemblage, his account was not the same again. His escape, therefore, took the form of an “absolute positive” escape or rupture which “does not reproduce an established assemblage”; instead, it seeks to create new ones in order to produce “a new kind of world in the shell of the old world” (Nail, 2017, 36). From that moment forward, Vince's account became an explicit force for change. His TikToks became counter-responses to Oedipalizing structures imposed by the very real material forces of a white supremacist socio-economic and political system that has seeped into his digital world, his real life, and has impacted his community’s everyday existence.

Two days after the Atlanta shooting, on the 18th of March, 2021²¹⁸, Vince posted another TikTok, this time calling for action from Latinx, Indigenous, Black Americans, and white allies to build coalitions to fight white supremacy, stating that “we must fight with united spirit.” It was a passionate plea and call to arms that was pushed forward by his desires, determination and conviction to a fight against white supremacy, as a “war” fought only with the solidarity and unity between minoritized, racialized, and marginalized communities. It is apparent to the viewer that the way Vince chooses to ‘fight’ and take action will be through what he knows—his music loops and ability to educate. Since that day, his account has taken another turn.

Vince faced many blocks, most of which he experienced throughout his life growing up, and many in the digi-spaces of TikTok, which he has addressed in his various clap-back posts on microaggressions, such as “Where are you from?”²¹⁹ or “Microaggressions the Musical”²²⁰. In

²¹⁸ Video captioned as “Build coalitions”. #latinx #asianamerican #stopasianhate #asianlivesmatter #newmusic, 665 likes, 169 comments, 80 shares.

²¹⁹ Video posted on April 11, 2021 and captioned as “PSA” #microaggressions #stopasianhate #asianamerican #ytpeople #violin #learnwithme, 3524 likes, 164 comments, 155 shares.

²²⁰ Video posted on April 11, 2021 and captioned as “PSA” #microaggressions #stopasianhate #asianamerican #ytpeople #violin #learnwithme, 3524 likes, 164 comments, 155 shares.

addition, Vince developed posts dispelling myths and educating about Asians and AAPI in America, such as “Which Korea am I from?”²²¹ and “If I just met you for the first time... PSA”²²². Vince found a way of countering these blocks by creating a digital space to voice his desires with his followers and anyone who may come across his feed. For example, Vince has spent a multitude of posts addressing racist comments as #clapback in the various niches he transverses, such as #stopasianhate, #asian, #microaggressions, #violin, #koreanamerican, #asianamerican, #aapifamily, #immigrant, #indigenous, #justice, and #modelminoritymyth to name a few (see Figure 9).

Since the shift in his approach, Vince's content has increasingly appealed to his audience using what he knows, his musical background, his comedic talents, his intelligence, his personal experiences as an Asian American, and, more specifically, his experience as a Korean immigrant. His absolute positive escape manifests beyond the realm of the digital space carried forth by his music and by those who either follow or stumble upon his content. His content crosses boundaries and creates transversal bridges to “connect communities” affectively through his sound and effectively through the various digital spaces he moves through, as he had accomplished with his greatest musical achievement, his album.

Sasho (he/him/his currently in Boston, email, venmo, and website, 392 following, 400.7 K followers, 28 M likes)

²²¹ Video posted on April 23, 2021, captioned as “Someone seriously asked me this during an interview on stage”. #koreanamerican #microaggressions #ytpeople #politicalhumor #violin #stopasianhate, 34.8K likes, 0 comments, 759 shares.

²²² Video posted on April 6, 2021 and captioned as “PSA” #ytpeople #stopasianhate #asianamerican #microaggressions #jingle, 1228 likes, 159 comments, 75 shares.

Figure 10*Sasho*

Sasho began posting skits on TikTok in March of 2020. From an overall engagement with his account, one can learn that he has had some challenging experiences as a son of Korean immigrants in the United States. It was not until he was 21, after being inspired by another Asian American creator on social media at age 11 that he could surpass his many struggles with being a Korean and Asian American in the US. At that point in time, he gained the confidence to do what he is doing now on TikTok and in other spaces. That is, speaking loudly and proudly of his Korean heritage and what it is like to be a part of the Asian community²²³, as is apparent by his word cloud (see Figure 11). In this respect, the fact that he is a history major has not only helped him, but as he has alluded to in a tongue-in-cheek manner in one of his TikToks, it has

²²³ Video posted on July 19, 2020, captioned as “NICE GUYS bridge nigahiga kevjumba chestersee – Adrian Vincent”, 33.7K, 587 Comments, 379 shares.

fueled his fight against racists on the internet²²⁴. His posts range from an array of light-hearted personal topics, such as his interest in food, anime, Korean women, as well as having fun with his friends. All the latter in addition to more serious topics such as his experience as a Korean American, being Asian American, speaking out against all forms of racism and injustice (e.g., #BLM and #AsianLivesMatter), and teaching about the history and politics of Korea, including all the nations that have impacted it (e.g., Japan and the United States). If one follows Sasho, they would see that his TikTok space is organized in such a way that it centres what he deems his most essential TikToks, thus, giving his followers quick access to his resources, categorized under a Korean Flag, “Asian Skits,” and “History.”

Educating the Masses

Sasho has posted consistently and often. Therefore, there is a great deal of content to speak to, such as his education on Korean history and terminology related to racist practices against BIPoC communities. Maintaining the revolutionary tasks of schizoanalysis in mind, that is, observing and mapping the blockages and productions that emerge *in situ* in connection with anyone or anything within said space, the following sections will focus on two threads found within Sasho’s content. Those threads are being an immigrant and being a content creator in the digital space of TikTok.

Perpetually the Immigrant. As mentioned earlier, Sasho was born in the United States, and his parents immigrated from Korea in the hopes of a better life for their family²²⁵. He grew up in a predominantly white neighbourhood, going to predominantly white schools and, as he

²²⁴ Video posted on December 18, 2020 and captioned as “sorry mom sorry dad” #history #college #comedy #education #xyzbca #asian #korean #Artmas #StrikeAPosay #DejaTuHuella, 48.3K likes, 179 comments, 401 shares.

²²⁵ Video posted on January 20, 2021 and captioned as “2% Asian population there [laughing emoji]” #asian #cali #california #travel #korean #comedy #mclovin #pa #xyzbca #immigration, 19.5K 444 comments, 185 shares.

explains, these contexts shaped his experiences as an Asian American and son of Korean immigrants²²⁶. Throughout his various TikTok's, he touches on his past and the various struggles he faced with discrimination and racism because of his ethnicity and family background. As a result, he touches on the various blockages that Asian Americans either have placed upon themselves, as discussed through the model minority myth²²⁷ and the various impacts it has had not only on the Asian American community in the United States but on other minoritized and marginalized communities (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colour) as a result. He also discusses the blocks that the Asian American community and BIPOC community, in general, have placed upon themselves, namely an internalized and casual racism, accomplished by upholding white standards over their own to fit in (e.g., beauty, culture, dating only white)²²⁸ and what he has also referred to as in one of his TikTok's as "Asian self deprecation"²²⁹. The intensities working through these internalized and self-deprecating actions stem from a grander machinic system, one that is rooted in systemic racism, as touched on by Sasho in his TikToks, and goes deeper than a need to belong and to fit into white spaces. Ibram X. Kendi (2019) clearly expresses this expression of internalized self-hatred and self-deprecation in his book, *How to be an Antiracist*, which recounts his own experience with internalized racism. At the start of this

²²⁶ Video posted on July 18, 2020 captioned as "Asian boys rise up" #asian #korean #asianboys #letsfaceit #manifestation #laceemup, 5270, 179 comments, 80 shares; see footnote 29.

²²⁷ Videos posted on May 17 and May 25 of 2020. They are captioned respectively as: "I'm so tired of talking about this" #asian #racism #black #korean #chinese #indian #littlethings #got2bhome #EatEmUp #homeroutine, 3478 likes, 151 comments, 38 shares; "The model minority myth hurts us all" #asian #black #racism #modelminority, 2490 likes, 124 comments, 51 shares.

²²⁸ Video posted on June 27, 2020 and captioned as "Love yourselves, give yourselves more credit". #beauty #poc #asian #black #culture #white #skincare #history #Rags2Riches, 6055 likes, 191 comments, 318 shares.

²²⁹ Video posted on July 16, 2020 and captioned as "It starts with us" #asian #casualracism #racism #korean #chinese #culture #UnitedWeDance #NicerToMe #stereotypes, 2021 likes, 64 comments, 132 shares.

book, Kendi relates his story of internalized racism by giving a speech in high school whereby he espoused many racist ideas towards 'his' community. Troubled by this event, Kendi states:

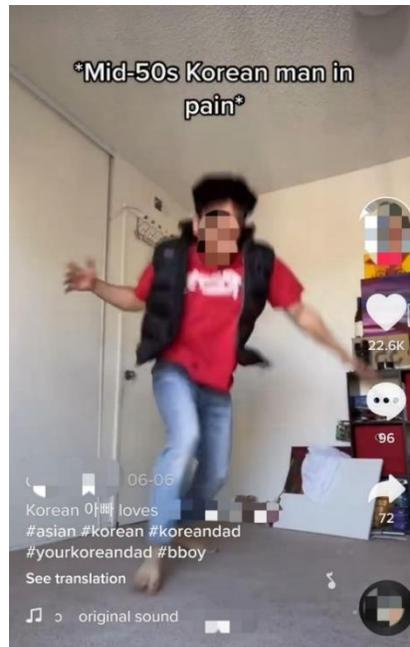
A racist culture had handed me the ammunition to shoot Black people, to shoot myself, and I took and used it. Internalized racism is the real Black on Black crime.... This is the consistent function of racist ideas...to manipulate us into seeing people as the problem, instead of the policies that ensnare them. (p. 8)

In addressing his followers in the "Asian self deprecation" series, of which there are two videos, Sasho asked on July 16, 2020, "Who are you doing this for?" as in for whom are you performing the degrading stereotypes? The stereotypes included calling one's self 'ling ling,' pulling one's eyes back, and talking in a funny Asian accent. Instead, Sasho states to his Asian followers;

When we ourselves perpetuate those stereotypes, we are giving permission to the white majority, to the status quo, to use those stereotypes against us as well. I understand the argument for reclamation of these stereotypes and not letting them not have power over us. The thing is, there's a tasteful and respectful way in order to do this. My friend @usercj (Roman) does a great job of portraying a character, a Korean dad, who has an accent but portrays an actual lived experience of how our parents might actually act.

This section observes how the desires of a power structure designed and constructed for a white majority is working upon the subjectivities of the minority, in this case, the Asian American community and BIPoC communities as a whole. Also observed are the desires of the Asian American community, who attempted to push back by reclaiming stereotypical and racist terms. While reclamation of language is a move that allows for one to take one's power back, it is a move that may not have much permanence. Language or terminology deterritorialization

could just as easily be co-opted and re-captured by the territorializing Oedipal force of the white majority and used against them. In its place, Sasho has offered a different option and escape for those who wish to counter majoritarian desires. He suggests a way of reclamation that is “tasteful and respectful” and allows for the Asian American voice to come through one’s lived experience. He does so collectively by going beyond his own space and suggesting the name of another content creator, his friend Roman who offers a different way of responding by *laughing with* rather than laughing at. This avenue of reclamation suggested by Sasho offers a way to potentially expand a collective becoming through the avenue of laughter (more on this in the subsequent case study). This use of laughter to produce a potential becoming is evidenced by Roman's video uploaded on June 6, 2021, where he is giving an impression of his #KoreanDad one-upping the ‘new Korean dad in town,’ Mr-Choo, at dancing (see Figure 12) (“Korean dad loves @userd” #asian #korean #koreandad #yourkoreandad #bboy, 22.6K likes, 96 comments, 72 shares).

