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6 **Incandescence, Melancholy, and Feminist Bad Vibes:**
7 **A Response to Ziarek’s *Feminist Aesthetics and the***
8 ***Politics of Modernism***
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If neoliberalism *upgrades* modernist concepts, values, and practices to work more efficiently for white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, then any understanding of neoliberal aesthetics must be grounded in a clear and sound account of modernism.¹ In *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek’s incisive analysis of modernism gives us this grounding. The book lays the foundation for feminist theoretical approaches to contemporary Western aesthetics, which have been variously called “accelerationist” (Shaviro), “capitalist realist” (Fisher), and “post-identity” (Patel). Read from the perspective of us who are no longer modernists (to turn Bruno Latour’s phrase), her book both brings the race/gender politics of contemporary aesthetics into focus and suggests ways feminist art has already been undermining and crafting alternatives to the “there-is-no-alternative”-style neoliberalisms that many philosophers and political theorists find so vexing.

I will consider these topics in order; in each case, I’ll summarize Ziarek’s argument and then push it beyond its modernist frame and into contemporary debates. I begin by explaining Ziarek’s account of

feminist *potentiality*, focusing on how specific practices of transformation and revolt worked and why, given modernist political and artistic contexts, they made sense as feminist, antiracist critical/oppositional techniques. I will then argue that neoliberal aesthetics and politics co-opt potentiality and transform it into resilience discourse. That is, neoliberal aesthetics takes feminist challenges to modernist patriarchy and uses them as the basis of hegemonic aesthetic and ideological production. Brilliantly and insidiously, apparently feminist work actually supports patriarchy. This raises the question: if resilience discourse is designed to automatically co-opt any and all transgression, deconstruction, critique, and opposition, how does one resist resilience?² The second part of the article responds to that question. There, I rework Ziarek's concept of *melancholy* and argue that this updated concept is, if not an alternative to neoliberal resilience, perhaps a feminist method of handling it. This melancholy isn't the failure to get over a lack, but the failure to keep pace with accelerationism, the failure to overcome harder, better, faster, stronger. Melancholy is, in other words, radiance that's either too fast or too slow, a bad vibe.

Potentiality

Potentiality is Ziarek's term for the ability to transform racist/sexist damage into productive political-aesthetic practice. After first explaining *potentiality*, I will argue that it thematizes precisely what neoliberalism domesticates and puts in the service of capitalist production and social reproduction. Potentiality gets upgraded into resilience.

Modernist Western art, like liberal Western politics, constitutively excludes both femininity and women. They are the "Others" to the patriarchal "Absolute," as Beauvoir puts it (5). *Fine art* has been consistently defined against women's cultural production. Thus, the first task of feminist art and politics is to be taken seriously as art and politics; however, because modernity is coherent only when women/femininity are excluded,³ women's participation will require a systematic reconfiguration of both discourses. Ziarek focuses her analysis on this reconfiguration. For Ziarek, the "fundamental question for feminist aesthetics" is "how the haunting history of destruction and the ongoing exclusion of women from politics and literary production can be transformed into inaugural possibilities of writing and action" (5, my emphasis). How have feminist authors turned practices conditioned upon their illegibility as women/feminine into methods and media for reading both patriarchal damage and women's/feminine creative work?

1 “How,” as Ziarek puts it, “to transform a persisting legacy of the destruc-
 2 tion of women’s art into its revolutionary possibility?” (48). Virginia Woolf,
 3 Nella Larsen, and British suffragettes have all transformed patriarchal
 4 damage into feminist practice by manipulating constitutive exclusion into
 5 a medium, not of inclusion per se, but of artistic and political production—
 6 what Ziarek calls *potentiality*. To put it in Rancièrian terms, the “wrong”
 7 that situates them as the “those who have no part” in patriarchy becomes
 8 the very medium in which they appear (9). They take “the impossibility
 9 and the destruction of female art” and rework it “into its future possibility”
 10 (Ziarek 102). Damage becomes a resource.

