

Modern Times

Avante Garde Pamphlet Project

As we will discuss in the next four weeks, the aftermath of World War I was a moment of intellectual reflection, revolution, and radicalism. The horrors of war suggested that modernity and civilization introduced more rapacious forms of savagery than it had solved. Simply creating new things, looking inward, or impressionistic painting would not be enough to save civilization from itself. Humanity required a redoubling of the Modern project to find radical new social situations. Culture would be at the leading edge of this new radicalism, otherwise known as the avante garde.

Many of those positions were articulated and circulated in the form of pamphlets. Crudely published but easy to circulate, ephemeral publications of this kind were tremendously popular among artists, provocateurs, agitators, and trouble-makers.

As a class, we are going to reproduce some of these key texts from the early 20th century, and in the process introduce old ideas to new audiences.

Over the next five weeks, you will:

1. Locate a short reading that represents the avante-garde in your discipline. While the definition of “avante-garde” is debateable, you are looking for a document produced between 1920 to 1950 that explicates a sharp political or cultural position, and can be excerpted to around 10-15 half sheet pages. To locate a reading, you need to follow three research paths:

1. Consult a librarian.
2. Talk with a faculty member in your department.
3. Conduct your own web search

2. On the day indicated on the schedule, conduct a brief seminar discussion on your document.

3. Reproduce your document in the form of a zine or pamphlet, including a short at least 300-word thoroughly researched preface that conveys the meaning and significance of this piece for artists in the 21st century. As a group, perhaps we can find a creative way to circulate these.

Examples might include, Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1912); Brecht, The Street Scene, (1928); Adorno, Philosophy of a New Music (1949); and Paulsson, Better Things for Everyday Life (1919); Nagy, The New Typography (1923); Grosz, Art is in Danger (1925); Yevreinov, A Member of the Audience, 1920; Artaud, Theatre and Cruelty (1933)