

ALTERNATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES. Copyright © 2021 by the editors and authors. This work carries a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 International license, which means that you are free to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format, and you may also remix, transform and build upon the material, as long as you clearly attribute the work to the authors (but not in a way that suggests the authors or punctum books endorses you and your work), you do not use this work for commercial gain in any form whatsoever, and that for any remixing and transformation, you distribute your rebuild under the same license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

First published in 2021 by punctum books, Earth, Milky Way.
<https://punctumbooks.com>

ISBN-13: 978-1-953035-57-8 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-1-953035-58-5 (ePDF)

DOI: 10.53288/0274.1.00

LCCN: 2021937406

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from the Library of Congress

Book design: Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

Cover image: Inca. Quipu, 1400–1532. Cotton, 20½ × 34¾ in. (52 × 88 cm).

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Eugene Schaefer, 36.413. CC-BY.



The Self-Reflexive Praxis at the Heart of DH

Alexandra Juhasz

It is my contention that digital humanities (DH) demands something new and potentially revelatory for humanities scholars: to be self-aware of and intentional about their work's audience, method, tools, style, and format in a collaborative practice that includes making things that will be used. Of course, all scholarship does this always. Writing a chapter on a laptop in Chicago style about self-aware DH for an editor or editors and ultimately her anthology's small audience of subject-specialists satisfies all of the above conditions. Even as I write this alone in a room, there's human and technological infrastructure undergirding my labor: my school-bought computer and salary-supported Internet; the students, designers, funders, YouTubers (but not 1 prisoner, more on this soon), and so many others who helped me to get to this point where I can "write it up" for you. But I suggest that *hegemonic* humanists (not quite so for scientists and even social scientists, I'd wager) were never really pressed to consider their reigning protocols, structures, and practices as such. Thus, whiteness, maleness, straightness, and the many other forms of privilege upon which hegemonic humanities gifts to some, like never having to name how or why or even

where one does one's work (say in the prison, or not, depending on who's in control), is both exactly what produces and confirms institutional dominance and what radical DH has the capacity to challenge within academia in its (un)doing.

DH mandates that those humanities scholars who are willing to take the plunge into digital technology, and its associated affordances, also attend to this exploration with a new scrutiny. Suddenly, the forms and methods of our workaday labor become visible as either new, or perhaps old, the prescribed, approved, and safeguarded activities they always were: ways of doing that were easily bolstered by time-honored and discipline-sanctioned expectations of authority, distance, and neutrality. Radical DH moves beyond this infrastructural clarity, to acknowledge and take account of the form, sanction, institutions, and yes, politics that have always operated between the scholar and her production and between her output and the world. Scary, exciting, and messy, something most of us are untrained to do and perhaps uninterested to partake in, self-reflexive DH praxis does us all some good: it accounts for the power, purpose, and place of our work while attesting that this is contextual and sometimes flexible.

Naming the structuring conditions of our work, and a work, is the first critical step of a self-reflexive DH praxis: Where am I doing this work from? How did I get here and why? Who uses and owns what I make? How do they get to it? Who doesn't get it? Then evaluating the forms and uses of one's own practices within and because of one's structuring conditions is a next crucial step: What will I make this time? With what method and associated tools? Who is my audience for this work? What do I hope we might gain? Needless to say, some scholars like myself and my comrades from "identity," "post-identity," and "political" orientations — i.e., women of color, anti-Zionists, feminists, anarchists, queers, environmentalists, and so on — have steadfastly focused upon the self-reflexive praxis at the heart of our scholarly project because we are not only committed to doing well by our work professionally but also in the larger world be-

yond our jobs and academia. What does this look and feel like in the doing?¹

Using one recent example from my own peripatetic and sometimes rocky journeys within and around the edges of DH — a 2015 project where I attempted to and ultimately failed at teaching about YouTube in a men's prison — I will map onto the several forms of this multi-step and multi-formed endeavor (including this one here) how I engage in, sometimes fail at, and learn from a self-aware process. Looking at this lengthy project as it developed in five discrete parts from 2007–2015, I will demonstrate why and how I tried a variety of tactics, made different things for a variety of audiences, and what I took away from these project's varied receptions and uses. I do so hoping that fellow humanities scholars, whatever your political commitments, can join me at this particularly productive place where DH allows me, and us, to begin differently: breakdown and disappointment. For unlike a/this book chapter, DH projects often end with a crash due to almost certain collapse among some or many of their complex requirements: funding, time, staff, technical expertise, inter-disciplinarity, collaborators, technology that works and might last, and pressures from outside institutions with different demands and norms. But look! Even when some parts end up breaking, others can survive. Here a chapter is the result of an ambitious radical DH project that failed before it really began: teaching a version of my class, *Learning from YouTube*, as an inside-out interaction between students at Pitzer College and Norco Rehabilitation Center, both in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

