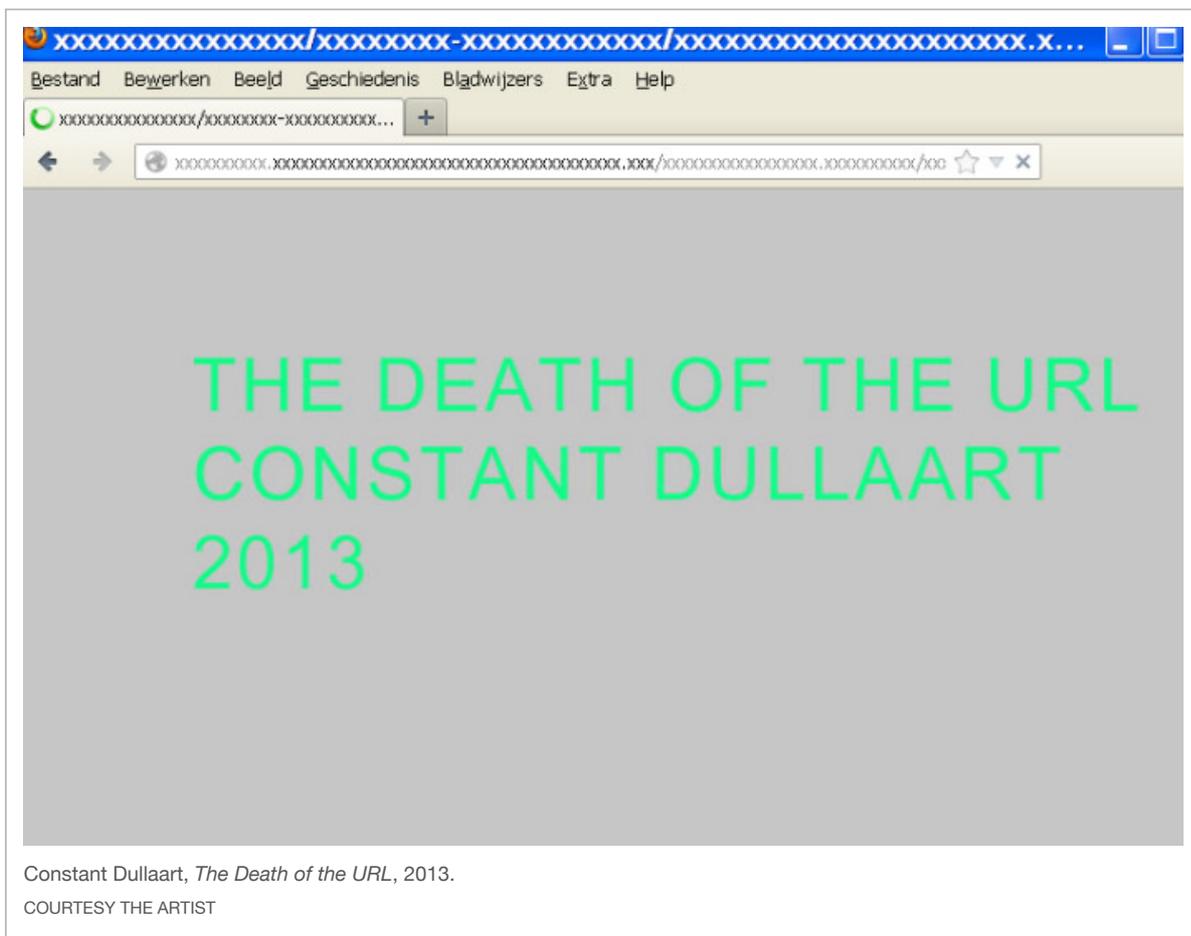


Alex Greenberger, "The Lulz Continue': The New Museum and Rhizome Co-Host the First Open Score Conference on Art and Technology', *ARTNEWS*, February 2016

# ARTNEWS

## 'THE LULZ CONTINUE': THE NEW MUSEUM AND RHIZOME CO-HOST THE FIRST OPEN SCORE CONFERENCE ON ART AND TECHNOLOGY

BY *Alex Greenberger* POSTED 02/02/16 2:27 PM



On Saturday afternoon, at the New Museum in New York, the artist Simon Denny was waiting for his slide to be projected. "It's a real honor to be speaking, and to be speaking first, but I will need the slide," Denny said, to the crowd's chagrin.

