**Art and the Senses**

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Art and the Senses is an excellent source-book on the relationship between art and our senses. Comprised of over 30 chapters and coming in at over 600 pages, this compendium is, to my knowledge, the first to broadly tackle sensory perception in relation to artistic endeavors. Indeed, it offers an extraordinary overview of the subject. Moreover, despite covering a broad spectrum of both qualitative and quantitative material, the book is quite accessible to a generalist reader like me. Topics include the neuroscience of sensory processing in the body, cultural influences on how the senses are used in society, interviews with practitioners about their work, artist papers about their projects, and case studies (e.g. a blind artist). The majority of the papers are easy to read, although I did find a few of the articles a bit technical.

Given its length, Art and the Senses works best as a reference tool. One impressive (and appreciated) component is the cross-referencing from paper to paper, a feature too often excluded from anthologies. Readability is further enhanced by a useful index (23 pages), well-chosen illustrations and the book’s overall organization. Early chapters set the stage by examining historical attitudes to and views of the senses. These foundational essays are followed by thematically based groupings that probe current projects and present contemporary research: Early essays cover touch and corporeal senses, as well as the chemical senses of taste and smell. Auditory experience and vision come next. The final chapters offer more of a potpourri, or perhaps a multisensory theme, with articles on synesthesia, multisensory work, dance and architecture. Some topics, film being a good example, fall into more than one of the above categories. The interspersed interviews are a nice touch, as they offer a change in rhythm and tone. These include a conversation between Francesca Bacci and Italian contemporary art critic Achille Bonito Oliva and two interviews by David Melcher (one with Brazilian artist and photographer Vik Muniz, and another with jazz musicians and educators Greg Osby and Skip Hadden on the mystery of representation).

Since our senses provide perceptual data, I think each reader will experience the essays quite differently, and the content is likely to stimulate both subjective and critical reactions. I found myself fascinated by the way the writing piqued my awareness of my own “body space” and reminded me of my biases. I also liked the way the book’s multisensory focus interfaced with the contemporary interest in networks and interactions in the arts, sciences and humanities. In some cases I found the information from beyond my normal scope spoke to old conundrums. For example, several of the articles about music reminded me that it is easy to simply like music without having any educated understanding of basic musical notation and auditory research. As a naïve listener, I know much of the resonance of music is more opaque to me than it is to others with knowledge of the finer points. Nonetheless, I recognize that musical sounds impact me deeply. Thus, I particularly appreciated the essays on musical topics.

The subtle tension between thinking, knowledge and sensory space often came to mind as I read. This got me thinking about the basic division into exteroceptive and interoceptive senses. I appreciated the examples that clearly expressed the ways in which art is multi-dimensional. For example, the Alexis Wright phantom-limb photographs, discussed by Siân Ede, offer a means for us to see the missing limbs of phantom limb subjects and to sense how the non-existent sensations “feel.” The paper on “mirror neurons” hovers around this kind of empathy. Galles by also adds: “Creativity is a distinguished feature of the human condition that I am afraid can hardly be reduced to the functional properties of specific populations of neurons, mirror neurons included” (p. 461).

As a whole, the inclusion of artists, scientists and humanists provides many contrasts and counterpoints. For example, I found that Rosalyn Driscoll’s chapter, “Aesthetic Touch,” in which she discusses how haptic experiences enrich and enhance visual perception and her own efforts to develop art that people with all abilities can touch, provides a nice counterpoint to the scientific research on touch. Bacci’s chapter, “Sculpture and Touch,” follows up on Driscoll’s discussion of her method by pointing out that “Driscoll regularly suggests that the public use a blindfold to first encounter her sculptures haptically before doing so through sight” (p. 143).
Much later in the book a chapter on a blind painter, Subject E.A., presents a striking contrast to Driscoll’s work. The research presented in this chapter focuses on mental representations and detail work that shows the blind use the same parts of the occipital cortex that the sighted use for visual processing to process other sensory modalities. Subject E.A., who lost his vision at a young age, offers a means to investigate how the “visual” brain of the blind works, using brain imaging to isolate the perceptual and cognitive processes involved in his drawing, scribbling, etc. By contrast, in their chapter David Melcher and Patrick Cavanagh look at pictorial cues in art and visual perception. They were not concerned with mental representations, but how the brain recognizes objects, understands spatial depth and uses illumination information in natural environments.

Overall, I found the book to be solid, and yet it also reminded me of the limitations of an edited volume. Even though a reader becomes aware of a great deal of material, reading *Art and the Senses* feels like taking an introductory course rather than an in-depth seminar. However, the content also makes it clear how much one can gain from comprehensive essays that cover a spectrum. Moreover, since there were common themes across the essays, the quality of the contributions will make the book a fulcrum for more expanded studies. One theme is the need to include the body and embodiment in the sensory discussion. Another is the role of learning in shaping the way people use their senses. Finally, individual authors and the volume as a whole make the point that we need to include equal measures of taste, touch and smell in the discussion of the senses, as opposed to the historical tendency to elevate vision.

There is also some agreement that art has a role in making us aware of these areas. The two papers on synesthesia (by Jamie Ward and Cretien van Campen) argue that studies in this area are important for both synesthetes and non-synesthetes; a sentiment I think is important to keep in mind as we re-visit the senses. Geraldine A. Johnson’s paper, “The Art of Touch in Early Modern Italy,” offers a nicely fleshed out discussion of the *paragone* debate of that period, one that continues to this day. She looks at the key players (e.g. Alberti, Ghiberti, Il Tribolo, Benedetto Varchi, Leonardo, Michelangelo, etc.) and reiterates the debate over whether sculpture or painting was the more noble art. To oversimplify, those who advocated for sculpture saw its tactility as a plus, while those who advocated for painting saw sculpture’s use of touch as crude, even arguing that painting was superior because a painter could imitate a sculpture abstractly.

Nick Wade’s paper, “The Scientist and the Sixth Sense,” uses perceptual portraits to depict the scientific history of the senses and offers an overview on the changing views of key figures. As always, Wade’s work is impressive. His framing of different sensory classifications outlines differing categorizations among scientists as he surveys debates about whether there is a sixth sense and what it might be (a muscle sense, a temperature sense, a movement sense, etc.). It may seem odd to offer more than one choice for a sixth sense and invidious to choose only one—Wade addresses this point, too. In Wade’s essay, as in most included in *Art and the Senses*, the Aristotelian “five senses” serve as the traditional touchstone, with the larger theme being that there is also an expanded framework. Howes presents somewhat of a contrast when he introduces an anthropological perspective and tries to lay the groundwork for a cross-cultural multimodal theory. In advocating for unity-in-multiplicity, however, Howes’s framework did not seem flexible enough to account for the multiplicity of our universe of sense/sensory experiences.

