

Lyotard argued that the *postmodern* condition is characterized by the end of a "master narrative," Krauss sees in the *post-medium* condition of contemporary art a similar coherence. She writes:

For the most part, *Perpetual Inventory* charts my conviction as a critic that the abandonment of the specific medium spells the death of serious art . . . the artists I observed persevering in the service of a medium had abandoned traditional supports in favor of strange new apparatuses . . . calling such things "technical supports" would, I thought, allay the confusion of the use of "medium," too ideologically associated as the term is with outmoded tradition (p. xiii).

In other words, since contemporary artists are often not medium specific, looking at art practices requires a broader framework than the traditional medium-specific approaches of painting, sculpture or whatever. As she puts in her essay "A View of Modernism," first published in *ArtForum* 11 (September 1972):

[M]odernist critics appear to have cut themselves off from what is most energetic and felt in contemporary sculpture. Their inability to deal with Richard Serra, or Michael Heizer, or Keith Sonnier, or Robert Smithson is anomalous in the extreme. Further, these critics have continually balked at admitting film to the status of a "modernist art." Given the quality of recent advanced film, this position is simply no longer admissible even for critics who confine themselves to dealing just with painting and sculpture, for film as a medium has become increasingly important to sculptors themselves; Serra and Sonnier are only the most obvious examples (p. 126).

As I read *Perpetual Inventory* I found the recent essays significantly more enticing than many of the older ones, particularly her discussions of William Kentridge's exploration of cinematic animation and Christian Marclay's "Lip Sync: Marclay Not Nauman." The "Lip Sync" article, first published in *October* (No. 116, Spring 2006), focuses on Marclay's *Video Quartet* (2002), an extraordinary work composed of a sampling of more than 700 Hollywood films that draw the viewer in immediately. To my mind, lip-syncing isn't really the focus of Marclay's work, which edits segments of films together using movements and sound to create tantalizing

connections. Krauss's point is that Marclay's efforts build on a history. Earlier filmmaker efforts to sync sound with lip movement are also well known. More recently, Bruce Nauman's classic piece *Lip Sync* (1969) alluded to this technological development in terms of video. Nauman held the camera upside down and focused on a close-up of his mouth with his lips and tongue articulating the words "lip sync" as the audio track shifted in and out of sync with the video. Marclay's statement, by way of contrast, offers more of an insinuation of synchronization than an articulation of it, developed through using hands on keyboards, men and women singing, dancing and noises to create the visual and sonic collage that unfolds on four projection screens.

Krauss suggests that Marclay's sense of synchronicity, which we feel more than perceive, is an expression of how an artist today blends tools and styles. Her larger point is that contemporary artworks are layered mechanisms that

PERPETUAL INVENTORY

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Perpetual Inventory by Rosalind E. Krauss is a collection of essays that spans three decades. The title comes from Krauss's view that her job as an art critic requires that she take a perpetual inventory of what artists make and do, constantly revising her ideas about the direction and significance of the work she critiques. I am not sure the book successfully showcases this effort, however.

In her introduction, for example, Krauss writes that this anthology considers what she calls the post-medium condition. She says that while Jean-François

show a unitary organization of an unfolding narrative. Those who know this work would understand that it feels like a unified piece despite the layers of its complexity. Yet, as is often the case with Krauss's essays, I am not sure that her commentary on *Video Quartet* will translate as effectively to a reader who is unfamiliar with the artwork.

The "Lip Sync" essay also shows that Krauss, too, has a talent for layering. For instance, this article references the use of grids in modernist painting, Nauman's *Lip Sync*, how Nauman both paid homage to the challenge early filmmakers faced in their efforts to synchronize sound with silent films and more. Reading through the article I could not help but think how fascinating synchronization is. Cable television today offers a good case in point, for the problem of synchronization periodically comes up due to the large amounts of video signal processing.

