critic, draughtsman, visionary, proponent of glass architecture and would-be inventor of perpetual motion. His ideas inspired avant-garde art and architectural circles, especially the so-called Glass Chain movement, a group that included architects Walter Gropius, Bruno Taut and Hans Scharoun. His ideas also influenced the mystical and Romantic strains of early Expressionism, Futurism, Bauhaus, German Dada and German science-fiction literature. Gershom Scholem presented as a wedding present a copy of Lesabéndio to philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin, who, in a glowing review, lauded Scheerbart’s serene vision and called him a humorist who never forgets that Earth is a heavenly body.

For Benjamin, technology sped up the process of turning its artifacts into commodities, along with the workers who produced them, thus alienating people from each other and from the fruit of their labor. Says Benjamin, instead of accumulating experiences or wisdom, societies so affected by technology spend all their time filtering continuous, discrete bits of disconnected information, distracted in their reaction to rapidly changing social structures.

In Lesabéndio, however, the inhabitants of the imaginary star Pallas make no rigid dichotomy between technology and nature, between themselves and technology, or between themselves and the surrounding natural world. Rather, they follow two preconditions Benjamin thought essential for humans on Earth: disregard of the belief that it is our task to exploit the forces of nature and belief that technology, by liberating human beings, will liberate the whole of creation.

The star Pallas is a rugged, mountainous topography overlaid with an urban metropolis highlighted by many lighthouses. Moving belways provide transportation between the northern and southern halves of Pallas. A glowing cobweb-cloud surrounds the planet and provides its light source. Pallasians are organic parts of their home star. They have one rubber-like leg, with a suction cup at its end, convenient for attaching themselves to any surface. They expand and shrink various parts of their bodies in order to see at a distance, shelter themselves at night and propel themselves via a method of high-speed bouncing. They smoke bubble weed in mushroom meadows until they fall asleep under violet skies and green stars.

And, thus, we have another way to conceptualize the novel: as an ecological science fiction story. Lesabéndio, the hero of the novel, persuades all Palladians to build a 44-mile-high tower, utilizing newly discovered Kaddimohn steel, in order to connect the two halves of their double star. An unintended effect is that the height of the tower alters Pallas’s center of gravity, which in turn changes the Palladians’ internal nature as well as the form and function of the star on which they live. As a result, Lesabéndio achieves a nearly unimaginable level of consciousness, sensory perception and communication abilities, heretofore only experienced by astronomical entities like stars, asteroids and the Central Sun of his local galaxy.

Lesabéndio, the novel, was ecological before ecology was a discipline, and science fiction before it was a liter-
ary genre. But the novel may also be read as a political parable about the dangers and necessities of conflict. For example, Peka, an artist who believes in art for art’s sake, wants to decorate the tower. Lesabéndio, on the other hand, wants to use the tower to aid and transform Pallas. Peka loses to Lesabéndio, who absorbs Peka through his pores, nonviolently making Peka a part of himself. This highlights Scheerbart’s idea that technology must be integrated into the natural world and subordinated to values greater than itself in order for humans to live in a world that is at once harmonious and worthwhile. Rather than a tool for altering and reconfiguring both nature and the surface of Pallas, technology alters its users and their ecological and cosmic niche.

But, far from programmatic, Scheerbart is unsettling, quirky and ironic in his humor and parody. The fact that pain and injuries are so rare on Pallas that they are remembered by only the oldest living beings might be an echo of a Neo-Darwinist understanding of nature not so brutally based on one species exterminating another. The mystical union Lesabéndio undergoes with the star Pallas might echo Nietzsche’s superman. The cooperative consensus among Palladians might echo thoughts on applied art, where art and technology should serve the spiritual needs of the people. Finally, the novel might be read as a pastiche of scientific texts, even while it questions the ability of such texts to summarize and objectively know.

And so, yet another way to approach Lesabéndio as part science, part art, part humor. Scheerbart’s odd humor, with its ability to estrange so much of our usual experience, makes the novel Lesabéndio both a challenge and delight to read, wreaking havoc as it does with assumptions about fiction and expectations about physical reality. This is, however, offset by the double star (two stars orbiting around a common center of mass) nature of the novel. The other, equally offsetting yet attractive result is that Lesabéndio becomes a novel about the future that we can read in the present. The dangers of ecological crisis and the opportunity for planetary transformative renewal portrayed in the novel are very much real today. A reconfiguration of one’s relationship with the planet one inhabits and its relation to other stars, as portrayed in the novel, speaks to the strand of current/future posthumanism celebrating disembodied information. In the end, Lesabéndio provides a surprising look at future alternative visions that is as fresh today as it was in the past when originally written.

Lesabéndio is often considered Scheerbart’s master work—his other works include The Development of Aerial Militarism and The Perpetual Motion Machine—but, published in German, in 1913, on the eve of World War I, its ability to wield wider influence was, arguably, cut short. This first English translation by Christina Svendsen and publication is especially welcome.

PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS: A CRITICAL EDITION—FERNANDO PESSOA


Reviewed by Allan Graubard. E-mail: <graubardsm@gmail.com>

Nominally considered the most significant poet of 20th-century Portugal, Fernando Pessoa also holds the distinction of writing himself out of much of his work systematically—something unique in European literature as a whole. This is all the more curious for his having published just four books during his life and many other poems and texts in literary journals and magazines. While a known figure in his locale and time, the broader international acclaim he has more recently gained during the last several decades plays well into the game he established as his overall method. He wrote the majority of his work under several heteronyms, each composing an oeuvre relatable to the name, not the author. But then, who was the author and whom do we read—Pessoa or the heteronym? And what difference does it make if we confound the two? Where does the one appear and the other fade? Or are they twins or something else that entices and eludes us?

There is certainly playfulness here, and it can grow infectious. Play has a tendency to do that. And what a breath of fresh air it is to find a poet who found, in fully embodied masks, a kind of multiplicity of character, if you wish to take it that way, and relative anonymity for the author behind, within or in front of the mask. At least in my reading of “his” poems and essays before the publication of the present book, it kept me attuned not only to their brilliance but also to the way that Pessoa set the stage for our encounter with them.

Not being a scholar in things Pessoa, I am not the one to comment in any authoritative fashion on the histories, complexities or parallelsisms that his masks—that is, his heteronyms—and writings involve. Perhaps his upbringing was a factor. It seems to have been. Born in Lisbon in 1888, thereafter relocated to Durban, South Africa, in 1896, he learns English, and the effect of this linguistic and spatial disjunction on the young sensibility of the future poet must have been significant. In 1906 he returned to Lisbon for good but did not give up writing in English. He only gave up writing in his name in English, adopting two droll “pre-heteronyms,” as Pessoa calls them—Charles Robert Anon and Alexander Search—in which to compose most of the brief philosophical essays that comprise the book at hand.