I highly recommend *Art and the Senses*. The volume creates a space for examining the topics through a number of lenses. This introduction to sensory awareness in terms of the arts, sciences and humanities is, I believe, the first to comprehensively tackle the senses from a cross-disciplinary vantage point. The treatment is robust and can help develop further conversations in this area. Finally, perhaps the highest compliment I can give the book is to relate my experience with it. Although I received a review copy of the hardcover version quite some time ago, the writing of this review got sidetracked because I began to use the book for my own work. Given how helpful I have found the papers, I think those who are interested in this area of study will want a copy of the volume in their own library.

**DREAMS BEFORE Extinction: NAEEMEH NAEEMAEI**


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Extinction is in the air. It’s common knowledge: The magnitude of what is happening is comparable with the disappearance of the dinosaurs. Science has been our principal guide to see and understand what is happening, but beyond the bare fact that species, like individuals, die, and that today’s tide of extinctions is overwhelmingly due to human activities, extinction remains difficult to comprehend. Few of us have actually seen an endangered species except on television, or possibly in a zoo. Furthermore, extinction is a magnified form of death, so most of us find it difficult to contemplate for long. We need something beyond facts and figures to hold extinction steadily in our awareness and to help us understand what is at stake.

With disarming directness and grace, the Iranian artist Naeemeh Naeemaei closes the gap between humans and endangered animals. In a series of paintings called “Dreams Before Extinction” she depicts herself, sometimes along with members of her family, in the company of endangered or extinct animals. In *Imperial Eagle*, for example, the artist sleeps on an eagle’s back as it soars over forested mountains. In *Horse-shoe Bat* two chubby toddlers, the artist and her cousin, use toy telephones to attempt to communicate with the bats. Elegant composition and an ominously dark background save the painting from cuteness and make it a meditation on yearnings to reconnect with animals.
Several works show human-animal hybrids, but Naæmæai does not humanize animals or reduce them to cartoons. Nor does she treat them as symbols. In response to an art critic who asked if she paid attention to the symbolic meanings of the animals in her works, she said, “No! . . . I am happy if the symbols match. . . but to me all animals, even the weak or ordinary ones, are as real and powerful as any other [beings] in the real world.” She depicts animals as equal in presence, mystery and worth to herself and her family, and by extension to any viewer. This personalizes the losses we face. Her paintings are at once warnings and elegies.

_Dreams Before Extinction_ accommodates the possibility of human extinction, but Naæmæai’s more immediate concern is that without the continued presence of certain animals in the world, the unique experiences of reverence and awe that each species can evoke will disappear forever. The human spirit will be diminished, perhaps irreparably. Spirituality informs these works. In _Siberian Crane_, which in reproduction strikes me as the most beautiful painting in the series, the artist holds a copy of the Koran above the head of a bird who is standing beside her, ready to depart on its annual migration north to Russia. We learn from the artist’s notes that “traditionally the Koran is held over the head of a person who is leaving the house for a journey, to make sure s/he will return safely.”

This cultural practice is unfamiliar to most Americans, but we know what it is to hope against hope that those we love will return safely. _Caspijan Tiger_ shows the magnificent creature surrounded by mourning women. Its head droops and its body is spotted with blood. The assembly refers to a tragic event in the foundation of Shi’a Islam, but even without knowledge of Shi’a history the image is profoundly moving. Naæmæai calls her images dreams, but she paints in a realist style, often borrowing from photographs. Realism and photography originated in the West, but Naæmæai’s use of them does not make her work Western. Like environmental consciousness, realism and photography have become global phenomena, but with different histories and associations in different places. The works that comprise _Dreams Before Extinction_ could not have been painted by a contemporary Westerner, if only because in the West realism has been largely relegated to illustration and the margins of the art world, or else is a vehicle of irony, nostalgia or kitsch. None of these play a part in Naæmæai’s works. She is able to achieve what virtually no serious Western realist can: a straightforward appeal to the heart.

The United States and Iran have not had diplomatic relations since 1979. In spite of recent signs of a thaw, we should not expect to see Naæmæai’s paintings exhibited in the U.S. anytime soon. For the time being, this beautifully produced book, put together by Paul Semonin, an historian and artist, is the best introduction to her work available outside of Iran. The quality of the reproductions is excellent thanks to the skills of people at Perceval Press and to the Internet, which made electronic transmission of images from Tehran possible. Naæmæai’s notes are helpful in appreciating many details of her paintings. An introductory essay by Semonin discusses aspects of Naæmæai’s work, emphasizing her solutions to the urgent problem of effectively communicating environmental realities to broad audiences.

**Virtual Modernism:**

_Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era_


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At the crossroads of media studies and American studies, and also of philosophy and cultural history, _Virtual Modernism_ offers a highly innovative and dramatically inspiring close reading of the way in which five major American modernists—Stephen Crane, Henry James, James Weldon Johnson, Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein—developed new ways of writing in response to mass culture and the new (media) technologies that reshaped American culture in the pre–World War I years. Biers’s book, however, is less a study of these authors’ resistance to mass culture or their creative reappropriation of it than an in-depth reflection on the way in which they reinvented literature to explore the fundamental philosophical and cultural issue of these years: the notion of virtual experience, a notion strongly related to the success of vitalist and pragmatic philosophy in the early 20th century.

For Biers, the term “virtual” escapes the two traditional meanings of the word, namely “fake” or “potential.” In her book, the notion of the “virtual” is linked with a special form of experience, which tries to exceed the limits of both idealism (which reduces actual experience in favor of non-empirical speculation) and empiricism (which reduces everything to a very narrow type of experience), for in this period the limits of both systems were becoming more and more apparent. Virtual experience is then a form of experience that hovers between the poles of subjectivity and objectivity, while also trying to offer an alternative to the latest forms of subjectivity induced by mass-media spectacles and communication techniques that accompanied, as well as accelerated, the spread of an industrialized society in the U.S. This virtual experience, Biers argues, is not typical of philosophical culture or sharply separated from popular and mass culture. It is also something that exists at the very heart of the literary work of American modernists, whose writing should be analyzed as an ingenious example of a dialogue between traditional culture (the term “world” culture would be better here than that of “high” culture) and mass culture (which is also a better term than “low” culture).

As the author stresses herself, this critical rereading of “typical” American high-modernist literary production as illustrations of what Biers calls the
“virtual turn” in literature has clear presentist concerns. Biers’s first aim is to demonstrate that the notion of the virtual cannot be claimed by digital culture alone. Second, she underlines the importance of philosophical thinking and philosophical problems in literary and cultural history. Finally, she frames her readings as arguments to support the cause of pragmatism and its importance for a better understanding of the major stakes of American premodern, modern and postmodern cultures.

In philosophical terms, the great interest of Biers’s book lies in the rereading of the two great stereotypes that govern our current interpretation of the notion of experience in the late 19th century. Indeed, for some scholars (the main example here being Stanley Cavell) the modern notion of a decentered and evanescent self had already been so deeply explored in the previous decades by authors such as Emerson, Thoreau and Melville that the idea of a new, “virtualized” experience emerging at the end of the century does not make any sense today. For scholars such as Cavell, if the late-19th-century experience became virtual, it was because it had already been virtualized in previous years. For other critics (chiefly those working in the tradition of Friedrich Kittler), the gap between the 19th and the 20th centuries was almost absolute, since it was only with the appearance of new forms of technology that the self proved to be suddenly expelled from the modern communication network. What Virtual Modernism clearly shows is that none of these two dominant views of modernity can do justice to the specific features of the Progressive Era.

