

LEONARDO REVIEWS

LEONARDO REVIEWS

Editor-in-Chief: Michael Punt

Managing Editor: Bryony Dalefield

Associate Editors:

Robert Pepperell and Dene Grigar

A full selection of reviews is published monthly on the LR web site: www.leonardo.info/ldr.

BOOKS

THE JASONS: THE SECRET HISTORY OF SCIENCE'S POSTWAR ELITE

by Ann Finkbeiner. Viking, New York, 2006. 304 pp. Trade. ISBN: 0-670-03489-4.

Reviewed by John F. Barber, *Digital Technology and Culture*, Washington State University Vancouver, Vancouver, WA, U.S.A. E-mail: jjfbarber@eaze.net.

A group of elite scientists, born of the Manhattan Project and evolved during the Cold War, has worked in secret to advise the U.S. government and shape American policy and science for the past half-century. Known simply as Jason (allegedly for the Ancient Greek hero of Jason and the Argonauts), these scientists are responsible for the electronic battlefield, the laser-guided star, global-warming and oceanographic studies, and the Star Wars missile defense system.

As more than researchers and inventors, Jason's task was to work on highly classified problems for the Department of Defense and the intelligence community. Aside from a brief period during the Vietnam War, Jason has worked with unparalleled freedoms in utter secrecy, unknown to the general public.

Ann Finkbeiner, who runs the graduate program in science writing at Johns Hopkins University, provides the first detailed accounting of the group and its activities. Her book, *The Jasons: The Secret History of Science's Postwar Elite*, not only details the personalities of the scientists who belong to Jason, but also addresses the Faustian dilemma pre-

sented by scientific innovation that has dogged the United States since some of the physicists charged with developing the atomic bomb questioned the morality of using their invention to destroy human life.

Counting among its mentors and members scientific stars such as Freeman Dyson, Murray Gell-Mann, Edward Teller and Hans Bethe, Jason has, according to Finkbeiner, perpetuated a keen sense of stewardship over the applications of pure science. Its idealism, however, has often clashed with the military applications of its research findings.

For example, during the Vietnam War, the U.S. military was frustrated by its inability to stop supplies moving along jungle routes from North to South Vietnam. Asked to help solve the problem, Jason developed an electronic sensing technology that could register and report movement near its location. Where Jason thought the technology would, and should, only be used to provide a sensor barrier across demilitarized zones, the military soon adapted the invention to direct aerial or artillery assault on suspected enemy positions. Several Jasons were highly upset over this, they felt, immoral use of science developed specifically to stop the war, and sought a public debate. The resulting media flurry was the first public awareness, and acknowledgement, of Jason's existence.

Another Jason project was called laser guided star, a technology that allowed the calculation of atmospheric distortion along the path of a laser beam directed at an astronomical object. Telescope mirrors could then be adjusted for the measured distortion, thus providing a clearer, more focused image. When President Ronald Reagan announced a space-based missile defense system he called the Strategic Defense Initiative (critics dubbed the project Star Wars) in 1983, the laser-guided star technology developed by Jason suddenly had tremendous importance for aiming and controlling the counter-defense system. For the next two years, Jason secretly reviewed SDI and offered advice. When, in 1985, a French astronomy magazine announced independent development

of laser-guided technology, the U.S. government was forced to lift the lid of secrecy, thus greatly improving astronomers' ability to see into space.

Called upon to help solve problems with dependable weather forecasts, Jason invented a 3D mapping system of the ocean's temperatures. Along with elaborate computer mapping models, this invention soon became the basis for charts supporting arguments for global warming.

In each case, Jason's mission to keep vigil over applied science has led them into both moral dilemmas and political messes. Finkbeiner recounts these standoffs with marvelous objectivity, often letting the scientists themselves, in clipped emotional phrases, tell their own frustrations and compromises with the often unintended consequences of their work.

In the end, *The Jasons* poses several vital questions. What role should government play in scientific research? Should research awards and grants go only to those scientists who agree to

Reviews Panel: Nameera Ahmed, Peter Anders, Fred Andersson, Wilfred Arnold, Kasey Asberry, Jan Baetens, Niran Bahjat-Abbas, Curtis Bahn, John F. Barber, Marc Battier, René Beekman, David Beer, Roy R. Behrens, Martha Blassnigg, Barry Blundell, Alex Brown, Paul Brown, Annick Bureaud, Chris Cobb, Donna Cox, Sean Cubitt, Nina Czegledy, Andrea Dahlberg, Victoria de Rijke, Shawn Decker, Margaret Dolinsky, Dennis Dollens, Luisa Paraguai Donati, Victoria Duckett, Maia Engeli, Anthony Enns, Enzo Ferrara, George Gessert, Elisa Giaccardi, Thom Gillespie, Allan Graubard, Dene Grigar, Diane Gromala, Rob Harle, Craig Harris, Josepha Haveman, Paul Hertz, Craig J. Hilton, Coral Houtman, Amy Ione, Jude James, Stephen Jones, Richard Kade, Nisar Keshvani, John Knight, Veronique Koken, Judy Kupferman, Jim Laukes, Mike Leggett, Katia Maciel, Roger Malina, Jacques Mandelbrojt, Malcolm F. Miles, Rick Mitchell, Robert A. Mitchell, Martha Patricia Niño Mojica, Christopher Morris, Michael Mosher, Alex Mulder, Frieder Nake, Mawreen A. Nappi, Angela Ndalians, Marcus Neustetter, Simone Osthoff, Jack Ox, Narendra Pachkhede, Robert Pepperell, Kjell Yngve Petersen, Cliff Pickover, Alise Piebalga, Patricia Pisters, Michael Punt, Kathleen Quillian, Harry Rand, Sonya Rapoport, Trace Reddell, Alex Rotas, Henry See, Bill Seeley, Basak Senova, Aparna Sharma, George K. Shortess, Joel Slayton, Yvonne Spielmann, David Surman, Eugene Thacker, Pia Tikka, David Topper, René van Peer, Stefaan Van Ryssen, Zaimub Verjee, Ian Versteegen, Claudia Westermann, Stephen Wilson, Arthur Woods, Soh Yeong, Jonathan Zilberg.

have their research co-opted for military application? What about pure research, undertaken simply to see what can be learned? At what point is the inventor of some technology accountable for the hazards of that invention? When does the good of an invention outweigh the bad? In answering these questions, Finkbeiner details the trouble scientists get into when they think they can advise the government, and the trouble the government can get into when it does not take the advice of scientists.

Finkbeiner concludes that when the country faces decisions about imprecise, shades-of-gray policies, it should have some truths at hand (p. 231). Scientists, she says, make good advisors in that they are drawn toward certainty but are at the same time wary because they know that they could just as easily be wrong. Jasons, noted for their admiration of complexity in a problem, can be counted upon to develop a solution that is objective rather than politically expedient. And when Jason's answer is negative, as it has been a few times in the past, and if Congress or the news media hears of the opposition, only strong personality or authority can overcome that hurdle.

THE SCULPTURE OF RUTH ASAWA: CONTOURS IN THE AIR

edited by Daniell Cornell. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, U.S.A., 2006. 205 pp., illus. Trade, paper. ISBN: 978-0520-25044-4; ISBN: 978-0520-25045-1.

Reviewed by Amy Ione, *The Diatropé Institute*. E-mail: <ione@diatropé.com>.

Published to accompany the first complete retrospective of her career, *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air* is a superb accomplishment. The book examines her pioneering modernist contributions and convinces the reader that Asawa's work is well deserving of the wide recognition it has received. Covering her early work on paper, her incredible wire sculptures, public commissions, and her activism in the arts and education, the volume is a must read for anyone who is interested in contemporary art and the history of Black Mountain College. Moreover, her artistic creativity is conveyed in the various essays that speak of her lifelong experimentation with wire, especially

its capacity to balance open and closed forms.

