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answer that will accommodate the ontological complexities and ambiguities that his analysis has disclosed.

Not surprisingly, Shusterman's pluralistic views surrounding the identity and ontological status of the text are mirrored in his findings on the pluralistic state of interpretation and evaluation. Looking at the logical status of interpretive statements, the logical role of reasons, and the general form of interpretive argument, Shusterman finds several different positions within each category. Some interpretations, for example, express propositions which claim some sort of truth value, some are recommendations or decisions on how to regard a work of art, and others are likened to performances. Likewise, an analysis of the logic of evaluation reveals different evaluative games constituted by different rules or "logics" and serving different aims. Moreover, each position can appeal to actual critical practice for some degree of confirmation.

Throughout the book, Shusterman appeals to ordinary usage, the actual practice of critics, and the pluralism of so-called "monistic" philosophical approaches to justify his advocacy of a healthy pluralism in literary studies. Although his "look and see" approach, with its many carefully drawn distinctions, provides an illuminating analysis of the literary world, the reader may still find it disconcerting that an aesthetic answer to the book's set of concerns can be given in such a matter.

But this may be shortsighted. For such an approach doesn't preclude attempts to examine the limitations and advantages inherent in all critical procedures. The philosopher's task, however, is not to prescribe how critics should practice, but rather to analyze and describe the logic of the actual critical games played by critics. Still, the games are indeed complex and deeply rooted in the fabric of our social lives. In unraveling the complex logical grammar of our aesthetic concepts, the philosopher reveals the underlying network of assumptions that constitutes that "form of life" and the grounds upon which that "form of life" rests.

The book's analytic focus, however, needs to be supplemented with other traditions—hermeneutics, structuralism, deconstructionism, phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, semiotics, etc.—for a richer appreciation of the full range of questions that can be raised. Still, for all educators concerned with the foundations of their discipline, Shusterman's book does indeed provide a series of issues and problems that must be confronted.

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THE ORIGINALITY OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND OTHER MODERNIST MYTHS, by Rosalind E. Krauss. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985, 307 pp., \$19.95.

HAS MODERNISM FAILED?, by Suzi Gablik. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984, 133 pp., \$14.95.

Modernism has failed, and the avant-garde is not original: these are the messages of the books under review. The promise to demystify certain

tenets of modernism in Krauss's title and Gablik's rhetorical question introduce books that mark disparate critical responses to the postmodern practice and theory of the visual arts and raise the question of whether the critic's job is moral tendance or the articulation of what are perhaps less than evident relationships within and among the arts.

Krauss's book is ground-breaking and must be read by anyone interested in contemporary criticism. The ground broken is that defined by the historicist criticism of the past 130 years, and what breaks it is the structuralism and poststructuralism introduced to our academic establishment in 1966 at a conference at Johns Hopkins University called "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man." Krauss is among the first to apply these critical theories to the visual and plastic arts, and the reduction of what modernism saw as timeless truths to the status of myth follows from her structural interpretation of certain artistic practices and products of the period in question. This collection of essays begins with the ascription of *silence* to the grid that appeared in prewar cubist painting and ends with the characterization of the practitioners of structural criticism whose criticism constitutes its own object as *writers*. Criticism and art are construed as a kind of writing, and art on this construal is silent, for it does not speak (flow from, express) the artist's mind.

One lesson of the theories of our modernity is that what "-isms" describe are the result of conceptual choices, they are not dictated by the nature of things. Preeminent among these theories is structural linguistics, two of whose tenets entail surrender of a spate of concepts surrounding belief in historicism: one is that the connection between the material aspect of a sign and its meaning is arbitrary, i.e., meanings are not natural or necessary but conventional; the other is that the meaning of a given sign is determined by its place in a system of axes, horizontal (possible combinations of signs) and vertical (lists of signs that could occupy a given position in a given horizontal string). If the boundaries of what a sign picks out are conventional, then we may ask what are the decisions that convened it, i.e., we may open it to question: the categories central to modernism—work of art, medium, author, oeuvre—are called into question by Krauss's essays. Does "Picasso" name the historical individual who is the *origin* of the meanings of figures in his works, or were the meanings already written before he chose them, making all of his works collagelike, that is, a pastiche of elements from elsewhere? What is the status of a cast of *The Gates of Hell* made sixty years after Rodin's death, when the first cast was made three years after his death from a diagram of the position of modeled plaster figures that he was regularly changing? There was no *original*: the *Gates* were not finished because the building for which they were designed was canceled.

