In Focus: Gender and Labor in Recession-Era Media and Media Studies

Introduction

by Caetlin Benson-AlloTT, editor

In an October 2011 series of “Voices from the Trenches,” The Wrap’s Steve Pond quotes an anonymous postproduction vendor lamenting, “All the business models that we grew up with? They went out the window.”¹ That lament should sound pretty familiar to readers of Cinema Journal. Hollis Griffin reached a similar conclusion in the previous “In Focus” (volume 52, number 4), where he observes, “The political economy of higher education has shifted in a way that makes having a long storied career—with plenty of support for research and ample energy for teaching—a luxury and privilege that fewer media academics will get to enjoy.”² In media production and media studies, the ways we understand and feel about our work are shifting rapidly in response to the global economic crisis colloquially known as the Great Recession. Media practitioners of all stripes—artists and critics, teachers and scholars—find their labor affected by new economies of media production, consumption, and education. The following six essays interrogate these changes through a wide variety of objects and methodologies, but all analyze the role that gender plays in our personal, institutional, and cultural responses to the recession. Collectively, they ask how feminist theory, pedagogy, and art can combat the worsening inequalities of our era.

As readers will no doubt recall, December 2007 marked the beginning of the greatest worldwide economic slump since the Great Depression. By the time the Great Recession officially ended—in June 2009—a new austerity was determining labor practices even in the


allegedly recession-proof industries of higher education and entertainment. Although contingent contract employment and corporate culture have long shaped academia and media production in the United States, the new austerity reminds us that these practices affect workers disproportionately. Hard times throw into harsh relief the prejudices that inform employment for gender as well as sexual, racial, class, and other minorities in this country. The Great Recession disproportionately affected workers already marginalized by age, ethnicity, economic background, and ability, but the difference that received the most attention was gender. Citing statistics of early job losses in male-dominated industries, op-ed columnists and economic analysts quickly declared the Great Recession the “he-cession,” “the death of macho,” and “the end of men,” despite ample evidence that women, people of color, and older workers were among those most affected by public sector cutbacks and corporate restructuring. Media representations of the recession—from The Company Men (John Wells, 2010) to Larry Crowne (Tom Hanks, 2011), from 2 Broke Girls (CBS, 2011–2013) to The Queen of Versailles (Lauren Greenfield, 2012)—also depict recession experiences as gender determined. In short, gender has become the privileged lens for examining economic precariousness during the recession, but these discussions have largely proceeded without the insights of feminist media producers and scholars.

To redress that absence, this “In Focus” analyzes gendered representations and experiences of labor in the distinct yet related fields of media production and media studies to foster coalition building among workers on both sides of the screen. When we as media scholars study the labor of media creators or representations of labor in film and television, we rarely reflect on how these forms of labor affect or resemble our work as researchers, writers, and teachers. This section seeks to create a continuum between these media practices and industries. It asks how feminist pedagogies, political economies, production studies, and textual analyses can expose and perhaps remedy common issues in our industries. These essays demonstrate that the challenges facing women and gender minorities in media production and media studies resemble one another in the most disheartening ways. For instance, in both media studies and media production, contingent and short-term labor contracts hinder women’s employment opportunities and expand the gender pay gap. As we all know, contingent faculty now represent at least two-thirds of communications, fine arts, and humanities instructors in US postsecondary education. With this exploitative employment practice come increases in the percentage of female faculty members in the arts and humanities. The Society for Cinema and Media Studies’ membership polls cannot provide conclusive data on this score, but statistics from similar professional organizations are gruesome. The Modern Language Association’s 2008 report on contingent faculty employment, “Education in the Balance,” found that across all levels of degree-granting institutions, women comprised the majority of full- and part-time adjunct instructors but the minority of tenured and tenure-track faculty. Production faculty face similarly...

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dire trends. Citing a report by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, Christopher Howard, managing editor of the College Art Association website, observes, “Although women make up two-thirds of CAA members, they tend to occupy the lowest rungs of academia, while men continue filling the higher-ranking and higher-paid positions.”

All adjuncts are underpaid and vulnerable to appalling economic precariousness and institutional abuse, but recent studies suggest that female adjunct faculty members are paid less per course that their male colleagues. Meanwhile, women wait longer for promotion on the tenure track than their male colleagues. Furthermore, women currently lead only a tiny percentage of massive open online courses, despite the unique possibilities of online education to address global gendered educational inequalities.

In summary, women seem to be achieving parity in academic employment only as that employment is being casualized and divested of the security and benefits it once promised. Alyson Bardsley calls this trend the feminization of academic labor: as the status and rewards of academic labor decrease, it becomes more available—and disparaged—as women’s work.

If commercial media production and contract work are not yet understood as feminized, they are no less risky and their female practitioners no less affected by the reactionary politics of this so-called economic recovery. Martha M. Lauzen’s famous annual reports on women in film and television production, “The Celluloid Ceiling” and “Boxed In,” found that women comprised only 16 percent of above-the-line labor in the 250 top-grossing films of 2011 and 26 percent of television creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography. In the case of film workers, this represents a 3 percent drop from 2001 figures—in short, a gender divide that is getting worse instead of better. And like their academic sisters, female media producers are being paid less for the work they do get. Here the most complete statistics come from the Writers Guild of America, West, whose 2011 report “Recession and Regression” found that women accounted for a smaller percentage of screenwriters in the wake of the Great Recession. Meanwhile, female television writers saw their gender pay gap widen by 84 percent between 2009 and 2011.


feminist distributors and media artists are also losing traditional funding sources and fighting harder than ever to make feminist media part of our cultural conversation.

These statistics cannot convey the lived experiences of women working in media studies or media production, and they sadly ignore entirely the presence of our transgender, gender queer, and androgynous colleagues in these industries. Few studies address intersections of race or age with gendered access to employment, but those that do suggest that older women and women of color have an even harder time finding equal work for equal pay in industries where “employment opportunities rest squarely on personal networks steeped in gender, race, and age.”11 Nevertheless, these numbers do demonstrate the profoundly similar vectors of power that determine value, employment, and remuneration in media-related industries, including media studies. Every media studies program I know emphasizes the imbrications of theory and practice in its curriculum, and this recession suggests that such insights should inform our creative and scholarly production as well. As artists, critics, and teachers, we need to uncover intersections in our working lives and the representation of labor in our subjects to recognize a common fight against systemic economic inequalities. The essays in this “In Focus” section create conversation and coalition by examining how twenty-first-century economic trends are affecting women’s relationships to recorded media—to making it, watching it, and teaching it. They explore the ways that gender and sexual identities continue to shape our professions. Only by recognizing our common labor can we demand better working conditions, and only by interrogating our experiences of labor inequalities can we determine what better should mean.

Gender Bifurcation in the Recession Economy: Extreme Couponing and Gold Rush Alaska

by Diane Negra

Purnima Bose and Laura E. Lyons have noted that interventions in response to the global financial crisis have tended to buttress “existing social inequalities by propping up institutions that benefit the wealthy and which precipitated the financial crisis in the first place.” To this I would add that “coping” and “recovery” rhetorics in the recession often suppress postfeminist fortification of split realms of male public enterprise and female domesticity.

My goal here is to investigate some of the ways that recession-era representational culture (in the specific form of two reality-television series) activates particular vocabularies of gender while suppressing others. Mindful of Lauren Berlant’s theorization of the death of the “good life” in America, I suggest that spectacles of (largely white) working-class enterprise function as a form of closely controlled ideological engagement with the exhaustion of aspirationalism and the stressed status of economic mythologies. Arguing that the recession has weighed heavily on the aspirationalism that customarily prevails in US representations, I analyze the staging of gendered modes of adaptation and enterprise in the first seasons of Extreme Couponing (TLC, 2010–), and Gold Rush Alaska (Discovery, 2010–).

These cable series retain femininity as fundamentally domestic and recuperate masculinity as a state of territorial expansion while promulgating ideologically “safe” modes of entrepreneurialism that conform to hegemonic gender codes. Ambivalently responsive to the resource gluttony of US consumer culture, they stage the promise and the frustration of a feminized thrift and a masculinized risk taking. Extreme Couponing’s female focus is hinted at in its tag as a “recessionista series,” whereas the premise of Gold Rush Alaska is succinctly described in the credit sequence voiceover as follows: “Six recession-hit patriots from Oregon become greenhorn gold miners and head north to dig for gold.

1 Purnima Bose and Laura E. Lyons, eds., Cultural Critique and the Global Corporation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

2 In subsequent seasons the series name was shortened to simply Gold Rush.

3 The term recessionista denotes an archetype of the budget-conscious yet fashion-forward woman.
and save themselves from financial ruin.” Another element shared by these series is their sense of localism and regionalism, which plays out against a backdrop of social isolation, with Gold Rush Alaska clearly trading on Alaska’s enhanced post-Palin status as virtuous frontier and breeding ground for authentic Americanness. Depictions of this kind, despite some ersatz formulations of teamwork, privilege resolutely individualist and private modes of recession response, and accordingly they help us to better understand why the collectivist movements associated with previous eras of economic duress seem not to be gaining traction in the so-called Great Recession.

In Extreme Couponing we see that recessionary popular culture has latched onto the commodification of domestic femininities in ways continuous with but also distinct from previous eras. Female thrift “works” for an era of adjusted economic realities, it seems, with female consumer resourcefulness becoming a new theme on many fronts. A number of the series’ profile subjects are women who have lost a male breadwinner’s salary (either through unemployment or divorce); they are invariably such assiduous and adept coupon clippers that they can get large amounts of groceries for free. These women are seen as stepping into the income breach without deviating from their domestic roles, and the series sustains a mixed discourse of praise and pathologization around figures inscribed on the one hand as bravura postfeminist housekeepers and on the other hand as intense overconsumers who speak with a worrying casualness about “stockpiling.”

As I have suggested, then, the series emerges out of a broader recessionary discursive field in which female thrift is being revalorized. Crafting, recycling, home cooking, and other domestic activities linked to “downsizing” and “making do” have acquired a raised public profile, sometimes in tandem with the emergence of celebrity figures like Ree Drummond, whose blog The Pioneer Woman, a chronicle of daily ranch life in Oklahoma, became widely read among US women and has given rise to a multimedia empire of cookbooks, a memoir slated for film development, and a Food Network series. Such developments seem indicative of the repositioning of the retreatist woman in a newly pragmatic recession context. Couponing, of course, meshes with the repositioning of female consumerism out of registers of frivolity to registers of seriousness. At the same time, it often retains a strong emphasis on choice rather than necessity, and it can be class unconscious to the point of absurdity. As if to certify that this form of thrift had become “hot,” Kourtney Kardashian briefly took up couponing in the 2011 season of Kourtney and Kim Take New York.

Each episode of Extreme Couponing adheres to a rigid format in which two female coupon clippers are profiled, with brief biographical and location details communicated to us in coupon style. The subject is then differentiated on the basis of her rationale for couponing, which must be seen as serving the interests of someone other


6 Across the twelve episodes of the first season, the series profiled only women, with the exception of the last episode, which featured a couple expecting a baby.
than herself. In short, episodes of *Extreme Couponing* are notable for their desire to explicate couponing on conservative cultural terms—episode 8, for example, “sexes up” couponing, representing it as euphoric and fun, if a little bit dangerous. The series’ first profile subject rather bludgeons us with this idea, telling us that “this coupon thing is totally sexy. . . . There’s a whole new generation of us younger moms saving money so we can buy sexy clothes or sexy purses or sexy shoes.” At the same time she reports, “Sometimes when I leave a store I actually feel bad. I feel like I just robbed that store.” The episode’s second half raises the stakes on this discourse of criminality with its focus on a couponer well known at her local grocery, who, despite her complex plans for maximizing the value of her coupons, is “spoken to” by a store representative and forced to recast her plans rather than violate policies on coupon use.

While episode 8 profiles two slim, young white women, the subjects of episode 9 are an obese woman, Amanda Ostrowski, and a black woman, Amber Flores, and the series discourse takes an immediate and dramatic turn. An opening voice-over prompts us to “get ready to meet two extreme couponers whose lust for discounts knows no limits,” and Amanda relates that “anytime that I can land a really great deal feels like I’m on crack.” The series’ initial impulse to pigeonhole these women according to race, class, and body stereotypes comes to be balanced against a rhetoric of stabilizing family values. Amber makes coupon clipping a family activity and cheerfully urges viewers to “go out and get some of these great deals that are available to everybody.” When (inevitably male) partners appear on the series, they are always accessories to female couponers, and although Amanda’s contemptuous treatment of her husband (who is a little slow on the uptake when it comes to matters of frugality) is highlighted, her couponing is valorized when it is framed as a gesture of support for her elderly grandmother, who lives on a fixed income and about whom Amanda feels so deeply that she bursts into tears when speaking about her.