Make no mistake: These essays, discovered recently and published as written for the first time, are not in any sense methodical or complete. They can be read as commentary on a host of issues—rationality, atheism, belief, freedom, the will, the soul, sensation, consciousness, etc.—and seem at once serious in their intent and ludic in their results.

This is not an unknown for poets who grapple with philosophical concepts. Nor are flashes of insight unknown, particularly in regard to a fundamental origin for the poetic: the
encounter with the Other, whether real or imagined, or partaking of something of both. The recounting of Baudelaire’s exclamation to a friend, who was just about to throw an African mask into the corner in disgust, to stop because the mask might be “the true god” is striking in this respect, especially for us, ever drained of the kind of heterogeneity between peoples and cultures that gives meaning to who and what we are. Striking, too, is this perhaps involuntary couplet at the end of a paragraph on “introspective psychology,” which of course can also be taken as two unconnected jottings:

Psychological arguments.
Walking in the street, too quickly.

Nor can I really say what the author meant with the following depiction though I have an inkling that it responds more to a poetic than to a philosophical desire:

Objective classifications made according to a process are Subjective, Objective or Subjective-Objective.
Subjective classifications as processes are of exaltation of degrees and of degree-exaltation.

The relationship of poetry to philosophy, and vice versa, which to my mind at least is one theme of these musings, however seemingly couched in the discourse of argument, is an exceptionally rich area. In one sense it returns to language a resolution not to foreclose too quickly on meaning, significance and resonance. In another sense it can open a reciprocal current that enlivens the concept that seeks clarity in its expression and the expression that seeks clarity in its embodiment.

I cannot help but believe that behind Pessoa’s “pre-heteronyms,” which feed the current volume, and his “heteronyms,” which feed the books for which he is celebrated, play carried the day, and that all else to follow for their author would come because of his mastery in playing. Pessoa’s Philosophical Essays are part and parcel of this sensibility, which left me wanting more from the aforesaid Charles Robert Anon and Alexander Search, however much those two last names, when placed contiguously, transform my want into something entirely else: Anon Search.

**WARTIME KISS: VISIONS OF THE MOMENT IN THE 1940S**


Reviewed by Jan Baetens. E-mail: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>.

Wartime Kiss is a book on the interpretation and meaning of time, analyzed from the viewpoint of a demanding and focusing on medium history, photography, film studies, and cultural history in general. It is, however, in the first place a very personal and exceptionally well-written book, and throughout its reading the word that is constantly popping up in the reader’s mind is: poetry. Not just in the sense of beautiful language, strong emotional involvement and originality of insights, but in the sense of what makes poetry poetry: the capacity to bring together two ideas, two words, two events that only existed as independent, unlinked realities in the mind and the heart of the reader. At the same time, the book is also a seminal example of new ways of writing history, for real poetry and great, demanding scholarship are not incompatible under the pen of Alexander Nemerov.

The initial corpus of Wartime Kiss is a collection of images, both photographic and cinematographic, some fictional and others documentary, most more or less known (some even so well known that we no longer question their meaning) but more than one totally unknown (if not discussed for the very first time). All of the images have to do with the dialectical relationship between moment and history, be it real history or mythic history (for in quite some cases moments tilt over in bits and pieces of eternity, and vice versa of course). In this book, the moment, the time and the history under scrutiny are those of the 1940s, the heydays of photojournalism as well as of the Hollywood studio system. However, the ways in which moment and history interact in order to construct original and complex, yet also very familiar and deeply shared, experiences of time cannot be reduced to either of these two dominating models—the documentary modus of Life magazine on the one hand, the dream factory of the culture industry on the other hand. What Alexander Nemerov unearths in the five chapters of his highly personal inquiry into some of the most iconic and most obscure representations of exceptional moments of the 1940s is the existence of a hidden relationship between the visual language of the decade and the issue of being at war.

The book starts with a chapter that deserves to become a classic in all future readers of visual cultural studies: a rereading of Alfred Eisenstaedt’s image of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square on V-J Day. However, to reread here signifies much more than to read anew: It is really to read in an unseen and unexpected manner, so that overlooked meanings and relationships become suddenly clear, as in a “flash.” The whole reinterpretation of the picture is based on the notion of flash (the atomic blast) and its implicit and explicit continuations, first in the picture itself (which Nemerov shows to be a picture of a violent collision, representative of the violence produced by the celebrations of victory at the home front), second in the picture’s surroundings (such as, for instance, the cover illustration of the Life issue in which Eisenstaedt’s photograph appeared: the picture of an underwater ballet swimmer, whose career proves to have crossed in countless ways the violence of war). Nemerov, however, never simply lists or enumerates the items of the files and archives that his research has gathered on the life (and sometimes death) of the characters represented in front of the camera or working behind them. He weaves...
them together in a story that takes the reader from one surprise to another, always managing to stay slightly ahead of his or her (increasingly) curiosity and always capable of bringing his reader back to the existential question that spans the whole book: How can we read history in what seems to be the representation of a moment out of time? How does the war reveal itself in situations that may at first sight seem light years away from what is going on “out there”?

With great brio and panache, Nemerov succeeds also in rereading four other pictures or groups of pictures: an image of Jimmy Stewart and Olivia de Havilland lying on a picnic blanket (at a time when they were young lovers and at the height of their careers), the dazzling photographs made by daredevil Margaret Bourke-White, some screenshots of a forgotten movie (Twelve O’Clock High) and the sensual experience of seduction, kissing and falling in love in Hold Back the Dawn (yes, with the same Olivia de Havilland, to whom Nemerov pays a deeply felt tribute). In all cases, the author does so with the same mix of spectacular revelations and a strong focus on the reflection on time exemplified by his first chapter. Et in Arcadia ego is one of the running threads of these studies, which show that no moments can be out of time, i.e. of death (even in the case of Bourke-White, whose whole work can be seen as an attempt to live within the pure moment). But the shift from moment to Time is not just a metaphysical one; it is also a leap into the harsh realities of a wartime decade: Stewart and De Havilland shared a passion for flying that will not remain a personal hobby, the desire of the emigrant to be flying that will not remain a personal fact.

