The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man

Reviewed by Martha Blassnigg, University of Wales Newport, Newport, U.K. E-mail: <marthablassnigg@yahoo.com>.

The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man, by Edgar Morin, emeritus director of research at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique and president of the Association pour la Pensée Complex, has long been regarded as one of the hidden treasures of cinema and film theory. The long overdue English translation (with a revised preface by the author from the 1978 edition) of Le Cinema ou l’Homme Imaginaire, originally published in 1956, deserves celebration.

Morin was a member of the French Resistance when he was young, and his subsequent understanding of communism was formed by his wartime experiences. Since the 1950s he has dedicated his work to reconnecting and reforming fields of knowledge between the “humanities” and “sciences,” and his oeuvre includes works on the scientific "humanities" and "sciences," and his understanding of fields of knowledge between the sciences. Since the 1950s he has dedicated his wartime experience to the French Resistance and his subsequent understanding of communism was formed by his wartime experiences. Since the 1950s he has dedicated his work to reconnecting and reforming fields of knowledge between the “humanities” and “sciences,” and his oeuvre includes works on the scientific method, philosophical anthropology, social theory, popular culture and contemporary life in its complexity. In 1956, with The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man, Morin introduced a more complex approach to an understanding of the cinema and its audiences than has been dealt with before or since, which makes this work, among others, so contemporary and relevant. Drawing on the work of a variety of thinkers from various fields such as sociology, philosophy and psychology, Morin reintroduces the imaginary as a fundamental human condition, exemplified in the process of cinema perception.

He departs from an understanding of cinema as the product of a dialectic where the objective truth of the image and the subjective participation of the spectator confront and join each other. As we know, film as object, even in its projection in an empty theater, is nothing more than a meaningless orchestration of shadow and light. Only through the mediation of the mind does film become what we understand it to be in an interpretative, narratological, cultural, aesthetic sense. Following this, Morin sees the function of art as to enrich the affective power of the image, which inherits magical qualities through the potential presence of the double. He speaks of the nascent quality of magic in an intermediate zone, commonly known as sentiment, soul or heart. The transfer of psychological states of mind onto an image reveals affective qualities of that image, and if these affections become alienated and projected into objects (as in the doubles on the screen), then magic is no longer external belief but interiorized feeling. The magic in cinema is transformed into an affective-rational syncretism in aesthetics and serves as an analogy for Morin to what he calls the “archaic” worldview. In this way Morin lays open processes of the mind, even calling cinema a “mind-machine,” where projection and identification produce our “affective participation” in and with the world.

For Morin, the aesthetic is not an original human given, but “the evolutionary process of the decline of magic and religion” (p. 211); in this sense the cinema is a historical mirror and, at the same time, a vanguard of mechanization. Cinema, the “personality factory” (p. 213), has externalized the psychic processes of the mind. Cinemato-graphic (affective) “participation equally constructs magic and reason, that finally, magic, sentiment, and reason can be syncretically associated with one another” (pp. 181–182). For Morin, not only reason but also magic and sentiment are means of knowing, sometimes contradicting the realms of reason, but always their necessary double. Cinema offers the ideal exemplification of this and constitutes a privileged medium of an incorporation of these processes, where the objective reality of the photographic image, saturated with its charm or magic power (photogenie), and the subjective interpretative processes of projection and identification converge. The presence of optic illusion of reality in film “reveals to us the reality of the need that cannot be realized” (p. 208). In this sense, the imaginary always precedes technology and any form of invention in their “oneiric fulfillment of our needs” (p. 210).

According to Morin, the genesis of the art of film cannot be explained apart from looking at the complex processes and fierce competition of cinema’s early years. The apparent contradictions in the early development of cinema between the needs of audiences and the needs of rising capitalism, visible in the product of the...
films, reflect for Morin a similarity to a genetic anthropology: the study of human transformations throughout history. Cinema, originally an invention serving science, for example in the Lumière brothers’ search for 3D visualization or the analysis of movement by Marey and Muybridge, has been taken over by the imaginary, and Morin most importantly points out that the “total cinema,” including color and sound, already existed at the very beginning of film’s invention (Morin refers here to the first film ever known to be screened in the Edison laboratory being a sound film; to the early color experiments of the Lumière brothers; and to the huge panoramic screens at the world exhibitions and the Crystal Palace in London around 1900). While Morin still regards the final outcome of the cinema as a necessary development, he moves away from the usual teleological account of a technological determinism toward an analogy with the human mind searching for expression and external reflection. He emphasizes that it was the imaginary of the audience’s participation, mediated by conjurers and magicians (like Mélies) who understood the needs and aspirations of the audiences, that transformed the cinematograph into cinema. Similar minds have postulated such arguments; only recently has profound research into early cinema and thicker accounts of the converging forces shaping cinema technology mainly through the interventions and active participation of the audiences been published. (See, for example, Michael Punt’s recent paper “What Shall We Do with All Those Old Bytes? Saving the Cinematic Imagination in the Postdigital Era,” Design Issues 21, No. 2, 48–64.) While Punt’s more complex accounts of the history of technologies are becoming more widespread, Morin’s work on cinema as a complex phenomenon is finally being translated into English. It seems as if after a long period spent establishing film studies with a focus on the film as text, using linguistic, psychological, cognitive or cultural analysis, separated from the history of cinema as institution, the time has come for profound transdisciplinary studies of cinema as analogous to processes of the mind and body in their historical context.

Morin in this sense postulates an anthropological approach to cinema by incorporating both the imaginary of technology and the magical qualities of myths into the psychological processes of the mind. Such an approach is broadening film and cinema studies, enterprises that have always been characterized by their interdisciplinarity. For, according to Morin, “the world [in cinema] is humanized before our eyes. This humanization illuminates the cinema, but it is also man himself, in his semi-imaginary nature, that the cinema illuminates” (p. 215). Such a move brings cinema and film studies together in a common enterprise and enriches the treatment of film as art form or expression of culture with a profound meta-discourse at the core of what has been considered the enigma, soul or magic of cinema. For a long time the discipline of film studies has been abstracted and transcended to a Platonistic universe, separated into singular and often exclusive discourses. Morin’s radical intervention aims to open up the discourse around cinema with its content of films to the corpus and specificity of human aspirations and activity to “reintegrate the imaginary in the reality of man” (p. 218).

