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Yahoo! Answers

Curated by Alicia Nauta

Gwen Bieniara, Bridget Moser, Joële Walinga, Diana McNally, Catherine Polcz

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Everytime I ask the internet a question Yahoo! Answers almost always comes up as the first or second search. It seems that not only has someone already asked a similar, if not that exact question (with varying degrees of accuracy in grammar, spelling and articulation) but there are already a plethora of answers to chose from. I once found a Yahoo! Answer asking, “Why do people use the word plethora when they could just say many?” I don’t know, good question. The number of questions that have been posed to the internet and more specifically, Yahoo! Answers, is both frightening and comforting in its abundance. When I ask questions, there’s a certain tone they take depending on the time of day. Mostly I ask questions at night, after checking facebook, email, craigslist free section, the magic eight ball site, goats yelling like humans on youtube, etc...still restless and wanting something, I’ll type questions into the google search bar, stuff like “I’m so hungry but I already ate so I shouldn’t be hungry anymore what should I eat” or “What am I doing with my life” or “three small bites in a row on my foot is it bed bugs or fleas????”

Sometimes I find straightforward answers and even learn something. Mostly though, it’s likely I won’t take the advice of whoever is offering it to me, and everyone else who’s ever asked that question via Yahoo! Answers. The amount of poorly formed questions and unsatisfying, inaccurate answers has made the site a target of ridicule, and yet Yahoo! Answers is ranked as the second most popular Q&A site on the web by comScore. Perhaps just the act of asking an embarrassing or worrying question is a cathartic release in and of itself. Maybe sometimes it’s more about yelling a question into the universe then it is about getting a correct answer.

Gwen Bieniara’s performance, *How Can It Know*, explores the desire for logical conversation and credible knowledge. The appeal of a site like Yahoo! Answers, in which there is potential to understand, challenge, debate, communicate, and share seems to outweigh the obvious downsides, where your perspectives and authority are challenged by a 12 year old boy with an avatar of a fake adult guy with yellow glasses and spiky hair. As Bieniara asks questions, recordings of answers culled from Yahoo! Answers respond to her. As the performance progresses, the voices and their answers start to

overlap and drown each other out. Playing the part of knowledge seeker, question asker and the anonymous visitor, Bieniara's questions are given too many answers, and resultantly no new or valid knowledge is gained.

Bridget Moser's video work, *Asking for a friend* was created searching through past performances, and then compiling all the questions she'd ever posed to herself or the audience. Interpreting these questions into bodily gestures, there is a sense of absurd futility in her movements that intends to parallel the same feeling that comes with asking a Q&A site advice about your life's direction. Props such as a bench, folding chairs, a very judgemental bike pump, a limp umbrella and a microphone become stand ins for people, where Moser's interactions with them are comically strained and somewhat upsetting. With her face squished against two folding chairs, balanced on a bench turned sideways, she asks, "Is successful the same thing as better?" At another point, cornered in what looks like an awkward office party full of acquaintances chatting amongst themselves or lying face down, Moser wonders if instead of figuring out how you got there, or how to get out of the situation, maybe there is something to be learned from all those that have their shit together. Throughout all this, there is the sound of meditation bells playing quietly in the background, as if to say don't worry, this confusing, questioning phase you're going through will last a long time as there are no answers.

Joële Walinga's works, *Clear plinth painted white*, *Plinth with cereal bowl built in* and *Plinth with plinth extension* began as mock up digital images she posted to Yahoo! Answers, asking for help or critique. Posing the questions in variety of ways, such as "I am just trying to get some real critiques and help before I submit these sculptures to a gallery", "would this fit in a gallery?" and the loaded, "are they good?" she uses anonymous public critique as its own medium, presenting the screenshot of the answers she was given next to the works they critique. What is really being asked is not what *Yahoo! Answers* users think of her work, but what kinds of art they consider admissible to be presented in a gallery. Much to my delight, two commenters posted, "this work would not be accepted to a gallery." Using the plinth as a sculptural object in its own right and only altering or adding slightly, Walinga asks how little is too little, illustrated especially with *Clear plinth painted white*. Mike1942 (a top user) dismisses it as "a waste of materials unless you reveal the clear." Walinga doesn't reveal the clear though, and the plinth does look like a totally normal unaltered plinth, though it was constructed of clear acrylic plastic cut to size, glued and then painted white.