The disciplined activities of female coupon clippers in *Extreme Couponing* are carried out in relation to a certain tension—when their activities comply with feminized notions of value, they can be celebrated, but when they don’t, they threaten to become subversive. The series gestures toward this tension by, for example, intercutting one couponer happily scooping up a large number of discounted lipsticks with another telling her young son to take a ball out of their shopping cart because “we don’t have a coupon for that.” The implied threat of female self-interest is carefully held at bay in *Extreme Couponing* through rubrics of family values and community service. In episode 11, we meet Joni, who caricatures her couponing compulsion by saying, “The girls at the register already know there’s that crazy lady,” but the series explicates Joni’s extremism by emphasizing that she provides for a family of nine and that “her stockpile has evolved into a community food bank” as she makes donations of goods to local charities. The privatization of social care is also a key theme in *Gold Rush Alaska*, which, like *Extreme Couponing*, continually draws attention to the beset working-class family while repressing any corresponding critique of the dissolution of state safety nets.  

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7 In a reading that stresses the ideologically contestatory elements of couponing, Melissa Click argues that “the earnestness with which couponers work the system to acquire their stashes provides a peek at the warped economic system that has grown so big that it simultaneously threatens the financial security of working class citizens,
Although it has clear sensationalizing and over dramatizing imperatives that accord with the mandates of reality programming, *Extreme Couponing* also has a long provenance in television programs that value and make games out of female thrift and consumer savvy. In this sense, its antecedents range from *The Price Is Right* (CBS, 1956–1965; 1972–) to *Supermarket Sweep* (ABC, 1965–1967; Lifetime, 1990–1995; PAX, 1999–2003). *Gold Rush Alaska* is certainly a relative, if not a descendent, of other Discovery series like *Deadliest Catch* (2005–) and *Ice Road Truckers* (2007–); the series reflects the channel’s move toward male groups after an earlier spate of the kind of lone survivalist series (*Man vs. Wild*, 2006–2011; *Survivorman*, 2004–2008), which Matthew Ferrari has aptly observed dedicate themselves to “accessing a spiritually regenerative preserve of primal masculinity.”

This programming mode has become more regionally particularized, with the emergence of *Ax Men* (Discovery, 2008–) focusing on loggers in Oregon, *Black Gold* (truTV, 2008–) highlighting the hunt for oil in Texas, and *Ice Pilots* (History Canada, 2009–) profiling pilots of propeller planes in Yellowknife, Canada. As Brenda Weber has pointed out, Alaska has been a particularly frequent setting for such series, which include *Alaska Most Extreme* (Discovery, 2009), *Bering Sea Gold* (Discovery, 2012–), *Tougher in Alaska* (History, 2008), *Untamed Alaska* (Discovery, 2009), *Alaska State Troopers* (National Geographic, 2009–), and *Arctic Roughnecks* (Discovery, 2009–). “*Reality TV,*” as she notes, “has entered the collective imaginary as a significant producer of the frontier myth.”

Overarching all these series, of course, is a dedication to the thematics of men risking their lives and struggling against nature in remote settings and the glorification of working-class resilience and adaptation. *Gold Rush Alaska* assesses the value of physical labor and small-scale enterprise in a post boom moment that ambivalently regards financial speculation, with stock markets both excoriated and still relied on. Shot through with anxieties about the male labor market, it seeks to recover viable physical working-class masculinity in a period in which “mancession” rhetoric hyps the notion that non-college-graduated men have been the hardest-hit recession casualties. The devastating impact of the recession on this class has been noted by Kate Bolick (among others), who writes, “No one has been hurt more by the arrival of the post-industrial economy than the stubbornly large pool of men without higher education. . . . Nearly three-quarters of the 7.5 million jobs lost in the depths of the recession were lost by men. . . . Men have since regained a small portion of the positions they’d
lost—but they remain in a deep hole.” A range of employment data suggests that the picture may not be so straightforward, but this sort of account typifies a received idea about the recession and its gendered impacts, and it certainly helps explain why the blue-collar white male laborer has become a reality TV fetish. Another explanatory factor may be that television’s more typical rendering of the white working-class father as buffoon is becoming painful or problematic in the recession; filling the gap of such staple representations in 2012 were a spate of “girl shows” (e.g., Whitney [NBC, 2011–], 2 Broke Girls [CBS, 2011–], New Girl [Fox, 2011–], and Girls [HBO, 2012–]).

In Gold Rush Alaska the quest for gold resonates in relation to the broader conceptual prominence of gold in the recession; as Justin Fox wrote in 2009, “gold, that barbarous relic, is having a thoroughly modern moment in the spotlight.” Closely watched dramatic increases in the price of gold became a site for the residual financial euphoria of the boom years, while calls for a return to the gold standard are intended to stabilize a volatile international currency market. Public awareness of gold as a conflict mineral whose extraction is entangled with labor exploitation and political and economic violence has been heightened in recent years, but most important, gold has been conceptualized as a private domestic resource that can be tapped in times of duress, hence the explosion of cash-for-gold businesses in the recession.

Gold Rush Alaska begins with Oregon father and son Jack and Todd Hoffman “assembling,” a voice-over tells us, “an unemployed bunch of buddies” in precarious economic circumstances. A local pastor comes to bless their journey and then he, too, decides to join the northbound convoy. Todd succinctly summarizes the group’s motivation, reporting, “I’m just your average guy tired of sitting here not making any money. So like my forefathers, they ballsed up and they went out into the frontier.” Todd is leaving his wife and daughter behind but taking his two sons, an unremarked-upon choice but one that is actually quite important to the same-sex dynamics of many recessionary media texts. It is also significant to the extent that it fortifies the theme of father-son financial enterprise, which links Gold Rush Alaska to other reality series, including American Chopper (History Channel, 2003–) and Pawn Stars (History Channel, 2009–), which showcase, respectively, father-son custom motorcycle and pawn businesses. Hamilton Carroll astutely reads American Chopper’s “production of a masculine family melodrama,” and the characterization equally applies to Gold Rush Alaska, which attributes great importance to the gold-mining venture as an opportunity to consolidate family roles and patriarchal expertise. (Jack has done some mining in the past, and his son Todd is relying heavily on his knowledge). At the same time, paternal and symbolically fraternal ties are a constant source of inspiration and friction throughout the series, as the various members of the neophyte mining crew struggle to work together and are subject to advice and interventions from more experienced, older miners.

Male ties are thus prioritized throughout the series, and women are mostly absent or oblivious to the travails of their male partners. We are meant to feel a strong sense of umbrage, for example in episode 3, when after watching the men cope with myriad technical problems, work long into the night, and deal with marauding bears in the campsite, we witness the arrival of a miner’s wife who asks skeptically, “What have you been doing up here—vacationing?” Similarly, when appealed to for a substantial amount of funding to keep the mine going in episode 7, Todd’s sister Alicia peers at a small amount of gold and asks, “That’s it, so like all the mining you’ve been doing, like it’s just been for nothing?” Women’s roles in the economic welfare of families are not this series’ concern, but it goes out of its way to caricature women as incapable of understanding the depth of male dedication to a cause. In episode 5, when miner Harnass learns that his mother is gravely ill and probably dying in Oregon, he must choose between her and his commitment to the crew. “You guys are like family and I don’t want to let you down,” Harnass tells Todd, and then decides to stay. (We never learn what becomes of his mother.)

The first season of *Gold Rush Alaska* tracks the group’s engineering and construction activities and the seemingly endless mechanical problems that impede their progress, while constantly emphasizing the fact that they are losing a thousand dollars every day that they are not mining gold. It quickly becomes apparent that they have underestimated the job. Nevertheless, their efforts are valorized, in part through a discourse of patriotism; when they succeed in building a camp, they immediately hoist a flag, and in episode 4 Todd tells the crew, “God put us together for a reason. . . . You know I complain a lot about the economy. I complain about our country, but to be honest with you, this is the best country in the world.” It thus becomes evident that the series accords with Carroll’s delineation of a popular culture landscape in which “the blue collar worker is cast in a nostalgic position of anteriority and abstracted to a set of beliefs about American national identity.”

In his account of financial crisis and the moral economy of house-selling reality shows, James Hay observes, “At the very least, the ‘crisis’ in home ownership in the United States involves a changing relation of citizens to ‘home,’ and an erosion or demise of the myths of the American Dream.” A key ideological pressure point in a recession so strongly associated with the collapse of the housing bubble is the status of the family home, and *Extreme Couponing* and *Gold Rush Alaska* respond to this in various ways. The latter is framed as an effort to seize control over the mobility that has become required of so many in the recession. The miners are centered in a praiseworthy discourse that celebrates them for at least evading a stultifying “unmanly” domesticity. In episode 3, Todd’s friend Dave arrives to help the group and gives them a pep talk, telling them: “You guys are an inspiration, you know. There are so many guys that are on their butts, sitting around watching TV, collecting unemployment and, you know;
guys aren’t made to do that.” Gold Rush Alaska’s hour-long format and regular graphic renderings of the mechanical processes with which the miners are concerned links it to the gravity of “science TV,” whereas the tone and treatment of female subjects in Extreme Couponing is more ambivalent, leading one critic to characterize it as a “tawdry” account of participants “doing their crazy best to stretch dollars and provide a little more for their families.”

Viewed together, these two series play out a larger recessionary theme: that men “take action” when they face unemployment, while women more nebulously “adjust.”

Extreme Couponing and Gold Rush Alaska exemplify Laurie Ouellette and James Hay’s claim that “staged experiments position television as a dramatic ‘civic laboratory’ for testing the capacities—and limits—of human subjects conceived as the agents of their uncertain destinies.” As the wage disparity between top earners and the rest of the working public comes to approach Victorian levels, reality series of this kind also relate to a broader turn in advanced capitalist economies back to the class roles and labor landscape of the nineteenth century. That landscape is populated by superwealthy fat cats, vulnerable employees of “sweatshop capitalism,” a small middle class, and a service class with increasingly specialized roles. Meanwhile, cued by the success of Downton Abbey (ITV, 2011–) and the revival of Upstairs, Downstairs (BBC, 2012–), the United Kingdom’s Independent notes that “the age of service has not only returned, but is thriving . . . The number of domestic workers is now higher than in Victorian times,” and Heather Havrilesky has reported similar dynamics in the US economy in the New York Times.

Indicative of the lengths to which television will go to present timely content while avoiding scrutiny of the dynamics of inequality, these series bear a strong flavor of the kind of affective economic relations Berlant would deem “cruelly optimistic.”

Demoting Women on the Screen and in the Board Room

by Deborah Tudor and Eileen R. Meehan

In this essay, we address the ways in which resources, power relations, cultural understandings, political systems, ideologies, and human agents combine to maintain, contest, and negotiate mediated understandings of gender and “race.” Those issues invoke a vast body of theory and research, so our approach is selective, focusing specifically on gender representations in the film *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, 2009) and on gendered relationships within the ultimate owner of that film, National Amusements. We address these relationships in terms of neoliberalism—the ideology which, through governmental and economic reorganizations, facilitated the creation of transindustrial conglomerates like National Amusements and caused intermittent recessions between 1980 and 2001, culminating in the Great Recession of 2007–2009. We begin by contextualizing these contemporary entities through a glance back at the television series *Star Trek* (CBS, 1966–1969) and its original owner, Desilu Productions.

Airing on RCA’s NBC, the first *Star Trek* imagined a future in which the integration of species, genders, and races within species was a fact of life on the starship *Enterprise*. Yet this vision was not postspecies, postgender, or postrace by any means, as indicated by the continuing banter among Spock, McCoy, and Kirk regarding Spock’s bispecies status and his decision to live as a Vulcan among humans. Generally characterized as a liberal text in its original television run, *Star Trek* was produced by Desilu Productions, whose owner and chief executive, Lucille Ball, had green-lighted it.

Having been a fashion model, film contract player, and radio actress, Ball was undoubtedly familiar with sexism in the workplace. But she was also familiar with racial prejudice, having married Desi Arnaz, a Cuban immigrant, in 1940. In 1948, Ball starred in the radio series *My Favorite Husband* on CBS, based on the novel *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat: The Record of a Happy Marriage*.¹ Although she and costar Richard Denning premiered as the Cugats, they subsequently became the Coopers for most of the series. When CBS decided to televise the radio show, Ball negotiated for Arnaz to play the husband. Her attempt

¹ Isabel Scott Rorick, *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat: The Record of a Happy Marriage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940).
to replace an Anglo-American with a Cuban immigrant failed, and she abandoned *My Favorite Husband*, which also failed on television. This cleared the way for Ball and Arnaz to found Desilu Productions and launch *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951–1957), with themselves playing Lucy and Ricky Ricardo. Later, she divorced Arnaz, bought out his share of the company, and took control of Desilu, which made her the only female executive in television. Given Ball’s personal and professional experiences, *Star Trek*’s concerns about gender and race must have rung true.

