

**ISSUE NO. 5**

# Conclusion: It's Our Collective, Principled Making that Matters Most: Queer Feminist Media Praxis @Ada

## Alexandra Juhasz

In the early 2000s, I began earnestly working on a book proposal for a collection of selected reprints of media theory that conformed to a strict set of guidelines; it was to be the first reader of theoretical essays written by film and media makers who wrote critically about their own practice of art production towards social change. I was convinced that this tradition that I called **Media Praxis** ([http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page\\_id=8](http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page_id=8))—one written by theorizing practitioners committed to social justice—cut a compelling and usually obscured picture of film and media history by indicating that a good many of the seminal ideas and practices of cinema were motivated not by narrative, nation, aesthetics, or format but rather primarily by Marxist and other political and theoretical commitments to world and self-changing. I wrote: “I want the theorizing that has been born from sensuous human engagement with the medium and the world to be granted the central place it deserves in the history and current shape of our discipline.”

While this argument was convincing and perhaps even compelling to acquisition editors at two highly-regarded academic presses, the manuscript shaped from it was the first in my academic career to suffer up close the “**crisis in scholarly publishing**” ([http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/cinema\\_journal/v044/44.3juhasz.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/cinema_journal/v044/44.3juhasz.html))” that was quickly reshaping the academic landscape. After several years stuck in review, I was eventually informed that a once-venerated publishing format, the reader comprised of reprints, was no longer deemed economically viable (and therefore publishable), regardless of its pedagogic, historical or intellectual worth. A little later, telling my sad story of wasted scholarly effort at a conference where I was presenting this (failed) project, my friend and colleague Michael Zryd suggested from the audience that I think outside the box of traditional scholarly publication and instead imagine innovative ways to share my work (and that of the many theorists/filmmakers I was championing). He suggested that I use this “crisis” as a way to make my sharing of this history of theories of radical forms and processes as radical in form and process as was the tradition I shared. Why not self-publish on the Internet, he asked? Hmm. What a novel idea!

And so, **Media Praxis: A Radical Website Integrating Theory, Practice, & Politics**

(<http://www.mediapraxis.org/>) was born: my first, timid, perhaps awkward, and certainly now

already-dated foray into self-reflexive Internet writing, teaching, “publishing,” and archive- and community-building. At the time, I wrote of it:

*MEDIA PRAXIS theorizes and makes media towards stated projects of world and self-changing. This ongoing project, as old as cinema itself, links culture, theory, and politics, in the 20th century, through mediation technologies and indebted to Marxist theories. While I name this a radical website in that it directly refers to what Marx, in “Theses on Feuerbach” calls “revolutionary practice,” a project of interpreting and changing the world, this site is equally radical in that it presumes that we are all participants in making history. It asks you to both study and join the tradition of Media Praxis.*

I start this conclusion of *Ada*'s now fifth successful foray into a much more refined practice of “self-publishing on the Internet,” with a backward glance because my earlier tale of invention, scholarly publication, unsupported labor, the Internet, community, media, feminism, and politics produces a time-stamped frame that can help clarify what might be unique, germane and also reiterative about this special issue on Queer Feminist Media Praxis not so many years later. Namely: how do time, technology, the addition of diverse voices, interests, and practices, and an explicit focus on feminist and queer praxis serve to expand, contradict, or simply date that decade earlier, similarly focused project? The connections and similarities between *Ada*'s contemporary experiment in online, open peer-reviewed, feminist scholarly publication and my own earlier one remind us about the continuities and progressions of an ongoing set of artistic, scholarly and political needs. At the same time, the shifts within what I had named the “Media Praxis” tradition, due to the unanticipated and then unimaginable reach of technology, globalization, and neoliberalism are also illuminating. Thus, my conclusion to *Ada*'s special issue elaborates on both the stable and mutable conditions of Media Praxis, as set forth **here** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-fotopoulouoriordan/>) and **there** ([http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page\\_id=8](http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page_id=8)), by putting my considerations from the recent past (and in another digital format) into conversation with the contemporary musings, experiments, and analyses of a valued and varied cast of international colleagues.

