Dwelling as method: Lingering in/with feminist curated data sets on Instagram

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Abstract

This article proposes and delineates "digital dwelling" as one method of grappling with a central methodological challenge that we, as feminist researchers, face of how researchers might account for the multiple entanglements of affect, history, culture, politics, and resistance within feminist digital media artifacts. Using our method of digital dwelling, we analyze three sets of carousel posts on Instagram from three different accounts: Intersectional Environmentalist Collective, For the Wild, and Richa Kaul Padte. We explore how the inter, para, and meta-textual arguments curated through these carousel posts change the ways audiences relate to one another and to the current political moment, and how audiences, including individual researchers, are situated in affective and embodied ways within the research scene. By demarcating small, embodied data curation as a key space of method and analysis, we suggest that the personal relationships we develop in community as researchers with located acts of transgression, like these posts, are significant to consider more fully through their *emergent intertextualities*, especially for those invested in contemporary social media, protest, and visual cultures.

Keywords: social media, visual methods, digital culture, activism

1. Introduction: "The possibilities explode"

On day thirty-two of #the100dayproject, an "annual global art project" where users post 100 days of their art on Instagram (@dothe100dayproject), artist Richa Kaul Padte (@richakaulpadte) shared an image on her account of an underwater spider delicately balanced upon an earth colored seabed. On cut out pieces of white rectangles, typewritten text overlaid on the image reads:

When we say

'believe women'

the possibilities explode.[1]

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[1] Posted on June 21, 2020 on the Instagram account @100forhirish, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBsKIqunseu/.

For us, the compelling nature of this image-macro media artifact lies in the way that it juxtaposes an aestheticized abstract image from nature—that of an underwater spider, a being often associated with a mixture of repulsion and awe—with an explicitly feminist political statement. This combination of image-macro meme with digital feminist messaging is not new; indeed, it has been a throughline within feminist digital activism since even before the viral uptake in 2017 of Tarana Burke's "Me Too" movement. And yet, the text, "when we say 'believe women' the possibilities explode," remains notable for how it situates a sense of the past, present, and future as coinciding within a single phrase of resistance and hope. "When" indicates a time in the past or the future for the action of "we say;" the second part of the statement, "possibilities explode," suggests the future potential of this actionable possibility. Laid against the image of the sea spider—eight legs, reaching out and extending past all sides of the edges of the frame, body leaning in towards the viewer—we are interpolated into this polyvalent moment of time and space where the impetus to believe women seeks to ensure the possibilities of feminist activism can explode. As we dwell with this post, we read an emergent theme about the need to (warily) work with the tools around us for their feminist possibilities amid the ongoing catastrophes of the everyday. This post is just one example of how feminist activists engage with the affordances of Instagram to protest the misogynist and often nihilistic realities of our digital social worlds. These accounts productively use the platform's grids and ability to post multiple slides in sequence (or what is more commonly known as a carousel) to advance cultural critique. This is one of many ways that feminist activists currently encourage visual protest in online space. Through the semiotic chain of relations these affordances offer, such activist accounts find new ways to prompt their audience of followers to question the various, and often competing, ideologies that circulate with ease in our digital landscapes.

Our consideration of this post aims to reveal the slow method of lingering with digitally born content to uncover techno-imaginaries of resistance they may offer. This content is a valuable form of techné—the images, their texts, their digital environments, and the meanings we might individually and collectively infer from them—that makes up the dynamic components of "media events" (Rentschler and Thrift 2015) that serve as a rich research scene. Within contemporary media practices, digital activisms mobilize a particularly poignant iteration of the 'personal is political' through anecdotes, stories, and visual cultural representations that evoke the materiality of lived experience within digital spaces of hashtags, memes, reels, and more. These personal and political media events create networked digital communities for speaking back to power through calling attention to misogyny. Each of these articulations within networked activist spaces constitute media events that create ripple effects into larger discursive fields and structures. Such media events are part of larger stories: "non-linear lived, and living, histories that have led to moments of personal or other disclosure, whether those disclosures are textual, visual, verbal, or all of the above, and the possible futures that may come to be through such disclosures." (Wiens 2021b, 10). In this article, we suggest that dwelling with the stories that such media events reveal––our own embodied intertextual, spatial, and temporally-inflected encounters—constitutes an important method of visual cultural protest and analysis.

Within this heightened digital moment, where algorithms and big data figure as key players, our opening encounter with the single image of the sea-spider is significant for how it leads to a digital feminist Instagram subculture of carousel posts, as well as how our engagement with it requires time and space where less data is more. This post-as-media event compels us to dwell as an act of both scholarship and scholarly resistance to the imperatives of impersonal, rapid data analysis. Within this context, these carousels function as media events that offer insights into how we might "do feminism" (Rentschler and Thrift 2015) in critically productive and sociopolitically-grounded ways. This article thus advances a method of collaborative and embodied digital dwelling (MacDonald 2018; Wiens 2021a, 2022ab) for assessing the complex digital visual cultural texts of feminist media events and their entanglements with social, political, economic, and technological forms of power. Rather than rely on the randomization, scaling, coding, and flattening of algorithmic and big data, which can overlook the complexities of networked textual and visual communication integral to feminist online activism, we propose digital

dwelling as a counterpoint. As J.J. Gieseking (2018) writes, we explicitly need datasets that are not abstracted aggregates of data in order to "call out the voices of the marginalized," while also "refus[ing] to be made small ever again" (154). Following this call, we look to the emergent practice of curated carousel posts of Instagram, where creators pull together sets of reels, TikToks, memes, Tweets (now X posts), and personal photography into one single post for their followers to swipe through.

In what follows, we draw on our humanities roots and our feminist commitments to first delineate our proposed method of digital dwelling as one way into analyzing these curated datasets. Using this method of digital dwelling, we analyze three sets of carousel posts on Instagram from three different accounts: Intersectional Environmentalist Collective, For the Wild, and Richa Kaul Padte. From these carousels, we explore how the inter, para, and meta-textual arguments (Genette 1991) curated through these carousel posts change the ways audiences relate to the content and how it builds associative relationalities to the current political moment. Ultimately, by demarcating small, embodied data curation as a key space of method and analysis, we suggest that the personal relationships we develop as researchers with located acts of transgression, like these posts, through digital dwelling are significant to consider more fully, especially for those invested in contemporary social media, protest, and visual digital cultures.

