Afterword: Blaming, Shaming and the Feminization of Social Media
Lisa Nakamura

> "We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice according to race, economic power, military force, or station of birth….Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are based on matter, there is no matter here. Our identities have no bodies, so, unlike you, we cannot obtain order by physical coercion."—John Perry Barlow

As the essays in this excellent volume show, surveillance does more than simply watch or observe bodies. It *remakes* the body as a social actor, classifying some as normative and legal, and some as illegal and out of bounds. There is no form of surveillance that is innocent. Technologies such as body scanners, ultrasounds, networked genomics, and other increasingly compulsory forms of biometric monitoring serve two functions: to regulate, define, and control populations, and create new gendered, racialized, and abled bodies through digital means. As Laura Hyun Yi Kang, Kelli D. Moore, Lisa Jean Moore and Paisley Currah, and Andrea Smith's work in this volume show, this has been true since well before the Internet—lock hospitals and homeless shelters have been surveillant state institutions that confined and monitored poor women, women of color, and migrant women. This volume describes how both pre-digital and digital technologies have enabled new and more comprehensive forms of dataveillance that disproportionately target women and minorities. It is a vital new contribution to digital media and feminist studies.

The essays in this collection illustrate how badly mistaken both the Internet's critics and its digital utopians were in the 1990's, when both asserted that the Internet would make surveillance impossible. As John Perry Barlow (1996) wrote in "A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace," the Internet was a place where users left their bodies behind, and this lack of physical bodies prevented not only identification, but also the possibility of "physical coercion" of members by other members, and also by the state. The ability to participate anonymously or, as was and remains far more common, pseudonymously was an integral part of why Barlow and other net utopians saw the Internet as valuable.

Before 2004, when Facebook and other social media services began to require "real names" authentication (defined by danah boyd (2012) as "terms of service [agreements that] explicitly require its users to provide their "real names and information" (p. 29)), many online social spaces permitted users to construct their own bodies, bodies which supposedly did not definitively establish their users as female, or male, white or black or brown. Though, as boyd notes, not all Facebook users complied with the "real names" requirements, and "late teen adopters [of Facebook] were far less likely to use their given name" (p. 29-30), is now the norm for social network service users to provide real names. This is a significant shift from the pre SNS period, when the remaking or refashioning of one's body on the Internet was celebrated by digital utopians such as Barlow. Barlow, Mark Hansen, and others from this period envisioned the Internet as a race and gender-neutral space where virtual bodies replaced real ones. They envisioned users' "electronic bodies" as a directly oppositional practice to states or other socio-political institutions that might define users in oppressive ways or seek to control their behavior.[i]

Yet, the remarkable case of Natalie Blanchard (Sawchuck, cited in Dubrofsky and Magnet's Introduction to this volume), a depressed woman who lost her Canadian disability

benefits because, according to the insurance company who accessed her Facebook pages, her profile pictures showed her in a bikini on vacation looking "too happy" (to be depressed), reminds us that the "real names" Internet has the potential to coerce us all. For women on social networking sites there is a constant negotiation between the desire to connect and the need to self-regulate. Our identities are inextricably attached to the cultural contingencies of our gendered bodies.

For instance, as Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Megan M. Wood discuss in this volume, female celebrities who post to Twitter are viewed as responsible for the displays that place them under surveillance, implicating them in their own objectification. At the same time, women on these sites generate a significant amount of the user traffic and profit for social networking companies, and in fact, endure significant pressure to behave in ways that actively invite a sexualized gaze. Women perform much of the "free labor" of social media—they are more likely to use Facebook than men, they use picture-sharing services like Instagram and Pinterest more frequently (Duggan & Brenner, 2013), they populate and generate original and unique content for fan bulletin boards and produce and share fan fiction. As Mark Andrejevic and others have shown, this subjects them to new and invisible forms of surveillance and enclosure as every click, every post, and every log-on is measured and often sold to advertisers (Andrejevic, 2009).

In response to this troubling state of affairs, Geert Lovink and Korinna Patelis's "Unlike Us" project has brought together "a research network of artists, designers, scholars, activists, and programmers who work on 'alternatives in social media'" with the goal of propagating the "further development and proliferation of alternative, decentralized social media software" ("About: Unlike Us," n.d.). This network proposes to produce an anti-Facebook form of social networking, and encourages, as a first step, boycotting for-profit centralized social media platforms. While it is hard for many in our current social media age to envision a new system of free and publically-owned social media, without this shift, it is difficult to imagine how users can be protected from having their personal data harvested and potentially sold.

