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Issues in Contemporary Art

Professor Gelburd

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Postmodernism Reaction: Gelburd & Jameson

My reaction to Gelburd and Jameson is that a concrete impetus for understanding the scope of Postmodernism in its entirety is being provided, in addition to an understanding of the true nature of art itself. Modernism operates under the premise of fundamentalism, where there is only one true methodology in assessing and depicting an artwork's unique attribute that it shares with no other, and that each stylistic movement is classified into periods of time with a clear beginning and clear end with no room for interpretation. Gelburd metaphorically depicts this fundamentalism as coloring within the lines of a coloring book and storing information in the labeled drawers of a file cabinet. Postmodernism operates under the premise of the simulacrum, where there is a continuum of art replication that is comprised of multiple styles of the past, and that the concepts behind the styles had no originality; they are eternal. Jameson best depicts the simulacrum as *écriture*, the clinical term for diagnosing schizophrenia.

He cites that the signifiers of Modernism form a utopian ideal that is actually a mirage, due to an inherent homogenous relationship among each signifier that constitutes a definitive concept, but that concept is engrained to the point that it negates other streams of consciousness. In Postmodernism there is discord amongst the signifiers, where other streams of consciousness come forward to fill the voids in between them and enhance communication of a concept, in turn negating the previously held interpretation due to its limited supply of information. Gelburd best

depicts Postmodernism as being a stew of synthesis, where all of the ingredients are blended together to create the recipe as a whole and the bones are picked out and discarded.

Postmodernism exists because it can initiate what mass protests cannot – true social reform. Jameson points to mechanical reproduction as the means through which Postmodernism operates. Like Cornell West, Jameson shows a duality at work, where the dominant culture defines art as a form of “entertainment,” but not “dissent.” While the dominant culture exploits art for material gain, art informs, inspires, and mobilizes the masses in opposition against it inadvertently via the simulacrum of Postmodernism. Power and momentum for social change is acquired by inspiring people from all walks of life, as well as artists, and further still with international exposure as the dominant culture markets art overseas. Benjamin summarizes this in an analogy of original art being represented by a magician, and mechanical art as represented by a surgeon - the magician is remote and ineffective, whereas the surgeon is close and precise. Jameson concludes by citing photography, film, television, and computers as all being mediums in a vastly complicated and interconnected global network of competition, where multinational capitalism will facilitate change on a global scale, hence making it the purest form of capitalism. It is the desire to connect to our fellow man that fuels mechanical reproduction, and in turn mechanical reproduction defines the true nature of art. With this in mind, both Benjamin and Jameson see mechanical reproduction as the key to effective social change, while leaving the “purity” of art untouched. As Danto said, art can be anything.