My method for this essay (she writes reflexively) is to answer the questions I raised above in relation to five iterations of

¹ See Aristeia Fotopoulou, Kate O'Riordan, and Alexandra Juhasz, *ADA: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology* 5, "Queer Feminist Media Praxis," <https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-fotopoulouoriordan>; Ramesh Srinivasan, *Whose Global Village? Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), or Ruha Benjamin, *Captivating Technologies: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

this project: 1. an undergraduate class, *Learning from YouTube* (LFYT) taught on and about YouTube in 2007 (and then taught again several more times in the years that followed); 2. a viral Internet event that lasted for a brief moment during the first semester and about the wacky class; 3. my wrap up of the project as a born-digital online “video-book” “published” by MIT Press in 2011²; 4. my attempt to reanimate the project in both traditional and prison classrooms in 2015; and 5. this iteration here, a write-up of these many steps ending in an untaught class. Across this piece (radical DH 5.0), I will pepper largish sections of two blog posts that I wrote after being invited by Tamsyn Gilbert to “reconsider gender and technology in the age of the distributed network” for her online journal *Lady Justice*. I do so both because I like what I said there and then, and don’t feel I need to say it again differently here, but also to demonstrate repurposing and transmediality as DH tactics in their own right that deliver new (if old) things to the changing audiences who might need them as projects jump formats, times, and potential uses.

Where Am I Doing This Work From?

For all five iterations of this project, I produced my work at work and sometimes also outside of it. In the time of this essay’s writing, I was a Full Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College, a small, elite liberal arts college. My capacity to work was buttressed by a beneficial combination of my professional rank, my place of employment (one that actually rewards innovation and even sometimes community-based pedagogy), and my own predilection towards creative projects that holistically intertwine theory, practice, and politics (what I call my media praxis). A strong situation in the workplace supported this entire body of work that never once was to deliver in traditional

forms. I was not doing experimental, out-of-the-box DH work from a place of fear, danger, or precarity. Quite the opposite. I understood that I could experiment with innovative forms because I had institutional sanction, and more so, I might even be rewarded for this work precisely because of its innovation, interdisciplinarity, multi-modality, and political aspirations.

One example of the supported place from where I was working: When I began thinking about “publishing” the large body of writing, videos, student work, and other digital objects that were produced across this project, I had behind me the muscle of USC’s Tara McPherson and the innovative and creative staff of Vectors, including technologists Craig Dietreich and Erik Loyer, as well as her role in the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture, given that I had been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer DH fellowship for my initial work on the project. With McPherson’s help, and a Mellon grant focused on digital publishing, I then connected to the MIT Press and worked carefully and self-consciously with them to have my born-and-always-digital-object, a “video-book,” understood contractually, legally, and institutionally “as a book” (it was double-blind peer-reviewed, it has an ISBN number), so that I could mark a possible space for others to do similar DH work who do not have the sanction I carry because of my rank, place of employment, and age.³

Interestingly, although my place of employment and my political and personal commitments stayed constant across the eight years of this project and its five forms, there are notable variations in context that prove demonstrative. My authority as a full professor is mutable as I move from the classroom, to

² Alexandra Juhasz, *Learning from YouTube*, a special issue of *Vectors: A Journal of Cultural Studies and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>.

³ See my self-reflexive discussions about the process, with MIT Press and my editor, of lengthy and interesting contractual negotiations for publishing an always-online “book” on the book itself: “The Absurdities of Moving from Paper to Digital in Academic Publishing,” *Learning from YouTube*, June 11, 2010, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=213> and “Me ‘n MIT: Building Better Contracts for On-Line Publishing,” *Learning from YouTube*, October 23, 2010, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=249>.

Fox News, or as I participate in the wilds of the Internet, at the prison, or in this anthology. I can be a proud leftist, feminist, queer professional in the classroom and here, too, while on Fox News and at the prison I must carry myself differently, wear another set of clothes, and speak the same ideas with slightly altered words and foci.

How Did I Get Here and Why?

