

Contemporary Aesthetics

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Contemporary Aesthetics does not publish book reviews. However, to inform our readers of new publications of interest, we do publish brief descriptions from information provided by the publishers. Readers are invited to send us such information about books they think will interest other readers of *CA*.

Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Williston, VT / Hampshire, UK, Ashgate).

The essays in *Re-thinking Aesthetics* reject the received wisdom of modern aesthetics. Berleant disagrees that art demands a mode of experience sharply different from others and unique to the aesthetic situation, and that the identity of the aesthetic lies in keeping it distinct from other kinds of human experience, such as moral, social and practical. Rather, he shows us how the value, insight, and force of art and the aesthetic are all enhanced and enlarged by recognizing their social and human role. This recognition contributes both to the significance of art and to its humanizing influence on civilization. He applies his theories to the contemporary arts, specifically music, literature, sculpture, and to common issues in aesthetic theory.

Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2004).

The Aesthetics of Ruins constructs a theory of ruins that celebrates their vitality and unity in aesthetic experience, drawing on over 100 illustrations by the author, prepared in 40 countries. Ruins flourish as matter, form, function, incongruity, site, and symbol. Ruin underlies cultural values in cinema, literature and philosophy. Finally, ruin guides meditations upon our mortality and endangered world. Foreword by Claire Richter Sherman.

Maarten Doorman, *Art in Progress: A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

Art in Progress is a philosopher's argument in favour of the idea of progress in art. Doorman analyzes the idea of progress, demonstrating how the idea arose in the eighteenth century, became all-qualifying during the avante-garde, and, with the end of avante garde, fell out of favor. Doorman argues for a reappraisal of some concepts of progress in order to deal with the noncommittal climate of postmodernist and posthistorical art.

Austin Harrington, *Art and Social Theory: Sociological Arguments in Aesthetics* (Polity, Cambridge, 2004).

Art and Social Theory serves as an introduction to sociological studies of the arts. It examines the central debates of social theorists and sociologists about the place of the arts in society and the social significance of aesthetics. Separate chapters discuss questions about the meaning of the arts in relation to changing cultural institutions and socioeconomic structures, as well as questions of aesthetic value and cultural politics, taste and social class, money and patronage, ideology and utopia, myth and popular culture, and the contested meanings of modernism and postmodernism.

Art and Social Theory also includes accounts of leading social theorists of the arts, such as Weber, Simmel, Benjamin, Kracauer and the Frankfurt School to Foucault, Bourdieu, Habermas, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Luhmann and Jameson.

Heike Strelow, ed., *Ecological Aesthetics. Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice* (Birkhäuser Verlag für Architektur, Basel, Berlin, Boston, 2004).

Ecological Aesthetics concentrates on the question, to what extent and in what way artists today can interfere actively in mental, social and environmental-ecological questions and problems. The main focus of the book lies on the design of cultural landscapes. We are faced today with fundamental practical issues about creative work on the environment, the space around us, the landscape: What sort of landscape to we want? How do we want to shape our relationship with nature? Can there be a sustainable landscape planning?

Ecological Aesthetics, which has been published in English and German editions, is a basic work, providing a comprehensive overview over the past 30 years of artistic environmental design. It presents the historical development of theory and practice of ecological aesthetics, by combining an extensive collection of essays with a lavishly pictured art book, full of exciting views. In some 20 essays German and international artists, landscape architects, philosophers, art, culture, natural scientists and politicians elaborate, each from her or his perspective and discipline, on the theory of ecological aesthetics. Over 300 pictures provide a comprehensive overview over 35 years of works by European, American and Asian artists and landscape architects.

The book also documents the artistic oeuvre of the German artist Hermann Prigann, one of the pioneers of "Ecological Art". As his individual artistic development is at the same time characteristic of the general development of art in landscape, his different works groups also provide the basic structure for the book. Together with more than 100 work examples of other European, American and Asian artists and landscape architects, the book shows new ways towards a sustainable landscape design. It shows how seemingly contrary approaches like ecology and aesthetic can be combined. The ideas of the introduced authors and artists are increasingly being used for solving challenges and problems of daily life. Yet, even after 30 years most of them are still pioneers in their respective art, science or work fields. In 256 pages *Ecological Aesthetics* brings together thoughts, pictures and views, providing wide-reaching analyses of the status of ecological design theory and practice.