

**Writing Seminar I:**  
***Collage: From Art to Life (and Back)***  
K10.0361

Fall 2008  
Monday, Wednesday 2:00-3:15  
715 Broadway, Room 601

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### **Introduction**

“What distinguishes [collage] from techniques of composition developed since the Renaissance,” writes the critic Peter Bürger, “is the insertion of reality fragments into the painting, i.e. the insertion of material that has been left unchanged by the artist.” Once inserted, the fragment assumes a dual existence: a constructive element of the new composition, it is also an independent entity that stubbornly retains its prior identity, its original context always perceivable alongside, behind or in front of its new role. In this class, we will explore the implications of making the new from the ready-made, of constructing one’s own from what was – and remains – somebody else’s. We will consider how collage-works are always reflections on both the specificity of artistic mediums and on the exchangeability of images – on the unique in the reproducible and the reproducible in the unique. And if collage truly aims at reintegrating art and life, we must keep our eyes always on the other half of this operation: what kind of life does collage art construct? Not passive imitation but active proposition, collage-work models a new society, an alternative system of human relations, and demands that the current one be remade in its image. We will be working with examples of both visual and verbal collage, using the idea of double origin – a new context superimposed on a prior one – to think about quotation and allusion (and the difference between them), and about writing as the juxtaposition of multiple registers of language. Once we have discussed some classic works of theory and practice, I will ask you to look for instances of collage in contemporary urban life – and, therefore, in your own.

### **Writing**

Over the course of the semester, you will write four essays.

(1) The first essay (3-5 pages) will be a *close reading*, or *descriptive* analysis, of some collage-work, in any or in multiple mediums, to which you have “direct,” tactile access, i.e. one that is not in a museum.

The other essays will combine close reading with imaginative application of the ideas we encounter:

(2) The *argument-based* essay (3-5 pages) will be your chance to take a position on one of the debates or questions that will have come up in class or in the readings. This essay should be polemical, as most of our readings will be. What you argue should be neither self-evident nor tepid, but original and provocative. You should also attempt to be convincing, through a combination of logical reasoning and rhetorical expressiveness.

(3) The *literary-critical* essay (5-6 pages) will focus on one or two texts and interpret them, alternating between close readings of quotations and explanations of their role in the text as a whole. While you're working on this essay, we will spend several classes discussing and practicing research skills: you will be finding secondary sources (i.e. scholarly criticism) on one of two texts and presenting them to the class in groups. Each group will be responsible for compiling a short annotated bibliography and distributing it to the rest of the class.

(4) The final essay, which I'll be calling *projective*, will be more open in form than the first three. It could take the shape of anything from a traditional expository essay to an avant-garde manifesto, with numbered points and expressive typography. Its subject matter will be equally open, but the essay should somehow look to the future: announce a new program for writing or art-making, found a new movement or school of thought, or, perhaps, declare your allegiance to an old movement or school you would like to revive. The projective essay should itself be an example of whatever it champions, the cornerstone of a new edifice – at once prophecy and its (partial) fulfillment.

You will be writing drafts for the first three essays – at least one for each. I will read and comment on the drafts, and we will workshop them in class, either as a whole class or in small groups. These workshops will be a key part of the course, so please plan on having drafts done on time and ready to be workshopped. Please, also, be ready to share your work on other occasions as well; throughout the semester, I will be asking you to read your writing aloud in class or circulate it in small, informal groups.

## Readings

Several of our texts will be theoretical essays, some quite famous, that offer justification or explanation for the kinds of innovations in aesthetic form and content that collage represents. While some will address collage specifically, others will not, but will provide you with the background and conceptual models crucial for making sense of modern “experimental” art and literature. We will also be reading some criticism specifically about our “primary” texts. Both the theoretical and the critical essays (you may find this distinction disappearing as we go along) will be paired with texts that, in one way or another, make use of collage techniques: poetry, manifestos, even a novel. We will discover, in fact, that many of these collage-works are difficult to assign to a single genre, that they are hybrids of poetry and prose, of theory and practice. Among other questions, we will consider what their nature as collages has to do with this generic instability.

In addition to the required readings, I encourage you to follow up whatever topics, authors, or texts particularly interest you. You could do this by looking up background information, searching for criticism, or getting further reading recommendations from me or your classmates.

