Kathryn Atherton

Reading Record

Maria Damon

Premonitions: Definitions, Explanations, Acknowledgments

from *The Dark End of the Street*

Response:

It was interesting how the work of minorities/outcasts has the connotation of being mediocre, but is often celebrated as being the most creative and groundbreaking. Obviously, this has to do with the fact that these artists can be groundbreaking because they don’t live within the mainstream culture. I also thought it was interesting that certain works can be avant-garde for one artist even if it doesn’t appear to stray outside the mainstream culture.

Discussion Question:

Is there a formal definition for avant-garde art? Can there be?

Outline of Argument:

* New ideas in art come out of outcast populations
* Traditional definition of avant-garde leaves out American works
* Art is social, separate from material
* Avant-garde: pushes the limits of experience and form
  + Historical context required for creation, but not linked to other parts of history
* Best people to push limits are those who are beyond their own limits (material, social, monetary, etc.)
* Military and poetry connection (guerrilla warfare & guerrilla poets)
  + Breaks rules to create new conscience and experience
* Oppressed people are not actively engaged in resistance
  + Resistance is intentional
* Oppression is vertical
  + Resistance responds in the same way to the same thing - strategy; untrue
* Minorities: second-rate/mediocre connotations
* Minorities’ work makes it into the mainstream
  + Example: Black music
* Border is not less than, but defining of the mainstream
  + “Unofficial”
  + “Cutting edge”, “revolutionary”, reactionary
* experimental/ avant-garde isn’t well-defined
  + One person can be experimental for their taste without going outside the mainstream definition of art
* Kaufman, Stein
* Neglect from majority culture, legend in subculture
* Acknowledgments