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PANEL 5
MEDIA NARRATIVES AND
(SELF)REPRESENTATIONS
OF WOMEN AND
FEMININITIES

Chairs:

Gabriella Polizzi (Kore University of Enna, Italy)

Speakers:

- Gemma Cobb (University of Sussex, UK)
- Fabiola Adamo (University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Italy)
- Burcu Şenel Alpuğan (Hacettepe University, Turkey)
- Anna Tarragó, Endika Rey Benito (University of Barcelona, Spain)
- Lucia Tralli (University of Naples Federico II, Italy)
- Lise Zurné (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands)



From wine mom to #sobercurious: media narratives of women's drinking

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Abstract

This paper offers a feminist reading of the current sobriety movement: it explores how consumption and restriction of alcohol is constructed by the media as a gendered practice and a form of 'class-making' (Skeggs 2004). In Western patriarchal culture women's drinking has long been problematised: of paramount concern was that imbibing women would neglect their household and familial responsibilities (Waterson 2000; Warner 2003; Zieger 2008). Today, the news media continues to portray women's drinking as detrimental to their fertility levels (Day, Gough and McFadden 2004) and domestic duties (Atkinson, Kirton and Sumnall 2012; Mitchell 2019). Simultaneously, participatory digital media have seen women responding with their own drinking narratives and recently two contrasting cultural figures have emerged: the 'wine mom': the harassed mother who frivolously declares a need for alcohol (Moss 2015) and the 'Sober Curious' woman, who overhauls her life by questioning her relationship with drinking (Warrington 2018).

Jo Littler (2019) suggests that the drinking mother is part of the 'mothers behaving badly' mediascape: a contemporary iteration of 1990s UK media coinage, the ladette, whose focus was drinking, smoking and casual sex. Like the ladette, the wine mom emerged as an antidote to conservative femininity – initially celebrated, she has been subsequently derided and represented as cause for concern (see for example Donovan 2017; Pearson 2020). Sober curiosity then operates as a rejoinder to the chaos of wine mom culture, given its espousal of mindfulness, self-discipline, and overall well-being. As such, this paper argues that the media constructed rise and fall of the wine mom and the ensuing advent of the sober curious woman has a didactic function: to reinforce normative gender roles. Drawing on empirical research across a raft of news media reporting and social media content on both wine moms and sobriety, this paper examines the feminist potential of the contemporary sobriety movement. It asks to what extent it can be socially and politically progressive when it is filtered through a postfeminist mediascape which frames temperance as a leisure pursuit of white, middle-class women for whom a hangover hinders the possibility of having it all (Genz 2010).



“Missy Magazine” and the Zines: about the medial spaces of the anti-normative femininity

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Abstract

Roland Barthes was responsible for the first studies on women’s fashion magazines, of which he perceives a certain complexity. But in his text just a few lines focus on cultural and political matters: the magazine remains a corpus to draw upon in order to conduct semiotic studies. Instead, it is with the spread of Cultural Studies that new critical readings of this medium as a safe space for women come forward. Angela McRobbie, in “Feminism and Youth Culture” identifies an emancipatory potential in the magazines “Jackie” and “Miss Seventeen”. Although inscribed in a mainstream circuit, they were to be recognized as subcultural products, because they were capable of activating resistance rituals in the readers against traditional gender roles.

Today women’s media spaces have expanded enormously, with most printed magazines in the process of being digitized and in search of new communication models compatible with those of the new media. There are few magazines that proceed in reverse, making the paper form their strength. This is the case of a sub-genre of magazines: the *Zine*. One of them is “Missy Magazine”, an intersectional feminist *Zine* founded in Berlin in 2008. This *Zine* considers the physical production of the magazine a political act. It is an act of resistance against an indistinct consumption of images and discourses on women. “Missy Magazine” proposes an extremely coherent aesthetic and ideological line, which pursues the mission of narrating and representing figures of a marginalized femininity (people of color, transgender, queer and generally non-normative women).

In this way, we will identify, by placing “Missy Magazine” as a case study, which forms of communication this *Zine* chooses to stand out from the mainstream women’s magazines of today. Secondly, we will analyze the patina removal mechanism that the journal constantly implements. Removing the patina is an essential step to move beyond an emancipatory fantasy and to really investigate the obstacles faced by anti-normative women’s communities. “Missy Magazine” thus stands, both in the choice of medium and in the contents, in antithesis with a glamorous feminism that has favored a liberal version of the movement, diluting it from its most radical features.



More than “only a story”: Young Female Writers’ Transforming Experiences of Storytelling Online

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Abstract

Founded in 2006 in Canada, Wattpad is one of the worldwide known digital reading-writing platforms, including the interaction of more than 80 million monthly users, most of whom are young women aged between 15 and 24. Having become strikingly famous also in Turkey in the last five years both with praise and criticism, Wattpad has not only been a digital storytelling platform, but it has also become a social media platform where young people interact daily. Due to Wattpad’s features making it also an entertainment company, this interaction has come hand in hand with the power of affecting the production of popular culture in Turkey through creating platform’s own star authors, whose books are published by well-known publishing houses, adapted into movies-TV series and followed by hundreds of readers/fans. In this regard, while Wattpad creates a youth-driven social storytelling sphere online, it also impacts the construction of digital personas and images, transforming young people’s offline daily lives and subjectivities.

