

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?

On one hand, one might have the impression (which is false) that Ndalianis's book offers nothing more than a systematic, complete, up-to-date, popular culture-oriented view and reworking of the Baroque's posterity in today's mass culture: She documents thoroughly issues such as "polycentrism and seriality," "intertextuality and labyrinths," "hypertexts and mappings," "virtuosity, special effects, and architectures of the senses," "special-effects magic and the spiritual presence of the technological," without saying anything that Calabrese and others have not already said. Yet on the other hand, Ndalianis also introduces a set of very new insights and approaches, which transform dramatically the very terms of the discussion, and this is what makes *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* a real landmark publication.

Ndalianis, who accepts the use of baroque and classic as transhistorical categories and who accepts equally the current definitions of both concepts (following Wölfflin and others, she thus opposes both as open versus closed, or dynamic versus static, etc.), emphatically rejects any binary analysis of their opposition. First, the author positions the relationship between the two poles of classic and baroque in terms of their continuity, instead of the split between them: The Neo-Baroque era in which we are living is neither the result of a refusal of the classic, nor the outcome of a degenerative process. Neo-Baroque's "chaos" is not the contrary of classicism's "order"; the former is, on the contrary, to be analyzed as a more complex instance of the latter. This reconsideration of the relationships between the two major tendencies in our culture is a crucial shift that Ndalianis also transfers to other dichotomies, such as modernism versus postmodernism, in which the author manages to break with the too-easy identification of postmodernism and Neo-Baroque: Neo-Baroque is, for her, part of the larger whole of postmodernism, not a simple synonym for it.

Second, and this is a very logical step in the author's argument, Ndalianis's refusal to oppose classic and baroque in an absolute way helps her to re-establish the fundamental historicity of each form taken by the two tendencies. In a more concrete manner, Ndalianis, while permanently foregrounding what links contemporary entertainment to the 17th-century Baroque, illustrates no less systematically the differences between

those two cultures. Taking her inspiration from Bolter and Grusin's remediation theory [2], Ndalianis demonstrates convincingly that given the differences at the economic, social, political, ideological and scientific levels, Baroque culture and Neo-Baroque culture cannot be the same, despite all of the forms, techniques and goals they undoubtedly share (Baroque's Catholicism, for instance, is something very different from Neo-Baroque's New Age sympathies).

Yet, the renewing force of Ndalianis's book is not limited to the discussions on the meaning, use and scope of the notions of (neo-)baroque and classic. *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* also makes an important contribution to the field of cultural semiotics as well as to the theory of contemporary culture as visual culture. In this sense, it is not exaggerated to claim that the stances defended by the author deserve to complete the theoretical attempts to define "visual culture" in the wake of W.J.T. Mitchell's famous visual turn [3]. Taking as a starting point the cultural semiotics of Lotman [4], Ndalianis tries to give a more concrete interpretation of his very abstract boundary theory of culture. Culture, for Lotman, is based on a double mechanism of inclusion and exclusion (before anything else, the semiotic mind shapes a universe by tracing a limit between an inside and an outside) that Ndalianis interprets in terms of culture as "spatial formation" (one may hear correctly an echo of Foucault's discursive formations) and finds illustrated in the tension between classic and baroque, the latter being fundamentally a culture oriented toward the lack or the break of limits (for instance the limits between inside/outside, real/fictitious, spectacle/spectator, etc.).

A fourth major achievement (besides the overcoming of the classic/baroque dichotomy, the re-historicization of these transhistorical categories and the valorization of the semiotic framework in cultural theory) is the healthy polemical tone of many pages in the book. How refreshing to read that one can embrace postmodernism and popular culture (and thus reject any nostalgia for a mythical high-art and unadulterated modernism), while at the same time attack the cultural pessimism of what is called here the post-modern "Holy Trinity" (Baudrillard, Jameson, Lyotard). The very positive interpretation of notions such as serial-

ity, copy, repetition, etc., which are for Ndalianis signs of vitality and instruments of (re)invention, provide a good example of the author's independent thinking. Another good example is the polemic against defenders of the "classic Hollywood paradigm" in film studies such as Kristin Thompson [5], whose work tends toward a negation of the Neo-Baroque in contemporary mainstream cinema.

Of course, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* is not a perfect book. One may regret that quantitative information (and even information overload!) sometimes takes the place of qualitative analysis. Ndalianis overwhelms her reader with everything he or she wants to know about this or that aspect of 17th-century history or contemporary film production, but she fails sometimes in offering her reader what a good book of this sort cannot do without: close reading. Although all the information on, for instance, the technical or financial underpinnings of *trompe l'oeil* ceilings or Spiderman tie-ins is very useful as such (Ndalianis's book has encyclopedic qualities that every reader interested in the genealogy of the Neo-Baroque will really need when tackling the subject from a different viewpoint), some pages of the book do not always adequately stress what is really at stake behind some figures. There are fortunately many counterexamples of this, among which is Ndalianis's brilliant analysis of the opening sequence of *Star Wars*, with fine and subtle remarks on the modifications of Hollywood's off-screen paradigm. (Ndalianis shows very well how, thanks to its new use of surround sound, *Star Wars* revolutionizes the classic relationship between on-screen and off-screen, which ceases to be a diegetic opposition in order to introduce a kind of blurring of the boundaries between the images on the screen and the space of the audience in the theater—a typically Neo-Baroque move.) From time to time, Ndalianis also has the unfortunate habit of quoting rather than truly reading. One of course has to forgive the author for that, but this kind of secondhand quotation sometimes produces a lack of subtlety in her argumentation. To give just one example: In the discussion on literary baroque, I would have welcomed a more cautious presentation of Jorge Luis Borges (whom Ndalianis strangely calls Luis Borges) since Borges's work, often praised for its forsaking of all South American