In a similarly rhetorical vein, Diana McNally has been working on the creation of a Yahoo! Answers generated eHarmony profile. Taking the 100+ questions posed by eHarmony in the creation of an online dating profile, she posts each question individually to her Yahoo! Answers account, then takes the median from the answers to each (eHarmony questions are answered on a scale from Rarely to Almost Always). In doing so she will have created a meta profile, but what does that actually look like? Does it represent a public median or just...nobody at all, as it negates all nuanced individuality? A friend and I once went through pages upon pages of OkCupid dating profiles, which started out fun, but we slowly got quieter and quieter until we were both

exhausted and depressed. In the end it seemed that everyone liked trying new restaurants, having a fun hobby like rock climbing, and owning a cute pet. What is interesting about this sameness is how despite the multitudes of experiences every person has, the intersections between them and the ways in which people arrive at actually seem to be quite similar.

After Ten, a video by Catherine Polcz, made up of questions and answers pulled from Yahoo! Answers and some of her own, oscillates between the millions of ways for a person to be. Because the text is uniform in appearance, it is impossible to discern what is authored by Polcz and what is Yahoo! Answers. Covering the topics Money, Love, Happiness, Sadness, and Health, Polcz boldly declares, “this is the year I make sense of everything.” Replete with spelling errors, utterly wrong and confusing advice or heartbreaking statements like, ‘is it true that if you haven’t done something by thirty you won’t do it?’ this is the stuff that first endeared me to Yahoo! Answers. People searching for meaning and desiring to reach out, whether that be to sympathize, pass judgement or just participate. A true reflection of the Yahoo! Answers community, *After Ten* reads like a weird, motivational powerpoint presentation peppered with crushing existential doubt. Thrown in is a thought or piece of advice that seems particularly succinct, ‘There are endless answers to this question, there are no correct ways for humans to experience their lives. There may be stupid ways and more enjoyable ways, but all these things depend on the individual.’

To close, here’s another question I asked Yahoo! Answers. Someone else had already asked it, but this response completely satisfied my question.

--Alicia Nauta

Why do people answer questions on 'Yahoo! Answers'?



[Experto Credo](#)

0% 0 Votes



[Radhakrishna\(prrkishna\)](#)

Friend,

During my 3 years stay i YA R & S , I have observed the following.

1. There are some highly scholarly people , who are very knowledgeable and really TRY TO HELP OTHERS (questioners) with their answers.Because of these people the YA R & S still LIVELY.

2.They are beginners (Me too) who learn from the Scholars , By both questioning and answering. In the answers I ask some clarification and our friends , brothers and Sisters really help with valuable links and answers.

3.They are some who are there simply to mark attendance and answer " Hmmm". I really do not know why they answer.I believe they want points alone.

4.There are some peculiar ones, who answer "IDK", .It is not mandatory that one should answer a question.When one does not know the answer , the best thing he or she can do is STAR the question to bring the question to the attention of their contacts and read the answees given. But they too seem points concious.They want two points.

5.There are some who simply distract you or the questioner by irrelevant answers.They are sadisdic rather.They Know pretty well what they answer is irrelevant, but still go on pasting the same answers.

6.There are some, who have a good Library of links to various subjects, and immediately open that page and Copy Paste 15 paras of answer.God knows whether they read it understood or not. It is tedious to read such answers. One shall read himself or herself and give the gist in their own words and finally provide the link for further elaboration.

7.Some with multiple accounts running in the Race of BAs .I do not now what they gain.It is not an Olympic Medal.Just a recognition.We should not bother about them.BUT SOME DO.

8.There are some. whatever the question, they propagate their religion.This YA is not that purpose.

We are one Family here.But many forget it and openly say I will give you Thumbs down whatever you answer.Let them enjoy their thrill. Let us hope all members realize why they answer and make this YA ANSWERS A BEAUTIFUL HEALTHY FRAGRANT GARDEN.