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 (Rodríquez 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 identitary 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 Kannengießer** 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.

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