

# SYNOPTIQUE



*An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*

**vol. 8, no. 2**

**The Labour of Media (Studies):  
Activism, Education, and Industry**  
eds. medialabour collective

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*An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*

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Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, Concordia University  
1250 Guy St., Montreal  
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# The Labour of Media (Studies): Activism, Education, and Industry

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# INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

## The Labour of Media (Studies): Activism, Education, and Industry

**medialabour collective**

The medialabour collective, formed in 2017, is a group of doctoral students in Communication and Film Studies, based at Concordia University in Montreal. As a collective, we focus on issues of precarity, casualization, competition, and colonization at the intersection of academic labour and media industries. In November 2018, the medialabour collective organized “The Labour of Media (Studies): Activism, Education, and Industry” conference that brought together scholars at different stages of their careers to discuss contemporary labour conditions within media industries in connection with the neoliberal restructuring of the university. We offer a continuation of these discussions in this special issue of *Synoptique, An Online Journal of Film and Media Studies*.

As PhD students in film and media studies, we consistently face the anxiety of precarity in our daily lives: from limited and unstable funding in the present, to limited term and part time positions that paint our probable future. We are aware that precarity is the structural condition of life under contemporary capitalism, which invades fields, industries, and modes of sociality within or outside of dominant institutions in a variety of geopolitical contexts. In introducing

a project conceived and organized by PhD students, it is important to foreground our own position as current and future contingent workers, facing entry into an industry with no promise of stable employment.

From the angle of shared precarity, media industries is a field that directly probes the connection we are trying to make in its focus on labour, even if it does not quite draw out the full entanglements we are trying to address (for influential dissections of the concept in the creative industries, see de Peuter 2011; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Media industries scholarship as we know it began as a confluence of interests in the academy between cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, and policy, each coming from very diverse perspectives with often irreconcilable goals. Since its inception, cultural studies encompasses a history of debates about the culture industries, from the Frankfurt School critiques of popular culture as tools of ideology (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) to the Birmingham School and cultural studies’ insistence on taking these popular industries seriously (Hall 1980; Hesmondhalgh 2013; McRobbie 1996; 2010). But absent from much of this analysis was the issue of production through an optics able to

grasp the industrial globalization of media rather than the social and semiotic observation of its particular effects. Toby Miller et al.'s *Global Hollywood*, and the concept of the "international division of cultural labor" (2002), began to articulate the implications of media globalization, the uneven spatial distribution of labour and production, and the race-to-the-bottom that it would entail. This was a concept that responded to the globalization of media industries and the increasing precarization of work within them, in regards to offshored media production as much as the disempowerment of unions in the Global North (on this "race to the bottom," see Curtin, 2013). This meant that a focus on culture, in particular media, as industry had far higher stakes than merely, say, studies of reception (Stacey 1994; Staiger 2000; Klinger 2006), or later ethnographies of "production cultures" (Caldwell 2008; Mayer 2011), but was tied up in disciplinary and methodological stakes about the place of cultural production within global capitalism (for an overview, see Holt and Perren 2009). At a certain point, once the field came to be more organized in its approaches, scholars turned their focus to the question of labour as the structuring principle of the field of production (see Mayer 2011; Curtin and Sanson 2017). In hindsight, this was a political response to a particular kind of constellation both within the field and with a global restructuring of media labour.

Concurrently, media industry studies has responded to the growing status of the neoliberal university as a cultural producer in itself, which at the same time led to the incentivized interaction of academics with industry workers and practitioners within a neoliberal contact zone (see Miller 2011; Nolan 2008). University training modules (whether providing humanist or technical knowledge) for media industries are a by-product of this global restructuring, whether in production programs that prepare students for gig work, humanities programs of Anglophone North Atlantic universities in the Global South, or even through the proliferation of postgraduate programs as a consequence of the decrease in market purchase of undergrad-

uate degrees. These training programs and professionalization requirements have also become increasingly important to the sustainability of the converging systems of education and media industries—a cheap and indebted labour force, the selling of flexibility and creativity as virtues, individualized and competitive professional socialization, the creation and maintenance of a reserve workforce based on access to opportunity and education, the naturalization of internships as blueprints for contract work, and the like.

As students and scholars, we share the same spaces within which media workers are being trained in these largely precarious and flexible fields, often in positions as lecturers, TAs, and mentors. Can these shared classrooms, hallways, offices, and facilities, be instrumental for establishing the lines of solidarity, rather than simply assuming that it's "knowledge work" that binds us? Rather, is there also something more directly spatial (and in some ways complicit) that exists as a bond between us, within the university and the industries under discussion? What forms of community and activism can be forged within the confines of the neoliberal university, and across the industries that it helps to organize?

At the outset of such a project, attending to individual positionality *within* these systems seems necessary. In the contemporary social landscape, as many discussions of neoliberal subjectivity and individualization have pointed out (Brown 2015; Dardot and Laval 2013; Lazzarato 2012), a person's movement must incessantly be invested in carving out a space of their own. This is seen as an unavoidable, and definite, mark of a person's identity. The necessity to articulate the politics around our own work seems to come as given. In the context of academic work, on the one hand, these politics are articulated through scholar's distinguishing of one's own personal history and corollary reflection on their own positionality. On the other hand, this is performed by emphasizing the significance of a specific and unique object of research, in terms of its geography, connectedness to underrepresented and marginalized communities, and theoretical fecundity. But how to move beyond this positionality restrained by the competitive



individualization?

As graduate students in film and media studies we must constantly navigate the tensions of articulating the politics inherent to our work as scholars and its valuation within specific regimes of knowledge production. As a collective project that would foreground the points of intersection between activism, academia, and questions of labour within media industries, we envisioned this as an exercise in exploring the potentials for political work within the academic setting itself. We chose to work collectively, to answer the question of how not to reproduce the work and social relations engendering mutual competition, individualization, and alienation. Throughout this project we have worked collaboratively on every aspect of organizing. It is a difficult process because the instruments that we have within academia are conceived to foster competition and individual achievements. However, our experience of collective work has been a starting point for practicing solidarity as a means to counter the despair of precarity. Collectively we imagine possible ties forged by the austerity measures that capture both academia and media industries. We also conceived this forum as an instance of solidarity among those working on/in media industries who experience flexibility, precarity and these other beautiful things as we do.

At the same time, our labour is situated within a political economy where we cannot help but become aware of the relations to media labour within and outside the university, in media industries, and within student movements, activist networks, and para-academic organizations, as many of the contributors to the Labour of Media (Studies) conference and special issue discuss. We aimed, thus, in a pursuit of the above mentioned lines of solidarity, to create a venue for discussion where we could share research, work, and debates on how we reconcile those tensions in the accessible and familiar formats supplied by academia—an international conference, a journal special issue. In other words, we have used academic resources and formats at our disposal to talk about what we think is important. Planning and organizing this project, we

found ourselves confronted with the paradoxical nature of academic work and the possibilities to operate politically within the pathways it sets for us. Soliciting the necessary funds, pitching the conference to the university, and coordinating the multitude of tasks required to put together a publication, we quickly understood the limitations of the pathways within the institution.

If traditional conceptions of activism and struggle do not easily overlap with academic work (also traditionally conceived), substantial efforts have been made with respect to practices of pedagogy to bridge prescient concerns of global conditions with knowledge production (Dickinson and Jaikumar 2018; The Edu-factory Collective 2009). It is worth mentioning that the Labour of Media (Studies) project originated in Kay Dickinson's graduate "proseminar" on Academic Labour. The "proseminar" is designed to professionalize doctoral students, to make them suitable to the demands of the job market, and at the same time to train them to meet the downward spiral of early-career exploitation with resilience and endurance. However, we were supplied the means to reconsider what is usually taken for granted as ways to acquire a diverse and marketable set of skills. Thinking about academic professionalization cannot be disentangled from the current conditions within the academy. Over the course of the seminar, we tackled not only the issue of the financialization and privatization of the contemporary university, but also the resulting precarity, competition, and flexibility of labour. While professionalism means adhering to standards of knowledge production, we learned together that our lived experience is inseparable from thinking through those issues. Becoming professional entails both the requirement to publicly communicate your research and an extreme specialization that leads to an inability to reach beyond academia, and even across disciplines and subfields. We are continuously engaged in gymnastics between arcane specialized knowledge and provocative, trendy elevator pitches (able to appeal, at the very least, to the funding agencies and high-profile colleagues).

Given the constraints increasingly shaping

academic labour, everyday practices of pedagogy in the classroom become indissociable from a self-reflexivity that both highlights the contradictions in which we are embedded, and might press against structural power relations in the educational system. These constraints are, on the one hand, an increasing reduction of students to clients, through the combined pressure of high tuition fees and quantitative surveys assessing their satisfaction. On the other hand, the competition for less precarious jobs, and the injunction to be actionable and “public-facing” are weights that we need to face every day, as they shape our research production and broadly, our academic labour. Faced with this situation, some turn to radical pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Grande, 2004), critical race theory (Harney and Moten, 2013), and feminism (Federici, 2019) to strategically resist a system of precarization and casualization. These theories provide us with key tactics for an activist research and pedagogical praxis.

For this special issue of *Synoptique*, we have adopted a slightly different format than the one usually offered by this peer-reviewed journal. The pieces collected here did not undergo a double-blind peer review process, a traditional process of quality control but also, in its very hierarchical and legitimating structure, a gatekeeping mechanism for the production of knowledge. Instead, we experimented once again with a collective approach. Every piece gathered here has been “peer reviewed” by members of the mediolabour collective, and most come from friends, comrades, collaborators, and colleagues. They are part of a continuity of the project, and come from real social bonds developed through our work.

To consolidate the reflection on the intersection of knowledge production and labour activism, the issue opens with thought pieces that provide thoughtful, reflective, and often personal commentaries on issues of media labour and media studies, and alternative and marginalized forms of knowledge. The contributors of this section, from researchers in the earlier stages of their careers to more established scholars, illuminate many of the inherent contradictions and challenges in knowledge production and labour

activism. These ruminations are fundamentally personal, though they nonetheless reflect broader experiences found throughout the academy and industry. This section brings together their research practices in fields of media studies and academic labour, and a larger critique of exploitation. Rebecca Holt elaborates on the personal and ethnographic challenges of studying pornography within the academy. Jacqueline Ristola, meanwhile, critically recalls their personal experience with graduate student unions, and points to some of the major issues that unites graduate students in the fight against austerity, increased tuition wages, and exploitation. Patrick Vonderau and Errol Salamon’s individual contributions consider digital media research in relation to industry and labour. Finally, Ned Rossiter, Brett Neilson, and Vicki Mayer, looking back at their careers as media scholars, reflect on forms of engaged pedagogies.

Similarly, other formats in the issue experiment with academic writing in a more *personal* way. The dialogical form of interviews, with scholars and activists Silvia Federici and Alessandra Renzi, brings forward the exchange of ideas between young researchers and professors whose academic research and labour are at the service of social and media activism. Importantly, Federici and Renzi discuss their scholarly projects within the context of their active engagement and experiences with social movements and media collectives.

The next section engages with the format of field notes from film practitioners, artists, and anthropologists, to reflect on the embodied practices of media labour and activism. The authors consider issues of documentary co-creation (Marcoux-Fortier) and co-production (Canella) as anti-colonial tactics of solidarity and dialogue; the uneasy relationship between art and activism within neoliberal environments such as academia and artistic milieux (Guinan); and the conflict of theorization and ethnographic observation in letting fieldwork “speak back” (Kelada). They offer a panorama of situated, embodied engagements with the themes of this special issue, and provide a hands-on reflection on the deep contradictions and compromises of activist

film and media labour.

Finally, this issue closes on a series of book and event reviews, anchoring the reflections of the medialabour collective and the contributors in a historical and contemporary landscape. They consider, alternatively, issues of media labour and film industries (Barber, Joglekar, Tiwary) and an examination of their history and historiography (Slifkin), as well as questions of gendered (Sicondolfo, Trépanier) and affective (Cochrane) digital labour. The event reviews, in turn, tackle two very different events: the highly mediatized, largely attended debate between Slavoj Žižek and Jordan Peterson at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto, and the long table discussion organized by the Institute for Urban Futures on the issue of precarity, in the working-class neighbourhood of Montreal's Pointe-St-Charles. With different settings and publics, both events pose key questions of public outreach and dialogue, on which the contributed reviewers reflect.

With the different sections of this issue, we have intended to open a dialogue across disciplines, methodologies, and formats, to discuss the relation between the different components of academic labour (e.g. research, teaching, and writing) and media labour (e.g. production, circulation, and exhibition). We hope to contribute and foster a conversation around the contemporary struggles facing students, media workers, and the rest of the precariat. With this in mind, as we write, students and academic workers are striking across over 60 universities in the United Kingdom. We want to conclude by affirming our solidarity with their struggle, among all precarity struggles across the world.

We would like to express our gratitude and acknowledge the support of friends, comrades, and colleagues past and present. This has been a collective endeavour from the beginning, and it would not have been possible without their help and solidarity. Special thanks to the many copy-editors and the Editorial Collective of *Synoptique*; Lily Corne Klein and Kyla Smith for their diligence and attentive labour; and Natalie Greenberg who designed and formatted this issue.

The medialabour collective is Mark Barber, Patrick Brodie, Sima Kokotović, Corina MacDonald, Ylenia Olibet, Lola Rémy, and Egor Shmonin.

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# **THOUGHT PIECES**

# ***Pedagogies of Paradox in Media Studies and Media Labour***

**Vicki Mayer**

My work on media production hinges on contradictions that swing wide open in the classroom. Contained within my own safehouse, the social theories of humans as inherently productive have been the inspiration for much of my academic research and writing career. Yet, my inspiration creates consternation in an academy that builds more walls than windows to the outside. We live in a world in which not everyone's labour is seen as contributing value—public or private—in which the university participates through pedagogic regimes of sorting and competition. Media Studies 2.0, as Toby Miller (2012) variously tells the history, moved from a training ground of Cold War propagandists to a full-body hug of global Hollywood and High Tech. While I have no illusion of remaking media studies outside of the contemporary politics of media representation, ownership, and distribution, I have found some doors that, if we crack them open a bit, might generate a collective ethics for media production.

Language and other representational forms are media for creativity and action. Passed along through social processes, they enable us to speak in our own voices and express the material conditions that have shaped us. Theories of voice and social action have underlined numerous strands of media activism, from the pre-Stalinist Labor Press in the early Soviet Union to the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine to Pacifica Radio and Bread and Puppet Theater. My own experience with media activists came in graduate school, at the urgings of DeeDee Halleck, who herself emulated a professor-activist for a theory of media production and social change. I spent a summer, then two, following the work of TV Maxambomba, a community media collective forged from the resistance to the continuity of authoritarianism in post-dictatorial Brazil. I cut my teeth on "vídeo popular" as a process of freeing working-class people by allowing them to self-produce videos that countered the images of themselves as either thieves or servants. Embedded in neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan sprawl of Rio de Janeiro were teams of mostly teen producers. They were planning stories about community concerns and developing fictional allegories for future political debates. For a number of years in the 1990s, they showed their work in public squares, projected on the wall of the church or the daycare center, and then opened the camera up to anyone who wanted to speak to what they had just seen. I was struck by how, with very little capital but a lot of gifted labour, an ethos of radical pluralism in media production empowered a community of citizens. Plus, it was a lot of fun. The spiriting uplift I still feel reading



about radical newspapers, guerilla video, community radio, and all sorts of production by the people, for the people can be quite deflating in a practical setting. Very few scholars have written about the micro-politics of the labour of media production—who gets to control the camera or the mike, the editing decisions or the audience discussion afterwards. All collective creative processes are messy. Richard Sennett (2012) theorizes improvisation as a kind of routinized communication between people who trust each other enough to let them express their unique contribution for a moment. Fostering trust, from inception to distribution of a media product, is one of the big reasons industrial media production tends to concentrate in a handful of global metropolises and creative production teams tend towards the same un-diverse set of workers. Geographic clustering allows people to build trust networks to efficiently get the routine aspects of the project done, while allowing individuals to add their own touch on the finished product. It's that security that motivates labourers to say they love what they do, despite every other crappy and precarious part of being a member of the vaunted creative class.

A university shares some of the same geographic advantages as a creative cluster. The media studies students know each other. They have to, if they are to finish their team projects and group assignments. In addition, institutions of higher learning draw together communities that share routines for the production of knowledge. There are the ritualized individual genres for self-expression—the essay, the exam, and the class presentation—but these are learned in a community of other students and in dialogue with the instructors. Bonds of trust, when built over time, allow individuals in the collective to show more of their own unique selves, to take that risk outside the rubric.

Paradoxically, the advantage of clustering is not in itself of value in the academy. Simply being present and interacting with others over a sustained time is not going to get anyone through their program of study, though it is the foundation for all subsequent production. Grade hierarchies do not reflect the value of negotiating social differences in the physical spaces of campus, much less the surrounding locales where part of the process of just being integrated into society is actually referred to as “adulting.” As a result, we don't tend to evaluate the quality of the clusters formed in that special community. Media industries are rife with creative teams who've worked with each other since the old college days. John Caldwell (2014) even calls them a shadow academy, for the ways media studies students import the critical theories from our classes into new contractual relationships. And there is yet another rub. With so many people working together even for a matter of weeks, the classroom tends to reproduce voices that represent the shared qualities of the whole, or lack thereof. If student media production reflects the quality of the clustered community, and we do not pay attention to or assess the social condition represented therein, then we should not be surprised at the narrow scope for media creativity and action, the lack of pluralism, and the abundance of highly skilled media pieces that all say very little.

Like in other creative industries I have studied, I am wary that the individualized goals of media studies' students overtake their attention to the politics of their own production community, and the means by which knowledge is produced and circulated. I am constantly searching for pedagogies that challenge the inevitable emptiness of media produced by individuals in search of reputation and affirmation within a small network.

Most of my class projects now find themselves in online spaces where they live among the contributions of others from many different communities of producers and users. The latest experiments have found their way into ViaNolaVie, a collaboration between university instructors and citizen journalists to promote voices about life and culture in New Orleans.<sup>1</sup> The projects set up challenges that demand that everyone participate in the alternative politics of community media. Namely, that project members forge:

- An alternative ethics for media representation that considers the perspectives of others beyond the classroom through deep listening and cultural study;
- An alternative ethics of ownership that reconsiders the property rules that protect their creations

but disrespect those of others beyond the classroom;

- An alternative ethics of distribution that experiments with interactivity, algorithms, and connected networks of partners

Not every project addresses every one of these alternative politics, but they are emulated across the ViaNolaVie archive as a messy, unsorted, and pluralistic whole. I guess that's what blows in when you open the doors.

When does the pedagogy of an alternative media studies move students from an academic model based on creative labour and into a creative activism based on plural voices and an alternative politics for media? Maybe these are not so opposed. Like creative labour, creative insurgencies are largely deliberate, social processes that take the familiar and make it new, strange, and symbolic. Theorizing the creative insurgency behind the Arab uprisings, Marwan Kraidy writes that productions were rarely spontaneous: "Mural street art is a laborious endeavor" (2015, 15). It involves many people working in a dialectic with other artists, activists, intellectuals, and ordinary people who inspire something not wholly new, but a fusion with the universe of what has been. The routine creative labour of the university classroom can contribute to creative insurgency, but it takes a long view with larger, connected producers and publics.

Of course, my theory of pedagogy would be incomplete if it did not assume the added labours that my co-teachers and I face in laying that groundwork for others. Even the etymology of the word depends on the pedagogue, from the ancient Greek *paidagogos*, or a "slave who escorts boys to school and generally supervises them" (Harper, n.d.). Beyond the slavishly routine duties of escorting and supervising, however, lies the excitement of building something together that lasts beyond the semester, the student cohort, the faculty, and the staff. For these projects are the products of those social theories ambling around my own mind, which only working together, can find a site to call home.

## Notes

1. This project has many predecessors and inspirations for collaborative production and archiving, including: MediaNola, New Orleans Historical, Technotrash, and Data Walking. I dedicate this essay to those who have invited me and those whom I have invited to work on these efforts.

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# ***“If I Was Moved...”: Doing Digital Ethnography in the Fields of Pornhub***

**Rebecca Holt**

I am often put in awkward situations where I am asked by other graduate students and academics to explain my dissertation. When I respond that I research online pornography they typically have one of three responses: (a) they light up over the possibility to talk about a taboo subject; (b) they make the well-trod joke of responding, “I know an expert” and then point at themselves; (c) they look at me slightly disapprovingly and begin to stare at an imaginary point just past my head. If I do make it past the point of saying “pornography” to people, they are often curious as to *how* one studies porn. Most assume my work is sociological in nature—that I must be conducting large scale interviews with the naughty individuals who watch adult content, travelling to observe shoots and gain the trust of performers, and/or accumulating large-scale data sets. I invariably let them down when I reveal much of my research involves digital ethnography—the practice of using the Internet as a research tool to analyze the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the web.

You can frequently find me alone (in sweatpants), talking to myself, and crawling through the web to track and utilize hashtags, search engines, hyperlinks and website archives. It is not strange for a graduate student to be isolated and in front of a computer, but the addition of pornography complicates the scenario. For the remainder of this meditation, I reflect on the practice of doing virtual field work in the context of online pornography. Namely, I want to focus on questions of how my own body is implicated in the process of studying online porn and what it means for my research outcomes. Just as it is the case with all other media, adult websites are designed to elicit emotional responses—ones that captures your attention and keeps you watching, searching and feeling. You might cringe, laugh, recoil in disgust, or, as it were, actually feel lustful. Even in the early days of graduate school, I always had a pressing, embarrassing—and I assumed naïve—recurring question: *does the body turn off when you begin your research? How do I stop myself from feeling? What does it mean to feel or have an embodied response in the context of research?*

I first began thinking about this question when I read the new preface in the 1999 reissue of Linda Williams’ canonical porn studies book, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.”* In this preface, penned ten years after the book was originally published in 1989, Williams takes up the topic of researcher objectivity in relationship to porn and reflects on her own process. She explains,

while it was not her position when she published *Hard Core*, she later came to believe the topic of pornography uniquely fractures the distance between researcher and object. Williams continues by suggesting a researcher's physical reaction is, in fact, "embedded" in whatever analysis is being performed. She writes, "this objective, distanced stance of the reasoned observer, neither partisan nor condemner, placed me in a position of indifference, as if above the genre. Was it right, or even useful to the analysis, to assume to be indifferent to, or unmoved by, these texts? Or, if I was moved, as I was sometimes to either arousal or offence, what was the proper place of this reaction in criticism?" (Williams 1999, x-xi). At the time of writing the book, Williams' used her objectivity as an instrument for re-contextualizing pornography as a form of media, as a genre necessitating a complex and careful treatment. The field of pornography studies was born of this novel approach. *Hard Core* did so much incredible work, and yet, I find myself often returning to the moment when Williams reexamined her work ten years later, pausing to consider whether or not her distanced stance was truthful to the experience of researching pornography (Williams 1999, x-xi).

Since the publication of *Hard Core*, it has become less common for pornography scholars to conduct their analysis in front of the screen and more common for them to use fieldwork to deepen their understanding of the pornography industry. In the article, "Studying Porn Cultures" Lynn Comella relays her experience of attending the Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas, writing, "One way to 'get at' the cultural dimensions of pornography is to ethnographically go inside and behind the scenes of the porn industry to better understand its many moving parts." She goes on to say, "Porn studies-in-action requires that we leave the confines of our offices, and spend time in the places where pornography is made, distributed and consumed, discussed and debated, taught and adjudicated" (Comella 2014, 68-69). Hence, if we want draw attention to the fact that pornography is, in fact a complex industry, it is imperative we leave the university and spend time understanding that complexity for ourselves. "Porn Studies-in-action" does not only entail producing novel insights about the industry, it is a method researchers should use to engage self-reflexively on what it means to study something like pornography from within the academy.

Pornography studies is marked by a perennially marginal status, despite the consistent and rigorous output of scholars in the field. It can be difficult to convince anyone, let alone funding bodies that studying pornography is a legitimate, necessary, and indeed urgent endeavor. I have heard bleak stories from numerous students and academics who reported being openly discouraged from pursuing the topic, denied funding at various stages of their careers, or marginalized in their respective institutions. I have been advised multiple times to abstain from using the word "pornography" in my writing and exchange it for "adult content" to lend propriety and credibility to my work.<sup>1</sup> On numerous occasions, colleagues have taken it upon themselves to convey a singular hard truth: "you study pornography... don't expect to get money for that." Thus, the academy frequently discourages this type of research, which makes it all the more apparent why Lynn Comella pushes pornography scholars to get outside academic confines and seek more direct knowledge of the intricacies of the industry.

I am not an established scholar. I have yet to receive the type of funding to support the type of field work that would grant access to particular people and places. I cannot travel to spaces where the industry is revealed to me. For now, I travel only through online spaces. My field notes look like this:

*I couldn't do any research at school again. I thought I had arrived at school early enough but that MA student from art history beat me to the reading room. I waved to my peers and headed home to crawl through the web for older versions of pornhub.com's homepage, particularly screenshots of 2012. As I sat in my kitchen, looking through Pornhub, I started to think about the knife's edge separating what I was doing at that moment from a user who went home early to watch porn for fun. Our bodies were potentially in the same position: eyes darting over our shoulders only to feel relief at finally being alone, browsing through the web trying to find the exact right thing, getting distracted by an advertisement, finding something interesting.*

Technically, my scraping of the web for pornography content is consistent with digital ethnography. But it is also the exact type of behavior that qualifies my research as unworthy of funding for many institutions. To return to the words of Linda Williams, “if I was moved, as I was sometimes to either arousal or offence, what was the proper place of this reaction in criticism?” (Williams 1999, x-xi). The humanities do not reject emotional affect—in fact, theories of emotion have gained new popularity in the last decade. But does being turned on count? This is a feeling inappropriate for the academy, I have come to recognize. Yet, if I consider online pornography to be an urgent research topic, I must—out of scholarly necessity—find a way to channel my emotions into theoretical criticism. Perhaps, in this way, I can reflect on my position as a graduate student with proper perspective. I, like millions of the very people I study, steal away to secretly open Pornhub on my phone. While I may be doing it to trigger pop-up ads and take screenshots, I believe the laughter, discomfort, and even physical desire I sometimes experience bring me closer to achieving scholarly insight. This is the type of experiential information I might not have access to, were I in a less precarious academic position. Porn is my object of research. It is an object that creates desire through technology. This is the structuring principle of my approach. I am concerned with how Pornhub uses big data to create desire from desire. Thus, it is utterly counterproductive to try and isolate my own feelings from my research object. Doing so would undermine the very argument I am forwarding. So, as a researcher, I am in meaningful ways indissociable from millions of other Pornhub users, with our multitudinously streamlined personal routines: we all open the homepage of Pornhub and browse in hope of find something that moves us.

## Notes

1. For more thoughts on this topic see Linda Williams (2014).
2. I want to clarify: the difficulties I experience as a researcher are clearly incommensurate with the marginalization and ostracism performers and sex workers experience daily. For more details on the stresses of sex work I recommend the zine, “A Brief Introduction to FOSTA-SESTA” (Shamas 2018).

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## ***Expert or Idiot? On False Dilemmas in Digital Media Research***

**Patrick Vonderau**

Recently, *Wired* published a portrait of Jonathan Albright, Director of the Digital Forensics Initiative at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism. It pictured Albright, a well-reputed communications scholar, as a new type of expert—as someone who would bombard journalists with “direct messages late in the night,” while “chugging a bottle of Super Coffee [...] to stay awake.” This new kind of expert academic, the article proclaimed, acted as a “detective of digital misdeeds,” working overnight from a windowless university basement in order to take on “the world’s biggest platform before it’s too late.” Experts like him, *Wired* found, have “become an invaluable and inexhaustible resource for reporters trying to make sense of tech titans’ tremendous and unchecked power. Not quite a journalist, not quite a coder, and certainly not your traditional social scientist, he’s a potent blend of all three—a tireless internet sleuth with prestigious academic bona fides who can crack and crunch data and serve it up in scoops to the press” (Lapowsky 2018).