With the original *Star Trek* tagged as “liberal,” much speculation centered on J. J. Abrams’s reboot of that franchise with the 2009 film *Star Trek*. The liberal position had been losing power as neoliberalism began its ascendancy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Central to the new position was the assumption that policies addressing inequalities due to gender, race, ethnicity, and so forth are no longer necessary. Because everyone is fully integrated into society and has the same opportunities, according to the neoliberal position, we can ignore demographic categories or social identities.

In this view, economic deregulation has secured fully free markets, allowing each person to rise according to his or her native intelligence, work ethic, and individual personality. Thus, for our postracial and/or postgender society, equality is guaranteed by competition: the best people will rise regardless of demography. Recognizing the significance of this perspective in social life, we first discuss the female characters of the new *Star Trek* franchise in terms of representations and roles, to see how neoliberalism presents a facade of equality through assumptions of a postracial, postfeminist world. We focus on the female characters of the new *Star Trek* franchise—Nyota Uhura (Zoe Saldaña) and her roommate Gaila (Rachel Nichols) in the 2009 film, and Uhura and Carol Marcus (Alice Eve) in the sequel. We then locate this neoliberal text within the corporate context of National Amusements, in which Sumner Redstone owns 80 percent of the voting stock and his daughter Shari owns the rest. Ironically, neoliberalism’s commonsense demotion of women was echoed both in *Star Trek* and in Redstone’s treatment of his daughter, as we discuss here.

The new *Star Trek* franchise exemplifies the textual operations of gender in neoliberal, postfeminist media, which frequently make the female roles seem more significant than they are. These transformations reveal the ways in which neoliberal media disguise gender representations as progressive cultural positions, thus allowing neoliberal masculinity to appropriate certain formerly feminist positions to present a far more egalitarian relationship.

This process operates through negotiations between masculinized power centers and progressive feminist ideas. Neoliberal masculinity depends on accommodations between feminism, particularly the white bourgeois kind, and capitalism—a compromise that has fundamentally changed the nature of masculinity itself. Neoliberalism has normalized a white masculinity that can quite easily coexist with pragmatic feminist ideas; for example, the acceptance of women in sectors of the paid-labor market without any reorganization of or fundamental challenge to the patriarchal nature of

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the workplace. This, along with the fact that labor in the home remains female identified, resulted in an underacknowledged 24/7 workday for women. While women have gained partial acceptance in the public sphere of work, little about the structure of the workplace itself has changed. Similarly, the presence of female characters on the ship’s bridge in Star Trek signals an egalitarian workplace, which the narrative contradicts by consigning these characters primarily to traditional female roles centered on family or romance. This limits their authority and power to the traditional one of female ascendency through the romantic control of a man.

In Abrams’s Star Trek, the only primary female or black character is Nyota Uhura. Other women in the film appear briefly and occupy traditional narrative roles: mother, sexual partner, and girlfriend. In the film’s opening segment, Winona Kirk gives birth to James, and then exits the narrative altogether. Amanda raises Spock and then dies on Vulcan. Uhura’s Starfleet Academy roommate, the Orion Gaila, appears in one scene as young Kirk’s lover, then twice more, but only in the background. Although Uhura becomes part of the bridge crew, she is narratively and visually relegated to the background of the bridge. Of all the supporting crew roles—Spock, Bones, Sulu, Chekhov, Scotty, and Uhura—she has the least to do, and she is often hidden in wide shots of the bridge by a tall computer screen.

On the bridge, Uhura monitors signals. However, “interference” prevents her from doing even that, thus relegating her to a mostly passive position in the plot. In fact, Uhura is almost completely sidelined; she has minimal impact on the plot’s cause-and-effect chain. Uhura has two brief dialogue exchanges to display her intelligence and then spends the remainder of the film as Spock’s girlfriend, comforting him in the elevator, kissing him good-bye as he leaves for a mission, and speechlessly gazing at him with love or concern while the men define the action the crew will take.

Abrams’s Star Trek does not include Uhura in any action sequences, so the issue of her fighting abilities does not arise. This apparently is no longer the case, as previews and production stills released for Star Trek: Into Darkness (Abrams, 2013) show her holding a weapon, apparently in a combat situation. As an avatar of neoliberal representation, Uhura personifies the rail-thin heroine who populates the majority of film and television shows. The popular media representation of action film women depends on an inherent contradiction of aggressive fighting power and an extremely thin body with minimal musculature, thereby constituting a representation of “powerful” women that does not violate current cultural limits on the female body. She is also apparently not the only female supporting character in the new film, as a younger version of Carol Marcus (Alice Eve) from The Wrath of Khan film (Nicholas Meyer, 1982) appears in previews and photos.

The December 2012 trailer for Star Trek: Into Darkness features these two women characters in four shots. Uhura is at the main focus of two shots and stands in the

4 Tudor, “Twenty-First Century Neoliberal Man.”
5 Two notable exceptions to this (and there are others) are Katee Sackhoff’s Starbuck in Battlestar Galactica (Sci-Fi, 2004–2009) and Gina Carano, former World Wrestling Federation champion and star of the recent action film Haywire (Steven Soderbergh, 2011).
background in another. Marcus appears in one shot. The first time we see Uhura, she crouches in front of a low wall holding a weapon while an off-screen explosion rains debris around her. The second appearance is a close-up of her kissing Spock. This shot cuts to a medium close-up of Marcus looking off-screen and screaming. The remainder of the trailer comprises action shots featuring the male characters, along with a couple of shots of the empty Enterprise corridors and bridge. While this trailer does acknowledge Uhura as an active character, the two-shot sequence of Uhura and Marcus emphasizes two traditional female action film tropes: romance and the female in danger. This does not mean, of course, that the entire film will follow suit and tilt the balance of representation toward romance and/or victimization of women characters. However, the marketing of the upcoming film in this trailer alone suggests a continuation of the gender politics of the 2009 film. The simple presence of a female supporting character here should not be mistaken for feminist progressivism; in fact, Uhura signifies the way in which contemporary neoliberalism attempts to legitimate unequal gender relations as natural.6

Star Trek narratives shift from transnational neoliberalism to an imagined transgalactic future, in which a heterogeneity of subjectivities might be expected. What emerges instead are two variations of the neoliberal female: Uhura, the girlfriend with a veneer of success and equality, and Gaila, a version of the twenty-first-century global advertising female, the “fun, fearless female” who poses in lingerie to declare her own sexual subjectivity and control.7 The figure of Gaila needs historical unpacking to see how she functions here. In the original series, Orion women were featured only as scantily dressed slave girls, whose pheromones drove men mad and who were content to be slaves.

Gaila has one speaking scene in the 2009 Star Trek, when Uhura’s return from the lab interrupts her liaison with Kirk. Gaila wears see-through lingerie; Kirk wears only briefs. She makes Kirk hide under the bed when Uhura turns up. He watches Uhura as she undresses down to very practical-looking white underwear, a strong contrast to Gaila’s sexy image. Then his presence is revealed, and Uhura remonstrates with Gaila about bringing men back to the room.

This superficially alters the original characterization of Orion women, placing Gaila in the academy but positioning her narratively as someone who sleeps with a lot of guys, a fact revealed through dialogue exchanges with Kirk and Uhura. Her major scene is almost extraneous to the plot, except as a coincidental way to create exposition and another snarky encounter between Kirk and Uhura. Gaila’s lack of guilt about her sexual freedom is not something to dismiss, although it is disheartening to see Kirk’s reaction to the fact that she has slept with a number of other men. For knowledgeable fans, her lack of shame originates in the Orion culture, where women are expected to be sexually active, though in a submissive way, and so saturated with pheromones that no man can resist them. The film makes no effort to characterize Gaila beyond this superficial setup, so all we know about Gaila is that she has a very active sex life. As does Uhura, Gaila gets a neoliberal gloss overlaid onto a stereotype.

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7 This phrase is the tagline for Cosmopolitan magazine. See ibid.
One final dimension of the female image is the choice of costume and makeup fashion that eerily echoes the 1960s mod makeup of Mary Quant and Yardley. Along with the miniskirted uniforms worn by the most visible female crew members, this evokes “swinging” London and an era in which feminism was closely aligned with the need to dismantle Victorian shibboleths about the female body and sexuality. That context for the miniskirt has shifted, and although women’s rights are certainly still under attack in ways that threaten autonomy of the body and of sexuality, the miniskirt has lost much of its perceived connection to the notion of women’s power. In a postfeminist realm, the miniskirt becomes a complex signifier of past struggles against sexual policing yet also a neoliberal signifier of the sexualized woman who claims to be pleasing herself while presenting herself in a style that has traditionally been objectified.8

We turn now from the representation of gendered relationships in Star Trek to gendered relationships at the top levels of Star Trek’s owner, National Amusements (NA). Star Trek’s path from Desilu’s ownership to NA’s ownership was long and complex.9 Suffice it to say that the path was smoothed by the Reagan administration’s initiative to deregulate US industries generally and media industries specifically. These policies were rooted in neoliberal economic theory, which redefined competition from individual companies vying for market share to individual products vying for consumers’ attention. From that perspective, the size or structure of individual companies became irrelevant. For the film industry, the vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition was again legal. For the television industry, the regulatory practice of barring film studios from owning television networks was moot.

As a result, companies were free to build transindustrial empires, which integrated the information, entertainment, and leisure industries. Sumner Redstone pursued this goal starting in 1981, acquiring majority ownership of stocks in various cable systems, theme parks, and television production companies. By 1987, he held 68 percent of Viacom’s voting stock, which he parked in NA’s holding division. This controlling interest enabled him to exercise allocative control: to set Viacom’s goals, to determine its budget, to select directors for its board, and to coordinate operations with his other holdings.

Over the years, Sumner bought and sold stock in various companies, shaping and reshaping his media empire. Across the decades, he remained firmly in control, known for his imperious management style, hot temper, and ego.10 Our specific concern here, however, is Sumner’s dealings with his daughter, Shari.

In 1978, Shari earned a bachelor’s degree in law from Boston University and married Ira Kroff. After earning her master’s degree in 1980, she practiced criminal law, estate planning, and corporate law, but she quit in 1982 to have her first child. In 1987, Sumner hired Kroff to run NA, which Kroff did until 1994, by which point he and Shari were divorced. When Kroff left, Sumner persuaded Shari to join NA as vice president for corporate planning and development, while he pursued control over Viacom.

8 Tudor, “Twenty-First Century Neoliberal Man.”
Shari revamped NA’s position in film exhibition by strengthening the company’s theater chains on a region-by-region basis, which enabled her to negotiate more favorable deals with distributors. She renovated NA’s multiplexes, installing stadium seating but avoiding the overbuilding to which other exhibitors fell victim. In selected cities, Shari built upscale theaters with full-service bars, gourmet dining, and valet parking—effectively offering a full evening of upscale consumption under one roof. Shari globalized NA by acquiring or building theater chains in the United Kingdom, Latin America, and Russia. She moved NA into online ticket sales through participation in Movietickets.com. When other exhibitors lost money as a result of falling ticket sales and overbuilding, Shari kept NA profitable and moving forward.

In 1999, Sumner rewarded Shari. As president and chief executive officer of NA, he gave the ceremonial role of president to his daughter, retaining the operational role of chief executive officer despite the fact that she was running the company. As chair of Viacom’s board of directors, Sumner made her a member. To the press, Sumner described Shari as his heir. He promoted her to vice chair of Viacom’s board and integrated her into Viacom’s operations. In 2005, Shari bought a residence in New York City, where Viacom was headquartered. She reportedly divided her time between NA and Viacom. When Sumner carved CBS out of Viacom in 2006, he placed Shari on the CBS board as vice chair and director. Reports that Sumner had named her as his successor in an irrevocable trust and was disengaging from the companies began to circulate.

Shari became more active in setting agendas for board meetings and recruiting new board members. Legal restrictions required that each board include some directors who had no ties to the other board, so Shari sought directors outside Sumner’s sphere of influence. Oversight from independent directors would bring a less personal slant to the governance of CBS and Viacom. Shari further proposed that executive salaries be tied to individual performance. These moves could be interpreted either as Shari modernizing corporate governance or as a personal attack on Sumner, who packed boards with cronies and compensated himself as he wished.

Sumner’s response suggested that he felt personally attacked. Between January and July 2007, he replaced six of CBS’s fourteen directors with individuals not favored by Shari. Also in July, Sumner wrote a letter to Robert Lenzer of Forbes and asked Lenzer to publish it. In the letter, Sumner makes it clear that he and he alone has been running the family business. 


13 Ibid.


First, he responds to “recent stories” in which Shari “talks of good governance.” He states: “[S]he apparently ignores the cardinal rule of good governance that the boards of two public companies, Viacom and CBS, should select my successor—and that no person be imposed on them.” Besides accusing Shari of ignorance, Sumner’s public letter implies that she could get his job only if an outside force imposed her on the boards. This echoes conservative reactions in the 1970s to equal opportunity laws: government might legislate the inclusion of racial minorities and women, but “those people” would fail because they lacked the necessary qualifications, that is, white masculinity.