In literary terms, the most challenging claim of Virtual Modernism remains the fact that literature is not a watered-down or instrumentalized type of applied vitalist philosophy (i.e. the philosophies of William James and Henri Bergson), but the privileged locus of a valuable alternative to modes of thinking and behaving created by the spread of mass communication techniques, whose specific feature is to offer a more one-dimensional, less virtual—and for that reason less liberating—form of experience. Literary writing, in other words, is seen by Biers as a cultural laboratory that goes beyond philosophy while addressing critical societal changes, not only in terms of content matter (and one knows how important these issues were in the period of reform between 1900 and 1910, during which the notions of commitment and documentary writing were rediscovered), but also and most crucially in terms of style.

The five chapters of the book all fully match the expectations raised by the ambitious introduction, and each of them offers a refreshing view on the interaction between an author’s style and an existing cultural and historical context. In the reading of Stephen Crane, the author who became famous with The Red Badge of Courage before having participated in a single battle scene himself, Biers’s discussion deals mainly with the problem of the tension between embodied experience and reflection and the necessity to keep a distance between reflection and all forms of direct or vicarious experience. The close reading of Crane’s use of color notations in his fiction as well as in his reportages gives Biers the opportunity to disclose and display the boundary zones between the observer and the observed, a boundary that was lost in most media spectacles of the time (war reenactments in amusement parks, for instance), as well as in sensationalist news coverage. Yet for Biers, Crane is also an example of the mundane continuation of the typically American Protestant hermeneutics, the ability to interpret the signs in order to discover in them the hidden presence of a higher, or at least different, order (Biers returns to this point and reaches different conclusions, in the chapter on Barnes).

Biers’s reading of James tackles the modern afterlife of 19th century pictorialism, defined as the tendency to infuse scenes and objects of daily life with intemporal meaning and hence to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal (the key word here was “realization”). In the case of “classic” pictorialism, this tendency took the form of a generalized intermediality, no longer the belief in the possible translation of all signs into each other, as in the ut pictura poesis aesthetics, but the practical endeavor to transpose one sign system onto all other ones. Comparing the “commercial” use of this intermedial pictorialism in Georges Du Maurier’s Trilby (the biggest best seller of these years, written by one of the best friends of James whose complex attitude toward the very idea of illustrated fiction was notoriously ambivalent) and the progressive complication of James’s syntax in these years, Biers suggests that James’s writing, which to a certain extent dissolves as much as it invents its own subject, has to be seen as the literary (and superior) answer to the problem of the “realization of the ideal” and the play with virtual experience.

The analysis of James Weldon Johnson’s The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man gives a further opportunity to stress the relationships between style and virtuality. Framed within the context of the “high versus low” debate on “national” music in the early 20th century, Johnson’s defense of the “commercial,” “denatured,” “mechanical” (and mechanically produced!), “disembodied” rag-time music as real American music is linked with his work on orality in literature, which Biers reinterprets in terms of virtualization. Johnson’s writing, she claims, is less an effort to introduce the spoken word in a written culture than it is an attempt to reinvent the lost exchanges between sound, music and language (as in many other examples of African-American literature and culture).

The chapter on Barnes does not single out Nightwood, Barnes’s legendary avant-garde novel, but the lesser-known journalistic writing she did for various newspapers and magazines before her exile to Paris. In line with the general claims of Virtual Modernism, Biers relates the stylistic analysis of Barnes’s tropes and devices as a stunt journalist (among other, more directly committed types of social reportages) with an intriguing approach of the importance of the virtual. In this case, the virtual is framed in terms of the allegory, which Biers reads in light of Walter Benjamin’s book on the subject as a specific stylistic and ideological response to a cultural crisis produced by the collapse of previous ways of world-making. In the case of the baroque theater Benjamin studied, the crisis was generated by the rise of Protestantism, which had destroyed the traditional ways of reading the world. In the case of modern culture experienced by Barnes, the crisis that followed was the decay of Protestant predetermination, as well as that of either the Catholic or progressive belief in “good works.” According to Benjamin, the allegory is not only a system in which the relationship between sign and referent becomes tragically arbitrary (signs have lost their meaning; they can refer to anything), but also a system in which one is forced to occupy, no less tragically, conflicting positions (since even if we no longer know what signs mean, we know that they signify something, hence the
permanently hesitation between the impossibility to make meaningful interpretations on one hand, and the necessity to do so on the other). Barnes’s journalistic work obeys this allegorical spirit: It criticizes both the closure of determinism and the naiveté of good works, while keeping virtual positions open for commitment and personal interpretation.

The reading of Gertrude Stein follows similar paths. Biers does not foreground the major avant-garde creations of the author, infamously but widely known as the acme of unreadability in modern literature. She focuses instead on the journalist writings and interviews that went along with an extremely mediated lecture tour in the late 1930s. Already a celebrity, despite (or thanks to) the obscurity of her prose, Stein became a real media celebrity; her portrait, for instance, appeared on the cover of Time magazine. Biers underlines the difference between Stein’s public figure (a nice old lady who manages to communicate very efficiently with all kinds of audiences) and her utterly hermetic prose (at least according to general standards). She also tries to reconcile both aspects as parts of the same communicative strategy and to show that Stein’s public appearance and declarations should be interpreted in a larger, unified framework. What matters here is the discussion on the role of modern mass communication technology and celeb culture, which certain analysts (Walter Lippmann) criticized as a means of manipulation and brainwashing, while others (John Dewey) attempted to foreground its possible democratic virtualities. Although repeated statements during the lecture tour reflected a rugged individualism and strong anti-State and anti–New Deal sentiments, Stein’s position toward the mass media was extraordinarily complex. Refusing the ontological prominence of “clarity” in mass media communication, to which she preferred the pragmatic notion of “force,” and thus refusing to make any concessions on the density of her prose in her newspaper articles and during her public readings, she developed a style of experimental communication that managed to create a sense of belonging. During her appearances, the public, even if they did not understand what Stein was reading or writing most of the time, could really feel involved, both as individuals and as a community. In this regard, she managed to convert her own idiosyncratic style as a promise of a virtual community unhindered by the limits of corporate or state mass communication and freed from the dichotomy of star and public.

With Virtual Modernism, Katherine Biers has written a landmark study that gives an inspirational twist to modernism studies.

**Cinema of Actuality:** **Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics**


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The Japanese word *eizo* is central to an understanding of the significance of the interventions made into the cultural life of the nation by a relatively small grouping of artists and writers working between the 1950s and 1970s. Traditionally used as a phenomenological term in science and philosophy, the character connoted shadow or silhouette, later shifting to signify optical processes. Like the Greek term *tekhne*, creativeness and the tools used to achieve the outcome are relative, nuanced and complex.

