Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog » Blog Archive » Errol Morris Understands What Academic Blogging Could Be

I've been catching up with some reading over break—reading both online and off, despite the NEA's recent dismissal[1] of the former. And nothing dismisses the NEA's dismissal of online writing as lesser than print better than the destined-to-be-a-classic series of blog posts by Errol Morris in the New York Times, "Which Came First?"[2] Better written than most novels, more insightful than most academic articles, and more of a (virtual) page-turner than most mysteries, you should do yourself a favor and read the entire series (go ahead, print it out if you must, it's long), and subscribe to Morris's blog[3] while you're at it.

"Which Came First" begins with Morris simply trying to figure out which of two stark and riveting Crimean War photographs by Roger Fenton was taken first—the one with cannonballs strewn across a deserted road or the one with the cannonballs clustered to the side. But the series of blog posts quickly devolves into a discussion and debate about truth in photography and history. Along the way we get pointers about the nature of sunlight, warfare, and Photoshop.

Beyond the series itself, I was impressed by Morris's conversion to blogging during the writing of the series. (Before "Which Came First?" he only blogged sporadically.) Morris began to realize that open access to his writing online led not only to a large and engaged audience, but also to critical feedback from readers. Some of the reader comments are as shrewd as Morris's narrative.

I'm at work on a longish series of blog posts of my own tentatively entitled "The Tyranny of the Monograph," building on my original call for professors to blog[4]. Morris's conclusion fits with the spirit of my series and with the need to think of new ways of academic publishing in a

digital age:

> A number of readers have claimed that I am not producing a blog—that I am producing a series of essays. Nomenclature aside, the idea of publishing the responses of readers to a given text (and even to including an author's responses to those responses) goes back at least to the 17th century…So what is going on here? I believe it should appropriately be called…"Cartesian Blogging."

This entry was posted on Tuesday, January 1st, 2008 at 5:20 pm and is filed under Academia[5], Blogs[6]. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0[7] feed. You can leave a response[8], or trackback[9] from your own site.

References

1. ^ NEA's recent dismissal (www.nea.gov)
2. ^ "Which Came First?" (morris.blogs.nytimes.com)
3. ^ Morris's blog (morris.blogs.nytimes.com)
4. ^ my original call for professors to blog (www.dancohen.org)
5. ^ View all posts in Academia (www.dancohen.org)
6. ^ View all posts in Blogs (www.dancohen.org)
7. ^ RSS 2.0 (www.dancohen.org)
8. ^ leave a response (www.dancohen.org)
9. ^ trackback (www.dancohen.org)

Excerpted from *Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog » Blog Archive » Errol Morris Understands What Academic Blogging Could Be*

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http://lab.arc90.com/experiments/readability