

In the Mood for Disconnection

Abstract

The needs and desires to disconnect, detox, and log out have been turned into commodities and found their expressions in detox camps, self-help books, and ‘offline’ branded apparel. Disconnection studies have challenged the power of commodified disconnective practices to create real social change. In this article, we build on the notion of affective attunement to explore how disconnection commodities provide differential ways for individuals to respond to the challenges of connectivity, and how they can form larger patterns of resistance that cannot be dismissed as futile. We examine the ambiguity of disconnection commodities through three examples: a smartwatch kill switch and stealth mode features, detox floatation tank therapy, and make-up lines. Our approach turns the perspective from ends to the means of disconnection. We argue that these commodities do not offer hard breaks but they do let users attune to connectivity.

Keywords

disconnection; commodification; resistance; attunement; connectivity; mood; affect; practices

Introduction

The language of disconnection and the ideal of digital detox have penetrated popular culture. Disconnection has been turned into a commodity, and has a supply and demand. In this article, we elaborate on one of the prevailing criticisms in disconnection studies—that disconnection and the practices users have to control their online connections are only temporary, occupy a niche position, and in the bigger picture do not solve the problems of digital connectivity. What are seen as particularly problematic are the commodified forms of disconnection—apps, features, and products technology companies offer for users to manage their connectivity (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2019; Natale and Trerè, 2020). Operating according to commercial imperatives, these digital solutions are positioned as ‘aids’, yet function as ‘tools of disciplining a productively labouring subject’ (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2019: 910). We take this criticism as a provocation for examining the meanings and impacts of commodified ‘disconnective practices’ (Light, 2014) as they become part of our everyday lives and media choices.

Our analysis draws from theories of ‘affective attunement’, a process which focuses not on practices but sensibilities and the ways we handle things in the world and give them meaning (Stewart, 2017; Ahmed, 2014). We ask: in what ways do disconnection commodities invite users into processes of disconnecting? We explore this question by examining a set of three examples—a Garmin smartwatch, a floatation tank detox service, and make-up lines branded with disconnection—, using close readings of these commodities and their promotional materials. We have chosen these differing examples to explore the ambiguity of the practices, goals and impacts of disconnection commodities.

We argue that disconnection as an affective attunement is not an end in itself but a process that makes connectivity manageable. Our examples displace narratives of disconnection as a hard break by turning the focus to the mutability of connectivity. We

conclude by offering a way to understand the differential impacts of disconnective practices. This article argues that disconnection requires us to be attuned for it, which commodities can sustain in different capacities.

Disconnection, Commodification, Criticism

In 2013, José van Dijck (2013: 4, 8) described our media environment as the ‘ecosystem of connective media’: a profit-oriented system of interconnected platforms and applications that automates connectivity, uses algorithms to mine information about users, programs their sociality and exploits their need for connectedness. According to Van Dijck (2013: 9), this online ecosystem did not appear from thin air but ‘is embedded in a larger sociocultural and political-economic context where it is inevitably molded by historical circumstances.’ This culture of connectivity and its contextualization through online platforms (Van Dijck, Poell and de Waal, 2018; Plantin, Edwards and Sandvig, 2018) entail infrastructures for relational—and complicit—forms of control and resistance.

This resistance is discussed for example as non-use, and the practices of disconnection are often examined through user studies of ‘disconnective practices’ (Light, 2014), where the regulation of one’s own use is a conscious choice and deliberate practice of self-care (Baumer et al., 2015; Light and Cassidy, 2014; Mannell, 2019; Kaun and Schwarzenegger, 2014; Syvertsen, 2020). Sometimes, non-use and practices of disconnection can also be integrated in the interfaces and systems themselves (Karppli, 2018): these include different privacy features (Draper, 2019) and socio-technical nudges that establish limits for connectivity (Docherty, 2020). Studies of disconnection make visible how users respond directly to and find ways to resist digital technologies in their everyday lives (Kaun and Treré, 2020: 701).

A market has formed around these products and services. Different commodified solutions for users interested in exploring resistance against digital devices, ubiquitous connectivity, and social media are available. Many of these goods, services, and experiences have been addressed in scholarship: commercial retreats, camps, vacations, and programs (Fish, 2017; Sutton, 2020); a self-help market of books and blogs (Syvertsen and Enli, 2019); software that obfuscates data-based surveillance methods (Brunton and Nissenbaum, 2015); online privacy products (Draper, 2019) and lifestyle products that glamourize moments of disconnection (Jorge, 2019).

