

From:

ELKE ZOBL, RICARDA DRÜEKE (EDS.)

Feminist Media

Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship

September 2012, 292 p., 32,80 €, ISBN 978-3-8376-2157-0

While feminists have long recognised the importance of self-managed, alternative media to transport their messages, to challenge the status quo, and to spin novel social processes, this topic has been an under-researched area. Hence, this book explores the processes of women's and feminist media production in the context of participatory spaces, technology, and cultural citizenship.

The collection is composed of theoretical analyses and critical case studies. It highlights contemporary alternative feminist media in general as well as blogs, zines, culture jamming, and street art.

Elke Zobl is assistant professor at the Department of Communication and director of the program area »Cultural Production & Contemporary Arts« at the University of Salzburg (in cooperation with Mozarteum University), Austria, and founder of the online archive www.grassrootsfeminism.net.

Ricarda Drüeke is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication at the University of Salzburg, Austria.

For further information:

www.transcript-verlag.de/ts2157/ts2157.php

Table of Contents

Foreword	9
Introduction: Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship	11
<i>Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zobl</i>	
Chapter 1:	
Feminist Media Production and Alternative Economies	
Feminist Media Production in Europe: A Research Report ...	21
<i>Elke Zobl and Rosa Reitsamer (with Stefanie Grünangerl)</i>	
Feminist Media as Alternative Media? Theorising Feminist Media from the Perspective of Alternative Media Studies	55
<i>Jenny Gunnarsson Payne</i>	
Archiving Feminist Grassroots Media	73
<i>Brigitte Geiger and Margit Hauser</i>	
Hand-Made Memories: Remediating Cultural Memory in DIY Feminist Networks	87
<i>Red Chidgey</i>	
GENDER JAMMING. Or: Yes, We Are. Culture Jamming and Feminism	98
<i>Verena Kuni</i>	
Making Feminist Media: Feminist Media Activists Share their Views with Jessica Hoffmann/Daria Yudacufski (<i>make/shift</i> , USA), Sonja Eismann (<i>Missy Magazine</i> , Germany), Jeanna Krömer (<i>AMPHI magazine</i> , Belarus), and Jenni (<i>Emancypunx</i> , Poland/international)	110
<i>Compiled by Stefanie Grünangerl</i>	

Chapter 2: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Technology

Streetwise Politics: Feminist and Lesbian Grassroots Activism in Ljubljana	123
<i>Tea Hvala</i>	
“It’s a Hard Job Being an Indian Feminist”: Mapping Girls’ Feminist Identities and “Close Encounters” on the Feminist Blogosphere	136
<i>Jessalynn Keller</i>	
Choreographing Coalition in Cyber-Space: Post <i>Natyam</i> ’s Politico-Aesthetic Negotiations	146
<i>Sandra Chatterjee and Cynthia Ling Lee</i>	
On the Aesthetics of Self-Representation: Mustached “Female” Youth on Flickr.com	159
<i>Marcus Recht and Birgit Richard</i>	
Struggling for Feminist Design: The Role of Users in Producing and Constructing Web 2.0 Media	170
<i>Tanja Carstensen</i>	
Using New Technologies to Enter the Public Sphere, Second Wave Style	182
<i>Linda Steiner</i>	

Chapter 3: Cultural Citizenship and Social Change

Cultural Citizenship. Participation by and through Media ...	197
<i>Elisabeth Klaus and Margreth Lünenborg</i>	
Online Cultures and Future Girl Citizens	213
<i>Anita Harris</i>	
Rethinking Political Communication and the Internet: A Perspective from Cultural Studies and Gender Studies	226
<i>Ricarda Drüeke</i>	

Digital Storytelling to Empower Sex Workers: Warning, Relieving and Liberating	238
<i>Sigrid Kannengießer</i>	
Pedagogy of Hope: Feminist Zines	250
<i>Alison Piepmeier</i>	
From DIY to Collaborative Fields of Experimentation: Feminist Media and Cultural Production towards Social Change – A Visual Contribution	265
<i>Elke Zobl</i>	

