

Editors' Introduction

Informed Historical Reveries

“Through this book, I imagine the possibility that later generations of media feminists might not have to do this work again: putting a stop, for a while at least, to this particular feminist ‘re’-cycle.”

—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, *WOMEN OF VISION*, 2001¹

“Theories and concepts help order history, but critically informed production practice, an orientation of learning, thinking, and doing might move us out of these painful historical reveries.”

—ANGELA J. AGUAYO, *DOCUMENTARY RESISTANCE*, 2019²

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In October 2017 I received an email from Shelley Stamp inviting me to edit a special issue of *Feminist Media Histories* devoted to activism. I at once asked her if I could collaborate with someone. I prefer this method for several reasons, not least because as a senior scholar for whom such invitations are often part of my job duties, it allows me to share the academic wealth, so to speak, with junior scholars. And collaboration is a feminist method in which I have put great stock—that is, sharing and building knowledge and community together. I immediately thought of Angela J. Aguayo—not someone I knew personally, but a fellow scholar of activist feminist video whom I knew professionally. There are only a small handful of scholars who work centrally in the subfield of activist media, and we can count on finding one another on panels and in the audience at media studies conferences. I knew Aguayo from the field. I knew she was great, but only from afar.

I suppose this was a gamble, proposing to work on something significant with someone I hardly knew. But a little precarious process is the first step toward gaining the creativity, even magic, that one most hopes to get out of collaborations (and for me, feminist activist media as well). It shouldn't be easy or effortless. It shouldn't be something expected or already known. Collaboration (and feminist activist video) are about bridging across and building from difference within a shared space of your own mutual co-design. From that, if you are lucky, you produce something new that neither of you could have found or made on your own. In terms of scholarship, this means both new knowledge

and new methods. For media activism, it means taking steps toward your stated goals of world changing. For histories of activist media, it means creating new ideas and methods from previous and present work to contribute to feminist projects. By collaborating with Aguayo, I sought for this special issue to emerge from processes of encounter and collaboration central to my own decades of theorizing, practicing, and historicizing this subfield, and in the process contribute to feminist media activism in its own right.

I called Aguayo out of the blue. We talked briefly. We were on.

“We are relational beings, connected through social networks. When we become relationally engaged with others, we often develop our sense of responsibility, our affective care and concern for others. These connections become the scaffolding of social change as networks are held together with shared interests but also with love.”

—ANGELA J. AGUAYO, *DOCUMENTARY RESISTANCE*, 2019³

ANGELA J. AGUAYO: I was surprised but excited to get the invitation from Alex. When does something like this happen—a senior scholar whose work you admire reaching out and suggesting a collaboration on a journal issue? It jarred my thinking. How could I use my own access to opportunity, growing but still unfolding, as I am only a few years past the tenure process, to create space for the next generation of scholars, artists, media makers, and instigators? I am at the point in my career where invitations for collaboration are beginning to appear more frequently, but my mindset is still caught up in the academic hustle. It’s difficult to step out of survival mode and imagine my own agency and ability to build inclusive networks through creative and scholarly initiatives.

In my current scholarship, I seek to understand how moving image cultures and discourses function in the process of social change. This includes a research agenda focused on how opportunities for social justice emerged from the documentary impulse as it moved through the introduction of portable analog video recording equipment in the late 1960s and into the contemporary digital culture of participatory media publics. As a producer and director, I use the practices of communication to make documentary media addressing the absences and silencing of history, locating and building from the concealed stories that inform our current social problems. This is my way of contributing to understanding the concerted efforts of organized people—in the past and the present—to create more inclusive and just communities with the means of media production.

Like Alex, I create the kinds of media that I study, and this engagement produces a form of reflexivity that does not easily fit into academic scholarship. My work—making and circulating moving image discourses—transforms my scholarly impulses and then theory directly informs my production practice. Where do the fissures between theory, history, and practice show up in our scholarship? Where are the connections? Alex’s work had provided language for my journey, and her approach created space for academic off-roading that expanded my curiosities about the terrain outside the well-worn paths created by traditional cinema history and media studies.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION

“I was surprised to see how we lack cross-generational conversation and how desperate we are for older women to hear the words of younger women and for younger women to hear those of older women. We as a movement—even though we are not a movement maybe—but we as women have neglected that, as does most of our culture.”

