conversations also depend on our relation between mutually respected participants to a conversation, what kind of a conversation? We would like to pose the question to Haydn, who may very well give us a different answer than Mozart (and this may be different still from Webern’s or John Zorn’s). This question, naïve as it may seem, is at the core of Hilda Paredes’ chamber works. Hence the title of the recent Mode CD of her work: *Listen How They Talk*. The CD features four pieces: the title piece (for string quartet), “Cotidales” (for piano quintet), “Ah Paaxo’ob” (for ensemble), and “Can Silim Tun” (for vocal and string quartet). The Arditti Quartet performs on three of the pieces, and other performers include pianist Ian Pace, the Ensemble Modern, and the Neue Vokalsolisten Stuttgart. In each of the pieces Paredes meditates on the nature of conversation, whether linguistic or musical. While classical chamber music—that highest of high-culture musical forms—has traditionally aimed for a “conversation” that is likewise of high standing, Paredes’ hybrid musical influences show us the form of conversation (musical or otherwise) as it really is—polyvalent, scattered, sensual, frenetic and quite often interrupted. Raised in Mexico, as well as of more modern musical cultures, focusing on the often tension-filled relations between them. And while it would not be inaccurate to compare Paredes’ works featured on the Mode CD is from 1998 and entitled “U y U T’an” (translated from the Mayan as “Listen How They Talk”). Performed by the Arditti Quartet, the piece starts with frenetic, jagged bursts and sheets of sound, musical lines or fragments of conversation pitched in here and there. The violin is prominent in this phase. But then, about halfway through the piece, the pacing suddenly shifts, and long, sinewy, more silent lines are heard. Here the viola is prominent, the other voices almost silently listening. The exchange nearly becomes silent itself, punctuated by those uncanny silences one suddenly hears amid the din of a café or restaurant. It then builds up again near the end, this time driven more by the cello. The bits of conversation rise and fall; one voice is started, another continued. Paredes has often been included as part of a new generation of Mexican composers eschewing any division between northern and southern hemispheric musical cultures, focusing on the often tension-filled relations between them. And while it would not be inaccurate to compare Paredes’ works featured on the Mode CD is from 1998 and entitled “U y U T’an” (translated from the Mayan as “Listen How They Talk”). It has become a truism that the string quartet can be likened to a conversation. The instruments are voices, the notes words, melody becomes communication, and so on. Each instrument—violin, viola, cello—has a particular sound to its voice, be it in terms of register, range or the more obtuse qualities such as breathiness, richness and sonorosity. Each voice not only has a particular kind of sound but also “sounds” (talks, converses) in an equally particular kind of way. A violin may be adept at firing off a rapid sequence of notes, or a cello may be adept at long, continuous lines of melody. All of this has a technical language within musi- cology of Western classical forms, from Haydn and Mozart to Beethoven to Bartók and beyond. But it is the trope of conversation itself that makes chamber music forms such as the string quartet interesting. If the string quartet can be likened to a conversation, what kind of a conversation is it? Is it an equal dialogue between mutually respected participants? Or is it in fact a monologue, in which one voice is always louder than the others? Furthermore, our actual conversations also depend on our relation with each of the conversants—is it a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a friend, a lover, a co-worker, a colleague, a stranger, a client, a teacher, a student? Finally, our conversations may vary widely, from highbrow discussions on culture and politics, to the guilty pleasures of gossip to the white noise of chit-chat.

Which of these describes the string quartet? We would like to pose the question to Haydn, who may very well give us a different answer than Mozart (and this may be different still from Webern’s or John Zorn’s). This question, naïve as it may seem, is at the core of Hilda Paredes’ chamber works. Hence the title of the recent Mode CD of her work: *Listen How They Talk*. The CD features four pieces: the title piece (for string quartet), “Cotidales” (for piano quintet), “Ah Paaxo’ob” (for ensemble), and “Can Silim Tun” (for vocal and string quartet). The Arditti Quartet performs on three of the pieces, and other performers include pianist Ian Pace, the Ensemble Modern, and the Neue Vokalsolisten Stuttgart. In each of the pieces Paredes meditates on the nature of conversation, whether linguistic or musical. While classical chamber music—that highest of high-culture musical forms—has traditionally aimed for a “conversation” that is likewise of high standing, Paredes’ hybrid musical influences show us the form of conversation (musical or otherwise) as it really is—polyvalent, scattered, sensual, frenetic and quite often interrupted. Raised in Mexico, Paredes moved to London in the late 1970s, there studying with composers such as Peter Maxwell Davies. But the Mexico she left (and that remains in her compositions) is a particular kind of Mexico, that of the traditional Mayan cultures, as well as of more modern folkloric influences. Paredes’ music is not simply derived from the post-war British school of Davies or even Eliot Carter; it “interrupts” this tradition, or this conversation, with the everyday magical element of traditional Mexican culture. One of Paredes’ works featured on the Mode CD is from 1998 and entitled “U y U T’an” (translated from the Mayan as “Listen How They Talk”).
chamber works to those of Ligeti, Xenakis or Tristan Murail, it is her attention to the relationship between communication and miscommunication, conversation and noise, that sets her work apart. In thinking about Paredes’ chamber works, we can borrow a phrase from the philosopher Michel Serres, “the miracle of harmony.” As Serres notes, the amazing thing is that conversation or communication occurs at all: “They neither hear one another nor listen to one another. And yet, sometimes, there is agreement. The most amazing thing in the world is that agreement, understanding, harmony, sometimes exist.”

But this is, of course, the exception, not the rule; in fact, the conversation, as a complex system, is predicated on this noise, this chatter, that it attempts to expel but that it cannot do without. In a sense, then, Paredes’ chamber works set themselves the challenge of conversing about the entropy of conversation itself.

### BOOKS

**UNNATURAL WONDERS: ESSAYS FROM THE GAP BETWEEN ART AND LIFE**


The psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton found that people cope with profound change in two different ways. One way is to adopt rules that provide stability and order in the midst of flux. Often, though not always, these rules evoke the past and the authority of tradition. Lifton calls this the “fundamentalist” response. The second way of coping with change is what Lifton calls “protean,” after the Greek god Proteus, who could assume any form. A protean response to change is to try something new because it is new. Each mode has its advantages and disadvantages. Most of us, according to Lifton, combine the two modes.

Arthur Danto responds to much of the bewilderment and diversity of contemporary art with protean openness. A philosopher and art critic, Danto has written 16 books of philosophical, four of art criticism, and six art monographs, but is best known for his reviews in *The Nation*. Observant, generous to a fault, erudite but always accessible, and master of an admirable prose style, he has become the most widely read art critic in America. He has also achieved what until recently seemed an impossibility in the United States: He is a well-known art critic whom artists rarely criticize.

