

Possible Strategies For Exploiting Wikipedia For The Dissemination and Profiling of Artist's Books and Multiples on the Internet

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Introduction

Who here has seen this painting?? Are you sure? Where was it? What did the frame look like???

It is, of course, Monet's Impression; Sunrise.

Except it isn't.

It's a projection of a digital file of a screen grab of an rgb file scanned from a book printed in cmyk taken from 4 metal plates created from 4 rolls of film taken from a layout page collaged with a photographic print taken from a cmyk slide taken of an oil painting. By my reckoning, it's gone through at least 8 major stages to be seen here today. In the process it's lost texture, scale, context, any accurate colour balance, and a lot of detail. And yet we all know it; this image has become an icon of early modernism, gaining gravity from such meanings as reputedly being the origin of the term Impressionism, the focus of snide remarks popularly believed to confirm the artist's revolutionary vision, and the augur of things to come. We don't need to have seen the original to understand its sign as an important staging post in modern art, as somehow relevant to our own practices.

A Working Definition of Art

I suspect that **a work of art is the residue left in the imagination after you've left the room**; our brain's wiring has been compared to a 2 dimensional grid, which is one reason why maps are so much easier to visualise than your local high street's shops in order, and why when I try to remember what my mother was wearing last time I saw her, I usually end up remembering what she was wearing in the last photo I saw of her.

Paintings are, of course, a good way to create memorable information two dimensionally. So are photos. So is the internet.

Towards A Working Definition of Artist's Books

I think the distinction between artist's books and multiples are problematic; many works hover between the two, such as Brecht's Water Yam, Duchamp's green Box, Roth's Literature Sausage & Creed's Crumpled Paper.

I think the central theme of an artist's book is that it has a relationship, however tangential, to what we consider a book, whilst implicitly challenging it's authority. By contrast, any book that implicitly accepts and exploits that authority, veers toward being a Livre d'Artiste.

An artist's book is intended as a work in it's own right and can be understood without reference to other pieces. It must also justify it's form, being unable to separate it's essential book-ness with it's content.

Unlike the Livre d'Artiste, it has a relationship to mass production and consumerism

“The multiple sets up a resistance to the inevitable tide of consumerism”

“Artist’s books are books, or book like objects, over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself”

both Stephen Bury

Duchamp famously said that ‘one is unique, two a pair & 3 are mass produced’. I think that an artist’s book has to be mass producible, at the least. It’s relationship to mass production is central to it’s identity. Any work that fetishises the artist’s hand veers toward Livre d’Artiste, especially if that attributable authorship is central to it’s visceral gravity.

Documentary Possibilities

Take this photo of an exhibition by Warhol at Leo Castelli’s gallery, New York 1964 I wasn’t there, but the photo works as a signifier of what it must have been like; each time I see one 24” flower I feel cheated that there aren’t a few more; in some ways I feel I know this show more than Sensation, say, which I did go to; without an iconic photo to act as a signifier, my memories of sensation are far shakier than my false memories of Castelli’s Flowers.

I think that in the the last 50 years, one of the defining changes in art practice has been the increased importance of the hermetically controlled environment, which has become far more important than individual works, which increasing look like beached relics that simply point at the original confluence.

From Monet’s seminal sequence of Rouen Cathedral, exhibited in 1895, to Chris Offili’s The Upper Room, the high concept show has replaced the salon as the centre of artistic production. Artist’s books have mirrored this progression; from the secondary illustrations in livre d’artistes, to the linear trajectories of monographs to the world-within-a-world contextualising of a modern artist’s book.

Artist’s Books, aswell as seminal exhibitions, stand to gain immeasurably from the possibilities of discussion, dissemination and contextualising that can be woven into essay published on the internet. Indeed, it’s only through these discussions, wether published traditionally or digitally, that any work acquires gravity.

Both media can benefit enormously from the kind of documentation available on the web.