It is well known that translators often are specialized authorities on the subject matter of the texts they translate; in this tradition, and in this spirit, Lorraine Mortimer, senior lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology at La Trobe University in Melbourne, has contributed more than a translation to this edition. In particular, the introduction reads as a scholarly exposition rather than a translator’s commentary. This is welcome and valuable to the new reader; however, the inclusion in the footnotes of additional commentary beyond the normal remit of translation is a little disturbing. Although these comments are clearly marked, it is in my view a questionable practice in terms of giving a firsthand account of the voice of the author.

Concurrently with The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man, the University of Minnesota Press has also published in translation Morin’s The Stars (Les Stars) (first published in 1957), which will be reviewed here later this year. The University of Minnesota Press is to be congratulated on this timely intervention. Given the actuality and originality of Morin’s work, one hopes that his other publications, for example, L’Homme et la Mort dans l’Histoire (1951) and his L’Esprit du Temps: Essai sur la Culture de Masse (1962), will also be made available for the English-speaking parts of the world.

**Masterworks of Technology: The Story of Creative Engineering, Architecture, and Design**


Reviewed by Rob Harle (Australia).

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Masterworks of Technology is one of those rare books that will appeal to both the layperson and expert technologist alike. This book is written in such an engaging style that I believe even the most technophobic among us will enjoy and benefit considerably from reading it.

Lewis loves engineering, and this passion is passed on to the reader with an infectious joy. Many books are written by authors who know their subject extremely well but are unimaginative, boring writers. Just because we can write a letter to our grandma, or a company report, we should not assume we are able to write well for a discerning audience. Lewis is a master storyteller. To illustrate my point I shall quote the opening sentence of Chapter One: “Relief came over us as our bodies welcomed the cooler temperature and our eyes adjusted to the dim light that stood in sharp contrast to the heat and intensity of the summer sun” (p. 13). I am sure that even the most critical fiction reader would agree this is an interesting piece of writing.

Engineering is quite often considered rather dry, unromantic, technostuff. It obviously depends on how it is presented. The sentence quoted above is the beginning of an analysis of how the great pyramids of Egypt were created. The next sentence is even better, but you will have to read it yourself to find out how the mystery unfolds.

**Masterworks** has a good bibliography, an excellent index and is arranged into 11 chapters that cover approximately 5,000 years of engineering, architectural and design innovation. Seductive chapter titles include “Rocket Science and More,” “Fascinating Bedfellows,” “Pushing the Envelope” and “The Mind’s Eye.”

Lewis discusses at length the relationship between craft, engineering technology and science, explaining the differences and how one discipline affects the other. It is only in the last few hundred years that science (which
This is a book aimed at a theoretically fluent constituency. Bennett’s analysis embraces theoretical discussions of memory, testimony, subjectivity, pain, trauma and loss plus victim and stranger discourses as well as more art-related issues of representation and the relationship between visual and cognitive processes. It will, therefore, delight a broad, if sophisticated, readership. Nonetheless, its primary audience will be readers from art-theory/visual culture/cultural studies backgrounds together with those interested in trauma studies or postcolonial theory. Innovative, courageous and unashamedly attempting to push “the analysis of culture onto new ground,” Bennett makes a powerful case for her central thesis that visual arts practice is generative rather than representative. Theory, she sets out to demonstrate, can be derived from visual domains and not just applied to them.

The ambitious remit of the book, however, is both its strength and its weakness. It is indeed, as the back cover proclaims, “written at the highest level,” but this implies a readership that can keep up with dense yet often economically argued prose. Bennett covers a lot of ground in this slim volume. Rather surprisingly, the central notion of “affect” is never defined (or even discussed) and we are left wondering if the “affective experience” is synonymous with the “aesthetic experience,” as Bennett herself implies toward the end. If so, of course, what exactly does this mean? And though keen to empha-
size the open-ended nature of the empathic response; she does assume that when she enjoys the affective element in an artwork, we all will; with the gloriously named Gordon Bennett’s work, for example, as much as I was fascinated by her analysis, I was not convinced by it (poor illustrations did not help).

Nonetheless, these are quibbles. This is an exciting read that more than repays the effort on the part of the reader that Bennett demands. Thought-provoking and at times startling, Empathic Vision opens up new ideas that stay with you long after you have closed its covers. And it deals with issues that are now relevant to us all; as Bennett observes, since 9/11, trauma has become a globalized phenomenon.

**VAS: AN OPERA IN FLATLAND**


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I did not know what I was in for when I volunteered to review this book. And the thing is, I should have known. I edited a volume of “experimental” fiction (read: “will not sell any copies”) called *Hand_Code* a few years back, and Steve Tomasula, whose hyperfiction work I was familiar with, sent me a section from a work-in-progress. What Tomasula had sent me looked like something produced by a sleep-deprived, delirious genetic engineer writing concrete poetry with Adobe Illustrator while the genome database directly hardwired into his visual cortex filtered spam ads for cosmetic surgery. So it fit right into the book I was editing. But I was, and still am, intrigued by Tomasula’s work, simply because it asks the reader how to read. Tomasula has since greatly refined his book and has teamed up with graphic designer Stephen Farrell to produce a unique statement on the relation between science and fiction. That work is **VAS: An Opera in Flatland**—a hybrid of fiction, biotechnology, science studies, the history of biology, aphorisms and even a touch of the comic book. We talk a lot about books that defy category, mix genres and so on. But this is among the few books that really live up to this description. The only recent comparisons I can come up with are Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, Jeff Noon’s *Cobralingus* and the works of Kenneth Goldsmith.