The vitality of Japanese cinema has been ever present within cinephiles’ experience; actually attending a screening, though, is usually restricted to festivals. The historical bibliography is extensive, with a tendency to celebrate the *frisson* of sex and violence, an aspect dealt with in this volume but with a good deal more relevance and care. Studies that grapple with the complexities of cross-cultural analysis are few—Noel Burch’s notable work from 30 years ago is referred to here—and the author is well qualified to achieve an excellent addition to the literature, aided I suspect by the distance of time.

The theoretical scaffolding of the period, developed and initiated predominantly by Matsumoto Tosio, enable a realization of the aesthetic and historical issues and the progression of the protagonists, including most notably Oshima Nagisa, towards the development of a body of work distinct from the *samurai* and *yakuza* melodramas more familiar in the West at the time. The chronological development is illusive as the emphasis is on issues—image theory (*eizo* not, images specifically made using machines); debates that moved away from *niariti* (reality) towards *akuchuariti* (actuality); and the incorporation of journalistic devices and performance events. The term *avant-garde* was applied to the emerging form of cinema, related more closely to documentary film than to art house or artists’ moving images. Perhaps this distinction could have been drawn more clearly in the book’s title by the use of the term *nouvelle vague*, thus aligning the avant garde movement with the French New Wave of the time, with which it shares many values.

The post-war generations of Japan were well-educated and, unlike the earlier regimented generations, restless for change. From the late 1950s onwards cooperative approaches to creative experiment of all kinds bloomed, unimpeded by the (Western) cult of the individual artist working alone. Likewise, in the streets students agitated and developed alliances with farmers and communities being forced into accepting the inescapable creep of a government “modernization program” of the nation’s resources, rallied and defended by corporate media organizations. (I remember local television news channels in the 1960s lapping up the extraordinary images of pitched battles of Japanese students, peasants and police, later repeated briefly by European and American comrades).

In this context of social fluidity, an established genre of *pink film* (erotica), which like international exploitation movies are made quickly and
cheaply, became the hothouse to which imaginative young men were drawn, (including the infamous right-wing nationalist Mishima Yukio). Wakamatsu Koji’s earlier work remediated the print and television journalism of the day, directing “our attention to the material gap between the cinematic image and the appropriated journalistic image.” within the spectacle of flesh and violence. The group of filmmakers often published discussions of each other’s work, linking through to the debates of leftist forces violently agitating against the grip of capitalist authority.

Another group of filmmakers took a different approach in response to events made sensational by the media. Documenting the life and death of a young serial killer, they visited the places throughout Japan from birth where he had lived, worked and committed murder, recording in a series of long takes the appearance of the landscape and the people found there, with a spoken narrative sparingly recounting the formative moments of the boy’s existence [1]. A discourse developed known as fukeiron (landscape theory) examining whether what in the West would be called a poetic form could engage forcefully with politics. The author pursues this discussion engagingly and at length, with reference to many other thinkers (including European, though not other avant-garde and artist filmmakers pursuing this line of research).

A parallel offshoot from fukeiron occurs with Wakamatsu and Adachi Masao arriving in Palestine on their way back from presenting at the Cannes Film Festival. Offering solidarity to the Palestinian cause through the production of a film, The Red Army/PFLP, a row with their hosts developed over the images of everyday life in the landscape of the refugee camp and the women who ran it. The contradictions of the filmmakers having involvement with the world solidarity movement, and the movements of other filmmakers including Godard and Miéville of the French New Wave, are examined in some detail, leading to the final chapter marking the demise of the radical movements in Japan, those of both the students and the filmmakers who form the core subjects of the study: Reabsorption into the mainstream of the film, television and official contemporary art industries leave a few of the original protagonists to re-emerge with kojin eiga (private film). Imura Takaniko (reviewed in Leonardo Reviews, <www.leonardo.info/ldr.php>) and others including Matsumoto establish a strand of video art that in the final chapter is replaced in the present era by the actuality of Internet social media and still developing modes of activism.

**Note**

1. Fortunately, at the time of writing this review, A.R.A. Serial Killer was available online in full and with subtitles, unlike most of the other films discussed by the author; a frustrating state of affairs for the full appreciation of both the book and the films.

**The Next Thing: Art in the Twenty-First Century**


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In his Introduction to The Next Thing: Art in the Twenty-First Century, an illustrated anthology of theoretical essays on contemporary experimental art, editor Pablo Baler claims “Nine O’Clock” sounds the knell for an historical paradigm shift in art towards displacement and alienation tantamount to a Lautréamontian tremor of intellectual estrangement. To support this contention, he cites tendencies in contemporary art since the 1990s that include attempts to dismantle master narratives; socio-cultural crises of identity; explosive reactions to social injustice; blurred trans-disciplinary boundaries; destabilized ontological contexts resulting from the interpenetration of real and virtual worlds; indeterminate relationships between the past, the present and the future; political activism and tactical intervention; bioethical transgression; and incipient indifference. The collection interrogates not merely the question of “What is Art?” but what it means to be human and what constitutes meaning at all in an increasingly dystopic, anti-aesthetic existence he likens to an alternative “posthuman” biotechnical condition.

Essays explore such subjects as conceptions of futurity; art as socio-political agent provocateur; perception in an age of simulated and reproductive media; art’s globalization and pluralism amid assimilated histories, mutated traditions and migration; post-colonial and feminist narratives; performativity, intervention and installation as political strategies; spatial sensibility, internal audience and subject/object intersections; axonometric perspective, authorship, the impact on art of political crisis and ecological disaster; Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics; post-criticality; ana-materialism, uncertainty, negation and programmable learning; and evolutionary biology (Richard Dawson), self-replication and artificial intelligence. International authors range from noted visual artists, cultural theorists and novelists to editors, art critics, contemporary philosophers and interdisciplinary professors based in Pakistan, India, the U.K., Israel, Australia and the U.S. with exemplary artworks culled from an intercontinental swathe extending from Southeast Asia to South America.

Widely informed by philosophy and metaphysics, psychoanalytic, cognitive and postmodern theory, i.e. Gilles Deleuze, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Theodor Adorno, Viktor Shklovsky and Melanie Klein, but also Hegel, Heidegger, Descartes and others, Baler casts his “interrupted reading” in the guise of a fiction for which such literary heralds as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Georges Bataille provide touchstones. Forcefully argued from ethical/ontological premises “deeply rooted in our bodies,” Baler considers all meaning to be “directly dependent on our biology,” hence predicated upon bioethical responsibility and moral exigency in the determination of future life. He offers Stelarc’s freakish implants, blended biomaterial, disembodied organs, commodified hybrids, cyborgs, protheses and systems of code as
remotely accessed, electronically manipulated, genetically modified fractal flesh. Such ventures expose the risks that can accompany secular humanism and artistic experimentation, i.e. that ethical considerations may in the future become obsolete, artificial or purely imaginary. Drawing a clear distinction between ontological speculation and ethical responsibility, Baler cautions that we “participate in an existence that transcends the limits of the merely human and extends beyond, towards all species: the living, the semi-living, and the non-living.” To an era in which technology far exceeds the capacity of the human brain in its reiterative capacity, “Johnny” Sue Golding ponders whether the structural logistics of knowledge systems and sequential loops of algorithmic formulae may one day slip-slide into “synthetic unities” construed as judgments.