Asawa's unusual history is especially well done in the book. Having always characterized her in my mind as a Japanese-American artist, I learned how little I knew of her history and of the kinds of events that had shaped her life and her work. All of the essays conveyed the multiplicity of ways Asawa's heritage influenced the woman she became. A few events stand out in my mind. Born in America to Japanese parents, Asawa was among those interned during World War II. While in a camp in California, she met a few Japanese artists from the Disney studio who taught art classes there. One, Tom Okamoto, had an immense influence on Asawa's future development.

A second event that impressed me was the path that led her to Black Mountain College. She had attended Milwaukee State College with the intention of becoming an art teacher. Unable to get a teaching certificate because no one would hire a Japanese American even for practice teaching in 1946, she went to Black Mountain in North Carolina, where she studied with Josef Albers, Buckminster Fuller and Ilya Bolotowsky, and met her husband (the architect Albert Lanier). When she arrived at Black Mountain, Asawa had intended to become a painter. She learned to knit with wire during a summer break in Mexico. The transparency of the designs appealed to her artistic sensibility. Indeed, she so liked the way the interior and the exterior of knitted wire intertwine and how the material takes on a fluid, ever-changing shape that it came to define her artistic path.

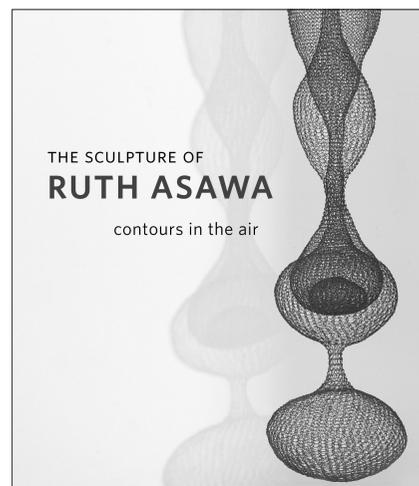
Perhaps the most thought-provoking chapter is "Critiquing the Critique:

Ruth Asawa's Early Reception," by Emily K. Doman Jennings, which deals with the significance of Asawa's Japanese-American identity to her art. Jennings argues that, on the one hand, it is correct to say that Asawa's Japanese-American ethnicity framed her experiences (e.g. spending time in the internment camps) and pointed her toward certain kinds of preferences in art and her activism. Yet, on the other hand, the development of her art is unique to her individuality and those who attempt to account for it in terms of her Japanese heritage are apt to misconstrue critical aspects of her history. For example, Asawa was born in the United States and did not develop her interest in Eastern thought and tradition primarily from her upbringing. Rather, it stems from her instruction by Josef Albers and Buckminster Fuller. Jennings tells us that

while her work can be discussed in regard to the fundamental figure-ground relationships of calligraphy or the teaching of Lao-tze, categorizing her work in strictly Asian terms disregards its context within a larger body of contemporary artists, such as Mark Tobey, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham, who drew upon Asian philosophy as a creative source (p. 130).

Here I wanted to hear more about the relationship to three-dimensional modalities such as pottery than about the design and calligraphic influences that resonate with Asawa's mentors and the Black Mountain experience. Thus, it seems that this essay succeeds in capturing Asawa's recognition of the dialectic between an artist's technique and the resulting forms in terms of relationship to 3D modalities but misses an opportunity to explain how modernist work has elevated our appreciation of craft and design, including Japanese aesthetics. In some ways, Asawa sculptures are fairly equated with the delicate forms that often accompany Japanese accomplishments, particularly this culture's achievements in sculpture, pottery and ceramics. From this perspective, equating her work with Japanese traditions is not to denigrate it so much as to affirm the degree to which cross-fertilization has muted the lines among traditions. In other words, it is perhaps ironic that this influence came to Asawa through Western minds and practices because her art overall has a very Japanese flavor and aesthetic.

Indeed, the people Asawa knew at



Black Mountain had a great influence on her entire life and the modernistic path she chose. Later in life she also developed relationships with key players in the development of contemporary art. This is one of the reasons her story, as captured in this book, is so compelling. For example, this expansively illustrated book includes a photograph of the wedding ring designed for her by Buckminster Fuller (made by Mary Jo Slick Godfrey in 1949). Also included are a number of amazing photographs by her friend Imogen Cunningham (and others), capturing Ruth in her studio, with her children and in various settings.

The book itself is divided into several textual sections, a section of plates highlighting her drawings, paintings and prints (photographed by Joseph McDonald) and a section of plates that presents her sculpture (most of which was photographed by Laurence Cuneo). This approach is effective in capturing the breadth of Asawa's work, as well as her history and the work's chronology. The works on paper are particularly fascinating. These show her "design sense" and how her creative imagination in two dimensions carried over to her 3D projects. Pieces such as the undated *Curved Lines (Free Study)* that were produced during her time at Black Mountain College suggest the hanging wire sculptures generally associated with Asawa's name. Similarly, the dynamics represented in several of the lithographs (such as *Desert Plant Black Reverse*, conceived at the Tamarind Workshop in 1965) resonate with her later tied-wire works.

All of the above fails to convey the wealth of contributions Ruth Asawa made to education in tandem with her incredible artistic development. When San Francisco cut art education out of the city budget, she and Sally Woodbridge set up the Alvarado Art Workshop to bring art into the classrooms. In addition, her service includes 8 years on the San Francisco Art Commission, an appointment to Jimmy Carter's Commission on Mental Health, membership on the National Endowment for the Arts Task Force on the education and training of artists, and service on the California Arts Commission. Clearly, Asawa is not the kind of artist who isolates herself from society. Just as her work stresses connectedness, her life has been one in which she has worked to connect art with the community.

Finally, the task of writing a book

review is an unpredictable one. Many books are useful, worthwhile and welcome additions to my body of knowledge. Some are informative, but dense and difficult to read. On occasion, I find myself so disappointed that I wonder what I can say to hide my dislike. *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air*, to be sure, is the kind of book that reminds me of why I write these reviews. Reading it was a total pleasure. Although I have known Ruth Asawa's name and reputation for years, this catalogue made it clear how little I knew about her life and work. All of the reproductions are excellent, and the essays are so informative that I found myself unable to put the book down, as though I were reading a novel. In other words, those who do not know Asawa's work will be in for a treat if they pick up this book. Anyone already familiar with her accomplishments will find that the publication effectively underscores what a remarkable woman Ruth Asawa is.

THE KING OF INFINITE SPACE: DONALD COXETER AND THE MAGIC OF GEOMETRY

by Siobhan Roberts. Walker & Co,
New York, 2006. 416 pp., illus. Trade.
ISBN: 0-8027-1499-4.

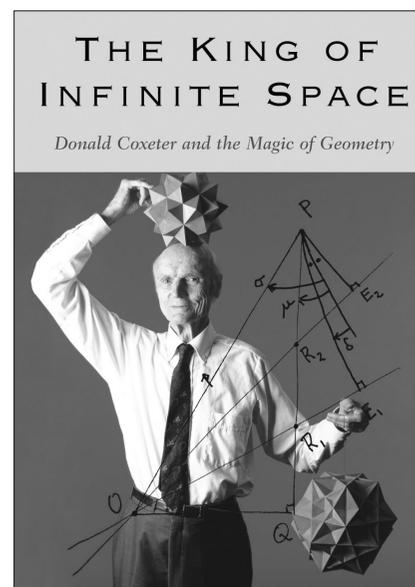
Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen,
Hogeschool Gent, Belgium. E-mail:
<stefaan.vanryssen@hogent.be>.