Appendix

Feminist Media Production in Europe: A Selected List of Projects	272
<i>Compiled by Stefanie Grünangerl</i>	
Author Biographies	288

Foreword

This anthology grew out of a research project and has gone through many different visions, stages, and forms of collaborations. The idea of this book was developed within the research project “Feminist Media Production in Europe,” which was started at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and then moved to the Department of Communication at the University of Salzburg, Austria. A warm thank you goes out to Elisabeth Klaus, the department head in Salzburg, who has been very enthusiastic about the project. The project was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (P21187) from December 2008 until November 2012. The study was conducted by a team: Elke Zobl, as the project leader, post-doctoral researchers Rosa Reitsamer (2009–2011) and Jenny Gunnarsson Payne (2008–2009) and doctoral student Red Chidgey (2008–2010), with research support from Stefanie Grünangerl (2010–2012). In the context of this project, we have been interested in such questions as: What are the content, forms, processes, and functions of feminist media production in Europe today? How far are these media used as sites of feminist news, activism and engagement? How can media produced by women at the grassroots level be a means to foster participation and civic engagement? What are the implications of women as active media producers for civic society? What is the potential of feminist grassroots media in Europe for cultural, social and political changes? Discussions of these and other questions can be found in this book (esp. see the research report by Elke Zobl and Rosa Reitsamer).

At first, an open call to contribute to this anthology with academic essays and case studies, as well as activist reports, practitioner interviews and visual commentaries, was issued in 2008 by Red Chidgey, Jenny Gunnarsson Payne and Elke Zobl. We received many contributions from various countries for which we have been very grateful, and we would particularly like to thank everyone who contributed at this stage. However, due to the difficulty in finding a publisher willing to publish a mix of theory and practice, as well as project personnel changes, we had to make the decision to focus the current volume on academic essays. At that stage Rosa Reitsamer and Elke Zobl were able to secure transcript Verlag as the publisher. We thank the editors of the Critical Media Studies series for their immediate enthusiasm for the book and their productive collaboration. As Rosa Reitsamer left the project for another job posting, Elke Zobl teamed with Ricarda Drüeke at the Department of Communication in Salzburg to edit the present anthology. As the project leader, Elke Zobl would like to thank all team members warmly and deeply!

The information that has been collected during the project has been continuously documented at the digital archive *Grassroots Feminism: Transnational archives, resources and communities* (www.grassrootsfeminism.net), which was set up in December 2008. By providing an interactive network portal and research platform for researchers, activists and media producers, this Web 2.0 archive makes contemporary feminist, queer and antiracist media and cultural practices more broadly accessible. The site is organized and maintained by Elke Zobl in collaboration with Rosa Reitsamer, Stefanie Grünangerl and Red Chidgey. Above all, we would like to thank everyone who continues to contribute to a diverse, engaging and critical feminist media landscape – and consequently to this website. At the end of this book you will find a selected list of feminist media projects in Europe for further consultation.

Another important impetus for this book were the annual Civil Media Conferences organized by Radiofabrik in Salzburg, where from 2008 to 2011 we invited feminist media producers from various countries to present their work and engage in discussions around media, social change, participatory culture, networks and cultural citizenship. We are deeply indebted to everyone who accepted our invitation and came to Salzburg, as well as to Radiofabrik!

Such an anthology is dependent on the help and enthusiasm of many: It would have not been possible without the patience of the contributors who revised their articles according to our input. For the detailed proofreading, we thank Jason Heilman (USA), and for the layout, we are greatly indebted to Brigitte Geiger (Austria). At transcript Verlag we would like to thank Anke Poppen for being our competent contact person.

In short: the development of this book has involved many people in various countries. We cannot name them all, but we would like to thank them from our deepest hearts!

