
REVIEWS

Gerhard Hoffman, Alfred Horning, eds., *Emotion in Postmodernism, American Studies - A Monograph Series*, vol. 74. Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 1997

The opening sentence of the proposal for the Mainz conference, which as I understand was a starting point for this book, ran: "It is hardly surprising that displays of emotion appear to be absent from postmodern art and postmodern discourse." No fewer than 439 pages of the volume clearly show that one should not judge by appearances. The third in a series of publications concerned with the analysis of postmodern American culture, *Emotion in Postmodernism* not only offers a cornucopia of manifestations of emotion, but also examines this complex and elusive issue in a variety of contexts and disciplines. Twenty two essays by leading European and American critics take up the problematic nature of emotion, its uses and abuses. Their perspective is distinctly interdisciplinary while the fields of examination include architecture, literature, crime novels, Holocaust literature, witchcraft fiction, literary criticism, the teaching of literature, philosophy, sociology, technology, media, pop music, postcolonial drama, and postmodern dance. The sheer scope is breathtaking, but for once quantity has not come at the cost of quality.

Conclusions drawn by contributing critics are equally varied. Some of them contend that emotions are present and well in the postmodern culture, others argue that the latest cultural dominant marks the degradation and disappearance of emotion. Among the former, Richard Martin discusses the displays of emotion in pop music while Chris Weedon presents the role of emotion in a fashionably postmodern process of the construction of Otherness. On the other hand, a renowned Dutch scholar Hanjo Berressem argues for the flattering and scattering character of "the thing formerly known as emotion" while Kathleen Woodward claims that post-war technoculture is informed by the proliferation of prosthetic emotions and that considerations of humanity have been framed in terms of a complex rationality rather than

emotionality. Additionally, the volume comprises several essays which aim at answering fundamental questions of what emotion is and how it can be represented. Among these particular attention is due to Gerhard Hoffman's monumental "Emotion and Desire in the Postmodern American Novel" which embraces both theoretical considerations of the nature of emotions and their practical representations in the canonical works of high literary postmodernism. Finally, there are essays here which examine such exotic topics as musical noise, Grand Canyon, or witchcraft in literature. All of them prove the point that emotions and feelings are indeed an essential part of the postmodern period, even though their forms and incarnations may vary more considerably than ever before.

For many readers such a broad range of topics covered may appear to be both disorienting and discouraging. In fact, this is not the case at all. The texts are highly-informative and perform their persuasive function perfectly. The argumentation is clear and well-grounded, although some essays may require certain prior knowledge of the subject. With few exceptions all contributions to *Emotion in Postmodernism* provide practical demonstrations of their authors' theses in the form of a range of postmodern cultural artifacts. It is also worth mentioning that coming from various cultural backgrounds the critics discuss not only American culture, but make numerous references to British, German, and French sources and works of art, which provides additional insight into the nature of the issue. I strongly believe that both experts and laymen interested in postmodern culture will experience problems with controlling their own emotions at seeing such a promising volume.

(Pawel Frelik)

Leopards in the Temple: Studies in American Popular Culture
by Steven Carter . International Scholars Publications
San Francisco, 1997

Popular culture has become in twentieth century America a phenomenon worthy of academic treatises and publications. An average American can learn from these scientific studies what his favorite TV programs are or what cultural meaning his shopping habits have, and although such assessments may seem trivial at face value, if nothing else, they do make one important statement. Namely, they show (to those who managed to retain a bit of common sense and the last sparkle of ego in stupefying and paralyzing contemporary reality) the monstrosity twentieth century man is creating to his doom.

It is highly surprising and paradoxical that the ideas lying at the foundations of American society - ideas which propelled the development of America's land of milk and honey, and whose aim was to provide more wealth and happiness and freedom to each and every American citizen - should to some extent be responsible for the present state of affairs. The belief that every American is entitled to whatever is available - be it a T-shirt, a Ford, or a plot of land, and that he can get it in bigger quantities and for smaller price - has set in motion a machine which has produced a stupefied and puppet-like consumer society.

One recent book which ventures into the mechanisms of desintegration of contemporary America is Steven Carter's *Leopards in the Temple: Studies in American Popular Culture*. Carter takes us on a ride through the world of technology, nuclear power, dazzling TV advertisements and labyrinthine shopping malls. However, the further we go on that ride the less we are sure of our destination. And indeed, in Carter's book there seems to be no destination for American society because the only movement we are certain of is that from normality to abnormality.