Within this context in this paper, I aim to concentrate on the experiences of young female celebrity writers of Wattpad Turkey. I chose the “celebrity” writers, because their adventures from the first day of writing in Wattpad to getting well-known in their communities are impressive reflection of their transformation as a person and writer starting online and spreading to the offline world. Together with my daily observations of the platform, its writers and their readers/fans also in different digital platforms in the last two years, I designed the research as a netnographic one and I conducted online in-depth interviews with 10 famous female writers of Wattpad Turkey in August-September, 2019. In relation in this paper, I aim to focus on the experiences through three interrelated topics: the motivation to write in the platform, the process of getting known by the readers and publishing houses, and the digital writer persona constructed in interaction with readers/fans. Within this framework I intend to discuss how engaging with Wattpad becomes an effective tool for young women from different backgrounds to produce and spread their own content, representation and culture together with raising their voices in male-dominated publication sector. Taking into consideration the neoliberal logic and exploitation relations the presumption process there may go hand in hand, I aim to show the potentiality to open new paths for youth social spheres, to affect the construction of new subjectivities and cultures, and to transform young women’s lives through the online-offline interaction the platform provides.



New voices and gazes on Spanish Cinema: Narrative and Production trends by Women Filmmakers

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Abstract

This proposal is based on the need to carry out an approach to the main production and narrative trends of the first works of Spanish women filmmakers, from 2010 to 2020. According to the Spanish Media, during the last years, the Spanish cinema industry is living a new wave of emergent presence of women filmmakers. At the same time, despite this growing presence, some agents still claim the necessity of increasing the female voices and their recognition. Which one is the reality of that presence or absence of feminine cinema voices in Spain? Which one is the evolution of the gender perspective in the recent context of Spanish cinema industry? Is there any difference between male or female direction in Spanish cinema? Do those female films have some elements or narrative patrons that define a specific way of filmmaking?

In order to answer these questions, we will focus the analysis in different items, like general characteristics of production (among others, the presence of female filmmakers, writers and technicians in production teams; presence of female main characters), or female narrative motives (like maternity, sorority, work life or family concept), to prove if this female presence is really growing up or it's only testimonial, and to study if a true female narrative and filmmaking voice is really changing the newest Spanish Cinema.



Italian Actresses and Instagram's Affective Labor: Celebrities Performative Practices and the Games of Relatability on Social Media

Lucia Tralli (University of Naples Federico II)

Abstract

Building on feminist theory around social media and affective practices (Kanai, 2019), this paper will focus on Italian actresses' celebrity performances on Instagram.

The strategic use of social media, especially visual-based Instagram (Serafinelli, 2018), to create and maintain a celebrity persona is a relatively recent phenomenon within the Italian celebrity ecosystem and has been scarcely explored within the celebrity studies framework.

Understanding celebrity as a performative practice that "involves ongoing maintenance of a fan basis, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona" (Marwick and boyd, 2011), we are interested in exploring which kind of affective labor is performed by Italian actresses on Instagram to nurture the performance of authenticity so typical both of social media and of celebrity culture.

In particular, some are embracing the logic and grammar of social media language, adopting attitudes and practices of relatability and strategic intimacy that have been studied for micro-celebrities and influencers native of the medium (Abidin 2018). This is, usually but not exclusively, the case of younger stars, such as Matilda De Angelis or Ludovica Martino, that are keener to craft an approachable self, indebted to a postfeminist construction of young womanhood. Established and older actresses, such as Claudia Pandolfi or Ambra Angiolini, also construct their online presence through frequent "spontaneous" stories, impromptu posting of intimate and lighthearted moments of their private lives. In some cases, their presence on the platform is characterized by a confessional style that can be found, for example, on Cristiana Capotondi's or Gabriella Pession's profiles.

Others, on the contrary, are employing an apparently opposite strategy, with scarce updates and/or withdrawn identity performances, avoiding to share intimate details of their lives (such as Alessandra Mastronardi or Kasia Smutniak), and negotiating a different level of access to their audiences, that seem defiant of contemporary social media customs, and is crafted by interspersing the professional content with concise and enigmatic posts or seldomly sharing content regarding favorite topics.

By analyzing significant profiles, I aim to map and investigate different levels of engagement with the "relatability game" so typical of contemporary social media culture.



Challenging Gendered War Memories on Instagram. Women re-enactment groups and the mediatization of female war participation

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Abstract

Since the 1960s, critical media studies have played a vital role in examining gender representations by highlighting for example the lack of women in the representation of (war) histories. Recently, historical re-enactments, often defined as body-based medium, have received increasing attention in academic research: scholars have argued that re-enactments provide opportunities to critically investigate history and its representations. As a male dominated practice however, most studies represent a male bias and/or emphasized the subordinate role of women reenactors. This paper focuses on two European women re-enactment groups in the armed forces during WWII who challenge this understanding: Die Flakhelferinnen in the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany and the Army Nurse Corps of the United States. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Czech Republic and Belgium, and visual analyses of Instagram, I will explore how Polish, Czech, Belgium and Dutch women reenactors negotiate gender in live and digital reenactments of both Nazi and allied forces. Particularly through social media, these reenactors find agency to mediate what they consider to be the 'invisible' history of women in WWII. The messages of these performances converge on three levels: 1) women had to execute dangerous and physically demanding tasks; 2) they achieved a strong sense of comradeship and sisterhood; 3) they needed to uphold standards of femininity "to boost the soldiers' spirits". By constructing these various digital and off-line representations, women reenactors challenge and redefine embedded notions of essentialized femininity in memories of WWII. By doing so, this paper demonstrates the agency social media audiences have in constructing (historized) media representations of female war participation.