



Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde

Susan Rubin Suleiman

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With this important new book, Susan Suleiman lays the foundation for a postmodern feminist poetics and theory of the avant-garde. She shows how the figure of Woman, as fantasy, myth, or metaphor, has functioned in the work of male avant-garde writers and artists of this century. Focusing also on women's avant-garde artistic practices, Suleiman demonstrates how to read difficult modern works in a way that reveals their political as well as their aesthetic impact.

Suleiman directly addresses the subversive intent of avant-garde movements from Surrealism to postmodernism. Through her detailed readings of provocatively transgressive works by André Breton, Georges Bataille, Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and others, Suleiman demonstrates the central role of the female body in the male erotic imagination and illuminates the extent to which masculinist assumptions have influenced modern art and theory. By examining the work of contemporary women avantgarde artists and theorists--including Hélène Cixous, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Leonora Carrington, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Cindy Sherman--Suleiman shows the political power of feminist critiques of patriarchal ideology, and especially emphasizes the power of feminist humor and parody.

Central to Suleiman's revisionary theory of the avant-garde is the figure of the playful, laughing mother. True to the radically irreverent spirit of the historical avant-gardes and their postmodernist successors, Suleiman's laughing mother embodies the need for a link between symbolic innovation and political and social change.

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