MEDIA DIALOGUES

A Scholarly Roundtable

MODERATED BY **ERIC DIENSTFREY** AND **CASEY LONG**

IN LIEU OF A ONE-TIME AND IN-PERSON ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATION, THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION took place between October 10 and December 15, 2017. We asked scholars from a variety of media studies traditions to contribute to a text document that was being updated on Google Drive. The shared document afforded each scholar the opportunity to contribute to the conversation at his or her own convenience, thereby enabling the discussion to develop organically during the ten-week period. The online format was thus our own attempt to experiment with the concept of media dialogues.

Our eight panelists were Miranda Banks (Emerson College), Cynthia Baron (Bowling Green State University), James Buhler (University of Texas at Austin), Nina Cartier (Northwestern University), Liz Greene (Liverpool John Moores University), Lori Lopez (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Miguel Mera (City, University of London), and Jacob Smith (Northwestern University).

We encouraged each panelist to share links to websites and videos, and we have added images from these links in order to preserve the interactive experience of the original conversation.

MODERATORS: Thank you all for agreeing to participate! We wish to begin this roundtable with a look at the way popular media attends to the shortcomings of on-screen dialogue. In recent years, critics have used the "Bechdel test"—inspired by American cartoonist Alison Bechdel—as a measurement for how well (or how poorly) Hollywood films portray female characters.[1] If a film depicts two women talking to each other about something other than men, it passes the Bechdel test. If a film does not include such a conversation, then it fails. The idea is to alert audiences to the unequal treatment of male and female characters, particularly with respect to the depth and development of their characters.

Do you see value in discussing and analyzing film dialogue in this manner? Do you specifically see the Bechdel test as a productive means of talking about gender inequality on-screen? If no, are there other ways of analyzing and measuring dialogue that are more useful? If yes, can the Bechdel test extend beyond gender to other problems with on-screen representation? Are there ways that you address these issues in your classroom?

MERA: It is worth remembering that the Bechdel test was never designed as an actual "test" but rather grew out of Alison Bechdel's brilliant *Dykes to Watch Out For* comic strip.[2] It has certainly revealed some striking and astonishing inequalities, and in that sense it is very

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useful. It can trigger important discussions. For example, there are some retrograde films that pass the test (e.g., *Twilight*) and other more progressive examples that do not (e.g., *Gravity*), and the Internet is full of conversations about cases like these. If it starts a dialogue, then I think that is a good thing.

In many films, at least those that for me are richer or closer to real human experience, the gap between what people say and what they really mean is the most fascinating aspect. So the Bechdel test does not capture conversations about men that are also feminist, nor does it capture conversations about men that are not really conversations about men. Furthermore, in order to pass the test only minor shifts to narrative events are necessary rather than deeper structural changes, so this suggests that content is more important than form. The Bechdel test does not really tell us anything about the flow and musicality of dialogue, or about voice-over, or about other modes of enunciation. Of course, it never set out to explore these, but if we are to develop it in a way that is productive in examining the problems and challenges of gender inequality, then I think we also need to look at some more subtle aspects. Britta Sjogren's *Into the Vortex* is very interesting in this respect because it highlights the paradox of the use of the female voice in cinema as a differentiating device.[3] I wonder how it would be possible to bring Sjogren and Bechdel together?

BUHLER: I don't think the Bechdel test promises to be anything other than what it seems to be: a quick baseline test that measures one aspect of the constraints working on the representation of female characters. Whether a particular film passes it and what it might tell us about the gender politics of a particular film are less interesting than the collective statistics that can be generated through it. Also, the test asks us to attend to certain features of the film that can illuminate the representational dynamics that underlie a film's gender politics. One downside of the Bechdel test is that filmmakers might seek to pass the test rather than using the test to rethink those representational dynamics.

LOPEZ: I love the Bechdel test! As others have mentioned, it's a blunt and overly simplistic tool that tells us next to nothing about the actual feminist dimensions of a text. But it's such a sticky concept—once someone explains it to you, you can't help but start to notice whom women are talking to and what they are talking about. And the depressing reality is that so many movies (and other media texts) continue to fail the test. Since most of my research and teaching focus on the idea of pushing for social change in media, I think it's always useful to have quick-and-dirty tools for convincing students that these problems haven't gone anywhere. Then we realize the conversation must continue. What are the other problems, and what would it take to actually solve them? The Bechdel test isn't robust enough to even constitute the foundation for an undergrad student paper, so we pretty quickly move on from there. But I think we shouldn't deny its power to efficiently lay bare a persistent site for inequality in media representations.

CARTIER: I love the Bechdel test too as a way to quickly expose one dimension of how gender dynamics can work on-screen. I've often wondered how it can be extended, though, since it only really exposes one dimension and falls short when you add any other dimensions into the mix, like race, sexuality, and so on. In any case, the Bechdel test cannot account for things like code-switching (meaning when people of color easily alter the content, cadence, and enunciation of their speech from one vernacular to another, more professional—and often read as "whiter"—form of speech) or the nuances of cultural speech that exist simultaneously across multiple registers (like the signifyin' Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes about).

SMITH: I like these points a lot, and the prompt makes me think about some aspects of M. M. Bakhtin's work on dialogue. Dialogue was the key term for Bakhtin, and it meant more to him than the verbal interaction among the characters in a text. He was interested in works that brought out the heteroglossia and diversity of language in a society, how texts could enact the interaction between society and language. "Speech genres," he wrote, "are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language."[4] From this perspective, the Bechdel test makes us aware of one way in which texts suppress the realities of heteroglossia by amplifying some voices and putting limits on the language of others. How might we

measure other kinds of social difference registered by the voice—accent, dialect, language, slang, professional jargon, and so on? Bakhtin was also keen on the "creative understanding" that was possible in the mutual encounter of difference. That makes me wonder about another kind of test, one that would measure the extent to which different voices were encountering and attending to each other—for example, the extent to which male and female characters spoke to and engaged with each other. It occurs to me that I'm asking, is there a Bechdel test for listening, as well as speaking?

BARON: It seems that Jacob [Smith]'s incisive question and points raised throughout all of the posts highlight the fact that the underlying problem in many/most screen representations primarily concerns the limited range of individuals shown as having full and complete subjectivity and personhood. While there does seem to be some connection between dialogue and agency (characters with more lines likely have more screen time and more necessary connections to the story), what seems more significant is whether or not audiences are given the opportunity to see a character plan, think, respond, and change over time. My sense is that this is the point James [Buhler] makes when he identifies the need for film and media makers to use "the test to rethink . . . representational dynamics."

Still, like others, I see the value in making students aware of the "test." I share Lori [Lopez]'s view that it is useful "to have quick-and-dirty tools for convincing students that [social justice] problems haven't gone anywhere"—especially when tools are from a source that students see as cool. (My guess is that if the Bechdel test had originated in an academic article, undergraduates might view it in a different light.) At my institution, essentially all of the film majors are familiar with the Bechdel test, and they think it's uncool not to know about it. While that might seem superficial, their growing awareness of the test seems to have been accompanied by an increasing number of screenplays and films that explore the subjective experiences of diverse characters.

MODERATORS: Perhaps, then, if we were to draw a preliminary consensus from your responses, it would be that the Bechdel test can be an effective way to raise further awareness of media representation and its flaws, but the test can also limit the way we listen to media. As many of you noted, if we merely quantify on-screen conversations, we neglect other gender dynamics, such as a character's use of slang, dialect, and professional jargon or the multiple ways characters discuss gender, sex, and sexuality.

So in discussions of the Bechdel test or any metric to gauge inequality, it may be useful to think about not only the problems embedded within dialogue conventions but also the ways we actually define effective dialogue or a powerful reading of dialogue. How do you personally listen to and evaluate on-screen conversations and vocal performances when watching a movie or television show? How might genre affect the way we listen to dialogue?

CARTIER: Personally, I always listen for what is being said along with what is being signified. I listen for how it is being said (inflections, cadence, etc.) and the vocalizations that outstrip words (mmhmms, umphs, clicks of the tongue) yet still convey overdetermined meanings. I listen for disjunctions apparent (or not) between the speaker of the dialogue, the words and meaning, and the writer (if known). And for me, genre weighs heavily when I assess dialogue. I allow much more wiggle room for disruptive, acerbic, and offensive language in a comedy or a documentary that I would turn the TV set off for in a drama.

