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Introduction: Queer Feminist Media Praxis

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This special issue of *Ada* emerged from several collaborations. It came together from existing networks and led to the making of new ones. Its genesis starts with the workshop Queer Feminist and Social Media Praxis, organised by the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, in May 2013. Aristea Fotopoulou was invited by Sally Munt to create an event that would link the work of the Centre, in gender and cultural studies, with the work of the annual conference, (Im)possibly Queer International Feminisms, organized by Cynthia Weber, Laura Sjoberg and Heidi Hudson, editors of the International Feminist Journal of Politics. Alex Juhasz came to the UK as invited keynote speaker, and we screened The Owls on a special evening, supported by the Centre for Sexual Dissidence at Sussex and Brighton's independent queer film night Eyes Wide Open Cinema. The film and Q&A session served as points of departure for a problematique that became central during the workshop discussions: the conditions of working and living collaboratively, including desire, ethics and violence. The workshop invited participants to explore a range of themes around mediation and gender/sexuality activism – and particularly how digital technologies, art and social media can present possibilities or impossibilities for social equality. The call for the workshop, and then for this issue, asked participants to engage with the questions: How can we understand the interconnections between radical art practices and cyberfeminisms? What role do science and technology play in shaping social practices and cultural identities? – questions that Alexandra Juhasz, during her keynote presentation, posted on her Feminist Online Spaces blog, and generated responses not only for the workshop participants, but also from Universities that are linked to the **FemTechNet** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FemTechNet) DOCC around the world. Expanding and overlapping networks of feminists and queer theorists/activists across local and global scales was not just the cause of the event, and the issue, it was also one of its scopes.

The putting together of the workshop opened up to other collaborations, in part through the question of how to facilitate an exchange between local and international feminist conversations. Fotopoulou and Kate O'Riordan, in conversation with Caroline Bassett, put together an idea for funding a feminist knowledge network, which would include the workshop and this issue of *Ada* as nodes. Under the name of SusNet, which aimed to bring together feminist cultural production, art and activist practices and enable exchanges between different researchers, activists, artists and dimensions of community, we secured funding to bring Alexandra Juhasz to the

UK for the workshop, as well as support for the ongoing project of materializing a network of queer feminist knowledge production. For Susnet, we wanted to reflect on the possibilities and obstacles for making and sustaining feminist knowledge in digital media, a context in which feminist knowledge production can be vulnerable and easily erased. At the same time, we wanted to think about how such feminist knowledge and praxis can be sustained within the institutionalised and canonical context in which we as academics operate, and which often performs its own kinds of exclusions. Hence *Ada*, with its open access, multi-modal peer review, was an essential collaboration for this exploration, and a most appropriate publication platform for the issue.

Juhasz's work on feminist media praxis together with Fotopoulou's work on contemporary digital media, feminism and queer studies structured the theme of this issue. We were interested in exploring what the concept of praxis could offer in our thinking about the intersections of gender, digital media, and technology. Praxis in both Marxist and in Arendtian political thought brings together theory, philosophy and political action into the realm of the everyday. Inspired from this premise, and continuing the conversations that started during the workshop, we focus here on the conditions for a queer feminist digital media praxis. Media praxis, in Juhasz's words is the 'making and theorising of media towards stated projects of world and self-changing', and can be a vital component of feminist and/or queer political action. Through the contributions here we offer an exploration of the different modes of political action for social justice, enabled by digital technologies and social media, including theory, art, activism or pedagogy. What kinds of possibilities or impossibilities do these technologies and platforms offer for interpreting and intervening in the world? The tensions that unfold from this question make up this issue.