Nemerov should be praised for another achievement as well: Although his work is on images, he succeeds also in making us sensitive to the other, nonvisual qualities of the images, which become almost tactile objects in his writings. The way in which he describes these stills and pictures turns them into “thick” objects (although his way of writing is always extremely “light”): Like all authors of great classics, he has the elegance not to burden the reader with the efforts that must have been necessary to research these images so thoroughly, with their own warmth, their own touch, their own feeling, in short their own life and presence, in which the pictures discussed and the words that discuss them merge into a new form of historical sensation.

**What Was Contemporary Art?**


Reviewed by Giovanna L. Costantini. Email: <costantini.giovanna.f@gmail.com>.

Richard Meyer has written an incisive book about “Contemporary Art” as a field whose meaning eludes precise categorization. Proceeding from a definition of the term “contemporary” as “belonging to the same time, age or period; and/or existing or occurring together in time,” Meyer examines the proposition that, as a chronological marker, the contemporary in art occupies an “unstable space” due to time’s perpetual forward movement. He evaluates diverse approaches to the notion of contemporary art based variously on chronology, newness, originality or other features that respond to a given cultural moment, such as those identified with European modernism as it emerged pre–World War I. In so doing, he traces a skeletal “history” of contemporary art as it developed in the course of the early 20th century among establishments that include Wellesley College, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art.

As a specialization within the discipline of art history, Meyer regards contemporary art as a hybrid endeavor situated somewhere between history and criticism. Whereas a historical approach is one determined by linear chronological development and influence, a critical evaluation proceeds from an artwork’s intrinsic values, which may or may not be confined to a particular historical moment. Thus, contemporary art history represents a dual practice that combines contextualized treatments of art distinguished in time from the observer with observations drawn from the perspective of contemporary experience. Citing 1960s publications by Rosalind Krauss and Michael Fried, he notes the erosion of “systematic objectivity” in assessments of contemporary art, replaced by judgments and convictions through which art history evolved into criticism. In light of the surfeit of contemporary art production today and the preponderance of university courses and dissertations in the area (80% in 2011), Meyer’s study seems to “reclaim the contemporary . . . alongside other moments, artists, and objects” so as to temper viewpoints confined to the limits of one’s own lifetime with a “more neutral condition of temporal coexistence between two or more entities.” This position reflects an idea initially proposed by Thomas Crow whereby art that persists over time can become newly relevant to later socio-historic contexts, disrupting distinctions between then and now by rendering the past newly present. At the same time, Meyer advocates a measure of intellectual distance from the present so as to encourage due weight of critical evaluation in the assessment of recent phenomena.

Meyer offers three key case studies of (then) current contemporary art events or exhibitions occurring over the course of the early 20th century that contribute to a revised understanding of contemporary art and its properties: a 1927 undergraduate course at Wellesley College, “Tradition and Revolt in Modern Painting,” the first of its kind; a 1937 MoMA exhibition of facsimiles of cave paintings labeled “Prehistoric Modern” that challenged the idea of chronology; and a 1948 controversy over Boston’s Institute of Modern Art’s decision to change its name to The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) to distinguish it from MoMA’s Eurocentrism, prompted in part by Surrealist exhibitions that James S. Plaut, then director of the Boston museum, described as “deliberately perverse” manifestations of “deranged minds.” Within this framework, Meyer examines other relevant exhibitions that juxtapose the art of the past with that of the present to fulfill Alfred H. Barr’s intent to elicit meaningful comparisons between seemingly unrelated artistic tendencies. These events include exhibitions presented at the MoMA and Boston’s ICA during the 1930s and 1940s on subjects ranging from Russian icons and Persian frescoes to Italian Old Masters and industrial glass and plastics. Meyer’s conclusion emphasizes the at times contradictory relevance of the historical past to the “unbounded consciousness” of the present thorough models of trans-historicity that extend to more recent artistic production: a 1985 interview with Andy Warhol...
conducted by Benjamin Buchloh in which Warhol refers anecdotally to the obsolescence of the human hand in the gathering of rhinestones in New York’s garment district; and a 2005 Toronto exhibition of Glenn Ligon’s neon Warm Broad GLOW as an example of “post-black” signage infused with anachronistic irony.

By his own admission, Meyer highlights the role of Barr, the MoMA’s first director (1929–1943), in the emergence, conceptualization and validation of contemporary art in modernism’s nascent history. His analysis expands upon Sybil Gordon Kantor’s text Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art, also published by MIT in 2003, in placing emphasis on less prominent areas of Barr’s activity at MoMA than his association with Cubism and Surrealism. By examining several critical exhibitions, Meyer repositions Barr closer to the purpose of a cultural historian. He revises what would later become “formalist” critiques of Barr driven by Clement Greenberg’s formalist advocacy during the 1960s by attributing to Barr more intrinsic core principles that stand at the forefront of vanguardism, especially Barr’s refusal to privilege any particular style, national school or chronological period in exhibits he curated at MoMA during the 1930s and 1940s and his commitment to flexibility and a capacity for change. As a propositional platform from which to contemplate the present, Meyer cites Barr’s response to a 1931 NYT questionnaire as evidence of his catholicity:

In the future, the Museum plans an exhibition which may include Dutch primitives such as Jerome [sic], Bosch, Baroque mannerists such as El Greco, Paleolithic cave drawings, Boeotian bronzes, T’ang figurines, Russian ikons [sic], Frenian miniatures, and twentieth century sculpture and painting. The general public will frequently be unable to tell the new from the old but it will learn to tolerate the strange even though it is contemporary (117).

Meyer’s arguments point up the relevance of contemporary art to events occurring within an established historical trajectory, to which the contemporary becomes attached, commingled or collaged. Although every expression emanates from a particular context, each event coexists with or is positioned between others. Depending upon the viewer’s perspective, work may appear progressive, retrospective, juxtaposed or superimposed. To the extent that innovation requires comparison to determine similarity and/or dissimilarity, Meyer argues for an eternal currency, immediacy and relevance of the past to the present in its capacity to inform one’s ability to think critically in trans-historical and meaningful terms. This mental outlook relegates “now-ism” to the margins of the contemporary, replaced by less context-specific imaginaries. Quoting Renaissance art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, who describe the “bending of time” that occurs in artworks that reference a particular moment of creation as well as an origin, precursor or state outside of time, as in divinity, Meyer describes ways that artworks “not only disrupt temporality but reconfigure historical perception through dialectical engagement” with the past. He cites the title of a 1907 book, English Society of the Eighteenth Century in Contemporary Art, or Kara Walker’s appropriation of 18th-century silhouettes, as illustrations.

