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LIBERAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT
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REPORT TO THE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

I would like to thank the members of the Committee for supporting my work this past winter. You supported my attendance at the annual College Art Association Conference in New York City where I gave a paper exploring the implications of the Internet for the dissemination of knowledge in general and art historical scholarship in particular. Although this may sound like a technical and Geek oriented topic, the shift from paper to Internet, from galleries to websites has profound implications for the art world, from artists, to art critics, such as myself and for art historians.

As faculty members, we have all worked within a system that is controlled by a variety of gatekeepers, but now it is possible to avoid the gates and enter into the open field that I have termed "content production." For years arts professionals have been held captive by a belief system that has both mystified and controlled access to presentation and display. I publish and produce two websites and I hear from people all over the world, asking me interesting questions.

One art writer asked me about helping him get his book on Vincent van Gogh published. He was going through normal channels and, because he didn't have a Ph.D., was facing a stonewall of resistance. I asked him one question: do you want to be published or do you want to be read? I reminded him that contemporary readers use the Internet and that if he just published the book—without asking permission—he would get read: if you publish it, they will come. He immediately published the book, thanked me on his website and is currently preparing a paper on Van Gogh to give at a Van Gogh conference. If he had gone the traditional route, he would still be confronting closed gates.

Today, for those who have come to understand that the mystique of scarcity and the myth of "quality" is no more than an attempt to control knowledge and to gain power over information, the Internet offers unprecedented opportunities. Will the art world take this new Cyber direction? The choice is

ours.

The Conference

In February 2013, I attended the College Art Association Annual Conference in New York City. I enjoyed presenting my paper and associating with my colleagues. A session leader from Pratt invited me to attend two sessions on technology and education and found out that Otis was very much ahead of the other schools—at least those represented by their faculty at the sessions. Not only is the College light years more advanced in educational technology but the individuals from Otis who attended these session, myself and two others, were also much more conversant with available technology and with new educational trends for the future. I also attended an interesting panel on Renaissance art, a panel I selected because a colleague of mine from Grossmont was giving a paper. Given that I was a speaker, much of my time was taken up meeting with my panel and setting up the presentations and giving the presentation and then attending the follow up session with my fellow panelists.

The main event, for me, was the presentation of my paper on a topic that is very important for academia: how the Internet is changing the mode of cultural production or producing intellectual culture. In the past, the creation and dissemination of knowledge was closely controlled through the activities of gatekeepers and the controls of peer review. However, as the publishing industry continues to decline and with the number of printed books and paper journals also declining, it is more and more difficult for faculty to publish and to advance their careers, *if* they follow the traditional narrow pathways. Today, there is no need to “follow the rules” and alternative ways of making and presenting knowledge can be viewed on the Web. As the publisher and author of two websites and as the author of two books, all of which I did on my own terms, I feel a responsibility to my profession and to my academic community to present a new way of thinking and new possibilities for intellectual growth and development.

The Presentation

“The Field of Content Production”

Presentation at the College Art Association for the panel *The Work of Art Criticism in the Age of Ezines and Blogging*

New York City

Saturday, February 17, 2013

Given that the College Art Association insists on remaining firmly entrenched in the mid 20th century, I have little interest in contributing to this organization with its high dues, high registration fees and low return for the money. However, I came across a panel in which I was actually interested and so I applied. My field of specialty, art criticism, is a small and disadvantaged subset of art history. Although we as art writers are present at the creation, we get little respect. Given that it is rare for CAA to focus on art criticism in any way, I applied to the panel chairs. I had literally not applied to any panel in 20 years--I have always been invited to present a paper, and I was pleased to be selected for I now had a chance to speak--for the second time—on the new possibilities for publishing.

It is my position that the artists and art writers are now living in an age that parallels that of the Impressionists in the 1870s. The art world is deep in a Salon phase and is run by a system that is hostile to different voices. Like the Impressionists, we must seek other available avenues to be heard. The concept of a contemporary challenge to modern gatekeepers is an alien concept and, although I have been making this point for years, I have met with strong resistance. I expected few of my colleagues to be interested. Indeed, I have been on many other panels at CAA, frequently focusing on obscure topics—such as one on art history and material—and the audiences were always small. However, to my surprise, on a Saturday afternoon, at the end of the conference, a large crowd showed up, stayed and listened attentively.