We are looking forward to feedback and further discussions!

Elke Zobl & Ricarda Drüeke

Introduction

Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship

Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zobl

Feminist Media

Women have always played an important role in movements for social justice. Using media to transport their messages, to disrupt social orders and to spin novel social processes, feminists have long recognized the importance of self-managed, alternative media. In the past two decades an increasing number of women have taken the tools of media production into their own hands. With the rise of new media and communication technologies, women have started to use these technologies for the production and distribution of feminist media. These demographics are often described as part of 'third wave feminism', 'pop feminism' or 'do-it-yourself-feminism'. We understand feminist media as any self-identified feminist and/or women's media project engaged in processes of social change. Feminist media – in this broader understanding – encompasses text production, e. g. zines, magazines and flyers, as well as practices of performance, graffiti and art. For this reason, we are interested in how feminist media producers create and engage in participatory spaces, networks and cultural practices, and how they assume a cultural citizenship and initiate processes of social change. Questions arise such as: What kinds of processes, strategies and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are at work in feminist media production? How does one assume a cultural citizenship within feminist media? How do feminist media producers engage with feminism, anti-racism and social change? Can we identify a 'new feminism' in feminist media – one that creates a new participatory culture?

The present volume offers several components for the analysis of feminist media in relation to participatory spaces, networks and the theoretical concept of cultural citizenship. The articles in this volume clearly illustrate the complexity and diversity of the issues that arise in this constellation concerning the character of the involvement and participation by feminist public spheres as well as reinterpretations of the hegemonic gender relations. In doing so, the articles incorporate approaches and findings from various humanities and social science disciplines, thus showing at the same time

the productiveness of interdisciplinary openness. By problematizing the existing power-political configurations, changes in hegemonic practices as well as alternative paths for appropriating media and culture become evident. At the same time the articles have a theoretical as well as an empirical orientation. The common objective of all of the contributions is to analyze the broad topic of media and gender from a social-theoretical – but above all, feminist – perspective. In different ways, the articles pose questions concerning the specific production conditions of feminist media, the interplay between art and gender, the options for opening up new participatory spaces as well as for the creation of feminist public spheres. From a theoretical viewpoint, the articles are based for the most part on feminist theories of the public sphere and on the concept of cultural citizenship. Starting from different perspectives, the empirical analyses in the individual chapters place the focus on feminist activism. The book is organized in three main sections: *Feminist media production and alternative economies*, *Participatory spaces and networks* and *Cultural citizenship and social change*.

Feminist media production and alternative economies

Feminist movements make use of their own media for information and as a means of mobilization. In addition, the media form a platform for criticizing the dominant structures and the contents of the mainstream media. The feminist media landscape is at the same time extremely diverse. Small-scale alternative media share a low level of professionalization, which is marked by a do-it-yourself culture. Thus, an alternative (and sometimes gift-based) economy is developed by media producers and consumers that distinguishes itself from the global media conglomerates. Their primary aim is not to commodify media; rather, alternative economies focus on the exchange of knowledge and information, the spread of emancipatory concepts and activism, and they envision social change.

The six articles in the book's first section dealing with feminist media production and alternative economies examine the effects, potentials, and limitations of grassroots women's and feminist media production from different perspectives and disciplinary viewpoints. The reflections focus on such questions as: What kind of mechanisms are at work in the production and distribution of feminist media? How do feminist media producers develop and engage in alternative economies? In which ways do these alternative economies make low-threshold feminist media possible?