*Wired*’s article may prompt us to question what it means and feels like for an academic to become this “potent blend” that “serves it up in scoops to the press.” While many academics in the humanities and the social sciences aspire to take on a public role, *Wired*’s portrait inadvertently lends an air of precarity to the role of the digital sleuth. There is nothing particularly attractive in being unable to sleep because of failures in regulatory oversight.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it desirable per se to align the scholarly research process with investigative reporting or other forms of knowledge production conditioned on competitive, time-pressured marketplaces. One also may wonder about the knowledge thus produced, as it appears valued solely in terms of its usefulness to the press and its publics. And what about the foil against which the digital media expert is defined, here somewhat ominously referred to as “your traditional social scientist,” someone *Wired*’s journalists are “certainly not” willing to talk or listen to? Why is not being able to code, to report, and to do proper social research a qualification for studying digital media, according to *Wired*?

The reason I asked myself these questions is a project I am currently co-leading, entitled *Shadow Economies of the Internet: An Ethnography of Click Farming* (2018-2020; funded by the Swedish Research Council). Our project came in response to a current sense of crisis evolving around notions of political disinformation, advertising fraud, and identity theft. Scoops in *New Republic* (Clark 2015)

and *The New York Times* (Confessore et. al. 2018) were quick to attribute these phenomena to a multi-billion dollar industry and the illicit inflation of social media currency, using an evocative imagery of offshore “follower factories” or “click farms,” supposedly located in the Global South. In this powerful narrative, digital sweatshops in Indonesia and elsewhere form part in a global labour arrangement designed to serve consumer brands, top politicians, and entertainment celebrities of the Global North. Accordingly, low-skilled “clickworkers” program or manage large scales of automated accounts stolen from real users and operated via bots, on behalf of brands in the U.S. or Europe who reap off the benefits. We initially responded with skepticism to these reports, their scandalizing of the issue, and the dichotomies at the core of their narrative. My own contribution to this project developed as a study of digital cultural production that would look at networks and actors somewhat closer to home, and at the businesses that provide both the marketplace for such services and the venue to reap off their benefits, such as Google, Facebook, and PayPal.

Long before a first peer-reviewed research paper was published, public interest in the project took off. We were contacted by national and global news outlets. Colleagues at a renowned data analysis school proposed to collaborate and urged to “aim for quick publication and [to] think about a media strategy. We have contacts with *NYT*, *Guardian* and *Buzzfeed*.” At this point, I had already started a collaboration with two senior editors at Vice in Berlin, feeling that I needed outside advice as being a detective was not part of my qualification as a humanities-trained media scholar. Friction soon developed within the project. My colleague, a social anthropologist, had conducted ethnographic interviews in Indonesia and raised doubts about my ethnographic input, given that I did not plan to conduct fieldwork on site in exotic foreign locales. Also, my work was going slow, and I had more questions than answers. The data school promised to speed and tool the project up, deliver more data, and package the findings in a way that would guarantee public impact. Although my collaboration with Vice had been motivated by my reluctance to act as a data analyst or public investigator, it suddenly appeared as if our project had transformed from two complementary research avenues into two competing media strategies. Was my teaming up with Vice in conflict with my colleague’s intent to link up with the school and the media campaign it wooed us with? Hadn’t we started this project by distancing us from scoops and the press in the first place? What had happened?

The figure of the expert may help explain some of the unanticipated dynamics in today’s digital media research. In *Wired*’s view, interesting scholarship seems to consist of “cracking and crunching data,” well in line with how *Wired*’s former editor Chris Anderson put it: “Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.” (Anderson 2008) Of course, such statements primarily testify to the strategically disruptive “bullshit” Anderson (and *Wired*) are famous for.<sup>2</sup> Yet positioning scholars as mere intermediaries for processing data to be found in the world also represents a (ontological) claim about scholarship found elsewhere. It’s a claim that has become commonplace since the 1990s Internet boom, when “knowledge” and “information” became interchangeable concepts, with knowledge positioned as a resource to be opened up for economic and other gains (Kocyba 2004). This is not to say that such knowledge would not be helpful in dealing with the many platform-related crises observed by the news media. For instance, a previous collaborative project I co-led employed an “interventionist” strategy of publicly experimenting around access to Spotify’s otherwise inaccessible user data, in order to create attention around Spotify’s intransparent collection and use of these data. (Eriksson et al. 2019; for project methods see also Rogers 2019). While we only performed as “experts” in the news after the project had been completed, our strategy paid off and led to Spotify being investigated by the Swedish Data Protection Authority (Datainspektionen 2019; see also Vonderau 2018).

Still, acting like an expert serving useful knowledge to the public is not necessarily a good *research*



strategy. In *Wired's* version of things, media scholars need to vigorously attach themselves to the problems they are studying (“No one cared about my work until it became political,” he [Albright] adds with a shrug” [Lapowsky 2018]). For me, it made more sense to study illicit online engagement based on a principle of detachment. A watershed moment that occurred in the research process in this respect for me was when both my colleague and I, in what I perceived as a friendly rivalry of topping each others’ data, coincidentally discovered the same seemingly big actor in the middle of our investigations which geographically first had taken us to Indonesia and Germany, respectively. The Big Actor Find, as we might call it, related to over 1,000 smaller entities that apparently had grown into something larger: the main supplier of the Internet’s “follower factories”? Invited by me to a joint workshop, a colleague from the data analysis school provided lists of more data and the prospect of stunning visualizations, as all the evidence now indeed appeared plainly visible. Rather than questioning the idea of “main supply”—somewhat at odds with the Internet’s distributed network topologies—and in lieu of a theoretically informed approach or a properly developed argument, big data-made-visible quickly fitted a story already out there—exactly the one we initially had aimed to confront. We were close to becoming experts.

In context of a Big Actor Find, this seems all but inevitable. While small finds and micro-actors force us into developing elaborate arguments, Big Actor Finds seem to provoke the opposite. Yet what alternative is there to providing “data,” given that everyone seems to vie for it? As philosopher Isabelle Stengers reminds us, another way of looking at the culture of expert knowledge is through the figure of the “idiot”—in the sense of a conceptual character that appears as antagonistic to what true experts embody (Stengers 2005). An idiot, according to Stengers:

is the one who always slows the others down, who resists the consensual way in which the situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilize thought or action. This is not because the presentation would be false or because emergencies are believed to be lies, but because “there is something more important.” Don’t ask him why; the idiot will neither reply nor discuss the issue. The idiot is a presence or, as Whitehead would have put it, produces an interstice. There is no point in asking him “what is more important?”, for “*he does not know.*” But his role is not to produce abysmal perplexity, not to create the famous Hegelian night, when every cow is black. We know, knowledge there is, but the idiot demands that we slow down, that we don’t consider ourselves authorized to believe we possess the meaning of what we know. (Stengers 2005, 996)

Anthropologist Ignacio Fariás suggests to embrace this position as one that helps thinking through the timing of collaborative research processes, arguing that fields characterized by an “entanglement of humans and non-humans” would require a “slowing down of thinking and decision-making, the opening up of space-times for the cultivation of emergences and differences” (Fariás 2017, 36). So, in doing digital media research on contentious issues such as “fake likes,” would we need to make a choice between acting as experts or idiots? Is this about attachment or detachment, crunching data and going public or, alternatively, remaining lost and lonely in a university basement?

The dilemma is obviously false, and partly imposed on the researcher, reminding us that empirical fields always are co-constituted in practice. Fields of inquiry emerge through interaction with actors within and outside these fields. A significant part of the scholarly discovery process consists in storytelling what we have found to our colleagues, informants, and ourselves. There thus is nothing wrong in either telling or not telling a story; it’s more about how this telling implicates us in the organizing of the field and the actions we observe.<sup>3</sup> In my own area of research, Production Studies, or the study of media industrial practices, “having access, and informants, and backstory information on industry” is not necessarily seen as an advantage, because they “may by themselves position the industry scholar as a ‘text’ being written by the industry.”<sup>6</sup> In a digital media context, not only may researchers be positioned through strategic leakages or the withholding of information that may be far more subtle than any power play in a traditional fieldwork situation; they also are obviously quickly induced to

let themselves literally be ‘written’ up by the industry, as the *Wired* example demonstrates. Unless it’s part of a self-reflexive and critical strategy, sending messages to journalists at night or crunching data for them is hardly productive for research that studies digital cultural production, and the same goes for traditional ethnography. While all of us are experts in some way, being idiots often may help, too.

## Notes

1. Albright (2019) himself seems to hint at this in his public Twitter feed where he notes of being “4-5 months behind on emails” and having trouble balancing “press/academic/leg inquiries” with research and administrative work, while lacking funding.
2. According to a data-driven sociological study, “pseudo-profound bullshit” is not only common, but popular (Pennycook et al. 2015). For a more substantial theoretical critique, see Geoffrey C. Bowker (2014).
3. In my work, I am following an STS-oriented approach in studying “action nets” and the way narratives form part in organizing (see Czarniawska 1997).
4. As John Caldwell observed fifteen years ago, “naïve ethnography” is as problematic as a “naïve textualism in accounting for cultures of media production.” Not much has changed since then (2006, 115).

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# Learning to Diversify the Media Labour Force

**Errol Salamon**

A long quest for diversity in the media labour force began in the United States in 1967, after President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of race riots in the country. According to the Commission's 1968 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, also known as the Kerner Report, "Our Nation [sic] is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" (Kerner Commission 1968, 1). Condemning white racism, the report criticized the news media for failing to "analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States" (ibid., 203). The report concluded, "By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problems America faces and the sources of potential solutions. The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world" (1). To remedy this failure, the Kerner Report recommended that news organizations employ enough African Americans "in positions of significant responsibility to establish an effective link to [African American] actions and ideas and to meet legitimate employment expectations. Tokenism...is no longer enough" (211). Beyond the news media, the Kerner Report also thought that "[African Americans] should appear more frequently in dramatic and comedy [television] series" (212).

The Kerner Report paved the way for numerous reports on the lack of diversity in news and entertainment media industries over the past 50 years. For example, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) has conducted an annual "Newsroom Employment Diversity Survey" since 1978, which collects data on the percentage of women and racial minorities working in U.S. newsrooms (ASNE 2018). Likewise, the Radio Television Digital News Association has done annual research on women and people of colour working in local U.S. news since 1995 (Papper 2019). The Pew Research Center has also conducted research on newsroom diversity with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, and age in the context of the U.S. workforce writ large (Grieco 2018). The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, a think tank at the University of Southern California, has studied diversity and inclusion in the film, television, and music industries, focusing on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and disability (Annenberg Inclusion Initiative 2019). All of this research has aimed to bring attention to and help fill gaps in diversity. Media education programs have also responded in the past 50 years, aiming to bring awareness to and teach emerging media workers how to challenge this diversity gap.

This article considers the relationship between media research, media education, media practice, and advocacy in such labour and diversity initiatives. In what follows, I will offer a reflection on my own labour-focused media research and strategic communication advocacy, and will outline my efforts at pedagogical intervention toward diversifying the media labour force.<sup>1</sup> The intervention occurs at the curricular level, teaching students ways to diversify media industries by understanding, analyzing, and evaluating what black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw defines as the three aspects of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). At its core, intersectionality is focused on overlapping social inequities, discrimination, and systems of hierarchy as applied to social identities, such as race and gender. As we will see, students leave my course with a “core career competency”: tools to “engage diversity” (University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts 2019). To establish my approach, I will first ground this case study in the labour-oriented media research and the social justice methodology which informs aspects of my pedagogy.

### **Labour Standpoint Research, Media Diversity, and Social Justice**

Grounded in a critical political economy of communication and sociology of work approach to media industries, my research is focused on the labour standpoints of media workers. Through archival research, interviews, and personal communication with workers and labour union representatives, I consider how broader structural conditions within and beyond media industries shape employment relationships, working conditions, workers’ experiences and identities, labour organizing, and labour resistance (Salamon 2019). Such a labour standpoint approach reveals the power and social relations, such as the relations organized around social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability. My research also reveals the roles that media workers have played in efforts to reform a privately-owned and controlled, white male dominated capitalist media system, suggesting implications for diversifying the media labour force.

Journalism students and labour unions have long played a powerful role in supporting each other’s efforts to address workplace and broader social inequities. As far back as 1968, hundreds of university students in the province of Ontario joined journalists who were on strike over union recognition at the *Peterborough Examiner*, which was owned by Thomson Newspapers (now known as Thomson Reuters) (Salamon 2018). Together, they launched a local alternative newspaper called the *Free Press*, filling gaps in local news coverage during the strike and commenting on the need to democratize the corporate and classist media system. In recent years, unions have addressed the economic barriers to securing and completing media internships, which have become an important stepping-stone for students hoping to obtain long term and decently paid media work. To limit such barriers, unions have launched and defended paid journalism internships at news outlets, such as the *Toronto Star* (Salamon 2015). Unions have also established and protected in collective agreements internships that pay an entry-level wage, including at the *Globe and Mail*.

In addition, journalism unions have created programs for students and emerging workers, and incorporated support for racial and gender diversity in hiring through collective agreements. Since 2016, I have served on the steering committee of the associate members program of the Communications Workers of America CWA Canada, which was established in 2011 (Lapointe 2013). CWA Canada has co-organized free networking events, arranged panel discussions and mentoring sessions with professional media workers, and published articles aimed at supporting emerging media workers. Our biggest campaign has focused on strategies to limit socioeconomic barriers to securing internships. We developed model language for media internships in 2016, which Vice Canada incorporated into its collective agreement in 2017, becoming the first digital news company in Canada to adopt such language. This advocacy and outreach has informed my scholarship, which is grounded in an “engaged” and “embedded research” methodology (Salamon et al. 2016, 267). This advocacy-oriented research is based on a close relationship between the researcher, the organizations, the communities, and/or the

individuals that are being studied. I bring these insights on labour and advocacy to bear in teaching media diversity.

### **Toward Institutional and Representational Change in Media Industries**

In my Diversity and Mass Communication course, students complete a final research paper based on an interview with a media professional and a labour force analysis. Working toward this major assignment, students do related short assignments and in-class activities throughout the semester. Students learn about the opportunities and challenges facing media industries in attaining equitable representations of historically marginalized social identities in media content and in the labour force by considering the following tactics, among others: diversity statements, employee resource groups, diversity committees, labour unions, and professional associations. For instance, we begin the semester by discussing company diversity statements. In class, we dissect example diversity statements and discuss how they are a clear way for media outlets, such as the Associated Press, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), the Walt Disney Company, and WarnerMedia, to publicly show their commitment to diversity and inclusivity in terms of race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, physical and mental ability, and age. To put this knowledge into practice, I ask students to create model language for a classroom diversity statement. Since diversity statements are commonly a company-led initiative, we turn to employee-initiated and collaborative tactics to diversify the media workplace later in the semester.

One such approach, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), consists of worker-led committees based on demographics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and age, which aim to diversify individual workplaces. Media workers have started ERGs at various media companies, including Vox Media and BuzzFeed. The impact of ERGs is measurable. For example, Vox Media traces an increase in diversity in its labour force with regard to gender identity and ethnicity between 2013 and 2019 in tandem with the work of its ERGs, among them ERGs for employees who identify as women, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Latinx, and/or LGBTQ+ (Vox Media 2019). BuzzFeed workers have expanded ERGs for women, people of colour, and LGBTQ+ employees since 2017 (Peretti 2018).

To help students write a short reflection paper regarding ERGs and explore their own interests, I took my students on a field trip to MPR in the fall 2018 semester. Dividing this assignment into small parts, students take field notes on a presentation about MPR's ERGs including "Women at MPR," "Millennial ERG," "Equalizers" for GLBTQIA employees, and "People of Colour ERG" (MPR 2018). We discuss their observations in the next class. Some students have then been inspired to write a paper on how MPR gives employees who identify as GLBTQIA, people of colour, or women a voice in the organization's cultural programming, grounding their paper in conceptions of intersectionality and social identity.

Outside of individual media companies, we focus on the role of labour organizations, including both unions and professional associations. Drawing on work from my current book project (in progress), we consider how recent union organizing efforts at digital-first media outlets across the United States, such as the Writers Guild of America East and The NewsGuild are helping media workers organize their workplaces and set up diversity committees (Salamon 2016). We also discuss some of the many professional organizations that are run by and for diverse groups. They include the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Association of LGBTQ Journalists, and the Asian American Journalists Association.

At the end of the semester, students apply this knowledge to their final research papers. They draw on demographic data, such as information in the reports mentioned above and from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, along with directed interview questions to examine how diversity plays out in the media workplace. Students interview a media worker about their work experiences and the content that they create. Examples of media workers include (but are not limited to) professional journalists,

graphic designers, and filmmakers.

The course assignments mentioned above are designed so that students leave my course with various skills and core career competencies, among them tools for “engaging diversity” in the media labour force. According to the University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts, engaging diversity refers to the “process of cultivating awareness of one’s own identity and cultural background and that of others through an exploration of domains of diversity, which may include: race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, ability, class, gender, age, spirituality, etc.” (University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts 2019). Such an approach recognizes that social structures and systems establish and sustain intersecting inequities in institutions, policy, and representations in media and cultural artifacts (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). This engaged pedagogy, grounded in course-based research, suggests that students who engage with diversity, appreciating and adopting an intersectional standpoint, may be better able to navigate and participate in the labour force. Yet, this approach also demonstrates the important role education and advocacy play in the landscape of alternative social structures and systems for historically marginalized social groups in the promotion of alternative media structures, policy, and representations.

### Notes

1. This pedagogical intervention is grounded in course-based research in Diversity and Mass Communication, an undergraduate course that helps students fulfill a liberal education requirement in diversity and social justice at the University of Minnesota in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

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# ***Fight to Win: The Political Contours of Graduate Student Organizing***

**Jacqueline Ristola**

This piece maps some of the political contours of graduate student organizing in the university setting. Drawing from my experiences of organizing (labour union-related or otherwise) at York University in Toronto and later Concordia University in Montreal, this piece reflects on what I've learned from other organizers and theorists to gesture towards some of the common issues on organizing graduate students. This will be in part autobiographical as I compare my experiences of organizing (labour or otherwise) alongside my experiences of labour studies in the academy. To wit, I'll use the organizing at University of Toronto in Summer 2016 as a site of exploration of the tensions between graduate union mobilization, and the difficulties of building solidarity for labour and other struggles outside of the classroom, either on or off campus. I'll end with gesturing towards the larger issues on the horizon for unionized graduate labour.

## **Organized Labour in the Academy**

To begin, what to say about the status of labour in the academy? First, it varies by region: my analysis here will be on the North American context. Here in Canada, we have the immense privilege of having union labour as the general standard across higher education institutions. This is not the case in the United States, where the ability to unionize varies by institution, with graduate students private universities recently losing the right to unionize as of September 2019.

Unionized labour in Canada is also distinct from the United States in terms of its strength. Writing for *Jacobin*, McGill sociology professor Barry Eidlin notes that while U.S. unionized labour relied heavily on legal arguments and political investments in the Democratic party, Canadian unions in the 20th century focused more on building class power. As Eidlin (2016) writes, "Canadian labor extracted its early legal victories from a hostile state. It was able to protect and build on those victories not because it had political friends in high places, but because it retained more of its independent strength as a class actor."

## **The Political Contours of Campus Organizing**

As graduate students, our union organizing faces particular challenges due to our university workplace.



The role of steward or department delegate is one example of this. At a unionized workplace such as a factory or a hospital, a shop steward's role is more clear-cut: be the union contact person during a particular shift and/or floor, ensuring consistent union communication and representation. This model is grafted to the university sector, with its own peculiarities. Instead of shop stewards based on location (at York we called them stewards; at Concordia, we call them delegates), union reps are based on department. While departments make sense as spaces for discreet organizing, organizing representatives by programs may also be a productive possibility, as the divide between MA, PhD, and late PhD students is quite pronounced in terms of schedule and workload. Aside from this, what becomes more difficult is cross-campus collaboration and organization.

There are unique difficulties to the university labour sector. In a neoliberal university setting, our lives are more precarious and often contingent upon getting the next contract. Such work on a contract to contract basis not only puts stress on our membership, especially over the summer when jobs dry up, but such sporadic contracts and eventual graduation means a constantly changing membership that needs education and outreach. Other roadblocks to mobilization include our status as both students and workers. Reaching out to the membership is tricky if there are multiple campuses (like Concordia and York), or if members are away on fieldwork, among other academic requirements.

At the bargaining table, management is usually quick to divide between student life and work life of graduate students, but the reality is much more murky. At Concordia, the Faculty of Engineering is an excellent example where student status and academic labour co-mingle into tricky situations.

A common issue in Engineering is overwork, that is, graduate students working more hours than agreed upon in their contract and workload form. However, many engineering students find they are pressured to overwork because they fear a backlash from their supervisors, such as not being hired again for a particular course or research assistantship, or receiving less support for their own research. Adding to this fact, many of these engineering students are international students, and thus their tuition is deregulated while their work opportunities are limited (no more than 20 hours of work per week off campus, which we'll return to later). As such, it's difficult for these students to stand up for their right to say no to unpaid labour.

Engineers tend to be the least #woke about their labour rights, but in some ways easiest to organize because of neoliberal capitalism's investments in STEM (the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) over the humanities. At Concordia, engineering graduate students get joint offices, with dozens of them filling up the EV building, which makes it easier for door to door mobilization. Door to door can be more difficult in other faculties due to less communal space. In my first year of PhD, one of my professors remarked how every PhD student got an office in his time. This is no longer the case in the humanities. There are communal spaces where PhD students sometimes gather, but they are few and far between. In short: capital's invested interests in STEM over the humanities makes it structurally easier to organize, but these are also the areas where we find the most exploitation by capital in response.

Outside of union labour, I have often found Graduate Student Associations (GSAs) to struggle with relevance. GSAs represent all graduate students, unionized or not, which ideally means you have a broad reach across campus for political organizing. In my experience with past GSAs at York and Concordia, these organizations have political potential, but ultimately lack the resources and people power that their undergraduate colleagues have (namely the Canadian Federation of Students [CFS], the largest student organization in Canada). Both GSAs, for instance, have a dental plan and a few other benefits, but they pale in comparison to CUPE 3903's unionized benefits hard fought over decades of bargaining. The GSA's representative positions on Senate and other important institutional councils however can be cultivated as important sites for political intervention, as it was during the CUPE 3903 strike through 2018.

### **Solidarity Forever?**

In my final course for my MA in Cinema and Media Studies, I took a summer course on media labour, detailing the various forms of labour that goes into making film, music, and other forms of art. Half-way through the course, food service workers at University of Toronto began protests at changes made to their workplace instituted by the University of Toronto. By switching their food from an outside contractor (Aramark) to be inside the university, University of Toronto was instituting a number of changes: a 15% elimination of the workforce, the erasure of years of seniority in shifting to a new system, and the loss of preferred affiliation with UNITE HERE, forcible joining the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Ontario framed this as “contracting in”). While I am quite fond of my former union, beyond the local level, it is composed of nearly impenetrable bureaucracy, where UNITE HERE, by contrast, is known for their grassroots organizing and empowering their workers. While CUPE’s involvement was relatively small, their lack of involvement was in some ways callous.

Galvanized by the protests (daily pickets on university grounds, actions during graduation, etc), I quickly made some handouts for my class. Speaking before class began as I gave everyone a handout of all the information, I made the pitch plainly: on the next Wednesday, a summer day when we don’t have class, let’s join the protest for 1-2 hours at U of T and support the workers. If we talk about the importance of social justice and labour rights in class, we should also be willing to engage in acts of solidarity outside the classroom. I hoped that at least a few members of my class would come to the solidarity picket.

No one did.

There are caveats here, of course. Obviously as graduate students, we have a lot of work we already have to do, and issues and recognition of capacity are valid. Perhaps if I had time to have one-on-one conversations with people, I might have had better success. But I must also admit that I was hurt by this failure to get anyone to come support workers in need, as it seemed a glaring contradiction: that we were moved by the stories of labour exploitation and precarity in the classroom, yet when presented with a tangible opportunity to support labour outside of the university, my colleagues failed to show.

By contrast, while my classmates from York and Ryerson failed to show, friend and member of CUPE 3902 (the union for contract academic workers—TAs, instructors, etc.—at University of Toronto) went on a hunger strike for a week alongside other UNITE HERE members. This individual, a woman of colour, put her body on the line in full solidarity, something I’ve rarely seen from those in the academy. The image of the labouring femme body is one that lingers throughout my union experience, as union labour has often divided itself across gendered lines.

### **The Work of Unions**

During the “off year” (2016-2017) I served on the executive of CUPE 3903, the majority of executives were women. It was only when bargaining began in 2017 that a significant number of men came forward to do the work for the executive. The gender dynamics were clear: men will step in “when it matters,” while women can keep the union running during these off seasons.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, our work was never mere maintenance. During my time as an executive, we were often stressed to the point of breaking down, and overwork and a toxic environment were common complaints throughout the year. But the reality is we always need people to help out, because as an organizer, you will never fully be at ease, because you are directly combatting a capitalist system that will do everything in its power to make you fail.

Political Science PhD Candidate and writer Alyssa Battistoni (2019) details these struggles in her powerful essay on her union organizing work with UNITE HERE at Yale University. While the fight to unionize at Yale’s fight is different than ours in terms of history and scope (there’s a decades long struggle to unionize the campus), Battistoni writes of the intense sacrifices she made as a key organizer in the mid 2010’s. The details she conjures —waking up with a pit in her stomach, crying in meetings,



stretching herself beyond her limit—were incredibly relatable to me. I, too, have cried in union meetings, and stretched myself to my limits at York. (I was a key organizer of May Day 2017 in Toronto, while also serving as a union executive, while *also* finishing my Master’s project.)

Lingering in Battistoni’s masterful piece is a question: why do we do it? Why do we sacrifice so much of ourselves?

For myself, my entrance into labour politics was built on necessity: York University previously promised international tuition indexation for graduate students, a provision hard fought by the 2015 strike by CUPE 3903. Tuition indexation is a provision ensuring that any increase in tuition must be matched with an increase in funding. It’s important to note this isn’t a unique win by one union; similar language was won in arbitration by CUPE local 4600, which represents teaching assistants and contract faculty at Carleton University in Ottawa. This language is particularly important for international students. As of Fall 2019, international tuition is deregulated in Ontario and Quebec. Tuition indexation ensures international students are not priced out of accessible education. It was only after accepting York’s offer and moving to Canada that York took away promised funding, leaving international students like myself in a terrifying limbo. While I was already politicized before coming to York, the union’s success in combating York’s attempts at austerity was the only way forward in completing my degree. Like many others, I needed to fight in order to live.

### **So What Are We Fighting For?**

To end this piece, I want to think ahead and chart the issues that are manifesting on the horizon.

First, as Eidlin (2016) and Battistoni (2019) write, labour cannot rely on legal arguments to support labour struggles. Under the Trump administration, unionizing in the United States is going to get a lot more difficult. The National Labour Relation Board (NLRB) is not your friend. As of September 2019, the NLRB has reversed its 2016 decision that gave the right to unionize to teaching and research assistants at private universities (Yaffe-Bellany 2019). Battistoni writes about the agonizing wait for the NLRB to give final certifications to they unionizing efforts, only for them to be washed away with the Trump administration.

In terms of organizing goals, the next step is to unionize post-doctoral fellowship positions. While teaching assistant unionization is largely standardized across Canada, post-doc unionization is not, despite these positions including teaching labour. Whether it be with teaching assistants or faculty associations, post-docs deserve unionized protections and gains.

The biggest issue, especially at Canadian universities, is the exploitation of international students. Canadian Universities in the 2000s by and large shifted towards exploitation of international student labour. Deregulation of international student tuition in Ontario and Quebec exploits international students (who will take any kind of work to make ends meet), while also making education accessible only to rich families. International students are also limited in the kinds of work they can pursue. While on-campus work is mostly free of hour restrictions, off-campus work is restricted to no more than 20 hours a week. This dichotomy—drastically increasing tuition, yet limited work opportunities to pay it — was thrown into sharp contrast in the summer of 2019, as international student Jobandeep Singh Sandhu was deported for “working too much.”