11 But how, technically, does this happen? According to Ziarek, for-
 12 mal experimentation is the artistic strategy these authors use to manipulate
 13 illegible damage so that it is perceptible and comprehensible as disruption.
 14 “Formal innovation in experimental women’s literature,” Ziarek argues,
 15 “connect[s] freedom with the unforeseeable, inaugural force of the new
 16 beginning,” producing as a result a “transformative freedom—the creation
 17 of the new and unforeseeable beginning” (42).⁴ By experimenting with the
 18 instruments that wreak patriarchal damage, feminist artists distort them
 19 to the point at which these instruments are so damaged that they can no
 20 longer play their old tune. The instruments that rendered women “mute” are
 21 “transformed into a process of writing” (2). But because we are experiment-
 22 ing with instruments, the sounds that come out may not be recognizable as
 23 speech or music; they will sound pretty noisy, if we can even hear them at
 24 all. In other words, these experimental processes produce aesthetic damage.
 25 This damage refracts patriarchal wrongs back into the system, disrupting
 26 it and triggering its reconstitution into a new paradigm of legibility.⁵ As
 27 Ziarek explains, “Modern literary works render the destructive ‘work’ of
 28 melancholia [that is, of patriarchal damage] ‘unworkable’ by absorbing its
 29 destruction into their own language. In so doing, literary practice brings
 30 the mute subjective incorporation of the political crisis into the language
 31 of literary texts” (73).

32 Think, for example, of the band Bikini Kill. Many of their songs
 33 bring the abject, in the form of structural degradation and affective disgust,
 34 into the means of artistic production (Austin). On “Thursten Hearts The
 35 Who,” they read, in a broken, screaming voice, a misogynist review of one
 36 of their concerts while barely coherent, noisy instrumentals play in the
 37 background; the aesthetic and affective breakdown deconstructs the content
 38 and the politics of the concert review. In this way, abject feminist art takes
 39 the “ongoing exclusion of women from political participation and literary

production” and transforms it “into the inauguration of new possibilities of writing, sexuality, and being in common” (Ziarek 7). Abjection—both as political exclusion and aesthetic damage—is the medium through which women artists can craft distinctively feminist responses to the discourses built on their abjection.⁶ Or, as Ziarek puts it, “[L]oss and violence [are] aesthetically transformed into new, multiple possibilities” (7). Damage—here, exclusion and the melancholic silencing it effects—is reworked into a resource. Potentiality, then, is the transformation of abjection into a new beginning, “a feminine modality of possibility that emerges out of ‘waste’ and ‘futility’” (107).

Ziarek’s theory of “the ‘feminine’ aesthetics of possibility emerging out of destruction” (105) echoes Angela Davis’s analysis of the aesthetic/political strategies used by twentieth-century African American female blues singers.⁷ This suggests that an aesthetics of potentiality was used across media—literature and music—and in both avant-garde fine art and commercial pop culture. Potentiality seems to be a common feminist response to modernist patriarchy. Though it is beyond the scope of my project here, it would be interesting to compare its different variations across media, genres, cultural milieux, place and time, and so on. What, in other words, is potentiality’s spectrum? How does it vary when it is refracted through the prism of different artistic media and historical/material situations?

This question about potentiality’s spectrum is important, I think, because some segments of this spectrum have been co-opted to support white supremacist patriarchy. Modernist feminist potentiality is filtered and reworked so that when it is played out in neoliberal situations, we can’t hear or otherwise perceive any remaining noise it might make. (Which is not to say that it isn’t there; we just don’t think it is, or that we have the capacity to hear it. Perhaps the constant invocation of “capitalist realism” is a bunch of white noise that obscures feral, undomesticated types of potentiality? In other words, perhaps we think there’s nothing to hear, so we never bother listening.) As I will argue in the next section, these disruptive frequencies are tempered into resilience discourse. As other feminist philosophers have pointed out, modernist feminist critique has become normative neoliberal femininity (Fraser). Ziarek’s book contributes to this conversation about feminist co-optation by identifying the specific political and aesthetic practices that get co-opted. Because it identifies what is feminist and antiracist about modernist potentiality, Ziarek’s book helps us trace the philosophical emergence of so-called postfeminist and postidentity aesthetics. These postidentity neoliberalisms take the form of resilience discourse because they

