

# L|R|Q

Leonardo Reviews Quarterly 1.01 | 2010

Executive Editor: Roger Malina

Editor-in-Chief: Michael Punt

Managing Editor: Claudy Op den Kamp

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## LEONARDO

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE  
ARTS, SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

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## Leonardo Reviews

*Leonardo Reviews* is the work of an international panel of scholars and professionals invited from a wide range of disciplines to review books, exhibitions, DVDs, CDs, websites, and conferences. Collectively they represent an intellectual commitment to engaging with the emergent debates and manifestations that are the consequences of the convergence of the arts, science and technology.

*Leonardo Reviews* publishes all reviews received from the panel monthly at [www.leonardo.info](http://www.leonardo.info). In addition, four times a year a selection of reviews is printed in *Leonardo* and now *Leonardo Reviews Quarterly* will be publishing an even larger selection as a PDF together with introductory material and overview essays.

Reviewers interested in being considered for the panel and publishers and authors interested in having their print or electronic publications considered for review by the panel should contact:

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## Reviews Panel

Kathryn Adams, Nameera Ahmed, Katherine Ancher, Fred Andersson, Wilfred Arnold, Jan Baetens, Niran Bahjat-Abbas, Brian Baigrie, Jenny Bangham, John F. Barber, Jon Bedworth, Roy Behrens, Katharina Blassnigg, Martha Blassnigg, Barry Blundell, Catalin Brylla, Annick Bureaud, Franc Chamberlain, Chris Cobb, Ornella Corazza, Geoff Cox, Sean Cubitt, Hannah Drayson, Anthony Enns, Jennifer Ferng, Enzo Ferrara, George Gessert, Thom Gillespie, Luis Girao, Allan Graubard, Dene Grigar, Rob Harle, Craig Harris, Paul Hertz, Craig J. Hilton, Jung A. Huh, Amy Lone, Boris Jardine, Richard Kade, John Knight, Mike Leggett, Helen Levin, Kieran Lyons, Roger Malina, Jacques Mandelbrojt, Florence Martellini, Eduardo Miranda, Rick Mitchell, Robert A. Mitchell, Christine Morris, Michael Mosher, Axel Mulder, Frieder Nake, Maureen A. Nappi, Angela Ndalianis, Martha Patricia Nino, Simone Osthoff, Jack Ox, Narendra Pachkhede, Jussi Parikka, Rene van Peer, Guiseppe Pennisi, Cliff Pickover, Michael Punt, Kathleen Quillian, Harry Rand, Sonya Rapoport, Trace Reddell, Hugo de Rijke, Stefaan van Ryssen, Sundar Sarukkai, Laura Salisbury, Lara Schrijver, Bill Seeley, Aparna Sharma, George K. Shortess, Chris Speed, Yvonne Spielmann, Eugene Thacker, Pia Tikka, David Topper, Nicholas Tresilian, Ian Verstegen, Claudia Westermann, Stephen Wilson, Brigitta Zics, Jonathan Zilberg

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## Hard Humanities in Difficult Times

The Leonardo publications were founded in the 1960s by a community of practice that included artists, scientists and engineers, scholars in institutions and individual practitioners. Survivors of the Second World War, they were motivated by a deep belief that the arts of our times had to integrate the sciences and new technologies. They also believed that international collaboration in the arts and sciences was part of creating a safer new world.

Over these forty years that original Leonardo Journal has evolved into a variety of forms including the Leonardo Music Journal, Leonardo Book Series, Leonardo Electronic Almanac, Leonardo Transactions, Leonardo Abstracts Data Bases, and now of course a multiplying variety of social network formats. Now we welcome this newest hybrid: the Leonardo Reviews Quarterly.

Over 7000 individuals have documented their work and thoughts through the Leonardo publications. Together with their families and close friends this community of 30,000 people is a larger creative community than fuelled the re-thinking of the world during the Renaissance. Geographically dispersed, and also ideologically, they seek not to create a third culture but rather to bring together our various disciplines to work together on the difficult or interesting problems of our times.

We live in changing times, as did the founders of Leonardo. We find ourselves in the situation of having to redesign our societies, if not our cultures, to anticipate the changes driven variety of anthropogenic loads on our environment and planet. Societies and cultures normally adapt to change in their environment (there are winners and losers) and this adaptation can occur more or less gracefully if the changes occur slowly enough. Our environment is now changing quickly enough that adaptation will be inadequate; we must redesign our societies and cultures in anticipation of the new world that is emerging. This is a very hard design problem. I like to call this the 'hard humanities'.

Innovation theorists talk about a standard model of innovation that transfers basic science discoveries to the applied sciences, then to commer-

cialization and then to economic growth. Second, Third and Fourth Generation innovation models recognize the non-linear complex feedbacks and interactions that actually take place in national innovation systems. Innovation theories talk about the 'Triple Helix of Innovation' that brings together universities, the private sector and governments that establishes the context to drive innovation. The Leonardo community would challenge this reductionism. They would insist that there are missing strands that bring in the variety of ways that the 'cultural imaginary' not only grounds innovation (not only technological but also social) in particular contexts but also drives it towards a variety of worldviews. Today the cultural imaginary is part of the hard humanities that we need if cultural innovation will occur quickly enough for us to redesign our societies in a sustainable way.

The 'human condition' of the sciences also requires us to build in what Romain Gary called 'la marge humaine' or that reservoir of ideas and potentialities whose value can often only be found in times of crisis. The artistic community that uses Leonardo to document its work is an 'early adopter' group that is keen to explore all aspects of science and technology displaying what Sundar Sarukkai calls 'an ethics of curiosity'.

Finally the Leonardo community is self-reflexive. Through the Leonardo Book Series, in particular, we have been helping document and analyse the theoretical and historical analyses that then informs new art-science praxis. Since its initiation Leonardo has published a review section. The founding reviews editor, Guy Metraux, in 1968 published reviews of books by JJ Gibson on Visual Perception, Herman Weyl on Symmetry, and a review by Richard Gregory on Optical Illusions. Michael Punt, and his team, have since 1998 re-invented Leonardo Reviews in the digital age. Thanks to the web the reviews become cross-linked in real time to the evolving intellectual discourse, and now with this new LRQ format will become accessible in the new print-on-demand and download formats. We hope these approaches will help short circuit the feedback loops that we need to put in place for the hard humanities.



## LRQ

Welcome to the first edition of *Leonardo Reviews Quarterly*. As I am sure many of you know *Leonardo Reviews* began life some fifteen years ago as *Leonardo Digital Reviews* and was intended to catch the wave of the new publishing era that wider access to the Internet offered. Since that time it has published on-line well over two thousand reviews filed by its international panel of artists, writers and scientists. We have published about a quarter of these in print in *Leonardo* and maintained a strong and accessible web archive of the rest. This is how we intend to continue for the next decade but in addition we will now publish an extended selection of reviews every quarter in a form that will meet the needs of an emerging print-on-demand constituency and will prepare the way for delivery of first rate copy to other portable publishing formats.

The new opportunities for this kind of publishing will allow us to present a quarterly selection of reviews together with other newly commissioned articles, such as overview essays and extended reflections on particular themes, along with a cross section of the reviews that we have received over the past three months. In this way we hope to provide a quarterly snapshot of the state of the field that can be engaged with in rather different ways to the monthly on-line postings or the edited selection in *Leonardo*. In particular we hope that it will provide a useful dossier for educators and younger researchers who are anxious to engage with multi-, inter-, and trans- disciplinary research and practice at the boundaries of art, science and technology. We also hope that LRQ (of course it already has an initialism) will be a useful format for drawing together many of the significant insights and interventions from the panel that have hitherto been distributed across two or three platforms, and that the intellectual agenda, that as editor in chief I have had privileged access to over the years, becomes more explicit.

The idea for *Leonardo Reviews Quarterly* has been simmering away for a long time and I have to thank a dynamic team of associates who have driven it to this current first edition. The Associate Editors of *Leonardo Reviews* have, in addition to their own work in the relentless monthly cycle of LDR, undertaken the preparation of many dummies and debated the finer points of the decisions we have had to make for this new venture. I am

also grateful to Pamela Grant Ryan and Roger Malina for their encouragement and support in developing this extension to the *Leonardo Reviews* project. Most of all, however, we have to thank Claudy Op den Kamp who has been the mind, the eye and indeed the elbow behind this issue, and of course especial thanks to the reviewers, without whose quality inputs the project would have no body.

I hope that you find this format useful for your own work and reference. Of course we cannot publish all reviews that are received at *Leonardo Reviews* in *Leonardo* or even as a POD version of *Leonardo Reviews Quarterly*. We remain primarily committed to the monthly online version as the primary dynamic interface with our constituency. We update *Leonardo Reviews* at [www.leonardo.info](http://www.leonardo.info) at the beginning of every month and will continue to publish edited selections four times a year in *Leonardo*, but here in LRQ we hope to open a new strand in our project to catch the next publishing wave while retaining the virtue and value of the conventions and procedures that are at the core of high quality research and practice at the interface of art, science and technology.

## Inside Time

by Jason Young

National Film Board of  
Canada, 2007

DVD, 35 min.

Distributor's website: <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca>

*Reviewed by Nameera Ahmed*  
*nameeraa@gmail.com*

'Inside Time', a video essay treated in a minimalist style, takes us inside the mind of Stephen Reid, an ex-bank robber and notorious bandit with the 'Stopwatch Gang' now in jail with an 18 year sentence, while he contemplates the abstract notion of time. An extraordinary man, Reid has the strength and insight to contemplate and share with others consciously his own life while verbalizing it in front of the camera. It is humbling to think that a man who once was a lawbreaker could educate us about life. While watching the film 'Inside Time,' one is forced to listen to each and every word that is uttered by Reid, as if it were a little gem of wisdom: We are an enrapt audience. He speaks of our ancestors, the life of humans as primeval creatures thousands of years ago, and our connection with the primordial even today with a kind of timelessness in him that we almost envy.

"When we recollect our lives we recollect moments of our lives. Our reference points for our entire lives will be a moment" he contemplates. Even though he says he's led a very exciting life, for some reason, those are not the memories that are strong with him. But the memories that so stay and keep recurring are the ones that are involuntary because of the kind of life he has lead. He gains more of our

sympathy when we learn that he was sexually abused by an adult when he was a child. He says that particular man "stole something from me...he introduced me to drugs, he introduced me to things I should never know, he stole something from me and I was malformed."

Throughout the film there are recurring images of a spider in a web, its silver thread shining against a black background, sometimes focussing in on a fly caught in it. These are woven in with images of children sitting in theme park rides, sometimes shown in close up, sometimes in slow motion. The use of close ups, symbolize scrutiny, and the analysis of Reid's past life, which he offers us. The use of childhood imagery enforces his lost childhood and innocence when he ran away from home to live on streets and became a drug addict. The ferris wheel and children's rides juxtaposed with the spider weaving its web imply a loss of the beauty of childhood and innocence that Reid has lost. "All understanding in life comes from retrospection — we seldom understand something as we're passing through it," he says. Even though one can feel how difficult it is for him to talk about it, he faces the camera bravely, speaking of his career as an addict, of life as "four-hour cycles" and the humans' main interest to seek comfort and safety in everything that they do.

The 'Stopwatch Gang' wove time so closely with what they did, that they could capture each second calculatedly. Reid says he never used a real stopwatch during his robberies even though they ended up with that name because he never needed one and had a much better one, given to him, he says, when he

was born. Time was so close to him that, he says it "was something that you could bite, it was there...it was a part of me". The connection between time and danger became strong for him, for he had to inhabit it, as he could feel its presence; it was so real. He talks of time, "This most precious commodity that we own...the one thing that we could actually control, and it's the one thing that we don't sit in, or stay aware of, or use properly." While he was in prison, he felt the 'freedom' to do important things. He felt time and retrospection was something no one could take away from him.

"The key to life is, not so much cycles, but spirals." "It's an ironic thing that being sent to prison, having that choice made for you, ...actually puts you in a place of contemplation and you break free of the time". "All understanding of life comes", he says, "from retrospection—we seldom understand something as we're passing through it." Ultimately Reid wrote a book while in prison, and moving away from what had happened in the past, "by engaging my mind just with this paper in front of me...I was actually able to sit fully in my own present, in my own 'now.'"

The music in the film complements the concept of time literally by emulating the ticking of a watch. Sometimes the ticking sounds are irregular, like a watch taken apart, and other sounds are added and infused to make a slow, percussion-based soundscape blended with xylophone sounds to emulate the passing of time.

"Desire is the cause of all suffering ... because desire takes you out of your time, and puts you into the moment of what it is you desire", Reid says, as he

imparts knowledge from his experience like the great Buddha himself, while we absorb and learn.

## The Inner History of Devices

by Sherry Turkle (ed.)

The MIT Press, 2008, 197 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0262201766

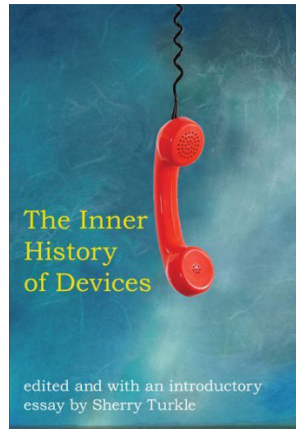
*Reviewed by John F. Barber,  
Washington State University  
Vancouver*

[jfbarber@eaze.net](mailto:jfbarber@eaze.net)

For more than two decades, Sherry Turkle, Founder and Director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, has written about how technology enters the private worlds of its users. In her latest book, *The Inner History of Devices*, she reveals how the technology that we make is woven into our ways of seeing ourselves. In this edited collection of 12 essays, Turkle weaves together three traditions—memoir, clinical practice, and the field work of ethnography—to illuminate the subjective side of technological experience and how technology inhabits the inner life ultimately becoming charged with personal meaning. Each approach, Turkle argues, each way of listening, is necessary for a deep intelligence of the relationship between technology and people's lives. Normally, one talks about technology by following standardized scripts from advertising and media narratives. Memoir, clinical sensibilities, and ethnography take practice, and quiet, in order to create a space for self-reflection, as well as for people to discover what is really on their minds.

For example, in her essay "Slashdot.org," Anita Say Chan writes about individuals who

claim to be addicted to the Internet technical news site Slashdot.org. Chan's informants are unrepentant addicts. They suggest that by losing control of their behavior, they have arrived at a better place, one that enhances their lives and personal learning styles. These individuals have reversed the social meaning of addiction yet are still frightened by their vulnerability to the website. They have, however, learned to live with this ambivalence as it provides for a liminal space, a space between themselves and their technologies where they can create meaningful relationships with devices.



In her essay about compulsive gamblers, "Video Poker," Natasha Schüll notes the goal is not to win, but rather to stay connected with the machine, inside an insulated zone of play. Her informants talk about fantasies of being inside the machines, participating in the turning of the cards, cyborg couplings with the machines.

This image of the cyborg plays out in Aslihan Sanal's essay "The Dialysis Machine," Alicia Kestrell Verlager's essay "The Prosthetic Eye," and Anne Pollock's essay "The Internal Cardiac Defibrillator." In each case the informants come to

think of themselves and their machines as one. As humans they have become something new, something half human and half electronic.

Beyond such devices designed to be within or close to the body, people have stories about their eroticized attachments to everyday communication technology. E. Cabell Hankinson Gathman's essay, "Cell Phones," tells how her cell phone became a crucial actor in the final throes of a love affair. Gathman deletes her lover's telephone number within hours of their breakup, but refuses to delete the special ring tone she set for his incoming calls. Long after the relationship is over, his ring tone remains, waiting for his call.

In each essay, informants acknowledge their understanding of the "company line" regarding new technology: that it will improve, even save, their lives. But in each case, the informants also acknowledge moments where they learn something new and are forced to express themselves in highly particular ways, close to idiosyncratic, and often in association with their bodies. Such triumphal narratives signal a break from technology's company line and a movement toward a new truth: that technology is central to forging identity, a theme of the clinical essays in this collection, and one familiar from Turkle's previous books. "The World Wide Web" by John Hamilton, "Computer Games" by Marsha H. Levy-Warren, and "Cyberplaces" by Kimberlyn Leary all speak to how adolescents use life on the screen to crystallize identity by imagining themselves as they wish to be. "The Internet," Turkle writes in her introduction, "appears as a medium in which people discover things about themselves,

good and bad, usually complicated and hard to sort out" (22).

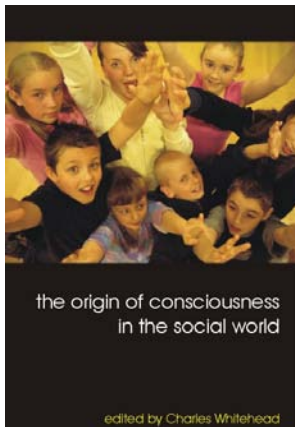
But, despite the difficulties, an inner history has begun and through these essays we can better understand the untold stories about our attachments to technological objects. The choice of memoir, clinical writing, and ethnography to share these stories follows the human act of putting events into shifting camps of meaning through remembrance. In the end, each essay in this collection brings us to the question we must ask of every device: Does it serve our human purposes? Asking that question causes us to examine the basic meanings of those purposes.

## The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World

by Charles Whitehead (ed.)  
Imprint Academic, 2008, 250 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1845401498

Reviewed by Martha Blassnigg, University of Plymouth

martha.blassnigg@gmail.com



With *The Origin of Conscious-*

*ness in the Social World* Charles Whitehead (ed.) offers us a unique, interdisciplinary, and timely anthology with a great variety of perspectives from a broad range of relevant subject areas that recognise the importance of including social and cultural interactions and contexts in the scientific study of consciousness. It is the edition of a special issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 15, No.10-11 (October-November, 2008) on social approaches to consciousness. ([http://www.imprint.co.uk/jcs\\_15\\_10-11.html](http://www.imprint.co.uk/jcs_15_10-11.html)). In his work, as well as in this edition, Whitehead takes issue with the underrated acknowledgement in cognitive neuroscience of the influences of the social world on the individual development of consciousness and the brain. He builds a strong case for the essential role of social anthropology in consciousness studies in his insightful, metadiscursive, and at times appropriately witty introduction. The two main reasons that Whitehead provides for the inclusion of long-term field observations as practiced in cultural and social anthropology are (1) the necessity of cross-cultural validation of scientific data for the establishment of truly universals of human mentation and behaviour and (2) the cultural analysis of scientific practice to minimize socio-political bias in theoretical work and maximise the return from research funding (p. 19). This recognition of the self-reflective potential of social and cultural anthropology supports the insight and underlying thread of the book that scientific research ultimately can never be divided from the dimension of shared experience. In this way *The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World* provides insights into methodology and epistemology, into ways

and perspectives how scientific studies of consciousness can be conducted and which central research questions need to be addressed for a way forward to an understanding of consciousness embedded in the context of social and interpersonal experiences. Or, as Whitehead defines his personal view for a science of consciousness: "... as one which makes models of how mental experience and the world 'out there' interact with each other" (p. 19).

The collection of articles provide in their very interdisciplinarity of self-standing fields of inquiry an overview of the state-of-the-art of current debates in consciousness studies in relation to social interaction and conceptions of the social brain, social mirror theory, etc. Moreover, and Whitehead has to be congratulated for this, the book is visionary in its scope of an emerging field of research that no doubt will be of use and influence for scholars increasingly working into this direction. One of the strength of the book is — and this makes it a unique and rather successful anthology — that Whitehead does not fear to tackle inherent tensions among the different contributions. He regards conflicts as a source for advancement and discovery, and avoids the temptation (common in this publishing format) to create a meta-narrative that should bind the single author's contributions together in one unique whole. What to some might seem a smart strategy, seems rather informed by an acknowledgement that interdisciplinarity only works well if the strength and potentials of the distinct disciplines are mutually respected. What all articles share is the recognition of the importance of social interaction and shared

experience for the development (and as the title suggests, an approach toward an understanding of the origin) of consciousness. The contributions differ in approach, methods, perspectives and the weight they give to the interaction between the physical and the social, cultural factors with profound and sometimes conflicting philosophical implications. The range of disciplines addressed in this volume accordingly comprises a wide range, including brain studies, neuroscience, biology, ethology, primatology, cognitive sciences, psychology, cultural anthropology, social sciences, and philosophy. Also impressive is the range of research areas that this anthology addresses, as it is immediately visible in the Index, which include studies in music, dance, cultural rituals, altered states, mother-child vocal communication, empathy in elephants' behaviours, pretend play, the neurobiology of sympathy, the problem of the origin of language, intention in action understanding, collective representations and consciousness, etc. to name only a few.

*The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World* should be regarded as exemplary for the way — as innovative thinkers such as Bergson or Bateson had envisioned — scientific research with sophisticated and well-grounded methods can venture into yet unknown and inexplicable areas of natural phenomena without losing its credibility and validity. This is particularly true for the study of consciousness, which presents a portal to a wide range of phenomena whose study may provide a lever to gain a better understanding of the underlying mental/cognitive dimensions of the human condition. In this regard Whitehead has been visionary enough

to dedicated space in the third section of the book, 'Collective Consciousness and Reality', for contributions discussing the role of emotions in inter- and transpersonal systems, the issues of collective consciousness and correlations in beliefs about consciousness and reality. The anthology is choreographed in a rather inspiring way in that the recurrent themes of shared experience, beliefs and nature of reality, intersect the attributed main sections which move from discussions of the 'Social Brain' in the first section, to discussions of the social mirror theory in relation to research into mirror neurons in the second section, 'Social Mirrors', and finally to commonly marginalised areas of approaches to transpersonal, interpersonal and collective phenomena in the last section.

The book is a must-read for anyone who is unsatisfied with reductionist, materialist (or on the other extreme irrational) approaches to the study of consciousness, and particularly also for readers in the Humanities and Arts who would like to gain an overview on the current state-of-the-art in the scientific study of consciousness that recognises the necessity of bridging between these academic disciplines. Although most authors can be regarded as some of the pioneers in the study of consciousness in the last 20 or more years, the articles are written in a most accessible style, so that the book can also be recommended for scholars new to this field. It covers a wide range of some of the most prominent debates in consciousness studies, by which it achieves both: a look back through reflections on the origins of consciousness embracing a historical dimension, a focus on the present prevailing

discussions and a perspective for potentials of future research directions. More publications in this field are needed with such vision to fulfil the Tucson Center for Consciousness Studies' call to establish research 'toward a science of consciousness studies' (<http://www.consciousness.arizona.edu/>), in order to embrace the broadest range of dimensions of the human condition. It can furthermore only be hoped that this may also result in a stronger inclusion of knowledge practices and empirical research from the Humanities and the Arts with their unique insights into, and historical traditions of, the very processes of creativity, imagination, etc. and the anthropology and philosophy of mind in relation to the subject of consciousness. By taking up Whiteheads call or an inclusion of social and cultural anthropology in the study of consciousness, Baruss' closing contribution makes an important move into this direction by addressing the materialist 'politics of science' in his insightful and useful clarification of the confusion in the interpretation of the term consciousness in the scientific literature. He calls for authenticity in empirical research and for the grounding of the researcher's actions on the very basis of her understanding.

Imprint also needs to be congratulated for taking on board cutting-edge research with visionary potential that is not (however not always reasonably) uncritically viewed in some of the more canonic areas of the sciences. Another example of an Imprint publication of the same year, *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love* (Maturana Romesin and Verden-Zöller, 2008) presented a similar potential (reviewed last month at *Leonardo Reviews*),



which is not unrelated in the way certain attributes of love like trust or empathy are recurring subjects in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World*. This is especially evident in those articles that locate their discussion at the pivotal distinction between human and non-human 'animals', in particular in Whitehead's insightful section of the 'cultural explosion' in his introduction to C. Knight's contribution. It can only be encouraged that this quality of interdisciplinary collaborations and interconnections presented here will be recognised as fundamental for future research and publishing strategies, especially for those who are at the forefront in recognising the importance and necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration in the rapidly expanding complexity of contemporary research areas.

## Mind in Motion

by Philippe Baylaucq,  
Françoise Lindeman and  
Véronique Maison

Icarus Films, 2008

DVD, 52 min.

Distributor's address: <http://icarusfilms.com>

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*Mind in Motion*, a television production with the original title *Le Cerveau en Miroir* (2008), directed by Philippe Baylaucq, presents findings in neuroscience in relation to recent studies of the brain's plasticity in its dynamic and constant development. It features interviews with leading neuroscientists such as Walter J. Freeman, Vilayanur Ramachandran, Bruno van Swinderen, Lionel Nac-

cache and Maurice Ptito. While the informed reader/viewer will be familiar with the presented insights from the scientific literature, the documentary does make some of the selected issues very accessible to a broad public. To the filmmakers' credit, the visual language of the film overall stays tuned with the subject presented in the context of scientific research and does not lose itself in an overemphasis on the attractions of scientific imaging. It succeeds in creating a humane approach to the frequent clinical and materialist scientific presentations of data in neuroscience. This is particularly achieved in the encounters with the scientists' personalities through unique interviews, which are presented in a rather personal and accessible manner.

The documentary starts off with an animated, colorised woodcut, originally published in black and white by the 19<sup>th</sup> century astronomer Camille Flammarion in his *L'atmosphère : météorologie populaire* (Paris, 1888). This visionary scientist, along with his scientific research, published several books regarded as occult literature in his time, among which *Lumen*, a kind of clairvoyant view of an extraterrestrial (or free spirit) onto occurrences on earth and the cosmos over time. This captivating image of a man peeking through the Earth's atmosphere as thought to examine the 'inner' workings of the universe, serves as visual transformational shift from the macro to the micro cosmic view, when the camera zooms into the human figure with a voice-over commenting on the introspective move of the sciences from the complexities of the universe into the explorations of the 'inner cosmos'. The zoom enters the man's brain and neuro-network

and ends up on a superimposed image of the painting *Narcissus*, attributed to Caravaggio, with Narcissus captivated by his own mirror image. From a Humanities and Arts perspective there would be much to say to this intro to the film, however, dramatically these images foremost seem to serve the purpose of evoking the idea of the mirror-image (and -neuron) as one of the *Leitmotivs* of the unfolding narrative. The largest interview sections are divided between V. Ramachandran and Walter J. Freeman as well as intersected sequences with interviews and glimpses into the research labs of van Swinderen, Naccache and Ptito. The initial discussion addresses neuroscientific research into brain functionality, highlighting Freeman's important intervention of an understanding of a dynamic brain (in contrast to the previously traditional view of a static brain), the way the brain constantly processes and creates understanding. This is followed by presenting studies of how the visual cortex of blind born individuals is being stimulated by learning processes of other sensory stimuli. Perception is revealed as attention alternation processes tuned into the environment we live in with individual differences, from perspectives informed by a predominant approach through an input-reaction model of how we interact with the world. The documentary further addresses the issue of simultaneous conscious and unconscious processes during perception. Although Freeman locates knowledge in the synaptic connections that recent instrumentation makes visible, he modestly admits that we still do not understand enough about the complexity of neuron activity to understand consciousness. Ramachandran demon-

strates the results of the last decade's applied treatment for pain in phantom limbs through a visual mirroring of the healthy arm/hand that allows the brain in some cases to reverse the unlearning processes that occur once the brain learns that a limb is not responding to its stimuli. Although the success-rate of this re-learning to activate certain brain areas, he admits, is probably only around 10%, this still has a positive impact for many suffering from this phenomenon.

The last voice-over comment in the film evokes collective consciousness as fiction in a provocative statement in line with some of the presented research, ending with some practical advice by van Swinderen how to effectively catch a fly to demonstrate the loopholes of distributed attention. In search for the take-away message, this may not be the most powerful issues to be remembered in particular if the viewer is encouraged to truly shift the attention from the organ "brain" to the film's actual title: *Mind in Motion*. What seems to linger instead is the actuality and timeliness of Freeman's last interview sequence. Freeman applies the understanding of the constant learning and unlearning processes of the brain to the social interaction and organisation: the brain functions as organ to facilitate cooperation rather than control — what in consciousness studies has become to be known as the 'social brain' (also for example *The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World* by C. Whitehead, ed., 2008, also reviewed here this month). In this regard Freeman evokes the importance of adaptation to each other in social networks (sports, fusion in groups, dance, etc.), similarly induced by drugs like XTC,

which dissolves pre-existing structures selectively to form new structures. He addresses the pressing issue in many Western societies of potentials for conflict of street gangs and particularly teenagers as targets for the formation of bonding and alerts to "... the failure of neuroscience to come to terms with that aspect of brain dynamics in the failure of learning as a model for the development of a stable society". What Freeman's concern here seems to call for is a timely broadening of neuroscience and scientific studies of the brain to the inclusion of socially and culturally informed considerations of interactions between individuals and their environment. Finally, to play upon the commonly assumed 'mystery of the brain', which, it cannot be denied, haunts the film's (and probably some of the scientists') unconscious, it might be appropriate to end with a credit to the opening titles by a quotation from *Lumen* (C. Flammarion, originally published in 1897 by Dodd, Mead, and Company). While astronomers today speak of the 'dark matter' of the Universe as that part of the unknown we will never know, the extraterrestrial messenger Lumen observed in his conversation with the earthling Quaerens:

"But I see by the disturbance of your brain, and the rapid movements of the fluid which crosses your closely-concentrated lobes, that you no longer understand my revelations. I will not then pursue this subject which I have thus merely lightly touched upon, with the end in view of thereby demonstrating how greatly you would err, did you attach any importance to difficulties born of your terrestrial sensations, and to assure you that neither you nor any man upon the Earth could form even

an approximate idea of the universe" (<http://books.eserver.org/fiction/lumen/contents.html>).

## Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice

by Cathy Lane (ed.)

CRiSAP, 2008, 205 pp.

ISBN: 978-0955827334

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When one thinks of a composer, one generally thinks of music, or some other sonic form. Rarely, does one think of the sonic qualities of the spoken word. But, as Cathy Lane, co-director of Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice (CRiSAP) at the University of the Arts, London, notes, there is broad and deep body of work undertaken in this area by John Cage, William S. Burroughs, François Dufrêne, Kurt Schwitters, and Henri Chopin—and other sound poets, text sound artists, composers, and verbal experimenters.

Where once such work was undertaken in relative isolation, there is now an interconnected and well-established community who freely share ideas, and inspiration. Many of these contemporary practitioners are included in Lane's edited volume *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice*. Each has been asked to engage with the motivating ideas and artistic concerns that inform their work, and how to translate the elusive qualities of their work with sound into the fixed medium of print.

This, of course, is a problem.

The sonic ephemeral does not always easily, or effectively, translate, or migrate, into the fixed state of print. And despite Lane's detailed explanation about the various experimental methods used by the contributors to describe the "sounds heard, used, produced or even unheard except in the imaginings of the 'mind's ear'" (9), the end result, although creative, is, ultimately, visual-textual descriptions about sounds, not the actual aural artifacts themselves.



One of Lane's contributors, composer, performer, and poet Jaap Blonk, notes the irony in his essay, "Sound," when he writes that "[h]earing is everywhere. And it knocks at every window of your cochlea. ... You hear! You hear, you hear sound! Sound" (32, 33). But, we only read the representations of sound.

Still, as Lane notes in the introduction, there is a social, cultural, and political power in words, as there is the opportunity for "artistic intervention" to bridge the gaps between the semantic and abstract components of words (10). This notion of power becomes a central theme of the collection.

For example, Ansuman Biswas draws inspiration for his work from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, whose teachings speak to the attribute in the human spirit that restricts us to the use and service of the immediate surroundings rather than the remote. Viewing the human voice as an example of technology most available at the local level, Biswas says, "I love the immediacy and constant availability of the voice" (46). Where Biswas feels writing is an invaluable aid to memory "but . . . can also be misleading" (45), Joan La Barbara describes how she begins her composition of music with stream-of-consciousness writing, listing all the words she can determine as possible inspiration for the new composition. For La Barbara, writing is the basis for sound. In addition to words, her notebooks also include graphic shapes to help her visualize the energy of a particular sound, or the mood of a section. The combination of words and imagery help her "transmit a more precise sense of the trajectory, energy, and delivery of the sound" and allow the listener to recreate her sonic idea in their own minds (56).

Composer Trevor Wishart notes the "richness and complexity of everyday sounds," especially those associated with the human voice, and says, "The voice connects with so many things. When we speak we not only convey meanings but we portray things about ourselves, simple things like what gender we are or whether we are ill or healthy, but also, perhaps, what our intentions are, what our mood is" (71). These qualities of individuality that come through one's voice promote both the capture of the individual quality of voice as well as its abstraction. As a result, new information is available.