The diversity of feminist media production in Europe becomes clear in the article by **Elke Zobl** and **Rosa Reitsamer** (with Stefanie Grünangerl). Based on the findings of a research project, the authors show what common and distinguishable features are evident in feminist media production in Europe, making visible the varied modes according to which feminists produce and use media. This feminist media production forms the basis for the emergence of a new social movement in the context of third wave feminism, one which appropriates the discursive and participatory spaces

of the public sphere. Underlying these production processes is the negotiation of feminist discourses in relation to a do-it-yourself (DIY) feminism, intersectional perspectives of feminism, and pop feminism in the context of the German-speaking debate on “new feminisms”, leading to the development of alternative feminist media practices. Alternative media are also the focus of the contribution by **Jenny Gunnarsson Payne**, who discusses the fundamental issue of the extent to which feminist media can be considered alternative media at all. Based on this, the author develops a concept linking poststructuralist approaches to alternative media together with conceptualizations of political subjectivity in order to carry out empirical analyses of the users and producers of feminist media.

The subsequent three articles are devoted to distinct areas of feminist media production. On the basis of a history of the archiving of feminist grassroots media, **Brigitte Geiger** and **Margit Hauser** show how from the very beginning these activities played a significant role within the women’s movement in order to make visible its history and politics. In particular, magazines resulting from feminist media production form a significant part of such archives. Nevertheless – as the authors’ analysis shows – the history of this archiving is not linear: individual feminist magazines were discontinued and new media are increasingly being used. Thus it remains to be seen how the print media landscape will evolve in the future. Continuing the theme of do-it-yourself culture in feminist media, **Red Chidgey’s** article deals with the practices and forms of collective memory in DIY feminist networks. On the basis of two examples from the Riot Grrrl movement, the author elaborates the concept of feminist cultural memory. Other feminist practices become evident in the contribution by **Verena Kuni**, who introduces the concept of ‘gender jamming’. Gender jamming is in the tradition of ‘culture jamming’ and looks mainly at the relationship between gender, queer and ‘post-gender’ in order to make clear that one’s chosen identity does not depend on such externals as a beard, one’s sexual preferences or biological sex.

The concluding article in this chapter features a discussion involving feminist media activists Sonja Eismann from *Missy Magazine* (Germany), Jenni from *Emancypunx* (Poland/international), Jessica Hoffmann and Daria Yudacufski from *make/shift* (USA), and Jeanna Krömer from *AMPHI magazine* (Belarus), conducted by **Stefanie Grünangerl**, which again illustrates that the common objective of many media producers is the creation of networks and participatory spaces. It becomes clear from this discussion that feminist media producers have to confront numerous challenges in their work – challenges that have just as much to do with involving young feminists in media production as they do with the lack of financial resources.

Participatory spaces and networks

The contributions in the book’s second section are concerned with the creation of the participatory spaces and networks that were already thematized in the previous chapter. A participatory culture has been described as of-

fering low-threshold access, support to each other, informal mentorship to pass on knowledge, meaningful exchange and an acknowledgement of one's own creation (Jenkins et al. 2006). Hence, the focus lies on participatory processes in community involvement and civic engagement. How do feminist media create, engage in and negotiate spaces that are characterized by such participatory practices? In which ways are feminist media producers involved in such spaces that envision social change? Can we identify a 'new feminism' in feminist media that creates a participatory culture? How do feminist media producers engage in and create local, transnational and virtual networks? Which kinds of networks are developed in relation to the production, distribution, geographic spread, content and aims of their media?

The six contributions in this section deal with the topic of feminist activism and the role of media users from different theoretical perspectives. With this, the focus of the empirical studies is just as much on political actions as it is on theoretical reflections on the possibilities and limits of feminist participation.

