The Aegina Academy, a Forum for Art and Science: Light/Image/Illusion


Reviewed by Martha Blassnigg. E-mail: <martathablassnigg@yahoo.com>.

The Aegina Academy, a cultural forum for art and science, was founded by the Austrian artists Gustav Deutsch and Hanna Schimek, with the aim to "contribute to the promotion of independent and critical dealings with media, thus taking a step in the direction of democratising the media" (Schimek and Deutsch, press release). In the background of their pioneering film work, Deutsch and Schimek opened up their private laboratory on the beautiful island Aegina not only to the public, inhabitants and Greek artists and scientists, but also to invited scientists and artists of international standing, allowing them to participate in a discussion and exhibition forum, contained in a cultural project called the Aegina Academy. First realized in 2003 with the topic Light/Image/Reality, the Aegina Academy followed up its debut with a theme focused on the interrelation among light, image and illusion, comprising a symposium, public lectures, art-education projects and workshops, exhibitions and film screenings. This review gives a brief overview of the Aegina Academy by situating its theme within the wider framework of Gustav Deutsch and Hanna Schimek’s work. Light/Image/Illusion opened with an exhibition cycle and lectures by neuroscientist Richard L. Gregory and pre-cinema specialist Werner Nekes at the Goethe-Institut in Athens. In the following symposium in Aegina, organized by philosopher Fay Zika, international specialists from the disciplines of art education, art history, philosophy, media and film studies, and natural and social sciences (especially psychology, neuroscience and computer science) pointed out various related aspects such as the psychological and physiological preconditions of perception (see, for example, the work of Freeman, Kubaček, Pircher, Venieri and Vidnyánszky), veridical representation and fictional construction as in virtual reality or other new media environments (Jahrmann, Klett and Sarris) and an emphasis on art education and perspectives on the history of technologies of optics and media art (Hyman, Peternak, Punt, Santorinaïos and Zielinski). With a strong emphasis on philosophy, art education and neuropsychology, the symposium encouraged a stimulating discussion forum in a small but highly specialized community with overreaches to the public via several art educational and exhibition projects, public lectures and guided tours. A fuller account of the symposium and events at the Aegina Academy can be found at <www.light-image.net>.

The Aegina Academy emerged from a generous gesture by an individual artist and is a reflection of Deutsch’s energy in his creative work with the film medium and his exploration of public interfaces. Originally trained as an architect, Deutsch became an independent filmmaker in the late 1980s and is often mentioned in the context of the contemporary Austrian avant-garde. His work, however, eludes any clear categorization and stands out through its originality and particularity, consisting as it does entirely of early film footage. This material is thoroughly researched by Deutsch and Schimek, and they have become familiar faces in film archives around the world, where they mostly seem to disappear behind huge piles of reels. Deutsch’s films investigate the very mechanisms of cinema and perception, commenting on the artistic expressions of the intrinsic qualities of the medium. This approach is most clearly exemplified in the series Film ist., which can be interpreted as a deconstruction of film in terms of language and movement. As Tom Gunning has pointed out in his article “Film ist. A Primer for a Visual World,” this project can be defined as the first film theory on film [1]. It now becomes clear, however, that Deutsch and Schimek have ambitions that lie beyond the mere deconstruction of movement and time or an analysis of the interrelation between image and language in the cinematographic experience.

This becomes most apparent in their work in Aegina, in particular in Deutsch’s camera obscura in Perdika, which is an integrated work of art embedded in the landscape and culture in a gentle and modest way characteristic of Deutsch and Schimek’s film work, which is also simultaneously personal and private, and generous and public. The camera obscura in Perdika is situated at the southwest end of the island and has already become a major attrac-
tion. It is the world’s first camera obscura with a 360° panorama, sited at an optimal freestanding location surrounded by sea, islands and inland mountains. It is really a camera obscura rotunda, a cylindrical wooden building constructed by Deutsch and the architect Franz Berzl and realized in collaboration with Gavrillos Michalis (see Color Plate H). When the visitor enters from the startling bright light of the island into the dark, it takes time for the eyes to adjust before, almost magically, there appear inverted images on the 12 surrounding translucent screens. After approximately 15 to 20 minutes, the eyes become fully adapted and are able to perceive small details such as the waves or even birds. Because the 12 holes in the round wooden construction overlap in the throw of their projection, a small section of each screen is repeated and creates a complex visual experience wherein an object, for example, can appear three times on three successive screens. This artwork in public space is maintained by a guard from the village of Perdika and has apparently gained great popularity amongst the inhabitants of the island, who call it Panagitsa (“small chapel”). It is particularly appreciated by young lovers replaying some of the kiss-in-the-tunnel films that were so popular in early cinema.

In addition to this extraordinary experience of a multiple-screen panorama, during the Aegina Academy, every evening closed with a film screening in front of the Makellos Tower (built in the 17th century, it housed the Greek government when it transferred to Aegina in the 1820s). Inside, next to the organizer’s office, there were some exhibitions of work by artists, including Deutsch and Schimek’s Atlas, Part 1, Athanasius’ photography project. The installation Kino-Illusion, by Mark Paul Meyer from the Netherlands Film museum, occupied five windows on the top floor of the tower facing the courtyard. They were illuminated from the inside to reveal still frames from early films: one a single frame, the second a sequence of three frames, two with several single frames and a Marey movement study with a moving body in several postures within one frame. Next to these still images, which were also visible from the inside of the tower, the same images were also presented in a video sequence on a monitor at their original speed.

While the film enthusiast and early-cinema specialist may have tended to investigate the origins of these images in order to situate them in the context of a narrative or of film history in general, Kino-Illusion inhibited any such formalization. The displayed images asked for contemplation rather than contextualization and held the viewer’s attention. This strategy was comparable with the moment during the projection process when the images are halted in the gate for a fragment of a second, while the shutter of the Maltese cross interrupts the light beam and as a consequence enforces the perception of continuous movement in our visual perception. Kino-Illusion’s evocation of contemplation suggested that it is in our minds that these images move, start to move or cease to move; they initiate not only virtual visual movement but also a freezing of the stream of thought interrelating the associations between single frames. More than movement, Kino-Illusion characterized the various time qualities involved in the cinema experience by slowing down the time of the difference between the image sequences to a point zero: The fragments created a sense of timelessness. Because they were not entities in themselves, such as still photography usually presents, these images were open to all sides for associative framing, something that in this context they were neither able to fulfill nor allow. Although Kino-Illusion did not necessarily surrender the visitor to a metaphysical experience, the moving fragments on the video screen did not, as might have been expected, accommodate the impulse to actually see the flow of motion in the still frames but rather extended the perception of time and movement, for example in the slow motion of some fragments. Finally and rather thoughtfully, the exhibition space on the top floor also included a small library with works on movement and film, illusion and perception, where the various deconstructed viewing experiences from the exhibitions could be integrated into a discussion about a possible alternative approach to the film experience, questioning a long tradition of orthodox treatments of film in theory as a language or as representations of reality.

The work with still frames at the Aegina Academy, shown for example in Kino-Illusion and also in the exhibition Illusionistic Quadrat in the Lagrafiko Museum Aegina, resonated with Deutsch and Schimek’s most recent work: their picture collection Atlas, an image library containing more than 2,000 images. Pursuing an idea of art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), who towards the end of his life expressed his core ideas on art history in his famous picture atlas Mnemosyne, panels with an assemblage of diverse images from different media (maps, photographs of paintings, drawings, etc.), Deutsch and Schimek produce image collages centering on the subject of light and image. Atlas, named after the two symposia “Light/Image/Reality” and “Light/Image/Illusion,” has been presented during the Aegina festival in 2003 and 2005, and also at the contemporary art museum Lentos in Linz in 2004 and was also exhibited in the Kunsthalle in Vienna. Either on light boards lit from below (in Linz), screened as image show from a DVD (Aegina 2005) or as light-box–projected images on the facade of the Kunsthalle in Vienna in June 2005, the flow of pictures plays with our perception of sequential images, creating illusions by false references and associations. Warburg’s crucial insights are reflected in the interrelation between the images, in which he saw archetypal meanings in the movement beyond the visible shapes and an invigoration of the Dionysian principle in art. While Warburg’s unorthodox approach found a place in the discipline of art history, possible relationships with moving image technology, a new technology of his time, have been recently pointed out by Philippe-Alain Michaud. He established an interrelation between the mechanisms of cinema technology and Warburg’s method of the mnemosyne in his recent publication Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion. Warburg is currently receiving revived interest, and Deutsch and Schimek, truly visionaries in this respect, have anticipated this reconsideration of the relevance of his approach in contemporary discussions on the meaning of images and image technology in the context of new-media environments.

By moving away from the actual image in sequence running through a projector, Deutsch and Schimek’s focus on the still image seems to suggest a crucial shift in attention from movement to motion, an emphasis on the forces behind and beyond the actual surfaces, aspects that, in retrospect, can be traced throughout their oeuvre.

A full listing of Deutsch’s films can be found at <www.sixpackfilm.com>.
Books

**Pop Trickster Fool: Warhol Performs Naivete**

Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University, University Center, MI, U.S.A. E-mail: <mosher@svsu.edu>.

David Bowie sang about him even before he met him. Michigan teenagers Destroy All Monsters lived as if they were superstars in their underground films. A bookstore owner who hosted him said he was the dullest person ever met. Andy Warhol cut a contradictory figure in society, from the Pop Art Sixties until his surprising, untimely death in 1987, cultivating a hazy naivete each step of the way. Author Kelly M. Cresap reads both Warhol’s aesthetic and persona as rooted in his homosexuality, and his jester-like naivete as a well-chosen strategy for maximum freedom in a circumscribed world.

Cresap contrasts fey Warhol with the mythic macho of the New York school, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and other two-listed action painters boozing it up and slugging it out at the Cedar Bar and other smoky, manly dives. These tough guys cast a pall on the next generation of artists: witness the trepidation and delicacy of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, gay artists only slightly older than Warhol, who kept the sissified fact that they had decorated store windows as secret as their relationship. A former commercial illustrator, Andy Warhol created his Factory studio, where he directed assistants serigraphing imagery on paper and canvas. They joined Warhol for evenings out on the town, attending parties, snapping Polaroids, shooting movie footage almost at random, projecting films behind the noisy band the Velvet Underground. Warhol’s colleagues called him “Drella,” a name containing his unique mix of Cinderella, awestruck at her good fortune, and Dracula, the scheming nocturnal vampire. In the musical tribute performed at Warhol’s funeral, Songs for Drella, the Velvet Underground’s Lou Reed and John Cale sang of his compulsive productivity.