We see this issue manifest at Concordia both in copious overwork, particularly in Engineering, but also in the job of invigilation. Invigilation is the the biggest labour issue of graduate students right now at Concordia. These jobs pay poverty wages (minimum wage at time of writing), while the same work at other Montreal universities is paid significantly higher. The majority of invigilators are international students because of their precarious status in Canada, and they deserve better.

Concordia and McGill were the largest lobbyists at the provincial government to deregulate international tuition. As of this writing, it is unclear whether the CAQ government has put this legislation on hold out of their own racist self interest.

Unions fighting for international tuition indexation is one route to support international students. Additionally, at York, the cost of health care plans is paid for by York, another important safety net won through union bargaining.

As international tuition is a provincial issue, many unions turn to electoral politics as well. Your mileage may vary in terms of “Voting is Harm Reduction” (VIHR), but I would seriously question the political efficacy of electoral politics, at least as the only form of political participation. As David Camfield writes in *Briarpatch Magazine*, “VIHR wrongly assumes that in the lead-up to elections, all we can do is vote for the least-bad candidate or party. Instead of encouraging us to think about how we can take advantage of the election season to further our projects ... VIHR often sends the message that all we can do is settle for one of the options presented to us. This can lead to people doing things that are inconsistent with the commitments to radical change they espouse, like uncritically supporting NDP candidates or even voting Liberal” (2019). (“Is voting really ‘harm reduction?’”). To return to Eidlin (2016), success comes not from electoral politics, but class power.

### Conclusion

To organize for labour is to sacrifice your labour for the good of others. It is a gamble on whether it will actually pay off. One of the so-called secrets from Labor Notes’ *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* is that “One hard reality about organizing: you’re going to fail a lot. You’ll lose more often than you win.” The challenge of organizing is daunting given we already feel overwhelmed pursuing graduate studies in the first place.

But the stakes for organizing could never be higher. Union erosion, neoliberal capitalism, the rise of the gig economy, and more, put pressure on younger generations to try and seek out a living, often at the cost of their livelihoods, particularly psychological health. But as Marx wrote, we have nothing to lose but our chains.

### Notes

1. There is more to be said in terms of other areas of intersection identity and union participation, particularly race and LGBTQ+, but this exceeds this essay’s scope.

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# *Extracting Concepts*

**Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter**

For over ten years, we have run research projects that grapple with questions of labour and its transformations across sites in China, India, Australia, Greece, Chile, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Germany. These investigations have taken us to locations such as recycling villages, semiconductor factories, e-waste dumps, container shipping ports, warehouses, copper mines and smelters, data centres, and railway terminals. Dubbed Organized Networks, Transit Labour, Logistical Worlds, and Data Farms, these projects have involved collaborative team research orchestrated in cooperation with local participants, many of whom are activist researchers. Labour precarity has been a consistent preoccupation of our investigations, which have engaged with questions of logistics, software, infrastructure, and data politics. We have sought to understand how digital technologies and logistical media have not only enabled the proliferation of precarious labour regimes across different worksites and economic sectors but also generated fantasies of openness, participation, and seamlessness that have papered over these same conditions of precarity. Organizing this research has involved engaging researchers across sites who have different interests, employment statuses, and levels of attachment to and investment in these projects. Consequently, labour precarity is not only an object of our inquiries but also a condition of their possibility. The following paragraphs reflect on this predicament and our negotiation of it.

First, let us say that we have no illusions about the potentially extractive nature of our research process. Our structural position, as tenured professors with generous research funding from government sources, dictates consideration of the interpersonal and transactional economies at hand. Even as we recognize that precarity goes all the way up and affects us in terms of performance measures and pressures to raise external funding that have real impact on our working lives, there are material differences at play. These differences relate not only to employment statuses and to symbolic authority, however tenuous and contested the latter may be, but also to the positioning of researchers across variegated landscapes of formal citizenship and political economy. Clearly, a researcher positioned in Germany has access to different opportunities than those available to a researcher in, say, India, although the latter may enjoy more secure employment than the former. Staying attuned to these variances has been an important part of how we have approached the practice of collective research, since, as busy academics enmeshed in ever-more demanding cycles of work and performance, our visits

to research sites have been necessarily time-limited. Analogous to work in Australia's mining industry, where workers spend short stints of time in remote extraction sites before returning to the city, you might say that we are "fly-in-fly-out" researchers. We think it is better to be straightforward about this situation than to cover it over with pretty talk about ethnographic reflexivity or theoretical idioms that seek to depict our position as a contingency in a method assemblage (or some equally justificatory conceptual equivocation). All of this we see as necessary, without even taking into account the planetary impacts of the carbon fuels we have burned travelling to globally dispersed research sites.

A core question that motivates our research is how to make infrastructural worlds, technical systems, and labour struggles intelligible in the context of differential geo-cultural dynamics and institutional conditions of knowledge production? Grappling with this question generates techniques of organization and the collective work of concept production. We tend not to find ourselves gravitating toward Moodle, MOOCS, or any of the online platforms designed to consolidate existing institutional hegemony through economies of data extraction and technological solutionism parading as open-access education. While unavoidable, the administrative work of interface management is a subtractive experience well-suited to the abolition of pleasure. One of the high points in building online forms of presence and connection arrives at a relatively early phase of project development. Here we are thinking of work we do with designers in devising an aesthetic grammar and conceptual coordinates which help orient the trajectory of inquiry, or at least serve as points of departure and compulsive infidelity. For many years, Kernow Craig was superb in forging a design signature that trafficked across our project websites and publishing activities. The isotype method of designing a language of work and political struggle by Otto Neurath was especially influential in the case of *Logistical Worlds*. More recently, Amir Husak and Paul Mylecharan have played key roles in the design logic of *Data Farms* and the *Low Latencies* imprint we have initiated with the *FibreCulture Book series* and *Open Humanities Press*. A smartly crafted design logic does wonders for concepts that need to communicate with a blade.

What are the relations between system and subjectivity, infrastructure and expropriation, labour and exploitation, politics and possibility? These are among the many questions that precipitate the collective work of inquiry that comprise the series of projects mentioned above. We are doubtful about the extent to which this research impacts beyond the forms of sociality and collaboration we experience in sites of investigation and the generation of texts, images, videos, sonic atmospheres, and experiments in digital methods more generally. We don't pretend that our research intervenes in material conditions on a grand scale. Delusions like that are best put to the side, only to be hauled out if required in reports read by few. Labour is always affective, though the toll on the body is exacted in highly uneven ways.

A credo of our research process has been no free labour. From locally based researchers to designers, translators to minibus drivers, programmers to event organizers, we have made sure to pay. No doubt, adhering to this credo has been a leaky process. Probably someone has come on board through friendship circles without making it onto our books. We can just imagine someone reading this contribution to *Synoptique*, quoting selectively, and calling us out. It wouldn't be the first time. When you fly in and out, nobody has your back. Nonetheless, we feel that we have been more rigorous in payment than we likely have been in concept production and theory making, and, ultimately, we feel that such rigour may be more important. The academy, if nothing else, has turned us into mildly competent accountants. Yet, whatever our attention to the spreadsheets, the mere act of payment is not enough. Not only is there the question of when the money comes—an important issue for those on the precarity treadmill—but there is also the matter of how much to pay. The latter is a vexing issue when working across different global sites and involving researchers in a process that often involves their own mobility across these sites. How much to pay a researcher in Greece, for instance, as opposed to one in Chile or Germany? With differently pegged rates in national labour markets and different expectations about how much work a certain amount of pay might warrant, the conundrums become thicker. Knowing that territorial demarcations, hierarchical relations between currencies, and the control of

labour mobilities determine pay rates across jurisdictions does not make the dilemmas any easier.

Our approach to these issues has been to pay the same amount to researchers working in different global sites. We leave it to our collaborators to determine how that translates into time and energy. Our graduate students have always amazed us with the intelligence and mature composure they bring to the scene of collective research, often undertaken in circumstances that exact a high emotional and physical toll. It is clear to us that the stakes are especially acute for graduates undergoing training for an education economy with few guarantees. The various media forms we employ and produce across the life of any particular project help give expression to co-mingling voices that slice the horizon of collective research with the intensity of situations marked by the force of history and the violence of capital. Like Paulo Freire's educators, media are never neutral. Unlike these good souls, however, media have no sense of duty, even as they define our situation. Brains and bodies coupled with technical operations forge the contours of cognition.

The artist Robert Smithson once wrote: "The investigation of a specific site is a matter of extracting concepts" (1967). It is time to run the brutal honesty of this statement up against the reality of extractive economies, which have proliferated under conditions of digital mediation and platform capitalism. Fieldwork is dead, gone the same way that dominant academic fields position the arts of critique. This is not only because researchers have become time-pressured mavens, forever distracted from making worlds by the need to check their h-indexes. It is also because, much to the grief of anthropologists, the interview and focus group have monopolized the dynamics of the encounter. Far from lamenting this situation and longing for a return to participant observation practices that dripped in the blood of colonialism, we prefer to experiment with new institutional forms. Collectivizing research is part of this effort. As we have discussed, such experimentation, in our experience, takes place under compromised conditions. At the very least, we have become aware that theorizing comes at the price of somebody else's labour.

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The background is a solid red color with a complex pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. These shapes include circles, rectangles, and irregular polygons in various shades of red, creating a layered, abstract effect. The shapes are distributed across the entire frame, with some appearing more prominent than others.

# **INTERVIEWS**



# *A Conversation on Reproductive Work and the University with Silvia Federici*

**Interviewed by Ylenia Olibet and Kerry McElroy**

Silvia Federici, currently Professor Emerita at Hofstra University, is a feminist philosopher and political activist. Her research on reproductive labour, feminist commons, and anti-capitalist struggles has always been coupled with political activism across different social movements. In January 2019, she introduced *What is Democracy?* (Astra Taylor 2018) at Cinema Politica in Montreal, a film that explores the links between neoliberal capitalism and social possibilities in a way that mirrors Federici's own most notable work. Although the concept of 'democracy' might show its limits when deployed in liberal-individualistic terms, it is still a value worth fighting for if intended as an opportunity to foreground the process of *reproduction*. In this case, reproduction entails the idea of caring for one another, as well as building communities and new forms of cooperation against the logic of capital. Connecting this reflection prompted by Taylor's film to the topics of financialization of the university system, as discussed at The Labour of Media (Studies) conference held in November 2018 at Concordia University, and to the function of labour in the context of pedagogy that this issue of *Synoptique* specifically addresses, the medialabour collective chose to interview Silvia Federici on her experiences

as an activist-scholar. Federici's historical and theoretical work on reproductive labour is crucial to understanding knowledge work. In addition, her body of work on the broader economic and political infrastructure that sustains academic labour is vital. Ylenia Olibet and Kerry McElroy, both doctoral students and feminist scholars at Concordia University, met Silvia in her hotel room on a cold January morning and interviewed her about her embodied experiences in both academia and social movements.

**Ylenia Olibet and Kerry McElroy: Your experience as a feminist scholar and activist, demonstrates that your intellectual engagement has always been coupled with a praxis, as seen from participating in the struggles of the feminist campaign of Wages for Housework, to the most recent Occupy movement. Could you say something about your trajectory and your influences? How did you develop political work within and outside the university?**

**Silvia Federici:** I was born in 1942, during the war. For years my parents spoke about it, and spoke about fascism. That was a politicizing experience. Then in the 1950s and 1960s we would hear about the Congo, Algeria, Cuba, and then the Civil rights movement in the US. My town in Italy was a communist town, so in

high school my school mates would talk about politics, and the older ones organized protests and demonstrations, for instance in support of Cuba. In every place I have been, including the university, I have carried on my political activism. My political activism has never really started from the University, but from outside. For example, I taught in Nigeria, at the time in which the University system there and other African countries was being destroyed by the World Bank, the IMF the Structural Adjustment Programs. Subsidies to education and to students were cut, and in response major protests on different campuses were organized. The governments began to ban students' organizations. Back in the United States, along with other fellows, we began the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa. We used the notion of academic freedom in a polemical way, defining it as the right to study, using this concept to support the struggles of students and teachers in Africa and beyond. There was never a conflict between my political work within and outside the university. This is because on one hand my teaching has always continued the kind of activism I was doing outside, and on the other, it was clear to me that the University too is a field of struggle. As a student in the 1960s, in the US, I was protesting against the Vietnam War, and I continued to do so as a teacher in the US and in Nigeria. Those who see a conflict between political work and working in academia are often afraid to expose themselves and lose their jobs. But it's not impossible to reconcile the two. I have never thought of working in academia and remaining silent until I would get tenure. And I must say that I have never seen a person that started being vocal only after getting tenure. If you silence yourself at the beginning of your career, you silence yourself afterward, too. So, my advice to those in academia is "liberate your tongue"!

**As you were saying, in the 1990s, you were on the frontlines in the formation of the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA). CAFA was an organization formed to support students and scholars struggling against the privatization of the educational**

**system and for better conditions of academic work, following Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa that deeply transformed the academic infrastructure in the continent. CAFA represented a crucial cultural-political moment that contributed to the understanding of the University as a key space of class struggle, one where alliances between workers may be forged in order to organize contestations against the dismantling of public education by global capital. Can you tell us more about that experience?**

A major conference was held in Kampala, Uganda in 1990, that brought together teachers and students to discuss confronting the cuts to subsidies to education and to students. For the first time in that context, students were not the elite, many of them came from peasant communities, so they needed the subsidies for food and transport. At the conference in Kampala, the concept of academic freedom, which is an elitist concept, began to be used in a different way, to express support to the struggles of students and teachers. There was a lot of repression on the campuses. In the summer of 1986, students that were engaged in a peaceful protest were massacred on the campus of Ahmadu Bello University, in Zaria, Nigeria. The Nigeria Students Association was banned and driven underground. The campus where I was teaching in Nigeria became a battlefield. Returning to the US, myself and other colleagues, from Africa, who were also leaving because they could no longer survive there, decided we needed to do something. We began building support and founded the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa. We published a bulletin to analyse the effects of the dismantling of the education system in Africa and its causes, and for 13 years documented students' and teachers' struggles. I think that our newsletter quite successfully carried on an analysis of Structural Adjustment Program that connected the attack on universities to the restructuring of the global economy and the international division of labour. We came to the conclusions that universities were being dismantled because, in the plans of international capital (the World Bank, the IMF, etc.), Africans were supposed to provide manual labour. A



consequence of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the universities was the elimination of any field of study that would enable the possibility of protest (ie. the Humanities, courses on Marx or anticolonial history, etc.).

We broadened this kind of analysis to other parts of the world, while we were documenting the struggles in Africa. We also published the book “A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African University” with African World Press. We did not succeed in our goal, which was to mobilise the campuses in the U.S. We never saw that kind of mobilization. However, our work was important for African students and teachers, as we provided a broader perspective on those changes, and provided a documentation of student struggles. We drew connections between the anticolonial struggles and the students’ struggles on their campuses. We showed that Structural Adjustment Programs was a new forms of colonialism, a process of re-colonization. Over the years, I have seen that our work was useful. Then, the more and more we were analyzing the situation in Africa, we discovered that similar structural changes were also happening in Latin America and in the U.S—the commercialization of education, the whole idea that education has to serve business, the introduction of fees, the very tight alliance between academia and business, the transformation of the University into a factory, and an enterprise.

**Upon moving back to the Western world, you encountered and agitated against problems not dissimilar to those you had found in Africa, in terms of the nexus of the University and society. Can you tell us about some of the movements that have most driven you in your life as a professor-activist in New York City?**

In recent years, I have been peripherally involved in struggles against the commercialization of University and student debt. An anti-student-debt movement came out of #occupy, which showed to a lot of young people that they all had student debts.

Although it is not as strong as we would wish, at least in the U.S., this movement, that in N.Y. was mostly organized around the network

of “Strike Debt”, has declared student debt illegitimate, and called for free education.. It has stated that education, knowledge should not be turned into a commodity.

In Canada there is a “Wages for Students” movement that is inspired by Wages for Housework. There is a connection between the two movements because Wages for Students is fighting against unpaid labour imposed on students, particularly through the internships system. Forcing students to do unpaid internships is a fraud because it displaces workers, with the excuse of giving students the possibility to train themselves. In Montréal, CUT is very active in this struggle.

**Can you speak about the organization of alternative forms of education that challenge the nefarious collusion of higher education systems with conditions of working precarity characterized by unpaid internships, short term contracts, flexibility, and casualization?**

Jakob Jakobsen, a comrade in Denmark, for six years ran with other people a Free University in Copenhagen. There is also now a ‘free university’ in New York, it is the idea of creating “commons of knowledge”—spaces for forms of knowledge production and circulation that are not dictated by the market. The concept of the commons extends to the question of knowledge production because knowledge is now being contained and privatized. This is something we have to fight against it. Until the 1960s the institutional rhetoric stated that knowledge is for the common good: knowledge in the schooling system is organized to satisfy a common interest. Since the 1980s the neoliberal ideology has steered away from this. Knowledge is now considered a private thing, a commodity you can buy, that serves to get a better job, better wages. So the idea now is that education is for individual benefit, and not to serve a collectivity. The schooling system is very much integrated into the capitalist machine. This ethos of education as personal gain serves the imposition of fees. Knowledge is not considered a common good, so, according to this ethos, you have to pay for education because you will be the sole beneficiary of it. Knowledge is thus transformed

into a commodity, and as such it can be exported. Your degree is a commodity that allows you to get the best job. This is perverse. The system of unpaid internships is part of it. Companies make students work as interns to lay off their workers. That is why students need to fight against it: they could be one of those workers who are displaced. By fighting now against unpaid labour, students are protecting their future position as workers.

**Can you share an example of what you see as the relationship between struggles in the University and pedagogical practices?**

In Italy in the 1960s the student movement had enough power to impose collective grading and collective exams. The topic of the exam was prepared collectively. The professor would not grade the individual, but the whole student body. Teachers have a great power in their position, like the power of giving grades. They sometimes do not realize that the grading system is actually a selection system. Collective grading is a way of defying the grading system. It allows teachers to be radical. In this respect, it is important that teachers are open to students' movements because these equally empower teachers as radical academic workers.

**With which theoretical approaches do you think the struggles within University should contend?**

I think that in the past, too much radical energy has gone toward fighting against what is being taught in class: can we teach Marx or can't we? How we can restructure the curriculum? These initiatives have somehow lost sight of the broader issue of power relations: what and who is financing the University, what is the relation between the academic hierarchies and the overall purposes of the University, what seems to interest the University? In the US, university administrations are more and more enmeshed with the military. The military has a big presence and impact, which is made invisible because many researches are divided up in several components so that researchers don't know what and why they are studying specific problems, and they don't know how their results are going to be used.

**Your analysis has shown how capitalism creates a hierarchy between productive and reproductive work, relegating women to the sphere of reproduction, usually performed as unpaid labour. Re-evaluating reproductive work means recognizing women's work of nurturing, care, education, and providing comfort, as central in the creation of social relations, and acknowledging this work to be of concrete value. How can the concept of reproductive labour be helpful to understand the constant attacks on the working conditions of the 'precariat' in the University?**

First of all, intellectual work — whether studying or teaching — is part of the reproduction of the workforce. Thus, there is a clear continuity between teaching, educating children and reproductive work. Also when you look at the schooling system, from daycare, to elementary school, to the university, you will find that women teachers and students have a different relation to intellectual work and to other people they work with. As a university teacher, you come to know a lot of problems students have that they will never, or rarely, present to a male teacher. There is a lot of mothering that is carried out by female teachers at all levels. This continuity between reproductive work and academic labour is part of the project of preparing a workforce that corresponds to the needs of the global market. Affective labour comes into play here; there is a constant use of the fact that all women have training in affectivity, they are the affective workers of the world. I think that there is a continuity between the struggles women make over domestic work, sexual work, and affective labour, all of which are expected of women in this society, and their work in academia, whether as students or as teachers. Schoolwork is reproductive work. I would also add that the women's domestic work in relation to child-raising continues in the school: taking the kids to school, speaking with the teacher, helping the kids with their homework. In this respect, the schooling system is a very important part of the reproductive system. It is a field of struggle - against fees, teachers fighting for better working conditions or for the creation of a different

curriculum.

Yet, I wish that the struggles in the schooling system extended beyond this. One of the things that I find missing in the struggles made in the University is the coming together of students, teachers, and other workers. If we talk about reproduction we must recognize that a large part of reproductive work within the University is carried out by people working in the cafeteria, or doing maintenance work. There is a whole reproductive infrastructure that is necessary, indispensable, very important. Unfortunately, the University makes those workers invisible. The University is considered a centre of knowledge, comprised of students and teachers. These other workers, who are often immigrants, are not seen as producers of knowledge, and in this way they are dehumanized. Their reproductive work is devalued. So, when I talk about struggles in the University, my point is always that we have to break down the hierarchies among workers to create connections through an understanding of collective labour. There are moments of unity. In the US this has happened when students have gone on strike, and the workers in the cafeteria have gone on strike too. However, on an everyday basis, there is a culture of invisibility that we need to break.

**We will end there for now. We would like to sincerely thank you, Silvia, for taking the time to answer our questions and share your generous reflections.**

You're welcome.

# Parsing Out Intersections Between Activism and Academia with Alessandra Renzi

Interviewed by Sima Kokotovic

As a part of The Labour of Media Studies conference held at Concordia University in the Fall of 2018, Alessandra Renzi participated in the workshop titled *Ethnographic Research in Media Studies: Practice, Methodology, and Ethics for Fieldwork*. Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University, Alessandra investigates the linkages and relays between media, art and civic engagement through ethnographic studies and media projects. In her projects to date, she has investigated pirate television networks in Italy, the surveillance of social movements since 9/11, and social justice activism in Indonesia. As constitutive aspect of these projects, her research has unfolded mostly through collaborations with activist collectives. As she explains, this approach necessitated reconfiguring some of the basic paradigms of research itself, always been guided by a clear intent to find best possible ways to contribute to ongoing struggles of media activists. With her experience, Alessandra raised some great points during the workshop. This interview presents both a brief reiteration and a continuation of conversations that took place that afternoon at Concordia's Global Emergent Media Lab.

**Sima Kokotovic:** In your research you've been looking into activist media collectives invested in specific and clearly defined political

projects. Could you speak more about the research questions and general concerns that guided you through your inquiries?

**Alessandra Renzi:** My work is mostly focused on activist media projects, while also paying attention to the surveillance, and the criminalization of social movements in general. I arrived at this kind of research through involvement with a pirate television network that emerged when Silvio Berlusconi became the prime minister and gained a monopoly on over 90 percent of the media in Italy. I joined this network called Telestreet, both as someone who was interested in contributing to the project, and as someone interested in studying it, since at the time I'd just been accepted in a PhD program at University of Toronto. Once I started interacting with these activists who had a rather heterogeneous background, a lot of analytical categories to study social movements that I was familiar with crumbled very fast. They were too restrictive as tools to describe the heterogeneity and complexity that are really a part of social movements.

One of the questions for me, from the outset, was how to contribute. How to shape my research in ways that would provide a contribution to the broader field of research, but would also be useful for the movement itself. So much of the research I'd been exposed to, even when it was in solidarity with the movement that was

the object of study, was still describing and often objectifying it. This approach did not allow me to answer the kind of questions I wanted to ask. Those were questions that had to do with what was happening in Teletstreet beyond the fact that this is a movement that emerged when Berlusconi was controlling the media, and when overall media consolidation and media power were becoming increasingly evident. One of the things that was interesting for me was the micro-political transformations of the groups and the individuals involved in the different groups and the way technology itself mediated these interactions. So, I ended up rediscovering the tradition of militant research that is very alive in Italy, called *conricerca*. Through this, my questions changed and shifted, slowly over the years, focusing more and more on the latent practices of resistance that were not necessarily articulated discursively in the groups. These practices became much more evident when one was more involved in the interaction, but also when one was paying more attention to the process and transformation that was happening among the individuals, and among the individuals and technology, as opposed to focusing directly on the outcome of the interaction, the films, the videos, the documentary or even any attempts at shifting media policy.

**Could you say more about the ways you were capable to discern and render legible these group interactions and forms of micro-politics that were not clearly articulated by the group members? What were the tools you used to incorporate these concerns into your project?**

It was actually a rather painful and long process to assemble different tools that would allow me to crack these almost imperceptible transformations. *Conricerca* itself has a focus on processes of organization and subjectivation. Those are very important topics in conversations within Italian social movements, which often come from the autonomist Marxist tradition and bring together Marxism with a Foucauldian and Guattarian analysis. Within the movement I was involved in, this vocabulary was used daily. People were reading theory. The first Teletstreet activist I met

at a national convention was reading *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). There was a certain way of harking back to already present traditions from the 1970s, but also departing from them in many ways. The ideas of subjectivity, subjectivation, of resistance that starts from the bottom, by changing the way people relate to each other and think about social reproduction, these ideas were always there.

However, translating this kind of work onto the page is a project in itself. After two years of fieldwork, the challenge was how to map out these processes and transformations. Thinking about the theories that helped me the most, well, starting from Deleuze and Guattari, I encountered Gilbert Simondon. His work has been key for me to think about the relationship between the individual and the collective, in a way that is nuanced and points to ongoing change and subjectivation—what he calls individuation. Simondon talks about serial transformations not only at the individual level, but also at the sub or pre-individual level, that is, at the level of affects and other psychosocial imperceptible stimuli. He theorizes these transformations as what is constantly producing and reproducing what we call an individual, the collective and society at large. This means that we don't have society as the container that produces and holds the individual and collective; the three are all complex structures that are entangled and emerge simultaneously. What I like about Simondon's work, and other theorists that extend these lines of inquiry, is that they allow me to work across what are usually considered bounded objects of study and to pay attention to the relations and relays among components of social and technical formations. I can also attend to moments of mediation, and not only among human subjects but also between the inorganic, the technical, the more-than-human. In particular, in the context of my work, it allowed me to think about the role of technical objects, which are very important at so many different levels of the structure. At the time, I was able to consider Teletstreet as a complex assemblage that included a variety of different technologies, some of which were already existing, dominant technologies, some of which have been created by the hackers, by the



people in the movement. It allowed me to analyze how all of these technologies function in terms of relations between pirate and the mainstream television but also other technologies, activist groups and spaces. In this sense, much of the work of describing and mapping out these transformations, teasing out minute details of these relations has been done in the process of writing. With respect to how one talks about an ethnography of these kind of transformations, I think this framework works really well for writing about them. For me, as a media activist, as someone who was trying to create an activist intervention with the book (Renzi, forthcoming), it was also really important to think through storytelling as a process, and how to animate these relations through it. Also, through Simondon, I discovered a variety of other theorists who were also thinking about these practices, the role subjectivity, and how that can be animated and thought through both in terms of research and in terms of relaying the politics of organizing. Isabelle Stengers has been really important for me, as well as Autonomist Feminists that are thinking about social reproduction and antagonistic social reproduction, while paying attention to not only practices of subjectivation but also infrastructures allowing subjectivation.

**On few occasions, when I was involved in a political action that is not related directly to the immediate material conditions of my existence, I found myself speculating what would happen if I am to bring the perspective that underlies this political action to the immediate environment of mine. What I want to ask you here is, have these critical tools, and the methodological apparatus you have developed, especially in the context of narrativizing the micro-political dynamics you encountered during the field work, have they made you reflect back on the conditions in which you are doing your work, and I mean here specifically about the environment of North American Academia?**

Yes, absolutely, and this happens both in terms of self-reflexivity and feminist politics of locating yourself within the research. I find it important to stress that these two things are not the

same, and it's probably worth addressing both. In terms of positionality, I have to say I am not a big fan of straight up, one to five paragraphs, where I will write "I'm a white CIS woman" and so on. Some people do that very well, and it is important and great that they do it. It just doesn't work well with the way I write, and the way I approach my identity and also my understanding of the role of identity politics today. This said, there are ways in which I constantly reflect on my position, the position of power and privilege during the process of research, first and foremost. I've talked above about the pirate television network, but since then, I have been involved with different projects where I had to shift my role between being an activist and being researcher, constantly blurring the boundaries between the two. This might actually be easy to do from one's own position but can be quite confusing for others. So, I do constantly reflect on what is my position, what kind of consequences it has for the people I'm working with and how it can be used to our advantages, mine and the people I am working with. This is both a tool and a problem to consider, from the perspective of ethics, of honesty, especially intellectual honesty. But also, creatively, it can become a way to adjust the lenses, to allow for the new insights into the research project. For example, on the one hand, I might be able to access certain spaces and institutions, and extract knowledge from those which could be useful for the group I am working with. On the other hand, in some cases, it might be better if I am not visible at all, and do not take up any space. In this sense, as a part of research, this self-reflexivity is a part of methodological repertoire that I have to think about.