The article by **Tea Hvala** thematizes the ways in which feminist and lesbian activism can occupy public spaces in concrete terms. Through the streetwise politics of feminist activists, the possibilities and the limits of alternative norms of public speech and of political expression in the public space are tested. Referring to the theoretical conception of counter-public spheres, the author shows how these spheres in Ljubljana, Slovenia, prove themselves to be sporadic, fleeting and mostly anonymous interventions in the public sphere. In historical terms, feminist public spheres mostly constituted counter-public spheres which sought to reach the hegemonic public by articulating alternative positions (Fraser 1990). The women's movement which created these public spheres was not, however, homogeneous. Black feminists in particular pointed out the differences within the women's movement, because they did not see themselves as adequately represented within a white feminism that remained captive of the middle class (hooks 1990). Feminist postcolonial theory opened up additional perspectives on the relation between gender and race (Rodríguez 2008). At the same time the categories of gender and race are understood as social constructs and discursive productions constructed through processes that go hand in hand with structural and identity effects. Postcolonial theorists thematized especially the ambivalent role of marginalized women, who in feminist discourse often remain invisible and voiceless (Spivak 1988). In the context of these theoretical debates, **Jessalynn Keller's** article examines the identity constructs of non-Western feminists. The negotiations concerning different identity positions are shown in India especially on the website the 'fbomb'. Feminist blogs of this type play a decisive role in the participation of girls as well as in feminist activism and in the end are responsible for the emergence of a feminist blogosphere.

Sandra Chatterjee and **Cynthia Ling Lee** also raise the issue of the networking of feminists through the internet. On the basis of the Post Natyam Collective, these two authors investigate how transnational collaboration is

made possible. Through a joint critical examination of South Asian dance by activists scattered across different countries, specific networks and participatory spaces come into being. Alongside the neglect of the category of race, queer theory points out another blank space in the early women's movement. Particularly by not thematizing the topic of sexuality this category ended up becoming a category of difference. At the center of the women's movement was for the most part an inexplicit heteronormative matrix. Mustached female youth on the platform flickr.com call into question this heteronormativity, as the article by **Marcus Recht** and **Birgit Richard** makes clear. These individual cases of self-depiction admittedly remain initially at the level of self-presentation but they have considerable political potential. Without the advent of new technologies – including the so-called Web 2.0 – such participatory spaces and networks would be hardly conceivable. In a study on the role of users in the production of Web 2.0 media, **Tanja Carstensen** highlights the fact that their role still remains ambivalent. Thus, on the one hand, one struggles with a feminist design of the internet while, on the other, numerous anti-feminist tendencies manifest themselves on the internet. One example of this can be seen in the German Wikipedia website, where suggestions were regularly made calling for the deletion of the entries for such topics as Ladyfest or Riot Grrrl. In the context of second wave feminism, **Linda Steiner** discusses the use dimensions of old and new media by the feminist collective *New Directions for Woman* to show how users make use of different technologies in order to make their goals and agendas visible.

Cultural citizenship and social change

The political potential of feminist media and the emerging public spheres are in the focus of the book's third section. One concept that theoretically captures the ongoing processes of social and cultural transformation is 'cultural citizenship'. T. H. Marshall described three main categories of citizenship rights: civil rights, political rights and social rights. Subsequently, the concepts of cultural citizenship (Hermes 2006; Lünenburg and Klaus 2004) and DIY citizenship (Hartley 1999) have been added and discussed. Alternative feminist media offer and constantly negotiate productive spaces to express opinions, experiences and political views – to actively construct meaning and make sense of the world – in which a critical and self-reflexive political education and a cultural citizenship could take place. Which expressions of citizenship can we observe in feminist media? How is cultural citizenship articulated in feminist media? How and under which circumstances and in which contexts does cultural citizenship take place? And what kind of processes of social change are intended and initiated?