Feminist scholars have discussed how commodified forms of activism turn the attention towards the self and self-disclosure instead of addressing the larger structural problems of discrimination and oppression (Repo, 2020: 220-221). These forms of activism are pursued through consumptive means, thereby reconfiguring and depoliticizing experiences, institutions and subjects through neoliberal imperatives (Repo, 2020: 228). Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake (2019) propose a similar critique in the context of disconnection commodities. In fact, many studies of disconnection argue that in spite of individual motivations, disconnective practices are not a real solution to the problems engendered by digital capitalism. Writing about artworks of anti-surveillance camouflage, Torin Monahan (2015: 160) argues that they are an ‘aestheticization of resistance, a performance that generates media attention and scholarly interest’. These artworks ‘frame problems with surveillance as universally experienced or as

needing individualized and product-based solutions to manage—rather than correct—systemic social problems’ (2015: 173). Laura Portwood-Stacer (2013) highlights disconnection commodities’ limitations as a form of lifestyle politics or taste culture that are targeted to the wealthy. Nancy Baym and her colleagues (2020: 9) explore the response of users who deactivated their Facebook accounts and concluded that while disconnective practices may make individual users cognizant of social media’s negative consequences, these practices ‘cannot aggregate into structural change. Individual minds cannot solve the technosocial conditions that lead to overconnection.’ Therefore, Baym et al. (2020: 9) argue that ‘[d]isconnective practices may help people find balance in the trap, but it cannot set them free.’

Disconnective practices and their commodification can be seen representing a naive vision of user autonomy and empowerment typical to digital culture (Darmody and Zwick, 2020: 2). Critics of disconnective practices tend to suggest that this brand of freedom masks collective entrapment: the ‘paradox of digital disengagement’, Kuntsman and Miyake (2019: 910) write, ‘lies in the illusion of choice that frames every act of refusal, disconnection or opt-out’. Taina Bucher (2020: 611) maintains that disconnection does not release individuals from the operative logic of connectivity where even the act of leaving leaves a meaningful data trace. She argues that as a consequence there is ‘nothing to disconnect from’. Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias (2019) point out that disconnection does not solve the larger structural problems of digital capitalism and digital colonialism, a global regime of dispossession that extracts economic value from the datafication of everyday life. Focusing on disconnection commodities, Simone Natale and Emiliano Treré (2020: 627) continue this line of argumentation, noting that ‘digital disconnection has been appropriated by big tech discourse’. They cite the example of the Apple Watch and how it is sold to users as a technology that liberates them from constantly paying attention to their smartphone. Yet, by buying the device, one does not solve the underlying problems of overconnection but merely substitutes one device with the other. Consequently, with commodification,

the emancipatory potential of disconnection as a form of critique and socio-political change is often deactivated and subsumed by the dynamics of digital capitalism under the innocuous facade of escape in connection to issues of authenticity, mindfulness and nostalgia (Natale and Treré, 2020: 628).

The authors (2020: 631) advocate for ‘decommodifying’ disconnection by reformulating it as a critique of digital capitalism.

Yet, Eva Cherniavsky (2014: 285), for example, reminds us that ‘we do well to remember that opposition necessarily belongs to the same historical moment and the same conditions of possibility as the power it opposes.’ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) maintains that we are always contaminated by our encounters—the quests for clear distinctions are themselves problematic. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012: 13-14) in their influential volume on commodity activism warn about ‘the pitfalls of binary thinking that separate consumption practices from political struggles.’ Michael Jackson (1989: 2) contends that even though ‘[l]ived experience overflows the boundaries of any one concept’, scholars are often preoccupied with ‘regularity, pattern, system, and structure’ (1989: 15). The entanglements between disconnection and commodification are ambiguous rather than clear.

Moods and Attunements

Susanna Paasonen (2021: 5) has recently called for a cultural inquiry of media technologies that begins with ambiguity and is ‘able to hold seemingly contradictory things together in dynamic tension’. She builds on a proposition that not everything is resolvable and in fact the tensions between different ends can be seen as productive rather than disruptive. Economic and political frameworks, Paasonen (2021: 6) points out, are ‘connected to available ways of thinking, acting in, understanding, and feeling out the world’. Seeing media technologies only as forms of exploitation falls into a trap of reductive thinking. To highlight the ambiguity of perspectives, she calls for an attention to the mundane as a location of the emergence of potential (Paasonen, 2021).

The focus on mundane reminds us of Michel de Certeau’s notion of ‘everyday practices’, which in the disconnection scholarship is used to describe the situational methods users have to manage their connectivity (Vainikka, Noppari and Seppänen, 2017; Mannell, 2017). Our interest is in the messiness of these practices and what invites, entices, and lures individuals to apply them. We trace these ‘everyday sensibilities’ (Stewart, 2011: 445) and ‘infra-structures of feeling’, which are often pre-emergent, not fully articulated or structured (Coleman, 2017), yet guide our everyday actions. As Chia and Beattie (forthcoming) argue, commodified experiences of disconnection operate in the register of sensations of wellbeing, as an atmosphere to which we attune ourselves.

