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Silvio Gaggi, *Modern/Postmodern: A Study in Twentieth-Century Arts and Ideas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, £25.15). Pp. 205. ISBN 0 8122 8154 3.

Contrary to the implication of its title, this study is concerned less with the question of distinguishing the Modern from the Postmodern than with the Modernist and Postmodernist threads that are to be found in all texts. That is, Professor Gaggi rejects the essentialist notion of cultural episteme in favour of constructed categories that intersect in texts which cannot belong unequivocally to one cultural kind only. These assumptions are not stated explicitly, but they emerge quite clearly from his approach. And it is refreshing to find a critic who is prepared to forego the debate over ways to separate absolutely the age and the art of the Modern from that of the Postmodern.

The fundamental assumption of this approach is made clear in the introduction which points to the historical tradition of self-conscious representation: novels like Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and paintings like Velazquez's *La Meninas*. Epistemological scepticism, ontological uncertainty, semiotic freeplay – these are not the exclusive characteristics of twentieth-century textuality. In place of a study that seeks exclusive characteristics, Gaggi provides an account of the ways in which texts respond to a modern crisis of belief. Nineteenth-century confidence in "a scientific, positivistic epistemology" (p. 49) is seen to be superseded in twentieth-century art by influential models of representation established by Pirandello and Brecht.

In a series of chapters that deal with, in turn, theatre, the plastic arts, film, and literature, Gaggi describes and analyzes characteristics of the two methods of representation. Each method is defined in terms of its attitude towards the relationship between art and reality. So the Pirandellian confuses the world of theatrical illusion with the extra-theatrical world, whilst the Brechtian dramatizes a radical break between the two. That Gaggi's sympathies ultimately lie with texts that promote a Pirandellian self-reflexivity becomes apparent in his analysis of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The inclusion of textual commentary he describes as a kind of Brechtian defamiliarization, but the discontinuity between fictional and "real" worlds represented thus is incorporated in and in some senses is transcended by the larger Pirandellian context of the novel that is about an author writing a novel and thus renders tenuous the whole concept of reality.

Professor Gaggi concludes his study with a discussion of Postmodernism, Posthumanism and politics in which he summarizes the primary issues of this debate, before relating them to trends both in critical theory and in such approaches to recent art as Christopher Butler's *After the Wake* and Ian Wilde's *Middle Grounds*. Both arts and ideas are considered seriously in this well written and engaging multi-disciplinary study.

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