

IF I WERE A COLLECTOR, I'D PUT MY VIDEO COLLECTION ON YOUTUBE

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Transcript of the lecture, Barcelona, LOOP Art Fair, Saturday May 30, 2009, as part of the panel “How new technologies and online participative culture affect the production and distribution of videoart”. Moderated by Julia Draganovic, with Christopher Eamon, Mike Stubbs and Domenico Quaranta.

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Generally I'm not an enthusiast of so-called “Web 2.0” platforms such as Youtube. My position about them is that they took the great networking culture of the Eighties and Nineties and deprived it of its critical potential, changing its powerful instruments into neutral, commercial devices.

Youtube's slogan is a good proof to my argument: “Broadcast yourself” turns Indymedia's “Dont' hate the media – become the media!” into a commercial for wannabe celebrities.

But here, we are not talking about Youtube per se, but about its consequences on art production and distribution – and I have to say that I'm quite optimistic about that.

The return of the amateur

One interesting thing about Web 2.0 platforms is what has been dubbed as “the return of the amateur”. This is a constant of the Net – think, for example, to the personal homepages of the mid Nineties.

The amateur does what contemporary artists usually do:

1. he produces and 2. he post-produces

...but he does it at an amateurish level. Saying that, with the Internet, everybody is an artist would be like to say that, with the invention of writing, everybody should be a writer.

> **Oliver Laric**, *Versions*, 2009 – <http://oliverlaric.com/versions.htm>

This video, by Munich-based artist Oliver Laric, is a very interesting take on the kind of culture the Internet is giving birth. *Versions* is also interesting because it shows one of the potentials of platforms such as Youtube for art production.

(Post)production

Youtube (but also Flickr, Facebook, Delicious and so on) offers an extraordinarily large pool of **SOURCE MATERIAL** ready to be rearranged, recycled, remixed, reused by the artists. Like most pop art, this kind of art has an ambiguous relationship with its source, incorporating both celebration and criticism:

> **Martin Kohout aka PASH***, *Moonwalk*, 2008 –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DVN4m41QCE&hl=it&fs=1>

> **David Kraftsow**, *YooouuuTuube*, 2009 – <http://yooouuuuuube.com/>

But of course, this kind of production is more interesting when it says something about the people behind the source material, their obsessions, their myths etc.

> **Oliver Laric**, *50 50*, 2007 – <http://oliverlaric.com/5050.htm>

> **Brody Condon**, *Without Sun*, 2009 – <http://tmpspace.com/?portfolio=without-sun-2008-2010>.

Dissemination

For artists, Youtube and alikes are not just means of production: they are means of distribution as well. Through them, they can make their art accessible to a wider audience. *Moonwalk*, for example, has been visualized 29.978 times on Youtube.

This, of course, can be useful for many purposes: not just reaching a wider and more variegated audience, but also:

- giving accessibility to historical material that is difficult to see in other ways, and thus enforcing the circulation of knowledge – i.e.: early computer art from the sixties and seventies; and, of course, most video art;

- distributing the work in unconventional ways – i.e. the media hacking strategy adopted by UBERMORGEN.COM.

> **UBERMORGEN.COM**, *Foriginal Media Hack No.1*, 2006 –

<http://www.foriginal.com/no1/>

Of course, Youtube isn't alone in this growth of dissemination and recycling. Peer to peer networks did it for a long time, and at a better quality. Of course, file sharing is illegal.

> **Alterazioni Video**, *Artists' serial killer*, 2008 –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVtGK4Kky9E&hl=it&fs=1>

The issue of copyright

Copyright is a complicated issue, and can't be properly discussed here. My general position is that there should be some limits to piracy and sharing, but in order to find this limits we first have to agree that copyright (in the current form) is obsolete, and should be completely reconsidered.

That said, I also think that, if we take into account the cultural market in general,

the art market is the last one that should be afraid of Youtube and file sharing networks. The reason is quite simple to explain. Cinema and music are still based on an “access economy”. I usually pay to see a movie or to listen to music. Of course, if I can download it for free, I will not pay any more. (This is the general argument beyond any restriction on file sharing – I have some doubts about it, but it works in this context). On the contrary, contemporary art is based on “mixed economy”:

- an access economy (for the general audience);
- a luxury economy of objects and fetishes (for collectors).

If I’m just a spectator, I can see artworks for free (or paying a small amount of money) in an exhibition. Even if I see a video on Youtube, I’ll keep on going to exhibitions, because the experience is fundamentally different.

What the Web can provides in this case is a brand new, deeper relationship with the artwork. When I see a video in an exhibition, usually I look at it for a couple of minutes. Showing video art is STILL a big problem. The web can give me the opportunity to see an artwork from the beginning to the end, one or more times, possibly on my bed.

If I am a collector, I’ll pay a large amount of money to have the actual work, as a unique or a limited, signed edition. Of course, I will not stop buying videos because I can see them on Youtube, because what I want is not the right to see it, but the property of an artwork. The video I bought has not just a personal, but an economical value too. The more this work is seen, discussed, understood, criticized, the more its value will increase.

This is why, if I were a collector, I’d put my video collection on Youtube.

> **Alterazioni Video**, *Copy-Right No Copy-Right*, since 2005