SMITH: Great new questions—much to think about! Before moving on, I wanted to follow up on Nina's insights on inflection, and so on with an example I've used in the classroom from *The Wire*.[5] It's a beautiful example of a dialogue that consists of a single word. It's also a fascinating update of an example that Volosinov offers in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. To illustrate the importance of expressive intonation for the social, contextual meaning given to speech, he gives the example of a story that Dostoevsky tells about listening to the conversation of some "tipsy artisans" who showed him that "all thoughts, all feelings, and even whole trains of reasoning could be expressed merely by using a certain noun"—in fact, an "unprintable noun" like the one used in *The Wire*.[6] Part of what makes that scene in *The Wire* so much fun is the presence of the man observing them—kind of like Dostoevsky listening to and appreciating the artisans' performance.

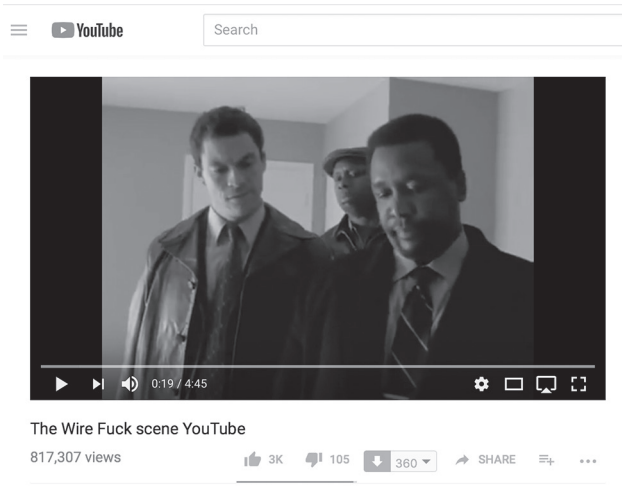


FIGURE 1. *The Wire* fuck scene. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lElf7D-An8.

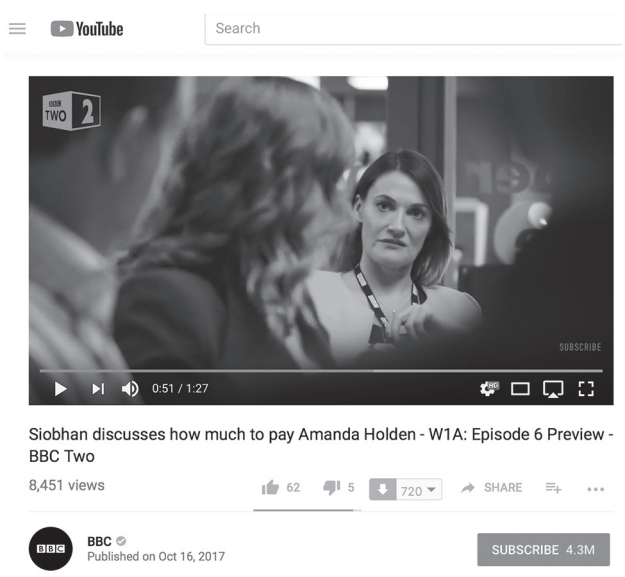


FIGURE 2. Shaping dialogue through performance, cinematography and editing in *W1A*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QRvQYOWzEg.

GREENE: This prompt makes me think of two television shows that I am currently following, *Jane the Virgin* (on Netflix) and *W1A* (on BBC and Netflix).

In *Jane the Virgin* season 2 episode 15 there is a whole episode devoted to the Bechdel test. The narrator (who plays a significant role in the series) asks us to question not only Jane's attachment to romantic fiction and her postgraduate creative writing project but also whether there is gender equality in her "real" life encounters. We are urged to watch and listen to Jane's interactions. The narrator and on-screen text affirm the Bechdel test in dialogue with us, the audience. Jane, her mother, Xiomara, and her abuela Alba move between English and Spanish, highlighting their Latina culture/heritage. The show is based in Miami. Jane is put under the microscope of the test, and in the meta nature of the show we are meant to listen actively to the performance of gender, language, and culture through dialogue.

In *W1A*, a series set in the BBC about television program making, the dialogue in meetings is particularly clipped, emphasizing an upper-middle-class Britishness that underpins a perception about "Media Types." Many of the executives are cut-throat caricatures of program makers with no real vision of where the BBC is going. The show requires close listening to the fast-paced, abrupt dialogue, which is viscerally affective in its delivery. The edit cuts on dialogue, we always see who is speaking, and it demands our attention.[7]

These programs are vastly different in terms of form and content, but both illustrate narrative setup and acting performance, and the sound and picture editing suggests that we listen carefully and engage with these two worlds. These programs are specific in their use of dialogue but not unique in the broader televisual worlds created.

I wouldn't say I have an approach to listening to film or television programs, certainly not on the first pass. But if something catches my attention I return to it and repeat the viewing experience for closer scrutiny.

BARON: Especially with Miguel [Mera]'s thoughtful post leading the way, it is perhaps not surprising that our discussion about screen dialogue would move so quickly into questions of subtext (the meaning beneath the words, or as Miguel put it, "the gap between what people say and what they really mean"). Similarly, with his post highlighting the need to consider "the flow and musicality of dialogue," it makes sense that we would turn rather quickly to the performative dimension of spoken language.

Our move in that direction also reflects Jacob's useful reminder about Bakhtin's interest in the "diversity of language in a society" and ways that "texts could enact the interaction between society and language," as evidenced by the fact that "social difference [is] registered by the voice—accent, dialect, language, slang, professional jargon, etc." The examples offered by Jacob, Nina, and Liz [Greene] confirm that value of examining the richness of spoken language—especially in studies of film, media,

and other performing arts (theater, video installation pieces, etc.).

There are many ways to study spoken words, and some include efforts to "define effective dialogue" or come up with ways to "evaluate screen conversations." When confronted with those inquiries, I find myself hesitating to answer, for I am reminded that evaluation and assessment arise so often in conversations about performance, including our case, the more narrowly focused question of performed speech (*parole*). By comparison, during the years of film and media studies' structuralist investigations of language systems (*langue*), more energy was directed to understanding how language systems work. It is possible that a parallel approach to performed speech might be useful.

The idea that dialogue and screen conversations reflect evolving genre conventions seems especially productive because it is value-neutral and focuses attention on suitability to the demands of the script as interpreted by the members of the production. Exploring connections between dialogue and genre conventions should also lead to (more familiar) investigations about interactions among industry factors, aesthetic conventions, cultural realities, texts, and audience expectations. In addition, exploring connections between dialogue and genre conventions could also lead to inquiries concerning interrelations among dialogue, narrative, and audiovisual elements. To offer a simplistic example, it seems that the same line spoken in a hoarse whisper might convey one thing or have one effect when combined with sinister music and spoken in a dimly lit, rough, urban exterior and another when combined with a posh, well-appointed, brightly lit drawing room and light-hearted music.

To revisit points made about the Bechdel test, my sense is that film and media scholars have a preference for screen conversations that illuminate characters' depth and complexity. It is possible that this general preference is shared by some but not all audiences and that it describes academics' preferences most but not all of the time. For example, during intense periods of writing, my screening choices include material that remind one of the "lesson learned" in *Sullivan's Travels* (1941).