This collection joins comparative studies in areas of aesthetic and ethical theory, cultural studies, moral philosophy and contemporary criticism that include works by authors such as Albrecht Wellmer, Barbara MacKinnon and Maria Hynes. Other tangents extend to writers such as Keller Easterling, who applies network theory to political infrastructures, artist-theorists like Suzanne Anker, whose many publications explore intersections of art and the biological sciences, including the initiatives of New York’s School of Visual Arts “Nature and Technology Bio Art Lab,” and artists such as Lynn Hershman Leeson. While The Next Thing identifies one tributary of art and meta-theory that courses through the 21st century, its prospect remains partial in relation to the larger scope of contemporary art, which includes work that eschews sensations of disenfranchisement, fear and disequilibrium—this among artists of a more positivist inclination who enjoin advanced scientific concepts and methodologies (i.e. neurodiversity, genomic biology, civil engineering, marine ecology, nanotechnology) in forms of expression less philosophically inclined to postmodern fragmentation. We can point for example to works by Pierre Huyghe, Amy Balkin, Christopher Williams, Peter D’Agostino, Ricardo Dominguez and D. Fox Harrell.

To the extent that art engages with our cognitive-affective understanding of the world and the value we confer upon its disparate particles and processes, the significance of this study is that it promotes critical discourse within the sciences and the humanities towards the preservation and enhancement of human life in an evolving universe. It does so through advocacy of consensual standards of ethical responsibility in the arts and the sciences that do not “recur to life itself as a medium” (p. 128). Such standards are arguably culturally relative, historically evolutionary and under certain conditions variable, yet hold the capacity to advance human endeavor beyond a level of instrumentality, provocation and self-realization to more naturally integrative ways of exploring and reconceptualizing reality. For art, this implies reaching beyond novelty and experimentation, critique, reportage and spectacle, and towards aesthetic coherence. In science, such striving has been expressed by E.O. Wilson in terms of consilience, interlocking causal relationships across disciplines such as to extend to moral reasoning. The danger, warned Martin Heidegger, is of modern technology exploiting man’s unique ability to employ techne for the purpose of revealing life’s interconnected truths as “an open place” in which art aspires to poiesis, a clearing resonant of man’s essential humanity. Baler would concur, it would seem, in his invocation of Duchamp’s identification of an artist in The Creative Act as one who “from the labyrinth of time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.”

**Molecular Aesthetics**

*Leonardo Reviews*

This amazing book is hard to pigeonhole—it is neither a coffee table book, text book, art catalogue, nor a scientific treatise but adequately fulfills aspects of each of these categories. *Molecular Aesthetics* is almost 500 pages long, contains numerous color and black-and-white images—historical photographs, artwork, diagrams/drawings and images from instruments that “see” at nanoscales. The images are accompanied by various scholarly essays and artists’ profiles and statements. As a bonus, the book comes with a pair of rose-colored glasses—actually one lens is rose and the other blue. Amazing things happen when viewing the artwork through these spectacles.

The first section discusses and shows 23 molecules that “changed the world.” These are astonishing, to say the least, and as varied as water, DNA, thalidomide, caffeine, DDT and polyethylene. The next section of *Molecular Aesthetics*, the bulk of the book, contains the essays and artist profiles. This section is divided into seven sections, followed by the contributors’ biographies.

The editors are to be congratulated on bringing to fruition this mammoth compilation of science and art. “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we register that art and science work together in common problem fields, that are the invisible fields that remain concealed to the human eye” (p. 72). The book is very much about this neo-symbiotic relationship of science and art, though the discussion of this relationship is not without its problems. Root-Bernstein uses the wonderful term “aesthetic cognition” to describe how scientific and artistic aesthetics are, at times, similar and lead us to new levels of understanding. “An understanding of how arts influence sciences through aesthetic concerns can therefore be valuable to scientists striving for innovation” (p. 265). The Watson and Crick aesthetic evaluation and visualization of their double helix model of DNA is a classic example of such a symbiotic relationship.

I have two problems with the whole science-art discussion (not the liaison itself), which this book, in certain sections, does little to improve. Firstly, many writers focus on a perceived antagonism between contemporary art and science. This, in my opinion, is a falsely perceived antagonism carried over from the “dark ages” of the 1950s. “According to some scholars, the arts have no positive status at all because they produce no testable knowledge” (p. 265). This statement is so inane it does not even warrant a comment. The scientists and artists that are actually doing the work (together or separately) could not care less about such boring, useless debates. Secondly, many theorists, talking and writing about new media art, verge on the almost evangelical, trying to convince us that traditional representational art (e.g. a portrait painted in oils on canvas) is an anachronistic dinosaur, totally passé and dead. The bad news for these new media fundamentalists...
is that worldwide gallery and museum attendance is increasing for exhibitions that display contemporary portraiture, the old masters (from all periods) and so-called traditional art. It is my contention that all forms of art are valid and beneficial to society. Of course, styles, subject matter and materials go in and out of fashion, but this does not mean that art that may not be the flavor of the month is no longer valid. Some new media advocates are writing an unnecessary apologetics for this latest fashion.

Reading this book, bearing this criticism in mind, will be a wonderful, rewarding experience and a fascinating glimpse into that which is beyond the normal reach of our senses. I was delighted to come across many of my favorite artists featured in *Molecular Aesthetics*, some of whom I have worked with, such as John McCormack, Julian Voss-Andreae and Blair Bradshaw, to name a few. Thierry Delalour’s essay on molecular songs was simply brilliant; his concept opens up a completely new genre of molecular music.

**Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers**


Reviewed by Mike Leggett, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia. Email: <mlegeart@ozemail.com.au>.

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In *Walking and Mapping*, both senses of the term “mapping” are caught up in a detailed hagiography of artists who, in one way or another, engage with movement through space, mainly as walkers. Records of the experience, by both the participants and the creators of the artworks, are mapped across both contemporary and historical time spectrums.

The walking aspects are various in approach—symbolic, referential, structural, relational, minimal or simply willful. The lists are expanded to encompass the psycho-geographical, the perceptual, datascapes of hybridity, networks with and without maps, and labyrinths. Modes of interaction across the spaces might be didactic, diaristic or conceptual, involve role play or engage the ludic. The making of a map as such is mercurial.