2. Feminist media, stories, and small data in digital culture

In digital spaces, as in everyday life, power is informed by the "matrix of domination" (Collins 1990) that looks across structural, discipline, hegemony, and interpersonal domains to examine how power accumulates, organizes, and is then experienced. Drawing on Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein (2020), who rely on the foundational work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990), we understand power as describing "the current configuration of structural privilege and structural oppression, in which some groups experience unearned advantages—because various systems have been designed by people like them and work for people like them—and other groups experience systemic disadvantages—because those same systems were not designed by them or with people like them in mind" (24). Building from these formative texts, when we talk about feminism, we refer to a movement that is not only about women and gender, but about these power dynamics more broadly—who does and does not hold and wield power within the current matrix of domination. This is crucial for studies of technology and the forms of visual cultural protest that occur within spaces that are both reliant on and critical of how technology furthers a variety of inequitable power dynamics.

Reflecting on power, from within digital spaces, racism, sexism, misogyny, queerphobia, and other forms of violence and discrimination continue to exist, furthering racial, gendered, and sexual orientation-based inequalities. Technologies, including the digital spaces of social media, reflect historic and socially ingrained biases, and as such the contexts in which technologies are created contribute to their effects (Benjamin 2019; Broussard 2018; Browne 2015; Nakamura and Chow-White 2012; Noble 2018; Noble and Tynes 2016). Those invested in critical feminist information studies and technology studies understand that current technologies and digital cultures are overflowing with forms of mediated misogyny and racism that promote intimidation, harassment, and "alarming amounts of vitriol and violence" online (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016, 171). Platforms and those who use them function as gatekeepers in who they cater to, what they value, and what they present to us as viewers and participants. Not only are algorithms filtering out what social media participants do and not see, but the online groups that these participants choose to engage with create the digital conditions for algorithmic learning and the content that participants can interact with. Together, these media events, platforms, and their para- and meta-texual discourses, are significant for how they "mediate new social relationships and forms of resistance to... inequalities... through critical engagement" (Zarzycka and Olivieri 2017, 528). Such events collectively "name what hurts," (hooks 2012) articulating aloud the harm done in order to draw attention to the matter.

In tagging individual posts and bringing them together in a collective naming of what hurts, media events like hashtags, memes, and reels articulate and amplify experiences of misogyny, rape culture, racism, and harassment that are structurally, collectively, and individually perpetuated. Notably, much of the research on such media events—while significant in academic and activist ways—depends on big data gathering to assess the current trends and patterns in digital feminist media work. Through using APIs, random sampling, quantitative content analysis, case studies, and big data visualizations (e.g., Bailey, Jackson, and Welles 2019; Brown, Ray, Summers, and Fraistat 2017; Clark 2016; Clark-Parsons 2019; Conley 2014; Keller, Ringrose, and Mendes 2018), traction has been gained in acknowledging the need to study digitally mediated social movements. This research undertaken by feminist media scholars has been foundational in making clear the ubiquity of misogyny, in outlining the violence enacted upon people who are already marginalized in this system. Moreover, this work has illustrated how feminists use media and digital technologies to document and respond to such pressing issues in the last decade, including rape culture, police violence, workplace double standards, and the rise of alt-right white nationalism.

But, as boyd and Crawford (2012) emphasize, big data needs to be critically interrogated. Because the term "is less about data that is big than it is about a capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets," the harmful myth has emerged that "large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy" (663). As a sociotechnical phenomenon located at the intersection of technology, analysis, and mythology, big data's rise in popularity should necessitate critical questions, including "what all this data means, who gets access to what data, how data analysis is deployed, and to what ends" (664). While this article does not claim to answer these questions, we do offer an alternative approach of digital dwelling for orienting this study of media events, focusing on Instagram carousels as a form of visual protest. In doing so, we seek to expand the vibrant field of research from the last ten years.

Digital feminist media research (e.g., Conley 2017; Rentschler 2014, 2017; Ringrose and Renold 2014; Thrift 2014) has already made clear that data are interpreted through specific situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) whether this is underscored by researchers or not. The value of embracing the fact of situated knowledge is it allows researchers to speak to the capacity for personal stories and individual media events to, in fact, create stronger objective truths (Harding 1993). While much of this existing research does not specify that they are working with small data, we find this term useful in its counterpoint to the concept of big data. In contrast to big data, small data provides an alternative to large data output and collection and the nuances that big data can often obscure. They are the dynamic and lively particularities and relationalities between individual feminist activist posts and the comments to these posts, and images, memes, and gifs that might be part of the aggregate dialogue or merely a reference in it, in addition to the specific paratextual social, political, and technological contexts they circulate within. Our small data approach focuses on lived experiences, how they are storied, and their consequences within socio-political structures of power. We focus on these "digitally-born artifacts [that] travel within and between various spaces to trace links, histories, and possible futures," tracing the "individual posts, hashtags, comments, images, media stories, the sociopolitical and technocultural contexts from which data emerge, and the relationships between these pieces of data" (Wiens 2021b, ii), all of which of constitute small data.

Leaning into smaller or, as Andre Brock (2015) suggests, "deeper" datasets can bring us more readily to the intimacies of social media participation as a series of narrative stories connected to other stories. Within big data, these same digital intimacies are aggregated and anonymized, coming to represent broad trends and universal objectivities. In response, we argue the need for analyses and approaches to research that look to the complexities of smaller specific pieces of digital data and their contexts within the larger media ecosystem. Focusing on smaller data-sets highlights the relationships between single social media posts, associated comments and images, the paratextual discourses that precede and succeed posts, and

the networks that enable posts and digital conversations to take place is important in this moment of big data scholarship.