As a feminist queer media scholar, I have always understood my teaching, scholarly output (writing or media), and academic capital to be techniques through which I can contribute to projects of self- and world-changing of utmost value to me. I chose to be a media studies professor, and now a DH practitioner, because in this regard, at least, I am a good Marxist who remains convinced that the production, analysis, circulation, and archiving of our own culture has political and social efficacy. I discuss where I come from and why I am doing this work in all my work.⁴ A feminist, situated understanding of myself and my project is core to my practice.⁵ For example, *Learning from YouTube* has a tour (or chapter) called “THIRDTUBE” that discusses my dreams for both YouTube and my analysis of it. The tour begins with “My Orientation (toward YouTube and ThirdTube)”:

In 2007, I came to YouTube (to teach and to learn) after twenty years of making, writing, and teaching about alternative media, particularly the community video work of AIDS and antiwar activists, feminists, people of color and queers of many stripes. I am a committed media scholar and maker whose work has focused on individual and community em-

powerment and, by design, projects to which I am personally related. I like to work within the forms I am analyzing and hoping to (use for) change. My reflexive process grounds the questions I ask of YouTube and where I try to push it.⁶

Many years and iterations of the project later, I wrote about why I was going to try to move the class to the prison in a blog post, “Learning from (Where) YouTube (Can’t Go): Inside-Out” (January 8, 2015).

In 2007, I engaged in what was at the time perceived to be an audacious pedagogical experiment. I taught a course both on and about YouTube. At that time, I opened out the private liberal arts classroom into the wilds of the Internet. These many years later, looking back at the experiment and also moving forward, I imagine what there might still be to learn and where there still might be to go within social media networks. Certainly much happened in the first class — virality, hilarity, hundreds of videos and interviews, caution, discipline, challenges to higher education and collegiate writing, and a “book” — but here I ask, how might the continual growth of YouTube demand new places and tactics for its analysis?

For, after that first semester, I found that my own practice of and pleasures in teaching the class were pretty routine (and this is not the case for my more traditional looks at more “traditional” subjects that I teach with frequency: say, video art or feminist documentary). While for a brief moment in 2007, so scintillating for me and my viral audience, so innovative in its approach, topic, and formats, studying and teaching YouTube also became for me — the sole person who had to do it again in each iteration — quickly and utterly boring (another structuring principle of our object of

4 I speak extensively about this in an interview I did with *Figure/Ground*: Laureano Ralón, “Interview with Alexandra Juhasz,” *Figure/Ground*, February 13, 2013, <http://figureground.org/interview-with-alexandra-juhasz>.

5 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

6 Alexandra Juhasz, *Learning from YouTube*, “My Orientation (toward YouTube and ThirdTube),” <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=243>.

study — boredom motivates staying and clicking — reiterated in my method, pedagogy, and writing about it).

Frankly, I'm a scholar (and maker) of independent, avant-garde, and activist media for a reason. I'm not passionate about popular culture nor the questions it raises and so these were not the questions I was asking about YouTube, even though I willingly snared myself within its structuring logics of capital, censorship, popularity, and entertainment, and I would follow my students' lead when they wanted to pursue such questions (for instance the popularity project of 2007).

And yet, here I am about to teach it again. Why, you must certainly want to ask, if I'm such a hater? I teach and study YouTube because I think social media needs critical and productive forces within it. I am always eager to learn about fellow projects of critical, productive Internet use and studies. I encourage my students and others to locate, analyze, and share productive changes in the culture of YouTube, or better yet to make those changes.

For this reason, this year I added a "practicum" to the class (it is now an "Inside-Out course" connected to PEP, the California-wide Prison Education Project). A small group of Pitzer students will be taking an extra half credit of course content as we join with ten students who will be taking Learning from YouTube from within the California Rehabilitation Center at Norco, one of the few places in America (and perhaps the world) where access to YouTube (and other social media networks) is denied to human beings as a condition of their punishment. We will consider: *What are the relations between social justice and social media?*⁷

Why Am I Doing This Work in This Form? What Will I Make?

1. In the class I set out to learn from my undergraduates who use social media in ways I do not; I modeled to them that an interventionist and critical role within social media is both intellectually and socially necessary; and I mirrored the structures of dominant Internet sites in the architecture of the course itself, explained below⁸;
2. The viral event (something I could not make happen but that I did set into place by generating a press release about the course which I understood to be "sexy" enough for Internet attention), was a second opportunity for my students and me to learn about and use Internet culture by engaging in a self-reflexive process of examination and experience. Going viral is an amazing opportunity to study and understand virality⁹;
3. *Learning from YouTube* was written as a born-digital "video-book" for several reasons: I wanted to keep my Internet writing in the space and vernacular that I was both attempting to understand and intervene in so as to better understand and change it; I wanted to open my writing up to new audiences;
4. The prison class developed its form for reasons discussed below; and
5. This article allows me to revisit these earlier experiences and already-made objects and then share my findings with an audience who is interested in the process and politics of DH, a different set of participants from those reached through the earlier versions of the project.

8 For more on the structure of the class, see my interview on Henry Jenkins's Blog, "Learning From YouTube: An Interview with Alex Juhasz (Part One)," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, February 20, 2008, http://henryjenkins.org/2008/02/learning_from_youtube_an_inter.html#sthash.2FyVZDld.dpuf.

