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Note from the Editors

Precarious Mobilities

When we proposed this special issue of *Feminist Media Histories* on "Precarious Mobilities," we were thinking about all the forms of precarity that engender mobility or make movement, in all forms, arduous or impossible. We were thinking about how certain forms of mobility could be precarious, risky, even dangerous. We were thinking about the long arc of precarious mobility, such as the forced enslavement of millions of Africans in the Americas. But we were especially attuned to contemporary dynamics of this state of being as it relates to what has come to be called the precariat, an intersectional class of people who lack labor security and thus have unstable sources of income, people who have "no ladders of mobility to climb," for instance those from the traditional working or lower middle class, migrants and ethnic minorities, and youth.[1] We were thinking about precarious labor in the academy and the gig economy; the lack of social mobility among youth; the increasing necessity for geographic mobility for jobs; the precarity of migrants and refugees; the movements of the homeless and the placeless, those whose travels through the world are risky or dangerous due to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or some intersectional combination, such as transgender women of color. We were also thinking about forms of mobility that stem from precarity and powerlessness, as when movement is forced (either physically or psychically) through political, economic, or social upheaval, or for purposes of war, and what happens when mobility is denied by, for example, economics, the police state (imprisonment), travel bans, sex trafficking, or segregation based on gender, race, ethnicity, generation, or ability, among other factors.

In January 2020, when we put out the call for papers for this issue, we had no idea that precarity and mobility would soon become so dramatically foregrounded as COVID-19 swept the globe. Against a fearful context of contagion, we soon enough became aware of the brutal spread of disease when the movements of humans carry a virus across the planet via airplanes

and other modes of transport, through business meetings, at professional conferences, and even at family reunions. Conversely, as hospitals and local governments faced shortages of PPE (personal protective equipment) and ventilators, the pandemic revealed significant failures in the ability of local, regional, national, and international governments to mobilize distribution networks. It showed the "fragility of complex mobility systems."[2] We were reminded of the dangers of immobility as the number of infections mounted in prisons and nursing homes, where people could not escape the virus once it entered the walls. Alternately, in the experience of lockdown, we discovered a common cause in immobility as we attempted to limit our spheres of movement to contain the virus, the language of containment underscoring how porous and permeable borders and boundaries can be. The idea of sheltering in place—how else and where else could one shelter but in place?—mandated fixity and moorings and made those with the means long for the ability to move freely, to travel, to be away from home. With nowhere to go, many stopped using cars, buses, and subways and opted for bicycles, scooters, and roller skates, or started taking long walks and runs, exchanging one form of mobility for another.

At the same time, we saw precarity and inequity in the risks taken by largely lower-income and essential workers, many of them people of color or recent immigrants, who could not stay home but had to travel to work on subways, metros, light rail, and buses while many white middle- and upper-class people sheltered at home or fled from hot spots to second homes, often taxing local resources in the process. We saw the stress of precarious mobility on those with no "place," as large swaths of the homeless in New York City either were forced into shelters that became breeding grounds for disease; or took shelter in places such as subway trains, historically connected to mobility but now viewed as sites of containment and contagion; or were placed in luxury hotels, in a parodic twist that underscored the implausibility of travel for leisure and made manifest debates about who has the right to shelter and where. We saw the impact of precarity on those most vulnerable to the virus as racial disparities in the rates of disease underscored unequal health care, income, quality of food, and housing among Black and brown communities. And, finally, we've seen the impact of the uneven distribution of vaccines, with the most in need often being the last to receive shots during a time when variants continue to threaten global health systems. Indeed, precarity and mobility morphed and changed, much like a virus.

While the world was fighting COVID-19, George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police officers created a global anti-racist movement

that mobilized millions to march—risking one form of contagion because they were faced with another. Along with marches, protesters occupied streets and buildings, refusing to move until their demands were heard. The demonstrations accentuated both meanings of mobility as we are defining it here. On the one hand, many of the protests were predicated on movement or change of place, as people marched down avenues, across bridges, into squares and parks. On the other, the protests underscored the precarious nature of civil unrest as protesters were often viewed as unruly and dangerous, the *mobile vulgus* in its historical sense—the mob, the rabble, the common people, the populace taking over streets, buildings, and commercial spaces.[3] And we witnessed other mobs: libertarians protesting the lockdowns and storming government offices to demand an end to containment and quarantine; those protesting against the Black Lives Matter protests, wielding guns and other weapons to protect perceived threats to their businesses and homes or driving cars into crowds of people marching; and, later, after so many months of social, economic, and political immobility and uncertainty, Democrats taking to the streets in celebration of the possibility of change signaled by the US presidential election, while unmasked Republicans protested the outcome of the same election, and eventually some, still refusing to believe in the results, stormed the Capitol.

