BROUHAHA: WORLDS OF THE CONTEMPORARY


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The term *brouhaha*, with which Lionel Ruffel, professor of comparative literature and creative writing at the University of Paris VIII, indicates the messiness that is the contemporary, is well chosen. Usable in both French and English, the term points to a certain noisiness. It has a sense of the comic, inviting laughter due to the “haha” at the end, but it also seems to be an onomatopoeia for a burst of laughter. Ruffel, however, does not talk of laughter, although laughter is an act that is very much “in the moment,” and the contemporary escapes, or attempts to escape, any historicizing outside of that. Or at least it adheres to a “history [that] is no longer thought of in terms of epochs” (p. 10).

It is in that sense somewhat confusing that Ruffel discusses the contemporary in six “series”—“Exposition,” “Media,” “Publication,” “Controversy,” “Institutions” and “Archaeology”—combined with a solid introduction and a conclusion called “Locations of the Contemporary.” In his discussion of the contemporary as replacement of the modern, Ruffel tries to avoid at all cost any chronology or analysis that might be seen as a modernist approach that neatly tries to box everything in. It would therefore maybe be better to talk of “strands” or “threads” instead of “series” that would tie in better with his observation that we clearly live no longer in a modernist, future-oriented society but in a contemporary one that is chaotic and messy in its multiplicity, being multidisciplinary and thus undisciplined, but therefore also extremely rich.

It is however hard to avoid any kind of order in an analysis of or an inquiry into a perceived phenomenon. Ruffel connects the contemporary in the first place with Exposition, as that is where we first became familiar with the term, in the sense of contemporary art. But typically for his approach Ruffel brings our attention in the first place to the fact that the question “What is the contemporary?” was first raised by the fanzine *Zum*, published by the Centro de Expresiones Contemporáneas in Rosario, Argentina, in 2004—far away, thus, from the Modernist center New York or the typically Western world in general, and before Giorgio Agamben would pose the same question a year later. It is an approach that Ruffel continues throughout his book. Although he references various famous “big” white males, he also constantly counteracts them with off-center and/or female voices such as Donna Haraway and her “Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), which Ruffel recognizes as already pointing in the direction of things to come.

Ruffel admits that in his investigation of the contemporary he mainly follows in the footsteps of Bruno Latour, exclaiming at one point that if we never were modernists, we were...
always contemporaries. Where Latour “called modernity an illusion that was in the process of being unmasked” (p. 19), Ruffel places the contemporary, which he sees basically as the result of “the very large number”—of us and of our data. Interestingly, *brouhaha* in French refers to the confused noise that comes from a crowd. Its multitude makes it automatically no longer possible to hold on to a modernist unifying approach but makes it “performative and temporary” and self-organizes toward an essential horizontal point of view that is dehierarchized, decolonized and deauthorized. The *brouhaha* of the contemporary is equal to noise and pollution in Ruffel’s book, be it in a positive sense. It is therefore not surprising that much attention is given to collective (non-Western) undertakings such as that of Raqs Media Collective, in which identities and tasks remain explicitly unclear.

Although Ruffel passionately opposes the use of any prefix, such as in the post- or alter-modern, seen as theoretically “weak” intermezzos, *brouhaha* nevertheless becomes a preposition, as when he discusses so-called *brouhaha*-literature. He can be forgiven for that as it is rather genius if he manages to get something as Dadaist as an Era of *Brouhaha* mentioned in future history books. That is, if there are ever going to be any future history books, because Ruffel sees the contemporary as “signifying the end of a sequential and successive representation of time and turn[ing] instead to a superimposition of temporalities” (p. 179).

In the strand Media, Ruffel refers to the notion of simultaneity as an important quality of the contemporary by means of the work of Benedict Anderson, who observes that “one could argue that every essential modern conception is based on a conception of ‘meanwhile’ “ (p. 54). Ruffel notes “a plural, dialectical coherence” in, amongst others, the anachronism of Georges Didi-Huberman or the nonlinearity of Manuel DeLanda, which “makes the contemporary into an observation site and a field of action that unsettles modern historicity, with its linear and sequentialist narrative” (p. 165). Although somewhat unexpected, archaeology therefore becomes the perfect tool with which to approach the contemporary, as it is not solely directed to a past but combines all temporalities in an ongoing simultaneity.

Although at times unavoidably confusing, this is a very timely book that luckily was translated relatively quickly so that it can find a wider audience (the book was originally published in 2016). It puts a new awareness of the world into a context in which we realize we are only part of an intricate human/nonhuman construct. Or rather, a plurality of “worlds” that constantly interact in a messy way.

**IMMEDIATIONS: THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE IN DOCUMENTARY**


Reviewed by Ana Peraica, PhD, independent scholar, Peris lit bb, 21 000 Split, Croatia.

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**Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary** by Pooja Rangan deals with ethics of the video documentary genre. This discussion in video is inherited from photography, where one of the largest critics of the documentary drive in contemporary visual culture was Susan Sontag. Like Sontag, Rangan also positions dehumanized life as raison d’être of the documentary genre but continues her discussion with the in-depth analysis of so-called participatory video, in which cameras are supplied to populations suffering or whose lives are at risk. In doing so, Rangan addresses a number of cultural theories, such as Foucault’s biopolitics, Negri and Hardt’s human rights, but also Butler’s gender.