Interspersed throughout Meyer’s discussion are debates that raged amid the political turmoil of the 1930s, especially the lead-up to World War II, for which contemporary art provided a battleground. Between the wars, strident Americanists, regionalists, realists and anti-intellectuals sought to advance the stylistic autonomy of American artists, liberating them from foreign (purportedly Socio-Communist) influence. Other factions reacted as strongly to the rhetoric of Fascism, with its taint of vainglorious heroism and the authority of classicism. The move to incorporate industrial design into the modernist canon pitted functionalism and the machine aesthetic against the commercial interests of companies like Steuben Glass, together with charges of commodification and corporate sponsorship that would fuel later controversies of the 1960s. Projecting forward to theoretical positions that would dominate the last half of the 20th century, Meyer notes how the deliberate introduction of facsimiles, reproductions and watercolor copies into MoMA exhibitions anticipated critiques of avant-garde originality to be mounted during the 1980s by Rosalind Krauss in her essay “The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths,” which referenced Foucault’s theories of authorship, and critiques of inauthenticity and simulacra championed by Jean Baudrillard.

A book that tackles the definition of Contemporary Art in America must of necessity establish parameters that restrict the field of vision to something focused and coherent. Yet a sequel might well consider a formative arc that extends beyond Alfred Barr and MoMA to the early Whitney Museum in Greenwich Village, the Brooklyn Museum, the Société Anonyme and proponents such as Peggy Guggenheim, Hilla Rebay and Katherine Dreier (among many others), whose energies contributed powerfully to the making of the Modern. Although Meyer cites opposition to MoMA’s policies by such figures as Ad Reinhardt and Peter Rutkoff, more prominent critics such as Meyer Schapiro are scarcely mentioned in countering Barr’s schematic formalism with more contextual or interpretative approaches. Some of the major controversies surrounding Barr, such as his notorious flow-charts, which ironically evidence linear art historical methodology, or debates surrounding figuration and realism that formed a backdrop to Regionalist programs that preceded the nationalistic posture of Abstract Expressionism, are deserving of further exposition. The theoretical confluence of Barr’s curatorial posture with what would later emerge as Greenbergian formalism, particularly in reference to collage as a precipitating event in advance of contemporary practice, would be another fertile line of investigation.

Any discussion of contemporary art as a dialectic over time, especially one that attempts to account for contemporary art’s intertextuality, must address markers both forward and back that include the structuralist logic
imaginaries of the colony and how subcontinent. Key to this period is the aesthetics and philosophical meanings of photography within the context of postmodernism as a linguistic exercise engaged in destabilizing or questioning the authority of tradition. At the same time, such efforts must implicitly acknowledge a shift in consciousness toward fragmentation, pluralism and contradiction of a magnitude comparable to those energies that catapulted Renaissance Europe into the Scientific Era through the relinquishment of dogmatic religio-philosophical belief structures. Meyer’s mapping, oriented around the agency of Alfred Barr’s provocative exhibitions at MoMA, assigns to early 20th-century modernism a definitive place in the history of ideas that approximates the Cartesian revolution in relaxing the strictures of representational imagery, referentiality and meaning as it had come to be inscribed in aesthetic language, iconography, context and tradition. The revolt that coincided with Barr’s course in Modern Art at Wellesley inaugurated a more combinatorial global condition forged of staggered progressions, autonomous cycles and assorted currencies. It signaled an opening out of the mind to change and receptivity as the necessary precursor and correlative to the hyper-pluralism of the contemporary moment. Contemporary art, as Meyer argues, was never dedicated to the proposition of “now-ism” or even novelty in the manner of a severed member, but to a biological condition in which art participates in active and perpetual regeneration from an integrated molecular sequence.

**Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India**


*Reviewed by Aparna Sharma. E-mail: <a.sharma@arts.ucla.edu>.*

Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth Century India studies the aesthetics and philosophical meanings of photography within the context of 19th-century colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. Key to this period is the revolt of 1857, and Zahid Chaudhary begins by offering a rigorous analysis of how this event impacted colonizer imaginaries of the colony and how those were transacted in Indian photographers’ practices. This revolt, while successfully suppressed, provoked a deep anxiety within the colonial establishment, spiraling further the colonizer/colonized, self/other binaries. This becomes the basis of Chaudhary’s phenomenological study of photographs from this time. Very early on the text situates the philosophical postures that shape his readings. Chaudhary is geared to analyze how history permeates embodied experiences of modernity, here specifically colonialism and the visual regimes it engendered. This is a very crucial move in the field of South Asian and postcolonial visual studies. Chaudhary draws from Walter Benjamin’s wide oeuvre, which takes up Marx’s concepts such as commodity fetishism, while at the same time resisting the obvious economic determinist line as exemplified in the Frankfurt School scholarship, particularly surrounding mass culture. Chaudhary’s invocation of Benjamin is two-fold. He takes up Benjamin’s key argument that perception is shaped in relation to history and changes alongside it, not abstracted from it. This allows Chaudhary to work with Benjamin’s critique of Bergson, for whom memory remains more exclusive of history. Chaudhary persuasively contends that his approach in reading 19th-century photography from the Indian subcontinent aims to examine how embodiment interfaces with history, not in an effort to plot direct correspondences between both but to explore what possibilities arise for visual discourse in relation to both.

For Chaudhary photography’s “reality effect” extends from its ontological properties, and he turns to Andre Bazin’s postures in explaining this. But he extends this discussion, which takes up the “indexical likeness” in relation to a reality effect by terming it photography’s rhetoric. Chaudhary’s use of rhetoric is not in a literal linguistic sense; instead, he derives from Cicero’s designation: “to please, to move, to teach” and this allows him to unpack the unstable nature of photographic rhetoric (p. 42). This is a very useful move and aligns Chaudhary’s interventions with recent scholarship in the fields of trauma and catastrophe studies as well as the post-digital revisitation of C.S. Peirce’s semiotic categories, including indexicality as taken up by such figures as Laura Mulvey (2009). The reader is positioned to appreciate the instability in photographic meanings and discourse that in turn facilitates understanding the competing and conflictual uses of the medium. However, while Chaudhary does not adhere to the rigid “realist aesthetics” prescribed by Bazin through the concept of the “reality effect,” it is limiting to situate the discussion of photographic rhetoric upon a primarily ontological schema. This becomes particularly telling in the first chapter of the text, in which Chaudhary examines how death is evoked in post-1857 revolt images by photographers such as the Tytlers and Beato. Can a political deciphering of the photographs Chaudhary examines be sustained without necessarily following an ontological line of thought? It seems plausible, given that references to death in the photographic images he examines are often staged and given that Chaudhary himself posits Peirce’s categories of the symbol, icon and index as not necessarily compartmentalized and oppositional. Ulrich Baer, as referenced by Chaudhary, has argued for how the stillness of the photographic image, the instant when it is clicked, can approximate and reflect states of trauma. This stands to be suppressed in an ontological line of the Bazinian sense. There the negotiating force-field between subject and photographer—the very field that Baer and Chaudhary are entering and positing as negotiated—is subsumed under the weight of the trace in the photographic image. In the text, this is not so much a lack of questioning the limits of Bazin’s ontologically grounded postulates; instead what is missing is a fuller discussion and explication of the author’s own stance in relation to the ontology.
of the photographic image that is more complex than in Bazin’s thought.

