

Choices to be made at the crossroads

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Some possibilities of form

Exhibition: Gallery; Non-Gallery.

Video: Documentary; Fiction; Unedited film recording.

Audio: Documentary; Music; Soundwork; Unedited audio recording.

Photograph: Documentary; Fiction; Unedited recording.

Text: Reportage; Fiction; Experimental.

Performance: Predetermined; Spontaneous.

Virtual Media: Web-Based; Computer-Based.

Interactive Media: Electronic; Hypertextual.

Non-Works: Non-Works.

Back then

I went down to the crossroad

fell down on my knees

I went down to the crossroad

fell down on my knees

Asked the lord above "Have mercy now

save poor Bob if you please"

Yeeooo, standin at the crossroad

tried to flag a ride

ooo ooo eee

I tried to flag a ride

Didn't nobody seem to know me babe

everybody pass me by

Robert Johnson. Cross Road Blues (1936)

There is danger at the crossroads, looking both ways will not help out, just when you think it is safe to cross over, some speeding vehicle will appear out of nowhere and sweep you off your feet. Your accident will not kill you, at this crossroads there are no fatalities, just confusion, disorientation and desperate claims of understanding. But this is time to play 'chicken' at the crossroads, to take chances with more than boasts of being radical.

The crossroads has always been a place of change, Robert Johnson is supposed to have made his diabolical exchange there: his soul for mastery of the guitar. The meeting point of traffic, the boundary line where the familiar meets the unknown, where what is valued is handed over for what is desired. Nothing is given easily in this transaction, both parties know what is precious to the other, and there is little call to give quarter in the negotiations.

Artistic research is reaching that point of understanding, and is begrudgingly coming to terms with the realisation that something will have to be lost in this quest for new meaning. The truth is worming its way out of the proverbial woodwork: It is not known what art is, or what it is supposed to do; the means to make claims of what is good or bad has left artists with more doubts than assurances; leaving words as the release valve of an overheated cultural escapade over-reliant on pre-specified context for satisfaction.

If the Emperor is truly naked, it may not be a bad start for him to develop his basic physique so that he can stand proud before those laughing at him, even in his nakedness. Attempting to clothe the naked emperor in words will only make the spectacle all the more hilarious. One poor tale built on another can only head towards absurdity, and while much can be learnt in moments of insanity, it is the ability to decipher material that leads to knowledge.

We may have the adventurous pleasure of being at an intersection of two (or more) roads, where an obligation of choice weighs heavily. Points at which crucial decisions can be made that will have far-reaching consequences on the nature of visual culture are exciting, they are however quite onerous.

Standin at the crossroad babe
risin sun goin down
Standin at the crossroad babe
eee eee eee, risin sun goin down
I believe to my soul now,
Poor Bob is sinkin down

Robert Johnson. Cross Road Blues (1936)

Let us end by envisioning a major speedway, let us call it the VA1 (named after the great Visual Arts who set about producing craved objects). It is a circular highway filled with

wonderful ideas, objects and vehicles to convey them in. It is a fast road, and whilst things travel in opposing directions at high speed on this road, there has never been much need to get off and mingle. Somewhat self-sufficient, it is expected that all that is needed will be pulled in by the traffic's far-reaching slipstream. As this often seems to be the case, the feelings that all is well on the road seems appropriate. This is not because there is no interest in things outside this multi-lane road, it is just that everything seems to get onto the road, it is then quickly appropriated, absorbed, and simply stays on.

Another road, this one can be called CT1, (named after the great Critical Theory who set about producing words to explain why and which objects should be craved). is equally circular, busy and self-centred. It runs perpendicular to the first. It too generates absorbing forces and seems able to sustain itself.

VA1 and CT1 meet at one crossroads, (Imagine a twisted figure 8 or two links in a chain.) in mutual self-assurance, traffic on either road does not stop or slow down as they approach the junction. There is constant collision, bits from each speedway ends up on the road, ground into the earth, pulled along under the vehicles' wheels into their orbit of influence.

It is the debris, the messy configurations, that is being addressed here. It is the uncomfortable exchange, the search for mastery at all costs. transactions with sworn enemies, it is the fear of the new, the need to acknowledge failure.

Robert Johnson is right, there is nowhere to run to. The answer is bound up in what we are willing to give up what others may chastise us for parting with. We may get what we want, but when we do this, we may find ourselves bereft and alone.

You can run, you can run
tell my friend Willie Brown
You can run, you can run
tell my friend Willie Brown
(th)'at I got the crossroad blues this mornin Lord
babe, I'm sinkin down

And I went to the crossroad momma
I looked east and west
I went to the crossroad baby
I looked east and west

Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman
ooh-well babe, in my distress

Robert Johnson. Cross Road Blues (1936)

Rationalisations of form

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