The October Century

Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism, by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh—she has published a textbook, Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism. While the other three authors receive equal billing, the book represents a kind of summation of Krauss's remarkable scope as critic and chef d'école.

To grasp the distinctive character of Art Since 1900, it is worth briefly retracing the evolution of Krauss's ideas. Her first book, published in 1971, was on the sculpture of David Smith, an artist championed by her mentor, Clement Greenberg. But Krauss located the originality of Smith's work in psychological and philosophical issues that had nothing to do with Greenbergian formalism. Krauss argued that, whereas traditional sculpture presented figures and objects as forms radiating out from a hidden "core," analogous to the hidden self of consciousness, Smith shifted to a contingent, additive mode of composition, challenging not just conventional esthetics but also the Cartesian idea of the mind-body relationship. Krauss expanded on this premise in her 1977 book, Passages in Modern Sculpture, a selective history tracing the medium's evolution from Rodin to Minimalism. Here she argued that the achievement of Minimalism was "to relocate the origins of sculpture's meaning to the outside, no longer modeling its structure on the privacy of psychological space but on the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space." Krauss explained, Minimalist artists were influenced in this direction by a variety of sources, from Ludwig Wittgenstein's attack on "private language" to the "objective," anti-psychological novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet.

Meanwhile, Krauss (together with Arlette Michel and Jean-Jacques Rival) had started October. In its pages, Krauss and her colleagues reformulated the critical program of Minimalism in the language of French structuralism. There was an immediate affinity between the two, since in France structuralism represented a revolt against the existentialist idea of the self. Yve-Alain Bois was soon recruited to the October group, bringing with him a novel synthesis of structuralism and Greenbergian formalism. With the advent of post-structuralism in the later 1970s, the attack on the idea of the self was rephrased in terms borrowed from Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Especially influential was Lacan's discussion of the "mirror-stage," which posits an irreversible contradiction between the real incoherence of the self and the fictitious unity it achieves when it perceives itself in the eyes of others. In the 1980s, Krauss discovered the writings of the dissident Surrealist Georges Bataille, and restated the subversion of the self in terms of "formlessness," "horizontal" and "baseline materialism." Bataille and Krauss's ideas point of departure, new recruits such as Hal Foster and Mignon Nixon used psychoanalytic theories about psychic fragmentation to explicate Surrealism and contemporary art.

Meanwhile, the academic leftist implicit in the journal's title, a reference to Gregor Elsenstein's film about the Russian Revolution, was bolstered by the contributions of the German scholar Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, who wrote on the works of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Peter Bürger to argue that the idea of the independent self was a piece of bourgeois obfuscation, and that the role of true avant-garde art was to expose it.

Over time, the leading writers associated with October assumed increasingly important academic positions. After many years teaching at the University of Chicago, Krauss moved to Columbia, while Bois, Foster and Buchloh found positions at Harvard, Princeton and Barnard, respectively. They are no longer a band of rebels against the establishment. They are the establishment. Their writings now constitute a large part of the standard curriculum for graduate students studying the history of modern art. The publication of Art Since 1900 seems meant to extend their influence to undergraduate education as well.

Art Since 1900 competes directly with existing textbooks by H.H. Arnason, Sam Hunter and other scholars. Alternatively, teachers and students can turn to Modern Art and Art Practices and Debates by a group of British scholars associated with the Open University, four volumes that trace the history of modern art from Courbet to Gerhard Richter in essays exploring topics such as "Primitivism and the Modern," "Surrealism, Myth, and Psychoanalysis" and "The Politics of Representation." Art Since 1900 sets out to combine the comprehensive historical narrative of a conventional textbook with the kind of critical analysis found in the Open University series.

When multiple writers collaborate on a textbook, they usually strive to merge their different voices into a single, seamless narrative. In contrast, the four authors of Art Since 1900 attempt to create a "dialogical" history. Each writer begins by presenting the theoretical approach that will guide his or her discussion of the material. The history that follows is divided into 107 mini-chapters (typically six or seven pages long), each written by a different author. The mini-chapters are headed by key dates and key events ("1916: Kazimir Malevich shows his Suprematist canvases at the "10th" exhibition in Petrograd").