For John Wynne, a sound artist who works with the click languages of the Kalahari Desert, language is the primary repository of culture and history, "and once a language is no longer spoken, the rich knowledge it carries is gone forever" (81). Paul Lansky, recognized as one of the pioneers of computer music, posits his use of the computer as an instrument in order "to project the image of the human performer behind the screen." In using freeform versus scripted narrative, Lansky calls the former "everyday sound" and "performance" while the latter is "eavesdropping" (109).

Toward the end of the collection, almost like a bookend to Lane's original comment about the power in words, Laurie Anderson calls words "magic," says they can change people's minds, and concludes "there are no more powerful things in the world than words" (184).

In the end, as Katharine Norman writes in her essay that it is the give and take between words, language, text, and place that produces the "play" in the book's title. It is this play that provides the opportunity to tell a story, another theme of the collection. Each contributor is trying to tell a story through the inclusion of sound, generally, the human voice, the voice of the storyteller, in their works. Missing however, is that sound, the aural qualities of the speakers' voices knocking at the window of our cochlea. It would seem of additional interest to actually hear these voices, rather than just read about the process of their inclusion.



## The Inventor of Love & Other Writings

by Gherasim Luca

Julian and Laura Semilian  
(transl.)

Black Widow Press, 2009,  
143 pp.

ISBN: 978-0981808871

Reviewed by Allan Graubard

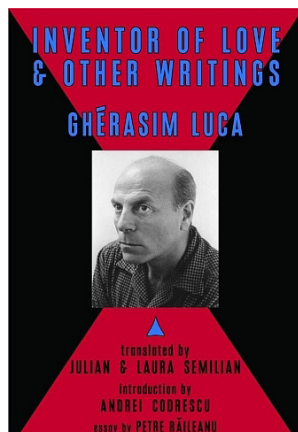
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"...from one temple to the other, the ebony blood of my virtual suicide drains in virulent silence... the bullets crisscross my brain day and night... dispersing inside the skull an odor of detonated gun powder, of clot-  
ted blood, of chaos."—Luca, *Inventor of Love*

Gherasim Luca, surrealist poet, artist, and theorist, has finally been translated into English, with two volumes this year: *The Passive Vampire* and *Inventor of Love & Other Writings*. Known as well to allies of surrealism and related circles in his native Bucharest and in Paris—where he exiles himself some 40 years until his actual suicide in 1994—he has come to us, as it often happens, through the praise of another. In this case, it is Gilles Deleuze who finds in Luca, quite simply, "a great poet among the greatest." Nor should we forget Luca's influence on Deleuze for his part in *Anti-Oedipus*, which seems at this juncture to have passed largely from interest or commentary.

The relationship of poetry to philosophy has commonly been one of precedence. From the origin of a sensibility comes a discursive horizon that details its own evolution, for its own time. Whatever the philosopher

sustains of the poet is something to discover, of course. But for a poet such as Luca, sensibility has a primacy that time does not diminish by virtue of alterations in the character of an idea. The poetic work eludes the constraints imposed upon it by history, its clarities and opacities interweaving perhaps in new ways as we encounter them but there, precise to the inspiration that revealed them.



Luca composes *Inventor of Love* in the 1940s, during the dark days of fascist rule in Romania, still suffering under its terrorist arm, The Iron Guard. As a surrealist committed to the overthrow of class society, principally by subverting its psychological underpinnings, and as a Jew, his marginalization is acute. In order to survive, he secludes himself and endures a clandestine existence along with his women and his few friends who comprise the Romanian surrealist group

Yet as a group—founded in 1940, disbanded in 1947—they maintain collective activity as they can. Post-war, before the Iron Curtain descends and socialist realism absorbs cultural activity, crushing independence as it does so, they make significant contributions to surrealism internationally, outlining a revo-

lutionary poetic program, with Luca playing a decisive role.

There is little question that *Inventor of Love* is a major accomplishment. Within it, Luca charts an act of poetic and theoretical revolt against the moral universe that typifies love as merely romantic or otherwise monogamous, and for procreation. As the myth of Oedipus is foundational here for Luca, he makes it his target; this myth which ties love to its repressed, reflected image in family, religion, and too much of the myriad relations of power that form our world.

It is, in no uncertain terms, Luca's attempt to reinvent love, to free this voluptuous, anti-social passion from the fetters that deform it. There is risk here, of course. And for one such as Luca, whose clarity is matched by the fervor of his writing, the tensions evoked are consequential. So much so that suicide, in contrast to the epochal blood baths crashing around him, is not something to avoid. And however desperate this may seem to us, especially in terms of poetry, or precisely because of poetry, it is necessary to note the authority in the act, from whence it comes and how it repudiates a world where mass butchery is the norm by a final act of desertion.

Luca thus attempts to commit suicide five times: strangulation by the aid of a necktie fastened to a door handle, Russian roulette, stabbing, poison, and self-strangulation. Before each attempt he leaves a note and afterward a commentary that depicts his struggle to rob death of its anonymity in a world flush with death, to rob death finally of the fear it induces; and to survive, which he does, with death

for him “dead” thereafter.

And so he writes, animated by the extremity he has brought himself to, with love balancing the scales, the body erupting through it all: tormented and tormenting, supernal with pleasure and power, this chaos he sublimates and transmutes; a font, in fact, of a poetic ascesis that allows him to grasp between a man and a woman the lineaments of a new kind of bond that will ground his efforts from then on. Along the way, as if in counterpoint, Luca assembles objects from things he finds or, more to the point, that find him, assemblages with near magic potencies that reveal the latent content of dreams as they confirm, however partially or completely, a route for his next move.

He writes: “...the female bodies that rendezvous inside my lover leave at the door, like a useless corpse, all their knowns, the ideas they had formulated about love... that cause her to search in me for that same lugubrious personage of a thousand masks that is her father.”

He writes: “...nothing can make me believe that love comes by anything other than this mortal passageway to the marvelous, inciting lascivious perilousness, in its aphrodisiac catacomb, where the never-before-encountered and the never-before-seen are the current characters of a continual surprise.”

I should add, to balance this nexus, that it is for man as for a woman, with the father replaced by the mother, and love for both an all too congenial substitute for ideational incest, with procreation the resumption of mothering and fathering along with the values it attracts. This is another reason that Luca pursues

his arc; and something for us to consider during a period when genocide, however corralled by place, stalks us under the guise, yet again, of a nationalized father image.

Where does such a poet come from? Biographical details or a discussion of influences will not do much to draw this man, born as Salman Locker, and who, upon finding an obit to his liking, took its name for his own, substituting a phantom for his lineage. Perhaps, because his desire is magnetic, he will attract you by his words and the objects he creates and discusses as external punctuations of this quest, amazed at the reciprocity that chance avails him through manufacturing and misuse. Perhaps you will find something of yourself in him; something you might wish not to meet yet which he compels you to admit; that you, too, might do as he did—were you free enough or compelled enough to follow the spark to its inevitable, overarching combustion in this particular way.

Most disarming, of course, is his candor; his understanding that poetic liberty is a very risky business in a world where family absorbs passion, genuflection masks love, and petty fears and hatreds proliferate as social mores and political platforms infused by the power of armaments and the illusions that control their use.

*Inventor of Love* is structured into four texts: *Inventor of Love*, *I Roam the Impossible*, *The Dead Death*, and an *Appendix*. Luca’s “other writings” fall under the rubric *The Praying Mantis Appraised* with 14 texts. Throughout are gems brilliant with incisions, sudden fulgurations, critical incantations, lucid despair, and a lucidity

tempered by sex whose white heat protects a definitive cold perception of duplicities with incendiary ruthless concision: alias Gherasim Luca.

## Third Person. Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives

by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (eds.)

The MIT Press, 2009, 636 pp.

ISBN: 978-0262232630

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This is, after *First Person* (strongly focused on gaming, 2004) and *Second Person* (with a great emphasis on interactivity, 2007) the third volume of a triptych on the relationship between narrative and play in 21<sup>st</sup>-century storytelling. The series, which one hopes to see continued in spite of the exhaustion of the pronominal paradigm for the titles of the volumes, is an impressive achievement, both in book form and in the multimedia environment that has been built at the launch of *First Person*. Thanks to a collaboration between *electronic book review* (one of the leading sites on digital culture), the two editors of the series and MIT Press, *ebr*, which is not organized in issues but in threads (thematic clusters with ongoing discussions on cutting edge topics), has created a thread in which large parts of the content of a book are not only made accessible online but also “substantially expanded via responses to the collection (ripostes) and enriched by incorporation into the *ebr* database” (<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/>)

thread/firstperson). The exciting intellectual results of this collaboration, which apparently do not kill the book format, can be a model for all those eager to explore the future of scholarly publications.

In *Third Person*, the central notion of “vast narrative” has a quantitative as well as a qualitative aspect. It has to do with extent and size (and we all know that it matters): vast narratives are narratives that are no longer contained within the traditional limits of the two mainstream formats of modern storytelling, the 2-hour feature film and the 300-page novel, but which include much more—in certain cases also innumerable—events, plots, storylines, characters, times and places, and fictional universes. But vast narratives are not only a matter of quantity and sheer numbers: at least as important is the potentiality of the narrative, i.e. its mediological capacity to migrate to other media and platforms, its procedural potential so that the rules of the narrative can be (partly) followed, performed, and experienced in various ways; its openness, finally, to reappropriation by reader and player.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Third Person* is the cross-media approach defended by the editors. The notion of vast narrative is not restricted to the capacities of computer games or the evolution towards complex stories in television shows such as *The Sopranos*. Corollarily, they also take into account previous forms of vast narratives such as Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* or—and this example is already more astonishing—Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers* as simple forerunners of what 21<sup>st</sup>-century techniques and new habits of

reading and playing are “finally” discovering. Rather than adopting such a teleological viewpoint, Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin propose a more transhistorical (yet not decontextualized) approach that makes room for many different types of vast narratives, including those created and published in traditional media. This clever decision does not only broaden the field of investigation, it also helps evaluating in a more correct way what is new or less new in today’s technological innovation and transmedial storytelling.

The structure of the book is very simple. Part 1, “Authoring”, brings together a certain number of testimonies made by those who are in the storytelling business. Their first-hand experience and the good balance between no-nonsense description of the things as they are and a good deal of self-analysis and theoretical and historical awareness make this section, which might have become self-complacent of anecdotal, great reading. An essay like the one by Norman M. Klein, who discusses the representation of space, in his “database novel” *Bleeding Through. Layers of Los Angeles 1920-1986* (2003), offers fascinating insights in the cultural framework that is both shaping and being shaped by the challenges of new forms of storytelling (in this case an interactive detective story combined with a city symphony using the archives of the Angeles Public Library and the Automobile Club of Southern California and a metanarrative reflection on storytelling in this digital medium).. Moreover, the fact that various essays are using the same corpus (*Doctor Who* being a good example here) or are discussing the same issues (the construction space is undoubt-

edly the most important of them) guarantees the internal cohesion of the volume and creates a good circulation between the texts. Part 2, “Exploring”, gathers analyses, yet all these readings are proposed by authors having a direct and hands-on experience of the medium they are studying (the reading of one of the comics, for example, is done by comic artist and critic Trina Robbins, the examination of board games by Matthew Kirschbaum, who reveals himself to be a die-hard boardgamer (which does not surprise us),, the close-reading of *Watchmen* by Stuart Moulthrop, the author and editor of a crucial portal site on this landmark graphic novel, and so on). In this regard, one hardly notices the split between author (part 1) and reader (part 2), and this role-blending is of course a perfect mirroring of what happens in the world of the vast narrative itself, where the positions of those who produce and those who consume are definitely intertwined.

In short, this is an important and very readable collection, which helps bridging the gaps between narrative theory (too often limited to a small set of traditional novels) and the world of contemporary storytelling (too often analyzed from the sole viewpoint of media and technology). To be read as soon as possible, and then to be continued on *electronic book review*.

## The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction

by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay  
Wesleyan University Press,  
2008, 339 pp.

ISBN: 978-0819568892

*Reviewed by Eugene*

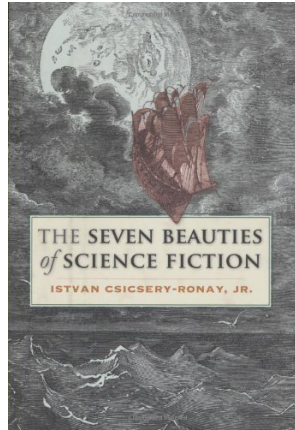
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Science fiction (SF) is a tricky genre to talk about. There is an aspect of SF associated with low-brow aesthetics and pop culture---this is the terrain of the fan. But there is also a high-brow, elite-culture aspect to SF, especially as scholarship in literary and film studies has begun to look at SF as a relevant mode of cultural expression---this is the terrain of the scholar. Ideally, the fan is minimally aware of the scholar, at least insofar as one gains a historical appreciation of SF. Likewise, the scholar must be minimally aware of the fan, especially since SF has been, for a large chunk of its history, a "pulp" phenomenon. But this is the ideal situation; the fact is that one rarely sees scholars at fan conventions such as DragonCon, and one rarely sees fans at academic conferences such as the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts.

There are, however, signs that this is changing, and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's book is an indicator of how we might move beyond the gap between the scholar and the fan, the elite and the popular notions of SF. In a way, Csicsery-Ronay's book signals a third kind of figure beyond the scholar and the fan, which we can, a bit tongue-in-cheek, call the SF "dweller." Whereas both the scholar and the fan are beholden to the specialized, genre-based status of SF, the dweller is not only the person who lives in SF story worlds but the person who takes it for granted that the actual world must be understood in terms of SF. It is this expansion and diffusion of SF that constitutes the overarching concern of Csicsery-Ronay's

book. Today, the increasing ubiquity of SF in culture stimulates science-fictional habits of mind, so that we no longer treat SF as purely a genre-engine producing formulaic effects, but rather as a kind of awareness we might call science-fictionality, a mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction [2].



That said, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* is, first and foremost, a book about SF as a genre. Csicsery-Ronay has done something remarkable---he has posed a number of philosophical questions concerning SF itself, while, at the same time, providing a set of conceptual tools for understanding SF as a genre and as a narrative form. Csicsery-Ronay is in a good position to do this; for a number of years he has edited the journal *Science Fiction Studies*, and SF scholars are well aware of his important essays on SF, in which he has consistently tried to think about SF outside the genre itself (his essays on globalization and SF, and on postmodern theory and SF, are noteworthy in this regard). Csicsery-Ronay avoids the more predictable routes of deliberating over the definitions of SF, as well as re-telling the

history of SF. Instead, he borrows from classical aesthetic theory to talk not about definitions or history, but about the major figures that together constitute SF---something like the "poetics" of SF.

As its title indicates, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* is organized along seven core figures. In each chapter, Csicsery-Ronay not only discusses these conceptually but also provides plentiful examples, including a number of insightful close readings of key SF texts or films. Csicsery-Ronay also takes up ideas from thinkers such as Kant or Burke, as well as engaging with SF critics such as Darko Suvin, Carl Freedman, Frederic Jameson and many others.

Briefly, the "seven beauties" of SF are: (1) "fictive neology" (the signs and language of SF, from the technical jargon and the language of future politics, to futuristic slang and alien linguistics); (2) "fictive novums" (borrowing from Darko Suvin's use of the term *novum* to mean the central imaginative novelty in an SF story world, which may be at once eschatological and highly rationalized); (3) "future history" (the way that SF often narrates the future in terms of the past---a "future past" tense---that may involve representations of history in SF, representations of the future in the form of a history, or forms of a prophetic or visionary future); (4) "imaginary science" (the poetics of scientific and technological world-building, which invites comparison between science and fiction); (5) "the science-fictional sublime" and (6) "the science-fictional grotesque," two related affective modes in which science and technology are represented, the former overwhelming in its complexity, the latter overwhelming



in its failures or breakdown; and (7) the “technologiade,” which is the narrative form specific to SF, “the epic of the struggle surrounding the transformation of the cosmos into a technological regime” (p. 217).

Csicsery-Ronay’s book does what good SF criticism should do---it offers clear explanatory models but also invites further speculation. The chapters on the sublime and the grotesque, for instance, raise philosophical issues that directly pertain to “science-fictionality” today. Whereas for Kant the sublime was principally evoked by nature (e.g. vast oceans, tumultuous storms, high mountains), in SF we have a technological sublime, which, in a Kantian vein, exceeds either by power (the “nuclear sublime”) or by complexity (the “informatic sublime”). But Kant’s discussion on the sublime is also about the need to preserve the boundary and the relation between the self and the world. The affect of the sublime is the threat to this distinction, in which self and world threaten to dissolve into each other. These aesthetic modes intertwine poetics and politics. Note that this is also the key aspect of the grotesque in Bakhtin as well---except that in SF the grotesque occurs not through natural monstrosity but through the aberrations of technoscience. As Csicsery-Ronay notes, the sublime and grotesque are two sides of a single page: with the sublime, there is something “out there” that cannot be incorporated into a subject “in here”; with the grotesque, there is a something “in here” that cannot be repulsed or pushed away into an object “out there.” SF explores precisely this boundary management between the grotesque and sublime, the “out there” and the “in

here,” the self-world relationship that is fundamental to our ability to think the world “out there” at all. Furthermore, SF is replete with examples that do away with this boundary altogether, from the cosmic visions of Camille Flammarion’s *Lumen* or Olaf Stapledon’s *Star Maker* to Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* (which Csicsery-Ronay discusses at length) to Brian Aldiss’s *Hothouse* or Ursula LeGuin’s “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow,” to Greg Bear’s *Blood Music*, Greg Egan’s *Diaspora* and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Forty Signs of Rain*---this interplay between the sublime and the grotesque dovetails on a problematic that is central not only to philosophy, but to the discourses of, for instance, global climate change.

*The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* is a good textbook, yes. However, I would argue that the real impulse of the book is to pose, again, the question of genre---not just as a literary or formalistic question, but also as a cultural and political question. SF, among all genres, seems to be characterized by its propensity to exceed itself. This process is perhaps similar to what philosopher Alain Badiou calls the “generic”: The term “generic” positively designates that what does not allow itself to be discerned is in reality the general truth of a situation . . . as considered as the foundation of all knowledge to come (*Being and Event*, p. 327).

“Generic” here means something different from its colloquial usage (e.g. banal, typical, unoriginal); it means that which has no specificity, precisely because it is functional, even pragmatic. So, while *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* has many relevant things to say about

SF as a genre, the broader question it raises is whether the shift from science fiction to science-fictionality is also a shift from genre to the generic. So, while Csicsery-Ronay does provide a clear discussion of the formal properties of SF that any reader can engage with, he also poses the question of the disappearance of SF when the genre becomes so pervasive that it ceases to be a genre at all, and becomes something like a way of understanding the world.

## Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice

by Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen and Tony O’Connor (eds.)

Stanford University Press, 2009, 336 pp.

ISBN: 978-0804759915

Reviewed by Rob Harle

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This book is a scholarly investigation into the nature and state of contemporary aesthetics. There are 18 contributors, mostly academics, who approach the notoriously slippery subject of aesthetics from three broadly different disciplines---art history, philosophy and art practice. The contributors to this volume do not adopt a coherent, and agreed line. This is to be expected as they come from different theoretical and practical backgrounds whose presuppositions and practices are being reshaped in significant ways as interpretations and debate emerge (p. 11).

*Rediscovering Aesthetics* is not a popular style book for the general reader. It is deeply philosophical, highly theoretical and at times abstruse. This is not a criticism per se---the subject matter, aesthetics as differentiated from art, warrants such deep investigation and discussion. The book is directed toward students, cultural theorists, philosophers and possibly artists who are grappling with the present volatility, constant changeability and, some would argue, fundamental vacuity of contemporary art. As the editors suggest, contemporary aesthetics is a discipline under construction (p. 11). Following a period in which theories and histories of art, art criticism, and artistic practice seemed to focus exclusively on political, social or empirical interpretations of art, aesthetics is being discovered as both a vital arena for discussion and as a valid interpretive approach outside its traditional philosophical domain (back cover).

Without boring the reader with details, I will insert a reminder that aesthetics, beauty (a term often used in defining aesthetics) and art are not synonymous or necessarily interchangeable terms. Technically, aesthetics is the philosophical study of art, as originated in Greek times and then further expanded by Baumgarten in the 18th century and then even further by many of the great philosophers, especially Kant, Schiller and Hegel. Part one of the book addresses some of these issues from the perspective of art history, discussing the contribution of many of these philosophers.

This book, I am sure, will have the effect of awakening aesthetics from its present coma. Aesthetics was already stale and

slumbering when the anti-aesthetic postmodernist movement put it into this coma. Diarmuid Costello's essay, "Retrieving Kant's Aesthetics for Art Theory after Greenberg," is a brilliant piece of work and shows just how much influence some critics have---for good or ill. "I take it uncontroversially---that the widespread *marginalization of aesthetics* in postmodern art theory may be attributed to the success of the art critic and theorist Clement Greenberg" (p. 117) [my italics].



It is my contention that any discussion regarding deep-seated human concerns such as aesthetics and linguistics that ignores biological underpinnings is doomed to be inadequate from the start. Like most other works on aesthetics, this book does not consider in any detail such biological traits as especially relevant to the discussion. Why humans need to make art, why beauty is such a perennial issue, needs to be considered in depth alongside the philosophical issues. I have made such a contribution to this side of the debate in a recently published paper---"Biobehavioral Basis of Art" [1]---that synthesizes the theories of Dissanayake and Joyce.

This criticism aside, I am sure this book will infuriate and challenge many readers, engage them at a deep intellectual level, pave the way for a new understanding of aesthetics and become a core text for many cultural theory, philosophy and art history courses.

#### Reference

- [1] Harle, R.F. "Biobehavioral Basis of Art," in *Technoetic Arts--Journal of Speculative Research*. Vol. 6 No. 3, 2008. pp. 259-268.

## Art For A Modern India, 1947--1980

by Rebecca M. Brown

Duke University Press, 2009, 196 pp.

ISBN: 978-0822343752

Reviewed by Aparna Sharma

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On reading *Art For A Modern India, 1947-1980*, one is most struck by the ambition underpinning this project. Rebecca M Brown's text unveils an array of artistic output starting from India's independence in 1947 until the 1980s prior to India's economic liberalization. Brown addresses the central paradox embodied in India's postcolonial condition---the transaction between modernity and the quest for Indianness. She does not approach either category as neatly constituted; instead she cuts into recent moves within postcolonial studies that point to the "centrality of colonialism to the production of modernity." She states in the introduction to the book that colonialism served not simply as a "tangential motivating factor but as a constitutive, core element" within modernity" (p. 3). This is a crucial move whose implications span the disciplines of both art history and anthropology, wherein

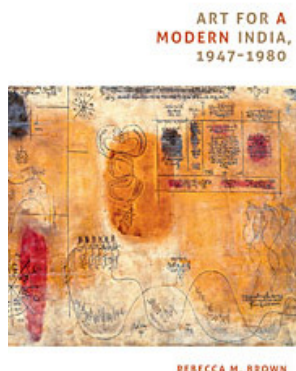
arts and cultural practices outside the Euro-American canon have invariably surfaced as “alternatives” evoked within the modernist project to critique the dominant and hegemonic paradigm. More specifically in the context of India, this flags up the tensions within the terms of reference for the arts heightening our sensitivity towards the operations of ideology within aesthetics.

Brown’s study of arts in India qualifies the disparity between modernity and modernism, which may be clear within a Euro-American context but assumes varied significance in the postcolonial context, principally as modernization comes to be equated with Westernization and neocolonial dependence. Through the breadth of materials examined and their juxtaposition in the carefully designated chapters of the edition, Brown inaugurates a much required and rigorous method for art history in India. This method privileges discourse over other terms of debating arts such as biography or technique—a move that only a few historians from the subcontinent, such as Geeta Kapur, have been previously able to successfully make. Brown brings varied media, such as Hindi cinema, parallel cinema, architecture, painting, industry and photography onto a common plane, from which she investigates and debates their strategies and discursive implications. This fosters cross-disciplinary discussion and overcomes the restrictions of focusing on a single medium. While discussing the works, Brown’s approach is descriptive and comparative. She points out that arts discourse in India was effected by the euphoric nation-building project that was itself charged with the quest for

asserting a distinct Indian identity on which basis claims were made to India’s past, prior to colonialism.

Brown highlights how nationalist assertiveness was problematically regurgitating the varied tropes of colonial discourse, including the orientalist posture. This problematic has two implications: One, it highlights the contingency underpinning the mobilization of India’s history and aesthetics prior to colonialism; and two, it sets up the specific terms of critique for a modernist project in India. The first three chapters of the text focus on issues of authenticity, iconicity and narrativity. Brown repeatedly points out how any claim to or valorization of a puritanical past is problematic, being ahistorical and essentialized and therefore counterproductive to a critical, modernist sensibility. She analyzes specific artworks, and while she points out discursive and strategic disparities between a spread of artists ranging from Charles Correa to Satyajit Ray, MF Hussain, Le Corbusier and Krishen Khanna, among others, what is wanting in this section of the book is a frontal and more direct discussion of the class backgrounds and social histories of the artists. The discussion of the artworks is detailed and evocative, and it is for this reason that one feels a gap between the artist’s body and the work. While Brown consciously steered away from plotting biographies, perhaps the ethnographic life history method that serves to contextualize the individual socio-historically could have been used to evoke the artist-as-person before us. In the endnotes for the chapters, Brown does gesture toward the artists’ backgrounds and supporting literature, but a rounded and more critical

discussion would clearly draw upon the disparity between the liberal cultural elite and the radical practitioners.



The last two sections of the book, “Science, Technology, Industry” and “The Urban,” are particularly thoroughgoing and interesting. Art, science and industry are placed in conversation through comparisons such as between city planning and architecture (for example Le Corbusier’s planning for the Chandigarh city), photography and industry. While previously in the text Brown treads into the disparity between folk and high art and the mobilization of the former within the nationalist discourse, her discussion for example of the Kanvinde Dudhsagar Dairy Complex and its comparison with Corbusier’s design of Chandigarh provide a telling critique of modernist primitivism as associated with issues of “authenticity,” “tradition” and the “past” within the context of the nation. With respect to these two projects she concludes;

The dairy complex acknowledges the material needs of local farmers rather than putting them on a pedestal as an example of ostensibly primitive purity. This crucial difference between Corbusian modernism and that ex-

hibited at the Dudhsagar complex allows the dairy factory to represent the mid-century movement of autonomous action *in its modernity*, serving as a hub for cooperative activity, economic growth and the articulation of industrial progress (p. 127).

In further examination of photography, painting and cinema addressing the urban context, Brown highlights the human element and its relationship with the urban context. The human is evoked here not in the sense of rationalist enlightenment, but more as a folkloristic category, such as in the discipline of American Folkloristics. Her concluding comments about Nasreen Mohamedi's work provide a succinct insight not only into the position of the human individual in the context of urbanity but the wider condition of postcoloniality---the theme of text. She says; Mohamedi's images show us precisely the difficulty of producing a fully evident, embodied modern Indian subject. We get hints of it, we see evidence of its potential, but it can never be complete or whole. Mohamedi's abstraction, then, provides us a glimpse into the postcolonial condition by articulating how the postcolonial self exists only in glances, shadows, and traces (p. 122).

Bringing together a range of disparate but linked examples, Brown's text makes for stimulating reading---an essential text for any student of the arts, postcolonialism and the interaction of science and arts in the postcolonial context.

## State, Space, World: Selected Essays of Henri Lefebvre

by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (eds.)

University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 320 pp.

ISBN: 978-0816653171

*Reviewed by Aparna Sharma*

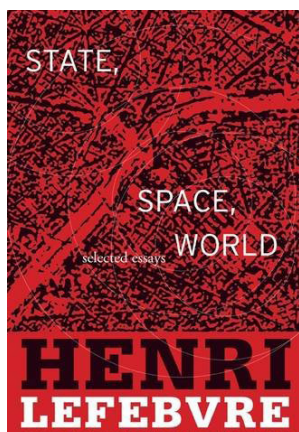
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*State Space World : Selected Essays* brings to English speaking readers some of the key writings of Henri Lefebvre that combine his Marxist state theories and their application to his readings of space within the capitalist context. The book is divided into two sections: *State, Society, Autogestion*; and *Space, State Spatiality, World*. A comprehensive introduction by the editors provides an insightful overview of the span of Lefebvre's concepts while contextualizing his writings in terms of the key philosophical influences on his thought i.e. Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger. This facilitates in understanding how Lefebvre's writings have both political-economy and philosophical dimensions that often tend to be divorced resulting in short-sighted economic determinism within Marxist thought. Part I opens with two seminal lectures, 'The State and Society' and 'The Withering Away of the State: The Sources of Marxist-Leninist State Theory' that involve a revisitation of classical Marxist texts such as Marx's 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', 'The Poverty of Philosophy' and Lenin's 'State and Revolution.' These two essays form the basis of understanding Lefebvre's approach to state theory and democratic transformation. Crucial in this section of

the book is first, Lefebvre's critique of Stalinism in both theory and practice, and second, his theoretical interpretation of the concept of 'autogestion' that remains largely misconstrued within varied forms of Marxist practice. Lefebvre turns to Lenin to elaborate on autogestion as he felt that this concept had not fully developed within Marx. Autogestion is the process of the state withering away and it is a consequent stage of revolutionary overthrow. Lefebvre cites Lenin thus: 'The organ of suppression is now the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage slavery. And since the majority of people *itself* suppresses its oppressors, a special force of 'suppression' is no longer necessary! In this sense the state begins to wither away' (2009: 88). This is a very critical move that outlines the theoretical span for the revolutionary project. Numerous examples of anti-state and pro-democracy movements come to mind here such as the Maoist-Naxalite resurgence in India and the pro-democracy movement of Burma. While critique of the elitist and authoritarian state apparatus as a discriminating outfit has within these movements the fashionings of political appeal, one finds that the understanding of revolutionary overthrow as for example among the Naxalites is often fraught with contradictions and remains largely wanting in theoretical rigour. This is reflected not only in grassroots politicking, but also culturally if one observes the cinema of Indian filmmakers who have attempted to respond to the Naxalite sentiment. While the concepts of 'bottom-up' and grassroots politics have in recent years gained substantial currency across disciplines, Lefebvre's discussion



of autogestion as derived from Lenin's writings posits the withering away of the state as an organic process of the revolutionary project, formulating as a genuinely interventionist political alternative.



Lefebvre's overarching study of the state and its complicity with capital installs his interest in 'space.' In his writings he plots the relationship between space and mode of production. According to Lefebvre, social bodies and relations are enacted and expressed through space because space 'participates in the production of goods, things, and commodities; it consumes productively; but at the same time it is totally covered by exploitation and domination' (2009: 202). In identifying how the state effects and relates with space, Lefebvre classifies three modalities: the production of space as in a national territory; the production of social space 'an (artificial) edifice of hierarchically ordered institutions', and the state as occupying mental space including 'the representations of the state that people construct' (2009: 224-225). Lefebvre proposes a schema for the organization of space the enactment of spatial relations within it. This schema includes 'homogenization-fragmentation-

hierarchization' (2009: 212-216).

According to Lefebvre capitalistic space follows from perspectival space of the Renaissance and heralds the destruction of the former mode. This has implications for art history for in his essay, 'Space and the State' Lefebvre critiques the Bauhaus and Cubists on the grounds that the departure from perspective resulted in the discovery of representing objects in space without privileging any side or façade — a feature that according to him characterizes capitalistic space. For him the Bauhaus' conception of space spread alongside neo-capitalism. In some senses this is a valid observation, however, the cubist, Bauhaus, or indeed the modernist project, which was not homogenous or unified, was certainly underpinned by a critique of the dominant aesthetic values and thereby worldviews. This is true of the modernist stance not only in Europe or North America, but more globally. What Lefebvre perhaps does not clearly distinguish is the appropriation and fixation of modernist strategies into a prescriptive aesthetics befitting neo-capitalist circulation.

The text *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* concludes with Lefebvre's ideas of the historicized 'global' and 'worldwide' experience. It is understandable that such conceptions are called up as a counter move embedded with a critique of capitalism that hierarchises and commodifies cultural disparity too. Lefebvre's essays speak across disciplines ranging from those directly associated with space such as economics, architecture, urban planning and social geography onto disciplines involved with the study of corporeal experience including perform-

ance, cultural theory, cinema and new media. For artists his essays maybe most usefully deployed when combined with methods befitting postmodern encounters such as James Clifford's call for an ethnography of conjunctures or observational cinema as exemplified through the practice of David MacDougall. At the end of *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* are included recommendations for further reading and a publication history. This is very useful for any further engagement with Lefebvre's influential writings.

