Criticism 2.0?

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- 1 If the afflatus of computers has marked the activities of archivists, as we are reminded in this issue¹ about the founding of the Archives de la critique d'art (ACA) in 1989, the development of computer technology, and data-processing, has also transformed the practice of art criticism and the activities of authors. From scratching out to the [delete] key, from scraps of paper to copy-and-paste, from linear scripting progression between drafts and occasional notes to cumulative and layered composition, authors have learned new private uses, first with enthusiasm or despite themselves, then as a native condition of the written word, faced with the instant display of text composed on an illuminated screen. Then they were swiftly connected, nurtured by and nurturing the online world, heading towards a new fortune for criticism—for want of their own fortune! The renewal of publishing habits has both delighted and worried people. They have been celebrated and hated. But this renewal now represents an extremely stimulating challenge for readers and for authors, in all the immediacy, dense versatility and stealthiness of the Internet. If publishing and reading online open up various areas to critical discourse, what about writing methods, languages and figures of thought, and notional equipment?
- 2 For it is important to reckon with these “new media”, whose legitimate aim has now reached a form of maturity. The Internet has been widely imposed as a source for the dissemination of and information about artists' activities. Be it artists' personal websites, the so-called “social media”, platforms of connivance, formed around coherences: geographical and generational, or involving media and types of discourse —, sites displaying institutional programming, or, better still, research centres like those at the Tate Gallery and New York's MoMA, and online versions often duplicating paper press media—specialized or otherwise—, their frequentation is part of an equipment that is vital for writing, with imagery being added to the other forms of knowledge on a level of shared availability, even to the point of deceptive intoxication, and visual nausea. In this busy context, there emerge specific forms of publication, for

which the critical requirement is not a mere heading but a far-reaching editorial requirement.

- 3 A selective and performative dynamic repertoire remains to be created and maintained for all these archive-related dreams, by bringing together, in all their diversity, the experiences and practices of critics, one more task for the ACA, and performative an international one. With the large number of online consultations, *Critique d'art's* reviews, in their meta-critical brief, are already fuelling the tight relation between traditional publishing and reference-based reading methods, introducing notices in the long term, while remaining underpinned by the topicality of publications, and the timetable of the paper review.² In the benchmark-free time-frame of electronic availability, the periodicity attaching to material production—a sole publication date for books, a clear pace, from the day-to-day to the annual for the press—remains a key for bibliographical indexing. But it is often lacking in online production, at the risk of becoming fragile. Publishing is an event that contributes to the relevance of content, and its critical moment. So the calendrical continuity principle of the blog is often valuable, as a principle for hierarchizing contents. Often underwritten by personal involvement, it does not always manage to impose a regular inspiration. But this is what permits Elisabeth Lebovici's effervescent blog,³ among those constructing an approach conducted with an historical and theoretical exigency combined with personal commitment. Lunettes Rouges,⁴ which is much closer to a practice of reporting, gives voice to an 'I' belonging to the art lover, with a sustained publication rhythm. If the truth be told, when the large number of projects is specialized, they mix, to a point of confusion, communications about events, timetables, and information about various forms of current commercial goings-on. It is not always easy, except by developing an albeit necessary attention, to give the task and even the deontology of publishers their proper due, along with institutional promotion and showcasing the work of foundations, public and private alike, be they commercial or not-for-profit. Depending on the titles, the online press allows for a legibility that is at times consistent with texts of serious criticism, like a choice made, even with regard to its title, for example, by the daily publication AOC (standing for Analysis/Opinion/Criticism),⁵ and, in quite different ways, and among so many others, *Slash*,⁶ with a very variable proportion of pages about art, based on a general publishing logic. Where the academic sphere is concerned, there are many platforms which underpin accessibility to university research work, a valuable stage, without any defined field other than academic disciplinary sharing, such as the highly useful OpenEdition portal.⁷ But this still leaves a whole publishing field that is closer to contemporary art, which is invented in relation to its base, associative, collective, or university-related. Since 1998, the e-flux artist-run project has stepped up its activities based on its information mailing list, enlarged in 2008 with *e-flux journal*⁸ and its hundred odd issues today, available both online and on paper, disseminating a consistent theoretical and critical literature. Based in New York, *Hyperallergic*⁹ associates journalistic reactivity and exigency over an expanded cultural field. In Canada, if Arttexte¹⁰ is involved in both the archival and production project, *Momus*¹¹ claims "a return to art criticism". L'Internationale Online¹² has espoused a more open and thematically mixed spirit of research akin to cultural studies. The goal of the ROSA B project,¹³ hailing from the Bordeaux School of Fine Arts, is to make the publishing wager "that the Web can bring into being a truly innovative critical writing, new ways of talking about contemporary art practices, and new ways of looking at art, too". If it passes muster in its style, it

nevertheless lacks the dynamics of a real periodical. From this far too offhand landscape, even just on the scale of France, there has emerged, over the past year, another publishing project of interest, both in the organization of its production and in the writing styles it has ushered in: this is *Switch (on Paper)*,¹⁴ which associates online press status with official press registration and attempts to use unusual publishing methods, for example under the heading “Agrégation” [Aggregation], echoing compilation practices used on the Internet.

- 4 It would require a lot more analysis to identify critical identities in this moving field, echoing transformed ways of reading. It nevertheless seems clear that, like art itself, the critical dimension is decisively fuelled by overlapping social and political, not to say militant and specifically feminist, domains and realities. Far from being transfixed in the well-marked field of an art criticism supported by disciplinary sharing, criticism has good reasons for laying claim to impurity as a kind of methodological wisdom. A happily ontological feature for art criticism!

NOTES

1. See in this issue of *Critique d'art*, “The ACA Adventure: a Thirty-year Commitment to Art Criticism”, p. 127.
2. <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart>
3. <https://le-beau-vice.blogspot.com>
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