While the development of alternative platforms for digital interaction is a promising goal given the huge amounts of time, data, and personal information we willingly give to for-profit corporations to keep, sell, or simply save, this approach has some problems. It is exactly those vulnerable populations—children, poor women, migrants, older women—who are the least able to "quit Facebook." Users who lack digital literacies as well as cultural ones are less likely to be aware of alternatives to services like Facebook, or indeed, to be aware of the risks associated with their use in the first place. As the essays in this volume show, women and people of color are still overwhelmingly the objects of the biometric and surveillance gaze, as they have always been. Lack of access to digital tools and techniques, the industry practice of shipping smartphones and other mobile devices preloaded with applications like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter[ii] (Washington, 2011), and most importantly a lack of awareness of options and training in how to seek out and install alternative platforms makes it unlikely that the most-surveilled populations in Canada and North America can escape from the "walled garden" of social media.

In the introduction to this volume, Dubrofsky and Shoshana A. Magnet ask a timely question, "How do questions of empowerment and responsibility become articulated when individuals operate the technologies that functionally surveil them and are used to obstruct their right to the privileges of citizenship including assistance from the state?" (p. XX) Social media

has become a space of intense surveillance and punishment of feminist activism and activity, most recently in the shared spaces of digital gaming.[iii] Anita Sarkeesian, a Canadian-American blogger and media critic whose video blog, "Feminist Frequency," focuses on the profound sexism in commercial video games, discovered this the hard way when she put up a Kickstarter campaign in 2012 inviting readers to finance a video series on sexist tropes in games. Sarkeesian received personal messages that, as Consalvo (2012) writes, established just how "toxic" the culture of digital gaming is, as male gamers flooded the Internet with death threats and user-generated video games that invited users to punch and bruise Sarkeesian's face.

Early Internet utopians claimed the Internet would give everyone the power to surveil, to see and not be seen, to become a body-less and thus un-seeable user. Instead we have become more visible and trackable than ever. Social media companies are now, for all intents and purposes, communication utilities that we depend upon for access to friends and community. Female users and other users from marginalized and stigmatized groups are differentially targeted as objects of surveillance and victimization in social media. For example, Blanchard (the woman accused of looking too happy in her Facebook pictures, thus losing her disability insurance) and Sarkeesian lost their rights to safety, support, and state-recognized protection from harm by engaging in public activities that threatened patriarchal norms of gender, health and in the "right to be entertained" by racist, sexist, and homophobic game texts. While Blanchard's beach photos were the result of one of the most common and everyday uses of social networks—sharing pictures with friends—they exposed her to comparison with the normative "depressed body," a comparison to which she was found lacking. Sarkeesian was surveilled by a community of journalists and gamers who subjected her to forms of intensely gendered and racialized violence and oppression. She received numerous death threats and was mocked on many gaming forums for being "ugly," and Jewish, though in fact Sarkeesian is Armenian.

There is a key difference between these two cases. Sarkeesian was a blogger who sought readers and visibility when she posted her work and requests for project crowdfunding on the Internet. Blanchard was not. Whether women use the Internet to produce feminist work overtly critiquing sexist digital industries like gaming, as Sarkeesian did, or merely venture onto private networks such as Facebook to share pictures, they are exposed to both symbolic and legal violence.[iv] Troublingly, the state is unlikely to provide solutions; online harassment is robustly resistant to policing partly because of anonymity and pseudonymity, and online threats often are not taken seriously, but are rather tolerated as part of Internet culture.

I am inspired by Dubrofsky and Magnet's call for an alternative to traditional forms of regulation other than surveillant policing and criminalization of offenders, a system that has been amply proven not to work well in the case of video game sexism and racism (Nakamura, 2011). As Dubrofsky and Magnet ask, "how to build coalitions across difference and make our communities safer while continuing to refuse surveillance practices[?]… For example, what might a focus on violence look like that did not rely on police to surveil abusers, but instead thought about community-driven options as a response to violence?" (p. XX, this volume)

One place to look for these possibilities is the world of feminist digital gaming activism where there is a small but vital group of feminist, anti-abelist, and anti-racist blogs, tumblrs, and twitter hashtags (see #1reasonwhy and #YesAllWomen) that exemplify the "community-driven options" that the Internet makes available to women. These blogs successfully appropriate the social media tools that we already have to exercise forms of counter-surveillance that are non-coercive in nature. Fatuglyorslutty.com,

NotintheKitchenanymore.com, TheBorderHouse.com, TheHathorLegacy.com, and Racialicious.com collect racist, sexist, and homophobic hate speech that female and queer gamers have received while playing networked video games and publicize them for all to see (Nakamura, 2012). These sites do not solely rely on the state or on corporations such as Microsoft and Sony to "police" offenders (though readers are encouraged to submit report tickets to these companies if they deem that an appropriate response): instead, they produce feminist countersurveillant media that present an alternative to either criminalizing offenders, boycotting, trying to shut down gaming networks, or breaking them for others.