The narrative begins with the year 1890 and concludes in 2003, although not every year receives its own chapter. In the preface, the authors suggest that the brevity of the narrative into a series of short entries might permit it to be used as a kind of hypertext, so that the reader could pick out the entries devoted to French art or to photography.

Krauss contributes more than a third of the entries in the book. Her range is vast. She writes about Pablo Picasso, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, Constantin Brancusi, Walter Benjamin and mechanical reproduction, David Smith, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, monochrome painting, Clement Greenberg, Marcel Duchamp's later work, Minimalism, site-specific art, the changing role of museums, postmodernism and appropriation, critiques of visuality, video art and William Kentridge's animated drawings—topics she has previously addressed in more specialized texts. She also provides insightful discussions of several topics she has not discussed before: the rise of Dada, Alfred Stieglitz's circle of photographers, Farm Security Administration photography, and the influence of existentialism on the art of the 1950s. Krauss has banished the jargon and the attacks on individual scholars that often mar her essays, but she has not lost her gift for withering scorn: the Modern's 1966 exhibition "New Images of Man" is denounced for "promoting a third generation of neo-Expressionists... at just the moment when Pop art was to enter the picture and throw all these ideas about the link between the figurative and the expressive onto the junkheap of history."

The other three named authors expand on elements of Krauss's broad intellectual agenda, adding their own interests and insights. Bois writes on Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Suprematism, Constructivism (in its original Russian form and in its later, international incarnations), Clement Greenberg in the 1940s, Barnett Newman, Gutai, Brazilian Neo-Concretism, Lucio Fontana, West Coast funk art, Clark Oldenburg and Robert Smithson. There is a subtle lightness and elegance to Bois's writing: "Mondrian's principle of reduction is that of maximal tension: a strict line is but a tensed curve." The same argument goes for surface (the flatlet, the tense). At his best, Bois recalls Roland Barthes and, like Barthes, he seems to invoke philosophical ideas and social issues for their poetic value rather than their literal truth or falsity.

Buchloh strikes a more moralizing note. He is in favor of Berlin Dada because it's left-wing Constructivism because it demystifies art; Fluxus and Nouveau Realisme because they subvert late capitalism; Conceptual art because it critiques museums and collectors; Viennese Actionism because it strikes a blow against repressive tolerance. He is against Neue Sachlichkeit because it analyzes and Neo-Expressionism because they reflect right-wing nostalgia. He is against Joseph Beuys because Beuys is too theatrical and romantic. He is for photography when it attacks the fetishism of the art object, but against it when it celebrates industrial production. He is for the mass media before World War II but against them after the war. He is deeply confused about Gerhard Richter. Buchloh's dense and repetitive prose is so cluttered with philosophical concepts that the art sometimes becomes invisible. The average undergraduate may well find his chapters unintelligible. On the other hand, if you are willing to roll up your sleeves and make the effort to understand him, he usually has something interesting to say.

Foster contributes almost 40 of the book's mini-chapters, more than Krauss and almost twice as many as either Bois or Buchloh. Accordingly, his name comes first in the list of authors. He writes about Dada, Surrealism, Minimalism and postmodernism—the subjects of his earlier books and essays. He also writes about fin de siècle Vienna, Paul Gauguin, Wilhelm Worringer, early abstract painting, Constructivism, the Bauhaus, machine-age art in America, Henry Moore, the Nazi attack on "degenerate" art, Jean Dubuffet and Jean Foujol, the Situationist Interna-
While Hal Foster, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh receive equal billing, the book clearly represents a summation of Rosalind Krauss’s remarkable scope as critic and chef d’œuvre.

On the other hand, some of Foster’s chapters have a muted, dullish feeling. You get the feeling that he’s picked up the slack for other authors who haven’t completed their assignments.

Arnasen’s History of Modern Art begins with a survey of European art from the Renaissance through Impressionism; similarly Hunter and Jacobs begin their Modern Art with a review of modernism’s origins in the 18th-century. In contrast, the narrative of Art since 1900 begins abruptly with chapters on fin de siècle Vienna and on early Matisse. In the absence of historical background, it will be unclear to students why these are important topics. The book’s division into mini-chapters means that the reader must cope with constant starts and stops. There is very little sense of continuity, and the confusion is exacerbated by the authors’ penchant for beginning their chapters in medias res: thus the chapter on Analytic Cubism begins with a pointless anecdote from 1911 and then backtracks to Braque’s breakthrough paintings of 1908 (which are not, however, illustrated). Nonetheless, bit by bit, the narrative gains coherence, and by the time we get to 1914 (on p. 130) the basic argument becomes clear: Cubism is important because it gives birth to Constructivism and to Dada—rival movements, but both dedicated to the subversion of bourgeois art and society. Constructivism, in particular, receives wonderfully detailed treatment; it is the subject of four mini-chapters ranging from its Russian inception to its English demise.