3. Digital dwelling with small data

Dwelling first emerged from thinking critically and carefully about the role of the researcher during the research process, as much feminist work has done (e.g., Alcoff 1988; Haraway 1988; Harding 1993; Luka and Millette 2018). As feminists, we take as a central principle the need for social media research to account for the algorithmic oppression (Noble 2018), digital redlining (Gilliard 2016), and "New Jim Code" (Benjamin 2019) that occur when aggregated data are used to make decisions about individuals. Recent scholarship has gestured towards how we might better take up embodiment, materiality, affect, and representation within media studies and digital humanities (e.g., Fotopoulou 2019; Vallee 2020; Wiens et al. 2020; Wiens 2022; Wiens et al. 2023). However, when taken out of these larger datasets and considered in relationship to their sociopolitical and technocultural contexts, the social media accounts they originate on, the platforms they circulate within, and the relationships between these phenomena, we argue that these small digital data are still worthy of investigation and can provide insights into the ways that social media participants understand and resist power and oppression. Across digital feminist media studies, we need to continue to develop approaches to research that acknowledge these kinds of interpretive biases and that value alternative and imaginative processes to big data that embrace and validate smaller subsets of data and processes of digital care that they can lead to through being with these data and processes. This speaks to George and Leidner's (2019) concept of "connective action," which "purposefully utilizes [information systems] to bring people together" in ways that change "the social action landscape" (4). Extending this productive understanding of carousels as collective action, we suggest approaching their analysis through the method of *digital dwelling*. As Tim Ingold (2011) writes, dwelling is "literally to be embarked upon a movement along a way of life," holding close the imperative to be with the world (9). This, we argue, carves out necessary space for analyzing the heteropatriarchal structures that seek to obscure individual voices.

3.1 Digital dwelling: Theory and method

As a method, digital dwelling asks, "that we linger in online spaces to sit with ideas, find out how tools work, how different tactics can be tools, and how they can be used in counter hegemonic ways to center marginalized voices and bring forth new ways of engaging in the world" (Wiens 2021a, 86). Dwelling allows focus on "the relationship between or 'intra-actions; (Barad 2003) of the researcher, research scene, participants, data, affects, and sociopolitical context," "the individual stories found through these data, not just the broader themes or trends of the aggregate," as well as more closely consider "the interconnected domains of influence between individual spheres and their relationship to collective and then structural levels" (Wiens 2021a, 86). As a method, dwelling is a practice undertaken with the tools observed and acquired to sift through the "research scene" (MacDonald and Wiens 2019) to gather all available means of persuasion and information, and then begin to understand those means and that information as data. Dwelling compels us as researchers to "pay attention to the specificities of the space that are overwritten by dominant perceptions and uses of it" (MacDonald 2018, 279). As an embodied act, dwelling enables us to "access and convey [the] layered nature of space" (279) through lingering with stories to reconceptualize research as layered scenes where stories and their affects are valued as data and where research can be understood as "collections of material objects for researchers to study" while "also acknowledging researchers' bodies, voices, and gestures as essential forms of material data" (Wiens et al. 2020, 22). The "intentional presence, embodied focus, and integrative reflection" thus enhances the emotions, affects, environments, and ambivalences of the research scene (Quinn 2021, 4). Dwelling then

becomes a method for understanding how people have lingered with their own stories as those stories shape and are shaped by other shared stories.

Dwelling asks that a researcher embed themselves as a participant in the research scene, observing the scene, writing research memos, and constantly filtering possible content for analysis in our daily travels across the online spaces that we ordinarily dwell within as everyday social media users. This is not only an effort to understand and deeply consider how the community understands itself, as thick description via ethnography would have a researcher do, but an extended autoethnographic effort to explore how our actions affect the scene and what this suggests for the entangled practices and digital communities we find ourselves in. Indeed, "dwelling is more radical in that it asks that we take up space and that we orient towards not just understanding the story, but towards acting on what we learn in the story. Through dwelling, we can see the tools at our disposal, how they have been used, and how we might use them differently in the future to provoke alternative programs and methods" (Wiens 2021a, 90). Importantly, then, dwelling does not presuppose a separation of our scholarly analysis from our position as viewers embedded in a reciprocal semiotic entanglement, a "multi-mangle" (MacDonald and Wiens 2019) with the carousel posts, or any social media post we engage critically.

Dwelling stands as a method of taking up space and creating a relationship with space "when that space has been denied within the institution—a way to make yourself present, resituate, and to recast colonial, sexist, racist, and/or ableist histories" (Wiens 2021a, 91).[2] Crucially, such feminist dwelling spaces implore us as researchers to understand media events as artifacts situated within specific platforms and circulated by specific technologies that are "not neutral," but rather "*do* things" (Conley 2021, 25). Tara Conley's imperative to look at the relationships between digital discourse, the embodied practices that circulate such discourses, and the ideologies they contain and espouse stand as a key component of dwelling—while her work focuses on hashtag feminism, we can still determine such interrelationships within broader media events through dwelling. And, as Katherine Quinn (2021) urges, this should be done with a spirit of slowness through what she calls "slow methods" of "doodling, deliberative dwelling, ethnographic description" (4) in order to slow down the pace of the research scene and move with its mundane paces. In other words, through dwelling researchers can begin to focus on how "power, affects and practices are entangled with media materialities" (Skageby and Rahm 2018, 2), or, in Sarah Sharma's (2022) words, we can begin to focus on the "medium specific techno-logics" of the platforms (8). This kind of dwelling enables "sticky" (Ahmed 2017) emotions to take up space within the affective structures of the research scene, staying with "feeling out-of-kilter, frazzled, uneasy and/or unsettled and considering the epistemic and political significance of such feelings for research practices" (Chadwick 2021, 570). Bringing together these various components, dwelling enables us to follow media events and archives to better understand how they exist in relationship to the technologies that support them, the ideologies that flow from them, and the bodies, emotions, and affects that surround, interpret, and remix them.

Methodologically, for the Instagram carousel posts we dwell with for this article, these accounts and carousels were artifacts that we had either shared through our direct messaging on Instagram or had saved in a shared folder on the platform—that is, given dwelling's insistence on the researcher's embodied affective reactions to the posts, they hold importance for us as researchers within a specific situated location at a given political and social time. Carousels that other researchers choose will thus be different given their own situated contexts. Once we return to the posts we collect on a daily basis, we then highlight or separate content that speaks to us, constituting the data that instills wonder and "glows" (MacLure 2013) within the miasma of digital content and asks to be engaged further. Once we agree upon the accounts and set of posts, we begin the analysis process by first looking at the account profiles that

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[2] As one example, Aditi Jaganathan, Sarita Malik, and June Givanni (2020) describe Givanni's Pan-African Cinema Archive as a "diasporic feminist dwelling space," emphasizing relationships between the UK's art and culture scene and Givanni's personal and professional relationships with African and Asian diasporic film, with other curators and directors, with museums that house and have housed the archive, and with the movements, marginalized cultures, and histories that are represented in the archive.

house each carousel since they offer context about the account's commitments, activist practices, and media presence, and we then linger with each post in the carousel, writing a thick description for each of the carousels as we engage with them individually and collectively in order to bring out themes, emotions, and greater affects. From here, we build a co-facilitated analysis around the content, whereby we view and engage with content together, taking written notes while in dialogue with the content and each other. This adds another level to the practice of dwelling insofar as we dwell with each other and with our separate readings of work. In staying with these themes and affects, we suggest that dwelling is, ultimately, a method of question-asking and answers: in dwelling with these themes and affects, we suggest that broader sets of questions should be considered, articulated, and explored. This, for us, is the value of a deep comparative reading of the cultural and political contexts of these media events and the formal content that is circulated, including how platform affordances are operationalized to communicate their forms of aesthetic resistance. This opens space to stay with the kinds of data that can be produced through dwelling, a thickness or depth of data that encourages multiple points of entry for rumination, reflection, and analysis.