MERA: I'm really glad Liz mentioned *W1A*. I think this is a masterpiece in its rhythmic flow, particularly its use of punctuation, silence, interruption, change of pace, and so on. Most of this series simply features a group of people who happen to be senior figures at the BBC discussing the minutiae of work issues around a boardroom table. In fact, it seems to be built around what David Graeber called the "phenomenon of bullshit jobs," that is to say, "It's as if someone were out there making up pointless jobs just for the sake of keeping us all working." The conversations criss-cross, change direction, and shift in tonal register, and yet none of this interrupts the effortlessness of the movement or the fluidity of the overarching structure. It works in tandem with brilliant visual editing and framing, and for me, the pleasure I derive from it is similar to listening to a highly skilled musical ensemble. I am especially interested in the musicality of the dialogue and how it works to generate humor, and I think this has a lot to do with the structural organization of punchlines, or what Salvatore Attardo called "jablines," that is, funny lines that are involved in the setup of a joke before the punchline. These are semantically identical to punchlines but are not final. Interestingly, though, I have played some clips from this series at a few conferences now, and I've noticed that UK audiences (or at least UK academic audiences) seem to find *W1A* much funnier than European audiences. So I wonder about local differences in the flow of dialogue and how this might affect appreciation. To pick up on Cynthia [Baron]'s point, I'm thinking about limitations in the analytical tools we have typically used to discuss the performative aspects of dialogue.

SMITH: Wow, I really need to see *W1A*! The genre question is really interesting and—surprise, surprise!—it makes me think of Bakhtin, in particular, the essay on "speech genres." He distinguishes between "primary" speech genres—relatively stable types of utterances used in particular spheres of everyday interaction—and "secondary" speech genres—the novels and dramas that "absorb and digest" the primary ones. This way of thinking about the traffic between everyday utterances and the artistic representations of them might lead in two different directions in terms of genre analysis. First, it might help us to better understand the sonic dimension of established "secondary" film/TV genres by tracking the conventions of speech that have been "absorbed and digested" in the gangster film, the western, film noir, melodrama, and so

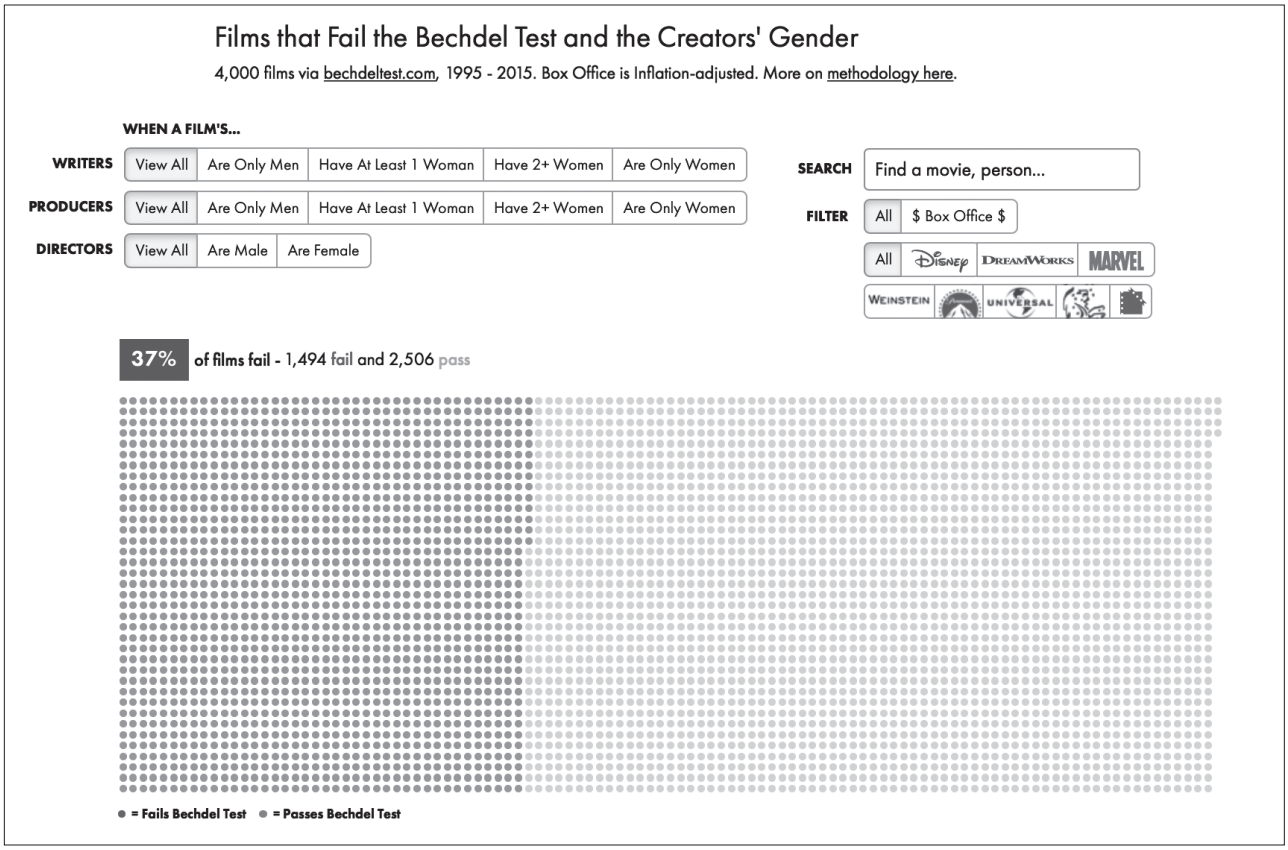
FIGURE 3. "*Laverne & Shirley*—Lenny and Squiggy 'Hello,'" YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AcBqfMH4fU.

on. Second, we might flip this around and instead start with how a particular genre of primary speech is depicted in the media irrespective of secondary generic classification. What kind of analysis would proceed from examining a set of greetings, farewells, congratulations, apologies, doctor/patient interactions, police interrogations, or sales pitches? It seems to me that the Internet is already compiling these kinds of data sets.[8]

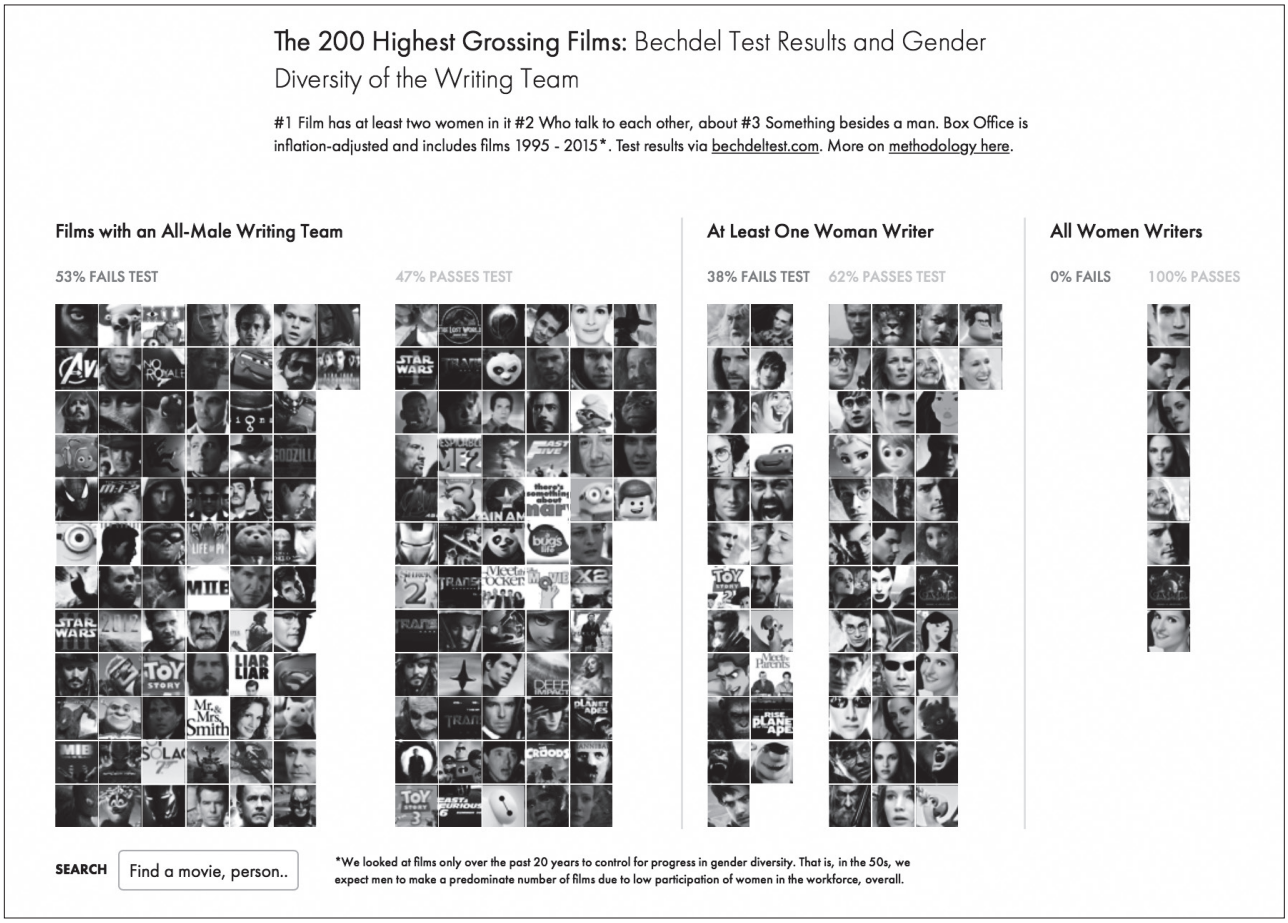
BANKS: Coming into the conversation late, so answering the first and second questions together. The Bechtel test is not a perfect data set, but it's a compelling shorthand that provides overwhelming evidence of gender bias in storytelling. It puts quantitative data behind qualitative studies of gender bias, which has led to rich conversations in the popular press, in classrooms, and in some Hollywood circles. As Lori points out, the test is sticky—and because of that, it gives people beyond the academic audience tools to calculate the everyday sexism of Hollywood movies. After the Bechtel test came the DuVernay test for racial representation and the Vito Russo test for LGBTQ representation.[9] One particularly interesting use of the Bechtel test was for a "data visualization" that combines crowd-sourced Bechtel test results with imdb.com information on the gender of above-the-line talent tied to a film (figs. 4 and 5).[10] This then led to a second study by the same group at Pudding.com to visualize Hollywood "screenplay dialogue by gender" and "screen direction by gender" of the character and by the gender of the screenwriter.[11] Again, the data have their flaws, but I am excited by the conversations that these popular data-based tools and crowd-sourced approaches to the study of media have amplified.