The first apparent difference is that *Ada* uses technology to open out the conversation about queer feminist media praxis to a large and diverse cast of participants through its unique structure of jointly-edited and collectively-authored and reviewed online publication. The networked collective structure supporting *Ada* highlights the ongoing centrality of feminist processes of **collaboration** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) and **power-sharing** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-jenzenkarl>) to queer

feminist media praxis, as well as to the Ada collective's practical uses of recent technologies towards these ends (Skype and Google+ allow editors and authors from around the world to interact in real-time, and WordPress lets us co-edit as well as write and publish multi-modally, thereby including not just images but sounds, gifs, videos, and experimental authoring platforms like Scalar in our diverse collection). Of course, my ample and repetitive use of linking (to essays in this issue), is another affordance of connection made available through digital publishing technologies (thereby providing another method to navigate this dense and complex issue, so please do click!).

And there are other ways that Ada's collective endeavor is more diverse and far-reaching than any single-authored effort can be (for instance, my earlier project was anchored to my original training in Cinema and Media Studies): it reaches to more locations, disciplines, objects and methods of analysis, and points of view. Its picture of queer feminist media praxis is multiple, self-contradicting, exciting, and sometimes frustrating in scope. The sensitive work of collective production is made even more delicate when the Internet expands our reach to collaborators with whom we have had, in the past, little opportunity for inter-cultural or interdisciplinary interactions (whether this be in terms of method, modes of production, or region, nation, or continent).

In my original work, **feminist** (<http://www.mediapraxis.org/?p=28>) and queer media praxis (via a section on my website dedicated to **AIDS activist media** (<http://www.mediapraxis.org/?p=30>)) were understood as two case studies within a larger history. In *Ada's* collective effort, we join, at least in part, to understand what might be definitive of media praxis that originates from a feminist and/or queer politics or positionality. That is to say, among other things we might be asking if there is something unique, definitive, or telling about media praxis from these orientations, towards these goals, or for this diverse/divided/differentiated "community" or set of disciplines? What emerges as particularly or uniquely feminist and/or queer in this praxis?

While I initially believed that contemporary answers to these questions might illustrate a waning of Marxist influence on feminist/queer media praxis (a theoretical and political orientation that had been central to the hundred-plus year old **history I had first studied** ([http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page\\_id=8](http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page_id=8))), I was gratified to see, as I looked closer, any number of contributions in this collection considering both the role of **labor** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-cowanetal>) and **capital** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hansson>) as central to their understanding of queer feminist media praxis. In fact, an

overtly Marxist concern about the costs and benefits of (**affective** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-zylinska>) ) labor is considered closely by several of our authors. Theories and practices of **rebellion** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-loza>) (if not revolution) similarly find their place in discussions here about **political** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-raval>) , **technological** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-barnett>) and **historical** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-samer>) processes of change. And of course, a **feminist-materialist** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-bigelow>) concern with both **body** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-mukhongo>) and **place** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-oconnor>) is definitive.

Beyond this praxis-orientation from Marxist theory, clear feminist through-lines also emerge. Longstanding commitments to the thoughtful, principled enactment of both **pedagogy** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-raval>) and **community** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) as core sites and practices of media praxis are evidenced across many of these contributions. Feminist/queer media praxis is committed to **collective** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-cowanetal>) action and processes, even as we respect the value of nuancing this with analyses and actions within the realm of the **personal** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-bigelow>) . Feminism's core commitment to the structural relevance of **race, gender, sexuality** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec>) , **nation, and other differences** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-mukhongo>) that affect the personal and the political (in conversation with social inequalities related to class), is also **abiding** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-jenzenkarl>) , **operational** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) , and seemingly hard-wired in the many contributions to this effort. Feminism's ongoing, motivating, and recurring concern/problem/inspiration concerning the place of **women of color, lesbian, trans and queer people** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hurst/>) , as well as **others on the margin of "mainstream feminism"** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-sunden>) is theorized and practiced in these contributions as a "**structural deficiency within feminist praxis** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-loza>) , " one that can as often be critical or it can be productive and generative. One author provocatively questions: "**What does it really mean to foster diversity? What may one achieve by populating a space with more women or people of non-binary genders?**" (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-raval>) and then several of our authors **answer her.** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) Authors discuss **activist projects** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hurst>) organized explicitly against racism, homophobia, sexism, and/or the damaging projects of

“globalization” or neoliberalism all the while questioning the sometimes tokenizing operating assumptions and related practices related to such projects committed to “diversity.”