Our proposition is that disconnection is effectuated as everyday practice through moods or atmospheres that incite and pattern their use. Mood does not only surround an object but provides us a direction towards it (Manning, 2016: 61). ‘Every attunement is a tuning up to something’, Kathleen Stewart (2011: 448) maintains. Jason Throop (2017: 201) writes:

moods are often complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic existential attunements to the world that often mix with other thoughts, images, fantasies, strivings, desires, emotions, and affects.

When we think about the orientation of moods we can see that they are more than temporary feelings or states of mind.

‘[W]e are never not in a mood’, Jonathan Flatley (2012: 504) writes. According to Flatley (2012: 504), ‘moods do, however, shift and change’ and even more importantly they can be invoked, directed, and designed through a process he calls ‘affective attunement’ (see also Ash, 2013; Throop, 2017). Sara Ahmed (2014) argues that attunement does not only deal with a response towards the other, the object, but to the feelings themselves in those encounters. Attunement, then, is directed towards objects but also ‘to the behaviours themselves, which are directions taken toward objects, ways of handling things’ (2014: 19). For example, Jennifer Silva (2013) posits a ‘mood economy’ among working class youth, framing moods through their social function to bear precarization.

Theories of attunement often build on Daniel Stern's (1985) work on child psychology and his discussion of the relation between the child and mother (Flatley, 2012; Ahmed, 2014). According to Anthony McCosker (2015: 4), Stern's interest is in the 'connections we make with others in communication, in intersubjective relations and processes (including group processes) of attunement'. Ahmed begins with Heidegger's discussion of attunement instead of Stern's and notes that attunement is 'openness to what is around us' (2014:17) and a mode of 'being with' (2014:16) that individuals share. Whether we start with Stern or Heidegger, attunement is a social rather than individual process (Ahmed, 2014; Flatley, 2012). To quote Ahmed (2014: 15), we do not 'catch a feeling from another person but [...] we are caught up in feelings that are not our own'. Understanding the sociality of attunement illuminates a political potential that is shared and collective.

When we use the notion of attunement we are weaving the same fabric as theories that work with the notion of 'affect'. Cultures of connectivity for example are not inert contexts but lived affect, which Stewart (2011: 452) describes as:

a capacity to affect and be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event. It is an attunement of the senses, of labor, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through the times.

The different definitions and theories of affect try to understand the force at play when bodies collide: gut-reactions, pre-cognitive responses, moods, feelings, and so on (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 6-8). These sensations are tricky to identify, name, pin down and analyze (Hillis, Paasonen and Petit, 2015: 11). Attunement turns attention towards different attempts to channel and transmit affective forces. Stern (1985: 152–153) maintains that attunement can be defined according to three criteria: shape, intensity, and temporality. While affect is an abstract force, attunement can have a definable form and function in arranging affective forces and establishing points of contact. According to James Ash (2013), our expectations and understandings towards something are impacted by somatic and analytic attunements. Somatic attunements mean that our bodies are already oriented towards particular sensorimotor responses that the object in an encounter evokes (Ash, 2013: 36-37). Analytic attunements include adjustments to particular temporal scales based on previous encounters (Ash, 2013: 37-38). Ash argues for an understanding that does not distinguish 'conscious or non-conscious processes' but how they are 'implicated' in different encounters (Ash, 2013: 45). Hence, the distinction between somatic and analytic is theoretical rather than clearly distinguishable. Both categories affect 'the taking place of *thought* as a process' (Ash, 2013: 38).

Commodities

We examine the attunements of moods and atmospheres that invite users to disconnect through three contrasting cases of disconnection commodities: a smartwatch with kill switch and stealth mode features, flotation therapy, nail color and make-up collections. Our aim is to uncover how they could establish an 'emergence of revolutionary counter-moods, those world-altering moments where new alliances, new enemies, and new fields of action become visible and urgently compelling' (Flatley, 2012: 504). Our praxis is influenced by Paasonen's (2021: 9)

insistence that '[c]ritical inquiry ... has to be both contextual and attuned to ambiguity'. We synthesize media and cultural theory with contextual articulation among cultural processes of consumption, representation, and subjectivity in the promotional and popular texts that inform our case studies (du Gay et al., 2013). Our studies are informed by socio-semiotic, textual, and visual analyses that engage with the ways brands in the disconnection marketplace create meaning around their commodities and appeal to sensations (Zhao, 2014). The discussion of flotation therapy is also informed by one of the authors' embodied knowledge (Ellingson, 2006) of flotation from nine 90-minute sessions in a facility in downtown **Vancouver**. This feminist approach to the body as a site of knowledge production attends to sensory entextualization (Seremetakis, 2019) in autoethnographic modes of reflexive analysis. In this sense, textual analysis is inextricable from dialogic ways of languaging the body. This focus on popular and promotional texts implies that our reading of these discourses are less about how these products actually function and more about cultural diagnoses of how companies cultivate affective attunement in different ways and how disconnection comes to matter in our daily lives.

