KATHRYN HEMMANN

> **“...it’s important to remember that these sorts of “Yet you participate in society” comments are also common in progressive spaces on left-leaning social media...”**

Kathryn Hemmann is a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania. Their book *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze* argues that a greater awareness of diverse creators can transform our understanding of pop culture. They write reviews and essays for *Comics Beat* and *Sidequest*.

COMPLICIT IN THE VERY SYSTEM OF CAPITALISM

I primarily consider myself to be a writer, but I'm also an amateur artist who draws comics for fun. I made this piece in April 2021, when I'd just started experimenting with sequential art. The scene in the comic is based on something that actually happened to me.

As an academic with a specialty in contemporary Japanese fiction, I'm interested in how the "Lost Decade" of economic recession in the 1990s and the subsequent cultural backlash against neoliberal capitalism continues to affect the stories that people tell about Japanese society and its trajectory through the twenty-first century. Earlier in my career, I confined my thoughts about the horrors of unchecked capitalism to my academic writing, but the COVID pandemic seemed like an appropriate time to be vocal on social media about how neoliberalism is an unsustainable ideology at both a societal and a personal level. As I write in the comic, people shouldn't be made to feel that their ability to be "productive" in a capitalist system defines their worth, especially not during the lockdowns, social distancing, and trauma of an immediate global crisis.

My own experience with the pandemic was that my tenure promotion was denied the day after the federal government declared a state of national emergency in March 2020. I had to scramble to find a new job during the first week of the pandemic, and I was forced to move very quickly from one city to another. The emotional impact of being so casually discarded by my former colleagues helped me reconfigure my perspective on the value of being productive for the sake of an employer who can terminate your position at any time and for any reason, even when it's almost comically evil to do so. This reconfiguration felt like a revelation.

I stay connected with a community of fellow amateur artists through my personal (and pseudonymous) blog on Tumblr, a platform whose user base tends to skew young and progressive. I thought, on Tumblr of all places, it was okay to comment on how, even during the remote working conditions of the pandemic, it's important to maintain boundaries between your job and your personal life. Mostly for my own self-assurance, I made a short post saying something to the effect of how the world wouldn't end any faster if I didn't reply to work emails on a Saturday evening.

Given that I mostly communicate with a small but supportive circle of friends, I expected to receive an equally small but supportive response to my post. Unfortunately, perhaps because Tumblr skews so young and progressive, my implicit admission of having work emails to reply to identified me as having a job, and thus being complicit in the very system of capitalism I was attempting to push back against. At least, that's what the

many (equally pseudonymous) commenters on my post told me when they called me out for being a hypocrite.

This is almost exactly the situation portrayed in Matt Bors's famous "Mister Gotcha" comic, of course. Instead of attempting to respond to the comments on Tumblr, I quietly made my own version of the comic and posted it on the non-networked space of my real-name professional blog on WordPress. It received no feedback, but that was fine with me; I created this comic solely for the benefit of my own mental health.

I'd like to say that this unpleasant incident rolled off my mind like pondwater rolls off a duck's tailfeathers, but I have to admit that it still upsets me. In my defense, this sort of aggressively bad-faith internet discourse is widely acknowledged to be infuriating. While Bors was specifically depicting the sort of annoying right-wing Twitter reply guys whose self-aggrandizing behavior would now (in February 2026) be called "engagement farming," it's important to remember that these sorts of "Yet you participate in society" comments are also common in progressive spaces on left-leaning social media, including Tumblr and Bluesky.

After venting my frustration by drawing this comic, I've since tried to avoid participating in potentially inflammatory political discourse online, even if my take on a given situation is absolutely, 100% correct. This isn't so much because I was silenced by the obnoxious Tumblr commenters popping out of some horrible "well, actually" to inform me that I was a hypocrite, but rather because I never want to risk becoming one of those commenters myself.

These days, the art and comics I draw may not seem to be overtly political, but that in itself is a political decision I made during the discursive turmoil of the pandemic years. My long-form professional writing is as keenly anti-capitalist as it ever was; but when it comes to posts and images that can be easily shared on social media, I feel like I have a responsibility not to add fuel to the many concurrently burning fires. Instead, I do my best to use the optimistically speculative nature of my creative work as a means to (hopefully) improve society somewhat.


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I DON'T THINK A PERSON'S VALUE SHOULD BE MEASURED
BY HOW MUCH THEY CAN PRODUCE
POST
YOU CLAIM TO HATE CAPITALISM
AND YET YOU HAVE A JOB