Anyone who has dabbled in group theory, even as an amateur, will have dealt with Coxeter diagrams, concise and very abstract symbols summarizing the symmetry properties of groups in any number of dimensions. Few people will know how these nice little drawings, consisting of nothing but a series of dots connected by numbered lines, developed as shorthand for the structure of kaleidoscopes. Even fewer will know anything about the man who developed them: H.M.S. Coxeter.

Coxeter's life spanned practically the entire 20th century (1907–2003). Starting as a precocious middle-class British boy with an inflated imagination—inventing his own language and mythology long before Tolkien started dreaming about Ents and Orcs—and an interest in the fourth dimension, he went on to read mathematics at Cambridge, become a Fellow of Trinity and move to Toronto, where he would spend most of his long life as a profes-

sor and staunch defender of the most unfashionable branch of mathematics: pure geometry. Against the tide of formalization, and holding his position in the surf of growing interest in algebra, group and number theory, topology and analytic geometry, Coxeter safeguarded the Euclidean tradition. When practically every mathematician was under the spell of the extreme abstractions of the Bourbaki group, he stuck to visualization, diagrams, lines and planes, regular solids and n-dimensional polytopes, gradually finding deeper and deeper insights in the basic structure of spaces and shapes. Of course, in the long run, his knowledge of symmetry in a purely geometrical sense turned out to be closely related to symmetries in any other branch of mathematics, but that was only recognized when most of his work had already been done and "Coxeter" had become a household name for certain classes of mathematical objects.

Siobhan Roberts chooses not to talk too much about mathematics when writing this biography of a man whose life was devoted to the discipline. Instead of really delving rather too deeply into his contributions to geometry, she sticks to harmless eccentricities, momentous events and a few personal anecdotes. Mathematicians might prefer to read more of a systematic exploration of Coxeter's contributions to their field, and avid readers of biography might want a bit more excitement, sensation and life, but neither of these is here. For the math, one should sim-



ply read Coxeter's books, and for entertainment, the man's life probably was not spectacular enough. Yes, he did meet Einstein and Von Neumann, Wittgenstein and Buckminster Fuller (he disliked his brashness but liked his domes). Yes, Coxeter was a lifelong vegetarian and pacifist with a tendency to believe in the Platonic equation between beauty and truth, but . . . A biography of this great mathematician is certainly justifiable, and I will be the last to claim that it has not been done well, but there is only one conclusion possible: Coxeter's life was more platonic than applied. If the man would have had a choice, he probably would have projected himself in four, or five, dimensions outside our own. However, the book is a good read for a quiet evening or two, and it whets the appetite for more triangles, diagrams and "kissing circles."

CARTOGRAPHIES OF TSARDOM: THE LAND AND ITS MEANINGS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

by Valerie Kivelson. Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, NY, U.S.A., 2006. 312 pp., illus. Trade, paper. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4409-8; ISBN: 978-0-8014-7253-4.

Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@hogent.be>.

When I was in primary school, our teacher proudly showed us the maps of Gerard Mercator, a native of "my" country, and told us this was how the world looked. Only much later, in high school, did I find out that Belgium was more than two or three times smaller than our erstwhile colony Congo, and that the maps of the famous cartographer grossly exaggerate the sizes of the countries away from the equator, even leaving out altogether the largest part of the southern hemisphere. Maps, so it transpired, did not present a truthful image of the state of matters and the matter of states, but were more or less a product of the dominating worldview. With some effort, I laid hands on a Peter's projection of the world, and I grew accustomed to another ideologically laden, but at least more "fair," flattening of the planet.

I could of course recall a similar anecdote about my history lessons,

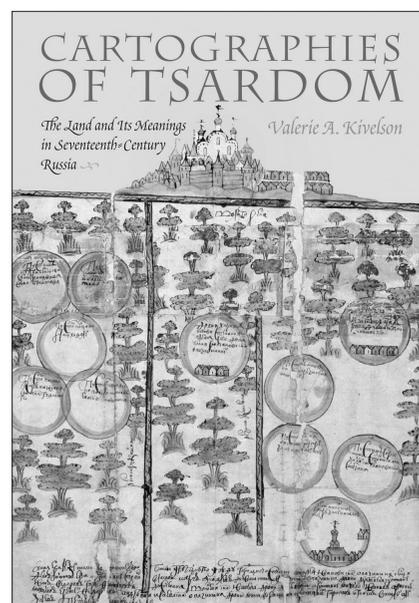
where we got fed an entirely skewed, Eurocentric narrative in which China, India and the Americas only acted as supporting characters. As with the maps, history seemed to center around the Mediterranean, gradually spreading out when the proverbial white spots in older maps were filled in by fearless conquistadores, settlers, discoverers and missionaries. Even after many years of reading, I could only write "*Hic est Leones*" or something similar on some parts of the map. One of these blank areas, both historically and geographically, was Russia and the vast Siberian expanse east of the Urals. To be honest, about the other countries east of the Iron Curtain I could not bring up even the most basic historical data. The Kingdom of Kiev, which dominated Eastern Europe for much of the Middle Ages and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which spread from the Baltic to the Black Sea and included part of what is now Poland and Byeloruss, were—and I think still are for most people of my generation—entirely unknown. Russia, as far as I was concerned, had been christened by Cyrillus and Methodius and then left over to the absolutist power of the Tsars, as it had, in my mind, always been.

I can think of no better, more entertaining and more informative way to get rid of all these misconceptions than by reading this beautifully written analysis of early Russian maps. For the first part of the book, Valerie Kivelson browses through hundreds of small-scale maps drawn by civil servants,

mayors and military men for use by magistrates from Moscou when dealing with conflicts about mills, fields, groves and ponds. Using these maps and the accompanying documents, she gradually gives us insight into how the people from the Muscovy era (about a century before the times of Peter the Great, who quickly modernized Russia and Russian cartography along Western lines) thought about their environment, their land and the complex rights of ownership. In the process, she unravels the delicate power structures of the Muscovy state, in which every piece of land was nominally owned by the Great Prince, who graciously left it to some landlord or abbey or township to be managed. In their turn, village farmers who were bound to the ground worked these feuds. On each level, the people involved kept a sense of ownership, establishing a threefold structure of responsibility. Serfs thus could act as witnesses in lawsuits between lords, even if most of them were probably illiterate.

In the second part of the book, Kivelson interprets some beautiful maps of the whole Muscovy realm, outlining the colonization process and the particularities of the Russian *conquista* of Siberia. Unlike Western maps, most of the Muscovy ones include the names of the local peoples and indicate the regions in which they live. And unlike the enslaving and dispossession of original populations by Spanish, Portuguese, French and British conquerors, the "rights" of these peoples were preserved—at least up to a certain level. As long as they paid tribute, in the form of sable hides, to the Tsar, they were left to their ways, religions and customs. Baptism was only reluctantly bestowed on the "heathens" as that would turn them into full citizens with all the accompanying rights. Compared to the Spanish and the Portuguese, Tsarist imperialism seems downright enlightened—at least in this respect.

Of course, there is much more to be learned from studying the maps of the 17th century. Students of Russian history will find in this book a balanced and very careful re-evaluation of some aspects of the Muscovy worldview. How did people think of Nature, the power structure they were living in, and the rights of colonized and colonizers? They also will get access to full-color reproductions of some of the most extraordinary maps made in that



period. For the lay reader, with little or no background in either cartography or Russian history, this is simply a delightful treasure of novel ideas and eye-openers. From now on, forget about Mercator, and remember Semen Remezov!

