

Who Cares Who Sees? (SECAC 2010 Richmond VA)

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CFP: SECAC Session on Contemporary Art

Who Cares Who Sees?

The Problem of Audience in Contemporary Art

Panel at the Southeastern College Art Conference (SECAC 2010)

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In his famous discussion of the "Death of the Author" (1967) Roland Barthes sealed the fate of authorial intention as the locus of artistic meaning. Literary critics, Barthes argued, were driven by the mistaken desire to "assign a 'secret' ultimate meaning" to a text. But because "We can never know" for certain what an author meant, it followed for Barthes that the only meaning we could know was how something was understood by its readers and viewers.

To tie a work to a single author was, Barthes insisted, to "impose a limit on that text." When the text was rid of its author, meaning became open-ended. So what began as skepticism of authorial meaning ends in the liberation of meanings. Barthes reasoned that the unity of the text was not at its origin the author--"but in its destination"--the audience.

This session aims to analyze this largely held assumption about the death of the author and the birth of the audience. Although this view has held ground for nearly fifty years, does it make sense? Papers will revisit the history of intention and anti-intentionalism, and ask whether, and how, the viewer of a work is relevant to its meaning.

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Reference:

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