The innovative work of the Fembot collective, and its journal *Ada*, gave us a platform for developing the theme by enacting it through participation in new forms of feminist media praxis. As was the case with the workshop, for this issue we were interested to work with *Ada* on enabling a space with different presentation formats, where people are encouraged to use their different disciplinary (or nondisciplinary) languages. Bringing together critical interventions that open up spaces for conversation and collaboration, creative work and other formats that cut across practices, was an experimentation for us as editors and organizers, and for the authors themselves. Experiments of course need to be repeated if knowledge is to be produced through them, and *Ada* as a platform offers the continuity necessary for such repetition. Together as themselves nodes in a network that is emerging and shifting, the workshop event, the issue, and our interactions as part of the Fembot community and editorial team point to the promises and possibilities for common languages or new, hybrid

knowledges and practices in feminist queer media theory and art. Themes and terms that are key to feminist media praxis, to how we work and connect, were revisited here, in writing and in our interactions, sometimes directly and playfully, in other cases in a slow, osmotic process. The energy from the Fembot community and *Ada* team, together with the work of the authors who have contributed to the issue, are the substance of this special edition.

Putting together this issue has been a project of making and theorizing media, making and theorizing community, making and theorizing knowledge. This special issue is a materialization of processes of engagement and intervention that stretch back over several years and across multiple networks, activities and countries – only some of them named in this introduction. The open review process during publication has entailed intellectual engagement with work in progress, which has also enabled wider participation, bringing new people into the Fembot collective and extending the reach of this feminist media praxis. The edition is comprised of essays, articles, commentary and art work that cohere around a core identity and theme whilst also producing friction between different directions.

We've assembled the contributions in alphabetical order, with the exception of this introduction and the concluding commentary by Juhasz. This edition invites multiple ways in and out and reading routes here are not determined by editing structures so much as tags, links and page referrals.

The edition opens with a piece by Tully Barnett on 'Monstrous Agents: Cyberfeminist Digital Media and Activism.' This essay traces the agency and energies of cyberfeminism from the end of the 20th century to its progeny in the current moment. It identifies viral imagery and bio-textual intimacies as central to cyberfeminism and thus, links it to new materialisms and media archeology. Locating cyberfeminism as a form of media praxis creates a genealogy leading from feminist video art in the 1980s, cyberfeminism in the 1990s and Fembot in the second decade of the 21st century. This allows readers to imagine a mapping and visualization of links between important political projects of intervention but also sounds a warning about contemporary media culture in the provocation: 'where have all the monstrous women gone?'

Megan Bigelow's 'RGB: You and Me (A Queer, Feminist Analysis of Emotion, Affect, and Materiality within Google Images)' continues this tradition of bio-textual intimacies by looking at emotion and image. The question, 'How does colour relate to biological and sociocultural responses in viewers,' opens up into an experimental and creative expression of the synergies between philosophy and aesthetics – especially

new materialism and affect. The appeal to a digital wild and wildness of sex, partly working through Luciana Parisi's provocations, echoes some of the cyberfeminist art projects of the 1990s discussed by Barnett. It also forges entirely different directions by taking on Google, algorithmic culture, affect and aesthetics.

In 'Speculative Praxis Towards a Queer Feminist Digital Archive', T.L. Cowan, Dayna McLeod and Jasmine Rault 'foreground the collaborative process of feminist and queer scene-making, archiving and digital labours.' The focus here is on two core dimensions of feminist media praxis – collaboration and process. The careful and reflective attention to process and the conditions of collaboration are illuminating, telling us much about the local queer scene-making in Montreal, and the more global contradictions raised by the compulsion to digitize. Digital labour appears in this piece as far from seamless; it is painful and messy, as well as in the end a bit too slick for comfort. They end with an emphasis on the paradox of working within a 'proliferating system of generative and obstructive contradictions,' and it is this closely experienced sense of the conditions of production as both generative and obstructive that holds across the terrain of queer feminist media praxis discussed across this issue.

The next piece, 'An Introduction to the Affect Machine' by Karin Hansson, takes speculative praxis in a different direction. In part, because this is a work in progress, its ends are speculative, and also because it too is a form of speculative praxis in the sense of feeling towards the impossible. Affect is at the centre of this project and whilst ideas about affect cut across many of the contributions, the proposal for the affect machine takes the value of affective ties as the heart of (digital) society. In doing this work, the affect machine offers a materialisation of the literal claims of digital culture and re-visions Facebook as a form of communism or ideal Marxism. With echoes of the 'Californian Ideology' in the rhetorical frame, this piece also comes very close to Lusike Lynete Mukhongo's ideas about how popularity in digital culture can be thought of as an economic base. The Affect Machine runs an experiment based on the desires of the crowd, but one we have already seen run. It sets up a kind of déjà vu, repetition as possible glitch, through which we might see the world differently.