These recent events underscore the pliancy in the meaning of mobility. At base, "the concept of mobilities encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life."[4] Mobility might mean very small movements, such as walks and bike rides on neighborhood streets; individual movement across greater distances, such as global air travel; or the very large movement of groups, such as protest marches or large migrations. It may also mean the movement of objects or information, or some combination thereof, for example trucks carrying packages cross-country using GPS software for guidance, or mobile apps used for contact tracing in the time of a pandemic. However, as Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry indicate, and as we have experienced recently with travel bans, immigration policies, pandemic restrictions, and other issues, mobility is "a powerful discourse that creates its own effects and contexts. . . . Issues of movement, of too little movement or too much or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are central to many lives, organizations, and governments."[5] Such "constellations of mobility—

particular patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practicing movement"—intersect in heterogeneous ways and forms.[6]

Not only is mobility ordered and constrained by individuals, organizations, and governments, but it carries varying ideological meanings depending upon context. Tim Cresswell calls it "a kind of blank space that stands as an alternative to place, boundedness, foundations and stability," an insight that underscores the precarious footing upon which it stands. As this suggests, the meanings of mobility can vary dramatically, depending upon how place, stability, and fixity are defined. "Mobility as progress, as freedom, as opportunity, and as modernity, sit side by side with mobility as shiftlessness, as deviance, and as resistance."[7] Forms of mobility usually associated with freedom include tropes of modernity such as the flaneur's aimless strolling, train travel, or the open road as well as tourism, voluntary migration for jobs, better housing, and other forms of social mobility. For these positive and progressive models of mobility, things viewed as rooted, static, and bounded are seen to be negative, reactionary, and dull. Under the more negatively viewed modes of mobility such as homelessness, nomads, gypsies, refugees, or exile, fixity becomes an ideal—not reactionary or dull, but grounding. Mobility, in this sense, looks like rootlessness.

Of course, we must think of mobility not only in terms of models associated with freedom versus rootlessness, or positive and negative modalities, but also as complexly intertwined with questions of privilege and precarity. As Hannam, Sheller, and Urry discuss, mobilities are "caught up in power geometries of everyday life. . . . Rights to travel . . . are highly uneven and skewed even between a pair of countries," and while cosmopolitan mobilities are privileged, that idealization of movement requires the exclusion of others who are not free to move.[8] And as Timothy Shortell and Evrick Brown note, "For the powerful, mobility is a lifestyle choice. For the powerless, mobility is often forced—by the state, by the threat of violence, or impoverishment. And for some, mobility is denied entirely—by imprisonment or segregation."[9] Understandings of mobility will thus vary not only according to which kind of mobility one discusses—travel versus migration, voluntary migration versus involuntary, the flaneur versus the homeless, et cetera—but also in relation to which community, and which historical moment in time. Consider for example the strict guardianship laws that constrain women's mobility in Saudi Arabia and the transformative, if limited, effects of the lifting of the ban on women's driving in 2018. Or how the Trump administration's travel bans singled out predominantly Muslim nations to effectively limit or deny

immigration from these places, severely hindering the ability of people from Muslim nations to work and study in the United States.

Of course the tensions between privilege and precarity made manifest recently are nothing new, and neither the freedom to be mobile nor the ability to stay put is ever accorded equally. Indeed, "mobilities . . . are political—they are implicated in the production of power and relations of domination."[10] In *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (2021), Mia Bay details, for example, the "intertwined history of travel segregation and Black struggles for freedom of movement from the antebellum period to the present day," arguing that Black mobility has historically been an "enduring focal point for struggles over equality and difference."[11] As Bay suggests, while the civil rights movements ended many of the humiliations and inequities engendered by Jim Crow laws on trains, buses, airports, and hotels, travel discrimination and transportation inequalities persist today, as indicated by social media campaigns such as #drivingwhileblack and #travelingwhileblack.

