

ARHS 5359
Seminar on Contemporary Art
Collecting and Collectivity: Objects, Community
and the Avant-garde
Professor Noah Simblist
Professor Charissa N. Terranova
Fall 2007
Wednesday 6:00-8:50
OFAC 1635



Louise Lawler, Three Women Three Chairs, 1984



Opening at Conduit Gallery, Dallas, Texas Summer 2006

Collecting and Collectivity, Scenario I:

In 1984, the photographer and conceptual artist Louise Lawler gained access to the Connecticut home of the collectors Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine. Inside she found an array of objects. Though all were valuable, some were worth more than others. A painting by Jackson Pollock hung next to a precious soup tureen. Fernand Leger's cubist work "Three Women" was on the wall above three French Empire chairs. Progressively speaking, the hierarchy of fine art was leveled, with furniture and dining-ware becoming potentially as powerful and important as avant-garde painting. In this leveling, art's avant-garde ability to promote collective revolution gave way to inertia. Though bringing pleasure to their owners as objects, the paintings would do little for the greater public, unless acquired at a later date by a public collection, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Dallas Museum of Art. Even then, it is unlikely that such painting would create momentous change in the way people think and act on a daily basis, or would it?

Collecting and Collectivity, Scenario II:

The urban agglomeration of Dallas-Fort Worth has a rich culture of art collecting. The two cities support several institutions of art and many contemporary art galleries. Each month, art lovers meet at the galleries to lavish love upon objects and one another. We find an instance in which the love of objects and collecting art create community. But does it create "collectivity" – urban citizens unified by art as an intellectual investment and political engagement? Gregory Sholette has suggested that historically the left was allied with communism. But, with the fall of the wall there emerged an intense skepticism of any kind of collectivity defined by social or political idealism. What is the possibility for artists to be politically engaged today in the wake of a century in which collectivism and avant-garde practice have turned up only mixed results?

Goals of Seminar

- 1.) Interrogate the words "collecting" and "collectivity" in manifold incarnations.
- 2.) Interrogate the role of contemporary art and related objects in the everyday life of people.
- 3.) Interrogate the manner in which a shared love of objects creates individual groups.
- 4.) Interrogate the qualities of those groups – to compare "community" to "collectivity."
- 5.) Read theories of the avant-garde in the 20th century in order to query the definition and formation of the avant-garde in the present.
- 6.) To understand better the shift from a Marxist-based avant-garde and analysis of objects to an amoral, consumer-based avant-garde and analysis of objects.
- 7.) Engage the art community of DFW by visiting museums and galleries before writing reviews of exhibitions.

- 8.) Familiarize students with the critical voices of six different publishing venues.
- 9.) Hone writing skills in six short writing assignments.
- 10.) Promote “art” as an active engagement with the public sphere by having groups of students write manifestoes and create art projects within the space of DFW.

Professor’s Office Hours and Office Locations

Noah Simblist:	3:30-5:00 OFAC 2735
Charissa N. Terranova:	By appointment Location TBA

Books for Purchase

- 1.) Karl Marx. *Capital: Volume I A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992. ISBN 0140445684
- 2.) Theodor Adorno. *Culture Industry*. London: Routledge Classics, 2001. ISBN 01415253802
- 3.) Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. New York: Pimlico Press, 1999. ISBN 0712665757
- 4.) Peter Burger. *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. ISBN 0816610681
- 5.) Johanna Drucker. *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complexity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. ISBN 0226165051
- 6.) Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. ISBN 0226143678
- 7.) Susan Stewart. *On Longing: On Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992. ISBN 0822313669
- 8.) Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*. New York: Verso Press, 2006. ISBN 1844670538
- 9.) W. J. T. Mitchell. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. ISBN 0226532488
- 10.) Jacques Ranciere. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006. ISBN 0826489540
- 11.) Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Le Presse du Reel, 1998. ISBN 2840660601
- 12.) Claire Bishop. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. ISBN 02652526433
- 13.) Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette. *Collectivity after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. ISBN 0816644624

Readings on Reserve

- 1.) Sigmund Freud. (1928) "Fetishism." Vol. 21 in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 152-157.
- 2.) Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I." *Écrits: A Selection*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977. 1-7.
- 3.) Emily Apter. "Fetishism in Theory: Marx, Freud, Baudrillard." *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. Chapter 1.