Further, Sumner claims: “I gave my children their stock; and it is I, with little or no contribution on their part, who built these great media companies with the help of the boards of both companies.” Although he may have given stock to Shari, she rebuilt NA by herself, modernizing operations and generating revenues. Shari’s work, in fact, allowed Sumner to pursue Viacom, and she subsequently commuted between NA and Viacom to oversee operations. Sumner dismisses Shari’s work as “little or no contribution” to his success as an entrepreneur. Noting his beneficence to “his children,” Sumner erases his daughter, the only one of his children who had contributed to NA’s success and who still owned NA stock.

Next, he belittles her 20 percent ownership as making “no practical difference.” His 80 percent share ensured “that the companies are operated in the best interest of the stockholders” using “principles of good governance.” With Sumner as majority stockholder, he could ignore his daughter, the minority stockholder. He had rewarded her obedience but would not reward her exercise of independent judgment. As the majority owner, Sumner still held the power.

Finally, he offers to buy her out “as long as the price is acceptable.” In this, Sumner gave Shari one last chance to please her father by selling her patrimony for a low price. Instead, Shari hired a law firm to negotiate a settlement. Negotiations failed. Sumner dominated the boards—hiring, elevating, and firing white male executives whom he also touted as successors—while Bank of America led a consortium of lenders pressuring Sumner to repay his corporate debts. Shari continued working in the family business, rather like Uhura behind that tall computer screen: a female executive, trained, capable, and invisible.

Both the corporate story and the cinematic narrative trade heavily on a popular masculine mythology: the entrepreneurial, self-made male in charge. These narratives rationalize a singular male leader through a postfeminist, neoliberal assumption that political classes based on gender, race, or economic class no longer need exist. Success, within neoliberalism, is an individualized process without systemic bias. In an era wracked by recessions and identified as postfeminist, or postracial, the stories of National Amusements and of Star Trek give us two “men for the ages”: Sumner Redstone, the corporate cowboy whose individual decisions built an empire, and James T. Kirk, the space cowboy whose captaincy spreads a free Enterprise across the galaxy.
Distribution Is Queen: LGBTQ Media on Demand
by Candace Moore

The research analyst who assured the Economist in 2009 that “people would sooner unplug their refrigerators than their cable boxes” may be eating his words.1 Perhaps he’d now muse that folks would rather sacrifice toilet paper than broadband. In “My Life as a Television Throwback,” Taffy Brodesser-Akner describes her cobbled-together viewing habits after her husband was laid off. Her family canceled cable and watched TV online through the usual streaming suspects, but also via digital antennae, forcing an encounter with “slow” TV—programs as scheduled during the week, interstitials and all.2 While my personal battle with AT&T to maintain cable service after a windstorm rages on after visits from six technicians, none of whom could climb a telephone pole, most of my friends have pulled the plug on cable and satellite. My dirtiest professional secret? I’m finding myself increasingly jealous of their lower monthly bills. And I write and teach about TV! But I am also anxious about what new online consumption patterns mean for the production and distribution of feminist and LGBTQ media.

Now that video streaming represents a quarter of total Internet usage, mainstream television and film distributors are struggling to create pay-per-view, commercial-sponsored, and subscription online formats enticing enough that viewers stop downloading pirated media for free. Unfortunately, distributors for independent, alternative, and niche media are also suffering a siphoning off of their profits—and these companies often barely break even on festival favorites that don’t otherwise garner consumer interest. A clear consequence of rapidly shifting consumption practices for the vitality of alternative media is that to ensure profit, work that reproduces popular Hollywood narratives and aesthetics tends to get picked up over more experimental fare, even by companies that have previously taken chances with riskier material. In what follows, I examine the digital strategies and harnessing of consensual fan labor that queer distributors, in particular, employ to stave off their own economic collapse. I turn to two of

the largest LGBTQ film and television distributors, Wolfe Video and the Logo network, respectively, as case studies. As I detail, Wolfe’s e-commerce business model incorporates “hiring” consumers as online subcontractors, partnering with digital video distributors, and maximizing content-sharing sites like Pinterest to socially distribute its films. The basic cable channel Logo uses mobile social media applications, such as Foursquare, and mines user data across access devices to create individualized media experiences for television fans. These practices reflect some of the seismic shifts in the structure of for-profit media distribution over the past decade—moves toward providing media content for the consumer on demand and across multiple platforms.

Given consumers’ new strategies for avoiding costly subscriptions, cable providers are retrenching, offering bundled deals, expanding video-on-demand (VOD) services for the customers they’ve kept, and developing online and mobile VOD sites that resemble HBO GO’s successful format. Apparently concerned that maybe “content is king” after all, multisystem operator Comcast even purchased the media conglomerate NBC Universal, first buying a controlling stake in 2011, followed by the whole company in 2013.\(^3\) Since the downturn of the economy, the film industry has experienced its own share of initial bed-wetting, given lower box-office and home entertainment sales.\(^4\) There’s also no money in local video-rental chains, unless you’re talking about those little red boxes outside of drugstores. Rental giant Hollywood Video closed its doors and Blockbuster declared bankruptcy.\(^5\) Initial estimates that viewers would buy nearly a billion more movies through legal online sources than on Blu-ray or DVD in 2012 ended up being inflated;\(^6\) but while 2012 didn’t quite mark the first year that Internet media viewing profits exceeded hard-copy revenue, online sales will inevitably beat out traditional delivery and home entertainment formats.

While both large and small media distributors experiment with pay-to-watch online delivery systems, consumers’ insecurity in the new economy, married with changes in streaming technology and file sharing, invites forms of consumption off the corporate grid. In 2011, Maria Pallante, the US register of copyrights, shouted “fire” in a House Judiciary Committee meeting on the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA).\(^7\) She warned that the entire “US copyright system will ultimately fail” if Congress didn’t crack down on Internet piracy. Digital media scholar Alexis Lothian suggests that although online thievery seems anticorporate and “insurrectionary,” such practices also circulate and serve to promote the media industry’s productions.\(^8\) Thus, the piracy community she dubs an “undercommons” “simultaneously reproduces and undermines the structures


that enable it.”9 For those of us who either compulsively or occasionally open BitTorrent (I won’t incriminate myself), the logic often goes: “I’m only stealing from the big companies.”

Although hits that sell decently from DVD catalogs have sometimes kept independent distributors’ business lucrative in the past, piracy and viewers’ shift away from purchasing merchandise or paying for cable pose serious threats to micromedia industries. While my anarchist tendencies shudder at the conservative scent of this sentiment, I’m more concerned than ambivalent about the results of this trend, especially for its effects on LGBTQ and feminist media production. Regardless of consumers’ rationalizations, films made for smaller, specialized audiences like gays and lesbians are also pirated and circulated. And piracy arguably affects whether low-budget filmmakers lucky enough to garner distribution can make enough return on their investment to continue making films. Jenni Olson, vice president of Wolfe Video’s E-Commerce and Consumer Marketing Department, points to the lesbian romance And Then Came Lola, which spurred tens of thousands of illegal copies on the Internet, as an example of a film that people thought they were “totally entitled to [watch for free] but that means that that couple of bucks in [the filmmaker’s] pocket [isn’t] getting there.”10

Emerging out of the rise of lesbian and gay film festival culture, Wolfe Video has remained one of the leading American LGBTQ film distributors since 1985, and it continues to expand its scope and relevance today by adapting to the present convergent environment. While queer film culture certainly existed before the 1980s, during that decade lesbian and gay film festivals sprouted up in major US cities; specialized distribution companies Wolfe Video, Strand Releasing, and TLA Entertainment launched and grew; and AIDS and queer activist filmmakers experimented with inexpensive video formats. Since then, hundreds of LGBTQ film festivals have come to showcase queer material internationally, and these circuits act as launching grounds for premieres of traditional and experimental, short and feature-length films alike. B. Ruby Rich describes LGBTQ film festivals as “gather[ing] queer communities together in a statement of identity and solidarity,” with the caveat that screening at them does not ensure “financial return for filmmakers and video artists.”11

Filmmakers continue to submit material nonetheless, as these festivals have become the major marketplace for independent queer directors to peddle their wares to distributors. Olson explains how a new gay and lesbian media distribution movement emerged in direct response to the rise of the festivals:

In the mid ’80s, people like Kathy Wolfe and Marcus Hu [Strand Releasing] saw the opportunity for getting these films to larger audiences. Even before that, in the early ’80s, Frameline realized that films would come from, say, Europe, for the festival and then get shipped back. They thought “Why don’t we just keep the film here and ship it to all the other [American] festivals and charge them rental fees?” Strand started doing more theatrical releases. Wolfe

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9 Ibid., 136.
10 Jenni Olson, telephone interview with author, February 7, 2013.
focused on home video and DVD and began doing broadcast [television] sales in the late ’90s and 2000s with outlets like Logo and Here! Networks.\(^\text{12}\)

What started as a collection of grassroots, festival-centered distribution efforts grew into a network of companies that promote queer media across theatrical, cable, merchandising, and digital venues.

Today, when Wolfe acquires a film, it sells it not just on the VHS and DVD market but also on multiple platforms, including Netflix, Hulu, iTunes, Vudu, and Amazon, among others. It handles foreign sales, delivering the film to festivals throughout the world, as well as broadcast sales, placing the film on a variety of television systems and channels. In 2009, for example, Wolfe made a deal with Warner Brothers’ digital entertainment arm to screen its products through VOD television and online pay-to-stream or download formats. Cognizant of the niche and crossover audiences that LGBTQ films deliver, Warner declared a dedication to screening these “successful independent features as part of [its] digital lineup,” including satellite, online, and cable providers.\(^\text{13}\)

Like the larger, conventional distribution companies in distress in the new media economy, Wolfe recently launched its own on-demand system for feature films. In June 2012, Wolfe debuted WolfeOnDemand in collaboration with technology partner Distrify, an Internet distribution service. The online delivery system allows viewers to stream digitized films for a rental fee of $3.99 or to purchase them for download or in hard copy for varying prices. The service also extends Wolfe’s market substantially, as it reaches an international audience through the Internet, even though the company only owns North American rights for most content sold on DVD. Olson calls WolfeOnDemand a financial “gamechanger”: “Historically, with people overseas, we couldn’t do anything for them, but with WolfeOnDemand we literally have viewers all over the world watching LGBT films.”\(^\text{14}\)

Although an Internet streaming or downloading service is obviously no longer innovative in and of itself, Wolfe’s is distinctive in that it actively encourages fan-based distribution. Once a title is clicked on, the website streams a trailer and offers the option to rent or buy. Buttons encourage consumers to “follow” email updates on the film, “share” a link to the film on Facebook or Twitter, or “embed” the link onto a personal website or blog. In the Facebook age, Internet media players, especially those designed by companies, often include such possibilities. What is most striking about Wolfe’s most recent distribution model, however, is that it relies on financial incentives to facilitate and maximize user-driven endorsement. Clicking on “share” or “embed” leads you to the following message: “Share this movie and earn cash rewards. When you promote this movie on your website or blog, you will earn 10.0% of any sales that come through your referrals.” Thus, consumers earn affiliate revenue when their links to films on personal or social networking sites result in an actual rental or purchase from Wolfe.
In *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the “diverse figures of social production” ushered in with the rise of the Internet: “Labor itself... tends through the transformations of the economy to create and be embedded in cooperative and communicative networks.”¹⁵ In media studies, many discussions of fans’ affective labor concentrate on how consumers not only enter Stuart Hall’s notorious feedback loop, implicitly influencing production, but also in some cases literally become producers.¹⁶ Along with analyzing examples of consumers as producers—producers, for example, of fan texts that offer free promotional content and audience research for studios—we should turn more attention to *social distribution*, and to understanding the new economic models that depend on consumers acting as distributors.

Media criticism and word of mouth have long promoted films indirectly. Viral marketing has been an industry catchword for decades. But the phenomenon of consumers acting as media distributors, providing access to video that other consumers must pay to see, is relatively new. Offering direct links to exhibition outlets, social media users are becoming intermediaries, who in some cases are being paid for their services. This e-commerce strategy relies on core constituencies of fans to maintain profitability, and it seems particularly well suited for distributing material that is likely to sell well to a particular social group or taste culture. For these reasons, it is not surprising that Wolfe would experiment with inviting individual viewers within gay and lesbian communities, not just companies, to be affiliates.