MODERATORS: Have you used these quantitative approaches in your own teaching?

BANKS: Yes, in a few of my classes we have studied crowdsourced tests, data visualizations, and some of the popular industry studies that have gained traction in the popular press. Recently, I have used this approach after talking to students about their upcoming research projects. We spend time examining how scholars have organized their own theories, histories, and data analysis of the industry. I'll break students off into groups, with each group with a different study. Some of them will look at scholarly studies (e.g., *Cut Out of the Picture*, *Inequality in 800 Films*, *Hollywood Diversity Report*), while others look at material created by individuals or fans (*Star Trek Viz*).[12] They will then report back on the thesis of the research, how the study was conducted, what was included in or excluded from the data set, what the researchers gained or lost from making these choices. I'll usually ask them to identify one or two pieces of data that were particularly compelling/surprising/indicative and how that might relate to other research or readings that we have done in class. From there, we can talk about data visualization and popular data crowdsourcing in relation to more traditional modes of scholarly information sharing.



FIGURES 4–5. Aggregating and visualizing Bechdel test results from IMDb data (fig. 5 from *The Pudding*).



MODERATORS: Thanks, Miranda! These teaching methods make us wonder if there are also ways to apply data-based analyses to the more abstract qualities of speech, such as the musicality of dialogue and the fluidity between the aural and the visual that Miguel mentioned earlier.

BUHLER: Like Miguel, I'm attracted to musicality in dialogue whenever it appears, but it is not something that I'm really looking out for. Rather, it emerges as something that "catches my attention," as Liz [Green] put it, and Nina [Cartier]'s "listening for disjunctions." Timing of entrances, pacing of delivery, inflections of pitch, and tonal register are things I pay particular attention to, but also how the dialogue passes from character to character: Is there a flow or a refusal or something in between? I would add to Liz's observations about the preview of episode 6 of *W1A* that the cutting on dialogue means that we rarely see enough reaction to know how the dialogue is playing. The result is a series of short, disconnected monologues where no one seems to be listening or responding to anyone else—at least not in a substantive way. Miguel notes a crisscrossing of conversation and observes a fluid overarching structure, which I agree is present, but what strikes me about this fluidity is its rapid-fire pace and its lack of flow, as each of the characters seems intent on intervening in order to divert the conversation.

BARON: To follow up on points by Nina and others, I would like to share a few things that have come to mind concerning analysis and description of physical and vocal expression.

For instance, one might consider scholarship in the area of conversation analysis. While I have not used its notation system, I thought it would be useful to mention it. Examples of this line of work can be found in *Television Talk Shows* (2001), in which Andrew Tolson explains that the approach "has been developed since the mid-1980s, by importing verbal discourse analysis into media studies." The work includes transcriptions that "incorporate a set of conventions developed in CA for representing such features as overlapping turn-taking, patterns of stress and intonation, paralinguistic punctuations (such as pauses and intakes of breath), and audience response."[13]

Studies of physical and vocal expression can also draw on Laban Movement Analysis. Although this system has been used most extensively by dancers and choreographers and in studies of dance, Sharon Carnicke and I have found that even its most basic concepts provide a useful starting point for studying all aspects of screen performance. (Chapter 8 in *Reframing Screen Performance* offers an introduction to the taxonomy and its application.)[14]

Given the discussion group's interest in screen dialogue, I thought it would be important to note that Laban scholar-practitioners discuss vocal expression. For example, in *Laban for Actors and Dancers* (1993), Jean Newlove points out: "Let us take a simple example. Try saying the words 'Yes' and 'No' with thrusting. The voice will be strong, sudden, and direct. . . . Try a similar exercise with floating. Could you honestly say that this person appears just as emphatic? Does the essence of floating lend itself to such clear and unequivocal decisions? Is there not an element of doubt, of having not quite come to a solution; perhaps not even wanting to arrive at an answer?"[15] *Laban for All* (2004) by Jean Newlove and John Dalby also includes a chapter entitled "The Movement in Sound and Voice."[16]

Newlove's observations about the contrast between thrusting and floating expression points to the wide practice (by actors and performance scholars) of locating the verb or subtext underlying vocal expressions. Even studio era actors recognized that a line such as "pass the butter" had to be informed by an action verb. So one set of given circumstances might lead the line to serve as a demand, "pass the butter," whereas another narrative context and combination of characters might cause "pass the butter" to be a line of flirtation. These examples are clearly quite simplistic, and they barely suggest the immense range of plausible verbs and subtexts. Contemporary acting and directing manuals often include lists of action verbs for actors (and scholars) to consider when analyzing a script (or completed performance). For example, Judith Weston's *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television* (1996) has an appendix with a short list of action verbs (with anchoring subtexts) and an additional list with more than 250 action verbs (e.g., taunt, entreat, inspect, cajole, etc.).[17]

It is possible that performances in *W1A* can strike audiences as the work of "a highly skilled musical ensemble," as Miguel has rightly noted, in part because each (short) line is colored by a distinct verb/subtext. For example, Simon Harwood (played by Jason Watkins) often says little more

than "brilliant," yet due to the distinct intention behind Watkins's deliveries of the line, each "brilliant" means something quite different, ranging from "that's ridiculous" to "now it's your problem" to "let's see if that will work" and more.

Also, in line with Miguel's observations about the show's "structural organization of punchlines," I would simply echo that idea by noting that it does seem to have the energy of sketch comedy. The wonderful paradox of the show might be that there is, on the one hand, marvelous interplay among the actors and, on the other, as Jacob has observed, characters involved in "disconnected monologues where no one seems to be listening or responding to anyone else." Perhaps as in a film like Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992), which features collaborative and seemingly improvisational performances of characters who are, by contrast, striving to destroy one another, the giddiness and dark humor that sustain *W1A* depend at least in part on the friction between the registers of performance and story.

