# 1 Digital Suffragists
MARIE TESSIER

Marie Tessier has been moderating comments at the *New York Times* since 2007, the year the first iPhone went on the market. Today, the number of smartphone users is estimated at over six billion. With so many people connected to the internet, the public sphere should, in theory, be more democratic than ever. So why is there an absence of women's voices online? Why are they outnumbered by men? What does this mean for democracy?

"The fact is," Tessier states, "that women are routinely criticised, demeaned, threatened, interrupted and characterised as wrong, unruly, disgusting and out of place when they exercise their rights as citizens or do their jobs as elected officials." One such example is US representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who was confronted in this way on the Capitol steps in 2020. Tessier traces these patterns of behaviour – what she calls "the fossils

of male white supremacy" – as far back as *The Iliad*.

"The fossils of historic gender segregation and the official exclusion of women from the public square have functioned as the new bones of digital technology and the public conversations they support," Tessier argues. "It has been digitally reframed and cast out into the world as if it were something new. But it is very, very old."

Digital Suffragists outlines the manifold reasons why many women's voices continue to go unheard – presenting in-depth analyses of news comments and online trolling. It also takes a deep dive into implicit gender bias in technology and web design. Finally, the text paves a way forward, imagining a democratic media space where gender and racial representation are at the forefront. "It's not enough to simply call on women to speak up," Tessier says. "It is fundamentally a design problem."
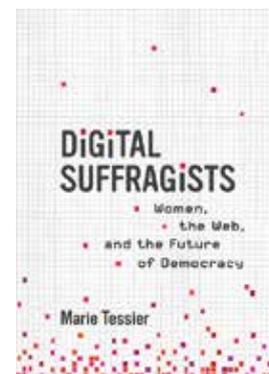
Words
Eleanor Sutherland
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MIT Press
mitpress.mit.edu

2 Black Paper
TEJU COLE

Photographer and writer Teju Cole (b. 1976) draws a series of lucid connections on the connotations of colour, shadow and gradient. Here, we are transported from the world of photography and abstract art – via theories of racial difference and the social hierarchies they uphold – to the domain of morality, in which "light" and "dark" signify good and evil. Above all, this text explores the conceptual and metaphorical dimensions of "blackness."

The book hinges on an introductory portrait of Caravaggio (1571-1961), Renaissance master of chiaroscuro (the use of shading to suggest the substance and volume of objects) and violent paranoiac, whose biography is saturated with tales of depravation and excess. "He was a murderer, a slaveholder, a terror and a pest," Cole notes. "But I don't go to Caravaggio to be reminded of how good people are, and certainly not because of how good he

was. I seek him out for a certain kind of otherwise unbearable knowledge." Cole is too subtle a narrator to spell out what this knowledge might be, but we suspect that an overly "black-and-white" worldview is being held to account for many of the evils in our present moment: not least the appalling treatment of migrants, whose deaths en route to western cities are amongst those referenced here. For Caravaggio, by contrast, truth lies in shading.

The main body of the collection comes from a set of essays, which have been expanded from lectures delivered in 2019. Here, Cole asserts that we should make more expansive and subtle use of all our senses in taking in the world. Indeed, read as a whole, these stories "collectively argue for using our senses – interpreted as capaciously as possible – to respond to experience, embrace epiphany, and intensify our ethical commitments."

Words
Greg Thomas
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The University of Chicago Press
press.uchicago.edu

3 The New Urban Aesthetic
MONICA MONTSERRAT DEGEN & GILLIAN ROSE

The past 15 years have seen a huge amount of work on infrastructure. Fast forward to 2022 and the overwhelming presence of advanced digital technology provides a fascinating point of departure to examine design and development as a whole, both in the present and in future. This new title exemplifies how the colonisation of data is defining the early 21st century urban experience, as a radical reconfiguration of 20th century inhabitation.

For Gillian Rose, Head of the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford, and co-author, Mónica Montserrat Degen, Reader in Cultural Sociology at Brunel University London, the dynamics of the contemporary world are fundamentally shifting as digital data is extracted, processed and returned in different formats, devices and situations. And, these changes are happening most intensely in cities. Today, a bewildering

amount of sensors generate data, which is gathered and analysed by human as well as algorithmic agents, and is used for things as diverse as the allocation of housing to policing and healthcare. Whilst the average citizen is aware of how smartphones, cameras and apps influence their everyday experiences, from travel to socialising, the deeper entanglements and interactions are less obvious.

The authors focus on three key examples of change in three very different cities: a large redevelopment in Doha, Qatar; the renovation of Milton Keynes to become a smart city; and the cultural regeneration of London's Smithfield Market into the Culture Mile. They examine how social media, and other technologies like CGI, have been critical factors in civic participation and gentrification. The conclusion leads, as promised, to the definition of a new aesthetic: glamorous, flowing and dramatic.
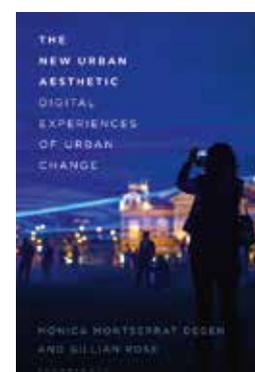
Words
Christopher Kanal
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Bloomsbury
bloomsbury.com