In the context of writing, this doesn't always happen, but in certain cases it has been very useful for me to include myself into a narration and analysis. If one talks about individuation, and subjectivation, and one is part of that relation, it is important to address how you function as an apparatus, as a way to make meaning and to draw attention to certain things. In the context of the Telestreet project, apart from being honest, it was useful for me to insert myself because I was able to use myself as an example to describe and make assessable certain kinds of



transformations that were happening. Through me, as someone who has used camera, I was able to speak about the affect, the emotions, the sensations, and the fear or the pleasure involved in collaborative production. In the context of the work I've been doing in Indonesia, I found it more useful to insert myself in another kind of inquiry where I'm not necessarily writing and extracting too much knowledge from the groups I am working with. These groups are more vulnerable, especially in the country that is a democracy with residual traces of the former dictatorship. It is also connected to the fact that my position allows me to access institutional spaces where I can produce a different kind of analysis. Instead of just talking about the work that, for instance, one of the groups I work with, Urban Poor Consortium, does, I can talk to city officials and figure out what are their smart city policies that displace the poor. In this way I can write about the gentrification of the urban environment and then draw out the consequences that this kind of processes, usually described as positive forms of development, have on the erasure of people already inhabiting those spaces.

**How did this research experience inform your understanding of militant research in the context of contemporary academia?**

Think about the militant research on the level of methodology, there is the question of the way in which you produce knowledge, and whom you produce not only for but with. There is no longer an excuse to produce knowledge for or on behalf of people, if they want to be involved. This relationship has been changing significantly. Militant research is becoming more about holding space for the groups as opposed to speaking on their behalf. "Nothing about us without us." No researcher has an excuse, anymore, to say how this is not possible, because there are ways to do it. And this is the case for a range of fields. From race studies to disability studies, there are scholars doing this kind of work quite well. I am not saying there should be no research that does not pertain to one's own positionality, rather, in most cases, what is at stake is creating the space to cite and support those already doing work at the margins of academia, or to facilitate research

with those who are still kept out, for instance by training and funding. Another thing to have in mind would be to think about how to change the role of research. Shifting the role of research from representation to creation, which is a Deleuzian move, as well as a very feminist one. Then, the question is not any more whom has the right to speak about whom, but what does it mean to create knowledge with people? What does it mean to work with those people and then write about the process? At the moment I am trying an experiment to build a participatory video archive, to facilitate different forms of community engagement to media, with the collective in Naples, again. For me, this brings about a couple of questions. One is the question of ties, and how to retain them. What kind of relationship and trust-building process is involved in the context of research? This stands in opposition to a model of scholarship that goes from one project to another. What is at stake here is trying to be more and more immersed in the culture and the struggles of people, and the way they change. This creates the possibility to contribute and think collectively in ways that are useful, while still producing knowledge that is rigorous.

In addition to knowledge, what else can we produce? What infrastructures, what set of practices, what codes of ethics, what archives, what forms of memory? Lately, these are the questions guiding my thinking about militant research.

**To end on these productive questions, let me thank you, Alessandra, for your time, energy and the lovely conversation.**

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# FIELDNOTES

# Letting Fieldwork Speak Back

Mariz Kelada

In the most basic sense, theory is the suspension of empirical knowledge, not merely its abstraction. Theory is often used quite plainly to make sense of happenings, to give them significance, and to read all sorts of politics into and through them. So what does one do if and when a theory does not seem to cohere or map out onto happenings? What does one do with the excess of happenings that appear eccentric, illogical and quite messy? Do we twist happenings to fit a certain explanatory theoretical framework? Do we throw a generalizable gloss over particularities, or, even worse, fixate on describing particularities as if they have unparalleled logic of operation? Certainly, these conundrums are subject to grand ongoing academic debates, such as the debate between post-colonial theory and Marxism, or political economy and cultural studies, or political science and anthropology. However, as an anthropologist with a foot in the door in film and media studies, I mostly work through critical ethnography (Madison 2011), i.e. this excess of seemingly “eccentric” messy happenings, as well as more theory than I can list here or even fully make sense of at times.

In this paper, I will share some practical reflections that can offer ways for reconsidering what one does with empirical knowledge, and how one might engage in ethnographic writing as more than just proof of theories; it also

speaks back. There are two strategies that I use to let fieldwork speak back which I will nickname here the “and then!” and the “so what?”. I have chosen these nicknames as metaphors of the necessity of continuous durational layering of empirics through the “and then!”, and the interruptive questioning of the resonance between theory and empirics through the “so what?”.

First, I will trace both the stakes and some techniques of ethnographic duration and writing. I will share the basics of gathering ethnographic information, some strategies of analysis, and points of tension and consideration of “writing up.” Second, I will share an example of why that irritating question, i.e. “so what?”, is important in unsettling one’s default use of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. I specifically illustrate how the particular happening of outdoor shooting in the Egyptian film and media industry demanded a reshuffling of my disciplinary theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

## “And Then!”: Layers of Writing Fieldnotes

Ethnography is about duration and participation, attunement not only to narratives and expressions but also to raw happenings. It is also about relationality, or how one’s presence inflects and affects a happening through observation, which always impacts the course of events in some capacity. While interviews are the most

familiar and manageable method, observation and participant observation are messier and trickier. Each method works on a different scale, and the layering of this multi-scaler information can be an overwhelming process. The process of ethnographic writing starts with: a) jottings, which involves writing down points that capture immediacies and first impressions on-site. It does not matter if these points are impressionistic, superficial or not completely accurate or detailed. This level of immediate writing is important because it retains one's primary reactions which are essential in acknowledging positionality and anchoring reflexivity. Jottings are as much a contact-sheet for happenings as well as for one's own first muddled encounters with them. From jottings, one would be able to then scale up to b) ethnographic sketches. Sketches are a chance to spend more time with happenings and their actors. They should be more detailed in terms of spatial, visual (or sensorial), temporal, and relational descriptions. To write an ethnographic sketch is to either transform jottings into a more coherent description of these conditions or to contrast these immediacies with what a longer encounter has brought to your attention. With accumulation of these scales of writing over a long duration, combined with interviews and other forms of knowledge (i.e. photographs, recordings, archives, etc.), one would then have the foundations for a fully formed ethnographic writing which then is transformed into a crafted, contemplated ethnographic narrative. However, there are other crucial analytical processes. Patterning is a primary analytical technique among others, such as discourse analysis. To put it simply, patterning is more than finding common occurrences or shared logics (this a valid use for sure, but it should not stop there because parallels can be interesting, but they can easily stop there, thus being reductive). Instead, patterning (Nina and Wakeford 2012) is to go over the accumulated layers of writings/information and disassemble them from linear or causal frames, and then to reassemble them in relation to their discontinuities, anomalies, and discrepancies. For example, if there is an activist group forming around a cause, it makes sense to trace their

shared motivations, but it can be even more generative to take note of instances where their practices differ or conflict which could reveal or at least account for more complexity that entails more than "a positivist claim."

This then takes us to how fieldwork can feature in a final piece of writing. The main thing here is to use field notes intentionally, not as an "accessory" or "spice" that adds anecdotal interest with no accountability to what else they entail. Using field notes to make or validate a claim—be it factual, historical, hypothetical or theoretical—is one of the ways. However, this approach can easily place a happening in the functionalist slot of "proof" which also condenses the durational aspect of ethnographic methods. Another approach that retains the sense of duration of ethnography is basically not starting from a claim but working in reverse; to first analyze the happenings on their own terms, giving that as much validity as theory, archives, or even statistics. In a sense, this achieves the leveling out of the habitual hierarchy of theory and empirics, which leads to the superimposition of the former on the later. I will illustrate this point further in the following part.

### **"So What?": Media, Outdoor Shootings, and Urban Anthropology**

My ongoing Ph.D. research on and with the technical workers of the Egyptian media industry focuses on the politicized socialities in media production, which is itself connected to dense webs of political and urban economies. Now the theoretical coordinates that I am working with are the anthropology of media, the anthropology of infrastructure and urban anthropology broadly, in addition to the anthropology of the Middle East in relation to political economy and conceptions of resistance. Each of the sub-disciplines is densely rich ethnographically and theoretically, and each can be sufficient for analyzing this topic. Additionally, there is much to say here about what concepts like "political," "urban," "resistance," or even "Middle East" are, and where do I situate my project in their theoretical debates. But, for the sake of concisely demonstrating how the "so what?" strategy works, I

will focus here on an example from my process of writing one of my qualifying exams which is basically a literature review on urban anthropology to demonstrate my “specialization” in this sub-field and to situate my research topic in the sub-field. The struggle was to find a way to demonstrate how analyzing the daily livelihoods of media’s technical workers, as part and parcel of urban infrastructure, can reformulate dominant understandings of media’s relation to politicized socialities.

During my fieldwork, Hady, a young production assistant, told me about the arrangements and negotiations around outdoor shooting as a central part of his job during an interview back in the summer of 2018 in Cairo:

*“Every outdoor location has a contractor. No crew can shoot a minute in Heliopolis for example without having an agreement with ‘am Sobhy. Thirty years ago he was a fruit seller in the area, and now he has almost complete authority on the shooting locations in the area from apartments, shops, to street corners [...] Even when we have all the legal permits to shoot outdoors, there is no way we can get the job done without constant arrangements and negotiations with the people who have actual authority on their streets.”*

The city of Cairo inspired a prominent wave of neorealist Egyptian cinema, especially during the 1980’s,<sup>1</sup> and it is still the locus of narratives in award winning ‘alternative’ film productions.<sup>2</sup> This observation is not new, and there are various analyses in film theory on cities (e.g. Bruno 1993; Clarke 1997; Massood 2003; Penz and Lu 2011; Pratt 2014). Media effectively shape the urban imaginary of a city and its dwellers with all the complexities of politics of class, ethnicity, and gender, etc. (e.g. Ginsburg 1995; Mazzarella 2003; Shafik 2007; Abu-Lughod 2008). But Hady’s stories, among others’ experiences, illuminated a thread that weaves films and cities not only symbolically and aesthetically but also economically, socio-politically, and physically. Then I asked myself: “so what?”; Cairo’s streets remain predominantly inaccessible to filmmakers without the long complex process of obtaining filming permits from multiple state au-

thorities, especially under the current militaized authoritarian regime. Counter to the state’s scrutiny over the city, there are still ways to ‘steal’ outdoor shots if one negotiates an agreement with the people who have immediate authority over “their streets,” as Hady stated. These people could be a kiosk owner, a doorman, a low-rank traffic officer, who can both allow one to ‘steal’ shots, but also can render the state-issued permit useless if they wish. There are also curious if not disruptive pedestrians who would gather around a shoot to catch a glimpse of a star or to peek into the frame for fun. When a shoot is suspended because of a policeman wants to check filming permits or an electricity glitch, the crew of technical workers, be it an assistant of production or a lighting technician, resolve or patch this issue through different ‘competences’. These competencies may be social, affective, physical or technical, or all combined. When the shoot is resumed, the entirety of the production system is not made more efficient, and the process of out-door shooting does not become any less turbulent. However, within every instant of a glitch, the technical workers function as a backup infrastructure to the failures of the infrastructures of media-making, while helping to maintain and reproduce the semi-haphazard system of media production and with it the entire political economy of the media industry. On its own, “outdoor shootings” consist of streets, permits, workers, sensory ambiances, visual references, class and gender configurations and relations, networks, skills, labour, socialities, imaginations, economies both formal and informal and so on. It indexes various “analytical categories” of often separate bodies of theory: it meshes them, refutes them, and ultimately speaks back at them.

This was an example of analyzing the happening on its own terms. But, by asking “so what?” every time I encountered a resonance or a parallel between theory and information about outdoor shooting, I started perceiving these particular happenings as being able to trespass the theory/empirics dichotomy. So what if Marxist theoretical frames can help me position media’s technical workers as urban precariats (e.g. Har-



vey 2006, 2008), so what if I can read Egypt's media industry as post-industrialist or informal economy (e.g. Low 1996; Simone 2004), or as a prominent shaper of urban imagination and experiences of modernity (e.g. Appadurai 1990; Buck-Morss 1992, 1995), and so what if there are entanglements of media in urban infrastructure (e.g. Larkin 2008)? Through centralizing the happening of outdoor shootings to the way I surveyed the literature, I set up three main stages to argue that if the relationship between the labour of media-making and politics are conceptually reorganized in relation to urban infrastructures, it can reveal other critical ways to theorize what can constitute political socialities beyond dominant conception of "resistance" that is either associated with labour unions and organized formal social movements, or microcosms of quotidian struggles and survivals, or the avant-garde artistic ventures battling over representations. By politicized socialites I meant the kind of social processes, networks, and relations that get to be viewed as "political" because they contest but also comply with power structures be it concrete or abstract. In part one, I staged the theoretical connections between media, social imaginaries, and modernity. Then, through a close reading of Appadurai's analysis of the social lives of commodities, which lacked consideration of space, I established the ways that "media-in-the-making" can be analyzed as commodities that are part and parcel of urban space as it pertains to notions of contested modernity. I then juxtaposed conceptions of mediascape with Larkin's "media infrastructure" to highlight the necessity of cross-reading media and the urban both symbolically and materially. Accordingly, I established the base for analyzing the labour of media-making as the shared infrastructure between media and the urban. In part two, I provided an overview of the anthropology of infrastructure to foreground the critical ways in which media's technical workers are tied to the urban as a dynamic infrastructure and accordingly to the neoliberal economy and different modernities. I established this claim by conjoining Simon's concept of people as infrastructure and Berlant's (2016) analysis of how

infrastructural breaks allow certain modes of sociality to form, with Ferguson's (2013) argument about labour as social membership and his theory of "declaration of dependency." In part three, I highlighted how the anthropology of cities mostly focuses on labour and social movements in relation to politics, and how on the other hand cities and politics are a prominent locus of many artistic and cinematic endeavours and theorizations. Through tracing the threads of theorizations in four conceptual configurations: (a) labor/politics, (b) city/labor/politics, (c) media/politics, and (d) city/media/politics, I established the need for a conceptual reconfiguration, if not hybridization: the politics of media-labor within and against the city.

Tours and detours through various bodies of theory, and asking "so what?" made evident that a happening like outdoor shooting is not just a metaphor for political socialities but it is on its own able to reorganize the default parallels one can make with several theoretical frames. Leveling the hierarchy of theory and empirics is not to maintain situational equity but to create a dynamic range where they speak to each other. What I did here is not necessarily explain "outdoor shootings" better to eventual academic readers, instead I show how this happening can challenge or complicate explanatory theoretical defaults. Through the happenings of outdoor shooting, what they refute and complicate about segmented theoretical suppositions, allowed me to engage theory more subversively through an attunement to laboring people as infrastructure that this happening demanded. This was a useful exercise of testing the limits of how theories can be reconfigured not only interdisciplinarily but also in response to the complexity of real-world-happenings.

## Notes

1. Mohamed Khan and the City Rhythms, Mohamed Al Masry, Cairo's *Cinematheque Magazine*.
2. El Said, Tamer, dir. 2016. *The Last Days of the City*. New York: Big World Pictures.



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# *Filmmaking as Militant Co-Research*

**Gino Canella**

Documenting activism through film and multimedia production provides scholars with invaluable opportunities to reflect on, (re-)evaluate, and enhance their research practices. From August 2015 to April 2018, I produced a series of documentary films in collaboration with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 105 and with Black Lives Matter 5280 (BLM5280) in Denver, Colorado. Working with, and on behalf of, SEIU and BLM5280 promoted ethical ethnographic fieldwork and multimodal scholarship fundamentally guided by questions of power and justice. Placing myself on the side of these organizations, however, also demanded that I recognize how my positionality as a researcher-filmmaker affected my political commitments and scholarly orientation. To negotiate my responsibilities and identities as a scholar-activist, I informed my ethnographic filmmaking with communication activism for social justice research, which encourages researchers to not only study community organizing for social justice, but to also “intervene into discourses and study the processes and outcomes of their interventions” (Carragee and Frey 2012, 7). This article explores how co-theorizing media and democratizing documentary filmmaking have the potential to script solidarity between researchers and community organizers and strengthen the social relationships among

activist groups.

## **Scripting Solidarity**

I began my filmmaking and research by attending numerous public community meetings hosted by SEIU Local 105 and BLM5280. I did my due diligence by first listening to the stories that organizers shared at these meetings, and then offering my media production expertise to key members of the groups. I also followed both groups on social media, which allowed me to learn about upcoming events and campaigns and watch livestreamed videos of meetings that I could not attend. Digital ethnography that engaged with these organizations’ online and offline practices served as pre-production of the films. This work fostered trust between myself and key organizers with these organizations, and provided me with political education that informed our films’ narratives.

After establishing a working relationship with SEIU and BLM5280, I produced a series of short films that covered protests and direct actions conducted by these groups. The films were episodic in nature and were edited and uploaded to social media within hours of filming. BLM5280 and SEIU Local 105 regularly use social media to challenge dominant narratives about race and class presented in mainstream commercial media, mobilize allies quickly to ral-

lies and demonstrations, and coordinate events with local community partners. My filmmaking with these groups represents how I contributed to the cultural work of social movements and produced public scholarship in a format that met the needs of the communities that I worked with. Because theory building, ethnographic research, and social media circulation operate at different speeds, my creative scholarship also mirrored the temporal nature of contemporary movements.

Throughout the publication of the short films on social media, my community partners commented on and provided feedback on my media. This was essential for the next stage of the project: a 23-minute documentary film, *Radical Labor: Aligning Unions with the Streets*, which was published in March 2018 on *Roar Magazine* (Canella 2018). The film places the series of short films in a broader context of progressive organizing in the United States, and stitches the stories of labor and racial justice together in a cohesive narrative.

Gerbaudo (2012) argued that media practices, such as photography, social media publication, and livestreamed video, *choreograph* the assembly of social movements by “preparing the terrain, or setting the scene, for people coming together in public space” (40). Documentary filmmaking is often a collaborative practice that requires people coming together in physical spaces—at meetings, rallies, and public forums. During production of our films, I became friends and comrades with many of the organizers with SEIU and BLM5280, and setting the terrain occurred not simply through technical or narrative decisions, but, rather, through highlighting the agency of working people and co-producing scholarship and media based on moral and ethical obligations.

Intervening as an activist-researcher presented several challenges for me, the most pronounced of which was navigating racial, gendered, and class differences. SEIU Local 105 primarily represents Latinx, Mexican American, and monolingual Spanish-speaking workers in the service industry. BLM5280 is a Black-led social movement that centers the leadership of

Black women and girls, and fights to eliminate structural oppressions in Denver. I exposed my personal and political identities with these groups by sharing our films online, publishing research that reflected on my experiences (Canella 2017), and attending demonstrations.<sup>1</sup>

Confronting my racial, gender, and ethnic identities was a formative experience for me. According to Uribe and Rappaport (2011), *confrontation* in ethnographic research reveals the struggle for voice and power:

It is in confrontation with people that both our knowledge and theirs will be validated, refined, and combined to produce concepts, methods, and procedures for activist research (*investigación-acción*), ways of knowing and doing that are novel, creative, and, above all, transformative of reality. (28–29)

Confronting differences—political, socioeconomic, racial, and gendered—created vulnerabilities and risks. For example, due to the close relationships I developed with my partners, I risked romanticizing our activism in my research and writing. Also, at a time when publics increasingly distrust institutions, specifically the news media and higher education, conducting multimodal research in collaboration with community groups put me at risk of being viewed by publics and my peers as a partisan liberal elite who does not conduct rigorous scientific research. By centering confrontation in my research and filmmaking, I embraced these risks, engaged in complex and dialectical analyses of activist media, and realized the benefits of co-producing knowledge.

### **Theorizing with a Knowledge Surplus**

With a growing number of scholars conducting multimodal research, it is important to note how theory-building is enriched through creative practice. Collaborative filmmaking presents communities that are often invisible with opportunities to contextualize their lives through media and scholarship. Bringing my partners into the research and filmmaking processes produced a knowledge surplus, which allowed me (as a researcher-filmmaker) and my partners (as

community organizers) to re-organize the assemblage between media production, culture, and academia.

Theory building, in partnership with activists and organizers, demands that scholars listen to those most affected by their research outcomes and give participants a say in the trajectory of that research. Rethinking our ontological positions as media scholars requires practicing what Juris (2007) calls “militant ethnography.” Remaining neutral or objective observers during times of crises is unacceptable, he argued. Rather, researchers must “become entangled with complex relations of power, and live the emotions associated with direct action organizing and activist networking” (167). Investigating activist media by “living the emotions” meant I was in the streets bearing witness to the emotions emanating from the crowds, documenting them with my camera, and utilizing them to narrate and visualize an imaginative and humane political project.

Through film, podcasts, and photography, movement actors are using media to theorize and disseminate radical visions of social and political life, and to challenge who and what society deems acceptable. Similarly, scholars must recognize that research is never neutral: it is always part of a cultural or political project that either reinforces the status quo or scripts an alternative vision for an equitable and just society.

### **Democratizing Documentary**

Carrying a camera into my research with SEIU Local 105 and BLM5280 altered the social and relational dynamics between myself and my community partners. My theoretical approach to collaborative filmmaking and co-research is grounded in democratic theory, which argues that people should make the decisions and control the resources that influence the material conditions of their lives. I democratized documentary filmmaking by sharing early drafts of my films with my partners and revising based on their comments and feedback; providing my partners access to a shared Google Drive that contained my original photography and videos, so that they could use this media in ways that

were beneficial for their organizing; and hosting a media workshop with SEIU, where I worked with members on how best to communicate their stories in the Fight for \$15.

Post-production (e.g., video editing, color-correction, and sound mixing), requires tweaking Uribe and Rappaport’s (2011) concept of “co-writing,” to refer instead to co-editing. Listening and re-listening to interviews for soundbites, and repeatedly reviewing footage in video editing software to ensure the pacing of the film was just right, demonstrates how activist filmmaking complements and strengthens ethnographic research. Co-editing required me to regularly question my ethics, test and update my research questions, and re-examine my political commitments as an allied filmmaker. Thus, media production reveals how writing, editing, analyzing, and distributing cultural texts are cyclical and interdependent processes.

My filmmaking could not have been possible without the cooperation and dedication of the organizers and members of SEIU Local 105 and BLM5280. Both organizations, albeit in different ways, shaped the narratives of our films and the trajectory of my scholarship. Although SEIU was more involved than BLM5280 in the production of our films, my relationship with BLM5280 was equally important. Attending meetings hosted by BLM5280 and having conversations with key organizers of the group injected our films with a radical anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and intersectional narrative. As scholars continue to intervene in community organizing through collaborative multimedia research, grassroots organizers also intervene in scholarship by forcing researchers to confront and revise dominant Western epistemologies. Co-producing knowledge happens when scholars and activists work together to foster a culture of care, produce empathic and compassionate storytelling, and maintain a dogged commitment to justice.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### Notes

1. Most of the short films are available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/ginocanella>.

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# HOMING – The Homes of the Women of Our Rural Home: *Documentary* *Co-creation As a Practice of Unforgetting*

Iphigénie Marcoux-Fortier



Photo Credit: Pigeon. 2019. *HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert



### **On the Other Side of the Field, a Quinzhee**

March 19, 2019, nine o'clock in the morning. I'm putting on my cross-country skis. My appointment is at ten o'clock in a quinze on the other side of the fields. I'm going to meet with a few of the women from my region interested in participating in the documentary co-creation *HOMING—The Homes of the Women of Our Rural Home*. With every sliding step, I exult. I remember that, as a child, we crossed the same field with my parents for the coveted purpose of going to eat french fries at the local snack bar. It took me time and effort, determination and imagination, to cross this field again. But this time, with another purpose. Not that I don't like french fries anymore—I'm a big fan of potatoes in all their forms, thanks to my grandparents and to Agnès Varda (Mercier 2019)—though there has been a shift in my experiences of home since then.

### **From French Fries to Sopaipillas, From Sopaipillas to Banik**

A few weeks before the quinze invitation, I presented my research-creation project as part of the series *Les grandes exploratrices* at the Centre de femmes Avec des Elles in St-Gabriel-de-Brandon. Before inviting women to *HOMING*, it felt perfectly right to begin by talking a little bit about some of my travels and documentary co-creations as a mentor-filmmaker in the context of the Wapikoni mobile, the Mapuce School of Filmmaking and Communication of Ayja Rewe Budi (ECCM)<sup>1</sup>, and the action-research-creation project *Power of the Lens*. *HOMING* is the natural extension of the work I have been doing for over a decade, which has transformed my artistic practice from *mentor-filmmaker* to *mentor-filmlearner*. While working with an intercultural and interdisciplinary team of academics, Indigenous community researchers, filmmakers, and community-sector actors, I have learned that filmmaking can be used as a site of transformation of still-oppressive social relations. Integrating culture into the act of creating film, into its methodology, rethinking its structure and its process has been for me an ongoing exercise of learning how to make film

differently.

In order to stir up curiosity and stimulate discussion around processes of documentary co-creation, I shared three short films I had collaborated on during the past years. They were all connected to the idea of coming back home: the needs, benefits, emotions, and transformations involved. *Ince ka mogetun (I Too Was Reborn, 2018)* allowed me to address my collaboration with the Mapuce communities of Ayja Rewe Budi<sup>2</sup>, where I have learned that film creation can belong to a particular place. The creation processes of the short films produced by the ECCM are directly linked to the territory and to the people who inhabit it, to *kimvn* (Mapuce knowledge) and *rakizuam* (Mapuce way of thinking) (Rain et al. 2019, 78). *Haññá boade gáddáj (Hanná Returns Home, 2017)*, created with the Lule Sámi community in Drag, Norway, provided subtle insight into the power the lens has for valorizing culture and strengthening community. The filmmaking process had given the community an opportunity to remember and valorize the impact of a Sámi language kindergarten started by the parents of the Lule Sámi filmmakers over than 30 years ago. *Koski Kiwetan (Going Back to Where We Came From 2011)*, co-created with Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok women of Manawan, allowed me to address both the presence of the Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok in the region and my own story of ignorance, which is part of a larger story of colonial ignorance.

### **Documentary Co-creation As a Practice of Unforgetting**

In the chapter “Remembering for the Future” of her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Alexis Shotwell, following American historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, defines “unforgetting” as an active act of resistance against infrastructures that normalize the colonial gaze. It is an activity in response to the “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007 in Shotwell 2016) in which “ignorance is not just an absence of knowledge; it is a way to (not) know things. In our being, ontologically, we become who we are in part through

what we know and what we are made (or made able) to forget” (Shotwell 2016, 37). Who was I through what I had been made to forget?

I’m from St-Norbert, a small village in the Lanaudière region in Quebec. I was in my mid-twenties when I learned about the existence of Manawan, which is situated 174 km from where I was born and grew up. Before that, I had ignored that I lived on unceded land. I had a desire to better understand the ethics of intercultural encounters, but I had tasted tortillas, chapatis and sopaipillas before ever tasting an atikamekw banik. In my home region, the only roads I had ever taken were the roads that were visible to my settler eyes. These roads were ones of the traces without inventory (Gramsci in Shotwell 2016, 23) my “colonial ghosts” (Spoon in Shotwell 2016, 23) had deposited in me. When I started to think about the roads I had never travelled around my home—and about what it meant—I felt I had a responsibility to travel them. If “the colonial ghosts live in the bones of their descendants and inheritors,” (Shotwell 2016, 23) what kind of ghost do I want to be? What traces will I deposit in the bones of my inheritors? Shotwell affirms that, as settlers, we can play a role by “actively participating in a politics of responsibilities in our intellectual and social labour, actively challenging our own and others’ ignorance and occluded thinking, and taking up practices of decolonization” (Shotwell 2016, 25). It’s also necessary to do so in our creative labour. As a *filmlearner*, I feel that I “partake in the legacy of colonialism and have the potential to affect what is remembered and why” (Shotwell 2016, 41). It was now time for me to come back home in order to travel the roads I had never travelled, to see what I had not yet seen, to listen to what I had never listened, to learn what I had not learned before. It was now time for me to unforget, using documentary co-creation as a form of relational art, as a practice of encounters, of listening, and of memory.

