

Issues in Social Media for the Arts 2019

Blueskying a Social Media Platform for the Arts

Hosted by
the Social Media Narratives Class
Art and Technology Studies
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Facebook Transcript: Tommer Peterson
Includes responses to his Google Doc Statement

Tommer Peterson
November 11 at 12:24 PM

Apologies for the late start, I was traveling last week, and am just now home and able to participate.

I am a theatre artist, and spent a good part of my earlier career working in organized arts and cultural philanthropy. In the early 90s, I was part of the team (along with Judy Malloy) that developed ArtsWire, the first national online network for the Arts. I am mixed-race First Nations and White. In Canada, where my family comes from, we are called Métis.

So...here are a couple of thoughts to start... I would not be so bold as to call this a “statement”. This is more of a brain dump.

Blue-skying Social Media Platforms for the Arts

I am suspicious; maybe hesitant is a better word, of the phrase “for the arts”. Inherent in this description is the idea that the arts are something that a line can be drawn around, that there is common shared definition, that we even know them when we see them.

The phrase “for the Arts” carries a suggestion of an inclusivity and breadth that is not easily achievable.

Admirable and effective institutions like Americans for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, numerous schools and museums for (and of) the Arts, reinforce this limited view by the work they support, recognize, embrace, and include. The institutional bias is unavoidable. It is naturally easier to address institutions. They are visible — they have professional staff whose job it is to make them visible. And one of the

outcomes is that, by default, arts institutions collectively become the entire universe. And, that universe then is largely white and Eurocentric in its world-view, and to a lesser degree, in its constituents.

I may be digging myself into a semantic wormhole, but claiming this territory is a kind of uber-binary (sorry) act. As soon as we circle up and all put our arms around one another, we turn our backs on others.

All that said, some discussion on what we mean by “for the arts” should be a consideration as we jump into imagining platforms, technology, and the like.

At its core, the idea of establishing a platform for the Arts is wonderfully bold and arrogant.

As we envision new platforms, let’s not start with the mainstream art and cultural expressions and then “include” others, let’s built as large and open a tent as possible.

I also wonder if Social Media is a destructive force to some specific cultures?

The topic of cultural appropriation / cultural transgression / cultural transference / cultural evolution is something that I am thinking a lot about these days. In general, we lack a common set of definitions, and the term “cultural appropriation” is used indiscriminately to describe a wide range of events in this sphere, some culturally destructive, some neutral, and some with vigorous hybrid potential.

Indigenous cultures are most often on the short end of the stick in these transactions, but the whole picture is significantly more complex. Getting to the point....social media plays a major role in the most destructive of these transactions, exposing and sharing cultural content outside its original context and meaning, to world-wide audience that is largely under informed on what they are experiencing.

Copyright protections and other protocols offer little to protect indigenous cultural material, images, and traditions. When individuals and communities venture online, we often find assets and content stolen and mistreated.

Is this the real world?

I expect that there are other participants on this panel who have thought more deeply about this, and I’d love to hear from you.

I am interested in the idea that inherent to all online social networks and platforms is the illusion they represent the entire universe, and so

become perceived as “reality” by participants. This stretches from “I read it in the Internet, so it must be true” to the ways that Facebook, Twitter, etc. influence public opinion (and elections) by the sheer volume of content provided on a particular topic or issue.

Similarly, the availability and use of online communication tools, does not include the entire population. The internet is largely an urban experience. Here are some stats on geographic distribution:

§ As of year-end 2016, 92.3% of all Americans have access to fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, up from 89.4% in 2014 and 81.2% in 2012. Nonetheless, over 24 million Americans still lack fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps.

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§ Rural and Tribal areas continue to lag behind urban areas in mobile broadband deployment. Although evaluated urban areas saw an increase of 10 Mbps/3 Mbps mobile LTE from 81.9% in 2014 to 90.5 % in 2016, such deployment in evaluated rural and Tribal areas remained flat at about 70% and 64%, respectively. Approximately 14 million rural Americans and 1.2 million Americans living on Tribal lands still lack mobile LTE broadband at speeds of 10 Mbps/3 Mbps.

§

§ Approximately 92% of the population has access to both fixed terrestrial services at 25 Mbps/3 Mbps and mobile LTE at speeds of 5 Mbps/1 Mbps. In rural areas, 68.6% of Americans have access to both services, as opposed to 97.9% of Americans in urban areas. With respect to fixed 25 Mbps/3 Mbps and 10 Mbps/3 Mbps LTE services, 85.3% of all Americans have access to such services, including 61% in evaluated rural areas and 89.8% in evaluated urban areas.

<https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2018-broadband-deployment-report>

It would be interesting to see this type of breakdown by age, race, education, etc.

Tommer Peterson

11/11/19

[Richard Lowenberg](#) Thank you Tommer.