Denny was at a four-panel conference called Open Score: Art and Technology, and he was

one of the panelists set to talk about art in the digital age. “Jacob [Ciocci] also has a slide,” the poet Andrew Durbin, who was moderating the first panel, pointed out. No less than a few seconds later, Ciocci’s slide popped up behind Denny, and Ciocci became the first speaker of the day instead.

Open Score was named after a 1966 Robert Rauschenberg performance that involved a tennis match between Frank Stella and Mimi Kanarek. Anytime the ball made contact with one of their rackets, the sound was amplified, and one light in the stadium went out at a time until, ultimately, they were playing in darkness. But, as with the New Museum conference, there was a technical malfunction at the premiere of the performance: the lights weren’t turning off, but the audience never knew because the engineers shut off the lights manually. Although Rauschenberg’s *Open Score* continued on with a technical snafu, and despite being poorly received, it went down in art history, as an important event where art and newfangled technology merged.

Similarly, Open Score, co-organized by the New Museum and Rhizome, felt like a prelude to something great. In the weeks preceding the conference, anticipation mounted. Tickets for both of the afternoon’s events sold out weeks in advance; the panelists included notables like Juliana Huxtable, Jerry Saltz, Constant Dullaart, Kimberly Drew, and Cathy Park Hong. Naming the conference after the Rauschenberg performance wasn’t just a poetic touch—it was also a way of showing that this was, in fact, something historical. It never lived up to that (the last two panels were disorganized and hard to follow), but the second iteration of Open Score, scheduled for next year, may live up to its ambitions.

Anticipation ran high in the minutes before the conference. In the museum’s atrium, curator Massimiliano Gioni, the New Museum’s artistic director, chatted with visitors near stacks of *Mass Effect*, the recently released anthology of essays about art and the Internet co-edited by Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter. Meanwhile, downstairs in the auditorium, the art historian David Joselit was one of the first to arrive; Ben Davis and Trevor Paglen later joined the audience.

To kick off the first panel, about art and social media, Ciocci began with three quotes: one by himself, one by Kendall Jenner, and one from a Buddha sermon. “I think that what I’ve been trying to research with my art and my thinking is...a combination of self-love and self-hate

The first panel of Open Score, called “Generation You,” featured, from the left, Andrew Durbin, Simon Denny, Cathy Park Hong, Juliana Huxtable, and Jacob Ciocci.

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that happens when we use social media,” he said. “It’s something that I think has been going on society since the beginning of time. I think that, now, this is just a newer version of that, and maybe not that different of a version, that we’re trying to grapple with right now.”

All of the panelists emphasized that, despite how new social media is, there’s always history to contend with. Denny brought up issues of attribution—after seeing images in NSA documents leaked by Edward Snowden, he was able to find out who the artist was, thanks to LinkedIn. This became the inspiration for [his Venice Biennale pavilion](#) (representing his native New Zealand), which, he said, “also tried to underline the value of reading his work by presenting versions of it and of other work from the Snowden archive in a kind of beautiful Renaissance library that is, in itself, a kind of allegory for the value of knowledge.”

Poet Cathy Park Hong said that social media has built on the history of what language can do. Whereas in the past poetic language was deliberately oblique, now it has become clearer and more readily accessible. “If Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* was published today on the Internet, she would actually have very few Tumblr followers,” Hong said. “What’s actually happening online is what’s part of poetry... And what we’re seeing, at least in social media, is a demographic which has been ignored, is refusing to be ignored, and is speaking up and calling out.”

Juliana Huxtable, who is also a poet, concurred. In high school, Huxtable would rely on online communities to learn about black history. Now, when she tries to reach those same sites, she gets 404 errors—the URLs can no longer be reached. History has, in other words, been erased. “It’s difficult for me now because I’m dealing with questions of loss... while offering at the same time that social media is necessary. It’s so necessary, and it’s so omnipresent that it becomes difficult to deal with those questions on social media itself,” she concluded.

In the next panel, Ed Halter introduced four writers: *Art in America*’s Brian Droitcour, Black Contemporary Art’s Kimberly Drew, Laura McLean-Ferris, and *New York* magazine’s Jerry Saltz. Each was introduced by their number of social media followers. Only Saltz and Droitcour disputed the numbers, the latter because Constant Dullaart bought him Instagram followers as an art project. (Disclosure: these pages are owned by the same company as *Art in America*.)

“On Twitter, you have 7,179 followers,” Halter, who cofounded the Brooklyn film and art venue Light Industry, told Saltz.