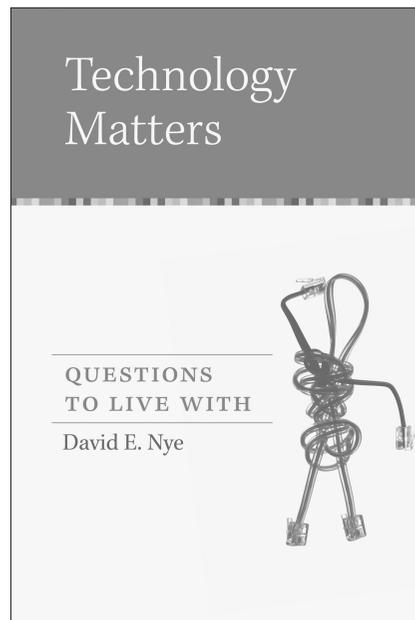
TECHNOLOGY MATTERS: QUESTIONS TO LIVE WITH

by David Nye. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2006. 280 pp. Trade. ISBN: 978-0-262-14093-5.

Reviewed by Michael Punt, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, U.K. E-mail: <mpunt@easynet.co.uk>.

The first five chapters of *Technology Matters* are a must for all libraries and a perfect undergraduate reader for all students whose studies have anything to do with technology—which means all undergraduates. It is also a must for anyone who needs to think about technology in his or her daily life and has not given much thought to the idea that technology might not shape culture. The book poses key questions presented by the idea of technology and proposes strategies for thinking about the answers. Each chapter opens with a new question: “Can we define technology?”, “Does technology control us?”, “Is technology predictable?”, “How do historians understand technology?”, etc. These first four questions are the best and most clearly argued, sober and thoughtful. So far so good. The difficulty, however, with such an accessible book is that it lacks subtlety and at times reiterates the slippery method of apparent causality and ill-founded assumptions that characterizes the slack argumentation opposed by Nye’s thesis.

Quite early in *Technology Matters* Nye reminds us that one of the great problems for scholars reflecting on technology is quite how retailers and librarians categorize a book such as his. As he points out, bookstores may have a section on the history of science, but histories of technology are often scattered “through many departments, including sociology, cultural studies, women’s studies, history, media, anthropology and do-it-yourself” (p. 9). This, he suggests, reinforces the misconception that “technology is merely a working out of an application of scientific principles.” It is a misconception, he argues, because in general the sequence is



reversed: Theory (science) is a strategy for making sense of practical results. Based on empirical evidence, it is difficult to argue against this view—at least as far as the 19th and early 20th centuries are concerned. Of course, we know what he means, but a slippery logic to his argument pervades what is otherwise a clear and profoundly valuable book that dismantles technological determinism, which is all the more valuable for virtue of being clearly written.

Technology is a working out of scientific principles, of course. Not in the hierarchical sense opposed by Nye, that technology is the worldly handmaiden of an abstract philosophical system called science, but in a more holistic sense, which I am sure he supports: technology is, indeed, a working out of science, but in most cases, a science not yet articulated or understood. Nye more or less argues this point in the following passage in which he suggests that the way we approach art may be a better way of thinking about technology. Artists, interesting artists at least, have always been worth listening to, not for their understanding of topics outside their practice, which is often woefully uninformed, but because art (interesting art) is an expression of ideas yet to be codified. For this reason we have always engaged with artists not for what they intended to express but what they expressed unintentionally. Without this bifurcation between the painter and the viewer art becomes

“picture-making” (or market-making) and viewing becomes trainspotting. In the same way, technology as it appears in the world is text to be read as a partial understanding of what is to become rather than (as I am sure Nye would agree) the culmination of a scientific endeavor. For this reason, the history of technology should be understood as a very different enterprise from, say, the history of science or the history of art. Sooner or later all bookstores will have a section called “History of Ideas,” and until that time histories of technology should be scattered throughout the store as an antidote to the materialist complacency that informs most histories of technology, science or art. Technology, science (abstract systematic thinking) and art are only occasionally things in the world; they are, first and foremost, aspects of human curiosity, intimately implicated in desire and on which we base certain actions.

Nye is one of the leading scholars in a project to revisit technology as a cultural and historical study that owes much to the New Historicism movement of the 1980s. Much of the groundbreaking work in technology studies that challenged the received histories of lone inventors is referred to, sometimes in detail, and yet curiously the bibliography does not include this literature. While some of the more unthinking commentaries on technology and science are included, groundbreaking and formative work by Bijker, Ferguson, Latour, Schaffer and Shapin, for example, is overlooked. While it is true most of the work by these scholars concerns science, Nye’s key point about the interdependence of these two is undermined by the omission. Given our predilection for material evidence, which, more than anything, reinforces technological determinism, the opportunity to reinforce the idea of technology as a consequence of the intersection on a network of determinants—including science—should not have been missed. As a consequence Nye’s achievement in foregrounding crucial issues in the way that we understand the social, economic and technological environment in which we negotiate our curiosity and desires is somewhat undone. *Technology Matters* is an ideal way to start thinking seriously about technology. It is a book that is long overdue, but also one that leaves the way open for further work by other scholars.

**SEEING HIGH AND LOW:
REPRESENTING SOCIAL
CONFLICT IN AMERICAN
VISUAL CULTURE**

edited by Patricia Johnston.
University of California Press, Berkeley,
CA, U.S.A., 2006. 317 pp., illus.
Trade, paper. ISBN: 0-520-24187-8;
ISBN: 0-520-24188-6.

*Reviewed by Jan Baetens, KU Leuven,
Faculty of Arts, Leuven, Belgium.
E-mail: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>.*

This collection of essays is great reading. Carefully edited by Patricia Johnston, author of a seminal and much-praised and prized work on the career of Edward Steichen, *Seeing High and Low* opens new ground for the study of a subject that seems slightly out of date given the innumerable discussions in the 1970s and 1980s on what was seen as one of the major characteristics of postmodern culture. Yet what *Seeing High and Low* achieves is nothing less than a challenging redefinition of the scope of this topic. Instead of linking it with discussions on the status of Art with a capital A and of identifying it with the more or less contemporary rejection of High Modernism, the essays gathered in this volume take a completely different stance.

In a wonderful introductory essay, Johnston accomplishes a triple break with much current scholarship on the high and low topic in art. First of all, she proposes very usefully to enlarge the scope of the study to the whole of "visual studies" (a multilayered term whose meaning is in fact much broader than just the merger of art history and cultural studies and that implies for the contributors to this volume a strong emphasis on history as well as on the interaction between the social and the technological). The advantage of this shift is to withdraw the discussion on high and low from the mere field of art and to tackle it as a basic feature of any modern, i.e. technologically mediated, society. Second, she also makes very illuminating suggestions for a more precise definition of what "high" and "low" actually are, for the meaning of these terms does not depend on a certain type of object or a certain type of practice but rather on a wide range of accompanying features that determine the artistic, cultural and social scale we use to qualify them: subject matter, the choice of a specific medium, quality judgments by various groups of

people (connoisseurs, amateurs, consumers, etc.), audience groups (publics and patrons) and finally use or functions. Certainly in the case of the "low," this approach is extremely refreshing, for it enables us to analyze the relationships of high and low not from the viewpoint of the high as it is contested, challenged, renewed, transformed or revolutionized by its clash with the low, but from the viewpoint of the mutual shaping and the inevitable overlap of both categories (in other words, high and low cannot be analyzed separately, it is on the contrary the larger context in which they always intermingle). Thirdly, Johnston comes back to what is, or should be, at stake when we study this interaction of the high and the low. The aim of such a study is not to produce a better insight into the evolution of art-historical categories or shifts in taste and manners but to get a sharper understanding of the historical conditions in which art is being produced. Here too, the focus is put on the historical context, but not to such an extent that artistic practices (commissioning, making, disseminating, selling, reviewing, rejecting, ignoring art) are denied their own specific logic and mechanisms. In Johnston's approach, art is never reduced to an illustration of historical processes; both brought together are, at a different level, high and low.