The Spread of The Internet as Validation of Existence

If books have had the ability to dramatically increase the fame and influence of works of art in the past, then the internet is poised to increase this communication of signs exponentially. Ever since broadband has become commonplace, the net has been able to transmit increasingly large pictorial files. Gone are the days of making a cup of tea whilst waiting for a download to happen. Whether we like it or not, students all over the world are researching every topic imaginable online; In effect, if an artwork doesn’t exist online it becomes invisible, a bit like if a piece of music has never been recorded it ceases to

exist. In my own practice, every time I apply for a group show, or exhibit, or sell a piece, my website and other presences on the web become central to my success or otherwise.

In effect, the internet has become the new literacy.

One of the classic problems with the internet has always been that a URL (uniform resource locator) is essentially no more than a phone number; if you don't know the exact address, you can't access the page you're looking for. This has meant that the few sites that catch the popular imagination, such as google, have grown in importance exponentially, whilst similar sites, such as Alta Vista, diminish into insignificance. You can open as many art based web sites as you want, with as much public funding as you need, but the laws embedding sites into the popular imagination are as unpredictable as the laws governing why one great film sinks and another becomes iconic;

Sites that your mother has heard of are rare but invaluable; Amazon, Google, Ebay. One such site is Wikipedia.

About Wikipedia

Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia, set up by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger in 2001. An experimental Hive Mind, to collect and collate as many viewpoints as possible, from anyone with access to a computer attached to a modem.

Web 2.0

Wikipedia is one of the most successful examples of web 2.0, a term coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2005 to describe the increasingly democratic interplay between users, encouraging dialogue and participation in the web rather than simply downloading authoritative texts, say.

Wikipedia can be edited by absolutely anyone (unless they have been blocked). Anyone who has logged in can write a new page.

It is now, apparently, the world's largest encyclopedia. Since anyone can edit it at any time, it is constantly changing, and has challenged the traditional notion of the encyclopedia as authoritative, replacing it with a model that is more like a continual dialogue.

One of the key weaknesses of Wikipedia at the moment is it's lack of articles on modern art. There are a number of reasons for this; copyright issues, low visibility of contemporary art within the mainstream culture, lack of a historical narrative to frame a grid that is baffling in the extreme to all of us, wherever we come at it from.

A few years ago, when I started looking at wikipedia seriously, there were no decent discographies of bands; these have proliferated due to becoming a wiki project; now there are full blown discographies on all sorts of musicians in all sorts of categories. It struck me as possible to do the same with artist's books and multiples.

My Intention

My basic idea, then, is simply to write a series of articles on artist's books, artist's multiples and exhibitions. Firstly, attempt a workable definition, that sets up a contrast with Livre d'Artiste, secondly choose a series of works that exemplify the genre. Thirdly, cross reference them to create a network that can act as a beginner's course as well as an archive to help research.

In my experience, few of us are aware of many other artist's books and multiples, and there are few accepted iconic examples. In a reversal of post modern orthodoxy, I think that we need to begin defining a workable canon.

It remains sufficiently difficult to access artist's books in this country that I have never held a copy of 26 gasolene stations, for example. And yet the history of artist's books in the second half of the 20th century is central to modern art; Manzoni's Artist's Shit, Weiner's Statements, Warhol's Index, Brecht's Water Yam, as well as notable examples by Hirst, Klein, Emin, Koons etc.

The approach to the book is itself a defining feature of each artist; and many movements, such as pop, conceptual art and post modernism, are defined by their approach to mass production, especially to the printing process. Compare Anselm Kiefer's huge lead books, literally essays in heavy metal, to Warhol's playful use of pop up paper aeroplanes and balloons in his self-mythologising 'Index'.

A Brief How To Guide

To make a page, you need

1/ To create a username on wikipedia by pressing the log in/create account button top left.

2/ You have to wait 4 days before you can upload an image.

3/ Try out html possibilities in the sandbox, in effect, a giant blackboard that is constantly wiped clean every 12 hours.

