Innovation and its Contestants (Montreal, 18 Apr 14)

Montreal, QC, Apr 18, 2014
Deadline: Jan 24, 2014
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Call for Proposals

INNOVATION AND ITS CONTESTANTS

5th Annual Emerging Scholars Conference
McGill University
Department of Art History and Communications Studies

Keynote Speaker: Keith Moxey, Barbara Novak Professor of Art History and Department Chair at Barnard College (Columbia University)

Deadline for Submissions: 24 January 2014

The concept of innovation buttresses a paradigmatically modern Western belief in the possibility of infinite economic growth and technological progress. It is in fact a buzzword with remarkable contemporary currency, one that is instrumentalized as a constant search for new technologies, means of production, market adaptations, scientific discoveries and social changes. As a fundamental tenet in Western systems of thought, it is also – and has long been – inscribed within the West's very view of itself as more successful and more 'progressive' than other societies. Note, for example, G.W.F. Hegel's famous juxtaposition of Europe's ever- changing art against the allegedly stagnant visual culture of India: the first modality accounted for the privileged position of the West as the locus of the emanation of universal Geist; while the latter stipulated an essentially 'un-progressive' timelessness in India.

The Western valuation and definition of innovation has thereby been mobilized as a justification for diverse colonial, post-colonial and now neoliberal enterprises. It operates as a smoke screen to preserve dominant power regimes both within the West and globally, concealing simultaneously the biased valuation of cultural production, and the unequal distribution of technological and scientific headway among diverse social strata. This is the case even as the current global financial crisis challenges the West's ability to regenerate perpetually. In fact, the stakes involved in the Western impetus to innovate seem to intensify even as recent projections of economic acceleration in several non-Western countries rouse fears that the West is losing ground as innovation's main stimulant.

The innovation paradigm is moreover implicit within the bulk of humanistic academic production.

As a case in point, the Greenbergian approach to art history, which dominated much of the twentieth century, revolves indisputably around a teleology of formal innovation. Meanwhile, within a number of current academic discussions – for instance those concerning experimentation and invention in the history of science (Galison); global art history (Elkins); visual culture studies (Moxey); history of ideas (Godin); the philosophy of mondialisation (Nancy); media archaeology (Parikka); technological obsolescence (Kittler); and the aesthetics of failure (Halberstam) – innovation is tacitly treated with caution, if not skepticism.

Given this tangle of collusions and complexities, how are we to approach and define innovation in academic discourse? Is the paradigm purely a means of disarming social pressure for an all-inclusive equalized prosperity; or might it be recuperated to provide a stimulus for sustainable growth? Can we understand innovation in a broader global spectrum without falling into the trap of cultural essentialism; or does this concept perpetuate Western-centric views and mores? Can the concept of innovation be used for the analysis of historical periods; or does it figure too easily in teleological narratives?

With these questions in mind, we are opening an enquiry into the concept of innovation. We invite paper proposals addressing a broad range of academic disciplines and historical periods. Papers might address, but are by no means restricted to, the following questions:
• Socio-economic implications of innovation. How do societies and specific agents adapt to new conditions once their old ways of life have been destroyed?
• The politics of innovation. Does innovation bring betterment or deprivation?
• What are the criteria of innovation?
• Challenging the Western canon of art built on the notions of style, progress, and originality
• Technological progress
• Patents
• Is Western-centrism pervasive in the concept of innovation?
• How does innovation affect personal identities (video games, Facebook, etc.)?
• How is innovation different from change?
• The contestations of innovation; the discursive counterpoints to innovation
• Centre vs. periphery; milieus of innovation
• Instances of anachronism masked as innovation in culture from the Middle Ages to the present day. Recurring regimes: the old in the new, the new in the old
• Does materiality matter in innovation?
• Temporality and innovation
• Commodity culture and innovation

We welcome proposals for 20-minute presentations. Please send your submission in the form of a 300-word abstract and a brief CV to ahcsconference@gmail.com. All candidates will be contacted by the first week of February.

For more information, please refer to the conference website (http://ahcsconference.wordpress.com/) or contact ahcsconference@gmail.com.

Reference:

CFP: Innovation and its Contestants (Montreal, 18 Apr 14). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 9, 2014 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/6713>.