The 15 essays gathered in the book cover a wide range of genres and artists. However, the overall unity of the collection is exceptional, thanks to the well-balanced historical line that has been followed and that brings us from the early Republic to the Reagan Era. Each of the essays, in which we feel the strong editorial hand of an editor who has managed to impose a unity of tone and structure to the texts without deleting the personal tone of the various contributors (all specialists in the field of American studies and American cultural history), foregrounds a specific period, and the sum of these periods in addition to the sum of the chosen media and works give a more than excellent survey of the high and low issue in the United States. It is a great pleasure to say that there are no flaws or minor contributions in this collection, even if some are more astounding and innovative than others. Given the fact that high and low have been heavily (and harshly!) discussed in the case of 20th-century art, it will not come as a surprise that the studies on older material are sometimes more pioneer-

ing than those on more recent material. An exemplary study in this regard is Patricia N. Burham's essay on F. Otto Becker's "Custer's Last Fight," a lithograph commissioned by the Anheuser Busch Brewing Company to be used as a nationwide decoration for Budweiser bars. Burham scrutinizes the form and content of this engraving, comparing it with the oil painting that it "copied" and the many other variations of the theme that circulated until the 1960s, when television ads took over this type of advertisement and the Vietnam War prepared a critical rereading of the Custer myth. She examines the critical and uncritical reception by all types of audiences (ranging from sophisticated art critics to uneducated tourists leaving the bus to take a refreshment) and the native representation of the same historical event in Sioux and Cheyenne art (often but wrongly discarded as folk art).

Yet in a certain sense, all the essays in this book (some of them on "high art" like O'Keeffe and Stieglitz, others on vernacular "non-art" like home decorations and popular journal cartoons) achieve the same accomplishment. All of them manage to link in a fluent, intelligent and innovative way the creative tension between high and low, following the various criteria and perspectives sketched out in Johnston's introduction. In short, this is a must-read for all those interested in the breaking down of the boundaries between art, culture, history and technology, in a way that maintains and even heightens all the scientific standards of art-historical research.

**ORGANIZED NETWORKS:
MEDIA THEORY, CREATIVE
LABOUR, NEW INSTITUTIONS**

by Ned Rossiter. NAi, Rotterdam, in association with the Institute of Network Cultures, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2006. 250 pp., illus. Paper. ISBN: 90-5662-526-8.

*Reviewed by Geoff Cox, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, U.K.
E-mail: <gcox@plymouth.ac.uk>.*

Organized Networks asserts that there is urgent need for new institutional forms that reflect "relational" processes to challenge existing systems of governance and outmoded representational structures. Emergent forms are radically dissimilar to the ways in which social relations are organized under the

“moribund technics” of modern institutions (such as the university or the state). These older forms, referred to as “networked organizations,” are hierarchical and centralized despite their pretensions toward fair representation. In contrast, emergent “organized networks” are horizontal, collaborative and distributed in a character offering a distinct social dynamic and transformational potential. The key difference is how institutions have responded to developments in networked communications technology and the issue of intellectual property rights: On the one hand, networked organizations using this as a regulatory mechanism to enforce or extend existing power structures, and on the other, organized networks advocating open source culture. If all this sounds rather too straightforward, Rossiter elaborates on the complexities, uncertainties and contradictions associated with sociality, labor and life in general.

The book is split into three main sections, each with two chapters: the first, addressing the limits of democracy and organized networks; the second, tackling the creative industries, precarious labor and intellectual property; and the third, the virtuosity of general intellect and “processual democracy.” Previous versions of many of the chapters have been already published, but together they make a powerful interlacing argument for network criticism, demonstrating a depth of research to highlight the key issues for political intervention (a companion volume might be Tiziana Terranova’s *Network Culture* [Pluto, 2004]). Acknowledging the peer intellectual support of the Nettime and Fiberculture mailing lists, it is perhaps not surprising that Rossiter demonstrates an impressive but familiar range of sources (including immanent critique and negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School, the concepts of general intellect and immaterial labor in Autonomous Marxism, and the constitutive role of the outside and immanence in Deleuze’s philosophy, amongst others), taking a transdisciplinary approach that he likens to the collective ethos and protocols of the network itself.

A sense of project is clear, passionate and full of hope:

It is about conditions of possibility, the immanent relation between theory and practice . . . and a resolute belief . . . in the concrete potential of transdisciplinary institutional forms that enlist the absolute force of labour and life (p. 17).

The potential to transform social relations is somewhat demonstrated in the socio-technical dynamics of mailing lists, blogs, wikis, content management systems, and so on. But it is the institutional nature of this, as a description of the organization of social relations, that makes it thoroughly political. An example is the section on the creative industries where the instrumental ways in which creativity has been exploited in the realm of policy are mapped against “a concept of communications media that acknowledges the constitutive role of the outside” (p. 103). For the argument of the book, the creative industries indicate two aspects: antagonism in the form of the exploitation of creative labor power underpinned by the increasing regulation of intellectual property as a consequence of the drive to commodify collective and communicative knowledge (the appropriation of general intellect, in other words); and also, the affirmation of creative labor that holds potential for self-organization through its networked capacity (where organized networks emerge). Through focus on the exploitation of immaterial labor-power, or what Rossiter refers to as “disorganised labour-power,” the underlying conditions are exposed, but so, too, are new forms of agency. Organized networks represent relative institutional autonomy but do so not in isolation; they are also required to operate tactically, engaging horizontal and vertical modes of interaction:

The tendency to describe networks in terms of horizontality results in the occlusion of the “political,” which consists of antagonisms that underpin sociality. It is technically and socially incorrect to assume that hierarchical and centralizing architectures and practices are absent from network cultures (p. 36).

Networks are clearly not limitless or without borders, but are far more complex, for

while networks in many ways are regulated indirectly by the sovereign interests of the state, they are also not reducible to institutional apparatuses of the state. And this is what makes possible the creation of new institutional forms as expressions of non-representational democracy (p. 39).

This is one of the interventions of the book: Far from arguing against institutions, the book takes the limits of democracy and the discourse of neoliberalism in general as the available means to rethink politics within net-

work cultures—and this is what is referred to as “non-representational democracy” to describe democracy decoupled from sovereign power (citing Virno’s *Grammar of the Multitude* [New York: Semiotext(e), 2004]). For Rossiter, organized networks offer such an opportunity to develop strategies and techniques of better organization. Indeed, “transformation is conditioned by a capacity to become organized” (p. 215).

JOURNALS

YLEM JOURNAL: ARTISTS USING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

edited by Loren Means. YLEM, San Francisco, CA, May–August 2006. Vol. 26, Nos 6 and 8, 27 pp., illus. SSN: 1057-2031. Journal web site: <www.ylem.org>.

Reviewed by Rob Harle, Australia. E-mail: <harle@dodo.com.au>.

YLEM (pronounced eye-lem) is Greek for “the exploding mass from which the universe emerged.” It is the name of the journal presently being reviewed and also of the “international organization of artists, scientists, authors, curators, educators and art enthusiasts who explore the intersection of the arts and sciences.” Their web site is <www.ylem.org>—if one is interested in art and science, it is a necessary visit.

This is a double issue concerned specifically with “the Singularity.” Other than the final article, which is an excerpt of a talk given by Martha Senger, and Douglas Hofstadter’s cartoon presentation, all the articles are in the form of interviews. The “Big Thinkers” (as YLEM refers to them) featured in this issue are Suzi Gablik, Douglas Hofstadter, Ray Kurzweil, Jaron Lanier and John Searle. The selection of these representative “thinkers” is important as it gives a balanced approach to this most intriguing hypothesis of the Singularity.