*Unnatural Wonders* is a collection of his essays, most of which were previously published in *The Nation*. The majority of these essays focus on the works of modern or well-established contemporary artists, among them Paul McCarthy, Barbara Kruger, Damien Hirst, Gerhard Richter, John Currin and William Kentridge. In addition, there are essays on Chardin, Leondardo’s drawings, Artemisia Gentileschi, and the effects of 9/11 on New York art, along with reviews of two Whitney biennials, and one essay each on Fluxus, the intersection of painting and politics, and the erotics of Surrealism. *Unnatural Wonders* concludes with several theoretical texts. What ties all of this together, besides Danto’s distinctive warmth and intelligence, is his belief that contemporary art has raised “the question of its identity” and has “carried the responsibility of the philosophy of art farther than the philosophers of art would have been capable” (p. 11). In other words, contemporary artists do work that in the past would have been done by philosophers.

Danto believes that with respect to *art, what he calls “our time” began in the early 1960s, when many artists broke from paradigms that had governed art since the Greeks. According to the earlier paradigm, art and life are related in complex ways, but comprise separate phenomena. Danto presents compelling evidence that over the last four decades a shift has occurred toward work that challenges the distinction between art and life. His prime examples are Andy Warhol’s Brillo box and the productions of Fluxus, works that not only mimic the things of daily life but in some cases are indistinguishable from them.

The breach of ancient barriers between art and life creates Zen-like ambiguities, and these require new ways of looking at art and life, as well as new approaches to art criticism. Danto’s approach favors an open, inquisitive and unassuming spirit. He observes what is before him, attempts to understand what an artist is saying or trying to say, and then seeks to communicate the artist’s intent to a larger audience. The role of the critic, Danto believes, is less to judge than to explicate. Danto is far from being the only art critic to have embraced the role of explicator, but he has been exemplary in fulfilling it, at least with respect to work that has already gained the approval of curators at important institutions.

Lifton believes that on balance the protean response to radical change is likely to be psychologically healthier than the fundamentalist response. However, the protean approach also has its limits. In *Unnatural Wonders* these limits are occasionally evident, but nowhere more clearly than in an essay on Jeff Koons. It begins with a quotation from the philosopher Charles Peirce. “I am inclined in my aesthetic judgments to think as the true Kentuckian about whiskey: possibly some may be better than others, but all are aesthetically good.” Here Peirce voices a primary way of experiencing the world. However, this primary experience is impossible to maintain for long without the aid of an acquired discipline, such as science. Perception generates judgments, which flow from recognition that experience can be pleasant or unpleasant. From such simple beginnings we evolve “good” and “bad.”

Most artists do this too, of course. Kitch, according to Jeff Koons, is good, because we enjoy it, while much contemporary work in the lineage of high art is bad, because we feel guilty when we don’t enjoy it. “I’ve tried,” Koons wrote, “to make work that any viewer, no matter where they came from, would have to say that on some level ‘yes, I like it.’ If they couldn’t do that it would only be because they had been told that they were not supposed to like it” (p. 296). Koons is reflecting here on his polychrome sculpture *Ushering in Banality*. It depicts a pink beribboned pig, pushed by a small boy and guided by two cherubs, all depicted in a classically kitsch manner.

Koons does not allow for the possibility that someone might genuinely dislike *Ushering in Banality* without first having been intimidated by some snob or elitist. Not that Koons is opposed to elites. He writes, “Don’t divorce yourself from your true being [love of sentimental knickknacks], embrace it. That’s the only way that you can truly move on to become a new upper class” (p. 290). But Koons is concerned about much more than status: He claims to have found in kitsch something that is universally appealing.

Danto is hostile to Clement Green-
berg’s universalist claims, but not to Koons’s. Why? Danto does not explore the question, but an obvious difference between Greenberg and Koons is that Greenberg voiced concerns of an earlier generation, while Koons, although hardly new to art audiences, is still contemporary. The jury, it seems, is out on contemporary universalist claims, but not on claims from the recent past.

Another difference is social: Greenberg was always embattled and hostile to dominant culture, while Koons speaks for it. He identifies with forces vastly more powerful and oppressive than anything Greenberg contrived. In Lilton’s terms, both Greenberg and Koons are to significant degrees fundamentalists, but Koons is a fundamentalist of the status quo, while Greenberg was a fundamentalist in opposition to it.

This is not to suggest that Danto’s response to Koons is simplistic. Danto finds the Banality works deeply disturbing, and goes so far as to describe them as “aesthetic hell,” but he does not explain what he means by this. The reader is left on his own.

In traditional art, representations of hell are meant to engage viewers, fascinate them and at the same time to deliver warnings. Hell draws us in, traditional paintings demonstrate, but imagery of pervasive pain makes for an easy choice: Hell is something to avoid at any cost. Ushering in Banality may draw us in, but clearly Koons is not delivering any kind of a warning. To the contrary, he does all he can to validate kitsch, to prove it “easy fun.” Koons is suggesting that kitsch is aesthetically equal to classical beauty or the sublime. Danto explicates Koons’s work but avoids its challenges.

The subtitle of Unnatural Wonders is Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life. Danto uses “life” in a narrow sense of the word, to refer only to the objects and happenings of daily life. Plants, animals and microorganisms are not included, although he briefly discusses live works by Yoko Ono and Dieter Roth. Danto does not mention one of Koons’s better-known works, a bioart installation titled Puppy. It is a 12-meter-high outdoor installation in the shape of a dog. The armature is steel and wood, with a skin of earth and flowering plants. Danto’s silence on the subject of bioart limits his discussion of the gap between art and life. More vividly than Warhol or Fluxus, live art closes the gap.

The question of what can or cannot be art remains interesting, but no longer has the sharp edge that it once did. Some time ago Fluxus won: Anything can be art—or almost anything. Immortal flotsam and jetsam of daily life have long since ceased to mark the frontiers of the possible. The same is true of states of absence, piles of debris and the manufacture of shit. But could an envelope full of anthrax spores be art? More tellingly than George Maciunas, Andy Warhol defined art as whatever you can get away with.

Bioart confronts us with the most important of which have to do with processes and systems that make human existence possible. Not very long ago Westerners took the continuity of life and what Alfred Wallace called “the great aerial ocean” for granted. If someone talked about the weather, they were talking about something of little consequence. All this has changed. The limits that we face imply new cycles of change, new exercises in protein adventurousness, and new opportunities for fundamentalist judgments. Questions and objections immediately arise. What grounds exist—have ever existed—for making judgments, in art or anywhere else, that extend beyond the merely personal and local in time, or at most beyond some subset of humanity? If we must make decisions about art relevant to the impacts of climate change and mass extinction, how can we protect against conditions that silence individuals and groups? Once again artists can use the help of philosophers, among others. However, as an artist, it seems to me that to the extent that we value human consciousness, a common reference point must be the well-being of the biosphere. Art that contributes to the integrity, sustainability and diversity of life, especially nonhuman life, is good for us. Art that does not is bad for us.

ARTSCIENCE: CREATIVITY IN THE POST-GOOGLE GENERATION


Reviewed by David G. Stork, Chief Scientist, Ricoh Innovations, Consulting Professor, Stanford University. E-mail: <artanalyst@gmail.com>.

