

Digital Frontiers' Social Media and Digital Communities Roundtable and Questions of Belonging

Created by Ann Howington

20th-21st Century Graduate Art History Seminar
AEAH 5813.001, Fall 2012

Dr. Jennifer Way, Professor

On Friday, September 21, 2012, Dr. Jennifer Way's graduate art history seminar on 20th-21st c art attended "Social Media and Digital Communities: A Roundtable Discussion," a session featured at the Digital Frontiers 2012 conference sponsored by the UNT Libraries. The roundtable speakers and titles of their presentations included Jennie Fleming, "Examining Flickr's The Commons: What does creative interaction with digital image archives mean for users and institutions?," Robert Emery, "Telling Stories of The Dallas Way: Finding LGBT History and Creating Community Using Social Media," Heidi J. Wachter , "RevolutionaryAct.com and ExperienceLife.com," and Mariette Papić, "Digital Rights, Media and Practice: The Right to Bear Arms in The Information Age." Spencer Keralis, UNT Libraries' Director for Digital Scholarship, moderated the roundtable.

Students in Way's seminar are studying how recent scholarship on belonging illuminates contemporary and historical art and art history. They are considering how art and culture foster belonging to a place as well as a nation, and the ways that places index belonging, inclusion and exclusion. A primary concern is the way the creation and use of works of art participate in facilitating someone or something belonging or not. There are also questions of what counts as a belonging and how this relates to someone belonging to someone, thing or a place. Ways of facilitating belonging include civilize, salvage, domesticate, diplomacy, accommodate, remember. Examples of forms of belonging include autochthony, citizenship, memory and heritage. Ways of not belonging encompass but are not limited to outsidersness, alienation, dislocation, refugee, and homelessness.

Way charged her students with writing a short paper to explore connections between the roundtable and their seminar studies. What follows is a short paper by graduate student, Ann Howington.

Ann Howington

In the Social Media roundtable discussion of the Digital Frontiers conference, Virginia Commonwealth University curator Jennie Fleming spoke about a type of social media called crowdsourcing, where “registered” internet users work with digital collections to improve the output in a sub-curatorial role. Cultural institutions are using new media to engage visitors to respond and improve collections by providing contexts and information about certain items. Participants doing this type of curating belong to a community of practice, a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do (Wenger, web). A shared, environmental - or spatial - belonging is “negotiated through practice and performance” (Mee and Wright, 772) among those working in the Flickr environment; though in a *virtual* rather than a physical space.

The speaker discussed the 2012 “Library of Congress Flickr Co-curation Project,” calling for Flickr super users to curate a new set of pictures in the Library of Congress Flickr account (Library of Congress, web). They were to group meaningful images together and add annotations. Library of Congress (LOC) hoped this would add value to their digital image collections within the Flickr Commons.

Jennie questioned the lack of success and low participation of the project. She suggested that the super users of Flickr Commons did not participate in the project because LOC reduced them to the class of “visitors” by telling them how to participate, thus stifling their creativity. If Fleming is correct in her evaluation of the Flickr super users’ resistance, we can extend this experience into the type of spatial belonging described by David Morley, “those within a bounded sphere can come to feel threatened by the presence of that which they deem to be foreign.” LOC, to the super users, was the “...outsider who comes from elsewhere and threatens the stability of their domestic scene” (Morley, 438).

Fleming, Jennie. “Examining Flickr’s The Commons: What does creative interaction with digital image archives mean for users and institutions?” Presentation at the Digital Frontiers Conference at the University of North Texas, September 21, 2012.

Library of Congress. “Help us develop a new set of pictures!” Accessed September 24, 2012. <http://www.flickr.com/groups/flickrcommons/discuss/72157630887751722>

Mee, Kathleen, and Sarah Wright. “Guest Editorial, Geographies of Belonging, Why Geography? Why Belonging?” *Environment and Planning A*, no. 41 (2009): 772.

Morley, David. “Belongings: place, space, and identity in a mediated world.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2001): 438.

Wenger, Etienne. “Communities of Practice.” *Communities of Practice*. Accessed September 24, 2012. <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>.