Smartwatch

In 2018 *The Washington Post* ran a story of the potential dangers of geolocation for military troops: 'An interactive map posted on the Internet that shows the whereabouts of people who use fitness devices such as Fitbit also reveals highly sensitive information about the locations and activities of soldiers at U.S. military bases,' (Sly, 2018) the story begins and describes how a 20-year-old Australian student of international security and the Middle East analyzed a GPS heat map produced by the routes of Strava users. According to the story, the student wanted to see if the map would also show U.S. soldiers operating abroad. It did indeed; when zoomed in on Syria, '[i]t sort of lit up like a Christmas tree'. The heat map produced by the wearables and fitness trackers could be used to identify not only the jogging routes of soldiers but U.S. Military locations and the surrounding patrol and supply routes. The imminent danger of these devices for military operators becomes recognized more widely. 'Turn off geotagging and location-based services. (Geotagging adds location-based information to content such as photographs, videos, websites, and messages. It is the equivalent of adding a 10-digit grid coordinate. Some devices and services may automatically embed geotags into content.)', the *US Marine Corps 2021 Social Media Handbook* declares. This is in line with a memorandum by Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan (2018: 1), which notes that 'devices, applications, and services with geolocation capabilities' could create 'unintended security consequences and increased risk to the joint force and mission.'

These three examples by a newspaper, a handbook, and a memo bring forth a specific problem caused by digital connectivity and its capability and desire to track our patterns, performances, and location in real time. The awareness of problems, as Flatley (2012: 504) points out, can lead into 'a mood shifting affective attunement'—an awakening of a counter-mood with a desire to act and knowledge of what to do. When the mood has been awakened, Flatley (2012: 519) argues that it can be 'renewed, revitalized, and redirected'. While Flatley discusses the role of a newspaper in this process, we direct our attention to the Garmin Tactix smartwatch series specifically advertised for military users.

Garmin, a company building GPS technology products and currently owned by Google, launched a smartwatch called Tactix Delta in January 2020. One of the images on the watch's website depicts a man in camouflage wearing a helmet and a chest rig. The tagline on the watch's website (Garmin, 2021) says 'Ready to Carry out the Mission', and the watch is advertised to be '[r]uggedly designed to meet military standards'. While smartwatches are defined by the connectivity they enable, what distinguishes the Tactix Delta from others is its emphasis on disconnective features. These two features are the Stealth Mode and the Kill Switch, which offer soldiers ways to control their connectivity. By choosing the 'Stealth Mode' on the watch one can stop storing and sharing the current 'GPS position and disable wireless connectivity and communication'. The Stealth Mode is designed to hide the user's device from technologies of tracking it based on the signals it sends and receives in real time. With the 'Kill Switch' the individual holds down the kill switch initiating a countdown timer. If the user does not cancel the process within 10 seconds, their connectivity with the terminal device becomes erased. The Kill Switch will 'remove all saved user data and reset all settings on the device to factory default values' (Garmin, 2021). For an operator in the battlefield, this capacity to disconnect can be a question of life and death—it won't necessarily protect the soldier but it can protect the others, whose location the data traces would reveal.

The Kill switch and the Stealth Mode supplement the senses of danger and risk with an atmosphere of choice, volition, and chance for the user to have an immediate impact on what is being tracked by these devices and who gets this information. Arguably, the counter-mood that arises from this series of smartwatches relates to the need and capability not to disconnect entirely but to be able to manage one's own visibility and the data traces online. As such, the smartwatch provides the user tactical means to deal with opponents in the situation of encounter (Ash, 2013: 40). For example, when the user activates the Kill Switch they have the means to kill their data body. Yet, the Kill Switch erases the data only from the terminal device and not the data double that exists in the cloud. To understand the impacts of this attunement, De Certeau's (1988: xix) notion of tactics as situational methods where events are turned into opportunities with temporary results is useful. Tactic does not 'have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow,' de Certeau (1988.: 37) writes.