In universities in the early 1980s, some gay and lesbian painting students (Robert Morgan at San Francisco State, among the best) depicted domestic “gay genre” scenes of themselves and their friends that no longer read as particularly transgressive. Twenty years before, Warhol created gallery pinups of macho figures such as Marlon “Wild One” Brando and the gunslinging cowboy Elvis Presley and tragically overdetermined female stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. Warhol’s quickly eradicated Most Wanted Men mural at the 1964 World’s Fair used mug shots from the “Wanted” posters seen in post offices, and the subtext may have been that Warhol craved the bad men’s passions. A near-fatal shooting in 1969 may have weaned him from dangerous company, for after that he seemed to prefer celebrities, safely illuminated by flashbulbs.

The book’s least-successful chapter is a panoply of contradictory quotes on Warhol that the author calls the “Free Andy” Open Forum. Here readers are given brief items from myriad sources on aspects of Warhol’s persona and career, including the artist’s relationship to the artistic legacy of Marcel Duchamp. The chapter seems to aspire to be a theater piece rather than an entr’acte in this otherwise clearly argued book. To this gripe the author might reply that a lack of a centered thesis is more Warholian. What Cresap calls an “anti-cogito” locates Warhol in various currents of anti-intellectualism in American society. When I encountered The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (1975) in college, I was struck by its celebration of triviality and subjectivity. Why, one musters a case for or against something with evidence, not on the whims of a moody schoolgirl! To read a middle-aged artist going on like that was amazing. Meanwhile, Warhol’s cool-looking Interview magazine was like a big bowl of ice cream with sprinkles, so mind-bogglingly vacant and agape that it almost gave one a headache to read it.

Cresap builds the case that the most significant historical current in which to locate Andy Warhol is that of camp—the ironic sensibility crackling through much urban gay male discourse—and the author credits Warhol as its major rejuvenator. I remember when the excitedly anticipated (by 8-year-olds) television show Batman debuted, and my parents and neighbors defined it as an example of camp, “so bad it’s good.” Perhaps their appraisal of Warhol as “weird” and “sexless” was their way of discussing the Queerness That Dare Not Speak Its Name. Four decades later Kelly M. Cresap voices concern that popular culture is now entirely camp-dominated, its mainstream so cynical and admittedly trivial that there are no longer great vertices against which outsiders and sexual outlaws can snidely dish. We will never see another Pop Trickster Fool like Andy Warhol.

**The Situationist International: A User’s Guide**

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All minds (esprits) which to an extent are informed of our time agree on that which is evident—that it has become impossible for art to assert itself as a superior activity, or even as an activity of compensation to which one could honorably devote one self. The reason for this degeneration is visible as the
emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life [1].

Had these sentences been written recently, perhaps, our glance into the future would contain more optimism. Yet, as some may know, they were written nearly 50 years ago.

Since 1989, when the first major retrospective exhibitions on a group that had referred to itself as an avant-garde movement—the Situationist International (SI)—were held, the theoretical and artistic works of the SI have been acknowledged by a wider public. Consequently, publications by the SI appeared in reprints, and numerous books of scholarly research were published.

In 1995 the British author Simon Ford published a book entitled The Realization & Suppression of the Situationist International, An Annotated Bibliography, 1972–1992 [2], listing 363 mostly English titles. Ten years later we have a second publication by Ford, in which the author builds upon the extensive research he performed for his previous publication.

The book is named The Situationist International: A User’s Guide. For those familiar with the works of the SI, it certainly will not be a surprise to be addressed as users instead of readers. They may recognize as well the opening citation of this review as belonging to a text written by Guy-Ernest Debord, the key figure of the SI, together with Gil J. Wolman. The text was first published in French shortly before the foundation of the SI in May 1956 in Les Lèvres Nues, a journal considered close to the surrealist movement, and translated into English as User Guide to Détournement.

Those familiar with SI texts in the original French will also be aware that The Revolution of Everyday Life, by Raoul Vaneigem, the second major theoretical book by the SI after Debord’s Society of the Spectacle, was meant “for use by the younger generation.” In the case of Debord, Wolman and Vaneigem, it is obvious who was addressed: those, possibly younger, who could contribute to the transformation of a society that was perceived as alienated from life into a society of constant revolutionary practice, those who could contribute to developing a new practice of life. Now, in 2006, one may wonder what kind of user is addressed in the User’s Guide presented to us.

In a sense, the book is a classic. It could be categorized as a history book. As such, however, it has a very specific focus on a limited number of persons involved with the Situationist International, a movement located in a specific time that has been described as the last avant-garde art movement. In four chapters the book presents an overview of the SI, the main actors associated with it and their ideas and actions within their historical context. All chapters are extensively illustrated. Numerous black-and-white photographs show SI members at their gatherings, and many images present examples of work by the SI, paintings, comics and other illustrations. Additionally, various citations are inserted within the text and provide an idea of the style in which the SI theses were passed on to the public. An extensive number of side notes point to primary and secondary literature, mostly English publications, and invite further reading.

The first chapter is dedicated to “The Pre-Situationist Years, 1931–1956,” in which many of the latter key ideas of situationist theory were developed, for example, psychogeography, dérive and détournement. Chapter 2 collects the events in “The Early Years of the Situationist International, 1957–1965.” It includes brief accounts of several principal artists associated with the SI, as well as a description of the scission from the German and Scandinavian section, the Spurists and the Nashists. Chapter 3 describes “The Beginning of an Era, 1966–1968,” with the two major theoretical publications by Debord and Vaneigem as well as the SI’s involvement in the 1968 student revolt. The last chapter is dedicated to “The Dissolution of the SI and Its Aftermath, 1969 and Beyond.” It includes several pages written about Debord’s films of the 1970s as well as notes on various groups that understood themselves as Situationist or were rather unwillingly associated with the SI by the media.

Ford’s book ends:

To study and learn from the lessons of the SI is no idle pastime or exercise in passive contemplation. It is nothing if not a determined step towards the realisation of a future society where the SI’s ideas about a useful life are no longer quite so exceptional.

At this point one certainly realizes that the users addressed by his book are of inclinations similar to those addressed by Wolman, Debord, Vaneigem and others associated with the SI. They are potential revolutionaries, the exception being that this time they are expected to wrap themselves rather modestly in history and not in slogan. One can assume that such a practice has the potential of becoming a very clandestine revolution, and as such, a possibly successful one towards a new practice of life. “Historical consciousness is an essential condition of social revolution,” as René Viénet, a sometime member of the SI cited by Ford, once wrote.

References

THE CRADLE OF HUMANITY: PREHISTORIC ART AND CULTURE

Reviewed by Allan Graubard, 2900 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20008, U.S.A. E-mail: a.graubard@ starpower.net.

“For the animal, being essentially man’s double, had something of the divine, the very thing he no longer attains except in the prodigious effervescence of festival” (p. 177).

With this assertion, along with others, Georges Bataille seeks to interpret prehistoric art and culture. But such is characteristic of Bataille. His work on
the formative complexities of culture is also a means to inform a sensibility we seem to share across epochs, and which because of its vitality eschews any notion of nostalgia.

It is something we call the marvelous; a desire for the marvelous.

What, then, did the birth of art mean 40,000 to 50,000 years ago? How did it mark the emergence of human culture; what are its ties to the community of hunter-gatherers, who embraced equally the animals they ate and used for clothing; and where does it link with the otherness of death—traits that in whole or in part distinguish sentient beings and cultures?

These are the questions Bataille struggles with in these 10 texts and appendix, written over a 30-year period (1930 to 1960) and which, despite their sometime brevity, also respond to his time, which is ours with its real and potential savagery; from the two world wars and intervening colonial conflicts to the Holocaust and the sudden emergence of the atomic age with the U.S. attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bataille’s *Visit to Lascaux* (1952) thus seems, in retrospect, a matter of urgency. He enters the cave he has previously discussed to test his ideas and to experience their capacity to refract art’s first flowering. He notes the exceptional qualities of the cave, the magical resonance of the drawings and the differences in depiction between animal and man: the former rendered with acuity, the latter as a rudimentary sign in an animal mask. Then in the last paragraph he returns to a history he identifies as our own, which begins with a form of slavery: the subjugation to work.

Are the cave and its drawings a tonic to this mention of work or a concise recognition of a development that calls for further study? Bataille does not say.

In this light it seems less important to test Bataille’s accounts by way of their conclusiveness than by way of what we gain and lose in our reading of them, a value that underlies much of his work and that also enabled him to confute his research on prehistoric man with three aptitudes: a philosopher’s skill in suspending judgment, an anthropologist’s need for specificity in observation and a poet’s desire to reveal qualities perhaps previously unknown but that, when recognized, gain precision by virtue of our assent to their immediacy.

We find this, most notably, in the text *Unlivable Earth*, which concludes the book. For here Bataille writes with a conviction infected with astonishment. In *Les Trois Frères*, our ancestors have depicted “all jumbled up [in] an immense crowd of animals” the emergence of “figures half-human, half-animal” that “lead to a musical tumult, a dance of deliverance into intoxication.” Bataille continues: “the straightforward animal figures were those of the hunt, but these strange—human yet animal—figures were in fact divine, for the animal,” and we return to the excerpt at the start of this review.

In matters of concern to art and poetry, philosophy and science, George Bataille is a provocateur. That his studies inevitably turn to tracking the rapport between them, as he wrote and when we read, why we greet each addition to his oeuvre in English with the attention it deserves.

The *Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, with its few but precise illustrations, contains perspectives that compel. It will interest readers of Bataille, and those more generally fascinated by how we interpret our origins in the art left to us by our ancestors.

**COGNITIVE SCIENCE, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS**


Reviewed by Amy Ione, The Diatrop Institute. E-mail: <ione@diatrop.com>.

