

process. Every chapter—and this is the part that makes the book an especially valuable resource—ends with a comprehensive, annotated list of further readings and a summarization of important concepts discussed in the chapter. I read the book from beginning to end, but it is also possible to access the content in a less linear manner. Each chapter is written in such a way that it can be well understood if read individually—the examples are always introduced in a concise way, and every reference to previous chapters is clearly indicated.

Here are just a few of the interesting themes and notions found in the book. Chapter 2, “The Design Process,” introduces the notion of the iterative design process, emphasizing playtesting as an important aspect of the process. The “Core Concepts” section concerns basic aspects regarding the study of games, such as “Meaningful Play” (the generation of meaning through play) or “The Magic Circle” (the space and time within which the game takes place).

“RULES” starts with the statement that all games have rules. Game design is a second-order design process of “elegant” rules that create experiences. In the chapter “Games as Systems of Uncertainty” the reader learns about commonly held fallacies of player choice. There is also a chapter on “Breaking the Rules,” noting that as a designer, it is important to know about different kinds of cheating. The three chapters on framing games, “Information Theory Systems,” “Systems of Information” and “Cybernetic Systems,” introduce and apply difficult theoretical frameworks too superficially.

“PLAY” is where I definitively started to enjoy the book. The authors define play as free movement in a rigid structure. Pleasure and the double seduction of play, metacommunication within the magic circle, simulation and aspects of reality are interesting aspects discussed. In the chapter “Narrative Play” the primary question is posed as “How are games narratives?” thereby taking a constructive approach and avoiding the “Are games narrative?” debate.

In “CULTURE,” the boundaries of the magic circle get blurred. The issues include, for example, the reflection and transformation of culture in games, open culture and how it parallels open source, cultural resistance and different ways for players to modify games. The authors conclude by describing their writing process as pieces

that fell into place and the stepwise resolution of larger patterns. “Having built the system, played it through, and exited on the other side, we find ourselves transformed” (p. 604). This transformation will also occur to those who carefully read the book. The “system” is meaningful and offers a wonderful structure for continuing investigations into game design.

I share the following hope with the authors: “Perhaps as the field matures, the theoretical borrowings that take place in this book will be replaced by more game-centric schools of thought. At least, we certainly hope so” (p. 244).

A THEORY OF /CLOUD/: TOWARD A HISTORY OF PAINTING

by Hubert Damisch. Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, CA, U.S.A., 2002. 313 pp., illus. Trade, paper. ISBN: 0-8047-3439-9; ISBN: 0-8047-3440-2.

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No one can write philosophy-imbued history like the French. As it is sometimes a chore to read for non-native speakers, a translation of such work is always appreciated. The translation of the *Origin of Perspective* made Hubert Damisch’s challenging thought available to a wider audience, and now Damisch’s even earlier *Théorie du /nuage/*, published in 1972, is also available. Wearing his structural-semiotic methodology on his sleeve, Damisch seeks simply to understand the sign-quality of the cloud, which he holds between slashes to remind the reader that clouds per se are not his interest. His idea is that the cloud exists in Western painting as a complement to the terrestrial reality ordered via perspective. One needs the other to have a full, oppositional meaning.

In a discussion ranging from painting to theology, theater and symbology, Damisch shows how the opposition of celestial-terrestrial is indeed deep. Even when the imagery for the clouds beneath Mantegna’s *Christ in His Ascension* in the Uffizi is derived from the roughly suggestive props of a local sacra conversazione, the clouds serve as the means to stake out the alternative space of Christ as against the world below. Perspective, as comprised by lines, and clouds, which resist delineation, mark out two graphic proce-

dures for signifying different realms. The perspective helps build the storia while the cloud suggests a space where stories do not unfold.

Damisch presents a cogent case for the cloud as representing alterity for Renaissance and Baroque painting. The realism of perspective is not pure reference. It enters into a semiotic system with the cloud and takes on meaning as non-celestial, while the cloud takes on meaning as non-terrestrial. Damisch’s reminder that clouds and other representational objects are signs in a representational order is a refreshing one and leads one to bring the discussion of naturalism in early modern painting to a more sophisticated level.

It is inevitable that after 30 years many of Damisch’s references are a bit dated. He relies on many older authors to build his case, and we cannot fault him for not knowing recent work by John Shearman on clouds and dome imagery. The traditional reader of art history may be turned off by several errors in names and places and chalk it up to the overall speculative nature of Damisch’s efforts. But this would be a mistake, as he is interested precisely in the system and not in the details.

Reading Damisch’s well-thought-out ideas, it is clear that there is little truth to the occasionally stated idea that Panofsky’s iconology brought semiotics into art history. For Panofsky, only the fixed order of antique symbols provides a pull on later use of the same symbols. To be semiotic, however, it is only important that the signs interact in their own order. In this sense, art history has not witnessed its semiotic revolution. Structuralism was one of the most promising social scientific methodologies of the past and certainly ought to have had its insights played out better in art history. Equally striking, however, is Damisch’s dogged explanatory attitude. In contrast to the few keepers of semiotics’ flame in contemporary art history, Damisch really wants to get down to business. Perhaps until the publication of *The Origin of Perspective* and *Theory of /Cloud/* we did not know quite how to do this. Now we cannot say we have an excuse.

THE MATRIX OF VISUAL CULTURE: WORKING WITH DELEUZE IN FILM THEORY

by Patricia Pisters. Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, CA, U.S.A., 2003. 303 pp. Paper. ISBN: 0-8047-4028-3.