Digital Divide
CLAIRE BISHOP ON CONTEMPORARY ART AND NEW MEDIA


While many artists use digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through the digital? Movies made with the elegiac mood of Sacher 8 can now be taken on your cell phone. So why continue with the体制机制, as does the digital medium. Just as a dream, or even to access something should be critiqued by acknowledging one’s desires and needs and by imagining the possible outcomes of one’s actions. as well as about trying to understand someone—no one can do what I can do if I can do it, you can do it!"
assemblage and ‘sameness’ into objects making has been predominantly described by Hal Foster as “precursory” sculpture (in the work of Isa Genzken and others), even though the tendency is manifested more frequently as retro-craftiness, as seen in the huddling corpuses and tepidities of the recent Whitney Biennial. Both motivations suggest some of the premises that current regimes of technology and communication have placed on the object, which becomes increasingly fragile and provisional, as if to assert subcultural (and narrative) against the scaled, improbably surface of the screen. Moreover, if Genzken’s work exemplifies an older model of bricolage, in which found objects are treated as raw materials whose histories are incidental, then the more prevalent strategy since the 1990s has been to maintain the cultural integrity of the reanimated artifact—to invoke and sustain its history, constitution, and modes. Books, performances, films, and modem design objects are incorporated into new works of art and repurposed.

Foster’s examples are Dean, Sam Durant, and Ouellette, whose histories are incidental, then the more prevalent strategy since the 1990s has been to maintain the cultural integrity of the reanimated artifact—to invoke and sustain its history, constitution, and modes. Books, performances, films, and modem design objects are incorporated into new works of art and repurposed.

The work attempts to reconstruct as much as possible of the infinite resources of the Internet, has become productively described by Hal Foster as the logic of the Internet. In the 1960s, this kind of drift was understood as an exodus from the logic imposed by positivist materialist planning; today, the drive is to the logic of our dominant social field, the Internet.

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Presented as carefully deployed collections, their installations hint at the extent to which everyone with a personal computer today has become a fact archivist, storing and filing thousands of documents, images, and music files. It often feels as if I don’t listen to music so much as perform upkeep on my iTunes collection—downloading new acquisitions, categorizing them, and deciding on importance or deaccessioning unwanted tracks.) Comparing these vernacular forms of aggregation with artists’ physical arrangements of ephemera and objects, we are once again returned to the rarefied aura of the individual and to questions of supply and demand.

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305 postcards, charts, 1972–76, to the Unknown Artists (detail), Image 45x411 to 473x711

ARTFORUM
Dedicated
susan hiller, approx. four
Below:
Zoe Leonard, big a show is anymore, but how:
A tiny gallery significant in many respects, not least of which was spectatorial condition. Documenta 11 (2002) was tors rather than artists) model this new illegibility as a before our eyes.”10 Today, many exhibitions (by cura-

One of the first constructed installations to be shown at the Whitney was John Goldsmith’s Xylotheque, 1970s, a video installation of my work and feel that the best way to docent. While I have always prioritized the physical presentation of my work but felt that the best way to experience it is to share time and space with it—bli to the unknown animated by the sense of collectivity; at its worst, it signals the impending obso-

Contemporary art simultaneously disavows and depends on the digital revolution, even—especially—when the art deserts to speak overtly about the conditions of living in and through new media. But why is contemporary art so ambivalent about this condition? After all, photography and film were embraced rapidly and wholeheartedly in the 1920s, as was video in the late 1960s and 1970s. These formats, however, were image-based, and their relevance and challenge to visual art were self-evident. The digital, by con-
tact, is a code, inherently alien to human perception. It is, at heart, a language. When you open a document, you see text: to eat and you will find its ingredients: a garbled recipe of numbers and letters, meaningless to the average viewer. Is there a sense of fear underlying visual art’s desideratum of new media? Faced with the infinite multiplicity of digital files, the uniqueness of the art object needs to be reasserted in the face of its infinite reproducibility via Internet searchability. But our consumption of this Internet searchability. But our consumption of this work in turn reflects the changing patterns of contemporary perception: It is impossible to take in all four one’s day’s edition of the New York Times (2003), a retyping of “The New York Times” as one model for poetry when promoting his theory of “uncreative writing,” citing the history of the 1980s as one model for poetry when promoting his theory of “uncreative writing,” citing the history of intellectual property and carefully assigned author-

My point is that mainstream contemporary art are as potentially shattering and vitalizing as the arrival of mechanical reproduction was for visual “With the Web, the writing has met its photography.”11 It is telling that two of the works I cited earlier, by Trecartin and Stark, make language central to their aesthetic. Is it possible that literature, and particularly poetry of the late championed by Goldsmith in his Creative Writing: “There is only one rule: don’t take up the avant-garde burden, then: finding its way to convey experiences in ways adequate to new technolo-
gical circumstances. Yet the hybridized solutions that visual art is currently pursuing—syntax, its scale; i also care very deeply about the printed experience it is to share time and space with it—blime to the unknown animated by the sense of collectivity; at its worst, it signals the impending obso-

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[Image 1272x92 to 1456x214]©-meter, and through new media.

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NOTES
1. Even traditional forms of art, like painting, are supported by a digital apparatus: PDFs sent to the press or to collectors, JPEGs on gallery websites, etc.
2. I will leave aside painting for the moment. Its recent exponents (in the US, at least) have consciously deployed digital referents: Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker, for example, produce hybrid analog-digital paintings. Rather than downloading images from the Internet, Walker sources his imagery in library books, which are then scanned, and altered on his computer, before being transferred to canvas for one-off paintings. Again, however, these works use technology (and rather decoratively) rather than reflecting on digital visuality per se. See “The Painting Factory: A Roundtable Discussion,” in The Painting Factory, exh. cat., Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), 11–12.
3. The analog fascination is not exclusive to contemporary art; to cite just one example, Urban Outfitters’ website now offers more than sixty products relating to cameras, most of which are based on 35-mm film or Lomography.
4. Of course, digital files are also subject to degradation through resizing and compression; the products of these processes are referred to as lossies.
5. Like performance art, social practice increasingly depends for its production and documentation on e-mail and digital photography.
6. Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 163–64. In the words of activist and law scholar Lawrence Lessig, we no longer live in a “Read Only” but rather a “Read/Write” culture.
8. Ibid., 5.
9. Ibid., 21.
10. Kenneth Goldsmith, Uncreative Writing (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 158. His formulation plays off and departs from current theories of scanning and saccadic vision. The precedents for this work are both literary and artistic: Gertrude Stein’s The Making of Americans (1925) and On Kawara’s One Million Years, 1969.
11. When cut-and-paste operations are transferred to literature, as Goldsmith and his many colleagues are doing, the stakes are quite different, since the economy of literature is much smaller and weaker and has no “original” to speak of.