The text includes four chapters, each taking up specific photographic practices and themes. The first deals with death and photography’s rhetoric; the second with modernist shock, anaesthesia and violence; the third with Indian photographers’ use of European picturesque aesthetics; and the last with famine and discourses of sympathy. In the second chapter’s discussion around modernist shock, Chaudhary commendably teases out how 19th-century technologies of attractions and curiosities problematically inscribed the colonized subject to a position of what he terms numbing self-preservation. Drawing from Benjamin, Chaudhary exposes how these technologies sit within a wider context of arcades, fairgrounds, and world expositions—all epitomizing how bourgeois life was conditioned by a global-political economy upheld by colonial transactions. He states:

Experiences of shock under modernity eventually block the openness of this system and reverse its role, numbing the organism instead of enabling perception. Consciousness then becomes a numbing shield against excessive stimuli, and this marks the impoverishment of experience under modernity, destroying the person’s ability to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake. In the nineteenth century, in addition to the body’s self-anesthetizing defenses, methods for intentional manipulation of the synaesthetic system proliferated, including a plethora of new intoxicating substances and therapeutic practices (p. 91).

It is plausible that modernity’s shock-effects provoke “self-anesthetizing defenses” within the colonized subject. But as persuasive and explicit as this reasoning is, one cannot but ask whether the classist underpinnings of this reading of 19th-century technologies and commodity discourses is limited, for the history of modernist thought, in the arts and cinema particularly, is dotted with the uses of shock as a counter-strategy against bourgeois values. Edward Said, in Culture and Imperialism, gestures toward this possibility with relation to literature, as have some film studies scholars working on early cinema in the Indian subcontinent at least. Also, when we examine the oeuvres of filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov—who are usually not considered to be ideologically or aesthetically aligned—we can nevertheless observe that the modernist aesthetics of shock have followed a more variegated and textured trajectory that certainly involved the impact on the colonized on the terms articulated by Chaudhary but also successively led to more complex possibilities that became the foundation of a critical visual discourse surrounding colonialism and postcolonialism. Take, for example, Vertov’s lesser-known work A Sixth Part of the World (1926), and in India, the parallel cinema movement, with figures such as Ritwik Ghatak, who clearly worked with and rearticulated Eisenstein’s montage shock aesthetics for a critical cinema discourse in the postcolonial context.

These criticisms of Afterimage are not in the spirit of interrogating its interventions as much as pointing out that some of the propositions this text makes open lines for further investigation, and while Chaudhary focuses on photography, there are potentially rich conversations to be pursued with other art forms including cinema and painting. It is through such lines of investigation that a more complex and richer discourse around visual cultures ought necessarily to be devised, so that critical scholarship does not inadvertently reify the rather convenient, colonizer-colonized binary. Afterimage’s third chapter, which examines the picturesque aesthetic adopted by Indian photographers in a gesture of mimesis reflects such complexity. Afterimage of Empire is a crucial text that advances visual culture studies in the Indian subcontinent but will also be of interest to scholars and students in the disciplines of art, modernism and cinema.

**MUTE POETRY, SPEAKING PICTURES**


Reviewed by Jan Baetens. E-mail: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>

This is an impressive, challenging, highly innovative study on a subject that we thought we knew by heart: the relationships, either pacific or antagonistic, between words and images. Since Lessing’s Laocoon (1766), Western culture has undergone a major shift from the *ut pictura poesis* aesthetic, a classic maxim that mainly stresses the similarity of the sister arts, to issues of “medium specificity,” which tend to highlight the gaps between the verbal and the visual. Recent work, often in the line of thinking opened by W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Iconology* (1985), has attempted to question as radically as possible the separation of word and image, by stressing both the visual dimension of the text and the linguistic underpinnings of the image. Yet this book by Leonard Barkan, which clearly belongs to this intellectual family, to which it adds a strong psychoanalytical note, is much more than a late example of this return to *ut pictura poesis*. It is, on the contrary, a study that revitalizes in a very clever way many preformed ideas while addressing questions, texts and images in order to read them afresh.

The biggest surprise is delivered in the coda of the book, and it is to the great merit of Barkan that this secret is hidden so well through the whole work. Despite the dizzying erudition of the author, who seems to have read literally everything that has been said and thought in the world on the comparison of the arts, one will not find in his study a single word on Lessing. The reason for this omission is not the fact that Barkan, a Renaissance scholar, initially foregrounds antique and pre-Renaissance sources as well as domains less frequently included in the word and image debate, such as theater, but the fact that *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* offers new readings of all basic references that are so rich and inspiring that one never feels the need for a more “contemporary,” Lessingian reading. The close reading of Horace, for instance, whose treatise on poetics quotes the *ut pictura poesis* maxim in a context whose importance
The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art, Revised Edition


Reviewed by Rob Harle. E-mail: <harle@roborle.com>.

I think I can say without fear of contradiction that this book is the definitive work on the relationship of non-Euclidean geometry, the fourth dimension, however conceived, and modern art. It was first published in 1983 from Dalrymple Henderson’s 1975 original doctoral dissertation. This substantially revised 2013 edition is at the very least a goldmine of detailed information for historians, artists, scientists, spiritual practitioners and teachers alike.

The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art is well written and quite accessible to both scholars and lay readers. The book is one of the Leonardo Book Series and offers a Foreword by Roger Malina and an extensive, comprehensive Reintroduction. This is followed by the original Introduction together with six chapters and the Conclusion. Chapters are as follows:

1. The Nineteenth-Century Background
2. Cubism and the New Geometries
3. Marcel Duchamp and the New Geometries
4. The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in America
5. Transcending the Present: The Fourth Dimension in the Philosophy of Ouspensky and in Russian Futurism and Suprematism
6. The New Geometries during World War I and the Postwar Period in France and Holland; Reevaluation and Transformation

There are appendices, extensive notes, a bibliography and indexes to both the reintroduction and the 1983 edition.