1 are reworkings of the critical modernisms Ziarek identifies in her notion
 2 of incandescent potentiality.

4 *Incandescent Resilience*

5
 6 A method for overcoming melancholia (97), potentiality is a way
 7 of bouncing back from the damage wrought by modern white supremacist
 8 patriarchy. For white men, this damage manifests as what Robert Gooding-
 9 Williams calls “skeptical melancholy” (54), or alienation from embodied
 10 receptivity; for women and nonwhites, it manifests as melancholic mute-
 11 ness, immanence rather than alienation.⁸ The women writers Ziarek studies
 12 rework this damaging immanence into ecstatic incandescence, effecting “an
 13 aesthetic transformation of loss into art’s own shining possibilities” (115).
 14 This incandescence is a two-step process: the artist first performs her dam-
 15 age (sparking a fire) so that she can then be seen to overcome it (radiating
 16 beyond her past inertia).

17 Neoliberalism co-opts this incandescence (or at least the most
 18 visible, legible part of its spectrum), domesticating its critical force into the
 19 means of producing aesthetic pleasure and reproducing social normativity.
 20 Potentiality has been “upgraded” into resilience.⁹ In resilient art, formal
 21 experimentation cultivates, or incites (to use a more Foucaultian term),
 22 shocks and feeds the resultant shockwaves back into the system.¹⁰ This
 23 feedback supports rather than destabilizes hegemonic institutions. The aes-
 24 thetic damage through which modernist art established its heteronomous/
 25 autonomous position of critique—stuttering, fragmented, degraded, aleatory,
 26 dissonant—is now the very medium of normalization.¹¹ Neoliberal resilience,
 27 in other words, is a method or process of recycling modernist damage.

28 For example, if modernist art invested aesthetic pleasure in the
 29 objectification of women (what Laura Mulvey famously calls scopophilia),
 30 neoliberal art invests aesthetic pleasure in women’s spectacular assump-
 31 tion of subjectivity—what Ziarek calls *incandescence*. If in modernity we
 32 liked doing damage to women, we now like to see women overcome that
 33 damage.¹² This means that we expect women to perform their damage as
 34 a baseline from which “good” women then progress. That damage is the
 35 fuel for incandescent fires, so it must be constantly incited and invoked
 36 so that there’s something for incandescent women to ignite. In this way,
 37 resilience discourse normalizes traditional patriarchal damage (e.g., the
 38 damage of exclusion and objectification) as a systemic or background condi-
 39 tion that individual women are then responsible for overcoming. “Undoing

[. . .] feminism while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism” (McRobbie 1), resilient incandescence is quintessentially postfeminist. We, the audience, use our identification with the resilient heroine as a way to disidentify with and (supposedly) transgress the imperatives of modernist patriarchy. This is why, as Ziarek explains, audiences have a “sympathetic identification with subversive femininity, with the mother avenging the murderous sacrifice of her daughter for political ends, rather than with the murderous father/king” (104). We enjoy women’s spectacular subjectivization (i.e., their overcoming of scopophilic objectification) because this distances us from unfashionable patriarchal formations and tastes (i.e., this latter scopophilia). In postfeminist neoliberalism, “bearing witness to both the destruction of women’s artistic capacities and women’s revolutionary aspirations” (5) becomes a source of aesthetic pleasure not because it’s revolutionary, but because it’s normative.