*HOMING* is the way I found—am finding—to unforget. It is the way I found to come back home and to explore how documentary co-creation can be used as a political tool of rendering invisible (infra)structures—inside and

outside filmmaking processes—of identity sharing and of dialogue between women of diverse backgrounds living in a rural territory.

### **Remaking Home Together**

An official definition of homing is “relating to an animal’s ability to return to its territory after travelling away from it” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). Like a pigeon. Like me. But is the pigeon still able to find its way home when home became this “unsettled space of impossible inhabitation” (Lauzon 2017, 4)? Or is there an urge, a necessity, to find new homes, like geese, caribous and other species affected by climate change do? Like human beings whose homes have been unsettled in “the aftermath of displacements, migrations, enslavements, diasporas, cultural hybridities and nostalgic yearnings [...]” (Lauzon 2017, 9). This piece and its aesthetic inscribe themselves in a development in contemporary art “which conveys home as a place of unmaking where longing is also a kind of belonging and absence a kind of presence, offers new models of intersubjectivity that recognize the embedded vulnerabilities of memory, inhabitation, and indeed human existence” (Lauzon 2017, 10). In *HOMING*, using the ever-evolving concept of home, I invite diverse women from my native rural region (Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok, non-indigenous, immigrant) to reflect on, converse and create their own notions and experiences of home.

*HOMING* embraces multiple theories, methods and working principles of the Open Space Documentary (Zimmermann and De Michel 2018) where designing encounters and emphasizing the significance of small places and polyphonic voices is central. In *HOMING*, through conversations, polyvocality is used to propose an inclusive present and future, where women of diverse backgrounds—and a pigeon!—who speak multiple languages, understand each other. This anchor in each one’s mother tongue is a key element of the project. I firmly agree with Barbara Cassin when she speaks of the bond between mother tongue and poetry: “But what is it that makes a tongue a ‘mother tongue?’ Perhaps the possibility of invention. Poetry, this making (of) language, is natural-

ly bound up with the mother tongue” (Cassin 2016, 46). In the project I have left it open for each woman to choose in which language she wants to express herself. I heard poetry emerging in French spoken as a second language. Poetry is all around us. Poetry might be more about the disposition to perceive it than poetic form itself.

*HOMING* takes care of each experience, each form of knowledge. In this way, *HOMING* proposes other ways of knowing and being. It opens up the path of *unforgetting*. Beyond stories, the process of co-creation is open, mobile and flexible, and invites each woman to participate on her own terms. I am very receptive to the concept of “sensitive engagement” that “involves a genuine attempt on the part of the filmmaker to understand the participant and their needs in relation to the documentary project or, to put it slightly differently, how their interests can be met in terms of their documentary participation” (Nash 2009; ctd. in Thomas 2017, 38). Here, the notion of “informed consent” shifts slightly in order to reflect the idea that “consent is a continuous process of negotiation” (Thomas 2017, 50), which brings forward the idea of

a very active dialogue, central to new approaches in co-creative documentary. While designing this project, I had many fantasies. Each of them is presented to the co-creators as such and is subject to change. This creation doesn’t belong to me. “Creative uncertainty” (Haraway 2016, 34) opens the space for “us” to happen.

As a result of my reflexive approach, I am the first participant in this documentary co-creation, exposing my own vulnerabilities and myself. In sharing my own intimacy, I pose the first caring gesture. This is not an easy thing to do, but it is part of the balance I need to now find between deep listening and deep speaking. This iteration of *HOMING* (Marcoux-Fortier 2019) is the fourth short film I’ve shown to the women as part of the invitation to become documentary *filmlearners* with me. In the same gesture, I also invited the co-creators to the place where I feel the most at home on Earth. It’s a family-made yurt in the forest behind my parent’s place, which is also the place where I was born. Meeting with my parents and Perro-the-Dog, food and story sharing are all part of the creative process. It is at the heart of my conception of home,



Photo Credit: Marcoux-Fortier, Iphigénie. 2019. *HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert.

of well-being. If we are in a time of unsettled homes, I firmly think that we can challenge it by activating relationships. “Unmaking home” is actually for me a way of productively “remaking home together.”

This is what I’m looking for in the process of co-creating *HOMING*; the construction of “spaces of home” through singular encounters. Encounters with ourselves, with others and with the environment, which Félix Guattari theorizes as the Three Ecologies. In *HOMING*, the “spaces of home” are a good place to unite while being different. In Guattari’s terminology, *HOMING* is our small ecosophy. I like to believe that this approach to the documentary is part of what Guattari called back in 1989 the “post-media age...in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularization” (Guattari 2008, 40). In *HOMING*, quoting Guattari, the Pigeon says: “It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity” (Guattari 2008, 29). As we are conversing around the concept of home, we are in a process of co-construction, a work-in-progress, of our common home; a home that is a co-creation itself, a sociocultural and an artistic gesture that belongs to a particular place. “Homing” could also be read as “becoming-home.” Becoming-place and becoming-mobility, becoming-dreams, becoming-vulnerabilities and becoming-death. Becoming-past and becoming-future. “Becoming-with” is an engaging gesture, a “response-ability” (Haraway 2016, 34). I’m eager to see how this small piece will grow in the coming months, linking voice after voice in a mosaic of new relations.

### Rendering Visible the Invisible

The aesthetics of *HOMING* is a way of being; a way of being together, of coexisting. But as an audiovisual media artwork, *HOMING* has at some point to transpose its relational aesthetics into images and sounds, into the world of the senses. *HOMING* plays with the contradictory union of an unhomely and a homely aesthetics.

The narrative structure of *HOMING* is a construction that emerges from the series of in-

timate conversations between the women. In the audio world, the voices encounter and speak to a space of intersubjective relations, of new assemblages where vulnerabilities are shared, a world of empathy and caring for others. “Remembering for the future,” as Alexis Shotwell would say. Indeed, this encounter in *HOMING*—both while performing it and in its traces—is an active way to “unforget.”

The visuals are created together with each woman. Camera in hand, I go where they invite me, film what they suggest as being meaningful in their visions and experiences of home. Landscapes are scrutinized, as well as houses, objects, archives and people. One of the women points to a tree that is significant to her. Another woman leads me to a dune that is central to her experience of home. As the poetry of the language, the poetry of the image is mostly everywhere. With *HOMING*, we also follow the path of other artists who positioned themselves as ghosts and wind haunters in order to see the past and “stem the tide of ruination” (Gan et al. 2017, G1). Yet, neither the Pigeon nor the women’s bodies ever appear in full opacity. Rather, we are traces of our bodies. The movements that animate the human bodies are not movements in space, but rather a pulse of our ghosts. The pulse between their presence and absence. The pulse between the past and the future.

Each microhistory is an assemblage of slowness. Where has the time gone? Maybe it has left the space to the silence? But is it really silent? When one starts paying attention, sounds are there to reveal the invisible. They reveal the winds in the branches, migrating geese, flying emotions. Being in the forest challenges the visual hegemony in which we, as human beings, are used to living in. *HOMING* is a dance with the “poetic universe” of the senses, using the Whiteheadian mode of aesthetics of “prehension” as a way of “caring for, valuing of things” (Dombrowski 2004, 88; in Donovan 2016, 212). This, I hope, allows for the art of noticing (Tsing 2015), while looking for details and organicity.



## Beyond Story

“It is crucial to think *beyond* story; to learn from and/or imagine other organizing principles that may have a greater force,” argue Alexandra Juhasz & Alisa Lebow in *Beyond Story: an Online, Community-Based Manifesto* (2018) while reflecting about the urge to look for other modes of documentary. *HOMING* belongs to this current of thought and correspond to many of the speculations toward polyphonic new media practices (Zimmermann 2018, 9-15). It goes beyond the act of storytelling, inasmuch as it uses documentary co-creation to generate new social configurations in a rural territory. Since the visit in the quinzhee last March, twenty-six women have enthusiastically responded to the invitation of *HOMING*. We were born in Lanaudière, elsewhere in Quebec, in *Nitaskinan* (Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok territory), in Ireland, Australia, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Romania, and Côte d’Ivoire. We are all different. Yet, we all share this rural place. We all relate to Lanaudière. And we are now united in a documentary co-creation process. In order to open our doors, converse, and create, we need to take

new roads. Storytelling is not the purpose of *HOMING*, it is the tool in order to know otherwise the land we live on. *HOMING*, in fact, is an act of rewiring the land and the people, an act of rewriting the future.

Who could we become while *HOMING* and unforgetting together?

The Mapuce School of Filmmaking and Communication of Ayja Rewe Budi has recently standardized the writing of words in mapuzugun in its communications using the spelling *ragileo*. In this system, the “ch” sound is written with the “c,” turning “mapuche” into a “mapuce,” without altering its pronunciation.

In the chapter “École de cinéma et communication mapuce: Espaces territoriaux, regard distinct et collaboration” from *Cinéma autochtones, des représentations en mouvements*, Juan Rain describes the Ayja Rewe Budi as an ancestral territory: “The Ayja Rewe Budi is an ancestral territory that is part of the wixan mapu baskence, that is, ‘those who identify with the sea.’ This territorial area is located between the Xayxayko (or Imperial) river to the north and the Toltén River to the south; from an administra-



Photo Credit: Amy Magowan-Greene, Iphigénie Marcoux-Fortier and Meky Ottawa. 2019.  
*HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert.

tive point of view, it corresponds to the municipalities of Puerto Saavedra and Teodoro Schmidt (IX Region) of the Chilean state. Using the term 'territorial space,' we design the territory from a holistic perspective that includes land areas as well as water, air and areas populated by non-human forces. All these elements coexist within a single territorial area" (Marcaux-Fortier et al. 2019, 75; traduction libre du français).

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## ***Between Practice and Praxis: Why I Am Not an Artist***

**Kerry Guinan**

Not long after graduating from my BFA in 2014, I requested a meeting with an old Marxist tutor to discuss an identity crisis I had quickly developed out in the real world. “I feel,” I confessed, naively, “that the artists don’t respect my activism and the activists don’t respect my art.” “Kerry,” he offered, simply, “it’s not your fault that the left is split.”

I am a visual artist, creating conceptual interventions that critique the relationship between art and capitalism. I am also a researcher, writing in the fields of critical theory and sociology to support the hypotheses of my practice. Motivating both of these roles is my communism, which manifests in praxis as grassroots organising, principally in struggles for housing and abortion rights. Here I reflect on the interaction of these various activities, with particular emphasis on why my art is not my activism, and why my activism not my art.

I am making this clarification in the context of art-activism, or—*artivism*—a new subset of contemporary art that merges practice and praxis to effect social change. Examples include Jeanne Van Heeswijk’s *2Up2Down* (2010), which involved residents in Liverpool in the repurposing of a vacant block; Tania Bruguera’s *Immigrant Movement International* (2010-ongoing), which saw the artist living among and aiding undocumented immigrants in Queens; and Gregory

Kloehn’s *Homeless Homes Project* (2011–ongoing), which provides mobile homeless shelters made from discarded materials. While there have always been outsider artistic practices motivated by social change, the novelty of these works is an activism legitimized and promoted by the art institution, and consequently by museums, academies, NGOs, and political institutions. As an artist making politically charged work within these institutions, it can be tempting to situate my work within this activist canon. However, my practice takes a slightly different approach. For while I am sympathetic to its intentions, I consider activism to be exemplary of the depoliticization of art and the aestheticization of politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The politicization of art is, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, an art subservient to its political history (Benjamin 1935, 26). Many twentieth-century art movements were politicized in this manner, being associated with political movements or organisations that provided a *raison d’être* (Groys 2014). Consider the relationship between revolutionary Russia and its avant-garde, surrealism and communism, or dada and anarchism. Indeed the ‘social practice’ end of today’s activism—that which valorizes civil participation in art as an end unto itself—has its roots in the radical community art movement in 1960s and 70s Britain, wherein artists rejected the art

institution to work on explicitly leftist community projects (Matarasso 2011). Politicized art therefore had a lot to say about the politics of art itself and tended to operate in spite of the art institution, finding enough validation in higher truth and principles, which were to fail by century's end.

A major factor in the depoliticization of art was the collapse of communism in 1989 and the subsequent 'end of ideology' consensus that caused artists to stop associating their work with any particular '-ism' and, by result, with political organisations and parties (Emmelhainz 2016). At the same time, the art institution began recuperating radical community art practices, eventually culminating in the architectural collective Assemble winning the 2015 Turner Prize for their work restoring houses in the working-class community of Toxeth, England. The depoliticization of activism over the past three decades is thus twofold: not only has the discipline now largely split from political praxis, it has also entered the very artistic institutions it once politically rejected.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the art institution seems to have replaced the social movement as being the most reliable supporter, and most appropriate historical framework, for activist practices. This is the split my tutor spoke of, the consequences of which are that many of today's activists operate in a networked (not organized), individualized (the artist has more access to opportunities than the community), and disassociated (not a component of a broader political movement) sphere, which succeeds in being 'political' but is not politicized.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly these same characteristics—networked, individualised, disassociated—may also be used to describe the aestheticization of contemporary politics. As an activist, my principles of praxis would stress the importance of collective empowerment, organization building, and winning political transformations. Praxis becomes aestheticized, again in Benjamin's understanding, when it relegates these political structures and principles to the experience of their aesthetic form. Yet such a characterization could apply to many of the twenty-first century's high-profile social movements, especially those

born of the internet, such as the Anti-Globalization Movement, Occupy, and MeToo. These movements have lacked the organizational structures, transformative principles, or political demands necessary to win concessions, but did enable an *experience* of political participation, not in a structured collective, but in a disassociated network of individuals. Their aesthetic dimension became the sole justification for the movements' existence: visibility was not just the means, but also the end. The spectacle of the crowd, of mass participation, is the desired change itself: 'I must be *seen*', these movements declare, but when the eyes are on me I don't know what I want, I do not have any demands. It is thus that practice and praxis have met at somewhat of an impasse, leading Yates McKee to write that Occupy may indeed represent "the end of socially-engaged art" (McKee 2016). Symbolic actions, individualized expressions of discontent, and performative politics are no longer the refuse of the artistic avant-garde—they are the keystones of contemporary political praxis. In the ensuing chaos, the distinct role of art is much less clear.

It is against this backdrop that I adopt the perhaps orthodox position that my practice cannot qualify as praxis or vice versa. Instead I approach each role with distinct criteria, incorporating research to evaluate how I might separately politicize practice and praxis. Artistically this has taken many forms, from running as a performative candidate in an Irish General Election (*Liberate Art* 2016), to purchasing the identity of a struggling gallery (126 © Kerry Guinan 2014), to an anti-gentrification intervention that resulted in a home visit from a Garda Síochána (the Irish police force) (*Presenting the Cultural Quarter* 2017). Such works could also be accused of aestheticizing politics and are at best ambivalent in their political relationship to the art institution. I place my work within the legacy of institutional critique, a conceptual art movement that criticizes the ideology of the art institution through the institution itself. For example, in 1974, Michael Asher, an American artist representative of the movement, removed a partition wall in a Los Angeles gallery, effectively bringing an office into the exhibition space

and critiquing the hidden bureaucracy of the art gallery. To critique something is, however, to continually reaffirm it, and my work occupies a difficult interstitial position that, on the one hand, antagonizes the art institution and, on the other, receives arts funding, exhibition, residency opportunities, and validation by the neoliberal academy.

While my right to critique the depoliticization of art is therefore questionable, I would argue its validity on the basis that my work has never aimed to effect social change, at least in a direct sense. Rather my practice is aimed at testing the boundaries of the aesthetic—precisely the political and material boundaries that prevent art from being a tool of social change. In *Liberate Art* (2016), for example, my radical election programme promising the ‘liberation of art from class’ was intended to fail, in order to illustrate the limitations of both contemporary art and liberal democracy. In *Presenting the Cultural Quarter* (2017), I highlighted how a contemporary art gallery with progressive public art, education, and outreach programmes is nevertheless implicated in local gentrification. And in *126 © Kerry Guinan* (2014), a small, independent, artist-run contemporary art gallery became reliant on my private sponsorship in order to meet their running costs.

If activism understands social relations in the spirit of free will and agency in an ‘arena of exchange,’ whereby voluntary participation determines the process and outcome of the project, my work, in contrast, considers social relations in Marxist terms, as the invisible economic binds that determine the very limits of agency.<sup>3</sup> I am currently exploring this distinction through the development of a style called ‘relational socialist realism,’ an expanded form of social practice that involves participants as agents of the economy, rather than free will.<sup>4</sup> As an example, my current work, *Artists* (2019), comprises a series of blank, white canvases, which have been signed in the bottom right corner, not by myself, the artist, but by the factory workers involved in the canvas’ production in the Dominican Republic. The aim is to politicize art once more but to do so honestly. For while the leftist paradigm has

been depoliticized in art, its capitalist politics are as organized and efficient as ever. The global art market, which determines the artistic trends that are taught in art schools and supported by art institutions, reduces art to its investment potential and remains entirely unregulated. Global companies, trading in arms, oil, and all manner of appalling commodities, sponsor the arts as a means of claiming moral capital. In countries that have undergone austerity after the 2008 recession, funding cuts to the arts have made such sponsorship all the more integral. This is what it means to be organized: to have laws, structures, and practices in place that facilitate your economic interests. My practice confronts this situation by repeatedly highlighting, in and through its institutions, that art is subservient to capitalism, and is therefore, covertly, always-already politicized.

Thus, while the surface of my work expresses a commitment to social change, its intra-narrative proclaims that art, in of itself, is not enough. This is why I proceed with ‘art’ and ‘activism’ separately, allowing the split to define the motive and methodology. I do of course contribute artistic skills to movements: making banners, designing leaflets, and printing t-shirts as is determined necessary and useful. This is, technically, a form of politicized art practice, but to declare it so, as an artist, carries the risk of recuperation by the art institution. For the most part, however, political organizing is tedious, bureaucratic, and unspectacular. It is the work of crafting strategies, agreeing principles, reaching out to affected communities, building their power and, perhaps most of all, keeping the administrative load ticking over. There is no reason why my work in social movements should be rewarded above any one else’s and for this reason I endeavour at all times to keep my practice and praxis at arm’s length from each other. This present exercise is an obvious and unique exception and so I can only hope that it is interpreted in the earnest manner in which it was intended.

## Notes

1. The critique of the art institution was an implicit feature of the radical community art movement, according to Matarasso (2011).
2. For Chantal Mouffe “the political” refers to this dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations,” while “politics” refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence” (see Mouffe 2016).
3. “Depending on the degree of participation required of the onlooker by the artist, along with the nature of the works and the models of sociability proposed and represented, an exhibition will give rise to a specific ‘arena of exchange’” (Bourriaud 2002). For György Lukács (1971), social relations make up the “fundamental nature” of the commodity, despite its “phantom objectivity” and appearance of “autonomy.”
4. *Relational aesthetics* is the name given by curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) to characterize art practices that treat the social element of art as their medium and form.

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# **BOOK REVIEWS**



## Book Review

*Michael Curtin, and Kevin Sanson, eds. Voices of Labor: Creativity, Craft, and Conflict in Global Hollywood. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017.*

**Ishita Tiwary**

Scholarly work on labour in screen industries has predominantly focused upon the mode of production. The most influential and well-known work is that of Janet Staiger. Staiger engages with the Marxist mode of production, arguing that a shift from capitalism to advanced capitalism encourages a “detailed division of labor,” whilst at the same time strengthening the discourse on efficiency and the star and managerial systems (Staiger 2006, 316). This division, she argues, was compounded by inter-union rivalries and the workers’ struggle for recognition. Taking this work forward, Toby Miller et al. (2005) observe that the compliance of labour organizations and governments led to Hollywood studio operations extending across the globe, where producers took advantage of the competition, thus, leading to the rise of an international division of labour which negatively impacted wages and working conditions. In his work on film and television production, John Caldwell (2008) notes that media industries are essentially socio-cultural communities that live by and follow their own rules and rituals of work and socialization. Film production, on the other hand, is based on “militaristic ordering” wherein behaviour, roles, and even spaces are carefully governed and codified

to create and maintain an ordering of bodies and materials (Caldwell 2008, 31).

The edited volume entitled, *Voices of Labor: Creativity, Craft and Conflict in Global Hollywood*, by Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson builds upon the above-mentioned work through a selection of detailed interviews with off-screen workers engaged in the mode of production for Global Hollywood. The book derives its title and form from the early WCFL radio show based in Chicago in 1926, which highlighted the lives of the workers. Through interviews, the volume highlights the craft and stresses the pleasure which off-screen workers derive from their work. One is reminded then, of Jacques Rancière’s work, in which he makes the link between aesthetic desire and labour. In it, the workers wanted to cross the barrier that separated those who produced art from those who performed labour. In this volume, we find the off-screen workers talking with love and excitement about their craft, the skill taken to accomplish a task, and the precarious condition they now confront in Global Hollywood due to diffusion of labour.

One of the interviews in this illuminating edited volume, discusses this diffusion which is currently taking place in Hollywood. The inter-

view is with a sound recordist, who observes that the biggest threat facing Hollywood off-screen workers, is the siphoning off of their jobs to other places in the United States, Canada, and England. He elaborates upon this by pointing out how each territory has different contractual labour terms which force Hollywood guilds to make concessions to the industry. Moreover, tax incentives from other places also lead to studios moving to other geographic areas as productions costs come down. This particular anecdote captures the larger impulse of this volume — how processes of globalization are changing relationships of labour in Hollywood, and the effects this has on the personnel behind the screen—professionally, creatively, financially, and personally, as well as its large-scale implications on the Hollywood studio machinery.

The book's delineation of these considerations, is divided into three parts: "Company Town," "Global Machine," and "Fringe City." "Company Town," focuses on the city of Los Angeles, the beating heart of the Hollywood Machinery. Interviews in this section include those with a showrunner, a screenwriter, a director, an art director, a costume designer, a makeup artist, a cinematographer, a grip, a sound recordist, and a musician. While these interviews insist that LA is still the creative and financial center that sustains the industry, they do acknowledge the effects of conglomeration. These effects are manifested through budget cuts, unionization, hiring processes, and creative decisions. What emerges is a growing sense of precarity, one in which the creative process is sidelined in favour of profit, leading to a working ecosystem that is predominantly white, male, with their insurance under threat, facing pressure to abandon a stable sense of home, in order to constantly move around the globe in search of work.

The migration and diffusion of off-screen labour in Hollywood is explored in the second part of the book, "Global Machine." In this section, the editors interview a studio production executive, service producers in Prague and Hungary, a production and location manager based in Scotland, and a Hollywood-based location manager. The interviews in this section reflect

upon the complexity of global film and television production and pushes back against the notion of workers in other locations stealing jobs away from Southern California. This section focuses on the intricacies of "service production," which is managed by expatriates who are experienced line producers with Hollywood credits and offer production services in other locations. Their primary duty is to negotiate and manage the needs of the visiting producers and those of local crew and bureaucracy. This set of interviews highlights the delicate tightrope of relations between transient and local crews and how the latter are given scant opportunity of upward mobility in the career ladder. Here, precarity is highlighted through the subsidies offered by local governments and their ramifications. For instance, in this section, it is observed that Prague established itself as a center to shoot big budget Hollywood films and developed the local infrastructure to support this. However, government subsidies were not Hollywood friendly, and thus Prague now finds itself losing out to Budapest. This shift affects not only service production companies but also the workers, who now find themselves facing scant job opportunities.

The last section of the book *Fringe City*," examines the role of visual effects (VFX) and the people behind creating it. The editors argue that VFX workers lie on the margins of Hollywood due to the origins of the field in the digital start up culture of the 90s. Its precarity lies in its geographical dispersion, supply firms outnumbering the demand (hundreds of firms as opposed to six major studios), the removal of directors from the physical production processes, and an atmosphere of fear and isolation amongst the employees who work in small cubicles at these firms. This section lays bare, that although VFX forms the backbone of the Hollywood global blockbuster, the labour behind it is perhaps the most exploited.

The importance of this book lies in laying bare the infrastructure of the Global Hollywood mode of production, the method used to collect these interviews, and future direction it can offer to other studies on labour and screen production. While infrastructure illuminates the

social, technical, and creative underpinnings of film production, the interviews in this book shed a light on the personal costs to the people involved in labour, the sociality that is needed to get a job and to manage runaway production, the technical know-how required for each task, and the skill set and creative acumen which are deployed to give a flair to what we see on screen. Susan Leigh Star observed that “Infrastructure is something that other things ‘run on’, things that are substrate to events and movements... Good infrastructure is by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work” (Star 2002, 116). Taking a cue from Star, can one think of Hollywood as good infrastructure as it makes invisible the labour behind what we see on screen? The interviews in this volume, however, indicate the precarity that the workers contend with on an everyday basis ranging from safety precautions, the waning influence of guilds, and the dispersal and diffusion of labour to other geographic regions. These interviews suggest that perhaps, studies of labour and film production can stimulate and provoke future infrastructure studies.

The book stands out for being an exercise in method—how extensive and in-depth field interviews can illuminate certain conceptual interests of screen studies. While previous work on labour and film production has mostly focused on archives and textual analysis, this edited volume makes a case for interviews and ethnography as an added layer to labour and screen studies. It would have been fascinating had the editors explained in further detail, their process of finding and cultivating contacts, how they structured their interviews, and how they were able to get articulate and elaborate responses from their interlocutors, as this would have helped future researchers to design their research models and to understand how to access the field.

It would also be interesting to see how studies of film production in the Global South, particularly those on Bollywood (perhaps the only national cinema that has long resisted the dominance of Hollywood), respond to the forces of globalization vis-à-vis labour, in conversation with this volume. For instance, Madhava Prasad

argues that in the context of Hindi cinema, the texts mirror both cultural factors and the modes of production at work. This industry was characterized by a fragmentation of the production apparatus, kinship networks, and reliance on merchant capital, conditions that were mirrored in the “textual heteronomy” of the films, which Prasad labels a “heterogenous mode of production” (Prasad 1998, 44-45). While Prasad uses the framework of textual analysis, Pawanpreet Kaur (2017), conducts an ethnographic study of stuntmen employed in the spectacular production sequences of the action films in Hindi Cinema. Vartikka Kaul’s (2013) work combines both textual analysis and field interviews to examine visual effects in contemporary Hindi cinema and how they create what she terms a “non-indexical realism.” Overall, this edited volume opens up possibilities to think through questions of infrastructure, method, and comparative screen studies. The book will be of interest to academics, practitioners and those who are interested to know more about the inner workings of the Hollywood mode of production.

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## Book Review

Jane Gaines. *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018.

Meredith Slifkin

Jane Gaines' latest book emerges at the juncture of an identity crisis for the feminist historiography project as it attempts to reconcile the successes and failures of the past—asking not just which histories are told, but who gets to write those histories, and whether those histories are valid. In a post-truth, post-#me too, post-post world, where the realities of the past are coming to the surface more quickly than they can be recorded for posterity, the floodgates to the injustices, omissions, and misrepresentations of women's experiences in the film industry and film academia are open. The result is a reinvestigation of the “historical turn” that emerged in feminist thought during the 1980s, and a renewed interest in histories that have not yet been rewritten.