So what has changed? An old standard, the feminist/queer praxis of studying, theorizing, writing, representing, and speaking to one’s own community and its unique practices—for the good or love of that community—is evidenced in a variety of projects that look from within and at media sites and methods that are themselves new, varied and timely: **Steampunk fandom** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-sunden>) , **Wikipedia editing** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-raval>) , **feminist/queer** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-cowanetal>) **digital archival** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec>) **research** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-samer>) . We are also lucky to include the work of several artists/theorists whose critical/political work takes the unexpected (new, digital) forms of **gifs** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-zylinska>) , **color-grids** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-bigelow>) , **fake Facebook pages** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hansson>) , and **haunted archives** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec>) . In these and other projects, the place of play, **affect** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-bigelow>) , beauty, color, movement, and frustration cannot be overstated as aesthetic/political/theoretical tactics of great use for feminists and queers and our allies in struggles against oppression; tactics that arguably can be altered, or perhaps even improved, with changing technological affordances.

Furthermore, this decade’s speedy and unrelenting **domestication** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-zylinska>) and **commercialization** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hansson>) of the Internet is also a shared feminist/Marxist concern for many of our contributors, while just as many point with some optimism to the new possibilities for **identity construction** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-mukhongo>) , gender and sexuality, **sexual politics, performance, self-representation** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-oconnor>) and agency that these ever-more-corporate tools nevertheless allow.

In these ten years, technological adaptations and inventions have added platforms and even practices that were literally unimaginable a decade ago. For instance, in our collection you will find both considerations of **hashtag feminism** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-loza>) (and its homes on Twitter, Tumblr, Vine,

Instagram, and other social media platforms, all less than 10 years old), and a community-based media project that benefits from the “**possibilities of social media to help generate and support outreach work with young LGBTQ people in the context of youth services** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-jenzenkarl>) .” But then, in equal turn, there are revisits to the cyberfeminist art praxis of pioneers like **VNS Matrix** and **Melinda Rackham** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-barnett>) . It appears that we can't use or understand new tools without returning to familiar and truly worthy old-standards, canonical texts and practices that remain vitally important to our always-developing praxis. Multiple uses of a diverse set of writing by touchstone figures reflect the complex theoretical lineages and through-lines that support our work. For instance, you will be **pleased** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-loza>) to find many **returns to** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) and **reworkings of** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec>) the foundational work of **Audre Lorde** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-samer>) , **Donna Haraway** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-barnett>) , and **Paulo Freire** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hurst>) , across a variety of the contributions in these pages.

This shared historiographic project bent upon feminist **lineages and timelines, queer temporalities, archives** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-sunden>) and **memory lapses** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moravec>) , and the **very project of revisioning** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-samer>) itself, become the first of many forms of feminist/queer media praxis exhibited collectively in this collection; writing that *is* media praxis. That is to say, not writing *about* media praxis so much as theory that itself performs or enacts its critique for the good of feminism. Along this line, three pieces here set out to theorize praxis itself, using complimentary rubrics: those of **love** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-moorecasper>) , **queer archives** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-cowanetal>) , and **community-based videomaking** (<https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-hurst/>) . In these examples of contemporary feminist queer media praxis, I find that I hear old resonances but also new feedback. In the 2000s, I **wrote** ([http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page\\_id=8](http://www.mediapraxis.org/?page_id=8)) :

*MEDIA PRAXIS simply prompts us to know film theory, history, and studies not as something written on paper, the mark of some other's formidable mind, but as a thing that was made to be used and re-made by us, in our world, towards what matters most.*

In 2014, this special issue of *Ada* allows us to see how the Internet and other related technologies have provided us ever-easier-to-use tools towards this remaking, and for just plain making. But to be clear, it is not “making” itself (the new-found, digital, DIY pastime of so many web 2.0 netizens and creative-intellectuals alike) that gets us to what I understand to be the heart and power of queer feminist media praxis, although it is a pre-condition. Rather, it’s our collective, principled making that matters most (whatever the tool at hand): a doing and thinking, together, in the name of world-changing. The feminist queer media praxis discussed and enacted in these pages uses many technologies, including this very publishing platform, to loosely link diverse feminist and queer commitments to identity, community, affect, labor, process and politics, and then to make something (art, action, media, writing, community, education) so as to make something else better.