For Lefebvre the body is an 'organic, living and thinking being' (229). And so, in modern space 'the body no longer has a presence, it is only *represented*, in a spatial environment reduced to its optical components. This space is also phallic...'; he states. (234) In the essay, 'Space and the State' Lefebvre.

## The Poetics of DNA

by Judith Roof

University of Minnesota Press,  
2007, 245 pp.

ISBN: 978-0816649983

Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg,  
University of Plymouth

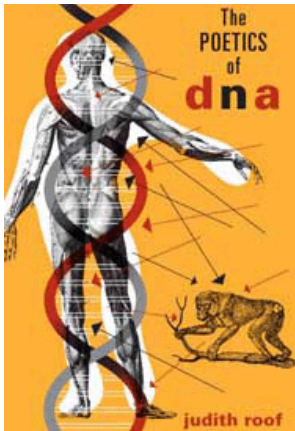
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With DNA, abracadabra's triangle is reduced to three letters (note 7, p. 232).

Genes act like we think we do (p. 119).

*The Poetics of DNA*, an elegant intellectual adventure, could have been more accurately titled *The Politics of the DNA Discourse*. It proposes that the process of identifying and describing the "DNA gene" has served as a means for allaying

fear of change and for rewriting “the truth of humanity in safe and conservative terms” (p. 27). An important book for science and social science, being one that provides fascinating critical thinking on singularly important issues of our time, it might well invoke consternation from scientists. Why? Judith Roof argues throughout that the idea of DNA and the gene are ideological constructions rather than scientific facts and that they serve as vectors for promoting homophobic, sexist and racist discourses.



Roof writes that the humanities can show science “how the relation between science and representation produces a paradox that is self-contained in the figure of DNA’s double helix” (p. 22). In arguing against the use of linguistic and structuralist models and analogies in science, the following sentences are paradigmatic of the whole, synecdoche if you will: The gene is the imaginary embodiment of a binary principle never detached from ideas of gender, the logic of heterosexual reproduction, or the structure of kinship . . . The DNA gene is the perfect synthesis . . . the signifier par excellence, whose significance reflects all other significance and whose imagined operation

enacts the structuralist principle by which it is situated as a reduction of all (p. 48).

In all this, DNA and genes are imagined as surreptitious narrative double agents that serve to reproduce dominant misogynistic ideologies.

As a consequence of the seriousness of Roof’s postmodernist political critiques of one of the most important areas of scientific research of the 20th century, this study should perhaps be debated first and foremost by scientists, who might be interested in reflecting on the consequences it could have for their own work, conceptually speaking. While that is relatively unlikely, this book will certainly provide for lively debate in graduate seminars on the history of science. Ideally, it will impel students to return to Watson’s epiphany and the importance Erwin Schrödinger’s text *What Is Life?* (1946) played in eventually invoking that epic discovery.

Although the author is careful to state that the book is not ultimately about the “truth”-value of DNA or the complexities of molecular biology, my reaction as a reader with an undergraduate degree in molecular biology and a doctorate in symbolic anthropology is that ultimately that is exactly what is at stake here. Herein the value of a study such as this goes far beyond a better public understanding of the debate over the nature of DNA and the gene and the implications. Its value should finally be judged in terms of what all of this means in the end for the field of molecular biology itself. It is no doubt fascinating to read how DNA serves as a cultural form, as a vehicle for chauvinist patriarchal hegemony, but in the end, deoxyribonucleic acid ex-

ists and its structure and basic biochemical function is certainly not a figment of the imagination. That is the fact of the matter, and as science advances, we progressively learn more and more about the complexities of the system and especially the role mRNA plays, and therein lies the poetry of it all. As I see it, then, the most important question to ask must remain how this study might or might not inform the thinking of molecular biologists with a broad enough interest in the humanities to seriously consider the arguments made here. Will *The Poetics of DNA* have any influence on future scientific investigation and insight into the nature and function of DNA itself?

While Roof is careful to note that she is referring to the use of figurative speech referring to genes and DNA, of the consequences of imagining them in terms of texts, codes, ciphers, metaphors and metonyms, the discussion consistently refers back directly to DNA or the gene, or the DNA gene, such that it can be argued that contrary to the argument that the subject is how DNA has been imagined and how that knowledge has been used, in the end we are still struggling to better understand and describe molecular chemistry, if it is even possible to do so without figurative language and dynamic structuralist models. To reiterate the essence of this review, we must simply ask: If the arguments made here are significant enough to give scientists cause for concern, then how might this book allow us to both better understand and advance molecular biology, the indisputable progress in understanding the structure and operation of DNA and mRNA and the awe-inspiring complexity of biochemical processes relat-

ing to genetics specifically and biological systems in general?

As regards the underlying logic in *The Poetics of DNA*, Roof understands DNA as a metaphor and the structure of DNA as metonymic. From this conceptual template she develops the very interesting notions of the metaphorical and synecdochal gene and narrative “gene DNA.” In this, according to Roof, DNA “stands for the gene as its synecdoche” (p. 6), meaning simply that it encompasses a general causal explanation for heredity and everything connected to inheritance. From there, she advances an argument for the role of the analogical figure in sustaining dominant Western patriarchal cultural hierarchies. Keeping such brief detail in mind, and the synopsis in her conclusion, one can imagine the significant challenge this study will present to scientists not well enough versed in social science to be able to challenge the logic of her arguments on their own terms.

What *The Poetics of DNA* does is to very effectively bring together an intriguing range of the popular, scientific and philosophical literature on DNA to bear on the evolution of analogies, on the shifting metaphoric imperatives describing DNA---first so grandly as the “secret of life,” then the “book of life” and finally the less-magnificent “parts list” as hybrid metaphor. In doing so, Roof is able to explore fascinating and important issues concerning genetics, language, ideology and gender politics, as well as those of copyright and commodification and the implications all this has for the future. Apparently the crux of the matter is a clash of Enlightenment values, in which scientists seek explanatory factors, structures

and mechanisms that humanistic social scientists necessarily reject as mere metaphoric vehicles for symbolic domination. Therein representations are always language- and culture-bound such that science is in effect ultimately a form of social science and not a separate realm with any specific claims to “truth” value.

It goes without saying that this book is avowedly political, that it has a very specific postmodernist agenda. Such arguments about the political uses of science and the misuse of science by pseudoscience are of immense importance in this age of the commodification of the gene. And yet all this critical insight also needs to be assessed in the tragic or stark comic light of the remarkable fact that almost half of the population in the United States does not even believe in evolution. In this I believe that the idea that any representation of science being dependent on analogy is necessarily a misrepresentation with compromising ideological baggage and is in itself deeply problematic: it allows for science to be seen as merely one form of truth, and thus intelligent design and creationism as merely another species of the truth, albeit it pseudo-truth to some. The challenge must be then to return to do intellectual and scientific justice to the reality of DNA. Instead of doing so, this book’s contribution will more likely be to advance the creative application of concepts of metaphor, metonym, metalepsis, metathesis and allegory, synecdoche and such while significantly enhancing debate over what constitutes pseudoscientific versus scientific discourse. And there, as *The Poetics of DNA* concludes, the implications are of the utmost significance in the realms

of technology, economics, politics and religion.

Writing as a social scientist with a scientific background, I would maintain that, in the end, the process and epiphany of coming to the realization that the structure of the double helix and its related structural reproductive logic is part mystery and part deductive progress is of the greatest value in and of itself. It is in itself prime evidence of the necessary power of the use of metaphor to advance science. Moreover, in assessing Roof’s critique of hyperbolized notions of DNA, one might ask whether her own hyperbolic ideological position has not served as pseudoscientific synecdoche.

Are we then simply not better off in the humanities in developing instead a much greater appreciation of the remarkable discovery of DNA and mRNA and the intricacies of these fields of investigation within molecular biology and biochemistry? And there, recognizing the majestic power of epiphany and the creative urge to determine structures, processes and principles of relations that drive science is of the essence. Thus take for instance the “uncanny description of the status of DNA at the identification of its structure” (note 7, p. 223) as Roof herself quotes from James Joyce: This is the moment that I call epiphany. First we recognize that the object is one integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is the thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul is the commonest object, the structure of which is so

adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.

And in this indeed, the discovery of DNA was as much art as science in terms of the style and suddenness in which it finally revealed itself (was revealed) through the workings of the engaged individual and collective scientific mind.

## Ex-Foliations: Reading Machines and the Upgrade Path

by Terry Harpold

University of Minnesota Press,  
2009, 365 pp.

ISBN: 978-0816651023

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My 12-in Macintosh, circa 2003, returned home today unable to be upgraded to the newest operating software. Running simply on a PowerPC G4 processor instead the newer Intel Core 2 Duo processor, it had reached its limit with the move to Leopard last year. I also found out I could not revive the dead battery that had gotten jammed into the computer. To install a new battery, I had to sacrifice the old--that, or be prepared to spend \$500 to remove the casing of my computer to get to the old battery without destroying it.

I tell this story because it fits well with what Terry Harpold talks about in *Ex-Foliations: Reading Machines and the Upgrade Path*, for the focus of his book is a reexamination of seminal ideas that helped to shape our thinking about digital media in respect to "media obsolescence, changing user interface designs, and the mutability of reading."

Generally speaking, we think of exfoliation as throwing off or removing something from a surface, as in eliminating a layer of skin, but the Latin version offers a more specific meaning: to strip off leaves. Playing on this etymology Terry Harpold uses the word as "a loosely grouped set of procedures for provisionally separating the layers of the text's surfaces without resolving them into distinct hierarchies, with the aim of understanding their expressive concurrencies." Such an approach, he tells us, is "opportunistic," since "it accepts a disjunction between the signifiers it isolates . . . and the signifieds it derives from . . . in response to those signifiers" (p. 137). Just as Harpold suggests, I will eventually have to quit using my laptop, essentially throw it off, because it will one day be unable to access more robust documents that will, without a doubt, emerge. Like the old Classic, the blue gumdrop iMac and the white mushroom iMac sitting on a desk in my office, it will be relegated to accessing outdated media.

Harpold's ironic humor is at work with the book's format, for it reflects an upgrade of sorts of print technology---call it "Book 2.0"---in that the text is divided into chunks and numbered based on its location in the book. The first paragraph of *Ex-Foliations*, for example, is listed as 1.01. Inside each discrete textual grouping (I am avoiding using the term *lexia* since Harpold takes Landow to task for his departure from Barthes' definition of it), we may find a link to another section of the book, a note at the end of the book or a figure within the chapter. That Harpold devotes close to a third of the book to Notes, Works Cited and Index should clue the reader in to the book's scholarly contribution to the field.

Those of us weaned on hypertext theory of the early 1990s will definitely find much to enjoy in Chapters One and Two, "A Future Device for Individual Use" and "Historiations: Xanadu and Other Recollection Machines," respectively. Here Harpold revises and/or clarifies old views of hypertext, challenging Jakob Nielson's assumption of reading practice, distinguishing between Ted Nelson's and Vannevar Bush's "textual systems" (p. 20), and rethinking Nelson's Xanadu project, to name a few points. We who spent hours creating links and nodes in Storyspace documents will gain much in Chapter Three, "Revenge of the Word," where Harpold revisits hypertext fiction and theories by Michael Joyce and Stuart Moulthrop, particularly as their work functions within the affordances of the user interface. It is in Chapter Four, in the 51st paragraph, that Harpold finally gets to detailing his ideas on "ex-foliations," defined above. We learn that ex-foliations are well suited to the interpretation of the multiple and irregularly layered surfaces of objects in the digital field, especially those in which idioms of the GUI are of relevance to the expression and reception of meaning, or in which they are repurposed or subverted for aesthetic effect (p. 137).

This explanation helps to underpin the discussion found in Chapter Five, "Lexia Complexes," of George Landow's notion of *lexia* within the context of Roland Barthes' introduction of the term and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. In Chapter Six Harpold moves on to a discussion of Joyce's *afternoon: a story*, focusing particularly on the way the story is affected by the Mac and Windows operating systems. As he tells us, Con-



ceiving of digital reading solely or even chiefly as a practice of excavating meaning from the machine's secret registers means mistaking for signs of depth objects that may be best thought of as stuck to the surface of the text: jammed, with the reading subject, someplace among the clattering apparatus of the reading scene (p. 208).

While he laments the "lack of a general methodology for making sense of the contributions of applications and operating systems to writing for the screen," he does allude to both "platform studies," introduced by Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, as well as "literary-digital forensics," introduced by Matt Kirschenbaum, as "show[ing] great promise in the analysis of [this kind of work]" (p. 204). Harpold ends the book with Chapter Seven (one would be tempted to assign meaning to this well-used Western symbol for completeness if it weren't for the warnings about the disjunction between signifier and the signifieds given earlier), "Reading Machines." This title, reminiscent of N. Katherine Hayles's book, *Writing Machines*, looks at the technology we call the book and compares it to a computer's interface, which he describes as "an impoverished system" (p. 13).

So deep is Harpold's knowledge of his subject matter that it is difficult to quibble over any points. Those of us who have been following his work for the last two decades will recognize the usual wit, mastery of theory and attention to detail. In sum, *Ex-Foliations* is a must read for all digital media scholars, for it contextualizes current issues and trends (and concerns) in digital media within the larger notions of the reading experience and human desire.

## Waxed Oop

by Fast 'n' Bulbous

Cuneiform Rune 277, 2009, CD

Distributor's website: <http://www.cuneiformrecords.com>

Reviewed by Michael R.

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*Waxed Oop* is a sprightly CD dedicated to the music of Don Van Vliet, who recorded albums from the 1960s into the '80s as Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band. This is the second Fast n' Bulbous album, a project organized by guitarist Gary Lucas, who played in a late version of the Magic Band.

One assumes that the cost to lease rights to one of Van Vleit's own paintings (he gave up music for easel painting about 25 years ago) was prohibitive, yet Jonathan Rosen's cover imagery and artwork may be a bit sensationalistic, the "medical model" Alexis Trice in bandages, menaced or restricted by tubing, mechanical diagrams, a male researcher, and her fetishistic high-heeled shoes (like a young woman in the comics of Beefheart's contemporary, Robert Crumb). Rosen's drawings don't evoke the Magic Band's swaggering exuberant musical boys' club (though Antenna Jimmy Semens did occasionally wear a frock), and are perhaps intended to evoke Leonardo Da Vinci's notebooks. A fat brass bee, perhaps a West African gold weight, seems the most appropriate image here for the brassy Fast n' Bulbous music.

Back to the music, Don Van Vliet was a teenage friend of Frank Zappa, who later returned the fa-

vor by helping him secure record deals and producing his major albums. While "Dropout Boogie" sound like garage rock the two might churn out as southern California teenagers. "Ice Rose" and "Trust Us" are classically Zappaesque, switching into different riffs and time changes in the course of each. While the Magic Band of the 1969 double album *Trout Mask Replica* and its successor *Lick My Decals Off, Baby* sounded audially transgressive and like nothing else out there, "You Know You're a Man" sounds like much 1970s Rock or Soul music.

*Waxed Oop* is bluesier than the groups' first album *Pork Chop Blue Around the Rind* (reviewed on this site), and features less of the Captain's intricate melodies with their early-twentieth-century discordant edginess. Several of Captain Beefheart's songs, like "Well", seem to contain only two notes, often the minor third distance, as from an E to a G. In Fast n' Bulbous' novel interpretation of "Well", the musicians let the rhythm loosen its threads, each instrument drifting into a crepuscular seascape of cirrus clouds, distant saxophone foghorns. A two-note riff propels much of "Blabber and Smoke", while another part of it sounds like it should be the Band singing about the American Civil War. Here's found a cheery "Woe is a Me-Bop", and medley of "Click Clack/Ice Cream for Crow". The simplicity of riffs in "The Past is Sure Tense" unleash these skilled players to have improvisational fun upon the song's simple disciplined base, showcasing Lucas' electric guitar and the baritone sax of David Swelson.

I'm still not sure I subscribe to Lucas and Johnston's thesis that Beefheart should be num-

bered among the top twentieth century composers, yet, like Zappa, Beefheart is someone who memorably expanded the horizon of rock music. Imagine the lonesome moaning blues of Howlin' Wolf, interspersed with complicated bridges by Stravinsky, performed by a college marching band; from this, Fast n' Bulbous' CDs make good, energetic university art studio work music.

Gary Lucas' solo National Steel guitar, played with a bottleneck slide, opens the disk with "Sure Nuff Yes I Do", from the Magic Band's first album long ago, when its first guitarist was Ry Cooder; one wonders what would have resulted had Cooder later brought Captain Beefheart to Cuba. The National is also pressed into service on the closing live cut "China Pig", sung by Robyn Hitchcock, who switches between a Delta Blues holler and Syd Barrett *sotto voce* as only Englishmen gone out in the noonday Rock do.

"The Blimp" is one of only two pieces on the CD with vocal accompaniment, a good example of Beefheart's poetic lyrical, over an insistent drum paradiddle. The recitation, originally on Trout Mask Replica, also appeared forty years ago on the Warner Brothers Records promotional album "Zapped", all musical acts that had been produced by Frank Zappa or were considered similarly avant-garde. Available by mail for a dollar, the LP was obtained by my hip neighborhood friend when we were nearly 14, and made deep impressions on us both (including purchase of Beefheart albums). Don Van Vliet's witty word confetti might be credited with launching that lad on his career trajectory teaching English at a major American univer-

sity. What a bit of it on Fast n' Bulbous' Waxed Oop CD does now is to remind me to invite the poets in my own university over for a listening of my vinyl copy of Trout Mask Replica on the old stereo phonograph.

## Forked Tongue

by Revolutionary Snake Ensemble

Wayside Music, 2009

Cuneiform Rune 269, CD

Distributor's website: <http://www.cuneiformrecords.com>

*Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University*

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Besides New Orleans' famous piano music of Tuts Washington, Professor Longhair, Fats Domino, and more, there's the tradition of the marching band. Caribbean syncopation, a mix of African and Spanish beats, and brass pneumatics suitable for funerals and Mardi Gras. Though Ken Field is from Boston, with his Revolutionary Snake Ensemble he does a good job of conjuring up Louisiana's Crescent City. The "Forked Tongue" CD opens with "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," which carries us to the graveyard, above the daily strife and New Orleans water level. Upon arrival, it then breaks into a second line rave-up on its nostalgic holiday return. I danced away several dead ancestors with this one.

The band plays a melancholy "Down by the Riverside," featuring Gabrielle Agachiko's vocals. After 2005, such a sad song can't be heard without serving as an elegy for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and neglectful aftermath. Poignancy is added with tango percussion, where

suddenly it evokes not only civil rights (and daily life) struggle in southern US but Argentine activists imprisoned or "disappeared."

"The Large S" has a premier horn band's very cool break, worthy of James Brown's JB's, the Average White Band or New Orleans' Meters. It dissolves in the shimmering bleats and gooey glacial drips of a reassuring tight funk machine. "Chippie" boasts deft horn charts and highly skilled improvisation. We are given Trinidad's "Brown Skin Gal," and Field finds an understated mystery fluttering through "Little Liza Jane". "Que Sera Sera" becomes a stately calypso march at a Brazilian carnival, percolating with that Iko Iko Bo Diddley beat.

The band's fun, college marching band version of Billy Idol's "White Wedding" was originally performed for a wedding in a family named White. It could be an *outro* to the commercial on a late night TV talk show. Sultry as a 1950s cop show theme, perhaps it could bookend a police drama featuring a drunken "Billy Idol, P.I." if he slicked back his spiky hair.

They end with a studious, head-nodding math-march, ending abruptly. I first listened to this CD on a cold gray day, and whenever it spins, it brings a smile. Dressed in spangles, dongles and dangles, one imagines (with envy) the Revolutionary Snake Ensemble spicing up technology industry corporate parties in the Boston suburbs.

## Unitxt

by Alva Noto

Rasta Noton, 2008

RASTER095CD, CD

Distributor's website: <http://>

www.raster-noton.net

*Reviewed by Hannah Drayson,  
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*Unitxt* is made from sonic artefacts harvested from digital files: buzzes, pops, all frequencies of digital noise that converge to sketch a tortured anatomy of a sound card. The album at first seems noteworthy because of the nature of some of the material from which it is constructed: sounds made by converting files from various programs, .ppt, .jpps, .doc, etc. to audio files. Making this modification itself isn't complex, simply done by modifying the file extensions of non-sound files to .mov, .wav or similar and then opening them in a wave editor or sequencer. The results are unrecognisable and often highly unpleasant—files designed to carry the content of spreadsheets are not easily aestheticised in terms of sound.

Carsten Nikolai (Alva Noto's human namesake) deserves a deal of respect for simply having the perseverance to so successfully craft the artefacts of this process into an album of compositions which are characterised by such meticulously programmed beats. Most of the tracks on *Unitxt* – despite their origin – feature the recognisable elements of an electronic kit or their analogues. Bass drum, snare, synth, hats, are all present. The crafting of noise frequencies draws reference to limited resources of early computer games designers who, having to deal with miniscule file sizes and simple hardware used tiny bursts of white noise to stand in for cymbals, resulting in that distinctive 'chiptune' sound. However, these sounds have been hard won, naturally

occurring within the architectures of the personal computer, carefully identified and clipped out of inhuman sound files. The final tracks of the album are a gallery of these source files that are often a few seconds of static scream and then endless silence.

*u\_07* is an interesting response to the problem of how to reference its human author in a work inspired by mechanical processes without spoiling its stark quality. Poet Anne-James Chaton delivers an audio portrait of Nikolai based on the contents of his wallet, systematically reading out its contents, cards, bills etc. Another track, *u\_08-1* features a recitation of the mathematical sequence known as the golden cut, a reference to the artist's preoccupation with the aesthetic power of mathematics. Nicolai is a digital/sound artist producing work under a number of aliases, which explains his preoccupation with process and stark compositional methods that (according to the notes released by the label) involves a 'mathematical' (but unexplained) system.

As a project, *Unitxt* seems to straddle the divide between a type of high modern process-led sound art and minimal techno music with considerable success. Paradoxically, its aesthetic, whilst beautifully rendered, conceals what must be a very large amount of real work on the part of its author in the way it presents itself as a harsh, but often beautiful, machinic product.

## **Sonic Mediations: Body Sound Technology**

by Carolyn Birdsall and

Anthony Enns (eds.)

Cambridge Scholars  
Publishing, 2008, 286 pp.

ISBN: 978-1847188397

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A great deal of academic theory and research is devoted to discipline-specific study of sound in cinema, social thought, new media technologies, music, orality and literacy, as well as the avant-garde in general. Within such contexts questions are raised concerning the study of sound when it crosses disciplinary boundaries. How, for example, does one define a field of interdisciplinary sound studies that encompasses music, literature, film, art, theater and performance? One approach is to identify common concerns that can become objects of analysis for more fundamental philosophical questions.

This is the approach taken by *Sonic Mediations: Body Sound Technology*, edited by Carolyn Birdsall and Anthony Enns. This collection of essays identifies mediation as one of the core concerns for scholars working in sound studies because, according to the editors, mediation "touches on most basic questions concerning the relations between the *body*, *sound* and *technology*" (pp. 2--3, emphasis in original); it avoids technological determinism or the overgeneralization of the phenomenal body; and it allows scholars to recognize sound as "a co-participating agent in cultural practices and performance" (p. 3).

Each chapter in this collection provides a detailed and focused case study involving different sound and music technology

gies, performances and installations. These case studies come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, such as musicology, film and media studies, art history, comparative literature, philosophy, theater studies, and science and technology studies. Each case study deals with specific aspects of sonic mediation, such as affect, memory, voice, musical gesture, gender, sampling, narrative, interactivity and intermediality.



Additionally, each essay focuses on specific questions. How do sound technologies and the performer's body mediate audio performances? How do bodies and technologies mediate the experience of auditory perception? What is the role of the listener in audio-based performances? How does sound mediate the experience of viewing optical media and how does this complicate vision-oriented theories of spectatorship?

Section 1, "Mediating Perception," examines the body as the mediator between sonic events and technologies. Essays in this section explore the relationship between sound technologies, auditory perception and memory; precultural factors determining sonic effects, such as anxiety; and the physical role of

the body in the act of listening.

Section 2, "Mediating Performance," examines the intersections between performers and machines. Essays in this section explore the role of contemporary sound technologies in music production; how sound technologies destabilize authorial control and gender identities; and the specific function of corporeality in composition, performance and perception.

Section 3, "Mediating Space," examines how sound technologies and installations offer new ways of thinking about how sound mediates between listeners and the spatial environment. Essays in this section explore how the shape of the performer's mouth is mediated during electronic music performances; how atmospheric noise received by electronic sound technologies inspires new relationships between people and their spatial environments; the potential interaction(s) between sound, technology and audience in sound installations; and how sound installations can convey a sense of history dependent on the listener's embodied experience and participation.

Section 4, "Mediating Audiovision," examines the role of both image and sound in mediating theatrical and cinematic events. Essays in this section explore what happens when opera is incorporated into cinema and vice versa; how interactions between visual and acoustic elements in contemporary musical theater allow audiences to reflect on the effects of the theater itself as a medium; and how interactions between visual and acoustic elements create a critical relationship with regard to fixed narratives.

Through their selection of essays, as well as their arrangement in these thematic sections, editors Birdsall and Enns attempt to extend the limitations on existing disciplinary frameworks surrounding the study of sound, while at the same time elucidating fundamental concerns relevant to scholars of sound. As a result, "sonic" is shown to encompass voice, music, noise and silence, and thus presents itself as a much broader category of study. "Mediations" is shown to include contributions of the sonic event itself, as well as corporeality, and the technological apparatus involved in the production, performance and participation of that sonic event.

The end result is, then, an attempt to establish a model for sound studies as a mosaic of innovative approaches where scholars from varied fields can enter into productive dialogues around shared theoretical concerns.

## **Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance**

by Tomie Hahn

Wesleyan University Press,  
2007, 224 pp., DVD included  
ISBN: 978-0819568359

*Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg,  
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Sensational Knowledge is a deft example of contemporary self-reflexive ethnography combining dance and performance studies amongst others notably Asian philosophy and ethnomusicology. Written by a scholar



and a dancer, it is informed by a life-long engagement. A deeply sensitive case study of the embodiment of knowledge and its transmission in Japanese culture, specifically of the *nihon buyo* tradition in which fans are used as extensions of the body as swords are in the samurai tradition, it succeeds with grace and energy, discipline and precision as befitting this dance discipline and Japanese aesthetics more generally.

One of Tomie Hahn's central goals is to re-appropriate the Orientalist image of the iconic figure of the *geisha* revealing and concealing her body with a fan. Doing so she tells a very different story. Beyond deftly synthesizing the historical and anthropological discussions on the history, culture and qualities of the *nihon buyo* tradition, her central focus is to convey the multi-sensory nature of dance transmission. In order to enhance the analysis, an accompanying DVD provides examples of dance transmission adding a vital element to the discussions of sensory pedagogy.

As the DVD conveys, the key difference between learning *nihon buyo* and other dance traditions such as other classical Asian dances and ballet is that "the art of following forms the foundation..." (p. 86) rather than learning individual postures and components first. In attending to this essential process, a flow experience, Hahn provides an extremely effective study for embodied dance scholarship. In this *Sensational Knowledge* will be particularly interesting for those who are concerned with combining historical and ethnographic appreciation of a cultural form with the rigors of such analytic and long term experiential or more specifically,

embodied learning.

The central chapter, "Revealing Lessons" examines different modes of transmission, namely visual, tactile, oral/aural and finally the lesser use of notation and video as teaching aids. In discussing how best to use the DVD, Hahn calls attention to the time stamps that mark specific moments that are referred to in the text. For instance, in the first example of learning the classic formal celebratory dance The Evergreen Pine, we are introduced to the narrative dimension of Japanese dance and the very distinct and acutely precise formality of the style.



Above all, though Hahn's concern is to use these videos to illustrate transmission and thus focus on the processes of embodied learning, what might stand out to the outsider perhaps, that is the reader and viewer with essentially no knowledge of Japanese dance, is the contrasts between the students and their teacher's motion which intensifies our recognition of the precision and strength of the *sensu*'s motion and every gesture in addition to the pedagogy of flow experience. This adds enormous visual power to Hahn's discussions of how the quality of one's dance is an

embodiment of one's character and lived experience, of one's cultural authority, knowledge and respect gained in time.

In watching the different lessons on the DVD my personal interests in aesthetics insistently took over in comparing the preciseness of the teacher's motion and her contained focused energy and the lack of such force and definition in the students motions. It impelled in me a strong intellectual sense of desire to see an analysis of the evolution of dance competence, that is, how the best of the students in time gradually acquire a closer approximation of the precision and grace of the *sensu*.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is Hahn's discussion of sound and dance. Take for instance her notes after a particularly memorable lesson in which "sight and sound intertwined": "We did not dance to the music; we embodied the music" (pp. 114). Exploring this through a fascinating conjunction of sensory precision and the sensuous, she describes a process of achieving kinaesthetic harmony through the intimacy of being cued by *lemoto*'s, her *sensui*'s breath.

This recalls the great subtlety of this study. Earlier in the book Hahn describes the relationship between dance and breath in the song *Kurokami* (Jet-black Hair), a song about the longing of a woman for her departed lover. As she writes:

"Each phrase consists of several movements, framed by held poses that add to the feeling of stillness (*ma*) and the melancholy mood. In this deceptively simple dance structure, every breath is apparent and, to a degree choreographed. An inhale

opens the dancer's chest above the *obi* (sash) and send barely noticeable movement across the shoulders, neck, and torso. Her inhale is timed within the phrase, held momentarily (*ma*), and with her exhale the energy of release instigates the vitality of the next movement. This cycle of breath – from inhale, suspension of breath, and exhale – imparts a stunning flow of tension and release.” (p. 57)

Consider then this subtle richness that mirrors the minimalist simplicity of the seventeenth century poem referred to and consider in addition the way in which Japanese music creates sonic landscapes through aural cues. Enfold that with the idea that in singing such dances, the fan itself is used as a vehicle for evoking the metaphorical associations of falling petals and changing seasons, waves running up the shore. Intensely choreographed, the dancer stepping quickly back from the waves, the life of the tree re-enacted, the helpless longing of a lover and the voice of a temple bell in the quiet night silver snow piling up, the highly practiced embodied memories of generation after generation of teacher and student endures precisely.

Hahn's contributions go further. Towards concluding she dwells upon the transformative effects of extraordinary experience and how the best ethnography embodies and transmits a shift in subjectivity. She illustrates this through returning to the first segment of the DVD, the dance “Matsu no Midori” in which the performer has to be able convincingly portray several different persona. To being Hahn emphasizes her *sensui's* directive: “without experiencing life, without personality, you have no dance, no *kokoro*

[heart, spirit, or soul], and you are invisible...but if you have a sense of self, then you can become any character onstage – a woman, a young boy, an old man” (p. 154). Then she uses this for an extended exegesis of believability, code switching and an all-important insight into the expansive consciousness achieved through enacting multiple identities.

Finally, *Sensational Knowledge* considers the flow of *ki* energy and returns to accentuate that every dance performance and lesson is about experiencing flow and learning to achieve it. Extending John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), she expands his insight to note that the way we sense, rather than merely see things, is culturally informed, that the embodied learning of sensational knowledge through the sensuality of dance has the broadest relevance to our lives.

## Otaku: Japan's Database Animals

by Hiroki Azuma

Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (transl.)

University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 200 pp.

ISBN: 978-0816653522

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The art and artifacts exhibition, “Little Boy,” held at the Japan Center in New York in 2005 and curated by the artist Takahashi Murakami, detailed some of the milestones of *otaku* culture. The anime cartoons Akira and Neon Evangelion! Personified *chara* advertising characters! Gojiro, a.k.a. Godzilla! It also demonstrated these cultural phenom-

ena's influence upon notable Japanese visual artists under 50 years of age, with examples of their works. What, or who, are otaku? They're nerdy young men, socially challenged and obsessed with popular culture. Yet the successful globalization of anime and manga tropes (noticeable in the enthusiasm for them among my own mid-American undergraduate art students) have positioned and elevated otaku as early adopters and innovators. Hiroki Azuma's intriguing book delivers Japanese applications of postmodernist theory to this population. There's a philosophical meaning behind antenna-hair and floppy socks on disturbingly sexy young cartoon “database animals” that appear in various novel games in Japan's cyberspace. “Hyperflatness,” the concept with which Murakami has explained the style of his and his contemporaries' Pop paintings, is aptly applied by Azuma to computer screen design as well.