Your posting resonates with some of my thoughts about our topic. We

could spend all our time simply attempting to define, draw boundaries around and open up our understandings of the terms and issues that are being discussed here. Social media is a moving target, as is any definition of the arts and creative livelihoods. Technological progress led the way, but most societies and individuals have been unprepared to effectively use, apply or further these major techno-social platforms. How and where do we learn to be social? Why are the arts a special category, when anyone can call themselves artist. Rhetorical questions that currently exist among greater noise than signal. Can we here make any meaningful difference? Where do individuals, anywhere in the connected world, learn to be individually and socially benefiting participants in the emergent 'information revolution'? And, is information 'property'? Whose?

I have had very peripheral involvements in indigenous/tribal internet and social media efforts since the very early '90s, from assisting colleagues with Native Net (in pre-web days), through co-organizing the ISOC Indigenous Connectivity Summit in Nov. 2017, and providing detailed reporting and assistance on tribal broadband networking for the State of New Mexico over the past many years.

On this specific regard, I need to take issue with the FCC data that you refer to in your initial posting. The FCC data is confirmed to be 'fake news'. Their means of collecting data about who is served and not served, defining broadband and producing maps reflecting this data is part of this administration's way of supporting corporate providers' interests, rather than presenting truthful maps and data and resulting support for widening urban, rural, tribal and other socially categorized divides. I can provide references, if wanted. For instance, if one household is served with broadband in any census block, all households in that block are considered served.

And FCC rural broadband funding is primarily for 10/1, not 25/3 (download/upload bandwidth),
Undermining their own definition and support for broadband.

I'll stop here, as postings should not be overly long. But I have much more to say in some next postings.

R.

[Tommer Peterson](#) Hi Richard,

First off - thanks for the clarification on the FCC stats. As I noted, this is to my field, and I was duped...I was surprised at the time that the

numbers were as high as stated.

If you know of an easy source of more reliable data, that would be useful to this thread.

There is a parallel question in addition to the availability of broadband. Just because it is available, is it being used? And for what purposes? And to what extent is it integrated into people's activities and contributing to the quality of their lives? (I will take a look at the Pew research site. This seems like the kind of topic they might have looked into.)

Great question, "Is information 'property'? And whose?"



Judy Malloy Hi Tommer Peterson Welcome to this year's Issues in Social Media for the Arts panel. Great to see you here! For the Group as a whole, here is Tommer's bio: Tommer Peterson is an independent theater artist and designer. He is currently at work developing a new movement play, *City of Refuge*, premiering in June 2020 at ReAct Theatre in Seattle. In 2017-19, he performed in the 600 Highwaymen production of *The Fever* in Switzerland, Germany, Romania, The Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, Bosnia, Ireland in New York City at the Public Theater, and LaMama He is the author of the plays, *Just Wait a Yottasecond*, *Va-Va-Va-Voom* and *No One On Board Took Notice*, and co-author, with KJ Sanchez, of the documentary plays *Night at the Opera*, and *Duck Soup*. He previously served as deputy director of Grantmakers in the Arts, development director of the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, and communications coordinator of ArtsWire. He was a fellow on the United States/Japan Exchange Fellowship program in 1989-90.



Continuing the Facebook Conversation

[Judy Malloy](#) Hi [Richard Lowenberg](#) In your preliminary considerations, you bring up the core point of "Building on existing systems or radical innovation" You have a lot of experience in systems where this issue will have come up, so as regards contemporary social media for the arts, I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on this issue(?)

[Richard Lowenberg](#) A couple of thoughts about calling oneself artist today. Many have remarkable talents, but a primary reason to call oneself artist is to give oneself freedom, independence for creative mind, actions and way of life. I feel that this self-imposed creative freedom, for some, not all, brings with it a responsibility to be relevant to current circumstance, and to set creative examples that may inspire others. A high calling.

Regarding social media, I'll mention that I'm a longtime subscriber to <nettime>, a place where these related discussions have been active for a generation, and are currently also focused on the nature and ways forward for social media. At a big-picture scale, there are current initiatives involved in completely and radically creating a 'next internet', led by people like Tim Berners Lee. Our little exchange is taking place amid the cracks where the light comes in. And if technological progress proceeds without major eco-social change, get ready for the photonic era, which portends ways beyond digital of processing data, based on the nature of light; a new analogue, with a quantum twist. Languages, economic disparities, social differences, vested-interests, systematization of everything, values and sustaining paths are at play with much less certainty. Open, intelligent, creative conversations about relevance and ways to make a difference, online and in-person, are so important. Get on the path, but be wary of solutions.

R.

[Tommer Peterson](#) Hi Richard,

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Great question, "Is information 'property'? And whose?"

I'd say, "sometimes".

My opinions on this thread? No.

The combination to the vault? Yes.

Your opinions on this thread? Maybe Yes, maybe No. You get to decide.

The song,"Happy Birthday". Used to be Yes, now it is No.*

My opinions on this thread? Yes, but only if anyone actually read the fine print in the Terms of Use for Google Docs.

You Social Security number? Yes.

My cell phone number? Yes, but it doesn't seem to matter....