In these pages and in this time, I find a queer feminist media praxis that is ever easier to actualize in a world that seems ever harder to change. This ambivalence may seem to point to a more definitive nihilistic characteristic of our current period, what Wendy Brown in her 2005 essay “Feminism Unbound: Revolution, Mourning, Politics” names as an “end to feminist revolution”:

*What has been drained from the present is not only faith in the capacity of revolution to dethrone corrupt or illegitimate power but the standing of this capacity as a beacon of the spirit of the age ... The problem is that it is nearly impossible to conceive of an emancipatory, ecological, and economically capacious socialism that could follow upon the current development of what Marx refers to as “productive forces.”<sup>[1]</sup>*

That is not my intention. Rather, I’d like suggest that what we see evidenced here, sometimes in the writing, sometimes in the projects the writing highlights, and often in the communal production of this issue itself is what I would like to think of as digital revolutionary-instants in the radical tradition of Media Praxis: micro power surges that are digitally-assisted, ethical, and political acts of feminist queer making, and also living.

Granted, during times in the recent past (Brown speaks of the Sixties<sup>[2]</sup>), such feminist instantiations of radical potential were likely to be “revolutionary” in that they were more fully embodied, better sustained and supported through counter-cultural infrastructures, and more clear about a shared “revolutionary horizon.”<sup>[3]</sup> I missed that time (at least as an activist and academic), but now I find that my own work of a slightly

more recent past—my 1980s and 1990s media praxis—is itself the subject of newer backward glances, ever seeking out, as some of us are want to do, evidence of a “radical vision as realistic or livable.”<sup>[4]</sup>

**AIDS activist video** (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/bruni-the-aids-warriors-legacy.html?pagewanted=all>) and **New Queer Cinema** (<http://www.cinema.ucla.edu/events/2012-02-03/nqc-20-revisiting-new-queer-cinema>) are celebrating, respectively, their twenty-five and twenty year anniversaries, and I am connected, as a **media maker** (<http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz/pages/filmography.htm>) and **theorist** (<http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz/pages/resume.htm#published>) to both traditions. As someone who participated in these earlier instances of feminist/queer media praxis (if not revolution), I first affirm that they were each deeply technological; we were always abetted by media, even if this was not yet digital in nature. And, in the living and doing—just as defines our work today—these “movements” (which were, at the time, something closer to linked moments of making; a movement tends to be found retrospectively), felt (as did the Sixties in its living and doing?) enormously small, fleeting, difficult, complex, impossible to render and realize and utterly wonderful and productive.

In my experience, the making and living of alternative, counter or radical culture, through media praxis, does not feel fully revolutionary in its own time because each act of making is too small, unstable, marginal, and precarious; the dominant culture, and its media praxis, looms large, solid, and powerful. And yet, each of these risky acts makes not just media that lasts for future study (and sometimes consolidation as a movement) but small, beautiful, fleeting instants of potential—“revolutionary-instants”—that we recognize and celebrate mostly in their doing and living, and of course, mourn in their immediate passing (only then, sometimes, to also reify in their later study and consolidation).

And, when I make feminist queer media praxis with others today (like this issue here and this writing in this issue), just as was true in the recent past, my work continues to feel incredibly small, local, marginal, frustrating, incidental and sometimes or even often emancipatory in the instants that are the instances of its more radical, collective, visionary doing and making. Brown continues about times better for feminist revolution:



*When poetry becomes political, when politics becomes erotic, when thinking is de-commodified and comes to feel as essential to life as food and shelter, not only do ordinary fields of activity become libidinally charged, but this desublimated condition itself betokens (however illusorily) an emancipated world to come.<sup>[5]</sup>*

I know that there have been moments, and actions, and movements in the past where that feeling of revolution feels closer to hand and body than it can today with both technology and capitalism standing between us and nearly everything that we might want or imagine. But instances of essential, libidinal emancipation *can* be lived, felt, and practiced in our (digital) world structured as it is ever more deeply by capital, in the sparks of political and intellectual attraction, action, and energy we can read (about) here, in instants of ethical interaction that first built what you read here, and in your potential to produce ethical interactions through your own digital engagement with this material. A revolution; not in the least! But queer feminist media praxis that marks that there are alternatives through our collective, principled making, without doubt.

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## Footnotes ( returns to text)

1. Wendy Brown, *Edgework* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2005): 102 and 105.
2. Brown writes: “In the Euro-Atlantic world, there was one decade in the last half century in which this other dimension was carved out in the form of political subcultures. The political upheavals and formations of the Sixties included the production of a cultural-political and epistemological outside that allowed utopian visions to stake more than utopian claims, to be sustained by and partially lived out in the subcultures themselves,” 107
3. Brown, 99.

4. Brown, 107.

5. Brown, 108.

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