Contemporary thinkers frequently lament the difficulty in finding materials that strengthen foundations for cross-disciplinary communication. *Cognitive Science, Literature and the Arts*, by Patrick Colm Hogan, is an exception. A quite readable book, the volume will prove to be a useful tool for those who wish to participate and contribute to a research program that combines humanities and cognitive science. The interactive feel of the book makes it appealing without compromising its value in explaining scientific concepts. Indeed, as the book progressed, I kept thinking that it would be an effective text in a classroom, where students from the various fields could directly engage with the scientific studies, access the artistic works used to reference artistic concepts (e.g. James Cameron’s *Titanic*, John Coltrane’s rendition of “My Favorite Things,” and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*) and flesh out areas that receive little treatment in the text, such as visual art. In this kind of environment, I believe, the whole would prove to be greater than the parts.

Several factors serve Hogan well as he tackles the task of simplifying relationships among cognitive science, literature and the arts. One is his use of questions to aid in leading us through the material. (A sampling includes: Why are some sequences of sound music and others noise? What are the differences between a literal statement and a metaphorical one? Why do we feel literary emotion, even though we know the events in the work are fictional? Why do many people feel sad at precisely the same moment when watching a movie such as *Titanic*? Is it the music?) A second is the book’s overall organization into sections that build on one another as the material is presented. All of these factors allow Hogan to leave the reader with a sense that dynamics are a major part of the book’s construction as well as the appreciation process we bring to art itself. Listening to music, reading a book, watching a movie and exploring a painting are all dynamic processes. In other words, the work has to be constructed to appropriately activate both the cognitive (cortical) and emotional (limbic) brain parts in their natural dynamic interplay. Shakespeare does not just tell a story; he interweaves comedy and tragedy, mystery and romance so as to keep all the components bubbling with their different dynamics holding our interest. While most of us intuitively recognize the degree to which it is the dynamic reso-
nance that makes music so powerful emotionally, *Cognitive Science, Literature and the Arts* makes us aware of this explicitly and offers a compelling account of how similar dynamics are evident in literary and visual arts.

In Chapter 1, Hogan gently eases the reader into the subject with a taste of how a listener cognitively processes music. From here, in Chapter 2, Hogan moves to cognitive science more generally, offering an overview of cognitive theory. Chapter 3 then outlines basic principles of creativity (emphasizing Howard Gardner’s work). Next Hogan turns to metaphor (e.g. Lakoff, Turner, Ortony and Tversky), followed by information on how a viewer reconstructs a story from the “discourse” or presentation of it. The theme of Chapter 6 is the emotive response to literature, framed in terms of a work’s narrative structure as well as an individual’s memories, literary emotion and recent work in neurobiology, all the time grappling with the question of why we are moved by the experiences of characters we know to be fictional.

Concluding with an overview of evolutionary psychology, and pointing out areas of methodological laxity, Hogan gives us much to think about in terms of the overall potential and roadblocks we must consider in combining cognitive science, literature and the arts.

The strongest part of Hogan’s study comes from his ability to lead us through scientific schools of thought without overlooking the need to simplify technical topics such as representation (connectionism, parallel and serial processing, encoding, types of memory, differences between structures and processes, conceptual integration (blending), etc.) Juxtaposing the science with a range of examples aids the reader in conceptualizing the links Hogan sees and clarifies, at least to some degree, how scientific researchers have endeavored to integrate qualities we identify with art (emotion, metaphor, etc.) without overlooking aspects of art scientists are likely to ignore in their studies. This multidisciplinary approach alone strongly recommends this work. The author also reminds the reader on several occasions that some art forms include the kind of political analysis that frequently accompanies descriptive theory. These, as he notes, are clearly outside the scientific purview, but are nonetheless an integral element of many artistic works.

Above I mentioned that within a diverse classroom environment some students would likely point out limitations within the slim volume as they learned from it. One that would surely come up is the limited treatment of visual art. It is unfortunate that the book does not give more play to this subject, particularly in light of the historical tendency to elevate narrative elements within visual art when conceiving art theory or speaking about aesthetics. Having primarily focused one arm of my own research around the tendency to conflate visual art with literary, narrative-driven standards, I am concerned that the interpretations that predominate in the book are likely to sustain the many myths surrounding the subject. As such, I fear, they will reinforce the tendency to confuse art and literature more than they will aid readers in envisioning the visual arts on its own terms. This is not to say the area is totally ignored. Some mention of Robert Solso’s work, for example, offers exposure to how we view paintings. Still, Solso hardly offers an analysis of visual art to equal Hogan’s touch with literature. Even if memories, story lines and emotive devices are nested within our experience with a visual object, the creation and appreciation of the visual artifact speaks to a kind of visual intelligence that deserves more specificity.

Similarly, the book would have benefited from an enlarged discussion of cognitive work that distinguishes the creation of art from our engagement with it. The chapter on creativity, which was no doubt intended to reference this, seems somewhat abstract, and I would presume that Hogan’s orientation toward narrative examples and well-written explanations are a logical expression of his background (he is a professor of English, comparative literature and cognitive science at the University of Connecticut).

In summary, although the book is aimed primarily at humanists, scientists interested in cross-fertilization will find it a much to chew on here as well. To the author’s credit, he successfully provides background material readers can use to participate in and contribute to a research program in cognitive science and literature either individually or collaboratively. His most successful achievement is the integration of the literature of cognitive science with arts that have a strong story line. The entry into music is adequate, while visual arts remain on the periphery of the study.

**Reference**


**HUMAN FACTORS METHODS FOR DESIGN: MAKING SYSTEMS HUMAN-CENTRED**


Reviewed by John Knight, User-Lab, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, U.K. E-mail: <John.knight@uec.ac.uk>.

This book comes from the same stable as Patrick Jordan’s *Pleasurable Products*. Other publications in the series include Jordan’s *Introduction to Usability* and *Human Factors in Product Design* with William Green. With this pedigree, this new volume is unlikely to disappoint, and it does not. It looks and feels trustworthy and complete, and is overwhelmingly practical as well as erudite when it needs to be.

The book has three parts. The first...
describes the practice of human factors. The second offers a compendium of methods. The last part looks at professional issues and applications. The book is clearly aimed at practitioners and should act as a single point of reference. It is indeed, the introduction suggests that the book was written in response to the lack of such work. It is aimed at the design disciplines and will have relevance to everyone from architects to software engineers. For the more “designerly,” it may be a bit dry, and there are few illustrations to break up the text. However, designers would be well advised to read it.

The book begins by looking at the barriers to the adoption of technology and the problems with design products and user interfaces. Human factors are proposed as a remedy to the intractable problems of interface design and improving the user experience. The focus is on traditional ergonomic concerns of comfort, performance, failure and reliability rather than experiential use qualities. As such, it is a good counterbalance to the current vogue of emotional design. Applications center on systems, especially those pertaining to activity and work. The firm ergonomic background is also evident in the focus on evaluation and standards and the process the author proposes that is built on solid requirements.

The text goes through the history of human factors design, and this is contextualized by a process cycle that dovetails with business needs and the product lifecycle. Given the ergonomic focus, it is understandable that the first section tackles human abilities and limits, memory and physiology and the influence of the external environment, including temperature. Motivation and problem solving are also considered and are firmly rooted in a cognitive perspective.

Chapter 3 looks at problem solving. Unusually so, given the practitioner focus, it deals with Montaigne and sensual experience and tackles philosophical issues in an accessible and businesslike manner. Chapter 4 looks at methods. These provide valuable professional guidance and make Human Factors Methods for Design: Making Systems Human-Centred an invaluable reference work.

**ART SINCE 1900: MODERNISM, ANTIMODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM**


Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg. E-mail: <andrea.dahlberg@bluerenet.com>.

*Art Since 1900* is a survey of the ideas and particular approach to art history of its authors—Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh. These art theorists have showcased their ideas in *October*, the journal founded in the U.S.A. in 1976. *Art Since 1900* is an overview and a continuation of the *October* project. This means that the essays, discussions and discrete entries on particular subjects that compose the book focus on the art of Europe and the U.S.A., are preoccupied with critical theory and conceive of art as “texts” to be analyzed and problems to be solved. Duchamp, of course, is the towering figure in this view of art. To paraphrase Levi-Strauss, these authors believe that “art is good to think.” In “thinking art” the authors invoke the grand narratives of psychoanalysis, structuralism, semiotics, modernism and postmodernism.

Unlike many, I have no quarrel with this theoretical focus. The authors are instrumental figures in the development of this way of looking at art; their work is extremely influential, and I doubt that anyone could seriously claim that it is not worth engaging. My view is that this is one highly influential approach to the study of visual meaning is constructed and that as much can be gained from rejecting aspects—or indeed, all—of this approach as accepting it. My expectation was that this survey would introduce the undergraduate and the more serious general reader to this way of engaging with visual art. In some respects this expectation is met. The organization of the material is a triumph. Some 107 essays are arranged chronologically from 1900 to 2003; each is well illustrated and supplemented by detailed timelines and side boxes on ancillary topics. Four theoretical essays on psychoanalysis, the social history of art, structuralism and formalism, and poststructuralism and deconstruction are placed at the beginning of the volume and lay the theoretical foundations for what follows. Easy-to-follow symbols throughout the text refer the reader to related essays and entries, so that nonchronological readings are possible. The reader can follow a traditional art-historical reading or break off at any point to follow a series of linked ideas that cut across time. This organization of the material encourages multiple readings of subjects, with illuminating results. It is a way of reading that is familiar to us because this is how the Internet creates relationships between ideas—by the use of hyperlinks—but it takes a high degree of skill to emulate so effortlessly this way of linking ideas in print with a subject as complicated as this.

The problems I perceive with this work are twofold. One is the inability of the authors to communicate their ideas
in plain English. I see nothing intrinsic in the subject matter that precludes this. The book, however, is full of sentences like this: “Matisse resisted Rodin’s metonymic fragmentation, and in some ways his sculpture represents the opposite approach.”

The essays are full of jargon, such as “hierarchical canonicity” and “hegemonic media apparatus,” and contain much of the vocabulary of Derrida and other theorists. Some of this jargon can be understood if the introductory essays are read first, but this precludes the kind of creative readings of the book made possible by the constant references to related ideas. A firm grasp of most of the complex theories the authors subscribe to is necessary before most of the essays can be read, and this is only very partially provided for in the introductory essays. In addition, I simply cannot see why much of this jargon is used. It seems possible to explain many of the authors’ ideas without recourse to it, and those passages that I found unable to translate into jargon-free English were ones I suspected made little sense to begin with.

While the essays suffer from this use of jargon and barely comprehensible sentences, the text boxes within them on various related topics are written in much clearer prose and offer many illuminating insights.