When you sign into Facebook, someone (or more likely something) has already assessed the exchange value of your attention. Social networking sites aggregate information about users to sell to advertisers, and users often inadvertently advertise products to their contacts. Sometimes, though, free viral promotion happens with users’ full consent or conviction. The central purpose of the bookmark-sharing site Pinterest, for instance, is to encourage consumer spending through user-generated online retail catalogs, full of enthusiastic pins. According to Reuters, the site thrills retailers: “Pinterest generates more dollars per user than some other social media sites, even though Facebook, the world’s largest social network with more than a billion users, is a leading driver of shopping by volume.”¹⁷ With five times as many unique visitors, Facebook’s ubiquity and advertising power continue to trump Pinterest’s.¹⁸ Similarly, the leading video streaming site YouTube, with more than a billion users a month, provides a quick vehicle for getting people to see movie trailers.¹⁹ However, small and niche film distribution companies such as Wolfe develop Pinterest presences in the hope that promoting products on a site geared toward fostering financial transactions will pay

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off. Whereas Twitter feeds fly by, Facebook clutter often gets a cursory glance, and YouTube doesn’t link straight to company sites, Pinterest attracts users who are more apt to shop through their browser windows. Wolfe’s Pinterest profile includes a “LGBT Movie Showcase” board, which features each film individually in an easily repinnable form with cover art and a short plot description. Clicking on a film brings users straight to WolfeOnDemand, where they can purchase the film and are offered an economic incentive to become part of a team of consumer-distributors. Rinse and repeat. The idea is that consumers who find Wolfe films through social networking sites will then return to those same sites to advertise to their own Internet circles.

Similarly to Wolfe, LogoTV.com includes options for sharing links to videos on multiple social networking sites, including Twitter, Digg, Myspace, Tuenti, Google+, Tumblr, StudiVZ, Reddit, Orkut, Hyves, Blogger, and Pinterest. Rather than entice consumers to purchase individual media products online and promote them, however, Logo uses its Internet presence to solicit additional viewers to access its network through cable television. In this regard, what it is selling through its website and social media profiles is itself (and, implicitly, cable subscriptions and its sponsors’ products). As Viacom’s LGBTQ-focused basic cable television channel, the Logo network streams programs and featured films online for free rather through a pay model. Like most other television networks, though, Logo uploads only a handful of episodes of any particular series in order to hook potential regular cable viewers. The Logo network was designed to be supported by ad revenue; to depend financially on its parent company, MTV networks, also owned by Viacom; and to be offered as part of a bundled cable tier that includes MTV, VH1, and Nickelodeon, among other channels. The public relations discourse around Logo’s 2006 launch proposed that the basic cable network finally addressed a specific, “underserved” niche: “If you’re gay and lesbian you have seen yourself represented on television for the last 20 years but you’ve never had a home,” Brian Graden, the openly gay then-entertainment president of Logo and MTV, told the New York Times: “In a world where golfers and cooks have a home on TV you feel left out.” Framing LGBTQ media as its own genre based on identification while describing its projected audience in terms of domestic and spatial metaphors, Graden pitches the network to a constructed community of viewers looking to find “home.”

On its current website, Logo seemingly continues its mission to help gay and lesbian viewers feel “at home” wherever they travel. Relating virtual interfaces with the fantasy of a real-life queer “public,” LogoTV.com touts the network’s tie-in with Four-square, an online site and application that syncs with mobile phone GPS technologies to upload messages about its users’ locations to a network of friends. The app also suggests local businesses close to the users’ place on the map on the basis of information it has gathered on the user. Logo’s website enticingly asks its visitors, “Want expert

dish on the most absolutely fabulous places from coast to coast? Follow LogoTV [on Foursquare] and get served tips from experts, actors, and drag queens!” Referencing one of its biggest hits, _RuPaul’s Drag Race_, the prominent show at the top of its webpage, LogoTV prompts consumers to develop or open Foursquare profiles. The cable network’s website promises that Logo television personalities will post notes on Foursquare about the “hot spots” they have ventured to on and off camera. Using mobile phones, fans can visit any restaurants, retail shops, bars, museums, and other recommended places and spaces featured on Logo’s Foursquare page, thus providing them with the sense that they have a special, “real world” relationship to the stars of Logo’s shows.23

Logo teams up with Foursquare to offer a tour guide that travels along with its fans on what cultural studies scholar Nick Couldry might call “media pilgrimages,” charting them as they go.24 How does Logo benefit from promoting use of this free social technology? Logo and its partners track the information fans provide through actual GPS technology, a step beyond mere online cookies. Using Foursquare encourages consumers to write entries across linked social media sites that relate their experiences to Logo’s programming, and by extension to its brand, advertising to others in their networks. This strategy also keeps Logo with fans when they’re away from their TV and computer screens. As another way of making the TV experience mobile, Foursquare helps create a link between (presumably) enjoyable leisure time away from the home and Logo’s specific entertainment source.

Cookies, or tracking devices, on Logo’s web interfaces gather information about individual users’ interactions to “tailor” content and advertisements for them and trace when they share material with other potential users. Given the potential legal ramifications of Logo’s systems of user surveillance and website specialization, it publishes its privacy policies in great detail. Information from all devices used in relation to Logo or affiliated companies can potentially be collected, as Logo’s policy makes clear: “Tracking Technologies collect ‘click stream’ data and additional Other Information regarding your visits to the Site (such as your visits to the Site’s webpages, use of our features, and purchasing history or preferences), may collect such Other Information across multiple sessions on this Site and other websites offered by the Parent Companies and/or Affiliates and may also collect your IP address or some other identifier unique to the Device you use to access the Site.”25 While learning that your consumer and curiosity preferences are meticulously tracked through data systems may seem alarming when you’ve read the fine print, the collection of this information keeps minority media available at your convenience, without a charge. Of course, Logo’s admitted practices of data collecting and processing are neither unique nor particularly dubious. Indeed, the majority of sites providing free content function similarly.

My focus, in this piece, on how for-profit distributors negotiate this changing mediascape in no way intends to ignore the importance and relevance of free queer media available through individual artists’ sites or posted on YouTube. Such work, presented

23 Ibid.
outside of a profit-based industry, is vital; however, it rarely supports the livelihood and craft of artists. The online retailing and promotional strategies I’ve outlined mark attempts by LGBTQ distributors like Wolfe Video and the Logo network to maintain viability in the new media economy. Online social distribution, affiliate marketing, mobile device tie-ins, and user profiling seem par for the course not only for larger media behemoths but also for distributors serving niche constituencies. New consumption practices, such as the gradual abandoning of home video collections and cable subscriptions, as well as the phenomenon of digital piracy, have permanently changed the way these media distribution companies do business.

Reading between the Lines: Gender and Viral Marketing

by Alyxandra Vesey

Gender changes the way independent filmmakers work, and it must change the way we understand their work. Traditionally, below-the-line labor is differentiated from above-the-line labor within media industries as being skill-based rather than creative, and thus compensated at scale and standardized through various guilds and unions. In recent years, scholars like John Caldwell, Miranda Banks, and Vicki Mayer have challenged perceptions about the lack of creativity in below-the-line labor, as well as the ways in which such labor is delegitimated through industrial and cultural processes of gendering. But scholarship also needs to focus on the ways in which gender and social media convergence blur the boundaries between above-the-line and below-the-line labor in independent American microbudget filmmaking. As Chris Atton observes, working between these lines is often a practical reality for independent media production. The binary may also be destabilized by female creative laborers who occupy above-the-line positions, carry out below-the-line promotional labor for microbudget film projects, and engage with multiple digital media platforms to make their labor visible and commodifiable.


Take, for example, the viral marketing campaign of the independent film *Best Friends Forever* (Brea Grant, 2013). Completed in the fall of 2012, the film focuses on two friends who embark on a road trip to Texas as the apocalypse nips at their hub caps; its online fund-raising campaign demonstrates how digital communication can support the production and distribution of independent film, particularly within industrial limitations that force independent productions to consolidate their labor force.

This specific case study also demonstrates the political potential of female media professionals taking on both above- and below-the-line labor roles. This shift should challenge our definitions of below- and above-the-line labor, particularly for independent or amateur filmmakers who take on a variety of work roles, including masculinized technical labor as well as the more associatively feminized labor of casting, marketing, and promotion. Most notably, director-producer-writer-star Brea Grant and produce-writer-star Vera Miao’s fund-raising efforts challenge the notion that above- and below-the-line labor are necessarily distinct from each other. By analyzing the ways in which independent filmmakers’ labor is articulated, this case study addresses how we view women’s numerous roles as creative laborers in contemporary American independent cinema. It also considers how they negotiate their myriad professional identities while working toward gender parity in the industry.

Matt Hills’s concept of counterauthorship is especially provocative. Hills argues that scholars should think of authorship as processual and paratextual, as labor forces and industries evolve, produce, and interact “across-the-line,” rather than reinforcing stable concepts located around one show runner, producer, director, or screenwriter over the course of a text’s production history. To wit, while Grant and Miao wrote, produced, directed, and starred in their own feature film, they also took on traditionally below-the-line labor, particularly while serving as the film’s promotion team. Counterauthorship also accounts for the ways in which marginalized authors insist on their authorial legitimacy in their work and industrial disclosures. That is, we need to consider the various meanings of author for above-the-line workers who are women, queer, people of color, or from non-Western countries, and who thus face a different set of obstacles in getting their work produced and in claiming authorship of those texts. Theorizing authorship in concert with counterauthorship allows us to better understand the struggle for recognition in above-the-line communities peopled by women. Furthermore, it enables us to better analyze independent film productions that require laborers—like Grant and Miao—to work above and below the line simultaneously to complete their film and prepare it for distribution. These hierarchies unfold in a postfeminist cultural moment that operates beside a long history of women slowly integrating into the creative industries without the legislative guarantee of equal pay.

For the unique production history of *Best Friends Forever* to help us to problematize industrial standards of labor distinctions, we must first rethink the ways in which marketing and promotion is gendered. There is historically limited scholarship that considers how marketing and promotion are articulated as distinct intersectional practices.

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or identities, but recent studies attest to their gendered cultural histories. Erin Hill, for instance, traces the historical development of casting, a below-the-line labor practice transformed by female studio administrative assistants who assumed these roles around the Second World War. Thus, the labor force defined casting as a feminine labor practice. In addition, the work of casting directors relies on affective and identificatory responses to certain personalities that are associated with feminized practices of intuition and fandom. In her history of the American gossip industry, Anne Helen Petersen observes a mutually beneficial relationship between studio publicists and gossip columnists that also took shape during the first half of the twentieth century, and she pays particular attention to the influence that female industry professionals cultivated in both fields. These contributions should inspire us to consider how similar practices—cultivating star-fan relationships and circulating trade discourses—shape contemporary marketing and promotion.

As working actresses and feminists, Grant and Miao were frustrated by the limited, often stereotypical minor roles they were offered in US television, as well as in mainstream and independent film. They were influenced in part by the success of 2011’s Bridesmaids (Paul Feig), which received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay. Nevertheless, Best Friends Forever went through a protracted two-year preproduction cycle. Grant and Miao spent 2010 developing the script and pitching it to various directors and production companies with little success. Ultimately, the pair decided to shoot the film themselves on location. They put their own savings into the project, solicited friends and family, harnessed their collective presence on social media sites, and hosted several fund-raising events in Los Angeles to help raise money for the project. In addition, they also booked various professional gigs—bit parts in low-budget films, commercials, and minor recurring television roles—which served as a revenue source and a way of maintaining their profile in the industry.

The film went into production in late summer 2011 and wrapped in October. Grant and Miao launched a Kickstarter and viral marketing campaign in January 2012 to help finance reshoot and various postproduction costs, including automated dialogue replacement (ADR), visual effects, marketing, and music licensing. It also allowed the filmmakers to compensate themselves for money they had invested and to pay their crew. They met their target goal of $75,000 on April 24 and ultimately raised a total of $81,797 with the help of nearly a thousand investors. Grant, who has nearly fifty thousand Twitter followers, used her blog and social media profiles to mobilize interest. A number of crew members, friends, and family also recirculated information on the progress of the film’s Kickstarter campaign on their respective Facebook pages.

and Twitter profiles. Finally, regular updates of the campaign’s status were posted on the film’s official website, which resulted in a huge spike in activity.

In addition to offering prizes as incentives, *Best Friends Forever*’s Kickstarter campaign focused on “spreadable,” bite-sized clips connected with the film’s larger themes, which emphasized Grant’s and Miao’s labor as filmmakers. Some of them were silly—one spoofed the “Bohemian Rhapsody” sequence in *Wayne’s World*. Others were cheeky responses to various dares the filmmakers promised to honor if they received a certain amount of money during the pledge drive. One involved an illegal dance party in a public library. Another showed Grant eating a whole pie in slow motion. Some of the clips showed the filmmakers, producer Stacy Storey, and a number of crew members hard at work editing, reshooting, or rerecording dialogue for the film. In one particular clip, Grant is filmed in an editing bay, looking visibly tired and talking at length about the personal sacrifices she had to make in order to realize this film in an effort to “change the world” by working within (and yet counter to) the Hollywood system.

