
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, XuHao Yang.
Through the presentations in relation to “social media” from the Digital Frontiers conference, one of the underlying connections could be found is that “social media” can be identified as a catalyst or “cultural platform” that blurs the boundaries between different communities, reshaping the related cultural identities, and facilitating the dynamics of cultural transformations and re-configurations between different cultural entities.

Bhambra in her article unwraps that cultures could help construct identities, and shape as well as retain the relevant boundaries (Bhambra, 32-33). Further, she argues that “an interpretation of culture” could be considered as “something which is intrinsically fluid, changing and dynamic” as well as “a relational field” (Bhambra, 34). In other words, if an understanding of particular culture, like what Bhambra addresses, can be constructed by different factors continuously and would not be a fixed definition but rather a mobile dynamics, people can conclude that identities could be a kind of changeable perceptions or negotiations. Social media, in some sense, would be the “social tools” that can facilitate shaping or reshaping communities by mobile and dynamic “cultural identities”. For instance, “the Dallas Way—the Dallas GLBT History Project” claims that they hope to reach the “marginal groups”, such as gays and lesbians, by using social media. That is, it would be a gateway that can connect those who own same cultural identity, a platform that can build a network to reach and explore previous “unknown people”, and a catalyst that can help shape a new community rather than retain the previous situation defined by “others” in society.

Indeed, different cultural identities that are based on different variables determine who you are, where you belong, and where you don’t belong. Also, belonging in relation to cultural identity would be loose and ambiguous, the boundaries, also, would be fuzzy as well. In terms of me, sometime it is hard to define obviously what my identity could be. For example, in China, I am “local people”, namely, at the side of “the majority”, but in the States, I belong to “the international students”, which could be located at “the minority”. I cannot fully explain who I am, namely my exact identities based on those cross-cultural and international experiences unless I can define the relevant variables, but I am quite sure that the boundaries between my identities should be unclear, vague, and dynamic. More important, as ways for perceiving the world in which I am living, the examination of belonging provides me with different perspectives to look at myself, and re-recognize or relocate the positions between “self” and “others”.