Once the story reaches 1915, most textbooks tend to focus on American art, following the progression from Abstract Expressionism through Pop art and Minimalism to postmodernism. For these decades, Art since 1900 tries instead to maintain an even balance between European and American practice; Bois, for instance, contributes two valuable chapters on French work of the 1960s and ’70s. From 1970 onward, the authors were themselves important participants in the development of contemporary art, and their account of this period is especially detailed and opinionated.

Unfortunately, the virtues of Art since 1900 are accompanied by equally striking flaws. Some of these are merely technical, and could easily be corrected in future editions. Key events are presented out of order, because they have been placed under earlier or later headings; for instance, we only learn about Bruce Glaser’s famous 1962 interview with Frank Stella and Donald Judd in an entry on the situation of French art in 1962.9 The numbering of the illustrations starts over again with each new mini-chapter, so that there is no way to cross-reference a discussion in one chapter with an image in another. For example, Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty is discussed but not illustrated on p. 50, as part of Bois’s insightful essay on entropy in the art of the 60s, while it is illustrated but not discussed on p. 543 as part of Krauss’s essay on site-specific art. There is virtually no discussion of modern architecture, which is given a detailed treatment in the volumes by Arnasen and by Hunter and Jacobs. The bibliographies for individual chapters are too abbreviated and too slanted toward authors associated with October. Despite its “diachronic” ambitions, the book is strangely coy about the question of authorship: the author of each mini-chapter is identified by his or her initials in the table of contents for individual decades, but not in the text itself or in the main table of contents. You have to keep flipping back and forth to be sure who wrote what. Equally annoying is the subject title of each entry—e.g., “Dada is launched”—is found only in small type at the bottom of the section’s pages. Sometimes, individual years are commemorated with multiple mini-chapters each bearing the date, a lower-case letter and a subject title; these may be written by the same person or by several different authors.

Numerous major artists are missing, or are discussed so briefly that they might as well be absent. Gliori di Chirico is covered only in passing, as part of an account of the linkage between Futurism and,Finish. The reader would never guess from this textbook that di Chirico exerted a huge influence on Dada, Surrealism and popular culture. The School of Paris has vanished, as has American art of the 1920s and ’30s (other than Precisionism and photography) and Latin American art of the 1950s and ’60s (except for the Brazilians Hélio Oiticica and Jeggi Clark). Two potentially unfortunate omissions have been rectified by bringing in an uncredited outside author, Amy Dempsey, to write chapters on the Mexican muralists and on the Harlem Renaissance. (A former Krauss student, Dempsey is the author of a compact handbook titled Art in the Modern Era.) Most astonishingly, there is no discussion of Picasso’s work between 1921 and 1938 (other than a brief reference to his sculptures of 1928-30 in a section on David Smith), while Matisse’s work of the years 1917 to 1930 is dismissed as part of a reactionary trend.

These omissions are not accidental oversights. Rather, they are the expression of an ideological bias that profoundly shapes—indeed distorts—the narrative of Art since 1900. No doubt the omission of Picasso’s influential neo-classical work of the early 1920s could be explained (if not justified) by the authors’ belief that the figurative revival of this era was not just artistically “reactionary” but also politically “antidemocratic.” But how are we to understand the absence of Picasso’s paintings of the later 1920s and the 1930s, the “hybrid Cubist-Surrealist work” that Foster mentions as the stylistic model for Guernica but that is not otherwise discussed in Art since 1900? From his interface paintings of 1926-37 through the “bone-bathers” of 1929 and down to the glowing nudes of 1932 and the “weeping women” of the mid-1930s, these are immensely important and influential works. In her discussion of dadaist Surrealism, Krauss credits Miró’s “rage against painting” evident in a 1926 relief covered with projecting nails, to the influence of Bataille’s criticism.9 But both Miró and Bataille were responding to Picasso’s crude and violent pictures of the mid-1920s, such as the Outer of 1926 in which Picasso had employed nails. Much of the imagery of later Surrealism derives from Picasso’s 1923 adoption of the minotaur motif,24 and the prehistory of Abstract Expressionism is inconceivable without the example of Picasso’s 1932 Girl Before a Mirror, acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 1938.