Clement Greenberg is the high priest of modernism; his *Art and Culture* (1961) created the conceptual space within which modernism could be thought. Krauss positions herself in opposition to Greenberg, her work comprising a radical inversion of the historicist premises that had dominated critical practice in this country and continued to dominate criticism

of the visual arts even while other universes of discourse were taking account of the structuralist challenge to historicism, the crucial tenets of which are that there are transhistorical universals—art, painting, sculpture, the masterpiece—that are like living organisms in undergoing constant change with no gaps or discontinuities between successive stages. The difference between her criticism and Greenberg's, with which Krauss introduces her book, is the difference between method and content. If what criticism is about is already given, part of the continuous history of art and expressive of the human mind, and if "art as a universal calls forth and is completed by judgment as another universal capacity of consciousness" (pp. 1-2), then criticism is handmaiden to the independent object which provides the *content* of the critical act of making evaluative judgments.

On the structural model of meaning, however, signs (here, works of art) are what they are by virtue of the relations in which they stand to other signs, and their meaning or signification is a function of the selections made by the critic from the network of signs. These selections precede the evaluative judgments that have been thought to comprise criticism. What the critic does is no different in kind from what the artist does: artist's creative act and critic's interpretative act alike are constitutive of an object that is never completed or finished off. Since the object is not the embodiment of an artist's act of mind, occupying a unique place in the continuing development that is the history of art, it must be constituted somehow. Criticism, Krauss argues against Greenberg, is the *method* by which the object of criticism is constituted and postmodernism the space within which the inversion of the critical categories of modernism is performed by artists and critics. Krauss discovers questions about copies and repetition, the reproducibility of the sign, textual production, within modernist practice itself. This is to say that a reading of modernism in terms of the inversion of the categories within which it has previously been thought discovers therein the ahistorical structural values of binary opposition.

The first half of the book, "Modernist Myths," interprets the grid in painting, the artist's proper name, photography in surrealism and in geography, and received wisdom about the sculptural practice of Rodin, Giacometti, and Gonzalez as myths, myths in Levi-Strauss's sense: mechanisms by which contradictions are held in suspension. The grid, for example, declares the modernity of modern art precisely by being ubiquitous in twentieth-century art and nowhere evident in nineteenth-century art. "In that great chain of reactions by which modernism was born out of the efforts of the nineteenth century, one final shift resulted in breaking the chain. By 'discovering' the grid, cubism . . . landed in a place that was out of reach of everything that went before" (p. 10). Within the structural rejection of continuous development, a break can be thought, and within the poststructural submission of works of art to the "test of their own histories," whatever is now thought about a work can be seen to have been there already in its history. Breaks disrupt the unity of what is broken, and repetitions cannot be original. Krauss goes a long way toward undoing the high-modernist values of unity and originality.

The twentieth-century grid is a repetition of past grids, not a development out of them. It is there in the nineteenth century illustrating treatises on physiological optics and in the mullioned panes of windows in Symbolist paintings, grids of science and of spirit, respectively. The rift between science and spirit in the last century was deep, but on Krauss's masterful reading of the cultural productions of the past 130 years, the application to canvas of optics's lessons by Seurat, for example, is seen to lead to the opposite of science, symbolism. Symbolism's windows themselves exemplify both transparency and opacity, panes through which light passes, mirrors in which images are repeated: this play of oppositions is explicitly modernist, Krauss argues, for modernism is a myth. Its function is to deal with contradiction, its method, to cover over the contradictory elements so that they seem to go away. But they do not. A further demonstration of the mythic structure of the grid is that the opposing values of matter and spirit are suspended within its modernist version: so far as it does not map the material world, it declares itself to be material, while Mondrian and Malevich, for example, declare its spirituality. The grid is both matter and spirit, and its being both shatters the unity of its concept, as it shatters the unity of modernism of which it is the emblem.

The second half of the book, "Toward Postmodernism," contains a series of essays some of which read against readings made in light of modernist presuppositions. Sol LeWitt, for example, has been said to have captured in his abstractions the look of abstract thought and so to be part of the Western tradition's "pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means." Krauss intersperses her argument that his work is absurdist with passages from Beckett's *Molloy* and concludes that his absurdist nominalism reigns in a world without center, not a world governed by modernism's transcendent subject, Mind.