9 See "Orientation to the Class" to learn more about our viral moment and our reactions to it: Alexandra Juhasz, "Orientation to the Class," *Learning from YouTube*, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=215>.

7 Alexandra Juhasz, "Learning from (Where) YouTube (Can't Go): Inside-Out," *New Criticals*, January 18, 2015, <http://www.newcriticals.com/learning-from-youtube>.

Rounding up my first blog post, I discuss why I used the form of a prison class:

Learning from YouTube was developed to mirror (and therefore make visible) the structuring principles of the site under investigation. Hyper-visibility, user-generated content, the collapsing binaries of public/private, education/entertainment, expert/amateur, and the corporatization and digitization of education, are only few of the site's structures that are also reflected in the course's design and implementation. Another critical framework for the course, like YouTube, was the hidden if also user-desired structures of discipline deeply architected into the experience.

Learning from YouTube Inside-Out has different walls, disciplining systems, and channels of access and visibility that will structure its pedagogy. It is my hope that this will reveal logics of and connections between the prison and social media:

What are the relations between social injustice and social media?

My more recent writing and thinking and practice with-in/about digital culture finds me theorizing and practicing its artful leaving, the considered departure, and ever more radical and thoughtful connections of "lived" and "Internet" spaces as a necessary part of social justice work and pedagogy. Sure, social media is part of any activist project in 2015 (and most learning projects, too), but I'd like to think of work in this space as proto-political and proto-academic: clicking, liking, reading, researching, forwarding, posting, tweeting, are a necessary component of contemporary activism that is only realized through linked, extra-mediated actions. To leave YouTube may be the best way to both know and criticize the linked systems of corporatized domination that bleed across (socially) mediated America.

How and why do we leave social media?

I am curious if feminist (pedagogic) activity (and the linked social justice work of many movements) can occur in the many shiny corporate, sexist, censored emporiums we've been given for free, or does the leaving demand another making: of rooms and art and people and movements of our own. Where are these feminist social media networked spaces and what are their structuring logics?

How and why do we stay in social media? What is a social media of our own?¹⁰

What Tools Did I Use?

For the class, I used YouTube, video cameras, cell phones, my blog, the classroom, and process-based pedagogy; when it went viral, the tools used me. For the "video-book" I used (and helped to develop) what would soon become Scalar, as well as an MIT Press-provided copy-editor and two reviewers; for the prison class, these tools available for the college-based class were not usable so I imagined work-arounds (described below) for the all the technology that my prisoner-students wouldn't ever have access to: computers, video cameras, books, scholarly articles. It was cool to see how easy it was to teach and learn without all this fancy hardware! For this final adaptation, my tools of choice are the computer and air-conditioning.

An understanding of education and technology can occur with an intense clarity in the prison. I learned a great deal about teaching tools from my inmate students at the California Rehabilitation Center at Norco in two classes (Technology in the Prison and Visual Culture in the Prison) that I team-taught there in 2014 with students from Pitzer College and the Claremont Graduate School as part of the California-wide Prison Education Project. There are infinite, situated technologies and visual cultures in the prison (just as there are anywhere) but the particular ways that they are dis-

¹⁰ Alexandra Juhasz, "Learning from (Where) YouTube (Can't Go)."

ciplined and controlled, and also taken up and used by prisoners, are unique in this learning environment. For example, visual messages about who can be where when dominate the visual landscape in the form of lines, signs, and bodily cues; some books are available but only after they are screened for gang-related messaging, sexuality, drug use, and profanity; the Internet is not allowed.

Naming these highly-regulated technological and visual conditions in the prison, and how they contribute to systems of institutional control and systematic oppression, became the primary foci of these two courses. The prisoner students were amazing teachers, and it was stunning to learn how the visual and technological logics of the prison are deeply connected to, if perhaps grossly exaggerated from, the underlying logics of control that operate across America. The prohibition of Internet access and the liberal favoring of television is a most egregious example of this arbitrary control that forcefully maintains logics of oppression, but others, equally dis-enabling and utterly mundane within the prison, would include our students' arbitrary and highly controlled (in)access to pencils, paper, white boards, moving images, books, and me as their teacher.

Let me explain. In the two courses my Claremont College students and I taught in the prison in 2014, the cruel, arbitrary, changing conditions of access to education (through the administration's definitive and seemingly random control of tools, space, people, and technology) was our greatest obstacle. A piece of media might be approved through the prison's slow and strange procedures of vetting only then not to show up on the day it was on our syllabus. Teachers might volunteer and get to the prison for the weekly class only then not to be allowed into the prison because of an unexplained change in their entry status.

In the most chilling of such whimsical and punitive closures of access (for me at least), my course *Learning from YouTube Inside/Out* — where I was planning to continue my teaching at Norco this Spring semester by building a section

of this tech-focused tech-dependent class *Inside with 10 inmates and 10 Claremont students* albeit with quite limited access to technology — went through a lengthy and controversial approval process only to be closed down on its first day.¹¹

Who Did I Work With?