Figure 11*Korean Dad*

Note. New Korean dad in town.

It was apparent, through engaging with Sasho’s videos and discussions that stemmed from video comment sections, that his content emerges from desires drawn from his virtual past (e.g., experiences or memories), as well as current interests and experiences pulled from the world and context around him. One TikTok that meshed all these elements together was his engagement with the release of a Golden Globe classified ‘foreign language film’ by the name of *Minari* (2020)²³⁰, directed by Lee Isaac Chung. He used this film to exemplify the perpetual foreigner status that Asian Americans hold in the United States. *Minari* is a film about a Korean family that immigrates to Arkansas. Sasho further relates that this film is directed, produced,

²³⁰ Video posted on December 28, 2020 and captioned as “#minari #a24 #film #asian #korean #history #CobraKaiChop #CozyAtHome #BRIDGERTON #xyzbca”, 39.9K likes, 528 comments, 1493 shares.

and acted by Americans and filmed in the US. Despite the fact that the US does not have an official language, the Golden Globes refused to classify the film as an American film, even though other films like it in the past have been classified as such²³¹. Sasho believes that this was due to the fact that it was filmed solely in Korean. In his video, he matter-of-factly exclaims, “the foreign part isn’t the language, it’s the people” he continues:

Because of years of propaganda and discrimination, Asian people will never be seen as American. This film is personal to me. I’m a Korean immigrant, this is my story. Growing up, my parents would always tell me,

[switching to Korean, the following is in captions]

‘Your face is Korean, but your heart is American.’

[back to English]

It’s too bad that the rest of America doesn’t feel that way.

The latter statement made by Sasho’s parents and his retort spoke volumes and instigated 528 comments. Glancing into the comments of this TikTok, one sees a drive for acceptance and belonging into a system not made for them. Here I present one comment thread depicting a Korean American viewpoint:

userhimh01: “As a Korean American, growing up I was called a banana...yellow outside but white inside. Can’t ever win either way... [angry emoji]” (12-28-2020)

userj.m: “Fr why can’t we just be American:/ we literally grew up here” (12-30-2020)

²³¹ The Golden Globes did not classify *Inglorious Bastards* as a Foreign Language film, filmed primarily in German and French.

userhimh01: “unfortunately we don’t fit Americans’ idea of an American. My kids are mixed race yet they are told they R Asians not “Americans.” Not white enough [swearing mad emoji].” (12-30-2020)

Here is another thread depicting who does relate and a reminder of place:

useros22: “As an indigenous person y’all are all foreign to me lol [laugh crying emoji]”
(12-31-2020)

useric: “totally valid, but for this video I wouldn’t say ur comment is really necessary”
(01-02-2020)

userom: “fr, I would think an indigenous person would relate more to us being discriminated by the colonizers rather than relate with the colonizers” (03-26-2020)

The legacy and tension many immigrant children, or children of immigrants, contend with, according to this TikTok, are accomplished by a sense of pride, a need, a lament, and resignation rolled into one.

Blocked. Racism thus far has been a constant block and driver of deterritorialization for the N|I youth that have appeared on my FYP. While TikTok, the machine, is always present and unseen in the background, ever surveillant and ever the accumulator of data, some tiktokkers will attract more attention than others. As discussed in Chapter Four in the section “User Suppression and Banishment,” the TikTok algorithm works to actively sort, categorize, suppress, and block certain accounts or videos over others. For example, if a user’s content or hashtag is tagged as “not for feed” (Ryan, Fritz, & Impiombato, 2020) or the user is reported by another user, then their account is at risk. Many creators on the app are taken down unjustly for speaking out against racism or hateful acts committed upon them or others. Not only has Sasho

been blocked by the desires flowing through TikTok for #hatespeech (see Figure 13), but he has been trolled and reported by many users who choose to be blatantly racist towards him or the Asian Community.

Figure 12

Blocked for #hatespeech



Note. Sasho. (December 1, 2020). Expressing his anger towards TikTok's policies.

In both of these cases, Sasho did not stay silent. In his video, he angrily called out TikTok on December 1, 2020, asking why his video was removed for calling out a racist action against the Chinese community. He also asks why the offender's video remained up. His video's caption reads, "@tiktok do better wtf #racism #hatespeech #asian." While one could understand Sasho's anger, it is difficult to pinpoint why the algorithm chose to block his video over the initial offender's. Could it have been a mass reporting instigated by the offender? Or was it a hashtag search that tagged him? In either case, it was a territorializing response to thwart an

escape attempted by Sasho, who was merely trying to call out the transgressions performed against a minoritized and racialized community. If it were a deliberate reporting by the troll and his followers, this would be an example of an “absolute negative” escape (Nail, 2007, p. 35) that completely rejects any of the established or potential new assemblages in their presence. For example, if the troll had rejected the established assemblage of his world that is inclusive of Asian Communities, that might have led him to act in a manner that seeks to destroy said assemblage by destabilizing them through acts of racism and hate. Secondly, if said troll did not like being deterritorialized—i.e., called out—for his hateful actions and was not open to receiving Sasho’s words, he may have acted out in such a manner as to destroy any possibility of a new assemblage that is inclusive of the Asian community. This later response is merely speculation. However, it seems a likely scenario, based upon the previous chapter on TikTok’s algorithm explaining that the algorithm is co-produced with the digital subjects it connects with and, therefore, works in tandem with their desires. That stated, TikTok is a techno-political assemblage, and those at its helm are not absolved of their complicity in these territorializing actions. This complicity is made obvious in the number of times members of the BIPoC community are targeted for shadowbanning, banishment and the similar story of unjust punitive actions that failed to ban the actual offenders.

The troll’s absolute rejection of the old and new assemblages can lead to them becoming fractured, whereby there is a possibility of easy recapture by other forces (Nail, 2007). As mentioned in the previous chapter, restating Deleuze and Guattari’s warning of this particular escape, Nail writes that “staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal

collapse, which brings them back down... heavier than ever (ATP199/161)” (p. 35-36). The first statement might be true for those looking to reject the old and new assemblages. Conversely, the act of being coded, categorized, and subjected is a big part of the problem within institutionalized racism, which, consequently, is the worst thing that could happen for those who are racialized and marginalized for their ethnicity. Hence, for Sasho, deterritorializing becomes about co-opting the absolute negative escape and attempting to turn it into an absolute positive and perhaps work to deterritorialize from an assemblage connected with racist ideas, policies, and structures. For Sasho, this escape is through confrontation and education.

In regards to the previous example of being blocked and other instances of trolls affecting the online spaces of TikTok, Sasho chooses to address his trolls head-on. While he could retaliate in a vengeful manner, his May 26, 2020²³² post offered a different way. In this particular video, labelled as “My message to @userdp” (in video), he addresses a troll and his followers regarding a past video in which Sasho had called out this particular user’s racist behaviour towards the Chinese community. As a consequence of userdps’ actions in this video, many users had trolled him in return. In Sasho’s video, he details how userdp made an ‘apology’ video (air quotes by Sasho) and spoke about being called the f-slur and receiving death threats. Following is Sasho's response to userdp and his followers:

Yeah, I’m sorry, dude, that shouldn’t be happening. It’s not acceptable. But when you come on my post when I said absolutely nothing but to share the post that you made.

²³² Captioned as “@userdp Please get the help you need” #asian #racism #aapifamily #politics #korean #chinese #aesthetic, 862 likes, 26 comments, 4 shares.

And then deny that it was racist in the first place. It gives me little reason to believe that you are actually sorry. I don't think you are a bad kid. I can see that you are troubled. I can see that you are ignorant. And, I can see that you are misguided. But this is your learning opportunity, right here, right now. Thousands of people have told you that it's racist, and it is. The internet is forever, and it is a scary place. Not everyone is going to sit you down and try to talk this over with you, okay? I just hope they don't find your job or your high school.

This address by Sasho demonstrates a few ways that N|I youth and those who interact with them are impacted in the digi-sphere. First, the desires of the collective subjectivity have a life unto their own. They are unpredictable and unknown, perhaps rightly making the internet “a scary place,” as Sasho claims. For instance, Sasho could not control how people chose to respond to userdp's hateful video, which, according to Sasho's video, were users lashing out in anger, users wanting to call out the wrong behaviour, users wanting revenge, and a call for potential vigilantism. Sasho could only control how he used his platform to speak to his followers regarding their responses towards userdp. This reaction to a video is applicable to any video and with any content creator. One cannot know what a digital 'collective' body of users will do in the digi-sphere. Sasho's response to this “kid” was to confront him for his behaviour and educate him, providing him with an opportunity to learn and grow. While he was talking predominantly to userdp, he was also addressing his collective, beginning his video with “you guys remember that video I made a few days ago...”, perhaps providing a learning opportunity for them as well. This video did not get many comments (26) or shares (4), hence, his message did not get very far. A becoming that was not accepted by all.

Mahasti (She/her, 19, link to Action Network, Instagram link, 193 following, 38.3K followers, 2.8M likes)

Figure 13

Mahasti



Out of the four N|I youth selected for this study, Mahasti was the only creator that did not have open public access to other platforms (e.g., Instagram), which would allow the casual TikTok user to cross platform borders with her. Her only available link, in her Bio, is to the Action Network organization that works to send letters to members of US Congress in the service of #SaveSheikhJarrah, a cause that seeks to aide and “protect Palestinian families and stop Israeli ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem” (n.p.). In an introductory video uploaded on June 4th of 2020, Mahasti describes herself as Somali, a “Positivity Queen!”, 18 (at the time of the video, currently 20), one that values “Allah and family over everything!”, and “A bad bitch all around!!!!” (in video) captioned as “#...get to know me!!” #muslim #somali #somalitiktok

#muslimtiktok, 2021 views, 223 likes, 5 comments, 4 shares. She is incredibly active on the platform, and since her first upload on May 17, 2020, she has been posting at a pace of 5 to 6 videos per day.

Her videos consist of her speaking on an array of topics pertaining to her experiences of being a Somalian Muslim, refugee, and immigrant in the United States. For example, she discusses her experiences wearing a hijab in public spaces in TikToks, such as “POV: Your hijab doesn’t look right...”²³³. At times, she seeks to educate her followers on various issues in videos such as “I see no colour is not the goal...”²³⁴, or by addressing white followers with questions, such as “How could you hate on me the colour that God gave to me for free, but you got to buy one?”²³⁵. She also addresses issues that matter to her, such as how men treat her, or Somali women, by telling them what or who they should be²³⁶. In addition, she has taken up social justice causes that have affected her, for instance, #blm, #GeorgeFloyd, #Libya, #sextrafficking, #SaveSheikhJarrah, and in China with the Uyghur Muslim community. More of her interests are reflected in Figure 14 as hashtags.