In this article specifically, each of the carousels analyzed was flagged by the authors during our daily exploration of Instagram content between January and April of 2023. This is in keeping with our overall practice at Feminist Think Tank, our research collective, where we collected Instagram content that caught our attention and held it (i.e., any post that impels a pause) through the "saved" function on Instagram on both our personal accounts and our collective research account (@Aesthetic.Resistance), selecting the three posts analyzed below for their frequency across our accounts and the popularity they accrued in the Instagram stories of accounts we follow. We then took a screenshot of these posts, which were saved in an external database using Tropy, a photo archiving platform, where they were coded and tagged. For all social media content that we analyze across our various projects, our research team at Feminist Think Tank, consisting of both the authors and our graduate and undergraduate research assistants, meets weekly to discuss the content collected alongside any themes or media trends that have been observed as emerging on different platforms, together prioritizing relevant themes for analysis. The carousel posts analyzed here are thus part of a larger collection of activist content that we have been gathering over the last four years. From this point, we (the authors) took on the role of dwelling, reading these posts alongside relevant cultural, historical, and technological contexts that we place in dialogue with the carousel posts in our analysis.

The three accounts that the posts are featured on, Intersectional Environmentalist Collective, For the Wild, and Richa Kaul Padte, were already on our radars independently for their compelling use of carousels for ecofeminist advocacy. The prominence of these posts simultaneously shows an overlap in our research interests and indicates how widely they were promoted through Instagram's algorithm, given that we are a diverse group in terms of education, age, race, and ethnicity and all found these accounts (perhaps, we might posit, suggesting the emergence of a new phase in influencer culture wherein accounts not tied to a specific person or face can be considered influencers). In the next section, we describe each carousel individually before putting them into conversation with each other. In doing so, we aim to demonstrate how dwelling with the posts individually and then in their relation to the other posts in the carousel produce what we call *emergent intertextualities* that can only emerge through both the platform affordance that enabled their sequencing and our dwelling with the set of posts as a whole.

4. Digital dwelling in practice

Carousels, which have been possible on Instagram since 2015, have become a popular tool for encouraging followers to spend more time on a post, gaining greater engagement with the content and thus influencing how the user's content is prioritized by Instagram's algorithms. As such, it is a staple feature for content producers at present. Carousels provide access for the cross-platform interplay of TikTok and Twitter on Instagram as the central site of engagement. Here, a sequential function of

carousels is how they reframe different visual cultural content, putting this content into intertextual dialogue with other seemingly unrelated content via the formal structure of memes. The practice of curating carousels offers Instagram users a great deal of agency in how the work is re-framed, re-mixed, and re-imagined via their own perspective for advancing explicit political and resistance content to their audiences. Ultimately, what Instagram carousels offer are a way to engage with small data in a concentrated form, given that they are already curated small data-sets in and of themselves, creating new stories for followers to infer and craft for themselves.
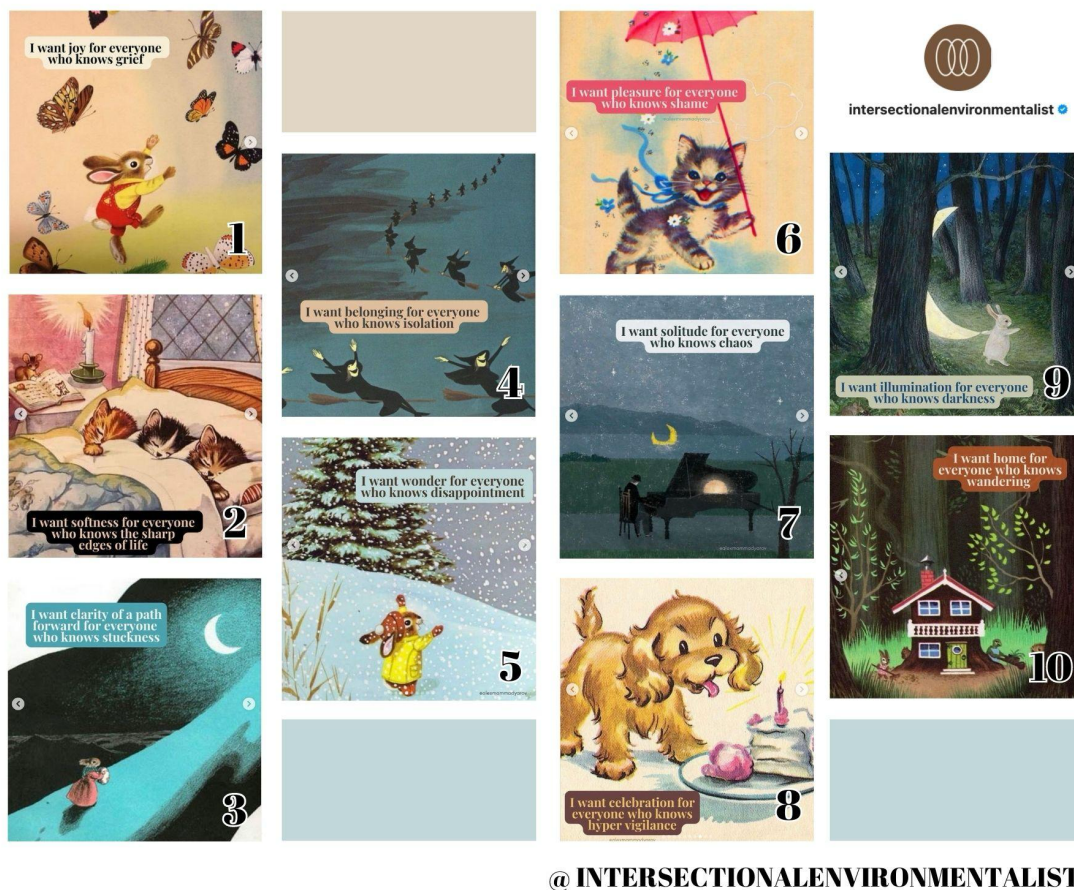