Azuma's concept of the database is that of a continually shifting authorship of *moe* (distinct fan-favorite elements, often yanked out of context) taken from “the grand non-narrative” of otaku stories in various media. Sometimes these are rewritten and reassembled by the original authors---including computer game designers---or sometimes by the fans themselves. Authority and authorization; derivation, variation and vision; official and bootleg versions all have been blurred in this cultural stew called the database---but what does the otaku care, as long as he's entertained and the fun keeps coming? Azuma applies Jean Baudrillard's procession of the simulacra, from imitation to something weirdly sui generis, to the database. Walter Benjamin's “The Work

of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is also cited as a historical precedent of this analysis, especially in noting the disappearance of the “aura” of a unique artwork (weird momentary reverie: I want to see a life-like Walter Benjamin Japanese robot, perhaps unpacking and repacking his library of manga in a busy department store). Yet it is Azuma’s provocative application of the ideas of Alexandre Kojève that is most interesting. Kojève described a posthistorical realm where material issues of survival have been overcome, which thus allows finicky attention to the aesthetic realm. While Kojève speculated that post--World War II America (where hamburgers sizzle on an open grill night and day) was this slightly effete promised land, Azuma argues that the otaku’s Japan circa Y2K fulfills the posthistorical utopia most appropriately.



The appropriately brief and thoughtful book, with its screenshots and theoretical diagrams, is worthy of multiple readings. The translators, Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono, have been conscientious and thorough in providing an introduction that establishes the context of Azuma’s work, as well as endnotes

of particular subtlety, pointing out shadings of interpretation within the Japanese language. Not having visited Japan since 2002, I am quite happy to have Hiroki Azuma’s 2001 appraisal of his nation’s cyberscape and happily anticipate (especially if put into English by these scholarly translators) more of the Japanese cultural critic’s subsequent writings. Perhaps I await them with an eagerness that could be called otaku-like.

## Bits of Life: Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology

by Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke (eds.)

University of Washington Press, 2008, 240 pp.

ISBN: 978-0295988092

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The ontological metaphor of this anthology’s main title is a playfully clever and potentially invertible trope. Might this anthology just as easily have been called *Cells of Computing*, *Genes of Gigabits* or *Bits of Bios/BIOS* to explicate the intended conjunction of biology, science and technology? The phrase is extensively applicable, providing the editors with a plethora of meanings and schemata to smartly traverse. The use of the term *Bits* delimits the need for engaging with “life as a whole”---employing binary digits for ontological measure---while specifying the techno-bios foci of the text. The *life* of bits, inversely, prefigures the conversion of life processes into technological methods, both

an ancient and modern praxis. Further attenuated by its subtitle, *Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology*, this lively and ambitious anthology intermixes “bits and pieces” of these overarching and overlapping fields filtered through much-needed feminist scrutiny and examination.

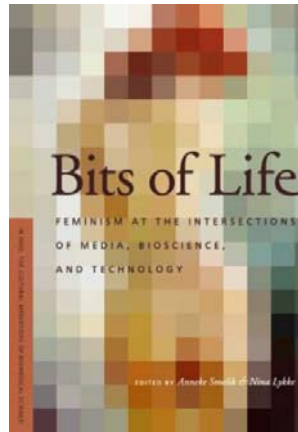
The synecdochical looseness of “bits and pieces” of life largely suits this anthology. It only becomes tedious when “bits” suggestively infers quantitative equivalence to cells or genes, rendering their functionality dangerously binary and teleological. Although the concept of information was introduced to biological discourse in the early 1950s, it soon became obvious that its use was quantitatively imprecise, thus, not literally applicable but rather metaphoric. The biologist Richard Dawkins offers an apt clarification: The genetic code is not a blueprint for assembling a body from a set of bits; it is more like a recipe for baking one from a set of ingredients. If we follow a particular recipe, word for word, in a cookery book, what finally emerges from the oven is a cake. We cannot now break the cake into its component crumbs and say: this crumb corresponds to the first word in the recipe; this crumb corresponds to the second word in the recipe, etc. [1].

The fifth publication in the *In Vivo: The Cultural Mediations of Biomedical Science* Series of the University of Washington Press, *Bits of Life* evolved out of a series of seminars and conferences held between 1996 and 2005 under the auspices of the international exchange program Media, Cultural Studies, and Gender: Looking for the Missing Links, funded by the Netherlands Organization

of Scientific Research. Further support and direction was given by the Danish research project "Cyborgs and Cyberspace: Between Narration and Socio-technical Reality" directed by one of the editors, Nina Lykke. She, along with co-editor Anneke Smelik, culled from these gatherings a collection of 12 scholarly papers by 14 authors. Together they organized their selection into four well-focused feminist trajectories mapped onto and through the intersecting fields of Bioscience, Media and Technology as Part 1: Histories and Genealogies; Part 2: Reconfigured Bodies; Part 3: Remediated Bodies; and Part 4: Philosophies of Life.

As feminist practice emerges out of a blending of scholarly and materialist concerns, or academic activism, here is a caveat to an otherwise extremely positive review. The editors specify the temporal parameters of the anthology as contemporary---post--WWII to the present---however, I found an unfortunate referential omission of *the* primary text on feminism and the biological, Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 tome *The Second Sex*. Charting biological data of the female from the simplest organism to the most complex, de Beauvoir's assertions are formidable and would have further grounded the text in feminist theory, complementing the solidity of techno-feminism on which it is already strongly based. Another feminist reference omitted is *The Dialectic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone. Published in 1970---shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Griswold v. Connecticut* declared laws banning the use of contraceptives for married women unconstitutional (1965) and before the *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion (1972)---Fire-

stone called for a cybernetic revolution to free women from the tyranny of the reproductive role of her *sex class*. The inclusion of both de Beauvoir and Firestone would have added---to an already outstanding anthology---the historical urgency of the biological imperative within feminism.



Rather, the editors cite C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* (1993) as the first significant reference in their introduction. Although briefly alluding to the post--World War II advancements in biology and technology in healing this divide and ushering in "The Third Culture," this allusion reveals the primacy and profundity of Snow's argument, that is, the cultural bifurcation of the humanities and the sciences. However, almost by equal measure, Snow's argument reveals his concern for largely unacknowledged yet entrenched class divisions between what he called the *rich and the poor*, and in fact, he seriously pondered this as a title for his Rede Lecture. Snow asserted that no matter how compromised the lot of the poor still is, that lot (as well as the lot of the rich), has been exponentially raised by advances in scientific methods. Can literary *progress* possibly boast such an achievement?

Although no one could argue against the humanizing effects of literature, it is quite fair to say that scientific and technological progress has not had a unidirectional effect on sex, race and class divisions. For example, such advances from which the average Western woman benefits in her yearly gynecological visit have largely been gained through the incalculable suffering of enslaved black women who underwent dozens of surgeries without the aid of anesthesia, and were, in most cases, only made worse. Numerous such surgeries were performed by Dr. J. Marion Sims, inventor of the Sims Speculum and subsequently dubbed the founder of American gynecology [2]. As evidenced, even within the gender inequity of healthcare, some medical and technological advances that have been made in women's health have been enabled by class exploitation and racial inequality. Such concerns rightfully ground our thinking in the historical and material bodies of the feminine. To this end, selected chapters will be considered in more depth below.

Of particular interest is *Part 2: Reconfigured Bodies*, which contributes solidly to this ongoing effort with the inclusion of four varied and distinctive papers. The first paper, "Fluid Ecologies: Changing Hormonal Systems of Embodied Difference," is by Celia Roberts, author of *Messengers of Sex: Hormones, Biomedicines and Feminism* (2007). Inspired by feminist corporeal theory, Roberts recounts the historical trajectory of our understanding of hormones, as "internal secretions" in the 1850s to discretely manipulable, albeit juicy, parameters of the *chosen* sexed body of today. Amade M'Charek,



author of *The Human Genome Diversity Project: An Ethnography of Scientific Practice* (2005) and filmmaker Grietje Keller, in "Parenthood and Kinship in IVF for Humans and Animals: On Traveling Bits of Life in the Age of Genetics," present fascinating and novel concerns specific to contemporary in vitro procreation practices, for example, two-mother-and-one-father parent configurations, etc. The third paper, "From Rambo Sperm to Egg Queens: Two Versions of Lennart Nilsson's Film on Human Reproduction," by Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke, reveals the variable contextual meanings in these two versions, speculating on marketing strategies, feminist influences, etc. However, what remains intact in both is the unquestioned biological imperative to procreate as well as the positivist portrayal of the inner portal of life. The fourth and final article is "Screening the Gene: Hollywood Cinema and the Genetic Imaginary" by Jackie Stacey, author of *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* (forthcoming), which offers a deftly intricate reading of genetic inference and representation in two films: Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997) and Roger Donaldson's *Species* (1995), revealing deceptive plays, or visual lies, of the obvious. The final paper selected here for review is from Part 3: Remediated Bodies and is "What If Frankenstein ('s Monster) Was a Girl? Reproduction and Subjectivity in the Digital Age" by Jenny Sundén, author of *Material Virtualities: Approaching Online Textual Embodiment* (2003). In this chapter, Sundén examines *Patchwork Girl*, the multi-layered hypertext fiction by the writer Shelly Jackson, which implicates the writer Mary Shelley as an active character interacting with the nominal protagonist, the *Patchwork*

*Girl* and the author Shelley Jackson. Again, expertly analyzed and richly critiqued, the paper rides the topic of simplistic solutions but is rich with ambiguity and feminist scrutiny.

Such richness of inquiry is to be found in the anthology as a whole. The editors and contributors alike are to be commended for their contribution to the intersecting fields of feminism, media, bioscience and technology. Enjoy the read; there is something for everyone.

#### References

- [1] Richard Dawkins wrote "In Defense of *Selfish Genes*," *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No 218 (556-573), a response to, what he considered, a hostile review of his book *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) written by Mary Midgley entitled "Gene-juggling" published in *Philosophy*, Volume 54 (October 1979).
- [2] See Harriet A. Washington's groundbreaking work *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Harlem Moon, 2006.

## Bioethics in the Age of New Media

by Joanna Zylinska

The MIT Press Cambridge, 2009, 240 pp.

ISBN: 978-0262240567

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The same day as I started reading Joanna Zylinska's *Bioethics in the age of New Media*, I saw a short news blurb on the web site of the *Scientific American*. According to the research summarized there, the brain interprets tools as part of itself without distinguishing the "self" from the "other." For the brain, the tools we happen to use become

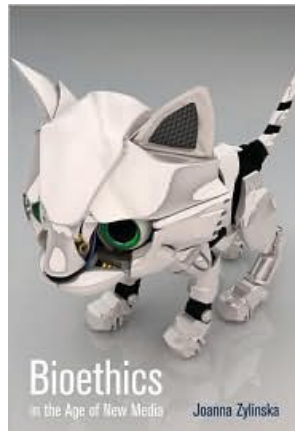
part of the body-schema, which tells the tale of how we continuously adapt to and change with our environment. Environment becomes less an external conditioning than an internal milieu as well. Apparently some brain scientists had come to the same conclusions through empirical measuring that phenomenologists and body theorists had been saying for decades. The body does not end at the skin, and the assumption of a rational, self-controlled subject is a fantasy without a scientific grounding.

Such arguments are at the core of Zylinska's book as well, which is a mapping of the ethical contexts, discussions and demands that new media imposes when rethinking life and embodiment. Her point of departure accepts the points made through cybernetics (to some extent at least), and theorists such as Bernard Stiegler that the human being is already technical. It is through such contexts that she wishes to challenge any "Edenic myth of originary nature, which still actively feeds into contemporary moral panics about genetically modified (GM) foods, aesthetic surgery, and cloning." (47). In other words, any sustainable notion of agency in the age of biodigital manipulation or engagement with the complex assemblages of network culture and its different scales from computer mediated communication between humans to non-human bots needs a very carefully established rethinking of how the changing "I" is already constituted through relations of alterity – the other. Zylinska acknowledges that of course such points convening very fundamental notions are not and should not be left to the experts, but touch our daily discussions from gene manipulation to other hot topics of coffee tables.

Bioethics is not only conversation or contemplation for Zylinska, she is more interested in bioethics-in-action, being performed through projects and concrete contexts. The book looks at various practices, which actually extend the notion from normative and reflective takes on specifically biological or medical questions to a variety of other topics as well. This refers to a wider field of biopolitics – management of life – in new media culture from the bidigital to blogging. Her analysis on blogging approaches it interestingly from Foucault's notion of the techniques of the self, and appropriating the notion of narcissism not as a negative solipsistic concern for the banality self, but as necessary for the building of the self. Blogs are for Zylinska more about "experiencing and enacting the simultaneous difficulty and necessity of relationality as a condition of being in the world" (91) than merely a genre of cultural production, such as citizen journalism. It would have been interesting to continue such ideas of biopolitics in directions that take directly into account such political economic factors of "care of the self" as post-Fordist labour, and the appropriation of life as the motor for production of value in social media networks.

Her extension of the notion of life makes the analyses of *Bioethics in the Age of New Media* interesting. The notion of bioethics becomes itself a vehicle with which to track the multiscale contexts of "life" in current culture. Through discussing a number of recent key writers on such notions of *bios* and *zoe* as Agamben, Foucault and Braidotti, Zylinska tries to carve out her stance to such notions with the help of Derrida and interestingly Levinas. By taking into account

the problems of Levinas as a too-human-orientated thinker, she argues with Derrida that the notion of alterity inherent in Levinas' ethics should be read as an absolute ethical framing of such constitutive others as animals and non-humans as well: "[...] the secret of the alterity of the other (lives), of the fact that the other (life) does not yield itself to thematization, that there is always something that escapes my conceptual grasp." (144) In other words, this is notion of ethics that reaches towards a futurity, or, "life-as-we-maybe-do-not-know-it-yet" kind of ethics that she follows through Eduard Kac's, Critical Art Ensemble's and Natalie Jeremijenko's projects.



What remains here as a bit unquestioned is the notion of difference and alterity as key drivers for contemporary capitalism and this leaves such post-structuralist accounts in need of further elaboration. What if capitalism also feeds on differences, and works to promote then, not just erasing alterity as Zylinska argues in her chapter on the make-up show *The Swan*? The chapter makes interesting parallels between the wider global biopolitical situation having to do for example with the "radical making over" of Iraq and current TV-

genres relating to cleaning up too fat and dodgy bodies but it could have pushed its argument even further, as well as explicated more clearly the different Foucauldian notions between disciplinary power, biopolitical power and mechanisms of security to which Foucault turned in his later work and that could have provided further fresh insights into the contemporary biopolitical situation.

In any case, Zylinska's way of reading politics of livability across scales is enjoyable and raises really important issues of the various contexts of biopolitics also outside the usual suspects of biotechnology. Her writing is very approachable and the book has clear course reading list potential. What Zylinska shows well is how new cultural studies is able to tackle the new challenges and contexts of race, gender and class outside their old representational contexts and engage with "welfare agencies, asylum and immigration centers, counterterrorism cells, DNA testing laboratories and so forth" (140) as the key sites where a cultural theorist should nowadays work her theories through.

## Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology

by Marianne van den Boomen,  
Sybille Lammes, Ann-Sophie  
Lehmann, Joost Raessens  
and Mirko Tobias Schäfer  
(eds.)

Amsterdam University Press,  
2009, 304 pp.

ISBN: 978-9089640680

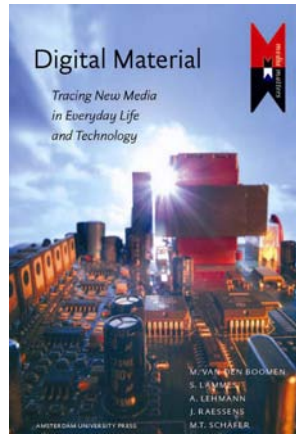
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The rich selection of essays gathered in this volume provides a survey of cutting-edge research in the field of new media studies as well as a sampling of the type of research performed at the New Media and Digital Culture program at the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University. The blending of these two perspectives is undoubtedly one of the most attractive aspects of this book, which demonstrates a strong sense of pedagogy and clarity in each of its contributions, while craving for presenting new insights in a scientific domain that is strongly opened to contextual and cultural analysis, yet for the same reason also difficult to handle or at least to circumscribe.

The editors of this collection are not claiming to present a full-fledged state of the art where the discipline stands now nor what it is actually standing for. Although well aware of what is being performed in the major research centers, such as MIT's Media Lab (where one of the founding fathers and still-collaborator with the Utrecht program, William Urrichio, is now teaching) or Montreal's NT2 and parallel centers, the Utrecht Department has tried first of all to achieve its own viewpoint on the practices and the discourses that are associated with the notion of "new media." The most striking, and dramatically important, achievement in this regard is the definition of digital culture as an illustration of material culture. Turning away from often very radical ideas on digitization as disembodiment, the Utrecht group rightly stresses the importance of the material aspects of digital culture, not only at the level of software as shaped by

as well as shaping a large set of material operations, but also at the level of the incorporation of this software in highly material hardware. The concept that the group has coined for this complex and multilayered form of materiality, namely "in-materiality," expresses in an exemplary way the will to find new paths within the broader approach of digital materialism.



Generally speaking, this ambition is successfully demonstrated in this book, yet in a way that remains rather "soft." Not in the sense that the concept of in-materiality proves only able to cover a tiny part of what is meant by digital culture; on the contrary: the topics and issues that are covered in *Digital Material* are important and wide-ranging and strike a good balance between philosophical reflections---yet philosophy here does not mean disembodied conceptualism---and close readings of sometimes very small phenomena. The book proposes excellent essays of, for instance, the status of the digital archive, the definition of new forms of indexicality, or the notion of audience participation, but it has no less attractive chapters on more microscopic themes such as specific discussion forums, innovations in e-

learning environments or music web sites. If the overall impression of the book is however more "soft" than the editors would like to have it, this impression has more to do with the fact that the authors rely on a wide variety of secondary literature and theoretical framings to study each in a particular subfield the core issue of in-materiality. Some contributors are heavily influenced by psychoanalysis and authors like Žižek (who is of course not a psychoanalytical thinker in the traditional sense of the word). Others have a strong preference for remediation theories à la Bolter and Grusin or are involved in an in-depth rereading of Johan Huizinga. Still others privilege Goffman or Certeau, and so on. This is of course not a critique, for this diversity, which simply reflects the diversity of the new media fields in general, is the best warrant against uniformity of thinking. Yet the mere concept of in-materiality may seem a little too weak or shallow to present the work of the group as fully homogeneous. Actually, after reading the book, one is more struck---and this again is not an unpleasant feeling---by the creative way in which most authors do something with actor-network theory. Nevertheless, at a theoretical level the articulation of in-materiality and ANT remains a little underdeveloped. Corollarily, I think that the role of cultural media criticism as practiced by Henry Jenkins might have been highlighted in a more explicit way. The focus on the "Utrecht concept" of in-materiality, however appealing it is, should not prevent the group from making its relationships to other approaches and theories more explicit. This is done in a wonderful way in the various texts on game theory, with very interesting rereadings of Huizinga (a must in a Dutch

context, of course, but an author whose work deserves to be taken more seriously). But one misses at the end of the book a kind of global rethinking of all the theoretical threads that have been followed by authors who do not always share the same theoretical, critical, and historical framework. The essay by Mirko Tobias Schäfer, already excellent in itself, may be one of those that go a little further than others in gathering these threads, but it is still far from a “general theory” (provided the editors of this book wanted something like that, which is not certain).

The articles are gathered in five sections, respectively labeled “processor,” “memory,” “network,” “screen” and “keyboard,” and it is very positive to see that this structure is already an attempt of translating and instrumentalizing the general notion of immateriality. Yet here as well, and personally I do not consider this a flaw of the book, the emphasis on social use and reuse, which exceeds always the division between the five basic categories, is very strong. New media theory remains in the very first place media theory, and theory should be in the very first place practice-based, hands-on theory. *Digital Material* manages very well to make these points very clear and can therefore be considered a very welcome enrichment of the scholarship in the field.

As always, the status and level of the contributions is not the same, and some of the texts are not totally new. Some of them seem to be reworkings of other versions, like the (excellent) essay by Jos de Mul, which contains throughout its paragraphs a list of references to figures that are not in the book (one

guesses for copyright reasons, but the effect is a little strange in a well edited and carefully printed book).

## Speclab: Digital Aesthetics and Projects in Speculative Computing

by Johanna Drucker

University of Chicago Press,  
2009, 264 pp.

ISBN: 978-0226165080

*Reviewed by Martha Patricia Niño Mojica*

*manino@gmail.com*

*Speclab* has imaginary terms that need to be explained in more detail, such as Graphesis, Patacritical and Trialectics. Graphesis is a term that is strangely associated with what author Drucker calls “boxcar phraseology.” Pataphysics is defined as “[t]he science of exceptions and of imaginary solutions,” or the science of exceptions and anomalies. This sounds somewhat gloomy. It is not clear whether the term Trialectics is a derivative product of the Trivium, or what we know as an introductory curriculum at a medieval university, involving grammar, logic and rhetoric, considered to be a triple way to eloquence. Under this definition, Drucker argues that it is possible to think the term “digital aesthetics” in a more ludic way than an intellectual one. Thus, it is also possible to reinvent the role of speculation as an initial branch of creativity in computing. In this line of thought, speculation should not be understood in the most general and pejorative use or as a conviction about problems of computing based on conjecture

rather than knowledge. In the main title, it is not clear why the author does not use the word “literature,” commonly understood as the works of imagination instead of speculative computing. Computing usually has to be clear, effective and precise.

The book presents a reflection about the provocative term, “digital humanities,” which comprehends projects of both data visualization and computational linguistics. For that reason, it explores the possibilities of XML, as a hierarchical tool for ordering systems of content. It would have been nice to have a deeper explanation of XML because the book does not explore its main possibilities as a creator of a semantic web. Comical and fascinating, the examples in the book are not pure XML, but a text that blends a script for an actor made by a theater director and XML, both styles with inaccuracies. On one side, the programming script in XML has content outside of the main tags <>; on the other side, the actor’s script has embedded XML syntax:

“[or perhaps <flirtation> starts here?]”

<conversation>

<directquote>“Really, is that what XML does?”</directquote>

She asked <directquote>“Yes,”</directquote>

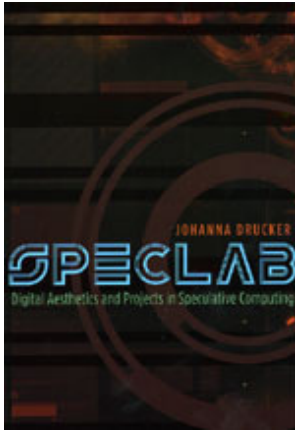
he replied, graciously,

[or should <flirtation> start here? Trying to catch her gaze]”

Furthermore, there are no other computing code examples in the book, nor an explanation of any computer language. In a rather syncretic way, some religious terms are used to describe computer processes. The work has imaginary words as-



sembled into phrases such as, "Can graphesis change mathesis?" This uncanny question with cryptic words opens the chapter "Graphesis and Code." It is not evident whether it is a word game; perhaps the author meant "Can Graphemes change Mathematics?"



With an intriguing opening, the chapter "Temporal Modeling" is a response to designs made by well-known designers such as John Maeda and other designers such as John David Miller, which the author considers non-humanistic because they are funded in discrete sciences, although it is not clearly explained why. Humanities, in her view, have more value when they are not interdisciplinary. This is a very surprising affirmation, taking into account that interdisciplinarity is a central issue in the study of digital aesthetics. This is a key topic because aesthetics is something that permeates all the sciences and not a compartmentalized and isolated field that can be separated from the realm of quotidian experience. It would have been nice to read about the role of fiction in scientific discourse and history of science, and about other authors working in the related fields such as, Janet Murray, Isabelle Stengers, Sean Cubitt, Iliana

Hernandez and Claudia Gianetti, among others. It is very interesting to see how the author makes an effort to reinvent the role of ludic and imaginary works in computing, but some of the graphics lack some clarity and look like sketches.

## From Papyrus to Hypertext: Toward the Universal Digital Library

by Christian Vandendorpe  
Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (transl.)

University of Illinois Press,  
2009, 191 pp.

ISBN: 978-0252076251

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The book places itself within the central debate of the late 1990s concerning the status and future of print books and hypertext. It is written in an essayist style, with 40 short nodes, each relating to central topics of the debate. Vandendorpe relates contemporary and future concerns to relevant historical themes. He thereby integrates relevant observations of ancient writing cultures, from the Renaissance to our time, with present hypertext problematics. The essayist style and the small nodes allow him to place his historical observations in a non-linear, thematic organization, which makes the book less heavy and more in tune with present hypertext writing style. In this way he treats central, concrete cultural and philosophical issues that all seem to be affected by the shift from the centrality of print to the computer as the primary text organizer and comes up with many relevant reflections. *From Papy-*

*rus to Hypertext* places itself in a line of hypertext theory that can be seen as commencing with Jay David Bolter's (1991) *Writing Space*, George Landow's (1992) *Hypertext 2.0* and Espen Aarseth's (1997) *Cybertext*. Whereas Bolter and Landow had an evolutionary, text-philosophical perspective, Aarseth was more pragmatic in trying to create an overall concept of text that could refer to both print and computer generated text. Günther Kress in *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003) and Christiane Heibach in *Literatur im elektronischem Raum* (2003) continue this aim and attempt to create new concepts and a new vocabulary, one that can embrace the characteristics of multisensoric multimedia text and make the importance of medium explicit. In this context Vandendorpe's philosophical, essayist style seems more related to the first line of hypertext theoretics. However, at a text-philosophical level, he does engage in questions concerning the future of the novel and the academic thesis, which must be seen as questions that are still unresolved and thus relevant.

In relation to a contemporary English-speaking audience within the field of hypertext theory, one has to regret that the translation was not made earlier. New media develop fast, and people adapt to new habits just as fast. In the 1990s the web page was still a new phenomenon for the broad public. Today it is so common that one hardly thinks about it. The debate on hypertext culture versus the traditions of print culture already seems ancient, and the main messages of the book are neither as new nor as relevant as a contemporary reader could wish for. For newcomers in the field of text and new media, however,

the book gives good insight into central themes of the debate, and since the problems of the future of print books and the possible development of the academic thesis form are still unsolved, it seems constructive to continuously bring new audiences into the debate. With this in mind, the translation of Vandendorpe's book does seem to serve a relevant purpose.

## White Heat Cold Logic: British Computer Art 1960–1980

by Paul Brown, Charlie Gere, Nicholas Lambert and Catherine Mason (eds.)

The MIT Press, 2009, 568 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0262026536

Reviewed by Jon Bedworth  
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This book has been an inspirational read. This is particularly so because, along with the well-researched academic chapters, there are many chapters in which various practitioners from the period recall their own experiences. These chapters really bring the subject alive, providing a personal dimension to the broader historical analyses of the period made by authors who were not directly involved. It has been instructive to read about how these practitioners overcame technological limitation and institutional resistance in order to create work that remains inspiring today. From the various personal recollections, one gets a sense of how early computer art was created through a painstakingly laborious, time-consuming process. Examples include Harold Cohen's description of learning to program FORTRAN and Mal-

colm Le Grice's account of how it took him 9 months to create 8 seconds of computer-generated film.

The results of such efforts have a continued, or perhaps rediscovered, contemporary relevance beyond the world of "computer art." For example, Gordon Pask's *Colloquy of Mobiles* dealt with themes of sexual selection and signaling behavior explored more recently in situated robotics, while Edward Ihnatowicz's *Senster* is an early example of the type of bottom-up approach to engineering later exemplified in the mid-1980s by Rodney Brooks's behavior-based robotics. Paul Brown recalls how, during the 1970s, he and others at the Slade School of Fine Art were dealing with certain themes associated with "artificial life" before the term was coined. Similarly, Stephen Wilats's conceptual drawing *Virtual Reality Booth* was created in the mid-1960s, many years before Jaron Lanier popularized the term.

Overall, the ambitions of these early projects left the impression that much current work is something of a reinvention of the wheel or, more charitably, that much current work is following in the footsteps of these early pioneers. Tantalizingly, there may be much more to draw on, as Brian Reffin Smith writes: "There is a mine, a treasure trove, a hoard---I cannot emphasize this too strongly---of art ideas that emerged in the early decades of computers that still have not remotely been explored" (p. 388).

This period in the development of computer art is marked by a symbiosis that occurred between artists, engineers and scientists working together, blur-

ring the boundaries between art and other disciplines. In pursuit of their goals several of these artists were also in effect engineers, willing to learn to use technology rather than get others to do it for them, an example being Ihnatowicz, whose approach, according to Aleksander Zivanovic, "was closer to engineering than to conventional art" (p. 108). There could also be two-way traffic, as computer programmers became artists (for example, John Vince at Middlesex Polytechnic).



This book also provides a wider context for understanding computer art during this period, both in terms of its relation to broader artistic concerns, such as constructivism, and as a demonstration of how progress in the arts does not exist in isolation from the wider cultural opinion of the time. Government and industry provided much of the funding and technical means, making the title of this book, with its reference to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology" speech, especially apt. In particular, government support for the creation of polytechnics seemed a pivotal development that led to much multidisciplinary research because of a "collaborative research-based culture" (Mason, p. 254). Then

there was the military, for, as Gustav Metzger said in 1971, “the true avant-garde is the army” (cited by Ford on p. 171).

In conclusion, this book is about considerably more than an academic history of the computer arts. It is also a record of the passion, difficulties and relationships that made this period of experimentation and advancement possible, a period that seems to define our own in many ways. It is hoped, therefore, that this book finds a wide audience beyond artists interested particularly in the computer arts.

## New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art

by Christiane Paul (ed.)

University of California Press, 2008, 273 pp.

ISBN: 978-0520255975

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As an art form that is time-based, and thus dynamic, interactive, collaborative, and ever variable, new media presents a unique set of challenges to traditional ideas of collection, presentation, documentation, and preservation. *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, edited and introduced by Christiane Paul, adjunct curator of new media arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, features cutting edge essays by curators, theorists, and conservators addressing these problems.

As Paul notes in her introduction,

the aim of this book is “to discuss the challenges of curating and presenting new media art that have been emerging over the past decade” (1). An immediate challenge is settling on a definition for new media art and defining the territory it occupies. A definition, however, says Paul, is elusive in that the art form, both its production and materiality, is constantly being reconfigured, one assumes through both technological development and artistic application.

Despite constant change, a lowest common denominator for new media art would seem to be that “it is computational and based on algorithms” (3). Art using digital technologies can manifest itself in various forms—from installations to software—and examine a wide range to topics.

Given such a broad territory, Paul and her contributors attempt to map its various regions. The first part of the book attempts to position what is now called new media art and curatorial models by examining historical precedents. Charlie Gere, “New Media Art and the Gallery in the Digital Age,” notes that although art forms and practices are embedded in larger cultural contexts, the history of technology and media science plays an equally important role in the art’s formation and reception. Gere also discusses the role of museums as archives and cultural memory and asks what effect the real time processing capabilities of digital media might have on future archives.

Sarah Cook, “Immateriality and Its Discontents: An Overview of Main Models and Issues for Curating New Media,” suggests iterative, modular, and distributive models for curating new me-

dia, as well new metaphors like software programs, trade shows, and broadcasts.

The second part of the book focuses on different strategies for presenting new media in gallery spaces. Particularly problematic in such spaces is net art, because, as Steve Dietz, “Curating Net Art: A Field Guide,” notes, this art form is not represented in its natural state in galleries. Dietz suggests enhancements to more traditional gallery spaces in order to make them more receptive platforms of exchange for net art.

Changes to curating, as a creative labor, wrought by informational content instilled, in part, by technologies used to create the object(s) of curation, is the focus of the book’s third part. Joasia Krysa, “Distributed Curating and Immateriality,” positions new media art and curating as a self-replicating system through her case study of an exhibition of computer viruses. Building on the idea of viral multiplication and mutation, Jon Ippolito, “Death by Wall Label,” explores problems faced by artists and curators when they confront documentation when they confront the standard method for defining art work—the gallery wall label. Ippolito proposes alternatives and discusses documentation tools that accommodate the mutations of new media digital art.

The variable nature of authorship is the focus of the book’s fourth part. Sara Diamond, “Participation, Flow, and Redistribution of Authorship,” explores the potential of network technologies to facilitate collaboration even while shifting the understanding of authorship and the autonomous cultural contexts of communities. Focusing on

Aboriginal groups, Diamond asks what issues technologies raise for their cultural heritage and identity.