Recent trends in scholarship which aim to take up this mantle, look to the past to make sense of the present. Such trends are made evident by projects like the Women's Film and Television History Network (responsible for the Doing Women's Film History annual conference and recent book), University of California Press's launch of the journal *Feminist Media Histories* in 2015, and Columbia's Women Film Pioneers project, of which Gaines is a founding member (the project was conceived as a series of edited collections in the 1990s, but in 2013 launched as a widely conceived digital archive meant to

promote and make readily available research on women's contributions to early cinema) (Gledhill and Knight 2015; Gaines et al. 2013; Feminist Media Histories 2015). While early feminist film theory did the work of revising the “great men” version of [film] history, it focuses mainly on the text—reclaiming archetypes (e.g. the fallen woman)—and engaging with post-structuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks. While indeed doing important work and finding agency in these characters and re-narrativizing women's representations on screen, these theorists often neglect the women behind the screen, be they women directors or women toiling in the everyday jobs of the industry.

As has been well-established, women played a large role in the fledging film industry (Mahar 2006). Prior to sound, film was still in the Wild West period of regulating its own production and exhibition practices, as well as imagining its own style and ideological goals: would it be a vehicle for documentation, propaganda, storytelling, or adaptation? It was certainly not considered an art form until much later with the inception of *Cahiers du cinéma*. With all of these possibilities open, the work of filmmaking was not yet gendered male, and many jobs such as editing were dominated by women and considered a woman's field (Hatch 2013). Which is all to say that women played an enormous role



in the early film industry before allegedly disappearing. Jane Gaines wants to find out what happened to these women, both in the changing film industry and in second wave feminism's failure to acknowledge them. Her work constitutes an important contribution to the field on three fronts: the history of women in the silent film industries, histories of film that omit their contributions, and how first attempts at revising that history fall short.

*Pink-Slipped* is an altogether different beast from much of the important historiographic work done for the Women's Film Pioneers Project. Gaines' approach is both empirical and philosophical. While she does the historical research necessary to shine a light on pioneering women who worked at all levels of the industry, this project is a Trojan horse for her overarching thesis, which argues for a reconsideration of historical philosophy and methodology, and is critical of the myopia of early feminist film historiography in particular, and second wave feminism more generally. The subtitle to her book, *What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?*, is asked mainly in irony. In fact, Gaines refuses to answer this question, calling on the reader to instead use the rhetorical device of "What happened?" to "anticipate a theory in which past and present are put in constant relation" (Gaines 2018, 139). Each chapter is an exercise in juxtaposing historical events with their later narrations, and what was lost in between. It is through understanding this relationship between past and present that she hopes the reader will learn to challenge any history that is shaped to fit the narrative of an already established outcome, and to question our complicity as scholars.

In the first three chapters of the book, Gaines follows the careers and "disappearances" of multiple early cinema polyglots, both well-known and lesser-known, in order to underscore the discrepancy between past and present, and its implications for the future. She discusses trailblazing figures like Mary Pickford, Gene Gauntier, Marion Leonard, Antonia Dickson, Alice Guy Blaché, Lois Weber, and truly far too many others than can be mentioned here, whose

hyphenated roles as actor-director-writer-producer-editor have been well-documented, but not fully unpacked in terms of their influence. Gaines infers that the ostensible answer to the question of "what happened?" is that nothing happened to them: careers for women in the film industry did not disappear. Having fallen prey to Roland Barthes' theory of "the prestige of *this happened*" and the tendency to narrativize history, 1970s feminists crafted a story that there were no women in the silent film or that if they were there, they had somehow vanished overnight (particularly after 1925 when the industry shifted more towards the studio system, which did result in fewer roles for women though hardly constitutes a disappearance) (Gaines 2018, 20-23; Barthes 1986, 13). Gaines claims that such attempts to search for the significance of gender roles in history are inherently paradoxical insofar as they are searching for the existence of a hierarchical gender dynamic that they themselves are imposing through the "successful failure" narrative (Gaines 2018, 23). Much of Gaines' logic takes on this ouroboros-like structure, which ultimately creates more questions than it provides answers, but intentionally so, as she insists that this is the best way to encourage further research: through constant re-evaluation.

Gaines puts her theory of historical re-evaluation into practice in Chapter 3, for example, where she revisits the case of early film pioneer Alice Guy Blaché, a perpetually unstable figure in film history, whose "career narrative has been radically revised over the century [...] variously characterized, demoted and promoted" (Gaines 2018, 51). Gaines traces a century of histories on Blaché (industrial and scholarly alike) that in some cases omit her contributions completely and in other cases accredit her with directing or producing upwards of one thousand films for the Gaumont Company. Gaines' object of study for the chapter is the dispute over the supposed first film directed by Blaché, *La Fée aux choix* (Gaumont Company, 1896 [disputed]). Through discourse analysis as well as her own extensive archival research, Gaines muddies the water of the already conflicting accounts on the film discovered in the late 1990s at the Swed-

ish Film Archive: is this the first film directed by a woman? Should we question the indexicality of this image? Can the film be attributed to Blanche? Why does the image not fit with the one described in Blanche's memoirs? Have feminist scholars hastily claimed this as the first film by a female director? (Gaines 2018, 53; McMahon 2002, 20). As in each of her case studies, Gaines is less concerned with finding definitive answers to historical questions than with opening the field of inquiry and questioning those who have attempted to provide answers. She prefers to prove the ways in which a history is never singularly knowable, and to show that any historical investigation necessarily invites larger questions of "where films come from" (Gaines 2018, 70).

Later chapters in the book (five through seven) take a more explicitly theoretical and even philosophical tone, contesting concepts of "historical time," or the notion of a linear past, present, and future. She argues against the practice of "correcting" historical accounts, warning that "we revise the historical record at our peril, knowing that it will be revised again and yet again, long after this moment of reassessment" (Gaines 2018, 31). Gaines is essentially arguing for a sort of "block universe" view of history in which the past, present, and future are simultaneously occurring at all times, making them infinitely accessible and therefore impossible to accurately represent. Despite these metaphysical musings, she nonetheless remains rooted in the specificities of the silent film industries by utilizing the organizing principle of melodrama as a mode or prism through which to understand the condition of early cinema. In Chapter 5 she introduces her "melodramatic theory of historical time," which posits an experiential approach to the "everyday uncertainties of historical time," uses melodrama as a schematic to relate the moral to the temporal (Gaines 2018, 95-6). We see this in the tropes of *almost* or *too late* that generate melodramatic tension, or in the moral legibility of actions and consequences which form the narrative structure of fallen women films, and force the questions of uncertain futures rooted in a desire to return to

the categorically impossible past of "what was." As an example, Gaines uses the film *Shoes* (Lois Webber 1916), citing Peter Brooks' formulation that melodrama is propelled by the desire to reveal injustice and maintain existence in a "space of innocence" from beginning to end (Gaines 2018, 97; Brooks 1976). The idea of Brooks' moral legibility is hardly new to discourses on melodrama, but Gaines is approaching this familiar theme from a uniquely temporal position: she sees melodrama as a mode distinctly suited to a circular rather than linear view of historical time, insofar as it is driven by the desire to return to an impossible past. In the following chapters, Gaines interestingly relates this to the moral/temporal responsibility of any historian (film, feminist, or otherwise): to return over and over to the past, and to avoid the tendency of narrativizing the past by framing it in false equivalency to the present.

Gaines ends her book with an almost-answer to the original question of "what happened" (by her own estimation there is no way to provide a definitive answer to such an inquiry). Of course women never left the silent film industries, and their perceived disappearance is the symptom of a second wave feminist approach that aimed to impose a narrative on the past, therein failing to recognize the more subtle and less directly traceable waves of influence made by the myriad women workers in the industry. Which is not to say that women did not, in some ways, disappear. Gaines ends with the ironic and appropriately circular assertion that "women were replaced by the motion picture narrative structure that they had helped to develop," in essence "pink-slipping" themselves, only to be pink-slipped by history as well (Gaines 2018, 193). This claim is bold and inspires further thought, which is likely Gaines' intention—to keep the gyre of feminist historiography in motion. This extremely ambitious project many years in the making, provides a significant contribution to both histories of women in the silent era, as well as to philosophical discourses on history and time. Undeniably (though not entirely) Western in scope, this project calls for further research that might investigate the mechanisms of his-

ory-making at work in the contexts of other film cultures and industries. Ultimately, the book is a valuable reflection on the processes of history-making, and an interrogation of the blind-spots that such practices create.

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## Book Review

Vicki Mayer. *Almost Hollywood, Nearly New Orleans: The Lure of the Local Film Economy*. University of California Press, 2017.

Mark Barber

In *Culture and the Public Sphere*, Jim McGuigan defines cultural policy analysis as “the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings” (McGuigan 1996, 1). In calling for a political specificity and institutional analysis of cultural policy, McGuigan has perhaps indirectly prompted a range of recent scholarship that engages with the relationship of cultural policy to labour, space, and political economy. In *Almost Hollywood, Nearly New Orleans*, Vicki Mayer addresses these intertwining relationships through a self-admittedly “modest” exploration of how the implementation of film tax credits in New Orleans, Louisiana, has transformed local media labour practices and urban spaces, as well as media representations of the city’s culture (Mayer 2017, 3). In doing so, Mayer’s analysis opens up the possibility for other case studies of local film economies in North America, and how they reshape our understanding and experiences of the interrelation of taxation, labour, and urban space.

Mayer’s argument necessarily rehearses the established political economic notion that neoliberal cultural policy invites broad privatization of public institutions, spaces, and industries. In theory, film tax credits—which are a popular tool used by state and provincial governments in North America to attract major Hollywood

productions—generate investment in the local economy and labour pool. Mayer provocatively questions this assumption, tying it to a supply-side economic policy that advantageously targets poorer cities in the Deep South, such as New Orleans (Mayer 2017, 2). Relying on a range of methodologies—including theories of space, political economy, and historical analysis—Mayer ultimately argues that film tax credits unevenly benefit Hollywood production companies, foster a precarious labour force, and gentrify urban space.

Among the compelling contributions Mayer offers is a historical rethinking of New Orleans’ relationship to the film industry, particularly in the early twentieth century. Chapter one details at great length the transactional history between land developers, film industry figures, and politicians, who collectively vied for a prominent local film economy in New Orleans in the early twentieth century. Mayer importantly notes that early films shot and set in Louisiana exploited the cultural stereotypes of the Creole population, as well as the state’s association with French culture. These films, in part, were produced to encourage travel to New Orleans to participate in the city’s Carnavalesque culture. Mayer uses this historical context to provide a framework for the current film tax credit system in New Orleans, particularly how it has been used to

create investment in the local tourism industry. This thoroughly researched history is useful for early film history scholars, particularly in how it situates both larger systems and key individuals as important players in the formation of early local film economies. It is also instrumental in revealing the racist histories of early film productions, and how these cultural stereotypes were exploited for economic purposes.

Chapter two explores the contemporary state of the local film economy in New Orleans. Highlighting some of the book's major claims and criticisms about film tax policy, Mayer investigates how the implementation of film tax credits in Louisiana has dramatically shaped labour, space, and the circulation of wealth. The central discussion around what Mayer calls "the reorganization of space"—though 'transformation of space' seems more appropriate—reveals how film tax credits result in the privatization of public spaces as a means to revitalize the local economy (Mayer 2017, 44). However, as Mayer descriptively outlines, much of this gentrification unevenly benefits the tourism industry, creates a contingent, precarious media labour pool, and further centralizes wealth amongst the privileged while continuing to displace minorities along intersectional lines of race and class.

This discussion of gentrification is a critical intervention into scholarship on the phenomenology of space in New Orleans. Mayer rightly takes issue with scholars who have problematically framed the Disneyfication of space in New Orleans as resisting the dominant forces of imperialism by prominently representing local cultures (Mayer 2017, 50, 59). The creation of film tax credits is directly related to the creation of spaces in New Orleans. These spaces have been created or re-created, per Mayer, to foster an experience of the city that is historically related to early stereotypical views of New Orleans as exotic, magical, and hedonistic. Mayer luminously reveals how these spaces conflict with the quotidian experience of actual, marginalized New Orleanians outside of the touristic neighborhoods, and how it has dramatically reduced their mobility as urban subjects. The conclusions Mayer ultimately draws in chapter two are in

line with many arguments made about neoliberal alienation, but they present the devastating case that film tax credits foster inequalities and further discrimination against those who are in desperate need of financial aid.

The final chapter employs an ethnographic/reception studies lens to examine how HBO's *Treme* (2010–2013)—a television series that was filmed and set in New Orleans—has been experienced by the local community. Mayer provides a necessary platform for marginalized subjects to speak about their own experiences with both the show and the local film economy. This chapter concludes that while many subjects responded positively to the show and its role in making the plight of marginalized New Orleanians visible, HBO still exploited local contingent labour for an unequal financial gain under the guise of philanthropy.

One of the few shortcomings of Mayer's work is an appropriation of a trend in the humanities to use the term 'archive' metaphorically to explain how media texts represent history. Chapter three devotes significant space to framing *Treme* as an "archive of cultural contexts" (Mayer 2017, 74). Mayer suggests that the series "indexes" local cultural and spatial details with which the New Orleans community identifies (Mayer 2017, 74). While Mayer's use of the archive as a theoretical and metaphorical device assists in understanding the archive's affective properties, more direct engagement is needed with the actual, frequently imperialist role that archival institutions play in the formation and preservation of historical narratives. In this sense, framing the viewer as an 'archival researcher' who closely examines the show for cultural details—as well as factual inconsistencies—contradicts one of the book's central aims: to address colonial representations of New Orleans in the media (Mayer 2017, 75–76).

Overall, Mayer offers compelling evidence for rethinking the material benefits of film tax credits. Using New Orleans as a case study is especially conducive towards understanding the effects of neoliberal cultural policy on the most marginalized areas of North America. Importantly, Mayer's focus on intersections of race



and class provide the necessary framework for thinking about how other local film economies in burgeoning North American cities such as Toronto, Atlanta, and Vancouver have dispossessed underprivileged communities. To that end, Mayer's book offers a cautionary tale about the political embrace of an entrepreneurial film industry and its cultural, political, and economic effects.

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## Book Review

*Hye Jean Chung. Media Heterotopias: Digital Effects and Material Labor in Global Film Production. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018.*

**Sarika Joglekar**

In February 2013, visual effects company Rhythm & Hues famously declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy merely two weeks before receiving the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects. Journalists and film scholars observed this occurrence as emblematic of the present industry dilemma—even as Hollywood was producing highly successful films that relied heavily on the talent of VFX companies, those same companies could not expect security in an industry racing to remain competitive against studio pressures. Hye Jean Chung's *Media Heterotopias: Digital Effects and Material Labor in Global Film Production* (2018) interrogates this underlying tension between the material realities of the labour involved in digital filmmaking and industry efforts to obscure these mechanics in service of a “seamless” product. Adapting Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces, Chung devises the theoretical approach of “heterotopic analysis,” which regards digital cinema as a meeting-space of global bodies, resources, and spatio-temporalities that retain their material traces onscreen despite efforts otherwise. Over the course of five chapters, Chung applies her heterotopic analysis to films along four different axes: mapping, modularity, monstrosity, and materiality.

In the introduction and first chapter, Chung articulates her method of returning to the materiality of the cinematic medium, the

involved labour, and the sites of production by perceiving these meticulously-hidden sutures in digital cinema. She interrogates the industry's aesthetics of “seamlessness,” which obscures the heterogeneous elements of production combined into a “flawless” digital image. The development of computerized processes is often followed by false notions of dematerialization and the elimination of human workers. This frequent slippage of meaning between digitization and automation becomes particularly problematic when used to service the industry's ideological agenda to obscure its foundational labour. Visual effects companies' specificities in style and software tend to be erased and subsumed, as they are considered conduits ultimately meant to deliver the director's vision (Chung 2018, 20). These contributing factors lead to a contradiction between the rhetorical and aesthetic emphasis on the seamlessness, magic, and automation of digital filmmaking technologies versus the reality of an increasingly transnational and collaborative workflow that relies on the global circulation of economic resources, technical expertise, and cultural labour.

Though rendered invisible onscreen, this labour leaves perceptual traces of residual materiality, what Chung terms “spectral effects,” derived from Derrida's hauntology, which posits spectrality as a mode of critique capable of addressing

issues of social justice and ethical debt. To deepen her analysis of “spectral effects,” Chung draws on Foucault’s notion of the “heterotopia,” which juxtaposes “in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 25). He uses the metaphor of the mirror to illustrate: the mirror is an object existing in reality that shows oneself the absolutely real space that one inhabits via one’s relation to the space around them, yet simultaneously makes this place absolutely unreal, since this perception is understood through a virtual space on the other side of the glass. A heterotopia may serve two possible purposes: to “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space...inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory,” or, conversely, to “create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 27). Hye Jean Chung then poses the term “media heterotopia” to describe a “digitally-enhanced audiovisual realm of representation that superimposes layers of diverse spatialities and temporalities” (Chung 2018, 37). Regarding digital cinema in this fashion is to use *heterotopic perception*, which recognizes that multiple spaces and temporalities coexist in the mediated realm of cinematic environments. Such a realization is necessary to deconstruct the illusion of digital seamlessness and recognize the labour and materiality undergirding contemporary filmmaking.

In chapter 2, “Heterotopic Mapping,” Chung explores how media heterotopias function as audiovisual indexes of complex geopolitical relations and concerns. She examines the spatial conceptions of the world in *The Fall* (Singh, 2006) and *Ashes of Time Redux* (Wong, 2008). As conceptual and visual maps, these films indicate the material sites implicated in the interrelated, but often conflicted, narratives of the film’s diegesis and its production history. In interviews on *The Fall*, director Tarsem Singh repeatedly emphasized the geographical diversity of the production process, which included location shooting in twenty-four countries. The geographical and cultural specificity of these sites, however, is

rendered irrelevant in the film’s diegesis; instead, these sites are used to perform a transnational landscape as spectacle and to enhance the fantastical and exotic effects of the film, particularly to Western audiences. Drawing from Fredric Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, Chung considers how the fictional universe of a film can orient viewers to their global situation. In *The Fall*, factual trajectories of travel are erased to “produce a simulated journey that presents an ideal vision of a readily malleable and maneuverable world” (Chung 2018, 59). In the case of *Ashes of Time Redux*, ruined remnants of the original negative were stitched together through digital restoration. The resulting film becomes a “secret archive or depository of film history” that embeds in it spectral traces of the global network of cinema culture, and material connections to a past Chinese diaspora (61, 69). *Ashes of Time Redux* constitutes a heterotopic map containing traces of the transnational trajectories of the original film that combines the material remnants of analog media (celluloid film) with digital media. It merges the binaries of local/global, national/transnational, and material/virtual in the “mediated space of the film and its material afterlife” through a “globally dispersed, digitally-enabled process of excavation and resurrection” (74). With these two films, Chung demonstrates how films can mediate or perform a global geography created by new transnational connections.

In chapter 3, “Heterotopic Modularity,” Chung turns her analysis to science fiction films that composite live action and CGI to create “alien” spaces, which manifests a spatiotemporal perception that is heterogenous and textured, as opposed to homogenous and empty. Her analysis focuses on three films, *Avatar* (Cameron 2009), *Oblivion* (Kosinski 2013), and *Interstellar* (Nolan 2014). The composite environments in *Avatar* are characterized by a convergence of materiality and modularity. The film’s virtual environments are built upon practical sets to create a realistic, visceral effect behind the digital images. Each composite element is also modular, or capable of being moved and manipulated, allowing for work on different components of the image to be geographically distributed between

companies. Approached with heterotopic analysis, the composite reveals the *thickness* of the multiple layers that form the image—the materiality of the location and materials constituting the image, as well as the globally-dispersed digital workflows that produce it. This thickness is also represented in the material manifestation into digital light and sound waves, the file size, and time it takes to render them (Chung 2018, 87). Chung also discusses how global media industries are integrating digital technologies that restructure the Fordist production model into a nonlinear and geographically-dispersed workflow that exemplifies a post-Fordist model of flexible accumulation. She examines how pre-production, production, and post-production no longer exist as distinct phases, but intermingle across timelines. Drawing from Vivian Sobchack, Chung contends that sci-fi films represent the interconnectedness of technology and one's experience of time in space, and that technology deployed in the capitalist mode creates "new spatial and temporal forms of 'being-in-the-world'" (79). Furthermore, film industries have an ecological impact on the natural environments, thereby contradicting popular perceptions of the intangibility of cinematic images. Despite attempts at erasure, the underlying processes and actors inevitably leave traces in imaginary and material forms.

In chapter 4, "Heterotopic Monstrosity," Chung moves her analysis from composite spaces to composite bodies, examining *The Monster* as a manifestation of a national imaginary that simultaneously enacts transnational cosmopolitanism in its circulation and reliance on international collaboration. *The Host* (Bong 2013) and the *Godzilla* franchise's historical references, settings, and monster design position the films as specifically East Asian cinematic objects, but the monsters themselves are sites of transnational spillage in technical expertise and in concept. Undergirding both narratives is U.S. economic, geopolitical, and neocolonial interference abroad that has led to national disasters. The monstrosity of these films, Chung argues, is the fear generated not by different bodies and their accompanying identities, but by their

intermingling. Concluding the chapter, Chung observes that contemporary monsters embody the pervasive current dread around increasingly globalized networks and digitized environments, as their unpredictable mobile existences transgress systems of control.

In chapter 5, "Heterotopic Materiality," Chung transitions into an analysis of heterotopic sites created within digital cinema, where transnational trajectories of labour, resources, and media images converge. Through an analysis of *The World* (Jia 2004) and *Big Hero 6* (Hall and Williams 2014), Chung demonstrates how contemporary digital cinema can "perform digitality in conjunction with how it performs globality" (141). Whereas *The World* criticizes the fetishization and commodification of global mobility through its emphasized distinction between real and virtual realities, *Big Hero 6* utilizes high-budget computer animation to erase the seams between these two realities and celebrate the dissolution of cultural boundaries. *The World* was shot in two theme parks in Beijing and Shenzhen featuring meticulous recreations of international landmarks. Chung considers these parks metonymic spaces for two cities known for their cosmopolitan aspirations and exercising of market capitalism. They constitute hyper-real spaces in which globally dispersed sites are situated together in an assemblage of a transnational imaginary. The film contrasts this to the reality of the park's migrant workers, for whom aspirations of geographical and social mobility are limited by structural inequalities that efface their labouring presence. Following other scholars' efforts to disengage the term "cosmopolitan" from lingering connotations of elitism and privilege, Chung coins the term "virtual cosmopolitans" to describe those who traverse national boundaries via digital means. By simultaneously highlighting and hiding the "labor of producing and maintaining the illusion of a transnational imaginary," the eponymous setting of *The World* embodies both functions of Foucault's heterotopia (150). It constitutes both a space of illusion revealing the illusory nature of real human spaces, and an other real space as perfect and meticulous as ours is disordered.

In her conclusion, she discusses Arjun Appadurai's concept of "the imagination as social practice" and Rick Carter's notion that visual effects' role is to create a space that is not merely fantasy but "a reality constructed with the power of imagination" (179). Chung suggests that financial motivations are inadequate explanation for the overwhelming use of digital effects in contemporary cinema, and instead this indicates a desire to represent worlds "dominated by pure possibility" (180). Contemporary cinema's preoccupation with digital death and reincarnation reflect the increased merging of human bodies with CGI or translation into code to form cyborg hybrid entities. Chung reasserts heterotopic perception as a critical strategy to counter the illusory nature of digital seamlessness and uncover its material underpinnings.

The strength of *Media Heterotopias* lay in its detailed film analyses that compellingly connect narrative, thematic, and production elements to contemporary experiences around digitized connection and pressures to "become" global. Sections on individual films would be excellent sources of production information and theoretical interpretation following a viewing of one of the films analyzed. A weakness of the work, however, is in its efforts to draw sustained connections between labour-undermining practices and aesthetics and the dynamics that produce them. Given its activist inclinations, *Media Heterotopias* could use more analysis dedicated to how capital becomes concentrated in the hands of a few, which creates a class of global elite that actively shape digital filmmaking production on an infrastructural level that reproduces an economically dependent and politically weakened workforce. Furthermore, certain concepts referred to in *Media Heterotopias* would benefit from additional explanation. Ideas of the virtual, Other, cyborg, and "media" itself have been applied along many different axes, and could use more clarification to service Chung's particular arguments. Similarly, "media heterotopia" is used repetitively and with lessening effect, a possible pitfall of the concept which Chung herself notes in the introduction. If one accepts that contemporary cinema is an amalgamation

of technologies, locations, materials and agents, the theoretical next steps are not particularly clear. Overall, *Media Heterotopias*' ambitious effort to "reassert the materiality of global film production" serves as valuable encouragement to deconstruct the ever-more refined illusions of unity in international film production through new approaches in thinking and viewing. The breadth of ideas and the quality of research presented in Chung's work regularly enlightens, just as it orients us towards the political stakes of filmmaking.

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## Book Review

Brooke Erin Duffy. (Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

**Claudia Sicondolfo**

This special issue of *Synoptique*—dedicated to a diverse range of intersecting questions about the labour of media and/or media labour—would not be complete without a book review of Brook Erin Duffy’s 2017 book *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. As already noted in reviews by Kait Kribs (2019) and Donna Harrington-Lueker (2019), Duffy’s book has become integral reading for anyone interested in digital media, gender studies and contemporary labour trends. Throughout the book, Duffy uses a sophisticated methodological blend of thorough historical and theoretical analysis along with practical, careful and sensitive primary research to produce an essential commentary on the evolving state of gendered creative work and cultural industry labour trends.

The book is a follow-up of sorts to Duffy’s first book, *Remake, Remodel: Women’s Magazines in the Digital Age* (2013). Within an accelerating landscape of participatory digital media, Duffy’s first book chronicled the evolution of women’s magazines, from their producers, to their audiences, and to their relationships with independent writers. Duffy’s newest book shifts its focus on the contemporary experiences of women digital media creatives. Based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork, Duffy grounds her analysis primarily in her conversations and

interviews with fifty-six social media creatives: bloggers, vloggers, DIY fashion and jewellery designers, online networkers, and street-style photographers. The reigning majority of her 56 interviewees are female, and almost exclusively fashion and lifestyle social media producers. Laid out very clearly in her preface, Duffy’s main methodological interjection is one which allows her project’s research subjects to speak of and through their lived experiences.

Duffy begins her book with a provocative prompt. Citing Mattel’s newest “Entrepreneur Barbie”—who graced the cover of the 2014 *Sports Illustrated*’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Swimsuit Issue in a bathing—Duffy gestures towards the increasingly lucrative lure of the contemporary entrepreneur figure in consumer culture. Barbie’s celebration by *Sports Illustration* subsequently draws explicit ties between the mainstreaming discourse of “digital democratizing” and its associated mythology of meritocracy within the fashion and lifestyle creative industries: if Barbie can be a celebrated entrepreneur, so can we. Broadly, Duffy’s book challenges the ever-present “glowing optimism of techno-enthusiasts” (Duffy 2008, x) by providing much-needed critique and detailed historical context of global, economic, and structural transformations within digital media’s “gig economy.” More purposely, she questions the extent to which the



often-self-declared passion projects by these creative labourers are actually “paying off” within a heightening, individualizing, “CEO of Me, Inc.” era.

In Chapter 1, Duffy develops her most significant theoretical intervention within the contemporary scholarship of precarious and gendered digital labour: that of aspirational labour. In overviewing how social media producers *aspire to* succeed, Chapter 1 situates social media content production within a career trajectory where labour and leisure are said to have the opportunity to coexist. Denoted as “a practice and a worker ideology,” Duffy explains how “aspirational labor” is made up mostly of “uncompensated, independent work, propelled by the much-venerated ideal of *getting paid to do what you love*” (Duffy 2017, 41; emphasis in original). Grounded within historically constructed notions of femininity such as community, affect and commodity-based self-expression, aspirational labour is reinforced by the “seductive ideology” of contemporary post-feminist logics of visibility, individual expression and empowerment (11). (*Not*) *Getting Paid* demonstrates how the pairing of contemporary passion-work with traditional women’s work—journalism, video production, advertising and publicity—continues to (invisibly) propel the engines of capitalism through women’s affective labour.