Figure 1. Carousel 1: @intersectionalenvironmentalist

This carousel comes from a nonprofit organization of the same name, Intersectional Environmentalist, who positions themselves as "a collective radically imagining a more equitable + diverse future of environmentalism" in their bio.[3] The account has just under half a million followers, and offers links in their bio to their events Instagram page; a linktree leading to the collective's annual impact report, open access playlists, resources on reproductive justice and modern-day imperialism among other intersectional social justice issues; and a space to submit writing, research, and creative work to be featured by the collective. The account posts regularly, often with multiple posts a day, and covers a range of topics including environmentalism, reproductive justice, food sovereignty and anti-racism initiatives. To set the scene for the feeling of the account, the top row showcases three pinned posts, with the first

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[3] https://www.instagram.com/intersectionalenvironmentalist/.

offering the words "joy + music are forms of activism" superimposed onto a video still of an outdoor public event from a 2022 "Earth Sessions" event the organization had hosted in Los Angeles.[4] The second pinned post is a longer edited video of the 2022 Earth Session with a caption that highlights "the importance of art in movement building,"[5] and the third pinned post shows a scene from the 2022 San Francisco Earth Session. On the grid, we're met with a femme figure with long flowing brown hair, holding herself in a hug and smiling up into the sun.[6] The post flips through video documentation of the event, focused specifically on the intersections between queerness and environmentalism. Throughout the grid, a purposeful lack of coherent aesthetic in the account, we suggest, makes it more inviting in its approachability, given that it offers a counterpoint to the highly curated and branded accounts of influencers, which its politics place it in opposition to.

On January 6, 2023, the account posted a carousel of ten slides that cohere around visual and conceptual themes of hope.[7] The visual theme relies on children's storybooks and images of woodland and magical creatures on backgrounds of bright primary colors. These images are held together with a text written by Alex Mammadyarov, written across and overlaid across the ten carousel slides of the storybook images:

> I want joy for everyone who knows grief.
> I want softness for everyone who knows the sharp edges of life.
> I want clarity of a path forward for everyone who knows stuckness.
> I want belonging for everyone who knows isolation.
> I want wonder for everyone who knows disappointment.
> I want pleasure for everyone who knows shame.
> I want solitude for everyone who knows chaos.
> I want celebration for everyone who knows hypervigilance.
> I want illumination for everyone who knows darkness.
> I want home for everyone who knows wandering.

Together, the text and images articulate a theme of wishing for a better life for those who experience hardship. The oppositional affective dynamics being named in each slide—joy/grief, softness/sharp edges, clarity/stuckness, belonging/isolation, wonder/disappointment, pleasure/shame, solitude/chaos, celebration/hypervigilance, illumination/darkness, home/wandering—and the visual images they corresponded with speak to themes of rest, release, delight, community, hope, and playfulness as antidotes to what hurts us, in addition to a temporality of the feelings. This can be clearly seen in slide one, "I want joy for everyone who knows grief," where we're welcomed by a bunny hopping through a sunny spring setting to frolic with a cluster of colorful butterflies. Similarly, slide three notes, "I want belonging for everyone who knows isolation," paired with a coven of witches flying off in a line into the distance on brooms with joyful abandon. These celebratory visuals mirror how the paired statements lead with the desire for revitalization as a remedy to experiences of social pain and cultural malaise and serve as a reminder that such feelings are temporary.

The visual movement in each of the images emphasizes these desires, creating a lively interplay of complimentary illustration styles and vibrant color palettes. The images alternate between drawing the eye upwards and off towards the top left corner of the frame and still image in the center of the frame, creating a sense of stillness and peace through a more minimal mise-en-scene. The movement between these two visual-affective settings draws viewers through the sense of competing emotions that the text addresses. The longer that a viewer spends time moving through the images, the greater the sense of joyful abandon, of peaceful release, revitalization, and hope, that emerges. It is not a coincidence, we

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[4] Posted on March 14, 2023 on the Instagram account @intersectionalenvironmentalist, https://www.instagram.com/p/CpyS3HngY9U/
[5] Posted on July 7, 2022 on the Instagram account @interesctionalenvironmentalist, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cghk5mJJpC5/
[6] Posted on November 16, 2022 on the Instagram account @intersectionalenvironmentalist, https://www.instagram.com/p/ClCe1Pbuu1B/
[7] Posted on January 6, 2023 on the Instagram account @intersectionalenvironmentalist, https://www.instagram.com/p/CnFNGOCOZCQ/

believe, that this carousel comes on the anniversary of the January 6, 2021, riots on the United States Capitol, a day that violently marked what many had hoped would be the end of a destabilizing political era following Democrat Joe Biden's win over Republican Donald Trump. Whether this was the intention of the account is not necessarily the point; rather, the cultural moment of upheaval and the subsequent collective release of breath matters for the tipping of emotions that had marked those four years and that we find echoes of in this carousel, even if for just us as viewers of it in its themes of grief, joy, and hope. With the rapid production of content in our mediated worlds, as within those seemingly endless chains of association the ideological threads of our cultural moment reveal themselves, it is crucial we spend time and space with the slow act of description and thematic analysis that speak to the emergence of such intertextual relations.

Figure 2. Carousel 2: @for.the.wild

The account, For The Wild, which describes itself as "An Anthology of the Anthropocene," represents its podcast and calls for land defense, activism, and slow study.[8] The account has 147K followers and over 1500 posts, with a call in their bio to connect with @forthewild.world for any inquiries or feedback and an invitation for listener discourse in the comments. Their linktree includes more than a dozen links, including how to join their patreon community, become a sponsor, or donate, as well as information on slow study via Dr. Bayo Akomolafe's "We Will Dance With Mountains: Into the Cracks!" and "Atmos",

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[8] https://www.instagram.com/for.the.wild/.

herbal first aid aftercare from those who have experienced police violence with @dixiepauline, prison holistic self care and protection; a link to the experience "Can I Get a Witness/Groundtruthing Oracle," links to the latest three podcast episodes (with Ann Armbrecht, Rachel Cargle, and Kimberely Ann Johnson), older episodes, and where to find the podcast; links to their website, how to join their newsletter, and land defense episode submissions. Its grid is carefully laid out with a pattern of posts that alternate between soft text and image, often relying on nature and surrealist visuals with neutral earth tones of greens, blues, and browns that invite dwelling. Many of the posts on the grid directly speak to the themes of anti-oppression, environmentalism, slowness, becoming, and belonging that are taken up in the podcast and are released alongside episodes to produce a wider range of mediums for sharing content. On March 19, 2023, the day of the spring equinox, the account posted a carousel with the caption, "The moods today are transformation, revolution, and care ❤️ Maybe a little magic too," followed by a list of the sources for the ten images used in the carousel.[9] In dwelling with this carousel, this caption becomes increasingly significant for the emerging practice it reveals within meme-centered Instagram accounts of producing carousels based on a theme, mood, or intention often tied to a temporal marker, such as a political scandal, the start of a new season, or a holiday.