The book concludes with four case studies and their curatorial practices. Each show posed significant challenges in communicating its contents and contexts, as well as providing an interface between different cultures, approaches, and audiences. The success of each show, however, demonstrates that artistic and curatorial practices can and will rise to such challenges.

And that seems to be the common narrative thread throughout the books multiple sections and essays. As a process oriented and participatory practice, new media art has profound impact on artists, curators, audiences, and institutions. Traditional roles of artists and curators are being redefined, often to more collaborative models of production and presentation. The audience is often involved as well, participating in the artwork in ways counter to the traditional role of museums and galleries as shrines for contemplating sacred objects.

All these issues require all involved—artists, curators, galleries, and audiences—to reconfigure themselves and adapt to the demands of digital new media art. As a preliminary map of a new territory, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond* provides ideas about possible routes that challenge customary methods of presentation and documentation, collection and preservation. The thought provoking essays collected here provide an overview of the conceptual, philosophical, and practical issues confronting the curating and presenting of new media art.

## Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System

by Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost (eds.)

The MIT Press, 2009, 180 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0262012577

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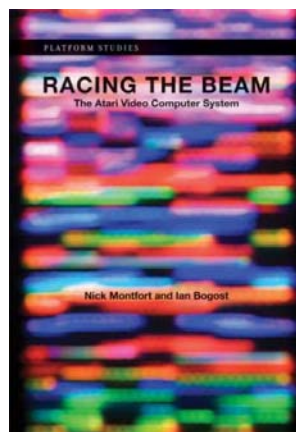
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*Racing the Beam* is the first of a new publication series entitled "Platform Studies." The authors, Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost (who are also the editors of the series), are highly established videogame researchers and theorists themselves, so it seems only fitting that they wish to start the proceedings with a detailed analysis of the Atari Video Computer System 2600 (or VCS for short).

Although digital media researchers are beginning to investigate how software and code provide useful insights into the cultural use of computers and digital objects, Montfort and Bogost argue that few media theorists actually analyze the platform systems themselves, where the code is programmed and executed.

Studies in computer science and engineering have addressed the question of how platforms are best developed and what is best encapsulated in the platform. Studies in digital media have addressed the cultural relevance of particular software of platforms. But little work has been done on how the hardware and software of platforms influences, facilitates, or constrains particular forms of computational expression (p. 3).

*Racing the Beam* is an attempt to do this, and credit goes to the authors, for what makes this book such an appealing read is the unwavering focus on a remarkable piece of limited technology. If one were to compare a platform study of the VCS with its contemporaries, namely, the early microcomputers (Commodore 64, BBC Micro, TRS 80) fitted with BASIC, a microcomputer platform study would require a greater level of complexity (for example the interaction between its hardware components and operating system). For the purposes of a short and engaging read, a platform study into a narrow, restrictive piece of technology such as the VCS (which never even had an operating system) is for the reader an accommodating move.



The book is split into eight chapters, six of which cover seminal games and arcade conversions for the platform: *Combat*, *Adventure*, *Pac-Man*, *Yars' Revenge*, *Pitfall!* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. Detailed analyses into these retro-emblematic pieces of game culture are actually prisms that shed light onto the creativity of the respective game developers. The two remaining chapters offer a brief introduction and an extensive conclusion on the VCS's influ-



ence on contemporary videogame culture.

The title, *Racing the Beam*, refers to the centerpiece of the Atari VCS; "The processor is always called the 'brain' of a computer, and, indeed, the MOS Technology 6507 is the Atari VCS's brain. But the custom Television Adapter (TIA) is its heart" (p. 27). The authors do a commendable job of elucidating the components of the VCS in an engaging style without compromising on technicality. This also serves to clarify the historical and economic conditions in which the VCS technology was developed, and it is this rigorous, thorough contextualization that stops the reader from over-scanning through the VCS's technical details. The authors elaborate on specific relationships between all the platform's components in a relatively lucid manner. For instance, the authors dedicate a large portion of the book to the VCS's low memory constraints---a result of the huge manufacturing costs of memory in the late 1970s. The VCS shipped with 128 bytes of RAM and no disk storage; its interchangeable ROM game cartridges shipped with typically 4K of memory (or in some cases, such as the included game *Combat*, only 2K). Such monumental technological constraints forced developers to wring every last drop of processing space out of the VCS in order to develop games that had some chance of industry success. In this sense, *Racing the Beam* recounts the ingenuity of designers in coming to terms with the weakness of the platform.

The previously mentioned TIA chip is an early highlight in this regard. Atari developed the TIA, code-named Stella, to power the VCS's sound and graphics, but

in reality it actually had to do much more. The VCS had to be able to output universal and representable graphics on all cathode ray tube televisions (CRT) at that time. CRT televisions work by firing patterns of electrons at glass layered with phosphors from one corner of the screen to the other and then refreshing the process. Then-current computer systems and arcade cabinets could manipulate the electron gun in accordance with the computer's hardware, but the Atari VCS was extremely limited in comparison. The machine is not equipped with enough memory to store an entire screen's worth of data in a frame buffer. The 128 bytes of RAM in the system are not even enough to store one eight-bit color value for every line of the 192-line visible display (p. 27).

Subsequent chapters reveal the creative lengths to which VCS programmers needed to go in order to create just a simple working videogame. Each cartridge had to be written manually, line by line, so that it worked in harmony with the television's electron gun. Through such examples, the authors reveal again and again how severe limitations can force new artistic processes. A particular highlight is how designers of *Pitfall!* managed to procedurally generate 255 explorative "screens" using hardly any ROM space.

For those who have an interest in the culture and history of retro gaming, *Racing the Beam* is an obvious choice. But this book may also be a less obvious choice for those interested in how artistic expression can be affected by material limitations. Furthermore, there is a hint in *Racing the Beam* that the very objects we create seemingly have their own agenda. Per-

haps this book can be seen as an attempt to re-establish digital media as equally participating objects (or actors) in their own right, rather than privileging the digital realm as a means to facilitate human communication and exchange. It can be said (and the authors insinuate this in an intriguing manner) that *Racing the Beam* transforms a historical piece of videogame culture into an object with curious agency.

## Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses

by Jussi Parikka

Peter Lang, 2007, 327 pp.

ISBN: 978-0820488370

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In his introduction to *Digital Contagions* Jussi Parikka argues that the history of computer viruses offers new insights into the role that accidents play in modern culture. Parikka claims that accidents should not be seen as the result of technological malfunctions but rather are part of "the 'normal' functioning of a technological machine" (p. 5). Computer viruses thus reveal not only the heightened degree of risk that is symptomatic of high-tech societies but also the ways in which accidents are useful and perhaps even necessary components of technological machines. One of the principle aims of this book, therefore, is "to emphasize the affirmative perspective we can take on accidents, events, and hence viruses by considering them as *events* that are overflowing their rigid territorializations" (p. 5). Rather than seeing



viruses as “malicious software made by juvenile vandals,” in other words, Parikka argues that they are “an inherent part of digital culture” (p. 23).

The book is divided into three chapters, the first of which focuses on the issue of risk and security. Parikka argues that the computer industry depicts computer viruses in a negative light in order to regulate and control consumer behavior. By examining how the emergence of new viruses required the sustained development of new anti-virus software, however, Parikka shows that viruses actually help rather than hinder the computer industry. Parikka thus concludes that “digital capitalist culture . . . succeeded in converting its own accidents to its own profit” (p. 100), and he even suggests that capitalism itself functions as a virus that is similarly “capable of continuous modulation and heterogenesis” (p. 96).

In the second chapter Parikka analyzes the cultural discourse surrounding the rise of computer viruses in the 1980s and argues that the sudden increase in public concern over viruses was closely related to the AIDS crisis. The computer industry introduced concepts like “safe hex,” “responsibility in use,” and “digital hygiene,” for example, in order to encourage “natural” and “healthy” methods of computing, which implied that computer viruses were spread by unsafe practices or degenerate hackers. By associating computer viruses with the AIDS virus, in other words, digital networks were frequently described using biological and ecological metaphors:

Bodies and diseases were not just entities of the biological

sphere but taken in their diagrammatic dimensions as notions that span the whole social field. ...This provided elements for a media ecology that essentially relies on a certain metaphoric and metamorphic basis deterritorialized by biology and ecology (p. 204).

In the third and final chapter Parikka complicates this metaphorical use of biological and ecological terminology by arguing that computer viruses can also be understood as living entities. Parikka begins by noting that it is often difficult to distinguish between “useful” software and viral “malware,” as many viruses also serve benevolent functions. Moreover, viruses are not anomalies within the system but rather “express its very defining modes of operating” (p. 215). Because these semi-autonomous programs are built into the very structure of digital networks and are fundamentally necessary for the functioning of these networks, Parikka argues that they represent autopoietic systems:

The perspective of ecologies should be understood as self-referential systems or processes, where to understand (or observe) the function of the system, one cannot detach single elements from its synthetic consistency (and label some elements as purely anomalous). ...[A] focus on such a systems approach allows one to think also of digital culture as couplings where “organisms” or “components” participate in the autopoiesis of the general system (p. 259).

Parikka then draws several connections between second-order cybernetics and Deleuzian-Spinozan philosophy in order to show how biological and

computer viruses both illustrate the ways in which bodies and environments “resonate together” and “infect each other” (p. 270). Rather than understanding terms like “computer virus” and “media ecology” as metaphors, therefore, Parikka concludes that biological and ecological concepts can be applied to both natural and technological systems.

Parikka’s project is largely informed by German media theory, particularly the work of Friedrich Kittler, which has often been criticized by Anglo-American media theorists for promoting a kind of technological determinism that grants undue power to machines. Parikka’s materialist approach is certainly vulnerable to similar accusations; indeed, the very notion of computer viruses as living agents or actors clearly endows the apparatus with a degree of power that some critics may find disturbing. While Parikka briefly mentions that computer viruses represent an example of “bottom-up emergence” (p. 3), he seems to employ this term in a biological or perhaps even evolutionary sense and he explicitly rejects the notion that viruses might represent the resistant logic of hackers attempting to subvert or appropriate corporate technologies. Parikka’s discussion of “viral capitalism” seems to pose a similar problem, as it implies that capitalism might also be understood as a living and potentially even benevolent entity. Nevertheless, Parikka’s argument is extremely persuasive and poses a serious challenge to critics who prefer to think of computer networks as potential instruments for promoting digital democracy. Parikka brilliantly weaves together historical research and poststructural theory in order to explore the nature

of digital computer networks and expand the field of media ecology.

## The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love

by Humberto Maturana  
Romesin and Gerda Verden-  
Zöller

Imprint Academic, 2008, 227  
pp.

ISBN: 978-1845400880

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*The Origin of Humanness*, written in the early 1990s, brings together two strands of research: Maturana Romesin's research into the origin of humanness and Verden-Zöller's research into the rise of self-consciousness in the child during early mother-child play relations. The authors' core claim is that the human species has evolved by conserving love as a fundamental domain of cooperation expressed through the basic emotions or moods of mutual respect, care, acceptance and trust (*Homo sapiens-amans*) rather than competition and aggression (*Homo sapiens-agressans* or arrogance). In this, they do not declare an ethical imperative, but rather situate ethics in biology, since, in their view, a responsible concern for the well-being of the other (human, species, biosphere, etc.) arises naturally from a manner of living in the biology of love. This is what they propose as a way for conserving the existence of social human beings (and what they call "social consciousness") and for countering the dominant culture of domination, submission or indiffer-

ence in Western society. Ethics, in this sense, is a choice of emotioning on an individual basis that in relation to a social community defines how a particular manner of living is to be conserved over the coming generations. In this way, the book opens up burning questions around the dimension of humanness in relation to contemporary developments in the sciences and the applications of technologies (genetic engineering, organ transplants, cloning, robotics, virtual reality, etc.), which the authors touch upon briefly as referential contexts, and Maturana Romesin has developed more fully elsewhere [1]. *The Origin of Humanness* is a testimony of hope, which calls for the integration of systemic and linear rational thinking through a change in attitude if we release our desire for control, and in doing so we could conserve loving humanness in awareness that the biology of love and intimacy is our fundament. That, indeed, would be a cultural change of no little magnitude (p. 129).

The fact that the editor, Pille Bunnell, decided to separate a scientific appendix from the main argument (thus dividing the book into two halves) is crucial to understanding the authors' argument in its self-conscious presentation as an explanatory system. This reveals that if, for example, the argument were to be read from an intellectual position that separated the explanatory system and the position of the observer from life as an independent reality, it could be misunderstood as carrying a certain essentialist bias. Such a misdirection completely dissolves once it is understood (and the scientific appendix makes this method very clear) that from a systemic approach, scientific explana-

tions are operational and conceptual instruments that permit us to "explain and understand what we do as human beings through our operation in the different domains of operational coherences in which we live" (p. 156). In the authors' view, any explanation can ultimately only explain experience, which reveals the constructedness of the notion of "reality" or "existence" as explanatory. This perspective is not only useful for understanding the authors' position when reading their reflections on the origin of humanness, but it also opens a framework to situate various other scientific explanatory models. As a foundational principle of any explanatory system, "structural determinism" is defined by the authors as the "abstraction of the regularities of our living and of our operation as living systems as the regularities of our living appear in our reflections as coherences of our experiences" (p. 159). What systems theory, used in this way, reveals is not a new explanatory theory of all and everything, but a *modus operandi* of how to situate and understand scientific explanatory systems that necessarily always include the position of the observer while their reflections abstract from life experiences. The insightful reflections in the appendix appear almost as a philosophy of science, and the "in the book" format presents a very complex system of thought and makes it accessible despite asking some forbearance from the reader or, alternatively, a disciplined interactive reading between the separate sections.

Maturana-Romesin and Verden-Zöller's intervention provides us with an innovative way to think forward by reflecting on the past, situated in very familiar contexts of the present. Given the book's

relevant topic, which occupies us all in some way or other, this leads us to ask more questions. It not only opens a way to address the topic of “love” in the sciences and related disciplines, but it also will have to be seen if the book might offer a new starting point from which to resolve the prevailing dualism that is used to describe the human condition. In a manner similar to the philosopher Henri Bergson’s in addressing the cooperation between the intellect and intuition in *Creative Evolution* [2], the authors propose that reason “may help to shift our psychic identity if it guides our emotioning, but does not do so by itself” (p. 106). Most significantly, *The Origin of Humanness* introduces an ethics to the way we engage in our current cultural environment, which is based in the fundamentals of human emotioning and, in combination with self-reflection, calls for responsibility for our desires as a choice for future directions in the human creative evolution.

#### References and Notes

[1] Humberto Maturana-Romesin has more fully developed a discussion with regard to technology in a 1997 article entitled “Metadesign,” where the artist and artistic, creative dimension in human being arises as a most significant interventionist potential for change through aesthetics linked to the emotional domain. The article can be found on-line at [www.inteco.cl/articulos/metadesign](http://www.inteco.cl/articulos/metadesign).

[2] Henri Bergson, [1911] 1998. *Creative Evolution*. (tr. A. Mitchell). Mineola, New York: Dover Publications. (French original: 1907, *L'Évolution Créatrice*. Paris: Alcan.)

## Everyday Creativity: Shared Languages & Collective Action

7th Creativity and Cognition

Conference, 27 - 30 October 2009

Berkeley Art Museum and the University of California at Berkeley

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Creativity is a word that people use as if we all share a similar sense of what it means. Yet, and I am certain I am not unique in this, talking to others at length often shows that how we define creativity is more multifaceted than our assumptions suggest. Given that I am a “creative” person and have come to see the term as both complex and ambiguous, I was delighted to learn that the 7th *Creativity and Cognition Conference* was coming to Berkeley this year. As a Berkeley resident, I was excited to find I could easily attend and learn how this group approached the idea. For this conference, the organizers decided to frame the program around the rubric of “Everyday Creativity” and posed several questions in their call for projects/papers: How do we enable everyone to enjoy their creative potential? How do our creative activities differ? What do they have in common? What languages can we use to talk to each other? How do shared languages support collective action? How can we incubate innovation? How do we enrich the creative experience? What encourages participation in everyday creativity?

It was no surprise to find that those at the conference answered these questions from many vantage points, although it seemed the accepted submissions emphasized computer science, design (in an engineering sense) and education. (I believe they said that only 23% of the

proposals were accepted, so I would assume that this kind of emphasis mirrors what the organizers wanted the conference to stress.) Still, the more hands-on discussions are those that have stayed with me to a greater degree. Although often more descriptive than quantitative or statistical, this work was striking because it showed evidence of problem-solving through visuals that also demonstrated a complexity that I do not think we have quantitative tools to describe. One paper that brought the humanness of creative acts to mind was “Assistive Devices--Stroke Patients’ Design” by Ana Correia de Barros and Carlos Duarte. Their interviews with 48 stroke patients illustrated many cases where “private” solutions were used to provide equipment to the patient so that they were better “equipped” to deal with their disabilities. Often these impressive handcrafted devices, made by family and friends of the patients, were similar to those on the market. Not having access to, or information about, the manufactured product, these “helpers” developed solutions that would function similarly to the unknown device and would successfully ease the daily tasks of someone in need.

Cathy Treadaway’s paper “Hand E-craft: an Investigation into Hand Use in Digital Creative Practice” similarly presented a sensitive articulation of the complexity of the creative process. In this case, she showed a video to allow us to see how an artist combined computer-aided design with work by hand. Treadaway’s approach to conveying the value of haptic sensitivity in a creative process seems important when we consider the trend toward digital and technological projects that often include a “distance” from directly exploring

our natural space.

I was also quite taken with a personal element that was very present throughout this conference. For example, Sarah Atkinson's contribution, an invited installation commissioned by BigDog Interactive, Ltd., was a creative inspiration that allowed many of us to receive unique conference bags. Atkinson issued a "Call for Bags" before the conference, asking participants to recycle their old conference bags so that she could re-craft them for this event. I received one of these bags at registration, with an attached tag that says it was "constructed using three different CHI conference sweaters that were cut into circles of various sizes and then sewn back together to make the fabric for this bag." Thank you, Sarah! I simply adore my bag and I am delighted to have this cool replacement for an old, ratty bag I've carried around forever. Another nice touch was the poster and demo madness session. Everyone who was doing a poster or a demo spoke for about a minute. These quick summaries allowed the attendees to have a sense of each project and to build a mental map of what to look for in the poster-demo session. There were also a number of prizes presented, including Amy F. Ogata for "Cultivating and Commodifying Everyday Creativity in Postwar American Childhood," Kimiko Ryokai for "Children's Storytelling and Programming with Robotic Characters," and Benjamin G. Shaw for "A Cognitive Account of Collective Emergence in Design"; Brittany Smith received the "most helpful student volunteer" prize.

Anyone who has attended a parallel track conference knows how frustrating it is to have to make choices between papers

when conflicts arise. Creativity and Cognition had only one stream of sessions, so we were all able to appreciate all the activities. Another plus was the idea to have a keynote on each of the three days. Each was different and, as a whole, they added tremendous scope to the event. JoAnn Kuchera-Morin of AlloSphere Research Laboratory Nanosystems opened the conference with her paper "Using the Creative Process to Map N Dimensions: Quantum Information at Your Fingertips." Her powerful talk put me in exactly the right mental space for the three-day event. To oversimplify, Kuchera-Morin introduced us to the Design Stage environment she has set up in the AlloSphere. This site allows researchers to transform their working space into an immersive design canvas where they can overlay their mathematical algorithms and real data and, in a sense, perform their work. Her presentation was so captivating that it was only later that it occurred to me that I am not sure I entirely grasped what all of this has to do with quantum information.

On the second day, Jane Prophet's keynote introduced us to her work as an artist who frequently collaborates with scientists. I found her talk the most engaging of the conference because of the multi-faceted nature of her projects and the themes she incorporated into them. Her *Swab Drawings*, also on display in the Creativity and Cognition exhibition area, was a video work she created in collaboration with cardiothoracic surgeon Francis Wells. It presents a drawing done by this doctor during a pause in an open-heart surgery. It was conceived to explain his procedure to medical visitors in the theater. Because the doctor is using the patient's blood

to make this quick sketch, the drawing challenges us to think about what a creative person does. In this case, I was confused about what was going on until Prophet explained that he was not taking time from the operation to do the drawing. In terms of "Everyday Creativity," it is intriguing to think that he made this sketch using the material at hand in his "everyday" environment. This work alluded to many things, including the creativity of the surgeon, the sharing of this creativity through the teaching of others in the theater, the artistic vision of Jane Prophet in recording the sequence, and the reactions of the audience to the unusual drawing she presents. Prophet writes: "In the Swab Drawing videos, we are privy to an intimate moment as cardiothoracic surgeon Francis Wells uses a swab of the patient's blood, during open heart surgery, to recall diagrammatically the operating procedure." The subject and the controversy bring to mind *The Sacred Heart: An Atlas of the Body Seen through Invasive Surgery* by Max Aguilera-Hellweg.

The final keynote, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, was one of the few papers that incorporated recent work in cognitive neuroscience. I was surprised to find those at the meeting emphasized psychological studies and results rather than what is going on in the cognitive neuroscientific community, particularly in light of the interest in musical work at the conference and the recent explosion of studies on music and the brain. Perhaps it was because many of the projects seemed to stress applications more than theories.

Overall, the program provided a stimulating environment. The emphasis on design and engi-



neering reinforced my sense that creativity has various meanings in our culture, a thought partially reinforced by the fact that my research into creativity is in other areas and moves in parallel directions. At the end, I found myself unsure as to how to evaluate the outcome. On the one hand, as someone who is generally critical of overly theoretical work, I was surprised to find myself feeling this event placed too much stress on contextual and applied approaches to the topic. It is undeniable that deciphering psychological traits is useful, as are efforts to encourage creativity in children and in the population at large. Indeed, it might be said that all our efforts to learn more about why the urge toward creativity resonates on so many levels are of value.

On the other hand, when walking home from the conference, I realized that I had wanted to raise many points about everyday creativity that seemed outside of the scope of this meeting. One that has nagged me for many years is that highly creative people sometimes have a negative impact on society. The financial devices that have wrecked havoc on the world economy, like Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme, are undeniably creative inventions that deserve no praise. Also, the many creative behaviors that defy social norms and stymie our lives were on my mind. Coincidentally, the next morning I awoke to a discussion on NPR in which a reporter explained that one of the problems in Afghanistan is that the terrorists are becoming more *creative* in how they make and use their weapons of destruction. I'm not certain it is appropriate to suggest that an academic research conference centered on Everyday Creativity

should have addressed financial and moral issues. Still, one of the most challenging aspects of creativity is that we cannot separate it from these kinds of difficult aspects of life because the negative products of the creative mind are also a part of our environment. Even Leonardo, the acknowledged master of creativity, put as much energy into devising battle machines as other kinds of engineering devices.

So the question remains: How does a society differentiate between a discovery that is a "correct" product in the sense that it is in line with a culture's norms and the discovery of something that is socially disadvantageous? As we educate each generation, I suppose the tools we use help formulate cultural balance and individual potential and build models that include structure, cooperation, teamwork, the individual and the exceptional. All of these elements were a part of the 7th Creativity and Cognition Conference to some degree, which is no doubt why it was a successful event

## **Invisible Vision: Could Science Learn from the Arts?**

by Sabine E. Wildevuur  
Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum  
Uitgever, 2009, 190 pp.  
ISBN: 978-9031351015

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*Invisible Vision: Could Science  
Learn from the Arts* is an intriguing book that will be of interest to many *Leonardo* readers. It

was written by Sabine E. Wildevuur. She is program manager/healthcare at Waag Society in Amsterdam. (For readers who might not be familiar, the Waag Society is a Dutch cross-disciplinary organization that "develops creative technology for social innovation" and "acts as an intermediate between the arts, science and the media.")

Wildevuur's question "Could Science Learn from the Arts" is a critical question relevant to the intersections of art, science and technology. There have been many articles and books written in the last few years on the intersections. Also many organizations, festivals and arrangements to encourage collaboration have been set up. Artists have leapt to create unprecedented new works inspired by research. The enthusiasm is building. Most of it is based on the faith that a techno-cultural society will be enriched by the arts and sciences engaging each other in many ways.

Most of this work, however, focuses on how the arts are enriched. By attending to the research world, artists are working with areas of inquiry of great importance to society. They are bringing new concepts and technologies into the art arena. However, according to the artists, theoreticians and policy makers encouraging this work, not only the arts will be enriched. They claim that the research community will also be augmented by being introduced to new research agendas, research processes, visualization methods, interpretations and frameworks for analyzing and communicating research.

The claim is intriguing and makes good sense. Yet there is significant asymmetry in this



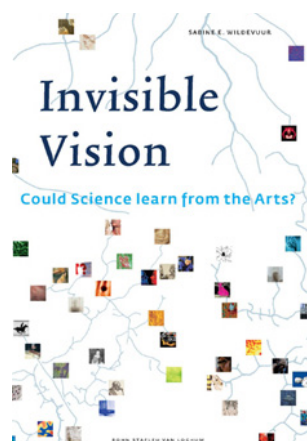
corpus of work. There is much less evidence and analysis about the impact on the sciences. Wildevuur's book is a strong first step in this analysis. Concentrating on medical imaging, which is key to both science and art, she presents an impressive body of material to bear on the questions.

She offers chapters on "Making the Invisible Visible: The Gallery of Medical Imaging;" "WYSIWYG (What you See is What You Get?)," "Visualization and Data Beautification;" "From the 'Art' of Medicine to Art in Medicine;" and "Imaging and Imagination of Science: A New Perspective." The book is richly illustrated with historical and contemporary images drawing both from art and science. She has done a marvelous job of locating provocative images to further her analysis.

A few examples will illustrate her approach. In the first chapter she develops the idea that art-making was intrinsic to the scientific enterprise in the early days of Western medicine/biology. Scientists could not proceed without careful drawings and models of what they were seeing as they peered inside bodies. Artistic craft and vision were essential to furthering the research. The objects created not only accurately documented observations but also generated great excitement that motivated scientists and also raised new questions that became part of the engine of science. The "Gallery of Medical Imaging" is an exceptional resource for those studying these topics.

In the "WYSIWYG" chapter Wildevuur explores the idea that contemporary medical research imaging tools such as MRI and PET scans cannot create purely

"objective" images. For example, the phenomena being scanned often do not have any specific colorization associated with them in nature. An MRI returns data about the intensity of the spin of hydrogen atoms. It is up to the scientists and designers of the devices to decide how to map colors to data. Different mappings emphasize different features of the data. Wildevuur explores the contribution an artistic sense can add to maximizing researchers' abilities to learn from their data.



The chapter "Imaging and Imagination of Science: A New Perspective" investigates new media technologies being adapted to research-immersive virtual reality and interactive gaming. For example, immersive VR is seen as opening unprecedented new ways to understand research data. The viewer wears stereoscopic head tracking goggles and 3D headphones so that they can move through and manipulate a high-fidelity representation of a 3D virtual data world. They can explore data elements from all angles as if they were objects floating in space. In the VR environment, worlds that are too small, too big or too abstract are rendered like familiar physical objects. Wildevuur notes that this way of approaching data not

only makes it visually clearer; it actually may add new conceptual dimensions for conducting the research. She poses this work with experimental media as a place the arts can teach the sciences.

The book is a great resource both for its ideas and for its visuals. It will add significantly to needed analysis. It should be noted, however, that it is not a comprehensive answer to the questions. It is lacking much direct testimonials from scientists who feel their research has been augmented by art. Also, its focus on visualization means it does not have much to say about some of the other ways artists think they might contribute to science---for example, identification of new research agendas, development of technologies outside commerce and working with non-visual aspects of science. While we can enjoy this book, we must recognize that there is still much work to be done.

## Secret Museums: In Search of Hidden Erotic Art

by Peter Woditsch

Icarus Films, 2009

DVD, 77 min.

Distributor's website: <http://icurusfilms.com>

*Reviewed by Rob Harle*

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This film is full of intrigue and adventure. It is as much about power, cultural politics and obsession as it is about erotic art. Many of the world's best known artists created erotic art, but due to the cultural biases and beliefs of the various eras, the works were

rarely displayed for public view. This film's mission is to track down hidden erotica, both in public galleries and museums, and those works in the possession of private collectors.

*Secret Museums: In Search of Hidden Erotic Art* runs for 77 minutes, is in colour, DVD format and is both educational and entertaining. I found the camera work generally excellent, and on occasions, absolutely brilliant. The background audio suits the film well, various languages are spoken, mainly French, English and German, and there are reasonably easy to read subtitles. My only minor criticism of this film is that it is a little over dramatic in certain places, together with some unnecessary repetitive shots of locked doors and so on.

Peter Woditsch has put and incredible effort and amount of background research into making this film, which was filmed in England, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the U.S. Part of the intrigue and adventure of the film is Woditsch trying to gain access and filming permission to the guarded, nearly always secret collections of erotic art. From the home of the world's largest collection of pornography in the Vatican, to the collections of obsessed, intensely private individual collectors' stashes, Woditsch attempts to show us just what is hidden and quite often deliberately kept secret and mysterious from us. As the film shows some collectors simply like to possess the artworks — which consist of paintings, drawings and sculptures, and a huge number of illustrated books — in their possession and keep quite about it. Others deliberately let others know of their 'secret' collections so as

to add intrigue, desire and of course raise the value of the works if they ever decide to sell.

The controllers of these collections, whether private or publicly held, are literally gatekeepers, who decide who, how, and when others may see the artwork. The British Museum refused Woditsch permission to film their collection. Of course, the Vatican allows enticing glimpses of their vast collection but certainly not unlimited access to even historians and research scholars. If this gate keeping were not so pitiful it would be laughable. As one collector-commentator in the film mentions, "three clicks of the mouse on the Internet and an individual will be confronted with extreme pornography of all types," "so why the censorship by public museums, to the public patrons, when these institutions are funded by the public purse?"

Throughout the film various experts discuss, "the reasons for cultural suppression and control of erotic art: how institutional gatekeepers, as the protectors of public morality, decide what is acceptable; the difficulty of some in accepting sexuality as an appropriate subject for art; the compulsion to assemble private collections; and how many erotic masterpieces remain hidden today" ("Back Cover").

I enjoyed this film very much and found the passion, obsession, and vast amounts of money paid for erotic artworks by private reclusive collectors the most intriguing aspect of the film. In the words of the *Vancouver Review*, "A brilliant documentary [that] is at times like a graduate seminar broaching issues about ethics, public space and cultural memory, preservation and archival energy ... A 'must-see' for anyone interested in the dis-

cussion of the *nature of power and knowledge*" [my emphasis].

## The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization

by The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group  
Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dong, and  
Tani E. Barlow (eds.)  
Duke University Press, 2008,  
448 pp.

ISBN: 978-0822343059

*Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg,  
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*The Modern Girl Around the World* is a fabulous book about the simultaneous emergence of the Modern Girl phenomenon globally. From an account of Madame C, J. Walker's cosmetics company and the "New Negro Movement" of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the US to the analysis of the phenomenon in the 1920's and 1930's in Africa, India, China and Japan, from "Blackfella Missus" in Australia to Bolshevik moralist rejection of the flapper, from the Neue Frauen of the Weimar and Nazi eras to "girls lean back everywhere" especially in France, it is a simply fabulous academic conjunction of history and cultural criticism. The trans-disciplinary reach of the historical analyses and the sustained intellectual dynamic informing and connecting each chapter makes this an enormously significant and fascinating body of work.

The research group was initially formed in 2000 at the University

of Washington in Seattle and substantially added to by a Tokyo-based group "The Modern Girl and Colonial Modernity in East Asia", this book being the outcome of both groups coming together in 2004 in Japan. The collective was inspired by the work of two historians in particular amongst others, the late Miriam Silverberg and the inimitable Timothy Burke. While Silverberg was chosen as the first invited speaker because of her all important work on gender and modernity in Japan in the inter-war years, of the many subsequent speakers, not all of whom contributed to the volume, it is the work of Timothy Burke that appears to have had the strongest influence of all. His path breaking study *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (1996) is as important to this collective study as Silverberg's work and perhaps even more so because of the combination of his powerful theoretical acuity and combination of fieldwork and historical research into what was at the time, certainly for Africa, completely un-chartered territory.