Again, the art of the 70s has been said to be multiple. Krauss sees its practitioners moving in lockstep, but "to a different drummer from the one called style," where style is a key unifying concept of historicism. They move instead to the beat of the index, the sign that bears a physical relationship to its object: it is exemplified by the photograph and by all art forms that depend on documentation, e.g., earthworks, body art, story art, video, photo-realism. The demonstration of indexicality is at the same time a *reductio ad absurdum* of the modernist thesis of art's self-containment, its nonreferentiality. Other essays move toward postmodernism by interleaving art with linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, mathematics—Duchamp with Jakobson and Lacan, Serra with Merleau-Ponty, earthworks with the Klein group—and in so doing call into question the thesis of the autonomy of art. All of the book's essays read the art of the present and the recent past "otherwise," and to stunning effect.

Gablik has written a moral pamphlet whose message is that modernism has failed. She is right *if* art has a moral function, *if* capitalism's secularism is a sickness, and *if* art's moral function is to cure this sickness by reviving the sacred. Her thesis is simple and sweeping: capitalism kills *all* moral values, and *only* art can resurrect them. The book, however, does not establish the thesis.

Gablik's hero is the artist invented by the nineteenth century: the inspired genius for whom art is a (priestly) vocation and whose life is lived on the fringes of society. Modernism in the hands of such artists promised to preserve the spirit from the imperium of capitalism: Kandinsky, Malevich, Newman, Rothko were concerned with the spiritual in art. LeWitt, Noland, Stella are not, and with them modernism begins to fail its moral purpose. Art is proclaimed to have no purpose other than itself, and, Gablik is at pains to show, freed from the moral, art cannot long stay free from the market.

Because the West is in thrall to capitalism, the book argues, its individuals have lost all sense of the sacred. The notion of the *sacred* is used uncritically and more or less interchangeably with the moral, tradition, the transcendent, rules, the idea of something bigger than ourselves, limits, the sources of moral authority, the absolute. Relativism, pluralism, lawlessness, unbridled freedom, all to an extreme degree, are said to follow upon what "we are really addressing . . . [namely] the *failure*, in our secularized age, of the moral and religious impulse, and a serious *disturbance* of man's relationship to God" (p. 92, italics added). Gablik seems not to know that there is a tradition of moral philosophy starting from Socrates whose task is precisely to provide a theory of the moral that is not dependent on the divine, a *secular* account, and that it is at least false to say that there is no secular morality. The strategy, intentional or not, is clear: since it is easier to disavow the sacred than the moral—few there are who would say that morality lays no claims—the assumption that the moral is equivalent to the sacred harnesses the authority of the former to the latter, which is characterized in such a way that only an artist/priest can see it and by showing it to us restore our lost sense.

In a letter to the editors of *Art in America* (January 1986) the author defends against the charge of doom-saying, averring that the purpose of her book is to define solutions to this failure, this disturbance. These consist, in her words, in art's recalling sacred signs, restoring sacramental vision, finding again its link with myth, and to this end the artist must assume the role of *shaman*, the visionary and healer of prehistoric times: for we are sick and the times are sick. It is not easy to argue for such a thesis, and in lieu of argument we get summary and quotation from a host of authors in a gesture that illuminates nothing and courts confusion. Surely the reader is not supposed to be persuaded that "far from what . . . Marx and Freud claimed," "men cannot abandon their religious faith without a kind of aberration of intellect and a sort of violation of their true nature" (p. 93) just because de Tocqueville said it? Gablik is neither social scientist nor philosopher, and her cruising their literatures bears no fruit whatsoever. She is a journalist, and her chronicles of the contemporary art scene, for example, the interviews with graffiti artists, do well the journalist's job of describing a scene. Since a point is better made with a good description than with unmotivated pontifications such as "Art . . . is merely evidence of the individual's self-transformations" (p. 82), Gablik could have advanced her cause far more by writing a detailed descriptive

account of the conditions of production and reception of certain figures in twentieth-century art. As it is, *Has Modernism Failed?* is little more than polemic and as such stands in dramatic contrast to the rethinking of modernism that occurs in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*.

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