The book provides a number of in-depth analyzed case studies showing up the problematic of film-based philanthropy organized around symbols of weakness such as the child, weather catastrophe victim, autistic person and animal.

The first chapter covers the history of a child as a target of a humanitarian drive, especially the idea of the wild child (savage) and the instrumentality of such an image. These images work on a projective identification model. The key example is the participatory project *Born into Brothels* by Zana Briski and Rose Kauffman (2004), in which the artist lent cameras to children employed in brothels so they could produce autobiographic narratives on their own prostitution. Although the financial product now goes to children, the idea of child labor and the sensationalism of the image of the child in an utterly pedophile market of child images comes to the forefront. Also in other, similar projects, such as *ZoomUganda* (2006) by Harambee Center, or *Through Our Own Eyes* (2010) by Plan International on street children in Bangladesh, or Charleston Kids with Cameras (2003), or *Girl Project* (2007) by Kate Engelbrecht, similar outcomes are reached.

The second chapter deals with natural disasters reported by participatory cameras and provides even more of interesting cases, for example, Télé Geto following earthquake damage on Haiti in 2010. Teenagers holding toy tools for reporting, such as plastic bottles combined with duct tape, ironically mimicked global TV media in a series of YouTube videos. Another case covered is a CNN call for images from its own audience during the time of Hurricane Katrina (2005) as seen in the Academy- and Emmy-nominated *Trouble the Water* (2008), directed by Tia Lessin and Carl Deal. Examples elaborated in the third chapter deal with the issue of autism, including *I Am Autism* by Autism Speaks; *In My Language*, a 2015 video by autistic blogger Amanda Baggs; and Gerardine Wurzburg’s award-nominated *Autism in the World* (2003). The last chapter elaborates on animals.

Rangan distinguishes a couple of subgenres of the participatory docu-
mentary, such as auto-ethnographic film, especially characteristic of 1970s feminist video art, but also provides a clear distinction from the pseudo-participatory genre.

Obviously a great compendium of contemporary documentaries, some of which are fully available online, Rangan's book is a good informative reading in the domain of humanitarian documentary genre. It is a good critical source for both authors and activists, but also for readers in cultural and film studies interested into ethical perspectives. Still, when reading, make sure to be close to the Internet, so you can look up works Rangan writes about.

SUPER POWER, SPOONY BARTDS, AND SILVERWARE


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Nintendo's presence in the videogames medium is substantial, so much so that the company's name became a byword for the medium. Over the past few decades that Nintendo has been directly involved in the videogames medium, its dominance has fluctuated considerably. In Super Power, Spooky Bards, and Silverware, despite its initially perplexing title, Dominic Arsenault addresses—for the most part—the role of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES [Super Famicom in its native Japan]) and what it meant for Nintendo. Arsenault contextualizes his approach under the aptly and purposefully titled "Nintendo Economic System." This might seem too endearing toward its subject matter, but the book is an objective look at what is explained to be the decline of Nintendo as a home console manufacturer during the 1990s, despite subjective sentiments claiming the SNES era to be a golden age for Nintendo.

Super Power, Spooky Bards, and Silverware is part of the wider Platform Studies series of books, which focuses on individual platforms, but thankfully Arsenault does not focus on the SNES in isolation and ignore other consoles, be they Nintendo or other platform manufacturers. It might come across as extraneous to dedicate a chapter to Nintendo's previous console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES [Famicom in Japan]), especially as there is a whole book dedicated to the NES in the Platform Studies series. This, however, is essential as it is here that Arsenault's concept of the Nintendo Economic System is formally introduced. This is an insightful perspective into the ideology of the veteran company; if there is one point that can be seen as the central tenet of the rationale behind many of its actions, it is that of "never relinquish control." Nintendo has made some questionable resulting decisions over the decades, but even if they have harmed the company in some form, this is deemed an acceptable cost to maintain overall control, and the SNES era was no different in this regard. This was evident in the relationship between Nintendo and the third-party developers that wanted to bring videogames to Nintendo's consoles. As much as possible was done on Nintendo's terms, with the very presence of third-party companies almost seen as an annoyance trying to benefit from Nintendo's Garden of Eden.

Nintendo is described by Arsenault as a "self-party" firm because it is invested in both sides of the videogames market: hardware and software. Typically, first-party firms rely on third-party firms to contribute the software that is available for their hardware, and because the third-party firms do not create their own hardware, the two types of firm are not deemed to be in competition. Nintendo is different in this aspect, as it is often the largest provider of software for its own systems (in terms of units sold), thereby putting them in direct competition with third-party firms. During the time of the NES, however, there was little serious competition in the hardware space, and due to the high demand for videogames software generated by the success of the NES, Nintendo was able to dictate terms that companies had to comply with to get their games onto the system. Nintendo viewed the strict requirements it placed on third parties as a fair price, given that they [Nintendo] did all the hard work, resulting in Arsenault's use of analogy the "walled garden" to describe the state of the Nintendo Economic System surrounding the NES. A walled garden is most effective when there is little alternative, but as efforts from Sega and NEC improved, third-party firms were less inclined to put up with Nintendo's strict requirements. This became even more problematic when Nintendo moved to the North American market, where the newly formed Nintendo of America (NoA) had to negotiate less aggressive terms with American firms, although of course Nintendo still retained that all-important control.

