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AAD 630 Research Methods
Analysis of two theses/projects/capstones

Analysis and Research Interests

For this course, I have been having somewhat of a dilemma trying to scale down what I would like to research. After the first term of this program, I feel as though I have been introduced to a plethora of new topics that I had never thought about that plague the art world. Before the beginning of the program, I had been intrigued at the role that technology plays in the arts. More specifically, I've been questioning whether technology helps, or hinders authentic engagement in the arts. This question was inspired by my time spent in art museums in Italy and France during the past year, and quietly observing the behavior of museum patrons and how they engage with the art.

I noticed that time and time again, patrons that would look at a piece for about 20 to 30 seconds, snap a picture and walk on, only to repeat the same behavior at the next piece. If there happened to be a well known artwork (example: Michelangelo's Statue of David, at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze), patrons would turn their backs on the artwork, and take a selfie with the piece, then spend the next several minutes posting the picture on Instagram or Facebook. I began to question how things like smart phones, apps, and social media affect our engagement with the arts. Francesca Trianni (2014) writes that "[a]t a museum in Milan, Italy, a student reportedly...climbed on a statue dating back to the early 19th century to take a selfie and caused the statue's left leg to fall off" (para. 2). Although this was an extreme case of lack of stewardship, it does represent how our engagement with the arts has been affected by social media on one level or another. It can be argued that if it weren't for social media, the student in question may not have ever have felt compelled to climb up into the lap of a statue to take a picture of himself in the first place.

Conversely, technology and contemporary media have made art incredibly accessible to the masses. All one needs is an internet connection and a search engine to access the arts in today's world.

I can sit on my couch and go on virtual tours of museums around the world, stream information at incredible speeds, and access high-resolution images of artworks that I would never have had the chance to experience in previous generations. Through the use of technology, art has become incredibly accessible. However, does that accessibility encourage my engagement with the arts, or overwhelm it? One question that I have begun to develop for my own personal interests is how does technology affect authentic engagement in the arts?

In accordance with the assignment, I have begun to identify previous AAD students terminal research projects/capstones/theses that are in scope with my interests. For this interest, I have been looking at projects that are centered around the use of technology in a museum space. Edward Wright Parker's project entitled *Process and Possibilities Associated with the Development of a Mobile App that Explores Culture, Place, and the Promise of Play*, has a lot of interesting engagement opportunities that support one side of my own question. His project centers around the process of developing a mobile app that is used for cultural mapping and participatory behaviors. Parker's main question that he addresses within his project is "What is the process for developing a mobile app that is engaging, interactive, and that can be used to capture digital artifacts that represent arts and cultural phenomena within urban spaces?" (Parker, p. 7). Furthermore, he addresses various sub-questions including: What is gamification and why should it be used to enhance products and activities?, What type of functionality should be implemented with a cultural discovery-based mobile application?, and How can traditional arts and cultural organizations engage with Cultureboard participants?

Parker's research project is certainly centered around the participation and engagement aspect of cultural trends. It is a very ambitious project that attempts to change and adapt the ways in which we engage with culture and the arts. Since today's society is ever changing, especially due to the newly developed forms of technology, his project attempts to bridge the gap between traditional forms of participation and new forms of participation. Parker's project outlines the framework used to create his

project, stating that there has been very little accessible research that centers around the development and/or use of a mobile app for cultural mapping purposes. He states that there is research available for participatory culture and cultural mapping, but very little that center around the use of mobile gamification to implement these ideas. The project goes on to explain and define the role of gamification, Parker's own role as a researcher, development and marketing of Cultureboard, and mobile app reviews.

Aside from a honest and critical look at the effects that technology pose on the world of art and authentic engagement, I am also interested in activist art, and the ways it can lead to social change. This year, artist Melissa Brooke DeHart approached me requesting my assistance in the development, marketing and promotion efforts of her latest project called Stripped Strong. The basis of the project is to take mostly women (but also some men) who have had issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in their past. The idea is to take one sentence from their story, most often something that had been said to them from their abuser, and paint the phrase on their bodies. Next, DeHart will take photos of the models with their message, but also take photos of the models as the wash away the phrase. Lastly, DeHart will take photos of the models as they stand strong, having been symbolically cleansed the the hurtful words that they have carried inside of them from the past. The idea of this project is to break the social taboos of assault and rape culture, as well as offer a level of personal and individual healing to the participants.

This project has already encountered some resistance, with many observers interjecting their opinions on the project, demeaning its validity. DeHart feels strongly about the message that this project will send, not only to observers and viewers, but to all victims of assault that it is possible to stand strong in the face of tragic events. Furthermore, it is also possible to do so in a symbolic and empowering way. I, too, feel that DeHart's project has a powerful message, and am excited at the prospect of participating in any form that I can. Which for me, also raises the question of how do

activist projects gain exposure, and how can one tactfully market a project that has already been met with a high level of dismissal and resistance from certain demographics? This also leads to other questions about the feminist movement, and how to promote women in the arts in a respectful and powerful manner?

Roya Amirsoleymani in 2013 wrote her capstone on *Planning for Public Participation and Community Engagement in Contemporary Feminist Art Programs*. In her capstone, she addresses the lack of feminist critique in arts administration by case study analyses on two active feminist art programs in the United States, as well as “assessing potential impact of that research on current or future programs that seek to advance art and feminism” (Amirsoleymani, p. 5). Amirsoleymani’s research methods and approaches include an in-depth literature review of both past and present feminist art programs, and takes into consideration elements that have affected participation.

Both Parker and Amirsoleymani have exhibited very thorough and detailed studies of the two areas of my own personal interests. I did find it interesting (i.e. amusing) to see the different projects presented over the years in terms of technology, and how much they have changed since the start of the AAD program. I do find that Parker’s research efforts are much more in line with my own personal interests, as some of the older research projects are now rendered virtually obsolete due to the pace of technology. I also found it interesting that in 18 years of terminal research projects that Amirsoleymani’s capstone is the only project that addresses the lack of the feminist art programming. I look forward to developing both of my personal interests, and seeing which topic I can research that may benefit the art community as a whole.

References

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