What makes VAS intriguing as a read is that it is a very diagrammatic book. The text always seems to be drawing lines, making connections, mapping loci, deriving genealogies, aligning text and so on. There are, of course, several stratified narrative layers in the book. As the subtitle indicates, it makes reference to Edwin Abbott’s famous mathematical fiction *Flatland*, in which primary geometric shapes are a family of characters who inhabit a 2D world; adventures follow when 3D characters such as ourselves intervene in that world. VAS takes up this motif and maps it onto contemporary genetics, biotechnology and medicine. It makes use of Abbott’s narrative as a kind of allegory for the way in which we are all making the dimensional shift from “human” to “posthuman.” Like Abbott’s *Flatland*, VAS also makes use of humor, mainly to point to the hubris and ambivalence that many biotechnological advances bring with them. As one drifts through VAS, there are genealogical pedigrees, bits of documents on eugenics policies, cranial measurement charts, IQ tests, illustrations of simian evolution, fragments of genetic patents, reproductions from anatomy textbooks, tables from natural history books, appropriated advertisements for aesthetic surgery, chromosome maps, medical imaging and of course the sprawling data of the genetic code (VAS is most probably the first fictional work to include a full GenBank sequence from an entire gene, covering some 25 pages—geeky, perhaps, but a noteworthy achievement nonetheless).

VAS threads together several narrative strata in such a way that it is actually very hard to read the text in a linear fashion. Now, this is of course a stock strategy of much so-called postmodern fiction; what makes VAS interesting is that this tension between linear-nonlinear in terms of narrative is played out against the same tension in molecular biology and genetics (“gene X causes or predisposes characteristic Y” vs. “polygenetic factors” and “systems biology”). At some points two or more text threads occupy a single page; at other points the narratives suddenly become a 1950s-era comic book; and at still other points the text becomes a natural history or eugenics textbook, replete with footnotes. Writing in *The Space of Literature* about the way that literature always questions its own possibilities, Maurice Blanchot notes that “the essence of literature is to escape any essential determination, or any affirmation which stabilises or even realises it; it is never already there; it is always to be found or to be reinvented.” I wonder if the same can or should be said of science—or politics. Overall, VAS is a welcome and innovative contribution to the ongoing discussion and debate on biotechnology and the posthuman, principally because it invents a unique grammar for engaging with the complex issues presented by biotechnology, while also eschewing the simple moral dichotomies that often pervade popular media representations.

**INNOVATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS: HOW OUR BROKEN PATENT SYSTEM IS ENDANGERING INNOVATION AND PROGRESS, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT**


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This is a timely and concise book that presents a comprehensive and convincing argument about the not-so-explicit changes in U.S. patent law beginning in 1982, changes that the authors argue have broken a patent system that worked previously. Primarily this book could be slated as a discussion between economists and lawyers, and yet it is very effective for a lay reader; the economists, i.e., the authors, lay the blame squarely on patent lawyers. Nevertheless, the authors’ analysis offers useful insight for anyone with research interests in this area as to how to make strategic interventions in the takeover of the patent process by special interests and their lawyers.

Adam Jaffe of Brandeis University and Josh Lerner of Harvard Business School argue a strong case as to how the current (read; since 1982) patent regime has failed to deliver the promise of America’s innovation engine. It further prescribes certain strategies to make the necessary corrections to the problems at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

One line of the book’s argument is the clogging up of the patent system by pesky patent lawsuits and the associated economic fallout that discourages the innovation process. One of the pressures identified by the authors is the diversification of patent revenue to other governmental expenses.

One of the key chapters in the book is Chapter Four, in which the authors focus on the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit (CAFC), the appellate patent specialty court with the most influence on the patent system. The authors discuss the CAFC’s role in increasing patent strength by broadening the list of topics that can be patented and putting restrictions on challenges to patent validity, and offer more effective solutions.

The authors tend to be more communal when offering solutions. They propose peer scrutiny as a better mechanism than individual expertise in the evaluation of patents. Further, they want the other stakeholders in this community of innovators, such as scientists and businessmen, to weigh in about any issue around the novelty of a new invention. There is an interesting suggestion made regarding the role of challenges to patents. The authors think such challenges should take place primarily in a patent office and not necessarily be discussed in front of a jury perhaps not equipped with the nuanced understanding imperative for such evaluations. They make another point about how to prevent useless and pesky tactics by making the challenger pay for the costs if she or he loses the patent challenge. This is all summed up in Chapters Six and Seven, in which the authors examine previous failures and strategize for future reform. In addition to the above, the authors suggest recouping more resources for patent examination, the establishment of a pre-grant opposition, giving judges more powers, and better deployment of knowledgeable professionals to advise judges on complex topics.

In regard to suggestions as to how the system could be improved, one will have to give the authors the benefit of the doubt, given the scope of the topic and the limitations offered by a 200-odd-page book. One notices that they are steadfast in articulating their faith in the traditional patent system rather than talking about the undoing of the changes in appeals court jurisprudence, which according to the authors is one of the key factors in the downward trend in innovation. Not everyone is going to take their diagnosis and prescription on face value. That is the paradox!

In any case, one can fairly say that the authors largely succeed in putting across their main argument. They employ interesting strategies and tools to keep the tone of the book light despite dealing with such a dry and tedious subject. Anecdotal tone, interesting snippets with a sprinkling of a historical narrative and proposed reforms pack the slim volume, which has a good dose of footnotes and a reasonable index. It makes for an engaging and quick read.

**Le arti e la psicologia**


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Lucia Pizzo Russo’s new book is dedicated to Rudolf Arnheim on his 100th birthday, and his spirit everywhere pervades it. The book, however, is not so much an exposition of Arnheimian theory as a deep reflection on the relation between art and psychology. It is composed of five chapters on theoretical issues, mental images and color. Chapters One, Two and Five form a natural group as a powerful metatheoretical reflection on the relation of art and psychology.