—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, *WOMEN OF VISION*, 2001⁴

AJ: I asked Angela to think about how she might want to approach our special issue. What concerns were live for her as a younger scholar, woman of color, and activist filmmaker working in feminist media activism, our shared space of subject and method? During our second call, she noted that she had gone back to my 2001 book *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* so as to reacquaint herself with my specific practice and interests. She told me that upon this rereading, the book’s focus upon, or grounding within, the 1980s and 1990s was of the most interest to her. I responded that her current research interest in this lost period—a period of feminist activity commencing a generation before her own—produced an eerie if familiar echo with what had motivated and then become the focus of that earlier project. *Women of Vision*, my second scholarly research project (the first was on AIDS activist video), also had begun with a keen interest in and attention to the experiences and knowledge of a still very active generation of feminists—my mentors, teachers, and predecessors—who had come of professional age primarily in the 1970s (and for some, the 1960s).⁵

Now I was that woman to her! Mentor, teacher, predecessor. We seek and are sought: “While I set out to make work for my students and others like them, I admit I had selfish interests as well. I needed to remedy my own confusion about being a feminist in an ever more conservative present, about being a progressive woman who lives haunted by an almost-lived, immortalized, recent, politically vibrant past embodied in the writings, images, institutions, and actual

bodies of women only slightly older than I.”⁶ The parallels in motive, period, and process are informative, disturbing, and beautiful. I think they may be definitive.

Angela suggested that we focus our special issue on the 1980s and 1990s not simply because it was just out of her reach, but more critically because she was convinced that there were useful similarities between that recent past and our own situation today, particularly in relation to contemporary politics. Both are times of sudden, immense political retrenchment immediately following periods of exuberant possibility. We left that conversation tasked with creating lists of feminist scholars and artists we might want to work with for our issue, women who could tell us more about the 1980s and today. One thing led to another, and somehow the list of possible contributors took shape as focusing upon the youngest eight women originally featured in *Women of Vision*, media feminists who had come into their voices in the 1980s. These were my own cohort, several of whom were at the time, and still are, my friends and collaborators (one, my ex-partner!). My previous project had used the intergenerational interview, collective conversation, and research within lived and loving communities as methods for feminist historiography. We decided it might be revealing if we did the same, again, with multiple timescapes at our disposal: looking today to what I had done with others previously, and to what we might hope for the future.

CRITICAL HISTORY AND ACTIVIST FIELD METHODS

“Documentary becomes an act of preserving the memory of unrepresented existences and offering these silenced voices powerful recognition in the patchwork of history.”

—ANGELA J. AGUAYO, *DOCUMENTARY RESISTANCE*, 2019⁷

AA: Alex’s call was an opportunity to rethink my deeply ingrained scholarly patterns and imagine different methods of exploring this history. What could be alternative means for recovering lost stories? What might be new ways to generate answers to persisting questions? When she reached out I had just completed my book manuscript *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media*. As I had been revisiting the history of feminist filmmaking through a chapter on abortion documentary, I noticed a strange absence. Beginning in the 1980s, it was difficult to trace any kind of feminist filmmaking history as an activist practice. “Where are these artists, makers, and activists?” I naively asked Alex one afternoon on the phone. “What happened to this robust history of radical women in the 1970s, and how did the next generation pick that up?” There was a silence, and

then she replied softly, “They were decimated.” Political conditions shifted dramatically for media makers in the 1980s, and the creative contributions of women and people of color were some of the largest casualties of this erasure.

The story of activist media production in the United States is of people unwilling to give up on the dream of an inclusive democracy and harnessing moving images, the apparatus of storytelling, and realist production modes to represent demands for a better world. In the 1960s, women were dying from dirty medical procedures in makeshift operating rooms. The horror of back-alley abortions and a lack of access to birth control led women to pick up film cameras and demand a new vision for their health. In these acts of resistance, beginning with a refusal of consent and compliance, activists set limits on the authority of others by demonstrating “the failure to adopt one’s behavior to the demands of the state, of the law and of capital.”⁸ Even when they were oppressed by the powerful, these media makers persisted. The story of feminist media activism in the United States is a story of self-determination and the long and treacherous roads of resistance we travel to achieve these ends.