The problems with this slim volume start with its title. Edwards, whose primary job is researching drug deliv
dipping into the “other” discipline, for instance in gaining insight on a scientific problem by beholding a work of art or gaining inspiration for new compositional methods by reading about science. Most of these anecdotes are somewhat arbitrary and less than compelling because they are based heavily on Edwards’ acquaintances in Cambridge and Paris. We learn of the engineer who is chosen to lead the Louvre’s conservation science department (decades after similar departments were thriving at other museums), of a chemist who gets a technical insight by looking at a painting, a pianist/composer who is so intrigued by chaotic transformations that she studies math and engineering in order to derive new ways to compose musical variations, a researcher who is also an expert skier, a health worker who considers her photographs not as art but instead documentary evidence about the AIDS epidemic, a medical doctor with a passion for photography, a scientist with a passion for cello. Such anecdotes are hardly news to readers of Leonardo, who likely are—and surely must know dozens of—such people. Incidentally, “passion” and its cognates are the most overused words in this book, but because Edwards explains so little of the depths of the cross-disciplinary ideas in each anecdote, readers are unlikely to experience such passion themselves, or have their interests much piqued.

Toward the end of the book, Edwards lists a few vague guidelines or principles that he believes stem from these anecdotes: Incorporating both science and art can accelerate the adoption of ideas. Process matters more than results. Results are never bad. Some institutions have barriers between the art and science worlds that might profitably be reduced. And so on. Because so much that went before is described in inadequate detail, and whole sections bear little if any relevance to these principles, and the principles are so vague themselves, readers will find them obvious or not compelling. This book will change few minds. Nevertheless, Edwards is trying to put his ideas into practice at Le Laboratoire, an interdisciplinary center in Paris, but it is surely too early to judge its possible successes. Perhaps someday he can write a deep account of the lessons learned from his experiment.

In the meantime, readers should stick to the best books in the large literature on creativity in science, technology and the arts, such as Tom Kelly’s The Art of Innovation: Lessons in Creativity from IDEO and The Ten Faces of Innovation: IDEO’s Strategies for Defeating the Devils Advocate, or Stewart Brand’s The Media Lab, where detailed examples of creative interdisciplinary “artscience” work and the organizational structures that support it make the concepts more real and convincing and where the link from such collaboration to the scholarly, artistic and business successes are clear.

**The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States**


*Review by John F. Barber, Digital Technology and Culture, Washington State University Vancouver. E-mail: jfbarber@eaze.net*.

Nineteenth-century doctors did not agree on the nature or causes of insanity. They did, however, agree that much of the insanity exhibited by Americans of that time was curable with the help of specially designed buildings. *The Architecture of Madness* is, at its heart, an exploration of the architecture for the care and treatment of insane persons during the 19th century.

More than simply a history of buildings, however, this new book by Carla Yanni, associate professor of art history at Rutgers University, demonstrates how ideas regarding the therapeutic values of architecture were closely connected to changing social and medical paradigms.

The number of insane asylums increased in the 19th century. Scholars of the history of psychiatry point to several reasons. First, the geographical separation between the workplace and home created splintered, smaller, specialized families that undermined the ability to care for needy members. Healthy individuals, who needed to work for a living, increasingly sought help from paid caregivers or the state for family members stricken with insanity, thus creating a new market economy. More fundamentally, the presence of an insane relative threatened the nuclear family and the sanctity of the home, both central components of the Victorian era mindset.

Both families and doctors faced a paradox when it came to committing relatives, however. Insane asylums were not seen as the sort of place to send a family member, especially with the general conception of insane asylums as large, unwelcoming, cold and dark, their residents sitting unclothed, shivering on dirty floors, shackled to the walls.

Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride, a Philadelphia Quaker, believed good architecture was essential for the treatment and recovery of lunatics, and it was his “linear plan,” short but connected pavilions arrayed in a shallow V, that dominated the architecture and building of insane asylums from 1840 to about 1880. These buildings, built in styles to mimic Greek temples, classical cathedrals and Arts and Crafts cottages, attempted to communicate a message of generosity, civic munificence, and kindness to those less fortunate. Coupled with ideas regarding the importance of proper ventilation, the benefits of outdoor activities and restful landscaping, these insane asylums, most often located on the outskirts of cities, attempted to provide a refuge from the stress and turmoil of urbanization.

*The Architecture of Madness* tracks these parallel histories through a series of tightly conceived chapters. The first chapter introduces the Victorian understanding of moral management as a treatment for the insane by which diverting activities such as walking, boat trips, acting in skits and sleigh rides were meant to inculcate patients with self-control and positive thoughts, all part of the cure for insanity, and all part of the internal culture of an asylum.

Chapter 2 focuses on Kirkbride’s “linear plan” and its development in several asylums throughout the United States to about 1880. In addition to
the architectural design, described above, Kirkbride advocated segregating patients by severity of illness, ease of treatment and surveillance, and ventilation. These factors were purposefully built into many of the structures following his lead.

Chapter 3 presents alternatives to the linear plan. Interestingly enough, however, these alternatives were not so much focused on buildings, either large or small, but rather on medical treatments and moral management, which, although different, still claimed the same beneficial results.

In the second half of the 19th century, following the American Civil War, insane asylums exploded in numbers and in size. The average number of inhabitants increased from 250 to 600. Larger asylums were built to accommodate them. Chapter 4 deals with these grand institutions. Additionally, asylums established on principles of architectural environment fell into disfavor in the 1890s, when neurologists mocked asylum doctors for their lack of scientific research. By century’s end many asylums had become human warehouses, exactly an outcome Kirkbride had argued against earlier.

In the end, Yanni’s point is well made: 19th-century doctors believed architecture was part of the cure for insane persons thought likely to improve, and part of the treatment for those chronically ill. In either case, treatment of the insane was conducted not only in, but also by, the asylum. By 1900, the focus on the therapeutic value of architecture and environment was no longer a key goal of asylum managers. Their buildings were crowded with those still unwell despite 60 years of treatment. The psychiatric profession needed to dissociate itself from the claims of environmental determinism since, obviously, the environment (including the architecture of the asylums themselves) had not determined many cures for insanity. More and more frequently over the 20th century, patients suffering from insanity were prescribed outpatient care. Today, the severely mentally ill are all but invisible, sequestered in state hospitals. And, as treatment emphasis has shifted to milder, non-institutionalized cases of mental illness, architecture has declined in importance to the field of psychiatry.

While it was at the forefront of treatment for mental illness, architecture was, as Yanni explains, deeply intertwined with then-prevalent social, intellectual and medical currents. The Architecture of Madness tells the story of this intertwining in a fresh and original way.

**The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney**


Reviewed by Wilfred Niels Arnold, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas, U.S.A. E-mail: <warnold@kumc.edu>.

Walt Disney (1901–1966) is an entertainment industry icon, whose contributions include creation of films (both animated and live), production of television shows, and construction of theme parks. His success and visibility were so great in his lifetime that a generic term, “Disney cartoon,” crept into the vernacular for all manner of animated screen items, which must have upset his predecessors in the medium and his subsequent competitors. But he was the first to develop a full-length feature film in animation, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. And Disney’s Fantasia, 1940, was the first successful realization of music as images: I remember being deeply impressed by this a year or so later in Australia, the more so as a pleasant distraction during World War II worries about Europe and the Pacific.