Pizzo Russo’s book would seem to appear at a time when the psychology of art is receiving new interest, as in works by brain researchers such as Margaret Livingstone, V.S. Ramachandran and Semir Zeki. However, Pizzo Russo rains on this parade with one of her first questions, asking whether a psychology of art can even be said to exist. Even granting the subject exists in a theoretical sense, institutionally it is marked by a very precarious existence. Who, after all, is a true psychologist of art? Arnheim, certainly. But who else? Or more importantly, how does a researcher consider art? What is its relation to general psychology?

Pizzo Russo is worried more about the way the psychology of art is treated when taken up rather than its marginal status in general. The way that the discipline of psychology fails to mobilize its worthiest and most central principles does not bode well. For example, one of the few strong research programs in the psychology of art, the psychobiology of Dan Berlyne, bases itself on hedonics, that is, non-cognitive principles.

Following a not uncommon Italian belief that American cognitive science carries on many scientific ideas of the Behaviorism it is almost universally considered to have replaced, Pizzo Russo reflects on the impossibility of understanding art through a science that seeks to model thinking on a computer’s functioning and takes its explananda from theories of scientific...
thinking. Pizzo Russo stops to marvel that the hero of cognitivism is still David Marr, who never sought to understand human vision directly but instead to develop machine vision.

In an enlightening discussion, Pizzo Russo discusses the works of Howard Gardner and points out the way in which his thinking frustrates the placement of artistic thought in any mainstream context. Gardner, who posited the existence of numerous intelligences, effectively created a barrier of comonality between scientific and artistic intelligence. The way that a basic notion of intelligence is translated through various media—preserving a common definition of intelligence while at the same time respecting the difference of its manifestation—is instead captured in Arnheim’s idea of representational development. This preserves general notions of intelligence that only find a particular manifestation in artistic products. Ironically, a psychology of art turns out to be an eminently general psychology of cognition.

Pizzo Russo’s reflections on mental imagery in Chapter Three are equally negative, noting as they do the Pyrrhic victory of the imagists over the symbolists. According to Pizzo Russo, Philip Johnson-Laird, for example, insists so vehemently that his mental models are not visual that the possibility of a final overcoming of symbolism is impossible. The chapter on color stands quite well alone and treats several issues facing those interested in art and psychology. This book is the fruit of many years work at the intersection of art and science. Working in the Italian tradition, Pizzo Russo does not have to worry about the American feel-good narrative of the “Mind’s New Science” of cognitivism. If we have learned so much about the mind, why is our understanding of art so poor? The ideology of mainstream psychological science accords Arnheim a respected position, but only historically. Perhaps if cognitivism is a true science, we will have to remember with Newton that a science is built on the shoulders of giants.

The Sonic Acts festival started in 1994 with presentations by students from the departments of Sonology, Composition and Sound and Image at the Conservatory in The Hague, the Netherlands. In recent years, the festival organization has been professionalized, which led to the renowned 2003 edition Sonic Light, and in September 2004 to Unsorted: An A to Z for SonicActsX, published on the occasion of the 10th edition of the Sonic Acts Festival.

Whereas the festival consisted of three consecutive afternoons and nights of live performances, a film program, a two-day conference and an exhibition, Unsorted—cleverly printed in an extremely handy pocket-size format, making it something that can and should be read anywhere—is a collection of essays and articles on “information arts.”

The term information arts covers art forms that “in form and content are rooted in the information society.” What these art forms have in common is that they do not adhere to the old paradigms and classifications of the art world, and they “defy several paradigms on which traditional art forms are based” (p. 65). So far nothing new. Whereas other curators and organizers generally try to impose their own classification systems on these new art forms, for this publication the Sonic Acts publishers have taken a slightly different route: unsorted. That is to say, sorted by alphabetical order, not by author, but by the first word of the titles of the essays. In this way, the Colophon can be found on page 32, and the Introduction starts on page 54.

Unsorted opens with Lev Manovich’s “Abstraction and Complexity”—a short essay from his upcoming book Info-Aesthetics on the relation between abstraction, realism and science, comparing early 20th-century abstract art and its relation to the science of its day, drawing parallels to the contemporary situation.

Following that is a slightly older, but still valid and inspired, article by Stephen Wilson on why artists should take part in the process of technological research. Next is “Collectives and Art, A Few Remarks,” by Arie Altena, on how the artist as the lone genius has become the center of a network, regularly operating in collectives, across boundaries of art forms or even both within and outside the art world. Echoing Bruno Latour, Altena concludes that “life is messy” (p. 30). After the Colophon, Unsorted continues with an interview with Driessen and Verstappen titled “Generating Art,” which is later complemented with an interview with Casey Reas under the title “Organic and Conceptual Systems.” These interviews are the only two texts that approach the topic from an artist’s more practical point of view and at some points are almost too literal examples of implementations of the preceding theoretical texts.

After these interviews we find the Introduction and Programme; from there the essays continue with Tobias C. van Veen’s feedback loop on modernism, postmodernism, futurism, the spread of technology and its political consequences in “The Reverb Engine.”

Will Stuart’s paraphrase from Kantinsky’s “Über das Geistige in der Kunst,” entitled “Yellow”—among other things, quoting Scriabin on a parallel between yellow and a state of joy—closes this beautiful collection of thought-provoking essays, all printed on yellow paper.

CONVERSATION PIECES: COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION IN MODERN ART


Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg. E-mail: andrea.dahlberg@bakernet.com.

Grant Kester’s intention in this book is not just to define and conceptualize community or socially engaged art but to trace its antecedents in art history, locate it in relation to critical theory, and provide a framework for responding to it and evaluating it. He succeeds on all counts.

In the search for the roots of this art form, Kester undertakes a brilliant critical re-evaluation of art critical methodologies. He tackles the important question head on: All the works he examines were presented as works of art as opposed to social or political activism, so what does it mean to take this claim seriously? How can a critical response be formulated? Kester’s attempt to answer this question leads him to question the tradition of art criticism and, in doing so, he challenges and expands the whole subject of art theory. Anyone interested in art theory and criticism today
CONVERSATION PIECES
COMMUNITY • COMMUNICATION IN MODERN ART
GRANT H. KESTER

will find the first two chapters of the book interesting.