As is true today, the 1980s brought drastic cuts to arts funding in general and activist media in particular. Reagan-era hostility toward the arts ushered in a new cultural regime in which media production “did not imagine new social spaces, but rather affirm[ed] unique individuals.”⁹ The restructuring of the telecommunications sector, political targeting by conservatives, and congressional debates against the arts and arts funding created a hostile environment for activist and community media. At this moment, some efforts to create feminist activist media funneled into local cable-access stations, where great droves of women’s production culture was generated. This is now destined for erasure as these shows die on VHS tapes that are not properly archived. Patricia Zimmermann has identified the 1980s as a time of war over how public space and nationhood would be defined. Productions focused on realist representations became sites for the expression of larger conflicts like the “war between the imagined white nation-state and the new formations of diaspora.”¹⁰ Loss of public funds and infrastructure and raging cultural wars resulted in the collapse of dozens of media centers, organizations, and arts funding for underrepresented communities.

“The New York Film Festival is happening and there is only one film by a woman,” filmmaker Su Friedrich announced to a crowded room full of artists and scholars who had gathered at Juhasz’s request to discuss the history of feminist filmmaking. It was the mid-1990s: the internet had yet to bear its

rich possibilities, independent film was difficult to find and screen, and feminist media work had yet to pierce the history books in any significant way. The women at the Feminist History Research Meeting wondered: How do we begin writing a history that has not been properly documented? How do we develop frameworks for understanding a production culture that has not yet been allowed to surface in the public imaginary? This is where Juhasz began in 1994, off-roading in interdisciplinary research by holding five meetings of media feminists across the United States, bridging the divide between artists and scholars to generate a collective understanding of feminist film history. The research meetings, held in 1994 and 1995, would lead first to Juhasz's feature-length documentary *Women of Vision: 18 Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (1998), and later a book of transcribed interviews, *Women of Vision: Histories in Film and Video* (Minnesota University Press, 2001). Scholar, activist, artist, and *Women of Vision* collaborator Alisa Lebow pointed out at the New York meeting that the boundaries of this history are unclear. Is this story about production, spectatorship, or politics?

Pulling from the fieldwork generated in the process of writing *Women of Vision*, we offer in this issue of *Feminist Media Histories* a sample from the five research meetings Juhasz conducted in 1994 and 1995 to explore (and generate) this history: a digitized and annotated version of a VHS tape recorded at Women Make Movies in New York. It records a gathering lasting four hours and twenty minutes, peopled by feminist artists and scholars like Su Friedrich, Annie Sprinkle, Cheryl Dunye, E. Ann Kaplan, Shu Lea Cheang, Shari Frilot, Yvonne Rainer, Abigail Child, and scores of others. Thanks to the tools built as part of another research project (Juhasz's current working group, VHS Archives), she has placed this footage into a lightweight portable community-archiving tool developed by Partner and Partners called Analog Archive.¹¹ Users can skip around through the long recording by using the annotations. They can also add annotations (and ephemera) of their own: about content, background, or feeling.¹² Online access to review and even engage with the digitized tape follows this introduction as "New Formats for Revisits." In this way, we jump-start and lead with the inclusive, interactive scholarly engagement that defines the rest of the special issue.

Academic scholarship and feminist theoretical interventions have not always illuminated the murky political roads ahead. My research shows that in the mid-1980s, psychoanalytic film theory had become a preferred mode of feminist analysis among film scholars.¹³ This turn away from materialist film analysis

and the subjugation of traditional political struggle as a focus of research had consequences for feminist media production. At a time when praxis was desperately needed for feminists, the divide between theory and practice was driven deeper. Working-class women, amateurs, and those who do not typically have access to tools of media authorship used “unsophisticated” realist media-making strategies, eliciting harsh criticism from scholars. B. Ruby Rich recalls a time in the 1980s when the elitist forces among feminist film scholars and the critics at *Screen Magazine* were so intense that a simple suggestion of media having political utility was met with accusations of vulgar Marxism.¹⁴

In her scholarship, Juhasz documents the steady erasure of talking head, cinema vérité, or realist approaches from academic film history. In the 1980s and 1990s, these kinds of working-class documentary approaches were characterized as “not sophisticated, or even legitimate, formal strategies.”¹⁵ Responding in 1994 to scholars like E. Ann Kaplan and Eileen McGarry, who were skeptical of realism’s ability to challenge political consciousness, Juhasz pointed out that working feminist media makers had steadily relied on realism, despite scholars’ preoccupation with psychoanalysis.¹⁶ Today, I find myself struggling with the lack of documentation of the history of feminist media practice, especially from the 1980s, a dark time politically and also within the feminist media movement. That’s the main reason we organized this issue around retrieval, return, and encounter.

