



Aesthetic Subjects

Pamela R. Matthews

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Recent calls for a return to aesthetics occur precisely at a moment when it is increasingly evident that nothing concerning aesthetics is self-evident anymore. Determined to recover the value of aesthetic experience for artistic, cultural, and social analysis, the contributors to this volume—prominent scholars in literature, philosophy, art history, architecture, history, and anthropology—begin from a shared recognition that ideological readings of the aesthetic have provided invaluable insights, in particular, that analyses of aesthetics within historical and social contexts tell us a great deal about the experience of aesthetic encounters.

From multiple and complementary perspectives, the contributors address topics as varied as Nabokov and Dickens, Caravaggio and Shelley Winters, gender and sexuality, advertising and AIDS. Taken together, their essays constitute a sustained and multifarious effort to resituate aesthetic pleasure in the mixed, impure conditions characteristic of every social practice and experience, however privileged or marginalized, and to ask what happens to the aesthetic if we consider it apart from—or at least in tension with—its historically dominant discursive formulations. As such, this volume establishes a renewed sense of aesthetic discourse and its usefulness as a tool for understanding culture.

Contributors: Leo Bersani, U of California, Berkeley; Susan Bordo, U of Kentucky; Bill Brown, U of Chicago; Beatriz Colomina, Princeton U; Ulysse Dutoit, U of California, Berkeley; Lee Edelman, Tufts U; Maureen Harkin, Reed College; Howard Horwitz, U of Utah; Audrey Jaffe, U of California, Santa Cruz; Martin Jay, U of California, Berkeley; Kay Bea Jones, Ohio State U; Robert Kaufman, Stanford U; Alphonso Lingis, Pennsylvania State U; Joseph Litvak, Tufts U; Douglas Mao, Cornell U; Barbara Stafford, U of Chicago; Kathleen Stewart, U of Texas; Kathryn Bond Stockton, U of Utah; Judith Stoddart, Michigan State U; Michael Taussig, Columbia U.

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Linda Gordon:

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