Curating a Technofeminist Space: Feminist Practices in Editing Online Publications

Part 2: agnès films as a Technofeminist Text

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When technofeminism was a prominent theoretical movement, the Internet was a different space. Two decades ago, as Kristine Blair (1999) reported, women represented "30 [to] 40% of online users" and even books meant to "challenge the perception of the Internet as male-dominated" and trying to "encourage women to take charge of their virtual identities" (p. 185) did so in ways that undermined the empowerment they were asking for. Today, the Internet has transitioned into a more accessible environment for women, even though it is by no means safe for us. In a 2016 Pew Research Center survey, of the 79% of adults on Facebook, 83% were women (Greenwood et al.). The survey also found that 66% of adult American women are online and 86% of young women are active internet users.

Another development since technofeminists were publishing their work that has been useful to *agnès films*'s target audience of filmmakers and film lovers is that Internet consumption is moving away from text and progressing toward video content. In 2015, Facebook experienced a 75% increase in video posts per user (Facebook Media, 2015). Moreover, according to the 2016 Cisco Networking Index, Internet video streaming and downloads will dominate 80% of all consumer Internet traffic by 2020. Video on social media is transitioning to be the main way to consume online content, giving popularity to content about moving images and producers of moving images, such as what *agnès films* publishes.

Technofeminists can be argued to be precursors of Fourth Wave Feminism with their explorations of the connection between feminism and digital spaces. Kira Cochrane (2013) notes that the shift from Third to Fourth Wave Feminism is "defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build strong, popular, reactive movement online." Expanding access to online spaces allows feminists to break barriers enforced by physical obstacles and connect with women across classes,

cultures, and countries. Despite criticism of "hashtag activism" and "slacktivism," proliferation of the internet and social media has provided many with the tools to become informed and active in feminist communities.

What happens in today's online feminist communities is not unlike the technofeminist activity Lisa Gerrard wrote about in 2002. She states that "women are not passive recipients of a dangerous net culture: They are shaping this culture in constructive ways. From at least the mid-1990s, women have been a strong presence on the net, organizing discussion lists, MOOs, Usegroups, and web sites dedicated to interests as varied as female sailors, Victorian Women Writers, and Wicca." (p. 298)

I, Hannah, grew up playing gendered games, such as Ubisoft's *Petz* series. Despite the expectations, women and girls used those games to develop skills that may have been discouraged and treated as male in other environments. As freelance gaming journalist Jessica Famularo (2015) asserts, "*Petz* became a hive for internet activity, and women were running the show. Many women thanked *Petz* for introducing them to HTML, graphic design, and coding." In my case, the welcoming and creative space helped me cultivate my interest in design and development.

In 1999 Hocks argued that "[f]eminists need to develop and publish software that resists the existing categories of new media, and feminists must continue to intervene in public conversations to establish a more powerful, resistant, and diverse presence within male-dominated electronic spaces" (p. 117). Although today the internet is still a sexist place, her call for feminists to create the online spaces they want to inhabit has come to fruition. *agnès films* is not an isolated instance. There are a myriad of clearly feminist sites and communities, such as *Everyday Sexism*, which acts as a place for women to anonymously voice their experiences with sexism without being subjected to labels or victim-blaming. Despite Twitter's public nature and the susceptibility to backlash, women persevere in curating feminist Twitter accounts. Be they personal accounts connected to real names or covert ones such as @girlsreallyrule or @ WeNeedFeminIsm, women share feminist ideas and offer real-time criticisms of current events.

Like technofemists, the *agnès films* team seeks to create a record of the work women and feminists in digital production, in our case filmmaking, are doing. As Hocks (1999) argued, women artists "become newly visible and audible to a wider audience" when they are "recognized and promoted by the popular press" (p. 109). Since Hocks wrote this piece, what constitutes the popular press has changed. According to the Pew Research Center, "The newspaper workforce has shrunk by … 39%, in the last 20 years" (Barthel). In 2015 alone "[w]eekday circulation fell 7% and Sunday circulation fell 4%" for newspapers across the U.S. (Barthel). The decline has in part been caused by the rise of publications like the *Huffington Post*, which Arianna Huffington started as a blog in 2005.