The images in the carousel alternate between nature photos, ink drawings, videos, and film stills. With the stated intention of transformation, revolution, care, and a little magic, followers are invited to produce their own meanings across the images. In the center of the first image, a blue-topped mushroom with a white stem covered in soft fuzzy gold-flecked spikes sits in the dirt; the foreground and the background are blurred to bring attention to the mushroom. With no other foliage or fungus in the shot, this magical-looking mushroom is left to stand on its own, with no text, drawing viewers towards the promises of the carousel's themes and possibilities. The second image, a confrontational image of a forest of trees in flames, is jarring and feels in stark contrast to the preceding photo both in tone and color. Red, orange, and yellow flames fill the frame and black smoke seeps in from the edges. The clear outline of a lone tree stands in the center bottom of the frame, not yet aflame, with a cluster of trees to the left already on fire and almost gone. There is a textured, almost matte finish, quality to the image that gives it the nostalgia of an older printed photograph. In white text across the top sit Bertolt Brecht's words from his writing during his exile from Nazi Germany:

> In the dark times, will there also be singing?
> Yes, there will be singing.
> About the dark times.

Taking these two images together, the semiotic chains of meaning that are produced seep through: the mushroom as an individual image of the beauty of everyday nature alongside an image of the destruction of nature speak to the political and ecological moment. Add to it a poetic quote about the temporality of living through dark times and a larger argument unfolds of imagining a chorus singing, of naming the dark times, which instills a sense of responsibility and gravity. Audiences are invited to recognize the dark times of climate disaster and to participate in a collective and watchful lament. And, yet, the weight of this image is eased in the following posts of the carousel.

In image three, a deep blue ink drawing on a muted taupe background shows a flower design directly atop two naked feminine figures, long hair covering their bodies, centered in the frame. One combs the tangles out of the other's hair, accompanied with the text:

> I help you.
> You help me.

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[9] Posted on March 19, 2023 on the Instagram account @forthewild, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp_gC6NrbpS/

Are the two figures with long flowing hair maidens? Goddesses? Nymphs? Or perhaps, in the associative flows that dwelling with the image offers, could they be sirens, issuing a siren call to audiences to gather more help for the pressing tasks at hand, but that can still be done gently and with love? These first three posts are followed by a video of a volcano erupting, its lava forging a new path in the land lava in post four. In post five, we are greeted by a grainy film shot of women in headscarves, sitting around a domestic table setting surrounded by greenery, with a subtitle on the bottom that reads: "What is today's topic? Revolution." The film still comes from *The Hidden Half* (2001) by feminist Iranian filmmaker Tahmineh Milāni, which follows a revolutionary militant woman accounting for her past. On posts six to nine, we are met with the contrasting blues of the ocean. These posts use the same painted image of a woman kneeling in a landscape of sand, water, and large rocks, looking down at an infant she is holding in her arms, both with a circular gold halo resting on their heads. Each post has its own call:

Post 6: Let us clean the waters.
Post 7: Let us sieve the air.
Post 8: Let us remake the world.
Post 9: It is good to be born on this earth.

These posts suggest a holy scene: a woman and child to be venerated and protected, invoking an associated reverence for the act of caring and protecting for both the next generation and the earth. The image and text overlap, building an argument to engage in acts of care and protection as part of the efforts to clean water and air, to remake the world free from human destruction, all while celebrating this earth.

Bringing together the above themes, the carousel culminates with an image of people gathered on a beachfront in Iceland to witness the encroaching lava, flowing in a form reminiscent of three large trees, branches of molten rock reaching out towards the crowd as if they were reaching for the sky. Like the introductory image of the magical mushroom, this image indexes the awe-inspiring power and beauty of nature, but this time from a birds-eye view. If the mushroom is a micro perspective, looking towards the intricacies of the forest floor, this final image is zoomed out to offer an aerial shot from high above. Between these images are a sequence of visuals and text that call for the co-creation of a revolution that holds the environment and solidarity at the center of our actions. Holding together this range of associations and media forms (ink drawings, documentary photography, painting, and video) from unrelated image archives gifts us an agency to dwell and co-create meaning from this constellation of media, nature, community, and politics. In dwelling and (re)visiting this carousel, we can begin to grasp and respect the power of nature's cycles of life, death, renewal, and transformation at various scales (volcanoes, water, and mushroom), while also bearing witness within communities of support ("I help you. You help me"). The work of ecofeminist activism and change-making must respect the more-than-human forces and temporality at play with a soberness about the seriousness of the task (Brecht's words), and the need for community and shared vision to make sure change occurs in sustainable and purposeful ways. While the aesthetic is different from the previous carousel (@intersectionalenvironmentalist), both offer alternative imaginings of how to resist through weaving visual-textual content together for audiences to dwell with and derive meaning from.

Departing from the emergent practices found in the above two accounts of collaging previously unrelated source material into a sequence of carousels, the carousel here from writer and artist Richa Kaul Padte uses self-made images and comes from the same series that first caught our attention for the beautiful possibilities of the sea-spider that we began this article with. This carousel[10] was posted on Padte's personal account, @richakaulpadte,[11] on February 4, 2023, and includes a curation of eight images from the artist's secondary account that documents her work for #the100dayproject

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[10] Posted on March 19, 2023 on the Instagram account @forthewild, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp_gC6NrbpS/
[11] https://www.instagram.com/richakaulpadte/.