(*Not*) *Getting Paid* successfully contributes its meticulously researched and situated gendered lens to recent scholarship about shifting digital media workplace cultures and technologies. Following a research lineage that examines labour trends through carefully developed fieldwork (for example, Baym 2015; Cohen 2016), Duffy interprets her interview data alongside industry field notes and historical inquiry. She also engages theoretical analysis from media studies, gender studies and sociology—an interdisciplinary methodology which has the ability to unravel the complex and influencing layers of a commodifying digital media labour economy. While the digital media industry is propelled by trends in innovation, for example, Duffy’s interdisciplinary methodology demonstrates how, as an industry, it remains largely bounded by trad-

itional gendered workplace and leisure expectations.

In Chapter 2, Duffy traces a lineage of gendered “aspirational consumption.” She turns to representations of women shopping within Victorian and early twentieth-century literature and eventually links their class aspirations to those shared by entrepreneurial women within digital media gig economies. Duffy historicizes the promises of unpaid passion-work within a marketplace that encourages status-induced consumerism and, thus, permits and encourages consumer-based feminine self-expression. For turn-of-the-century women who publicly displayed themselves as fashionable shoppers, aspirational consumerism was a status-symbol projection of “*who the individual may become*” (23; original emphasis). By historically situating today’s so-called digital democratization promises—and their delusions of gendered hierarchies—Duffy explains how a shift from feminized consumption towards cultural production ultimately re-inscribes gendered labour inequalities. Duffy argues that the (digital) media workplace landscape—albeit fragmented through individual start-ups—continues to attract and cluster women in the “pink ghetto”: private, segregated spaces of “promotional or below-the-line” communication jobs (43), through an affective “lifestyle brand” ethos and with endless aspirational promises of personal self-fulfillment and public, professional success.

Arguably, though, Duffy’s rich inter-textual and multi-disciplinary methodological approach is sustained through a debt provided by her subject-centered approach. Throughout (*Not*) *Getting Paid*, Duffy holds true to two of her main project goals: to uphold the legitimacy attributed to the “passion” work her research subjects generously narrate for her, while also theoretically drawing out important contradictions in their self-descriptions (Duffy 2017, xii). In Chapters 3 and 4—two chapters that heavily interlace digital media labour theorization and subject-centred life stories—Duffy centres these two main goals while simultaneously critiquing the social, economic, political and gendered structures that surround the often-invisible labour of

her interviewees.

Chapter 3 “exposes the deep cracks” in narratives of social media labour, leisure and entrepreneurial amateurism (Duffy 2017, 48). Through her interviewees’ shared experiences, Duffy articulates how these social media aspirants do, in fact, treat their social media work *as* work, but are continually lured to it through its most salient conditions and features, such as: promises for creativity, relationship building in on-and-off-line contexts, and access to various modes of individualized self-expression. However, Duffy pulls a divisive tension between labour and leisure from their origin stories. Julianne, a fashion blogger, for instance, tells Duffy: “The most important thing for bloggers is to have a social presence, and in order to have a social presence ... you really need to be *on*, and ... interacting with people a lot ... one just keep[s] at it [and has to] juggle a life of work, and writing the blog” (70, 96; emphasis in original). Duffy attributes Julianne’s (and others like her) self-branding and self-fashioning to a sort of post-feminist “peacocking” subjectivity, whereby a form of success—or empowerment—is envisioned as possible through commodity visibility. The social media producer (and her body) must be permanently accessible and active and—in the words of Julianne—“always on.” What’s most remarkable about this chapter is how Duffy remains sincere to her chosen subject-centred methodology. She demonstrates she is capable of providing important social media labour critique, while not critiquing the subjects themselves—who, let’s not forget, are willingly re-labouring (likely for free) on behalf of academic research. In this methodological feat, Duffy echoes Nancy Baym’s important reminder to avoid understanding labouring relationships as “inherently either genuine or alienating, empowering or oppressive...they are all of these and more, often at the same time” (79).

Duffy continues to draw out the complexities of relational labour in Chapter 4, asking important questions about the “authenticity brand” of lifestyle social media content production. This chapter explores the contradictions these women are challenged to uphold while overworked and

underpaid, “given that the ‘authenticity’ trope is increasingly compliant with the demands of capitalism” (Duffy 2017, 100). While women—like New York based model and blogger Crystal—sustain their “brands” by being “real,” or “ordinary,” or “just like you or me,” they explain how they must continuously tightrope between concealing and revealing the veneer of their “authenticity brand.” In other words, Crystal creates a cooking brand that is “attainable but also aspirational.” This is a “realness” that Crystal works hard to code as relatable to her imagined audience, and because, as Duffy elaborates, “one’s *creative voice* is synonymous with her commoditized *brand*” (135; original emphasis). Chapter 4’s life stories reveal how the tensions between professional and personal realms simultaneously help these labourers (aspire to) succeed, while also keeping them susceptible to public surveillance, scrutiny, and confined to normalizing visibility tropes of commoditized femininity. Consequently, their eventual ability to profit is made possible through paid sponsorships, but often only *because* of their “successful” ability to leverage their “authenticity brand.”

In Chapter 5, Duffy pushes the contradictions between “staying real” and “selling out” further. In other words, her interviewees discuss the difficulties of actually, publicly, and successfully making a living doing what they love—which eventually means landing a paid corporate sponsorship. Herein lies the tension explored in Duffy’s potentially strongest chapter, which deftly argues that while the digital media landscape has borne many “partnerships” between grassroots bloggers and industry behemoths, these industry arrangements continue to unfairly sustain inequitable “partnership” imbalances. Such industry disparities, Duffy argues, harken back to mid-century, word-of-mouth, multi-level marketing systems (like AVON), which affectively targeted women and their “housewife” communities. While these social media producers *need* these advertisers to get paid, the “partnership” advantages continue to out-favour corporations: a blogger’s “authenticity” brand helps breed a more organic, “influencer” brand for the business, while simultaneously providing

the corporation with affective and affordable (or, often, free) marketing. Here, Duffy turns to sociologist Nikolas Rose to firmly denounce the internet's myth of democratic labour and leisure meritocracy. Locked in an endless spiral of economic capitalization of their own selves, these bloggers become their brand. For these women, aspiration comes in the form of a promise of exposure, as the platform of the internet is inherently rooted in its myth of discovery.

One of Duffy's most salient epigraphs precedes her sixth chapter, "The 'Instagram Filter': Dispelling the Myths of Entrepreneurial Glamour". Heather, a mommy blogger, calls blogging "the fastest hamster wheel possible. You don't ever get to get off of it." (Duffy 2017, 185). With Chapter 7 acting as her summation and concluding chapter, Chapter 6 is where Duffy's interviewees are the most revealing. It's where—as the chapter title's pun gestures towards—these social media producers remove the "filter" on their entrepreneurial aspirations. It is in this chapter where the interviewees shed light on the arduous, intensive, unglamorous work of building a Personal Brand, Inc., and where they cautiously critique the "Cult of Positivity" of "doing what you love." Heather, the mommy blogger quoted in the chapter's epigraph—once hailed by the *New York Times* as the "Queen of Mommy Bloggers"—is uncompromisingly honest about the unsustainability of the blogging profession (196), but she also admits to the privileges working from home provides for her (208). Additionally, despite running ragged on the hamster wheel, some bloggers share how they rarely publicly divulge whether or not they hire admin support. They explain that removing this filter could severely damage a hard-to-attained individualized brand. So, often, they continue to labour alone or keep their hired help secret.

By Chapter 6, the level of trust built between Duffy and her interviewees is notable. And it is, likely, Duffy's intention to end her book here—in a place of honest vulnerability. However, it is not just Duffy's interviewees who are trusting. She too, exposes a level of vulnerability in her epilogue that is rare in academic writing. Duffy's epilogue is undeniably the hardest-hit-

ting section for me—also an aspiring (white, cis, able-bodied) woman media studies academic. In the last few pages of her book, Duffy flips the aspirational veneer on herself: "I'm something of an aspirational laborer, too," she says. "After all, as a junior scholar, I am well-acquainted with the injunction to promote one's own work...I [soon] realized how similar the worlds of creative production and academic production really are—and thus how *aspirational* much of my *labour* was" (Duffy 2017, 230-231). Duffy's epilogue is profound: she, like many aspiring, women academics, feels compelled to dedicate a section of her book to laying bare the affective tensions of the academic labour of media studies—and I wonder, reading her epilogue, if my aspiring male academic colleagues would go out on such a limb. Let me be clear, in her epilogue, Duffy does not critique herself, nor her colleagues (of any gender). Rather, she acknowledges the structural tensions inherent in her own position, as an aspiring woman academic, whose privilege is notably distinct, yet mired in the affective lived realities of her interviewees.

Herein lies the methodological success of (*Not*) *Getting Paid*: Duffy is careful throughout her book to critique and situate her field of study and mirror it back to the industry that withstands it. Most notably, as media studies scholars interested in inequitable gender realities, by contradictory tensions fueled by the myths of digital democratization, and by the increasingly individualizing structures of creative labour, we can uphold Duffy's book as a methodological manual for how to do our critical work equitably and fairly. Duffy's ability to challenge the social-economic structures surrounding her interviewees, rather than the interviewees themselves, is particularly insightful for many of us who may struggle with the methodological query of how exactly to study media labour without replicating its systemic conditions of precarity. This is valuable and significant scholarship for any media studies labourer, at any level of their career aspirations.

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## Book Review

Greg Goldberg. *Antisocial Media: Anxious Labor in the Digital Economy*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

Kristen Cochrane

In contemporary discourse, critics can appear adamant that the transnational, digital ecosystem is a threat to workers. It atomizes, divides, and alienates the individual subject, while exploiting labour through covert and unfair processes of remuneration. While these arguments do carry weight, there is a further anxiety that undergirds the tensions that surround economic upheaval: the collapse of the social or, more specifically, the collapse of normative sociality and relationality. This is Greg Goldberg's argument in his rigorous and astute monograph *Antisocial Media: Anxious Labor in the Digital Economy* (2018).

Goldberg's book is a refreshing intervention amid discourse on the negative effects of digital culture and the digital economy. While "effects theories" in media studies are taught to students as a relic of the past, this line of argument continues in many popular academic books, particularly within the public intellectual circuit. Goldberg sits in opposition to these "effects hermeneutics," while articulating his ideas with a complexity that is elegantly buttressed with clarity. I do not hesitate to make the bold claim that Goldberg has the calibre of a public intellectual without forgoing nuance. The *Antisocial* of the title can evoke the spirit of a polemical text, but the provocation of this term coincides well with a book whose arguments and evidence are elaborated with precision and acuity.

It was also restorative to read a book that does not carelessly and superficially use notions of "queering" as an interpretive category. Instead, the particular modes of queer theory that Goldberg relies upon are identified and articulated before being mobilized. A maneuver like this can be unusual amid the panicked attempts by authors to make a text "feminist," "queer," or "decolonized," for it often backfires as a paranoid mechanism to prevent critiques that the text is too heteronormative.<sup>1</sup> The modes that Goldberg hones-in on do not conform to the neoliberal, identity politic moves to white, cis-gender, heterosexual, settler innocence, unfortunately produced in a postmodern, late capitalist milieu where writers and academics are short on time and kept in line by academia's predatory managerial class. Goldberg's methodological strategies make use of both the pessimist and optimist schools of queer thought. On the pessimistic side, he reckons with the works of Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, and Sara Ahmed. A word of caution on my use of the word pessimist is necessary here: I use pessimist not to mean fatalistic theoretical devices, but those theories that embody an initial rousing, negative orientation in order to rupture a toxic, infected hegemony, akin to the French existentialists and nihilists who claimed that a lack of existential meaning can encourage more diverse forms of freedom.



The utopian school of queer thought is also present in the intellectual spirit of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose work sought to encourage coalitions rather than divisions within queer theory until her untimely death in 2009.

Paranoid reading practices, as laid out in detail in Sedgwick's work, have arguably infected the ways in which cultural interpreters select their intellectual engagements, whether these cultural interpreters are op-ed writers or researchers in the humanities. In radical, activist circles that are driven by affect—academic or non-academic—the distinct dread of critiquing the conditions of one's own precarious location introduces obstacles to intellectual advancement. But Goldberg is elegant in critiquing a milieu in which he is evidently part of—as a self-identifying queer man with leftist beliefs.

His first chapter, "Anxiety and the Anti-social," a crucial examination of the shift from symptomatic reading to paranoid reading provides a context for the insidious epistemic displacement which has relied on selective affect at the expense of rigour. Goldberg reminds us of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's critique of the aforementioned "paranoid reading," the mode of interpretation which finds its legacy in symptomatic reading. A historicization of anxiety follows, illustrating how anxiety has been pathologized and subsequently medicalized. Drawing from Foucault, Goldberg highlights the uses of diagnosing anxiety through mechanisms that administer techniques of discipline, punishment, surveillance, and control. An important contention that guides the book is Goldberg's description of anxiety as a mechanism to "police the solitary pervert." Rather than enjoying and embodying solitude, the subject must embrace the normative grid of collective and communal responsibility. A deviation from this matrix is in violation of deep-seated yet typically unspoken behavioral codes.

The second chapter, "Playing," Goldberg maps the ways in which one's contemporary work is figured as a "symbolic object" in which the right forms of sociality are constructed. This construction is formulated through discourse, be it academic, journalistic, political, or conveyed

through statements from the multinational corporations who operate on the logics of a sharing economy or platform capitalism. It is in this chapter that Goldberg takes aim at dominant readings on playbour (play + labour)—that the difference between work and play has become increasingly unclear. The critique of an inability to discern work and play exposes an uneasiness towards what Goldberg aptly labels "antisocial hedonism."

A discussion on the apprehension surrounding technology that replaces human labour is the subject of the third chapter, "Automation." Here, Goldberg convincingly argues that the worries encircling technological unemployment are not concerns motivated solely by the loss of income for workers. Rather, concerns towards automation are also motivated by the disruption of social bonds and communal ties. Again, the discursive origins for these anxieties are multiple; they originate not solely from workers, but from various agents.

In his fourth chapter, Goldberg addresses the discourse on the "sharing economy," where he adds an endnote stating that the term "sharing economy" is regularly substituted by the terms "gig economy" or "platform capitalism." An assessment of literature in various settings—journalistic, trade, op-ed/think piece, and academic publications—demonstrates that many critics lean on arguments of worker exploitation by technological advances. Critics of the sharing economy argue that it provides the conditions for corporations to undervalue the labour of its workers. What lurks beneath these assumptions, however, is a perceived attack on communal relationality, or a collapse of social bonds.

Goldberg's body of scholarship is fascinating, and it diverges from the unproductive, paranoid readings that persist in queer studies and media studies. In his 2017 essay, "Through the Looking Glass: The Queer Narcissism of Selfies," Goldberg also draws upon the antisocial thesis in queer theory to problematize psychological diagnoses of the perceived social problem of the selfie's popularity, or, of subjects taking what is considered to be too many photos of themselves. Like anxiety, narcissism has an inverted



orientation to the self and bears a compulsion to scrutinize. In place of a paranoid hermeneutic, Goldberg chooses the reparative strategy in dismantling diagnoses of narcissism, and elects a reparative approach again in *Antisocial Media*, by scaling the parameters that make anxiety an attractive diagnosis for the maintenance of a normative social realm.

As I read the book, I wondered where taste politics and taste hierarchies could figure in the normative rejection of “antisocial” forms of relationality. This is not to say that a lack of attention to taste is a glaring omission but rather it is, in my eyes, a next step that could be a vital addition to his body of scholarship. Goldberg does briefly mention some denigrated forms of play, such as reading celebrity gossip blogs and looking at online pornography, but I am left with my appetite whet for more on taste formations. I would be delighted to read about how certain “antisocial” activities are hierarchized in Goldberg’s future work.

It is evident that Goldberg is a superb teacher—when ideas are posited, Goldberg concisely explains their origin and the stakes. Not only is this useful for building interdisciplinary coalitions, but it reads as a work that would be useful for students—at both the undergraduate and graduate level—who would benefit from contextualization in order to advance in the fields with which Goldberg is in conversation: media studies, affect studies, and queer theory, among others. Moreover, it is a book I would recommend to friends and acquaintances who have inquiring minds but bemoan what they consider to be impenetrable academic writing. *Antisocial Media* is not impenetrable, but rather, creates fissures in what is not immediately apparent among the increasingly urgent narratives, ideology, and discourse relating to our contemporary digital economy.

Wayne Yang’s essay, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” where the authors state: “The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence’, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, 1).

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## Notes

1. I am certain that these critiques exist in a formal text, but the text I frequently think of that relates to the frivolous use of a politically charged term is Eve Tuck and K.

## Book Review

*Julie A. Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim. Mothering Through Precarity: Women's Work and Digital Media. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.*

**Anne-Marie Trépanier**

In a recent interview published in conjunction with the exhibition *Our Happy Life: Architecture and Well-Being in the Age of Emotional Capitalism* produced by the Canadian Center for Architecture, Wendy Chun and Orit Halpern (2019) exchange ideas on the measuring of happiness by the state and the emotion economy. By quantifying their citizens' emotional well-being, governments presuppose that there is a correlation between public policies and happiness production. Starting from the interpretation that "happiness is a question of luck," Halpern suggests that this correlation enforces a democratization of probability and resiliency by encouraging people to take risks in becoming happily successful. Thus, a happy individual is one that is resilient to precarity and flexible enough to adapt to a fast-changing, unpredictable environment.

As the bearers of future citizens, mothers are particularly affected by these unstable grounds, on which they have to navigate while feeding their families with hopes for happy lives. In *Mothering Through Precarity. Women's Work and Digital Media*, Julie A. Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim present an ethnographic study and media analysis of the role played by digital media in contemporary mothering, as working and middle-class mothers face emotional and financial precarity. This collective research effort brings together each scholar's personal and

professional experiences: Emily's as a feminist media ethnographer and mother, and Julie's as a "happily child free" scholar working on women's work, neoliberalism and digital media. Inspired by feminist audience studies and radical contextualism, the book resists separating media from the intersubjective networks and contextual settings of the digital mundane.

Facebook, Pinterest, mommy-blogs, couponing, and health and parenting websites compose what Wilson and Yochim call the "mamasphere," a constellation of online resources and communities supporting mothers experiencing emotional and financial precarity. Targeting two localities from northern Pennsylvania where the poverty rate verges on 30%, these postindustrial districts experience abrupt demographic and economic mutations as they get propelled into the service economy. Although they cannot speak for all mothers—most of the participants being white, middle-class, heteronormative mothers—Wilson and Yochim affirm that the collected testimonies proffer a glimpse of the day-to-day reality of *some* women and illuminate the "silence and gaps" of everyday gendered life.

In the first chapter, the authors explore how mothers' lives get affectively *loaded up* by family autonomy and the *government of mothers*—moms' self-reflexive work and affective management. "Good mothers must be happy mothers,"

but paradoxically they are also expected to get around the dissatisfactions and anxieties triggered by the inevitable friction between individualization and normalization of the nuclear family. Taking inspiration from Ana Villalobo's ethnographic study *Motherload*, the authors argue that neoliberalism *intensifies* mothering as it is based on the expectation that family security is contingent on mothers. In other words, mothers must carry the burden of multiple loads in order to protect their family's sovereignty and privatized happiness in a recessionary economy.

In the second chapter, the authors explain how precarity forces mothers to rehabilitate their family as a "rationalized web of economized care" for the promise of a secure life. Activities and initiatives taken by mothers in this aim are defined by the concept of "mamapreneurialism" and the figure of the "mamapreneur." Their interpretation of contemporary mothering as *business* adds to recent critiques of the rationalization and quantification of happiness and the financialization of daily life. Happiness becomes a family enterprise where the mother is the boss and consequently, must release anything that interferes with rationalized, optimized output—weaknesses, anxieties, pessimistic mindsets—outside of the family sphere.

In chapter 3, Wilson and Yochim explore the networks of support used by mothers as digital users in the mamasphere. As they underline, these banal entanglements of digital media and daily life can concurrently exacerbate and alleviate mother loads. The authors deconstruct these digital entanglements into three sections—the "charge," the "commune," and "code and recode"—to indicate how the mamasphere forges a network of affects that feed into resilient happiness. As they present it, the mamasphere *charges* women's mundane activities with affective punches such as project ideas, entertaining games, online courses, blogging and vibrant exchanges of comments and posts. On the down-side, these communities of users rest on the free digital labor of mothers in order to stay active and vigilant. Paradoxically, these vital sharing platforms add another point of pressure on women, since they must bear the weight of

digital labor in hope of a sense of community. In addition, participation on those platforms *converts* the events of the everyday into an infinite spectrum of "happy potentialities": any instant can be remediated through the lens and filters of digital media as a "happy" moment. The laughable example of "happy vacuuming" is at the very least, telling of the desperate need for aesthetic, insightful moments.

The erosion of social structures and public services is pushing mothers to become resilient, not only for themselves but for the prospects of humanity. The fourth chapter presents collective modes of mothering as *individualized solidarities*, where the aim of collectivity is to privatize happiness through resiliency nets. In the introduction, Wilson and Yochim provide a fascinating overview of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mothering support groups and media productions, such as La Leche League and their *Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* (1958) book. Despite the briefness of this historical segment—which could have benefitted of a more significant role within this chapter—the correlation between the early stages of neoliberalism and the government of mothers is well demonstrated as they move on to two contemporary communities: the Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), a grassroots international Christian organization for the self-education and guidance of mothers; and Momastery, an international online community of support led by mom microcelebrity Glennon Doyle. This comparative analysis makes clear that by encouraging mothers to become leaders, not only in the nucleus of family, but throughout various nodes of the mamasphere, these affective infrastructures induce a tolerance of precarity. By politicizing motherhood through the government of mothers, neoliberal systems propagate depoliticized resiliency and thus shut off any possibility for alternative ways of being.

But is family autonomy immutable? The authors suggest otherwise in their final interview with Nancy, a young mother of one child working full-time time as an administrative assistant, struggling with physical and emotional exhaustion. The interview captures the way in which Nancy's strategy for family happiness is in

contradiction with her own personal happiness scripts. Even with her anchored heteronormative gender assumption, she appears to be drifting to the edge of “affective alienation,” a concept gleaned from feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed. Affect aliens resist imposed conventions of happiness, they accept it neither as a social norm nor as a social good; instead, they are those who are “alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world,” whether it be negative or positive. Drawing from Jean-Luc Nancy’s definition of *happstance*, the unpredictable and contingent nature of events that makes the world how it is, Ahmed suggests that affect aliens embrace chance, let go of the obsession of happiness and let the “hap” happen. Wilson and Yochim make a solid claim by calling to “new sensibilities,” above ideological critique and official policies, to recode our communities of care. Although they limit their example of new family structures to cohousing, their conclusion opens up a network of potentialities beyond family unity. Ultimately, new sensibilities will feed into new consciousness of race, class and gender to extend collective resources to those who are pushed to the margins of neoliberalism.

Overall, Wilson and Yochim draw up a dejected, disillusioned portrait of motherhood in our neoliberal era, which they recognize as incomplete. At multiple times throughout the book, the authors reiterate that their research focused on the heteronormative nuclear family and their use of digital media. Thus, the potential for extrapolation seems limited. The book could have benefitted from a wider field of vision to encompass the affect aliens that stand at the limit of its framework. More of an unhappy diagnosis than a claim for emancipation, this book rightly testifies of the sturdiness of family autonomy within Western individualized affective economy.

Conclusively, *Mothering Through Precarity* provides a complex, detailed account of the trails and traces of neoliberalism within the routines and affective networks of mothers. The authors offer an original account of their interdisciplinary research where the oscillation between the

digital mundane and ethnographic observations is at times out of balance. Still, this work offers a rich synthesis of preceding seminal works in cultural studies and constitutes a significant and ingenious contribution to the field of digital media and gender studies.

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# **EVENT REVIEWS**

## Event Review

*Front Row Seat at the “Debate of the Century”: Slavoj Žižek vs. Jordan Peterson, April 19, 2019<sup>1</sup>*

**Joaquín Serpe**

It finally happened. Jordan Peterson faced Slavoj Žižek in a public debate. After various calls from either side to set a date—reminiscent of the press hype surrounding two heavyweight boxers—Peterson and Žižek finally decided on a time and place to resolve who is right about the world and everything in it. The place? The Sony Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto. Žižek came to

face Peterson in his own turf. The topic? Happiness: Capitalism vs Marxism. Nothing subtle about it. They were set to define once and for all the meaning of happiness, and what socio-economic system would provide the best conditions for us to attain it. The destinies of humanity were at stake and I had a front row seat.





There are multiple reasons why a review of this event is featured in a film and media studies journal, and especially in an issue dedicated to labour. The debate became a notable occasion that was broadcast and streamed live. It was also heavily commented and disseminated on social media platforms. In fact, Žižek and Peterson are popular internet personalities. Their talks and interviews circulate widely online. There are also various accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Reddit dedicated to sharing their phrases, ideas, and all kinds of media content—like memes and user-created videos. As a matter of fact, the idea for “the debate of the century” took shape on the Web. After Žižek published a piece on the British newspaper *The Independent* targeting Peterson, the latter challenged him to a public debate while arguing with a quote bot on Twitter (Žižek does not have social media accounts on any platform). Their followers immediately reacted asking for the intellectual strife to become a reality. Altogether, they not only mobilized the labour power, infrastructure and resources needed to assemble a media event of this magnitude but also revealed the work that entails being a public

intellectual in the age of social media and strong political polarization. They, thus, expose the performances of the academic and the celebrity—and the entanglement of the two—as labour.

Out of the two contenders, Žižek is probably better known both inside and outside academic circles. Since his first book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* published in 1989, he has written more than 60 books, as well as keeping a high profile in the media. There have been at least 5 documentaries made about his persona and his theoretical work, which combines Marxist thought and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He frequently writes for *The Independent* and *Russia Today*, commenting on various political and social hot-button issues. He is a provocateur and has been involved in a series of polemics by supporting Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, criticizing the LGBTQ movement, as well as the European Union’s reception of refugees. However, he remains a left-wing intellectual referent due to his long and prolific career, in addition to his populist rhetoric style.

Peterson’s rise to fame has been more recent but meteoric. A clinical psychologist and profes-



sor at the University of Toronto, he gained notoriety after attacking Bill C-16, which further protects gender expression and identity under the Canadian Human Rights Act. This event brought him closer to neo-conservatives and the alt-right movement, who regard suspiciously, even hatefully, feminism, queer theory and social liberalism. He is a self-proclaimed defendant of individualism. He preaches about a supposed moral weakness that is spreading across the youth in the Western World; the result, for him, of a certain “postmodern Neo-Marxism.” This would make the younger generations far too focused on critiquing social and economic inequalities rather than focusing on themselves. According to Peterson, this critical disposition is not the result of systemic social and economic precarity, but rather an ideology that is disseminated by the social sciences and humanities departments. And their ideologues are poststructuralist authors such as Derrida, Butler and Foucault—who, if anything, have always had a complicated relation with Marx. These claims earned Peterson strong criticism (see Haider 2018) for his lack of knowledge of both postmodernism and Marxist theory; a fact that would be put on display during the debate.

Despite their opposing political affiliations, it seems that the debate between Žižek and Peterson was meant to be. Both authors are fierce critics of political correctness, that social mandate that demands to be attentive and careful of those who are in more vulnerable social positions than us. But there are also other aspects shared between both figures that tend to be shadowed by the occasional analysis that puts too much stress on the validity and rigor of their thought.

It seems that both Žižek and Peterson touched some sort of deep social-political nerve, which has led to them becoming such relevant public figures. There is an affective side to the role they perform as cultural referents that is usually overlooked. They promise to offer answers in the context of a world that appears to be more and more complex and chaotic. We are in times of great uncertainty for liberal democracies and the global economic system. A new international right-wing wave is surging and making

its way through the First and Third Worlds responding to situations like the refugee crisis, as well as longstanding internal conflicts. We have a looming environmental catastrophe. On top of everything, we live in an era of information overload characterized by an explosion of voices and opinions coming from traditional mass media and social media platforms. In this framework of such a critical scenario, Peterson and Žižek help their followers to make sense out of a deluge of information, whilst also positioning them within a particular ideological spectrum. They provide a service that feminist theory would recognize as *affective and reproductive labour*. As Kalindi Vora explains at length in *Life Support* (2015), this type of labour, rather than referring to sexual reproduction, is instead the work that has been historically expected of women as homemakers. It has to do with caring and nurturing; providing support to the worker when they come back home. Fans of Žižek and Peterson feel themselves listened to, that they have support for their ideas, and, ultimately, through social media they can also find other like-minded individuals with whom they can share their views and experiences. Peterson and Žižek reveal the cis white male subject as a provider of emotional care, and that ultimately underscores the type of support necessary to help maintain their sense of self—one predominantly heteronormative, masculine and fragile.

