



Moving the New Anthropology of Art beyond the Museum

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ply as illustrations or attestations (in Maher and Pusch), or as “interruptions” (his word, in Ibañez). Graf and Lippa discuss gay men’s use of female terms of reference and address, presenting no data to support their generalizations directly and beginning from certain presuppositions about how people use language that are contradicted by virtually every other author and even finally by their own reported observations. Likewise, Collins offers no language data in his discussion of nonheteronormative sexualities in science fiction; on the one occasion that language moves to the center of his focus—when he cites science-fiction writer Gerrold’s striking question “What pronouns would you use?”—it is rapidly forgotten.

As a self-avowed comma queen, I cannot neglect to mention frequent technical deficiencies in *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon*: several chapters are rife with typographical and punctuation errors (while others are flawless). References cited are incorporated into a single bibliographic list, with several dropping out along the way; especially unfortunate is the omission of Bolton’s “Appendix I,” where the titles he analyzes would have been listed. The bibliography also includes

a number of titles nowhere cited in the volume; several works in other recent anthologies are cited under different titles than they finally appeared.

These excellent books, especially taken together, will serve nicely as the basic texts for a course in gay and lesbian language and communication, or in a course on the ethnography of homosexuality. Without in any way exhausting their subject, they provide signposts for its further exploration. Carlier noted the “immoderate love of verbiage” that characterized pederasts and antiphysical prostitutes (p. 324), and it would be nice to see greater attention to the artistic use of language (supplementing Manalansan and Barrett). And the problem of how it is that members of gay and lesbian communities can dependably recognize gay speech when they hear it—how best, that is, to characterize Carlier’s *je ne sais quoi*—remains a crucial area for further study even if, as these works show, it is only one among many tasks to be pursued. Finally, greater attention should be paid to prosody—to Chevalier’s cackles, flourishes, and twitters—and to listeners’ perceptions and judgments of fluency. ■

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Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity. Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995. 210 pp.

This volume explicitly carries through a general agenda that has occupied anthropology implicitly for some time and that began to emerge more distinctly with Sally Price’s *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*. Edited by two young scholars of a new wave, it attempts to bring the anthropological study of art more directly into contact with an important set of critical perspectives about “difference”—feminist, poststructuralist, postmodernist, marxist, and so on—that have been circulating within segments of the Western art world itself. What these contemporary critical perspectives share with anthropology is a radical relativism that anthropologists may have undertheorized but that lies at the heart of the project of “critical ethnography” outlined by Marcus and Fischer in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

It is no secret by now that, in the Western art world, critics have challenged the neutrality of evaluative perspectives that attempt to delineate high cultures from baser ones, arguing, against notions of art’s

autonomy, that such boundary making and hierarchical organization of aesthetic activity is socially embedded and ideologically significant. This volume shows that the long-standing anthropological concern with ethnoaesthetics—by which I mean the recognition that an aesthetic component may be significant in a range of activities, such as Trobriand yam gardening, that are not conventionally regarded (in the West) as “art”—should be considered not simply as aesthetic variants that have been ignored through ethnocentrism. Rather, the implication of the volume is that the boundaries of exclusion must be brought within the anthropological frame of analysis in order to understand the significance of such “local” aesthetic practices.

The attempt, then, is a laudable and intelligent one, focusing not on the “primitivism” debates about cultural “others,” which have had a large place in recent discussions of representation in museums, but on the hierarchical boundaries of “difference” within national societies. The essays (an introduction and six cases) are concerned with the United States and Mexico, and while they are each interesting, there was for me, at least, neither a sufficient development nor cumulative broadening either from their combination in total or their progression. In this sense, while the in-

roduction was adequate to point out a relevant frame, it did not bring out a deeper and particular project served by the individual contributions. Perhaps this thematic unevenness is inevitable from a volume that grew out of a symposium, but I was disappointed that such an important topic did not receive a more comprehensive treatment. They do succeed in two areas: (1) bringing “together discussions of aesthetics and anthropology in order to emphasize the social processes and problems of cultural identity negotiated through works of art, whatever their evaluative designation,” and (2) delineating the ways in which “the meanings and valuations of art forms, however exclusive, are also complicit and interdependent” (p. 5).

The essays themselves are rich in detail and insightful, but some could have benefited from an editorial “thinning out” toward a clarity of direction and fewer points. Brenda Bright examines the significance of Chicano customized cars (“low riders”), providing a particularly complex interpretive reading for these cultural products as an alternative space—and a pleasurable object—in response to police surveillance and limitations on Chicano mobility. The article, and the activity of customizing, is densely overdetermined, exploring a politics that both separates Chicanos from others but also joins them in critique of the aesthetics of mass production in which (new) cars are located. Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino provides an extremely illuminating, if sometimes stiff and obscure, analysis of the progression in East Los Angeles from what he considers to be Mexican American graffiti to Chicano murals. Criticizing the assumption that the relevant (natural) category of understanding should be that of “art,” this author argues that what occurred was less the displacement of “vandalism” by “art” than a transformation of one kind of territorial marking into another. Paralleling its criticism of art’s appropriation of the murals, the essay’s style seems to distance it from others in the volume and from a placement solely within the academy. In exploring the Mexican high-art world, Liza Bakewell’s knowledge is equally impressive in providing a space from which the cosmopolitan categories of art, high and low, are relativized. She explores the nationalist ideological significance of Mexican distinctions between “artist” and “artisan” (*bellas artes* and *artes populares*), when the Mexican revolution valorized the popular aesthetic.

Two essays are said to show the “difficult contexts of artistic production for Native American art-

ists” (p. 13), but while they have something to do with cultural production and cultural identity, they are less involved with issues of cultural hierarchy. Barbara Babcock’s contribution discusses the “mechanical reproduction” of Maria Martinez, the famous Pueblo potter, in an endless stream of images, texts, and exhibitions, evidence of “how our society has collected the other, then reproduced the collectible, which reproduction in turn becomes collectible—standing in for the unaffordable real thing” (p. 145). Barbara Tedlock’s essay on the repatriation of the Zuni war god and conflicts over kachina representation among Pueblos joins her knowledge of traditional Zuni ethnoaesthetics with an account of the new politics of culture. She demonstrates powerfully the ironies involved in Zuni attempts to control the production and display of their art.

Finally, the volume concludes with George Marcus’s unconventional and provocative essay (his second) on the J. Paul Getty Trust, in which he describes how the Getty re-creates the category of “high art.” Focusing on the significance of “middlebrow popularizations of high-culture conceits in American life,” on the way American academics “flee from the middlebrow origins of their own high-cultural interests,” Marcus’s thesis concerns the way “highbrow taste and allusions, or rather the tyranny of highbrow taste in its seriousness, have themselves been a part of popular culture” (p. 174). The essay explores the way in which this gap is managed by the “scholars” who are invited to spend a year as the cultural capital of the Getty.

Despite the obvious relevance to arguments about art’s transcendence and autonomy, or questions of mutuality, identity, and contestation, neither Clement Greenberg (the bad object of much recent critical writing) nor Mikhail Bakhtin receives even a single mention in the volume. Nor is there a mention of Varnedoe and Gopkind’s exhibition “High/Low” or of the parallel track of British cultural studies in deconstructing cultural hierarchies. Readers, I believe, would have benefited from the opportunity to see the project of this volume in relation to other, related interventions. If this is not yet the counterpart to Bourdieu’s work on state, however, it is a valuable step beyond a new anthropology of art which has perhaps dallied too long *in* the museum and needs as well to explore the arenas in which ordinary people may act. ■