Kurzweil describes the Singularity as a metaphor and states, “The real meaning of ‘singularity’ is similar to the concept of the ‘event horizon’ in physics” (p. 12)—that is, it is a *technological* event horizon that we cannot see past. It is a hypothetical concept that refers to the point when technology reaches a critical mass and moves for-

ward, away from biological humans, on its own, under its own intentionality and volition.

There is very little art in this issue of the journal, and one would be excused for thinking it is a futuristic philosophy journal. I was very disappointed with the graphic quality. It is printed on cheap, plain paper, and the black-and-white photographic reproductions are atrocious. They remind me of the low quality standard available from photocopiers in the early 1980s. I would have thought that at a membership subscription cost of \$40US, and given the ubiquity of low cost desktop scanners and printers, a higher quality production would be in order. Also there appears to be no means of subscription available for non-U.S. residents.

Gablik and Lanier's contributions give a cautious and concerned environmental and humanistic counterbalance to Kurzweil's infectious push toward a nonbiological future for *humans*, in which technology reigns supreme and we move off the earth and out to colonize the universe. Searle gives strong philosophical arguments against even the possibility of true artificial intelligence. Kurzweil's hopes will never be realized if we do not fix up this planet urgently. The destruction of the natural environment, increasing at an exponential rate (to borrow his favorite phrase) and the major climatic changes associated with this may see no humans left here from which to transcend in technological rapture. Hofstadter's brilliantly conceived cartoons take a shot at both sides of the singularity camp and in a sense highlight the extent of our ignorance.

Senger's talk is the only one that discusses art, and it has some very interesting and inspiring concepts. Titled "Neo-Vorticism: The Tao of Form," the talk contains so much California-speak, New Age jargon that it is almost painful to read. More seriously, however, it contains some amazing generalizations and unsubstantiated speculations. For example, she writes, "We're in the midst of a momentous cultural shift *perhaps equal to that of the emergence of consciousness several thousand years ago*" [my emphasis] (p. 23). We have no real clue as to when and how "consciousness emerged"; it was certainly not "several thousand years ago." Even more ridiculous is the following statement that I will quote in full:

This situates us within the domain of the "strange attractor"—living time

free within a toroidal topology of uncertainty but with a clear view to the future—alert to its symbolic nuances, surfing its self-similar curves and tuned to the golden-mean ratio of that aesthetic object of desire at this epoch's end—the Singularity (p. 23).

"Aesthetic object of desire"! If there is one thing that all proponents of the Singularity agree upon, it is that it is unknowable from this side. It is a sure sign of foolishness to make something that is unknowable and inconceivable into an aesthetic object of desire. Particularly when there is a very real possibility that if the Singularity does occur, it *may be* the most inhuman, disastrous event ever brought about by "smart but not wise" humans. The great thing about *YLEM* is that it brings these contentious, potentially dangerous concepts into the public arena for balanced debate.

RES MAGAZINE

edited by Sue Apfelbaum and Jesse Ashlock. New York, Res Media Group, March/April 2006. Vol. 9, No. 2, 80 pp., illus. <www.res.com>.

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

It is good to see *RES* magazine still publishing in 2006. This reviewer first picked up a copy at a seminar held at San Francisco State University in 1999 when the magazine was based in that city. At that time, digital cinema was an exciting and promising new concept that was more ideal than reality, largely unused by a skeptical Hollywood though beginning to blossom in short productions. It offered shrimpy streams, or a few products downloadable over the Internet . . . for those willing to wait.

A 1999 issue of *RES* discussed works screened at the Sundance Film Festival and two-minute films, shorts on ifilm.net streaming over RealNetworks technology. Michael Moore, at work on the Bravo network series "The Awful Truth" on downsizing, expressed interest in MiniDV cameras, while George Lucas announced that subsequent *Star Wars* episodes would be shot digitally. A 2000 issue discussed high-end camera equipment and underwater digital camcorders, the conceptual pranksters ®™ark, <www.rtmk.com>, and Tim Burton's Shockwave comic *Stain Boy*.

The March/April 2006 issue covers the several directors of videos for the band Death Cab for Cutie; songwriter Tom Zé and Beastie Boy Adam Yauch; documentary filmmaker Rachel Boynton; the latest movie based on comics by Daniel Clowes; and an unassuming diary of an internship at the advertising agency Weiden+Kennedy. There is a useful item titled "How to Sell and Promote Your Videos Online."

RES is now published by Res Media Group of New York, with offices in Los Angeles and London. For 9 years it has sponsored Resfest <www.resfest.com>, a festival of short films, animation, design films and music videos. *RES* has many of the same advertisers as *Wired*—Sony, Toyota Scion—as well as others more specialized for media-makers, such as the San Francisco International Film Festival, AVID and the Ex-Centris commercial complex in Montreal, seeking creative tenants. The masthead page explains the production process of the cover image of cartoon clouds by Antoine+Manuel (collaborating artists Antoine Audiau and Manuel Warosz of Paris), which was done with both traditional gouache on aquarelle paper and digital scanning and manipulation. The cover promises coverage of Film/Music/Art/Design/Culture, and, as in *Wired*, the reader finds CD, game and "gizmo" reviews. There are reviews of design books and other contemporary design works, as one finds in the industrial design magazine *I.D.*

The *RES* reader encounters ads for digital and cinema design programs at Full Sail, NYU, Los Angeles Film School and San Francisco's Academy of Art University. The magazine's annual Res 10 selection highlights emerging artists in film, video, design, ads, music and media art. It is followed by a Student 10, this year aged 19 to 35, who are doing interesting work at various schools. The cover of this short, sharp, sprightly journal might read *RES: The Hip Magazine for Cinema Students*.

FILMS

THE ANGELMAKERS

directed by Astrid Bussink. The Cinema Guild, New York, 2005. DVD, 34 min, color.

Reviewed by Kathryn Adams, Australia. E-mail: <kathy@pacific.net.au>.

If there is a problem with him, I have a solution.

Szuzsanna Fazekas, midwife.

The women of Nagyrév, Hungary had a problem with their husbands during the early 1900s. Their men were abusive, alcoholic, crippled war veterans who were a drain on the families' meager resources, unemployed or simply "just in the way." At a time when arranged marriages were common and divorce was not an option, these women needed to find another way out of their domestic torment. When a local midwife suggested they poison their husbands by adding arsenic to their meals, the women of this sleepy, Hungarian village had their solution.

Astrid Bussink brings the village of Nagyrév and its mysterious past into the spotlight in her award-winning short documentary *The Angelmakers*. By gently coaxing present-day villagers, some of whom are descendants of the families involved in the original events, to talk about the series of "arsenic murders," arrests and subsequent trial that took place in their town, Bussink succeeds in unraveling some closely guarded village secrets. Some of the people interviewed are elderly women who still reside in the village. Although their recollections are hazy at times, these wonderful, whimsical, irreverent characters give this film its heart. An 83-year-old woman, remembering the day the authorities came to arrest the guilty women, says wryly, "after this the men's behavior to their wives improved markedly."

This relatively unexplored chapter in Hungary's past has been described as being "one of the most extreme examples of female uprising in history." Although things have improved as far as women's rights and privileges go, the women of Nagyrév are still fighting the gender politics that remain in the society today. We see how one contemporary group of women overcomes these gender issues by forming a local folk dance group against the wishes of their disgruntled and unsupportive husbands. These women are clearly frustrated with their struggle for these small privileges and are determined to retain their freedom. All is not well on the home front, György—I would let the ladies dance if I were you.