The concept of the Modern Girl is used here as a heuristic device that is eminently useful for exploring what it meant and means to be "modern", specifically in terms of visibility and self-fashioning through commodity consumption. One of the study's central concerns is to de-center the notion that modernity is purely Western as each chapter differently relates in very different contexts whilst being careful to distinguish between the periods before and after World War Two. Above all, Chapter 2, "The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of

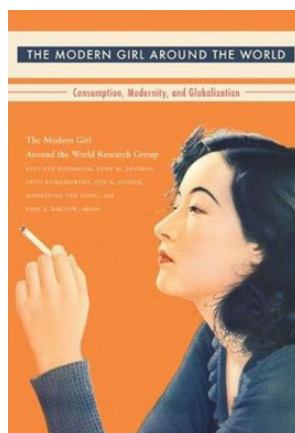
Race and Style", is foundational in the sense that it is collectively written and clearly lays out the essential parameters of the project and its theoretical claims.

Here, in this critical chapter, through analyzing advertisements from four continents and from a range of print media and languages, the group defines their methodology as "connective comparison" – "a method which allows us to identify connections among disparate locales and to explore the overlap and distinction among Modern Girl representations..." (p. 26). This also enabled the authors to identify local aesthetic and stylistic peculiarities and the "citation" of these across contexts such as an Asianised art deco derived aesthetic, one instance of "multidirectional citation", that is, "the mutual, though non-equivalent influences and circuits of exchange" that shaped and transformed the Modern Girl around the world (ibid.). Though this method and theory is elegant enough and no doubt well supported it will be interesting to follow the degree to which these two ideas, connective comparison and multidirectional citation achieve any sustained theoretical currency in the diverse literatures for which this collection has such broad relevance and application.

What stands out across these mainly historical studies is the degree to which wherever the Modern Girl appeared she was always associated with romantic love, dating and premarital sex and as such posed a threat to tradition and authority. And yet it will be striking perhaps for some to contrast the emotional intensity of that and the visceral creative pleasure of consumption and self-fashioning with the largely joyless critical analyses

presented here. The unfortunate result is that the study for some will come across as extremely anodyne if always complex and critical. For others, it evokes rage and sadness.[1]

This anodyne quality is a result of a forthright approach as the introductory chapter concludes. There the authors explain their analytic tactic as such:



"[it] resists assessment of consumption as positive or negative, oppressive or liberatory, and instead emphasizes how commodity advertising and consumption were productive of the Modern Girl as both representational strategy and social agent formed in and through early processes of gendered globalization." (p. 22)

Keeping this analytic position foremost in mind, one should perhaps best begin by reading Burke's chapter, essentially the epilogue. To begin with, Burke notes that the term modernity is a word "now used with near-meaningless abandon..." (p. 363), hence the turn to "multiple modernities" and their contextualization as so well provided in this study. However, note his caution: "the emancipatory value of both modernity and capitalism have been systematically

underrated by a generation's worth of scholarship which dedicated itself, often appropriately, to correcting colonial ideology and capitalist mythmaking" (p. 363). And furthermore note this: "Historians obsessed with refuting colonial ideology have managed to overlook the degree to which some women adopted wickedness with considerable enthusiasm" (p. 365) never mind one add the enthusiasm of using beauty products and fashion to make themselves "beautiful". Burke also adds the important caveat that the notion that desire and consumption are trivial expressions of liberty has its origins in the Enlightenment's ambivalence over liberty, discipline, and indulgence, in this case that women are acting rather than self-fashioning. The consequences are not insignificant.

Burke is, it seems, asking for something more in future scholarship, perhaps something that gets closer to the consumers' personal experience, maybe more sensuous, more joyful and less judgmental. To get there will require an ethnographic turn, a shift in emphasis so as to more sensitively appreciate how the modern girl enjoyed and empowered herself, and continues to do so. That can arguably only be achieved without the over-determining burden of the edgy emphasis on race and gender as battle zones in which savvy sexist racist advertisers and companies are simply making money out of manipulating "false" dreams, desires and aspirations. In this, feminist fracture lines course through this study and the emerging reactions to it. And there, in college classes on gender, Alys Weinbaum's contribution "Racial Masquerade: Consumption and Contestation of American Identity" will be a very fine place

to start especially considering the iconic significance and recognition Man Ray's photograph "Blanche et Noire" first published in *Vogue* in 1929 has assumed over the intervening decades as for how it serves as symbolic in a sense for the arguments made throughout the study.

Burke ends by reminding us that the Modern Girl's most significant agency, her power to express her desires and identity has been sometimes solely achievable through the consumption of commodities in the capitalist marketplace. Surely this is a caution against the endemic quality underlying much of the discussions in this book that the Modern Girl is being duped by advertising rather than empowered by it. In this, despite the very great strengths of this book, and perhaps as a direct result of its critical analytic distance, it lacks the very qualities that make the Modern Girl so dangerously alluring and often-times empowered. That being said, *The Modern Girl Around the World* is a fabulous study in every respect and it will be of very great use value for years to come, especially for adding complexities to debates over the nexus of Americanization, globalization and hybridity in the all important context of the consumption and self-fashioning.

#### References

[1] See Mary Evans, "Women should go shopping", *The Times Higher Education*, June 11, 2009, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=406904>.

### Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism

by Ashley Dawson and Malini Johar Schueller (eds.)

Duke University Press, 2007, 311 pp.

ISBN: 978-0822338208

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However unpalatable certain regimes or societies may be at times, finding the means to express solidarity with and give aid to their peoples is preferable to acquiescing in the politics of war making and empire building, even when given a liberal veneer of progress and enlightenment. --Omar Dahbour, *Exceptional State* (2007) pp.128

*Exceptional State* is a timely collection of chapters on liberal imperialism. It seeks to distinguish between whether the United States is an effectively imperial or merely hegemonic state. In what amounts to a collective Bush bashing, the authors consider issues from colonial legacies to new modes of anti-imperialism, from torture to the Rumsfeldian notion of techno-dominance and more. Arranged around three themes concerning technology, gender and the Other, it will be accessible to a broad readership but will perhaps be of greatest interest to those academics in cultural studies and representation. In light of the current soul searching about the limits of American power, the questioning of the notion and practice of humanitarian intervention, the militarization of aid and philanthropic imperialism, it makes for fascinating reading. (1)

A book about "an empire . . . that dare not speak its name," Niall Ferguson's pithy words quoted to apposite effect here, (2) *Exceptional State* will perhaps be applauded by those on the left, derisively received by intellectu-



als of more central and conservative ilk and most critically of all received by historians and political economists of all persuasions. It is essentially an anthem of a passionate American intellectual resistance to imperialism in the context of cultural studies today, an anti-imperial project explicitly responding to the Iraqi and Afghani imbroglios prior to the Obama presidency. In the Faustian light of the opening months of "Obama's Vietnam," it will be sure to stimulate further explorations in the paradoxes and unfortunate and inevitable conjunctions of liberal imperialism and neoconservative worldviews such as millennialism and exceptionalism.

Above all, the introductory chapter rethinking imperialism today makes for compellingly urgent reading. As Dawson and Johar Schueller write there:

Let us be very clear about one thing: imperial U.S. policies threaten the future of humanity and the planet in the most immediate way. By providing prominent and emerging scholars with a venue to analyze the cultural contradictions of contemporary US imperialism, we intend to highlight and challenge the role of US culture in perpetuating popular authoritarianism... We thus intend our work to provide tools with which to dismantle coercive U.S. power both domestically and internationally (2007:21).

Yet some will find this goal to be a somewhat fanciful idea of what such essays are capable of achieving. Moreover, they are somewhat uneven and in many cases prone to interpretive excess and simplistic anti-imperialist hyperbole. That critique aside, in addition to the particularly strong introductory chapter,

it is in my view the chapter by Omar Dahbour's which stands alone as a serious intellectual contribution of the outmost significance to the problem at hand. Dahbour's chapter "Hegemony and Rights: On the Liberal Justification for Empire" describes the emergence of militant human rights approaches and the eclipse of passive humanitarianism. It is deeply instructive about the limits of attempting to enforce the universality of liberal values.

The other contribution of particular note is Johar Schueller's "Techno-Dominance and Torturegate: The Making of US Imperialism" which focuses on the use of torture in the war on terror and which represents one example of a continuing discourse and activity in the US Congress and civil society which is all the more significant in the current context of President Obama's capitulation on taking a more politically principled stand on the outsourcing of rendition, torture, degradation and murder. (3) In contrast, it will be interesting to see whether a critical academic discussion emerges on whether the evidence given for a national narrative justifying imperialism, specifically the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have been over-determined and especially the concluding claims for the potential power of an emerging anti-imperialist public sphere able to change American foreign policy.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and problematic chapters is "Putting an Old Africa on Our Map: British Imperial Legacies and Contemporary US Culture" by Harilous Stecopoulos. Following Henry Louis Gates Jr., Stecopoulos draws attention to the recent fascination in America for books about

"darkest" Africa and argues that they serve as active agents in the promotion of an imperialist consciousness. In posing the question "Why Victorian Africa now?" the answer given is this:

...the appeal of those representations of old Africa lies in their peculiar capacity to offer a historical justification for US geopolitical power. The allure of Victorian Africa for popular culture has less to do with US interest in exploiting a poor part of the world...than it does with the way the bankrupt state of the content renders Africa an exemplary signifier for Western intervention" (2007:222).

As in the other instances concerning Iraq and Afghanistan, the argument goes that such representations embody a racist and essentialist view of Africa and the Other in general which under-girds and maintains US dominance in Africa and elsewhere. Not only does Stecopoulos, as do the other authors arguable, give far too much agency to the texts and images under analysis as to the effect and consequence on the reader but the interpretations are debatable no matter how appealing they are in terms of how seamlessly they serve the simple anti-imperialist agenda of the study. Nevertheless, wherever one might be coming from in the political spectrum, each of these chapters will be sure to inspire useful debate in the social sciences.

The overwhelming concern for popular culture, specifically literature, film and the mass media in creating and bolstering the public appeal of an imagined benevolent imperialism requiring a sustained history of foreign intervention for hegemonic interests is a key topic in many of the



chapters. For the most part they argue that the fascination with violence and techno-domination is a central element sustaining the domestic political currency of American cultural imperialism today as is the trope of "saving brown women from brown men" while demasculating them during torture and consigning the women to passivity. As a consequence of the fundamental importance of all these issues in American society today, no less the regions which are experiencing the full brunt of the consequences of the war on terror, *Exceptional State* makes for an exceptional college text. It is worthy and by and large easy reading across the disciplines which will inspire intense debate, especially by war veterans returning to study in colleges and universities today and tomorrow.

One final question which may arise in readers' minds is if this book gives too much credence to the notion that the United States is an all powerful imperial force rather than a struggling hegemonic power past its Cold-War zenith. In this, it is equally possible to argue that the geo-political reach of the U.S. is increasingly limited and strategic and more often than not highly compromised. There, some will surely conclude that reducing the U.S. government and its shifting foreign policies to a monolithic imperial power with a stable male dominating imperialist agenda so simplifies the situation, never mind the complex relations to other states, as to make this study more of a caricature of American intellectuals teaching in English departments than anything else. To so systematically ignore the positive role that the U.S. can and does play in the world, to some extent in some contexts, and the enduring value of the Jeffersonian

Ideal, the very notions of the combined advancement of the enlightenment, liberty and democracy as projected by the U.S. as a highly compromised super-power working in concert with foreign governments in crisis are all effectively tarred black with an indiscriminatingly broad imperial brush and feathered with intellectual fluff.

#### Notes

[1] See Steven Simon, "Can the Right War Be Won?: Defining American Interests in Afghanistan." *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2009: 130-137. Also see William Easterly, "Foreign Aid Goes Military!" *The New York Review of Books* vol. 55, no. 19, December 2008 Alex de Waal, "No Such Thing as Humanitarian Intervention: Why We Need to Rethink How to Realize the 'Responsibility to Protect' in Wartime," *Harvard International Review*, March 21, 2007.

[2] See Niall Ferguson's *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, New York: Penguin, 2004.

[3] For studies which emerged several years prior to the election, see Mark Danner *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*, New York: New York Review Books, 2004, Meron Benvenisti et al., *Abu Ghraib: The Politics of Torture*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004, Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Pratel, eds., *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* and most recently Jane Mayer *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals*, New York: Vintage/Anchor Books, 2009.

## French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States

by François Cusset

Jeff Fort, Josephine Berganza  
and Marlon Jones (transl.)

University of Minnesota Press,  
2008, 388 pp.

ISBN: 978-0816647330

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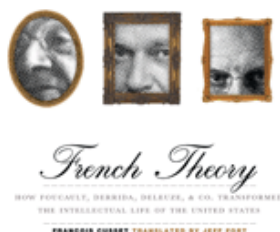
Artist and activist Jean-Jacques Lebel, who had imported beat poetry into France from the United States, once invited Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to a 1975 concert held in Massachusetts, where the two had the opportunity to meet Bob Dylan and Joan Baez backstage. Somewhat unimpressed with the two French philosophers, the folksingers had not bothered to read *Anti-Oedipus*, and likewise the two theorists were unfortunately not interested in smoking marijuana: an inadvertent misalignment of social interests, creating a somewhat awkward encounter for all parties involved. This anecdote of an ill-conceived compatibility epitomizes the spirit of comprehending the objectives of French theory and prompts an inevitable query: have we on the U.S. side of the Atlantic been able to come to terms with the French, their traditions of intellectual thought and their philosophical legacy?

Deleuze stated in *Cinema I: The Movement Image* that "Theory is itself a practice, no less than its object is...It is a conceptual practice, and it must judged in terms of the other practices with which it interacts" (in an epigraph before *French Theory's* preface), and if this inaugural quotation is an evocative portent, the book unfolds as a meta-narration of the historical misunderstandings, mistranslations and misappropriations that emerge from within the differing internal organizations of France and the United States, leading French theory into formidable political situations---involving Western capitalism, multiculturalism and postcolonialism, to

list a few---and to all-star personalities such as Judith Butler, Edward Said and Frederic Jameson. "The still unidentified flying object" known as French theory, a general term applied by Cusset himself throughout the book, which refers to the body of works originating in the 1960s and 1970s by theorists ranging from Deleuze to Virilio, remains an influential and preeminent set of academic methodologies, and there has not been a single discipline or field, including art, cultural studies, film, gender studies, history or literature, that has remained untouched by its pedagogical impetus.

Densely written, highly informed and comprehensive in its scope, connecting theory to the far-flung reaches of politics and social action both inside and outside the university setting, Cusset's book, as translated from the original French, sets out in a cultivated, distinctive fashion to rediscover why American academics became so enamored with the ideas of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and others such as Baudrillard. In his intricate descriptions of how these concepts were appropriated, skewed, then deployed in the service of politicized agendas that ranged from affirmative action to neoconservative crusades for counter-intelligentsia to deconstruction and postmodern architecture, the multifarious episodes and numerous examples are well-contextualized and historicized, expatiating how these reactionary thoughts were transmitted from French institutions and intellectual figures to those corresponding in the United States. What the French call "thought" is what Americans know as "theory," or so claims Sylvère Lotringer, who edited an older

volume of articles with Sande Cohen, similarly entitled *French Theory in America* (2001), and views the first book of French theory as John Cage's *For the Birds*. For those not well versed in French philosophy, poststructuralism and Marxism, this book may prove to be a fairly difficult task, since Cusset assumes that the reader is familiar with the suppositions associated with Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze and is capable of seeing beyond the popularized associations of power, discipline, difference, and schizophrenia to some of the more sophisticated philosophical consequences of these arguments.



Three moments of cultural contact between France and the United States---the artistic and intellectual exiles who traveled from the U.S. between 1940 and 1945; the exportation of Surrealism, Sartrean existentialism and the ideas of the Annales group; and the October 1966 conference held at Johns Hopkins University---mark what Cusset views as integral, prolonged exchanges that revolutionized viewpoints for those in both countries. Alan Sokal's notorious hoax article of 1996, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics

of Quantum Gravity" in the cultural studies journal *Social Text*, performs as a crux of vexation and controversy, launching debates about the merits of these theorists' ideas, printed through underground publishing houses such as Semiotext(e) and communicated to an American audience in the 1970s, who, in turn, disseminated French theory through many seminars, conferences and artistic movements.

Cusset assembles his book around three central themes, although there are, in fact, many more that could be recognized: the French issue of writing that becomes the American issue of reading, how capitalism was transformed into the enigma of cultural identity, and how micropolitics turned into a different question of symbolic conflicts (the "denationalizing" of texts in a global market). French theorists cast representation and language as problems in specifying any goal, pressuring existentialists, structuralists, Marxists and feminists to surpass their critiques. While the entirety of the book is engaging but concentrated, two sections are rather compelling: Chapter 6, "The Politics of Identity," and Chapter 12, "Theory as Norm: A Lasting Influence." Intellectuals from the third world, as Cusset indicates, are forced to use the "arms of the adversary," such as terms taken from the Enlightenment and rational progressivism, and the subaltern is often taken as the "blind spot of the historical process" (p. 147). French academics are set apart from the international networks set up by American universities, theorizing exile and miscegenation as a political condition of the contemporary subject (p. 296). How Foucault and Derrida are read directly in Mexico and Brazil, for example, produced

entirely different readings than those generated from within the United States.

Stanley Fish, a literary critic who pokes at the uselessness of academics and who has also reviewed this book, does not believe that such intellectuals need be essential, stating, "Although the 'textual' or the 'discursive' is...a crucial site of social contestation, the people who study that site are not crucial players in the contest" (p. 157). Theory should be given a place in contemporary times and a global destiny to fulfill, as Cusset intimates; along these lines, what is the expected responsibility of a public intellectual in the United States, and how can academic encounters foster the adoption of given ideological policies related to the present global recession, climate change and the environment, or the crisis of the humanities in education? French society, Cusset insists, is just beginning to grasp the multiple subject and the consequences of intellectual isolation, where, in the words of Walter Benjamin, their drive for knowledge derives entirely from "a feeling of obligation, not to revolution but to traditional culture" (p. 323). By exploring social critique beyond Marx and continuing to exercise political vigilance (p. 330), French theory may bring about the convergence of opposing philosophical ideologies. It not only produced "intensive hypotheses, general and specific at the same time . . . on communitarian apparatuses, discursive regimes, or the machinery of capitalist desire," but if it could reestablish opposition to polarized representations and binary discourses such as German Marxism and French Nietzscheanism and join such apparently disparate camps (p. 334), theory could coincide with

forms of activism today (even in 1978, when Foucault was arrested for visiting both sides of Berlin). Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West*, acknowledged the importance of the "art of deliberate misunderstanding" or "felicitous misreading," which was indissociable from a culture's pure essence, and this very act is what Cusset conjures for us and demands that we owe to the life of texts---or "the interval between the emergence of writing and its canonical normalization, between the logics of the intellectual field and the unpredictabilities of posterity" (p. 338)---and to an existence of devoted political engagement, either at home or abroad, that will help us fathom the conditions of our changing world.

## And While I Have Been Lying Here Perfectly Still: The Saskia Olde Wolbers Files

by Philip Monk

Art Gallery of York University,  
2009, 136 pp.

ISBN: 978-0921972532

Reviewed by Rob Harle

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This delightful little book is an enigmatic enigma. It was published in conjunction with an exhibition of Saskia Olde Wolbers at the Art Gallery of York University in 2008 and curated by Philip Monk. It is a fiction about fictional fabrications based loosely on true stories loaded with pathological lying. Be prepared to throw logic to the wind. Olde Wolbers works predominantly with short video pieces, many presented as gallery installations. These videos are fantastical stories matched by

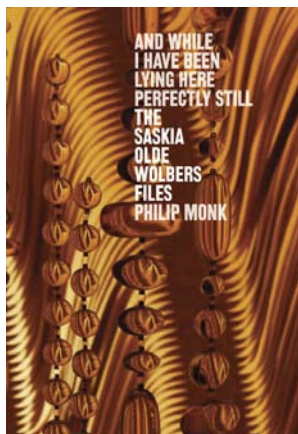
equally fantastical landscapes. Sometimes the meticulously created sets are filmed underwater to add to the dream-like fantasy of the story. Each of the videos has voice-over narrative with a hypnotic lure.

*And While I Have Been Lying Here Perfectly Still* is beautifully illustrated, with both color and black-and-white plates, together with excellent graphic presentation. The illustrations are composed of video stills, gallery installation stills and photo archives.

The first section of the book consists of *The Case Studies of Russell Clergy*, 01---*Placebo*; 02---*Interloper*; and 03---*Kilowatt Dynasty*. Each of these script Case Studies is a transcribed narrative from an Olde Wolbers video piece; these run for six minutes each and are accompanied with a foreword by Florence Wellington and an introduction by Stanley Pugh.

The second section of the book has *Postscript to a Fiction* by Philip Monk, followed by 04---*Trailer* and 05---*Deadline*, 10- and 18-minute videos respectively. Discussing the *Trailer*-video piece, Monk has this to say: A lie is not just in the telling. It is just as much what is unsaid, such as family secrets shielded from children---that is living a lie rather than telling one. *Trailer* relates the bizarre unraveling of such a family secret that was always waiting to be exposed (p. 77). Fictional fabrications indeed. In this book Olde Wolbers' artworks are treated at an interpretative remove through the genre of psychological case studies...these are case studies where the doctor/author, an expert in pseudologia fantastica, is himself a pathological liar (Back Cover). It reminds me of the

old philosophical conundrum known as Epimenides' paradox. Epimenides was a Cretan who made one immortal statement: "All Cretans are liars."



In our contemporary world where "dumbing down," banality, and superficiality seem to be the order of the day, Saskia Olde Wolbers' artwork and Monk's commentary on her artworks are like a breath of fresh air. Convoluted, challenging, sophisticated and multi-faceted, I guarantee they will intrigue you and mess up your mind in an enchanting way. But then why should you believe me?

## Gerhard Richter

by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh  
(ed.)

The MIT Press, 2009, 200 pp.

ISBN: 978-0262013512

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*Gerhard Richter*, the eighth publication of MIT's October Files series, offers a collection of interviews and essays that examine this virtuoso painter's oeuvre, his historical position and how he "fits" within the contemporary climate. Comprised of two

interviews with the editor Benjamin H.-D. Buchloh (from 1986 and 2004) and eight critical essays (by Gertrud Koch, Thomas Crow, Birget Pelzer, Hal Foster, Peter Osborne, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Johannes Meinhardt and Rachel Haidu), this book is a fine and inexpensive addition to the publications that examine the work of this talented and versatile painter.

Scholars of Richter's work will no doubt appreciate these essays, which encapsulate long-standing debates about Richter's contributions. For example, the philosopher Peter Osborne argues that Richter's paintings "register the historical negation of the representational function of painting by photography, by conceding to photography the primary determination of the representation form of the image—both by making photographs their subject matter and by themselves submitting to a quasi-photographic mode of 'objective' representational mimesis" (p. 95). This view, he tells us, is also a response to notion of "the aesthetic" offered by an art historian, Paul Wood. In all honesty, while some of the essays were lively, Hal Foster's for example, much of the academic sparring seems a bit contrived when compared to visual aliveness of Richter's work.

One much discussed topic is the relationship between painting and photography, since Richter has often used photographs as source material. Another theme that has captivated the contributors is where the superb paintings of Gerhard Richter "fit" in a culture where painting is now "dead." Hal Foster delves into this through Michael Fried's work and the debates about the death of painting in the 1970s, which no doubt Richter

was aware of early in his career since his first exhibition in the U.S. took place at the Reinhard Onnasch Gallery in 1973. Even the product description is looks at the achievements of Gerhard Richter within the "painting is dead" frame; characterizing Gerhard Richter (born in 1932) "as modernity's last painter and as painting's modern savior, [he seems] to represent both the end of painting and its resurrection." The comments don't seem to take into account painters such as Francis Bacon (1909–1992), Lucian Freud (b. 1922) who, although a bit older, are still seen by many as artists who showed that painting is still "alive" to those who paint. Jasper Johns, Jr. (b. 1930) and David Hockney (b. 1937) also come to mind as successful painters who continue to develop their craft.

Given the contemporary nature of Richter's work, I found the "painting is dead" question more academic than pertinent. It is my impression that Richter does as well. When questioned about his urge to paint he has said: "I am bourgeois enough to go on eating with a knife and fork, just as I paint in oil on canvas (p. 128). Moreover, his web page biography states: "Richter's beliefs are credited with refreshing art and rejuvenating painting as a medium during a period when many artists chose performance and ready-made media." All in all, reading these discussions brought to mind earlier pronouncements of paintings demise, most famously by the Salon painter Paul Delaroche (1797-1856), who reportedly said after seeing his first daguerreotype in 1839 that "from today, painting is dead."

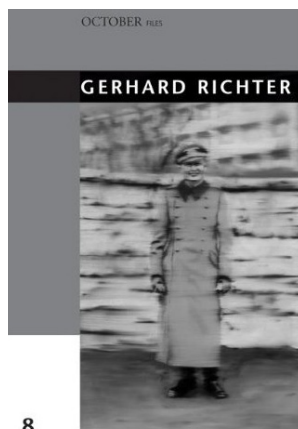
While he is a traditionalist technique-wise, Richter's works



acknowledges current political events and has embraced newer forms of image making as source material. Indeed, one of his most challenging works is *October 18, 1977*, a series based on photographs that charted a well-known event in Germany that took place on that date. Briefly, three young German radicals, members of the militant Baader-Meinhof group, who were found dead in a Stuttgart prison. Although they were said to be suicides, many people suspected that the state police murdered them. Eleven years after this traumatic event, Richter created the 15 paintings known as the *October 18, 1977* series, based on photographs of moments in the lives and deaths of four members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), a German left-wing terrorist group that perpetrated a number of kidnappings and killings throughout the 1970s. His paintings were based on newspaper and police photographs and he reworked these documentary sources to create dark, blurred, and diffuse works. [Images of the works in this series are available on Richter's page, see October series: <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/exhibitions/exhibition.php?exID=343>.] [I presume it is a coincidence, though a compelling one, that this book is published by MIT's October series, and edited by the editors of *October* journal.]

Overall, the strongest chapters of the book are the two interviews with Richter himself. His own words are more engaging and compelling than much of the analysis of his work. At times, also, there are surprising comments. In my earlier readings of Richter books, I must have missed Richter's disdain for Cézanne's works, noted in the 1986 interview. Richter and

Buchloh briefly touch upon a remark the artist made to the effect that many amateur photographs are better than the best Cézanne. In the 2004 interview, when Richter said he wished he could paint like Matisse, I was reminded of Matisse's comment that Cézanne was the "Father of us all" and wondered if he Richter's feelings about Cézanne have changed since he made his Cézanne comment in the 1980s. I was less surprised that Richter appreciated the shimmering qualities of Bridget Riley's paintings because some of his recent paintings of scientific elements actually bring her work to mind, as I discuss in the following paragraph.



If one wanted to read only one chapter of the *Gerhard Richter* book, I would recommend the final one, his interview with Buchloh from 2004. Richter talks extensively about his *Strukturen* [*Structures*] paintings. Inspired by microscopic photographs, these images include many devices from Richter's earlier work (blurriness, monochromatic, etc.) and yet have a visual dynamic that is strikingly fresh. I was not surprised to learn how much he has relished producing them. He tells Buchloh:

"I waited far too long for a motif to finally fall into my hands that fascinated me, that I absolutely wanted to paint. This is how the four large new paintings came about. I called them *Strukturen* [*Structures*] because they happen to form kind of a structure. And because in some cases I don't even know what kind of substance the illustration is supposed to depict. Only the original, the microscopic photograph from the popular science magazine, has any claim to illustrating science." (p. 167).

As inexpensive introductions to contemporary artists, the October Files series from The MIT Press is a winner. These books give the general public access to the work of this artist of the postwar period who has altered our understanding of art in significant ways and prompted a critical literature that is both sophisticated and sustained. In the book, the use of black and white reproductions is not as problematic as is often the case in inexpensive productions since many of his works are monochromatic to begin with, although the reduced size is, as always, problematic. Color images translated into black and white are well done, but I can't image that anyone who has not seen the originals will genuinely grasp the power of Richter's visuals. Given this, I would recommend that readers look for originals and/or turn to Richter's web page to supplement the book. Created and maintained by Joe Hage, the Richter web page is at [www.gerhard-richter.com](http://www.gerhard-richter.com). On the site, there are also audios and videos that supplement this publication.



## Bill Viola in Conversation with Adam Weinberg

27 October 2009, The  
Whitney Museum's 2009  
Annenberg Lecture

Event web site: <http://whitney.org>

*Reviewed by Giovanna  
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"I don't really believe anymore that we are meant to go it alone," intoned Viola at the Whitney Museum's annual Annenberg Lecture. "Our task is to teach," he continued, "for we become broader and deeper when we experience the work of those who have gone before us to take our place in the flow of time."

To this purpose Viola opened his talk with quotations from *Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets*, verses composed at the end of life from poets about to take their last breath---moments, much like Viola's body of video art, that would mark a transition from this world into the next life. Reading passages from the text, he described the poems as a single brushstroke painted at the very moment that one steps from a material existence into immateriality, a transformation of death into life, like art, through an act of creation.

Speaking not in the theater but in the common areas of the museum's portico, where he was framed by simulcast projections of himself against *Passage into Night*, a 2005 work in which a reflected image advances into a pool of water, the space seemed eerily crypt-like, the projections disembodied and ephemeral, like much of his artwork, in

which figures emerge and recede from ulterior dimensions of time and space.

He compared the creative process to a ritual act of destruction and creation in which the artist, as Prometheus, journeys to the edge of possibility (or emptiness) and contemplates the force required to externalize the fire within. Viola looked to technology, the Greeks' *techné*, for the means to "trick" nature into revealing her secrets, to translate revelation metaphysically into art. "Never has there been a time of greater possibility," he emphasized, with illumination extending from stained glass to digital machines, synchronization codes and electrical circuitry that can scan lines of visual data into a single frame and vibrate at incredible rates of speed to suggest amazing movement in order to reproduce a single, simulated image of reality. The digital revolution ultimately emanates from the mere four watts of energy that power the electrical system of the human brain, he explained, yet like the blood vessels of the body, technology can be used for purposes of destruction as well as to express human connectivity and life's imponderable mysteries. He pointed to his most recent installation, *Pneuma* (1994/2009), in the current exhibition, *Bodies of Light* at the James Cohan Gallery in New York, as an example. Here, projections merge and submerge from indistinct shadows as grains of shifting memories, sensations or dreams. Each time light passes through the body it reveals another layer of skin from a figure that is barely recognizable, until eventually the body disappears altogether. Yet the image appears to linger indefinitely in the penumbra of consciousness that leads from

one state of being to another.

He admonished artists to learn from a position of weakness--to work in the messy areas of love, not its pristine repositories where one places things one has forgotten how to use. "Position yourself both within and outside of yourself," he advised, "so as to work as though there is someone greater than you in the room watching you. Masterpieces tell you nothing," he cautioned. "It's about not figuring out the end until you get there."

At the Whitney, Viola's voice accompanied the screening of *Passage into Night* as a transfiguration occurring at his back. A silhouetted woman garbed in black advanced toward the viewer at a pace timed to coincide with the duration of Viola's remarks. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, we become aware of her inner radiance as glints of light dancing over a body of water. "She is almost here"---he turned to regard her from time to time, until ultimately, she was immersed, as art, in her own reflected image. In certain ways, he pointed out, the image echoes that of *Fire Woman* (also 2005), inspired by the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, in which a dying man, consumed in flames, falls into an ocean, where the flames elongate, expanding into brightness as prisms of light.

## What's under Your Hat?

by Lola Barrera and Inaki Penafiel

The Cinema Guild, 2006  
DVD, 75 min.

Distributor's website: <http://www.cinemaguild.com>

*Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg,  
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*What's Under Your Hat?* is a film about outsider art and the mystery of the creative quest. Above all it is the story of the late Judy Scott, of the love between her and her twin sister and the remarkable work at the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, California. It is a profound film that raises all manner of questions about art and creativity.

Judy Scott was born with Down's syndrome, deaf and mute. She was institutionalized at the age of 6 with devastating emotional consequences for her mother and suffering for her sister Joyce who later in life resolved to be united again so as to heal the pain of that separation. That love and this unfolding goal is the thread and the plot from whence this remarkable story found itself unwittingly woven.

Silences within. In silence she weaves, methodically collecting found objects and tying them meticulously together with threads into marvelously textured and colored packages. Strange inverted bird nest like forms, the most peculiar fetish-like cocoons, wondrous in all. We cannot ever know what she might have been trying to say if anything, whether these forms are expressive of ideas or feelings that she was working out or rather more simply the exercise of control and repetitive creative action with a therapeutic result. What we can tell is that she was clearly aware of her sense of purpose and of her identity as an artist in the meticulous and focused attention immanent in her work and the process itself, no less in the way she presented herself increasingly as an artist through the symbolic act of wrapping her head - almost ritually tying it and then wearing a

hat - thus the title: "What's Under Your Hat?"