(@100forhirish). Padte's account has just over 3880 followers and over 485 posts; her bio lists her 2018 book *Cyber Sexy: Rethinking Pornography* (Penguin) and her artist account @100forhirish, as well as a linktree that links to her person website, her article on "The Trap of Digital Productivity" in *Catapult*, her book *Cyber Sexy*, an article about her interview with writer Jenny Odell (author of *How to Do Nothing* and *Saving Time: Discovering a Life Beyond the Clock*), an article co-written with Shivangini Tandon on "Where the Wild Things Were: What two great hornbills can teach us about Goa's true wild side" in *The Indian Express*, and a link to sign up for her newsletter called "Aeroplane Mode," which focuses on "anti-productivity, wildness, and having a body in the world."
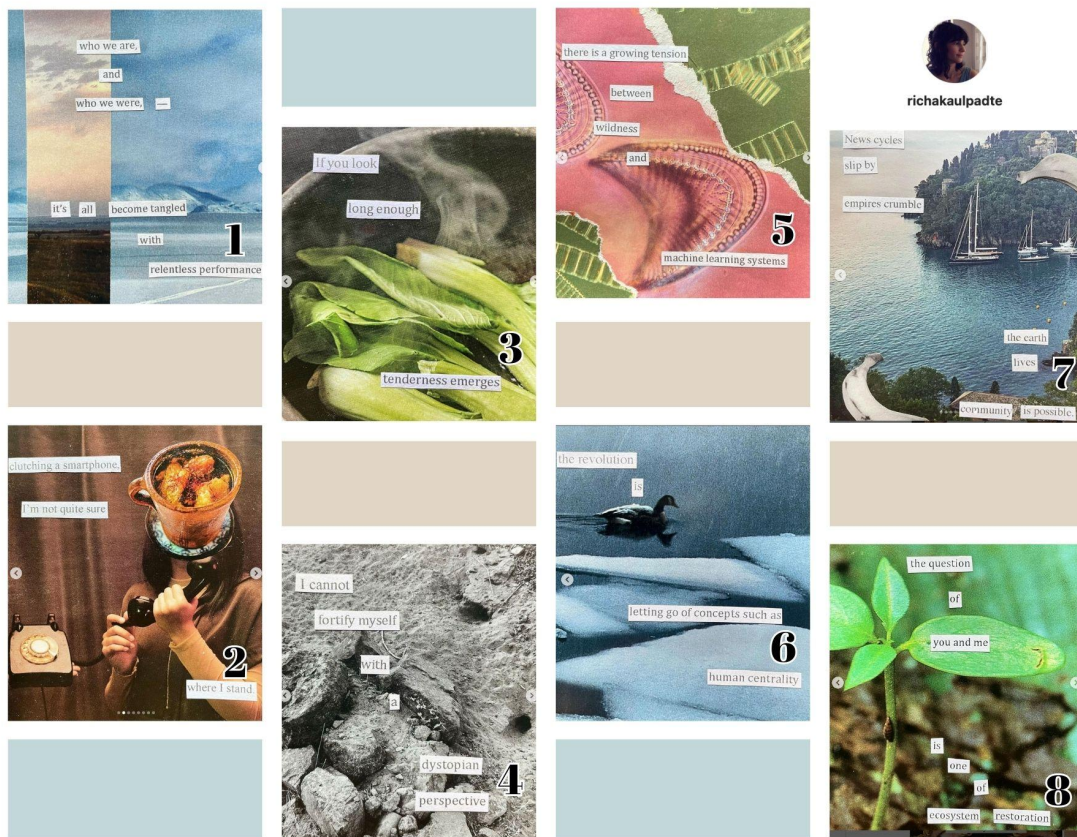
Figure 3. Carousel 3: @richakaulpadte

Notably, all three accounts we dwell with in this article call for paying close attention to the wild and to nature, to embodiment, and to slowness. As with the other carousels, this one builds a thematic argument that spans across its contents, using pictures of nature to build its argument. In the first post of the carousel, a larger, blue-toned image of the ground rushing up to meet a mountainous background is vertically interrupted in the left foreground by a narrow cut out strip of a verdant landscape with warm skies. Pasted over the frame, spanning both images, in type-written cut/paste form, are the words:

> Who we are,
> and
> who we were —
> it's all become tangled

with
relentless performance

This sets the tone for the whole carousel; a focus on a "we" of humanity at the crossroads of nature and technology, and the sense that neither humanity nor nature are faring well, seeps through the entirety of the post. Like Padte's other posts, and like the above carousels, there is a tonal emphasis on time as a grounding element. Present and past collide in the tangling of "relentless performance" or, as in the previous posts, the space between joy and grief or between you and me as we help each other. Here, the imperative to relentlessly perform comes from the very platform that we view these images on and the neoliberal constraints under which we labor to not only create content but to live our everyday lives. The second post, is a vintage looking photograph, shows a woman clutching a rotary phone handle, her face covered by a large teacup and saucer. The text is distributed across the image, cascading down from left to right:

Clutching a smartphone.
I'm not quite sure
where I stand.

This is followed by a picture of a steaming basket of bright green bok choy. Cascading from top to bottom and left to right, surrounding the center of the image, reads:

If you look
long enough
tenderness emerges

The following picture is an abrupt change in color and tone. Against a bleak gray landscape of rocky earth, the text:

I cannot
fortify myself
With
a
dystopian
perspective

serves as rising action to the ruminations within the sequence, with the remaining posts becoming more direct in their interventions. Post five laments:

there is a growing tension
between
wildness
and
machine learning systems

The image behind it layers a ripped piece of rose-colored paper with an epaulet-like design atop a muted olive-green paper with a yellow ladder-like pattern. The tension in the clash of patterns, coupled with the rip marks of the rose paper as it interrupts the green background, emphasize the strain that the text espouses. This is equally felt in the visual split of the text between "here is a growing

tension/between/wildness/and" and "machine learning systems," as if to accentuate and juxtapose wildness's associations to the natural and animal world with the sterility of machine learning systems.

The argument built across these early posts climaxes in the following two posts, which return us to nature: post six brings us a duck swimming in an icy pond in blue-gray tones and post seven showcases a green sprout with a striped insect crawling up its stem. Post six reads:

> the revolution
> is
> letting go of concepts such as
> human centrality

While post seven offers:

> the question
> of
> you and me
> is
> one
> of
> ecosystem restoration

Together, the posts at this point of the narrative journey speak to the threat of modern technology's speed, robot-like productivity, and the lack of tenderness and identity we experience once we are in the thralls of it, as well as our tendency to centralize the human in all things. The revolutionary call here, which corresponds to those of Carousel 2 from @forthewild, is to restore the ecosystem in a way that displaces machine learning and humans as central to all action.