Why are these essential passages in modern art missing? The only explanation I can think of is that Picasso’s work of these years is the preeminent modern example of artistic innovation as an expression of individual genius, and therefore falls under October’s interdiction on the idea of subjectivity. Krauss has famously expressed her antipathy to the biographical interpretation of Picasso’s work, which sees the paintings and sculptures of these years as by-products of his scandalous love life.25 But to ignore the work for this reason is to throw out the baby with the bathwater: as Robert Rosenblum demonstrated many years ago, it is perfectly possible to discuss the erotic imagery of Picasso’s work without getting lost in biographical details.26

A similar antipathy to the biographical and the subjective seems to lie behind the strange treatment of Robert Rauschenberg. His early works, such as Automobile Tire Print of 1968, pass muster, because they utilize “the indelible imprint . . . as a weapon against the expressive mark.”27 Seventy pages later, in a text box about Leo Steinberg’s concept of the “flattened picture plane,” Krauss cites Steinberg’s lyrical analysis of Rauschenberg’s silkscreen paintings of the 1960s.28 But neither the silkscreen paintings nor their revolutionary precursors, Rauschenberg’s combines of the late 1950s, are reproduced or discussed in Art since 1900. The problem, apparently, is that Rauschenberg’s work is too subjective, too rooted in his own tastes and associations. In contrast, Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg’s chief artistic interlocutor of these years, is praised for his use of “conventional, de-personalized” elements, and his work is discussed (and reproduced) at length.29

The “social history” of art in the chapters written by Buchloh is almost as problematic as the omissions of his co-authors. Discussing work made from 1900 through 1970, he judges artists by the degree of their adherence to the “anti-aesthetic” of Dadaism and Constructivism, which “replaces originality with technical reproduction . . . destroys a work’s aura and the contemplative mood of aesthetic experience and replaces these with communicative action.”30 The “aesthetic”
“shock” and “rupture” of avant-garde art are valuable because they accelerate the demise of bourgeois subjectivity. In contrast, Buchloh condemns the Neue Sachlichkeit painters as “cynical and melancholic” spokesmen for the “oligarchic bourgeoisie” and “tribal petit bourgeoisie” of the Weimar republic. After 1929, the goal of political effectiveness triumphs over the quest for a new formal language: now the task of the avant-garde is “to provide mass audiences with images of didactic information and political action.”

Elsewhere in the book, Foster acknowledges the argument, advanced by the Russian scholar Boris Groys, that the Constructivist ideal of a politicized avant-garde leads straight to the elevation of Stalin as, in Foster’s words, “the epitome of the Constructivist engineer of culture,” but he rejects Groys’s argument as “reductive, indeed anti-modernist.”

Buchloh’s criteria of political correctness change after 1960. The new enemy is “postwar consumer culture”—in other words, the long economic boom that made the European and American proletariat into members of the middle class, writing texts to the dream of a socialist revolution. By 1960, we are to believe, the worker has been brainwashed to see himself primarily as a consumer, held in thrall by the “spectacle” of mass entertainment and advertising. Suddenly, the old bourgeois culture doesn’t look so bad to Buchloh. He refers nostalgically to “the enlightenment culture of the bourgeois public sphere that has to be defended against the thugs of the forces of the culture industry.” Now that subjectivity is under siege, it has become a good thing. Diane Arbus, for instance, is praised for her “complex understanding of the fragility of the processes of subject formation, and the tragic consequences of the latest state of affairs.”

For all his brilliance as a critic, Buchloh is humbled by the fact that his political and aesthetic ideals are only rarely in accordance. As he writes in his introduction:

If the social history of art were to align its aesthetic judgement with the condition of political solidarity and class alliance, it would inevitably be left with only a few heroic figures in whom a correlation between class-consciousness, agency, and revolutionary alliance could actually be ascertainment. These examples would include Gustave Courbet and Honoré Daumier in the nineteenth century; Käthe Kollwitz and John Heartfield in the first half of the twentieth century, and artists such as Martha Rosler, Hans Haacke, and Allan Sekula in the second half of the twentieth century.