The second problem is that while the authors are enthusiastic proponents of the use of theories such as Marxism, postmodernism and psychoanalysis “to place criticism on a more rigorous intellectual footing,” they have, in practice, ignored most of the (often quite devastating) critiques of these theories launched from within the social sciences. Some of the passages in which the authors draw particularly heavily on concepts from semiotics and deconstruction, import the concept of visual meaning as a form of linguistic or literary meaning, with the result that the construction of visual meaning is treated as though it were strikingly akin to the construction of linguistic or literary meanings. This, in turn, means that the works of art under examination lose much of their specificity and a huge dimension of what defines them is under-analyzed. One cannot help wondering if the authors’ disinterest in painting after 1960 is not connected to this. This way of analyzing art marries much better with art that is preoccupied with ideas than with art that is insistently visual.

This kind of engagement with visual art can be understood as a response to Duchamp’s question “What is art?” and his attempt to dissolve it. It turns art criticism into an intellectual exercise, requiring it to justify itself, question itself and look at the conditions of its own making and display. Many of its strengths and limitations can be seen in this volume, and this raises the question: What other approaches to art might there be at this point in time? The book is a summation of the October project that will speak most clearly to those already familiar with the work published in that journal but, at the same time, it invites the reader to stand back from that project, assess its significance and imagine what lies beyond.

**THE ART OF SETTING STONES AND OTHER WRITINGS FROM THE JAPANESE GARDEN**


Reviewed by Rob Harle, Australia.

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This is a very soothing book! When everything in the world seems wrong or you are overwhelmed by the tensions of everyday modern living, reading a few pages of The Art of Setting Stones may just be the best medicine you could take.

The sense of peace one feels in a well-cared-for garden, especially a garden that embraces the Asian aesthetic style, is conveyed throughout this book. Small water features and naturally weathered stones are extremely important parts of Japanese gardens. Hence the title refers to the way these features are carefully placed in such gardens. The naturalness and apparent simplicity of these gardens belies the complex philosophy behind their design. Like the highly structured process involved with the traditional Japanese tea ceremony, these gardens are precisely designed and constructed. However, when done correctly, the artifice disappears and the viewer experiences a wonderful empathy with nature.

The book has eight chapters: “Currents,” “Boundaries,” “Closing the Circle,” “Trees,” “Layers,” “Balance,” “The Art of Setting Stones” and “Wintergreen.” There are quite a number of delightful illustrations, “done on black clayboard by the author, whitting away the cold evenings at his hori-kotatsu, during the late Autumn and Winter of 2000.” Marc Peter Keane lived in Kyoto for many years, and the gardens he describes are all from this area of Japan. The book describes many traditional Japanese customs, such as sword-making, and Keane flows in and out of the garden descriptions with snippets of philosophy and words of wisdom on topics ranging from economics to ecology to the nature of existence.

While The Art of Setting Stones is not by any means a how-to instruction manual, attentive readers will understand what is required to create a natural garden place of peace and tranquility for themselves. Keane is an astute observer of minute detail, and this is meticulously reported on almost every page. As an example: “Waves of light ripple off the water, shimmer up the stones, the trunks and branches of the trees, rising in endless waves, as if returning to the sun” (p. 33). Consequently, it is not really the sort of book one reads from cover to cover in one sitting; it has the potential to become a little boring if consumed in this way. Reading a few pages or perhaps a chapter at a time, however, will uplift even the most jaded psyche.

I feel considerable sympathy for those who live in high-rise buildings or congested cities with no regular access to the healing, therapeutic qualities of well-designed gardens. Incidentally, there is a considerable body of emerging research supporting the therapeutic affect of gardens and wild places, such as rainforests. Even in the smallest apartment, a miniature Japanese garden, perhaps 60 x 60 cm., may be created and incorporate the philosophy outlined in this book. Such a small
gardens have the capacity of bringing about the same sense of tranquility and connection with the natural world as some of the much larger gardens created outdoors. This book may just inspire you enough to create your own place of peace.

ART MARKETING 101: A HANDBOOK FOR THE FINE ARTIST

Reviewed by George Shortess, 3505 Hecktown Road, Bethlehem, PA 18015, U.S.A. E-mail: <george.shortess@lehigh.edu>.

This book and others like it raise an interesting question about the nature of art. This is somewhat unintentional, I think. While there are some disclaimers, the book assumes that art can be treated as a commodity, like a washing machine or a pair of shoes. This, of course, is not necessarily bad, since many collectors also approach art as an investment and as a commodity to be bought and sold, hopefully at a profit. In order to use the book effectively, however, the artist must accept this mentality. If, however, you believe that your art is primarily an expression of yourself, and you are the sole arbiter of what you produce, you will have trouble getting the most from the book. You may also have more difficulty making a living from your art. The assumption is that since you will sell what the market wants to buy, you must do some form of market research and try to find a market for what you produce. If there is no available market for your work, you might want to consider changing what you produce in order to sell. This is, of course, what successful shoe companies do.

Therefore, for anyone who intends to sell artwork, especially if one wants to make a living at it, this is a very useful book. It is not limited to marketing and advertising help, as the name might imply, but covers legal protections, taxes, record keeping, shipping and other related issues. It is very thorough in treating these subjects. By following the suggestions, an artist should have no problems in setting up a business and promoting artwork. This will increase the likelihood that an artist will sell work, but as the author points out, there are no guarantees of success.

It is admittedly weak on the treatment of computer systems and web-based marketing tools but does refer the reader to other sources.

Surprisingly, there is no discussion of short-term art residencies in schools by teaching artists. Of course, it takes a special kind of artist to do this successfully, but there are many artists who supplement their income with these opportunities. As I have found out, these teaching experiences often have the added benefit of forcing the artist to rethink his or her own art.

I would recommend the book to any visual artist who wants to sell artwork and is willing to accept the idea that art is a commodity.

The PARADOXES OF ART: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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

“A small child once said to me, ‘You don’t draw Bugs Bunny, you draw pictures of Bugs Bunny.’ ... That’s a very profound observation because it means that he thinks the characters are alive, which, as far as I’m concerned, is true.” Chuck Jones, cited p. 80.

It is taken for granted, in certain circles anyway, that art is important—that it matters to our lives. Commonplace and connection with the natural world. This book and others like it raise an interesting question about the nature of art. This is somewhat unintentional, I think. While there are some disclaimers, the book assumes that art can be treated as a commodity, like a washing machine or a pair of shoes. This, of course, is not necessarily bad, since many collectors also approach art as an investment and as a commodity to be bought and sold, hopefully at a profit. In order to use the book effectively, however, the artist must accept this mentality. If, however, you believe that your art is primarily an expression of yourself, and you are the sole arbiter of what you produce, you will have trouble getting the most from the book. You may also have more difficulty making a living from your art. The assumption is that since you will sell what the market wants to buy, you must do some form of market research and try to find a market for what you produce. If there is no available market for your work, you might want to consider changing what you produce in order to sell. This is, of course, what successful shoe companies do.

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We would not be convinced by Rick’s acts of self-interest and selflessness in Casablanca if we did not believe he were a “realistic” depiction, and that the circumstances of his life and personality were veridical determinants of his behavior. Few viewers, however, would also argue that he is really real—even if he were based on a true-life person.

We know just as well that Bogart is acting a part (very well) such that he brings the character of the troubled bar owner “to life.” Yet knowing this does not diminish the emotional force of the portrayal.

Philosophers (and others) have long puzzled over this conundrum (usually citing loftier literary examples) but as with many similar paradoxes have failed to defuse its inherent contradiction. Paskow’s move is to return to Heidegger, principally Being and Time, and extract from that a counter-intuitive worldview at odds with much current scientific and philosophical discourse.

The position he defends can be summarized as follows:

1. Representations and the realities they represent are not as distinct as Western philosophers since Kant have assumed.
2. We treat the represented object, scene or person to some extent in the same way we would treat the real thing.
3. Therefore, the represented thing matters to us in the same way that the real thing would.

By hopping over the Cartesian boundary that putatively separates mind from world, the imagined from the real, Paskow helps to revivify the sterile debate about whether beauty is objective or subjective—whether it exists in the minds of the beholders or the world they behold. His argument draws intellectual sustenance from Heidegger’s most important work and, in particular, his contention that “self” and “world” is a unitary phenomenon. The world for Heidegger is not an external, remote domain we observe through slits from within a Cartesian mind-bunker; the world is the very thing we are, including our outlooks, dispositions, cultural and philosophical orientations, and so on. In a sense “being-in-the-world” amounts to “being-the-world.” On this basis, Paskow can claim:

...when we are captivated by a painting [the characters in the painting] are not merely taken to be the subjects “in our minds,” but... beings who are “out there,” thus not simply in an “ideal
Insofar as works of art represent people, places or objects we would respond to in certain ways in the “real world,” so we respond in like manner to the same thing in imaginative form, and it is this that accounts for the veridicality and vitality of works of art. To take as an example Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Paskow argues we should not regard such an artwork as just a concept or image merely in a person’s mind . . . but as a being in its own right (e.g. a particular young woman wearing a silver earring, out there) as well as a being with a meaning and significance that one takes implicitly to pertain to one’s life (p. 64).

Given this, how then do we distinguish between, say, a girl in a painting and a girl in real life? Disregarding those soap fans unable to discriminate between actors and their on-screen personas, Paskow asserts that we “know” a depiction or portrayal is not real at the same time as we believe it to be real. Surely this asserts a contradiction that violates the philosophical requirement for rational analysis? Not a contradiction, Paskow says, but a case of “dual vision” in which two separate conscious agents (what he terms Consciousness1 and Consciousness2) coexist in the mind of the beholder.

Consciousness1 is “credulous and fully engaged,” believing wholly in the vision” in which two separate conscious agents (what he terms Consciousness1 and Consciousness2) coexist in the mind of the beholder.

Consciousness1 is “credulous and fully engaged,” believing wholly in the mind of the beholder.

Consciousness1 is “credulous and fully engaged,” believing wholly in the mind of the beholder. and Consciousness2 tempers its stance of meaning has been batted back and forth between mind and world. Consciousness1 (in Paskow’s terminology) reflects our more private, dream-like world where imagined objects are directly and uncritically apprehended. Consciousness2 reflects our socially mediated world, in which, for example, we are able to verify that the contents of our dreams are fictional. The co-presence of these two modes of consciousness reflects the totality of our experience in which we both believe in and do not believe in imagined or fictional worlds.