This desire for maintaining control could be seen in part as a response to the position that Nintendo finds itself in relating to how it obtains and manufactures the videogame consoles that it sells. Unlike later-arriving competitors such as Sony, Nintendo does not possess the facilities to develop its own components; each console is made from "off-the-shelf" parts. Arsenault explains how Nintendo is therefore reliant on the capabilities of other companies for the technical basis of its consoles, meaning the company needs to create the strongest bargaining hand it can manage. It is for this reason that Nintendo continues to use "outdated" technology, as this can be purchased in bulk utilizing economies of scale to gain favorable costs. But Nintendo is only able to continue to do this because it can afford to place such large orders. Nintendo's approach to selling consoles also differs from that of its direct competitors, as the company makes it a priority to sell its consoles at a profit, rather than selling at a loss to give it a more attractive

Leonardo Reviews 199
price, and then hoping to make more money back via sales made through software licensing. This is made clear by Arsenault, as he states in the latter part of the book the percentage of software sold for Nintendo consoles is dominated by Nintendo-published games, highlighting why Nintendo cannot afford to rely on the success of third-party software to provide it with the cash reserves necessary to invest into the next console.

The original Famicom/NES was not marketed as a technical powerhouse but instead as a family computer in Japan and an entertainment system in the West (so much so that NoA redesigned the console so that it looked and operated more like a home video cassette player). While home console sequels existed previously, Nintendo was for the first time preparing a direct follow-up with the Super Famicom/SNES; therefore, it was crucial to highlight the benefits that this new system would provide, downplaying the fact that if consumers wanted to play the newest games they had to buy the newer system. This technological obsolescence could feel forced upon those who had invested money and time into the previous NES console, which is why Nintendo carefully marketed the SNES as a significant upgrade, going so far as to use the tagline “now you’re playing with power,” and the use of the prefix super to denote its superiority over the previous console. This, however, as pointed out by Arsenault, is an exaggeration. Whilst the SNES was indeed more powerful than its predecessor, it was no technical “powerhouse.” Again, using a similar approach of utilizing “outdated” technology and optimizing it to make it as efficient as possible—referred to as the Yokoi Principle, named after in-house designer Gunpei Yokoi, who favored the use of lateral thinking rather than focusing on high-tech components for the sake of it—the SNES was a cost-effective way to keep Nintendo relevant in the home console market. Despite on the surface appearing to abandon the Yokoi Principle, the principle was alive and well behind the scenes, the difference being that Nintendo was actively persuading the public of the advancements now possible thanks to its new console. This could be an elaborate act of smoke and mirrors, providing players with spectacle while simultaneously masking the limitations of the console. This was evident with the promotion of a specific graphical process named Mode 7, which was described as providing players with 3D style graphics, despite technically displaying 2D images, but layering them in a way that appeared to be 3D. This was enough to allow Nintendo to appear to be keeping up with its competitors. Later upgrades to the technical prowess of the SNES emerged in the years that followed via the use of components such as the Super FX chip; this was embedded in the videogame cartridges themselves to make up for the insufficient capabilities of the base SNES hardware. This enabled the SNES to display 3D images, albeit very basic ones, most notably with Star Fox.

The “super” in Super FX chip crucially continued the use of what Arsenault describes as having “practically become a Nintendo trademark,” as well as assisting Nintendo to skip a crucial piece of technology that was now being used by its competitors—namely the use of CD-ROM technology—yet still enabling it to compete on its own terms. With Nintendo continuing to bring technical advancements through the SNES game cartridges, the base SNES console remained the same; therefore, production of the system would only get cheaper. As pointed out earlier in the book, Nintendo’s aim was to generate as much profit as it could from its consoles. In addition, if other developers wanted to utilize this technology for their games, the risk would be with them and not Nintendo, as they had to purchase the cartridges from Nintendo up front and then distribute them. If the game failed to sell through the stock that was available, the loss remained with the developer.

Nintendo’s hesitant approach when it came to adopting new technological elements could be argued to have contributed to the fall of its walled garden. With CD-ROM technology adopted by Nintendo’s main competitors by the mid-1990s, an attractive alternative was now available to third-party developers. Arsenault explains that the use of CD-ROMs rectified many problems that afflicted videogames because of the cartridge-based storage medium. Developers now had access to around 650MB of storage, considerably more than the mere 16MB cartridges used by the Nintendo 64. With Sony’s new PlayStation—itself the realization of a failed CD-based add-on for the SNES between Sony and Nintendo—using this storage medium as standard, developers were able to include higher-quality sound as well as Full Motion Video (FMV), which was not possible with cartridges. Another crucial aspect outlined by Arsenault was that developers were no longer at the mercy of the time it took Nintendo to produce the cartridges in Japan; this could take up to three months, and payment was required up front before production could begin. Plus, Nintendo ultimately decided how many cartridges a developer could order. The nature of CD-ROMs meant that an order could be completed in less than two weeks, meaning more copies could be quickly produced if required. Furthermore, blank CDs were considerably less expensive at about $6, compared to $35 for blank cartridges. The combination of financial benefits, extra storage, and the creative freedom this brought made the use of CD-ROMs desirable for many developers. Ultimately, Sony was successful at taking market share away from Nintendo because it was able to attract third-party developers away from Nintendo’s walled garden by offering greener open fields.