While The Animated Man succeeds in capturing day-to-day activities of the developing Disney industry, a large proportion of the book is devoted to labored detail. The narrative is sometimes difficult to follow at first reading because of a paucity of chronological hallmarks and unconvincing chapter headings. Readers of Leonardo Reviews will probably expect a more analytical view of the man who became a household name and anticipate a more philosophical discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of animation techniques as developed by one of its prime-movers. They will be disappointed on both scores. On the other hand, the attention to Walt’s older brother Roy Disney (1893–1971) is welcome, and he certainly comes across as a steadying influence in their overlapping careers.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs opened in December 1937, and just 6 months later Disney received honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale Universities. At the former ceremony, the recipient had the good grace to acknowledge that he wished he had a college education. Michael Barrier was surprised that each honor was only a Master of Arts. On the other hand, some of us think that the honorary doctorate has become a bit of a give-away in recent years.

During the early corporate years, Disney was always self-confident but bordered on being a benign despot according to Barrier. Things reached a head in the spring of 1941. Under economic pressure from its bank and shareholders, Walt Disney Productions felt a necessity to scale back costs. Each laid-off employee was assured by Walt himself that “this release is not based on unsatisfactory performance on your part.” Not unreasonably, one of them had the temerity to ask what he should do instead and Disney replied, “Start a hot-dog stand.” A picket line of dissident workers went up at the end of May. Thereafter, Disney remained generally disturbed about organized labor, and in 1947 he actually testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that some former workers who had instigated the 1941 strike were Communist sympathizers.

Some of the black-and-white illustrations are curious choices and suggest deficiencies in research, fact-checking and editing. For example, below one of the ganged photographic reproductions starting after page 236 the caption refers to a Disneyland “monorail,” when obviously it is a regular pair of rails, albeit of small gauge. A photograph of Walt Disney and actor Richard
Todd could easily have been cropped rather than include an “unidentified third man.” Again, an “unidentified lawn-bowler” at the clubhouse of Smoke Tree Ranch, Palm Springs, is given equal weight to Walt within a half-page photograph—surely a more informative action shot of Disney on his own could have been discovered.

Walt Disney died of lung cancer in Los Angeles, on 15 December 1966. Two years later his image appeared on a U.S. postage stamp (6 cents); just one of many recognition items befitting his substantial contributions. The old studios are now part of a multi-billion dollar media corporation that carries his name. Michael Barrier resides in California and is the founding editor of the magazine Funnyworld. He is also the author of Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age, published in 1999.

Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema

edited by Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert.

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

Beyond the Soundtrack is much more than just another collection of proceedings (in this case of a conference hosted by the University of Minnesota in 2004). Thanks to the innovative claims of the editors’ introduction and the outstanding quality of its various chapters, this volume has everything needed to become a landmark publication in the (too slowly) growing field of film and music studies.

As convincingly argued by Claudia Gorbman in her seminal study Unheard Melodies, film music is supposedly at its best when it goes unnoticed, an observation closely linked with the film industry’s recycling of a specific type of music, the postromantic symphony, a default option in many traditional Hollywood movies that helped bridge the gap between the pre-cinematographic tastes of the audiences and the new forms of cinematographic narrative. This collection, however, exemplarily edited by a team of film scholars and musicologists, does not limit itself to updating and renewing our common frames of reading film music, often reduced to two stereotypical discussions: that, first, of the difference between diegetic (onscreen) and nondiegetic (underscore or pit music), and that, second, of the convergence or divergence between what we see and what we hear (with the infamous “mickey-mousing” or acoustic mimicry in the role of the bad guy and sound-vision contrast in that of the good one). Beyond the Soundtrack achieves, on the contrary, a complete overthrow of these traditional interpretive frames, proposing, and excitingly illustrating, a real Copernican revolution. Far from considering film music as a lucky or unlucky accompaniment of the film’s language, the editors suggest that it is the latter that should be seen as a representation of the former. Film, then, is no longer complete by a score or a soundtrack, it is, on the contrary, a way of embodying a musical experience (this is the reversal the authors of this book call the “representation” of music by film).

The volume is organized following the three dimensions that shape this new approach of film music: (1) meaning: how can film be studied as a way of visualizing music, i.e. a semiotic experience known to be meaningful yet very difficult to conceptualize by verbal means; (2) agency: how does music transform, create, question, contest the global meaning of the cinematographic world?; and (3) identity: does music, which can express almost anything, mean something, or does it merely represent itself, i.e. something that is beyond or beneath meaning in the traditional sense of the word? Most essays in the book obviously cover all three of these dimensions, and it is, therefore, not always easy to understand why this or that particular chapter obeys primarily to this or that aspect of film music. But the merits of each essay make the reader forget almost immediately the overall structure of the book, which is a little artificial, and focus exclusively on their own specific insights and thought-provoking hypotheses. The 16 texts are without any exception more than worth reading, and most of them respond quite directly to the stakes raised by the editors’ preface. Since it would be unfair to mention or quote this contributor rather than that one, I would like to single out some of the fields of research opened—and deepened, widened or reinforced—by the essays.

First, the reinterpretation of the relationship between the postromantic symphony and cinema, and the clearly formulated idea that the successful emerging form of narrative cinema can be understood as a transfer or transposition of an existing cultural form shaped by symphonic music and its ideological underpinnings, such as the target-oriented narrative structure, the exteriorization of subject-located impressions, the tension between order and chaos, individual and society, etc. Various articles disclose important historical evidence to foreground this link between film narrative and symphonic music, suggesting how films have been taking the place of an outdated musical experience that was no longer possible in itself.

Second, the critical reappropriation of Adorno’s heritage. Clearly, Adorno is the main theoretical point of reference for most of the contributors to the volume, yet nobody is reading Adorno uncritically. The creative and productive role of popular and commercial music within film is never despised, while the Adorno-Eisler plea for a “negative” relationship between sound and vision does not function as an unchallengable dogma—as it occurs more than often in critical readings of film music.

Third—but of course not last—Beyond the Soundtrack manages also to establish a permanent movement of back and forth between the past and the present, between auteur cinema and Hollywood movies, between film and television, high and low, and so on. The book does not fall prey to established divisions in film theory, and the
healthy acceptance of “bad” film music as well as the clever refusal of any idealization of “good” film music, is paramount to its global achievement.

**PROCESSING: A PROGRAMMING HANDBOOK FOR VISUAL DESIGNERS AND ARTISTS**


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

Why did we have to wait so long for this marvelous gem? It is, indeed, rare to find a technical book of such clarity and insight and especially so in books concerning computer programming. I have grappled with many programming books over the years in an effort to teach myself programming and none come close to *Processing: A Programming Handbook for Visual Designers and Artists.* Casey Reas and Ben Fry are to be congratulated on two counts. Firstly, for writing this 710-page comprehensive book, and secondly for producing the associated open-source programming language software, also called Processing, which is a companion to the book, so to speak.

The reader is directed on page 9 to go to the Processing website (<www.processing.org/download>) to download the software. After so many frustrating attempts in the past to download so-called “free” software, I approached the web with trepidation and cynicism. I thought at this stage, “Doesn’t matter how good the book and language software, also called Processing, which is a companion to the book, so to speak. My fears were completely unfounded. Within 15 minutes I had downloaded the 32 megabyte package for Windows (it is available for Mac and Linux as well) and installed it effortlessly. After a further 10 minutes I had my first program, as per instructions in the book, up and running.

