

The New Criterion

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A new low at the *Times*

On the New York Times Book Review.

We've had several occasions to remark on the astonishing metaphysical feat of *The New York Times Book Review*. For as long as anyone can remember, it has been an embarrassment, as bad as it was possible for such a mainstream paper to be, and yet how do they do it? it always manages to surprise by being just a little worse this week than last. A couple of months ago, the *Review* treated readers to a feature about the size of black genitalia. In its issue for December 11, there appears an immensely long essay on contemporary art criticism called "State of the Art." We do not know who put Barry Gewen, an editor at the *Book Review*, up to the task. Perhaps he lost some bet with the editor and this was his punishment. Mr. Gewen has never before betrayed any public interest in art or art criticism—he certainly betrayed no knowledge of the subject in this essay. To call it confused would be a calumny on confusion; to say that it was a hash of half-understood liberal clichés would be unfair to the institution of the cliché. It is a dog's breakfast of an essay, so bad that pity for the author competes with irritation at the travesty he has perpetrated. Those unfortunate enough to have read the piece will understand our particular irritation at such sentences as "[Hilton] Kramer employs a clear-cut either/or aesthetic equation: modernism good, postmodernism bad" and the suggestion that, somehow, writings by the editors of *October* "sound like no one so much as the traditionalist Hilton Kramer," a statement of such consummate preposterousness that we wondered for a moment whether the whole essay was some sort of joke. Nietzsche once said of the Germans that they had no fingers, only paws; what, we wonder, would he have said about the lurching clumsiness of *The New York Times Book Review*?

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