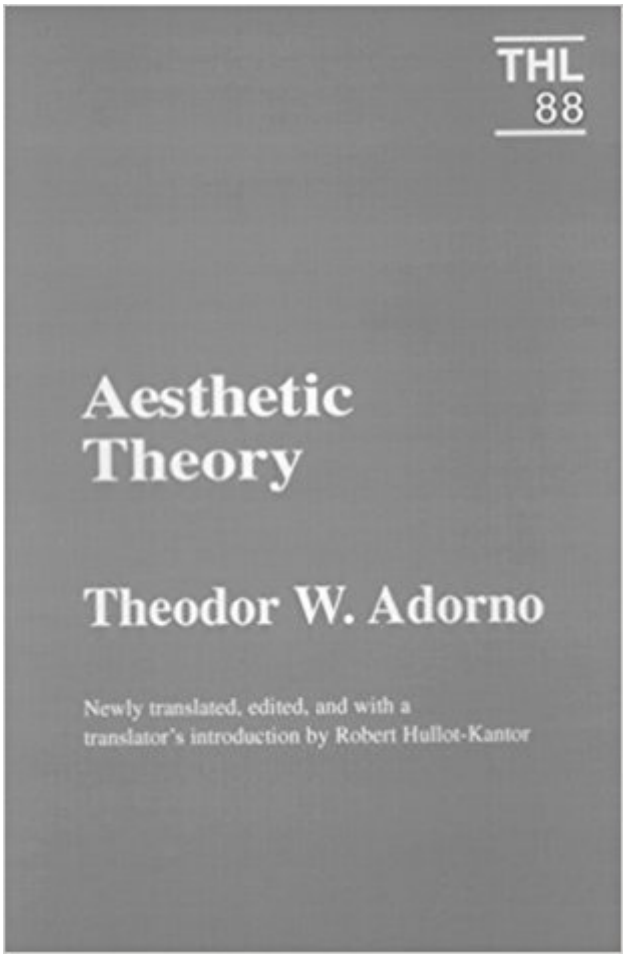
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Aesthetic Theory (Theory And History Of Literature)



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Synopsis

Perhaps the most important aesthetics of the twentieth century appears here newly translated, in English that is for the first time faithful to the intricately demanding language of the original German. The culmination of a lifetime of aesthetic investigation, Aesthetic Theory is Theodor W. Adorno's magnum opus, the clarifying lens through which the whole of his work is best viewed, providing a framework within which his other major writings cohere.

Book Information

Series: Theory and History of Literature (Book 88)

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Univ Of Minnesota Press; 1 edition (August 12, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816618003

ISBN-13: 978-0816618002

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #111,852 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Aesthetics #59 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > Literary Theory #82 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics

Customer Reviews

While the imitators of great literary theorists may have produced the least lucid, most jargon-laden and most parodied literary and cultural criticism since the 18th century, editors Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse of the University of Minnesota's Theory and History of Literature series cannot be blamed for such excesses. Their 88-volume series, which contains some of the most cogent though still challenging criticism of the last 15 years, terminates with a volume from the controversial late Yale deconstructionist Paul de Man (Aesthetic Ideology) and a retranslated edition of mid-century Frankfurt School leader Theodore Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. This dignified leave-taking preempts the empty millennial speculation currently dominating postmodern studies, and leaves in its wake a generation of scholars reared on the series. (De Man: $49.95, 224p ISBN 0-8166-2203-5, $19.95 paper -2204-3; Adorno: $39.95, 448p ISBN 0-8166-1799-6, cloth only)Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ã¢â ¬Å“Ã¢â ¬Â¦the fact that they [Continuum] are putting low price tags on works once published in expensive academic editions is something of which we can all be glad..Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â œModern Painters, 2/05 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adorno's Aesthetic Theory is not the first book you want to grab if you neither have a solid foundation in the basics of the German philosophical tradition, nor have spent some time reading other, more simplistic texts on aesthetics. This book is paratactic ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • some paragraphs run for several pages. This is intentional; Adorno's hope is to force the reader to think in a radial fashion, returning, like a spiral, back to ideas already presented, but framed differently. This aggravates many. It is also a posthumous work, so it's quite unrefined. Inasmuch as it might be foolhardy to snip choice quotes out of their paratactic contexts, thereby squelching the experience Adorno is trying to force the reader into, it is also foolhardy to believe this represents Adorno at his best.Reading Hullot-Kentor's Translator's Introduction is a must. If you heed his suggestion and read the Draft Introduction first and then approach the beginning as he states, the text in general will make much more sense early on than if you try to start at the beginning and dive off the cliff into the chaos of words.Finally, for those who can surmount these caveats, I believe you will, about one-third of the way through, begin to appreciate the effort for not only its choice snippets, but the work as a whole.