Historically, as George Chauncey and Kathy Peiss have illustrated, certain forms of forced mobility stem from different forms of precarity. For gay men and working-class ethnic whites in New York in the first half of the twentieth century, "given the crowded conditions in which most working people lived," home was not private, and "much of their social life took place in streets and parks."[12] Streets, parks, and amusements enabled forms of sexual expression and encounter not allowed at home, but at the same time, gay and working-class life in public was scrutinized and policed by family, reformers, and the state. Thus, mobility both stemmed from precarity and simultaneously made people's lives even more precarious.

In a similar vein but with somewhat different effects, Saidiya Hartman describes how the early twentieth-century Black urban poor were constrained by racist prohibitions on the one hand, and on the other "an optic of visibility and surveillance that had its origins in slavery and administered the logic of the plantation" under the conjoined impulses of charity and policing. Nonetheless, the segregated slum became a space of possibility: "A whole world is jammed into one short block crowded with black folks shut out from almost every opportunity the city affords, but still *intoxicated with freedom*. The air is alive with the possibilities of assembling, gathering, congregating. At any moment, the promise of insurrection, the miracle of upheaval: small groups, people *by theyselves*, and strangers threaten to become an ensemble, to incite *treason en masse*."[13] Here, the prohibitions against certain kinds of movement and social mobility lead to what Hartman describes as errantry

and wayward travels, for young Black women in particular—forms of mobility that are also acts of resistance.

Just as the meanings of mobility will morph depending on circumstance, understandings of precarity shift depending on historical context, changes in the economy, changes in the law, and other factors. Most agree that precarity, as we now understand it, was ushered in by neoliberal policies, "the social and economic condition of abandonment made manifest at the core of social life by the crisis of the Welfare State and by the weakening of labor rights that is the signature of the neoliberal as a global phenomenon." In this historical moment, precarity is at once a condition specific to groups of people for whom the loss of a safety net and labor rights have dismantled job security and created deep inequities and instability, and also a more generalized feeling of "ontological condition of vulnerability" attendant upon living "without a protective net provided by others, by social caring, and collective protection."[14] Precarious labor conditions manifest across the globe as increased global competition, multinational sourcing of different components, and outsourcing of work drive down pay rates, benefits, and job satisfaction. Precariousness is a condition for workers "all over the world, from the low-end service sector in developing nations to white-collar elites in centers of capital. No longer can individual workers expect a life-long career with a single employer; instead, they must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency as standard employment and its associated entitlements become artifacts of a bygone industrial era."[15]

There have been other moments of global precarity, including the Great Depression or the world wars of the twentieth century, but precarity is not always world historical and rarely evenly distributed. For some, in slums, shantytowns, favelas, banlieues, small rural towns, and ghettos across the globe, poverty and precarity are ongoing, with little hope of social or geographic mobility available. Residents are anchored to their place. Others fall into precarity due to political upheaval, war, drought, or other socioeconomic or climatic causes that make them flee their homelands. Some lives, such as those of queer or trans teens, are made precarious due to bullying, hate crimes, and/or a lack of family acceptance; a self-assertion of identity can have endangering consequences. In the United States, simply a matter of existing, of being, can lead to violence and harm for large swaths of the population. Black lives are at risk when driving a car, going for a jog, encountering police, protesting, selling cheap cigarettes, playing with a toy gun, sleeping at home, or wearing a hoodie. Even the act of saying "Black lives

matter" can place people in precarious positions, as its assertion, such as taking a knee, can lead to controversy. Just like mobility, precarity is political.

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In the pages at hand here, we are considering precarious mobilities in relation to screen cultures. To a certain degree, mobility and precarity are at the heart of cinema. Cinema, motion pictures—"the movies"—do not exist without movement, whether one means the movement through a projector that brings the images to life, the movement of film reels to cinemas across the globe, or the movements of film crews to locations near and far. Television, video games, streaming content, and social media likewise all rely on flow and movement. Cinema is also defined by precarity, whether in the material instability of celluloid (especially in its early nitrate form), the ephemeral quality of film prints, the vulnerability of film stock, the loss and orphaning of films, the uneven nature of preservation and archiving, the disappearance of cinemas and circuits of distribution, or, presently, the vagaries of streaming and access to catalogues. In the latter case, the democratic potential of the internet has been limited by gatekeepers like Netflix, Amazon, HBO, Hulu, and others who not only put a price on content, but also engender uncertainty about availability due to constantly changing licensing agreements. Different forms of precarity plague other screen media as well, in disappearing websites and links, lost live TV events never preserved on video or film, video games designed for now-defunct game systems, films stuck in outmoded technologies such as laserdiscs and videotapes and unavailable on other technologies, and other conditions of instability and insecurity.