The premise of Super Power, Spoony Bards, and Silverware is one of reevaluating the influence of the SNES and its impact on the videogames medium and industry. While it outsold its main competitor, Sega, the SNES failed to recapture the wider-
reaching success of its predecessor. But the crux of Arsenault's argument is that the approach Nintendo took during the lifespan of the SNES handicapped the company moving forward. Its next two home consoles languished behind as it moved further from the Yoko Principle. Even when trying to adapt to common standards, such as finally adopting a disc-based storage medium, Nintendo still did so in a way that retained additional control, as evident with the GameCube's use of mini-DVDs instead of standard DVDs.

While Arsenault does not go into too much detail regarding Nintendo's position since its highly successful Wii console, the insight into the Nintendo Economic System continues to be relevant, with the Yoko Principle resurgent, as evident in the design of Nintendo's current hybrid system, the Switch. Nintendo's so-called Golden Age during the SNES era is rightfully scrutinized by Arsenault as a fabrication, but he has rationally outlined how Nintendo's continued desire to "never relinquish control" is partly responsible for the difficulties it faced during the 1990s. This case study insightfully explores how Nintendo utilized its position in the videogames industry to its advantage, only for it to be undone by its desire for control. Not quite a warning for other console manufacturers, but rather a fascinating insight into how the videogames industry has been shaped.

**DESIGNED FOR HI-FI LIVING: THE VINYL LP IN MIDCENTURY AMERICA**

**Reviewed by John F. Barber.**

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In the contemporary world, where music can be streamed anytime, anywhere, from "the cloud," many readers may not remember when well-appointed midcentury American living rooms included a high-fidelity (hi-fi) console, complete with amplifier, stereo receiver, speakers and a record player.

Near to hand would have been vinyl record albums. In their recent book *Designed for Hi-Fi Living: The Vinyl LP in Midcentury America*, Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder argue that record albums included learning opportunities for Americans aspiring to embrace the modern postwar consumer culture.

The authors suggest that following the 1959 debate between United States Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev—televised live as they lingered over lemon-yellow kitchen appliances at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow—American homes became the front lines of the Cold War. For the Soviet Union, success meant technological systems benefiting all citizens, transportation systems, health care, housing programs. For America, success was the ability of individuals to buy cars, appliances and suburban homes.

The individual home in midcentury America became a place of retreat, a place to entertain, to mix drinks, cook food, display good taste. But how to do this? Surprisingly, help came in the form of the humble record album cover.

Borgerson and Schroeder examine nearly 150 LP covers, some featuring the work of famous designers, photographers and painters. They also provide careful readings of liner notes. Together, their efforts provide a revisionary examination of a hidden agenda for distributing cultural tropes through record albums and their covers.

Borgerson and Schroeder divide their book into two sections: "Home" and "Away." Both offer interesting glimpses into the American postwar imagination. In the "Home" section Borgerson and Schroeder examine record albums with titles like *Cocktail Time, Music for a Chinese Dinner at Home* and *The Perfect Background Music for Your Home Movies*. These and other record albums provided information and guidance on how to impress one's guests through tasteful entertainment skills.

Liner notes, all carefully crafted, provided details for embodying the ideal American lifestyle based within participatory capitalist democracy. How to dress for backyard barbecue parties. Where to buy live lobster. Gardening. Card parties. Patio parties. Images on the record covers showed the ideal results. Liner notes provided the details. The music itself, experienced by listening to the record, provided background and/or backdrop. Visual and aural information were designed to market one's sense of the ideal home and domestic space.

The "Away" section examines record albums that provided information on how to travel to and interact with foreign cultures. Examples include *Honeymoon in Hawaii*, *Strings for a Space Age and Cairo! The Music of Modern Egypt*.

Stylish vacations are encouraged. Jet airplane travel is celebrated as offering new levels of consumer choice. Travel to new locations confronts one with new norms. The music, pictures and information provided by these record albums prepared American tourists for their travels in foreign lands, as well as outer space.

A major theme throughout *Designed for Hi-Fi Living* is that record albums, perhaps seen primarily as popular, even mundane, artifacts of mass culture in postwar America, were in fact designed to teach American consumers how to form and reinforce family bonds,
how to entertain at home and how to travel away from home. Seen through this lens, midcentury record albums were cultural windows, each providing an essential information distribution format.

Borgerson and Schroeder contend that midcentury record albums offered compelling visions for incorporating style, home and travel into mainstream American society. Designed for Hi-Fi Living offers a view of this vision, a way to illustrate the role of the vinyl LP in developing contemporary American consumer culture.

POETIC CONVENTIONS AS COGNITIVE FOSSILS


Reviewed by Rob Harle.