The Processing language was written specifically for visual artists and designers, whether they be interested in producing still images, animation or interactivity using their own programming efforts, rather than relying on commercially available software applications. For those artists who use computers in their work and like to have control at a fundamental level this book will be a revelation and worth every cent it costs. I was stunned at how few lines of code are required to produce complex images, for example a color wheel. The software comes loaded with numerous examples of what can be achieved with Processing using existing modules of code.

Processing was created in the spirit of the open-source software movement, which not only results in free programs but also encourages social networking and users’ play and experimentation. For the few who do not know what open-source is (you must have been holidaying on Mars for the past 10 years), do a search on the net and be prepared to be amazed. Artists need to be mindful not to forsake their final artistic creations in the wake of becoming absorbed or obsessed in writing code. This can quite easily happen in the arduous and lengthy task of learning the more complex languages such as C++. Processing gets results fast, seems to be naturally intuitive and, due to Reas and Fry’s brilliance, easy to learn.

As the back cover states, “Tutorial units make up the bulk of the book and introduce the syntax and concepts of software (including variables, functions, and object-oriented programming).” “More advanced professional projects from such domains as animation, performance, and typography are discussed in interviews with the creators.” For artists interested in creating programs that run devices in an artistic installation there is an introductory section on electronics (Extension 8, pp. 633–659), which provides enough basic knowledge to get you started in microcontrollers, basic robotics and sensors to control motion, sound and lighting. This section includes examples of code and types of controllers to purchase.

There are chapters specifically on mobile software applications, networking, creating 3D applications, printing and, of great importance to my own work, high-resolution file exporting. This book is so well thought out and referenced it is quite astonishing. For example, there is a general Index and a Code Index. Numerous appendices cover such basic, though important, topics as code comparisons, reserved code words and programming languages. There is even a table of contents, then a Contents by Category and, further, an Extended Contents section. These sections enable readers to quickly find exactly what they are looking for without plowing through the whole book sequentially. Processing has numerous illustrations, both black-and-white and color. The smaller images accompany examples of code-text to illustrate what the code produces on the screen. Larger images are examples of actual art produced by a variety of artists using more extensive modules of code.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough; I only wish that it had been written 10 years ago. I’m sure many artists, who, like me, have wanted to experiment with computer control and programming for artistic projects, have been frustrated to the limit by poorly written, obscurely referenced and inappropriate programming books and languages. This book remedies all this and is even very reasonably priced.

All I can say to Casey Reas and Ben Fry is: Thank you.

**ADORNO IN AMERICA**


*Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan 48710, U.S.A. E-mail: <mosher@svsu.edu>.*

David Jenemann argues that severe cultural critic and German exile Theodor W. Adorno wasn’t a fish out of water in America, but was an active and engaged participant in the cultural and intellectual issues and arguments of his time concerning mass media and its messages. Adorno arrived in New York in 1938, to work in collaboration between the Institute for Social Research (ISR) and the Columbia University Office of Radio Research. One day he was struck by the experience of walking out of one downtown building while a piece
of music was playing on the radio, and hearing it several times coming out of other buildings as he walked down the block.

In Adorno’s critique of the authoritarian logic of radio, he felt the mass media’s own seamless narrative of the culture industry prevents any historical understanding of it. CBS Marketing material privileged European music, especially musicians from the Axis countries or imperial capitals. Cultured Europeans in evening dress were photographed in sharp contrast to rustic, outdoorsy American folk musicians (the publicity omitted any mention of jazz or black music). Radio, movies, early television were all strongly girded with white, male authoritative (or authoritarian) voices, from the 1930s through World War II and the 1950s to the mid-1960s, voices that spoke in a confident and un-ironic tone difficult to fathom in today’s world, where most U.S. students get their news from “The Daily Show”’s John Stewart or his colleague Steven Colbert.

Adorno noted atomized listening was the condition fostered by the repetition and interchangeability of radio programs, where all pop culture and programming were merely tools of workplace productivity. Adorno fumed, “Music under present radio auspices serves to keep listeners from criticizing social realities; in short, it has a soporific effect upon social consciousness.” His colleague Max Horkheimer worked on building the relationship between the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and empirical research. In 1945 Adorno lamented the “sneering empiricist sabotage” of social research, whereby sociologists like Paul Lazarsfeld turned it into venal market research. Audience measurement and reductio-ad-absurdum product rating systems and focus groups granted upon Adorno. Lazarsfeld, in turn, found Adorno an elitist and odd dilettante.

Adorno was interested in new musical technology, including the electronic violin, the Hammond organ and especially the theremin, all of them dispensing with imitation of natural sound for something entirely new. The theremin, now re-popularized by Michigan rock songwriter Mr. Largebeat, among others, was used in many horror and science-fiction movie soundtracks of the 1950s as an audio signifier of weirdness and alien presence.

In 1941 Adorno moved from New York City to what he called “a small university town,” Los Angeles, and soon completed a book on film music with Hans Eisler. He also advised Hollywood director William Dieterle on scripts, and was criticized by Hans Richter for unconscious racism in depiction of a black character in a possible version (several were proposed) of a movie called “Below the Surface” that Dieterle and Adorno developed concerning anti-Semitism and ethnic prejudices.

Adorno advised Thomas Mann on musical sections of his novel Doctor Faustus, and some of his ideas turned up in the dialogue of characters in the book. The novel tells of an artist’s retreat from the world, and the communist critic Georg Lukacs claimed it—despite some self-conscious techniques of fragmentation of dialogue and chronology—as anti-modernist, socialist realist work. This reviewer recalls how the book was suggested by Chilean novelist José Donoso to students in his 1970s fiction workshops who proposed rock ‘n’ roll settings for novels.

David Riesman argued in The Lonely Crowd (1949) that comic strips encouraged kids to think in terms of winners and losers rather than complexity of life’s situations. Driving around Los Angeles in his Plymouth, Adorno was a fan of a Chrysler-sponsored comic strip, Chuck Carson, whose crime-fighting hero was an automobile dealer. In his summary of his book on Theodor W. Adorno’s American years, Jenemann compares Adorno, (Jewish) exile from a doomed foreign world, to the comic book superhero Superman, or at the least the Man of Steel’s creators, Siegel and Shuster. In making this comparison, Jenemann might have cited Michael Chabon’s 2000 novel The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, which explores the mindset of Jewish superhero creators. Theodor Adorno, regrettably, failed to live to read and critique that novel, though in his heightened sensitivity to American pop media, he surely would have done it justice.

Re: Skin

Reviewed by Dene Grigar, Digital Technology and Culture, Washington State University Vancouver, U.S.A. E-mail: <grigar@washingtonstate.edu>.

Think of aphorisms involving skin. “Beauty is only skin deep” suggests the difference between the superficial and the genuine, with the word “only” hinting at skin’s lack of importance in the measurement of one’s true value. “Thin-skinned” hints to a failing of character. “No skin off my nose” is a flippant response signifying we do not care what another says or does. “Give me some skin” reduces intimacy of a physical connection to the imperious slapping of another’s flesh. So pervasive is skin as a “significant border,” a “boundary between one’s self and the surrounding . . . world” that Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth have devoted a whole book “on the contentious situation” of it (p. 1).