Kester’s definition of a socially engaged art practice is one in which the aesthetic experience is constructed so as to challenge conventional social perceptions. This is a non-object-based artistic practice that is more concerned with communication and praxis. Kester takes as his first example an orchestrated series of conversations on a boat involving politicians, sex workers, journalists and activists in Zurich. Their task was to discuss the issues and problems faced by drug addicts in Zurich who had turned to prostitution to support their habits. The eventual outcome of these ritualized conversations between parties with conflicting views was a safe haven for sex workers. Kester considers and develops his theory in relation to numerous other socially engaged art practices that are described throughout the book. His direct engagement with this work is valuable not only to test his ideas, but also because it has the additional benefit of reclaiming and preserving some of this work, which so easily disappears from the historian’s and critic’s gaze prematurely. If we are to consider and develop his theory in preference to the application of his theory could be developed further to more fully embrace the aesthetic and thus claim this work entirely for the visual arts. Kester is aware that his analysis focuses more on the communicative practices of this work as opposed to its visual impact, and one is left believing that the application of his theory could be developed further to more fully embrace the aesthetic and thus claim this work entirely for the visual arts.

Kester has provided an impressive critical and historical foundation for this often-ignored artistic practice. The debate on the nature and value of this art form has been enriched immensurably. I look forward to the response of the Critical Art Ensemble and many of the others who have opposed this form of artistic practice in preference to continuing to work within the avant-garde tradition of the 20th century.

DREAM BRIDGES—TRAUMBRÜCKEN

247 pp., illus. Trade.

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This book is both inspiring and delightful. All the text is written in both English and German. “A voice crying in the wilderness” is a phrase used to describe the passion and vision of Wolfdietrich Ziesel. The wilderness alluded to is the impoverished emptiness of postmodernism driven by “turbo-capitalism.” While the subject of the book is bridges, the book is really about dreams, “a compilation of thoughts about desires and dreams relating to bridges” (p. 9). It is about the state of the built environment and the quality of life associated with, and in turn influenced by, the integrity of architects, engineers, planners and construction company executives. Ziesel argues (p. 12), as does Jörg Schlaich (pp. 54–59), that this integrity leaves much to be desired in our contemporary society.

Schlaich also stresses, quite forcefully, that the dramatic increase in technologies, which should engender innovation and an exquisitely built environment, has done just the opposite. Technology, especially computer design applications, has the potential to liberate or enslave a designer’s imagination. The elimination of the engagement of extreme creative efforts, by allowing computer software to take over, as it were, is a recipe for a bland, uninspired, soulless built environment.

Dream Bridges is lavishly illustrated with sketches, engineering drawings and photographs, both color and black and white. There are six essays, including one by Ziesel himself; all are inspiring and challenging. The first essay —Ziesel’s “Dreaming about Bridges—Dream Bridges”—explains his attitude to design and his passion for all things bridges, both metaphorically and literally. Ziesel is professor and director of the Institute for Statics and Theory of Structures at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna.

Günter Feuerstein’s essay “What Is Truth?” discusses the notion of truth to materials and truth of appearances. He believes Ziesel’s work “stands for a new truth, a new beauty, and therefore a new transcendence in building, without his being doctrinaire or puritanical” (p. 23). As already mentioned, Schlaich, in “Wolfdietrich Ziesel: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness,” challenges contemporary architects and engineers and the way they are trained, suggesting alternative methods. Monika Gentner’s essay “Somewhere over the Rainbow” uses examples from literature to help us understand the importance of bridges, not so much in their literal, structural sense but in their metaphorical imaginative power. The architects Brell, Cokcan, in “Pedestrian Bridge of the Golden Horn,” discuss the favorable influence of Ziesel’s teaching: “He taught us not just to dream our architecture, but to live it” (p. 184). Finally, Otto Kapfinger’s essay “The Art of Civil Engineering: An Unknown Species in
Austria?” comments quite critically on the state of the built environment in Austria, including historical examples and architecture’s relationship with technology.

The book is mostly set in Austria, Ziesel’s homeland, and most of the structures are from this part of Europe. When I started the book, I wondered if this visionary and globally aware designer/engineer would mention the Harbour Bridge in Sydney, Australia—arguably one of the greatest creative engineering feats of the 20th century. And, yes, indeed on page 16 there is a mention of our beloved “Coathanger,” as we Ozzies like to call it. Many of the great landmark bridges around the world are mentioned throughout the course of the book, giving considerable credibility to Ziesel’s authority as a leading innovative engineer.

The book has an excellent graphic layout and would be at home on any coffee table, though it is far more serious than just a “nice” production. There is no bibliography, which I think would have been useful for students and researchers. Some of the essays could have been longer and perhaps a little more in-depth, especially concerning a bridge’s relationship to the two locations it connects, although this aspect of the book is covered to a certain extent in the text accompanying the 20 or so “case studies” that intersperse the essays.

This book is essential reading for all built-environment design students and those professional architects and engineers in practice at present who have the responsibility of further despoiling our visual urban landscape or perhaps improving it. The book puts such designers “on notice” to leave their egos at the office/studio door and work cooperatively with each other and the hapless public that has to endure and use their creations.

**HOKUSAI**


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As a student I was introduced to the work of the leading practitioners of the Ukiyo-e style of printmaking: Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Ando Hiroshige (1783–1864). I recall I was awestricken then (and still am) by the work of these three artists, along with a handful of others. What I did not know back then is that a century earlier, a large number of Western artists and art collectors in Europe and the U.S. (Frank Lloyd Wright, for example) admired and collected the work of these artists in a tsunami-like wave of influence called Japonisme. Dating from the 1890s, there is a studio photograph of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec dressed in a kimono and holding a Japanese doll and a fan. And as virtually everyone knows, there are Ukiyo-e prints, paintings of peacocks, vases, shoji screens and other Japanese artifacts in the backgrounds of paintings by Edouard Manet, James A.M. Whistler and their contemporaries. Van Gogh repeatedly made attempts to paint copies of these prints, in the hope that he might learn about the principles of composition.