When I am beginning a project, I generally get in the habit of asking a series of questions: What stories currently exist in the archive, in the public record, in history? Whose interests do they serve? Which stories are missing? What can be added to the historical record? What is significant about these stories? And how can I collaborate with others to make the public record more complete, dynamic, multivocal, and inclusive? The more voices we bring to bear in the public archive, even in their inconsistent logics and memory, the closer we get to understanding the root patterns and structures of power.

Existing on the fringes of the market, activist media is often financed by its creators and sometimes circulates for free to intensify the documentary’s impact by removing cost barriers to access. These smaller-than-a-micro-budget films often exceed the concept of entertainment. We might not want to see what the director asks us to witness. The message may go against the collective wisdom of the day. Or the work may give space and dignity to people or issues that are not recognized in mainstream culture. These forms of feminist media intervention often utilize a talking-head political aesthetic and other realist strategies.

Despite harsh criticism leveled by many film theorists, the activist strategies embedded in the realist codes of feminist media representations accomplish important political work, tethering previously unarticulated knowledge to history. As oppressed people and those who record our circumstances know instinctively, these “bad” and “unsophisticated” stories provide a rare space for vernacular contributions to public record. The films, bemoaned by critics for their lack of cinematic artistry, offer representation to people who are rarely allowed to see or present themselves on-screen. It is from this location that activists ground their media in the power in authenticity. I wanted to learn more about feminists who did such work in a dark time, politically and perhaps within the film community, and I wanted to learn more from feminists now, perhaps asking similar or related questions about the forms and methods of their current practices.

COLLABORATIVE REFLEXIVITY

“I integrate and synthesize intellectual, creative, and political practices. My initial training is in research and scholarship, but I am also a media maker with a focus on creating social change documentary. The ideas, questions, insights, and reasoning found in the pages of this book are informed by scholarship, but they also reflect my on-the-ground experience working with the process of documentary and social change.”

—ANGELA J. AGUAYO, *DOCUMENTARY RESISTANCE*, 2019¹⁷

“I make the same thing that I study: feminist media and feminist media history. Self-consciousness about my own process becomes part of the study.”

—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, *WOMEN OF VISION*, 2001¹⁸

AA AND AJ: This is not an easy history to excavate. Feminist activist media resist traditional methods of historiography and theorizing because the practitioners are very much alive, are actively producing and considering this history as core to their own creative and political work, are doing much of this collaboratively and in conversation with other movements, and have been stymied, due to patriarchy and other structural forces, in their efforts to produce, save, and share what has been made. This does not mean we should turn away from making and engaging this history. Rather, we face up to the challenges of historical fissures, contradictions, and convergences with writing that seems appropriate to the task and the community, allowing for innovative paradigms of thinking and novel approaches to knowledge production.

“There were things happening with video that are not product oriented,” Mona Jimenez explains in the research footage from the 1994 New York

meeting available in the online project that follows. She goes on to explain all the ways video had been used to document and organize, but that these feminist works had limited circulation or preservation. In 1994, Jimenez lamented that recording formats would disappear, and certain media would cycle out of perceived value and usefulness. As she anticipated, few traces of this work are to be found in traditional archives today. But this history is being saved in the storage closets and basements of those who lived through it, and it is being archived by activist theorists and artists like Juhasz and her colleagues at VHS Archives at the CUNY Graduate Center (who produced the tool that annotates and saves video footage using queer feminist principles of archive). Underground works need finding, documentation, and sharing in ways different from what has worked for traditional or patriarchal media. Underground people—the feminists, queers, people of color, poor and working people, children, and others who make up our feminist activist media world—need caring research methods as well. And we need them (the people, their media, and the media that was never made or never saved or rarely seen) as proof of existence of those before us. We want to share their historical traces so they can linger for us to pick up and continue the work.

We wonder: Why are so few scholars in the academy writing about independent, activist, and community media? Although there has been steady scholarship around feminist media cultures since Juhasz's *Women of Vision* research meetings (and before), the study of activist film and video is still carried out by a relatively small community of scholars. Most of cinema and media studies focused on great auteurs, artistic accomplishment, popular culture, and commercial filmmaking (or making someone lost into someone great); the study of activist and community media production does not carry the same scholarly status. The women discussing feminist media culture in 1994 well understood and recognized this pattern of exclusion, as we can now see twenty-five years later. As they and we testify, if what one creates or studies is not perceived as valuable, the impact of the work is minimized and so are the possibilities for the mobility of its creators and the work itself, in its own time and then for the future.