Precarious mobilities are also the stuff of cinematic representation. In Siegfried Kracauer's famous formulation, "film renders the world in motion": "Take any film you can think of: by dint of its very nature, it is a succession of ever-changing images which altogether give the impression of flow, a constant movement. And there is, of course, no film that would not represent—or, rather, feature—things moving. Movement is the alpha and omega of the medium."[16] Linking movement to precarity, Kracauer claims that cinema is concerned with the "flow of life," which entails on the one hand a sense of life's "haphazard contingencies," and on the other life's open-endedness. Contingency, for Kracauer, is counter to fate or determinism, and allows for possibility and change; contingency also entails insecurity and uncertainty, or precariousness. Indeed, some form of precarity would seem to be the engine driving any screen fiction insofar as something needs to be destabilized (the

"inciting incident" of narrative cinema) for anything to happen. And more open-ended narratives give more play to uncertainty.

More than this ontological affinity for precarious movement, cinema and other media have historically evinced a deep interest in narratives of precarious mobility. In some cases, genres of precarity intersect with conventional film genres. Consider the precarious mobility inherent to the Western, whether encompassing the cattle drive at the center of *Red River* (1948) or the transnational movement of Western tropes into an Italian-Spanish coproduction about a Mexican con man and a former member of the IRA joining forces in a dangerous mission to aid the Mexican Revolution in *Duck You Sucker* (1971). The precarity of movement is emphasized in a road movie such as *Queen & Slim* (2019), in which two Black criminals on the run unknowingly forge a social movement similar to #BlackLivesMatter, or *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), where three drag artists—two gay men and one trans woman—encounter homophobia, hostility, and acceptance across Australia's outback.

Precarious mobility underpins neorealist films such as the Italian *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), in which the key to mobility and the security of a job, the bicycle, is stolen, and in Iranian cinema, as in *Bæccähâ-ye âsmân* (*Children of Heaven*, 1997), in which a lost pair of shoes requires two siblings to work in tandem, sharing one pair of shoes as each tries to go to school. The 1930s cycles of fallen-woman films, such as *Blonde Venus* (1932) or *Shénnǔ* (*The Goddess*, 1934), and the contemporaneous cycle of tramp films, such as *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), *Modern Times* (1936), or *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (*Boudu Saved from Drowning*, 1932), share stories of characters adrift, in poverty, wandering urban landscapes, vulnerable and at risk. Child-soldier films such as *Rebelle* (*War Witch*, 2012) or *Beasts of No Nation* (2015) weave the precarity of childhood with the precarity of war through their conscription of young characters into cross-country treks in which they learn to become armed combatants in guerilla wars. The false promises and letdowns of social mobility propel narratives as diverse as Depression-era films *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Baby Face* (1933), to contemporary films about precarity and inequity such as *Manbiki Kazoku* (*Shoplifters*, 2018), *Parasite* (2019), and *Nomadland* (2020), or TV shows like *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988–97, 2018) or *Superstore* (NBC, 2015–21).

Of course, countless films and other media engage with processes and effects of migration and immigration. These include comedic takes like Charlie Chaplin's *The Immigrant* (1917), Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than*

Paradise (1984), Peter Weir's *Green Card* (1990), Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), Paul King's *Paddington* (2014), and TV's *Emily in Paris* (Netflix, 2020–) and *Ted Lasso* (Apple TV+, 2020–). More somber narratives include, for example, art-house classics such as *La Noire de . . .* (*Black Girl*, 1966) and *Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974), both of which thematize immigration through the prism of colonialism. The film *Frozen River* (2008) and video games like *The Migrant Trail* (2014) take up the fraught issue of illegal immigration across the Canadian-US and the Mexican-US borders, respectively, while the game *Papers, Please* (2013) involves immigration across an undefined, but seemingly Eastern bloc, border. *Tangerine* (2015) grafts a story of being unhomed through immigration with narratives of the homeless precarity of trans and cis-gendered sex workers, while also using low-res technology (iPhones) to capture a manic feeling of danger and rootlessness. In the miniseries *The Spy* (Netflix, 2019), Mossad sends an Egyptian-born spy into Syria, where he poses as, and in essence becomes, an immigrant.