"The Rock": William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection," originally published in *October* (No. 92, Spring 2000), is the most compelling essay in the book. William Kentridge is a South African artist whose animated films pursue the problems of apartheid. It is in this essay that Krauss comes closest to articulating the idea of technical support, because Kentridge's work mixes film, drawing, erasure and highly charged ideas. Indeed, Kentridge is a good example of how the narrative of a product is not simply what a work is "about." With Kentridge, Krauss shows how an artist speaks through the activity of creation and, in doing so, uses a language of a different quality than the narrative associated with the work. Kentridge's term for this is *fortuna*, a word that is intended to explain how the technical aspects of his process open onto the conceptual. For him, *fortuna* is like improvisation. He compares it to speaking, pointing out that it is through the very activity of speaking, the act itself, that new connections and thoughts emerge. Because Krauss's definition of technical support is broad enough to include *fortuna*, Kentridge is a particularly good showcase for her ideas. "Stalking the drawing" is another Kentridge device Krauss mentions to explain how the combination of drawing and seeing, making and assessing where one is, stimulates the creative process.

Regardless of whether Kentridge's drawings for projection come together in a series that examines apartheid, capitalist greed, Eros, memory or what-

ever, his process is not based on the theme of the series. The works result through the dictates of his creative practice of drawing a bit, shooting the drawing, and then drawing and shooting some more. The activity involves walking between the camera and the drawing and includes erasure as well as the ongoing progression to the work's conclusion. Krauss also does a nice job of relating Kentridge's technique to the ideas of Eisenstein, Deleuze, Cavell and others.

Aside from these two extraordinary essays, the book struck me as choppy. Although I am a big fan of Sol LeWitt's work, and he is one artist who comes up frequently in Krauss's writing, I thought Krauss's commentary on him seemed dated. With Kentridge's work and Marclay's *Video Quartet*, by contrast, I felt that reading her critique enhanced my understanding of these artists. Debating how to convey my overall response to the volume, I am drawn to a comment in the book itself. Krauss thanks her editor at MIT, Roger Conover, for his help and mentions that she is grateful he supported the project despite the "publishing world's disapproval of anthologies" (p. x). Reading this volume I better understand why this sentiment exists. To be sure, Krauss has considerably influenced contemporary art history, and her writings (particularly essays for *ArtForum* and *October*) highlight her intellectual gifts and legacy. Yet throughout the book Krauss offers minimalist explanations as to where the essays fit within the larger body of art criticism. Thus, although no doubt unintentional, there seemed to be a certain conceit in this assemblage. While I can appreciate and understand why a scholar wants her voice to be heard, the contributions written specifically for this book are too sketchy. The introduction, for example, is only two half pages and two full ones. I ended up thinking that having an outside editor for the volume would have helped place her work critically within the larger scheme of things through broadly engaging with it. This feeling that an outsider commentator could have added some breadth to the discussion was particularly acute with the essays that date back to the 1970s.

I also wish more care had been given to the little touches that make a book reach out and help the reader place the details in relation to one another. Ironically, even though I could easily see instructors including some of these essays in course readers to help students

get a feel for discrete topics and specific artists, I also felt that an educator would end up using some of the oversights within the presentation to aid students in thinking about how writing most effectively communicates with an audience. It strikes me as odd that a poor editing job could have a positive benefit—in this case providing a classroom tool for looking at how an author can better organize a paper. One example of the problem is the fact that the illustrations are not well integrated into the article. Rather than including in-text references that would lead the reader to an image, the pictorial content simply co-exists with the articles. I think it makes more sense to walk the reader over to the image so that she realizes that there is a reference point for the textual elaboration, particularly when the image is not on the same page or across from the text.

All in all, the range of this volume demonstrates that Rosalind Krauss has a rich and fertile mind. Some of the longer essays are thought provoking and well worth reading. Some of the shorter essays bring to mind how little one can say in a brief critique. Taken as a whole, *Perpetual Inventory* highlights many of Krauss's contributions to art criticism and will no doubt enhance the libraries of contemporary art historians.