As mentioned earlier, Mahasti’s consistent posting produces an enormous amount of content for consumption and interaction by users. For this case study, two threads are highlighted. The first thread examines the blockages produced in the educational and digital realm working to stifle and inhibit Mahasti's subjectivity as an immigrant. The second thread

²³³ Video posted on June 6, 2020 and captioned as “relatable!!” #muslim #somalia #somali #somalitiktok #muslimtiktok, 136 likes, 4 comments, 0 shares.

²³⁴ Video posted on May 28, 2020, and captioned as “fyp please be educated!!!” #muslimtiktok #somali #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesheard #iseeyou, 373 likes, 11 comments, 3 shares.

²³⁵ Video posted on May 25, 2020, and no caption, 67 likes, 6 comments, 2 shares.

²³⁶ Video posted on May 28, 2020, and captioned as “I am I right!” #somali #muslimgirl #muslimtiktok #somalitiktok #muslimboy, 1245 likes, 138 comments, 73 shares.

demonstrates how she uses humour as a potential escape and counter response against the standardizing forces that wish to block her desires as a Muslim female N|I youth subjectivity.

Educational Blocks on N|I Youth

Mahasti has a few videos dedicated to her experience as an immigrant, a Muslim, and a self-described Hijabi²³⁷ within the public education system. On a video uploaded on June 3rd, 2020²³⁸, she comically and dramatically vents to her followers:

I was number one student back home, what you mean, F? What you mean, F? What you mean negative? What you mean F negative? Disappointment

[says something dismissive in her language]²³⁹.

In another post on May 21st, 2020²⁴⁰, she relates an experience with a substitute teacher that impacted her life for an entire school year and beyond. During the roll call, this teacher could not pronounce her name, so she decided to ‘play’ with the sounding, spelling, and meaning of Mahasti’s name. The result was that her Somalian Muslim name was made to sound sexualized, which made a tasteless mockery not only of her name but of Mahasti as a person.

Unfortunately, she was called that name for her entire first year of high school. In this particular video, she addresses her followers with a slight undertone of disbelief and critical inquisitiveness to instigate thought in her followers, “Can y’all believe a substitute teacher called me a *****?²⁴¹” [inflection in her voice rising at the end]. She has a

²³⁷ A woman or girl that wears a hijab (a head covering).

²³⁸ Captioned as “POV: my dramatic Somali mom when I receive an B on an test!!!!” #somali #muslim #somalitiktok #muslimtiktok, 164 likes, 9 comments, 2 shares.

²³⁹ Another similar TikTok talking about the same issue on May 31, 2020, and captioned as “Relatable?” #comedy #exam #jokes #somali #muslim #zycba #zyxcba, 41 likes, 2 comments.

²⁴⁰ Captioned as “Struggles” #starbuckshack #thisisamerica #hijabi #muslim #ethnicity #classof2020 #highschool #somalia, 26 likes, 4 comments, 6 shares.

²⁴¹ I cannot state the derogatory term since it would give away Mahasti’s real name and it is demeaning to her.

straightforwardness to her address, taking up the whole screen and staring right into her follower's eyes [the camera]. This experience had affected her to the point that she has carried it forward with her into the digital sphere and has extended it beyond her TikTok platform by sharing it with her collective digital others and onto other digital niches, such as #starbuckshack, #thisisamerica, #hijabi, #muslim, #ethnicity, #classof2020, #highschool, and #somalia.

What the previous two examples demonstrate is the significant role that schools and teachers²⁴² can play in the wellbeing, resettlement, adjustment, and educational success of immigrant and marginalized youth, as spoken of in the introductory chapter, under the section "School Affects | Effects" (Bennouna et al., 2019; Liversage et al., 2021; Makarova et al., 2019). In this section, the many challenges that forcibly displaced people from across the globe face and continue to struggle with in adjusting to a new place, such as learning a new language, learning a new way of living, and learning a new societal context, were discussed. Regarding N|I youth, they face specific difficulties in the educational realm, such as a rigid educational system (Mikulecky, 2013 as cited in Bennouna et al., 2019); high educational expectations (Wong & Schweitzer, 2017 as cited in Bennouna et al., 2019); and perceptions that foster hostility, and, at times, acts of violence (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015 as cited in Bennouna et al., 2019).

Returning to the examples of Mahasti in the school system, one will notice how the desires of the US educational system—as a machinic entity—work upon her refugee-immigrant youth body. As touched on by Bennouna et al. (2019), it can offer a rigid curricular and

²⁴² Schools and teachers are not the only factors fostering N|I youth wellbeing, resettlement, and educational success. There are a variety of reasons, and it is complex. This exploration is better suited for a separate study on its own with online spaces.

standardized structure of rules and tests that function against youths already struggling with relocation, potential traumas, parental stressors, societal adjustment, and well as language and social barriers. In the first example, not only does Mahasti have to contend with parental expectations of her maintaining her high grades from Somalia, but she must also contend with the challenging expectations placed upon her by her new teacher. One might see here how the desires of her online portrayal, who she wants to be, and who she once was, clash with the blocks that her new society, and educational system, have placed upon her.

In the second example, the real and material impacts that racist microaggressions can have upon a racialized and marginalized body and be taken up as a collective becoming in the worst possible way, become explicit (Rai, 2013; Saldanha, 2006). Here one can observe how the dynamics and forces of power can flow through the systems of racism and discursive structures of schools—e.g., teachers—to manage, morally subjugate, and, in the end, consume youth for capital gain (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Foucault, 1982; Lazzarato, 2006). Thus, actively blocking any N|I youth escapes or deterritorializations in educational spaces. Of course, these are not all the cases (Liversage et al., 2021; Roxas & Velez, 2021). However, according to the studies reviewed above, they are the majority. By observing Mahasti, one can see how she positions herself to counter these narratives by carrying these actions forward into a different space, that of the digi-space of TikTok, and retelling them through her voice to her followers. Mahasti deterritorializes and escapes from the established assemblage of the educational realm and ‘real-world’ to build something new on TikTok. However, does her escape become absolute?

Roxas and Velez (2021), in their article, *Photovoice as Micro-Invitation*, describe how communities of colour that experience racial assaults in the form of microaggressions will consistently feel numb disempowered, and their sense of identity and self-worth is harmed (Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2006) In Roxas & Velez, 2021). Roxas and Velez's research highlights how "im/migrant high school students challenged everyday microaggressions" through the building of collective acts of resistance through "access[ing] the benefits of *photovoice*," which they name as acts of "micro-invitations" (p. 268). They found that "im/migrant" students "wanted to both describe their lives in and out of school, but also invite their peers, teachers, and members of the local community to better understand their unique situations and contexts of reception" (p. 278). Although the act of a micro-invitation is imagined as a collective act of resistance within the school context, for Roxas and Velez, it could be extended into the digital realm. Mahasti, for instance, has taken an experience of racism that has impacted her for an entire year and moved it onto TikTok, a digital platform that she shares with her followers and anyone she wishes to include (via hashtag). In this digi-space, she has carried forth her desires as an N|I female youth from Somalia who is also Muslim and is often a marginalized and racialized black person. In these spaces, she has attempted to "(re)cast and (re)frame the ways in which we [her audience] view" her and the situation of being a marginalized person (p. 279). Most of her video content is of her own experiences, thus, her escape is attached to a construction of her identity and perceived self image. Although she successfully escaped one assemblage and created another, her deterritorialization remains ambiguous in its potentiality for collective becomings. In the presented personal videos, hers is a "relative positive" escape that deterritorializes from the educational assemblage to build a

new one on TikTok, however, there is not a defined idea of what will become of her video blogs (Nail, 2017, p. 35). That stated, what Mahasti is successful at is delivering with humour and, perhaps it is in those affect generating moments where one might see a glimpse of what could become when connecting with Mahasti's content.

Humour as Potential Escape

This section highlights Mahasti's free-spirited sense of humour and how it is used to build community, alleviate the external pressures, and counter hurtful and stereotypical narratives that are acting upon both her digital body and that of her community. While other N|I youth engaged with have used humour in physical ways—i.e., performing comedic musical loops (e.g., Vince) or goofy stunts with their friends (e.g., Sasho)—what differentiates Mahasti are the ways in which her humour flows through the majority of her interactions, even her serious ones. For example, using TikTok filters to distort her appearance and create different personas (see Figure 15), generating pun-filled joke series that revolve around Muslim names (beginning with her own), and laughing—at herself and her content.

Figure 14

Mahasti + TikTok Filters



Note. Mahasti's 'third eye'²⁴³ filter.

Through humour, Mahasti has managed to reterritorialize what should be harmful and territorializing offences (e.g., microaggressions or explicit expressions of hate) upon her subjectivity.

Overall, as a digital N|I subject, Mahasti has spent less time on what most would interpret as digital social justice educating and, instead, has spent more time being a teenage content creator speaking intimately to her 38.3K followers in the digi-sphere. She light-heartedly speaks on and makes jokes on various topics, such as her parents and family, being

²⁴³ Uploaded on December 27, 2020, and captioned as "My third eye is here!!" #CobraKaiChop #december21 #CozyatHome, 628.4K likes, 10.3K comments, 8690 shares.

Muslim, being an immigrant, being Somalian and North African, and generally pokes fun at herself. My first introduction to Mahasti was on November 24, 2020²⁴⁴. Her video began;

Why I think immigrant kids make the best influencers. First of all, we are too grown for our age. We have been reading government papers since we were 8 years old... [And here is where you see her personality come through as she holds back a giggle with a squeak] Second, we don't take anything to the heart. Okay, we get body-shamed on the daily. Threats on the daily from our parents. At this point, it's a regular day.

In the article, *Going to Bed White and Waking Up Arab: On Xenophobia, Affect Theories of Laughter, and the Social Contagion of the Comic Stage* (2014), Cynthia Willett and Julie Willett, look to affect studies²⁴⁵ for understanding the impacts of xenophobia. In particular, they examine how humour could potentially transform or alter the negative social context "through waves of cathartic laughter" (p. 87). They further state that "laughter functions as a source of emotional release...relief from the normal unpleasant stresses...of the social world...It can [also] shift perceptions and alter social reality" (p. 87). While they recognize that affect studies understand xenophobia as a contagious "affect of fear targeting a race or ethnicity" (p. 86). They contend that laughter, like fear, is a "socially contagious" affect that can cross borders across groups having the power to generate solidarity across identities (p. 88). For example, when first introduced to Mahasti on my FYP, I laughed *with her* because I could relate as a

²⁴⁴ Captioned as "The Blanket is my" #muslim #somalia #muslimcommunity #muslimtiktoks #immigrantmom #creator, 33.5K likes, 352 comments, 646 shares.

²⁴⁵ How affect is engaged with here is different than how affect is engaged with by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009, 1980/1987), whom she affects as a nonconscious intensity or force (i.e., desire) that emerges from the virtual into the actual (and back again). It is not to be taken as an emotion, although it can produce an emotion. However, affect for this study is grounded in the feeling or transfer of emotions in an environment or context. Willett and Willett are informed by philosophers and scholars, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa Brennan, John Protevi, Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, and Sarah Ahmed.

daughter of Chilean immigrants who often asked me to translate or speak for them in various contexts. In deterritorializing from an overly standardized “social context,” such as the demands of immigrant parents or a society that is not made for one's culture, language, or ethnicity, Mahasti's desires have connected with her TikTok spaces to shift her follower's perceptions of what it means to be a child of an immigrant in the US. In doing so, potentially generating a sense of solidarity or collective becoming.

