ISSUE NO. 1

Introduction: Conversations Across the Field

Kim Sawchuk
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On a warm October day, nearly three years ago, a group of feminists at the University of Oregon got together to talk about shared research interests in gender, new media, and technology. We kvetched, as academics are wont to do, about publishing, about how so much of our work was locked away in journals and books that weren't accessible on the internet, and about the amount of labor we perform (publishing, reviewing, reading) these publications with so little compensation, of either economic or intellectual varieties. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick put it in *Planned Obsolescence*, which some of us were reading during its online peer review, we found ourselves "entrenched in systems that no longer serve our needs" (2011, 13), if indeed they ever did.

The seeds of the Fembot platform and its online journal *Ada* were planted that day. As ideas for the project began to germinate, those of us located in Oregon knew that if Fembot was going to work, it had to move beyond a single institutional host – we had to grow organically, rhizomatically and horizontally, rather than institutionally and vertically. And we did not want to create an Old Girls' Network made up of affinity networks that sprouted from individual members. Instead, we wanted to avoid the pitfall of many feminist organizations – what Jo Freeman described so many years ago as a "tyranny of structurelessness," which enabled affinity groups rather than transparent rules and procedures to govern organizations.

So we began to hold meetings at conferences – at the International Communication Association's conventions in Boston and Phoenix, at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies' conference in New Orleans, at Console-ing Passions in Eugene and Boston, at the Crossroads Conference in Paris. Chris Chesher, Alice Crawford, and Mat Wall-Smith of *Fibreculture* (http://fibreculturejournal.org/) spent an inspirational coffee hour with us in Sydney, talking about their project and process, and how they had so effectively, in Chris's words, "performed legitimacy." With a group of visionary professors and graduate students at Concordia who connected with us at an early meeting in Boston, we began to map out a possible platform. At every meeting, participants came up with new ideas for creating interest and collaborations. At a preliminary meeting in New Orleans, Carrie Rentschler from McGill commented on the dearth of short, teachable pieces of feminist media criticism. And like that, Laundry Day was born! Graduate students at UO mentioned how hard it was to find sample dissertation prospectuses –

our Professional Potpourri now has two of those samples and plans to expand to include grant applications and job letters. Hye-Jin Lee and Carol Stabile had a conference hotel lobby coffee break that produced the idea for Books Aren't Dead, which has become one of our most popular features. There isn't a single feature of Fembot that wasn't the product of collaborations like these.

Throughout our conversations, we heard one unified call: smash open the black box of publication. This has led to the formation of an interdisciplinary, open access, multimodal journal committed to innovation, experimentation, and creating leadership possibilities for feminist graduate students and faculty members. Many of us can recount stories about not ever feeling at home in institutional spaces, about difficulties with peer review processes that stemmed from our political orientations. Indeed, feminism is threatening enough to the status quo. When you add to that a feminism that critically allies itself with digital culture and new media, the combination can be downright terrifying to non-feminist or anti-feminist academics. Our experiment in open access publication would need to create a support system for feminists engaged in this kind of research, as well as leadership possibilities for feminist graduate students. It would also – centrally – need to transform how we work. *Ada* was born of this shared sense of the need for *feminist* platforms for creativity, collaboration, and mentoring. It addresses the need for a new kind of intellectual home.

Of course, our conversations have been tempered by reservations, qualms, and a host of uncertainties. How could we model the forms of inclusivity the project requires? How can we attend to relations of power and hierarchy in academia, which measures and assess the value of academic work through metrics and indices that are take seriously by hiring committees and tenure and promotion committees? How could we confer legitimacy on the kinds of conversations we wanted to have, while avoiding abstract references to "excellence"? How could Fembot and Ada be truly international, given our limited translational capacities? Why would graduate students and assistant professors want to publish in a new online journal? How would we get work done, given how overcommitted we all feel? And why now? Why not wait until some of these issues could be more systematically addressed and more funding secured for the project?

This inaugural issue reflects our decision to be bold – to take this opportunity to seize the means of production (albeit in a limited fashion). In this spirit, we launched Fembot's *Laundry Day* in January 2012 and now this first issue of *Ada*. In addition to

this first issue, "Conversations Across the Field," we have committed to the following issues, which take us into 2016!