When women create their own networks for posting content about video game racism and sexism, they can have unexpectedly wide reaching and powerful effects. In a post entitled "Perspectives and Retrospectives: Vol 3," "gtz," a co-founder of FUoS ("Fat, Ugly, Or Slutty") tells a fascinating tale of her and her collaborators' work building a coalition of anti-racist, anti-sexist gamers. As she writes, "we've received letters from parents expressing gratitude for the 'work' that we do and their thoughts on how it affects their childrens' lives…We get 'thought this might interest you' emails from people linking us to various gaming, gender, and harassment-related issues that have popped up online. All over forums and blogs and Twitter people are expressing relief at *not feeling alone* in harassment." ("gtz," 2012). This post appeared in the "Staff Blog" section of the site on February 1, 2012, and it directly addresses Dubrofsky and Magnet's call for a "community-driven option" as a response to gamer violence. For as "gtz" reports,

> a couple of weeks ago, FUoS had another first—a request from someone to have their harassing messages taken off the site. This person had googled their own username, and lo and behold, all the results came up with FAT UGLY OR SLUTTY DOT COM. We've had folks 'featured' on the site show up in comments and defend their actions, or deliberately try and incite some flamewars…but this was new…this was the first time someone actually had expressed a modicum of regret after seeing it on FUoS.

"gtz" goes on to describe how she decided to handle the request to take down the poster's abusive message. The poster described how when he googled his username and saw his original post; he wrote to FUoS "can you remove that its dumb and immature im only 16 when I made that to sum chick cause I was bored and id like to not be reped in that way could you please take it down? I learned my lesson don't be a jackass on internet things." [sic] As gtz writes, "there's something, *something* in the email that says he gets it, even just a little bit, and I believe it." In the end, the site moderator decided keep the original post on-site, but remove all references to his username, thus protecting his privacy and reputation.

This decision to "police without policing," exemplified by "gtz"'s actions in this case, embodies a feminist ethics of pedagogy and care. It responds to the harasser's assertion to have "learned his lesson" by hailing an affective register; as "gtz" writes, "a lot of this is gut feeling and that's partly why I wanted to do this series." She identifies her decision to anonymize the young man's post to protect him from publicity and ridicule as emanating from her "gut," but there is clearly far more at play. As she writes, the site originated as a way to help women publicize gamic harassment, but had unexpected consequences.

Parents as well as bloggers, Twitter users, and gamers came together to form a feminist community based on media activism on FatUglyorSlutty.com. Though their actions were the result of frustration and disenchantment with the game industry's ability or desire to address the

toxic environment of many of its products, they advocate a two-pronged approach that included both "official" regulation and community-based documentation and activism.

FatUglyorSlutty.com models an alternative ethics of regulation that stands in sharp contrast to Sony and Microsoft's official complaint handling policy in regards to their gaming platforms, a policy based on irregular enforcement of a Terms of Service agreement that is rarely read by players and written in legal, rather than affective, discourse. As more of our lives continue to become mediated by social media and gamic worlds, we would do well to look out for such models. This is not a utopian story: there's no way to verify that the young man was telling the truth, or that his experience will deter him from hate speech the next time he plays online games with women. It is, however, ultimately a hopeful one.

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[i] See González, J. (2009). The Face and The Public: Race, Secrecy and Digital Art Practice. *Camera Obscura, 24*(1 70), 37-65. for an eloquent argument.

[ii] According to Washington (2011), people of color are far more likely to access the Internet from a mobile device, effectively creating "two Internets": one for privileged broadband users, and another for mobile users who must deal with the limitations of small keyboards, impoverished interfaces, and less interactivity: "Fifty-one percent of Hispanics and 46 percent of blacks use their phones to access the Internet, compared with 33 percent of whites, according to a July 2010 Pew poll. Forty-seven percent of Latinos and 41 percent of blacks use their phones for e-

mail, compared with 30 percent of whites. The figures for using social media like Facebook via phone were 36 percent for Latinos, 33 percent for blacks and 19 percent for whites" (Washington, 2011).

[iii] See Marwick, A. (2013, March 29). Donglegate: Why the Tech Community Hates Feminists. *Wired*. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/2013/03/richards-affair-and-misogyny-in-tech/ for an excellent analysis of the pervasively anti-feminist climate of computing culture generally.

[iv] See Gregg, M. (2011). *Work's Intimacy*. New York: Polity. for an excellent account of the intermingling of these labor and leisure engendered by digital mobile media.