I LOL in the Face of Oppression. Recalling the substitute teacher incident from the beginning of this section. The following example demonstrates how Mahasti drew from this bitter experience to create a counter perspective for herself and establish a sense of community. She begins by telling a joke about her name²⁴⁶:

Mahasti: What do you call a Somali girl that's a M*****?²⁴⁷

—A M*****!

[laughing and giggling ensues]

[Behind her, you can hear her friend laughing]

“People the user name. I am not a M*****!”

[laughing]

While this joke may not make much sense to the reader, it generated a response from her viewers²⁴⁸, receiving high statistics in relation to her previous videos. Furthermore, upon reading the comments, there was an observed variety of responses. For instance, there were

²⁴⁶ Video post on May 24th, 2020 and captioned as “#indoorlooks #minivlog #somali #somalitok #thankmelater #meme #jokes #muslimstiktok ##eid #eidmubarak #memes”, 4823 likes, 166 comments, 353 shares.

²⁴⁷ I could not tell the joke fully as it would reveal Mahasti's real name. Imagine that it was a sexualized version of her name. This is the name her teacher gave her on the first day of her first year of high school.

²⁴⁸ It also generated a series of Muslim and Somali name joke TikToks by Mahasti.

users who laughed along with her as evidenced by emojis and ‘LOLs’²⁴⁹ and users who commiserate with her since they share the same name, ergo, shared a laugh. Other users did not understand or like the joke (5 stated this), such as those wanting to change their name due to bullying (2 stated this) or those upset by the implication of the joke. For instance, userb23 on May 25, 2020 stated, “Bro there is no way y’all find this funny”. Usercc, on the same day, particularly stood out for wanting to tell the joke to anyone that shared Mahasti’s name, “thank you, next time I see one²⁵⁰, I’ll tell this joke”.

Willett and Willett (2014) explain, through the work of Boskin and Dorinson, that “the use of retaliatory jokes by ethnic minorities can be an adaptive and even a triumphant response to an oppressive culture” (p. 97). In the meantime, the oppressive culture tends to use an aggressive style of humour for one or both of the following reasons, to create conflict or control (Willett & Willett, 2014). When creating conflict, it is used in forms, such as irony, sarcasm, satire, and parody, in order to “weaken the out-group” and strengthen the “in-group” (p. 97). This positioning to generate conflict was the case for Mahasti when the substitute teacher decided to create a parody of her name. The teacher’s decision to make fun of her name on the first day of class weakened Mahasti in front of her relocating country’s peers. In a similar vein, in her video's comment section, it is difficult to interpret the comment made by the usercc above who wanted to retell her joke to other namesakes. For instance, is their intention to create conflict and control, or banter? One can only speculate, and in doing so, incorporating one’s

²⁴⁹ Laugh Out Loud.

²⁵⁰ What the user meant by ‘one’ is ambiguous. Is it someone else that carries her name or someone else that is Muslim, hijabi, Somali, or black and female?

own desires into the interpretation. Nevertheless, Mahasti's joke has been carried forward into a space beyond her niche's borders to be connected with by others.

Becoming with N|I

Throughout my observations, I came across plenty of tiktokkers. The algorithm, however, specifically recommended a select few with which I connected. Their spaces were a landing pad that acknowledged, understood, and acted upon similar experiences and issues that flowed through my own life as an immigrant youth growing up and continues to have a profound impact on my adult life. I was able to access my virtuals and pull them into the present by observing how N|I youth TikTok spaces, particularly their comment sections, brought together other youth or adults to *become with* them—i.e., the content creator, the other users, and the spaces they transverse. In the process of connecting with N|I youth in these spaces, one is potentially learning and engaging with the idea of N|I, Asian, Korean, South Asian, Muslim, racism, white supremacy, or any topic emerging in their videos and commentary discussions (see Figure 4). In other words, through the youth creators' stories, actions, and often implied experiences, including the observed comment section discussions, I was pulling from the great multiplicity of experiences that I had lived through, and have not yet lived through, and found myself opening up to new connections, differing perspectives, and being invited and provoked into viewing N|I *differently*. In being an active participant in the online spaces, as a researcher, I recognized in each content creator the importance of such spaces to express their thoughts, be heard, be validated (by most), and be *doing* something productive (e.g., educating, pushing back). By connecting in the spaces of TikTok, content creators and the users of TikTok that take the time to watch and comment can create a meaningful place.

Anastasi²⁵¹, for instance, is a social justice motivated latine youth born in the US to N|I Mexican parents. She struggles with her identity and is vocal on numerous issues impacting her and the latine community and her family. Milos²⁵² is a comedian with stories of growing up as an immigrant, and I will never forget his TikTok of the #immigrantblanket that every immigrant family seems to have, which saved him from the winter storm in Texas. I was transported into my teen bedroom that day. Filip²⁵³ was adept at explaining the struggles of being a #thirdculturekid while cooking his collection of fusion recipes constructed from his ethno-cultural roots and familial history. I enjoyed his kitchen education thoroughly. Next are creators like Max, Vince, Sasho, and Leila, who were all socially conscious and active in their communities, and were trying to build bridges in their distinct ways between worlds.

All the aforementioned creators uniquely reached beyond themselves, connecting with their followers and travelled beyond to educate and create community. I observed how a few managed to extend to other platforms and build movement into the 'real' world, such as Max, who took his activism to the streets to protest with #BLM, #AsianLivesMatter, and to speak on media outlets as a representative for the Asian American Community in his area. On more than one occasion, I witnessed how creators would cross onto one another's spaces to amplify and support the other in their causes. For instance, Max²⁵⁴ stitched Sasho's TikTok asking children of immigrants not to be ashamed of their native language and put the effort in to learn it. As

²⁵¹ Video posted on June 10, 2021 captioned as "#argentina #latinoamerica #brasil #mexicoo #mexicans #brazilians #argentinians #warning, 45.7K likes, 3492 comments, 1733 shares.

²⁵² Video posted on February 18, 2021, captioned as "We must honor the blankets #immigrantblanket," 40.2K likes, 2554 comments, 1081 shares.

²⁵³ Video posted on July 9, 2021, captioned as "They never got in trouble either, just me [face palm emoji]" #NightDoneRight #asian #aapi, 3408 likes, 97 comments, 8 shares.

²⁵⁴ Uploaded on August 16, 2021, "stitch with Sasho love that this generation refuses to be shamed for our culture and heritage. Y'all make me proud af" #community #culture, 2173 likes, 103 comments, 23 shares.

observed in the case study above, Leila is one who took her perspectives on South Asian culture and what it means to be an immigrant onto a podcast platform on Spotify. Also mentioned above, Vince transported his activism and experiences onto other mediums and platforms. Through the algorithm's 'recommendations' and sorting, the content creators above have reached countless FYPs and they are still going.

Minoritarian-Becomings?

As touched upon in earlier sections, it is with limits that one can experience a minoritarian becoming or an “absolute positive escape” (Nail, 2017, p. 36) since a user or content creator is not ‘free’ on this app or the entirety of the digital realm. Recalling that freedom and fluidity are illusory, highly monitored, and codified in the digi-sphere, N|I youth, as digital subjects, who transverse these spaces will always be at the mercy of the algorithm that places them in contact with specific individuals and spaces (Andrejevic, 2013; Deleuze, 1990/1995; Savat, 2010, 2013). Similarly, they are bound by the power structures flowing through its spaces in addition to the physical technologies and constructed boundaries of the digi-spaces they choose to cross into—often designed by and for those who own²⁵⁵ the space. Nevertheless, youth and anyone who connect with these spaces are machinic subjects that can be co-creators and producers of the digital reality they are presently in.

While it may or may not become explicitly apparent to the N|I digital subject, majoritarian and standardizing structures seek to limit or obscure freedoms, either as constructed boundaries on the digi-sphere (e.g., TikTok interface, ‘recommended’ niches, and

²⁵⁵ And their partners and the interests the platform may serve.

rules) or as flows beneath the surface (e.g., techno-capitalism, white supremacy, educational expectations). In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) state that *it is not a question of how to become free from the standardizing structures*. Instead, one must consider, *how does one find a new path where there was none before?* As such, when inventing a minor literature or minoritarian becoming—i.e., a people to come—there are three characteristics one, in this case a N|I youth, should consider, those are: i) Has one been affected or unsettled (deterritorialized)? ii) Is your deterritorialization connected to a political urgency? and, iii) Has your deterritorialization generated a collective assemblage of enunciation (e.g., is it collective expression)? (p. 16-17, 18; see also, Bogue, 1997).

Positioning N|I Digital Subjects on TikTok

In the digi-spaces of TikTok, N|I youth, as digital subjects, often positioned themselves or are positioned as minorities in the emergent assemblages generated. Whereby the standardizing discourse or structure would vary for each of them, *in situ*. For Leila, for instance, the standard she encountered (or was in alterity to) was often her traditional South Asian cultural expectations perpetuated by her parents, the Desi community in diaspora, and the fabricated 'homeland.' For Vince and Sasho, it was racism, the model-minority myth, and anti-Asian hate upheld by standardizing institutions of white supremacy in the United States. Finally, for Mahasti, educational institutions connected with white supremacy that forced stringent expectations and specific perceptions of her as a refugee and a Somalian Muslim woman. These positionings and felt social injustices were the impetus for a movement and change. Hence, the four youths were affected and unsettled into a politically characterized escape. However, the question emerges as to whether their escapes collective and absolute?

In this project, deterritorializations are forms of escapes (Nail, 2017), and each of the four N|I youth experienced an escape—relative or absolute—in their own manner. As observed, through the explored case studies, limits or boundaries do exist in the form of blockages. Nevertheless, these limitations have not prevented their N|I desires from initiating affective responses by creating new utterances and fabulations, for themselves and others. These desires are evidenced through their acts of initiating and producing TikTok vlog creations (Leila; Mahasti; Sasho; Vince), hashtag generation and manipulation (Mahasti; Sasho)²⁵⁶, musical loops (Vince), and providing thought-provoking and emotionally charged content in order to educate or elicit a response (whether intended or not) (Leila; Mahasti; Sasho; Vince). In these circumstances, one might begin to witness how they all attempted to invent or forge a new way or manner of being for themselves and others in the digi-spaces they created (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). As explained in the first chapter, there is a difference between a becoming minority and becoming minoritarian.

Minorities are the beginning of a potential and not the actual becoming. They are “thought of as seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 106). As explored in Chapter One, for N|I digital subjects online, as users and content creators on TikTok, being minoritarian can become about their power and potential to produce connections beyond themselves with the content they are producing or sharing. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), it is not merely a matter of using or displaying a minor or minority language or

²⁵⁶ I do not spend time on this as much as I would like in my case analysis. However, if one observes the hashtags of these creators, one will notice how they play with them or use hashtags that have nothing to do with their topic. This would be an area of further research.

identifier as a regional localism that makes one revolutionary. Instead, it is “by using a number of minority elements, by connecting them, conjugating them, [that] one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (p. 106). Leila, Sasho, and Vince showcased this difference in expression. For example, throughout Leila’s videos, it is was not so much that she was speaking about her own experience growing up in a South Asian household (e.g., I did this...). Instead, it was that she was using her experiences to extract issues in order to educate and provoke conversations from her followers and other users (e.g., “Do you ever...?”, “No not equality, you mean...”). These issues did not solely belong to her, but to everyone who could relate to them by pulling from their virtual past (i.e., multiplicities), thereby allowing anyone who connected with her content to *become-other* perhaps, initiate a *thinking with*. By depersonalizing and disassociating herself from experiences, Leila was acting as an “anybody” or “vital potential” for anyone that engaged with her space to become affected and form their unique path with their collective multiplicities (Deleuze, In Rajchman, 2000, p. 87-88). Leila demonstrates this disconnection by addressing her audience by provoking them with questions or by using impersonal yet personal anecdotes paired with humour, meme culture, or music.

