

ing and punctuation. The editorial function should include the sending of worthwhile manuscripts to readers who are informed in the natural backgrounds and technical inventories of the societies, or at least the regions, concerned.

The publishers of this book should have treated its resources with greater appreciation and care. Dr. Glaze's photographs, which she took herself, are technically and didactically excellent. The color photographs are reproduced well in special sections. The black-and-white photographs, however, are printed on unsized text pages, a process which results in considerable darkening. In the field subjects this quality can obscure significant detail.

The publisher's transcription of Senufo words uses umlauts to distinguish vowels usually designated by standard phonetic symbols. This convention is carefully explained, but my attention could never pass easily through the plethora of marks usually associated with other, and quite different, sounds.

Africanists know of the much simpler and clearer system used in Nigeria, where a dot under a conventional letter assigns it a different phonetic meaning.

I bring these criticisms up only in the interest of maintaining precision in discourse concerned with African traditional art. Dr. Glaze's book brings these questions to mind only incidentally. Its merits place it far above any serious criticism. It should be entirely welcome as a source and a promise.

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Barbara Kruger. We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture. A catalog with texts by Craig Owens and Jane Weinstock. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1983. 63 pp. \$10.00.

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A feminist man enjoys, to his surprise, looking at the naked woman photographed in the centerfold; a monk is distracted from prayer by carved arabesques; a Marxist admires the elegance of a TV advertisement for a stockbroker. What we thus enjoy visually is only partly determined by our acknowledged beliefs, and the study of pleasure in visual imagery cuts across distinctions between popular and serious art, revealing how complex the connections between belief and vision are. A picture is true or false according to whether it shows the world as it is; and if that sort of truth is difficult enough to judge, true or false pleasures in imagery are still more complex. In one sense, a pleasure, as a sensation, simply *is* and so cannot be true or false. Psychosomatic headaches differ from "true" ones not in being less painful but in having the wrong sorts of causes. Somewhat analogously, false pleasures are those I would not have if I had the right sorts of beliefs. My feminist, monk, and Marxist enjoy guiltily what they believe they should, given their beliefs, disdain. More complex are cases where some observer tells a person what he should not enjoy, as when, for example, some feminists argue that no one ought to enjoy pornography. Were a man's beliefs different, he would not enjoy pornography; but so, too, were I repelled by Christianity, Giotto might disgust me. So the notion of false pleasures can be defined in a noncircular way only if we have some convincing theory of human nature, some explanation of why some visual pleasures ought to be sought.

These writers, critics of the false visual pleasures of late capitalism, point to the ways in which our culture encourages us to treat as natural what is a product of our visual ideologies. Artworks like Kruger's collages critique these prevailing mythologies, her practice thus a parallel to the theory presented by Jameson, Owens, and the other writers. The key reference

names here are Barthes, both for his early *Mythologies* (1957) and for the late *The Pleasure of the Text*, and Lacan, for his discussion of desire and looking (scopophilia) and its relation to the constitution of the self. In English-speaking countries, this very French synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis has had the greatest influence in film studies (see Duncan 1983), a new field, thus lacking an established ideology. When Craig Owens, Jean Clay (see Clay 1981), or Norman Bryson (see Carrier 1983) apply these approaches to painting, they meet resistance, whether because art historians are determined to reject innovation or because such new approaches only provide new bottles for old wines. But this work is highly imaginative and so deserves sympathetic and critical consideration. Barthes's texts are relatively accessible; his gift for providing apt examples and his clear writing make his work a valuable influence. Lacan is another story; his playful and self-conscious obscurantism supports, even if it is not entirely justified, the view that he is just a clown. Still, just as Wittgenstein is so deeply imbedded in an Anglo-Austrian culture as to make an explanation of his most obvious points necessary to outsiders, so the same is no doubt true of Lacan. But since English-language aesthetics is in great need of stimulus, making that effort is surely worthwhile.

What does it mean to assert that the very process of looking is grounded in ideology? The claim made famous by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* that old-master nudes function in part like pinups would, I suppose, now be generally taken seriously. Lacan's more radical point, popularized in a well-known essay by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), is more elusive. Pleasure in looking draws on internalized beliefs about gender:

Desire (is) born with language . . . but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in context, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox.