Written Assignments

There are six short written assignments that involve writing conventionally and broadly conceived. You will make sentences by tapping away at your keyboard, one word after another, upon having visited an exhibition and read an assigned newspaper or one of several journals. “Writing” is thus the physical movement of working at your computer and the intellectual act of reading in the environs of your choice.

You are to write six 1,000-word reviews of six different exhibitions. The reviews should be conventionally formatted, paginated, doubled spaced and with 1.5-inch margins. Prior to writing you must become familiar with the critical voices of the assigned publishing venue and then model your voice after the assigned newspaper or journal.

Assignment 1

Exhibition: *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* at the Dallas Museum of Art

Publishing Venue: *Art Forum*

Due Date: September 12

Assignment 2

Exhibition: *Beastly Words: Bradley Brown* at Road Agent Gallery, Dallas

Publishing Venue: *Modern Painters*

Due Date: September 26

Assignment 3

Exhibition: TBA at Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas

Publishing Venue: *Frieze*

Due Date: October 10

Assignment 4

Exhibition: *Declaring Space: Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

Publishing Venue: *New York Times*

Due Date: October 24

Assignment 5

Exhibition: TBA at And/Or Gallery, Dallas

Publishing Venue: *Bomb*

Due Date: November 7

Assignment 6

Exhibition: *Tom Hollenback* at William Campbell Contemporary Art, Fort Worth

Publishing Venue: *Art Lies*

Due Date: November 21

Capstone Project: Manifesto and Group Engagement

For the final project, you will be divided into three groups. You will collectively write a manifesto that is connected to an artistic endeavor of the group. An "endeavor" can be a performance or an installation. You will present your manifesto in words, acts, and/or objects. We encourage interaction with the public space of Dallas-Fort Worth. The last three classes will be devoted to experiencing the projects. The guidelines for the manifesto are as follows:

- 3,000 words
- thematically conceived in accordance with the performance or installation
- due December 12 in Noah Simblist's mailbox

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation in class are mandatory. You may have one unexcused absence, after which your grade will be lowered by one letter grade with each subsequent absence. You must come to class well prepared – having completed the readings in a careful and deliberative manner, ready to ask questions, and discuss ideas.

If you will not be able to attend a specific session, you must make arrangements with another student to get copies of notes, etc. Assignments must be turned in on time; for each 24-hour period an assignment is late, one full grade will be deducted (e.g., an "A" paper will become a "B" paper). Appropriate medical and family excuses will be accepted in order to establish new dates for assignments. Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled

University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue) Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Grading

Your final grade is based on the following:

Assignment 1	10%
Assignment 2	10%
Assignment 3	10%
Assignment 4	10%
Assignment 5	10%
Assignment 6	10%
Capstone Project	30%
Participation	10%

Class Schedule

August 29: Introduction and Commodity Fetishism

- Presentation by Simblist and Terranova
- Marx, *Capital*, pages TBA [Come to class ready to discuss!]

September 5: Negotiating Negative Dialectics

- Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 29-177
- Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*

September 12: The Avant-garde and Negative Dialectics

- Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*
- Written Assignment #1 Due

September 19: After Adorno

- Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*

September 26: Fetishism and the Body

- Freud, "On Fetishism," on reserve
- Lacan, "Mirror Stage," on reserve
- Emily Apter. "Fetishism in Theory: Marx, Freud, Baudrillard," on reserve
- Written Assignment #2 Due

October 3: On Longing for and Loving Objects

- Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," in *On Longing*
- Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," in *Illuminations*

October 10: Object as Image with Life

- Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*
- Written Assignment #3 Due

October 17: Objects as Manipulation

- Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*

October 24: Object as Action and Interaction

- Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*

-Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*
-Written Assignment #4 Due

October 31: Object as Participation and Collectivity

-Bishop, *Participation*

November 7: Rethinking Collectivity in the New Millennium

-Stimson, *Collectivity after Modernism*
-Written Assignment #5 Due

November 14 Visiting Artist's Lecture

November 21

-Group 1 Presentation
-Written Assignment #6 Due

November 28

-Group 2 Presentation

December 5

-Group 3 Presentation

December 12

-Manifesto due in Noah Simblist's mailbox