These calls are confirmed in the final post. A calming scene of sailboats floating on an inlet surrounded by bushy green forestry in soft blues, greens, and whites is presented with cut out photocopied bananas on the top right and bottom left of the frame, with the pasted text:

> News cycles
> slip by
> empires crumble
> on the top left, while on the bottom right sits:
> the earth
> lives
> community is possible.

The sense of temporality here is once again significant. The post offers viewers the long view that the threats of empire and bleak news narratives are temporary, but the earth is more permanent—if we take care of it. This perspective advances a secondary call that community is a desirable and generative aspect of our relationship to the environment. The pairing of earth and community, alongside a dismissal of algorithmically biased, harmful media rhetoric and colonial empires, builds itself around the next revolution as based on a community that centers the restoration of ecosystems. In Padte's intentional use of a shared aesthetic to build her narrative, which deliberately pairs a selection of slides from her larger #the100dayproject, we become witness to a different form of small data curation: not from an endless chain of images circulating online, but from her own body of work for purposeful ends.

5. Conclusion: Emergent textualities in/as creative pleasure and protest

In the opening pages of *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) writes that "emergence is our inheritance as a part of this universe; it is how we change… Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (3). As a method, dwelling speaks to this embodied act of longing. It is about letting go of the rigidity of reasoning and logic, replicability, and generalizability—letting go of the productivity of machine learning systems, to quote Richa Kaul Padte. Dwelling is about our intimate relationships to the lively stories within media events that open us to the intertextually mediated components of stories as they circulate, illustrating the connections between different intersecting stories as they move within digital space and encouraging social media participants to interpret and remix posts by putting carousels and accounts in conversation with each other, as we have done here. In dwelling with the carousels here, a preoccupation with temporality rings clear across them: an apt meta-theme given their shared concerns of climate crisis, feminism, and revolution. This speaks to the significance of the act of curation to the act of carousel production. Well curated carousels inspire an emergent affect that encourages embodiment and reflection, whether the images are sourced from various media platforms or are self-produced works. In other words, carousel curation produces semiotic and affective chains of meaning that build over the specific sequencing of the posts. These associative themes flow from one post to the next, emerging and solidifying across the carousel the longer that a viewer spends time with it, and flowing outwards to larger research scenes across the media ecology, whether those carousels are determined by our research collections or the platform's algorithms. Although these capacious connections may seem endless, through the method of dwelling, we are able to grasp, if only momentarily, the rich meanings embedded within these ephemeral media events. We can slow down and be with this curated content in the ways we sit with other, more traditional, forms of visual media like painting, sculpture, and film. Extending this existing tradition to digital media contexts enables us to better appraise what we understand as the *emergent intertextualities* of power and resistance that are revealed within the visual, cultural, and political valences of media events.

Notably, the content depicted in these carousels does not reflect traditional assumptions of what visual cultural protest looks like. These are not images of bodies marching in streets, protest signs held high, shouting in unison against identifiable issues to be counteracted. And yet, through dwelling with these accounts and the subculture of feminist activist content circulating at these specific moments, we came notice the emergence of a different kind of protest: one that is clearly anti-capitalist and eco-feminist, advancing old critiques of neoliberalism through new visions for resistance that require a different kind of affect than rage. Instead, these accounts and their carousels seek out and move towards joy and pleasure. This work flips the script on dominant visions of public protest fueled by a collective rage. While this is still important, these works show an emergent strategy built on communal visioning for a better future. Because the collection of the media artifacts we study happens in the everyday practices of our digital lives, we gather data through our own affective pulls, following what sparks interest and feels relevant in the moment of collection. In doing so, we cannot know the broader patterns that will be uncovered, but in the act of purposefully placing our early insights together by formally dwelling with selected data, themes reveal themselves.

Such themes reflect the emergent intertextualities of protest, power, and resistance within these media events. Bringing Brown's (2017) "emergent strategy" with Julia Kristeva's (1986) "intertextuality" — the "intersection of textual surfaces" that produce a "dialogue" between writer, the audience or textual figures, and "cultural context" (36)— we center forms of relationality that consciously situate and index the forms of implicit power circulating in our layered encounters with the systems we move within. In Kristeva's hands, intertextuality is "a political concept which aims at empowering the reader/critic to oppose the literary and social tradition at large" (Alfaro 1996, 276). For Brown (2017), the political importance of emergent strategy lies in its ability to build "complex patterns and systems of change

through relatively small interactions" (2). This strategy is, above all, an "adaptive, relational way of being, on our own and with others" (2). As demonstrated in our dwelling with the above carousels, the shared thematics require paying close attention to the systems and patterns that emerge *from* and *in* response to them, as well as recognizing the value of small actions of engagement and interpretation. This is what we hold at the fore of our approach to digital visual culture via the act of dwelling. As Kristeva (2000), no stranger to the powerful swells of protest and revolt, suggests, the most meaningful acts of resistance come at the level of the individual in the everyday. And as bell hooks (2012) so infamously wrote, we must name what hurts.

The practice of dwelling with small, curated data-sets in slow and purposeful ways to produce deeply descriptive accounts of digital content, seeking out where themes may reveal themselves, adheres to the politicized intention of the feminist work we follow that opposes the present social-cultural and academic preference of rapid, operationalized knowledge paired with big data and aggregate generalities. As we show here, the level of specificity that these smaller sets of data encourage opens new possibilities and visions of feminist futures that larger big data methods do not afford. Even as we follow a carouselled story broadly, digital dwelling deliberately asks us to reflect on our own relationship to the stories shared and brings us to the affective, lived impacts of what might be seen as an individual story but that is collectively felt. A different researcher examining these same posts would have seen different relationships between ideas, using different stories to derive different sets of insights. Or, perhaps, they may have found a different entry point and set of intertextual relations to examine altogether. But that is the beauty of such a method. Lingering in online spaces to embrace emergence, to sit with stories as they affect us, see how stories and their themes emerge, and explore how different digital tactics can become our own to use in counter hegemonic ways allows us to bring forward stories that get lost in the messiness of digital space and to highlight that which resists. Ultimately, we see engaging in this process of dwelling as a method of encouraging others who approach the research scene to also dwell and, in doing so, begin their own processes of thinking and subsequently acting differently as we encounter new forms of relationality and ways of being in the world.

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