One way into exploring these erasures and fissures between history, theory, practice, and what gets made and saved is to experiment with reflexivity as a method of knowing, and with creative interactions as a way of doing. Intergenerational collaboration allows us to begin to acknowledge and work from gaps in understanding and stitch together continuities in experience across difference. We have much in common. Feminists who place limits on the

authority of the state, law, culture, and capital with their media production practices share an agitational and critical relationship with power. We can learn from one another.

Given our shared commitment to and ongoing interest in intergenerational conversation as a method for gathering and growing ideas and community, we devised a rather adventurous structure for this issue, one that reflected the useful encounter that we were having. We decided to reach out to the eight women highlighted in the third segment of *Women of Vision*: Megan Cunningham, Cheryl Dunye, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Eve Oishi, Valerie Soe, Juanita Mohammed (Szczepanski), Victoria Vesna, and Yvonne Welbon. (Negrón-Muntaner and Vesna enthusiastically agreed to join but could not finish their creative projects within the required timeline.) We invited these women to create their own structure and format for intergenerational conversation with another media feminist. Our concept was for each invitee to reflect on the 1980s and 1990s as they relate to the political climate today, as well as to feminist media history and feminist activist methods. We also invited one “outside” project to join the effort, given that it so closely shared our goals and methods: the pedagogic intergenerational research project FEMEXFILMARCHIVE by Irene Lusztig and Julie Forrest Wyman.

Feminist Media Histories gave us permission to give them permission to be creative. Given the journal’s internet home, and the fact that many of these women are artists as well as theorists and/or activists, it seemed exciting and also potentially productive for them to coauthor their contributions about the/their history of feminist media activism across a range of platforms and methods. Their amazing, inventive, diverse, but complementary projects constitute this issue. Frances Negrón-Muntaner was interviewed by her student, Elisabetta Diorio, for their piece “‘We Learn Together: Feminist Film Pedagogy in the Ivy League,’ a Conversation with Frances Negrón-Muntaner” after our special issue was copyedited. Although it could not be included here, its connections to other contributions in the issue around undergraduate education, Latinx media history, mentorship, and feminist media outside and inside academia are an invaluable contribution to our shared effort.¹⁹

We positioned ourselves and then our contributors beyond the well-worn paths of cinema and media history and method, purposefully looking back with an eye toward what might have been overlooked, especially in the shared context of resource scarcity and hostile political oppression. We also enjoyed the now: our time together, making history, looking at the past, working toward a better present and future. This collection includes collaborative history

interactions in a variety of formats: scholarly and poetic texts, interviews live and in writing, video and podcast, and the reassembled asynchronous interviews with Barbara Hammer and Carolee Schneemann that form the coda. Megan Cunningham, who today runs a large media company where Juhasz serves on the board, engages her mentor and former teacher in a conversation podcast. To mirror this effort, Aguayo engaged in a podcast interview with her own mentor and teacher, the activist and documentary video maker Ellen Spiro. In the small and linked worlds that form activist feminist media, Juhasz and Spiro had met as AIDS activist video makers in the 1980s and had recently made a short AIDS documentary together, *DiAna's Hair Ego REMIX* (directed by Cheryl Dunye and Ellen Spiro, 2017). This connection wasn't known to Aguayo and Juhasz until Spiro engaged in her own intergenerational interaction for the project. Eve Oishi chose to author an auto-ethnographic intergenerational account of queer of-color film curation with her graduate student and fellow programmer Marisa Hicks-Alcaraz. The beautifully edited video conversation between Valerie Soe and Mila Zuo sits in a similar intellectual and social space—an intergenerational academic conversation—while also taking up a more experimental form. Soe chose Zuo to work with, since the latter had already expressed scholarly interest in thinking through and with Soe's extensive video output. Negrón-Muntaner and Diorio also built from the teacher-student dynamic.