This, I believe, is a significant contribution, not just to the debate about why art matters to us but also to the wider question of how we consciously inhabit the world. The quest to understand consciousness in scientific-philosophical terms has generally held it to be a unitary phenomenon in which diverse neural and cognitive activities are drawn together into a singular experience. Extrapolating from Paskow’s influential *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, however, seem to be part of an emerging tendency across a number of discrete disciplines to regard certain longstanding metaphysical and epistemological questions with fresh insight. Rather than arguing the toss between two equally feasible yet apparently contradictory positions—whether aesthetic experience resides in the world or the mind, for instance—there is a growing recognition that a more productive line of inquiry may be to accept the validity of both, even with the contradiction (see my review of Graham Priest’s *Beyond the Limits of Thought* [1]).

There are several other important components of *The Paradoxes of Art* that would require too much space to fully unpack. It is worth mentioning briefly, however, the way Paskow follows and builds on Heidegger’s treatment of the individual object (or work of art) not as a discrete and self-bounded entity but as an integrated extension or embodiment of all other things in the world that relate to it. Thus, the work of art matters because in it, as in all objects, we perceive not only the isolated object or person itself but the extended web of our own existence: “The experienced thing is thus a microcosm, a sort of Leibnizian monad which—darkly, uncannily—reflects the current struggles of our being-in-the-world, and the Significance of our lives” (p. 104).

This metaphysical analysis is used to support the claim that when we view a work of art, we bypass the assumed Cartesian split between art object and viewer, such that the work and our experience of it become indissolubly bonded: “A currently and fully experienced Vermeer painting becomes for me an important aspect of the way I feel the world right now, and it is an important dimension of who I am right now” (p. 196).

I believe Paskow has told us, in philosophical terms, something important about the way we experience art, something we already knew in a naïve way, and something that for Chuck Jones was a professional necessity: that the work of art is experienced as being “out there,” and not in our heads; that what it depicts is real and yet is also artificial; that we “read in” our own experiences such that the work becomes an extension to and an embodiment of us; and that we both believe in the characters we become involved in at the same time that we are able to determine they are not real.

*The Paradoxes of Art* is a complex and in some places technical argument, much of which will be of little interest to those outside certain confined academic cells. The general import, however, has much wider significance, and is of particular relevance given that the discourses of art, philosophy and consciousness are rapidly converging, as evidenced by recent books and conferences covered in this journal.

**Reference**


**NEW PHILOSOPHY FOR NEW MEDIA**


Reviewed by Eugene Thacker. School of Literature, Communication, and Culture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332-0165, U.S.A. E-mail: <eugene.thacker@loc.gatech.edu>.

Reading through Mark Hansen’s book *New Philosophy for New Media*, I was reminded of an H.P. Lovecraft story entitled “From Beyond.” In it, an
obscure occultist-engineer invents a device that enables him to glimpse other dimensions of space-time. What he sees does not fill him with wonder and awe but rather a “cosmic terror.” Apparently, all sorts of polydimensional, vaguely amphibious and formless “things” populate other dimensions. And these things look back at him with great menace. What terrifies the narrator of the story, however, is not the weird creatures but the fact of being shown the embodied limitations of human perception and cognition. Something nonhuman and radically other gnaws at the human-centric world of seeing and knowing, and we can neither see nor know it.

Of course, this is not to say that Hansen’s book should be read as a supernatural horror story, but the questions New Philosophy for New Media raises are not dissimilar. Amid the plethora of books about new media, Hansen’s book offers a unique perspective by focusing on what is perhaps the paradigmatic new media artifact—the “digital image.” For Hansen, however, the digital image is neither an abstract number (a collection of bits) nor a paradoxical thingless thing (a Photoshop file). The digital image is instead a process, a sort of processual singularity that encompasses the process of perceiving as well. Neither “number” nor “object,” the digital image “can no longer be restricted to the level of surface appearance, but must be extended to encompass the entire process by which information is made perceivable through embodied experience” (p. 10). This is the core of Hansen’s approach to new media. While many studies focus on the technical details of digital artifacts, Hansen suggests that such perceptions dissolve the body from the image—a process that, he argues, is constitutive of perception itself. While many studies obsess over the ontological problems raised by digital technology (in terms of simulation and so on), Hansen focuses on the co-evolution of embodied cognition (perception as filtering) and the ways that “information processing” always points to an instance of embodiment—even if to radically transform it.

These orientations lead Hansen to explore the specific relation between new media and the role of embodiment. Hansen’s use of the term “embodiment,” however, is complex. While he does acknowledge the rich use of the term in phenomenology, he is equally interested in the viewpoints of cognitive science as well as the philosophy of Henri Bergson. In fact, Bergson’s notion of the perceiving body as a “center of indetermination” is one of Hansen’s guiding motifs in his analyses of contemporary new media art-works. This is played out in his concise and patient discussions of the works of Jeffrey Shaw, where the assumed correlation between body and image (immobile, receptive body + external object-trigger) is shown to be much more complex. In fact, Hansen’s progressive analysis leads to an emphasis on “affectivity” that is, in a way, isomorphic with information processing. The readings of Robert Lazzarini’s piece skulls, Douglas Gordon’s video projections and Bill Viola’s recent “digital portraits” sheds light on this notion of affectivity: “the capacity of the body to experience itself as ‘more than itself’ and thus to deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new” (p. 7).

I would be tempted to refer to Hansen’s New Philosophy for New Media as Cinema 3: The Digital Image, if such a reference would not place an undue burden and anxiety of influence on the author. It would also be inaccurate, for while Hansen engages deeply with Bergson’s work on perception and memory, he also reads Bergson against Deleuze. In the latter, Hansen sees a tendency to dissociate the image from the affectivity of embodiment and towards an abstract “time-image,” from body to frame. In this sense Hansen’s book is actually poised between two theoretical traditions—phenomenology and structuralism, surface and structure, “experience” and “pattern,” flesh and number, body and algorithm, etc. Often discussions about new media fall to one side or the other of this polarization. Hansen’s book is unique in that it asks us how new media, or the “digital image,” challenge us to rethink embodiment in radical ways, ways that are uncannily “nonhuman.” At the end of the day there is still someone watching, even if that person watching is really actively filtering—even if that person filtering is really engaged in the co-production of body and milieu. This is captured in Hansen’s selection of artworks, all of which engage the notions of “computer vision” or “machine time” in a profoundly ambivalent way. There are lingering questions for me—the particular take on Deleuze, the role of the biological or neurobiological, the emphasis on the visual. The most provocative question I draw from New Philosophy for New Media, however, is not about art, or the image, or visual culture, but about the “problem” of sense. Is embodiment always “human,” even—and especially—if it is not simply “technological”?

Eating Architecture


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It is not an obvious subject, but once one has come to think about it, the combination is not surprising either: Food and shelter are as essential to the development of civilization as fiber and fuel. Cooking and building both imply the transformation of (raw) materials applying energy while following rules to reach a final result: a meal or an inhabitable space. Time scales may be different, but if there is anything like coherence in culture, both activities must have at least some symbolic, structural or metaphorical relationship. That is exactly what the authors of this collection of essays are exploring or proving.

Jamie Horwitz of Iowa State University and Paulette Singley of Woodbury University serve the meal in four courses. In “Place Settings,” the connections between food and locale are explored. Each essay looks at food from a different angle: the locality or globality of its production, regional culinary identities, the “consumption” of the colonies and the international tourist taste. In “Philosophy in the Kitchen,” the cleansing, cutting, and cooking of food form a routine that also doubles as a site for aesthetic experimentation. By drawing gastronomy out of the kitchen, the essays that follow shift the discussion toward the performative space of eating—a site that is inherently unstable, mutable, mobile and memorable (p. 16).

“The Table Rules,” with its striking reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s magnum opus, The Origin of Table Manners, effectively honors the founding father of structuralist anthropology without copying his themes or imitating his approach. It is in these five contributions that the close connections between practical day-to-day architec-
ture and interior design and the social and cultural meaning of food are analyzed. Watch out for “Food to Go: The Industrialisation of the Picnic,” by Mikesch Muecke, when next victimized by a fast food giant or committing another takeaway, “Embodied Taste,” finally, targets the taste buds and their counterparts in the other senses. This is where art and architecture meet gastronomy and food production. Of course, Georges Bataille and Damien Hirst must pass in revue, as do Dalí and Francis Bacon.

All in all, I found the essays in this collection of uneven quality, but almost all of them inspiring and certainly thought provoking. I found it difficult to stomach Donald Kunze’s extra-ganza on the Missing Guest, but Susan Herrington’s cultural and culinary portrait of Canada is palatable, hilarious and wise. Daniel S. Friedman’s “Cuisine and the Compass of Ornament: A Note on the Architecture of Babette’s Feast” offers a grandiose reading of this intriguing film and is as clear and sparkling as a glass of spring water, and the closing essay by editor Paulette Singley made me think again of marble and pork and why I am not disgusted by either.

**ARTIFICIAL LIFE IX: PROCEEDINGS OF THE NINTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SIMULATION AND SYNTHESIS OF LIVING SYSTEMS**

edited by Jordan Pollack et al.

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

Artificial Life (AL) has never been and probably never will be the art of re-creating life in a test tube, even if the tabloids and some conservative lobbyists want the public to believe it is, in the hope of selling more copies or winning more souls. Instead, in the words of editor Jordan B. Pollack, AL is:

the study of the organizational principles of life, rather than the study of carbon-based life as it exists on Earth. Some of the fundamental questions of AL are:

• What are the principles of evolution, learning and growth that can be understood well enough to simulate as an information process?

• Can robots be built faster and cheaper by mimicking biology than by the product design process used for automobiles and airplanes?

• What kind of constraints should be placed on sciences, such as “Wet ALife,” which work with self-replicating elements?

• What components of physics and chemistry support emergence and automatic discovery of physical and cognitive mechanisms of life forms?

• How can we unify theories from dynamical systems, game theory, evolution, computing, geophysics, and cognition? (p. xii).