There are numerous auteurs of the precariat, including Chaplin and Vittorio De Sica, whose work is mentioned above. Ken Loach, master of British social realism, focuses on the travails of the un- and underemployed across films focused on an unemployed singer and a construction worker in *Riff-Raff* (1991), Latinx cleaners in *Bread and Roses* (2000), and a carpenter seeking unemployment benefits, battling an unyielding bureaucracy and the inhumanity of social services, in *I, Daniel Blake* (2016). The neorealist films of Ramin Bahrani, such as *Man Push Cart* (2005), *Chop Shop* (2007), or *99 Homes* (2014), feature protagonists in various states of precarity who mistakenly rely on literal forms of mobility, such as pushcarts and taxis, or false promises of social mobility, including crime and real estate, as a means to achieve a version of the American dream. Kelly Reichardt's films, including *Old Joy* (2006), *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), and *First Cow* (2019), examine characters who are unmoored, drifting and struggling, with the tension between being mobile and feeling stuck expressed visually through long takes and open-ended narratives. The brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne dwell especially in the intersectional precarity of children in poverty in brutal realist films such as *La Promesse* (1996), *Le fils* (*The Son*, 2002), *L'Enfant* (*The Child*, 2005), and *Le gamin au vélo* (*The Kid with the Bike*, 2011). And Andrea Arnold focuses on contemporary youth showing lack of mobility in the council flats in *Fish Tank* (2009) and hypermobility and lack of stability among itinerant workers in *American Honey* (2016).

Above and beyond questions of representation, of course, workers in media industries are subject to the job contingency endemic to contemporary culture. As Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson examine in their volume *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor* (2017), media industries, as much as any other sector, have been shaped by neoliberal policies. In a global economy, US studio heads and producers "have made clear that they intend to keep scouring the globe for lower labor rates and less regulated environs," tax breaks, subsidies, and non-union working environments. Rather than a uniquely Hollywood problem, Curtin and Sanson lament, there are "increasingly interconnected modalities of exploitation" around the world, with the motion picture industry in Bombay, for example, "transformed by management logics that are remarkably reminiscent of those being practiced by major Hollywood conglomerates." Not only are jobs outsourced to independent and low-cost contractors, but workers with jobs are asked to perform unpaid "second shift" duties producing ancillary content for websites and social media, and the "blurred boundaries between producers and consumers, professionals and amateurs," so celebrated by proponents of the convergence culture articulated by Henry Jenkins, create an unregulated, uncompensated practice that undermines the value of labor by giving it away for free.[17]

While for some media workers, precarity is a new phenomenon reflecting weakening unions and the disappearing entitlements of bygone modes of employment, for others, work in media industries has always been precarious. In her analysis of "post-racial" labor practices, particularly casting, Kristen Warner identifies systemic and structural biases in entertainment industries that have made precarity a "historical state of being for marginalized men and women of color." Warner notes that not only is Hollywood "an industry characterized by chance, instability and insecurity" that impacts anyone seeking work, but it is also "built around relationships, networking, internships, and apprenticeship—a classed set of practices from which people of color are systematically excluded."[18] Warner demonstrates how, even with good intentions, Hollywood casting practices reproduce white supremacy by adhering to myths of hard work and talent without acknowledging systemic barriers to success; "whitening" Black actors via colorblind casting practices that tokenize and isolate Black actors from communities of color or cultural context; or erasing the blackness of Black productions under cover of universal humanism. In this way, white dominance is achieved through practices that maintain, uphold, and depend upon the continuously precarious status of BIPOC workers.

The status of women media workers has usually been considered similarly precarious. As continues to be the case, women have inarguably been marginalized in particular aspects of the film industry as certain positions, director and cinematographer especially, have not historically been as open to them. Instead, women have been largely relegated to below-the-line jobs such as editing, inking and painting in animation, script supervision, production design, and wardrobe. Still, scholars have suggested recently that by focusing solely on the work itself as precarious, our histories have made female media labor invisible, suggesting the precarity of historical memory and a disciplinary bias toward the auteur model. J. E. Smyth in *Nobody's Girl Friday: The Women Who Ran Hollywood* (2018), Jane Gaines in *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (2018), and Nathalia Holt in *The Queens of Animation: The Untold Story of the Women Who Transformed the World of Disney and Made Cinematic History* (2019) have all pushed back against such narratives about the absence of women in film to show not only how important women were to the workings of the film industry, but also how 1970s film theory and historiography absented them from the record.[19]

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Just as we could not predict in January 2020 how the pandemic and global anti-racist movements would impact our understanding of precarious mobilities, we also could not have predicted the range and variety of submissions we received for this special issue. The essays collected here interpret "precarious mobilities" in diverse and fascinating ways across a broad spectrum of screen texts, media makers, and issues. While some essays deal with representations and aesthetics of precarious mobility in film and TV, others consider women's and contingent labor in a variety of contexts. Writers engage the mobility of exile, placelessness, migration, and immigration as well as the mobility of films themselves and the precarity of the archive. Each, we believe, provides a model for understanding the complex interconnections linking precarity and mobility in film and media.