The role of locative media and the need to disconnect when taken together change the way we perceive space and our relation with it (Beattie and Cassidy, 2021: 398). Attunement to connectivity here does not only mean that we are beginning to assess connectivity through its risks and dangers but it also about the alternative ways of handling things that emerge from those particular moods. While many of the features of the Tactix smartwatches are tactical, they also imply the possibility for more strategic changes. For example, while the Stealth Mode could be seen as a rebranding of the airplane mode common to our other networked devices the new contextualization here matters. The Stealth Mode is a particular affective attunement to connectivity. While the airplane mode refers to a specific situation and context, the Stealth Mode highlights that our connected life is in an increasing manner becoming contingent to the possibility to disconnect and we are attuned to the mood to realize this possibility in our daily lives.

Flotation

‘I can honestly say I don’t think I’ve ever gone two hours without looking at my phone’, a BuzzFeed (2016: np) host ruminates to the camera as they prepare to float naked in a light-proof tank filled with salt-saturated water heated to body temperature. Flotation therapy facilities—such as the one featured in this BuzzFeed video with over 3 million views on YouTube—have been commercially available since the 1970s. Also known as isolation or sensory deprivation tanks, flotation was developed from Cold War interrogation techniques and became popular among psychedelic enthusiasts and New Age practitioners. In the last decade, flotation has been reinvented as a spa experience for disconnecting from overstimulation from digital devices and their bane of endless scrolls and constant notifications. For example, in a video of her first float, travel influencer Miss Mina describes the flotation tank as a ‘digital detox’ and ‘a heaven to get away from your phone and its parade of notifications’ (2019). Miss Mina reports her time in the tank as a meditative experience from which she emerged with less anxiety and more mental clarity. Similarly, the BuzzFeed host reflected positively on being alone with only their own heartbeat and thoughts, and reported emerging from the tank with the realization that ‘I don’t even want to be on my phone. Looking at my phone is a way that I distract myself from myself.’

At first glance, flotation falls in step with digital detoxes (Syvertsen and Enli, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020), which emphasize individualized aspirations rather than collective obligations of wellbeing (Purser, 2019). Like digital detoxes, these 1-2 hour flotation sessions frame disconnection as a reprieve from the necessity of our networked devices to recalibrate our continued screentime (Aranda and Baig, 2018). Like detox camps designed for elite tech workers (Sutton, 2020; Fish, 2017), flotation is promoted in the language of self-optimization through recuperation of productivity and enhancement of creativity. For example, in a profile by Fast Company, the owner of a Silicon Beach flotation facility explained that they restrict tablets and Wi-Fi for a ‘digital-free space, like a digital detox’ for burnt out executives from Facebook, Google, and Snapchat to cultivate ‘free flowing ideas and clear thinking’ (Raphael, 2016).

It would be easy to dismiss flotation as what Natale and Treré (2020) refer to as a façade of escape that does not solve the real or structural problems of digital capitalism. Indeed, as a disconnective practice, flotation is currently touted as a physical and mental reset to rejuvenate ourselves for future connection. In fact, Aleena, one of the authors of this article found herself habitually looking forward to checking her phone notifications after emerging from the tank, and would reach for her cellphone even before showering, leaving a trail of salt on the touchscreen. However, the reduction of flotation to popular detox slogans such as ‘disconnect to reconnect’ overlooks crucial differences from other disconnective practices. First, popular discussions about flotation as a form of digital disconnection begin with the recognition that willpower is not enough: physical barriers of salt, water, and plastic are necessary to prevent us from constantly connecting. For example, in a talk at a flotation industry conference, chief strategy officer of Deepak Chopra’s Center for Wellbeing states that being physically separated from our phones and its dopamine-laced notifications force us into stillness and awareness that can rewire our habitual urges to check our phone (Machaiah, 2019).

Like practices of life-hacking among elite tech workers described by Joseph Reagle (2019), flotation is not a brand of disconnection that substitutes one device for another. Instead, flotation bypasses the techno-psychological formulas big tech use to keep people ambivalently tethered to their devices. Instead of defaulting to Google Wellbeing apps or Apple Screen Time functions to modulate dis/connection according to normative metrics for healthy use, flotation provides an atmosphere for disconnecting by minimizing external stimuli to attune to one's own body. Flotation does not deprive one of sensations per se: it provides an atmosphere of darkness, buoyancy, salinity, viscosity, and humidity. In the tank, bubbles tickle one's neck as they rise from trapped pockets in one's hair; condensation periodically trickles down from the ceiling in a muffled symphony; salt crusts on exposed skin on one's neck, stomach, and chest. This atmosphere is designed not for smartphones but interoception: attuning to one's internal bodily signals such as breaths, heartbeats, and stomach rumbles that cultivates meditative states. For example, in a TEDx talk, a clinical neuroscientist states that through flotation therapy, interoception allows people 'to disconnect from the outside world and suddenly reconnect to themselves' (Feinstein, 2020). However, interoception does more than modulate breath and direct conscious thoughts; it can also incubate non-conscious cognition such as mind wandering, liminal dreams, and autonomic processes such as muscle spasms. Aleena's micro naps in the tank were frequently interrupted by muscle spasms. Awakening in the tank was a pleausurably disorienting experience that blurred the boundaries between thoughts and dreams, skin and water, sounds and auditory hallucinations.