To use Jack Halberstam’s term, we like our women to “go gaga” because this incandescence, this “unpredictable feminine” (114) methodology allows us to eke even more light out of otherwise exhausted enlightenment modernity. If we’ve reached, as Ziarek discusses, the so-called end of art and the end of history (and the end of tonality and the end of representation and, well, the end of modernity), then the only way to find more resources is, like Pixar’s WALL-E, by sifting through our vast piles of waste. And in that waste heap is abject femininity (what musicologist Susan Cook calls the feminized “abject popular”). Femininity is abject because its exclusion from patriarchy is what constitutes patriarchy as a coherent system. In both Ziarek’s aesthetics of potentiality and in resilience discourse, women artists do the cultural work of remaking abjection or constitutive exclusion into ecstatic radiance.¹⁵ In the former case, that work is revolutionary; in the latter case, that work normalizes. Resilience discourse transposes feminist revolution into a nationalist, patriarchal, white supremacist practice.

Take, for example, Katy Perry’s “Firework,” in which the lyrics trace the affective journey from dejection to radiant exceptionality. The song begins by asking listeners to identify with feelings of irrelevance, weakness, loneliness, and hopelessness; it posits and affirms damage, suffering, and pain. But then Perry’s narrator argues that in spite and perhaps because of this damage, the listener has precisely the means to connect to others, to make a difference, to have hope: “[T]here’s a spark in you / You just gotta ignite the light and let it shine.” She uses the metaphor of fireworks (and their association with U.S. Independence Day celebrations) to describe the

1 listener's self-transformation from black dust to shining light: you may feel
 2 like trash, but if you can just light yourself on fire, that trash will burn with
 3 a dazzling radiance that lights up the sky, just as it lights up audiences' faces.
 4 Here, Perry transforms abjection—feeling like trash, unmoored, socially
 5 dead—into incandescent triumph. In the song, the addressee's personal tri-
 6 umph evokes U.S. nationalist narratives of overcoming colonization (i.e., the
 7 Declaration of Independence, celebrated on the Fourth of July). Feminine
 8 incandescence—the transformation of waste and melancholy into glowing
 9 potential—is no longer revolutionary. Not only parallel to U.S. nationalism,
 10 it is the very means for reproducing normativity.

11 In resilience discourse, wild and crazy femmes—like, say, Kesha—
 12 reproduce normativity in the same way that deregulatory economic practices
 13 do (see Cardenas). Unlike Kant's genius, who gives laws and generates order
 14 (i.e., regulation, giving a law) out of unruly materiality, the incandescent,
 15 "gaga" femme amplifies what feels like disorder by "resignif[y]ing" damaged
 16 bodies and objects previously expelled from the realm of meaning" (6). And
 17 to do this, incandescent femme geniuses use a specific type of experimenta-
 18 tion, what Ziarek calls "a *dynamic* model of interrelation between literary
 19 form and material elements of the work of art" (6). This "dynamic interac-
 20 tion" between large-scale form and material details produces "effects" that
 21 are "unpredictable and unforeseeable" (Adorno qtd. in Ziarek 114). Experi-
 22 mental methods produce aleatory results.¹⁴ Neoliberalism, however, has
 23 systematized the aleatory; deregulatory practices are designed to control
 24 background conditions so that "dynamic interactions" between form and
 25 material produce a range of superficially random outcomes.¹⁵ Deregulation
 26 turns experimentation into the means of capitalist/hegemonic production.
 27 Brilliant gaga ecstasy is what fuels economic and social reproduction.¹⁶ So
 28 even though incandescent potentiality might be "the very opposite of the
 29 traffic in women" (Ziarek 119) figured as the exchange of commodities (e.g.,
 30 in Irigaray and Rubin), it is quite consistent with neoliberal political and
 31 aesthetic economies. Who radiates with potentiality more than the resilient,
 32 entrepreneurial postfeminist woman?