In this book, which is breathtaking just to hold (how often are we treated to a volume that provides us with 700 reproductions, 500 of which are in color?), the focus is primarily on Hokusai, whom everyone remembers for his ubiquitous image of “the great wave” (titled Beneath the Wave of Kana-gawa), a print from a series called Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (c. 1834–1835). Hokusai was already world famous 40 years ago, and a flood of books and studies about Ukiyo-e, Japonisme and Hokusai has been produced in the meantime. Nevertheless, this book is a welcome addition, surely because of the excellence of its many reproductions, but also because it includes eight very interesting essays (informed by the latest developments in the practice of art history) on aspects of the life and work of Hokusai, with studies of his youthful work, his Western influences, his murals, his erotic art, the relation of art to literature in Japan, his late works and his letters. Of particular value to readers is an annotated list of works that runs for more than 75 pages and includes invaluable details about the context and interpretative signs for each of the book’s reproductions. Text and reproduction space is given to Hokusai’s many caricatures, his “how-to” diagrams about pictorial composition, his influence on Western artists and his effusive depictions of lovemaking (the so-called spring pictures or shunga), as in such fantastic scenes as The Jeweled Merkin and Diving Girl Ravished by Octopuses. Whatever topics chosen by this astonishing master, he always made powerful images that so far have survived the dreck of more than 150 years of art criticism—and will assuredly still be admired far into the future.

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**LA PLANÈTE HYPER: DE LA PENSEÉ LINÉAIRE À LA PENSEÉ EN ARABESQUE**


Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

La planète hyper (Hyperplanet: From Linear Thought to Arabesque Thought, my translation) is the third in a series of philosophical essays by Hervé Fischer about the effects of the digital on society and philosophy. In Le Choc du Numérique (The Shock of the Digital, 2001) he tried to take stock of what counts as the digital revolution, and in Cyber-prométhée (CyberPrometheus, 2003) he focused on how our understanding of what it is to be human may have changed. Throughout these books the author has made a point of developing a critical perspective, presuming that his readers share his fascination for the newly emerging technologies of the last decades.

According to Fischer, Western modernist thought combated obscurantism by using the “trilogy” of realism, ration-
alism and humanism as an aggressive armor. Realism opposes and opposed nominalism and idealism and laid the foundation for a scientific representation of the world. Rationalism replaces and replaced beliefs and scholasticism in philosophy, and humanism tried to override religiously inspired ethics. This triad appears to be in crisis, and the rise of the digital is at least instrumental in its demise. At the same time, an opportunity to find footing for a new philosophy presents itself. The passage from the analog to the digital marks the dematerialization of realism by presenting the world as a vast web of hyperlinks. Rationalism has reached the end of its breakdown in the complexity of the sciences and the science of complexity while postrationalism emerges as a way of thinking in connections and arabesques. Linear thought no longer suffices. Meandering thoughts and strengthened associations, gathering weight as they are used and reused, will become the basic instruments of philosophy. And humanism, dangerously losing credibility, is threatened by the double utopias of technoscience and posthumanism. “La planète hyper,” or the hyperplanet, is also the realm of otherworldness (“altermondialisation”), where individuals and societies have learned to live and thrive together instead of fighting cold wars and wars of terror.

This essay is an analysis of the rise of modernism and its crisis in the face of the realities of the 21st century as well as an exploration of possible solutions. Fischer thinks that by incorporating the strengths of the information age—Castells and Giddens are never far away—modernism may evolve into some new world view, combining a metaphysics of hyperlinks, the logic of fuzziness, paradoxes and multiple values and a meta- or hyperethics based on the connectedness of individuals within emerging newly defined communities. He fails, however, to substantiate his grand view of a new triad. While reading, I kept thinking, “Yes, but how?” What is the added value of this new philosophy? Why would it stand up against the forces that have undermined modernism, and how would it, if even partially successful, change the lives of the TV-watching, perpetually consuming or hungering masses who are gradually miring in the swamps of particularism and fundamentalism? In this sense, Fischer’s tone of “dismal optimism” reminds me some-times of the web-cult magazine Wired, even though the language is much more erudite and its references are way more classical.

**EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

**VISIONARY ANATOMIES**


Reviewed by Amy Ione, the Diatrobe Institute, P.O. Box 6813, Santa Rosa, CA 95406-0813, U.S.A. E-mail: cione@diatrobe.com.

One of the best-kept secrets in Washington, D.C., is the National Academy of Sciences gallery space, where exhibitions that explore relationships among the arts and sciences, engineering and medicine are regularly mounted. Given my enthusiasm for this venue, I was excited to learn a small catalogue accompanied their recent exhibition Visionary Anatomies. Excellent, and yet concise, this 40-page overview is a treasure. It includes full-color reproductions of each artist (or collaborative team), brief statements about the printed works, and introductory essays that place current fashions within the history of art and anatomy. As a whole, the book brings to mind several recent exhibitions (Dream Anatomy at the National Library of Medicine, 2002; the Hayward Gallery, London’s Spectacular Bodies, 2000–2001; and Revealing Bodies at the San Francisco Exploratorium, 2000). These exhibitions similarly highlighted how artists have translated collective advancements in medicine, anatomy and technology into their own projects.