In everyday media use, digital platforms and devices modulate users' affect through reminders, notifications, and interfaces (Paasonen, 2021); users also modulate affect and partition time using social media for procrastination or distraction (Neves, Chia, Paasonen and Sundaram, Forthcoming). In the tank, non-conscious cognitive processes such as mind wandering are guided not by recommendation algorithms, game mechanics, or interaction design but predominantly by interoception. In the tank, we defer our urges and in doing so, modulate our affect—at least temporarily. This is why Feinstein (2020) and Machaiah (2019) call interoception a contemplative practice that facilitates digital disconnection. As floaters drift between liminal and day dreams, time in the tank literally escapes them in mundane, yet transformative ways—attuning one's self to cognitive and bodily processes in the tank is a way to recalibrate habitual reliance on digital platforms and devices.

Cosmetics

In Spring 2018, Almay launched a collection of eyeshadows including 'Unplugged' and 'Less is More'. The following Spring, Zoeva presented its 'Offline' eyeshadow and blush palettes; in nail polish brands, Kinetics announced a 'Reconnect' line, and Essie sold 'Serene Slate' line. In nail polish, 'new colors are introduced twice a year, in the northern fall and spring' (Jones, cited in Barrios et al., 2020: 2), and make-up brands launch new products on a continual basis throughout the year. Marta Milena Barrios and colleagues (2020: 2) found that a Colombian nail polish brand, Masglo, decided in 2017 to switch from numbers to designate the colours into names 'linked with their emotions so that [consumers] could recall them easily'. So if the saturated cosmetic market has instilled this norm to have seasonal or occasional collections to

create differentiation, why were brands taking up the disconnection theme around 2018 and 2019? And why is digital disconnection being commodified through tangential products, and specifically in beauty products, especially targeted at female consumers?

These brands use disconnection tropes and some internet vernacular, sometimes modulated as puns and parodies, as well as other cultural references, in ways similar to what Zhao (2014) found for a hipster magazine. These range from Almay's 'Unplugged' and Kinetics 'NO WI-FI' and 'ERROR 404', Zoeva's 'HUMAN AFTER ALL' or '404', to Essie's 'generation zen' nail polish colour. Kinetics' Reconnect is exemplary here, with 'REDHASHTAG', for instance, to connote being overshadowed. Zoeva named one of the eyeshadow colors in the palette 'Pasiythea', a reference to Greek mythology to connote relaxation and meditation, and all altered states of consciousness. Through a creative use of language that constructs irony, cynicism and parody, the branding of nail polish and make-up aestheticized under the 'offline' imaginary attempts to position the brands as modern and attuned with the cosmopolitan, hyperconnected consumer, as well as to create a sense of sophistication in the user. These strategies may not only result in a fleeting smile from the reader, but also invite virality, as Barrios et al. (2019) found—which in the theme of disconnection accentuates the irony and cynicism.

In terms of visual and sensory elements, on the one hand, Zoeva embraces this paradox and its poster shows the two palettes on a table with a computer keyboard and a smartphone with the screen facing down, as well as a coffee cup. Offline make-up products use capitalized lettering, deploy the acoustic metaphor 'RING RING RING', and their colour range has more colour (strong pink, copper, blue, velvet) than the other three lines. Taken together, these elements point to a construction of the products as integrated in the hyperconnected lifestyle of consumers with a promise of personalization and optimization (Radzi and Musa, 2017), which can be explained by the fact that Zoeva grew as an online brand before selling through retail outlets. This self-actualization attitude is also invited by Almay Shadow Squad through the product names, which not only play with the disconnection theme ('Unplugged', Less is More'), but also create a constellation of meanings through clichés and idiomatic expressions, even misspelling, around an affirmative attitude: 'Making a Statement', 'Individualist', 'Never Settle', 'Own It', 'The World is My Oyster', 'Thrill Seeker'. This cluster can be seen as part of a trend in cosmetic marketing with a postfeminist positioning, where women's autonomy is reincorporated in the consumption realm (Radzi and Musa, 2017). Rosalind Gill (2008) frames this process as *commodity feminism*, where women's individual acts—instead of collective action—particularly through consumption, are suggested as the means to liberate women. This has been embraced by lip colour, nails and make-up marketing in their attempts to differentiate themselves, sometimes resulting in further accentuating conservatism (Barrios et al., 2020).