To circle back to one of Jacob's earlier observations, I also see the value of starting with questions about "how a particular genre of primary speech is depicted in the media, irrespective of secondary generic classification." As he notes, one could ask: "What kind of analysis would proceed from examining a set of greetings, farewells, congratulations, apologies, doctor/patient interactions, police interrogations, or sales pitches?" The Prague school (1926–48) theorists took up that line of inquiry in some of their work. They developed the term "gesture-sign" to refer to culturally specific but recognizable physical/vocal signs of greetings, farewells, and so on; their companion term is "gesture-expression," which refers to the individual embodiment of one of those recognizable moments. As a starting point, they would consider whether a particular gesture-expression amplified, sustained, or contradicted conventional associations with the socially determined gesture-sign. So, for instance, it catches our attention when a screen character's individual expression of a (cordial) greeting carries connotations of unfriendliness.

There are important connections between Bakhtin's writing about dialogic relations and the Prague school's observations about dynamic structure in composite art forms (theatre, film, television, dance, performance art, and so on), in culture, and in the intersection of art and culture. Jacob points out that Bakhtin "was interested in works that brought out the heteroglossia and diversity of language in a society." Prague school theorists share that interest and would extend it to include the diversity of embodied expression in a society. Similarly, echoing and perhaps extending Bakhtin's ideas, Prague school theorists explored the interplay among various elements of the performing arts (lighting design, sound design, performance choices). Thus, their work, which invites analyses to consider mutual interactions between aesthetic elements, could be brought into (our) discussions of performance, framing, and editing. In addition, given the Prague school's attention to dynamic structures in culture and cultural institutions (in ways akin to Gramsci), the underlying premises of their work, namely, that there are no static structures, that the ostensibly key dimensions of a subject depend on the perspective of the observer, and that individual iterations of larger systems warrant attention, share common ground with, for example, the perspectives that inform the marvelous industry studies research that Miranda [Banks] describes when she points out that key questions concern "how the study was conducted, what was included in or excluded from the data set, what the researchers gained or lost from making these choices."

MERA: I love the idea of using Laban Notation to analyze dialogue. That is a really great way of ensuring that embodiment and movement (kinetography) is central to our understanding of vocalization. One challenge I can see, though, is that it does not deal with timing as effectively as other forms of notation such as, for example, standard musical notation. It does, however, deal with spatialization and embodied dynamics very effectively, as Cynthia outlines, and that is something we could think about in much more detail in our analyses of dialogue.

SMITH: A quick follow-up to one of Cynthia's excellent points. I have also been inspired by work in conversation analysis. An important work for me in this regard was Robert Hopper's *Telephone Conversation*, a book that suggests that an interest in dialogue and conversation might prompt media scholars to move beyond film and television texts into other modes of mediated interaction.[18]

MODERATORS: A perfect segue, as we too will now move beyond the analysis of on-screen speech and introduce a

new topic of discussion: the dialogues that exist between the media industry and its audiences (defined as fans, critics, activists, and scholars). Specifically, are there productive ways that audiences can dialogue with the industry to encourage those who make media to improve upon or change their practices?

Often these discussions focus on representation and labor, and we are very much interested in reading your thoughts as to how effectively activists can generate responses from the industry. At the same time, this discussion can also deal with other issues. Over the weekend Mark Mothersbaugh, the composer for the most recent *Thor* installment, noted to *Hollywood Reporter* that he changed the way he envisioned his musical score for the film after watching the online video criticism about the aesthetics of Marvel theme music.[19] Perhaps then we might wonder if video essays and other forms of new media criticism are a better way to get the attention of producers, filmmakers, and other media makers than are traditional essays and monographs?

LOPEZ: The question of how we can productively dialogue with the industry in order to improve practices is my exact research area, so I'll kick off with some of my own thoughts. First, there is a long history of media activism that moves between reactive and proactive responses to problematic representations. I would highlight the work of Katherine Montgomery on television advocacy groups and Charles Lyons on censoring the movies for a primer on this history. But the basic idea is that if audiences are upset about an image, they can either try to build friendly relationships inside the industry or stand on the outside throwing tomatoes, so to speak. There are also a number of long-standing media advocacy organizations whose sole mission is to create these conversations, and they deploy a wide range of strategies in doing so.

While media industries are embarrassingly risk-averse and do hew largely to upholding the status quo, they also want to minimize bad press so they can make a return on their financial investments. So there is some incentive to actually participate in those dialogues, if they perceive the aggrieved party to be powerful. But time and again we really do see the same mistakes made over and over (see continuing to fail the Bechdel test, whitewashing, etc.), so there is some pessimism about how much these dialogues lead to long-term industrial shifts or learning.

I also want to point to the possibilities for new tactics, such as contacting media producers using Twitter. While I am often critical of how Twitter's word constraints also limit our ability for discourse that accounts for context, nuance, and history, it cannot be denied that media producers actively engage in this platform and are open to being contacted there. While media activism used to be a long-term investment that took considerable time and planning, a burst of trending Twitter activity can quickly produce a response from filmmakers, such as an apology. The bigger question is then what happens after these apologies . . .

BARON: Lori nicely captures the dynamics of industry/audience interactions in her observations about the reactive and proactive responses to representations and the industry's risk-averse incentives to participate, or at least seem to participate, in dialogues with audiences. In addition, censorship is certainly one of the more illuminating aspects of audience-industry interactions. I share Lori's interest in Charles Lyons's *The New Censors: Movies and the Culture Wars* (1997), which for me serves as a useful companion to Gregory Black's *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (1995) and the wonderful body of literature that reaches back to *Censored: The Private Life of the Movies* (1930), coauthored by documentary filmmaker Pare Lorentz and civil liberties lawyer Morris L. Ernst, cofounder of the ACLU.[20] The history of censorship is a reminder that audiences include the Catholic Church, corporations like US Steel, the transnational food industry, the US Chamber of Commerce, and other institutions that continue to see themselves as key participants in ongoing dialogues concerning representation.

This week I have also been thinking about artists and media professionals as individuals who can occupy the roles of both content creator and audience member (fan, critic, scholar). For example, comedian Hari Kandabolu is getting a lot of media attention for his film *The Problem with Apu*.[21] Kandabolu talks about the documentary in the November 15 episode of the *Code Switch* podcast.[22] As he points out in his conversation with the *Code Switch* hosts, we are seeing changes in US media's representations of South Asians in part because the entertainment industry has figured out there is money to be made by generating product featuring "fresh" new faces, namely, people of color. (Of course, he puts this much better than I have.)

The video essay about music in Marvel movies, which is a reminder that industry-audience dialogues can be about aesthetics and that new media criticism can have an impact, led me to think about the ways in which audience members contribute to contemporary perceptions and perhaps to media representations as well through massive sites like TV Tropes.[23]

It also seems that a conversation about dialogue designed to improve or change practices would necessarily include a look at the series of dialogues that include individuals, news outlets, the media industry, and other institutions in the post-Weinstein era. For me, one of the interesting developments is that accounts that were essentially overlooked just a couple of years ago are now receiving attention. For example, *An Open Secret* went essentially unnoticed when it was released. Today it is part of the discussion.[24]

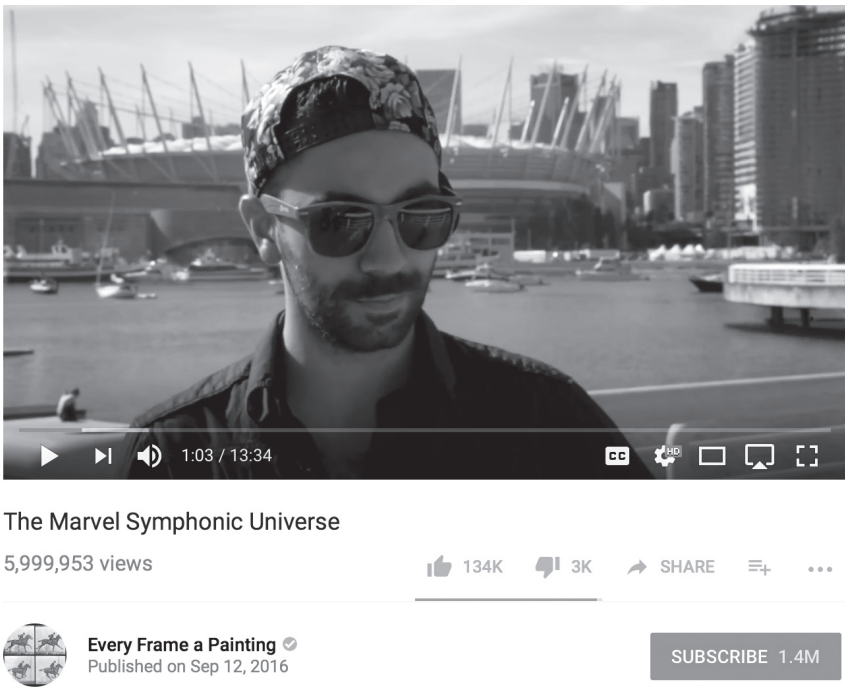


FIGURE 6. "Marvel Symphonic Universe," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcXsH88XIKM.