The campaign’s inaugural—and arguably most suggestive—clip focuses extensively on the gender disparity in above-the-line labor positions in American mainstream and independent film, and it makes clear that the filmmakers wanted the film to help close the gender gap in male-dominated above-the-line creative and below-the-line technical positions. In the clip, Miao offers the following statistics: in 2011, only 5 percent of American-made films were directed by women. Of those films, 14 percent were written by women, 4 percent were shot by female cinematographers, and 25 percent were produced by women. Grant points out that *Best Friends Forever* has a female director, along with two female screenwriters; three female producers; and a female cinematographer, key grip, and sound team. This clip set the tone for the purpose of both the campaign and the film’s larger industrial goals.

Taken together, these marketing strategies offer access to what Caldwell refers to as semidisclosed deep texts (that, through the processes of uploading and spreadability, become publicly disclosed deep texts) and help to legitimate their collective fundraising efforts. However, the construction of this campaign as labor enacted by female independent filmmakers performing social media fluencies is important. As Rosalind Gill argues about the precarious existence of new media workers, “working in new media involves multiple practices of managing the self in conditions of radical uncertainty.” In this new, digital economy, professional identity is tied to fluency with technologies of selfhood, and gender is fundamental to this management of the self, as demonstrated by the female laborers involved with *Best Friends Forever*. On the one hand, the inaugural video explicitly critiques gendered inequalities of labor operating within the film industry that the film and campaign are trying to correct. Yet with the help of their producer, Storey, who helped maintain the film’s website, Kickstarter campaign, and Facebook page, Grant and Miao performed their technological savvy by maintaining a sustained social media presence through blogging, tweeting, and updating their


websites. Not only did they learn how to shoot and edit in 16mm, but, through social media, they also performed those labor processes for fans and potential investors.

The campaign gave potential investors access to the filmmakers by attempting to make the process transparent through mediated self-disclosures and allowed them the opportunity to see the videos as fan labor that was helping to shape the film as a product. Many investors recorded and uploaded clips to the film’s Facebook page that explained their reasons for donating to the campaign. Many revealed a desire for gender parity among independent filmmakers as a primary motivator for investment. Nodding to the film’s subject matter, a number of supporters posted videos that also offered (often inventive and humorous) tips and suggestions for how to survive a zombie apocalypse.

Yet it is also important to interpret who uploaded fan videos on the film’s Facebook page to coincide with the Kickstarter campaign and what this tells us about the role of social networks in the production. Two notable users were social media entrepreneur Laura Roeder and actress Cathy Baron. Roeder is Grant’s social media strategist, a job that includes managing the actress’s Twitter account and maintaining her professional website. Baron is a professional colleague who produces original content for her own YouTube channel (Grant has appeared in a few titles). Simply put, both women are friends with the filmmakers. Through these connections, Grant and Miao were also able to get author and lifestyle coach Kaneisha Grayson to contribute a video about representations of African Americans in zombie films, as Grayson has worked with Roeder. In short, there is a deep connection in the filmmakers’ use of social media for the purposes of network building, cultural entrepreneurship, and the activation of fan labor. Best Friends Forever operates within a set of distinct social networks that are defined at once by a connectedness to peers and communities, the liquidity of labor within everyday existence, and the blurring of boundaries between artists and fans. According to Nancy Baym, these networks are defined by a shared set of resources and support, as well as a shared set of identities. Baym argues that the definition of community in a digital context often implies a supportive exchange of resources. Social support is especially important and is differentiated between network and emotional support. These networks of social support are vital to independent filmmakers, particularly if they share certain identities and politics with their audiences, who in turn have to subsidize and support the films if they want to see them.

The Kickstarter campaign gives us a manageable frame within which to understand the film’s postproduction process. But this two-year production history can offer us only an incomplete story of Best Friends Forever and its creative team. It will be interesting to see whether my findings and theoretical suppositions are challenged after the film is picked up for other national and international festivals. Best Friends Forever premiered at the Slamdance Film Festival in January 2013 and has since screened at film festivals in Austin, Texas; Los Angeles; and London. It also partnered with Tugg, a Web platform that works to get independent films theatrical distribution. But, if the

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film gets a “proper” theatrical run, how might our understanding of the film’s marketing campaign expand and change after it is exhibited theatrically?

Last, as a scholar who studies gender and media labor, I should also disclose my own relationship to this film. I served in a limited capacity as a music consultant for the film. The film prominently utilizes mix CDs as a form of narrative commentary and characterization. I was tasked with putting together a compilation of songs for the film from predominantly female Texas-based artists whose music fit the film’s general tone and aligned with the characters’ personalities or narrative arcs. Thus, I recognize the potential risks in selecting my case study and the methodology I chose to better understand it, as my involvement in the project compromises any pretense I could claim to objectivity. I participated in the film because a friend asked me to. I also agreed to pitch in because I believed in two working actresses who self-identify as feminists setting out to make a film about female friendship and homosociality, which is still rare, even post-Bridesmaids. As such, I am a part of the fluid network of social connections, labor, political support, and female friendship described here.

But I was also drawn to the project because of the precarious nature of American independent film. In general, media and cultural studies suffers from “the decreased attention to independent media, despite the so-called rise of participatory culture and an increase in production studies,” an issue Mary Celeste Kearney drew attention to in an Antenna post that grew out of her plenary talk at the 2012 Console-ing Passions conference.10 Far more attention is paid to mainstream television and film production, and a possible reason for this is the visibility of such projects. To research a film project like Best Friends Forever, we would have to know that it exists. We could not read up on it in Variety or the New York Times or watch the trailer on the Hollywood Reporter, at least not until outlets like IndieWire and Huffington Post offered the project some visibility by following the film’s fund-raising campaign. To know about it, we must have some personal connection to the community that is producing the film in the first place.

This is not to suggest that applying a production culture approach to independent filmmaking is inherently political, progressive, or subversive, regardless of the individual filmmakers’ politics or identification with feminism. But while I want to be rigorous as a feminist media scholar, I also want to use my labor in the service of texts and labor identities that have previously been unexplored or undertheorized. Thus, I think of my scholarship as a small way to honor my friends’ labor by considering the feminist negotiations they and their colleagues made. Perhaps in so doing, we can acknowledge the legions of other feminist women filmmakers who have accomplished, are accomplishing, and will accomplish similar feats while harnessing the potential of social media to work outside (yet alongside) mainstream media production.

Six months ago I landed a dream job. With it comes a regular paycheck; health insurance; paid vacation; prestige within the admittedly narrow circles of academia; and the approval, finally, of my second-wave feminist mother. Yes, I am the rare filmmaker with a tenure-track teaching position at a major university. But I won’t lie to you: when I reflect back on my various experiments across my working life to balance paid labor with my filmmaking, I am ambivalent about where I find myself today.

On the one hand, what kind of feminist wouldn’t be proud of competing successfully for a job that shouts “professional achievement,” especially in such a tight labor market—a job that manifests the feminist ambitions of her mother’s generation? On the other hand, I dearly miss “the holes,” the gaps in my old workday schedules back when I was an audiovisual technician. I exploited those holes to make films in much the same way my fellow third-wave feminists exploited the resources of their part-time jobs to crank out zines, music, and art.

What follows is a personal meditation on labor, feminist history, and feminist filmmaking. Can this feminist filmmaker—a former audiovisual tech, film projectionist, and union member—find peace, happiness, and the “holes” she needs to continue making films in her new job as an assistant professor?

When I moved to San Francisco in the early 1990s, artists of my generation were prioritizing their creative work over more traditional careers. Punk rock, anticorporate, and do-it-yourself (DIY) ideology dominated the San Francisco art scene, propagated through DIY zines such as Working for the Man, Dishwater Pete, and Temp Slave. Artists largely avoided the siren call of lucrative corporate careers, opting to work part-time jobs that allowed them to paint, write, or make films or music instead of becoming cogs in the system. Most DIYers believed it was better to work a part-time job and create their own culture than participate in the establishment.

During this time, rebellious young women, angry that they were relegated to the punk-rock sidelines, started an underground feminist movement. Riot Grrrls advocated that women make their own media, whatever their skill levels or resources. It was important, they argued, to distribute feminist media that was smart and political as an alternative to the mainstream media’s limited and often demeaning
representation of women. They adopted the idea that “cultural production is a key site of struggle.”

Inspired by Riot Grrrls and the punk-rock DIY ethic, I set out to make Grrlyshow (2001), a film about grrrl zines. But to pay the bills, I took on a job working as an audiovisual technician.

I didn’t make a lot of money working as an AV tech, but the job gave me the cash I needed to both pay my rent and make films—Grrlyshow was followed by Bachelorette, 34 (2009), which offered a sassy, third-wave feminist rebuttal to the media’s pervasive, and pervasively damaging, stereotypes of women. But the Riot Grrrl approach to art, industry, and labor placed me in direct conflict with the upwardly mobile second-wave feminist vision of career advancement with which I’d grown up.

Working a part-time blue-collar job instead of pursuing a more prestigious and lucrative career was anathema to my second-wave feminist mother, who raised my sisters and me on books such as Girls Can Be Anything and Free to Be You and Me.2 Girls Can Be Anything featured pictures of eight-year-old girls in a variety of jobs: president of the United States, brain surgeon, astronaut. Blue-collar jobs, AV tech among them, were conspicuously absent. My mom reminded me that her generation fought for equal pay and equal access to jobs and professional advancement. She was worried that I was squandering my career opportunities and “living like a retired person.” I explained to my mother that for feminists in my generation, creative work unleashed through alternative media is as powerful a tool for change as politics was for feminists in her generation. When she trotted out the feminist metaphor of smashing through the glass ceiling, I told her to forget the ceiling; we’d left the building.

I can understand my mother’s insistence that forging a career path is important, given the restricted professions available to women of her generation. When she was a girl, she was given books such as I Want to Be a Homemaker, an installment in the I Want to Be . . . series for children that was published in the late 1950s and early 1960s.3 While boys got Doctor, Dentist, Policeman, and Architect (and, to be fair, Cowboy and Mechanic), girls got Homemaker, Secretary, Nurse, Telephone Operator, Beauty Operator, and Ballet Dancer. My mother went for the teacher option. “I couldn’t type, I like to talk, and I couldn’t sit still,” she said. “Plus I wanted summers off.”

Her generation was also treated to educational films such as Why Study Science? (1955), about a family camping trip in which father and son go fishing while mother and daughter cook and clean up. When daughter Betty asserts that she wants to get married and have a family, Mother explains that she will need science to keep house and plan nutritious meals. While this film also showed women working as physical therapists, nurses, and medical and lab technicians, in that era these weren’t scientific careers but “women’s work”—low-paid, dead-end jobs that made it possible for their male counterparts to climb up the ladder.

These texts, which so offended my mother, became found-footage material for my documentary *Grrlyshow*, contributing to its Riot Grrrl and decidedly third-wave feminist aesthetic. *Grrlyshow* tells the story of the girl zine explosion, in which women from all walks of life began creating self-published periodicals as an alternative to the homogeneity of the corporate media. *Grrlyshow* juxtaposes scenes from mid-twentieth-century menstrual educational films and vintage “found” clips showing women as secretaries and data-entry clerks with interviews with the creators of zines bearing evocative names such as *BUST* and *Bitch*. The zine creators describe how they appropriate work resources—especially unobligated hours in their workday and access to supplies and equipment—to crank out their publications. A narrative sequence features actors dressed in hip retro 1960s fashions who give step-by-step instructions on how to make their own zines, suggesting that it’s best done on “the man’s time.”

My mother, of course, didn’t have the luxury of appropriating work time. She grew up in southeast Kansas, the daughter of an evangelist Baptist minister. “We had a script to follow,” she told me. “It was more important at that time to have a family. Get married and have a family.” Which is just what she did. It wasn’t until my mother turned eighteen that Betty Friedan’s best seller *The Feminine Mystique* tore down the wall of veiled complacency with the forceful argument that confining women to their homes wasted their education and frustrated their abilities. Of the moment she discovered *Ms.* magazine at a newsstand, my mother says, “I felt like that magazine was written just for me.” Soon thereafter, she dropped her family’s Southern Baptist religion and conservative politics and joined civil rights marches, Vietnam War protests, and the women’s liberation movement. She claims that she was one of the National Organization of Women’s first ten members. My mother had caught the second wave.

Raised by a second-wave feminist, I grew up within the feminist movement. My sisters and I wore iron-on T-shirts that read “Ms.” or “I’m a winner,” and my favorite book was a self-published, handmade, Xeroxed and stapled fairy tale in which the princess leaves the prince because he is a classist and snob—and then goes on to teach the workers of the castle how to read.

