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and receives more complete coverage in the conclusion, is the influence of Marx, Freud and Saussure on the structuralist tradition. These figures (at least Marx and Freud) have been dominant in French intellectual life for some time, either through appropriation or critical assessment/rejection. Again, the book deals with structuralism as French tradition. (Is that why Piaget, a Swiss, is omitted?) Although coverage is somewhat uneven, clear exposition and exceptional disciplinary range make this a significant addition to the secondary literature on structuralism and a useful text for a survey course in the area.

**Seeing Berger: A Revaluation of *Ways of Seeing*.** Peter Fuller. Writers & Readers Publ. Cooperative, London, 1980. 40 pp. Paper, £1.00. ISBN: 0-906495-48-2. Reviewed by **John Adkins Richardson\***

Perhaps it is just the taste of grapes gone sour—I grant the possibility—but a great deal of today's critical writing smacks, for me, of vintage sophomore. Thus, a television program intended to enlighten the British public generally has been received as a revelation by a select minority which includes some art critics and historians. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1971) was predictably popular among the Left who perceived it, correctly, as an intended antidote to the 'bogus religiosity of art' presented by Kenneth Clark's stupefyingly successful series, *Civilization*. Berger set out to demonstrate in what ways masterpieces of the past are in complicity with an elitist economic system. His was, as I noted at the time, 'an intelligent repudiation of many of the values assumed by those of us engaged in teaching about the arts'. I also remarked that anyone 'even slightly familiar with Marxist or neo-Marxist criticism will find little that is new'. In this last I was quite obviously wrong.

Confronted by Peter Fuller's pamphlet, I find myself in the position of Dr Johnson upon reading Edward Young's *Conjectures*—surprised to find the author taking as novelties what I thought very common maxims. After all, Arnold Hauser and Meyer Schapiro had given us similar analyses that were, respectively, of greater intellectual sweep and infinitely more penetrating long before Berger commenced as art critic. But, then, no art historical writing could possible have had the influence that a few moments of television can provide. And it must be said that Fuller is not completely adulatory; the latter portion of his essay takes *Ways of Seeing* to task for the very thing that annoyed others of us, specifically, Berger's evasive reluctance to deal with the near paradox that genius in the service of property surpasses its base purpose. Dealing with this, Berger sounded like a reluctant Trotskyite; Fuller is an eager one, ready to embrace bourgeois delights if they can but be transferred to socialist equity. Fuller is very different from someone like Nicos Hadjinicolaou, who sees every work of art as being nothing more nor less than an ideological mirror. Hadjinicolaou's *Art History and Class Struggle* (London, 1978) is scarcely more than a cosmetically streamlined version of Zhdanov's 'socialist realism'. It draws no distinctions between advertisements and Abstract Expressionism. Berger worried about that in his review of the book. Fuller worries about Berger's inability to deal with the difference between works and reproductions. To me, the lot sound like well-read ninnies stumbling around in the dense mysteries that seem always to turn up whenever one tries to demystify art by exposing its role in (according to the Marxist lexicon) the reification of spiritual values. Only a simpleton would suppose that every art form generated out of a society is absolutely incompatible with other forms of social organization. Fuller's little book does, however, show some of the problems zealots face when they attempt to accommodate indifferent reality to strictly purposeful systems rather than proceeding the other way about.

The internal contest of opinion dealt with in Fuller's essay will be understood by Marxists as one more instance of the larger conflict between the schools of Marxist aesthetic known as 'naïve' (strict, doctrinaire) or 'critical' (revisionist, Trotskyite). The one thing to be said in support of these contestants, in contrast to the similarly tedious controversies common in conventional art historical scholarship, is that the Marxist critics are at least arguing about the constraints imposed upon taste by ideological orientation, whereas their bourgeois counterparts are held in working harness by the same kinds of constraints.

**About Looking.** John Berger. Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, 1980. 198 pp., illus. Paper, £2.95. Reviewed by **Lucia Adams\***

John Berger is far more of a social critic than an art critic; his bleak and uncompromising view of contemporary life in the Western world colors all his opinions on art, which is frequently used to exemplify his social and political beliefs. These beliefs posit the ideal of a rural socialist Utopia in which The Family of Man lives in great harmony, a great harmony that probably never existed on this planet. But this naive and fundamentally conservative belief is the bedrock of every word he writes. Currently living in a peasant community in France, the setting of his latest novel *Pig Earth*, John Berger has previously published all but two of the essays in *About Looking* in *New Society*, a journal that attacks prevailing and cultural values in the West and feels that they must be radically altered. Whether this should or should not in fact be the case, the whole issue is outside the scope of art history and art criticism.

Divided into three broad sections, *About Looking* starts with an essay called Why Look at Animals?, an extended reflection on man's relations to animals from the time of the cave to the present, which is castigated for relegating animals to marginal places in our consciousness. In this critique of corporate capitalism's evil effect, we see artistic expressions used to illustrate the point about man's rupture with the ancient connection with nature and the earth. Replete with existential abysses and copious alienations, it reveals Berger's proclivity to search for too much meaning, to see things that in fact do not exist. But regardless of this predictable and irritating simplification, not to mention the cosmic scale generalization that has little basis in acknowledged fact, *About Looking*, with the exception of the second section with some execrable essays on photography, a realistic form with which he appears to be at a loss, is a stimulating and provocative book.

Despite his contempt for the Positivist tradition, Berger uses a Taine-inspired approach to individual artists in the third and best section, Moments of Living. Placing the artist in time, place and milieu, Berger's perceptions are refreshing and unique. He develops the idea again and again that the environment is instrumental in an artist's development, and, surprisingly, the environment is the natural and not the social or political one. Thus, 'The Thames developed Turner', the cliffs surrounding Le Havre, Monet, the Jura, Courbet, and so on. The configuration of the land and other natural phenomena are causative factors, an interesting idea that harks back to Mme de Staël and 18th-century aesthetics.

We are on somewhat more familiar territory with Lowry and the Industrial North, in which Berger relates the Lancashire primitive to the cultural locale with ease and grace. His approach works well here because he does not have to strain a point, molding intractable material into a preordained form that doesn't fit. For example, in Millet and the Peasant, whilst we acknowledge that the events of 1848–51 might have influenced Millet to paint peasants, it is not for the first time in the European tradition and it does not, at least in this reviewer's opinion, prefigure the modern conflict between the first and the third worlds. In Francis Bacon and Disney, again, this reviewer does not feel that the latter made 'propositions about the alienated behaviour of society'. On the other hand, Between Two Colmars, in which Berger discusses the Grünewald Altarpiece in the light of his subjective reactions in 1963, then again in 1973, and uses the great artwork as a pretext for writing a moving essay about love, is excellent.

Other essays in *About Looking* include: La Tour and Humanism, Seker Ahmet and the Forest, Hals and Bankruptcy, Ralph Fasanella and the City, Courbet and the Jura, Article of Faith, Turner and the Barber's Shop, Rouault and the Suburbs of Paris, Magritte and the Impossible, Giacometti, Rodin and Sexual Domination, Romaine Lorquet and the final essay, Field. This describes in detail the idea that in perceiving a scene in art or nature one is only really viewing 'the same proportions as your own life'. One must give Berger credit for a true honesty in describing his approach.

As a means of providing deeper insight into oneself and into one's responses towards one's environment, natural or cultural, this book makes an effective contribution, especially to those involved with the practice of art. For those teaching all arts it will also provide some interesting and polemical material for classroom discussion. As plain good reading, it can be recommended, but as solid art criticism or reliable and accurate art history, it cannot.

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