33 In the same way that feminized, blackened receptivity was the
 34 solution to modernist anxieties about alienation (e.g., the aforementioned
 35 Gooding-Williams), feminized, racially nonwhite resilience is taken as a
 36 solution to the problem of the "end of art." Having transgressed all limits
 37 and prohibitions—for example, emancipating dissonance, making music
 38 out of noise—modernist art had no means of establishing its opposition to
 39 society/social normativity. Similarly, capitalism had colonized the globe,

exhausting its ability to profit through simple expansion; with no new markets, with nothing else new to conquer, it needed a new method for generating surplus value. As Jeffery Nealon and others argue, capitalism has become a logic of investment and intensity. Instead of expanding and assimilating, it recycles waste and increases efficiencies. Thus, traditionally non- or devalued “women’s work” becomes the fastest growing sector of the service-and-care-work economy. And women’s art-making practices become the hottest new thing in the artworld: think of all the “feminist art” retrospectives and exhibits that have taken place in the past five or so years. Modernism’s constitutive outside becomes neoliberalism’s bread and butter; or, the object is now central to the means of capital, political, and aesthetic production.¹⁷

Because it so clearly describes what gets co-opted and domesticated, Ziarek’s account of modernist feminist aesthetics provides the foundation for theorizing neoliberal postfeminist art and politics. But it also provides a possible avenue for contemporary feminist aesthetic and political responses to resilience. It points us to some of the feminist frequencies that resilience discourse obscures: the melancholic end of the spectrum, so to speak, rather than the incandescent. How might we upgrade Ziarek’s theory of melancholic art so that it functions like a queered resilience, resilience gone wrong, resilience that puts us “out of phase” with social normativity?¹⁸

Melancholy

In Ziarek’s text, melancholia is a symptom of abjection, or constitutive exclusion.¹⁹ But what if we rethink melancholy so that it’s not pathological or failed inclusion (i.e., abjection), but pathological or failed resilience? Resilience incites melancholic damage, feeding it back into the system as the raw material in a tale of incandescent overcoming. But what if this melancholy isn’t overcome, but intensified? When plugged back into the system, would it produce antisocial effects? (That is, effects that don’t help reproduce society.) Can melancholy be kindling that won’t spark when lit or that sparks and burns too cool or too hot, too fast or too slow?

If classical melancholy involves “hanging on” to what ought to be excluded (e.g., women’s art), neoliberal melancholy would manifest as insufficient resilience, incandescence that radiates at the wrong frequency, so that, for example, we couldn’t hear or see it. Instead of turning silence into speech and writing, melancholic art would queer silences. Jonathan Katz’s essay “John Cage’s Queer Silences” begins with the line “John Cage never

1 quite came out of the closet.” Cage never positively claimed his identity as a
 2 formerly damaged (closeted) but now unrepressed sexual subject. In other
 3 words, he didn’t transpose his homosexuality into the terms that would
 4 interpolate him into resilient citizenship. Instead of openly proclaiming
 5 his gay identity, he remained queerly silent. His silence is “queer” because
 6 it doesn’t conform to the in/out or mute/vocal binaries that structure the
 7 closet’s epistemology. As Katz explains, “Cage himself, while never denying
 8 his sexuality, preferred instead to duck the question: when asked to char-
 9 acterize his relationship with Merce, he would say, ‘I cook and Merce does
 10 the dishes.’” Cage answers the question, but in terms that aren’t directly
 11 and efficiently legible as a response: cooking and dishwashing seem to have
 12 little connection to sexuality.