“No, it’s 71,000!” Saltz protested.

“I don’t think I’ve memorized your statistics as much as you obviously have,” Halter said, drawing “oohs” from the crowd.



The second panel of Open Score, called “Liking and Critiquing,” featured, from the left, Brian Droitcour, Kimberly Drew, Laura McLean-Ferris, and Jerry Saltz.

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Saltz feigned being offended and then responded to a question about whether his social media was an extension of his criticism. He answered, “One day, for no reason, instead of writing what the weather was, I wrote [on Facebook], ‘I really don’t like Marlene Dumas’s current show at David Zwirner’... I had 10,000 new assholes torn for me in the first hour... I wrote a really positive review of Kara Walker. In that review, I happen to mention I love that big sugar thing she did out there in Brooklyn so much that I thought it should be made into a big parade float and brought back and forth across America for 10 years. I was really attacked for that. Everybody said, ‘You haven’t respected her well enough. You’re dissing her.’ I was called a racist over and over, a lot of letters written about it. And luckily, Kara Walker comes on my damn whatever it was, and said, ‘I like it,’ but that didn’t really stop it. And it happens a lot, let

me just tell you, but that’s okay. I’m sort of wandering because I don’t really know what the question is.”

Unlike Saltz, McLean-Ferris is concerned that people are becoming less opinionated because of increased visibility online. “Critics, artists, and curators share a space all the time and have some understanding of who is friends with who and so on,” she said. “That means that negative criticism becomes a little bit more fraught.”

Be that as it may, Drew refuses to weaken her strong opinions online. She explained that, in 2011, she started her Tumblr blog Black Contemporary Art to learn more about art history. She was hesitant to make any strong statements then, but now, following the blog's fifth anniversary, "I feel a little bit more confident about developing my own voice. But I do always, just being a black woman in the art world, think about the way my tone is policed constantly... Now that I've actually started developing my voice and tell people what I think, everyone's like, 'Oh, Kim, the activist.' I'm not an activist! I center on my identity, and I respond to the things I see. It's simple. It's just an observation."

Turning his attention to Droitcour, Halter focused on airing opinions online versus offline. He brought up Droitcour's Yelp project, in which the writer rated art spaces on a star system and wrote short reviews as institutional critique. (Droitcour, who wore a sash to prove that he was Yelp Elite, got into an onstage spat with Halter over his two-star review of Light Industry.) "So much of art writing is just kind of affirming these structures of power that already exist or are already givens," Droitcour said. "I was making an analogy between that and the user, who is affirming the existence of things like Yelp and Facebook just by writing all of this text for no compensation."

The panel got tenser as it went on. Halter brought up listicles—were these valid forms of art criticism? And then Saltz and Drew turned the question back on Halter—was he being elitist for not thinking they were art criticism? The crowd howled and clapped as Halter tried to maintain some sense of order.

After a break, Lauren Cornell, the New Museum curator, introduced the third panel, which was themed around surveillance technology. There was Simone Browne, who writes about blackness and surveillance; Adrian Chen, who writes for the *New Yorker* about online communities; and Rob Horning, who writes for the *New Inquiry*. The only person explicitly connected with the art world was Emily Segal, a cofounder of the art-inflected trend-forecasting and marketing group K-HOLE.

Browne began by discussing how to historicize surveillance technology in relation to blackness. "Surveillance is nothing new to black folks," she said, referring to laws intended to keep close watch over slaves in 18th-century America. Very little has changed with the Internet. She mentioned Mendi + Keith Obadike's *Blackness for Sale*, in which the artists auctioned blackness on eBay. (This, as I overheard Drew lament, was one of the few works by a person of color mentioned at Open Score.)