One thing this study really highlights is how scientific “truths” are subject to change without notice! And how they become accepted totally by the public and then, sometime later, rejected or at least forgotten. Prior to Einstein’s theories of relativity, the fourth dimension was generally conceived of as a spatial dimension, invisible to normal human perception. With the discoveries of X-rays, wireless telegraphy and demonstrations of electromagnetic principles, the idea of an invisible something or “ether” existing could no longer be denied. “Contemporary periodicals, for example, provided instructions for wiring an antenna to one’s apartment balcony in order to pick up the time signals sent out from the top of the Eiffel Tower” (p. 15). It took some time after Einstein published his relativity theories before they would supplant the spatial fourth dimension with that of time as the fourth dimension. There has been a major resurgence since the latter part of the 20th century in the belief (once again) that the fourth dimension is a spatial dimension. This is partly due to the introduction of superstring theory and computer demonstrations that were not possible prior to its introduction. “By definition, it is extremely difficult to imagine worlds outside of our experience. For that, we are as likely to receive guidance from our artists and philosophers, as from our mathematicians and scientists” (p. 96). Anyone who doubts the possibility of dimensions more than our three obvious ones should read and/or watch Flattland, which this book discusses at length. See also my review of Flattland: A Romance of Many Dimensions (The Movie Edition) by Edwin A. Abbott [1].

The exciting part of this book for me is the extensive discussion concerning how various artists adopted, intuited and utilized these scientific discoveries in their artwork. Artists such as Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, Dali, Moholy-Nagy and Malevich, to name just a few, were all intrigued by the fourth dimension, and their works of the second and third decades of the 20th century were
extraordinary examples of how science and art can form a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship. This book is an excellent example to illustrate Leonardo’s and ISAST’s mission, especially its first aim: “To document and make known the work of artists, researchers, and scholars interested in the ways that the contemporary arts interact with science and technology” (p. xxi). The book weighs in at a hefty 740 pages, is extensively illustrated with black-and-white images of our very favorite masterpieces of modern art and by any account is a veritable intellectual tour de force.

Dalrymple Henderson’s historical investigation and exposition leaves very few stones unturned—and for those that she does, she explains why. Some sections of the book are a little dry, a bit long winded and repetitive, but these are made palatable by the exciting, tasty portions of little-known connections and influences of a huge number of artists, scientists, mathematicians and occultists, such as Ouspensky, Blavatsky, Tesla, Poincaré, Steiner, Weber and Fuller, together with sections on mysticism, Theosophy and certain Russian paranormal investigations. As this book clearly shows, the reverberations of different incarnations of the fourth dimension traverse artistic, scientific, cultural and national boundaries, and humanity is enriched immensely by this cross-fertilization. This is a must-have book for historians, artists, cultural theorists, scientists and the general reader interested in the history of ideas.

Reference

MY LIFE

Reviewed by Allan Graubard. E-mail: <graubarda@gmail.com>.

Isadora Duncan’s autobiography, My Life, has just recently reappeared with its original content intact. For those compelled by genius and history, not only in dance, and the birth of the modern sensibility prior to World War I, this is not something to pass up. This striking, bold and graceful woman for whom the dance became a self-taught mission, and which she revealed as never before, speaks to us with the kind of clarity, passion, pleasure, despair and grief that I cannot get enough of. Nor do I respond viscerally to most books of this sort. But Isadora Duncan did not live an ordinary life, either as a choreographer and dancer or as a woman. By strength of will and vision, by perseverance, and by those chance events that can ignite a career, she became as we know her; this woman who, even now, somewhat lost to time, returns in these pages as determined, voluptuous and original as she was for those who saw her perform, for those who celebrated her, for those who knew her distantly and those who knew her intimately: as friend, collaborator, lover, or teacher and mother and daughter.

“It has taken me years of struggle, hard work and research to make one simple gesture, and I know enough about the Art of writing to realize that it would take me again just so many years of concentrated effort to write one simple, beautiful sentence.” This statement occurs in the second paragraph to her introduction. It speaks of the honesty that she approaches her life with, as she configures it, and of the difficulty she will have in keeping true to her task. After 368 pages I know that she has done all she can to clarify who she is, what she has experienced, and with whom.

More poignantly, she tells of how, after the loss of her three children, two by drowning in a sudden automobile accident, another later, just after birth, she once again took to the dance as her salvation, however fleetingly full it was for her then. For never thereafter would she be that woman, artist and mother, those roles too-briefly entwined; that all else, except her effort to found a children’s school for the dance, seemed less. Her tragedy lies here. It was what her close friend, the actress Elenora Duse, intuited one day as they walked along a deserted Italian beach, their retreat from the world; Duncan grieving still for her two children, Duse refusing to act unless the demands of her theatrical vision were met.

It is worth repeating something of this encounter.

One day Duse and I were walking by the sea when she turned to me. The setting sun made a fiery halo about her head. She gazed at me long and curiously. “Isadora,” she said in a choking voice, “don’t, don’t seek happiness again. You have on your brow the mark of the great unhappy ones of the earth. What has happened to you is but the prologue. Do not tempt Fate again.”

Duse was right, and Duncan knew it. When she lost her third child, there was no turning back. Incapable of enduring another disaster, her motherhood banished, her exceptional effort to sustain her school over several continents and cities finally came to naught, she receives as if from out of the blue an invitation from the new Soviet Government to establish her school there. And so in 1921 she leaves for Moscow, again as a celebrated figure in full support of a revolution she knew little of, and the next phase of her life begins with its chaos and hope. She is married for a year to a leading poet, Sergei Esenin, a fellow whose lyrical gifts were matched by his propensity to rough Duncan up. Several years after their split, Esenin commits suicide in 1925.

Duncan travels west, settling in Nice, performing now and then, her years of hard living, performance tours and affairs having caught up with her as she nears 50. With her stature as a celebrity now grown ragged, she begins to write her autobiography. In 1927 she gives her last performance in Paris, and in September sends the current manuscript to her publisher in New York. Soon thereafter, one late afternoon, her long red shawl gets caught in the spokes of the back wheel of a speeding convertible, snapping her spinal column and killing her.
Isadora Duncan’s life and achievements are here for us in this restored edition. The story is incomplete, perhaps a bit histrionic for our taste, and steeped in an idealism that we can all too easily forgo were it not for Duncan’s gift to embody it in her dance, with her school, in her friendships, and the largesse and drama that infused her. Because of her, not only her but certainly her, modern dance in America, if not elsewhere, came to be beyond the artificial bounds of the ballet and the garish lights of the music hall; and because of her, not only her but certainly her, women came to accept more openly than before the pleasures and beauty of their bodies. And that is reason enough to meet Isadora again on her terms, in her words, and in the style she brought to them. Would she have it any other way?

