

# About Writing Online: Questions from Creative Capital

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May 11, 2016

While Circulation/Exchange is about photography and art in an age of social media, it is also about my looking for new ways to write and publish as an academic. Writing the essays here over the past six months has been a rewarding departure from the kind of prose I'd gotten used to through fifteen+ years of academic papers, submitting journal articles for peer-review, and publishing a book with a university press.

This site and the kind of experimenting it has allowed me is made possible, in large part, by an [Arts Writers Grant](#). I am hugely grateful to that program, [Creative Capital](#), and the [Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts](#) for supporting writing in the arts in this way. Their application's description of the kind of writing they want to see and support struck a chord with me when I first applied and is well worth citing in full (not to mention reciting as a daily reminder):

*Through all its grants, regardless of topic or project type, the Arts Writers Grant Program aims to honor and encourage writing about art:*

- *that is rigorous, passionate, eloquent, and precise;*
- *in which a keen engagement with the present is infused with an appreciation of the historical;*
- *that is neither afraid to take a stand nor content to deliver authoritative pronouncements, but serves rather to pose questions and generate new possibilities for thinking about, seeing, and making art;*
- *that is sensitive to both the importance and difficulty of situating aesthetic objects within their broader social and political contexts;*
- *that does not dilute or sidestep complex ideas but renders accessible their meaning and value;*
- *that creatively challenges the limits of existing conventions without valorizing novelty as an end in itself.*

Applications for the 2016 grant cycle are now open, but close May 18. I hope some of my peers will apply, and I look forward to seeing what new digital arts writing and publishing projects might come out from this initiative in the future.

Last month, Alex Teplitzky at Creative Capital began a series of interviews with 2014 and 2015 grantees in the blog category. You can read all of the interviewees answers, arranged by question, over at Creative Capital's blog, The Lab. My set of answers to Alex's thought-provoking questions are also below.

**Alex: What was the first thing you did with your grant? And/Or: What was the most important way you've used your resources?**

Kate: The grant allowed me to take two semesters of sabbatical (instead of one) from my faculty position at the University of Arizona. It really went entirely to this, straight income replacement. So while the money was spent on pretty mundane things—like rent, groceries, and child care—what it really funded was those extra months of time without teaching or university service responsibilities that I wouldn't have had otherwise. The value of this is incalculable, and goes well beyond the parameters of what appears on Circulation/Exchange.

**Alex: What are some things you've learned about maintaining your own blog?**

Kate: One of the first things I learned was that it was harder than I expected to switch modes of writing, from footnoted academic journal articles to something that felt a little closer to talking, or giving a lecture. And I've had an even harder time writing anything less than about 1500 words, even though I think there is real value to expressing shorter thoughts. But old habits die hard, or evolution is slow, or something.

I'm using Jekyll to build the site, and GitHub to edit and host the content, and the process of getting here – rather than using a standard blogging site like Wordpress – has taught me something about the various options in online publishing, and also expanded my thinking about what a “blog” might mean (more on that in the next question). GitHub acts as a publicly accessible repository of any changes I make in the text after publishing. In that way, it's really different from a typical blog or publishing someplace like Medium (which I've also been experimenting with) because it preserves the original form of the piece as well as subsequent changes, if any. That kind of transparency has been interesting—if a little scary—to engage with. The site has also been configured to offer a downloadable pdf of the essays, which appeals to my material interests.

On a practical level, I've learned a little bit about things closer to the world of coding. Not coding itself, but I understand a little bit more about html and Markdown text mark-up. It's not a language I'm anywhere close to fluent in, but I'm more aware that it exists and that I can speak at least very modest versions of those languages.

I've also learned that the momentum really shifts from day to day or week to week, in terms of what I'm able to produce. But that's not so different than any other kind of writing.

**Alex: How has art blogging changed over the years? Do you see it as a sustainable media form?**

I think that calling something a blog used to mean something about community and direct engagement – blogs were a kind of public journal, a way to collect an ongoing assortment of thoughts and potentially build an online community of like-minded thinkers. But I didn't really read blogs when they were so popular in this way. That said there are several arts blogs I've read a lot of material in over the years – especially [greg.org](http://greg.org), [Modern Art Notes](#), which is now a [podcast](#), and [Conscientious](#), which is now a [magazine](#) – though actually none of those foster the kind of community that I think was both possible and desirable at one point. And, in fact, those three tend a bit toward the longer form essay or interview.

With that in mind, I don't think that calling something a blog is a particularly useful distinction anymore. I think more about the continuum of what we mean by a blog in relation to an online journal or a long form essay or any of the types of regular, sustained writing people do, especially on a defined topic, that lives and can be shared online. To me it's more about writing online at all, and what that means for an academic, in particular, to have that immediate, share-able, non-peer-reviewed result rather than the years-long process of academic publishing. There is a lot that I value about the academic model of publishing, including a really invested and knowledgeable (if extremely small) audience, the ways one can be pushed by a good peer review, and the thoroughness required in an academic conversation in terms of engaging directly with a long and rich history of sources, footnoting them, etc. On the other hand, that model also often produces an extremely insular form of writing that is generally only accessible to someone with a university library account and the time and interest to comb through the scholarly journals. I find that really limiting, particularly given the current topic of my research interests.

I've digressed a bit here from your question, but it allows me to articulate what I would like to see more of, which is the level of engagement, knowledge, and passion that I see from so many of my museum and academic colleagues, but that is so hidden from a wider audience, behind scholarly journal paywalls and within museum archives. I think that's something that the AWG in particular really helped me understand, and having that support

– the validation, I suppose – fuels my conviction that there could be a much more robust level of online and easily share-able conversation within the academic and museum communities and others who are so knowledgeable about art and also often such good writers.

So to circle back to the question you actually asked: I'm less interested in seeing blogs sustained as a distinct form (whatever one understands a "blog" to be) and more interested in seeing platforms evolve to attract, accommodate, and distribute a range of voices in arts writing that are not currently well represented online.

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Kate Palmer Albers, "About Writing Online: Questions from Creative Capital," in *Circulation|Exchange: Moving Images in Contemporary Art* (May 11, 2016). <http://circulationexchange.org/articles/aboutwritingonline.html>.

Any updates or corrections to this article made after May 11, 2016, are tracked in full in the GitHub repository for this project: [https://github.com/katepalbers/circ-exchg/commits/gh-pages/\\_posts/2016-05-11-aboutwritingonline.md](https://github.com/katepalbers/circ-exchg/commits/gh-pages/_posts/2016-05-11-aboutwritingonline.md)

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