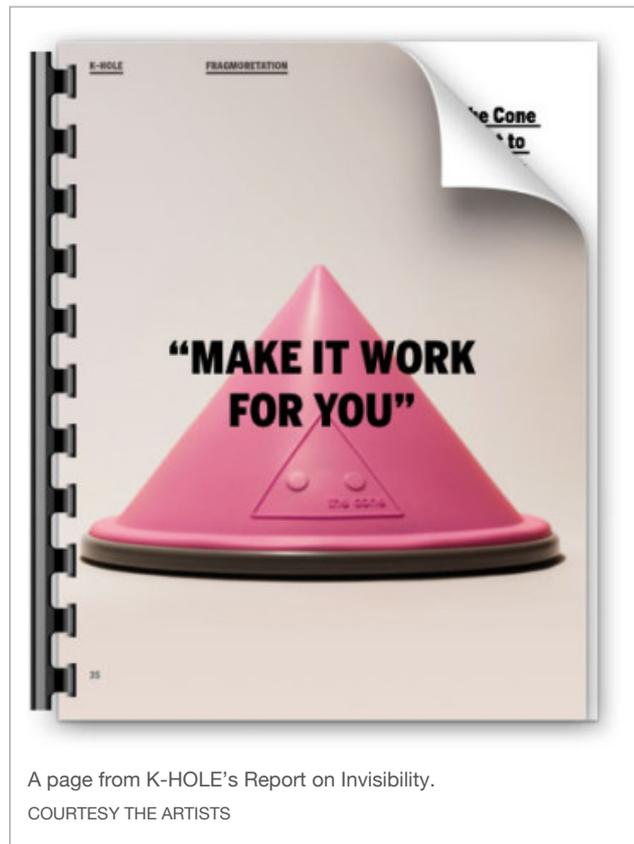
The other three panelists discussed visibility and anonymity. Chen described how Internet subcultures use their anonymity to “shirk bad behavior,” while Horning, who admitted to not really knowing about art, spoke about surveillance’s impact on our daily actions. Segal mentioned K-HOLE’s concept of “Stealth Mode,” a form of dark-arts magic in which a person becomes so technologically backward that they can’t be seen online. Stealth Mode is only for people who are “powerful enough not to be connected,” like Anna Wintour, who has a flip-phone and remains Twitterless.

It was around this time that Orit Gat, a contributing editor at Rhizome, was tweeting with the hashtag #OpenScore. Cornell looked at her iPhone, scrolled through it, and announced to the audience, “There’s an active Twitter discussion happening. I don’t know if Orit Gat is in the room, but she’s Twittering. Orit, do you want to ask your question IRL?”

“If you’re going to say it online!” Gat said. She stood up and said she likes Trevor Paglen and Zach Blas, but was it enough for them to just visualize surveillance technology we couldn’t ordinarily see?

“I don’t know if I can gloss what you said any better than what you said,” Horning noted. “We need something different, but I don’t know what it is.”

It then became the job of the fourth panel to discuss the future of Internet-based art. Anyone hoping for an easy answer wasn’t going to get it. Michael Connor, Rhizome’s artistic director and the panel’s moderator, began by discarding the word “Internet.” That was a dated term, he explained—we know it doesn’t mean what it used to. In other words, the Internet’s future is uncertain.





The last panel of Open Score, called “The Future of Internet Art,” featured, from left, Michael Connor, Shawné Michaelain Holloway, Colin Self, Peter J. Russo, and Constant Dullaart.

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Likewise for the art that lives on it. When asked to talk about her art, Shawné Michaelain Holloway chose not to show a picture of it. (She became famous for being a Camgirl—she made videos of herself in sexual situations that she uploaded to Vimeo.) Instead, she projected an image of a blank Safari browser. “It’s not a picture of my work, but where I work,” she explained. In her work, her question originally was, “So where could I exist in a browser?” Now the question is, “Where can I gain power, but also, what kind of powers are imposed upon me?”

Colin Self has used the Internet as a space for community-building, to democratize the art world and the LGBTQ scene. This has, in the past, meant everything from making Facebook groups to connect artists, to simply creating a Google Doc to offer tips for how to survive a New York winter.

“I’m trying to think about what would be bad about sharing information about wellness,” he said, “but I can’t.”

Peter Russo, the director of the online-only magazine Triple Canopy, said that he wants to open up the Internet as a space for collaboration. He referred to the Internet today as “a digital dark age, or at least that’s how we’ll look at it from the future.” Archiving, he explained, becomes a major challenge for the upcoming years.

Constant Dullaart, meanwhile, drew lines between the past, the present, and the future. Presenting an image of a faux start-up company he funded through Kickstarter, Dullaart said that art about the Internet is hardly dead—there are still plenty of unresolved digital issues about reality versus non-reality, authorship, economics, and politics. “The lulz continue,” he said, “and the lulz can be art. That’s all I’m saying.”

**CORRECTION 02/02/2016, 3:27 p.m.:** *An earlier version of this article misstated the history of Robert Rauschenberg's Open Score. The performance did occur with technical malfunctions, but it never had more successful, more technically seamless follow-up. The second performance, like its first, was poorly received. The post has been updated to reflect*

*this.*

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