This certainly is a tall order, but research done by the scientists who attended the Ninth International Conference on the Simulation and Synthesis of Artificial Life in Boston in 2004 testifies to its feasibility—in the long run. No less than 97 papers were selected for presentation and published in the proceedings. It is hard to find any trends or even highlights in this highly entropic collection. The papers organized themselves alphabetically by author’s name in nine subfields, so it is not surprising that the subfield Self-Organization has caught the eye of the popular scientific press—considering also that it delivers some spectacular results such as self-replicating machines (in the work of Efthathios Mytilinaios et al).

The subfields of Robotic Studies, Formal Games and Automata, Artificial Chemistries, and Evolutionary and Adaptive Dynamics are evidently blooming, as they take up more than half of the contributions, but it was in “Language, Brain, Culture” and “Art and Philosophy” that I found the least technical, although certainly not always the most accessible, material. “Language” in this context is not to be taken as the highly sophisticated communications systems we colloquially use but rather as a set of simple rules and a few words, the evolution of which is studied in a computer-simulated environment. This says it all. Artificial Life studies nowadays consist mostly of mathematical and statistical analysis of emergent properties of very simple computer-dwelling entities, fitted with a neural network and evolving by means of a genetic algorithm in a highly simplified environment. The majority of the papers here include just these elements: evolution, emergent behavior or emergent properties and contextual or environmental restraints. From these principles, which are articulated in very different ways, very divergent effects can be seen to arise: from the expression of desire to the recognition of the shape of objects to the emergence of grammar.

This being the proceedings of a conference, most papers are highly technical and require a good understanding of the typical language of neural networks and genetic algorithms, and a background in at least the basics of Artificial Life or the older science of Artificial Intelligence. On the other hand, this is not a book one wants to read from cover to cover. Browsing through it, reading an abstract here and a paper there, will allow one to catch a glimpse of a most fascinating field of discovery.

**IMAGE RETRIEVAL: THEORY AND RESEARCH**


Reviewed by Pia Tikka, researcher at University of Art and Design, Hämenehte 135 C, 00560 Helsinki, Finland. E-mail: Pia.Tikka@uiah.fi.

Image Retrieval: Theory and Research is a book that serves, as author Corinne Jörgensen emphasizes, as a foundation for individuals in research communities who need an introductory overview on the issues of image access, indexing and retrieval. It becomes clear in reading this excellent book that it is intended for experienced readers: not only...
because of the quite brisk “first-aid” coverage of the exhaustive fields that relate to image retrieval and systems design, such as the domains of cognitive psychology, the psychology of art, computer science, content-based image retrieval (CBR) and library and information science (LIS), but also owing to the compactness of the information presented.

It is made clear that the cross-disciplinary, user-centered approach is a must in future research. The large body of literature concerning data models, pattern and feature recognition, database architectures and machine learning and image understanding through applications of artificial intelligence, Jørgensen notes, have concentrated on what is computationally possible, but not on the analysis of the needs of real-world users. The support outside the scope of the book could be found in Andy Clark’s discussion of the inseparable reciprocal evolutionary relationship between the human mind and techno-environment, that is, “specially constructed environments replete with artifacts, external symbols, and all the variegated scaffoldings of science, art and culture” [1]. Jørgensen suggests unifying research technology, methods and goals that facilitate “a common, sensible, and easily understood framework” (p. 199) for the future interdisciplinary research community.

Jørgensen’s preliminary research interest lies in identifying and categorizing image attributes in user queries and image-indexing [2]. The research draws from the human tendency for “similarity” and “critical difference” judgment, which provides plausible tools for image feature categorizing. The perceptually stimulated attributes, such as the human figure, objects, color and location, are typically recognized in images. Jørgensen’s research concludes that the contextual situatedness of each individual, whether a user or an indexer, fundamentally enables or constrains the image classification and management processes. Emotional moods, personal motivations, likes and dislikes, life experience, etc. affect the descriptions and feature attributes given to the images when indexing and, in turn, to the information requested when searching images. Thus, an ecological view [3] surfaces toward the end of the book.

Jørgensen’s wish list for future research includes the following: a test-bed for comparative evaluation, which would incorporate a large number of images from diverse domains (science, arts, consumers, etc.); a visual indexing language for bridging the gap between, for example, the automated lower-level feature-based image-content analyses and the higher-level semantic content of images; an integrated indexing record accommodating multiple types of data from both human and machine process; widening communities of research and practice juxtaposing the researchers’ experiences and interests from the domains of the CBR and the LIS. Final but not least in the researcher’s wish list is a request for a new starting point: Understanding the needs of an end user and her desired methods of interaction should guide creation of “real-world” applications, specifically usable, flexible interfaces.

The critical notion of the book’s content draws from the apparent two-faceted problem of visual and textual information. Although the book emphasizes the research orientation toward the integration of visual and textual knowledge, it deliberately ignores this in the content of the book itself. In my view, both for less-experienced readers and for researchers not familiar with the computational image-analyzing systems, access to the image indexing and retrieval topic might have become more feasible with some visualization. Use of images could have added to the discussion the actual dimension that the author’s approach emphasizes, the visual knowledge and embodied understanding as an unexplored resource of image retrieval systems design.

In conclusion, I recommend the book as an excellent introductory text to the field of image processing. Jørgensen’s overview on image retrieval, that is, human-generated and machine-processed practices and theory, makes an important contribution for the designers of a globally accessible image management. It seems, though, that the success or failure of future research relies fundamentally on the application of what Western science has come to know as embodied knowledge.

References


3. “The ecological approach” refers to the idea that the organism evolves in continuous interaction with its environment. Here the reviewer assumes that the author relates to the view of J. J. Gibson, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

LARA CROFT: CYBER HEROINE


Reviewed by Dene Grigar, Texas Woman’s University. E-mail: dgrigar@twwu.edu.

As I write this review of Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky’s book, Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine, today’s technology news from the BBC shows the headline “Lara Croft Firm Gets Bid Approach.” Following the link to the story, I learn that interest in SCI Entertainment—the company that currently owns the Tomb Raider video game series featuring the Lara Croft character—rose after SCI announced that several companies expressed interest in buying it. What is interesting about this report is not the fact that some entertainment company’s stock earnings have improved but rather that the BBC news highlights the Lara Croft name while omitting the name of the game from which she originates. This treatment of the Lara Croft character is consistent with the insights found in Deuber-Mankowsky’s book, for as she shows us, Lara Croft was—and, obviously, still is—a phenomenon, one that oversteps the boundaries between the sexes just as she has those between virtuality and reality” (pp. 4–5). For millions of fans around the world, Lara Croft, not Tomb Raider, is what drives their interest, just as for an entertainment company her image, not the game, showcases its news. It is this curiosity that Deuber-Mankowsky seeks to explain in the book.

The book, Volume 14 of University of Minnesota’s Electronic Mediations series, is actually a translation of a work originally written in German and released in 2001 just after the Lara Croft sensation had reached its peak with the release of the first Tomb Raider movie. Entitled Lara Croft—Modell, Medium, Cyberheldin: Das virtuelle Geschlecht und seine metaphysischen Tüchen, the book has been updated and expanded to address changes and...
Deuber-Mankowsky follows these three threads, weaving together everyone and everything from Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan, Sybille Kramer, Teresa de Lauretis, Slavoj Zizek, Ernst Kantorowicz, Enid Coleslaw (a character from Ghost World), Cartesian theory, The Matrix, Heidi and U2, to name a few theorists, characters, ideas and rock bands used to make her argument.

The final analysis of how and why Lara Croft achieved such success and what that success says about us as human beings as well as our attitudes toward women and media would have carried more of a bang in 2001, perhaps, than it does in 2005. For today, when a vapid media personality such as Paris Hilton can find fame for no reason other than her ubiquitous physical presence (remarkably oversized in some places and undersized in others), no one is surprised that a virtual character, even one who exhibits more wit and intelligence than Hilton, such as Lara Croft, “promotes the reduction of women to their (female) bodies” (p. 58), a depressing truth I and my graduate students arrived at in the late 1990s after I bought Tomb Raider and asked them to join me in playing the game in my Feminist Cyberculture course. At best, Deuber-Mankowsky suggests that “sexual difference [can] be understood as an irresolvable question, a place of unrest situated at the limits of knowledge, and which interrogates their foundation” (p. 82), a view that is as hard to disagree with today as it would have been then when I was teaching Feminist Cyberculture. Her conclusion, however, that “[t]he question of sexual difference becomes an antidote to narcissistic identification and the metaphysics of gender” (p. 83) seems a severe judgment even with an argument so well constructed. Were those really the forces driving my 6-year-old “gamer” nephew to play the game over and over again when it first came out? Of was it, as he claimed as I watched him taking the Lara Croft persona and killing his thousandth bad guy, the “cool” graphics?

If there is one thing certain in the atomic age, it is that the future is uncertain. While artists, scientists, engineers and (dare I say it) politicians are busy defining and redefining the limits of culture and society, Histories of the Future takes a moment to reflect on some of the more colorful fruits that have been left in the collective wake of progressive activity during the last half of the 20th century. This could easily have been a straight chronicle of popular utopian fetishes (time travel, aliens, computers, cyborgs). While it certainly addresses these topics, it does not stop there. Rather, it tidies up the fuzzy edges surrounding some of the more obscure historical events—from nuclear testing to the Heaven’s Gate cult—and gives them neat little pedestals on which to sit in their respective places in the halls of history.

Stemming from a research workshop that first took place at University of California, Irvine in 1997, the contributors to this volume, consisting mainly of anthropologists and historians, formulated a cultural conversation in the shadows of the American western frontier—an area that harbors many of the strange and unique things that define the United States. After several subsequent meetings, workshop participants were left to formulate their own ideas as they saw fit. Some stuck with American history; others stemmed out to...
explore histories in other areas of the globe—futurism and the city in Tokyo; futurism, surrealism and food in Europe; cell phones and revolution in the Philippines; and resource frontiers in Indonesia. The volume as a whole manages to cover a satisfying range of subjects in the wide net it casts. There is enough in it to indulge the interests of individuals ranging from New Deal historians to die-hard science-fiction fans.