Other scholars from the group are likewise committed to researching and sharing the output of foremothers. Irene Lusztig and Julie Forrest Wyman were already working on their own feminist intergenerational conversations and histories and generously agreed to participate in this effort by explaining and sharing from their pedagogical feminist media history project, FEMEXFILMARCHIVE. Scholar and filmmaker Yvonne Welbon's interview with Alexis Pauline Gumbs, part of her larger *Sisters in the Life* project (in which Juhasz is a close collaborator), is a similar project: dedicated to creating and documenting connections and legacies between Black lesbian and female filmmakers. Much aligned and also in the family, community-based activist video maker Juanita Mohammed chose to make a creative poetry video piece with her granddaughter, Pharaoh "Pharah" Diaz. Meanwhile, Cheryl Dunye organized a multi-modal social-media-based conversation with feminist and queer scholar (and her wife) Karina Hodoyán and student Toni Adeyemi about changing media strategies. The issue begins with the aforementioned interactive four-hour slice of research footage shot in 1994 and only now publicly available in 2019. And, continuing to honor duration,

memory, and media, we end with a coda and homage to Barbara Hammer and Carolee Schneemann, two of the earlier project's interviewees who died while this effort was under way.

OUR TEN COLLABORATIVE HISTORIES

AJ: All told, these ten original contributions offer important insights into feminist activist media history as well as the creative processes that might help us understand and continue to enact its values and goals. The importance of visibility remains paramount: of oneself as well as of one's family, community, and criticisms. Equally critical is the value of the visibility of other powerful women. In "Two Women," Mohammed and Diaz find scores of such images and intercut them with their own poems of personal pain and plans for ongoing empowerment. The matter of competing as well as connecting registers of time, between people of a generation and depictions of generations, is also common. "People are still focused on dramatic storytelling about problems from the past. The present still points backward," says Dunye. A range of methods are enacted, but all are process- and people-oriented—teaching, talking, art making—what Hicks-Alcaraz calls *pláticas*: informal conversations highlighting the ephemerality and serendipity of process. Gumbs understands this as "intergenerational accountability." Identity-based work continues to register value, even as the technologies and theories that frame these identities change. As for space: margins shift, recede, calcify, and open. According to Dunye, whose own career has led her from art video, to indie film, and now to TV: "What was once out of reach for the margins is now within reach." Social risks, technologies, and vulnerability change, but even so, we always have our bodies. The coda that revisits Hammer and Schneemann, honoring their lives and deaths, cancers and careers, reminds us of this critical feminist orientation and the media and histories our bodies generate.

AA: I too want to highlight the importance of what was created by using intergenerational conversations as an approach to knowledge production, a manner of recovering what has been lost. The conversation between Juhasz and Cunningham reflects a complicated new history spanning the early onset of digital video into a burgeoning world of multimedia connectivity. It is intimate and reflective of the history they share as teacher and student, addressing how feminist media work evolves from the classroom and into the practices of the global media market.

Most of the contributions in this issue are built on such intimacies: familial, mentoring, political. Cunningham and Juhasz's intergenerational exchange reflects traces of feminist pedagogy even as Cunningham has shifted into

commercial practices. The FEMEXFILMARCHIVE likewise creates community and exchange around a sparsely documented history. Lusztyg and Wyman offer a collective archiving project for their students and others, featuring the work and histories of feminist experimental filmmakers. Their web-based archive is framed as a generational modeling project: “We encouraged our students to think about things like how to find their own creative role models, how to learn from listening, and how to learn from intergenerational feminist conversation.” Generational exchanges become critical when communities seek to gain public recognition, especially when there is a problem with documenting and accessing history. Speaking across generations is a collective knowledge production for survival, marking a path of what came before and what could come next.

In this way, Soe looks back on her media practice through questions posed by Zuo, explaining how the contours, theories, and practices of identity and representation fluctuate across the evolution of her work. The conversation addresses remix, oppositional aesthetics, and historical representations. Meanwhile, Mohammed and Diaz also engage creatively across media formats and feminist of-color representation—as do Dunye, Hodoyán, and Adeyemi, who create an intergenerational exchange about the legacy and movement of Dunye’s work across shifting modes of storytelling. Their exchange manifests over a public social media account, harnessing new spaces of exchange as a mode of documenting feminist QPOC histories. The result is intimate, digestible bits of conversation that stitch a sparsely documented production history into an unusual media landscape.

Hicks-Alcaraz and Oishi, while also interested in feminist QPOC media histories, take a more traditional approach, producing a scholarly essay on political identity and community-based film festivals and their experiences as festival curators—a mostly unpaid culture of identity-based film. The exchange between Gumbs and Welbon looks to lesbian of-color filmmaking but pulls the past into the future. Talking through structures of racism, education, and feminist film culture, they build a portrait of grassroots world-making. Spiro and I struggle with modes of activism at different stages of our respective lives, discussing motherhood, the precarious financial conditions of documentary production, and how to survive “the calling” of making the stories needed for social change. Collectively, our exchanges produce insights that converge past and present, pulling forward the things worth remembering and drawing out what we have collectively buried.