Evidently, politics cannot be used as a yardstick of aesthetic quality; in practice, however, Buchloh cannot resist the temptation to do this. The more fundamental problem here is that Buchloh, and his co-authors, have such a narrow and theoretical idea of social history that there is no way for real history, with its wealth of detail and its manifold links to art, to squeeze into their analyses. Foster’s relations to the social and political issues of his time, for instance, have been discussed by critics and historians including John Berger, Patricie Leighton, David Cottington, Jeffrey Weiss and Gergje Ulofs, but none of their ideas or discoveries is cited in Art Since 1960.

Some exception should be made here for Foster. In many places, he follows October’s party line. As the book proceeds, however, he seems to depart from it more and more often. Maybe this is because he wrote so many more chapters than the other authors the experience of absorbing and analyzing such a wide variety of art seems to have shaken his faith in his theoretical assumptions. Particularly, in his chapters on art after 1970, you seem to see Foster growing and changing as a critic, getting more flexible and more thoughtful.

So what’s a teacher to do—assign Art Since 1900 or angrily reject it, like the critic for the Wall Street Journal who wrote: “I have a suggestion for the parents of high-school students: Find out whether the college that your child hopes to attend plans to assign Art Since 1900 in its art-history courses. If so, apply elsewhere.” The answer, of course, will depend partly on the teacher’s tastes and politics. The intellectual intensity of Art Since 1900 should engage undergraduates (and other readers) who are prepared to be challenged rather than spoon-fed. Its more conspicuous omissions will perhaps be rectified in the next edition, due out in about three years, and in the meantime the publisher, Thames and Hudson, is supplementing the textbook edition with a copy of a multimedia CD, Art 20: The Thames and Hudson Multimedia Dictionary of Modern Art, which includes reproductions of many of the missing works.

On the other hand, I wonder whether a big, ambitious textbook like Art Since 1900 isn’t in fact a kind of dinosaur. The rise of copyright clearance houses means it makes possible for teachers to offer students customized selections of readings, photocopied and bound between paper covers. It’s still useful to have a textbook that serves as the backbone of a course, tying everything together, but there’s no need for the textbook to be the students’ only resource. If I were teaching a course on 20th-century art, I would probably assign Hunter and Jacobs’s Modern Art, which has a shorter, pithier text than Art Since 1900 and offers 887 illustrations compared to 697. To compensate for the lack of critical theory in Modern Art, I would put together a reading guide pointing to essays by important critics, certainly including Krauss, Foster, Bois and Buchloh, but also covering writers such as Alfred Barr, Roland Barthes, Homi Bhabha, John Berger, Mel Bochner, Ann Chave, T.J. Clark, Thomas Crow, Carol Duncan, Michael Fried, Coco Fusco, Tamar Garb, Clement Greenberg, Eleanor Heartney, Fredric Jameson, Donald Judd, Allan Kaprow, Donald Kuspit, Lucy Lippard, Robert Morris, Cindy Nemser, Molly Neishtat, Linda Nochlin, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Robert Rosenblum, Richard Sven, Kenneth Silver, Robert Smithson, Leo Steinberg, Kirk Varnedoe, and Anne Wagner. The students would be exposed to a wider spectrum of opinion—and they’d have more fun.


4. On the relationship between existentialism and structuralism, see Bois’s comments in “Roundtable: The predication of contemporary art,” AS79, pp. 671. Greenbergian Formalism is attractive to Bois and other advanced French critics because, compared to the poetic effusions of existentialist art critics, it appears breezily objective and “structural.”


8. Bois recently accepted a chair at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, N.J.

9. Richard Shiff at the University of Texas in Austin, T.J. Clark and Anne Wagner at Berkeley, Linda Nochlin and Robert Sklar at the Institute of Fine Arts, Patricia Mahaffie at the Graduate Center (CUNY) and Michael Fried at John Hopkins are also head important centers for the graduate study of modern art. But the critical program of the October school is still in place and the conversations continue.