13 Cage’s silences aren’t just a political response to sexual norma-
 14 tivity; they’re also musical responses to increasingly deregulatory (read:
 15 neoliberal) compositional methods like “open works” and chance processes.
 16 For example, *4’33”* can be read doubly, as both resilience and queer silence.
 17 Insofar as it recoups extraneous concert-hall noise and places it at the
 18 center of the musical work/performance, *4’33”* is a paradigmatic example of
 19 what Ziarek calls modernist experimentation and what I call deregulatory
 20 resilience. As much as philosophers love to cite this work as an *example of*
 21 *something*, however, it’s hard to find examples of people enjoying the work, at
 22 least at the level of affect, that is, rocking out to it while exercising or driving
 23 down the highway. The affective surplus value we expect from resilience
 24 (e.g., glowing radiance) is absent here. The compositional practice of resil-
 25 ience fails to adequately perform the cultural/affective labor with which
 26 it is usually tasked. Instead of amplifying affective and aesthetic pleasure,
 27 *4’33”* completely undercuts them by giving us the wrong kind of excess. Cage
 28 shows us that silence is full of sounds we can’t hear because they radiate at
 29 frequencies we can’t (or won’t) hear, that are queerly out of phase with our
 30 ability to perceive them.²⁰ Melancholic practices don’t accomplish the kind
 31 of work from which neoliberal capital and white supremacist patriarchy can
 32 extract adequate surplus value, so we don’t experience them as affectively
 33 profitable or pleasurable.

34 Neoliberal melancholy might feel superficially like modernist
 35 resentment—the Nietzschean “bad conscience” that Ziarek describes as
 36 a “reactive rather than creative affect [. . .], a frustrated and powerless will
 37 riveted to past injuries rather than engaged in the creation of new politi-
 38 cal or artistic forms of life” (96). But neoliberal melancholy is something
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quite different from modernist resentment, and more like (to use Sara Ahmed’s term) *killjoying*—which is another way to think about “bad vibes.” In Nietzsche, resentment, or bad conscience, is quintessentially modern: it is the Enlightenment’s will-to-truth, what Gooding-Williams calls the “skeptical melancholy,” that Nietzsche’s perhaps all-too-neoliberal subject must overcome. Neoliberal melancholy is not founded in skepticism, in mind/body dualisms, or in other such problematics; it isn’t part of the Enlightenment episteme. Killjoying is invested in the same affective, aesthetic, and political episteme as resilience (e.g., what Ahmed calls “the promise of happiness”), but it queers these investments. “Riveted to past injury,” modernist melancholics can’t perform resilience; in Nietzsche’s terms, they say “no” instead of “yes.” Neoliberal melancholics perform resilience, but in a way that intensifies damage rather than overcomes it. They say “yes,” they affirm, but this amplifies rather than overcomes damage.²¹ For example, melancholy could be the affirmation of the wrong frequencies, the frequencies resilience discourse tunes out. In this way, melancholy isn’t the absence of resilience, or the opposite of resilience, but misfired resilience; “transformation” is not “blocked” (Ziarek 96), but unsuccessful. Neoliberal melancholy goes through the motions but doesn’t “glow” with joy.²² Instead of either accelerating or decelerating, melancholy is the experience of being, as an acoustician might put it, “out of phase” or “phased out” of social normativity.

In sum, feminist responses to resilience, or neoliberalism, shouldn’t try to seek an “outside” or a “new beginning”; modernist critical strategies generally support neoliberalism. Instead, they need to figure out how to work within resilience discourse. Melancholy might be one such way.

I have tried to show how Ziarek’s book, because of its narrow focus on modernist feminist aesthetics, provides a productive foundation for theorizing neoliberal feminist aesthetics, the feminist aesthetics that respond to “capitalist realism.” The central terms of her analysis—damage, incandescence, melancholy—are key factors in neoliberal politics and aesthetics. What Ziarek’s book shows us is the gendered dimension of these politics and aesthetics and how neoliberalism co-opts women’s resistance strategies, plugging them back into racist, patriarchal projects.