As an act of curation the author confesses she focuses “mainly on walkings and mappings I was able to experience firsthand.” The territory is, therefore, predictably Europe and North America (she is based in Paris), clearly delineating this volume as a partial listing, more of a journal of encounters with mapping projects or narratives about them. It lacks the authority of other listings in the Leonardo Book Series, such as Stephen Wilson’s *encyclopaedic Information Arts*. As she reads, the reader enters into a whirl of encounters, almost collisions, with the many exponents described, rushing past on their way to a destination, happily of their choosing. The movement through space/time is well documented, the ramifications of each project remaining in often transitory or ephemeral states. The sense of an ever-changing inventory is palpable, as is an awareness that these accounts may be the only record of many of the works described.

As the author observes, “The field has burgeoned over the past decade.” This is fully evident. More recent projects have been related to “landmark works from the past half-century.” Precursors to this recent past are, nonetheless, also inside the circle—Baudelaire, the French surrealists and situationist followers are present, the latter encouraging an approach termed psycho-geography, intended to eventually “reveal the city’s underlying structure.” In this regard, a “landmark” figure in Britain, Steve Willetts, goes unlisted, and reference to writers influential on this field of art practice, such as W.G. Sebald, are not part of the mix.

Curious references are made with claims, for instance, that boredom in the 1960s became an aesthetic, with films like *Wavelength* used as an example (p. 32). By comparison, too much of what is described as mapping makes the film for this reviewer an edge-of-the-seat thriller. There is, in fact, no clash of aesthetics here, as the art in common is centred on the existential and reflexive experience of space and time and the reflections that flow from them—*Wavelength* certainly encourages such engagement, though not through physical perambulation. Many will find the wealth of detail in this source book valuable—the research effort is impressive and the findings are clearly if not pleasurably expressed. The bibliography in this well presented and illustrated volume is extensive.

Tom Conley wrote recently of the impact mapmakers had on the social development of early-modern France through the shifts in understanding caused by the ideological re-definitions of byways, and concepts of country and property (reviewed in Leonardo Reviews, April 2012). Conley arrives at a sentence that carefully locates the reader, the text, and its writer: “One can move into space by surveying and arrogating it, and one can make it virtual, seemingly self-made, when a cartographic process is adjusted to the imagination of one’s origins, growth, works, memory, and living itineraries.” This perfectly expresses the Australian indigenous contribution to knowledge (glibly referred to as “songlines” and “bush erudition” by so many) being a complete expression of place, identity and community as part of an ancient lineage.

The contemporary shifts in describing space and its dominions explored in this volume have impacts far removed from such a culture. Conley describes cartography and its impact on the confines of 16th-century culture and politics. The performances described here possess significance in a provisional context—it being too risky, it seems, to assess the role ubiquitous and ready-to-hand technologies have in lubricating changes in social and political relations.

**The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games**


Reviewed by Jan Baetens. Email: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>.

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In this short, thought-provoking essay, Jesper Juul departs from the personal but widely shared observation that video games have as much to do with pain as with pleasure: We feel pain when we don’t manage to end the
game or to play well, we feel disappointment and anger if we are beaten by other players, we feel something like injustice when game designers do not treat us fairly, and so on. At the heart of video games there is, Juul argues, a paradox of failure: “1. We generally avoid failure, 2. We experience failure when playing games, 3. We seek out games, although we will experience something that we normally avoid” (p. 2). The essay is an attempt to understand, first, what we have to understand by this notion of failure; second, how we can have a better understanding of failure by linking it with other dimensions of culture; and third, what games can teach us about failure and therefore about culture and about ourselves.

The notion of failure in games is complex, as is that of the paradox of failure. Juul offers an excellent overview of the kind of failures and pain that players experience while playing, and this spectrum of negative feelings ranges from boredom (certainly if one wins too easily) and real anger (and we all know how irritation can turn into rage and have a strong impact on real life). Yet, what he is most interested in is less the description of all these feelings than the reason why we do not avoid them, and how we try to cope with them. Game players have developed many strategies to diminish the unpleasant sensation of feeling incompetent, inept, silly, unprepared or simply stupid. Playing badly on purpose is a good example of a psychological mechanism that helps us save face, either to ourselves or to those with whom we are competing, but there are many others, such as starting to play a game while being unprepared. All excuses seem to be good ways of making the pain of failure less painful. Nevertheless, game players do not stop looking for experiences of pain and failure. According to Juul, this is where we can find an explanation of what makes games so unique: They make us feel inadequate, yet at the same time they seduce and perhaps even force us to continue to play and, by doing so, become (eventually, hopefully) more adequate. Or as the author summarizes it: “It is the threat of failure that gives us something to do in the first place” (p. 45).

Although this book is mainly about video games, Juul claims the notion of failure cannot be understood by focusing on these kinds of games and experiences alone; therefore most chapters of the book are devoted to a comparative analysis of pain generated by video games and other kinds of pain, which are both similar to and different from the discomfort felt by players of video games. The best-known example of such a pain is of course the fictional representation of tragedy, theorized since Aristotle via the concept of catharsis. Through the analysis of, for instance, suicide games, in which the player has to put an end to his or her life, Juul demonstrates very convincingly that the painful experience of games should not be reduced to a simple variation of fictional pain. What we feel by losing a game, or by being beaten by other players, is not just one more variation on the classic theories of catharsis. For example, the structures of identification are different (we do identify less with others in games than with those we play ourselves). Moreover, games do not purge us from negative feelings; they seem instead to produce them, and that is the main reason why we play them.

Finally, Juul broadens the scope of his reflections on video games to games and culture in general, hence the frequent comparisons with sports and purposeful behavior where similar mechanisms are at stake. While reading Juul’s book, I did not cease thinking of the irrational—or at least unsocial—behavior of the protagonist of Allan Sillitoe’s “The Distance of the Long-Distance Runner,” who refuses to win a game in order to make a larger statement on society and politics, and on the personal philosophy of the infamous (and criminal) Unabomber, who explains the crisis of modern civilization by emphasizing (among many other things, of course) the easiness of contemporary life where challenging goals are no longer available. Juul’s book on video games offers fascinating insights on these cases, thanks to his commitment to stress the crucial importance of games. For Juul, games are neither escapism nor entertainment; they are life itself. In that sense his whole demonstration is meant to make us accept the following conclusion: “I would like to excuse from the English language the phrase ‘just a game,’ because it pretends something that is not true, that failure is neutral as long as it happens in a game” (p. 123).

The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941–1945) by Suzanne Césaire
doi:10.1162/LEON_r_00880

In Martinique from 1941–1945 a very small and marginalized group of poets and intellectuals banded together to produce a journal that would have lasting influence not only on the island, its culture and its politics, but also on the development of a broader movement for racial equality in Africa, the United States and elsewhere. In the pages of this journal, Tropiques, Negritude, in its initial evolution, joined with surrealism and a forceful new chapter in sensibility appeared. Its principal animators were Aimé Césaire, his wife Suzanne Césaire, René Ménil and George Gratiant. For those interested in Francophone history in the Caribbean, Aimé Césaire and René Ménil are touchstones. Less known, but now finally published as they were for Tropiques, are Suzanne Césaire’s seven essays. Nearly 70 years after they appeared in the journal, they have now been translated into English and published in a slim volume that speaks of her and her time. How these essays speak to us and to our time is something to consider. Readers of the volume can do just that. At the very least, the synthetic activity of critique grounded in a poetic perception of independence and community, or of a convulsive poetry framed by such
critique, will enliven us—we who seek similar values despite our “virtual” presence.