10. Arnason’s History of Modern Art was first published in 1968 as a companion volume to I.W. Jamieson’s venerable History of Art, which was being prepared for reprinting in a revised second edition in 1969. Both books were published by Prentice-Hall and Abrams, and have near-identical formats, typography and covers; however, whereas Jamieson covered 15th-century painting, sculpture and architecture in 49 pages, Arnason gives them over 600. Modern Art by Sam Hunter and John Jacobs (the latter wrote the chapters on architecture) was published in 1976. At first glance, both books would thus seem distinctly out of date. However, textbooks have more legs than cats. A second, enlarged edition of Arnason appeared in 1977; the fifth edition, published in 2009, carries the story up to about 1988. Similarly, the third edition of Hunter and Jacobs’s book, published in 2004, covers contemporary art up to 2005. There is something incestuous about the world of textbooks. Both Arnason’s History of Modern Art and Hunter and Jacobs’s Modern Art were published by Prentice-Hall (now Pearson/Prentice-Hall). Daniel Wheeler, who updated the third (1988) edition of Arnason, is also responsible for the new chapters in the third edition of Hunter and Jacobs. (The new, fifth edition of Arnason was updated by Peter Kalb rather than by Wheeler.) In the interim, Wheeler published his own textbook called Art Since Mid-Century (Prentice-Hall, 1988) which now competes with Jonathan Fineberg’s Art Since 1960: Strategies of seeing (Abrams, 1996; second ed., 2000). Meanwhile, Janson’s History of Art, now in a “revised sixth edition,” has been heavily rewritten by his son, Anthony F. Janson the 20th century, extending to the present, is now alloted 168 pages. Similarly, Gardner’s Art through the Ages, now in its 11th edition, has 440 pages in its paperback edition. It should be noted that the current text of Gardner’s is credited to Fred S. Kleiner, Christiane J. Jantwort and Richard G. Tansey, as far as I can tell, nothing remains of the trim, elegant text originally written by Helen Gardner in 1966.

11. The four volumes of the Open University series are Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century.
The omission of Picasso’s work of 1921-36 and the dismissal of Matisse’s 1917-30 efforts as reflecting “a reactionary trend” are not accidents. They are the expression of an ideological bias.

37. Buchloh, “The social history of art models and concepts,” AS1900, p. 26. Ironically, the work of Käthe Kollwitz, one of the few 20th-century artists to make Buchloh’s list of “heroic figures,” is discussed in the surveys by Aronson and Nolte but not in AS1900 (presumably because her art is not sufficiently modernist). What links the other 20th-century artists on Buchloh’s list is their total lack of effectiveness as propagandists. Heartfield’s political photomontages were done for the left-wing journal AIZ, intended to influence the German working class, but, as Buchloh himself notes, “the assumption that AIZ … would have a propagandistic effect turned out to be false since large numbers of the working class who had formerly voted Communist would vote for the Nazi party in 1933” (p. 172). The work of Röser, Haucke and Schoala has reached a smaller, more elite audience than Heartfield’s, and has probably had even less political effect. Buchloh knows this—he refers, in his chapter on “Photoconceptualism,” to the poorness of “a mere return to a political claim for photographic documentary” (p. 594). He just can’t stop himself from asserting that such work has political value. Thus he praises Haucke for his “depersonalization and repoliticizing of photoconceptualist practices,” and describes his famous photo-and-text piece, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, as an essay “in the manner of a molecularly analyzing journalism” (p. 545). But Haucke’s piece isn’t journalism. It is “documentary style” art, like the 1930s photographs of Walker Evans (see Krauss’s acute discussion on p. 278). Derrida of narrative explanation, and displayed in a gallery rather than the pages of the Village Voice or the New York Times, Haucke’s piece had no discernable effect on city regulation of landlords, but it gave art-world patrons a platform for playing a more important role.


39. For instance, in his chapter “1940-Postmodernism,” Foster begins by replaying the art wars of the 1980s, opposing the “poststructuralists” (i.e., good postmodernism) of Barthes, Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler to the “neo-conservative” (i.e., bad) postmodernism of Julian Schnabel, Ameilie Klafer and Francesco Clemente. Looking back, however, Foster comments that, despite their stylistic differences, both groups “tended to … shatter the notion of traditional representation,” the former intentionally, the latter inadvertently (AS1900, p. 599). The heretical implication is that the two groups weren’t so different after all, and that maybe artists such as Kiefer and Clemente were just as subversive—and important—as Kruger and Levine.


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