Rachel Hurst's 'How to "Do" Feminist Theory Through Digital Video: Embodying Praxis in the Undergraduate Feminist Theory Classroom' is about both seeing and doing differently. Her work mixes theory and practice: embodying praxis through the work of making video. Embodiment here lies in the bodily practices of filming people, bringing other bodies and their specificities into the frame, and in the video as an enactment. In this case, feminist media praxis becomes a way of teaching feminist, queer and postcolonial theory, experiences of service learning and video pro-

file:///Users/kateoriordan/Desktop/Introduction:%20Queer%20Feminis…ournal%20of%20Gender,%20New%20Media,%20and%20Technology.webarchive

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duction. Hurst interviews her students after they make videos about how theory can be understood in relation to the work of organizations, and this adds another layer of reflection on what it means to embody praxis.

Media praxis and embodiment operate along a similar pedagogic line in Olu Jenzen's and Irmi Karl's 'Make, Share, Care: Social Media and LGBTQ Youth Engagement.' They look at peer support and digital social media praxis in a youth group in Brighton (UK). In this case media praxis is embedded in the oscillation between ideas about media engagement and actual practices of media production and consumption in the organization. The article takes for its analysis a collaborative research project between the university and a community partner, and it is what people do with media that comes into analytical play. They note that pragmatism is the basis for decision making about engaging media culture, and that although social media and outreach can sit together there are also obstacles and constraints. Pedagogy is implied rather than explicit, but it emerges in examples of peer support as forms of teaching and self-teaching about how to make, share and care.

Susana Loza's article on 'Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the Other #FemFuture' focuses on the Twitter platform and traces the rise and fall of specific hashtags. In doing this she examines the promise and pitfalls in attempts to use social media platforms to revitalize feminisms in the USA. In some ways Loza shows us that old arguments play out in new media. However, by situating the arguments in hashtag activism in the historical context of similar debates, she also shows readers some of the possibilities that these new frictions open up.

Another analysis of women, media cultures and social media platforms is Lusike Lynete Mukhongo's 'Reconstructing Gendered Narratives Online: Nudity for Popularity on Digital Platforms.' This piece provides a commentary on digital celebrity culture and identity in the rise of media socialites in Kenya. Taking their cue from self-branded Western media celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton, young urban Kenyan women are also creating new brand identities through social media platforms. Mobilising these identities to establish career stakes and sources of income, nudity and explicit self-images become part of this currency. Mukhongo outlines a shift from patriarchal modes of production in which women were objectified for popularity, to a subjective styling of the self through posting sexualized and nude images for popularity.

Whilst Loza and Mukhongo take us to subcultures in mainstream media culture, Darnell Moore and Monica Casper take us to an activist media project in 'Love in the Time of Racism.' An essay on making *The Feminist Wire*, this takes us through an ac-

count of love praxis, a framing which opens up their work to an epic and moving horizon. Their account of love praxis is at once grounded in the concrete everyday and opens up a utopian politics. Through this, the essay speaks to the political importance of utopian thinking in feminism, and a commitment to making things work in embodied, grounded and situated practices. Love praxis offers another dimension to understanding queer feminist media praxis and embeds it in a history and future of radical intervention.

Another form of activist media unfolds in 'Unghosting Apparitional (Lesbian) History' by Michelle Moravec. This is a creative, scholarly Scalar project that takes up the footnotes of academic feminist histories to bring outsiders back into the frame. This project looks for the contributions of a woman called Bonnie Johnson who Moravec sees as having a ghostly presence in accounts of women's liberation. It traces her presence in places, events, documents and 'unghosts' her. The project embodies feminist media praxis through a new archive offering a critique of the erasures of black feminists in academic feminist accounts of liberation in the USA.

