

Three Blogs Devoted to Contemporary Art

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ctrlaltdelate.org

we-make-money-not-art.com

trendbeheer.com

Even people who blog journalistically – with a view to producing information and reportage for a group of readers – do so first and foremost for themselves. The American political philosopher Jodi Dean recently characterized blogging as 'a practice for managing the self under the conditions of communicative capitalism'.¹

Blogging has more to do with the design and presentation (performance) of the blogger's (public) self than with journalism or the production of a publication in the classic sense. You can see it as a form of personal online information-processing and reflection – even though such reflection may consist of no more than the choice of a couple of photos. That it provokes reactions, that an audience may (sometimes) form around a blog, is of secondary importance. Of course, certain blogs put an emphasis on debate, host heated and/or substantive discussions, and raise and invite comment on ideas, but generally speaking these blogs are a minority. And although it's true that a loose sense of community takes shape in links between various blogs, and in the fact that they react to one another, such communities seldom take to the streets or manage to turn their concerns into public issues. The possibility should not be entirely ruled out, however. It happens more often in non-Western countries, where blogs and other diy online publications are the only form of alternative journalism. The fact is that most bloggers write for themselves. They don't have a public; they have readers.

Take Peter Luining, Net artist and 'internetter' from day one. On his [weblog](#) he documents things that have struck him on his walks around Amsterdam. The walks began as a way of shedding the excess weight accumulated during more than ten years of internet use. (It would be hard to imagine a nicer example of the proposition that blogging helps to keep you healthy in the presence of all that media excess.) In reporting on exhibitions he has visited, he includes photographs and impressions. Recurrent elements provide the appeal ('stickyness') of Luining's art log, such as art spotted on eBay or among rubbish on the street ('Art is lying on the street'). Although it is possible to infer a view of art from Luining's choices, he refrains from explicit criticism on his blog. This is a deliberate policy. Criticism means proffering considered arguments, making a substantiated 'distinction between', and doing so takes time. As long as you don't offer criticism you can safely follow your own inclinations; you can get away with ignoring important matters and paying attention to trivia. Hence the 'lightness' of many blogs, which can be seen as a positive quality. Those who indulge in unsupported, decontextualized criticism in public very soon descend into indiscriminate ranting, ridiculing or blowing their own trumpets. Which is why Luining and other bloggers who prefer not to be seen as loudmouths or self-

promoters are clever enough to let the chosen material speak for itself. It is up to us to draw conclusions.

The blog we-make-money-not-art.com has developed into a source of news and commentary from the new media scene, thanks to the approach adopted by Regine Debatty, who is a journalist, not an artist. Debatty writes long pieces, publishes interviews, and visits the latest media festivals and exhibitions. She pursues her own interests but uses her journalistic experience to produce a readable and interesting publication. To safeguard her position and professionalism, she takes a balanced approach, resulting in a much more explicit view of media art than a blunt expression of her opinions would have produced. Debatty establishes links between art and current technological, between social and scientific developments, and builds bridges to design, consumer electronics, games and internet culture. From the perspective of art criticism, it is significant that Debatty doesn't start from the history of the avant-garde or the tradition of European media criticism. On the contrary, she has a positive view of art: art is the creation of experiences, is about making discoveries; it opens the way for discovery and, yes, also asks questions.

It has been claimed, especially since 2001, that blogs are an invitation to engage in conversation. Blog software makers promote blogging as a way to 'publish your ideas, get feedback! ' This claim does not apply to the art blogs mentioned here: Luining does not invite reader reactions, and although Debatty does, her invitation seldom leads to discussion. In terms of graphic design, format and technology, the Dutch art blog Trendbeheer (Jeroen Bosch, Marc Bijl, Niels Post, Hans van der Riet and Jaap Verhoeven), belongs to the genre of blogs that have emerged since 2003 and which feature comments, automatic insertion of 'delicious links', tags and an overview of the latest reactions. Turnover is high, with several contributions a day. Or, as the American blog ideology of the top 100 Bloggers stipulates: publish a lot and often in order to create a readership and keep readers happy. Compared with those of Luining and Debatty, entries in this genre are more sarcastic, funnier and more provocative. There is occasional harassment, leading to a spate of reactions nearly always from the same people: those who make nuanced remarks and others who are a pain in the ass. Trendbeheer's sometimes satirical, I-don't-give-a-damn-about-anything tone is adept at deflating hypes and misplaced pomposity. In that sense, Trendbeheer appears to be more critical than Luining and even Debatty. But ultimately it doesn't go beyond mockery; it never rises to the level of polemics, let alone criticism.

Actually, Trendbeheer has no desire to engage in art criticism or to conduct a theoretical debate on art. In saying this, I do not mean to denigrate the quality of the information and links on offer but simply to comment on the tone of the blog. Those who don't care for it or can't stand it are welcome to look elsewhere. After all, given the wealth of information on the internet and the possibility of doing a better job yourself, why would you spend a lot of time criticizing the blinkered vision of one particular blog?

Anyone who concludes from my remarks that blogs excel at registering and commenting on things and fall short when it comes to reviewing and criticizing – in other words, fall short in creating a public sphere – is too hung up on a classic notion of the function of the press. Such a conclusion misses the implicit view of art that gradually develops on a blog, the connections that are made, the presence of many perspectives, and the networks that readers can scour. A blog is permanently 'under construction'; entries are temporal – and all that temporality is archived. There is a sense of a vision that is continually being formed – that is examined and interrogated but seldom explicitly defined. To be able 'understand' what is happening, a reader needs to follow a blog for a while (or to read three months' worth of reports in one go). Over time, a blog's lightness may start to acquire more gravitas.

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Footnotes

1. See Jodi Dean, 'I cite, "Liquid Modernity"', 30 May 2007, ideanicate.typepad.com

Tags

Art Discourse, Media Society

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