I loved that dog-eared book so much that I wore it out. When I asked my mother for another copy, she told me that her friend had written the book and self-distributed it. Even as a child, I was impressed that anyone could just write a book and hand it out. At my mother’s suggestion, I called her friend and asked her to write a sequel. This direct connection between a self-published writer and her readership was a preview of the DIY media movement that would blast off in the 1990s, just as Julia Reichert and Jim Klein’s *Growing Up Female* (1971), a classic feminist film, revealed to me the potential of filmmaking as both a creative path and a means for change.

By the 1990s, *Growing Up Female* seemed like a time capsule from a bygone era to the daughters of second-wave feminists. When I first saw it in a women’s studies class, it was obvious to me that the business instructor and guidance counselor whom its young female subjects encounter were deeply sexist. But I was struck by how the filmmakers counterpointed those in authority roles. For example, instead of filming the guidance counselor as she explains to sixteen-year-old Terry her future duties as a wife,
the filmmakers chose to watch Terry’s reaction and document her visible discomfort. Leaning away from the counselor, with her arms crossed, Terry clearly isn’t buying the counselor’s advice, even though she doesn’t yet have the voice or language to talk back. The documentary introduced me to filmmaking as a vehicle for posing questions about basic social premises. A feminist almost since before I was born, I rushed toward the creative and politically meaningful work that I hoped awaited me.

But then, just as the tools of independent media production were becoming more accessible to young women and women were gaining wider acceptance in the workforce, the professional world to which my mother and other second-wave feminists had fought to gain access was slowly disappearing. The 1980s witnessed a shrinking middle class, job shortages, and corporate globalization, and baby boomers filled the jobs that did remain in the United States. In her essay “Living in McJobdom: Third Wave Feminism and Class Inequity,” Michelle Sidler writes that while second-wave feminism leveled the traditional playing field and opened doors for third-wave career seekers, “unemployment, debt[,] and technology” upended that playing field in the 1980s. As it turned out, 1991, the year I started pounding the pavement, “was arguably the worst job market since World War II.”

Riot Grrrl artists and zine publishers didn’t aspire to upwardly mobile jobs within a capitalist economic system as our second-wave predecessors had done. Given the weak economy, there were few upwardly mobile jobs anyway. Instead, Riot Grrrls creatively exploited existing systems—notably, their day jobs—to make change. In fact, if you could find only part-time work, it was all the better: the gift of time for making art was one of underemployment’s best benefits for the artist born into a culture that rarely rewards creative work monetarily. Hence, the Riot Grrrl mantra: “Just do it at work.”

I followed this mantra by taking a job as a tech with an audiovisual company, driving around San Francisco and setting up speakers, TVs, microphones, and PowerPoint presentations at hotels and conference centers. My workday started with a list of the day’s setups. Embedded in my orders were time gaps, or “holes,” when I was free to do my own thing. If I were sent out to set up a sound system in a business office downtown, I’d also load a camera and a few lavaliere microphones into the van, just in case a “hole” popped up. During the holes, I interviewed zine editors for my film.

One day I was dispatched to set up a TV at the City Club of the Bohemian Grove, an exclusive, all-male club of power brokers that boasts such current members as George Bush senior and junior, Donald Rumsfeld, and, formerly, Richard Nixon. Women aren’t allowed into the club unless they’re kitchen workers, prostitutes, or AV techs. All clients have to book for a four-hour minimum but it only takes forty-five minutes to set up a TV. So after that was done, I slipped out to interview some zine editors.

editors for Grrlyshow. In this way, not only was I able to work on my movie, but also both George Bushes helped fund it.

I was far from the only person working in the holes. Using supplies from her job at People magazine, Barbara Kligman produced Plotz, the Zine for the Vaclempt “through the cracks of capitalism and in the shadows of mass media.”¹⁸ Similarly, Lynn Peril, a legal word processor, and Margarita Alcantara, a legal secretary, wrote their legendary zines Mystery Date and Bamboo Girl, respectively, whenever a gap in their workday presented itself.

Sasha Cagen, coeditor of the zine Cupsize, worked for a well-known women’s glossy magazine. In her essay “Cut-and-Paste Revolution: Notes from the Girl Zine Explosion,” Jennifer Bleyer writes, “Late at night, [zine coeditor Tara] Needham would come to Cagen’s Midtown office building, and the two would ride the elevator up to the twenty-first floor and take over the corporate suite. Writing, cutting, gluing, and drawing [Cupsize].”⁹

Zine writers speak with pride about siphoning off means of production and refusing to accept advertisements. Andi Zeisler, editor of Bitch, told me, “From the start we envisioned and described the project as something that would counter the way that traditional magazines depended on ad revenue.”¹⁰ Zine legend Lynn Peril recently summed it up for me: “The whole point was not being beholden to corporate interests, hence the cries of ‘sellout!’ when someone accepted advertising.”¹¹

For many feminists in my generation, working in the holes was a strategy that eventually led to the production of successful work, some of which is now standard fare for women’s studies courses.¹² Working in the holes made it possible for me to produce films, but circumstances eventually drew me toward a full-time job. My part-time status as an AV tech limited my health insurance and other benefits. When I started pushing forty, I decided to go full-time so I could get insurance through one of the few remaining unions left in San Francisco (IATSE Local 16). I was ambivalent about this choice. The efforts of my mother’s generation gave me the chance to join this historically male union, but I was confronted by subtle, and sometimes direct, forms of sexism—full-time rather than part-time. And my revised schedule cut deeply into my creative time. Later, cutbacks forced me to move from a progressive contemporary

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10 Andi Zeisler, email message to author, January 7, 2013.
11 Lynn Peril, email message to author, January 7, 2013.
12 For instance, Lynn Peril wrote her canonical books on the history of femininity—Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens and Coeds, Then and Now (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), and Swimming in the Steno Pool: A Retro Guide to Making It in the Office (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011)—while employed in a job traditionally considered “women’s work.” My own films, Grrlyshow and Bachelorette, 34, have been sold to more than one hundred colleges and universities for use in their women’s studies classes and have been screened in popular venues ranging from the Sundance Film Festival to the Oprah Winfrey Network.
arts space to the corporate theater next door, where I projected for such companies as Google, Apple, and Intel. I was, in DIY terminology, working for the man.

My mother began needling me to become a professor and teach film production. That would be like her career as a teacher, she said, but better. And I could use my summers off to make films. But to get a job teaching, I needed teaching experience. So I got a part-time job as an adjunct lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz. While at first happy to garner more familial respect than I’d had in my entire working history, I soon discovered that I was paid only for the time spent in the classroom, without compensation for my time preparing for classes, grading papers, advising students, and writing letters of recommendation. Because I had to work three months full-time as an adjunct to earn what I could make working one month as an AV tech, I decided to return to the AV union full-time. Even my mother agreed it was the better option. I figured if I worked seventy-hour weeks for six months, I could bring in just enough money to take the other six months off.

But still, when I was offered a tenure-track job as assistant professor at Syracuse University, I jumped at it, because a part of me still wanted to “succeed.” Even though I still embrace the Riot Grrrl principles of producing your own culture, it seems I have also internalized my mother’s second-wave-feminist upwardly mobile ambitions.

The job market has only worsened since the days of Riot Grrrls, and the always-slim options for filmmakers have become even slimmer. Today, many of my artist friends back in San Francisco who are temporary and part-time workers have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet, which leaves little time—and few holes—for media activism of any kind. So I am grateful to have a job, even one without the workplace protections offered by a union. I look forward to the opportunities—such as access to state-of-the-art equipment, meeting visiting artists, and applying for research grants—that working in academia opens up. But I admit that I’m a bit worried. So far, after six months working as a full-time assistant professor, I am uncertain when I’ll be able to produce creative work.

My new colleagues tell me that it gets easier, that the first year is always the hardest. And my faculty advisor, in an effort to reassure me, tells me that all I need to do to remain competitive is to replicate the exhibition record I achieved before I arrived. But in San Francisco, I organized my entire work life around making two films: the first one took three years to make and the second one took seven years. What’s more, I was one lucky filmmaker to get screenings at eminent venues such as Sundance and the Museum of Modern Art. “You don’t have to do everything yourself,” my advisor says, adding, without apparent irony, “Why don’t you produce someone else’s film or work as a director of photography?”

I value my advisor’s advice, but the emphasis on the exhibition track record runs counter to the Riot Grrrls’ political approach to DIY art and industry that inspired me to make films in the first place. I have begun to realize that to survive the tenure process, I’m going to have to keep my eyes open for new kinds of holes to pop up, perhaps during semester breaks, conferences, and—who knows?—maybe one day a paid sabbatical.

My work life has been checkered. I have tried income patching through part-time jobs that left holes for my filmmaking. I have worked full-time jobs for the security and
validation they offer but was unable to produce a single film. I have finally launched the kind of career my mother envisioned for me, though it’s too soon to tell whether my schedule will allow me to get any creative work done. But to date, the only time I’ve been able to make films was when I was working part-time, Riot Grrrl style.

I am uncertain about what the future holds for me and other third-wave feminist artists. I appreciate the struggle of both the labor movement and second-wave feminists to open up and protect jobs, and I support labor organizers and antidiscrimination lawsuits, more than ever during the dual political wars against unions and women. But there aren’t enough jobs for us, and even if there were, few of them would place financial security and creative freedom in the service of cultural production. And so this meditation ends on a note of ambivalence: my take on labor as a third-wave feminist filmmaker is a work in progress.

Toward Networked Feminist Scholarship: Mindful Media, Participatory Learning, and Distributed Authorship in the Digital Economy

by Vicki Callahan

While the forces shaping our current understanding of labor within an academic context are complicated and interlocking, in this essay, I want to examine a range of possibilities that technology and the shift to a digital economy present to feminist scholarly practice. From the tools of writing to the place of learning—to the very boundary of authorship itself—the reconfiguration of academic work has produced both utopian and apocalyptic proclamations from all points on the political spectrum. If, as bell hooks notes, “[o]ne of the most powerful counter-hegemonic narratives that can lead us down the path of critical consciousness is the idea of democracy,” how can we as feminist scholars intervene to ensure that everyone has a voice and is empowered in this emerging educational landscape?1 As always, there are powerful financial interests at stake, but notions of left and right, democracy and oppression, are increasingly muddled by an economy that touts openness and accessibility through the tools of digital technology while simultaneously featuring an ever-growing concentration of wealth and control over resources.

The recent discussions of massive open online courses (MOOCs) serve as an exemplary case in point, where issues of affordability and quality seem to cross the liberal and conservative divides. The language of class bias and privilege at times seems everywhere and nowhere, while almost universally the stated objective is a more educated populace and in turn a more democratic culture (nationally and internationally). Clay Shirky rightly points out the shocking and rising disparity between ever-increasing tuition for students and ever-falling income for graduates, and Ian Bogost correctly targets the defunding and privatization of education as the key culprit in this burgeoning gap. Moreover, given the diminishing—and highly unlikely to return—investment in public education, it is particularly appalling to see supposedly “free” MOOCs siphoning away large sums of state funding, especially when we know that these are venture capital–driven enterprises. Suddenly, free and open seem troubled terminology, and online education yet another dubious revolution.

My interest here in bringing up MOOCs is not to resolve this heated and very much in-process debate on their merits or failures, but to ask us to step back from our technological essentialism (on both sides of the divide) and consider how we might engage with “online education” in a much more diverse and productive way. As someone who has been teaching in hybrid, fully online, and face-to-face (F2F) contexts since 2008, I have seen enormous pedagogical value in online education’s possibilities. This was something that I had not expected to experience. I had entered the online education world as somewhat of a skeptic, especially as our department chair at the time was both encouraging and demeaning of the activity—“it’s just a bunch of lectures and quizzes.” This criticism of online structure—which is now identical to the standard attacks on MOOCs—is only partially and sometimes correct, depending on the circumstances. There is nothing about an online class that requires the structure of “lectures and quizzes,” and indeed there is nothing that prevents an F2F class from adopting precisely the same organization.

As Scott Carlson and Goldie Blumenstyk note in their pointed and thoughtful critique of MOOCs, “For Whom Is College Being Revinvented?,” a key problem is not so much technology in itself but the industrialized context of contemporary education that produces a two-tiered system of elites and others, which an online component (especially MOOCs) can facilitate and, indeed, exacerbate. That the division between these two domains is founded on class dynamics is no surprise, and Carlson and Blumenstyk have no illusions that MOOCs are there to democratize as much as to expand and entrench the gaps in resources and opportunities already in place. As they argue:

Part of the problem is that the two-tiered system that Mr. Aoun fretted about is already here—a system based in part on the education and income of parents, says Robert Archibald, an economics professor at the College of Wil-


liam and Mary and an author of *Why Does College Cost So Much?* “At most institutions, students are in mostly large classes, listening to second-rate lecturers, with very little meaningful faculty-student interaction,” he says. “Students are getting a fairly distant education even in a face-to-face setting.”

