

"Liberate Literature: Creating an Artistic Culture outside of Academia"

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Statement

The main, almost exclusive economic-cultural sector being represented in these halls today, and for the next few days, is what we call "academia." There's nothing anomalous about this fact; this, after all, is a conference by, about, and mainly geared towards writing program issues. Over the years (this is my, let's see - 9th? AWP in the last 11 years), an increasing number of panels have been accepted and presented that attempt to define writing practices outside of the specific economic-cultural sector that is academia. This panel is such a one.

My estimation at the end of the day is that these type of panels serve mainly to add variety to the whole event, that is, from the "event's" perspective. In no way can panels such as these gain wide influence over the core issues that university ensconced writing programs have to face, issues such as an ever-shifting curriculum to meet an ever shifting equation of student identities. But it's that very problematic, the so-called event's (AWP's) vantage point that attracts me as a presenter to challenge it, and even to call it a *distortion field*.

How many economic sectors are currently active in the United States? That is, how many life-structuring terrains have their own cultural values and forms of expression, and how much have they reached into the realm of aesthetics. To list just a few sectors, we have service, manufacturing, construction, transportation, health care, agriculture, etc. And how many *informal* sectors exist alongside these official sectors? Do these sub- or alter sectors not produce social actors capable of producing valuable, lasting, but most importantly, *useful* coordinates for poetic continuity? Think of it, we might have by now lost two whole generations of talented grifters.

What happens (is happening) when one single economic-cultural sector dominates the very definitions of what is literary and who are indeed literary people? What vital *lessons* (cultural, ideological) from other sectors are we missing when acting under the constraints of mono-sectoral culture-making? But of course, it goes without saying, that a great many literary folk within academia have ranged, thrived, or downright *wrecked* in other sectors. But "folks" - in and of themselves - does not a sector make. Rather, it is the internal logic, pressures, and prescribed horizons of sectors themselves that *constructs* folks - in a big way, shit tons more than most of us can squarely face.

So what are we "missing?" The scary reality is that at this accelerated pace of near complete saturation of mono-sectoralism - *we don't know*. And the bright-eyed gods of Mount Archive can't save us. So, let's say it, *mono-sectoral*. And some of you can say *this* while looking into the mirror, "I want ascendancy within a mono-sectoral poetic practice." And yeah, I just said that too, but hey, I also mean it when I say that. I'm not keen on self-erasure, no matter the tattered state of affairs.

Ok and this opening statement is not a drubbing of academia, especially of liberal arts academia, so under siege by neo-liberal ideology and practice. This is not a cornering and poking of that sector to cough up some kind of answer to mono-sectoral predominance. But, nonetheless, here, within these halls, at this event, we must venture the question, what happens when our most awarded, most read, most emulated, most influential literary actors are beholden to one, and one economic-cultural sector only? I am eager to join everybody assembled here into a spirited discussion on the matter.