True to their promise, Re: Skin is a very compelling book that explores skin in a variety of genres, from numerous
perspectives, penned by a wide range of scholars and artists. As the editors point out, *Re: Skin* "is a complex understanding of the ways in which difference, especially gender difference and bodily difference, is marked and constituted" (p. 5). It will be hard for anyone looking at the images or reading the various works of fiction, nonfiction and scholarship to remain unconvinced. Flanagan and Booth make their point well, organizing works into three sections: "Inside, Outside, Surface," "Transgression," and "Mapping the Visual and the Virtual."

The first piece, for example—L. Timmel Duchamp’s "The Man Who Plugged In," the story about a male robotic expert who, borrowing his wife’s womb, makes history by carrying a fetus (not ironically a son) to gestation—opens the book with a discussion about the intervention of technology and 20th century medical practice into the traditional female purview of childbirth and the pregnant body. Vivian Sobchack’s essay "On Morphological Imagination," a “meditation on the dread of middle-ageing” (p. 103), looks at images of women in film, from those found in sci-fi to *Death Becomes Her*, a film about plastic surgery and rejuvenation that gives me the willies even now, particularly now that I am middle-aged. Those of us focused on media art will find Rebecca Cannon’s “Perfect Twins” provocative. The art she presents by Tobias Bernstrup and Linda Erceg forces us to think about the way network environments help us to explore gender identity and sexuality.

Keith + Mendi Obadike’s "The Black. Net. Actions," a short piece that looks at "the language of color," presents three works the authors have been engaged in. One in particular, "Blackness for Sale," is particularly fitting for a book about skin in that it experiments with selling "blackness" online at eBay—an enterprise that netted the artists a mere $152.50 before the auction was shut down for "inappropriateness" (p. 245). Another favorite is Shelley Jackson’s "Skin," an essay about the work of art by the same name. In this piece Jackson asked people across the world to tattoo a word from her story somewhere on their bodies. Images of participants showing off tattoos like "finger," "if," "swelling," remind us of the potential permanence of embodiment and the depth of which we are marked by language. David Leonard’s "Performing Blackness" critiques the way in which black male characters are relegated to video games involving sports, "individual and communal representations, demonstrating the ideological and representational connections among stereotypes, minstrelsy, the virtual sporting world, and our own playgrounds" (p. 322).

As mentioned above, the point the editors make about the role that skin plays in our lives and culture is well argued. Try as I may to find an aphorism that offers a spin on skin not associated with race or gender identity or some notion of a lowly physical existence or position, I was not very successful. Hoping other forms of literature besides fiction and nonfiction offered better, I found only T.S. Eliot’s rather violent image of rendering life from limb in *Murder in the Cathedral* ("take the skin from the arm, take the muscle from bone, and wash them") and Jean Toomer’s *Cane* ("Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon/ . . . When the sun goes down"). No help there.

*Re: Skin* is a terrific book. Scholars teaching feminist or cultural studies will want to get their hands on it.

**THE HIDDEN SENSE: SYNESTHESIA IN ART AND SCIENCE**


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

Crètien van Campen’s study on synesthesia, the sensory experience that makes us perceive words in colors and/or colors in words, for instance, and, more generally the phenomenon that makes us activate two or more senses when semiotically speaking only one sense is addressed, offers a clear and refreshing view of a phenomenon that has long been taken for a hallucination or a delusion. Strongly relying on the latest scientific experiments (brain scans) as well as on lifelong personal research on and with synesthetes (persons being able of synesthetic perception), the author manages to offer a discussion of synesthesia that is of interest for the specialists as well as for the broader public.

The book is divided in three sections. In the first part, van Campen examines the synesthetic perception itself: What does one perceive when one perceives synesthetically? In the second part, he analyzes the way synesthetes think: How can synesthesia be framed as an occurrence of visual thinking? In the third part, he brings together the current scientific reflection on the phenomenon (both the thinking of those for whom synesthesia is an abnormal brain function and those for whom it is a normal brain function).

The author’s way of arguing always finds a good balance between direct experience (the testimonies of the many synesthetes with whom he has been working for many years) and the scientific results of cognitive and neuroscientific research (of which he is able to give very clear and readable reports and syntheses). The basic ideas defended in the books are quite simple. On the one hand, the author clearly defends the universality of synesthesia, not in the sense that we are all synesthetes without being aware of our synesthesia, but because synesthesia is part of human experience (we are all born synesthetes, and then our cultural and biological evolution separates our sensory experiences) and because, more importantly, synesthesia should be considered a specific form of what we are all capable of performing, namely “synchronesthesia” (i.e. the simultaneous perception of various signs that each address a separate sense). Van Campen makes, therefore, a plea for making room for a “hidden sense,” which is our ability to process information in a unified and more holistic way that lies behind or beyond the processing of information through separate senses. On the other hand, the author is also reluctant to reduce the universality of syn(chron)esthesia to a uniform
and homogeneous phenomenon. He demonstrates very convincingly that synesthesia remains an essentially individual process (the many experiments with synesthetes prove that there is never an identity between the perceptions of two persons, at least not when the researcher tries to identify the sensory perceptions in a very fine-tuned manner) and that there is definitely a cultural bias in the perception of synesthesia (in Western culture, where taste and smell are not differentiated, synesthetic experiences will not take the simultaneous perception of taste as smell and of smell as taste into account, whereas in other cultures this will be seen as a clear example of synesthesia).

As a corollary, van Campen refuses also to abandon his first-hand experiments and discussions with synesthetes and he many examples provided by art and history in order to make them match the findings of the results of modern brain scanning techniques. He remains critical of the findings of that kind of brain research, always making room for the individual testimonies and examples he presents and analyzes with great astuteness.

A less convincing dimension in this book, however, is the references to the art world. Obviously, synesthesia is a key dimension of many artistic expressions and movements, yet van Campen does not always pay enough attention to the possible tension between the status of the work and that of the author. The fact that a work features synesthesia does not imply at all that its author is himself or herself a synesthete; it is on the contrary perfectly imaginable that one has only a hearsay knowledge of synesthesia, but performs it artistically for reasons that have nothing to do with a sensory basis, but only with an artistic agenda. It is clear that this was the case for the experimental Dutch poets of the 1950s, who used synesthesia not because they were synesthetes, but because synesthesia was part of their innovative rhetorical agenda. More generally, it would have been interesting if the author had asked questions on the cultural (un)willingness to tackle foreground (or censor) synesthesia. The relationships with cross-cultural aesthetic tendencies such as the "ist pittura poetica" might have been useful here. Questions like these are unfortunately never asked, and for this reason this book is missing an essential feature, namely history. The Hidden Sense is a good and warm introduction to synesthesia and an important plea for its "normalization." Yet for the reader who is looking for a cultural history of the phenomenon, the book will remain disappointing.