4/ In your own account, you will find a user page in which you can fine tune an article of your choice

5/ to create a page, search for the page of your choice, making sure that there isn't a page of that name already. The search engine wikipedia uses is caps sensitive and punctuation sensitive; if no one has written that page already, then click on the create new page, copy and paste the entire article in your user page, and then press save. Bingo!!!

6/ to add pictures, you have to upload the image into wikipedia before you can link the thumbnail to your account. If you own copyright, or it is an image in the public domain, then it can be uploaded into wikipedia commons. If you are using a copyrighted image, then it has to be defended as a free use rationale, citing that the image is low res, where it has come from, which article it is being used for, why it can't be replaced with an image in the public domain, why it is necessary to illustrate the article in question, and with a code defining it's provenance. These can be found within the help section under non free content.

7/ once you have created a page, you should cross reference it with links from other pages. You can also use categories at the bottom of the page. I suggest the use of an 'Artist's Books and Multiples' category.

8/ if you have a really great idea for a project, you can pin it up in ongoing projects, with a brief statement of intent, and see if any other wikipedians take an interest. I propose to start one that any interested parties can add to,

My Own Pages On Wikipedia

So far, I have created 3 pages; Linee, Yves: Peinture and sections of Piero Manzoni.

Questions that have come up include;

- 1/ Whether to use English or original language in the descriptions
- 2/ How to justify illustrations
- 3/ How to get over the idea that someone can trash your writing
- 4/ How to get over the idea that you might trash other people's writing
- 5/ Learning how to speak the language
- 6/ Deciding if you should speak the language

An Extremely Incomplete List Of Seminal Bookworks & Multiples

Jazz/ Matisse 1947

Yves: Peintures / Yves Klein 1954

Linee / Manzoni 1959

Bodies Of Air / Manzoni 1960

26 Gasolene Stations / Ruscha 1962

Daily Mail / Dieter Roth 1962

Water Yam / Brecht 1963

Statements / Weiner 1968

Laair / Bruce Nauman 1970

Reason,/ Kozlowski 1972

Warhol / Flash 1968

Literature Sausage / Dieter Roth

Lost Day / Gilbert and George

Concorde / Wolfgang Tilmans

Yahoo / Paul MacCarthy

Mark Pawson / DIE-CUT PLUG WIRING DIAGRAM BOOK

Work No. 88: A sheet of A4 paper crumpled into a ball / Martin Creed

Cas Serafin's List

Details Of Depression / Tracey Emin

World View / Emma Kaye

Will happiness find me? / Fischli weiss

Love death of a lady / Tal r

Anette Messenger

On Karawa

Sophie Calle

I think that I have only seen 4 of these, let alone held them.

Stephen Bury's List

Ruscha 'Twenty-six gasolene stations', 1963
Boltanski 'Recherche et presentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance', 1969
Broodthaers 'A Voyage on the North Sea', 1974
Michael Snow 'Cover to cover', 1975
Susan Hiller 'Rough sea', 1976
Maciunas 'Flux paper events', 1976
LeWitt 'Autobiography', 1980
Yoko Terauchi 'Ebb & Flow', 1988
Simon Patterson 'Rex Reason', 1994 (paper ed. only !)
Fiona Banner 'The Nam', 1997

Sarah Bodman's List

Andy Warhol's Index Book,
Weproductions MIM,
Sophie Calle,
Jonathan Callan,
Simon Cutts,
Ruscha
Weiner
Douglas Huebler
Sharon Kivland

Anyone who wants to add this list, or to change it in some way, please do.

Intentions and Consequences

The basic aim of mine is to move the emphasis from the artist to the artwork; to discuss exhibitions as important vectors rather than as collections of individual works, for instance, and to have what little I know about artist's books to be challenged, augmented and filled in between the holes, by other like minded enthusiasts.

I believe that the artist's book is central to the continued development of modern art, and that the internet can go some way in addressing it's main weakness; it's discrete presence and individualised dialogue with a single viewer.

Both are mirrored in the dialogue between the viewer and the viewed on web 2.0 sites such as wikipedia.