“The Field of Content Production”

Originally conceived of as a discussion of the practical effects, present and future, of the presentation of knowledge on the Internet, the paper broke down into three parts. First, the Web has not been sufficiently theorized and my question was—is it possible for the Internet to be brought under theoretical analysis? I examined various Postmodern theorists and determined that only few of these individuals, Jean-François Lyotard, who understood the possibilities of the Web and Richard Rorty who posited the end of philosophy and its evolution into a series of continuous conversations, provided promising avenues for future discussion. Earlier writers in Postmodernism, that is, theorists from the sixties and eighties, were just that too early (pre-PC) for a developed discussion of the Internet. Like much of what has been written before 2005, their work is interesting, historical and now out of date. The Internet, I concluded has no center and is boundless,

and, because Postmodern theory needs an object to focus upon, the Web is an activity beyond the reaches of traditional theory.

How then, might knowledge/information in Cyberspace be theorized?

Second, I addressed the way in which knowledge is disseminated on the Internet and the changes that occur for writers and users which material, which was once on the pages of books, now appears on computer screens. The Internet, I suggest has a particular “ethos,” or set of ethics put in place by those who made the Web—there should be equal and immediate access to knowledge, which is then built upon through a community of contributors. The Web is a gift culture, not an exchange system. Today there is a battle between those who believe in freedom of information, including academic publications, and those who would control access and profit from colleges and universities who must pay huge sums of money to access scholarship. Colleges and universities are bending under the huge prices they must pay to databases which have commanded control of scholarship, most of which was publically funded and should be a public good. In addressing their own faculty or knowledge producers, Harvard University has begged them to not pursue traditional publishing but to seek alternatives—the cost of database subscriptions is hurting even Harvard. Therefore producers need to rethink the mode of production of knowledge.

In terms of users, I discussed “produsage” a term coined by Alex Bruns, denoting the user who is also the producer of knowledge/information. This hybrid individual is typical of the inhabitants of the Web. Then I explained more contemporary theories and concerns about the Web, such as the Long Tail idea of Chris Anderson and the Open Access Movement, led by Lawrence Lessing. The Long Tail is an economic model developed for open access to music, stating that when all music is available to all users, niche audiences emerge and listen to music that commercial music producers would normally refuse to make available. My argument is that if knowledge is open and easily available, then people will want to access and learn about even the most obscure subject.

The Open Access Movement is connected to Creative Commons and many scholars, such as myself are refusing to participate in a system that curtails the development of knowledge. Writers of honor may publish “books” in the traditional sense but after a year, these authors will make their book available on line for free—the gift culture ethos in action. In contrast to the assertions of the gatekeepers that only

certain kinds of information are of value, there is an audience for knowledge that can be developed only when knowledge is made freely available and only when more people take advantage of the opportunity to produce culture. My questions are: are you an educator? Are you an intellectual? If so, then how can you honorably be a gatekeeper?

What does it mean to be a cultural producer on the Internet? Next I laid out the problems of traditional publication. I did not go into the problem of the decline of the traditional publishing industry but examined a more present problem: what has happened to scholarly work that is published in traditional formats. Books lie dusty on shelves, print journal rest on racks—untouched. The younger generation is Internet trained. For them, it is not on the Web, it doesn't exist. Protesting this trend, does not mean that it is not real and it is up to the contemporary intellectual to figure out how to become accessible.

People, who research on the Web, will not pause for passwords nor will they pay for access, thus, academic publications that are password protected will not get read. More and more, those who follow the stipulated paths find that their work is "protected" through limited access. Due to the changing habits of students and researchers who use the Web, rarely read a printed book, and simply don't use knowledge unless it is available. Prominent scholars whose publications are no longer available to the public are increasingly finding themselves left behind with institutional prestige and very few readers. Those who put their work on line have thousands of readers, a number far exceeding those brave few who dig their way through JSTOR. Sadly for the scholars who have donated their time as peer reviewers, their talents as writers, their gifts are being taken advantage of by databases such as JSTOR that make huge profits (they say they don't but they do) off of the good will of scientists and those in the humanities.