The title of the volume, taken from a major essay of Mme. Césaire’s, also holds up a mirror. For her, the “great camouflage” simply describes the way things were in Martinique: A society that grew out of slavery and held the ideals of freedom promulgated by the French Revolution close to its heart, that still found itself coerced, controlled and distorted by colonialism, racial indignities, political backwardness, self-deception and, as translator Keith Walker notes in his introduction, “inauthenticity, bad faith, psychological and affective aberration, and cultural zombification.” Francophone yet not accepted by France on equal terms, the island and its culture evolved as a possession, finally of the Vichy government during those war years, a government reviled and on the run post-WWII for its collaboration with Fascism.

For Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and their friends, with the first issue of Tropiques there was no going back to the way things were. In the larger scheme of events and interpretations, there was little possibility of accepting anything less than their desires portended in the various ways that they could be realized—in their living, their sensibility, their literature and their politics. It was no longer possible to support—however passively—or to even endure their colonial status quo with the world convinced by war and their tropical island infected by its repercussions.

Their fortuitous meeting with André Breton, André Masson and Wilfrado Lam in 1941—the first two in exile from France, the latter returning from France to his Cuban homeland—came as both a mutual recognition in this light and as a means to enjoin their projects with allies, which later included Jean-Paul Sartre.

In this mix is Suzanne Césaire: a wife, mother, teacher, intellectual and writer whose keen intelligence, honesty, confrontational fervor and facility with metaphor, a principal means to evade censorship, is evident—at least until the journal was suppressed in 1943 for having surpassed the bounds of acceptability as a “cultural” organ.

This volume serves a real purpose beyond its engagement with a relative lacuna in Francophone scholarship. That Suzanne Césaire was eclipsed thereafter by the emergence of her husband as a major poet and politician—Aimé Césaire was elected mayor of Fort de France in 1945, a position he held for 56 years—left her in shadow until her death in 1966, at a mere 50 years old. What she could have accomplished as a writer we will never know. That we have these seven essays—from her use of the German ethnologist Frobenius’s study of Africa and her view of André Breton, to her critique of Martinique poetry, her acclaim of surrealism in 1943, and her defenestration of the “camouflage” that characterized the place she came from—is enough to draw us to her.

When considering Suzanne Césaire, Tropiques and those she held close, we should also remember this: Their world is not our world. The possibility of rebellion in the name of a poetic has become a cliché, something we expect from culture, something just a bit too easy. This was not the case for them. Critique, which they sought to build from several perspectives as a kind of provocation at least equal to their constraints, is now reserved for academics, a few critics and their readers, or appears at large and vanishes with little lasting effect. The alienation and devaluation she found impermissible, but is uniquely present for us; it has also gained a bearable, even entertaining projection from technology. We are less free, more overworked, and consistently preyed upon by a composite of factors we have some but never enough control over.

Unlike Suzanne Césaire, however, we find it difficult to counterpose the pressures of the quotidian with even a metaphorical horizon that is something more than the compromises we make, compromises we expect others to make as a matter of course and which inevitably sap our eccentricities and our passions, however intensive or diffuse they may be. As Suzanne Césaire well knew, power sustains by camouflage and mimicry when it has little need of direct force. It absorbs what opposes it the better to compel from that opposition the nourishment it needs. And freedom, this grand category that we have all too much lost the scent of, as a collective project and a subjective necessity, in all its concreteness, was yet her driving force. We are lucky that she portrayed it well enough in these essays now available to us.

The volume closes with tributes to, and discussion about, Suzanne Césaire by André Breton and André Masson (drawn from their book Snake Charmer), Réné Ménil, Daniel Maximin (a writer associated with the publishing house Présence Africaine), Aimé Césaire, and Suzanne and Aimé Césaire’s daughter Ina Césaire.

**Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind**


_Reviewed by Jan Baetens. Email: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.be>._

The book also has the ambition to reshape the whole field and to remediate some of its current problems, such as, mainly, the unresolved tensions between various methodological and theoretical approaches of storytelling and, corollarily, the absence of a truly transdisciplinary theory and method.
**Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind** is an important attempt to bridge the gap between several (sub)disciplinary approaches, while avoiding the pitfalls of the promotion of one master discipline.

In short, David Herman’s position in this book can be described as a plea for a two-sided approach of narratology and cognitive sciences. On the one hand, he defends the idea that narrative can only be understood by taking into account the basic insights and hypotheses of cognitive research, hence his emphasis on the necessary link between reading stories and reading minds, and his challenging remarks on the role of narrative as a way of world-making and sense-production (to use very traditional terminology). On the other hand, he criticizes the ideas that, first, real cognitive science is neuroscience and that cognitive analysis should be conducted at a kind of infra-personal, strictly biological level; and second, that narratology has more to learn from cognitive sciences than the other way around. Contrary to these currently popular stances, David Herman insists on both the usefulness and the necessity of always linking story and mind as well as narratology and cognitive studies. He defends the inevitable symmetry and intertwining of “worlding the story” (by taking into account cognitive research in the search for a better understanding of how stories tell something about our relationship with the world) and “storying the world” (by emphasizing the importance of storytelling as a sense-making device in the functioning of the brain). This transdisciplinary ideal, by the way, goes much further than other endeavors that presently focus on the interdisciplinary study of story and storytelling from the point of view of intermediality.

Although David Herman makes strong claims in favor of a certain theory and a certain method of understanding narrative from his own transdisciplinary point of view, it should first of all be stressed how broad and open-minded this position always remains. There are definitely some polemical chapters and analyses in this book, such as the debate with the long-standing tradition of anti-intentionalism in narratological studies, as well as with the narrative framework that builds upon the twin notions of implied author and implied reader (which Herman considers a way of negotiating between intentionalism and anti-intentionalism without taking clear anti-intentionalist stances). But in general what strikes most in this book is the incredible encyclopedic knowledge of the author and the desire to do justice to all theories and methods that he discusses. In that regard, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* can be used very fruitfully as a shortcut to past and current discussions in narratology (and one can be sure that most of them will still be on the agenda in the near future, such as the debate on medium-specific versus non-medium-specific ways of storytelling). On all these topics, David Herman proves an excellent guide, both by the richness of the information he provides and by the clever positions he takes toward them.

Finally, I note the presence of many fully worked out examples that help the reader get a better grip on the theoretical discussions Herman covers. Moreover, these examples are often very rich (not just selected to fit the point the author wants to make) and their diversity is a great asset (the examples chosen belong to a wide range of genres, periods and media).