BUHLER: The odd thing to me about Mothersbaugh's comments is that his score seemed pretty standard issue for Marvel. The film used popular music a bit more prominently than other Marvel films featuring characters from *The Avengers* and more in line with the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films than, say, the *Iron Man* films. But Mothersbaugh's score didn't otherwise seem to address the issue raised at the outset of the "Marvel Symphonic Universe" about the lack of memorability in Marvel's themes, what I have called the "underarticulated" quality of the thematic material.[25] That video essay received a lot of attention when it came out, and the premise of the essay—which combined the complaint about memorability with an indictment of temp tracks and composers not taking emotional chances—is not argued especially cogently. Dan Golding's response, "A Theory of Film Music," effectively rebuts the salient points. Temp tracks have a history nearly as long as sound film itself, and the basic determinant of film scoring today is the technology of virtual instruments and the demoing and rapid rewriting of musical cues that they make possible. We need to look to these technological determinants rather than the use of temp tracks if we want to understand why the thematic material in contemporary films is structured the way that it is (and so differently from how it was in the past).

I wrote a long series of tweets in response to Golding's essay to which he responded in turn, and it was, insofar as these things happen on Twitter, a relatively productive exchange, but Golding's video essay remained unaltered, and my commentary on it is essentially ephemera, lost, like almost everything else on Twitter, to the entropy of the time line. Therefore, I would respond to the statement "if video essays and other forms of new media criticism are a better way to get the attention of producers, filmmakers, and other media makers than are traditional essays and monographs" by doubting that they will facilitate any such exchange due to the power differentials that exist in these sorts of exchanges.

To recapitulate: Mothersbaugh claims to be influenced by Tony Zhou's critique of music in Marvel films, but, as I mentioned, there is little evidence of this in Mothersbaugh's approach in *Thor: Ragnarok*. Golding provides a cogent reply in his "Theory of Film Music," and Zhoiu's YouTube video links to Golding's reply, but beyond

the link the reply otherwise goes without a response. I critique Golding on Twitter, and Golding responds on Twitter, and this response has no influence on the dialogue over this issue at all. (That's not a complaint, just an observation.) It's a series of failed dialogues.

My point, then, is that I doubt very much that video essays and other forms of new media will have any more influence on filmmakers than traditional academic work, writing hot takes for media outlets, and so forth. Video essays are not going to open up an effective channel between academics and fans, on the one hand, and the filmmakers, on the other—except perhaps accidentally when something happens to go viral. Video essays are an effective medium—I have found they can be quite fruitfully deployed in class and lead to energetic discussion, and the large number of hits on Golding's response (around 280,000 views and 1,000 comments) shows that video essays can get a much wider reception than an academic article—but I don't get a sense that professional filmmakers seek these things out. And there is a real issue of whether this constitutes "dialogue" or is better thought of as a form of broadcast.

MERA: One of the central concerns of my own research has been the close connection between theory and practice, and I work as a professional film composer as well as an academic. There are genuine challenges to dialogue between these two worlds primarily because of different frameworks. It seems to me that researchers are often perceived by practitioners to read too much into their work and to lack awareness of the political realities of working on a film project. People working in the industry are often perceived by researchers to lack critical or broader cultural awareness. These perceptions are not accurate, in my experience, but are shaped by the different contexts. If we do want more productive dialogue, then it has to be clear what is in it for both sides. The reasons why it would be useful for a researcher to access "insider" information may be more immediately obvious than why the "industry" would find it especially useful to engage with academic researchers. So I think we need to do more to make it clear how the relationship might be mutually beneficial. When I interview practitioners, I find they tend to enter into a standard journalistic response mode featuring simple and clear sound bites about the main message they want to convey. I find this attitude can change when the interviewee realizes that I do genuinely want to engage in deeper discussion and that I do really know about their work and professional situation.

The "industry" is, of course, deeply concerned with trying to understand what its audiences think and how they might act, which is why Hollywood films, for example, engage extensively in audience test screenings as a product-development process. The relationships between audiences and producers, however, are becoming more sophisticated and complicated, particularly in transmedia environments. Sarah Atkinson outlines some fascinating case studies in her book *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences* (2014).[26] I don't think she discusses it specifically, but an interesting example is the BBC series *Sherlock*. At the end of season 2, in *The Reichenbach Fall*, Sherlock appears to jump off the roof of St. Bartholomew's Hospital to his death. As Watson visits Sherlock's grave months later, however, the detective is revealed to be alive and well and watching from afar. In the eighteen months before the season 3 opener provided "answers" as to how Sherlock faked his death, however, the Internet was filled with elaborate theories from amateur sleuths. The audience was desperately trying to complete the story. The writer, Steven Moffat, fully aware of this, seems to have used the enthusiasm and energy both to develop the script and to fuel further speculation for publicity purposes. In interviews before season 3, Moffat demonstrated detailed knowledge of the online sleuths' theories and also repeatedly teased: "There is a clue that everybody's missed." Episode 1 of season 3, then, seemed to poke fun at all of the fan's exhaustive guesswork. It outlined thirteen ways that Sherlock *could* have cheated death without really providing a clear answer. There is a fascinating relationship here between the audience (as represented by its fan communities) and the show's creators. The audience is kept guessing and is encouraged to keep guessing, but the writers also analyze those discussions in order to shape the structure of their response to the audience.

CARTIER: There are so many thoughtful, informative responses here. I really appreciate the conversations historicizing media activism as well as those connecting our contemporary moment. Personally, I'm a bit stumped by

the question of how fan bases, audiences, and activists can more directly impact media when it comes to questions of race and its various intersections. I'm stumped quite frankly because I remain cynical about what counts as progress and change and what counts as activism. Just the other day in one of my intro classes I screened *Small Steps, Big Strides: The Black Experience in Hollywood,* and students reacted with their usual levels of shock and then recognition that the more representations of blackness and access to the means of production had changed, the more those things had remained the same. Is the fact that a black film like *Moonlight* won big at the 2017 Oscars progress? Is activism #oscarssowhite, the subsequent backlash, and then increased diversification of the Academy to include more voting members of color?

Old-school black media activism has ranged from protests and boycotts, to scathing newspaper reviews in the black press, to creating independent media designed to combat negative stereotypes. And that was back in 1916. (Research as varied and wide-ranging as books like Anna Everett's *Returning the Gaze*, Yearwood's *Black Film as a Signifying Practice*, George Alexander's *Why We Make Movies,* and Jannete L. Date and William Barlow's *African Americans in the Mass Media* document black media activism by tracing black engagement in media practices.)[27] Fast forward a hundred years, and what kind of media activism do we have? The same methods challenging the same conditions, with the twist of our digital era making these methods more widespread and widely accessible. Hashtag activism via social media does get the attention of media execs—like the #oscarssowhite I referenced above—but since the problem is systemic, how far does the system have to go to include more diverse bodies to avoid tokenism? I certainly don't have the answer—at least not a number—but I do know that until we can stop identifying a film as a "black movie" that is an Oscar contender and not just a "movie," we really can't consider the system as having made progress.