BEYOND CONTEMPORARY ART

Reviewed by Florence Martellini. E-mail: <florencemartellini@gmail.com>.

The author Ethan Jonathan Ilfeld published his first book Beyond Contemporary Art to share his passion for contemporary art. Thus in no way should it be taken as a compendium of artists illustrating a trend in contemporary art. Ilfeld selected 85 artists/groups of artists, providing for each of them a summary of their work with high-quality illustrations and a website address—official websites, which do not necessarily come up when we enter artists’ names in an online search engine, are extremely useful not only to get further insight into the artists’ backgrounds, work and ideas, but also to hear artists reporting directly about their work. An overwhelming majority of these selected artists are from Western Europe and North America. Russians are almost nonexistent, and there is a small representation for Asia, the Middle East and South America. Artists are classified alphabetically to avoid any categorization. Ilfeld leaves it to readers to devise their own. However, a “selection” implies a level of subjectivity. So what are Ilfeld’s criteria? He is particularly interested in digital art and in artists who create new art forms by mixing various disciplines and practices, including performance, sculpture, architecture, painting, graf-fiti, design and new media. By bringing them together, he simply hopes to inspire people to think about what contemporary art is—by nature almost indefinable in that artists are constantly pushing boundaries.

In his excellent introduction, Ilfeld reminds us about the current and rapid globalization of the contemporary art market with the blossoming of art fairs, festivals and galleries (both corporate-sponsored and alternative), the opening of modern/contemporary art museums and art schools around the world, the acquisition of contemporary artworks by institutions and private collectors, traveling blockbuster art exhibitions, etc. In this vibrant art “ecosystem,” a cross-disciplinary discourse has emerged, fed by leading art schools and artists themselves. Thus it is not unusual to see trained scientists or designers choose the artistic route to experiment with and communicate their ideas. For example, Patrick Tresset, armed with a degree in computing science, decided to become an artist, exploring nature through drawing. Following a nervous breakdown, he could no longer find inspiration to draw and returned to computing by creating a robot that sketches: Akon—a genuine art-science integration. Sputnik!, armed with a bachelor’s degree in computer science and mathematics, continued on to a master’s degree in design interactions and currently designs a wide range of devices that sit on the borderline between art and industrial design, such as Menstruation Machine, Nanohana Heel and Pénis Cybernetique. Marina Kassianidou graduated with two bachelor’s degrees, one in computer science and another in studio art. Her practice shows the overlap between art and science, such as creating camouflage to invite viewers to seek beyond what they see. Usman Haque, an architect by training, experiments with architecture-based projects to show how digital technologies are changing our built spaces, taking into account the presence of the people who inhabit these spaces. It is striking to note how younger artists appear to be more market aware. Furthermore, they are better integrated than their older peers in the establishment either in academic institutions holding senior teaching positions or in the business community working on commissions for prestigious corporate brands. Stephanie Posavec specializes in data visualization and information design. Amongst other works, she has designed an artist theme for the Google Chrome browser and a visual index embedded in Stephen Fry’s MyFry iPhone. She created the artwork of limited editions of Haruki Murakami’s IQ84, for a new edition of Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, for a series of album covers for the American rock band OK Go and for projects with various researchers and designers at Microsoft.

Beyond their educational background or market acumen, most of the artists listed in this book experiment with a wide range of art practices and disciplines. Ai Weiwei, a political activist for the freedom of speech, is a real polymath. He has worked in media ranging from conceptual art, photography, sculpture, film, design publishing and architecture. For example, he designed the Beijing National Olympic Stadium and created the Sunflower Seeds installation at the London Tate Modern—he commissioned 1,600 Chinese artisans from Jingdezhen to create and hand-paint 100,000,000 porcelain seeds. Eduardo Kac has pioneered biotechnological and transgenic art and merges multiple media and biological processes to create hybrids from the conventional operations of existing communications systems. For example, his Aromapoetry is the first poetry book written exclusively with smell. This ever-growing “cross-disciplinarity” in art comes with pros and cons. On the one hand, it invites each discipline involved to become open-minded to alternative ways of looking at the world. Combined with digital technologies, it is helping to change the modern mind’s need to divide, specialize and think in categories. By linking places, disciplines and objects of all sorts, they invite us to see things and ideas in terms of relations or relatedness rather than in isolation. On the other hand, there is a danger of oversimplifying complex issues and taking them out of their context. Hence, we must not forget that artists are only showing us new ways of thinking, of using space, materials, etc., and that they are not experts in each of the fields with which they are experimenting. They are playing with them. It is for the scientists, the designers, the philosophers, the politicians to decide how they can test and integrate these new approaches in their own disciplines (the issue of transdisciplinar-ity is currently discussed by a group of academics called SEAD [Science, Engi-
nering, Art and Design], who have published a series of white papers). Jeremy Wood plays with GPS satellites and highlights their inaccuracy in positioning objects in space. He shows the discrepancy between the physical and the virtual. Could this be a science project? In simply pointing out to scientists that they got their calculation wrong, can this installation really be considered an artwork? Other projects of his include the creation of GPS maps of Warwick University and the recording of his daily movement in London over a decade.

This book points out that the Internet, smartphones, social media, etc., have enabled the development of a real global virtual art space and network, omitting, however, that they tend to work in favor of digital artworks. Other media, such as painting and textiles, lose some of their texture when photographed. Therefore, an important component of their integrity is not transmitted—photographic representation is not how we perceive the world with a naked eye. The digital world is also favorable to experimenting with the boundaries between the visible and invisible realities, the information and the materiality, reminding us of the avant-garde artists of the turn of the 20th century who found a new impetus to rethink the notion of space with emergent scientific theories of waves, X-rays, wireless telegraphy, relativity and quantum mechanics. In both circumstances, revolutionary advancements in technology have brought artists a new range of instruments to explore light, movement, space, time, etc. Some of the contemporary digital art practitioners remain interestingly self-critical, however, in warning us how modern technology tends to place the value of efficiency above all values, such as the aesthetic, the moral and the spiritual.