In terms of colour range and textures, however, Almay can be grouped in a different cluster: eyeshadows are mostly neutral and nudes, with each product in four different finishes ('matte, metallic, satin, glitter'), and a 'soft, velvety formula'. Essie's Serene Slate collection (Essie, n.d.) not only deploys a grey scale, but uses lowercase lettering in all of the communication, which connotes low impact—in contrast with Zoeva Offline, as mentioned. Furthermore, in their more sophisticated branding, Kinetics and Essie build on associations to

the imaginary of meditation and countryside: the former has a 'Reconnect' lookbook with pastoral and serene elements, while the latter uses the image of stones used in massages as a background of their poster for Serene Slate collection. This is reinforced by acoustic metaphors—Essie labels a grey nail polish 'On Mute', where the absence of notifications and any sound is a part of the imaginary of quiet and freedom achieved through digital disconnection; as well as through sensorial association, in the case of Kinetics. The brand website includes an inspiration for each of the colour of the collection, and colour Reconnect, for example, is inspired by: 'Peppermint tea, Energy, New beginnings, Grass' (Kinetics Beauty, n.d.). These associations are consummated in the calls for action of the taglines or product labels of the different ranges. For example, Essie relies on calls for inaction such as 'find an excuse to unplug from the screen and plug into a manicure of mineral neutrals that suit any skin tone or state of mind.' Similarly, Kinetics also brands itself through inaction:

Do not share. Take your time. Not yet. It is ok to fail, but more important is not giving up. Like a fresh morning in a swamp, wait for dawn and start over. A color that gives you new hopes and ideas to start a new life. (Login Failed).

To Baym et al. (2020), commodities such as those sold by Essie, Almay, Kinetics and Zoeva exemplify the fashionability of concerns about 'overconnection'. Lifestyle, including beauty and fashion, is one of the themes that grew the most with and through social media, in the valorization of (stylized) personal image. These nail polish and make-up collections propose a momentary escape from everyday—hyperconnected—life, through commodity aesthetics, that does not so much lead the target to consume something that is at all alien and strange to their will, but rather serves to create a different emotional sensation in consuming. Offline-branded cosmetic products invite to ornament the body under an imaginary of a peaceful, silent, orderly life. This offers a form of attuning to disconnection that is layered over the body, and further associates disconnection with self-care and with feeling good as a way to live in a structure where individual agency is limited. So it is tactical—these commodities help to accommodate the hardships and tribulations caused by overconnection through a mood (Silva, 2013), a sensation of escape.

Also, while they do not afford disconnection, but aestheticize and play around disconnection, these products promise to give off an aura of fancy consuming to the user, by capturing the disconnection topic and tropes as 'out there', and bid for further reintegration into social media content (Jorge, 2019). These commodities thus summon to embrace the paradox of disconnectivity by optimizing self-presentation for the sake of further connectivity, by inviting to share online the disconnection *on* the body. As they contain a potential to make disconnection more visible and accessible, it may be flattened or unheard amidst the noise. They can, then, absorb an emotional displacement of hyperconnectivity, or even substitute the experience of disconnecting.

Differential Attunements

While Bucher (2020) and Natale and Treré (2020) are skeptical about the subversive power of commercialized disconnective practices, they also respectively note that we should not dismiss disconnective practices but find meaningful ways to work with them. Bucher (2020) suggests that ‘being-with disconnection’ is a method of working the problem. Being-with for Bucher is an ontological commitment that considers existence as relational, which renders a state of total disconnection illusory. For Bucher, the point is not to refute disconnection entirely, but to understand the new connections it makes possible. Disconnection is seen here not as a break but as an opening towards new relations. Similarly, Natale and Treré (2020) turn their focus to the new modes of engagement enabled by disconnection. They (Natale and Treré, 2020: 631) highlight that ‘disconnection can be reinterpreted as a set of situated practices that do not refuse, but instead, complexify our everyday encounters with digital technologies.’ These authors provide means to critique the dogmatism of defining disconnection as a binary response and call for a more affirmative theory of disconnection.