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Notes

- 1 On neoliberalism as an “upgrade,” see Winnubst.
- 2 Steven Shaviro’s “Accelerationist Aesthetics” gives an excellent account of the role of faux transgression in neoliberal cultural politics.
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- 7 Indeed, as Christine Battersby notes, Kant argues in his essay “On the Origin of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime” that some women might be able to reason—and thus be both moral persons and capable of aesthetic judgments—but they have a duty to refrain from using their reason, because if they did society would crumble into disarray.
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- 4 Ziarek argues that this unpredictability is what distinguishes “femme” potentiality from (perhaps queer masculine) negation. Formal experimentation is a way of “escalating destructive force” in a way that “exceeds negative contestation” (26). Unlike negation, which reacts to a determinate phenomenon, experimentation is indeterminately oriented; “the inaugural force of the new enacted in the work of art exceeds the determinate negation of historical reality” (46). Experimentation can generate results that exceed the limits of one’s initial framework, results that were unpredictable and illegible. Negation, on the other hand, pointedly destroys a specific thing—it damages by opposition, not by excess.
- 5 “Escalating destructive force [. . .] is inseparable from the creation of the new, unprecedented changes in political life” (26).
- 6 Carolyn Korsmeyer makes a similar point in her work on the role of disgust in feminist art.
- 7 See Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. See also my article “From Receptivity to Transformation.”
- 8 “It is the subjective incorporation of oppression that undermines the expression of women’s grief, since such suffering is not available as a social or a subjective referent” (Ziarek 92).
- 9 As Mark Neocleous defines it, resilience, is “the capacity of a system to return to a previous state, to recover from a shock, or to bounce back after a crisis or trauma.” It is both a “technology of the self” and a method of, loosely, “governmentality.”
- 10 This is similar to Naomi Klein’s account of “shock doctrine”—style capitalism.
- 11 As Shaviro argues, “Where transgressive modernist art sought to break free from social constraints, and thereby to attain some radical Outside [. . .] transgression is [now] fully incorporated into the logic of political economy.”
- 12 Or, to rework Mulvey a bit: instead of “woman as image, man as bearer of the look,” it’s now “woman as selfie, man as app.”
- 13 From one perspective, this ecstatic radiance is precisely the sort of “logic of intensity” that neoliberal capital demands (Nealon).
- 14 “Woolf suggests that following potentiality through experimental [. . .] reveals an ecstatic relation to the world, language, and others” (Ziarek 115).
- 15 On deregulation and the aleatory see Attali; and Foucault.
- 16 The incandescent femme is neoliberalism’s ideal subject, the resilient, flexible entrepreneur who can turn any and all crises into wildly successful opportunities. As Ziarek argues, the incandescent

- femme is “the exemplary figure of the human capacity to change” (106). And, while such flexibility once challenged modernist ideals of masculinized authenticity and rationality, it is now a central component of normativity, which values resilience, or the “struggle against the destruction of their capacities” over and above “agency or will” (106).
- 17 This is what is variously called “total subsumption” or “cognitive capitalism” (Dean).
- 18 When sound frequencies are out of phase, this means that a specific moment in time one frequency is in the positive part of its cycle (heading up to the peak of the wave), and the other is in the negative part of its cycle (heading down to the valley of the wave). If two signals of the same frequency are out of phase, this results in what is called “phase cancellation”—the sound is either totally silenced or its volume is significantly diminished.
- 19 “In aesthetics melancholia is a symptom of the struggle between excluded women’s experimental writings and the hegemonic conception of modernism based on such exclusion” (5).
- 20 Steve Reich calls these the “irrational” moments in phase compositions like “It’s Gonna Rain” or “Violin Phase.”
- 21 From this perspective, the eternal return shifts its function. Instead of a technology of the self that trains you to tune out or sublimate bad vibes, it’s a technology for processing the vibes themselves so they generate feedback.
- 22 Neoliberal melancholy doesn’t “deny the mediation of subjective expression through the materiality of the work of art and the social process of making” (Ziarek 96). That mediation happens, but the feedback is either sub- or super-sonic, a “queer silence.”

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