For the class I collaborated with my students and internet; for my viral Internet moment, I was helped a great deal by my school's PR people and my network of friends who talked me through this trying time. Of course, the users of the Internet and professional journalists also worked on, and sometimes with me; Craig Dietrich, my designer and programmer at Vectors, built the backbone and visual design of *Learning from YouTube*, and the videos were made by my students and everyday YouTubers. Doug Sery at MIT Press and his staff also toiled with me: it was quite hard to go from paper to digital. I did not get to collaborate with prisoners with no thanks to the obstructive, controlling, punitive prison staff. Adeline Koh, Dorothy Kim, and Cara — who have edited this article — and you will read it. I'm not sure those activities are collaborations as such, which gets me back to my opening gambit: writing "for paper" does not seem to create the same powerful alienation effect, and changes in practices, that is forcefully realized by making digital, activist, or even plastic things.¹²

How Was the Project Supported?

My teaching and the writing of this chapter are supported by my salary while virality happens through the unpaid labor of Inter-

11 Alexandra Juhasz, "Access Denied, Internet Dark: Technology, Prison, Education," *New Criticals*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.newcriticals.com/access-denied-internet-dark-technology-prison-education/page%E2%80%99315>.

12 Here the work of Brecht and Eisenstein is helpful. See "10 Terms and 3 Calls," *Learning from YouTube*, August 23, 2007, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=122>.

net users with a little help from the ever-less remunerated work of media professionals. DH projects are almost always supported by soft-money. *Learning from YouTube* was funded by grants from the Mellon Foundation and the NEH, with more support from Vectors, Pitzer College, and the MIT Press. My prison course was a “volunteer” project that was supported through Pitzer College’s commitment to social justice and undergraduate education and through PEP (Prison Education Project).¹³

What Is My Method?

In the video-book I explain that “YouTube is the subject, form, method, problem and solution of this video-book.”¹⁴ I continue thus from “My Orientation (toward YouTube and ThirdTube)”:

a critical pedagogy aiming toward digital literacy and a civic engagement in the hopes of creative democracy are also central to my praxis. I believe that under the right conditions, citizens and students (Web 2.0’s much-celebrated “users”) can make expressive, critical, beautiful media that makes relevant contributions to our culture. Thinking through (and in) these conditions is a defining orientation of my project.¹⁵

I engaged with virality by trying to infuse my moment of attention with smatterings of my more radical thinking all the while perpetrating a winning professional demeanor.¹⁶ The method of my prison class, mirroring and complementing that of my regular class explained above, as well as the architecture and discipline of its home environment, proved too experimental

and political for where it was to engage. I was told that prisoners needed to learn useful things like math. The method of this piece is to try to write in a conversational tone, reflecting upon my process, and demonstrating alternative modes of writing within academia that are personal, function-driven, and “honest.”

Who Is My Audience? Who Uses and Owns the Thing I Made?

When I teach *Learning from YouTube*, my work is mostly engaged by my students, other YouTube scholars, and interested thinkers on the Internet. When it went viral, it was seen, mocked, and also sometimes supported by a huge swath of humans who were online or plugged into mainstream media, but only for a very short time, and in a very superficial way. I owned the ideas and content of my class. YouTube shared ownership of the videos we produced. Because of this I paid a summer intern to copy and move all the class videos (and some central YouTube work as well) to the MacArthur-funded public media archive and fair use advocacy network Critical Commons.¹⁷ I was worried that once the book went live, YouTube would censor all the videos, effectively closing down the book. Apparently, it never posed a threat to them; they’ve never intervened. I’m not even sure they know I exist. As for our viral moment, the media and Internet controlled, but did not really own, the way my students and I were seen. I wrote the book about it for interested students and scholars of critical digital studies, and this essay is for a similar clientele of critical DHers. The prison class was shut down, so never used. I wasn’t given reasons, that’s how this system of discipline functions. Its sudden and total collapse was a gross, mean-spirited signal of who controlled me and my prisoner-students. Of course, not only prisoners face such violent abuses of access. Control of access to technology is a method of punishment and self-denying the world-over.

¹³ *Prison Education Project*, <http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/>.

¹⁴ Alexandra Juhasz, “YouTube Is...,” *Learning from YouTube*, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>.

¹⁵ Juhasz, “My Orientation (toward YouTube and ThirdTube).”

¹⁶ I write and make videos about trying to manage this brief moment of “celebrity” in “Fox It Is and Fox Is It,” *Learning from YouTube*, September 21, 2007, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/textoe.php?composite=112>.