Motivated by Catherine Russell's method of parallax historiography, for example, Asli Ozgen-Tuncer's essay "Walking in Women's Shoes: Precarity and Feminist Pedestrian Acts in Cinema" emphasizes the "versatile symbolism of shoes as signifiers of women's mobilities, from having to walk to save carfare to idle wandering and forced displacement." Her analysis compares the images of a woman's worn shoes in Lois Weber's 1916 film *Shoes* and

Agnès Varda's 1985 film *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*), two seemingly disparate and yet related narratives. Ozgen-Tuncer underscores how images of shoes create a complex web of affect that signifies women's precarious mobility across historical and cultural contexts, with *Shoes* focusing on the early twentieth-century female immigrant experience in the United States and *Sans toit ni loi* relating the perils of solo movement for women in a European context.

Where Ozgen-Tuncer compares tropes across texts from different directors and historical moments, other essays focus on single directors and suggest an auteurist investment in precarious mobilities. In "Space Race: Cauleen Smith's Cinematic Errantry," Ryan Conrath traces in Smith's work "an aesthetics and politics of errantry that favors radically divergent forms of movement and spatial relation," echoing Hartmann's understanding of errantry discussed earlier. Conrath frames Smith's errantry "both as a formal and material operation as well as a political one grounded in a critique of place and movement as they are normatively construed." Viewing Smith's work as being about Black placelessness, Conrath argues that Smith's errantry is "born of the insight that blackness cannot (and indeed should not) be incorporated within the normative spatial coordinates of dominant institutional, geographic, and social paradigms," but offers a critique of those normative conceptions of space and place that also interrogates classical cinematic aesthetics through the use of self-conscious filmmaking techniques and exhibition spaces.

In "The Double Day of Valeria Sarmiento: Exile, Precariousness, and Cinema's Gendered Division of Labor," Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto simultaneously critiques the gendered division of labor, the "double day," in filmmaking that has largely obscured Sarmiento's role in making films with her husband, the highly acclaimed auteur Raúl Ruiz, while also finding evidence of Sarmiento's authorship. In alluding to the double day, Ramírez-Soto understands Sarmiento's work as a filmmaker (paid) and her work in the domestic sphere as Ruiz's editor (largely unpaid). More than a metaphor, the concept allows the author to consider Sarmiento's labor as both director and editor. Moreover, the couple's experience in exile exacerbated this duality because, as Ramírez-Soto suggests, the structures that backed Ruiz's "genius" in exile (as an auteur) "pushed Sarmiento to a constant mobility between institutions and geographies as well as to continuously work a double shift as director and editor. At the same time, it was this precarious mobility that enabled her to strengthen her feminist gaze and authorial voice—to expand

her critical stance toward a wider Latin American region and its ingrained patriarchal culture."

Malini Guha's essay examines director Filipa César's praxis of assemblage, which is deliberately resistant to claims of authorship while simultaneously expanding on the creative role of the editor. The films *Spell Reel* (2017) and *Conakry* (2013) are each built around a series of archival moving image fragments that were stored at the National Institute for Cinema and Audio-visual Arts in the West African nation of Guinea-Bissau and are the "remaining traces of a nearly lost history of a militant cinema praxis in Guinea-Bissau that flourished between 1963 and 1974." In Guha's reading, the images are precarious in both their condition and their aesthetic. In assembling and distributing the images, the two films "transport us back to the revolutionary past and its cinema while demonstrating the immense promise these images hold for the present and the future as they are gradually returned to the public domain." In a lovely conceit, Guha describes the films as "mobile homes" for these digitized images, which "harness the inherent ability of the image to assume new forms of life in alternate spaces of habitation." Thus, in Guha's essay we see the intertwined and intersecting forces of precarity and mobility, and text and context.