Also, I have to problematize what we consider media activism and how it intersects with plain old activism. In my eyes, although there is a spectrum of practices that can count as activism, many of them involve transformation of the communities the practices wish to impact. So black media activism somehow concretely transforms black communities through perhaps invigorating black communities economically when films use black neighborhoods to shoot on location, creating programs to train and subsequently hire more black film techs, or building and maintaining exhibition spaces in black neighborhoods that create jobs and feature black independent productions. This kind of activism rarely happens, however. I think back to my own neighborhood, which was featured in the popular *Barbershop* films. Bernice's Twilight Zone bar, one of the main locations for the film, is still an empty, derelict building, and the surrounding neighborhood still suffers from high crime, food insecurity, and other social ills. Can one film solve those problems? Of course not. But one film can help reinvigorate that space for more than just the duration of the film shooting schedule. I suppose I remain suspect of the ease of retweeting a hashtag or giving a statue to a new hot film to satiate audiences still hungry for representations (as Donald Bogle and other black film historians have argued since, well, forever) while not fully attacking the systemic problems in play.[28]

And although it is obvious, media activism must not be divorced from media literacy. One of the primary sources of my irritation with the #oscarssowhite hashtag activism is the easy rebuttal white racists and those who suffered from internalized racism proffered: if black films were good, they would win. And when black actors and films did indeed win, it was just to quiet the whining of social justice warriors who didn't really want art to win. Just a black face—any old face—would do. Such easy rebuttals elide the systemic nature of institutionalized discrimination that the American media industry suffers from. The idea that award shows reflect a kind of artistic meritocracy still holds tremendous sway within ideologies that only "good" art should be rewarded, when in reality much of the "good" film art (from creators of any racial background) rarely even gets green-lighted, let alone actually produced, due to the economics and politics of media production (especially on a large scale). In an era when any information that doesn't conform to your own worldview comprises "fake news" and people who agitate for greater access to and representation for black media are labeled "snowflakes" whose "whining" causes racial problems instead of solving them, only increased media literacy as a primary function of media activism will help ameliorate the unfortunate media climate we find ourselves trapped within as a country.

Finally, as educators, what happens when our media activism makes us targets? What happens when just teaching various viewpoints about contemporary and historical media phenomena can jeopardize your T&P dossier or your chances of rehire if you are an adjunct? What happens when your black media activism is rebranded as domestic terrorism because it emanates from a black body that dares to demonstrate how black lives should matter in media, too?

BARON: To say that I have read people's recent posts with interest is an understatement. I have taken notes, paused, and reflected—and wondered if I should come back another day to add comments, but due to the upcoming duties of the week I'm going to press on. To start, it is troubling and significant that black media activism is labeled "domestic terrorism." That is unacceptable, and I hope other forum contributors will suggest ways to combat that pattern, if only within academia.

If one were to consult Foucault, Gramsci, and others, there would be scores of quotes to support the point that what's going on involves nothing more (or less) than the abuse of power. Put another way, what's so clear is that "domestic terrorism" is anything the right wing does not like. In this connection, one might recall that even *Avatar* provoked right-wing commentators who argued that it supported the aims of ecoterrorists. Will Potter's *Green Is the New Red* (2011) provides a useful introduction to the battles on that front.[29]

I will admit that despite my ongoing efforts to support positive social change, I know that I have never made a dent in the status quo and that I increasingly struggle to get through the day, given the never-ending barrage of domestic and international news. Moreover, I had once imagined the academy was a place where reason prevailed, but in the 1990s I let go of that fantasy when I lost a visiting assistant professor position because a student identified me as a communist. I think the allegation was based on me briefly mentioning that Ronald Reagan had an FBI informant number. Maybe it was because I showed *Rules of the Game* and noted that people belonged to different classes, I don't know. At any rate, I met with AAUP representatives and was told that I should find another place to work. I did. At the new institution, my chair told me that as a tenure track faculty member, I should not do research on labor practices in the film and media industry. The provost confirmed that. My subsequent work on screen performance became a safe, innocuous activity—who cares what screen actors do. The insignificance of my research ensured I could fly under the radar of Ohio's higher education censorship boards. Huzzah.

Given this (and a lifetime of other stuff) and the high profile of the flagrantly entrenched positions of people who support systemic racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other toxic forms of being human, I share Nina's cynicism about progress and change. It is difficult to keep going when it's so clear that the problems are so systemic and that people committed to change find themselves using the same methods to challenge the same conditions. One can only see the glass as half empty at best.

Still, and perhaps I'm grasping at straws, as messed up as the dominant culture is, I find myself hopeful about people coming of age. It's terrible that in financial and social terms, little has changed in half a century, but it's wonderful that students' perceptions have changed, as perhaps indicated by Nina's observation that when she "screened *Small Steps, Big Strides: The Black Experience in Hollywood* . . . students reacted with their usual levels of shock and then recognition that the more representations of blackness and access to the means of production had changed, the more those things had remained the same." The students' reactions are significant, and they suggest ways to move forward.

To revisit Nina's point about activism and media activism, my sense (perhaps hope) is that young activists work very comfortably and effectively at the intersection of activism and media activism, in part because they have grown up already familiar with lessons from scholars who highlighted the significance of representations of identity. Wise beyond their years, they know how to build their audiences (through standup comedy, theater, fashion, etc.) and then how to take their message on the road. Of course, there are scores of projects that still never see the light of day (as Nina points out), but what is astounding is the richness of the media discourse, if one is there to listen.

In our current situation, media literacy is, as Nina notes, extremely important. While there are always challenges to "ruining" students' pleasure in distracting objects, my experience is that students can see and reflect on the biases that shape their preferences. In parallel, and to

echo points Miguel has made, there is a need for scholars and practitioners to work together to enrich the world of film and media. As someone who came to academia after working for years in production, I recognize the value of integrating craft and scholarly discourses. Given the many assaults on people's awareness of history, reality, and facts, it would be useful for film and media scholars to see the value of collaboration with and support for (high-profile) practitioners who are putting themselves at risk by candidly expressing their views, as well as the scores of film/media laborers who are also at risk simply because they have worked on a particular film/media project. (As friends and colleagues have noted, high-profile figures being discredited means that scores of unaffiliated crew people are now out of work.)

BANKS: Wow, so much to comment on. That's what happens when you come to each question toward the end of the week. Okay, where to start. I have loved reading everyone's responses to this question and would love to think more about audience activism and connections to makers. But maybe I'll focus on a different part of the question that we haven't touched on as much in this section—the use of engagement, and then later, specifically about dialogue between scholar and maker.

What's interesting about the *Thor* example is that the critique was of another work. While I wholeheartedly agree that one clear pathway to success for some media makers is to read and think about how audiences experience media, is it always most useful when it is about their own work? In other words, is it always a useful endeavor for a practitioner to engage with their audience? There's often a natural assumption that this is desirable, but true engagement is not so easy to create and not necessarily profitable. (Actually, now that I think about it, really the only assured thing that a maker might get out of it is financial profit. Exposure to crowds might lead to more notoriety, fame, or, if things go wrong, backlash.) My point is, there are many kinds of creator/audience engagements, and I think lumping them together as one is problematic. I am not convinced that fan/maker interaction is inherently productive. The question, really, is, what are both parties looking for when they interact? In other words, are audiences looking for connection, to express disappointment at what's happened to a character, to request that something will happen to a character? Are they there to stargaze at a maker who they deem an auteur of a beloved text? Are makers connecting with audiences when they go to events or reply to tweets, or are they using these opportunities for press or to build their fan base? What is the goal of the transaction?

Regarding Kandabolu, I was so hopeful about his film, and yet there was a perfect example of someone who really could have used a media studies scholar as a talking head within his documentary. His critique of *The Simpsons* was dead-on, but his approach to thinking about the problem never went far beyond the surface. So I guess I could tweet at Kandabolu and suggest that he should have interviewed a media studies scholar with a specialty in critical race theory, but I see that as somewhat different from audience communication with industry. And that, I think, gets to my own frustrations with some interactions between industry and scholars.

