

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

May 23, 2007

Why blog when you could be doing porn?

Filed under: [artists, on blogging, quotes](#) — alecsothblog @ 1:05 am

Yesterday came the question, "[Why did I think I needed a blog?](#)" Looking for an answer, my first Google search led to an evangelical bloggers [Top 50 Reasons to Blog](#). Here is one:

This is what I've called the 'Google Parable': Reciprocal linkage helps all the boats on the (search engine) river rise. Actually, Jesus said it first, "Love one another; prefer one another". But if we won't listen to Jesus, perhaps the new-paradigm giant will convince us. Networks of 'driven' Christians can impact society more than individuals or self-serving churches.

But I'm not sure that either Jesus or the 'new-paradigm giant' is the right answer for me.

Next I turned to the Washington Post. In an article entitled [Bloggers on the Reasons Behind Their Daily Words](#), this fellow was quoted:

Having lived with the same woman for nearly 20 years and learning from her that nothing I had to say was *ever* right, I discovered early that things worked best between us if I would just keep my mouth shut. Well, one can only imagine what it must have felt like after the kids were grown and we finally parted company. I could actually begin to write and speak my mind without the slightest fear of reprisal or being made to feel like an idiot. I understood what the freedom to speech was truly about.

That one doesn't quite work either. I'm not looking for my blog to replace my wife. But I guess it does fulfill a certain kind of social need. "We read about the Cedar Tavern, and it sounds so romantic," I said in [a recent interview with ArtKrush](#), "but what if you live in Minneapolis with two kids? The blog is as close as I get to the Cedar Tavern."

But the truth is that I can't blame Minneapolis and the two kids. I'll never forget going to one of the artist parties for the [2004 Whitney Biennial](#). I felt like I was in high school and had accidentally stumbled into the cool-kids party. I approached one well-established artist and introduced myself. She didn't even respond before turning around and walking away.

One of the artists at that party was [Zak Smith](#). We didn't talk much, but he actually seemed smart and nice. Since that time, we've both acquired new hobbies. I've started blogging and Zak has started doing porn.

Smith's motivation for his hobby doesn't seem too different from my own. "I'm living off my paintings and have been for years," he said in [a recent interview](#), "I'm involved in porn mostly because the social life of the art world is like living death."

Whatever you think about Zak Smith or his [Zak Sabbath](#) alter-ego, he is an engaging conversationalist. Read this exchange from a [fantastic interview](#) about Smith's book, *Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel Gravity's Rainbow*:

Terri Saul: Gravity's Rainbow is one of the most drug-ridden novels ever written. When considering your illustrations of it, I thought about Glenn Gould, a musician who experimented with both drugs and classical music. Do you ever use drugs while working?

Zak Smith: 1-Drugs are very popular among people who are interested in interesting things but are not themselves very interesting.

2-Drugs make your body do weird things—so they're interesting if you're in the performing arts.

3-Drugs make boring things seem interesting, so products created by people while they are on drugs are often really boring.

Glenn Gould is a pretty good example of all three of these propositions—his rendition of Webern's piano opus—(23 or 28?)—is amazing, but when he sits down and writes his own stuff, he's terrible and derivative.

What I do—and what most fine artists do—is not a performing art, so drugs just do to you what they do to everyone else: they make you suck and then waste everyone's time pretending you sucked for some non-drug reason.

I mean, in art school if there was some minimalist who made like a 2 by 4 except it was purposefully off by a quarter-inch and that was their art, you knew that guy was either on speed or a big pothead. When you look at all that crap conceptual art from the sixties and seventies—drugs.

Anyone with half an eyeball knows Victor Moscoso is obviously waaaaaaaay better than Andy Warhol—unless you're on LSD, in which case they're both exactly the same—green next to magenta, fuuuuuuck duuuuude. Then you sober up and have to defend how much you liked it and well, Andy's got some old photo of Jackie O in it so you pretend you like it because it was like socially relevant and shit and Victor Moscoso just has a cool picture of a dinosaur so you just pretend you never saw it.

Big muddy neo-expressionist art that looks exactly like every other big muddy painting anyone accidentally made ever? Cocaine.

The funny part is then the critics have to scramble back to their desks and write 80-page essays about why they think Andy Warhol is good that DON'T just say "Sorry, sorry, I was on drugs."

Terri Saul: Gravity's Rainbow is a book—at least in part—about how information can tend toward entropy. What is your view of our current information-saturated culture?

Zak Smith: Ok, here's a view—in newspapers with huge circulations we got headlines saying the president is a felon who lies about pretty much everything all the time and doesn't know where Sweden is and most people in his country either don't vote or decide to re-elect him and I got a myspace page which says "Don't send blind friend requests, explain who you are first" and I get blind friend requests every day.