What I would like to suggest is that online education could—and I emphasize *could*—provide a disruption to the industrialized, two-tiered model of educational inequality. I argue this on the basis of what I have personally experienced and learned from online teaching in a variety of contexts. First, I would say, the students in my online courses were much more diverse than in any F2F context, and this held true especially for my Multicultural America course at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Suddenly, my course, which had seen mainly a younger-than-twenty-one, almost exclusively white, middle-class student profile was one that brought in students across race, ethnic, class, and age differences. In addition, the life experiences and perspectives brought into the online classroom were quite different. We had new mothers, single mothers, grandmothers, service members, returning students, and students with disabilities. Moreover, I would venture to say that the majority of my students were women. They wrote to me often about personal and economic circumstances that simply would not have allowed them to attend, much less live, on campus. In many cases, students were undergoing a crisis—the breakup of a marriage, loss of employment, health issues—that without the flexibility of the online class would have meant their leaving the university entirely. I certainly don’t want to go down the path of saying that the live-in campus experience is something only a few can afford, and thereby inadvertently reinforce the two-tiered model, since as we know quite well the campus experience will not entirely disappear. But I do think we need to address the change in who and where our students are today, and the gaps and divisions in personal, financial, and educational opportunities that will now place and fix some of them in the second tier unless we can find strategies to disrupt this structure. Online education could be one, though certainly not the only, strategy, given its ability to expand access.

Beyond access, online education offers the opportunity to expand the voices engaged in the classroom. Despite rumors to the contrary, there is much more to online pedagogy than lectures and quizzes. Just as in a F2F class, it is possible to have structured or even unstructured discussions. My University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee colleague Shelleen Greene and I held a live blog with two of our Multicultural America classes to discuss *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) and *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009), and the commentary was so enthusiastic and spirited that we had to call on all our

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5 I thank Professor Greg Jay for the opportunity to design and develop the Multicultural America class within an arts context as part of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee’s Cultures and Communities certificate program. I also want to thank the former University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee PhD student and my current University of Southern California colleague Virginia Kuhn for the inspiring work of her earlier Multicultural America class (within the English Department at University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), which served as a great model for multimedia scholarship as I developed the class. You can read about her work with this class as part of her essay “Performing Life: Whose Pictures Are Worth One Thousand Words,” *Enculturation* 6, no. 2 (2009), http://enculturation.gmu.edu/6.2/kuhn.
skills as classroom conductors to ensure equal time for everyone wanting to contribute. The afternoon conversation was so lively and thoughtful that we ran well past our allotted time for the event. Perhaps it was the topic, but overall I found even highly structured online discussion forums to encourage energetic and often more honest and respectful debate than an F2F class context. As we know, race and gender questions are always difficult to address directly, and frequently face-to-face classroom sessions produce silence or highly self-censored discussions as students work to avoid confrontation with their peers. In the online context the dynamic is different, as everyone gets a chance to speak in the forum, and it is more difficult to be shouted down or feel put on the spot. There were occasionally students who would try to dominate a discussion or filibuster a topic in the online forum, but that would take an incredible amount of work, and even then their cohorts would often simply ignore them and put their countercommentary on the record without intimidation.

In addition, the online context facilitated another aspect of the Multicultural America course, a required service-learning component. From the beginning, it had been designed as a media theory and practice class, including photo and video projects that connected directly with the service learning. The hybrid format particularly facilitated more time for the community engagement component and lab work. As I moved the course fully online, I was concerned about losing our praxis orientation in the class, since it meant losing our lab space, but fortuitously an ever-expanding array of new media tools were on hand. And with equal good fortune, I worked with the incredible staff at the Institute for Service Learning, who arranged on-site placements for students at distant locales and even developed innovative partnerships for fully online service learning.6

The online conversations now included community voices through photo essays, videos, and student journal accounts, thus resulting in a semester-long, multimedia-rich “participatory archive” that students developed in collaboration and conversation with their community partners. The online journal component—linked to service learning and course readings—created a space of dialogue and reflection on the partnerships where students were volunteering. Let’s take an example from the final project by Cory, a sophomore student in journalism and media. After a young student he was tutoring noted, “I’m black, you’re white—that’s cool though,” Cory’s narrative reveals a beginning rather than an end to a conversation across the largely unspoken landscape of segregation in Milwaukee. Cory continues: “On my drive home from the Goldin Center I had a chance to reflect on some of the six-year-old wisdoms I had heard that night. Stereotypes are as common as horrible high school garage bands, but even to a six year old? Our different skin color seemed to be continually on Jonathon’s

6 The smooth workings and truly innovative efforts of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee’s Institute for Service Learning staff deserve mention here. Although the office is chronically underfunded and understaffed, the people in this office developed an incredible breadth of community partnerships, such as neighborhood development associations, foster-care agencies, urban garden co-ops, civil liberties organizations, community-based museums, and inner-city tutoring programs, to name but a few, that provided a range of options for students in service learning. Moreover, the office’s attention and commitment to service learning’s best practices were especially useful to me as someone new to the area. My gratitude for the years of hard work developing the Institute go especially to Dr. Julianne Price, Jan Kiernan, and Sarah Warren.
mind; was this just curiosity? I have more questions than answers at this point, but I hope to find out more about race and what it means to these kids.\footnote{7}

The fully online service-learning component proved even more instructive, and indeed transformative, for how I thought about the larger possibilities of online education. Many of the young women whose personal situations required an online-only context worked with the American Civil Liberties Union and gained knowledge not only about civil rights issues but also about valuable digital literacy skills as they worked on Internet campaigns for youth legal rights. In another particularly striking case, for her service-learning contribution one student, Meredith, designed the Milwaukee County Passport Program, which visitors could use to gain information about, as well as record their visits to, local museums. Meredith has a chronic autoimmune illness, and the physical challenges of most of the service-learning assignments were inappropriate for her situation. Finding an all-online solution for her assignment not only enabled Meredith to participate but also created an environment in which she could truly excel. Her final project far surpassed the service learning and media project’s requirements. As she so eloquently noted, “Instead of finding out, once again, that there is something that I can’t do (my disability), we found a way to use what I can do (my abilities).”\footnote{8}

Given what I had learned in watching the inclusiveness of online conversations, I began to try to find ways to expand and deepen the exchange. I carried over the lessons from the online class experience into a face-to-face class at the University of Southern California’s Institute for Multimedia Literacy, Introduction to Multimedia Authoring: Social Media and Remix, which had, as one might imagine, a significant online component as well. I wanted the energy and inclusiveness of the online forums and project journals to be fully integrated, so I designed an online collaborative-storytelling project. The class as a group would have to create a story or story world (which would involve multiple narrative lines), and research (using and remixing found materials), organize, and then compose a media-rich story of their choice (fiction, nonfiction, or hybrid). The results have been quite different from one class to another in terms of the content the projects produced, but the process has consistently developed a more inclusive conversation throughout the class. This is the first project of the semester, and it contributes to a real sense of camaraderie among student peers and a strong sense of empowerment. The project is very much the students’ story, as they plan everything from start to finish, and my main role is to provide basic guidelines, which include a few tricks to jump-start initial postings (to get over the hurdle of the first post on the online “blank page”). As in the case of the forums, journals, and live blogs, I find the

\footnote{7 All student projects used pseudonyms for those they interviewed unless the people involved were adults who had provided permission. Permission forms for media work with appropriate signatures for minors were also employed. For more on student projects from courses mentioned here, please see my teaching site, http://djzoetrop.tumblr.com.}

\footnote{8 You can find Meredith’s semester-long class project, which is built on her service-learning work, at Memory of Mankind, http://memoryofmankind.wordpress.com. While Meredith’s innovative passport program with the local museums was in place for only a short time, given the Milwaukee County Historical Society’s shortage of resources, her idea was adopted in another venue. Historic Milwaukee Inc. developed a children’s passport program called “Doors Open Milwaukee” that was modeled on Meredith’s work.}
collaborative-storytelling assignment to be one in which students exceed the requirements. Time and again, I have found that the cohort’s work served as an inspiration for a student to contribute more to the project. As my student Sarah noted in her reflection:

Working as an entire class pushed me to meet the expectations of my fellow classmates, and to try to raise the bar that some of the more involved students had already set. I was wonderfully surprised at how creative and into the project some of my classmates had become. I was planning to only post tweets as the main character, “Chad Lee” or “@MainChad,” and leave the rest up to the others in the class. After a few days I realized that others were making use of the wide world of media that is accessible to everyone, and I thought to myself, why am I not doing that?

Sarah then went on to develop a media-rich Tumblr site for her character (connecting back to the main story world) with attention to providing “Chad’s” response to events with more emotional depth.

Of course, we can and do see such passion and enthusiasm from students in an offline context as well, but the issue is to not look at the technology in itself as the driver of the results. Rather, we should be examining what we can learn from teaching in either context: what is going on online or in class as a practice that inspires our students and can inform our teaching? Teaching online provides a different lens that may well help us question our assumptions about our students and even our class structure.

Online teaching forces us to think about structure well beyond the world of syllabi and planned assignments. Indeed, the very pace and process of setting up an online course site takes a turn toward defamiliarization as you become painfully aware of everything you say and have mapped out for the class—it’s clarity, logic, accessibility, and structure. Modules must be broken down, assembled, and uploaded into discrete elements of lecture, assignment, project, and discussion. Each of these categories is in turn broken down into components of what to view, what to interrogate, how and where to respond, and so on. The entire course website becomes a kind of exercise in data visualization for your teaching strategy. In short, online teaching makes you more “mindful” of the media and the attendant practices you employ—from text to image to video to the site itself—as well as the way you employ them.

What I learned the most from online teaching, which is relevant in the face-to-face context as well, are concepts closely aligned with the slow media movement. Here I would reference particularly “The Slow Media Manifesto” and Helen De Michiel’s “Towards a Slow Media Practice.” Specifically, as the manifesto states: “The concept ‘Slow,’ as in ‘Slow Food’ and not as in ‘Slow Down,’ is a key for this. Like ‘Slow Food,’ Slow Media are not about fast consumption but about choosing the ingredients mindfully and preparing them in a concentrated manner. Slow Media are welcoming and

hospitable.” In both cases above, the writers point to elements crucial for employing media and technology mindfully in our communication, teaching, and everyday practices. That is, media should be deliberate, should encourage creative and active engagement with media (not just passive consumption), should record local and often invisible histories, and should foster communities and their culture.

These comments about slow media echo what I found in the online and face-to-face worlds, which is that the key to good teaching is not “bigger, faster, cheaper,” but smaller, more personalized, more dialogical, and connected. This is almost impossible to do in large classes—online or offline. This will not make administrators (or some department chairs) happy, but we need more communication, not less, with our students to make mindful media and teaching take hold. Communication starts at the level of the email, goes through peer and instructor feedback and grading—and all of it should be as timely and individualized as possible. We also need to be sure that when we do employ these tools of connection, we use them to connect, both ourselves to our students and our students to one another. The temptation, and sometimes recommendation, is to use the tools to further isolate students as one more element on the factory line, through siloed assignments and cut-and-paste responses. It is the factory model, with its assembly lines and discrete interchangeable parts, whose only real purpose is revenue and profit, that we need to challenge—and that model needs to be challenged online and offline.

In my own scholarly practice, I am also trying to incorporate what I have learned from the online experience. I am especially intrigued by the idea of collaborative writing and the many forms that it might take, from assembling a collection of essays to coauthoring an essay or experimenting with digital possibilities. I started the website Feminism 3.0 in early 2008 to see how collaborative writing from across various perspectives—inside and outside of academia, and across the arts, humanities, and technology—might address what I thought were important emerging issues for feminists in the digital space: media praxis and new archival forms. Currently, I am exploring how the notion of distributed authorship might work in conjunction with a more traditionally configured single-authored manuscript, whether that is through linking other sites to an online supplement for my book in progress or by engaging other viewpoints more directly through assorted media diaries and dialogues. As feminists we cannot afford to turn away from, ignore, or demean technology, whether that comes in the form of online education or areas of media in which we might be underrepresented (e.g., programming) or abysmally represented (i.e., most of mainstream media). Even in the case of MOOCs, which to some seem irredeemable, I would say, “It depends.” MOOCs can be both global and local, encourage participatory learning, and become far more than “quizzes and lectures.” But from MOOCs to

11 Ibid.; De Michiel, “Towards a Slow Media Practice.”
12 Here I must thank Amy Mangrich and Tanya Joosten from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee’s Learning Technology Center for their repeated and patient guidance in my understanding of best practices for online teaching. Amy and Tanya are an inspiring example of the vibrancy and possibilities of this format.
13 Feminism 3.0 is a collaborative blog with a special focus on theory, practice, and new archival forms. The website is found at http://www.feminismthreepointzero.com.
the face-to-face seminar; the classroom must be shaped by ideas and practices consistent with the needs of our communities, not the captains of industry.

Contributors


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