- Issue 1: Conversations in the Field Issue (November 2012), co-editors Kim Sawchuk and Carol Stabile
- Issue 2: Feminist Game Studies (May 2013), editor Nina Huntemann, Suffolk University
- Issue 3: Feminist Science Fiction (November 2013), editor Alexis Lothian, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Issue 4: Open Call (May 2014), co-editors Kim Sawchuk and Carol Stabile
- Issue 5: Challenging the Ideology of the Digital Divide: Feminists of Color and New Media Studies (November 2014), editor TBA
- Issue 6: Open call (April 2015), editor TBA
- Issue 7: Archives and Archiving (November 2015)
- Issue 8: Militarism and Technology: Fighting the War Machine(s) (May 2016), editor TBA

This first issue is comprised of articles we solicited from feminists whose work we valued and respected. From the start, we imagined this issue as a wide-ranging conversation across fields. The conversation begins, as it rightly should, with Krista Geneviève Lynes' compelling call for vigilance in understanding the "frictions between media activists and media objects in the global sphere." Lynes effectively challenges the "presumption of solidarity among feminist media activists around the world," cautioning us to continue to seek affinities or resemblances between media works and media activism in the global system with care and attention to the centrality of very different material and historical contexts.

Sarah Kember's contribution to Ada enacts the question of feminism as a writing practice, invoking the idea of the manifesto, re-considering the vital contributions of previous generations of feminist writers, like Hélène Cixous and Donna Haraway. In her pointed reflections on the need for a genealogical approach to media history, she asks us to consider interventions into with science and technology through a consideration of "feminist methodologies" as forms of intervention that take us "from dissent to dialogue back to what Derrida calls dissension – the internal revolutions or overturnings that might afford us non-entrepreneurial opportunities or spaces for some serious play."

Together, Mia Consalvo and Lisa Nakamura look at persistent harassment in video games and other online environments, calling for more feminist work in those areas, but also increased understanding of the structuring roles of gender, race, and class. By linking the constituent elements of what she describes as a "toxic gamer culture" in a time line, Consalvo vividly illustrates the systematicity of these behaviors, asking feminist scholars to continue the work of documenting these abuses, as well as continuing to research related topics and work on strategies for intervention. Nakamura would also have us direct our attention to the myriad ways in which race and gender privilege play out in videogame culture, analyzing the important role played by very gendered and raced forms of gaming capital.

Alexandra Juhasz and Anne Balsamo's contribution addresses pedagogy, another key component of a feminist project for the transformation of the university. Written as a dialogue, they recall their reasons for creating FemTechNet, a sister project to Fembot, that is a transnational experiment in online feminist course delivery that uses virtual space to create new collaborations and connections between different nodes of intellectual activity. A crucial feminist intervention into the growing field of online education, FemTechNet emerges from the crosscurrents and yearnings for feminist community that also inspired Fembot.

Importantly, Vicki Mayer's contribution reminds us of the materiality of more privileged people's device-driven worlds and the increasing fragility of the infrastructures that support these. Mayer begins with her recent experience following Hurricane Isaac in New Orleans, a city that has seen much more than its share of climate change driven sorrow over the past decade. In the wake of Hurricane Sandy's devastation of parts of the Caribbean and the US northeast, Mayer offers us the cogent and always necessary reminder that our ventures into the brave new world of digital publication are fundamentally linked to a material infrastructure grounded in harsh economic disparities.

In the spirit of building a community of critics, readers, and engaged students, we hope that you will participate in this inaugural conversation across the field by commenting on the contributions, tweeting links to it, and engaging with the ideas and research featured in this issue. Because we wanted to invite speakers to comment on broad issues in the field of feminist media studies, this first issue was not peer-reviewed. Our next issue, on Feminist Game Studies, will be fully peer reviewed in a system designed to make the process open, accessible, and useful to all those who participate in it.

Because of the collaborative nature of this project, we have many people to thank for making it possible. Thanks first to our good-natured contributors for their lively and thoughtful contributions to this, our first issue, and for their patience with the process.