In a fortuitous accident of timing, Leana Hirschfeld-Kroen's essay "Weavers of Film: The Girl Operator Mends the Cut" was the winner of this year's graduate writing competition (jointly sponsored by *Feminist Media Histories* and the Gender and Feminisms Caucus of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies). The essay examines the contingent and largely invisible labor of women film editors and the extent to which "the flexible accumulation of women's collective *linking* labor has shaped filmic grammar." Hirschfeld-Kroen examines "two hypervisible cinematic icons: telegraph and telephone operators." Coining the term "mediatrix," she sees telegraph and telephone operators as "white-collar woman workers in modern clerical and communications infrastructure, a role promoted by corporations, nations, and popular media as paradigmatically feminine for more than a century." Like female film editors, Hirschfeld-Kroen argues, these emblematic figures also play crucial roles in stitching together narratives, particularly as figures who anchor crosscutting sequences, weaving together cuts and plots across disparate spaces.

Alla Gadassik's essay "Homeworkers: Independent Animation and the Feminization of Creative Labor, 1970–90" likewise analyzes the ways in which certain kinds of creative labor have become feminized, and how

independent female animators acknowledge feminization as the "pervasive condition" of their work. Calling the work feminized, and not merely feminine, accounts for the affective dimension of precarious contract labor, which expects workers to be pliant and flexible and to ignore their insufficient material remuneration and instead "center emotional investment as their motivation, value, and reward." Rather than "freelancer," Gadassik uses the term "homeworker" to counter romantic notions of the freedom of the freelancer, and to remind us that "independent creative production often implicates the domestic sphere as the actual location of the work," much like the double day Ramírez-Soto discusses. While homeworkers are stuck in conditions that resist upward mobility and embed them in the home, Gadassik nonetheless sees sites of resistance in a "subversive erotics of creative labor."

What we hope to have illustrated throughout this collection of essays on precarious mobilities is that while the context of COVID-19 has underscored precarity, mobility, and immobility, such conditions are not new to film and media. From the mediatrixes of the early twentieth century through homeworkers doing double duty as professionals and caretakers, the subjects covered here suggest that, rather than fixed categories, film, media, and the digital arts offer possibilities for an expansive understanding of precarity through and across moving images.

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In January 2020 we also could not have foreseen the ways in which COVID-19 would underscore issues of precarity, mobility, and immobility within academic film and media studies. As we moved into quarantine in early March, many of us faced canceled conferences and research travel and a whiplash-inducing shift to online learning, the latter new to many of us. In the rush of things, many of us had to make do without crucial teaching materials left on office shelves or in undigitized film libraries. As the pandemic carried on and schools continued to be sites of containment (or, in some cases, experimental sites for managing the disease), faculty had to learn new pedagogical methods suited to the new reality, for instance "asynchronous learning" and "dual delivery." We began using Zoom or Google Meet for classroom meetings, found new ways to make films and TV shows accessible to students, learned how to give tests online, recorded lectures, taught filmmaking to students stuck at home with only the cameras on their phones, and/or managed interactive learning in masks and at a distance. While digital

technologies brought us together with our students in a time of social distancing, we became aware of the fragility of the bond between teacher and student that builds in a classroom setting. Some of us taught hybrid courses, risking our own health through dedication to our students. Others were given no choice but to enter the classroom, underscoring issues of inequality and precarity across institutions and making visible the ways in which academic labor is subject to control and oversight in a neoliberal environment ruled by the bottom line. Indeed, we became subjects of a "fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices," made all the more precarious through the pandemic.[20]

Besides the pandemic's impact on the classroom, COVID-19 had a devastating effects on scholarship. Quarantine, travel bans, and closures have meant that most of us have not had the benefit of exchanging ideas in person; online seminars are generally poor substitutes for the spontaneity of like minds gathered together. Many of us whose research is based on archives, museums, and libraries faced difficulties and delays in our work. Our ability to do academic research and writing has been hampered by caretaking needs, as children were sent home from school and the elderly fell ill to COVID-19, and by the lack of privacy plaguing couples and families working from home.[21] Many scholars found it hard to concentrate through the anxiety of living through a public health crisis, then an anti-racist movement that proved especially traumatic for BIPOC colleagues, and then a fraught US presidential election and takeover of the Capitol.[22] Many colleges and universities are examining their tenure review practices and expectations in order to address the delays and stalls in academic research, particularly as they impact women, but even the most generous recalibrations will not make up for the lost time in research and writing, let alone the attendant financial losses of delayed promotions and raises.[23]