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**THE GRAND OLD LADY OF MODERN ART: MARCEL DUCHAMP’S NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE**


Reviewed by Kieran Lyons. Email: <kieranlyons01@btme.com>.

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Isabelle Fleuriet’s monograph *The Grand Old Lady of Modern Art: Marcel Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase* deserves attention not only for its subject matter but also for the significance and achievement of the author writing this coherent and engaging text in English. The text we read is in its original form and, therefore, not a translation from an existing source; we can assume, of course that Fleuriet, a French art historian living in Paris, could produce an equivalent publication for the French reader with ease—but she hasn’t. So the decision to write and publish for Anglophone readers has a significance of its own. Published under the imprimatur of Francis Naumann’s 57th Street Readymade Press, the collaboration between the French academic and the New York publisher comes together in a counterpoint with the story that Fleuriet unfolds. Duchamp’s painting, a misaligned byproduct of the tense interface between salon cubism and its Italian futurist rivals—which failed to find acceptance with either group—could nevertheless have only been painted (and then marginalized) at this particular juncture and time. Although the painting originated in pre-WWI Paris, its subsequent story, its rise in popularity and developing prominence from that time onwards is—for better or for worse—an American one. America made it famous, even eclipsing, at times, the name and standing of the artist himself. And so it is fitting that this book is primarily about the work and not about the artistic development of the man who made it. It is perhaps for this reason that Fleuriet’s narrative begins on March 18, 1912, when Duchamp removed his painting before the vernissage of the Indépendants exhibition, and not the day before when, already sensitive about his painting, he went to bizarre lengths to deliver it by boat, first unpinning the painting from its stretcher, rolling it up and then rowing it several kilometers to its destination. Notwithstanding, Fleuriet keeps to her self-appointed brief, and the solid accumulation of material is presented in a timely and methodical way. It makes a valuable contribution.

The success of Duchamp’s painting came at a price, however, for not only was the artist’s name obscured behind the notoriety of the work in the 1930s and early 1940s, but also the notoriety upon which it came to thrive occasioned a strange complacency about its status and standing. Its reputation, sporadically reinvigorated in news bulletins and puzzled reporting in the popular press, gradually elevated it to the status of a national treasure, competing for popularity and publicity at one point with celebrated strip-tease dancers as well as masterpieces by El Greco and Gainsborough. *The New York Times* put it on a par with the pyramids and the Empire State Building. Later on it would draw just enough xenophobic criticism from McCarthyite voices in Washington to sustain its radical credentials.

Meanwhile, in the very different environment of European painting, the French historian Robert Lebel began to prepare and eventually publish in 1959 his monograph *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, the first serious attempt to analyze the artist’s work in its entirety. This had the effect of pre-empting any attempts by...
American historians who at this point, with all of Duchamp’s major works at their disposal in national collections, including, of course, the four versions of the famous *Nude*, had not put an estimation of the status of the artist who had come to stay with them into any historical or national context. When Duchamp’s first major retrospective took place in Pasadena, CA, in 1963, it was accompanied by the sensational razzmatazz of the septuagenarian artist outperforming a naked girl in a game of chess—a scenario that Duchamp was no doubt perfectly happy to go along with, but that also deflected attention away from a more complete understanding of his aims, as well as continued the deception that he had given up art for chess.

This publicity, as well as the uncritical approval in Robert Lebel’s text, conspired to generate a sense of unease with a younger generation of painters in France who were concerned about the materialist direction of modernist practice that Duchamp was leading them towards. Duchamp’s acceptance of American citizenship further contributed to this dissatisfaction, which found its most virulent critique within the Marxist collective of Arroyo, Aillaud and Recalcati. It is at this stage in her account that Fleuriet develops the most engaging and sustained treatment of the legacy of the *Nude* through their signature work *To Live and Let Die, or, The Tragic End of Marcel Duchamp,* and I think this is her main contribution to a greater understanding of the subject. The critical protest by these artists has been documented elsewhere, of course, and Fleuriet, while scrupulously acknowledging her source material, revitalizes it in this altogether new context of the hyperbole surrounding *Nude Descending a Staircase.* Fleuriet’s methodical tracing of these popular responses in newspaper coverage from a period of over 40 years presents them as a set of recurring tropes—based on the painting’s illegibility or its subject’s invisibility, for example—while always setting the discussion against the painting’s escalating monetary value. Fleuriet’s examination of Duchamp’s legacy, one that was gradually being invented by a form of publicity—which, as it grew began to claim the artist for its own—is, I think, a major contribution to the canon.

This decision to deal with an art-work, rather than the artist’s development across the 100 years of its history, is preceded on the multiplying bookshelves of Duchamp scholarship in, perhaps, only two other works, which like Fleuriet’s are devoted to the analysis of a single work only: John Golding’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1973) and the much later *État Donnés* by Michael Taylor (2009). However, Fleuriet’s agenda is more specific than either of these monographs, in that she traces the vicissitudes of this work through its appearances in the popular press and in its redefinition in subsequent artworks in the form of advertisements and shop window displays, usually arranged by Duchamp himself, and occasionally given magisterial treatment by other artists such as Yves Klein and Robert Rauschenberg. Except for the notable exception of the French agitprop group mentioned above, these homages were made in America and aimed at American audiences. In a separate section entitled *The Nude’s Descendants 1963–2013* Fleuriet traces a second wave of artists with more or less overt references to Duchamp’s painting; but notwithstanding the quality of some of these works, they appear very much as a *coda* to the work without a clear connection to the main thesis, which depends very much on the way the shifting perceptions to the *Nude* were exploited and developed by Duchamp or his promoters while he was alive. This section demonstrates the esteem that subsequent artists held for the artist and the popularity of the work under review, an enthusiasm that I certainly share. However, for me the weight and importance of Duchamp’s work comes to a close in 1963, while the artist was still alive and when he could assess the extent of his legacy across two major responses to his work. On the one hand, we see the eight panels of the collaborative painting *To Live and Let Die or the Tragic End of Marcel Duchamp* painted by Arroyo et al., and the second is in Robert Rauschenberg’s magisterial composite painting *Express.* They are both to be seen in Madrid in adjacent museums so that these two oppositional strands of Duchamp’s effect can be seen almost in one go. Go and see them to judge which one handles the responsibility better. When you do, take a copy of Fleuriet’s book with you.

**Leonardo Reviews On-Line**

**April 2014**


*The World’s Next Supermodels,* directed by Ijbrand van Veelen. Reviewed by Giuseppe Pennisi.

**March 2014**

*Art and the Senses,* edited by Francesca Bacci and David Melcher. Reviewed by Amy Ione.


**February 2014**

*10 PRINT CHR$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10* by Nick Montfort, Patsy Baudoin, John Bell, Ian Bogost, Jeremy Douglass, Mark C. Marino, Michael Mateas, Casey Reas, Mark Sample and Noah Vawter. Reviewed by Brian Reffin Smith.


*Photographic Theory: An Historical Anthology* by Andrew E. Herschberger. Reviewed by Jan Baetens.