

Facing page  
Dr. Lakra *Untitled* (Antonion  
Leony Saul Montana),  
2004, diptych, ink on vintage  
magazines, each 28 x 24 cm  
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contention that drawing is 'improvisatory', efficient, effective and immediate is in itself a neo-Romantic fallacy misconstrued as a 'trend' that can be revived unproblematically. Contrary to Dexter's claim that drawing 'had never been widely theorized in its own right', cognitive psychology and histories of pictorial representation have long posited drawing to be predicated on learning and manipulating conventions, conventions that have changed very slowly and that differ dramatically around the world (there is no 'global visual language' as Dexter imagines). These conventions take time to learn and can prevent imaginative communication just as much as they can allow it. Despite how internalized and habitual the drawing process becomes for some, it's certainly not the case that it has an 'immediate [...] proximity to thought', this is merely an illusion that drawing conjures. The attempt to make drawing appear 'relevant' (which begs the question, relevant to what?) leads Dexter down a familiar 60s hippy trail to drawing in an expanded muddy field wherein we encounter anything that vaguely sounds like it might involve 'lines'. Characteristic tactics of practice-based research, such vague Humpty Dumpty-style analogies push the term 'drawing' to the point of meaninglessness, rendering the book's exercise of drawing a line around drawing futile. Most of the works reproduced in the book make use of permanent materials and conventional techniques (dark lines on white paper fields) and are incongruous with such evocations of dematerialization. They demonstrate how engaging and diverse contemporary art is, while the preponderance of design drawing, tattoos, manga, faux-naif folk and adolescent slackerisms reminds that drawing, like photography, isn't something uniquely practiced by artists and therefore would be better understood as a series of customs that cut across cultures. Correspondingly, if we want to know what's happening in art now, we need to do our own investigations, without medium-specific prejudice. NM

## Art History

### New Art City

Jed Perl

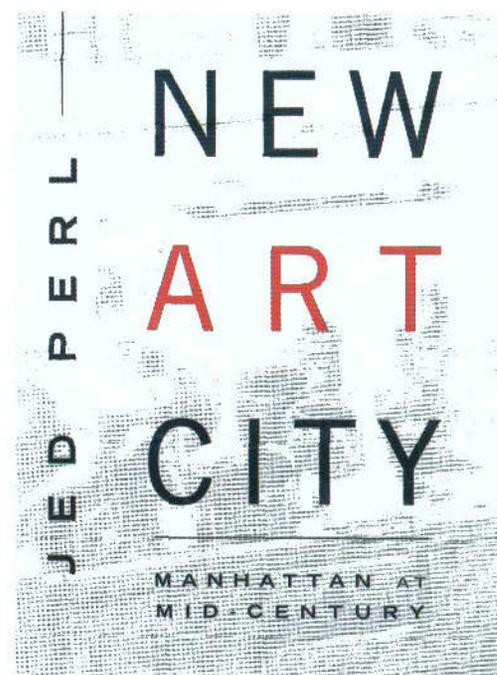
KNOPF \$35.00

It would be the grandest of understatements to say that Jed Perl's *New Art City* is a period piece. Capturing the sensibility of New York in the middle decades of the twentieth century through the art to which it gave rise, and the artists to whom it played host, Perl gives us something more than the easy rhythms of a broad-brushed historical portrait of a time and a place. Artistic sensibility, Perl's book reminds us, is in the details.

But for details to rise to the surface a shift of perspective is necessary, one at once panoramic and close-up. Perl's book opens with an introductory chapter entitled 'The Painter and the City', which returns Hans Hofmann to aesthetic centrality within the New York School. As Perl writes, 'More than any other artist who worked in New York, it was this old man from Munich who would not let gallery-goers settle down. There was probably no other artist who caught so much of New York City's light, with its clarity and penetration, its brilliance was like a wake-up call, like an alarm clock going off.' This is not just Perl wielding a critic's flourish but an exercise in reorientation. If New York really did steal the idea of Modern Art from Europe (and Paris in particular), with Pollock filling out the role of the new world's romanticized individualism, then it was Hofmann's wide-ranging influence as both artist and teacher, and his new life in New York, which made such thievery possible.

Hofmann is no main character in Perl's account, but, like the city itself, a golden thread in a complex narrative weave that covers an impressive array of people and places – from 'Welders' like Smith and Stankiewicz to the opening of the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building. These are what we might call Perl's new art citizens.

It is quite evident that Perl's intention is not to have written a book that recuperates some lost history of modern art in New York by shining light on artists and individuals whose own brilliance was otherwise overshadowed



owed by the biggest personalities on the scene, it is rather to demonstrate that by far the biggest personality was that of the city itself. Only one chapter focuses on a single artist – Joseph Cornell – and even there that artist's signature collage aesthetic is no longer just an assault on the autonomy of the picture plane, or an evocation of the unconscious, but a proxy for the manifest heterogeneity of the metropolis. 'In Cornell's New York,' Perl writes, 'time and place flowed, reversed, overlapped. In his imagination, the city was transformed into an urban pastoral – a city that was both in and out of time.' One imagines that this is how New York must exist for Perl as well. JTDN

## Cultural Theory

### Mediated: How the Media Shape Your World

Thomas de Zengotita

BLOOMSBURY £12.99

*Mediated* begins with a great anecdote. The year is 1963 and the author, at this time a drama student in Manhattan, is rehearsing in a studio with his fellow thespians. Suddenly, there's a knock on the door and an administrator walks in to announce that John F. Kennedy has been shot. The students are briefly stunned, but then assume this is an improvisational cue. They bawl; they emote. Then they learn that not only has he really been shot, but that he's dead. De Zengotita says he learned something else too: 'It was the realization that there was nothing left, no level or nuance of feeling that hadn't become a resource for our enterprise of Method acting.'

This 'nothing left'-ness is what *Mediated* is all about. It's a fusion text that strives to join the dots between cultural critique, post-modern theory and sociolinguistic treatise through contemporary American pop life. De Zengotita has a theory: our lives, he asserts,

A vertical bar on the left side of the page, consisting of a series of colored squares (red, orange, yellow, green, blue) stacked vertically, with a small red diamond at the top.

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