Fabulation, Power, and TikTok Becomings. Lived or shared experiences as digital stories or fabulations—e.g., creative content on TikTok—can have the power to modify and construct online digital subjects’ historical and personal pasts, present, and potential futures to come. Fabulations, however, can also work to transform one’s modes of thinking and being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994). Deleuze (1985/2013) defines fabulations, or powers of the false, as a form

of story-telling²⁵⁷, as linked to a writer's ability to create new worlds or a director's ability to narrate through images (see also, Bogue, 2005/2010). Fabulation is a form of myth-making, as it relates to human's ability to invent gods, religions, and social rules used to enforce obedience (Bogue, 2005/2010). In other words, fabulations can have a set image in mind for the future by having a majoritarian agenda (e.g., nationalism), a discourse in mind (e.g., harmful rhetoric against marginalized groups), or it can leave the future open as a potential for something new to arise.

A fabulation, as a "fabricat[or] of giants" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986), seeks to go beyond one's lived experiences or memories in its becoming. Fabulation can call forth the memories of others to initiate a creative movement beyond. Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986, 1980/1987, 1991/1994) call this the invention of a people to come, although, for this project, it is also about provoking new modes of thinking and manners of being. Leila's and Sasho's content accomplished this to some extent through their ability to open up spaces for thinking *differently* through their story-telling and educating.

For this research, I engaged explicitly with fabulations as taken up by Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) in *What is Philosophy?* and as powers of the false in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Deleuze, 1985/2013). In *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994), fabulations are spoken of in relation to their use in art, which I attempt to extend into the digital

²⁵⁷ Found in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Deleuze, 1985/2013) concerning powers of the false in cinema. Deleuze ties the power of the false to a director's ability to weave and manipulate narration in cinema (pp. 133-136). The story, according to Deleuze, "concerns the subject-object relationship and the development of this relationship" (p. 147). This relationship on the cinema screen, which could translate onto the digital screen, is who is observing (object/objective) and who is being observed (subject/subjective). Also, the story could be seen as the relationship between two images or discourses, that which is objective and which is subjective—i.e., the one being and the one doing.

media realm. In particular, drawing from their chapter on “Percept, Affect and Concept,” where art is considered as a “monument” (p. 164) that is independent from the artist and the subjects observing it. As a monument, art preserves and “is preserved in itself” (p. 163). In other words, art must be able to stand alone for all time, and what is preserved are the “blocs of sensations...a compound of percepts and affects” (p. 164)²⁵⁸. Deleuze and Guattari explicitly state that, as a monument, art does not preserve or commemorate a given past, therefore, storing memories. Instead, if there is a feeling of a particular past being reflected in the art, it is due to the connection that is made between a particular person’s past experience and the piece of art. In other words, art is not only what is perceived in the usual sense, where a thing is observed, but how people and things experience it, it is the affects that a piece of art can produce which could initiate a becoming (deterritorialization). Whether or not said deterritorialization is productive and collective is the unknown. As discussed by Marks (2005/2010), percepts make the invisible forces of the world visible, much like Shield’s (2014) *visualities*²⁵⁹, as discussed in Chapter One. As explored in this study, the affects and percepts (visualities) that emerged from the content produced and the comment sections were the video statistics (e.g., likes, shares), the hashtag manipulations, music, and expressed emoting from the creators and the users. The enunciations from those responses were also

²⁵⁸ This is not the same as perceptions or affections. Sensations, percepts, and affects are independent from the subject and exist in their absence as the potentials of a becoming to come. Perceptions and affections, on the other hand, are tied to the subject and are what is ‘seen’, ‘observed’, ‘felt’ through opinions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994).

²⁵⁹ Where the visual is understood alongside the invisible, stating that a “visuality draws attention to the operational processes, techniques, and technologies that support visibility and invisibility in their everyday senses” (Shields, 2014, p. 190).

made visible in duets with other creators, the creation of additional content, the movement onto other platforms, and the construction of a digital subjectivity²⁶⁰.

Channelling Deleuze and Guattari, Bogue (2005/2010) defines *fabulation* as a “specific mode of becoming” that creates “larger-than-life images that transform and metamorphose²⁶¹ conventional representations and conceptions of collectivities, thereby enabling the invention of a people to come” (p. 100). Such is the case for music, for instance. Music is an invisible force. However, when played, it can conjure images from the virtual, thus making it visible and giving it a material form. Vince successfully used his classical violin training to challenge and transform the standard in terms of what the milieu of classical play could look like, what the discourse of classical music could be, and for whom classical music is meant. Vince’s absolute escape was his use of juxtaposition when playing his light-hearted and comedic musical approach for affectively and effectively capturing the attention of his audience and indirectly critiquing, commenting upon, and educating others about the standardizing structures of society. Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) write that “artists are presenters of affects...they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound” (p. 175). The sensations created from music call forth from the virtual to connect with the present to create new potential becomings. Vince’s musical loops could call forth sensation and have the potential to stand on its own to preserve itself as a digital monument for as long as it continues to live online.

²⁶⁰ This was witnessed by watching a content creator's evolution from start to present day on TikTok (Vince).

²⁶¹ Connect objects/subjects that are different from one another to create new becomings (transversality).

The concept of "the power of the false as the principle production of images" through telling a story in cinema is a valuable concept for connecting with media and digital spaces in general (Deleuze, 1985/2013, p. 131). That stated, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, a fabulation can either close a future by telling a story with a specific image in mind or open up towards a new kind of future through the creation of a new story in connection with something or someone else. TikTok²⁶², as a digital space, is filled with stories and the creators of images. Images²⁶³ set on a platform (e.g., TikTok) that "shatter the empirical continuation of time," "bring together the before and after in a becoming," break a "chronological succession," and, for some, "breaks with indirect representation" (p. 155). As witnessed with the content creators mentioned above, they all have, in one way or another during their various enunciations, pulled their fellow user's past experiences from them and, in so doing, brought forth the conditions for the new to emerge (Deleuze, 1985/2013). Leila, for instance, accomplished this through her exposés, such as delving into how conservative parents function to block Desi women's subjectivities. Sasho did this through his co-option and then deterritorialization from a different assemblage to show users a different manner of being against racist structures, ideas, and policies.

Additionally, they were all able to capture their follower's attention through affect generation, as demonstrated through the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the statistics of their likes, shares, and comments. Their expressions were made explicit through a diverse usage of hashtags they created (see Figure 4) In addition, content produced

²⁶² The internet as a whole.

²⁶³ Specifically, time-images that are part of the "series of time," otherwise known as the third time-image (Deleuze, 1985/2013, p. 155).

enunciations were deterritorialized from their initial assemblages and propelled into the digi-spaces of TikTok to do something different for themselves and others. While they each had their initial reasons for beginning their TikTok platforms or transformation on TikTok, they did not have an initial image in mind for their paths forward. Even when Vince was wounded and felt propelled to act in order to help the AAPI community after the Atlanta Shooting, he did not have an exact vision in mind for collective action. There were also invitations for engagement from all the content creators to their audience. For instance, an invitation to participate and act from Vince, an invitation to be educated from Sasho, an invitation to laugh from Mahasti, and an invitation to dialogue and share from Leila. Why was this all possible? There was an observed distancing from the personal “I” in most of their vlogs. Yes, there were introductory and reflexive videos, however, most of their content was emergent from their collective experiences, not necessarily about *their* experiences. Relating to their followers seemed to increase the appeal of their videos for a greater audience. Even though the ‘I’ was not always present, a strong sense of their self-identified identity became more apparent with each video engagement. There was a stronger attachment to cultivate and maintain said identity through their content (expressions or minority discourse) under forces impinging upon it or seeking to transform it. Overall, their potential escapes were positioned in alterity to any Oedipalizing forces—e.g., parents, educators, white supremacist rhetoric— that oppressed their ability to maintain said identities, be they cultural, ethnic, racial, social, or gender-related. Part of what the desiring cases were doing, consciously or not, were exposing the forces working against them, not only to themselves, but to any user, bot, space that connected with them on TikTok

and beyond. In so doing, they were acting towards an active transformation of an imposed standard and the potential for a *becoming-with* a new future to come.

Chapter Six – A Summary and Other Connections

As a transversal (Guattari, 1992/2006) project and work of public pedagogy (Burdick, Sandlin, & O'Malley, 2014; jagodzinski, 2014), this dissertation is an exploration into how the digi-spaces of TikTok affect and effect NI youth (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994; Guattari, 1992/2006). As observed, N|I youth have constructed specific identities and images for themselves online as digital subjects. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is not only on how youth seek to transform or directly reaffirm said representations or identities. Instead, its primary aim is to expose the standardizing forces flowing through the various digi-spaces created and observe how N|I youth respond to them. Therefore, this study actively engages with a schizoanalytic framework and philosophy of desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, 1980/1987) that seeks to map the desires and productions of four N|I youth (ages 18 to 25~), Leila, Vince, Sasho, and Mahasti.

Through a combination of netno- and techno-graphic methods for online ethnography (Kien, 2009; Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2018; Lugosit & Quinton, 2018; Powell, 2010; Sandlin, 2007), this research project observed and gathered expressions (enunciations) of the above-mentioned N|I youth to later *transverse with* and *think with* (Deleuze, 1990/1995; Mazzei, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) the concepts of assemblage and machine theory, deterritorialization, affective wounds (Clough, 2009, 2016), fabulation (Deleuze, 1985/2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994), place, and the potential for a minoritarian-becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, 1975/1986) as discussed throughout the dissertation. This work aimed to engage with N|I youth in ways that extended beyond the

superficial, pre-given and given constructed images or representative expressions generated from and for themselves or others (e.g., peers, politicizing and institutional forces, capitalism). Instead, as a transversal project online, this dissertation sought to acknowledge and connect with N|I youth expressions as they emerged *in situ*, as *singularities* with multiplicities that are not only acted upon but can act upon and affect|effect others. In other words, N|I youth, as digital subjects, are not solely observed (by a viewer) as a representation of an imposed identity in the digi-spaces they have co-constructed on TikTok, they are observed as active participants and co-creators of place in connection with others, as demonstrated in Chapter Five.