This is the focus of the articles gathered here, which deal with social change as well as with theoretical reflections on the shaping of cultural citizenship. The article by **Elisabeth Klaus** and **Margreth Lünenborg** provides

a fundamental introduction to the concept of cultural citizenship; here, the authors explain how cultural citizenship can serve as a key concept in examining cultural production. As Fiske (1986) argues, cultural studies are both an intellectual and a political project. Culture is the site of political critique and intervention. Therefore the concept of cultural citizenship is part of the circle of meaning production, which is located between fact and fiction, information and entertainment, privacy and public or political discourse, rationale and emotional debate. The authors clarify the complexity of the concept using the example of reality television – especially talent shows – and its portrayal of migrants and queers. Furthermore, participatory spaces for social change are increasingly being created online, as the article by **Anita Harris** shows. Through the use of online DIY culture and social networking sites, new participatory communities are being established for young women, which in turn open up new forums for negotiating citizenship identities in the confrontation with the increasingly neoliberal tendencies of society. These new forms of activism do not, however, lead automatically to a strengthening of political activism, which is also continued offline. The article by **Ricarda Drüeke** is based on the assumption that the underlying theoretical concept is the determining factor for analyzing political communication via the internet. Based on a theoretical approach combining the insights of gender studies and cultural studies, this article explores how questions of participation and the public sphere are linked to online political communication. Participation and, above all, the empowerment of women can take place in a variety of ways, as the article by **Sigrid Kannengießner** makes clear. The method of digital storytelling illustrated in her article serves as a tool for narrating the life stories of sex workers in South Africa in short films, and for thus opening up the opportunity for contributing to the visibility of different individual life plans. The focus of the article is on the meanings of such films for the producers with respect to possible empowerment.

Feminist zines, as it becomes clear in the article by **Alison Piepmeier**, can perfectly well develop into alternative strategies of political intervention. Based on the example of the zine *Doris*, the author works out the cultural and political aspects of zines in general. In doing so, forms of political intervention become evident which can transform the subject position of the female reader and thus open up a moment of resistance. A pedagogy of imagination then becomes a pedagogy of hope, which has an inherent political character. Finally, **Elke Zobl** deals with the concept of participatory spaces in a visual contribution. The collection, which ranges from DIY to collaborative fields of experimentation, shows on the one hand the changes of feminist media, while demonstrating on the other hand the diverse production of feminist blogs, print zines and e-zines. The subsequent appendix encompasses a selected list of feminist and women-led media projects from all over Europe including links to print media, blogs, e-zines, radio and TV shows as well as to networks, databases and visual material. It aims to provide a first insight into the variety of feminist media production in Europe without claiming to be exhaustive and thus also shall function as a

reference list or starting point for the reader's own encounter with feminist media.

The present volume covers a broad spectrum of topics. In the variety of the problems that are discussed here and the distinctiveness of the approaches and perspectives, essential dimensions of feminist media and of the resulting participatory spaces and networks emerge. At the same time, however, the articles also reveal the increasingly pressing issue of the social and societal conditions which are necessary to share in the public sphere and its cultural resources. The diversity of feminist activism as well as the variety of feminist forms of involvement and theoretical reflections nonetheless provide hope that contributing to social and societal change will continue to be the main objective of feminist media production.

References

- Fiske, J. 1992. *Understanding Popular Culture*. 2nd Edition, London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N., 1990. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text* 25–26, pp. 56–80.
- Hartley, J., 1999. *Uses of Television*. London: Routledge.
- Hermes, J., 2006. Citizenship in the Age of the Internet. *European Journal of Communication* 21(3), pp. 295–309.
- hooks, b., 1990. *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Jenkins, H., Puroshotma, R., Clinton, K., Weigel, M. and Robison, A. J. 2006. Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century [online]. Available at: <http://www.newmedia-literacies.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf>
- Klaus, E. and Lünenborg, M., 2004. Cultural Citizenship. Ein kommunikationswissenschaftliches Konzept zur Bestimmung kultureller Teilhabe in der Mediengesellschaft. *Medien und Kommunikationswissenschaft* 52(2), pp. 193–213.
- Rodríguez, E. 2008. Postkolonialismus: Subjektivität, Rassismus und Geschlecht. In: R. Becker and B. Kortendiek, eds. *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. 2nd edition. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, pp. 239–247
- Spivak, G. C., 1988. Can the Subaltern Speak? In: C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, ed. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, pp. 271–313.