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This book is an intellectual tour de force—detailed, complex and groundbreaking. In Tsur's own words, "The whole book is about how poetic conventions are shaped and constrained by the natural capacities and constraints of the human brain and cognitive system" (p. 157). Tsur's "cognitive poetics" is his theoretical methodology for investigating and analyzing this phenomenon. One of the most important aspects of this research is to show how conventional poetic styles are modified and created by our cognitive systems and not only migrate from one cultural period to another.

As the authors of the Preface state, "Poetic Conventions as Cognitive Fossils sets a high standard for the principles of scholarly learning—formidable yet available, humanistic in the best sense, and a fitting capstone to the career of an illustrious scholar" (p. ix). I could not agree more, although I have to question "yet available." This text should be read by all students, if only as an example of how real in-depth research should be carried out. As I read this book it occurred to me, as brilliant as it is, and as accessibly well written as it is, it will have a limited audience. It is not at all suitable for general readership—linguists, literary theorists and neuroscientists will all gain valuable insights from Tsur's research. The "average" poet embroiled in the daily business of actually writing contemporary poetry will probably not gain all that much from the insights presented.

The book has 10 chapters, detailed below, prefaces, references, an excellent index and a companion website featuring sound files to enhance Tsur's discussion.

1. Where Do Conventions Come From?
2. Some Implications of D'Andrade's Assumptions
3. Poetic Conventions as Fossilized Cognitive Devices: The Case of Medieval and Renaissance Poetics
5. Artistic Devices and Mystical Qualities in Hebrew Devotional Poems with Idit-Nov
6. Figurative Language and Sociocultural Background: Hebrew Poetry as a Test Case
7. The Translated Poem as an Aesthetic Object: How Conventions Constrain One Another in a Poem
8. More Is Up—Some of the Time
9. Some Remarks on the Nature of Trochaes and Lambs and Their Relationship to Other Meters
10. Poetic Language and the Psychological Aspects of Everyday Life

Tsur discusses many different poetic forms and styles throughout the book and also includes such phenomena as slips of the tongue, tip of the tongue frustrations, jokes and accidental misquoting of text to support his arguments. His analysis of these "quirky" events is mostly from a Freudian perspective, which he tends to take as a given, although many of Freud's concepts and approaches are highly questionable in the light of recent neurological research. To be fair, though, Tsur does caution restraint in the application of psychological theories: "I also believe, however, that we should not take for granted what is explained by the application of a psychological theory and should scrutinize its implications in the light of research on poetic conventions" (p. 58).

I enjoyed chapter 7, "The Translated Poem as an Aesthetic Object," very much, as it helped me understand a little more important questions I have pondered for some time. Translating poetry is a very different matter from, say, translating a technical manual. Tsur tackles this complex problem admirably, and I would suggest that all those who attempt to translate poetry would benefit from a close reading of his approach. He believes that "poetry translation [is] an art in its own right" (p. 157). I could not agree more, especially when the translation is from a source language with little similarity to the target language, such as English into Chinese—French or Italian into English is possibly a little easier but still not a straightforward matter. As Tsur notes, "The translator seeks an elegant solution to the problem of integrating the conflicting conventions into a target-language poem that has aesthetic merit in its own right" (p. 157).

These translation problems were made all the more clear to me recently when a scholar in Romania translated some of my poems into that language; she had to repeatedly check with me what my exact meaning was in certain lines—subtle and idiosyncratic English metaphors that I simply took for granted were not at all clear to her!

As Tsur repeatedly states, this book is devoted to the question of how cognitive processes shape and constrain cultural and literary forms, and I believe he does an extraordinary job in exploring this question from a multidisciplinary approach. Although as I mentioned above the book is not recommended for general readership, it will surely become a core reader in the disciplines of linguistics, literary theory and archaeology of languages.
AERIAL AFTERMATHS: WARTIME FROM ABOVE

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The specter of the aerial photograph, imaging the surface of the planet beneath, is riven with emotional response as much for what is imagined as for what is actually seen. Bombarded with looping footage of claimed precision interdictions, our lives and those of others are imprisoned as for what is actually seen. Bombarded with looping footage of claimed precision interdictions, our lives and those of others are imprisoned.

Wartime aftermath is the aphorism applied throughout this stimulating volume, specifically the technological approaches taken to envisioning warfare and the social outcomes following wars’ leveling effect. The account is deftly trimmed to focus on the point where confusions of place—as topographies, histories, mythologies—are crystallized for the purposes of control, even suppression, and, latterly, as imperialist resource. The weapons are the lens, the eye and the camera [1].

The five chapters examine different periods in which this fixing moment is engagingly argued to have occurred. The Scotland of Celts and Picts had been a thorn for neighboring Romans, Danes and Saxons for centuries, eventually becoming pacified by the English through a combination of ruthless military invasion and subtle prefiguration of the topography. The unmapped “wasteland,” a place of great mythological significance for its inhabitants, became disciplined using the new techniques of the Board of Ordnance surveyors, formed into a corps of Military Survey charged with the task of completing this novel process of pacification. Painters employed to invent the interpretation of altitude and gradient on a map used their brushwork to augment income by painting bucolic scenes beyond the picturesque, an aesthetic generated for the production of editions of prints delivering news of their imperialist successes back to the King and the populace. Cartographic practice was enshrined in Britain from then to this day—Ordnance Survey maps—along with banal scenes of loch, moor and heather.