'"Weird Sex": Identity, Censorship, and China's Women Sex Bloggers' returns our readers to subcultural intervention in dominant media cultures. Lindsey O'Connor foregrounds China's women sex bloggers and their resistance to dominant norms of gender and sexuality. This commentary on blogging practices in China examines the self-styling by women sex bloggers and the policing and framing of their presence by authority figures. O'Connor allows us to understand these bloggers enacting forms of feminist media praxis through their interventions in media culture and subversion of normal as a political practice.

Noopur Raval takes us to the heart of knowledge production in media cultures through a reflection on practices in editing Wikipedia. In 'The Encyclopedia Must Fail! – Notes on Queering Wikipedia,' Raval reflects on her experiences as a contributor to Wikipedia, the deletion of some of her entries, and her attempts to understand the codification of systems of inclusion and exclusion. She draws on Judith (Jack) Halberstam's discussions of queer failure to mobilise this concept and use it in relation to Wikipedia. Thus, for Raval, failure is a process of possibility that opens something up. The commentary allows readers to understand the figure of the Wikipedian as a political subject for whom the conditions of possibility for contemporary knowledge production are played out. In the case of understanding sexual violence, it sometimes seems as though patterns of violence, sexism and racism are doomed to repeat. However, through the concept of failure she opens up the possibility of changing those conditions, or at least keeping them open.

In 'Revising "Re-vision": Documenting 1970s Feminisms and the Queer Potentiality of Digital Feminist Archives' Roxanne Samer takes on another trope from a toolbox of feminist intervention – that of revision. Drawing on Adrienne Rich's use of the term, and reworking it through an account of developments since the 1970s, Samer doubles the term by re-vising re-vision. This approach has both echoes of Valerie Traub's 'cycles of salience' and Donna Haraway's 'diffraction': the first looks, as Samer does, at when and why things come around again in feminism; and the second explores the kind of intensity of optics implied by the doubling in revising revision. Through this approach Samer's essay unfolds an account of media practice and archives, helping the reader to understand the value of making allegiances, un-becoming histories and reading second wave feminism with love.

Jenny Sundén's article, 'Steampunk Practices: Time, Tactility, and a Racial Politics of Touch' foregrounds a different kind of feminist media praxis in tracing out an ethnographic experience of Steampunk subcultures and in stretching out how we understand media. Touch as approach, theory, intervention and experience is central to this analysis and offers touch as another dimension of praxis. This piece takes the reader through the brushing up of bodies and texts. Subcultural identities, mediated through clothing, accessories, books and fan fiction are the lens through which Sundén explores the touch of bodies, imaginaries, feeling and text. This returns us to another iteration of bio-textual intimacies referenced in Barnett's piece on cyberfeminism. Indeed the two pieces are in an indirect conversation through the relationships between cyberpunk and steampunk (as technological, literary subcultures). Sundén's own voice in cyberfeminism both informs and haunts the earlier piece. If cyberpunk was the subculture of an earlier digital culture; steampunk is that of new materialism and post-digital turns.

Joanna Zylinksa's 'iEarth' is an intriguing intervention embodying queer feminist media praxis through an animated gif. Multiple layers are evoked through the project. To unpick only a few: the materiality of lego and diaorama with their links to maker cultures; animated gifs and their nods to social media cultures; Google Earth and in Zylinska's hands a link to Haraway's 'god trick' eye of seeing everywhere; and aesthetic nods to a history of digital art practice and film. This intervention also evokes the question of scale that cuts across this collection; all of the pieces open up to an indefinite horizon of possibility whilst at the same time being grounded in the everyday, the pragmatic and the definite.

The concluding piece, 'It's Our Collective, Principled Making that Matters Most: Queer Feminist Media Praxis @Ada' by Alexandra Juhasz is another kind of doubling. It offers a reflection on ideas about queer feminist practice as she revisits her own work

in relation to this collection, and this collection in relation to her work.

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