¹⁷ *Critical Commons*, <https://criticalcommons.org/>.

Learning from YouTube Inside-Out has different walls, disciplining systems, and channels of access and visibility that will structure its pedagogy. In the two classes I did get to teach at Norco, my students, fellow instructors, and I began to understand a critically unnamed truth about social justice and social media only made visible through the structuring denial of access to the Internet and other technology as a fundamental feature of contemporary punishment: technologies of care, conversation, and personal liberation through education need no more tools than access to each other.

I was more than ready and able to teach about YouTube this spring without an Internet connection. I was going to assign books on the subject (with a few pages excised, mostly due to their discussion of sexuality on YouTube), exercises where prisoners would write screenplays to be shot by their fellow students who had access to cameras and the Internet, and conversations about the meanings of all of our varied and regulated access to technology. (Along this vein, prisoners' near universal access to cellphones as a contraband of choice, despite prisons' concerted efforts to keep phones out of the prison, radically underlines what it means to say "prisoners don't have access to the Internet or social media.") I had learned before that while the prison and its administrators can systematically strip me, and my students, of tools and technologies (pens, videos, the Internet), our desires and abilities to communally learn — and thereby escape its lines, signs, limits, and holes of available information, if only fleetingly — falls completely outside the of logic of technology-based punishment.

That is until I was denied access to teach and learn inside.¹⁸

How Does My Audience Get To It?

Teaching is cool because you have a habitual audience guaranteed by the disciplinary procedures of school to participate, and

if you are lucky and skilled, the social possibilities rendered by quality teaching to care. They get to class by moving their bodies there. Of course, at Pitzer, they have to 1) get in to the college; and 2) pay \$60,000 for this privilege. Putting a class onto the Internet opens up American elitist education to other students. I think about this a great deal in collaboration with many others when I work on FemTechNet's DOCC.¹⁹ When things go viral, everyone who's linked in gets to it easily, superficially, and quickly. I have called this the slogan-like function of viral culture²⁰ and am no fan of it.²¹ The *Learning from YouTube* video-book is free, but hard to find, given that it's buried down deep in MIT Press's website. I run Google analytics on top of it and know that it has been seen by hundreds of times more "readers" than my other academic books or even articles. That said, the typical user stays for under a minute. A small number of prisoners get to take classes by being granted privileges that can easily be taken away from them, and often are. Because their opportunities for education, and any other form of self-improvement or personal dignity, are so rare, they are by far the best students I have ever taught. The opposite of the twenty-second Internet readers I just decried. You get to this article via your education and by buying it. I am glad that this writing is copyrighted, not owned, by punctum books: being as it is "an open-access and print-on-demand independent publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical

19 See FemTechNet White Paper Committee, "Transforming Higher Education with Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs): Feminist Pedagogies and Networked Learning," September 30, 2013, http://femtechnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FemTechNetWhitePaperSept30_2013.pdf and FemTechNet, "manifesto," <http://femtechnet.org/publications/manifesto>.

20 Alexandra Juhasz, "On Slogans," *Learning from YouTube*, August 31, 2007, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=120>.

21 See Alexandra Juhasz, "Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary," in *New Documentary Ecologies*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 33–49.

18 Juhasz, "Access Denied, Internet Dark."

para-humanities assemblage.” Expanding rights and privileges of access has always been core to my work.

Since I began teaching the class in 2007, in the matter of just these few short years, access to social media has exploded (for those not denied it as a condition of their punishment). We have been told (and sold) that this access is critical for our expression, community-building, political citizenship, and well-being. We have been led to believe that access to social media is a form of liberation. But two more related things have also become quite clear in the 2015 iteration of the class Learning from YouTube (sans prisoners):

1. In contra-distinction to the experience of prisoners, for my students, the Internet is the very air they breathe in a way that was simply not true in 2007 (as much as my students thought it was). Young people today (as is true of their teachers) inhabit the Internet, speak its language, and have an agility, familiarity, and jaded acceptance of its norms and (aspects of) its history that is at once stunning and enervating. Stunning is the speed and complexity of this familiarity; enervating is its occlusion of familiarity with and interest in the other norms, places, and histories that we might once have understood as part of being institutionally, culturally and personally “situated.”