European wars and revolution had their aftermaths—in the 1780s it was the aerostation, or balloon, sweeping up populations in balloonomania spectacles and, for the individual in the basket, the ecstasy of silently floating in the clouds. Bird’s-eye view enthusiasts measured and mapped, finding “vision from above to be fragmented, uneven, and confounding, even if sometimes startlingly clear.” In this era, “the watchtower moved into the air and became personified as the ‘eye’ of the general.”

Such privileged viewpoints led rapidly to permanent constructions, panoramas of places (such as the trophy city of Edinburgh, delighting the observer perhaps in the same way as Google Street View has done in more recent times?) and events: “battle scenes and sites of territorial aspiration [bringing] events and information that would otherwise circulate in more distanced ways into immediate sensation.” The spectacles of warfare, “so much a part of British life” back then, are today augmented by globalized motion picture and game.

During World War I in Mesopotamia, the innovative adaptation of technology, initiated through the lens of the airborne camera, led to a reorganized air wing, again with the military working closely with professional cartographers able to produce maps only days old; these could be dropped by the same aircraft to commanders about to initiate an advance, giving them invaluable intelligence and thus advantage. Following the Armistice, the British applied the concept of “empty map” to Iraq (as they had applied terra nullius—empty earth—to Australia 120 years previously), and, with the French, used the new cartographic technologies to replace earlier Arabic topographic systems and means of navigation. The politicians redrew borders as a deliberate act of dispossession, as aerial archaeologists to enable their grabs for ancient loot. The wartime aftermath introduced the iniquity that we see today in the military exercise of political objectives using technology to callous and brutal ends: Arab rebellions were countered using “air control,” following reconnaissance flights and bombing of entire villages, economically more effective than using ground troops alone, with Winston Churchill in 1922 defending the invention of what was to later become known as blitzkrieg or “shock and awe.”

The author’s usage of the literature is deft, keeping the text moving with discussion and a contemporary turn of phrase. In the final chapter, the imaging of contemporary conflicts from the First Gulf War to today, artists, photographers and filmmakers join the flow, starting with Jean Renoir, continuing through Robert Capa, Man Ray and visual artist Jananne Al-Ani to Sophie Ristelhueber’s installation Fait, in which “the flattened logic of the fact mingles with the unspooling history of the
photographic artifact to generate the disturbances of time and space of wartime aftermaths.”

The book format precludes actual reading of the many maps instanced, but the fulsome references enable originals or larger copies to be found. The book is well designed and fully indexed, making it a valuable resource for interdisciplinary study and discussion.

Note


EXTENDED HEREDITY:
A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF INHERITANCE AND EVOLUTION

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Nature or nurture? Is a person born knowing, or do they learn to know? Science today has gone far beyond such a simple dialectic. Extended Heredity explains how by asking another question: Could acquired experiences of an individual be passed on through the reproductive process, apart from her nuclear DNA?

The answer here is a nuanced yes. Nature and nurture are complementary, and a continuum: The DNA of a baby is only a “musical score” to be read and interpreted according to the environment it enters. It starts at conception, when the fertilized egg’s new nucleus containing DNA from both parents is still surrounded by cytoplasm of the parental phenotype. Experiments have shown that male mice that have been traumatized (e.g. by early separation from parent) transmit small non-coding RNAs in their sperm cytoplasm to the baby. These mice grow up with depression symptoms that are passed on to their own offspring. A similar situation occurs with obese fathers. This is epigenetics—a young science that is rapidly changing our understanding of heredity.

Extended Heredity here comprises epigenetics as well as many heritable, nongenetic transmissions (soft inheritance) of acquired traits from parent to child, often lasting for many generations. It potentially includes not only the embryological development of the child and its subsequent behavior but also cultural and educational impacts throughout life. Bonduriansky and Day cite many social customs that are the direct results of gene-cultural interaction, such as lactose tolerance in hunter-gatherer societies. Most adult mammals lose their ability to digest milk sugar (lactose). But in some Northern Europeans, the lactose tolerance gene persists into adulthood. There is advantage in using milk as a source of nutrient as its supply becomes more reliable with farming. The authors suggest a scenario where such tolerance could have started with soft inheritance, only later being incorporated into the more permanent DNA—giving soft inheritance an evolutionary role. This is a neat theory but needs verification by molecular experiments showing the chemical pathways. Also, pinpointing the gene’s first occurrence and its evolutionary frequency in different cultures is difficult if not impossible. Ancient DNA is not reliably available for an entire population. For example, the authors cite the absence of a lactose tolerance gene in the DNA of 6,000-year-old human remains from Germany and Lithuania (and other findings) as evidence that it did not exist and therefore the gene for the digestion of milk had to be recent—as a result of an increased “mutation rate” in cattle farming societies. This argument does not indicate how the mutation rate could have been increased by the environment. It also fails to consider the possibility of lactose bacteria in our body’s abundant microbiome, and the consumption of bacteria-fermented yogurt in many cultures for millennia—as these would have enabled lactose-intolerant individuals to consume dairy products. We now know that the body’s microbiome can be passed through the vagina during birth and is a form of soft inheritance—but the authors do not discuss this in connection with lactose tolerance and evolution.

