

No Object

Curtin 118

Panel Chair: Nathaniel Stern

Andrew Strombeck (Wright State University)

“Gary Indiana, Richard Serra, and the Creative Economy of 1980s New York”

Throughout his 1980s columns for *The Village Voice*, the critic and novelist Gary Indiana refused New York’s rising creative economy, praising art objects that indexed their own social conditions against art that furthered corporate and governmental agendas. While influenced by the journal *October*’s poststructuralist critique, Indiana mixed critical judgment with his own affective response to art, anticipating a synthesis that Sianne Ngai attributes to aesthetic categories such as the interesting and the cute. In the 1980s, continued fallout from the 1975 fiscal crisis collided with a booming art market; the resulting pressure on the city’s housing market established groundwork for what Richard Florida has praised and Sarah Brouillette has critiqued as economic development driven by artistic creativity. Such pressures coalesced around Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc*, a work that served for both Serra and his *October* supporters to critique the material conditions of sculpture’s production and reception—an intervention that Indiana should have loved. Instead, referencing the city’s growing housing and immigration problems, Indiana snarled that Serra “assum[ed] *noblesse oblige* over large numbers of citizens who [...] own the space that the work occupies.” In doing so, Indiana mediated between public voices who reacted to *Tilted Arc* with disgust, associating it with rats, urine, and graffiti, and *October* critics like Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp who defended it with critical judgment. Returning to the multiple refusals around *Tilted Arc*, my presentation will reexamine the creative economy’s uneven terms at the moment of its ascendance.

Prayas Abhinav (Indus University)

“Refusing to Make Art, But Not to Being Artistic”

Saying no to using a type of language which increases chances of inclusion in a privileged group which has a reception seems to be against one's self-interest. Self-interest seems to be another word for selfishness but it is not so. Self-interest stands for a set of long-term strategies for privileging not just oneself but also one's hopes and aspirations for one's community. So the refusal to emulate the behaviour of a group can also be an action conveying a desire to change how one is perceived. So instead of being against any self-interest, it represents a more nuanced idea of self-interest. It refuses to be a part of an industry which claims to be a world and instead seeks to differentiate a practice from a profession. This paper talks about the refusal to make art and distinguishes art (the singular word) from the quality of being artistic. It does this through a set of brief reviews of projects around the world - some a part of the attention apparatus of art and some not. This refusal is one of the few redeeming factors of contemporary cultural practice that seem to keep possibilities open for future developments. Like the fashion industry the tangential curve of the supposedly singular art world is not linear but a series of spiral and coiling movements. So which attribute will become significant in the future cannot be easily predicted.

Philip Sayers (University of Toronto)
“Barthes’ Politics and the Yes-No Paradigm”

At the beginning of his lecture course on *The Neutral*, Roland Barthes provides a tentative formal definition: “I call Neutral everything that baffles the paradigm.” When faced with a binary choice—yes or no, commitment or decadence, speech or silence—the Neutral is (in the words of Maggie Nelson) “that which . . . offers novel responses: to flee, to escape, to demur, to shift or refuse terms, to disengage, to turn away.” Not so much a “no” as shrug; not so much a refusal as a refusal of refusal.

This paper (adapted from a longer chapter on Barthes and feminism) focuses on the political stakes of Barthes’s work on the Neutral. Barthes’s tendency to act and think in ways that baffle paradigms have led to a number of related critiques of his work, centering on the accusation that his thinking is insufficiently political. Here I analyze three of these critiques, which focus on Barthes’s relationship to queer politics, to post-1968 left politics, and to feminism. I trace the shifts in Barthes’s reception, explaining why it is that, in recent years, progressive writers and scholars, especially in feminist and queer circles, have increasingly found Barthes an enabling thinker, in ways that a previous generation did not. With particular reference to Barthes’s Collège de France lectures and to work by Maggie Nelson and Brian Blanchfield that picks up on these lectures, I argue that Barthes offers valuable resources for thinking politics outside the binary paradigm of yes and no.

Tony Yanick (University of Glasgow) and **Anne-Françoise Schmid** (MINES ParisTech)
“Unseeing Delta No: The *Insu* Operator and the Contemporary Object”

In Anne’s work on Integrative Objects, one of the design methods, and the most complex and important (especially in the realms of mathematics and philosophy) is that of “the method of the unknown”. The method stands that the object is unknown to us, so we search mental properties and list them. The method then asks us to hypothesize 1 property, in which we are left with a lost space of knowledge that incites us to introduce new knowledge to the object — thus recomposing the object totally. The method of the unknown is the “object-without” (philosophy-without subject, mathematics without proofs/demonstrations and so on) and is at the core in the theory of design and non-philosophy that discover convergences between different fields (the without here is the point of externality which decomposes the object and alongside of a fiction operates to transgress borders). We propose, in this email informally, our topic to explore the “non-dispersible” integrative object, engaging with *insu* (the unknown to consciousness), as — without. Therefore, in the theme of the conference and the working title of our proposal, is the Unseeing Delta No: The *insu* operator and the contemporary object. The contemporary object highlights this New No, that is insolvable (non-dispersible) or resists synthesis. We might think of climate change as a core example, or more simply the consistency in the history of our social symbolic (obesity, cancer, etc.), yet research on these registers are non-synthesizable. This No is directly seizing of the simple or complex object-form, we must invent or fiction a third-object: the integrative object. However, this third-object is not a synthesized form, but rather a collection of fictions, multiplicities, disciplines in decomposed form — or, in other words a heterogenous architectonics of the unknown, alongside its two other operators (delta) of fictions, the generic.