Questions Un/Answered

I began this research study with the questions: *Where and how might youth, particularly N|I youth, develop “counter responses” in the digital and offline spaces they transverse, alone and in connection with others?* This question then spawned the secondary question; *Is there a place for minoritarian politics online?* Moreover, *what might digi-spaces do for N|I youth, as digital subjects, who transverse them to generate place for themselves and others?*

Freedom is Illusory

The first question is essential for N|I youth or anyone looking to ‘freely’ and/or ‘creatively’ express themselves in whichever form they choose online. As discussed in the sections on “Capitalist Machine” and “Control Society and Digital Media” in Chapter Two, there is no such thing as ‘freedom’ or ‘free’ expression online. The internet is a territory of enunciation where humans connect as digital subjects, and users of the space can become

sources of data and commodities for the standardizing forces that flow through its multitudinous spaces. This *datafication*—codification and categorization—can be observed in digi-spaces, such as TikTok, whose developers are diligent about the ways in which they seek to control their platform and users within it through the algorithm and by other means.

Such control is evident, for instance, through the use of long, at times ambiguous, and continuously changing *Community Guidelines*, *Privacy Policies*, and *Terms of Service* agreements. While these rules are meant to protect the vulnerable, they are often skewed in interpretation, enforcement, and use. Dr. Casey Fiesler (as cited in Press-Reynolds, 2022), technology and digital ethics researcher, states in an interview with *Business Insider* that TikTok's guidelines are highly detailed, allowing individuals to name the infractions perpetrated against them. However, she does not have "a great deal of confidence in the moderation system" since TikTok does not tell perpetrators of the rules they have broken (para. 8; see also, @professorcasey, 2022). As discussed in this dissertation, this break down in communication between TikTok and its users results in a lack of transparency, wrongful blocks, suspensions, shadowbans, and the continuation of trolling by groups that have not been held responsible, as demonstrated with Sasho, for instance. As a result, these rules end up working against those they are made to protect and work in favour of TikTok as a business machine, as discussed in Chapter Four. This business machine is nothing less than the conglomerate of TikTok and those it serves, namely corporate partners or marketing sponsors. In addition, Tik-Tok is directed towards those favoured by the algorithm, as explicated in Chapter Four.

Although one might like to think that content creators who make a small profit through the Content Creator Fund are being served in some way by TikTok, the creators are serving TikTok. As discussed in a later section and in the Chapter Two section entitled “Capitalist Machine,” a tiktoker’s “technological creativity” is TikTok’s most precious ‘human’ “intangible” quality and resource that is captured and harvested for capital gain. Such processes are emblematic of technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa, 2009, p.3). This process is inclusive of the creator, who produces the content (for a set fee²⁶⁴), and the user, who provides the affective responses (collected data). While one is always free to voice one’s concerns and can ‘counter-express’ online, one cannot assume that what is expressed online is ‘free’—e.g., without capital or labour cost to the user or the TikTok machine itself—or that it will produce a subjectivity’s escape to an imagined freedom²⁶⁵.

A Minoritarian Politics Online

As evidenced by the textual and observational analysis of TikTok in Chapter Four, TikTok is a highly codified, surveilled, and controlled space. This knowledge was necessary for mapping how the standardizing and majoritarian forces of TikTok, and the spaces within it, were acting upon N|I youth to explore how they could create place for themselves and others. More important is how they, as digital subjects, were able to potentially initiate a new mode of

²⁶⁴ Only some content-creators are paid.

²⁶⁵ The idea of freedom will vary from one individual to another.

thinking or *manner of being* for all who connected with them, including themselves. Thus, leading to my second query: *Is there a place for a minoritarian politics online?*

In answering this question, I needed to think through the concepts of minority and minoritarian | majority and majoritarian in relation to N|I youth, as discussed in Chapter One. *Thinking with* these concepts allowed me to understand and identify N|I youth assemblages online (see Chapter Two). In addition, it allowed me to observe how majoritarian forces positioned N|I youth, as minority digital subjects, in the digi-spaces of TikTok. In addition, it allowed me to examine how the forces flowed through those spaces to further impact their movements and productions, as expressions, within any interacted digi-space in connection with others. Although one might assume the intention is to escape entirely from majoritarian forces. Creating a minoritarian politics online *is not a question of how to become free from the standardizing structures* or over-coding discourses as they present themselves. Instead, it is about the consideration *of how one might discover new modes of expression, thinking, or being that were not thought of before* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986). As mentioned above, online freedom is illusory and non-existent due to the algorithms and technocapitalist forces in those spaces (Suarez-Villa, 2009). In order to generate such a politics in *connection with* something/one/space, as digital subject online²⁶⁶, there are three questions to consider, as informed by Deleuze and Guattari's work with Kafka (p. 16-17, 18; see also, Bogue, 1997): Has one been affected or unsettled (deterritorialized)? Is one's deterritorialization (or rupture from the assemblage) connected to a political urgency?; and, Has it generated a collective expression?

²⁶⁶ As a user or content creator, or both.

As witnessed with Leila, Vince, Sasho, and Mahasti, they each, in one way or another during their various enunciations, were able to pull from their fellow user's past experiences and call forth the conditions for the new to emerge (Deleuze, 1985/2013). Leila, for instance, accomplished this through her exposés, such as delving into how conservative parents function to block Desi women's subjectivities. Sasho, through his co-option and then deterritorialization from a different assemblage, showed users a different manner of being against racist structures, ideas, and policies. Through his affective musical loops, Vince called out egregious and insidious behaviours against Asians in the US. Finally, Mahasti, through her humour, instigated a *laughing with* in her audience to open up an affective wound for new thought to emerge.

As digital subjects, all four were able to capture their follower's attention through affect generation, as demonstrated through the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the statistics of their likes, shares, and comments. Their expressions were made explicit through a diverse usage of hashtags they created (see Figure 4). In addition, they were deterritorialized from their initial assemblages and propelled into the digi-spaces of TikTok to do something different for themselves and others. While they each had their initial reasons for beginning their TikTok platforms or transformation on TikTok, they did not have an initial image in mind for their paths forward. Even when Vince was wounded and felt propelled to act in order to help the AAPI community after the Atlanta Shooting, he did not have an exact vision in mind for collective action. There were also invitations for engagement from all the content creators to their audience. For instance, an invitation to participate and act from Vince, an invitation to be educated from Sasho, an invitation to laugh from Mahasti, and an invitation to dialogue and share from Leila.

In part, the content creators connected with successfully captured and generated followers due to an observed distancing from self or disassociation in most of their vlogs. Yes, there were introductory and reflexive videos, however, most of their content was emergent from their collective experiences, not necessarily about their experiences. Relating to their followers seemed to increase the appeal of their videos for a greater audience. Even though the 'I' was not always present, a strong sense of their self-identified identity became more apparent with each video engagement through a holistic view. As a result, there was a stronger attachment to cultivate and maintain said identity through their content (expressions or minority discourse) under forces impinging upon it or seeking to transform it. Another method was, as mentioned before, by using elements in their videos that would generate an affective response, such as music, filters, and appealing to user's emotions.

It is necessary to recognize the tension that N|I youth²⁶⁷, as digital subjects, occupy in the digi-sphere. That is, N|I youth are being caught between their drive for deterritorialization and their potential for becoming, as well as the majoritarian drives that seek to code, categorize, consume, modify, and capitalize off of them—i.e., technocapitalism via algorithms and an affective economy (Andrejevic, 2013; Bakir & McStay, 2021; Deleuze, 1990/1995; Lim, 2021; Savat, 2010; Suarez-Villa, 2009). With that in mind, it appears difficult for a true “absolute escape” (Nail, 2017) to occur unless it is transported offline (e.g., #TulsaFlop and #blm) (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020) since, the speed of anticipation, speculation, and creation on behalf of the escape would have to be phenomenal to stay ahead of techno and surveillance capitalism and

²⁶⁷ This is applicable to anyone online that are feeling this tension.

recommender algorithms (Zuboff et al., 2019). Although, the offline brings up a different set and expression of desires to contend with.

Overall, the relative and potential escapes of those engaged with in this study, in addition to algorithmic and technocapitalist forces, were positioned in alterity to any Oedipalizing forces—e.g., parents, educators, white supremacist rhetoric— that oppressed their ability to maintain said identities, be they cultural, ethnic, racial, social, or gender-related. The four youth, consciously or not, were expressing how various forces were working against them. In doing so, they could generate moments of thought and affect. In the act of recognizing and naming the systems or forces working against them, one can learn how to transform them. These are just the beginning of what might be the potential for a *becoming-with*.

Emergent & Future Learnings

Technological Changes

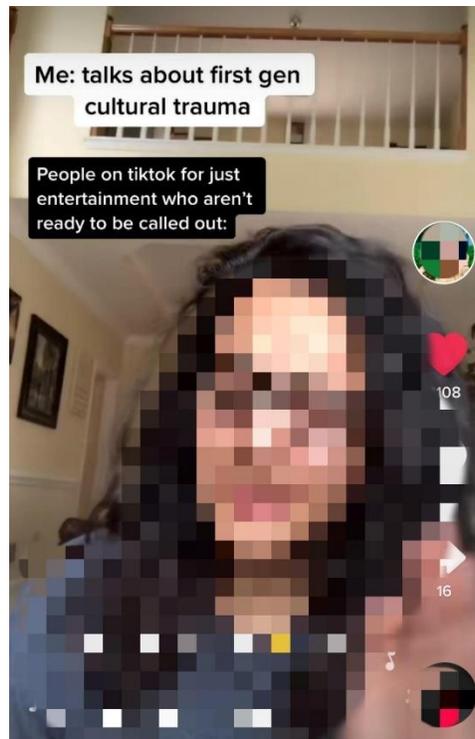
One of the most significant and stressful challenges throughout this research project was generated from the rapid and constant changes that TikTok, as a technological app and business machine, underwent over a short period. It seems that technological innovation and advancement both on or offline is in a perpetual state of development that rapidly makes the new obsolete or superseded by something else. Here I will begin with the changes that were not picked up until it came time to map and *think with* each of the N|I youth creators, as a user and non-creator of TikTok.

Since beginning this research journey, TikTok has continuously added new sounds²⁶⁸ and filters²⁶⁹ for creators to use for content creation and for users to engage with and share. Many of these filters and sounds have started fun or controversial trends, or tensions with the company. The impacts that these changes would have had on this study were regarding the visual aesthetics and audio engagement of the youth's content. Those creators who used filters and sounds to move their content in a different direction, such as Mahasti and Leila, produced a positive affect and effect for blurring the lines of reality. For example, Mahasti's use of the head bump filter for her 'third eye' subjectivity (Figure 15) or subjectivity production with Leila²⁷⁰ when she used the sound "Leave Me Alone Please" by Pak Duo to express a *becoming with* the viewers of TikTok that only want to be entertained (see Figure 16).

²⁶⁸ These were either created and uploaded by the creator or provided by TikTok.

²⁶⁹ Filters can be added as effects to a vlog. For example, a filter can change the creator to a cartoon character or appear invisible on the screen. New filters will be added at different times.

²⁷⁰ TikTok uploaded on June 2, 2021. Captioned as "The amount of comments I've seen that said 'I feel called out' 😏" #desi #trauma. 3108 likes, 56 comments, 17 shares.

Figure 15*Leila + First-Generation Trauma*

Note. Leila becoming with sound.

