Voices From Every Angle: An Experiment in Documenting Contemporary Art

Colin Post
University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Project Overview

- **Goal:** document two UNC MFA student thesis exhibitions
  - Both were performance events with complex, interactive installations
- **Strategy:** Interview both artists and attendees of the exhibitions
  - Create a dynamic record of the creation and reception of the exhibition
Difficulties Documenting Contemporary Art

- **Complexity**: artworks may be composed of many parts in a variety of media
- **Interactivity**: artworks may involve participation and manipulation from audience
- **Experiential Qualities**: the artwork is a lived experience through space and time, not a static object
- **Obsolescence**: components of the artwork may be difficult to replicate in future installations of the piece
Installation View
Artist Interview

● Drawing on methods from art history
● Serves many documentation purposes
  ○ Captures artist’s creative process, intentions, and the development of artwork from conception to completion
  ○ Inventory of components making up the artwork
  ○ Overall, this documents the artist’s perspective on the artwork
● Informed me about what to focus on in audience interviews
Installation View
Audience Interview Guide

- A set of 5 questions to loosely structure audience interviews
- Customized for the specific exhibition and informed by what I learned from the artist interview
- Designed to capture many levels of the experience
  - Descriptive
  - Affective response
  - Evaluative and speculative
Installation View
Conducting Audience Interviews

- Decide how to best embed myself in exhibition
  - When and how to approach attendees
  - Minimizing obtrusiveness of observer
  - Needed to work closely with artist so that interviewer is integrated into exhibition
Takeaways

- Overall, very positive response from both artists and audience members
- Importance of collaborating closely with artists throughout the process
- Demonstrates powerful role interviews can play in documenting contemporary art
- Potential for artists, archivists, curators, and museum professionals to develop documentation strategies for contemporary art
Resources

● Variable Media Network: http://variablemedia.net/
● Daniel Langlois Foundation: http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/
● Re-Collection by Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito
● Learning from Artists’ Archives: http://artiststudioarchives.org/