GERARD CARIS:
PENTAGONISMS/PENTAGONISM


GERARD CARIS:
ART AND MATHEMATICS.
NEW REFLECTIONS ON THE PENTAGON/KUNST UND MATHEMATIK. NEUE REFLEXIONEN UEBER DAS FUENFEBK


TEKENINGEN/DRAWINGS
SMA CAHIERS


PENTAGONISME/
PENTAGONISM.
SMA CAHIERS


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

This review discusses four separate books concerning the work of Dutch artist Gerard Caris. Two of the books, with soft covers, are catalogues with essays. They also have color and black-and-white reproductions of Caris’s drawings, relief structures and 3D sculptures. These have been associated with exhibitions of his work at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA).


The fourth book, the thickest (also with hard cover) and if selected singularly perhaps the most important, or at least most comprehensive, is entitled Pentagonismus (Pentagonism). This book has six essays by leading art scholars and high quality images of Caris’s work. It is supported by ZKM Museum (Centre for Art and Media Technology) in Karlsruhe Germany and is edited by G. Jansen and P. Weibel. This title is the same as the soft cover (SMA) catalogue, which actually presents more examples of Caris’s artwork.

All the books have excellent quality reproductions and are bi-lingual in all respects; essays, titles, artwork descriptions and so on. They are available from the respective museums where they were published, and Pentagonism (hard cover) is also available from bookshops. Combined, the books form a definitive reference for Caris’s art-work, inspiration and life story.

Caris’s work will be of particular interest to the Leonardo community, as his work crosses the boundaries of art and science, and in a sense dissolves these often artificial boundaries to produce a unique body of artwork based on mathematical and scientific exploration. His work for over 40 years has exclusively involved the nature and properties of the pentagon and regular dodecahedron. This study has led to new discoveries in mathematics and created aesthetically beautiful artworks concerning the dodecahedron, which many regard has having an almost mystical nature. "His unique genius explores this new universe, thus creating bridges between mathematics, crystallography and art" (p. 48).

The essay in the larger SMA catalogue, Passion and Precision: The Art of Gerard Caris by Evert van Uitert (pp. 6–25), is an excellent overall introduction to Caris’s personal journey, detailing training, travels, pre-art occupations and of course his studies in California and inspiration to work with the illusive qualities of pentagons and dodecahedrons.

The six essays in Pentagonism approach Caris’s work in very different ways. Holz for example discusses the sensuousness of ideal form and the importance of the number five and the sensuousness of ideal form and the importance of the number five for Caris. Where as Zeki, in The Art of Gerard Caris and the Brain’s Search for Knowledge approaches Caris’s work from a neurophysiological standpoint, discussing the way our brains seem to...
have preference for viewing horizontal lines or diagonals or verticals, which has been shown through MRI brain scans of individuals viewing different artworks. Some of Caris’s drawings and relief structures make one feel like one’s brain is being twisted this way and then that. It is not only an optical illusion effect but a different kind of visual challenge for the brain. “They create physical and mental conditions in which we become conscious of something in ourselves that has been triggered by geometrical form and its treatment” (p. 57).

I appreciate and enjoy Caris’s artwork not only because it is challenging, aesthetically pleasing and culturally important but also because in a sense Caris is a loner and marches to the beat of his own drum. In a world where embracing the latest trend is almost essential for artistic (or scientific) survival, there is something refreshing and optimistic about an artist who quietly and obsessively follows his own path no matter the consequences. Caris is one such artist and if for no other reason than this it is worthwhile including these books or at least Pentagonisms in your library.

**DVDS**

**PRISONERS OF BECKETT**

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

Criminals are often far more colorful than the average person.


*Prisoners of Beckett*, a film by Michka Saïd, is a true account of a group of inmates in a Swedish prison who stage a performance of Samuel Beckett’s black comedy, *Waiting for Godot*, both inside and outside the prison walls. Inspired and guided by their exuberantly passionate director and producer, Jan Jonson, the men embark upon an experience that not only opens their world to Beckett and the parallels his play has with their own existences but, in an ironic twist, also paves the way for their escape.

The film opens with interior and exterior shots of Kumla Prison. Accompanying the footage of barbed wire, sealed off passageways, barred windows and claustrophobic concrete walls is one of the many Bob Dylan songs featured throughout the film. This immediately sets up the haunting and melancholic feel that permeates the entire film and will remind any lapsed Dylan fans of the emotive power his music still holds when aligned with images of despair and deprivation.

Speaking to a camera from a formal stage setting surrounded by black-and-white photographs of Samuel Beckett and two of the prisoner/actors in their roles as Estragon and Vladimir, the intense and animated Jonson acts out his recollections of his experience at Kumla Prison. This “staged show within a show” technique is extraordinarily dynamic and effective and gives this film its distinctive edge.

Jonson speaks passionately of his admiration for Beckett, whom he eventually met through his work at the prison, and of the friendships and heartfelt connections he made with the prisoners and their Warden, Lennart Wilson. During one of his own performances in a production of *Waiting for Godot* in Stockholm, Jonson remembers the audience member who said, “Take your play, your text, your tie, your furniture and give it to my boys in Kumla.” “Are you talking about the inmates from the Kumla Prison? . . . Who are you?” asked Jonson. “I am the Warden.”

Original footage of the prisoner/actors rehearsing within the prison grounds by Jösta Hagelback (poet and filmmaker who also appears in the documentary) in 1985 is interspersed with interviews with prison officials, a journalist, Lennart Wilson and most intriguingly three of the five prisoners who played the roles of the characters in Beckett’s play. Wilson, whose compassion and foresight turned the entire project at Kumla into a reality, explains how he thought, “It would be great if we could put on a play that allow[ed] the inmates to express themselves.” He also sings a rendition of “I Did It My Way”—an entertaining snippet and insight into the life and personality of an admirable character. But it is the inmates who steal the show, so to speak.

When Jan Jonson went to Kumla to discuss Beckett’s play with the prisoner/actors for the first time, one of the prisoners exclaimed, after reading the manuscript, “This is not a play. . . . It is my fucking diary!” These men could easily identify with a story that was essentially about despair and frustration and of course, the never-ending act of waiting. As one of them explains, “In prison you wait for things longer than anyone else.”

Criminals or not, these spectacularly flawed, melancholic and talented individuals will win you over and leave you wanting to learn more about their lives. It is a shame the documentary loses its focus and becomes more about the life of Jan Jonson than about these intriguing outcasts of society, who, as one prison official notes, “had talent for more than just crime.” Although this does not have an enormously negative impact on the film, it weakens the essence of the story, and the core of the film becomes fragmented.

The setting for *Waiting for Godot* has often been described as a place where Godot Is Not. Oddly for director Jan Jonson, life imitates art, when his cast fails to appear for one of their scheduled performances, and he finds himself waiting and waiting in a theatre where his actors are not.

This distinctive, original and noteworthy film is highly recommended viewing. Considering it has been 20 years since the event took place, it has been well worth waiting for. . . .

**ON THE RUMBA RIVER**

Reviewed by Jonathan Zilberg. E-mail: <jonathanzilberg@gmail.com>.