A longstanding debt of gratitude to the librarians at UO who made Fembot possible: Karen Estlund, who is also a member of the Fembot Advisory Board; Annie Zeidman-Karpinski, who attended many of our early meetings; Andrew Bonamici, who was a booster from the start.

Many professors (full, associate, assistant) gave freely of their time, enthusiasm, support, and advice: Alisa Freedman, Joan Haran, Nina Huntemann, Polina Kroik, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Tara McPherson, Lisa Parks, and Carrie Rentschler.

Graduate students made this project hum. For their insights, energy, labor, myriad talents, and tech savvy, we thank Fiona Barnett, Chelsea Bullock, Hye-Jin Lee, M.E. Luka, and Jacqueline Wallace. Mara Williams provided the wonderful cover image for this and several upcoming issues. A huge shout-out to Staci Tucker, who took on the work of designing *Ada* and helping to get it launched.

Thanks also to Chris Wilde and Milo Miller from QZAP, for advice about building community and the platform at a very early stage of our development.

The Fembot Advisory Board has provided guidance, reality checks, and inspiration over the past year. Our gratitude to:

- Anne Balsamo, who provides a key link to FemTechNet and has shared critical resources with Fembot
- Karen Estlund, who has wrangled designers, domains, and so much more from her vantage point in the UO Libraries
- Radhika Gajjala, who reminds us of the importance of internationalizing Fembot and whose collaborative skills are amazing;
- Mél Hogan, whose Nomorepotlucks (http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/) has been a design inspiration!
- Sarah Kember, whose commitment to experimentation continues to move us all forward;
- In the midst of completing her own dissertation, Hye-Jin agreed to manage "Books Aren't Dead," a series of podcast interviews between authors of new books in feminist media studies and junior faculty

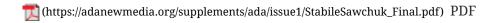members and graduate students that will go live on Fembot on 1 December 2012;

- Bryce Peake, our web mistress, who has made sure that our content is visually compelling and fresh and who has handled crises with aplomb and good humor;
- Jacqueline Wallace, whose creative industry experience has made her a sharp and wonderful reader of this project.

We owe Chelsea Bullock a huge thank you. Chelsea oversaw far more doodles than anyone should, she helped organize a symposium, and is helping us with two upcoming unconferences, among other logistical feats (including the first Fembot baby and a dissertation prospectus).

And finally, thank you to the Fembot Collective. *Ada* – and Fembot – are meant to be forums for lively discussion: for what Sarah Kember refers to as "dissensus," in an engaged, respectful fashion. We can't do that without you.

—CITATION—

(https://adanewmedia.org/supplements/ada/issue1/StabileSawchuk_Final.pdf) PDF

Kim Sawchuk (https://adanewmedia.org/author/kimsaw)

Kim Sawchuk is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University. A co-founder of the internationally acclaimed feminist digital media hub, studioxx, she is Concordia University Research Chair in Mobile Media Studies

Carol Stabile (https://adanewmedia.org/author/cstabile)

Carol Stabile is professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and associate dean for strategic initiatives in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oregon. She researches the history of gender, race, and class in media institutions. She received her PhD

from Brown University. She is the award-winning author of three books: Feminism and the Technological Fix, White Victims, Black Villains: Gender, Race, and Crime News in US Culture, and The Broadcast 41: Women and the Anti-Communist Blacklist. Her articles have appeared in Camera Obscura, Cultural Studies, and South Atlantic Quarterly. She co-founded the Fembot Collective and co-edits the Feminist Media Studies book series for University of Illinois Press. Her book, The Broadcast 41: Women and the Broadcast Blacklist (Goldsmiths University Press, 2018) tells the story of a group of women who were driven from US media industries during the Cold War. Stabile received an American Council of Learned Scholars (ACLS) Fellowship to complete the book and is working on a digital companion to it. She is currently collaborating with digital humanities scholar Roopika Risam on a new digital publishing project, Reanimate, aimed at restoring the contributions of women and people of color to media history and documenting lost innovations, creativity, and resistance within media industries.

2 THOUGHTS ON "INTRODUCTION: CONVERSATIONS ACROSS THE FIELD"

Radhika Gajjala
JANUARY 27, 2013 AT 4:23 AM

Carol and Kim,

Once again – my congratulations on launching this. This issue continues to be useful for me and my students!

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