

Ana Ćemalović

University of Arts in Belgrade, Serbia

Book Review

Bojana Matejić, *Rosalind Kraus*, Beograd: Orion Art, 2018, 164 pp., ISBN 978-86-6389-071-8

The study *Rosalind Krauss* is the first monograph on the theoretical work of the prominent American and international art critic, theorist and historian of the same name, published in the Serbian language by Belgrade's Orion Art publisher. The book is the result of a systematic exploration of a theoretical work of Rosalind Kraus, which author Bojana Matejić conducted for several years. The author makes a profound elucidation of the methods and cultural-political consequences of the employment of French structuralism and post-structuralism, as well as Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, on the dominant international Western high modernist discourse of Greenberg, providing a platform for the interpretation and contextualization not only of the New York cultural scene of the 1960s and 70s but the international world of art. The study implements *post-structuralist critique* of the Western episteme as regards art historicism. Implicitly, the study enforces a *cultural transfer* approach to knowledge production between American, French, German, and Yugoslav art and media theory, as well as artistic scenes.

In this highly complex textual narrative, Matejić identifies the following aspects of Krauss' theoretical work: a psychoanalytic, deconstructive and feminist approach to high modernist Western international historicism, theory and artistic practice and especially to the 'paradigm shift' from the critique of formalistic concepts of the *medium specificity* towards a new theory of the contemporary *post-medium* condition. One of the main conceptual paradigms present throughout the chapters is 1) A Euro-American-centric critique of the values of high modernism as an *international* paradigm and deconstruction of the discourse of the Western History of Art; and 2) The metacritique of the Euro-American-centric critique from the standpoint of the special (i.e., Eastern European) epistemological break.

The 164-page study includes five chapters: Part 1 – *From the formalist aestheticism to the structuralist turn* presents elucidation of the political, cultural, and theoretical presuppositions of formalist aesthetic standards, as well as its post-modernist crisis. Matejić more specifically deals with the question of how formalist high modernist *aestheticism* became the cultural-political tool of the Cold War international

hegemonic (Western) propaganda, drawing a parallel between high modernist Abstract Expressionist art and post-war Yugoslav socialist modernism. The pro-soviet phase of Yugoslav socialist realism was interrupted by the Informbiro Resolution of 1948, which was followed by the liberalization of scientific and artistic life in building a specific 'third way' cultural policy during the Cold War. According to art historian Ješa Denegri, an epistemological break from socialist realism brought about circumstances for the development of new artistic formations of socialist modernism and social aestheticism based on high modernist formalistic and pictorial values, and therefore not confronted with the established political and ideological system of socialist Yugoslavia¹ Part 2 – *Antiessentialist definition of the Art Work* thematizes and discusses a Western i.e Euro-American-centric critique of the modernist autonomy of art and medium (*medium specificity*) and (Western) *historicism* which were dominant conceptual values of Cold War Art *internationalism*. Part 3 – *Reception of the Psychoanalytic Discourse* focuses particularly on the problematization of the modernist fetishization of the gaze and post-medium condition, based on Felix Guattari's usage of the notion of post-media by which Krauss deconstructs the universalist model of formalistic-essentialist concept of Western art history and contradicts traditional notion of the work of art. Part 4 – *Heuristics of Deconstruction* directs attention to the *heterological* methodology of Krauss' deconstruction of the hegemonic internationalist formalist aesthetical values of the high modernism, which, however, falls back geopolitically on the concepts and theoretical assumptions of the same Western Euro-American metanarrative. *Historical heterology* is here introduced both in terms of the geopolitics of knowledge and gender alteration of (Western) art history. Matejić proposes the methodology of *historical heterology* particularly from the perspective of coloniality and power – based on Georges Bataille's notion of *scientific heterology* – that implies the problematization of the "silenced histories" from the colonial horizon of Euro-American-centric artistic modernity. The author maintains: "The *October* project offered alternative values that 'de-dull' knowledge, but apparently it stopped at this. There are many singular modernisms, artistic practices, and phenomena at the contemporary geopolitical level 'beyond' the hegemonic Western modernism, which have no stable reciprocity towards the Western, safe modernism, but operate as the other that 'threatens' the Western Subject of censorship." (p. 108) Finally, Part 5 – *Towards Philosophical Art Criticism* discusses David Carrier's introduction and explanation of the philosophical art criticism that lies on the edge of art history and philosophy.

The book challenges the self-explanatory meaning of the very term *international* as a Euro-American-centric concept, and deconstructed the universalities of the so-called "apolitical aspects of international high-modernist art" during the Cold War, not only theoretically in accord with Krauss' critical approach (Euro-American-centrism), but also geopolitically, from the standpoint of the geopolitics of knowledge and colonial difference. In Parts 1 and 4 Matejić explicitly questions the

¹ The Yugoslav socialist federal state existed, under different denominations, from 1945 to 1992.

Euro-American-centric critique of modernity and the Euro-American-centrism from the perspective of the geopolitics of knowledge. The specific value of this monograph lies in the methodological approach to study that entails implications of *historical heterology* and *post-structuralist critique*. *Historical heterology* does not imply simply a commitment to the nameless others, but a certain alienation from the dominant logic of the “present orthodoxy” of the writing of history.

The monograph would have been even more comprehensive had it included a more extensive account of methodologies of the postcolonial critique of episteme from the border-epistemology position in the history of art. Nevertheless, *Rosalind Kraus* is theoretically stimulating. Matejić opens and develops new research optics as regards the ongoing trans-local and transcultural research agenda in art history and philosophical art criticism.