Many lifestyle disconnection brands emphasize good feelings of an easeful life instead of ordinary feelings of discomfort that are part of the everyday friction of resistance (Chia and Beattie, Forthcoming); this applies to the flotation services and beauty products analyzed. In these cases, disconnection is not a negative force that breaks but a positive force that affirms. The discourses and practices highlight how disconnection is not a full stop or complete break but are different ways of attuning to connection. This can be seen in the ‘new hopes and ideas to start a new life’ promised by Kinetic Beauty’s Login Failed nail polish. Flotation therapy facilitates affective modulation through interoception. The Kill Switch and Stealth Mode of the smartwatch can save lives by giving the ability to control online visibility and the data traces military operators leave. The marketing language highlights the powers of conscious attunements with connectivity instead of getting rid of connections entirely. It is about the joys that being and engaging with disconnection can bring.

Taking disconnection as rapture—a joyful ecstasy—instead of rupture reminds us about the Spinozist formulation of the body’s capacity to affect and become affected. Paasonen and her colleagues (2015: 6) write that Spinoza represents an ‘anti-Cartesian interest in how bodies are constantly shaped, modified, and affected by encounters with other bodies, encounters that may increase or diminish, affirm or undermine their life forces’. These life forces, as the authors note, are in relation to the bodies’ capacity to act. Gilles Deleuze (1988: 101), following Spinoza, distinguishes joyful and sad feelings-affects and points out that the difference between these categorizations is that the former augment our ‘power of acting’ while the latter diminish it. Disconnection as rapture, then, points towards a positive change in the individual’s *capacity to act* rather than naming a particular feeling or emotion.

An affirmative approach to disconnection turns the perspective from the ends to the means of disconnection: to the capacities we have to handle connectivity. These capacities are ‘differential attunements’ (Massumi 2015). Brian Massumi (2015: 115) explains that “[a]ttunement” refers to the direct capture of attention and energies by the event.’ When Massumi talks about the differential attunements, his example of the event is the presence of a

potential catastrophic situation or a crisis in which we are all prepared for but with different capacities to act. Massumi (2015: 115) explains that differential ‘refers to the fact that we each are taken into the event from a different angle, and move out of it following our own singular trajectories, riding the waves in our own inimitable way.’ Differential attunement describes how bodies that are in encounter are both absorbed in the same situation in their own ways and have their own trajectories (Massumi, 2015).

Differential attunements are not merely emotional responses to connectivity but form the basis for movements towards and away from connectivity. Our three cases show that these capacities are qualitatively different and operate on different registers. Flotation helps practitioners attune to the flow of their own affects and non-conscious cognitions, instead of habitually directing them through commercial digital infrastructures. The smartwatch’s features allow surreptitious navigation of our data-saturated environment. The make-up products are about making a statement on the body about its hyperconnectedness, and attuning analytically to disconnection as a project.

Jon Baggaley (2012: 122) uses the notion of ‘disconnectivism’ to argue that ‘it is important to be able to shift dynamically between connectedness and disconnectedness at the right moment, just as one changes one’s clothes to suit the weather.’ Similarly, our cases do not represent the terminus of connectivity—their value is in the temporality of their being and the minor adjustments they make. These commodified practices cultivate the mood of resistance. As a mood, disconnection is shared and contagious and drives to ‘strive for collective experiences of the disconnected life’ (Stäheli, 2021: 25). As such, the body whose capacity to act is affected by disconnection is no longer only individual but collective. Being in the mood for disconnection foregrounds the sociality of practice and galvanizes users into action.

Conclusion

Our goal has been to push the boundaries of disconnection scholarship’s foregrounding of interpretive meanings of modulating connection, and critique of consumerized acts of opposing connection. Against advocates of decommodifying disconnection, we argue that political potentialities for transforming platform society are extant in disconnection in spite of its commodification. When Massumi (1995: 96) writes about affect, he defines it as an openness that cannot be entirely captured—something always escapes. The notion of attunement displaces the vocabulary from capture to processes such as directing, invoking, and shifting. These processes exploit the openness of affect without aiming to capture it entirely. The potentialities of disconnection commodities exist in this openness that cannot be entirely closed. This openness contains moods and counter-moods, negative and positive forces that give power to particular bodies but can also take it away.

In her account of pericapitalism—salvage economies in blasted landscapes that are simultaneously inside and outside capitalism—Tsing (2015: 27-28) declares that ‘purity is not an option.’ Tsing states that in our current times of generalized precarity, in the absence of teleology, the task of scholarship is no longer to critique modernity’s fantasies of stability and systematicity, but to imagine collective survival through forms of contamination and

complicity that make life possible. In the absence of purity and teleology, disconnection must be considered not as binary but modular—as a perpetual field of technical *and* affective modulations and attunements that co-constitute bodies, behaviours, and moods. Commodified forms of disconnection are encounters that contaminate, but we cannot avoid them. As Tsing (2015: 27) points out, '[w]e are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others.'

Funding

Tero Karppi acknowledges SSHRC Explore Grant for the support to conduct the research for this paper.

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