And, finally, I laid out how writing art criticism would change and has changed on the Web: exploring issues such as the end of local art scenes, the problem of outdated topics, such as art exhibitions, and how to present texts on a computer screen. Art writing has always been local: a few critics working closely with a few artists and then "creating" a movement. A small group of writers created *modernité*, created Cubism, created Abstract Expressionism through discourse. In an age where there is no local art scene and no art movements, what is the new role of art writing and how does one write for Web trained

readers? The main theme of the paper was that times had changed and the mode of disseminating information and the means creating knowledge has been permanently altered. Most importantly, the Internet has no gatekeepers and the system of peer review and publish or perish which has traditionally thrived in academia is no longer viable. As a writer, your "peers" are your audience. As opposed to a traditional peer review of two or three colleagues, the Web writer faces a jury of thousands. The days of the gatekeepers are over and a new way of reading and writing and publishing is at hand and knowledge is now out of the hands of the elites.

Reception

Given its controversial content, that paper was well received by a friendly and interested audience. A woman in the audience came up to me and asked my advice as to how she could get a book on her late husband's work published. She has since contacted me by e-mail and I have sent her my paper, as she requested. She said my paper was a "highlight" for her because it gave her the inspiration to bring about her goals of honoring her spouse (who was a very interesting Alex Katz type artist) independent of the traditional paths of publication.

Although CAA is only slowly accommodating the wired world (two years ago, there was no access to wireless unless the panelists paid fees to the hotel), this year, the members were busy tweting about the events of the conference. There were two tweeted events: one was a paper that criticized CAA for being unresponsive to the needs of today's art historians---a paper given by a graduate student whose work forced some of the powers-that-be to reply to her concerns. The second tweeted event was a contretemps between a young scholar who wanted to publish on line and the reaction for one of the Old Ones who said that anything published on line did not count.

After the panel session, the session leaders were approached by a book publisher and by a journal, both of which wanted to publish our work. For most speakers at CAA, such opportunities would be a dream come true: for us---no dream. We were all uninterested. None of us publish in paper and all of us publish our own work. We declined the offers.

The Outcome

This paper has since been greatly modified and expanded to a book, tentatively titled: *New Art Writing. Producing a Culture of Cyber*

Criticism. I have finished this book and my layout designer has finished the cover and is laying out the text itself. The completed book is brief—less than 60 pages, with 120 pages of footnotes and 25 pages of bibliography. In the process of writing this book, I have expanded its content far beyond the original title (hence, the "tentative") to a three-part examination of 1. How critical theory and the Web intersect and 2. How academic culture has operated before the Internet and 3. How academia will function on the Web in the future.

I have found writing this book to be an illuminating exercise. For years I have sought to contribute to my discipline by advocating more independence of thinking and acting on the part of my colleagues. With job opportunities dwindling and even threatened due to the advent of Massive Open On-line Courses--which soon will dominate colleges and universities--and with art history's reluctance to enter the twenty-first century, I am concerned that an entire generation of young professionals and their scholarship will be lost. My research indicates that I am not alone in my concerns, and I have uncovered an entire discourse, most of it post 2001, about the problems of "publish or perish," "peer review," databases, and the dissemination of knowledge.

That said, much of the writing that critiques the academic system is outside of the humanities and can be found mostly in the sciences and in technology. Very little has been written in the humanities and almost no one has taken the approach that I am taking. In expanding my paper, I have developed the sections on theory and the Internet and believe that I will be able to present some interesting new arguments. I have unsnarled a few misconceptions, such as the equation between hyper text and intertextuality, and discussed the consequences of what happens to knowledge when it is unbounded and unconfined. It was interesting to look back on the writings of Jean-François Lyotard, who wrote at the dawn of the computer age in 1979—decades before the Internet. And yet he foresaw what would happen to the grand narrative when knowledge was dispersed via computer technology, an effect he called "paralogy," a term that became a key trope for me. At the time his book was published, almost no one understood what he was talking about—computers—and misread Lyotard as a "Post-Structuralist." I am among the very few who returned to his seminal work on the "Postmodern Condition" and have replaced the "condition" where it belongs—in Cyberspace.

It is my hope that the extensive research I will present in this book will help convince my colleagues that there are new ways of publishing,

instead of perishing, and that there are new ways of developing yourself professionally in a more free and creative fashion. I made no particular effort to attract attention to my recent book *The Writing of Cubism*, but with this book, I have cited a large group of like-minded people, all of whom I plan to get in touch with and thank for their contributions. In that way I hope to become part of this already existing network of creative academics and publicize my book at the same time. This book will be published this summer as an e-book for a nominal price.