For now, it is due to this lack of firm evidence that nongenetic inheritance is still fighting an uphill battle, I believe. The idea of “hard” inheritance, that DNA, sequestered inside the nucleus of the cell, is the master of an individual’s destiny, is still dominant in the public imagination—a frequent lament in the book. Here, perhaps, citing an example or a survey of people’s attitudes could replace many repeated generalities. The story of soft inheritance is a convoluted one, littered with weak and biased experiments in its early days, many by experimenters aiming to prove a point, often political. And the opposing gene-centric view did no better. To its credit, the book supplies abundant examples on both sides.

One tragic consequence of the gene-centric view was the popularization of eugenics—that it was possible to produce a superior race by selective breeding, a sort of “purification”
of the gene pool. Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin, is held largely responsible for fostering the idea—leading to the Nazi atrocities and the many horrors of the twentieth century. The credibility of soft inheritance was also dealt a severe blow by the spectacular fraud embraced by Stalin in the Soviet Union: Lysenkoism. Lysenko was not a scientist but rejected genetics (therefore eugenics) as evidence of Western corruption in order to promote Communist ideas of social engineering—that people and plants (mostly food plants) can be transmuted to become more productive. This scandal hardened the dominance of genes. As a result, the gene-centric view of heredity prevails to this day, especially in the public eye.

Evolutionary biologists Bonduriansky and Day employ mathematical modeling to predict natural selection of certain behaviors and their competitive advantages. Such predictions become difficult to prove in actual populations, especially those long perished. But molecular biology today, being able to visualize gene expression in neurons while an animal is performing a behavior, like parenting, could prove a promising tool in future research (the MERFISH Protocols, 2018). Thus, the tone of the book appears to me unnecessarily pessimistic about the recognition of soft inheritance. In addition to ample evidence from this book and other publications, it has a long history going back to Greek and Roman times: fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), now widely acknowledged. FASD concerns in eighteenth-century London also prompted William Hogarth’s etching, the “hellish” Gin Lane (1751, Tate Gallery) and the Gin Act by parliament the same year to reduce alcohol sale.

An expanded view of heredity can no longer be ignored.

**Passwords: Philology, Security, Authentication**


Reviewed by Jan Baetens. doi:10.1162/LEON_r_01732

This highly stimulating book is in the first place a new and innovative take on the well-known two cultures debate. Yet rather than stressing the added value of bridging the gap between the two major strands—arts and sciences, alpha and beta—that emerged from Western modernization and secularization after the Renaissance, Lennon argues that in some cases—that of philology, the humanist study of language, and that of cryptography, the mathematical and technical science of codes and ciphers—the two cultures gap is much smaller than we often think. Not only because philology and cryptography have a lot in common, as Passwords makes very clear, but also because we systematically forget about their union. There is indeed a widely shared refusal to acknowledge the common history of much “cryptophilology,” a concept that refers both to the obscured historical roots of contemporary forms of philology, today often gathered under the umbrella of digital humanities, and the almost routine intimacy of philology with cryptography. For Lennon, this oblivion is anything but a coincidence or an accidental flaw in the discipline’s self-construction and positioning; it is instead the result of a deliberate, politically and ideologically determined will to make the links between philology and cryptography, that is, in today’s terms, the industrial-military complex of security and intelligence industries as dramatically reinforced, yet not exclusively, after 9/11.

Written during the—now already contested and fading—triumph of the digital humanities, Passwords can be read as a continuation and update of books such as Robin Winks’s *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939–1961* (1987), which discloses the role of many (but mainly Yale) language scholars and graduates in the attempts to mechanically decipher and decode human language messages. But one may think also, although from a very different point of view, of Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era* (2011), which hints at the role of the CIA in the funding of creative writing programs as part of a larger propaganda policy in favor of the “free world.” Lennon’s book goes much farther however, since he discloses a much longer and almost essential relationship between the humanist study of language—be it the attempt to discover the correct form and thus the real meaning of a message that seems impure, coded, strange or simply difficult if not impossible to understand, or the attempt to ascertain the universal language that lies underneath or beyond each individual language—and cryptography. To the extent that it also includes non-Western ancestors of philology as well as many “forgotten” encounters between the work of philologists and that of cryptologists, the story Lennon reconstructs is very convincing.

Lennon clearly discloses that much philological labor was immediately put into the service of surveillance and intelligence work, which in turn determined the way in which philological research was structured and oriented. Next to the well-known examples of code-cracking during the World Wars and other conflicts, Lennon mainly focuses on three cases: automatic translation, stylometrics and digital humanities. In the two first cases, he carefully details the critical debates that have accompanied these (unsuccessful) attempts to transform humanist philology into a fully automatized and mechanically performed method delivering the truth on hidden meanings and unattributed authorship. He highlights the temptation to move into the direction of cryptography, both from the point of view of the humanists (always in need of funding and in certain cases also of personal and social recognition)
and from that of the surveillance and intelligence services (chiefly interested in issues of code-cracking and authorship attribution). At the same time, he also brings to the fore the errors and dead ends of this temptation, which puts between brackets the complexity of human language and the inevitable necessity of interpretation. The real target of Lennon’s analysis is, however, the digital humanities hype, whose ambitions and utopias are criticized in various ways: first because this new discipline has not succeeded in defining itself (it remains a buzzword, whose limits are becoming more and more apparent), second because it seems to repeat all the errors that have been made by all those who instrumentalize the humanist study of language in the name of “real science”; third, and perhaps most of all, because it does not ask any questions on the way its methods and results are directly and openly used by a state that gives so much priority to surveillance and security that there is no longer room for privacy, individual freedom and democratic debate.