Being made aware of varying forms of multimedia filters and sounds earlier would have directed my focus onto different enunciative expressions from each of the N|I youth creators and added another dimension to the case analysis regarding minoritarian-becomings. First, as a statistical dimension, I could have taken note of the sounds used for each video gathered, either for consideration into this case analysis or for future research. Second, I might have introduced a dimension demonstrating with more efficacy how the digital subject is broken down representationally in these spaces and how subjectivity is re-singularized. As a result of this realization, possible future research might specifically address the sounds and other multimedia

affects of TikTok and how they work to affect | effect its multiple spaces to propel collective action.

Next, it was reported in September of 2021 that Google was in talks with Instagram and TikTok to Index search results to make content discoverable (Southern, 2021). This cataloguing meant searching for videos and content on either engine using hashtag(s), for instance, would instantly bring up the highest-ranked content (videos) associated with said index(s). This new development would have impacted my initial approach, hashtag searches, and data gathering method. Rather than spending countless hours on FYP, this function would have directly shown me multiple, highly engaged creators all at once. That stated, the process of the FYP was one of learning in itself and a necessary one. In addition, as mentioned in a later section, this change could act as an option in response to TikTok policies that would work against quantitative and qualitative researchers.

Other changes that emerged were the continual updates to the platform's features, *Community Guidelines*, *Privacy Policy*, Privacy settings, and the *Content Creator Fund* of TikTok. Some examples include changing the length of a TikTok from 1 to 3, then 10 minutes (Kastrenakes, 2021; Vincent, 2022). Another is the addition of features for 'well-being' that provided resources for creators struggling with mental health, which included implementing links to kid's helplines, for instance. This addition, in turn, led to changes in the *Community Guidelines* in efforts to prevent self-harm, doxing, bullying, cyberstalking, and sexual harassment (Admin, 2020). Updates to privacy settings and defaults for users under 18 years old were also introduced in January of 2021 (Perez, 2021). The latest additions to the

Community Guidelines, stated to strengthen and safeguard the TikTok community, were introduced in February of 2022 and came into effect in March of 2022. Some of the updates further support the “well-being of users and the integrity of the platform” by fostering “an experience that prioritises safety, inclusion, and authenticity” (TikTok as cited in Awodipe, 2022, para. 7). This meant that TikTok would prevent certain content from being pushed to user’s FYPs²⁷¹, such as unoriginal or low-quality content, oversexualized content, extreme violence, any hateful ideologies, underage content, any content with substance abuse or use (Awodipe, 2022; MacKay, 2022). All the above-mentioned changes emerged from lawsuits against TikTok for failing to protect the privacy and data of their most vulnerable and consistent feedback—positive and negative—from their creators and users (Awodipe, 2022; Perez, 2021; Siegal, 2021).

One last concern I would like to address is TikTok as a business machine. In particular, how it connects with its content creators as producers of content for capital gain. Although the Creator Fund is most applicable to US content creators²⁷², it can impact all who choose to create upon its spaces and on any social media platform, as they all, in one way or another, have the flows of capital driving them. On January 20, 2022, Hank Green²⁷³, in a YouTube vlog titled *So...TikTok Sucks*, revealed to all of TikTok’s community and beyond how content creators were being exploited ergo TikTok should pay them better. In a 24-minute video, he gives a

²⁷¹ All this content, however, is still searchable by users.

²⁷² This would impact all four youth engaged with in this study.

²⁷³ Green is a well-known American internet vlogger (on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok), writer, musician, and developer of educational science shows.

thorough, historical and contemporary explanation of how monetization works on YouTube and TikTok. He explains that TikTok pays its creators from a set pool of money that does not change, regardless whether TikTok's revenues or viewership increases. Moreover, even though TikTok continually attracts more content creators, there is less money to go around since "the well" from which creators' are paid is stagnant and is split between more *tiktokkers*. Therefore, "when TikTok becomes more successful, tiktokkers become less successful." As a result, Green calls for a fund where "everyone benefits" and for TikTok to consider collaboration and competition (i.e., keeping other platforms in mind), and for collective action from its community to add pressure and make change happen.

This recent public unmasking of TikTok by Green has only added to the argument of TikTok as a machinic entity and business machine. TikTok was making connections and assemblages apart from those that were made with its users and content creators, as a technological assemblage driven by the forces of technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa, 2009). Capitalist forces online are working to deterritorialize and reterritorialize subjective desires on their various platforms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). As a business machine that works with and through the desires of an established money market and neoliberal capitalist political system that operates in connection with the machines of an affective labour economy, TikTok exists to maximize profits for itself and its partners (Andrejevic, 2013; Bakir & McStay, 2021; Clough, 2008; Lim, 2021; Shade, 2021; Suarez-Villa, 2009). TikTok is doing what it is meant to do.

Considering all discussed and demonstrated in this dissertation, particularly in Chapters Four and Five, one could imagine how a diasporic digi-subjects might be created. For instance,

subjects might be oriented to the importance of being fluid, flexible, and adaptable to the present moment such that they could navigate and interact with each digi-space *differently* while forming new relations *in situ* with each singularity. The digi-subject could be considered multiple in how they transverse space(s), create place(s), and exist in time, such that they can form a multiplicity of connections in the present moment. The digi-subject might be able to speculate, anticipate, and produce the future in the present, such that they could speculate and anticipate majoritarian movements and potentially produce new ways forward for new ways of thinking and being. If a digi-subject could do all that on TikTok, they might be a force for transformation.

COVID-19

When I initially conceptualized this study, it was a two-part postqualitative study. The first part was intended to be an online ethnography with accompanying case analysis. The second part was meant to be a series of face-to-face interviews with N|I youth about their experiences with digi-spaces²⁷⁴. Then COVID happened. At the outset of the pandemic, I had considered an analysis of multiple social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, Snapchat, and any other digital social spaces that N|I youth might navigate²⁷⁵. TikTok was, at this point, just starting to get noticed by the 'older'²⁷⁶ mainstream (early 2020). I had considered doing a larger-scale sweep of these platforms using a hashtag data scraper. This data collection method would have allowed me to focus my search by subject matter and quantity on specific

²⁷⁴ I would still like to conduct these interviews and expand this study beyond the spaces of TikTok.

²⁷⁵ It might be an interesting project to do this with multiple researchers at once as a place making project.

²⁷⁶ I say this tongue-in-cheek since youth ages 13 to 24 were on the app in 2019 enjoying the days long before adults and ads began arriving and settling-in (Williamson, 2019).

platforms, particularly on Twitter and Instagram. However, this form of collection was much harder to do on TikTok since it required knowledge of JSON script, a skill that I had yet to acquire but was willing to learn. I realized quickly that a cross-platform study, although a critical addition to considering place | making online, was too expansive for this particular study that I was undertaking²⁷⁷. I needed to limit myself to one social media space. Hence, I chose TikTok since it was where youth were gravitating. In addition, TikTok would allow me to listen to youth stories *differently*. As a result, I made the study contextual and related to the individual processes and forces occurring or emerging at the moment - *in situ, as singularity*, rather than having an AI bot mass gather categorized and representational data for me.

Having gone through the process, one advantage of using an AI bot to mass gather data would be to conduct an initial hashtag search to find and narrow down potential N|I youth participants. When I began my research in early 2020, however, TikTok was not very accessible to researchers in this way. Currently, however, under TikTok's *Community Guidelines* (2021), under the section labelled as "Platform Security," it is explicitly stated to "not use automated scripts to collect information from TikTok" (n.p.). That stated, the indexing of hashtags on Google has made it easier to conduct searches for videos, as discussed earlier.

Time | Online

Time online is experienced differently than in the offline world insomuch as it is perceived, constructed, and experienced by the individual with the digi-space, content, and

²⁷⁷ This will be an area of future research and study.

users, as discussed via Savat (2010) in the section “Place in the Digi-Sphere” in Chapter One. A challenge that emerged for a desire focused ethnography online was the amount of time one dedicates to it without realizing it, specifically in the spaces of TikTok, where time is often described as a “black-hole” (Zhao, 2021). First, as my desires influenced my FYP selections, they also impacted who I chose to *engage with*. It took time to build up my FYP page to what I needed or wanted it to be for this research; as it was through the curation of the FYP, I could begin to see a ‘digital landscape’ of N|I youth expressions. At times, this research would involve minutes of scrolling before coming across content related to my research project, while other times, it would take days. Time and content on TikTok are expansive, tricky, and nebulous. I, therefore, needed to set a limit for myself each day; otherwise, time on the app would extend much longer than I ever anticipated.

Regarding the expansive content on TikTok, there was an inundation to the point of being overwhelming. This inundation had an unusual affect|effect whereby I had to consciously pull myself back from distraction—e.g., being pulled away from my initial purpose—and from losing myself as the ‘researcher’ Adriana to one that was enjoying herself as the digital subject, @userhm1²⁷⁸. Depending on the day, I experienced what it meant to become the enmeshed and embodied digital subject either exceptionally well or very poorly. I became a part of the platform itself—as its design is meant to keep you addicted—through its endless scroll format and automatic looping of the videos that kept playing in the background even as you read the comments. *Interpassivity* (Jagodzinski, 2004; Pfaller, 2003) is easily achieved, and mindless liking

²⁷⁸ Pseudonym

[double tap], gliding my finger up on the screen [scroll and next], blocking content [pull menu down and select], commenting, and on and on, became the rhythm of TikTok.

It is also necessary to note the discrepancies that can occur with time between researcher and content creator regarding online data collection. For instance, the time of initial *connection with* a creator's content (e.g., first time video is viewed) might be different from the time of the content creator's original upload of the video, which, in turn, could be different from the day of the actual production of the video, which could be different from the first time I, as a researcher, download the video onto my technology. Similarly, the latter might be different from when other users *engage with the video and* when I choose to re-engaged with a video on a continuous loop or from another platform (e.g., my laptop). Created content is also different from a creator's live content and the comment section's conversations that can also occur at different times. As explained by Eaton (2016), through his study in Chapter One, digi-spaces do not require a human presence for observance. This lack of presence might connote an infinite time and continuation online for the digital subject, as an avatar or expression (e.g., uploaded content), with or without the user.

The consideration of how time travels, moves, loops, and can stand still for all time in the digi-sphere is relevant when engaging with youth, content, or anyone in these spaces. For one, their content will be on TikTok for others to connect with by choice (e.g., a conducted search), by recommendation (shares or FYP), or 'accidentally' (landed on the wrong side of TikTok). Due to time's vastness, researchers can connect at a deeper level with content creators that go beyond the superficial and representational. The experience of time is not linear. That is,

one is able to travel through a digital subject's timelines (forwards, backwards, and at the moment), observe conversations at different moments in time, observe how learning might advance, and observe if minoritarian-becomings have occurred offline. This topic would make a worthwhile, stand-alone study.

Working Around Boundaries

This work was intended for in-person youth interview experiences to enrich my work with respect to how they engage with digi-spaces online. I had obtained full REB ethics to pursue this. TikTok, however, is not a space that is amenable for 'Direct Messaging'²⁷⁹ a new user unless they are a digital subscriber or 'follower.' This feature is there for a creator's protection from possible abuse, personal privacy, and security. On the other hand, it can prevent potential social and political movements from building and gaining momentum, including the creative and destructive. In addition, for researchers, such barriers make it incredibly difficult to gain access to potential interviewees to ask for the use of image permission.