The pleasure associated with Žižek is that of laughter and irony that characterizes so much of our online culture. He is excessive. He swears and tells vulgar jokes in his lectures. He sweats and sniffles. He is exaggerated when gesticulating, and he has a heavy eastern European accent. His followers are in big part after the comic relief that they get when they listen to him or read his work—a lot of his famous jokes can be also found in his books. He allows his audience to not take things so seriously. He provides a buffer zone between one and reality.

Peterson has a stiffer style, but he also has a more “human” side. He has become a self-help guru. A big part of his talks revolve around fighting against depression, taking responsibility for one’s actions, and changing one’s habits to attain

Audience arriving at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts. Photograph: Joaquín Serpe



personal fulfilment. In his bestseller *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* he orders his readers to literally stand up straight and clean up their rooms, to start searching for something to give meaning to their lives, instead of complaining about everything that is wrong and beyond their power to change. In his videos, he is moved to tears by how much confusion and pain the youth is currently going through, and by the stories of his fans who tell him how much their lives were changed by his teachings. His followers also feel that their beliefs and values are reasserted when watching his online media content. He is perceived as a professional debater who helps to maintain the status quo. The titles of clips say things like “Jordan Peterson DESTROYS feminist,” or “Jordan Peterson CRUSHES transgender debate.” However, it is very clear that they have been edited so it appears this or that way.

The debate was going to meet the various expectations of both their sets of supporters and disappoint them in other respects. Located in downtown Toronto, the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts is one of Canada’s biggest theatres. The discussion was organized by American events promoter Live Nation, and it was sold out. The audience was predominantly

white and young, between their 20s and 30s. There was also a noticeable presence of people of colour. Contrary to the idea that both Žižek and Peterson’s fans chiefly are men, there was a strong presence of women. Even more, gender distribution seemed to be 50/50. It was not clear who was there for whom, except for a young man who came dressed up in a Žižek t-shirt and Žižek paraphernalia, which he had designed and created for the event. There was also another boy who had a “Make America Great Again” hat—denoting a right-wing inclination, and, thus, partiality for Peterson. By the entrance there was a big screen on which one could see the name of the event together with images of Peterson and Žižek. This was a hotspot for people to take selfies and group photos to later share on social media. To my disappointment, the only merchandising on sale was the books of both authors. I sat beside a family—parents plus teenage son. I asked them who they were supporting and what brought them there as a family, and the father replied that they liked aspects of both thinkers. But what was most striking about his answer is that they were there “for the spectacle,” indicating the level of exposure and the allure that Žižek and Peterson have generated.





Photograph: Joaquín Serpe

Since the moment that both intellectuals came out on the stage, the audience was already laughing at Žižek's deadpan facial expression. Peterson decided to focus his first presentation on attacking *The Communist Manifesto* which was, by his own admission, the only text he had read out Marx's vast bibliography. He even confessed to have read it only twice: when he was 18 and in preparation for the debate. He said that he was going to present 10 arguments against Marx and Engels's piece, out of which he only really exposed 4 or 5. The rest was up to the audience's interpretation (Studebaker 2019). He suggested that a class-divided society finds its underlying principles in nature. He also defended the managerial class and the benefits of unrestrained market forces. The evidence for his arguments remained unclear and he left various thoughts unfinished. Despite the weakness of the presentation, his fans cheered and applauded in an act of partisanship and loyalty to Peterson and his rhetorical style.

When it was Žižek's time to speak, he point-

ed to a series of issues that indicated a deeper knowledge of Marx and the problems that the socioeconomic system is facing. He talked about the relationship between authoritarianism and capitalism in the Chinese model; he connected the refugee crisis with the international division of labour; he defended universal and free access to education and health care as a fundamental necessity for the development of society; and he defined the current climate catastrophe as a very real and worrisome limit to capitalism and humanity. His presentation received the clamouring of the people in what was going to be the longest applause of the evening.

From that moment on, something changed. Peterson's voice trembled as he declared that it would be very difficult for him to answer to the list of problems that Žižek had raised. Therefore, he began repeating his mantra about individual responsibility, and he added that he was scared that the left's discourse would be a segue for young people into the ideology responsible for some of the worst crimes against humanity—referring to the horrors of the Soviet Union. However, Peterson seemed confused, even infatuated with Žižek. He told the Slovenian that he found him very interesting (that he was quite a character), to the point that he asked him whether he considered calling himself a “Žižekian” instead of a Marxist. It felt like Peterson wanted to side with Žižek but couldn't do so due to his political affiliation and, more immediately, because he was in front of his own fans. Later, Peterson would agree that capitalism was a system that produced inequality, and that it needed some kind of regulation. Žižek took the opportunity to point that if Peterson's book is “an antidote to chaos” it is because the Canadian also sees a widespread state of crisis.

Žižek spent the last moments of the debate asking Peterson about those “postmodern neo-Marxist” thinkers that he usually talks about; who were they? Peterson tried to avoid the answer by referring to a series of statistics regarding the vast quantity of left-wing professors in the social sciences, and that these are a demagogic force. While Žižek agreed with this, he continued pressing Peterson on his knowledge

of Marxism and postmodernism, bringing up the “complex and serious” work of David Harvey and Fredric Jameson to illustrate the difference between the two intellectual movements. Peterson then mentioned Derrida and Foucault as examples. Žižek immediately responded, suggesting that he saw neither thinker as strictly leftists nor radicals, and that even someone like Foucault was at odds with Marxism. Peterson seemed clearly overwhelmed, having his expertise put into question once again.

The discussion about happiness was displaced by the pessimism that both authors expressed regarding humanity’s capacity to change the course of history, and to offer an alternative to the reigning socioeconomic paradigm. They both agreed that they were victims of a victimizing system, and that they should double down on their rejection of political correctness. In the end, Peterson did not “CRUSH” Marxism, and Žižek did not turn out to be so Marxist. It was nonetheless a collective cathartic moment; a value-producing physical gathering that condensed and exploited the affect and labour so common in our contemporary digital public sphere. If for a moment time stopped in Toronto, the world outside went on as if nothing had happened.

## Notes

1. This article has been previously published in *La Agenda* (Serpe 2019), and has been translated and revised for this publication.

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## Event Review

### *A Reflection on Precarity: The Institute for Urban Futures and Le Banquet des Précaris*

**Sadie Gilker**

Precarity is an issue that affects us all. As a direct result of capitalism, we are watching our world crumble. Environmental issues are progressing rapidly, housing is becoming scarce, assets like a well-paying steady job are rarities. Basic human rights, such as access to healthcare and education, are increasingly becoming privatized, concentrating the wealth of the world into a few hands at the top. This paper will briefly outline what precarity is, and how the Institute for Urban Futures (IUF) grappled with this question in the form of a Long Table discussion called *Le Banquet des Précaris* at Bâtiment 7 in September 2019. The IUF is a research and research creation group in the Fine Arts Faculty at Concordia University, currently under the leadership of Dr. Shauna Janssen. The Institute undertakes work that attempts to foreground a collective and varied understanding of what the urban sphere looks like, and what can be changed going forward.<sup>1</sup> While I am a member of the IUF team, the opinions in this paper are my own, and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the entire IUF team or affiliates.

As the title suggests, the discussion was around issues of precarity, and what it means to be alive and working within a neoliberal, capitalist-fueled society. As Kasmir defines it, “*Precarity* describes and conceptualizes this unpredictable

cultural and economic terrain and conditions of life” (Kasmir 2018, 1). The Banquet des Précaris engaged attendees with discussions on exhaustion, collective action, taking care, changes in the world as we know it, and what the future will look like in the new “gig-economy.” Pierre Bourdieu has claimed that “It has emerged clearly that job insecurity is now everywhere: in the private sector, but also in the public sector, which has greatly increased the number of temporary, part-time or casual positions; in industry, but also in the institutions of cultural production and diffusion” (Bourdieu 1998, 82). This can be seen in cases as diverse as casual conversations with colleagues, to academic papers, and newspaper articles which cross disciplines (see Kenney and Zysman 2016; Tolentino 2017; and Muntaner 2018). Precarity as a condition is experienced throughout the world, especially as gig and platform labour, embodied in sites such as AirBnB, Uber, Amazon and Etsy, become global norms as a way of making a living and supplementing existing work in order to survive.

With these global conditions in mind, the importance of hosting a long table discussion on the issue of precarity felt more pertinent than ever. In a discussion with Alex Tigchelaar, who spearheaded this event, she notes:



It is always important to discuss precarity. It touches all of us in different ways but when I think about those of us making our way in the increasingly neoliberalized art and academic worlds, sharing our feelings of precariousness is imperative to breaking the competitiveness that neoliberal modalities demand. We make assumptions about privilege and status in these spaces that often belie the real and painful circumstances of peoples' experiences. When we can share our fears and challenges, we become more approachable. We become more human. We are more inclined to share resources. (Tigchelaar, interview October 28, 2019)

The notion of sharing our feelings within a space that is accessible and easy to engage with develops a new layer of resistance to the hierarchical structures involved in promoting and protecting capital. It forms a unique way to address economic insecurity, as well as sharing thoughts on 'self-care' and mental and physical exhaustion in a society that always appears to be on the brink of burning out. Tigchelaar expands on this:

Vulnerability is a terrifying position to take in hierarchical institutional structures, yes. I have regretted being vulnerable at times in my life. But I am coming back to it as a power position to break the isolation I have felt holding on to shames and fears that have prevented me from moving forward with confidence. Vulnerability is essential to developing empathy and by extension more empowered social and political relationships. It is very important to me as a middle-aged woman who has lived the gig economy her entire working life (so from the age of eleven when I had my first job out of the house), to develop supportive intergenerational networks in and around increasingly inhumane institutions. (Tigchelaar, interview October 28, 2019)

These topics of discussion were essential to our conversations which we held around a long table discussion at Batiment 7, a community space in Point-St-Charles, a working class neighborhood in Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Inspired by Marleen Gorris's film *Antonia's Line* (1995), Lois Weaver developed the Long Table format to provide an open and inclusive, non-hierarchical way to discuss and process a

topic, without imposing too many restrictions. (Split Britches 2019) There are a few etiquette rules for the long table, which are easy to follow and "include items like 'There can be silence', 'There might be awkwardness' and 'There can always be laughter'" (ibid.). The Long Table format has roughly 12 seats around a table, with additional seats surrounding so that participants can move in and out of the table. This format is simple, and those who wish to talk can simply sit at the table by taking an empty seat or asking someone for their seat. This promotes a spatial awareness of the room, and allows participants to come in and out of the conversation, as you would at a dinner party. The performance-based practice leads to a breakdown of hierarchical knowledge that can be experienced in traditional academic settings, such as the conference panel format, or even classroom discussions. There is no right or wrong answers, and the space invites participants to explore ideas collectively, allowing for space to parse out ideas that are still in the process of formation. As Tigchelaar told me, "Personally, I have participated in a few and really like the format. They have always initiated interesting/enraging/engaging/fruitful/complex conversations around the chosen topic. And the non-hierarchical structure stops droners from droning" (Tigchelaar, interview October 28, 2019).

The long table format inspires truly remarkable social relations, as Shauna Janssen, the director of the IUF states:

It's a great space for breaking down hierarchies of expertise—for me a much more democratic approach to participation and engaging different publics in a conversation—so links with IUF aims to produce space—even temporarily—that foregrounds inclusion and diversity and a variety of perspectives from people. It's also mobile—we can go anywhere with two tables and some chairs! (Janssen, interview October 28, 2019)

This form of decentralizing knowledge is beneficial for a number of reasons. While it does create a non-hierarchical mode of discussing a topic, it is incredibly accessible for academics and non-academics alike to engage in conversation across positions. It is easy to set up, the materials are minimal, and it promotes face-to-

face communication. In addition, the long table format breaks down common visual cues, such as the person of expertise positioned at the front of the classroom, lecturing to a passive audience. By sitting around a table, one can listen, engage, take notes, or day dream without being judged.

I personally found the engagement with the Long Table format wonderful at the Banquet. The energy around the table was calm, the discussion brought forth was fruitful, and the attitudes were positive and inquisitive. There were more questions posed than answers given, but that is not necessarily negative. Despite the difficult concepts addressed, the long table format allowed people to discuss questions and concerns regarding the world that we live in in a way I can only describe as comfortable. With the dim mood lighting and the wonderful urban foraged meal to keep 'hanger' at bay, I felt at ease sitting around a table of mostly strangers, discussing issues that affect us all. It was nice to realize that one is not alone, as the conversation bounced around, addressing issues such as the constant struggle to find affordable housing, a job that pays well, or to find any time at all to sleep. In my (albeit limited) experience with the long table, I believe that there is space for this model to proliferate even within the institution. It is accepting, forgiving, and kind, which is something that can be hard to come by in a neo-liberal, post-capital, ever-more precarious world.

In conclusion, the event that we hosted was eye-opening in realizing shared feelings of extreme exhaustion and generated possibilities for a kind of collective self-care. By listening and vocalizing fears of my precarious position as a graduate student working multiple jobs, the event helped me assess my own position within the university, as well as the world at large. There needs to be more space for these performance-based discussion practices, and I believe that all disciplines can benefit from this type of engagement. There are more capacious avenues possible for political discussion. Lois Weaver, the credited developer of the long table format, has also experimented with other forms of performance-based discussion. Others that deserve more exploration within the institution are the Care Cafés, Porch Sitting and Situation Rooms, which all prioritize community engagement, as well as spaces to think and flow with natur-

al discussion. In a world that is becoming more fractured, individualized, and isolated, these collective agreements to discuss issues which affect us all, such as precarity, should be employed in order to break down the traditional modes of learning, and collectivize action around topics that are important to us. The idea of sitting down with a group of peers and strangers alike to discuss issues such as precarity opens up an important site for dialogue, and keeps it flowing long after the event is over. Let us remember one of most important the etiquette rules from the long table: "there is an end, but there is no conclusion" (Split Britches 2019).

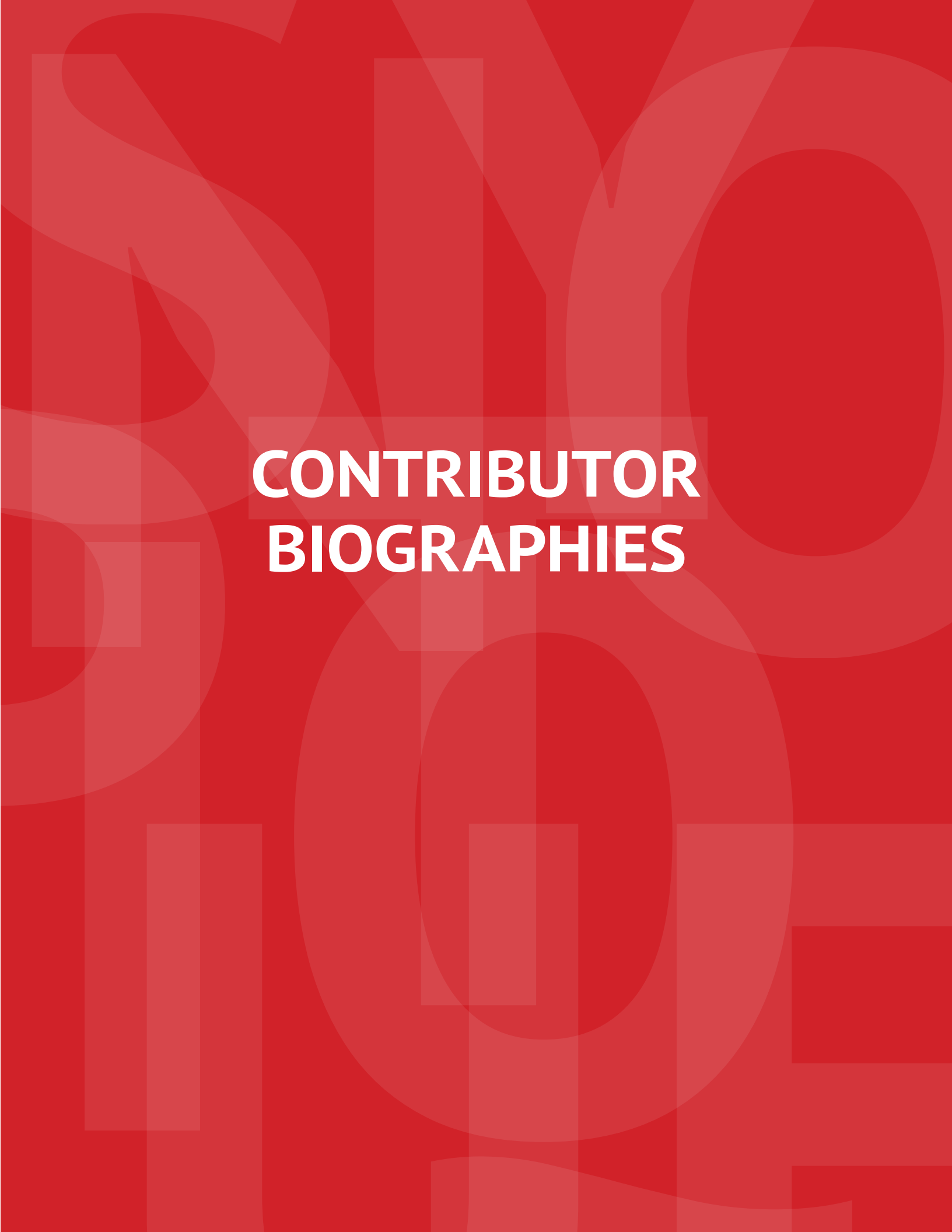
### Notes

1. The IUF was initiated in 2016 by Dean Rebecca Duclos, Faculty of Fine Arts. The IUF "is a space for bringing together faculty, artists and researchers, visiting artists and scholars, as well as students across the university and greater Montréal community, who seek to actualize and shape the potentiality of urban life—of possible and more just urban future—through the arts, culture, media, technology, business, architecture and design" (Institute for Urban Futures, n.d.). Through this framing it has hosted a variety of events from banquets, talks, conferences and workshops. In 2018 the IUF changed its focus to "developing topical research clusters with an ethos towards social justice and speculative modes of expression within the areas of Performative Urbanism, SmArt Technologies & Inclusive Cities, Social Practice & Community Engagement, Design, Sustainability & the Built Environment, and Urban Research Methodologies" (Janssen, n.d.). My own role within the IUF is to manage web content and development. In this role I update the website, promote events, and try to engage with the affiliates in the digital sphere. I am honoured to provide a reflection on the event *Le Banquet des Précarisés*.

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# **CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES**

**Mark Barber** is a 4th year Ph.D. student in Film & Moving Images at Concordia University. He received his BA and MA in Cinema and Media Studies from York University. His work explores the political and cultural economy of queer cultural institutions in North America. He has worked as a researcher for the Queer Media Database, and as a film critic for *Wylie Writes* and *Fresh from the Theatre*. He is the co-founder of the Toronto-based film curatorial collective The Citizens' Committee on Moral Hygiene, which specializes in avant-garde cinema.

**Gino Canella** is a media researcher, instructor, and documentary filmmaker. He is currently assistant professor of journalism in the School of Communication at Emerson College. His research and creative works explore activist media, social movements, and the framing of race and class. Gino produces films in partnership with grassroots community organizers, and researches how the social practices embedded in the production and distribution of media have the potential to foster solidarity among groups fighting for social justice. He is interested in how the affective nature of film and media complements traditional community organizing and promotes democratic citizenship.

**Kristen Cochrane** is a doctoral student in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montréal, Québec. Her research interests are currently located in taste politics, gender and sexuality, popular culture, social movements, and exploitation cinema in the Americas. She received her MA in Cultural Studies from Queen's University, where her dissertation examined homosociality, homoeroticism, the social politics of rurality, and queer representation in contemporary Argentine cinema.

**Sadie Gilker** is a student in the Individualized Master's Program at Concordia University, Montréal, Québec. Her work looks at violence in public spaces in Northern Ireland through the lenses of Performance Studies, History, and Urban Planning.

**Kerry Guinan** is an Irish artist and researcher exploring the relations of art, capital, and place under neoliberalism. She is a recipient of the Arts Council of Ireland's Next Generation Award (2018). Recent projects include "Our Celestial Sphere," a solo exhibition presenting *relational socialist realism* at Pallas Projects / Studios (2019), "STALKER," a retreat with Franko B and a/political, and "The Limerick Soviet Shilling Project" (2019), a public intervention curated by Ciaran Nash. Guinan is currently developing relational socialist realism in a Masters by Research at the Limerick School of Art & Design. She is Curator of TULCA Festival of Visual Arts: TACTICAL MAGIC in Galway, Ireland, 2019. <http://kerryguinan.art/>.

**Rebecca Holt** is a PhD candidate in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University, Montréal. For her dissertation, Rebecca is researching MindGeek—the company responsible for Pornhub and most other popular pornographic platforms. Rebecca locates MindGeek alongside other tech giants to understand the impact of online pornography on digital culture, new economies, and the Internet at large. She is a coordinator and member of the Global Emergent Media (GEM) Lab at Concordia University.

**Sarika Joglekar** is a master's student in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montréal. She is from Atlanta, Georgia, where she earned her bachelor's degree in business administration at Emory University's Goizueta Business School. She previously worked as a programmer at Turner Classic Movies (TCM) and FilmStruck, in addition to programming other film events and concerts in Atlanta. She is currently a co-organizer of Cinema in the Midst of Struggle, a screening series engaging with historical and contemporary works from anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist struggles. Her research interests include topics in new media studies and social and political theory.



**Mariz Kelada** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Brown University and is simultaneously pursuing her MA in the department of Modern Culture and Media, having received the university's Open Graduate Education Fellowship. Her Ph.D. research focuses on the makings of the political and urban economy of the film industry in Egypt, through an ethnographic engagement with the livelihoods of its technical workers. She has recently received the Open Society Civil Society Scholar Award to conduct her fieldwork. In 2017, she attended the NIA-Ethnofest Summer School of Visual Ethnography of Cityscapes, and in 2018, she received the Mellon Graduate Fellowship in Collaborative Humanities. She also participated in the Political Economy Summer Institute at the Arab Studies Institute. Earlier, Kelada completed a BA in English Literature at Cairo University in 2011, and an MA in Anthropology and Sociology at the American University in Cairo 2014. Her MA thesis: "Makings of Imagination in Alternative Cultural Spaces in Cairo" was based on yearlong ethnographic fieldwork, part of it is published in the *International Journal of Sociology* in 2014. Her academic work is deeply intertwined and fueled by her life and work as a cultural practitioner in Egypt, as she works to find ways of conjoining academic knowledge with 'street'/vernacular knowledge, especially through cultural spaces and artistic collectives.

**Iphigénie Marcoux-Fortier** has been concocting documentaries since the turn of the millennium. She has co-founded the production company *Les glaneuses*, through which she co-creates films anchored in the territory. These films raise questions of identity, highlight intercultural encounters, philosophies of life (or death) and, like a silent mantra, they listen to details. As a filmmaker-mentor, she has accompanied the creation of more than forty short films in an indigenous context. In light of this background, Iphigénie conceives documentary filmmaking as a political and poetic process, as a flagship tool, and as a tool for bridge building.

**Vicki Mayer** is Professor of Communication at Tulane University. Her research encompasses media and communication industries, their political economies, infrastructures, and their organizational work cultures. Her publications seek to theorize and illustrate how these industries shape workers and how media and communication work shapes workers and citizens. Her theories inform her work in the digital humanities and pedagogy, most recently on ViaNolaVie (<https://www.vianolavie.org/>) and New Orleans Historical (<https://neworleanshistorical.org/>).

**Brett Neilson** is Professor in the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. With Sandro Mezzadra, he is author of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (2013) and *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (2019).

**Jacqueline Ristola** is a PhD candidate in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University, Montréal. She received her master's degree in Cinema and Media studies from York University in 2017, where she also received a Graduate Diploma in Asian Studies from the York Centre for Asian Research. Her research areas include animation/anime studies, media industry studies, and queer theory. Her work is published in *Animation Studies Online Journal*, where she was awarded the inaugural Maureen Furniss Student Essay Award. She is currently a co-editor of a forthcoming issue on LGBTQ Animation for *Synoptique: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*, and also has a forthcoming chapter in *Representation in Steven Universe* (Palgrave).

**Ned Rossiter** is Professor of Communication at the Institute for Culture and Society with a joint appointment in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Western Sydney University. He is the author of *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions* (2006), *Software, Infrastructure, Labor: A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares* (2016) and (with Geert Lovink) *Organization after Social Media* (2018).

**Errol Salamon** is a Postdoctoral Teaching Associate in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota. He has a Ph.D. in Communication Studies from McGill University. He is co-editor of *Journalism in Crisis: Bridging Theory and Practice for Democratic Media Strategies in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2016). He is working on a book manuscript on digital media workers and journalism labour. He can be reached at [esalamon@umn.edu](mailto:esalamon@umn.edu).

**Joaquín Serpe** is a Film and Moving Image Studies PhD candidate at Concordia University, Montréal. An Audiovisual Designer from the University of Buenos Aires, Joaquín worked in the Argentine public television industry as a sound engineer before starting his graduate studies in Canada. For his doctoral project, he examines the transformation of public intellectuality from mass media to digital platforms and social media networks. He is one of the main coordinators and researchers at Concordia University's Global Emergent Media (GEM) Lab. There, he ran the research group on populist media, popular culture and political theory, as well as a project on global streaming communities.

**Claudia Sicondolfo** lives and works as a guest in Tkaronto. She is a Vanier Scholar and PhD Candidate in Cinema and Media Studies at York University. Her research projects address topics ranging from film festivals, screen publics, youth and digital media cultures, decolonizing research methodologies and affect in the creative industries. Her doctoral research project examines pedagogy, community outreach, and audience engagement within contemporary Canadian digital screen initiatives and in Canadian film festivals. Her writing has been published in *Public* and *Senses of Cinema*, in addition to various book anthologies. Claudia has worked intimately with educational communities across Canada and has published educational companion curriculum for documentaries. She is the co-chair for Toronto Film and Media Seminar and is a researcher on the Archive/Counter-Archive SSHRC Partnership Project.

**Meredith Slifkin** is a doctoral candidate in the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concordia University, Montréal. She received her Master's degree in Cinema Studies from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and has been published in *CineAction* and *Feminist Media Histories*. Her research explores melodrama as a critical method for mediating the intersections of gender, genre, and nation in the cinema of the late-1950s to early-1960s, along and across geopolitical lines.

**Ishita Tiwary** is a Horizon Post Doctoral Fellow at the Department of Cinema, Concordia University. Her research interests lie at the intersection of media infrastructures, video cultures and practices of migration. Her work has been published in *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, *Post Script: Essays in Film and Humanities*, and *MARG: Journal of Indian Art*, amongst others.

**Anne-Marie Trépanier** is an artist-researcher, editor and MA student in Media Studies at Concordia University, where she previously completed a BFA in Intermedia/Cyberarts. Her research-creation practice focuses on the mediation of experience through language and technology. Her writing has been published in *esse*, *Spirale*, *Architecture | Concordia* and the *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History*. She is the co-founder and co-editor of *Cigale*, a bilingual biannual journal dedicated to the production and dissemination of artists' writings. Trépanier's current research interests include cyberfeminism, experimental publishing and archiving practices, shadow libraries and documentary practices in the arts.

**Patrick Vonderau** is a Professor of Media Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany. His latest books include the co-authored *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music* (MIT Press, 2019). He currently acts as PI in the project "Shadow Economies of the Internet: An Ethnography of Click Farming" (2018-2020), funded by the Swedish Research Council. Patrick is a co-founder of NECS-European Network for Cinema and Media Studies.