There are particular aspects of the way in which Judy Scott worked that stand out in this film - the sense of complete absorption, the highly organized and meticulous approach in the calm absoluteness of each action, the finality, and above all - the silence within. With a sense of exquisite economy, she cuts and wraps producing an extraordinary balance between bulk and delicacy, embroidered masses of strange beauty. Through the repetitive act of wrapping found objects, shoes, Christmas lights, folded blankets, records, CD's, and dish racks, boxes and pieces of card board, a grocery cart, a bag of potato chips, through the meditative act of cutting and tying and weaving, the most acutely original forms emerge. And when the final knot is tied, it is done, the process complete. She moves on.

What is there to say but appreciate the beauty, the mystery, the love from which all this sprung, the debt to the sensitivity of those who work in partnership with such artists at the Creative Growth Art Center overseen by Tom di Maria, the thoughtful and nurturing Executive Director. There is within him and those he works with a gentle and qualified wisdom, gestures towards our uncontainable urge to make sense of the ineffable that our capacity for speech and writing impel. Roger Cardinal, art critic, Jack Fischer, art dealer, John Cooke, spider expert, Stan Peterson, artist and teacher, Sylvia Seventy, Judy's angel. For the scientist, her loving brother in law, her silence and her art was that of the underwater spider that weaves an underwater dome and fills it with air bubbles to live within. For Roger Cardi-

nal, her art seemed quest-like, a means for creating stability, not a struggle but an expression of certainty, perhaps even of the bond between her and her twin.

She gathers, she hides. When the time comes, she gently with complete certainty begins to weave. When she is done, she moves on. As Tom di Maria relates, what makes Judy Fisher's work so interesting is its enigmatic quality. It embodies her determination to collect and keep and it speaks of an entirely unpretentious process, perhaps spiritual. But one should also note though that there may be more than meets the eye in terms of how conscious she may have been about the creative process for see how carefully she looks through art books and magazines. And note there too how this methodical nature, her systematic sense of careful and measured organization, is expressed in her every motion, from the way she places her books below her chair to peeling a banana, to wrapping her head, to folding and placing objects, to cutting each thread and tying each knot.

What we see here is not only something of how her nature finds its expression in her art but even something of her genesis as an artist. Consider first and foremost, the desire to collect and keep and thus secure a sense of control. As di Maria notes, this is an issue of intense concern to anyone who has ever lived in an institution. Consider also the conceptual need to focus one's energy on achieving an end. Finally, consider that magical moment of inspiration in which these imperatives and the creative need first found its sudden solution, the immediate self-realization, and thereafter the quest repeated differently,

endlessly. Judy Scott leaves us in awe with the most interesting of objects we recognize as enormously aesthetically sophisticated, a quality implicitly recognized both within and without, that is, by herself and by ourselves - we on the other side of the silence.

Genesis. Joyce, during a meditation retreat, arrives at a quiet place within where she realizes there is no reason to be apart from her twin any longer. She resolves to reunite, to be made and to make whole. She brings her sister to live with her and realizes she will need to find a way to look after Judy during the day. Being creative herself, she recognizes that so may her twin be and hence enrolls her in the Creative Growth Art Center. And then there was nothing for the first two years, or was there?

In the film, very little if anything is made of Judy's first engagement at the art center, that is in her disinterested scribbling phase in which she created "loop de loop" drawings and then quickly bored turned to playing solitaire. However, perhaps there is more to be made of this initial phase in hind sight considering the elemental features of her mature work - methodical repetitive encircling motion including in particular dimension, and finality, that is, in her immediate lack of any further interest in the form after its completion. These features were there in the first stages of her genesis as an "accidental" artist if one re-examines her "scribbles" not dismissively as uncontrolled mechanical activity for the sake of mere minimal compliance but instead as germinal. How so? They were thread-like in the way in which they looped back to repeat the controlled gesture. Most importantly of all,

towards dimension, she always covered the whole surface and then turned the page over and continued on the other side. And when she was done. She was done.



Later, in time after she had made friends with Sylvia Seventy, a partner artist in residence, in my mind's eye, she seems to have extended these expressive tactics, to have found a way to expand her interest in repetitive motion in terms of how it can accumulate form, texture, color and dimension. In a flash of recognition, inherently private but in the sense of an express communication, in the work's exhibition and reception, in effect dialogic. Over the course of the rest of her public life as an artist, complex aesthetic objects never seen or known before, a new form of woven expressionism was born. She seems to have been most assuredly aware of all of this.

Such peregrinations seem to haunt the minds of those who either knew Judy Scott or appreciated her art and her stubborn determination and self-composure. For instance, for Tom di Maria and Stan Peterson, this raises a slightly sad sense of fascination and wonder, that while outsider art is neither dia-

logic nor autistic it does presuppose a communicative intent. Judy's art inspires in Tom's mind the notion of a "prepared spontaneity" and raises all manner of questions: Did she make objects or art? Was she unraveling and relating things that had been unable to talk about but wanted to express? Does it call into question whether we really know what it means to be creative? Certainly, as they more confidently feel, the creative use of repetitive gesture induces a sense of coherence that can acquire a formal and sophisticated power.

What we learn from the record of the context itself from which her work emerged, is that it and the work of the other artists there, is and was characterized by a special feeling of concentrated, focused energy in which ideas and inspiration move around like the paint dripped by chance from one painter's work onto another's. And yet despite Roger Cardinal's fine grained thoughts on the quality of this experience, we might question his conclusion: Is this an urgent form of essential self-expression which we respond to because we are witnessing someone struggling to find their voice and consolidate themselves? Or is it something far more ineffable and in that - enduringly enigmatic.

Finally, What's Under Your Hat? provides a deeply moving experience, a remarkable documentary of an artist's life, of the embodied and externalized expression of the intense physical and emotional bond that exists between twins and of the power of art to heal. "I remember this cold space in the bed and found my mother in the kitchen...I remember her teeth chattering...I did not get that she [Judy] would not be back...there

was a lot of pain and loss that was never dealt with...it was as if she ceased to exist" - no more. Judy died wrapped in her sister's arms after dinner one night, a metaphor as fitting as the continual act of wrapping sometimes twinned objects in the soft thread of the "perfect love" unspoken they shared.

## Camoupedia---A Compendium of Research on Art, Architecture and Camouflage

by Roy R. Behrens

Bobolink Books, 2009, 464 pp.

ISBN: 978-0971324468

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Conflating the words camouflage and encyclopedia as a title is clearly an attempt to disguise the true intent of this volume. The outcome of enthusiastic research it is, but an entertaining summary of the field it also manages to be. It's hard to believe that it was only in Modern times that soldiers were obliged to take measures to survive if only to enjoy the peace. Concealing their presence on the battlefield to achieve this desirable outcome was less to do with returning as heroes and more a part of the development of industrialized warfare. Science and technology conspired to deliver death from beyond the horizon with machines of war so cumbersome that they immobilized the soldier. Hiding and obscuring physical evidence of intent was as necessary for the squaddie and the GI as the generals' conspiracies to ensure the continuation of the conflict--

--good for business, then as now.

The band of brothers we encounter alphabetically in this research are, for the most part, the boys in the backroom; and we gather they had a lot of fun--razzle, dazzle, baffle and zébrage, especially for the hell of sail or other extreme environments: ice, snow and rain, and more rain. Behrens has, it seems, tracked down every last one of the brothers: printmakers, painters, sculptors, even art theorists and set designers, well versed in forced perspective. Apparently architects made the best field *camoufleurs*, scattering their flowers, their nettings and their *trompe l'oeil* while under fire from the enemy. Painters, however, trained as they were to touchup and varnish, were not good at leaving details to subordinates. Usually wrangled into Groups, Corps and Societies, *camoufleurs* are listed here from amongst the talent of England, France, Australia, South Africa and, predominantly, the U.S.A., where the author is based. Curiously, the adversaries marshaled under the Kaiser are hardly mentioned, except in one instance when some German airmen dropped a message to soldiers of le Grande Alliance suggesting improvements to their methods of concealment--*wir sprechen Technik*.

Claims abound as to who was the first to propose concealment in warfare; Shakespeare gets a mention though not his Forest of Dunsinane. Abbott and son Gerald Thayer's article and book on *Coloration in Animals* in 1909 in the US prompted serious interest from the intelligentsia if not the military. It was not until later in the Great War of 1914-1918 that together with other sources in France and the U.K., its usefulness became recog-

nized. The word *denature* was used to describe the painting of familiar objects in strange ways; camouflage became "the Cubists' revenge," something denied as coincidental by its main protagonist, Georges Braque, another *camoufleur*; the British surrealist Roland Penrose was another in the following World War, publishing a wartime Home Guard manual on the subject, with a chapter entitled "How To Turn Yourself into a Hedge"; the famed Comédie-Française actor Jean-Louis Barrault (described as a comedian!) also served in a camouflage unit. Robin Darwin (a descendent of the definer of the species), presciently recommended interdisciplinary creative approaches to a British War Ministry; "that artists and designers are of undoubted value in the development of camouflage, but that they should work alongside engineers, architects and scientists." And the psychologists came up with the term *legendary psychasthenia*, or "the inability of people to distinguish themselves from their surroundings, social or otherwise," a term surely useful in many contexts today. And camouflage toilet tissue came into being with a U.S. Patent Number!

Camouflage technology emerges as the reader works through the book, picking out detail from the background of seemingly endless anecdotal biography entertainingly presented, although of curiosity value to any but the serious researcher. Experiments by each and every recruit to the cause led to hosts of visual treats guaranteed to alarm if not succeed in their purpose: in the mainly thumbnail-sized images we get a sense of the shock and awe value of the designs for ships in particular, the purpose of which were



to deceive rather than conceal. There is little evidence of any serious science-based cognitive evaluation of the success of the various illusions, though a team at the Kodak Labs came closest, risking risibility with the invention of a "visibility meter"! It was however, part of measuring the process of denaturizing visual memory and confounding tacit knowledge of the natural world. The phenomenology of a state of war, the situated actions of helmsmen in the collisions and other accidents at sea attributed to dazzle-painted ships for instance, became the real measures of success determined by commanders.

The paraphernalia of camouflage continues to fascinate visual artists even as recently as 2009 in Australia, where Sussi Porsborg installed *Portable Cenotaph*: working with army blankets, clothing and textiles gathered from around the world, visitors are encouraged to select from the camouflage patterns that take their attention and, with scissors and sewing machine, construct small objects to become part of the exhibit.

Self-published, this is no coffee table book, and it suffers from sheer quantity of entries as a compendium should but does not lack visual fascination, even though the scale of most of the riveting images are too often postage-stamp size. The obsessive research contained in this compendium delivers a prodigious quantity of leads into the field. It is as if a mountain of post-it stickies had been transcribed and ordered alphabetically, and even the author admits he had to call "cease-fire" as the research results escalated. As such this volume will be a leading contemporary source book, complete with a

bibliography of more than a thousand titles, some 40 from Behrens himself.

## Between Earth and Sky: Our Intimate Connections to Trees

by Nalini M. Nadkarni

University of California Press, 2009, 336 pp.

ISBN: 978-0520261655

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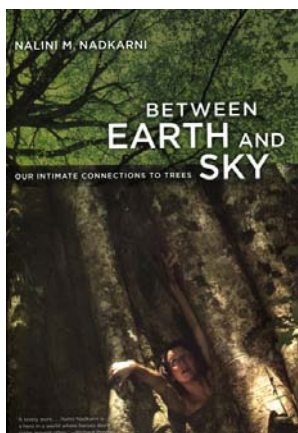
*Between Earth and Sky* is a wonderful study on trees by a world-renowned canopy biologist, weaving personal stories, scientific knowledge, poetry and---although to a much lesser extent---photography into a very readable companion to all one may want to know about trees (this is the point of view of the reader) as well as to all one should know about them (this would be the point of view of the author, who does much more than just love the object of her research). In the first place, however, this is a feel-good book with a clear message: Trees are not just a fascinating part of nature, they are also immensely profitable for humans.

Having received a Guggenheim Fellowship to support the public dissemination of her work, Nadkarni knows how to raise interest in her passion for trees among a wide range of audiences, including those who never go to science museums or read books. The author's strong commitment as well as her ability to entertain---in the good sense of the word---are well illustrated in *Between Earth and Sky*, which does tackle the issue from a very singu-

lar perspective, namely the way trees help us to be(come) more human. It explains what trees are, how they are built, how they function in their environment and how they form forests, but not why cultures have selected this or that "idea" of a tree (why we want trees to resemble human bodies, or vice versa, for instance), nor why certain ideas of trees are being challenged or chased by other ones (what does Deleuze's plea for the rhizome, which brings him explicitly to make a case against trees, mean for the cultural paradigm we are living in?). In short, Nadkarni's science is real science (and one really learns a lot) but it remains light science (and after reading this book one understands why Nadkarni receives so many invitations to speak to all kind of audiences, from political lobby groups to churchgoers). As a corollary, the environmentalist issues are of course present throughout the book---and one can only admire the author's acute sense of an ethics of care---but the level on which Nadkarni discusses them is always the strictly personal one: People first have to understand what trees can mean for them; then they will behave differently and life will become nicer and brighter. Her proposal to reduce the recidivism rate in state prison through gardening can be a good example of this attitude. A dendrophile myself, I will not contest these benefits, but the author's innate optimism and good temper are sometimes a little one-dimensional. Therefore, the reader will have to complement this study with darker ones, such as Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (1992), a cultural and literary history of the "deforestation" of the Western imagination (usefully included by the author herself in the final



list of recommended readings).



The basic structure of the book obeys two different logics. First of all, Nadkarni follows Abraham Maslow's well-known schema of human needs (cf. his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation") and expands it in a personal version that resembles---yes---a kind of Christmas tree with eight layers: physical needs, security, health, play and imagination, time and history, symbols and language, spirituality, and mindfulness. Each of the chapters (after an introductory chapter offering some very interesting basic information on the definition of trees and forests, with amazing insights on the study of canopy life) gives a global overview of what trees have to offer in all these respects---always with a very strong emphasis on the positive aspects of trees. In Nadkarni's worldview, trees only give shelter; they never kill people when they fall upon them, so to speak. In spite of these restrictions, one can only say that the story told is very convincing. The second major aspect of the book's structure is its trans-cultural dimension: Nadkarni reconciles the viewpoints of many different people---peasants and city-dwellers, canopy scholars and Inuit who have never seen a tree in their lives, artists and

prison inmates---as well as she manages to seamlessly gather Western and non-Western or contemporary and less-modern voices. This is a great achievement, and the resulting homogenization cleverly underlines the very holistic approach of man and tree in the book.

Targeting a very broad audience, the author has nevertheless managed to present here an amazing wealth of scientific data on trees. Yet the presentation of these data is always extremely user friendly and constantly highlighted by the use of a kind of material that is usually missing in scientific prose, even if it belongs to the subfield of scientific vulgarization: poetry. Nadkarni's book is also a personal anthology of poetry on trees, and this is a refreshing decision.

## The California Deserts: An Ecological Rediscovery

by Bruce M. Pavlik

University of California Press,  
2008, 384 pp.

ISBN: 978-0520251403

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*The California Deserts: An Ecological Rediscovery* is an in-depth study of the three deserts---the Great Basin, Mojave and Sonoran---that together make up the California desert bioregion. The book comprehensively examines the geography, geology, climate, soil and waters in the three deserts and maps the historical evolution of this bioregion's ecology. Core to the discussion is the understanding of ecology as "community"---a

system of interactions and inter-dependencies between physical features/conditions, plants and animals. This approach to the ecological system as a community makes a useful intervention toward studying the region's biodiversity and specificity; this has implications for understanding the region as a cultural landscape as well. The text enjoys a rich range of primary sources that provide insight into distinct experiences, narratives and understandings of the desert landscapes. Some of the most striking accounts include those of early explorers such as John C. Fremont and *Los Angeles Times* reporter John Lummis. The text itself begins with a compelling introduction, "The Lost Basket," which uses the object of a native Indian basket to weave varied temporalities, first in the hands of its native Indian users in the 19th century, and later through its discovery by botanist Mary DeDecker in the 20th century. Quotations from desert philosopher John Van Dyke are carefully interwoven to suggest how the desert landscape is at once harsh and filled with solace. This is one of Van Dyke's succinct comments:

Not in vain these wastes of sand. And this time not because they develop character in desert life, but simply because they are beautiful in themselves and good to look upon whether they be life or death (p. 56).

The study of American wilderness in anthropology, American and cultural studies builds a consciousness of colonial exploits and their impacts on native peoples. Bruce Pavlik skillfully negotiates through this, contextualizing a spread of data and accounts. The ecological and cultural diversity of the California desert landscapes

is historicized, and this posits culture and ecology as interactive and coextensive with each other. Both are living, fragile and versatile categories. This understanding is crucial, because in the occupation with colonial and consumerist exploitation of cultural landscapes, cultures can often be reified as fixed and determinate categories. Pavlik's focus on how ecology and culture interact factors in the elements of contingency and indeterminacy in the constitution of cultural landscapes. The desert landscape is posited as vernacular, layered, and each encounter with it is validated within a wider discourse of re-discovery that is the basis of Pavlik's study. He states:

Perhaps exploration, exploitation, and understanding are necessary before we can cherish a land. When a society is newly immersed in wilderness, the bravery and cruelty of the pioneer, the necessary emphasis on survival and the strong focus required for scientific inquiry simply forestall contemplation and artistic rediscovery. In California, the final rediscovery began when it was clear that the deserts had been subdued by roads, railroads, and reservations and welcome for all to come (p. 54). The concluding section of the text examines current threats to the California desert bioregion. These include human incursion, introduction of non-native species and depletion of resources, including water. Though concerned about how the desert landscape can be overwhelmed, Pavlik is not pessimistic as he asserts that deserts are self-healing. Studies of disturbance, population dynamics, and succession tell us that species have an intrinsic ability to recover and communities to recuperate. Processes

of dispersal, colonization, soil formation, and vegetation development impart resilience to biological systems that allows persistence (p. 296).

Bringing together dimensions of ecological study, this book presents an interdisciplinarity necessary for the study of cultural landscapes. Its empirically informed and conversational writing style is complemented with a spread of illustrations and images that enhance the reading experience. References are usefully divided according to the chapters and sections of the manuscript.

## Recipes for Disaster

by John Webster  
Icarus Films, 2008  
DVD, 63 min.

Distributor's website: <http://icarusfilms.com>

## The Axe in the Attic

by Ed Pincus and Lucia Small  
The Cinema Guild, 2007  
DVD, 110 min.

Distributor's website: [www.theaxeintheattic.com](http://www.theaxeintheattic.com)

## Umbrella

by Du Haibin  
Icarus Films, 2007  
DVD, 93 min.

Distributor's web site: <http://icarusfilms.com>

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Although they concentrate their respective attentions on supposedly separate issues---the

human factor, environmental catastrophes and rising consumerism in developing countries---the questions raised by this set of documentaries are strictly intertwined. The viewpoint can move from Denmark to the Southern U.S.A. or China, but the focus remains on the same arguments: the mainstream directions of economics and the responsibility of governments and people for their behavior, collectively as a society and individually as citizens in daily life. The environmental endangerment related to greenhouse gases and climate change remains in the background, while the perspective remains in the social impacts at various levels of the global economic system.

*Recipes for Disaster* is a Finnish documentary that tackles the question of the excessive amounts of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> continuously sent into the atmosphere. Usually, remarks the director, people blame corporations and industries for what is going wrong with the planet---but what about the global mistakes that we daily pursue in a collective commitment to mistaken attitudes? "We are addicted to oil," explains John Webster, filming himself, "and it's going to lead us to destruction."

The film develops along six sections, whose major concerns are forms of denial (It's not my problem, psychological denial, rationalizing bad behavior, persistence in error, hang on to what you have and innocently happy). The director likens our behavior to sawing off a branch on which we sit and remaining happy. "Environmental warning lights are flashing like crazy," he explains, "yet how do we respond? By consuming even more oil."

Webster and his family decided to experiment with a one-year period of oil detox, living without any fossil-fuel derived tool, like cars or airplanes, and avoiding everything packaged in plastics, such as take-away food, make-up, shampoo, toothpaste, toys, etc. "An oil celibacy," they call it, while recording the transformation of their habits and evaluating the results in terms of reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The film confronts us with the depth of our current oil addiction, revealing acute withdrawal symptoms. We know that excess consumption is not doing us any improvement; rather it is going to destroy everything we hold dear, but it appears as if we just cannot break free. These are the recipes for disaster, Webster concludes---the seemingly innocent daily failures of common people, which lead step by step to destruction.

And destruction can happen. *The Axe in the Attic* presents a 60-day road trip from New England to Texas in the aftermath of Katrina, the hurricane that struck New Orleans in 2005. Its impact was among the worst ever for the U.S.A. in terms of human lives (at least 1,836 casualties) and economic damage (\$81.2 billion US). The film also illustrates the catastrophic failure of protective agencies to deal with the resulting flood. Doubts are raised about the true will of the government to protect the poorest citizens of New Orleans. The title itself refers to the wisely self-consistent attitude of keeping a hatchet in the attic to smash the ceiling and reach, in case of flood, a safer position on the roof.

The two filmmakers, Lucia Smal and Ed Pincus, captured along the way stories from peo-

ple displaced by the disaster. They simply pointed the camera and filmed scenes of wreckage, confusion and hysteria. As the journey approaches the hurricane zone, the mood darkens. A surreal atmosphere of calm prevails as days are spent managing endless government and insurance paperwork. The evacuees allow us to witness loss, dignity and perseverance, but also humor, although they feel like exiles in their own country. Above all, they seek meaning in what has been happening to them since Katrina. Thus, the breakdown of trust between the government and its citizens dramatically emerges, along with evidence of the scarce social resiliency of modern America. The influence of race and class on the destiny of the evacuees is questioned, as is the ethics of documentary filmmaking itself.

The last work discussed here, *Umbrella*, shows the contemporary results of the economic reforms initiated in China in 1978, aimed at financing the modernization of the nation. Farming is still the basis for the Chinese way of life, but now those sweeping transformations have become plainly visible in a country increasingly divided between its rural and urban regions. Those farmers traditionally engaged in land cultivation continuously migrate toward the cities, where the global economy seems to flourish before spreading through the whole world, like the ubiquitous low-price Chinese umbrella.

Using a purely observational style, with no narration or commentary---one can simply observe labor routines or read written sentences, maxims and exhortations---*Umbrella* is divided into five parts, each corresponding to a social group.

The first scene shows the workaday life of young employees of Umbrella Factory in Guangdong Province---a monotonous, endlessly and rapidly repeated routine for which they are paid a meager piece rate. In another part of China, the Yiwu-Zhejiang province, a successful farmer has become an entrepreneur, running an umbrella manufacturing business at a massive shopping mall (Wholesale Market), where the same umbrellas are sold at much higher prices by wholesale merchants, who are among modern China's most effective social climbers.

The film then shifts to Shanghai and follows students and graduates struggling to find employment through a hyper-competitive higher-education system or undergoing ideological regimentation at a garrison of the People's Liberation Army. Once again, the recruits come from farms in the countryside, looking for another life. The final scene documents the population in a village of Henan province, consisting mostly of the old and infirm, as younger generations seek their fortunes elsewhere. Those elder farmers struggle specifically to recover a premature harvest of drought-impacted wheat and in general to survive amidst the combined forces of globalization and the new Chinese economy.

Taken together, these documentaries offer a comprehensive historical and societal portrait of our times---a rather depressing one, unfortunately. Although dissimilar, all capture another view of the scarcely sustainable trends of modernity. We can clearly feel the fickleness and superficial prosperity of several situations along with the rising economic tide, but what emerges as a major obstacle

is the difficulty of engaging in a real change of perspectives. "Even in a sinking boat," we are told by John Webster, "passengers wait for the very last chance before leaving." It is the same for social behavior and economics: people tend to favor conventional conduct, no matter if in the long term it is the losing choice. Everywhere in the world, whatever the situation, people can overcome almost any problem, but first they must overcome themselves and their societal divisions.

## The Revenge of Gaia

by James Lovelock  
Basic Books, 2006, 177 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0713999143

## The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning

by James Lovelock  
Basic Books, 2009, 278 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0465015498

## Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet

by Mark Lynas  
National Geographic, 2008, 288 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0007209057

## The Bridge at the Edge of the World

by James Speth  
Yale University Press, 2008, 295 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0300151152

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For years the news from science about climate change, although never of one voice, has gone from bad to worse. To borrow a line from Lily Tomlin, no matter how pessimistic I get, I can't keep up. Take the most recent assessment report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for example. *Climate Change 2007* had barely been released when one of its most sobering predictions was overtaken by events. That summer the northern polar ice cap retreated as far as the report predicted would be likely - in 2030.

*Climate Change 2007* consists of three volumes summarizing scientific findings on climate. Each volume is about a thousand pages long. Eight hundred contributing authors and 450 lead authors wrote the texts, which were reviewed by 2,500 scientists from 130 countries. *Climate Change 2007* is widely considered the most authoritative summary of what is happening with Earth's climate and what is likely to happen over the next century. These volumes provide the scientific basis for international discussions about a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which will expire in 2012.

The research that the IPCC gathered indicates that due largely to human activities, worldwide temperatures in the next century will rise somewhere between 1.4° to 5.8° Celsius (approximately 2° to 10° Fahrenheit.) What do a few degrees matter? A lot, if Earth's history is any indication. During the last ice age, average global temperatures were only about 6° C less than today. At the low end of the IPCC's predicted rise, we can expect an unabated wave of extinctions, severe storms, and widespread desertification. In the midrange,

add in submersion of New York and other coastal cities, transformation of the Amazon rainforest into desert scrub, and world famines. At around 4° C tipping points are likely to take things out of human hands. At the upper end of the predictions, most of Earth, both land and sea, will become a biological desert.

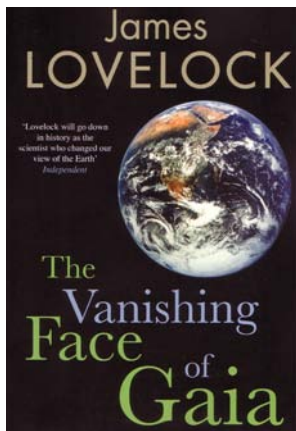
The texts of *Climate Change 2007* are technical and emotionless. Many of them reference complex computer models. Yet the volumes have a cheerful, user-friendly look. There are attractively colored maps, charts, and graphs, and tables with pleasant background tones. Section headings are in color. Apocalypse is in the air, but the visual presentation is pretty. The effect is a little schizophrenic.

Non-specialists will find the report dauntingly long and eye-glazingly detailed. A good distillation of *Climate Change 2007* is Mark Lynas's *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*, which delivers the IPCC's message in clear, non-technical language. Each degree of temperature rise gets its own chapter, proceeding from low to high, and from familiar climate-related tragedies like Hurricane Katrina and the Australian drought to cascades of unfamiliar disasters. The book won the Royal Society Science Books Prize, Britain's most prestigious prize for science writing.

IPCC reports provide policymakers with information necessary to develop responses to climate change. The reports also affect public discourse. Just how dramatically can be gauged by reading *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* by Thomas Friedman, a prominent pundit and bellwether of received wisdom in the U.S. For many years Friedman has skillfully charted a course that



follows the slightest shifts in the American political winds. For example, he supported the decision to invade Iraq, but parted ways with the Bush regime as it failed. Friedman does not have a reputation for concern about the environment, but in *Hot, Flat and Crowded* he repeats IPCC warnings and adds his voice to the swelling American chorus demanding that climate change be addressed. This requires new rhetoric, which he helps supply. Following Al Gore's model in *An Inconvenient Truth*, Friedman balances bad news with good: the shift to a green economy will free the U.S. of dependence on foreign oil, improve trade balances, and provide a wealth of opportunities for entrepreneurs. He waxes rhapsodic about America's can-do spirit and envisions the U.S. becoming the world's leader in clean technology. If the U.S. leads the way, even China will go green.



Capitalism, according to this faith, is less a cause of climate change than its cure. As with all faiths, arguments can be made. Friedman points out that massive government subsidies to fossil fuel industries - some 30 billion dollars in 2007 alone - and the practice of externalizing costs have long violated the spirit of capitalism. All that

we have to do is overcome the fossil fuel lobby in Washington, eliminate market distortions, adequately fund clean energy research, and everything will turn out better than ever. Friedman's trust in capitalism is almost infectious. He sees some troubling signs, but rarely lingers on them. In his discussion of China, for example, he acknowledges that "catastrophe" there is possible. However, beyond mentioning air pollution and social unrest he says little about what this catastrophe might be.

The limitations of Friedman's approach are most evident in his failure to connect the dots between climate change and the full economic cycle. He recognizes that growth has contributed to climate change and therefore he advocates changes in how we achieve growth. However, he does not say what happens in recession. (*Hot, Flat and Crowded* went to press in July, 2008, before today's recession hit full force, but he writes about the gathering storm.) In spite of the hardships that recession causes, everyone benefits in one way: decreased economic activity results in slowdown in greenhouse gas emissions. This, unlike existing kinds of growth, buys us a little time. If effective political solutions to emissions are not forthcoming, economic shrinkage will be our only hope (short of massive volcanic eruptions that spew cooling particulates into the atmosphere) for avoiding the worst effects of climate change. Obvious as this is, Friedman does not discuss it, probably because it indicates that the familiar economic order, except in decline, will destroy the natural systems that sustain it.

The IPCC reports accommodate responses like Friedman's. The

problem lies less in the science than in the summaries. These occupy a few pages at the beginning of each volume, and are the only parts of the reports likely to be read by nonscientists, including pundits. Each of the 130 participating governments had veto power over the summaries. With veto power exercised by the Bush administration, and by states such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, and India, all economically locked into production and consumption of fossil fuels on a massive scale, the summaries could not sound warnings that imply need for quick, far-reaching change. Because of this, it is safe to say that climate prospects may be considerably worse than the summaries indicate.

James Lovelock provides a less politicized perspective than the IPCC summaries. He has made many important contributions to science and has proven himself an exceptionally prescient thinker, but is best known for the Gaia hypothesis, which construes Earth as a largely self-regulating entity with characteristics of a super-organism. Lovelock has worked with NASA, universities, and the British government, but for the past several decades has maintained his independence from institutions. His interpretations of data relevant to climate, with some exceptions, do not serve the immediate interests of the global economic order. As a consequence, Lovelock has been relegated to the margins of acceptable public discourse in the United States. Friedman, for example, does not mention him.

In *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*, Lovelock minces no words: it is impossible to save the planet as we know it. He is convinced that we are moving swiftly toward a hot, desert world in which the



only places suitable for agriculture will be near the poles, on favored islands, and at a few continental oases. "It is hubris to think that we know how to save the Earth," he writes. "Our planet looks after itself. All that we can do is try to save ourselves."

How can we do that? Dutifully Lovelock considers ways that humanity might still avoid the worst, surveying familiar and exotic remedies, from revival of nuclear power, to massive production of char, to fertilization of the oceans with trace nutrient iron. However, he does not think that technology is the key. We already have the technical means to save ourselves.

The problem, according to Lovelock, is lack of time, and the nature of human consciousness. Although we are capable of acquiring some understanding of Earth and the biosphere as they evolve over time, for the most part we live locally and immediately, not all that differently from other mammals. Our political and economic systems reflect our dominant modes of consciousness and are not geared for the long run. Furthermore, our population has far overshot Earth's capacity to sustain us. According to Lovelock, were the population of the Earth a hundred million we could live indefinitely like affluent Americans, but humans now approach seven billion, and more and more people are striving for and achieving American levels of consumption. "No voluntary human act," Lovelock writes, "can reduce our numbers fast enough even to slow climate change." In interviews, he has predicted that by 2100 our population will be less than a billion. He does not say how he expects this to happen, but his silence suggests that he believes the

process will be Malthusian.

In Lovelock's previous book, *The Revenge of Gaia*, (2005) he assured readers that at least we did not face extinction. Even under his worst-case scenarios, a few breeding pairs would survive. The central problem would be to preserve what he considered "essential knowledge", such as the table of elements, and the germ theory of disease.