Meaning Making Online

Form of expression and meaning when describing or attempting to describe a content creator's work on TikTok accurately can quickly become lost in translation when writing for research. Each user, including myself, plugs into TikTok and its content as a singularity, each with a multiplicity of experiences and thoughts. Thus, one is connecting with one's desires. How

²⁷⁹ DM'ing

I chose to express the content, as a researcher, to the reader, is not only imbued with the creator's desires online, it includes the desires that are flowing through the spaces they are connected to (e.g., capitalism, TikTok, or another user's) in addition to my desires as a TikTok user.

As a schizoanalytic and desiring project, I aimed to expose the seemingly imperceptible, often silent and virtual forces to maximize the latent potentials for place | making with N | I youth. As a minoritarian project, specifically, it sought to break down and critique power and reifying socio-political-cultural structures flowing through digi-spaces that N | I youth transverse. To do so, one must begin with the micro and move outwards. The micro in this dissertation that seeks to break the hierarchies between the participant and the researcher in their connected spaces. Whereby the researcher (myself) is a machinic subject and co-actor-user-producer of the digi-spaces observed, *thought with*, and analyzed.

As a desiring researcher, I observed and mapped the affects concerning each youth without directly interpreting what they meant. Instead, I observed what the affects were doing to prevent or propel youth movements and, in turn, how each youth and users in their spaces responded to these blockages in the spaces they created or transversed. To allow this work to be a project of public pedagogy, I needed to be as true to their content representation as possible, especially since I maintained their anonymity throughout. This representation was accomplished by contextualization *in situ*. This was exemplified by describing the affects as best as possible by using emoting words. For example, when quoting Leila on "woke" people:

But, if you aren't even related to the topic, and you go, oh, this *could* be offensive to so-and-so group.

[exasperated]

Let that group speak for themselves!

However, this act required that my interpretation and representation schemas would be applied. That is, how I first *felt* and *observed* a perceived sense of emotion on Vince's or Sasho's facial expressions as affects. Then, drawing from my past experiences with observing these feelings and emotions (as virtuals), I was able to name them as sadness and frustration as they were expressing their thoughts on what had occurred in Atlanta on March 16, 2021.

Provocations for Learning

At the start of this dissertation, I extended an invitation for all readers to connect and *think with* the complex and multilayered textual spaces of philosophy, research, and N|I youth that were being transversally thought with within its written borders. To reiterate, as the reader, active witness, and single part of a desiring assemblage one is transversally *thinking with* the stories and concepts within, deterritorializing from the standard, and potentially transforming it into something new *with* N|I youth. Using examples from the case studies in Chapter Five, I will provide a series of provocations and potential avenues of undertaking for school stakeholders to advance how they may connect, transform and create *with* N|I youth, thus, embodying an approach of *in situ, as singularity*.

Defining *in Situ*, as Singularity

*In situ*²⁸⁰ is to *engage with* and be responsive to N|I youth in the present context or given time, space or place—either on or offline, or both—“independently of interpretation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2009, p. 322).

N|I youth, as *singularities*, acknowledges that N|I youth subjectivities are composed in *connection with* others and the world around them. As discussed in Chapter Two²⁸¹, subjectivity is co-produced in the register of the social or the nexus where social forces connect and constitute collective expressions (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986/2008). Recalling that the collective can be composed or registered on the individual or group subjectivity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) state, “[t]here are no individual statements, there never are. Every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation” (p. 37). Engaging with *singularities*, in this dissertation, also acknowledges that one is not only connecting with the individual before them, as a subject with given identities (e.g., a newcomer|immigrant), but one with a multiplicity of past and potential future statements that may emerge in the present (*in situ*) as a part of a collective enunciation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

Provocations for School Stakeholders

From this study of N|I youth, a new set of questions might be advanced for consideration by school stakeholders. Such questions might include:

²⁸⁰ For a digital engagement of *in situ*, as singularity, see Chapter Four, section “Towards a Digital *in situ* Ethics”.

²⁸¹ Information on singularities will be found in section “Subjectivity|*In situ*, as Singularity”.

- i. How might educators and administrators engage with N|I youth expressions *in situ*, as *singularity* within the spaces of the classroom and the school?
- ii. How might engaging with N|I Youth *in situ*, as *singularities* be *thought with* to impact perceptions and expectations by teachers, staff, administrators, curriculum scholars, and policymakers?
- iii. How might educators allow N|I youth to create spaces for expression and place|making in their classrooms with their peers and beyond?
- iv. How might N|I youth place|making online be used to assist educators to relate to, learn about, and potentially involve their students offline?
- v. How might considering N|I youth as digital subjects *in situ*, as *singularity*, change an educator's perception and expectations when teaching online, either asynchronously or synchronously?
 - a. How will this impact lesson planning and delivery?

Potential Avenues for Engagement With N|I Youth. How *might* N|I youth approach educators, administrators, policymakers, and community about the abovementioned questions? In this section, I provide, as examples, a table constructed from my own observations and *desiring* engagement with N|I youth content creators, *as singularities*, in the spaces of TikTok, *in situ* (see Table 1). The table reads top-down working from the micropolitical to the macropolitical as these avenues for engagement emerged from N|I youth expressions online.

Table 1

How N|I youth might interact with school stakeholders as observed from their expressions

*online.*²⁸²

N I Youth	Vince	Leila	Sasho	Mahasti
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow N I youth space to express and process any 'wounds' that may emerge as a collective. • Allow expression to happen in creative ways or in ways one feels comfortable with (e.g., music), providing that sharing is emergent and not forced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become Informed of parental pressures, expectations, and the potential traumas that could be placed on some N I youth at home. • Develop an awareness of societal pressures placed upon immigrant families as a whole that may impact youth performance and circumstances in schools. • Become attuned to student silences as a mode of communication and understand potential reasons why they may not stand up for themselves. • Become attuned to N I youth who wish to create spaces for sharing and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow N I youth to express themselves with humour, to play with appropriated terminology and lived experiences in order to express who they are, open up a space for 'laughing with' instead of laughing at, and see N I youth as more than a "perpetual foreigner". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become aware of one's biases, language and use of microaggressions towards N I youth. Develop an awareness of their expectations, as teachers, on N I youth and where those expectations are coming from. • Provide a learning space for teachers to engage in culturally sensitive ways with N I youth. • Allow N I youth to "re-cast" themselves and construct who they wish to be in educational spaces instead of the other way around.

²⁸² Subdivisions of columns shows a strong opinion by a content creator, while a lack thereof shows a commonality.

educating their peers about issues important to them.

- Being cognizant of consent and will to share on their part, as opposed to a requirement to share.

Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where able, provide teachers and staff the opportunity for intercultural training and development. • Supportive environments, spaces, and staff for N I youth and families. Listen and create safe and productive spaces conducive to respectful dialogue (Leila). • Be aware of 'silence' when conflicts arise. • Allow N I youth to educate you.
Community (e.g., parents, peers, social realm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look beyond the representations of what one thinks a N I or N I youth are. Instead, connect with N I youth as being composed of all their experiences and expressions (past, present, and yet to come). • Listen and be conducive to respectful dialogue. Allow oneself to be educated.
Curriculum Design scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being aware of the material affects and real-world impacts of the online in the various offline educational spaces, and how N I youth are being constructed and connected with in curricular documents and by educators alike.

Provocation for the reader

I invite the reader to consider how has *connecting with* this dissertation, and all the approaches and findings within, worked as a potential force for *learning with* N|I youth? That is, did it initiate an escape or opening to produce a different mode of thinking for you?

N|I Solidarity in Place

At the start of this project I posed and later considered a question in relation to educational spaces, that was: *What might digi-spaces do for N|I youth, as digital subjects, who transverse them in terms of generating place for themselves and others?* At this juncture, I

would like to envisage this question in a grander context offline and relate it to the concept of solidarity, calling forth the work of *la comunidad* and the drive to express one's stories in order to propel action and a movement of *solidaridad* towards a cause, as mentioned in the Introduction.

This project began by placing myself in relation to and in solidarity with the place and land that I am currently settled and living on in connection with all peoples and things (living and non-living) that exist within it. To do so is to be acutely aware of where one comes from and who one is in relation to place and others in order to create a future to come together. Additionally, it is to know that despite being forcibly displaced, one can create place with new relations in lands far from where one is born. This realization has become ever more apparent in the digi-sphere where all who connect, as enmeshed diasporic and digital subjects, have the possibility of creating community and place, despite the absence of a physical place online (Eaton, 2016; Schultze, 2014). As revealed throughout this study, place|making in the digi-sphere becomes a collective experiencing that emerges between an assemblage of desires, those of the territory (e.g., TikTok), the standardizing flows (e.g., technocapitalism and algorithmic coding), and the subjectivities or collective enunciations (e.g., N|I youth, content creators, users). What *might* emerge from place|making are expressions that speak against a perceived or felt majoritarian discourse, as exemplified by Vince, Leila, Sasho, and Mahasti, and in doing so, plant the "seeds" for new modes of thinking in those who connect with them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 106).

As discussed in the introductory and first chapter, varying forms of immigration, migration and forced displacements are an ongoing and increasing reality spurred on by climate change effects, volatile world conflicts, capitalism, and, currently, world health crises (Andrews, 2017; Geisler & Currens, 2017; UNHCR, 2020). N|I movements across the globe and into Canada are many and each has circumstances, histories, experiences, cultures, languages, needs, and affects|effects of their own, and as discussed in earlier chapters²⁸³, newcomer and immigrant identities, subjectivities, becomings and potential futures in Canada and North America are not always their own (e.g., used for economic or political gain). What has been made clear through the experiences of N|I youth is there are opportunities for counter-expression and there are spaces to create place when one has been displaced, no matter the circumstance. One such opportunity and responsibility for N|I's to Canada is to learn and become, in solidarity, with Indigenous Peoples who were internally displaced upon their own lands. Building a transversalist bridge (Guattari, 1992/2006) to *learn with* as N|I's requires attending to the stories of Indigenous peoples in Canada—past, present, and yet to come—and their existing Treaties, lands, relations, and ways of living in order to *think with* and become “seeds” for becoming-with (Chatterjee, 2019; Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

As Dauvergne (2020) and N|I youth content creators suggest, it is not until the majoritarian discourses of an embedded colonial and white supremacist²⁸⁴ logics are bested that change will occur (p. 97). As was mentioned through the case studies showcased in Chapter Five, to transform the discourse of the majority requires that minoritized groups (e.g., N|Is and

²⁸³ For examples on how N|I's as minority subjects are coded, categorized, captured, and used for social, economic, and political gain see the Introduction, section “Unwelcome Aesthetics|Welcoming Aesthetics”.

²⁸⁴ I added this based on the gathered expressions of the N|I youth content creators.

Indigenous communities) find new ways of *fabulating* or creating a new aesthetic (Shields, 2014) against set or given logics and/or hegemonic forces, such that it invites and propels a *becoming with* where the future is open for all, inclusive of the majority. In doing so, potentially creating a way forward where there was none before.

To conclude, this dissertation, as a project of N|I youth place|making and a work of public pedagogy, engages with the minority potential as “seed[s]...of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 106). In *engaging with* the various expressions of N|I youth assembled within this document, there is a potential to *learn and think with* the ideas and voices one has connected with. That is, to allow N|I youth subjectivities, as engaged with on and offline, to affectively cut into classroom spaces and beyond to instigate new modes of being or thinking for a collective becoming that is yet to come.

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