*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Birthday_to_You

Tommer Peterson

1/11/19

Judy Malloy In the past five years, working with students who are exploring creative practice on social media platforms that are increasingly not hospitable to challenging work, it has become apparent that it is time to explore the creation of social media platforms that would better serve creative practice. Everyone sees different things as regards the arts on social media. From my perspective in all of the courses in this field that I've taught in the past five years, I have been surprised, amazed, and thrilled by the ways in which students have explored creative practice on or about Social Media platforms -- in approaches that range from creative computer-mediated modeling of

how social media impacts our attention (an Asian American student at Princeton) to using social media-based narrative to envision a world without racism (a black Rutgers Camden student); to creating a social media-based archive for non-binary visibility (last year at SAIC ATS). This year among many other projects, SAIC ATS Social Media Narratives students are using social media platforms as authoring systems to create projects that range from a Twitter-based matriarchal family history of African slavery in Barbados to a drawing diary tutorial -- created in the Korean language and shared on YouTube -- as an antidote to stress and Internet-overload.

There may be better ways to say that it is important to envision a social media platform for creative practice, but "for the arts" is a workable phrase.

[Joe Matuzak](#) I am curious, Tommer, Richard, Judy, et al, about how you view the discussions of the pertinent issues having changed over the years. Privacy and ownership have always been part of the discussion landscape, though with the rise of data mining the issues and urgency of those issues have become more complex. Certainly the online Native Arts movement (and it would be remiss not to mention Randy Ross' visionary role in that) has always been acutely aware of those issues, as well as the role that disparity of access brings to the table. But as someone who was involved in many of these discussions and issues a long time ago, who then moved to a different side of the equation in my later role at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, where the issue of gaining access to personal data to enhance scientific research while properly safeguarding it to ensure the anonymity of individual participants was and is very much an issue. So, again, how do you see these discussions as having changed over the years? Has anything actually been "solved" or defined that we could all accept as a baseline?

[Tommer Peterson](#) Hi Joe! Great to run into you here. My first response is, "Same old shit." But these days the stakes are higher, and the issues have indeed changed. The question of access in the 80s was "is it available?", today it is "can you afford it?" An over simplification, granted, but the change is that access has been monetized. And as it increasingly moves from land-based connectivity to cellular, the cost has increased.

[Joe Matuzak](#) Certainly, the failure to get universal internet access included in the rewrite of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has meant lack of access to many groups and higher costs for many. But hasn't access always been monetized? I recall paying ridiculous amounts to be online in the early 80s, less but still a great amount in the 90s, and now the general ubiquity even of cellular data access has dropped to basic cost to below the dollar amount per month of what we used to pay. (It's ironic that everyone essentially carries a modem with them at all times these days, when I think about the massive amount of hours we all used to spend helping people set them up and use them prior to the web becoming ubiquitous.) What has changed is the presumption of what will come through the pipeline, as previously most things were text or static images and now the presumption is that we will all stream video and sound on a near constant basis. Ultimately, this change is also tied up in the "who owns what" discussion, which really began to turn in the later 90s when the corporate landscape recognized that they needed "content" and pivoted to try to control and own as much of it as possible. This attempt to own as much intellectual property as possible is of course what is still driving things today, as demonstrated by Disney's acquisition of Fox, and its launch tomorrow of its streaming service that incorporates the fruits of that. It's a recognition that big empty social media warehouses by themselves mean nothing, and that it's what's brought to the table in terms of original content that drives the engine. Facebook would be irrelevant without its users constantly adding to its content. The tension there has always been about control: I think back to when AOL wanted us to bring ArtsWire to their platform, since our profile was so high in the early web years and we had some of that magical content stuff, and I had to patiently explain to them that it just wouldn't work because (among a million other reasons) we were about hosting all of the people that they would surely censor, because they didn't fit the AOL definition of being "family friendly" not only in terms of who they were but in terms of what they produced. That definitional umbrella has broadened somewhat, certainly, but not because corporate America's values have somehow broadened, but instead because there's a drive to control and monetize pretty much everything and every perspective as much as possible, since appealing to as many groups as possible means spreading the money umbrella as widely as can be. To me, part of the fascinating tension is individuals within this miasmic landscape trying to proactively understand exactly what kind of control they are or are not giving away.

Judy Malloy Thanks Tommer Peterson and Joe Matuzak and also to Juana Guzman on Google Docs for bringing up the issue of connection expense. Particularly in Academia, this issue is not emphasized enough!

Judy Malloy An aside: while acknowledging that the Facebook Group platform on which we sit is user friendly and vibrant and fun to use, it should be noted that it is difficult to find these recent responses. There is no reason that a better system for indexing truncated content cannot be devised

Judy Malloy Hi Joe, So good to see your voice!

The erosion of You Own Your Own Words is a notable change. I would summarize this issue by saying that on The WELL and Arts Wire, users owned their own words. Period. Users knew this and had little reason for concern. But on contemporary social platforms, there is a blurring of ownership of data and ownership of creative content. This results in a perception that commercial social media platforms own our words. For instance at

https://www.facebook.com/communitys.../intellectual_property FB says: "You own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings." But observe what they say on their use of data page -- <https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/update>

(and note that these statements tend to change with some frequency)

When considering what would be needed in a contemporary social media platform that was hospitable to the arts, a clear you own words and your own data statement would be desirable.