REVISITS AND HISTORY

“I, too, worry about the remembering of the recent feminist past and more specifically about the forgetting of feminist media history.”

—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, *WOMEN OF VISION*, 2001²⁰

AJ: Why do/did we/I revisit? Why would I/we revisit a revisit? Perhaps each revisit is simply its own *new* visit, albeit a meeting where time, the past, and memory are centered and central to the engagement. Revisiting is history making, isn't it? And if the people from the past in question are still alive, a researcher can do some of her work or revisit as a new visit: perhaps arriving with a gift of food or flowers, or with a camera or microphone, and most likely being treated to some hospitality herself, which would include the gifts given of memories or answers. If the people whose lives are being revisited are no longer with us, records of previous revisits can be of a colder kind (no flowers, tea, or affective intimacy) or a warmer one, as in my coda to this issue.²¹

During revisits, things happen that I believe in—ideas, energy, intimacy, connection, information sharing. Feminists conversing within our known communities, now and again, is a method I take stock, pleasure, meaning, and delight in. Why do/did we/I revisit as feminist media history making?

- There is still more to learn. Many visits are needed.
- Visits can be fun, nourishing, empowering, intoxicating.
- The researcher and her subjects can compare and contrast with the previous visit, marking and naming change, growth, and loss.
- The first visit wasn't seen enough or seen right by others.
- Revisits allow for reintroductions.
- Revisits honor the cyclical, repetitive, self-reflexive nature of feminists and their movements and processes.
- Revisits can shock you, wake you up, allow you to see (newly or again).
- Revisits allow for introspection on personal and collective levels, especially if you revisit yourself or your own group.
- Revisits allow for new analyses within contemporary frameworks.
- New formats or technologies engender new ways of seeing things that were previously encountered.
- Revisits can produce what Jaimie Baron calls “the archive effect,” a powerful experience of reception founded upon the project of repurpose and transformation through recontextualization, holding at

once the then of the footage, the now of the making, and the now of the watching.²²

AA: We revisit to build upon the pathways of understanding laid before we arrived. It is our obligation to look back and remember what dominant history routinely forgets: the efforts of average people to demand and shape a better world. Our urgency is fueled by the timeliness of this task. The feminists who paved the road before us are passing on their work, and it is imperative that we build continuity with our political interventions.

NEW FORMATS FOR REVISITS

“I find that I am still motivated by the possibility of feminist association—generations learning from and working with each other.”

—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, *WOMEN OF VISION*, 2001²³

AJ: Why use or invent new formats for revisiting? Because it already seemed hard before: writing a traditional scholarly book about a quirky self-aware community. Because it seems relevant now, and there are new formats that we had only dreamed of then. Because I couldn't remember much of it even though I myself had already done it. Because I had it and thought I might be able to make it (more) usable to others who might need it. Because no one else had yet, at least in this way. While for some (the young) twenty-five years might seem like a long time ago, for me it still feels very much connected and also highly relevant to what I (still) know and believe. And worse, or more, this question of the (quick) loss of (or never found) work and history, and subsequent feminist returns, is the very subject of much of the work! And yet, as a researcher as well as a reader, I learn differently from inventive methods because they (can) create action, art, and community as much as knowledge, or *as* knowledge: ways of being, knowing, and learning that are most meaningful. I find Gabriella Giannachi helpful:

“We design the archive as the apparatus we want to be produced by . . . as a ceremony where a community is reminded of its own identity as a kind of collective autobiography.”²⁴

AA: In the process of pulling together her field tapes, Alex wrote me a letter. I could tell the excavation of this work was not without its emotional toll. Her self-evaluation and self-reflexivity have their own wisdom:

Trump is destroying the world. All that I've done and known about alternative culture continues to seem both the only sane response to a horrific world ruled by capitalism and patriarchal greed and violence, and also proof that we didn't really (and can't really) change much. We did our good work twenty years ago and yet here we are even so.

Angela, I don't feel hopeful. But I offer you the tape because I said I would, and with hope that something might emerge from the process: from you. I do trust in this, our process, maybe for no other reason that it's mine and ours: feminists' that is. And that *is* something: our potential to be moved and activated by the other, together. That is more than nothing, more than giving up or giving in or staying home, online, alone.