Throughout the volume, a certain frequency of anxiety is continually channeled, befitting the unknown. The book opens with a vibrant picture of American excess in a small corner of the Nevada desert in the early years of the Cold War, with a pulsing palette ranging from nuclear power to Liberace. Throughout the volume, essays continuously scan the range of progressive impulses, from millenarian to utopian to technological to spiritual—all with a similar intention of gauging the often-minute measurements between expectation and results. “How to Make Resources in Order to Destroy Them (and Then Save Them?) on the Salvage Frontier,” by Anna Tsing, illustrates the spirit of the volume by discussing the making of a resource frontier in Indonesia in the 1990s in the face of globalization and the otherwise overwhelming burden of supply-and-demand economics. In it she discusses how the turbulence implicit in the activity on a frontier—in this case, the foraging of natural resources—both confuses and defines an industry’s operations. The prospect of profit—whether economic or spiritual—invites a wide range of participants who invariably become involved in a tangled web of cooperation and deceit, with little regard to sustainability.

In between the essays are “interludes” that stray from the straight essay style—including a game, a fiction piece, a manifesto and a timeline of timelines. “Global Futures: The Game” is not designed to produce winners and losers; rather it is a forum for players to test their knowledge of world events and to stretch their imaginations at the same time by proposing how to reshape those events into many viable, alternative futures. “Access Fantasy: A Story,” by Jonathan Lethem, is set in a traffic jam with no conceivable beginning or end, in an undefined urban area in which a novice sleuth makes his way through the world of subsersive advertising in search of clues to link a suspected murder to the owner of a highly coveted apartment in his fantasy realtor video tape. The world animated in this fiction piece, though otherwise fantastical, is not so far removed from our current one, considering the pace at which things are developing in the global capitalist circus. A frightening prospect, to say the least.

“Histories of the Future gives us a few things to think about as we forge ahead with our shortsighted addiction to progress. There are still many spectral uncertainties hovering at the edges of the road to utopia that could bear some focused scrutiny if we want to make sure that only the positive results of history are repeated.

**LEONORA CARRINGTON:**
**SURREALISM, ALCHEMY AND ART**


Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens, Department of Art, University of Northern Iowa, U.S.A.

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Reproduced in this book is a famous group photograph, taken in New York in 1942, of a group of mostly European artists in “exile” in the U.S.A. They are arranged in three rows, in a quietly comical manner: Everyone in the back row faces left, those in the center face right (with one exception) and those in the front row face whatever direction they like. Of the 14 artists in the photograph, 11 are men, but, as if to anticipate recent concerns about gender inequality, each row contains one woman, including Peggy Guggenheim (of Guggenheim Museum fame), Berenice Abbott (the famous photographer) and a largely obscure painter named Leonora Carrington. While everyone else in the photograph has died, this third woman, whose life and work this book concerns, is still living.

Born in the north of England in 1917 to a family of wealthy industrialists, she is less known in part because she is so easily confused with another person, of the same time period, named Dora Carrington (unrelated), who was closely linked with the London-based Bloomsbury artists and writers, and also because her fame initially grew from having been romantically tied with the handsome German-born Surrealist Max Ernst (Dada Max), whose artistic celebrity eclipsed nearly everyone’s and, as this book suggests, whose conquests of women were many. In addition, after World War II, Carrington finally settled with other Surrealist émigrés in Mexico City, which was then and still is too distant from the molten core of the New York “art world.” So while she certainly became prominent and admired in Mexico City (among her friends were Luis Buñuel, Octavio Paz and others), there is no reason to expect that her work will ever be lauded at the level of such superstars as Frida Kahlo and Georgia O’Keeffe. Biographies and films about those two famous women are premiered almost weekly, while this is the first and only English book about the art and writings of Carrington.

Reproduced throughout this book are many finely detailed plates of her paintings, prints and sculpture, the first from about 1936, the most recent from only a few years ago. Looking at them, I sense that they could never appeal to audiences as wide as those of Kahlo or O’Keeffe, both of whom, while certainly indebted to Surrealism, use styles and symbol systems that are more believable, less sci-fi, and far more approachable than the nightmarish androids that tend to appear in a Carrington painting. This book’s author, an art historian at Bard College, more or less admits to this when she contends that (because of Carrington’s interest in alchemy and the occult) “there is no key with which to decipher her work easily, because there cannot be one. It is not that certain embedded symbols have no meaning; it is that these symbols cannot and do not ‘illustrate’ ideas in the manner we are accustomed to” (p. 9).
Symmetry 2000: Parts 1 and 2
Edited by J. Hargittai and T.C. Laurent.
Reviewed by Rob Harle, Australia.
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Symmetry 2000 is a wonderful treasure chest of diverse investigations into symmetry in all its aspects. The book is highly relevant to the Leonardo community, as quite a few of the chapters, especially chapters 40 and 43, discuss in detail the relationship and convergence of science and art.

This two-part volume represents the papers given at the symposium held at the Wenner-Gren Centre, Stockholm, in September 2000. This symposium brought together an extraordinary variety of participants. "Scientists, mathematicians, engineers, sociologists, artists, humanists and educators came together; and their presentations had a common thread, the concept of symmetry" (p. xi). While the majority of the chapters represent symposium presentations, the book also contains contributions from scholars outside the actual symposium whose work helped to broaden the coverage of the book.

The diversity of disciplines covered indicates that there is something of interest for everyone. When I started reading Part 1, I had a growing concern that this book was for specialists only and then only for those with a high-level understanding of mathematics. This fear was allayed the further on I read. Just over 50 chapters cover investigations into symmetry in such areas as classical art, quantum physics, molecular structure of materials, social and cultural phenomena, folk art, optical illusions—even the work of Alexander Pushkin. Some chapters are written in a rather dry and boring style, while others, with similar subject matter, are interesting and vibrant. This highlights the ongoing need for scientists to learn to convey their knowledge in a more colorful and engaging manner. I must say I found the section on social culture somewhat unconvincing compared with the level of sophistication in the hard sciences area. The exploration of symmetry in social and anthropological studies needs to be dramatically expanded and refined before its findings will be of much use in a practical way.

Symmetry 2000 is published as two separate volumes. I am not sure why this was necessary; I do not think a single volume would have been physically too large and would have had the advantage of always being together if needed for cross-reference. The whole collection is divided into six subsections as follows: Part One: Shapes and Fractals; Properties and Regularities; and Symmetry and Chirality. Part Two: Molecules and Assemblies; Social Culture; and Artistic Symmetry. From these titles it can be seen that the work proceeds from geometry through science to the arts.

The text of all chapters is accompanied by numerous black-and-white illustrations (photos, drawings, diagrams and graphs). This is in keeping with a somewhat understated notion throughout the book that symmetry should be investigated and experienced in a visual as well as intellectual manner. The visualization of the double-helix configuration of the structure of DNA and the building of a model to represent this was essential for Watson and Crick in their discovery of the molecular structure of DNA. Science is increasingly using visualization and artistic input to understand phenomena from the micro world of subatomic particles and waveforms to the macro world of galaxies and deep space.

It is most interesting in itself that the concept of symmetry has the qualities of intellectuality and existence at a fundamental level. I found the chapters dealing with symmetry in nature such as the Fibonacci sequences especially interesting and inspiring. Chapters 30 and 31 present the fascinating aspect of symmetry called Fibonacci or spiral phylotaxis.

Symmetry 2000 will appeal to a large, intellectually inclined audience. I think scientists, mathematicians and artists particularly will find it an invaluable addition to their libraries. The book touches on so many areas of symmetry-inspired research that it will provide a base to motivate even broader and more diverse investigation.

Audio CDs

Gyromancy


Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University, University Center, MI, U.S.A.
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One likes to think that a benefit of our postmodernist century is that all music we ever liked or heard is now available for our collections; I recently purchased Farfetched Records’ Destroy All Monsters Broken Mirrors disc for tracks recorded live at a concert I attended in 1978. ReR Megacorp has reissued four pieces by the Mnemonists, an electroacoustic group from Fort Collins, Colorado, that later recorded under the name Biota, first issued on 7-inch (45-rpm vinyl, presumably) in 1983. They process a wide range of musical instrument sources, and the CD is enhanced with a book of artworks.

“Gyromancy A” begins with distant, Edgard Varése–like doom-booms. A march-like drum corps enters, throat singing intertwaving with its bagpipes. There are malevolent, scraping dangerous noises, a burst of sawing and big portentous silences in between. “Gyromancy B” mixes moody chimes with sounds that evoke a swarm of bees attacking the string section in an orchestra pit, the cut equally chugging forward like a railroad train. “Nailed” suggests the cries and growls of a mismanaged zoo’s animal house and sewer echoes beneath it. “Tie” creates a snuffling pig scraping something off a shoe, his successes marked by quick annunciatory piano glissandos.

The same label’s CMCD: Six Classic Concrete, Electroacoustic and Electronic Works 1970–1990 collects a variety of compositions by international composers. John Oswald is probably best
known for his Plunderphonic CD a decade ago, all copies of which were destroyed at the behest of Michael Jackson’s record company. Jackson’s music was one source (Michigan’s MC5 was another) for that rich audio sampling and remixing project, but collaging Jackson’s head and leather jacket upon a nude female body probably did not endear Oswald to the plaintiff either. On this CD, Oswald’s speeding up of Erik Satie’s “Parade” sounds like exactly that. Did punks shout “Faster!” at Satie’s concerts?

“Aide Memoire,” by Georg Katzer, is made up of German radio broadcasts from 1933 to 1945, painting an audio mural of the Third Reich. It is a very cinematic collage, a Dada-animated cartoon like a haywire collaboration between John Heartfield, George Grosz and Warner Bros. director Tex Avery. Broken by the white whoosh of a nervous hand rotating the radio dial, it processes both angry Nazi speeches and uplifting choral song. It does not take much to make Hitler scary, and the skillful assemblage ends with a metallic clank, as if der Führer were mercifully bonked on the head with a lead pipe.

Lutz Glandien’s “Es Lebe” uses tuba as its source…yet these multi-tracked and processed tubas have grown aeronautic, and we seem to hear the pneumatic propulsion of craft resembling a Popular Science melding of dirigibles and Electrolux vacuum cleaners. “A Quiet Gathering,” by Steve Moore, strings together field recordings at various sites in which we hear children’s voices, church bells and rowing on a river. It may be a bit too long for the simple concept, although parts of it do have the quotidian-becomes-epiphanic quality of the dawn of cinema, like the Lumière brothers’ Train Arriving in Station. Similarly, Jaroslave Krcek creates a sonata that is largely like a cat’s meow.