The pandemic contoured the final shape of this issue of *FMH*. Initial abstracts were due in mid-March 2020, just as lockdowns were beginning in the United States; first drafts were due in August, after the season of protests, looting, and counterprotests following the murder of George Floyd; and revised versions of essays to be sent to external readers were due at the end of fall semester, when most were teaching in some pandemic-compromised format. Some of the initial contributors to this issue dropped out because they did not have access to the materials needed to complete essays, or the mental bandwidth to write them. Some faced personal losses: of income, loved ones, or homes. Others had research interrupted by caretaking

duties—of children, elderly parents, or others in need—thus performing their own version of the double day. We regret the loss of those essays and the fact that the forward motion of deadlines cannot accommodate the wayward trajectories of work sidetracked and waylaid by sociohistorical conditions. We hope that those essays do take root sometime in the future.

At the same time, we deeply appreciate the work done by the authors included here. Academic writing always has a curious status. While it is the bread and butter of scholarly advancement, the everyday duties of academic life—which, besides teaching, seem to consist increasingly of meetings and administrative obligations—take up time, and writing often occurs only in the margins, at night, on weekends, or during "breaks" from school. (As a friend once said, "Academia is the only job that requires moonlighting to succeed.") These essays, written under extraordinary circumstances, convey a depth of understanding of precarious mobilities that may be uniquely attuned to this historical moment. They also suggest that scholarship produced at a precarious time continues to be nimble, rethinking given aesthetic boundaries and expanding our historical worldview.

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NOTES

1. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 22–23; Guy Standing, "The Precariat," *Contexts* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 10–12.

2. Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, "Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings," *Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (March 2006): 7.

3. Tim Cresswell notes, "By the eighteenth century, the moveable and excitable crowd was known as the mobility (the *mobile vulgus*, in contrast to the nobility), later

shortened to the *mob*." Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20.

4. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, "Editorial," 1.

5. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, "Editorial," 1.

6. Tim Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 18.

7. Cresswell, *On the Move*, 1–2.

8. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, "Editorial," 3. See also Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (New York: Verso, 2018), which lays out a framework for theorizing "mobility justice" in relation to crises such as climate change, global violations of human rights, interpersonal bodily violence, and other extremes of inequality.

9. Timothy Shortell and Evrick Brown, "Introduction: Walking in the European City," in *Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography*, ed. Timothy Shortell and Evrick Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 5.

10. Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," 20.

11. Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 3.

12. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 180. See also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

13. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019), 21, 8, emphasis in original.

14. Gabriel Giorgi, "Improper Selves: Cultures of Precarity," *Social Text* 31, no. 2 (115) (Summer 2013): 71.

15. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, "Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor," in *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, ed. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 5–6.

16. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 158.

17. Curtin and Sanson, "Precarious Creativity," 1, 16, 4, 2, 10–11. See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

18. Kristen Warner, "Strategies for Success? Navigating Hollywood's 'Postracial' Labor Practices," in *Precarious Creativity*, 172, 179, 177.

19. J. E. Smyth, *Nobody's Girl Friday: The Women Who Ran Hollywood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jane M. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Nathalia Holt, *The Queens of Animation: The Untold Story of the Women Who Transformed the World of Disney and Made Cinematic History* (New York: Little, Brown, 2019).

20. Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," 18.

21. See for example Alessandra Minello, "The Pandemic and the Female Academic," *Nature*, April 17, 2020, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01135-9; Colleen Flaherty, "No Room of One's Own," *InSide Higher Education*, April 21, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity.

22. Indeed, in response to the fact that it had been widely reported that scholars were finding it hard to research and write articles during the pandemic crisis, and that parents and caregivers had found it especially difficult to find the time to give academic work the attention it requires, the Society for Cinema and Media Studies produced a special online dossier of articles under the label "Short Attention Span Criticism," edited by Cara Dickason, Rebecca M. Gordon, and Pamela Robertson Wojcik. This appeared on SCMS+, a new, experimental, curated digital space for scholarly reflections that are timely and not suited for traditional academic journals: https://www.cmstudies.org/page/SCMSPlus.

23. Beyond the loss of productivity, women have been especially hard hit during the pandemic, as they have lost jobs or been forced to take time off to care for children. Calling the pandemic recession a "shecession," economists note that women's financial losses "compound over time in the form of missed wage growth, retirement savings and Social Security benefits." Mark Miller, "Female Workers Could Take Another Pandemic Hit: To Their Retirements," *New York Times*, December 11, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/business/women-retirement-covid-social-security.html.