Pleasure in looking at images always depends in treating that representation as-if of such a desired-and-threatening woman.

Such an account raises difficult problems. Even if this reconstruction of the origins of visual pleasure is accepted, it would not necessarily follow that all picture viewing is explained. That would be like asserting that the failures of 1980s Communism are due to lacunae in Marx's texts, as if the origins of Marxism could explain its entire history. Mulvey moves from a discussion of voyeurism in some Hitchcock films

(*Rear Window*, *Vertigo*) to a more general conclusion: "Cinema builds the way she is looked at into the spectacle itself." Films with female protagonists or with only male characters are treated as not real counterexamples to this thesis, which cannot, I think, even explain the full significance of Hitchcock's procedures. Like any attempt to offer a general account, this analysis is vulnerable to the obvious objection that it explains too much too easily. *Rear Window* or an Ingres *Odalisque* may be atypical visual artworks; at least, it is not obvious that a theory explaining why we enjoy them would apply to other, different films or paintings.

To follow through the complex political implications of such an analysis we need to turn from Lacan's account of desire to Barthes's study of visual myths. For while the very generality of Lacan's link between visual pleasure and castration anxiety makes the discussion of individual images difficult, the focus on culturally determined visual myths points to specific ways in which sexism functions visually. As Jameson and also Colin Mercer point out in *Formations of Pleasure*, the political position of such critics is complex. It is easy to oppose the mindless sexism of magazine centerfolds to the sophistication of intellectuals who use Lacan and Barthes to analyze such images. What is false in that opposition, Barthes thought when he looked back critically on his *Mythologies* (see Barthes 1971), was the failure to recognize how "demystification . . . has itself become discourse, stock of phrases, catechismic declaration." Marxism, he earlier said, was not a myth because it sought to transform, not just represent, the world. But once the revolution too becomes a myth, such criticism becomes, as here, the subject of academic discourse. This problem seemingly recurs once any critical work, literary or visual, achieves success. An advocate of Kruger's art confesses:

Certainly I did not expect this work simply to function instrumentally or even didactically. . . . (But now these works) allow themselves simply to enter that discourse . . . on a par with the very objects they had once appeared ready to displace. [Crimp 1982]

To achieve the success measured by such publications as this exhibition catalog means that her work is already compromised, and so other critics compare her unfavorably to other less well known and so perhaps more radical artists (see Kelly 1983). So understood, radical artists are in an inescapable bind: either they remain safely obscure or else they become part of the system they criticize. Kruger's photographs are commodities, and so if they become

well known, they will become valuable. But how could such artworks change the practices of an entire society? That left-wing critics have failed to think through these questions poses a major problem for their analysis.

One starting point is to note the complexity of the relation between an artist's beliefs and our pleasure in his or her work. As Terry Eagleton points out in his wonderful essay in *Formations of Pleasure* on Yeats's line, "A terrible beauty is born," many people who dislike the poet's politics still admire his poetry. Building on Barthes's discussion in *Sade/Fourier/Loyola* we might contrast disinterest in an artist's "message" with pleasure in the technique. In *Formations* Victor Burgin has a picture essay, "Gradiva," about Freud's analysis of a novel. What I enjoy is not the slightly pretentious choice of that subject but the way the photographer juxtaposes a fountain pen and a photograph of an antique sculpture reproduced, I am reminded, in the images of Freud's consulting room. Another, somewhat similar text, Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, aggressively refuses to sentimentalize skid row (Rosler 1981). She juxtaposes unpeopled scenes of storefronts with word lists describing alcoholics: "up to the gills, under the table, slopped over, limp, melted," for example. Like the student who doodles during the most serious part of my class, I find myself thinking not of these real issues but of Mallarmé's poetry or of other texts with commentaries, Nabokov's dotty *Pale Fire*, for example. I enjoy these images perhaps because their almost precious elegance makes it easy to avoid thinking about the people whose life they describe.