*On the Rumba River* is more significant as a social documentary about the tragic history of Zaire and the Democratic Republic of Congo and the surrounding region than as a film of Zairean Rumba music per se. It conveys little of the dynamic sensual passion and none of the energy for which Zairean Rumba is best known and appears to have been inspired by the vastly more effective documentary about Cuban jazz, *The Buena Vista Social Club*. Sarasin’s film provides no hint of the immense continental and transcontinental success of the tradition. Instead, one is forced to witness the disaster that is Papa Wemba’s and the common person’s lot in Kinshasa and Brazzaville on the lower reaches of the
Congo River. Above all, the film is an account of a pitiful attempt to revive this one man’s career and the impossible dream of getting a gig for his band in America so as to reclaim a space for a musician who was one of President Mobutu’s favored arriviste cultural thugs—by his own account.

As recounted by Gary Stewart in _Rumba on the River_ (1999) and in Graeme Ewens’s “Heart of Dancelessness” in _World Music_ (2000), African Rumba, its wellspring being Zaire, is not Rumba in its West Indian sense but a complex combination of Cuban-inspired musical styles. After Cuban Rumba took off in New York in the 1920s and in London in the 1930s, it was transformed in the 1930s and 1940s and thereafter into African Rumba known as _Soukous_, the word being derived from the French word _souvenir_—to shake. After African jazz emerged in the 1950s and the post-independence political conflicts in the 1960s, Zairean musicians began migrating to Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, where they continued to sing in Lingala. In the 1980s the Rumba scene took off in Paris and London, as best represented by Papa Wemba’s success there. Later, in the 1990s, a fast-paced, even more intensely sexual form known as _Kwasa Kwasa_ became so popular in Zimbabwe and South Africa as to dominate local music when musicians such as Pepe Kalle the Elephant Man thundered onto the scene. In more recent years in Zaire, the hyper-aggressive sexuality of the latest form of Rumba known as _Ndombolo_ has been considered by the Museveni government to be so obscene as to be deemed illegal. Naturally, it subsequently became more popular than ever—especially the frenzied whistling and gyrating of the new dance—the Bill Clinton.

If viewers of this film did not have this background to go on, they would think that there was no music to be had in Zaire, never mind any joy or wealth such as best expressed in the decades-long, fabulous, opulent expressive life of the _sapeurs_ whose competitive prestige depends on their public displays of the latest and most expensive European designer clothing and Italian shoes. In contrast, there is an intensely flat and depressive quality to this film. In fact, in order to best get a visual sense of the lack of energy in this film, one should be sure to watch the film _Touki Bouki_ to understand the sheer joie de vivre that can be found in these ghettos and thus something of the _joie de vivre_ that gives Rumba its power.

Perhaps _On the Rumba River_ is deliberately designed in this way so as to convey the dispirited nature of these unemployed and relatively impoverished musicians. In this, its real value is that of a social documentary. The film very well provides a vehicle for capturing peoples’ memories of the end of the colonial era, the early years of independence as Mobutu entrenched his grip on power, and the gradual descent into the postcolonial condition aptly portrayed here. And while the film leaves one perhaps thinking that things are calm, if going nowhere, the final text on the screen notes that 4 million people have died in recent years. In fact, three years later, in 2007, further upriver in the Eastern DRC war, mass murder and mass rape is the order of the day, as brought to our attention by the gender activist Eve Ensler. The UN and others are now working hard to bring this situation to the international community’s attention through V-day and the stop fistula campaign, and in this larger political context, there is surely an uncomfortable space here between the exaggerated male sexual aggression in this dance form and the codified defensive female postures and the climate in which rape is so persistently and wickedly used as an instrument of war. But one would not get any sense of any of this in this film, as the Rumba revived here is a slow and refined, subtle _Africanized_ dance form more attuned to middle class Cuban aesthetics of the early decades of the 20th century.

Repeatedly the camera and the main figure, Papa Wemba, return to the river from the ragged broken poverty of the urban squalor the musicians endure. There he sadly watches the great brown river flowing by fast as if mocking time itself while the lost signs of the future, large metal transport and passenger barges, one by one, rust and sink into the turbid and turbulent waters. For those who have read Conrad’s _Heart of Darkness_ and Naipaul’s _A Bend in the River_ by way of Achebe’s objections, when you next dance to Rumba in Paris or London, you may do so with a certain edge—particularly if you are aware of how the squalid daily life depicted in this documentary is absolute heaven compared to current conditions upriver in the war torn Eastern DRC.

One should then perhaps keep in mind when watching this calm and dispirited film that foreign African armies and interests have for a long time now been working with competing local forces to extract the wealth of the nation in some degrees in ways every bit as appalling as the Belgians before them. Thus, images referred to in the media such as the triumphant Rumba musician being carried through the jubilant crowds in Kinshasa on the back of a Zambian tank remind us of the larger context to which this film, so morbidly obsessed with a failed past, could only point in closing with an epigraph.

If this film has one message it would seem to be that greed and suffering are as constant, as mighty and as unforgiving as the flow of this great river and time itself. There is a quality of darkness here in which explicit Conradian metaphors are at work: the broken down steamships and the long-dead engine gauges themselves as modernity’s lingering and hunching deferred failure, the river as all-powerful and timeless, greed and decrepitude, suffering all around. Whither goes Africa, you will be forgiven for asking perhaps. But in the meantime—shall we dance?
Over the last decade, “nano” has become the buzzword signifying everything from imagined atomic-scale robotic utopias to small electronics. For scientists the shift toward nano has also become ubiquitous; what used to be referred to as “molecular” has been reframed as “nano,” 27 journals devoted to nanotech/nanoscience are now published, and the National Science Foundation and other granting agencies have devoted a significant amount of funding toward nanotech/nanoscience. Among engineers, scientists and science-studies scholars, discussions of the potential of nanotech/nanoscience abound, including conferences that debate the pros and cons of a nano-hegemony and attempt to debunk some of the hype. Artists, however, have only begun to explore this emergent scientific field, leaving it wide open for creative interpretation. With this special section of Leonardo we hope to ignite artists’ interest in the exploration of nanotech/nanoscience and encourage scientists, scholars and educators to contemplate the implications of an art-nanotech/nanoscience connection.

Leonardo, in collaboration with the Exploratorium under the auspices of the Nanotech Informal Science Education Network, will publish a series of special sections periodically over the next 5 years exploring the intersections of nanotech/nanoscience and art. We are especially seeking submissions of artworks (visual, performance, sound, etc.) with artists’ statements explaining the relationship of the work to nanotech/nanoscience; essays from scientists, engineers and scholars exploring the connection between nanotech/nanoscience and art; and essays and visuals aiming at nanotech/nanoscience education that uses the arts as a pedagogical tool.

Interested artists and authors are invited to send proposals, queries and/or manuscripts to the Leonardo editorial office: Leonardo, 211 Sutter St., Ste. 501, San Francisco, CA 94108, U.S.A. E-mail: <isast@leonardo.info>. Editorial Guidelines for Authors can be found at <www.leonardo.info>.

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La Gioconda
(Mona Lisa) ($500 to $999)
Lars Ole Belhage
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Lef Brash
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Michele Emmer
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Flying Machine
($250 to $499)
Loren Basch
Ray Bradbury
Bettina Brendel
David Carrier
Holly Crawford
Eugene Epstein
Lawrence Fave
Herbert Franke
Doreen Gatland
Pamela Grant-Ryan
Oliver Grau
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Frieder Nake
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