

rial conditions of both past and present—while harnessing the revolutionary, “perverse core” of Christianity, which will lead, paradoxically, to Christianity’s end. As his wide-ranging argument zigzags back and forth from the Bible to critical theories to today’s consumerist, globalized societies, Žižek continually returns to Christianity’s founding gestures and principles as seen through the writings of St. Paul, which he implies are increasingly relevant in an always-catastrophic world whose current manifestations include the War on Terror, pleasures without substance, and the “weird,” fetishistic trend of victims (and/or their heirs) seeking monetary reparations for such post-Enlightenment catastrophes as American slavery, the Holocaust or a steady diet of unhealthy meals from McDonalds.

Central to Žižek’s thesis is that the Christianity so prevalent in the everyday machinations of modernity maintains a “hidden perverse core” (p. 15) that is particularly evident within two founding “Events”: Adam and Eve’s Fall and Christ’s sacrifice. Žižek asks, for example, “if it is prohibited to eat from the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, why did God put it there in the first place,” if not as “a part of His perverse strategy first to seduce Adam and Eve into the Fall, in order to save them?” (p. 15). Similarly, God creates Judas, “the ultimate hero of the New Testament, the one ready to lose his soul and accept eternal damnation so that the divine plan could be accomplished” (p. 16). Although Žižek implies that God is a perverse opportunist who introduces

the world to misery so that He can later save the world, God’s power is by no means absolute. While suffering on the cross, for example, Christ calls out, “Father, why hast thou forsaken me?,” thereby committing “what is, for a Christian, the ultimate sin: he wavers in his Faith” (p. 15), suggesting that: 1) God is not divine, for He (in the form of his son) does not understand why He has been hung up to die in the desert; or 2) (and more importantly) that God is unable to help his son because God is impotent, and, ultimately, absent, a reading that seems to be in agreement with “Lacan’s thesis that the big Other no longer exists” (p. 53).

Žižek’s often devastating critique of conventional Christianity and the contemporary world, neither of which we can view in isolation, hinges upon Pauline Christianity’s radicalness, which, when followed to its logical conclusion, results in Christianity’s death (and subsequent radical rebirth as something else). And Žižek’s emphasis on Christianity’s “perverse core” enables him to embrace “Christianity as the religion of atheism . . . [which] attacks the religious hardcore that survives even in humanism, even up to Stalinism [and the War on Terror], with its belief in History as the ‘big Other’ that decides the ‘objective meaning’ of our deeds” (p. 171). Following Judas’s example, the world’s next “hero” of Christianity will participate in a major (self) sacrifice, “the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: In order to save its treasure [the obscene fact that there is no big Other], it has to sacrifice itself—like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge” (p. 171). Since the “big Other” remains so central to oppression and alienation within a variety of (interrelated) cultural forms—including religion, democracy, totalitarianism, the family, and everyday life—awareness that the (absent) “big Other” no longer exists (the central objective of Lacanian psychoanalysis) must become, according to Žižek, the major goal of a radical theological/materialist social praxis that can renew the world not through a messianic reintroduction of the big “big Other,” but through its wholesale liquidation.

The Puppet and the Dwarf, frequently punctuated with jokes that exemplify abstract concepts, provides the reader with a witty, informative trip through Paul’s subversive Christianity, related philosophies and critical theories,

popular culture, and pressing problems of the early 21st century. This volume, both erudite and accessible, will be a welcome addition to research and large public libraries, and it should prove valuable to students of cultural studies, philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis and theological excess.

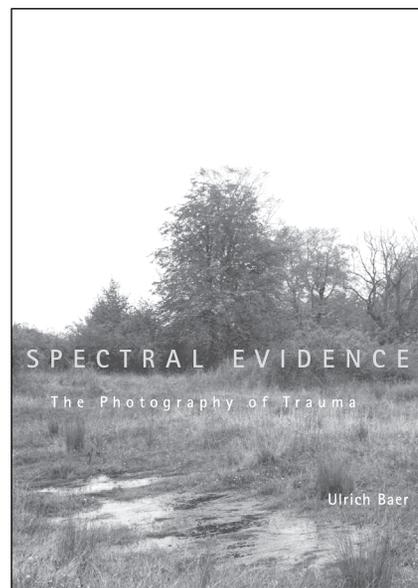
SPECTRAL EVIDENCE: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF TRAUMA

by Ulrich Baer. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2002. 182 pp., illus. ISBN: 0-262-02515-9.

Reviewed by Robert Pepperell. E-mail: <pepperell@ntlworld.com>.

According to Ulrich Baer, “Each photograph, by virtue of the medium, inevitably turns the viewer into a late-comer at the depicted site” (p. 181), unifying in some paradoxical way the present and the past. Given that we are in some sense “present” at the scene, how are we to read photographs of sites that elicit some of the most awful associations it is possible to imagine? Should we do so as passive observers who are shielded by the buffer of historical distance or are we really, as Baer argues, witnesses to an event that is not entombed in the past, but part of an ongoing process of seeing and knowing?

Analyzing a range of images of “trauma,” from Charcot’s flash-frozen hysterics in the Salpêtrière to a Nazi official’s matter-of-fact color slides of life in the Polish ghetto of Lodz, Baer asks us to consider the scenes depicted outside of their historicized context. Instead we are invited to look upon



them as a testament to extreme human experience—a “zenith” of horror—that cannot be defused by an appeal to a wider social milieu.

He argues that photography and trauma (both 19th-century inventions) are characterized by a postponement or delay by which an event that occurs but is not consciously registered is only brought into experience at a later date, just as a film exposed in a flash undergoes a prolonged process of development and fixing. Thus,

Traumatic events . . . exert their troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence. Just as the photograph ‘mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially,’ as Roland Barthes writes, trauma results from experiences that are registered as ‘reality imprints’ or, as psychiatrists have phrased it, recorded ‘photographically, without integration into semantic memory’ (p. 8).

Using a range of authors from Freud to Benjamin and Bazin to Barthes, Baer seeks to usurp our common understanding of the photograph with a richly informed and persuasive discourse. Rather than serving as an objective record of historical fact, photographs of the kind considered here construct a experience that never existed at the time the image was taken. Thus we become part of, and to some extent responsible for, a living chain that extends across time and is not foreclosed by the shutter.

In *Spectral Evidence*, Ulrich Baer manages to overcome the deeply melancholic mood of the images discussed, with their profound sense of foreboding and suffering pending. He looks to the images to “open up a future that is not known and, because it is not known, might yet be changed” (p. 182).

GLOBAL CITIES: CINEMA, ARCHITECTURE, AND URBANISM IN A DIGITAL AGE

edited by Linda Krause and Patrice Petro. Rutgers Univ. Press, New Brunswick, NJ, U.S.A., 2003. 208 pp., illus. Paper. ISBN: 0-8135-3276-0.

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Since the Lumiere brothers filmed workers leaving the factory and trains

pulling into the station, the cinema has been an essentially urban medium. In the 1920s, German and Russian filmmakers explored their cities’ architectural and navigational cross-cutting, while in the United States Charlie Chaplin was entranced by urban modern times and city lights. In the 1950s and 1960s, Parisian Situationists compared the unfolding streetscape to a fictitious movie illuminating the screen. Throughout the 20th century the spectacular realms of cinema, architecture and urbanism went hand-in-hand, three old troopers strolling down the boulevard.

In the first of two memorable essays on film in this collection, Ackbar Abbas explores the Hong Kong that informs the work of Ang Lee and Wong Kar Wai. Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* showcases the film industry in that city by masterfully using contemporary digital technology to produce astonishing cyber-kung fu fight sequences. Wong’s *In the Mood for Love* depicts lovers negotiating the city’s crowded corridors, staircases and noodle shops. Both directors occupy what the Italian writer Italo Calvino has called “invisible cities,” a term applied by Abbas to describe a Hong Kong whose glaring discrepancies of poverty and wealth recall Calvino’s imagined dialogue between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. In her essay on Naruse Mikio, Catherine Russell calls that Japanese movie director’s work from the 1950s “Too Close to Home” for its confining domestic settings. The female protagonists in these movies found that the conditions of the postwar world imposed a particularly, peculiarly Japanese modernity upon their daily lives. Naruse sensitively captured this era and showed how changing times colored all human relations among his films’ representative characters.

For some of the writers in the book, ours is a time of chaos for the city, and for others it is a time of challenge. Saskia Sassen reads the city, long the site of “spatialization of power projects, whether political, religious or economic,” as requiring new analyses for a global digital age with its new economic circuits, sub-economies and frontiers. Tasha G. Oren calls for a rethinking of many cultural studies assumptions about locality and territoriality that privilege mass media at the expense of other forces. In the rebuilding of Berlin, and in San Diego’s Barrio Logan and community mural-rich

Chicano Park, Jennifer Jordan finds sites of collective memory put into architectural and spatialized forms. South African architect Jo Noero closes *Global Cities* by describing the process by which he designed an appropriate building to house the Museum of Apartheid in Port Elisabeth. Here the recent memories of the brutal and unjust apartheid system are captured, preserved and displayed. May all our cities, buildings and civic representations serve to trap and remove past oppression and confinement, asserting themselves at their urban, urbane best as the historic cradles of freedom, growth, creativity and fulfillment.

CD-ROM

LES UST NOUVELLES CLÉS POUR L'ÉCOUTE

Unités Semiotiques Temporelles, MIM (Laboratoire Musique Informatique de Marseille), Marseille, 2003. CD-ROM with informational insert. ISBN: 2-9506677-4-0.

Reviewed by Chris Cobb. E-mail: <ccobbsf@hotmail.com>.

You cannot help but learn something new every time you use this fascinating CD-ROM by MIM. It offers historical background, composer biographies, sample analyses and multiple ways to examine musical compositions. Rather than being just a tutorial or a manual, *Nouvelles clés pour l'écoute* (New Tools for Listening) also addresses issues of nuance and philosophy in music.

Whether you are a composer, a musician or simply curious about how music is created, *Nouvelles clés pour l'écoute* will hold your interest. Young people and students will benefit from its intuitive and easy-to-use interface. There are games, puzzles and text that illuminate various musical terms. In fact, the more technical/philosophical concepts such as “Trajectoire inexorable” (relentless trajectory) and “Lourdeur” (heaviness) are explained in a section that presents a context for numerous ideas. It is a pleasure to see some of the more esoteric and philosophical aspects of music placed alongside the technical. One great strength is the section with links that allow you to