Information is only information if people are not total morons—however, people are total morons. Therefore we do not live in an information-saturated culture, we live in a Brad-Pitt-and-whatsurname-just-had-a-baby-saturated-culture where smart people who care can find what they need when they have to if they're lucky and we always have and we always will.

Makes me wish Zak Smith had a blog. (A great example of how he would handle readers [here](#)). But, then again, maybe I should be doing porn.

8 Comments

1. Hello Mr. Soth...,
I just started reading your blog some weeks ago....or so, for time is running, and I am loosing track of it. I like the unexpected connections you make, the links you put in. An you seem, indirectly, showing something about yourself, as a person...Being tired, or hurt,being in love with your family.
But I admit, thats all a phantasy, something happening in my mind. I liked the interview with Zak Smith, a lot more than his artwork, which, on my monitor, seemed to me very decorative. Best wishes, Z

Comment by Zoltán Jókay — May 23, 2007 @ [4:47 am](#)

2. Hello again,
some afterthoughts. Some american president, during his campaign, said: read my lips: and his lips moved and said: "stupid, it´s the economy"..anyway thats how I remember it. The thing about your blog is, that is says mor than it expresses explicitey, or it leaves enough empty spaces, for the reader to look for meaning. Z

Comment by Zoltán Jókay — May 23, 2007 @ [5:03 am](#)

3. I know one thing, if you started doing porn, I wouldn't check in nearly as often.

You might find helpful an excerpt from author Yi-Tu Faun on the Dynamist blog: <http://www.dynamist.com/weblog/archives/002546.html>

Just curious, but why look to the internet for an answer to this question?

Comment by [Sean Cayton](#) — May 23, 2007 @ [8:27 am](#)

4. While I can't quite see myself ever getting involved with the porn industry, I like that Zac Smith a.k.a. "Zac Sabbath" isn't afraid to entertain the idea for himself (he even links to his art site from his porn site).

Which got me thinking: Photographers seem to have this problem where they feel the need to be one *kind* of photographer, develop a niche, a style. I think this is true for artists in general. While this often happens naturally due to what we like to call a "vision," many photographers force themselves into one vein of working and are afraid to, for example, pursue digital experiments alongside their black-and-white large format portraits — even when they are equally passionate about the two.

With these ideas in mind I thought I'd offer two possible solutions for anyone suffering a similar dilemma (in this case, in response to the "Why blog when you can be doing porn?" question):

1. Blog *and* do porn.

2. Porn-blog.

And, Alec, as to your ultimate question "why blog?" — I don't have a convincing answer. Because everyone else is doing it? Haha, I hope not. For me it is accomplishing some things that are, for the time being, making it worth the time/effort. I hope this is how you feel because from what I can gather, your readers are getting quite a lot out of your posts – including myself. It's true; the discourse here on your blog is phenomenal.

I've noticed, just in the last year, how many more blogs have popped up online (yours included). 5 years from now, maybe most everyone on the Internet will have a blog of their own — in replace of MySpace pages? They'll be the new "profiles" of the web where you simply link to your friends and acquaintances that have one. While MySpace could disappear and I'd be completely

unbothered, I wonder how the steady increase in personal blogs will affect the way that blogs are received now, or were received in "the beginning." Could they be less worthwhile if that happens?

You're a smart guy, you'll figure it out. I'll figure it out. We'll all figure it out. And maybe, if we're good, without the help of the Internet.

Comment by [Shane Lavalette](#) — May 23, 2007 @ [11:26 am](#)

5. I'm much more interested in your "cool kids" statement than any blog issues, however I could see a connection between the two. I'm always stunned by the sense of ego some artists display like a Budweiser sign at the Metrodome. It looks flashy and grabs your attention, but ultimately it's promoting, well, Budweiser.

The only difference between the cool kids party then (high school) and now (insert occupation here) is then they were drinking Bud from plastic cups, now they drink it from champagne flutes. It's still the same crap, just a different vessel.

Sorry you had that experience with unsaid artist at the opening.

Comment by [Brett Kallusky](#) — May 23, 2007 @ [4:23 pm](#)

6. Actually Alec, I'd like to apologize for how I treated you at that opening.
-Zoe Strauss

Comment by [Zoe Strauss](#) — May 23, 2007 @ [6:52 pm](#)

7. More [good stuff](#) from Eric Z.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — May 23, 2007 @ [10:50 pm](#)

8. [...] Alec Soth is a great photographer who has a blog that I like to read from time to time. He recently posted some excerpts from an interview with artist Zak Smith. I don't know who Zak Smith is nor do I know if I like his art or not. I do like what he has to say in the excerpts that Alec put on his site so I've copied them here. I have to go look into this Zak guy. [...]

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