### **Required Texts**

You can buy all our books at the NYU Bookstore. All additional materials will be either collected in a course pack (to be announced) or handed out separately.

Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*

Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*

Jean Toomer, *Cane*

Susan Howe, *The Europe of Trusts*

### **Trips**

We will be going on at least two, probably three field trips. One will be to Bobst Library, where a librarian will take us through the library's various resources. We will also go to MoMA (the Museum of Modern Art), where you will have a chance to see firsthand a lot of the twentieth-century art relevant to our topic. We will also try to see a film at Anthology Film Archives, the cinema-museum which regularly screens classic and contemporary avant-garde films.

### **Syllabus**

#### I. *Pasting Paper, Freeing Words*

#### **Week 1**

Wed, Sep 3

- Introduction
- In-class reading: Charles Bernstein and Susan B. Laufer, "Style" (1978)
- In-class writing: received ideas
- Discussion: writing in many voices

#### **Week 2**

Mon, Sep 8; Wed, Sep 10

- Reading: Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968); Mary Ann Caws, "Constructing: Joseph Cornell's Metaphysics of Memory" (1997); Siegfried Kracauer, "Two Planes" (1926), "Analysis of a City Map" (1926)
- Discussion: close reading
- Continued work on description

**Week 3**

Mon, Sep 15; Wed, Sep 17

- Reading: F. T. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912); V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh, "The Word as Such" (1913), "The Letter as Such" (1913); Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto" (1918)
- Descriptive exercises due

**Week 4**

Mon, Sep 22; Wed, Sep 24

- Reading: Clement Greenberg, "The Pasted-Paper Revolution" (1958); Rosalind Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso" (1985)
- **Draft of descriptive essay due**
- Workshop

Thu, Sep 26: Possible viewing of *The Man with the Movie Camera* at Anthology Film Archives.

**Week 5**

Mon, Sep 29; Wed, Oct 1

- Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (1934); Peter Bürger, from *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974)
- **Descriptive essay due**

II. *Making Strange*

**Week 6**

Mon, Oct 6; Wed, Oct 8

- Reading: Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device" (1917); William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (1923), "Preface" to *Kora in Hell* (1920)
- Discussion: the argument-based essay
- In-class writing: presenting a debate

**Week 7**

Mon, Oct 13 (**no class**); Wed, Oct 15

- Reading: Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914)
- Discussion: close-reading for form, the relation between form and content
- **Draft of argument-based essay due**

**Week 8**

Mon, Oct 20; Wed, Oct 22

- Reading: André Breton, “The Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924); John Ashbery, “In the Surrealist Tradition” (1964), “The Heritage of Dada and Surrealism” (1968), “Joseph Cornell” (1967)
- In-class writing: presenting a concept
- Discussion: tone
- Workshop

### III. *Archiving (in) the Present*

#### **Week 9**

Mon, Oct 27; Wed, Oct 29

- Reading: Rosalind Krauss, “Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image” (1974); Douglas Crimp, “On the Museum’s Ruins” (1980)
- Discussion: the literary-critical essay
- **Trip: MoMA**
- **Argument-based essay due**

#### **Week 10**

Mon, Nov 3; Wed, Nov 5

- Reading: Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916); Marjorie Perloff, “The portrait of the artist as a collage-text” (1996)
- Discussion: the relation between part and whole

#### **Week 11**

Mon, Nov 10; Wed, Nov 11

- Reading: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)
- Group presentations of secondary sources
- Discussion: the canon and the museum
- **Trip: Bobst Library**

#### **Week 12**

Mon, Nov 17; Wed, Nov 19

- Reading: Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)
- Group presentations of secondary sources

#### **Week 13**

Mon, Nov 24; Wed, Nov 26

- Reading: *Cane*
- **Draft of literary-critical essay due**
- Workshop

Thu, Nov 27: **Thanksgiving**

**Week 14**

Mon, Dec 1; Wed, Dec 3

- Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse" (2004); Susan Howe, *The Liberties* (1983), "There Are Not Leaves Enough to Crown to Crown to Crown to Cover" (1990)
- Discussion: the future of the past
- **Literary-critical essay due**

**Week 15**

Mon, Dec 8; Wed, Dec 10

- Reading: Howe
- Discussion: the projective essay (**due date TBA**)
- Conclusion