Book Review: "Online Evaluation of Creativity and the Arts" by Hiesun Cecilia Suhr (ed.)

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This book ambitiously sets out to give an overview of the potential, as well as the limitations and challenges, of 'online evaluation cultures' in eight chapters focusing on 'creativity and the arts'. In the introduction the author and contributing author Hiesun Cecilia Suhr outlines the motivation and scope of the book and also argues that for artists building a reputation – built on evaluation and judgment – is of economic importance. Because digital environments help build such a reputation, she continues, there needs to be interdisciplinary understanding of these digital environments with regard to their 'evaluation cultures'. The collection includes diverse contributions covering the 'different creative fields' of visual art, music, photography, makeup tutorials, design, fashion blogging, reputation ranking and game design. In an attempt to unite the different chapters, the introduction identifies five distinct dimensions that are related to online evaluation, on the grounds that all chapters 'intersect with at least one of the five aspects'.

The first of these aspects is linked to the materiality of the medium and its role in the modalities of communication-evaluation practice. Joseph Reagle's chapter about one particular online gallery might be seen to fit within this particular aspect. Reagle's contribution is an interesting account of how an online user community assesses the potential implications of different possible technical implementations of a rating system for pictures. Limitations of the current standard solutions for online evaluations – 'liking' and commenting – for nuanced feedback and evaluation are repeated assertions throughout the book and this is most apparent in the chapters about visual arts and online music contests. Linda Vigor's pertinent examination of art studio critique sessions and its comparison to the feedback that is enabled by online visual art websites demonstrates that different settings influence the nature of feedback beyond explicit divergent rules and instructions. While music contests are nothing new, according to Suhr the nature and process of an online-based contest may impact profoundly on the way that the music is evaluated. Another example, given by Ramon Reichert, are YouTube makeup tutorials which, through by their online format and the characteristics that come with it, he says blur classic conceptions of production and reception.

The second and third aspects used to unite the work presented are social dimension and power and politics respectively. Evaluation, in any given form, is not only a matter of individual taste but also one of social convention, which can, of course, be both explicit and implicit. In her compelling contribution about fashion bloggers, Brooke Erin Duffy makes a thorough examination of social norms and their enactment within a specific online community of practice. Of particular interest – and reminiscent of the first aspect – is her depiction of how some of these norms are entangled with the technological specificity of blogging where links, comments and 'likes' are not only a means to express feedback, but also a way to augment a website's reputation and economic status. Helen Kennedy broaches power and politics in her contribution, through a nuanced account of anti-spec movements and their importance for rejecting non-compensated design competitions and spec work. Spec, or speculative, work describes the potentially unpaid labour solicited by such design competitions where compensated work has become the prize. In providing a closer look at this topic, her chapter shows how different discourses about spec work reflect powerful social dynamics. Notably, spec work also overlaps with the fourth aspect identified in the introduction as related to online evaluation; tension 'between creativity and the commercial market'. Kennedy outlines how the tendency to glorify the 'amateur culture' contributes to a legitimization of spec work which, in turn, increases the precarity of creative work and undermines the ethics of professional creative labour.

Evaluation as learning opportunity is identified as the fifth aspect related to online evaluation. While a running thread throughout the work, this approach is most explicitly examined in the chapters concerning visual art and spec work. Vigor's research on critique in the visual arts explains how cognitive and structural components intersect and impact the possible level of learning that can be derived from any evaluation. Online spec work, as illustrated in Kennedy's chapter, inhibits the learning process that is indispensable to professional design work. The same aspect, however, also appears in another light, because obviously other contexts result in participants appreciating online-based

evaluation for the learning opportunity it provides, as is highlighted in Trammell's contribution on online board game design forums. In fashion blogging, it is the participants' hope of learning something that comes to form a large part of their motivation.

The five aspects highlighted above are very different in nature. Some relate clearly to the declared topic of the book, whereas others are generic analytical dimensions of human practice and representations. Using a mixture of central aspects in this way makes for an interestingly broad perspective, as does the wide range of topics addressed. The breadth of topics here might serve as exploratory groundwork for further addressing complex issues such as evaluative processes in digital environments. Indeed, Suhr takes the opportunity to call for interdisciplinarity and non-binary modes of inquiry in her contribution to this ambitious book.

One might, however, also argue that instead of giving an overview, the large scope of the work results in a volume where it is hard to see an obvious relationship between the various contributions. Because several contributions broaden the basic concepts to which the book is addressed even further, be it evaluation or creativity, it can be quite hard to grasp its scope. Alessandro Gandini's pertinent study 'Critique on Klout', for example, is a discussion of whether social media metrics of influence are correlated to offline networks. Admittedly this is of 'freelance creatives', but it strays a long way from addressing creativity and the arts.

In conclusion, while appreciating the breadth of study, this reviewer became confused in the mix of chapters thematizing evaluation *of* an online practice and chapters focusing on online evaluation *as* a practice. The distinction of these is, unfortunately, not well made for the reader and the use of the five aspects in attempting to categorize the work does not achieve this. While I cannot recommend the book as a coherent volume on digital evaluation of creative and artistic practices, there are individual chapters that have merit and the breadth of the work might be useful for the exploration of the different topics addressed going forward.