Similarly, when Kruger wants to tell me something about capitalism and power, I look at the man in "Your comfort is my silence" and find his hidden face mysterious, or read the black parallels in "We construct the chorus of missing persons" as rather beautiful quotations of minimalist art, notwithstanding the ominous title. For just as I may appreciate tribal war masks or baroque martyrdoms without reference, almost, to their content, what I perversely enjoy in Kruger is less the message than her skill at composition. Compared with a political text, which demands close attention to its words if it is to be understood at all, such artistically sophisticated images are not easily adapted to conveying messages. Kruger of course recognizes this point. Unlike artistically naive protest artists, she aims to present not so much images of protest as representations whose perception challenges our visual habits. Owens has some interesting remarks about her use of shifters, such pronouns as "I" or "you," which address the viewer. We might thus

contrast passive contemplation, the use of known codes, with such active readings required by works that challenge those conventions. The claim that only politically conscious works require such active reading is worth investigation (see Foster 1982). My state license plates read, "You have a friend in Pennsylvania"; and the meaning of that phrase is not transparent. Of course I have friends in Pennsylvania, for I live here. But what about visitors who read the slogan? What I think the words *mean* is that the state encourages investment and tourism; checking that interpretation would take research, but what is interesting is that I have never until now found them problematic. Similarly, perhaps, when Kruger places the words "We are being made spectacles of" across a romantic couple, we are to infer that these depicted people are speaking. The visual message is undercut by these words, and so we become more self-critical. But here, of course, that reading is prepared for by our awareness of the work's context.

It is interesting to note how this analysis was anticipated by earlier critics. Greenberg's justly famous analysis of kitsch says that socialist realism, which "predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art" (Greenberg 1939). The viewer of serious art must work. Gombrich, similarly, proposes that sophisticated viewers are frustrated artists and so want "at least to project"; hence academically perfect drawing has become taboo (see Gombrich 1953). "One could learn a lot," he adds, "in studying such prohibitions." Written before the widespread use within serious art of images from mass culture, these accounts propose a schema found in more recent discussions. The popular is the effortlessly pleasurable; the serious is that which denies easy enjoyment. Excluded from the realm of mindless pleasures, the serious observer can feel exalted, placed above the masses. And viewed from this Nietzschean perspective, the patronizing attitude implicit in Jameson's question—"How do you distinguish . . . between real pleasure and mere diversion?" (p. 3)—is, as he recognizes, a product of the intellectual's inability to enjoy in an unreflective way such pleasures. There is a certain highly sublimated pleasure (and aggression) in thus denying oneself access to "common" pleasures.

The worst aspect of mass culture, Richard Wollheim proposed in a remarkably prescient essay,

is its tendency to encourage and to reinforce a highly relativistic attitude. . . . People come to tell not what they like, but what other people will like. [Wollheim 1962]

To uncritically enjoy mass culture, an individual must cease to think of him or herself as having peculiarly individual desires; for many postmodernist critics that notion of the self itself has become problematic. But whether this is a new result of mass culture is unclear. Reynolds' contemporaries on the Grand Tour were perhaps relativists in Wollheim's sense of the word also, their judgments reflecting what they believed others of the elite would like. To put this point in a more general way, studies such as these would benefit greatly from the introduction of a historical perspective. Certainly the distinction between serious and popular art is a relatively recent creation, as is the development of that genre used by figures like Kruger, protest art. But comparing and contrasting her with baroque artists, who were also interested in visual rhetoric, might be highly illuminating. And then the gap between the art historian and these critics who borrow from Barthes and Lacan might be narrowed, to the benefit of both art history and the study of popular imagery.

These no doubt are utopian hopes. What meanwhile is ironical in these texts, as Jameson notes, is that Marxists play the role of Platonic philosopher kings, prepared to tell everyone what they ought to enjoy. The most trenchant comment I have heard on this practice comes from Howard Becker, who effectively halted one discussion by asking a question nobody could answer: "how do *you* know what mass audiences think?" Plato at least had reason to prefer the rule of philosophers, since he believed that only men and women who knew the difference between appearance and reality could lead society. But though the tools provided by Barthes, Lacan, and the other writers referred to in these volumes are fascinating, only a great optimist would claim that such speculations, which have almost no foundation in empirical research, explain popular culture. The gap between the analysis of high culture, where literary critics and art historians can claim to have specialized knowledge, and these discussions of mass media and art playing with mass media images remains very broad, and this clever synthesis of feminism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism remains a curiously academic affair, a strange fate given the political aspirations of these authors and artists.

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