In *Archive Everything*, Gabriella Giannachi notes that archives are “not distinct from their administration.” Today, people like us, activist media feminists, store and make accessible some of the things that matter to us. This apparatus—our archives of the everyday—is “a knowledge generating process or lab” that points to the commitments of the archivist while also “drawing attention to the significance of the user” (xvii). My tape now sits in a funky digital archive and there evidences a process between archivist and user that I can believe in.

We still need each other for a “collective autobiography”: that is, a sense of self in history, in community, in media, and in conversation. In these many revisits to this project, I continue to find that the connections between feminists—together producing community through media production and reception and driven by stunning mixtures of inclusivity and difference—lead to exacting and nourishing considerations of our power, agency, creativity, and capacity. As well as to inspiring art, and life-sustaining engagements. We are enhanced and deterred by technology, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and other structural oppressions. We are made whole by connection.

From the digitized tape that follows, I find hope in the words of the women who traveled this road before me. I hang on to their experiences, hoping to learn from their missteps and triumphs. I take in their insight like oxygen in a room with little air. This is more than an exercise of knowledge between Juhasz and me; we are building the stories for the next generation of women behind us who find themselves, again, in a room with no oxygen, hungry for understanding.

How to tease out these histories inside of histories of women picking up the camera to engage the world around them? This is a tangled narrative. It does not fit neatly in established categories of film scholarship. The ways we gather and use these bits of unattended evidence matter. Exclusion and the lack of representation of feminist film practice haunt this story, putting demands on what is expressed and how. If we travel only along the routes of our well-weathered methodologies, we will miss precious and undocumented stories. Traditional archives usually concentrate attention on the great films and auteurs of history. Yet the story of activism, feminism, and media production exceeds this narrow scope. As the camera settles in the hands of feminists committed to changing the world—including the two of us, and all who have done this

work before, and alongside, and after us—the possibilities of social change magnify. This history continues to be incomplete and in need of excavation and reevaluation. My thanks to Alex Juhasz for offering digitized access to her video records and field notes as another beginning, an invitation to pick up what has been left behind. Now, readers, will you help us make this history more complete? ■

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ALEXANDRA JUHASZ is chair of the Film department at Brooklyn College, CUNY. She makes and studies committed media practices that contribute to political change and individual and community growth. She is the author of *AIDS TV* (Duke University Press, 1995); *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001); *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*, coedited with Jesse Lerner (University of Minnesota Press, 2005); *Learning from YouTube* (MIT Press, 2011); *The Blackwell Companion on Contemporary Documentary*, coedited with Alisa Lebow (Blackwell, 2015); and *Sisters in the Life: A History of Out African American Lesbian Media-Making*, coedited with Yvonne Welbon (Duke University Press, 2018). Her current work #100HardTruths-#FakeNews is on and about feminist internet culture, including fake news: me/100hardtruths and fakenews-poetry.org.

NOTES

1. Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, Visible Evidence 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 10.
2. Angela J. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 129.
3. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance*, 22.
4. Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, x.
5. My earlier book was Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
6. Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 327.
7. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance*, 125.
8. Joss Hands, *@ Is for Activism: Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture* (London and New York: Pluto, 2011), 4–5.
9. Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 11.
10. Zimmermann, *States of Emergency*, 13.
11. For more on VHS Archives see <https://www.centerforthehumanities.org/public-engagement/working-groups/vhs-archives>. The Partner and Partners website is <https://partnerandpartners.com>.

12. To add content please email Alexandra Juhasz.
13. B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 287.
14. Rich, *Chick Flicks*, 301.
15. Alexandra Juhasz, "‘They Said We Were Trying to Show Reality—All I Want to Show Is My Video’: The Politics of the Realist Feminist Documentary," *Screen* 35, no. 2 (1994): 191.
16. Juhasz, "‘They Said We Were Trying to Show Reality,'" 191.
17. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance*, 15.
18. Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 1.
19. You can find the piece here http://ffc.twu.edu/issue_10-1/feat_Negron-Muntaner-and-Diorio_10-1.html.
20. Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 1.
21. See Alexandra Juhasz, *Video Remains* digital video, 2005, 54 min., available from the artist at her website: <http://alexandrajuhasz.com/films-videos/video-remains/>.
22. Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2014), 7–22.
23. Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 38–39.
24. Gabriella Giannachi, *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xvi–xvii.