The last track is a fine piece of rethought audio pop art, as strong as the best Plunderphonics works of John Oswald. Richard Trythall’s “Ommagio a Jerry Lee Lewis” opens with sonic glimpses of the old rock ‘n’ roller Lewis, as if a curtain coyly parted momentarily and then snapped shut. We strain to hear tantalizing bits of the pop narrative “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Going On” as the song is subjected to speed changes, filtering, loops and reverberation by Trythall. Sometimes this results in the song sputtering into bouncing fragments like ball bearings or air-rifle BBs emerging from a chute.

Sometimes the listener is spattered with pulsing bursts of vocals or guitar lead, and sometimes we have to duck from the demon pianos swooping from the rafters that Trythall has unleashed from Jerry Lee’s tortured soul.
therefore, the authors describe their method as “resolutely historical,” as they are primarily interested in the anthropological value of these images (p. 14). While some reviewers have interpreted this stance as “po-mo ooze” [6], it appears to me as an attempt to understand the context in which these images were originally produced and received. According to Apraxine and Schmit, such an approach was also necessary in order to do such a show. Schmit says, for example, “If I hadn’t considered at least the possibility of it existing, I don’t think I would have been interested in doing the exhibit” [7]. Apraxine’s attitude is similarly ambiguous: “I believe you can see a ghost, but that doesn’t mean I believe in ghosts” [8]. As this enigmatic statement makes clear, the relationship between belief and sight is precisely what these photographs so powerfully disrupt.

My only criticism of the book is that I would like to see the authors make more precise distinctions between the various types of photographs. Rolf Krauss argues, for example, that the photographing of fluids marked a fundamental shift in the spiritualists’ understanding of the role of the camera [9], and Karl Schoonover similarly claims that spirit photographs and ectoplasm photographs actually represent different conceptions of the photographic process [10]. As purely historical texts, however, the scholarly articles that accompany these images are thorough and provocative, and it is a testament to their own imaginative powers that the authors were able to raise such serious questions with material that is so rarely taken seriously.

References
8. Kennedy [7].
mentaries, The City Beautiful, by Delhi-based Rahul Roy, and The Bond, by the Bombay team Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar, cut right into the complexities of the ethnographic and documentary project around the subaltern subject. Both films center on urban subjects. While Roy follows the tribulations of two families from a working-class colony on the margins of Delhi, The Bond is about conflict resolution and communal harmony initiatives within one of Asia’s largest slums, Dharavi in Bombay. Both films benefit from sustained filming around the subjects and very unabashedly reveal the multifaceted aspects of life at the margins. Clearly contextualized, there is no air of exoticism in either, even in moments such as the trance sequence in Roy’s film. There is also no deliberation on postcolonial irony, which is the usual prerogative of an outside, often Western eye. In their own ways, both films are self-reflexive, and this aspect sets up a curious debate.

In The Bond, the filmmakers are indicated to us through obliquely and meticulously designed imagery composing objects metonymically evoking the filmmakers. There is even a distinct voiceover narration pertaining to them, which does not fully interact with the rest of the film. At once poetic and systemic, this reflection is still problematic. The urge for ethnographic self-reflexivity, which the filmmakers announce at the start of the film, invites a confrontation with the socioeconomic and intellectual disparity between themselves and the subjects of the slum they film. Clearly Monteiro and Jayasankar are conscious of the exclusivity embedded in their intellectual privilege. The stylized and metaphorical nature of the self-reflexive sequences within the film, however, disavows and obscures the added function of reflexivity within the defined context. The contrast between the respective images is visually striking, but little possibility arises for dialogue or to deconstruct the position of the filmmakers and, through that, unlearn their privilege, which the film is, in some measure, a commitment toward.

Roy makes no such announcement as Monteiro and Jayasankar do. His film, however, commands very spontaneous moments of reflection that surface in the dialogue with his subjects. His brief and blatant interactions are more interwoven within the film and leave the viewer better equipped to appreciate the exchanges between himself and his subjects. It cannot be emphasized adequately how Roy’s film testifies to some rare, extremely human moments of relation realized through the camera with the subjects, including women—the dynamics of that relationship being particularly socially complex.

While almost all films at the festival emphasized spontaneity during encounter and documentation, one could not but note clear distinctions in approach and discourse that resulted in contrasting representations of the subjects being examined. Lina Fruzzetti and Akos Ostor’s Singing Pictures—Women Painters of Naya is a gripping film about the Patua community of painters and singers from West Bengal, who sing stories depicted on painted scrolls. This film examines the contemporary state of this enterprise by interact- ing with a group of women painters who have formed a cooperative to better compete and improve their conditions. At the festival, this film was screened along with Mainak Bhaumik’s Gone to Pat, which interacts with a wider community of the Patuas. Both films are similar in subject but markedly distinct in the visual regimes they employ that in turn reflect their relative merits and demerits. Singing Pictures relates to women and weaves in how the folk tradition has mixed with contemporary social conditions and concerns. One senses a faint reminiscence of Satyajit Ray’s rural Bengal, and in keeping with that there is a slight Orientalist naturalist tendency in this film. The attention to minute detail achieved through proximate imagery and perspectival location synch sound, which it itself parallels some of Ray’s most celebrated exhibitions of local cultures such as in his Aparajito from his acclaimed Apu trilogy, leads Fruzzetti and Ostor to attend to the subject more complexly and comprehensively than Bhaumik—situating the oriental as clearly local yet fully conversant beyond.

Bhaumik’s film heavily employs an advertising aesthetic widespread in post-liberalization India, which privileges lighting design. This leads to visually rich images, but the film remains mecag in its visual focus on the paintings and characters and weakly posits the vibrant links between social conditions and the folk form. The screening of the two films in succession brought forth the proximity between visual regimens and the scope of the ethnographic text, usefully foregrounding the import of the discursive positionality of the ethnographic filmmaker.

The festival went on to explore some rather unconventional and particularly contemporary encounters where the ethnographic method had been employed. Several films come to mind here: NFT graduate Daniel Vernon’s Fountain of Youth, a film with a surreal edge exploring a community of aged persons settled around a rare natural spa in the Californian low desert, and My Brother My Enemy, a collaboration between two NFT students, Pakistani Masood Khan and Indian Kamaljeet Negi, that is a powerful second-generation attempt to confront the animosities between the two nuclear neighbors in the backdrop of the subcontinent’s two fanatical passions— cricket and Bollywood. There were other, more overt films, such as Between Two Villages, examining the steady displacement of a village in Portugal consequent to construction of a dam, and Promised Land, which follows the patrons of a U.S. organization, Friends of Israel’s Defence Force. Promised Land is an argumentative film that employs thematic juxtaposition to explicate the convictions and motivations of valued contributors of this organization, and succeeds in situating them within a wider regressive liberal U.S. political context.

Particularly striking, however, were two films mapping very contemporary spiritual encounters. NFT graduate Mark Boulos’s film The Gates of Damascus, which witnesses a Syrian housewife’s ecstatic visions of Jesus and Mary during an Easter weekend, and U.K.-based independent anthropologist Michael Yorke’s journey with two Indian ascetics on a pilgrimage in the Himalayas in Holy Man and Fools. Both films, unusually daring, are smattered with instances that invite discussion. Boulos has some powerful imagery of Myrna Nazzour claiming to experience visions, along with the responses and hype the annual visions have steadily come to invite. However, the film would have benefited from discussion—ideological, scientific or medical—of Myrna’s experiences, so as to adequately explore and contextualize her claims for healing.

Yorke’s film, on the other hand, cuts into debates from varied philosophical discourses of India. Yorke, however, maintaining an outsider position, ends up completely bypassing these. The two ascetics, a Swedish woman, Uma Giri,
and the young Vashisht Giri, interact very closely throughout the film, and while they address much of Yorke’s inquisitiveness and reveal previously unseen ascetic regimes and rare spiritual instances, we barely glimpse the whole experience from their position, as Vashisht Giri indicated at the discussion following the screening of the film at Oxford.

Filming any spiritual encounter is a complex proposition, as spiritual discussion by its nature enunciates positionality. Documentation therefore calls for the mobilization of distinct positions that compete with or converge at the spiritual. While the spiritual films planted interest for further discussions, the RAI Festival in its entirety drew attention to the increasing tendency of defining the positionality of the ethnographic filmmaker within practice.

This position, as one gathered from the festival, is not simply that of a researcher. In that position, however, are embedded ethnological definitions that reveal and facilitate the particularities of the ethnographic text as constructed. The RAI Festival was provocative, proving itself a rich resource for ethnographers and anthropologists and a larger body of artists and film practitioners contemplating the possibilities of vision, position and the context for practice. The exchange of discourses and cultural imperatives in the various films emphasize sociocultural context, not in any reductive or determinist manner, but rather in a spirit of critical engagement and discursive appreciation.

Leonardo Reviews On-Line

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 January–February 2006 <leonardoreviews.mit.edu>.

February 2006

Aesthetics and Visualization in Chemistry (Including Virtual Art Exhibition: Chemistry in Art), edited by Tami I. Spector and Joachim Schummer. Reviewed by Amy Ione.

Codex Mundi: Escriitura Fractal II (con cuadratura numérica del hexagrama), by Ramon Dachs. Reviewed by Martha Patricia Niño Mojica.


Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication, by Wilfred Niels Arnold.


The Goebbels Experiment, directed by Lutz Hachmeister and Michael Kloft. Reviewed by Artur Golczewski.


Interzone—Media Arts in Australia, by Darren Tofts; Ashley Crawford, New Art Series ed. Reviewed by Mike Leggett.


Regular or Super: Views on Mies van der Rohe, directed by Joseph Hillel and Patrick Demers. Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens.

Rocky Road to Dublin, directed by Peter Lennon; cinematography by Raoul Coutard and The Making of Rocky Road to Dublin, directed by Paul Duane, with Peter Lennon and Raoul Coutard. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

Über die Beziehung zur Welt (Relating to Reality), by Andrea Gaugusch. Reviewed by Frieder Nake.

User: InfotechDemo, by Peter Lunenfeld; Mieke Gerritzen, visuals. Reviewed by Martha Patricia Niño Mojica.

January 2006


IT Project Proposals: Writing to Win, by Paul Coombs. Reviewed by Dene Grigar.


Modern House 2, edited by Clare Melhuish. Reviewed by Maria Buteler.


Prostrapstvennaja Musica (Spatial Music), edited by Bulat Galeyev. Partially reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Regular or Super: Views on Mies van der Rohe, directed by Joseph Hillel and Patrick Demers. Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg.