

mean—are they photographs of “what really happened” or were they staged for profit or propaganda? The continuing debate over Robert Capa’s “Falling Soldier” or the images of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein are evidence of this insecurity and the desire to unlock the meaning of photography and its relationship with contemporary culture and history.

As the Iraq war and its aftermath unfold before us in a series of photographs, televised images and videos, questions about how such images gain their power and what they mean have a particular urgency and relevance. In *Shooting Kennedy*, David Lubin addresses these questions by analyzing films and photographs John F. Kennedy’s years in the White House and his assassination. Lubin uses an art historical approach and identifies aspects of the images and then relates them to other historical images, aspects of popular culture and music. The range of historical and cultural references is dazzling. Lubin invokes Greek and Roman art, 17th-century Dutch painting, American sitcoms, movies, popular songs, Chopin, Beethoven and John Cage. He does not confine himself to a chronological approach but moves backwards and forwards in time, spinning out visual associations and linking the art of centuries largely through its visual characteristics. Little attention is given to how these cultural objects were constructed, what they meant to their makers, the specific conditions of their making, and how they were and are understood and used by different groups. “My subject,” writes Lubin, “is the impact of images on images.” But images can have no impact, indeed cannot even exist, without human agency.

This question of human agency raises the issue of who understands these images by reference to this complex web of contemporary and historical sources stretching across countries and continents. Lubin’s answer is that the images are powerful because they “activate latent memories of other powerful images in the histories of art and popular culture.” This seems to imply some sort of unconscious mind, but whether it is Jungian or based on the now discarded theory of mind posited by Levi-Strauss or some other alternative is unclear. Lubin does not explore this question. His interest lies primarily in weaving webs of resemblance between the Kennedy images and numerous aspects of various Western cultures.

Sontag interprets the Abu Ghraib images as acts that took place in a specific context. She reveals the legal and power relations that made them possible. Lubin’s analysis, by contrast, never stays still for long enough to uncover these conditions. His claim to de-mythologize the images is, therefore, unconvincing. The myth of Camelot lives in this book.

COMPELLING VISUALITY: THE WORK OF ART IN AND OUT OF HISTORY

edited by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, U.S.A., 2003. 280 pp., illus. Trade, paper. ISBN: 0-8166-4115-3; ISBN: 0-8166-4116-1.

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Traditional writings about the visual arts—the objects and their creators—include elements of joy, admiration, explanation, analysis and criticism, as well as the facts and numbers of history. Various art historians use different blends, and their products meet different audiences. However, in more recent times, artists with household names have attracted such a mass of unorganized commentary that this habit has spawned a new genre, namely an analysis of the commentators. It is an art history once or twice removed, in which the writers (not their subjects) are embraced without much regard for accuracy or contribution.

Such an example is to be found in the essay by Michael Ann Holly, one of nine contributors to *Compelling Visuality*, wherein the competitive interpretations by Martin Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro of the van Gogh painting, *A Pair of Shoes*, are revisited for the umpteenth time. The objects on the canvas were Vincent’s own footwear, according to Schapiro (he took the time to read *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*) and not a peasant woman’s shoes, as imagined by Heidegger, who went on in sublime ignorance to wax poetic about the woman’s “slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind.” Holly has the temerity to call the Heidegger bit “one of the most famous passages in contemporary critical theory.” This nonsense is only rivaled by Jacques Derrida, who dreamed up a correspondence between Heidegger and Schapiro in 1977. And

appeal to authority takes over where organized skepticism screams for attention. I am afraid that my eye for the rest of the book was jaundiced by this early chance encounter, occasioned by spotting the van Gogh reproduction.

The editors emphasize that they wish to raise questions beyond the traditional approaches of art history. They suggest that because the contributors come from different disciplines and from various countries with different intellectual traditions, a new “art history after aesthetics” is achieved. The first four chapter titles indicate the flavor: “Ecstatic Aesthetics: Metaphorizing Bernini,” “Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism,” “Aesthetics before Art: Leonardo through the Looking Glass,” “Touching the Face: The Ethics of Visuality between Levinas and a Rembrandt Self-Portrait.”

This volume is modestly produced in 9 × 6 inch format, lightly illustrated with black and white reproductions, and relatively expensive. Notes and references are given at the end of each chapter. There is no index and no list of illustrations. Claire Farago is a professor of fine arts at the University of Colorado. She has published on Leonardo da Vinci. Co-editor Professor Robert Zwijnenberg is at the University of Maastricht, the Netherlands, where he is concerned about art history in relation to the development of science and technology.

NEO-BAROQUE AESTHETICS AND CONTEMPORARY ENTERTAINMENT

by Angela Ndalians. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2004. 336 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 0-262-14084-5.

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With *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, Angela Ndalians has written an important book. Although the relationships between Neo-Baroque and postmodern culture (here represented by the entertainment industry) have been stressed by many scholars (Calabrese still being the best-known of them [1]), Ndalians succeeds in broadening the discussion in significant ways. But how does the author “outperform” (to quote one of her favorite expressions) the achievements of the existing scholarship on the Neo-Baroque/postmodern issue?