

David Simons
Prof. Peter Haratonik
Understanding Media Studies
Sept. 22, 2009

Library/Online resources assignment

1. The Reference Room

I entered into the reference room at NYU Bobst Library, went to the computer and located some "media research" books and articles. Strolled among the isles, looked down and found myself staring at the *New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (volume 2, G-O, Stanley Sadie, ed. Macmillan Press, 1984). Right away the first couple of entries I'd never heard of:

Gaasay - a giant gourd thumb piano [like a Kalimba or Mbira] played over a pit and struck with fan shaped beaters. From Niger, Africa and used in spirit possession rituals.

Gabus (pronounced ! [tongue click] gabus) - mouthbow of southern Africa.

What an amazing resource, I must come back to this encyclopedia.

2. The Serials

Wandered into the Periodicals (3rd floor) and picked up a couple of interesting journals. *Leonardo* (vol 42 #1, 2009, MIT Press) has a great article which references Suzanne Briet (1894-1989), whom I'd never heard of before. She explodes the concept of What is Documentation (also the name of her book). Author Corina MacDonald writes : "The production of knowledge and its documentation proceed simultaneously and often the two may become conflated as documents are arranged in new contexts to create new meanings". (*An online search for the title of this article from Leonardo showed that they mistakenly didn't post the correct contents of that issue!*)

Actually the *Leonardo* article was about documenting the sound installations of Janet Cardiff. I know some of her work, it's clear, minimal and obvious, and very well done. But the revelation that day was Briet: "Can a star, or a pebble, or a living animal be a document ?" This really inspired me to think and discuss with artist friends the nature and possibilities of what is documentation.

3. The Main Collection

The online catalogue indicated that the book I wanted, Title: *What is documentation?: English translation of the classic French text*. Author: Briet, Suzanne, 1894-1989. Z1001 was not available until Jan 2010. I went up to the Z section and the shelf where it would be anyway, just for the exercise. Then I initiated an inter-library loan search and just received notification that the book has been located and I can sign it out at Bobst.

4. The Avery Fisher Center

At the front desk of The Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media at Bobst, I asked the young woman there for help in finding the call # for the film I wanted. I started typing in "Pirates . . ." and she goes, "Oh, we're into Pirates are we?" British accent and all, but I finished ". . . of Silicon Valley". I got the DVD and watched some of it. Had to go to class, but I'll return many times, no doubt. And I'll finish watching that movie. Someone in *Media Practices: Concepts* recommended viewing it as an interesting history of how Steve Jobs and Bill Gates got their start. That was how the consumer computer industry began, and Jobs just knew it would create a radically new chapter in modern life.

I did have fun at Bobst library, it was like a scavenger hunt. Research is invigorating - I've always thought that the universe of knowledge is out there waiting for the right questions to be asked, and new connections, new insights to be drawn from what's already available.