This book feels like reading a great mind as his thoughts emerged on the page. It happens to be Adorno's last unfinished work, and almost seems pre-production in its thought process but has been faithfully translated from German as it was left...be warned you will come away as if you just penetrated a mind in mid thought and heard everything word for word. Read in small bits it begins to make sense as your subconscious mind rearanges his thoughts into an order that become relateable. Adorno gets to the Meat of what Art is and threatens to be, as much as elucidating what it becomes...ergo, from passionate hands to ears and eyes, to passionate hearts, so go the journey of the arts. Had it been more cogent I would have made it 5 stars. There is an oceanic depth to his discussion and points...dive deep with him and come away with sand and silt dripping from your hands gouged from the bottom of the dark abyss that is Art.

Adorno is not famous for his writing style. His prose is dense, and sometimes impenetrable for the English reader. Yet, I think Adorno's Aesthetic Theory is one of the greatest books of XX century

philosophy along with Heidegger's "Being and Time", and Wittgenstein's Tractatus. I think there are three levels of reflection in this book. The first is that AT is a sociology of art. Adorno traces the social and economic conditions of how modern art becomes to being. Industrialization and modernization have a great impact on aesthetics because perception and reality are fundamentally altered. Adorno makes the case that the destruction of nature by industry propels modern art to find its reality elsewhere by becoming abstract. Art does not want to imitate nature since nature is already destroyed. It escapes to the realm of idea(l)s in order to critique the current state of being. Aesthetics is the second level of reflection. Aesthetics in modernism becomes an instrument of social critique. Before, in the time of Kant and the idealists, aesthetic was the study of beauty and artistic genius. Now, according to Adorno, it becomes the study of social disintegration in which the artist is just the "unfortunate" medium to express it. Yet, Adorno is not a complete pessimist. He sees in aesthetic reflection a tool for utopian transformation. This transformation constitutes the third level of reading AT -the philosophical or utopian. Modern art, because it critiques this world for the sake of a better one, is also philosophy. Since philosophy was the discipline that established how the real and ideal are separated, modern art also shows this gap, and treats beauty as a poor substitute for happiness. Beauty, once idealized by the elite, becomes a sign of art's powerlessness to transform the world. This impotence, still, is a sign of art's utopian power. This kind of paradoxical reasoning is typical of Adorno, and it is loaded with political significance. Art promises something that cannot be delivered, but who delivers then?

Aesthetic Theory is Theodor Adorno's great unfinished work on the material and formal conditions of transformative aesthetic experience in modern society. This being Adorno, modern history and its disasters are constant accompaniments to discussions of aesthetic beauty and the conditions of possibility for serious modernist art; this being *late* Adorno, the text is one continuous chunk with "headings" floating above each portion. Chief Adorno potentate Robert Hullot-Kentor retranslated the book to capture what Adorno was trying to do with that 'paratactic' approach (the Continuum/Bloomsbury edition of Hullot-Kentor's translation creates chapters out of the headings, exactly what Hullot-Kentor was trying to avoid; the full-gospel Minnesota edition is apparently still available, though).The central thesis of the book, though it runs through nearly all of Adorno's varied competencies, is that art and truth are indissolubly linked; there is no 'art appreciation' that does not fundamentally come to grips with human existence in its concretely solipsistic mode, and all great art from antiquity on requires an intelligent and 'disinterested' spectator, two manners of being late capitalism makes war on. As regards classical philosophical aesthetics, Adorno praises Kant for

being *materially* attuned to what the 'generally' right Hegel was blind to in art and art's importance. This is a book for the already-learned, but even if you detest Adorno you're likely to absorb something worthwhile; he lets his hand slip much more than in earlier writings, saying *what he really thinks* about Schoenberg and Brecht and the rest of the gang.Highly recommended for humanist scholars and practicing critics.

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