In his more recent book he does not discuss preserving knowledge, and is less sure that our species will survive. If melting polar ice results in unconstrained exploitation of the vast stores of natural gas and oil that lie beneath the Arctic Ocean, Earth's temperature could be pushed well beyond the uppermost IPCC predictions, so high that not only will our species join the trilobites, so will all other forms of life except for a few thermophiles. Most of these are single-celled, and because of their adaptation to heat and chemically unusual environments, they will not have the capacity to moderate Earth's climate. Earth is too close to the sun to remain cool without the regulating effects of diverse, abundant, and complexly interconnected life, so temperatures will climb above the boiling point of water. The planet will remain searing hot until, after a billion years or so, it will be consumed by the sun.

Almost everyone today has glimpsed the abyss of extinction, but few have gazed into it as unflinchingly as Lovelock. Remarkably he does not despair of humankind. Even though our species is rapidly turning the planet into a desert, he believes that we still have a crucial creative role to play in Earth's future, and therefore it is imperative

that we survive. In the final chapter of *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*, he makes a suggestion that is astonishing to hear from a scientist: to save ourselves and prepare for our next role in Earth's history, we should develop a new, Earth-based religion that situates humankind within the larger context of the biosphere and elevates Earth's well-being above our own.

Many Earth-based religions already exist, but Lovelock does not discuss them, perhaps because all are pre-scientific in their basic outlooks. Presumably he holds out hope for a religion rooted in science. However, this religion would not worship science or reason. Lovelock considers reason among the finest and most valuable of human capacities, but he recognizes that it does not meet the needs of most people most of the time. Emotion, intuition, and spontaneous action need to be validated and given form without opening the door to the depredations of the biosphere that Christianity and other anthropocentric religions and their secular descendants have allowed.

It is a sign of our times for a scientist of Lovelock's stature to say that we need to establish a new religion. Critics of *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* have called it a jeremiad and a rant. It is both, and at the same time it is heroic. Lovelock gathers the knowledge of a lifetime to transcend the bounds of scientific discourse and sound a warning about matters of the greatest urgency.

By articulating some of the most terrible possibilities that we face, Lovelock goes a long way toward breaking the spell of fear, numbness, and denial that climate change generates.

Climate change is a profoundly emotional issue. We need to find ways to express the anger, despair, grief, and emptiness that come with knowledge of climate change. Only by engaging the emotional dimension of climate change can anyone decide with a clear mind what to do or not do. Extraordinary problems demand extraordinary responses. Our situation may even favor major cultural mutations. There is more energy and hope in Lovelock's unsparing honesty than in anything else I've read on climate.

With increasing confidence we know what *may* happen, but obviously no one, including Lovelock, knows exactly what *will* happen. As a species we have lived through major climate change before, but the last time was before the agricultural revolution. We cannot be sure how we will collectively respond this time around. We may have a greater capacity to look beyond individual concerns and immediate self-interest than Lovelock believes, or these may play out in unexpected ways.

James Speth, in *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*, considers a range of political and economic approaches which in theory could bring our high-flying economic and cultural order back to Earth without a cataclysmic crash. Speth, dean of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale, argues that climate is less a technological problem than a cultural, political, and economic one. He concurs with Friedman that the rhetoric of capitalism may be useful for legislating reforms to make markets reflect the true costs of energy. However, Speth considers this only a first step. He sees capitalism as a key part of our problem because capitalism is a

system that cannot survive without expansion, and as production increases, natural systems, most of which are now in severe stress, pay a further price. Capitalism's reductive dynamic was of some use before our population numbered in the billions, and before we had developed ways to extensively exploit non-human nature. Those days are long gone. Capitalism is now on a trajectory toward overshoot and collapse. The alternative is rapid development of some kind of steady state economy. Historically, most economic orders have been more-or-less steady state. In this respect, Speth suggests that we will become more like our ancestors. Whatever happens, we can be reasonably sure of this much: a century from now the human order will be well on its way to something as different from today as today is from medieval Europe, or even the Mayans.

## 15<sup>th</sup> Filmfest St. Anton

25 - 29 August 2009

<http://www.filmfest-stanton.at>

*Reviewed by Martha Blassnigg, University of Plymouth*

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Mountain film festivals, or alpine film festivals, have been founded as specialist film festivals that showcase mediations of life on mountains that stretch from human encounters, sports and adventures to landscape panorama's from bird's eye views, animal life documentaries to animation and other

artistic films around the topic (see for example the festivals associated with the *International Alliance for Mountain Film* <http://www.mountainfilmalliance.org>). In the literature, especially film-studies, the term 'mountain film' often centres around the genre of the German *Bergfilm*, coined in the 1920s around famous figures such as Franck, Riefens-tahl, Trenker, etc. It mainly refers to fiction film or docu-fiction, often staging biographical real-life stories, such as the various versions on the drama during the first climb of the *Eiger Nordwand* in 1936 or a more recent approach to the genre, MacDonald's *Touching the Void* (2003) of Simpson' and Yates' drama in the Andes (which was Oscar nominated and won the BAFTA award in 2003 for Best British Movie). To obtain a mediated experience as closely to real-life as possible, alpinists and mountaineers themselves have experimented with audio-visual mediation, from expedition drawings to photography, film and video, some of whom were trained and experienced in both or several disciplines (e.g. Vittorio Sella, Hans Ertl, Gerhard Baur, David Breashears, Robert Schauer, etc.). Many of these films are accompanied with a certain myth, spirit of adventure and conquest, and in some way reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* from a creative point of view (see for a historical example Hans Ertl's extraordinary photography and self-reflective style in *Nanga Parbat*, documenting the first summit climb of the *Nanga Parbat* in 1935 featuring Hermann Buhl's famous achievement through experimental simulation). In mountain documentaries or docu-dramas, cameras are frequently attached to ski lifts, helicopters, helmets or other extensions to provide

the most astonishing, thrilling and novel perspectives. Most importantly the mountain film (understood in this broad sense) excites through the mediation of experiences that remain inaccessible for many; it ventures into extremities of possible encounters and borderlines of human endeavours and draws attention to a particular combination of specialist human training and ability with innovative technologies and materials.

The *Filmfest St. Anton* recognises this particular asset and has established an annual event of a particular kind. It has been established as a showcase, platform and a broad network for encounters and exchanges between, in the words of the organisers, "hardcore sports and mountain fanatics" and those audiences who share a fascination with human endeavours in extreme conditions, where physical, mental, cultural and experiential human boarders are being explored, crossed, superseded and challenged. This includes various sport genres such as bouldering, climbing, free skiing, free riding, alpine expeditions. It is not foremost an exclusive filmfestival as such with juries and awards, but provides a unique platform for a niche that also supports various dimensions that go along with the filmmaking in these extreme environments. Set in the famous skiing resort St. Anton am Arlberg, in the North-West of Tirol (Austria), the festival has settled throughout the previous years with a manageable size of five rich and diverse evening programmes, an exhibition and various podium discussions and talks with invited sports/mountaineering experts, film protagonists and filmmakers. This year's programme was especially dedicated to the celebrities Dean

Potter, Beat Kammerlander, Markus Bendler und Gerhard Baur, all present at the festival among other invited guests. Rock climbing, boulder and ice-climbing workshops were offered by Beat Kammerlander, Angela Eiter, Bernd Zangerl and Markus Bendler (see <http://www.arlrock.at>). Films were shown from the USA, the UK, Italy, Switzerland, Slovenia, Canada, Australia, Germany and Austria. The *Filmfest* is also dedicated to support young sports talents in the combination of innovative, adventurous projects and the mediation of their experiences through the medium film / cinema.

The film program of the *Filmfest* comprised dedicated evenings that were arranged with a great variety of film forms and approaches. These ranged from short films to feature length, fiction, docu-fiction, documentary, artistic/animation films to personal film diaries and essays. The courage of this mix was balanced with moderated introductions to each film along with accompanying podium discussions and talks, which positioned each film on its own terms within the festival remit. What the *Filmfest* in this way achieved was a rich program for a broad audience without loosing the focus of the event: to bring mountain professionals and enthusiasts together to meet, share, exchange, enjoy and relive some of the most memorable adventures in the higher regions of our planet. Whilst the festival's programme committee does not exclude fiction films (*Cliffhanger* was for example shown in an earlier edition of the festival) and is particularly fond of animation films, the festival tries not to focus on the hypes of the big screen by supporting rare as

well as small productions of mediated extraordinary human experiences in mountain sports and extreme alpine conditions. Rather than subsuming a sensationalist bias, the unique shots of breathtaking achievements and adventures in the selected programme of the *Filmfest* tended to culminate in the surfacing of the human condition during these encounters and events: the very aspirations, motivations, the physical, mental/psychological conditions, dreams and passions as driving forces behind the very happenings. The fact that technology is constantly reinvented, reinterpreted and expanded, constitutes, it could be said, the daily bread in extreme sports documentation and has been an influential terrain in the development of audio-visual technologies at the edges of the standardised industry (e.g. expeditions in the Himalayas and other extreme environments, visual anthropology, sports documentary, or independent productions).

Whilst the festival organising committee is careful in selecting not only interesting content but also high quality forms of presentation and communication through audio-visual media, central to the festival are people, individuals and their experiences, motivations, fascinations, passions and achievements in the mountains. This was evident this year in examples such as a biographical documentation on coping with grief after loosing a family member during a Himalaya expedition, a sponsored charity sports event by two famous champions in a unique combination of two sports disciplines, a monitored real-time adrenaline-test during the descent of free-riders or a historically informed documentary on the famous 1936 climb

of the Eiger Nordwand. One of this year's acclaimed festival's highlights was the screening of *Making of... "Mount St. Elias"*, a 26 mins masters-cut by Gerald Salmina of the making of the documentary on the first, and longest, ski-descent of the second highest mountain of the USA, from the summit of Mount Elias to the Golf of Alaska featuring Axel Naglich, Peter Ressmann and Jon Johnston, released as *Vertical Rush* in the cinemas this year. A unique independent production was *Aria* by Davide Carrari with climbing scenes shot by means of an especially constructed micro-camera attached on top of the helmet of one of the top European all-round climbers, Piedro Dal Pra. A special treat for the film and genre specialists was the screening of a historic film held in the Museo Nazionale della Montagne in Turin, featuring the first filmed expedition to the Karakorum in 1909, commissioned by H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amadeo of Savoy Duke of the Abruzzi and filmed by the alpinist and photographer Vittorio Sella. This inclusion of what was positioned as cultural dimension of the program, reveals the crucial link between contemporary experiments with AV-media in extreme environments and the products of some of the early pioneering film productions at a time when the film business only had started to become standardized and comprised a great range of technologies, forms and exhibition formats to serve a great variety of tastes, expectations and styles. Most relevant for the context of the 'mountain film' is the fact that cinema from its outset not only was international and innovative in the development of the novel technologies of the moving image and projection technologies, but also profoundly

interested in the expansion of the limits of what was considered perceivable by the human senses. By taking up the legacy of early photographic and mountaineering pioneers such as Sella's, the *Filmfest* shows its grounding not only in a well-informed understanding of the roots of the present in the past, but moreover the fact that any achievement in extreme conditions has to be understood on its own terms.

What would have been interesting for the film specialist would be more specific information about the various film formats in the program, both on which format the original film was shot and on which format it was screened. However, since the *Filmfest* dedicates all attention into one screening room to keep the event a focused and inclusive happening rather than splitting into several parallel sessions, one always has a good chance to catch the filmmakers / protagonists / producers after the sessions to gain in-depth insights into the making-of. This also speaks for the relaxed and accessible atmosphere that the festival offers, where the spotlight embraces stars, newcomers and cinephiles alike. The location of the festival (slightly off the main travel routes on the East-West tangent of the *Inntal*), and being one of the few mountain film festivals in the region set during the summer period, encourages to combine the festival with some first-hand mountain experience — in the specialist workshops of the *Filmfest* or the Alps surrounding the location which offer a spectrum from leisure hiking to extreme climbing.

## Ars Electronica 2009

Linz, Austria, 3 – 8 September 2009

Reviewed by Yvonne Spielman

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The festival of Ars Electronica is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in conjunction with the city of Linz being cultural capital in 2009. One would assume that this year's conference and exhibition programme and the related events intensively discuss increased complexity or in reverse simplicity (which was a topic of Ars Electronica in 2006) of producing, debating and positioning electronic media in past and present at a comprehensive international and intercultural level. Surprisingly, solely reference to the beginnings of the festival and its enlargement over the years was given during pretentiously self-mirroring award presentations that indulged in boring self-contemplation of the here and now. Moreover, invited speakers – mostly white males – have changed little over the past decades of the festival, the same range of names reappear like in extended feedback loops. There is also indication that the topics around electronic media are evaporating and strong thematic foci are not on the horizon. Clearly, the festival deserves fresh impulses, more new faces and a clear direction where it is going and what positions need to be taken.

As it stands, two directions strike out that signify transformation of a timely important and trendsetting electronic arts festival into something else: the first direction heads toward sciences and results in many demonstrations



of very specific technical applications without much consideration of the aesthetics, the installation environment and formal matters of presenting the tools and functions. The second direction also departs from the artworld and highlights games and gaming as ubiquitous means of entertainment suitable for all age groups in the family. Both tendencies intersect in the Ars Electronica Center which assembles milestones and newer works in the realm of electronic/digital/interactive media applications in packed black boxes with a high surround noise level – a mix of machines and screaming kids. In this environment there is not much space left for reflection over critical encounter with the concepts and ideas that have driven the technological-aesthetic developments in the past and till today. Also, the “Device Art Exhibition” that focuses on Japanese examples offers too little information on the cultural context that would be helpful to appreciate how technologies are fused with Japanese notion of aesthetics.

In another location, the OK galleries, another Japanese-Hungarian-Swiss team work strikes out. The group “double Negative Architecture” (Sota Ichikawa, Max Rheiner, Akos Maróy, Kaoru Kobata, Satoru Higa, Hajime Narakuwa) presents the virtual architecture project “Corpora in Si(gh)te” as one of the most complex and aesthetically convincing installations. It employs smart technologies – of military nature – to map and remap our built architectural environment and superimpose the buildings with the virtual possibility to make connections through decentralised networks which – like the internet – self-organise communicating structures in

constantly changing environments. The group’s philosophy is to use data input from nature/ outside (wind, temperature, light, sound) to build living architecture environments with intelligent sensors. In the architecture project “Corpora in Si(gh)te” the concept is to decompose the parts and materials of real buildings and reassemble them as an autonomous structure with varying viewpoints, called super-eyes. Superimposed architectural models are built from data measuring light, wind, temperature, sound. The generated 3-D structure is constantly changing, demonstrating how the created corpora – which is constructed from the collected and connected data of multiple viewpoints – occupies and dominates the surrounding public space. The super-eyes are self-generating, self-assembling structures that exist in polar coordinates, not in Cartesian parameters. They create an intelligent structure that dismantles the smart technologies of military surveillance operations, using their sensors and wireless network functions. The aim is to demonstrate how we may change the function of, and challenge the ways in which we perceive and behave in relation to, disturbing, decentralized, unstable, constantly reassembling environments.

The critical direction of a work like “Corpora in Si(gh)te” provokes aesthetic experience of network environments which we usually use but not consciously reflect, whereas the overriding festival title “Human Nature” aimed at an even larger scale of discussion. But in effect it signalled more a general motto that embraced many loose ends and did not provide any rigorous thematic structure of this year’s festival. Most surprisingly, the Golden Nica for

interactive art was awarded to a rather non-interactive science demonstration. The installation “Nemo Observatorium” by Lawrence Malstaf (BE) provided the spectacle to experience an artificial snowstorm inside a huge glass cylinder and was meant to immerse us – but only 1 visitor at the time – in a flow of particles like inside a swarm of pixels. It remained unclear to most festival guests what arguments could have led to the decision to give the award. Other Golden Nicas were awarded to long-time companions of the festival: the Hybrid Art award was given to another genetic adventure by Eduardo Kac, this time he injected extracts from his own DNA into a petunia and displayed the outcome bluntly in large scale prints of the flower that are ready for gallery exhibition and success in the art market. In contrast, the sound installation by Bill Fontana received the Golden Nica in Digital Music for shifting sounds of the bells of Big Ben to other everyday locations in rather subtle ways that make us more aware of environmental sounds and the ways in which we usually relate audio to specific locations. More welcomed was Canadian Iriz Pääbo who won the Golden Nica in Computer Animation for portraying a hockey game with noisy sounds and images that joyfully express the structural violence and randomness of the players’ behaviour/movements in a given closed space. Even the highlights of the festival cannot be mistaken that the festival in its conceptual roots needs thorough re-engineering to blossom again vividly and with innovative and critical ideas.



## Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa

Fowler Museum, UCLA

22 February - 14 June 2009

Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts,  
Curator

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Reviewed by Aparna Sharma

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mological sources through which the exhibition offers a historicised survey of the cultural landscapes of post-colonial Africa. The imaginations and interrogations mapped by individual works provide a nuanced and complex insight into contemporary issues surrounding history, sociality and representation in Africa. This is a vital move in documenting cultural history at far remove from the economic and social determinism surrounding the colonial encounter.

*Continental Rifts* makes two clear interventions. One, imagination in terms of a nostalgic longing and the projection of an idyllic quality to the 'homeland' is brought forth through a deconstructive and self-reflexive formal approach in a range of works. This occurs most poignantly in two works by Claudia Cristovao. Installation *Fata*

turns to his birthplace in search of a family treasure buried in haste while his family fled civil war. The piece does not provide resolution on the family treasure, but a web-based interview with the subject recounting his memories and a two-channel, low-resolution video projection plotting the concerned landscape situates the viewer in an in-between space where imagination and situation, memory and desire intermingle. Navigating between these the viewer enters a nomadic space that parallels the subject's experiences. Berni Searle's installation, *Home and Away* also creates a liminal experience. It is composed of two videos projected facing each other. One is shot off the coast of Spain and the other off the coast of Morocco. The work references migration from Africa to Europe. The artist performs in one video where we see her body in the ocean as if suspended and swayed by ocean currents. Shot from a top angle, her body freely enters and exits frame repeatedly. The fluidity so rendered by the work serves in gesturing towards the contingency and arbitrariness of migratory experience, identity and cultural history.

The innovative formal approaches of the works included in *Continental Rifts* make for a further intervention. While some works like Cristovao's and Searle's installations use design, sound and projection quality among other features to evoke a sense of liminality and fluidity in the viewing experience, others such as Yto Barrada's and Alfredo Jaar's films adopt a direct, documentarist visual regime to highlight socio-cultural complexities extending out from the colonial encounter and perpetuated by a partial global order of contemporary times. Yto Barrada's



*Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa* was an exhibition at the UCLA Fowler Museum displaying time-based media works of five contemporary artists linked to Africa. While the works span varied themes, the exhibition broadly examines the relation between the individual subject and the continent. Experiences of individuals as socio-historical categories are the key episte-

*Morgana* includes a series of conversations with persons displaced from Africa who recount memories of the landscape. Their conversational approach serves to situate imagination as an agent in the constitution of postcolonial subjectivity without either reifying or undermining it. *Le voyage imaginaire* succeeds *Fata Morgana*. This piece exposes us to the journey of a man of mixed heritage who re-

*The Botanist* is a short film that raises issue with the homogenization rendered by global urbanization. The film focuses on the depletion of native flowers such as the 'Moroccan Iris' along the Atlantic coast. The film is structured around a group of visitors who visit an amateur botanist, Umberto Pasti's garden on the Atlantic coast, south of Tangier. The garden is home of rare and endangered plant species. The film's cinematography is powerful and subversive. The low angle from which we can only access the visitors' feet in the garden emphasises the landscape and situates in the film's conversations a social and historical imperative. The viewer's attention is directed on the debate within the film from a camera position that undermines the sound conventions in mainstream and institutional documentary practice. The critical stance towards globalisation is not limited to the verbal discourse within the film, but it is embodied by the film's form that constitutes as a rigorous political gesture within film historically.

The most phenomenal and ambitious work in the exhibition is South African, Georgia Papageorge's *Africa Rifting: Lines of Fire: Namibia/Brazil*. In this work, Papageorge boldly returns to the geological formation of the African continent. She focuses on the Gondwanaland split, 135 million years ago, from which South America and Africa were formed. Papageorge's territory is difficult for in the colonialist discourse, geology functioned close to biological determinism on which racial and civilizational disparities and inequities were grounded. *Africa Rifting* uses a series of endless red banners flowing very elementally on the Skeleton Coast of Namibia. The

elemental and fluid nature of the red banners against a sparse landscape steadily evokes the redness of blood. Combined with a minimal soundscape the piece catapults the concepts 'rift' and 'blood' into metaphors of dissociation, fissure and reconciliation — extracting them from the colonial imaginary and re-appropriating them within a postcolonial context. Papageorge states: 'coming out of a country torn apart by rift, by apartheid... You can find it in the arterial lines that run through each and every one of us, the rift lines that break us apart or create pathways in our lives. The *Africa Rifting* project extends these concepts. The rift becomes internalized — an extension of the conflict between the physical body and the immortal soul.'

Walking through *Continental Rifts* one cannot but be struck by the elemental quality of most pieces that resonates with some biological category or the other, say blood, fluid or fauna. The colonial discourse was founded on biological determinism. The works in *Continental Rifts* evoke and reposition biological metaphors using them to gesture towards the indeterminacy, contingency and contiguity embedded in human relations among themselves and in their interaction with cultural landscapes.

## Svetlana About Svetlana

by Lana Parshina  
Icarus Films, 2008  
DVD, 44 min.

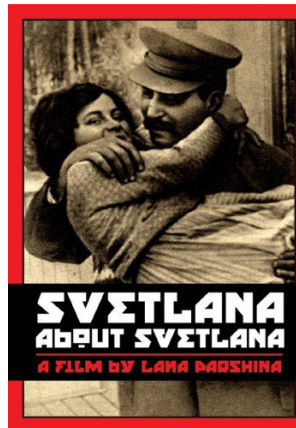
Distributor's website: <http://icarusfilms.com>

Reviewed by Michael R.  
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I was a kid when (then-) Svetlana Aliluyeva, daughter of Joseph Stalin, left the Soviet Union for political asylum in the West. It was a big story in *Life Magazine*, and after my parents explained its importance to me, I began drawing cartoons of the moustachioed former Communist Premier. A couple years later, with my parents at the world's fair in Montréal, I was sure the smiling, middle-aged woman standing near us on the bus that took us into Expo 67 was the famous exile Svetlana.

Decades later, Lana (Svetlana) Parshina was deeply impressed by a childhood reading of Aliluyeva's book *Twenty Letters to a Friend*. Though Russian, she didn't realize at the time the historical significance the author's father.



As a woman in her 20s, living and working (in film?) in New York City, she learned that Svetlana Aliluyeva, now Svetlana Peters, lived in Wisconsin. Parshina persistently sought an interview. At this point, we think we are about to watch a story spun from a frustrated hunt like Michael Moore's "Roger and Me," Moore's pursuit of the CEO of General Motors in a time of

downsizing and plant closures. That's not the case. Parshina's persistence bore fruit when Ms. Peters agreed to an interview. We are led into the old woman's room, where she settles into a chair and reminisces.

Stalin's daughter was raised by a nanny to whom she was much closer than to her parents. Her mother committed suicide and her father was, well, Stalin. Her half-brother Yakov was captured by the Germans during the war and died in a concentration camp after Stalin refused to trade him for a General. Another brother, Vasily, drank himself to death. Parshina cuts between the storyteller, her family photographs, and further fleshes out the personal history with archival imagery in photographs and newsreels.

The senior Svetlana had various husbands and homelands (Russia, India, England, the US). Her love life was sometimes frustrated by a strong willed father, one with the power to send suitors of whom he disapproved to Siberia and did exactly that. She's quite happy discussing metaphysical philosophy and her distance from the Cold War struggles that attempted to use her.

If the viewer is left with any regret, it's that Lana neglected to discuss *Twenty Letters to a Friend*—or whatever she found in it besides the historical moment—with the aged author. We are, however, given a satisfying encounter with one worldly twentieth-century woman recounting her long and interesting life, whose face, four decades later, further convinces me that we once, briefly, shared a Montreal bus.

## The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara & Lenin Play Chess

by Andrei Codrescu  
Princeton University Press,  
2009, 248 pp.

ISBN: 978-0691137780

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When I was in high school, my art gang and I swore by Hans Richter's *Dada: Art & Anti-Art*. This tome was full of tales, a swashbuckling old artist spinning anecdotes---yet in a scholarly way---about fascinating characters. My classmate was inspired by it to make a short Super-8mm film biography of prizefighter Arthur Cravan, that (in his movie's title) "Dada Bantamweight Rascal." *The Posthuman Dada Guide* makes for a similarly useful handbook on dadaism for a student's backpack, thin enough to poke out of a jeans pocket like a travel guide. Andrei Codrescu is a poet who early in his career was recommended to us teenage dadapuppies by one of our hippest high school teachers. More recently, Codrescu is known as an intelligent National Public Radio commentator, a sage with an accent reflecting Romanian roots similar to those of his countryman Tristan Tzara. Being of the generation that grew up with--or under---Communism, then having watched it crumble from North American exile in his middle years, Codrescu cannot help but also be fascinated by the figure of Lenin. The author seems to feel an affinity with Tzara on many levels, whereas Lenin may embody socially minded censors, editors and college deans

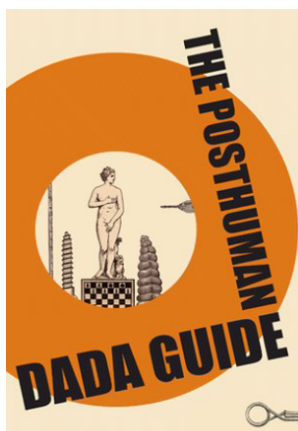
who have policed him throughout his lifetime. Consequently, Codrescu celebrates dadaists, who meant to induce collective delirium, joy, hopefully, but rage if there was no choice, and to drive the maddened collective to either an orgy or arbitrary destruction, "arbitrary" being the operative word. "Nonarbitrary" destruction was what the political mobs had been doing forever and what, unbeknownst to the dadas of 1916, they were going to do to much more sinister effect in the coming decades (p. 91).

Tzara was born Sammy Rosenstock, while Lenin was born V.I. Ulyanov. Codrescu reveals how names are a slippery thing, as are many of the concepts, tropes and personalities whirling in the historical constellation of dada, whose parts he seizes and fishes out from the maelstrom for examination. The alphabetical organization of this book serves this process, though at times (when so much is packed in under several dates in 1915), it seems like a slightly lazy one. As a creative artist, Codrescu witnessed many of the most radical aesthetic ideas of the century tamed into fashion and commodity and academic curricula.

Today, almost everything you're wearing or thinking that gives you the slightest bit of subversive pleasure comes from a dead dadaist. Janco's costumes for Huelsenbeck, for instance, have been recycled by fashion so many times, there are now real bishops wearing them (p. 95).

There is wit here, which is essential for dada (though too often not for the humorless surrealists). There are some nice passages of poetical imagery-

hurling, which would only look precious if quoted out of context but enliven the chapters in which they appear, often at their conclusive and climactic endings. And, in the spirit of the dandy gossipmonger Hans Richter, Codrescu tosses out parenthetical asides that maddeningly cry for unpacking over a pitcher of mojitos: a linkage of dadaism and vampirism elicits "'Wherever there is cable, there I am,' Grampa Munster [Al Lewis] said to me in Havana, 1996." Was Cuban dadaist Francis Picabia also at the table, Andrei? Lily Munster on Fidel's arm?



Any reviewer in Michigan takes pleasure, although reservedly, in Codrescu's references to dada in our rustbelt. He conflates two years worth of events that include a Living Theater university performance, an urban anarchists' disinformation project an hour away, and a student reviewer's opportune, zeitgeist-grabbing "Paul is Dead" college newspaper hoax . . . but Codrescu's seamless fabric does weave it---normalize it---all into a jolly, fast-moving story.

Because (snicker) after all, Dada is Normal, and Normal is Nice.

## A Small World: Smart Houses and the Dream of the Perfect Day

by Davin Heckman

Duke University Press, 2008, 224 pp.

ISBN: 978-0822341581

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Davin Heckman's *A Small World: Smart Houses and the Dream of the Perfect Day* examines the history of smart homes and the utopian fantasies that informed their design. By focusing on both the history of technology and the representation of technology in literature, film and television, Heckman's book effectively analyzes the cultural discourse surrounding the very concept of "smartness" and offers a vehement critique of the incorporation of technology into everyday life. The first chapter examines the rise of home economics and scientific management, which introduced new time-saving labor practices that linked the comfort of the home to notions of temporal and spatial efficiency. This call for greater efficiency eventually led to the development of electrical appliances, automated kitchens and domestic robots. The second chapter focuses on the introduction of new media technologies, such as televisions and computers, into the home, which gradually transformed the home into "a communications and processing center" and its inhabitants into passive spectators and consumers (p. 42). In the third chapter, Heckman more closely examines this shift from futuristic visions of the home to contemporary smart homes, and he outlines two

competing discourses concerning the fully integrated home. On the one hand, the smart home represents a new image of freedom that is closely linked to consumerism, which is best exemplified by reality television programs whose purpose is to promote certain lifestyles. On the other hand, haunted-house narratives provide a counter-discourse that illustrates the repressive controls lurking behind such consumerist fantasies. Reality television and haunted houses thus represent "opposite sides of the same coin of universal freedom under neoliberal capitalism: one story celebrates the freedom that comes with integrating oneself wholly into the system of commerce, the other warns that living inside the system forces one to become subject to its whims" (p. 139).

In the fourth and final chapter Heckman focuses on what he calls "the dream of the Perfect Day," which represents both the notion of everyday life as the ultimate consumer practice and the fantasy that every problem can be solved by modern technology. Heckman argues that smart homes are fundamentally based on this belief that technology can transform the world into a perfect place: "The smart home . . . edits the world and makes it perfect as we experience it so that we may be given the impression that the world is indeed perfect" (p. 164). The "Perfect Day" thus resolves ethical dilemmas by "only displaying those things which the subject would like to see" (p. 141) and by avoiding "the ethical dilemmas posed by this system" it effectively represents "a refusal to engage with ethics" (p. 142).

Heckman employs this argument to intervene in contemporary debates concerning posthu-



manism and posthuman ethics. Heckman argues, for example, that “the smart home functions theoretically in accordance with the classic conception of the cyborg” because it allows “subjectivity to migrate through informational flows” and it replaces “the ‘human’ with a representation of subjectivity that is accentuated by a variety of machines” (p. 151). Heckman notes that Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” does address “questions of ‘human rights,’ such as welfare, access to health care, and labor reform,” yet he adds that it “makes little effort to establish or even acknowledge the humanist foundations from which these scholars can clearly operate and offers no assurances or ‘rules’ by which abuses can be soundly critiqued” (p. 147). Heckman thus concludes that “abandoning the human as a solution is foolish” (p. 152) and runs the risk of “delivering subjects over to the mercy of the free market” (p. 153). In his closing paragraph Heckman even compares the repressive force of the “Perfect Day” to Nazi concentration camps: The Perfect Day . . . may very well still use the motto “works makes you free”---in the sense that this promise of total agency is one which requires a form of constant attention to a multiplicity of media forms. In the walls of the fully automated home is a camp that requires every bit of psychic concentration as it enfolds a new generation of abject souls (pp. 168-169).

Heckman’s book is extremely thoughtful and well researched, and his argument clearly follows in the Frankfurt School tradition. His description of the “Perfect Day” as a “tyranny of pleasure,” for example, seems to echo Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s famous “culture industry”

argument. As with Horkheimer and Adorno, however, there are moments when Heckman’s otherwise very incisive arguments seem to resemble a conspiracy theory. In his final chapter, for example, Heckman suggests that there is a link between the “Perfect Day” and the increase in government surveillance following 9/11, yet it remains unclear whether these government initiatives would have any impact on the design of smart homes or how the “Perfect Day” would even be compatible with a regime that maintains a constant state of fear. Heckman’s warnings concerning the dangers that smart homes pose to the humanist tradition also seem somewhat exaggerated in light of the fact that virtually all the futuristic designs outlined in his book ultimately failed. While Heckman acknowledges that Walt Disney’s Epcot and Roy Mason’s Xanadu were never successful, for example, he still suggests that these failures contributed in some way to the contemporary incorporation of technology into the home. It seems possible, however, to interpret the failure of Jim Sutherland’s Electronic Computing Home Operator (ECHO IV) and Honeywell’s H316 Kitchen Computer as emblematic of a more widespread resistance against the capitalist forces that guide the development of new technologies. This idea already seems to be implied in Heckman’s discussion of haunted-house narratives, and I would have liked to see Heckman draw a closer connection between the presence of this counter-discourse and the failed promises or dystopian futures that the smart home also represents. ■



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