The 2015 version of the course made me feel at once stimulated and enervated because I have seemingly nothing and everything to teach them. Nowhere and everywhere to go. “The internet does not exist,” writes Hito Steyerl. “Maybe it did exist only a short time ago, but now it only remains as a blur, a cloud, a friend, a deadline, a redirect, or a 404. If it ever existed, we couldn’t see it. Because it has no shape. It has no face, just this name that describes everything and nothing at the same time. Yet we’re still trying to climb on board, to

get inside, to be part of the network, to get in on the language game, to show up in searches, to appear to exist.”²²

I long for the lost views of my prisoner students: humans who can teach us a thing or two about place, liberation, punishment, and control sans the Internet. For, this place of liberation, the Internet, has quickly become its opposite (“emancipation without end, but also without exit” according to Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle²³)—a prison (although not a punishment, as it is always entered willingly and ever with the promise of pleasure); a highly structured, corporate-dominated sinkhole. “In the past few years many people—basically everybody—have noticed that the internet feels awkward, too. It is obvious. It is completely surveilled, monopolized, and sanitized by common sense, copyright control, and conformism” (Steyerl).²⁴

“This moment,” according to my 2015 students, is defined by anxious, cynical, consumption-based Internet experience that is linked to ever more desperate Internet-based attempts at escape into a nostalgic (“old”) Internet time and place that is imagined as low-tech, slow, user-made, fun, real, innocent, awkward, less-sexualized, and de-politicized (outside or before the petty, bitter Internet “politics” about the Middle East, feminism, racism, rape, and the environment from which escape deeper into the Internet is desperately needed). The new Internet is a prison from which escape is to fantasy of an older, innocent Internet.

Who doesn’t get it? Given that almost all of the versions of this project are available for free on the Internet, the primary

22 Blurb for Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds., *The Internet Does Not Exist* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), <https://www.e-flux.com/books/66665/the-internet-does-not-exist/>.

23 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, “Introduction,” in *The Internet Does Not Exist*, eds. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 5.

24 Hito Steyerl, “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” *e-flux Journal* 49 (November 2013), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>.

group of non-receptors is the huge population of humans without online entrance or with spotty access. Next, for the video-centric parts of the project, all those whose Internet's bandwidth cannot carry videos don't get it all. I had a humiliating and important lesson in this when I decided to speak on the LFYT project to scholars and activist at the OurMedia Conference held in Ghana.²⁵ There, people had heard about and read of YouTube, but mostly couldn't see it, and used radio for their media activist interventions. Finally, even as my interlocutors expand because of Internet access, I am aware that my writing style, intellectual and cultural influences, and overtly political project serves to dissuade many potential readers from engaging: this is one of the downsides of committed academic output. Your ideas may, in fact, be of real purchase to more traditional scholars, or those with other political points of view, but your work may not signal to them its worthy content, obscured as this may be by style, tone, or function. Of course, the prison debacle occurred because it was organized to take place in a place where a class of humans are disallowed access to most everything the rest of us take for granted as the main feature of their punishment.

In her contribution to the *e-flux* journal issue "The Internet Does Not Exist," from which I've been quoting extensively in this last section, video artist Hito Steyerl pens an article entitled "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" There she answers herself: "the internet is probably not dead. It has rather gone all out. Or more precisely: it is all over."²⁶ But of course, Steyerl knows, as must we all, that while the Internet feels like it is the whole world, or perhaps too much world, there are blank spots on the map where the Internet cannot see, there are ways not to be seen, and there are missing spots

in our situated communities where the Internet can't or perhaps is not allowed to go.

If we theorize the Internet, or education, from these blank spots, from the place of too-little, (in)access, quiet, and darkness (as does Lennon), we see values, uses, and needs for MOOCs, YouTube, technology, and education that are not clear from an anxious state of hyper-abundance. This is not to romanticize the punitive lacks of the prison. Rather I ask us to draw from what becomes visible when we situate thinking about learning, technology, punishment, and escape in places where education is not primarily linked to tawdry pop songs, tutorials, consumer goods, flame wars, and self-reference to Internet culture but rather to the fundamental questions of liberation, learning, and empowerment that those stripped of technology have unique access to in the quiet and (in)access of their punishment.²⁷

What Do I Hope We Might Gain?

When I teach, I hope my students and I might gain from a uniquely structured classroom experience that reflects upon and contributes to contemporary culture: invigorating, challenging, lively teaching and learning. In moments of virality, I hope that a few people who might be interested in my work get exposure that encourages them to look deeper. I wrote *Learning from YouTube* to practice one of my core beliefs: to make and build the Internet culture we want and deserve. I tried to teach the course in the prison because I theorized that there and there alone we might gain better insight into the structures of control and freedom at the heart of education, prison, and social networks and the inter-relations therein, so that we can live and do better. I also wanted to teach students who needed me. I thought they might gain some rare moments of freedom. For this article, I hope I might gain and share an expanded, radical sense of the possibilities and responsibilities of a self-aware DH,

25 Alexandra Juhasz, "Beyond Visibility/Learning from Ghana," *Learning from YouTube*, August 20, 2008, <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=50>.

26 Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?"