Although *agnès films* has nowhere the circulation of some popular blogs, it does exist at a time when many turn toward online publications for their main source of information. In 1999 Hocks was calling for more technofeminists to "develop

and publish electronic materials [that] highlight women's accomplishments and experience, their political struggles, and their written, visual, and spoken art" (p. 109). *agnès films* meets that call to action and because sites like Wordpress---which we use---make it possible to make independent content look professional, we do it in a way that looks legitimate and helps forward the careers of the filmmakers we feature.

Despite the substantial presence of women online, the web can still be a hostile and unforgiving environment. In 2002, when Lisa Gerrard wrote that "many women have been subjected to uninvited pornography, sexual come-ons, anti-woman flames, and even virtual rape," (p. 297) it only foreshadowed what would come. The expansion of social media and smartphones has led to unrequested sexual photos becoming commonplace. Gamergate left several women who chose to speak out against sexist tropes and environments in gaming communities fearing for their physical safety, and a recent Twitter rampage against Leslie Jones showed that racism and sexism are still very much willing to rear their ugly heads.

These attacks rage not only in emails and direct messages, but often on public forums. Rape and death threats appear in YouTube comments sections and on public Twitter accounts for all the world to see. As Hocks (1999) stated, "Studies have documented the persistence of sexism on the Internet, in spite of women's increased presence and their creative responses to online harassment" (p. 107-108). The safety of being online has not, as we'd hoped, improved in the 18 years since Hocks wrote that statement, but that makes feminist sites of resistance even more vital to women and the culture at large.

Technofeminist Ann Brady Aschauer (1999) explained that "feminist scholars identified men's monopoly of technology as an important source of male economic and political power" (p. 7). While the internet technofeminists were discussing was one mostly focused on emails, websites, and MOOs, today much of online dissemination of content and interaction unfolds on social media. According to a Pewter Center study, women are more likely to be active on Twitter than men (Fallows 2005). In addition, American women have more accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram than American men. While the internet may have initially started as a male-dominated place, women-generated content is steadily growing and building its own subcultures online through social media interactions like *agnès films* promotes.

One of our main goals at *agnès films* is to tell stories that show women using technology to empower themselves and each other. In 2000, technofeminist Pamela Takayoshi bemoaned the fact that many of the stories told by Computers and Composition scholars about women and technology centered around struggle and deficit. She asked, "Why are we not looking as a field at more empowering instances of women using technology as a way for understanding the protean nature of the relationships women affect toward technology? Why are women in the stories often object of study rather than subject of action?" (Takayoshi, 2000, p. 130). The stories we feature, while acknowledging the complications of being women filmmakers in a male-dominated industry, do represent women as being competent wielders of the camera and the technology required to make moving images. We bring attention to

their films and to the process of creating them.

Besides featuring current work, we also provide content about women filmmaking pioneers whose work is not as familiar with today's audiences as it should be. Technofeminist Ann Brady Aschauer (1999) argued for the importance of scholars "recover[ing] and reclaim[ing]" the stories of "women who have used technology confidently and skillfully, but whose work has been overlooked or forgotten altogether" (p. 9). By showing women's historical contributions to technology, we can begin to erode the myth that men are better suited to it. *agnès films*, for example, has tried to preserve the legacy of filmmaking pioneer Dorothy Arzner by, with the authors' permission, reposting a comprehensive 1974 interview with her that had been out-of-print for decades. The piece has been viewed over 3,700 times since we published it in 2011 and gets additional hits each week. We recently published a new piece on Arzner that examines her legacy, helping more audiences discover her groundbreaking, women-centered films.

Credits

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Soundtrack
"Blue" and "Silk"
By Podington Bear
Downloaded from
Soundofpicture.com

Ambient Sound
"The Sound of Deep Forest"
By craftport
Downloaded from
freesound.org

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