Keith Haring and his subway drawings started a movement 20 years ago that has brought original artworks to everyone, violating the traditional art display network, such as museums, galleries and fairs. Followers continued this art display revolution using the Internet and the streets to make and exhibit their work. Ilfeld selected the renowned Banksy, best known for his street art, but we also learn that he is a painter, conceptual artist, and filmmaker—his film Exit Through the Gift Shop was nominated for an Oscar (for Best Documentary). Aram Bartoll creates public intervention by integrating the virtual with the physical, highlighting the interdependency of information and materiality. For Map, he juxtaposed digital data with a physical landscape by creating a giant Google Maps icon that he installed in several cities throughout the world. Invader, a anonymous group who meticulously plan their street interventions, such as their mosaic meta-tagging in cities, create maps that have the shape of the mosaic tags. This project, Target, led to copycats, generating a life of its own. These artists are also reminding us how we now more than ever keep juggling our lives between two realities: the physical and the virtual.

Conceptual art is about ideas and processes, an ideal platform for artists to document and show off their creative processes. Ilfeld mentions the Museum of Everything, which focuses on the creativity involved in producing work that is usually not recognized within the fine art markets. He also points out that the speed at which the art market is going makes it increasingly harder to distinguish between underground counterculture, popular culture and contemporary art. In addition, market forces, with their commercial and profit agenda, are increasingly influencing the creation and curating of contemporary art—for better or worse. Thus, only time will tell which artists, ideas and processes will make history, implying that the contemporary art market is a rather “risky” business.

Digital art is changing the notion of copyright in that if the “limited edition” of an art piece is to remain, we need to find ways to keep track of the owner of each edition. A company’s [edition] is doing exactly that and hopes in the meantime to create a second market for digital work. However, is the principle of the “unique piece” really that important anymore if, as conceptual artists show, the creative process itself is given more attention than its output? Perhaps the creative “journey” is the one to copyright from now on.

All in all, Beyond Contemporary Art is a very accessible, useful and well-illustrated book for anyone who is interested in digital contemporary art and would also like to learn more about its market trends, bearing in mind however that this book is written by a British author focusing by and large on Western European and North American artists.

I would like to start with two indirect words of praise. First for the publisher, who has accepted to follow the author’s passionate journey to the treasure island of the moving panorama, allowing him to enrich our lives with a splendid book of nearly 450 large, tightly printed and wonderfully illustrated pages. It is reassuring to know that there are still publishers willing to fight the scholarly habits of reading only articles, preferably online, and who believe in the future of research in print. Illusions in Motion is without any doubt a book that will prove them right. Second for the author, not because he knows his subject so well and is able to communicate his knowledge in such a pleasant and convincing way (after all, this is what can be expected from any serious scholar), but for the love and passion that he has put into his research, which are visible in every page of this book. There is no great scholarship without deep personal commitment, and Huhtamo’s book is a great example of this statement as well. True, love and passion do not necessarily make great books, but great books become even greater if they have their origin in the author’s fascination and awe (for it is not only the sublime and
art with capital A, or death and horror, that may fill us with awe).

But why is *Illusions in Motion* such an impressive achievement? On an initial level, the book offers a precise and detailed historical overview of a kind of panorama whose existence, although often acknowledged by many historians and contemporary witnesses, has never really been taken into account as a specific apparatus and independent cultural practice, different from the larger category of the 19th-century panorama. Huhtamo defines his “missing medium” as follows:

Instead of being surrounded by a stationary wrap-around painting, the spectators sat in an auditorium. A long roll painting was moved across a “window” (often with drawable curtains) by means of a mechanical cranking system. The presentation was accompanied by a lecturer, music, and occasionally sound and light effects. Other attractions, such as magical acts of feats or legerdemain, could be added. The duration varied, but by the mid-century a length of ninety minutes or more had become common (pp. 6–7).

The author, then, completes this first definition by distinguishing three major dimensions: (1) *painted*: a moving panorama was an object, a roll of pictures; (2) *performed*: it was also an event, for the painting was unrolled in front of spectators, who listened to a lecturer; (3) *discursive*: the moving panorama was also something that was evoked by words and illustrations, and which was thus part of a culture’s imaginary. Given the relative absence of direct evidence, since only a handful of moving panoramas actually survived, the role of this discursive dimension was key, and the story told by Huhtamo knits objects, events and discourses seamlessly together.

From the very beginning, *Illusions in Motion* emphasizes the great diversity of the moving panorama. Not only are there several models of format that determine the form and function of all variations (rather than one basic model), but the very distinction between the moving panorama and other forms of theatrical and optical devices and representations is far from always being clear. Thanks to the impressive evidence gathered by Huhtamo, we do know however how important this “missing medium” was during the 19th century (with a peak in popularity around 1850). Huhtamo’s work is not only descriptive, however. Although historical accuracy is generously featured throughout the whole book, *Illusions in Motion* also represents an important contribution to the field that the author has helped build over the last two decades: media archeology. Within this domain, Huhtamo defends a modest but dramatically inspiring stance. Contrary to theoreticians such as Friedrich Kittler, who approach media archeology as a Grand narrative of the Machine in which there is hardly any room left for human agency, Huhtamo foregrounds a methodology that insists on concrete people, concrete desires, concrete aims and concrete objects that do not shape a “theoretically correct” meganarrative but try to fill in small gaps in our current knowledge in media history. The importance of people and objects is displayed in the often amazing iconography of the book (most of the time based on items from the author’s private collection, the result of a lifelong fascination with media technology) and the biographical information given on all those who made or unmade the moving panorama (for there were competitors relying on other media, unsuccessful lecturers or entrepreneurs, resistant or parodying audiences, etc.).

The making of a moving panorama went beyond the mere act of painting and installing it. Huhtamo evokes in great detail the performative aspects of the medium as well as the many ways in which the contemporary spectators wrote about what he rightly circumscribes as a storytelling medium (most paintings did not represent action, which was added by the lecturer). Chapter 7, for instance, on the career of Albert Smith, a moving panorama showman who was a celebrity in the 1850s, should be compulsory reading for all media historians, literary students and film scholars, as well as for all those who major or minor in marketing, business administration and the creative industries. The more one progresses in the book, the more one becomes aware of the fact that the moving panorama, although “missing” in current media history and “lost” as far as its concrete material forms are concerned, has played a key role in the emergence and development of modern media culture. On this topic as well, Huhtamo has many sound things to say, and his both modest and profound ideas may prove very helpful in freeing us from either a purely technological or a strictly ideological approach. Huhtamo makes a plea not only for agency (against a dominating strand of antihumanist study of technology) but also for participation and interaction (and this goes against the grain of many fashionable ideas on the society of the spectacle and the culture industry).