While I have been to some fabulous events where industry professionals and academics are in conversation with each other, some of the most disappointing panels or keynotes at media studies conferences have been with media makers. The problem comes when we as scholars are mistaken by industry experts for fans or for general audience members. Sure, we can often count ourselves as fans, but our interests go beyond fandom into scholarly inquiry. Ideally, when industry experts speak to a group of media scholars, the conversation should engage with issues, topics, and ideas that are quite different from the typical Q&A audience/fan questions. But so often, either out of deference by the moderator or out of an industry expert's misunderstanding of who is in the audience, we end up having conversations that rarely get to thoughtful engagement between two or more experts. UCSB's Media Industries Project had a number of conferences that were able to design day-long events that placed makers and scholars in dialogue together particularly well, for example, "Net Worth: Media Distribution in the Digital Era" (Santa Barbara, CA, February 18, 2011) and "All in the . . . Modern Family" (Santa Barbara, CA, April 27, 2021), a conference on the social impact of television sitcoms. Each panel mixed expert scholars with industry professionals on specific areas and allowed for a pointed creative engagement. I should say, I think that it is much easier when conversations are one-on-one. I've found I can

guide a conversation toward my particular research-based questions. Often I've had interviewees say to me, "You've done your homework." Which, as a professor, I'd hope I'd have done.

In conversations with industry folk, I'm always aware that the conversation I am having in that situation is primarily for my benefit, not theirs. There is a power dynamic—I need something from them (information, a conversation), and they grant me time out of a busy day. Sure, while I would hope that my interviewees get something out of the experience, they are there out of their own professional motivations or obligations. So what am I trying to say? I guess that we need to be thoughtful about the interchange as a transaction. In my current research, I'm interviewing a lot of industry folk (agents, executives, writers, etc.) about their internal efforts to diversify the media industries (fellowships, show runner mandates, studio policy changes, diversity hiring initiatives). What has been exciting with this work is to consider the ways that scholars and makers can share information and research in order to make change. Give me a few more months to collect my thoughts on my research, and I'm sure I'll have much more to say on this.

MODERATORS: As we wrap up this conversation, are there questions concerning media dialogue (both performance-oriented dialogue and conversations between theorists and practitioners) that you would like to see historians ask in future research? How do you think the concept of dialogue should be analyzed and discussed? Are there any questions that you wish we had asked you during the roundtable?

SMITH: Many thanks to our *VLT* hosts and to all the panelists for this stimulating conversation—I've learned a lot! Two suggestions for areas where the conversation might continue. First, historical analysis of the changing conventions of realism in dialogue. What role has been played in establishing the norms of dialogue by systems of training, influential writers, actors, or directors, regimes of censorship, or new technologies? What makes dialogue feel "real" today? Second, an ecocritical approach might investigate the potential of cross-species dialogue or "zoosemiotic communication" via media technology. Such an investigation might include the study of animal trainers and animal performers in film production, the use of media technology to communicate with nonhumans or to study nonhuman communication, or the impact of media devices or infrastructure on the nonhuman environment. In an era of environmental crisis, what difference would it make to understand the representation of global warming, species extinction, or resource extraction as a kind of dialogue?

GREENE: I would like to echo the above sentiments. I have read with great interest everything that has been shared in this roundtable. There are a number of "dialogues" that are evolving within this discussion, and there are many threads that I would like to pick up. Like a number of people here, I have a background in practice—as a below-the-line worker in location sound. In my current position I teach practice; in previous posts I have taught only theory or a mix of theory and practice. Teaching film practice is meant to be about upskilling students to use various technologies, craft a film, and be able to critically reflect on the work produced. At least, that is what the Assessment and Learning Outcomes state.

What I tend to spend most time thinking about and grappling with, and I suspect some of you probably do too, is how to teach not just the subject but also the student in front of me. In limited ways I am able to discuss race (color correction issues in FCPX), gender and sexuality (hearing range), class (voice and accent) in the context of a sound or editing class, but this requires seeking out noncanonical examples or offering off-the-cuff comments that are only tangentially connected to the main teaching goals. I often intervene to engineer group work, considering the lack of a level playing field for young women entering into film practice. These are the small tactics I employ to try and create an environmental change.

I need to use these tactics to make sense of my job and my life choices and to reassure myself that my small interventions could spark something in someone, perhaps not immediately, but maybe down the line. I keep coming back to the work of Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to think through what a radical curriculum could look like in terms of "dialogue," a dialogue of practice between me and the students I am working with.[30] I would be interested to know what that looks and sounds like for other people's teaching practice and what tactics they

deploy in the classroom in order to change the working environment for a post-Weinstein generation.

On many occasions while reading through this discussion, I wanted to hear your actual voices; I wanted to listen and soak up everything "said." Perhaps a Google Hangout or Skype call could work for future roundtable discussions? Thanks for allowing me the space to think through all of these "dialogues."

BANKS: Yes, the topics have been great, and it's been wonderful to engage with you over a series of weeks. I like Liz's idea of a Skype call, if only to ensure that sometimes the conversation is more of a quick and playful conversation and not all long response pieces. Perhaps another way to do this is to ask some really short answer type questions as well. Another thought: there were many weeks during the semester when I couldn't check in on the conversation. I would love it if there was some way for us to track when people pop on to write or some way to see what's changed since we last wrote. Many thanks for doing this.

BARON: I would also like to say thanks all round. It has been wonderful to hear everyone's ideas. As in previous weeks, colleagues' responses to the prompts are insightful and beautifully articulated. Jacob makes really useful points by highlighting both the need for "historical analysis of the changing conventions of realism in dialogue" and the value of seeing "the representation of global warming, species extinction, or resource extraction as a kind of dialogue." Similarly, Liz calls attention to key questions for teacher-scholar-practitioners in describing the importance of thoughtfully creating "a dialogue of practice between me and the students I am working with." As someone who has been teaching screenwriting courses for some time, I have also found myself working through the challenge she identifies so concisely: "how to teach not just the subject but also the student in front of me."

Concerning the concept of dialogue, I might add that it seems useful to continually bear in mind Bakhtin's ideas about dialogic relations—and to consider the writings of Prague structuralists, whose ideas could contribute to contemporary work in pedagogy, aesthetics, cultural studies, and ecocriticism. I find value in Prague structuralism because it reminds one that everything exists in dialogue, in relationship, and that nothing is static. Their perspective provides an alternative to binary thinking. It also calls attention to the dynamism of communication, art, society, and nature-culture relationships. When I try to visualize structure as conceived by the Prague school, I find myself thinking about dodecahedrons (twelve-sided polyhedrons) that are constantly in motion. Perhaps one could also envision diagrams of atoms. Keeping the perspectives of Bakhtin and the Prague structuralists in mind can prompt one to always search for the implicit dialogue(s) that shape aesthetic norms (like those concerning realistic dialogue) and cultural norms (e.g., the religious and secular doctrines that have created the specious nature-culture divide). In addition, my sense is that a keen awareness of dialogic relationships is precisely how Liz and other teachers are able to figure out the kind of "small interventions" that help students (and teachers) change, shift, grow. It also seems possible that the flow of the *VLT* roundtable reflects the way that ideas exist in dialogic relations, necessarily connected but dynamic insofar as they can move toward a variety of topics.

As a postscript, I'll note that a brief mention of the Prague school in James Naremore's *Acting in the Cinema* first led me track down their writings available in English (translated primarily by Mark E. Suino, John Burbank, and Peter Steiner in the 1970s).[31] I recently came across a piece that has excerpts from Mukařovský's "Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts," which has an introduction by Ulrich Lehman, who identifies connections between the work of Mukařovský and Bakhtin.[32]

MODERATORS: Your book recommendations are a great note to end on, Cynthia. This has been a truly fascinating conversation. We hope that it encourages more scholarship on the subject of media dialogues. Thank you, Miranda, Cynthia, Jim, Nina, Liz, Lori, Miguel, and Jacob for your participation in this experiment!

Notes

1. "Bechdel Test Movie List," accessed January 27, 2018, https://bechdeltest.com.

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3. Britta Sjogren, *Into the Vortex: Female Voices and Paradox in Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

4. M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 65.

5. "The Wire Fuck scene YouTube," YouTube, last modified September 12, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lElf7D-An8.

6. V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102–3.

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