Images of the surrounding countryside and the deserted buildings that dot the now desolate and depopulated town give the film a real sense of foreboding. The market sellers, the ferry-

man quoting lines from a Petofi poem and the meandering hunchback with a basket to fill give the film a folkloric quiriness and an insight into modern day Nagyrév.

The original score by John Schaten, no doubt inspired by Hungarian folk music, is particularly haunting during the closing credits, when black-and-white photographs of the real women on trial for murder are shown, dismal and resigned. This is a poignant and reflective time for viewers and gives credence to the historical basis of the story.

For the skeptics, including Hungarian friends who have never heard of the case and insist it is fiction, you will find an abundance of information about these fair ladies and their ill-fated husbands on the Internet. By 1929 this quiet but potent uprising had ended. The authorities were notified, over 140 bodies were discovered and the murderesses were put on trial. For those keen to do further research, a trip to Nagyrév itself could have you poring over old court records at the town archives, where Dr. Geza Cseh is convinced "there are still secrets to be unearthed."

This is an intriguing tale by a young filmmaker who has added all the right ingredients and turned history into atmospheric and compelling viewing. Bleak but oddly refreshing, this documentary not only raises social, economic and cultural issues, it also gives us a glimpse into a town still nursing the secrets of its dark past. You will have mixed feelings as to whether or not these women should be labeled "murderers" and be surprised at what became of "Auntie Szuzsi," the midwife at the center of this wicked and delightful yarn. As a Hungarian folk song says,

If your husband has you seething
Belladonna you must feed him
Add some pepper, make it pleasing
He'll be laid out by the evening

Mind the goulash, chaps!

PLAYING THE NEWS

directed by Jeff Plunkett and Jigar Mehta. First Run/Icarus Films, Brooklyn, NY, 2005. DVD/VHS, 20 min, color.

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

I have never forgotten one passionate class discussion on television violence

that took place during my days as a graduate student. Although I am unable to recall the course, the voice of a student who was a forceful advocate of showing the violence has come to mind frequently over the years. She strongly believed these scenes provided a vehicle for those of us who lived far from crime-infested areas to understand lifestyles we do not experience first-hand. At the time, and still, I find myself torn. As much as I oppose censorship in any form, whenever I think about the ramifications of continual exposure to this kind of brutality, I fear it normalizes the behavior in a way that is not socially beneficial. Over the years, as I have watched violence increase, pondered the escalating conflicts within our polarized world and watched new technologies easily circulate events such as the Saddam execution, my mind has often returned to that class debate.

Playing the News is a film that speaks directly to the dilemma. Keith Halper is the chief executive officer of a company that markets game simulations based on battles from the Iraq War. The Kuma War on-line games, he explains, are designed as an "intense, boots-on-the-ground experience" for those who play. He sees this experience as a positive way to understand the actual events for, in his view, young people do not watch television news or read newspapers. Rather, they play hour after hour of video games, so why not convey war reports to them through their recreational activities?

To its credit, the script responds to this question through the voices of both critics and enthusiasts. Commentary from figures outside the gamer community is the film's strength. Henry Jenkins, who teaches Comparative Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, asserts that the game allows a player to see the world as an embedded journalist would. This conclusion seems to correspond to the game's intention. Andreas Kluth, a technology writer for *The Economist*, is a bit more skeptical. Kluth concedes that the videos may educate people about the war, but concludes that this type of experience would be more voyeuristic than real. A gamer may learn about the mechanics but would miss the agony of the population, for example. This skewed perspective comes about because heroic events are included in the games, while less attractive actualities (such as U.S. military torture at Abu Ghraib prison) are not. A war

correspondent, Philip Robertson, articulately expands on Kluth's point. Voicing suspicion of Kuma's claim that it is much like a news organization, he asserts that integrating a game format with "news stories" misconstrues the very nature of the war itself. Speaking persuasively against being swayed by the "educational" thesis, he asks whether a video game focused on simulating the violent engagements of the war is a form of entertainment that sanitizes too many aspects of what is essentially a complicated and chaotic environment?

Black Caesar, Rick Harris and Steve Jefferson offer the gamer perspective. They are among those who download the episodes from the Internet, and each conveyed his fascination with the product. One, for example, said he becomes so involved in the game that he has no idea what is going on around him. Another states it is "funner" to watch the game than to look at the real news on television. I found Steve Jefferson's experience representative. He plays 5 to 6 hours a day and has concluded that the war is pointless but believes that we have to do what we have to do. He also notes that he has friends posted in Iraq and that, to his mind, the game gives him some sense of their experience. By contrast, he acknowledges that the game is still just a game, and he can walk away from it.

The need to engage with the distinction between actuality and the shades of it a video experience can capture goes far beyond *Playing the News* and video games. Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* is a forceful book that comes to mind as a recent critical commentary on replacing media-based education with engaged, critical commentary and involvement with genuine events. Indeed, the conflict between reality and the shadows we mistake for it has long been debated. They are a part of a tradition we can trace back to Plato, who wrote that people who see the shadows on the wall as real are less likely to venture out of the cave and meet the truth provided by actual experience.

After watching the film, I am inclined to ask what it teaches us when we see it in terms of a broader picture that includes how the war began and the background of those who initiated it. It is well known that George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and their team have never actively had "boots-on-the-ground" experiences. Perhaps this explains why

their "leadership" created a quagmire and why they do not seem to clearly perceive the wrenching reality of the war now. Bush, in particular, brings to mind the idea that real leadership and "gaming" are distinctly different activities. In light of his cowboy attitude, it is (morbidly) ironic to realize that he was an active game player in his younger days. Old friends have said that when he was losing a game, he would change the rules until he won. Kuma Wars, of course, was not available in his youth, so he was not nurtured within its environment. While in college, however, he was an avid fan of another game, Risk: The Game of Global Domination. Players in Risk control armies with which they attempt to capture territories from other players. The goal of this strategy game is to control all the territories, or "conquer the world," through the elimination of the other players. An aggressive player then, Bush, now a world leader, seems to carry the same sort of bluster into the "battles" he "leads" today. My point is that although it is hard to say if a Kuma player might mature into someone as out-of-touch with the realities of war as Bush, a former player of Risk, this kind of parallel seems to underscore why it is critical to distinguish between the educational experience of games and reality. (To be fair, as Hurricane Katrina showed, Bush is out of touch with reality in general, not just the handling of a war.)

In summary, this even-handed video narrates the history of the Kuma War video game, introduces the game's audience and raises critical questions. Although the Kuma company's intention is no doubt well placed, and the news commentary does appear to accurately set the stage for the sequences, the "game news" that frames the video war served more to remind me of the quandary between an embodied actuality and a simulation of it. I was also reminded of the young people I know who do not play video games for hours on end and who follow the news closely. Thus, Kuma's argument that the value of the game comes from its focus on coupling accurate reporting with a careful replication of real events in the episodes seemed more self-serving than convincing. A provocative, balanced and thought-provoking film, it is not surprising that *Playing the News* has received many awards (for example, in 2005 it received the Currie Documentary Prize from the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. It was also

recognized in 2006 at the Middle East Studies Association Film Festival, the Tribeca International Film Festival, SXSW Film Festival, Seattle International Film Festival and the Florida Film Festival.) Given the deference shown to all sides, I would recommend it for classrooms, particularly those focusing on culture, entertainment and the role of media in society. The tensions within the questions raised by the film are perhaps timeless. Given this, I believe, it is critical that each generation looks at them, particularly if we aspire to live as citizens within a peaceful world.

HATS OF JERUSALEM

directed by Nati Adler. First Run/Icarus Films, Brooklyn, NY, U.S.A., 2005. VHS/DVD, 52 min, color.

Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg, independent scholar. E-mail: <jonathanzilberg@gmail.com>; <jonathanzilberg@yahoo.com>.

Nati Adler's documentary film is a quixotic and artistic combination of image and sound that often reminds one of Rembrandt and French Orientalist paintings because of the quality of the light and the otherworldly scenes. Following one hat after another, Adler leads us through ancient alleyways and up and down narrow cobbled streets through Jewish, Christian and Muslim neighborhoods, all utterly separate social spaces. By simply asking what hats mean, he reveals the diversity of the Holy City as a microcosm of the Abrahamic world.

In a beguiling and impish way, Adler deftly captures the powerful emotional and symbolic significance of hats as identity markers. Stitched together from interviews with both those who wear and those who make these hats, with images and accounts from the art-historical and historical record, this documentary is important on two counts. First, it shows how religious identity is embodied. Second, it sensitively explores the veiling of Jewish and Christian women, a vital issue considering the heated contemporary debates over the *hijab*.

From the Ashkenazi *shtreimel* to the Moroccan *fez* or *tarbush*, from the Armenian cone as a symbol of Mount Ararat to the Palestinian *keffiyeh* as a symbol of resistance, this documentary is a marvel in terms of how deeply

significant historical, political and religious events and markers can be so successfully approached through such a simple tactic. Not infrequently, when Adler asks his usual question as to why wear one kind of hat and not another, he is treated contemptuously as some kind of idiot outsider. His informants, however, would be surprised at the results of his research, as they would learn something of their own histories and of others. For example, in delving into the history of the *shtrimmel*, we revisit Brueghel's paintings of 16th-century Holland, which evidence Pope Innocent's 13th-century decree that Jews, beggars and lepers wear foxes' tails upon their jackets. Hence we learn that this symbol of collective belonging, of Jewishness, is the transformation of a marker of an oppressed minority. From shame to pride, from disguise to donation, the documentary gets increasingly interesting scene by scene. For instance, we see mounted Jewish settlers disguised as Bedouin warriors, learn how the Israeli Defense Force's signature Castro-like hats were donated by the American Hat Association and that the Syrian priests' white folded hats recall Antonius, the first Christian monk, and his struggle with Satan in the 3rd century.

Though Adler is Jewish, he finds it virtually impossible to penetrate his own society in his search for meaning. Ironically, the first time that he strikes ethnographic gold is when two Greek Orthodox priests invite him into their dormitory, where they entertain him with hard-driving Christian rock music and draw his attention to the lyrics, which for them memorialize the Armenian genocide. Suddenly the barriers between Adler as a profane secular outsider and the priests as religious insiders are breached and the distinction between self and other that marks the documentary up to that point falls away as a veil to the floor. From this point on, the documentary moves into even more remarkable territory as Adler enters both sacred and private contexts that would have appeared unimaginable at the start of the documentary.

For example, he meets a Russian Orthodox nun who is willing to talk to him, but her Bishop refuses to allow it. This critical event completely re-sets the stage for the last half of the film. Adler begins this complementary part by providing us a brief insight into the world in which the opulent and color-

ful bishops' hats are made, extraordinary hats of silken cloth, dazzling with jewels and brocade. Though he is not allowed to interview the cloistered sisters, he is allowed to film them practicing their hymnals. Inadvertently, he has struck an even richer seam of ethnographic gold and enters into a deeply numinous and beautiful space. The camera's gaze focuses on an attractive young Russian novice whose stray wisps of blond hair escape her veil. Ever aesthetic, Rembrandt-like at times, the intensely sensitive combination of sound and image shifts across starkly different contexts of prayer and cultural space again and again.

For the rest of the film, Adler explores an issue of exceptional contemporary sensitivity with an ingenious twist by looking into the world of Orthodox Jewish women and the pleasures and frustrations of being veiled. From the austere black robes of the nuns and their bishops, to shrouded shapeless Muslim women in black, we make the acquaintance of a formerly orthodox Jewish woman liberated and dressed in black leather, her radiantly red, long tresses free. She takes us inside the world that Adler at first could not penetrate; there he strikes an even richer, sexier vein—a hair salon in which Orthodox young *Vogue*-like Jewesses have their wigs cut, blow-dried and permed—platinum blond today, eager brunette tomorrow. Then the most stunning image of all, an exquisitely beautiful woman posing movie star-like with her serpentine coils of hair tightly bound in dark blue cloth, talking about the relationship between her hair and her sense of identity and sexuality. Then, evoking the fear religious men have of the figure of the *femme fatale*, of the peculiar concept of women as the source of all evil, we learn that Eve was not Adam's first wife, that first there was a redhead named Lilith whom God had expelled from Eden for being insufficiently submissive.

Adler does not disappoint us. He moves to closure with a scene of hatless children playing and shares with us his Dr. Seuss-like wish that a wind would blow everyone's hats off so that no one would know who was who or what was what. Yet he ends appropriately with the image of two robed Orthodox Jewish men walking into the sunset, their big black hats bobbing and peyotim swinging to wistful music evoking the time of the ghetto.

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 May–June 2007 <www.leonardo.info/ldr.html>.

June 2007

After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda under Napoleon, by David O'Brien. Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg.

The Atlas of Climate Change: Mapping the World's Greatest Challenge, by Kirstin Dow and Thomas E. Downing. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics, edited by Sara Nuttall. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

Cyberspaces of Everyday Life, by Mark Nunes. Reviewed by John F. Barber.

The Future of Electronic Literature, by Maryland Institute for Technology. Reviewed by Dene Grigar.

Japan's Peace Constitution, directed by John Junkerman and produced Yamagami Tetsujiro with music by Soul Flower Union. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

El medio es el diseño audiovisual, edited by Jorge La Ferla. Reviewed by José-Carlos Mariátegui.

Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions, by Ned Rossiter. Reviewed by Geoff Cox.

Other People's Pictures, directed by Lorca Shepperd and Cabot Philbrick. Reviewed by Kathryn Adams.

PopModernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday, by Juan A. Suárez. Reviewed by Jan Baetens.

Russia in Transition: I to IV, by Sergei Loznitsa. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?: Experiencing Aural Architecture, by Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter. Reviewed by Florence Martellini.

Surviving Death/Alive Why?, by Larval.
Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

Tin Men, by Archie Green. Reviewed by Rob Harle.

The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft, by Anne Friedberg. Reviewed by Ian Verstegen.

May 2007

The Animation of Lists and the Archytan Transpositions, by Warren Burt.
Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Jonathan Vickery. Reviewed by Rob Harle.

Constant, Avant le Départ, by Maarten Schmidt and Thomas Doebele.
Reviewed by Anthony Enns.

Full Metal Apache: Transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America, by Takayuki Tatsumi. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

Ghosthunter: A Journey through Haunted France, by Simon Marsden. Reviewed by Allan Graubard.

Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording, by Tim J. Anderson. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film, by Brigitte Peucker. Reviewed by Jan Baetens.

Musimathics: The Mathematical Foundations of Music, Vol. 1, by Gareth Loy.
Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.

Renzo Piano: Work in Progress, directed by Marc Petitjean. Reviewed by Nameera Ahmed.

Salvador Allende, directed by Patricio Guzmán. Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher.

Scientific Pluralism (Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science), edited by Stephen H. Kellert, Helen E. Longino and C. Kenneth Waters. Reviewed by Amy Ione.

Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art, edited by Caroline A. Jones. Reviewed by Craig Hilton.

Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis, by Elizabeth C. Mansfield.
Reviewed by Amy Ione.

YLEM Journal: Artists Using Science and Technology, edited by Loren Means, guest-edited by Gregg Rickman.
Reviewed by Rob Harle.