baroque at the level of its style, is definitely something else than, for example, the very “wild” and definitely baroque writing of Severo Sarduy or Lezama Lima. As a corollary (but this is a problem with many Anglo-Saxon interpretations of the modernism/post-modernism debate), the coupling of Borges and Derrida, which can be defended at a strictly theoretical level if one considers that both writers take poststructuralist stances, is seriously challenged by the stylistic and rhetorical differences between them. But these are minor flaws, compared with the major qualities of a book that sheds much new light on very old problems.

References

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2. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
3. W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1994).
4. Yuri Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1990).
5. Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

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AGAINST FASHION: CLOTHING AS ART, 1850–1930

by Radu Stern. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2004. 205 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN 0-262-19493-7.

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Near the close of the 19th century, the French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec exhibited his stained-glass window designs (produced by Tiffany and Company) in Paris at the famous L'Art Nouveau gallery, the interior of which had been designed by Belgian architect and designer Henry van de Velde. At some point, Toulouse-Lautrec was invited to visit Bloemenwerf (near Brussels), the home that van de Velde designed, both inside and out in, 1895. However, when the diminutive but proper French artist arrived, he was apparently greatly offended because Mrs. van de Velde greeted him dressed in what appeared to be her housecoat

(or dressing gown), a sign, he thought, of disrespect. As it turns out, she was wearing not a housecoat but a simple, loose-fitting garment designed by her husband, who insisted that his wife (while at home) should dress in a way that reflected the building's architectural style, a belief that was widely referred to in Europe and the U.S.A. as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or total work of art). As this book reminds us, the person who launched this link between clothing and architecture was probably William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as he was most likely the one who designed the loose-fitting corsetless gowns that were worn by his own wife, Jane Morris (consistent with the spirit of Red House, their innovative home). Following that example, van de Velde designed outfits for the wife of one of his patrons; Frank Lloyd Wright created dresses for his own wife and the wives of two architectural clients; Wassily Kandinsky made outfits for a woman companion; Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser designed clothing ensembles; and of course there is the well-known example of Gustav Klimt, who designed one-of-a-kind “art dresses” (called *Kunsterkleid*) in collaboration with his companion, Viennese clothing designer Emilie Floge. By the turn of the century, a German essayist could claim that the time was fast approaching when “shows of women's clothing will take their place among art exhibitions,” with the result that it may be exhibited “next to paintings and sculptures.”

Illustrated by more than 100 photographs and drawings (many in full-color), *Against Fashion* is an interesting history of the development of an attitude that flourished during the eight decades between 1850 and 1930. The first third is devoted to an essay on clothing as “anti-fashion,” detailing contributions by the Wiener Werkstatte, Futurism, Russian Constructivism, the Omega Workshops and others. The remaining portion is an insightful anthology of 30 historical writings about clothing and art by Oscar Wilde, Hoffmann, van de Velde, Giacomo Balla, Varvara Stepanova, Sonia Delaunay and various others. Of particular interest is a pioneering essay (dated 1868) by British architect E.W. Godwin on the importance of clothing design and its relationship to architecture and archaeology. “As Architecture is the art and science of building,” wrote Godwin (a friend of Wilde and

James A.M. Whistler), “so Dress is the art and science of clothing.”

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THE CINEMA EFFECT

by Sean Cubitt. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2004. 464 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 0-262-03312-7.

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Another Cubitt. After the publication of two volumes on video that discuss aspects of medium and culture (*Timeshift* [1991] and *Videography* [1993]), Cubitt's critical preoccupation with the phenomena of flow, change and instability also drives the discussion of digital media and networked communication with regard to the organization of knowledge, power and spatial relations on a global scale in the monograph *Digital Aesthetics* (1998). There, he identifies cartography as the paradigm of realism in contrast to perspective as the paradigm of special effect (perspectival vision is synthetic) that is essentially spatial because it organizes in space. (Cubitt coins the term “spatial effect.”) And finally—after publishing the comprehensive survey of simulation theories (*Simulation and Social Theory* [2001])—the masterpiece (so far) is out: A book about *The Cinema Effect* that takes in previous reflections on the instability and flow in the emergence of media, instead of identifying interruption and defining normative patterns.

Departing from still commonly held theoretical positions according to which cinema is roughly divided—that is, realism (starting with the brothers Lumière) and magic (starting with the stop-trick by Georges Méliès)—Cubitt is interested in the magic flow of effects that constitute cinema on the whole: as a visual effect of motion on the temporal raster of the “pixel;” as an effect that through the differentiation of the “cut” constructs objects in spatial and temporal relations; and as a special effect that is grounded in animation and connotes meaning, transformation and metamorphosis through the “vector,” which marks the transition from the “being” of the object (cut) to becoming “synthetic.” The book's argument lucidly develops from the beginning of the medium, where Cubitt describes three positions, namely Lumière, Méliès and