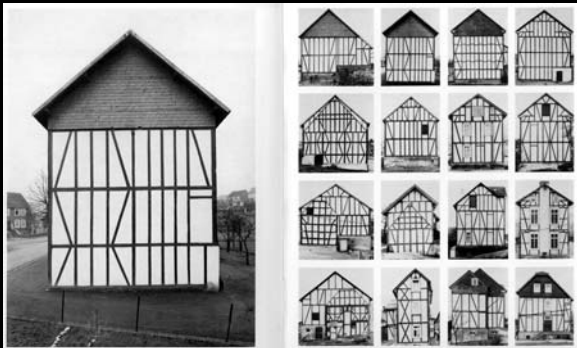


ART HISTORY PROGRAM

Lecture Series

UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

<http://arthistory.ucdavis.edu>



FALL QUARTER 2009

Blake Stimson

“PHOTOGRAPHY & ONTOLOGY”

Photography has two distinctly appealing properties that stake their claims on universality. On the one hand, photography has mechanically-enhanced artistic powers: it can capture a moment, orchestrate an intricate arrangement, or populate an empty frame in the blink of an eye. We might call this its vertical or qualitative axis, and plot any given photograph according to its degree of artistic success by whatever criteria we choose—the judgment of art's or photography's institutional authorities, say, or our own individual judgment of its beauty or mastery. On the other hand, photography, like computers, has its own technologically-accelerated powers of distribution and promises something like a factory in every pocket or handbag. We might refer to this as its horizontal, or quantitative axis, and plot the spread of photographicization by the picture, say, or camera, or megapixel, or cumulative ISO sensitivity. Each of these two properties makes its own claim to universality, to ontology, to the meaning of being, to a unified theory of everything—one in idealist terms and the other materialist, one metaphorical, the other metonymical, one through the aesthetic register of unity and the other through the sociopolitical register of multiplicity. Because of its uniquely bipolar appeal as art and non-art, photography's ontology is defined to an exceptional extent by a dynamic tension between the one and the all, between unity and multiplicity. This essay will explore some of the aesthetic and sociopolitical opportunities—some of the ways that the ontological subject (Being) might be imagined or experienced—arising from that distinctive tension.

Blake Stimson is a member of the Art History Program at UC Davis .

Tuesday, October 27th • 4:10 pm in ART 210D