27 Juhasz, "Learning from (Where) YouTube (Can't Go)."

and the opportunities this might provide, so as to make connections with like-minded practitioners, and with the hope that I might tantalize others. Perhaps this playing out and stalling out of my achievements will be a worthy method to demonstrate the exciting opportunities of radical, self-aware DH. Even though Learning from YouTube in the prison never happened, *through its process*, I gained connection, community, publication (right here!), data, paths for future action, and the joys, challenges, and life-affirming thereness of process itself. At the same time, because this version of the project was its most overtly political and outside the (academic) box, the costs of its failure were also the most severe and impactful. Ten or more prisoner students did not get to take class, did not get to learn from me or YouTube or their fellow classmates. I never got to teach YouTube in the prison for reasons that reveal much about the prison, my own teaching, and technology. With that gain and mighty loss, I conclude.

what I tried to display and enact in this piece. “to be self-aware of and intentional about method, tools, style, and format in a collaborative practice that includes making things that will be used.” That is always changing, it is achievable. This is where our radical power lies.

Postscript: A quick perusal of my “records” allows me to see that I originally wrote this essay in 2015 trying to make sense of a recent and defining injustice enacted on my students and myself earlier that year in regards to DH pedagogy, method, infrastructure and prison. In the essay, I return (self-reflexively) to my own earlier work and thinking (2007–2015) about the Internet, pedagogy, and privilege as a strategy to enact and display the distinct personal, political, temporal, and situational limits on scholarship and activism that encumbered and enabled this mutating DH project. Much has changed since then: for me, the world, prison, DH, and the prison abolition and education movements. Although Dorothy Kim invited me to revisit this effort attending to some of what the world, internet, and prison have wrought since then, I respectfully decline here for reasons that are not about a lack of energy, effort or interest in contemporary work about “gender, race, current discussions of incarceration as a longer history in the US about chattel slavery and Jim Crow.” Rather, the situated nature of our own practices (in time, place, institution, method, discipline and privilege) was

Bibliography

- Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, "Introduction." In *The Internet Does Not Exist*, edited by Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015.
- Benjamin, Ruha. *Captivating Technologies: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Critical Commons. <https://criticalcommons.org/>.
- FemTechNet. "manifesto." <http://femtechnet.org/publications/manifesto>.
- FemTechNet White Paper Committee. "Transforming Higher Education with Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCS): Feminist Pedagogies and Networked Learning." September 30, 2013. http://femtechnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FemTechNetWhitePaperSept30_2013.pdf.
- Fotopoulou, Aristeia, Kate O'Riordan, and Alexandra Juhasz. *ADA: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology* 5, "Queer Feminist Media Praxis." <https://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-fotopoulouoriordan>.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99. DOI: 10.2307/3178066.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Learning from YouTube: An Interview with Alex Juhasz (Part One)." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, February 20, 2008. http://henryjenkins.org/2008/02/learning_from_youtube_an_inter.html#sthash.2FyVZDld.dpuf.
- Juhasz, Alexandra. "10 Terms and 3 Calls." *Learning from YouTube*. August 23, 2007. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=122>.
- . "Access Denied, Internet Dark: Technology, Prison, Education." *New Criticals*, April 9, 2015. <http://www.newcriticals.com/access-denied-internet-dark-technology-prison-education/page%E2%80%939315>.
- . "Beyond Visibility/Learning from Ghana." *Learning from YouTube*. August 20, 2008. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=50>.
- . "Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary." In *New Documentary Ecologies*, edited by Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes, 33–49. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014. DOI: 10.1057/9781137310491_3.
- . "Fox It Is and Fox Is It." *Learning from YouTube*. September 21, 2007. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=112>.
- . "Learning from (Where) YouTube (Can't Go): Inside-Out." *New Criticals*. January 18, 2015. <http://www.newcriticals.com/learning-from-youtube>.
- . *Learning from YouTube*. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>.
- . "Me 'n MIT: Building Better Contracts for On-Line Publishing." *Learning from YouTube*. October 23, 2010. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=249>.
- . "My Orientation (toward YouTube and ThirdTube)." <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=243>.
- . "On Slogans." *Learning from YouTube*. August 31, 2007. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=120>.
- . "Orientation to the Class." *Learning from YouTube*. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=215>.
- . "The Absurdities of Moving from Paper to Digital in Academic Publishing." *Learning from YouTube*. June 11, 2010. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=213>.
- . "YouTube Is..." *Learning from YouTube*. <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>.
- Prison Education Project*. <http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/>.

- Ralón, Laureano. "Interview with Alexandra Juhasz." *Figure/Ground*. February 13, 2013. <http://figureground.org/interview-with-alexandra-juhasz>.
- Steyerl, Hito. "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" *e-flux Journal* 49 (November 2013). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>.
- Srinivasan, Ramesh. *Whose Global Village? Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*. New York: NYU Press, 2017.