Indeed, J.D. Talasek acknowledges that Visionary Anatomies is a part of the dialogue begun in these earlier venues. Talasek also reminds us the dialogue between artists and scientists has an extended history. Some of the details of this history are outlined in Michael Sappol’s contribution, “Visionary Anatomies and the Great Divide: Art, Science and the Changing Conventions of Anatomical Representation 1500–2003.” Sappol, a curator-historian with the National Library of Medicine, introduces a series of long-standing issues in the history of anatomical representation that include the conventions that govern collaborations among artists and anatomists. He speaks of both the boundaries and dialogue between them. Beginning with the assertion that we think of ourselves as anatomical beings, Sappol then moves to how the subject of anatomical representation, like the placement of “boundaries” between art and science, is not purely academic. It also has reference to our own experience. What I liked most about this short essay was the chronology it provided. Also of great interest were the engravings included to illustrate the text. For example, although I am acquainted with the history of anatomy from Galen through Vesalius, the Scottish anatomist John Bell, and contemporary imaging technologies, I had never clearly delineated how the uses of anatomical representations shifted as artistic/scientific conventions, meanings and audiences altered their perspective on the world. Whereas Vesalius’s bodies are often placed in a scene, and other illustrations cited (or parodied) iconic traditions and subjects, by the 18th century conventions had changed. The essay further explains that by the end of this century Bell had truculently denounced “the vitiuous practice of drawing from the imagination,” instead of “truly from the anatomical table” (p. 5).

The plates of the artworks convinced me that this is an excellent exhibition, while also reminding me of how much is lost when we look at reproductions rather than the works themselves. Some of the pieces worked better in the small format than others. I loved the sinewy quality and the way it was accentuated by light/dark contrast. In Mike and Doug Starn’s Blot Out the Sun #1, which used a combination of techniques found in both the history of photographic processes as well as tools of today’s digital age, Katherine du Tiel’s Inside/Outside series also translated effectively despite the small format. Images reproduced include Spine/Back and Muscle/Hand, which are printed so that it is difficult to separate the within from the without. Each confuses the lines between anatomy and physical reality, and combines an elegant aesthetic with a subdued whimsy.

The limitations of seeing art through a publication were more obvious in Stefanie Bürkle’s Panorama Paris Lambda print. It was immediately
evident that her work follows in the epic style that has become associated with contemporary German photographers (e.g. Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff and Candida Hofer). This piece contrasts the Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris with a terminal at Charles de Gaulle airport. Bürkle places an anatomical model of a man standing on his head in the museum room, which is stacked full of encased creatures, objects of natural history. Visually the juxtaposition is intended to prompt a comparison between cultural and social values in the 19th and 21st centuries. Impressive as I assume the piece is in the physical space, the contrast was primarily in my mind when pondering it in the catalogue. The reduction of a 31.5 in. piece to a two-page spread that measures 13 in. across mitigates its power. Similarly, Richard Yorke’s piece looked impressive, but is too large to read in the small size provided.

I was particularly grateful that contributors included statements about each work. As someone who enjoys knowing the process and how the artist “sees” the project, I found this information helpful to round out the book as well as my understanding of what I was actually looking at when viewing the reproductions. For example, (art)’s contribution Pet Study 2 (Lung Cancer): Man Ray/Picabia Imitating Balzac is a virtual sculpture modeled on a photograph of the painter Francis Picabia taken by Man Ray. I would not have conceptualized the image at all without the accompanying statement’s explanation that when the image is viewed through a backlit barrier screen, the assembled images are perceived by the viewer to exist in three dimensions. The statement also explains that similarity exists between the way that (art) builds up the multiple layers of the virtual sculpture and the way that contemporary medical scanning technologies deconstruct the body in a series of planes.

In closing, the Visionary Anatomies catalogue is a splendid overview of contemporary work that references the body. It is available in its entirety at <www7.nationalacademies.org/arts/Visionary_Anatomies.html>. I highly recommend it, with the footnote that those who can visit the show will no doubt find the actual works offer more when seen at full size in the physical world.
under a new “building” that had the shape and color of a rocky mountain and thereby represented a typical Austrian landscape. The pavilion could be accessed only from behind, and inside, a labyrinth of ladders led to the rooftop, from which the visitor had a 360˚ panoramic view of the pavilions and the city of Venice. Reworking a provocative mix of media, fashion and politics was the central theme in the large-scale photographic collages by the British performance and mixed-media artists Gilbert & George. Pictures that resembled pieces of a mosaic contained graffiti, religious symbols, oriental ornaments, hieroglyphs and particles of sub-cultural language codes that express a shift in perception. Gilbert & George have developed a visual language that derives from the experience of living in East London, where the reality on the street is determined by graffiti and young people from different ethnic origins. With regard to the politics of the real, the mosaic pictures of Gilbert & George make the transition between secret codes and specific languages and meanings that, on the one hand, are shared by those who can read the signs and on the other hand are an overt provocation of normative systems in religion, politics and aesthetics. Because the artists themselves appear as figures that seem to assimilate into different cultural spaces and semiotically hybrid environments, they manage to entertain and disturb at the same time.

Away from the Giardini, one of the most interesting exhibitions, which fit nicely into a Venetian “palazzo,” was the Latin American show curated by Irma Arestizabal. The exhibit featured modestly arranged painting, photography and video works next to each other, creating a multi-perspectival kaleidoscope with no need of demonstrating interference or any painful overlay. Donna Conlon’s (Panama) video Coexistence showed ants carrying green leaves and also little leaf-shaped flags of different countries (which the artist had “planted” among the real leaves for the ants to take away). This was a telling comment on the geopolitical question of what flags stand for in a time when we move, travel, migrate and even emigrate. A completely different notion of space from an art-historical perspective was the basis of the piece by Swiss video artist Pipilotti Rist, who used the original ceiling space of the San Stae for a seamless four-channel projection. Viewers had to lie down on divans in order to experience the unusual view of voluptuous female figures that, in the tradition of fresco painters such as Tiepolo and Tintoretto, seemed to fly and sometimes swim in the ceiling/heaven without concern for the laws of gravity. This type of site-specific video projection onto the church ceiling in a sense replaced religiously defined heaven with today’s virtual reality imagery.

The general question of how to integrate and properly present video projections in appropriate screening rooms still needs some consideration. Sadly, Bruce Nauman’s important 1990 video work Shit in Your Hat—Head on a Chair was poorly presented in an open doorway. In the piece a mime artist acts out offscreen verbal instructions in silence, thereby self-reflexively addressing contemporary topics of translation and transition through travel, migration and the experience of English as the dominant world language. In contrast to many video presentations in unsuitable spaces, narrative if not to say conventional forms of movies, as for example by Stan Douglas or Candice Breitz, were presented in purpose-built cinemas where the viewer was expected to find a seat in complete darkness and remain there for hours. This suggests that the question of projection and screening remains crucial when art exhibitions extend into media and implement film formats in their non-cinematic settings. Apart from having a few points of criticism from a media perspective, I thought that what worked really well were spatial installations, such as the four-wall projection room designed by South African artist William Kentridge, who deliberately referred to film pioneer Georges Méliès and used early film techniques as a lively and entertaining form to merge and intersect with different media and materials such as drawing, film and performance. The artist appears and disappears on multiple screens at different sizes where he creates, arranges and rearranges objects and images that surround the viewer as if he or she were immersed in a multimedia environment. In a different approach, one concerned with the politics of borders, Northern Ireland artist Willie Doherty scrutinized in his video installation the effects that real borders and the politics of separation have on the individual who is trapped in visions and reflections of split-reality, disturbed by unsettling questions of identity and self-assurance that occur and increase when one is confronted with the environmental situation of restlessness. Everything is ambivalent in Doherty’s work: The visuals and the narrative together produce a sense of the uncanny.

In general there was not much art that would point to new horizons, either technologically or aesthetically. Although there was a larger number of Asian participants in the two exhibitions curated by Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez and also in the additional exhibition venues outside Giardini, most pieces worked with highly conventional mise-en-scène in the film and video format. Interestingly, Xu Zhen from China, in the multiple-video projection Shout, depicted random street scenes in which people suddenly react to an invisible scream (produced by the camera team). The short scenes of shouting were randomly projected into the surfaces of oil tanks. Concurrency, the Japanese Pavilion at Giardini had history and memory as its theme, but in the form of personal, intimate reminders of a person departed. Miyako Ishiuchi’s exhibition in memory of her mother presented large-scale photographs of used objects that belonged to her mother. These included broken lipstick, shoes and different pieces of transparent and embroidered underwear that through the fixity of the photograph reflect on death as the state of stasis and immobility. Nothing changes anymore in these sensitive pictures, time is frozen forever, the traces of former usage are fixed and maintained for eternity. Ishiuchi’s work with these traces of her departed mother clearly can be seen as both an individual’s reminder and as a way of using media properties in accordance with aesthetic meaning. Needless to say, the Japanese participation was the most impressive.
Barricade 3, originally recorded in 1976, was the debut album of the French composers and musicians Hector Zazou and Joseph Racaille. Five years later it was released by ReR’s predecessor Recommended Records as one of their earliest titles. In the label’s catalog of out-of-the-ordinary albums, Barricade 3 ranks high among the most eccentric. Re-issued on CD in 2004, it has not lost any of its musical lopsidedness.

ZNK’s album has the hallmarks of a debut, and of the technology that was in use at the time. It is also very French, mindful of Erik Satie’s spiritual heritage. This is immediately evident from the titles of the pieces and descriptions of the instruments played, such as “The great composer seen in the face” (and from behind a bit further on), and “Your nipples are like poppy petals,” which features Zazou on “inspired electric piano” in the first movement; on “Annie la Télïe” Racaille sings “disastrous vocals.”

The album’s sound is determined largely by the duo’s use of the VCS3 and ARP2600 (synthesizers that were very much in vogue in the mid-1970s), electric piano and all manner of sound treatment. In some ways ZNR’s tools are similar to what Brian Eno unloaded on the music and musicians with whom he worked. They even share with Eno a bent for the elegant. ZNR’s interpretation of this is far-removed from Eno’s stylistic and dreamy moodiness, however.

The duo are more light-hearted and light-footed. They sound like they enjoy what they are doing, rather than brood over it. And if a solo has the sonic finesse and grandeur of a dentist’s drill, they clearly welcome that.

Zazou’s only appearance as a vocalist (Racaille does all the singing on this album, in a charming and inept manner), on “Seynete,” has him intone his lines through a distortion device that gives his voice an alien, machine-like, croaky buzz that contrasts poignantly with the emotional urgency of the accompaniment, and which is especially sinister when he chuckles. Likewise, the synthesized sounds float through those of the acoustic instruments (woodwinds of all sorts and sizes are particularly in evidence), resulting in patchwork chamber music that is too bizarre to become sentimental—although Zazou and Racaille like to dance on the dangerous line between brilliance and bad taste. If anything, their game is confusion. They play that to their heart’s content. The sound is outdated, there is no doubt about that, but the playful joy is timeless.

The reviews published in print are but a small selection of the reviews available on the Leonardo Reviews web site...

Below is a full list of reviews published in LR October–December 2005
<leonardoreviews.mit.edu>

December 2005


Brides of Frankenstein, curated by Marcia Tanner. Reviewed by Sonya Rapoport.


A Culture of Light: Cinema and Technology in 1920’s Germany, by Frances Guerin. Reviewed by Amy Jene.


Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, directed by Max Cacopardo. Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg.


Pond, by Tod Dockstader and David Lee Myers. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Psi Wars: Getting to Grips with the Paranormal, edited by James Alcock, Jean Burns and Anthony Freeman. Reviewed by René Stettler.


TCP/IP Essentials: A Lab-Based Approach, by Shivendra S. Panwar et al. Reviewed by Rob Harle (Australia).

November 2005

9th RAI Festival of Ethnographic Film. Reviewed by Aparna Sharma.


The Test Drive, by Avital Ronell. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

October 2005

Acousmatics and Interactive Music Festival, Pro Arte Institute, with support of the Ford Foundation. Reviewed by Mikhail S. Zalivadny.

Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism, by Hal Foster et al. Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg.

The Art of Setting Stones & Other Writings from the Japanese Garden, by Marc Peter Keane. Reviewed by Rob Harle (Australia).

At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet, by Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark. Reviewed by Mike Leggett.


I Wish You Peace, by Paul Dunmall Moksha Big Band. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.