Lennon’s book ends with a discussion of the nondebate that followed the recent initiative by Matthew Kirschenbaum, a leading voice in the critical study of digital culture, to launch a public dispute on the question “Should DHers accept military/defense funding?” Few answers were submitted, and none of them proved sufficiently strong or interesting to continue the conversation. What this semisilence actually means is of course not clear, perhaps because the funding in question is not direct but indirect (digital humanities does not have to be funded by defense or military sources to be used by them: Who knows what happens with research funded by Google or Facebook?).

The cryptophilological tropism of all philology since the beginning of the discipline makes it plausible to suppose that much research is actually used for surveillance and intelligence aims, while the no-less-traditional obsfucation of the link between philology and cryptography also suggests that nondebates are the rule, not the exception. Lennon leaves to the reader how to interpret the silence that surrounds Kirschenbaum’s question, but he does not hide the contrast between the radical decades of the 1960s and 1970s, which witnessed an increasing unease with—if not blatant refusal of—the instrumentalization of philology for surveillance and intelligence aims and the current indifference, which he sees as a tragic surrender of humanist values.

**PERFECTION’S THERAPY: AN ESSAY ON ALBRECHT DÜRER’S MELENCOLIA I**


Reviewed by Mike Mosher.

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doi:10.1162/LEON_r_01733

Peter Anders, architect and cyber-arts activist, reported to this reviewer in early 2018 that he’d been puzzled about the polygonal shape in Albrecht Dürer’s Melencolia I, so he recreated it with 3D software and a 3D printer. He realized that the model, viewed from above, formed a six-pointed star—the hexagram or Star of Solomon, a symbol used (both with and without its Jewish associations) in Renaissance magic. Consequently, I was curious to learn of Perfection’s Therapy: An Essay on Albrecht Dürer’s Melencolia I by Mitchell B. Merback, its dissection of an artwork I have long admired. Dürer (1471–1528) was a master of the woodcut (collected by Willi Kurth, in a great book from Dover Publications). Dürer’s biographer Irwin Panofsky wrote that, unlike the artist’s blissful, God-serving Saint Jerome, Melencolia I showed “a life in competition with God...the tragic unrest of human creation.” Walter Benjamin wrote in 1925 that this print “anticipated the Baroque in many respects”; then Benjamin’s admirer Susan Sonntag wrote of him as the embodiment of melancholy, born “Under the Sign of Saturn.” Merback now asserts the print Melencolia I is both a diagnosis and “therapeutic artifact” in its context. Dürer, like the poet Petrarch, set himself up as a “physician of the soul.”

The prescription? In the print, there’s the weird little banner MELENCOLIA I on a bat, or perhaps tattooed on its shaved or flattened wings, who dodges a shooting star, while a sullen angel with compass (female, or a longhaired male like Dürer?), a bellows concealed by her robe, ignores a putto doing something atop a stone wheel, with a sleeping hound, all amongst the polygonal object, a sphere, woodworking tools, an hourglass and bell, plus a Magic Square of numbers. Panofsky wrote the angel’s “fixed stare is one of intent through fruitless searching.” Merback says Dürer subscribed to the Ciceronian idea of philosophy as the “art of healing the soul.” Dürer claimed to be its physician, proud of his eloquence too. So, was Melencolia I Dürer’s spiritual self-portrait? This was an era of “therapies of the Image” that included ancient amulets, prints, imagery of the stages of a Christian’s life for contemplation of a prayer. Dürer gave the public ethical and spiritual training in visual form. Dürer depicted Christ as the Man of Sorrows. Other artists, including Cranach (1528), created representations of melancholy; in his, four toddlers torment a dog, and nude riders fill the sky: witches atop horses, bulls, a stag, a boar. This reminded me of the dream drawings of contemporary surrealist Jim Shaw.

The Magic Square in it, an invention of seventh-century Arabs, has each row or column, or the four corners, adding up to 34, coincidentally the number of years Christ (almost) lived on Earth. Dürer’s mother, whom he had drawn on occasion, died when Dürer was 43, in 1514. Melencolia I was created that year; was the square an emblem of consolation for the bereaved artist? About a year before, he had drawn a self-portrait pointing out the location of an abdominal pain. Dürer had boasted in a poem to his chubby and lusty friend Willibald Pirckheimer of his healing skills. Merback calls Dürer the first modern Christian artist, for his Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were issued in
1500 to take commercial advantage of end-of-the-world fears among the pious—perhaps comparable to the worries about infrastructure failure as Y2K approached. Dürer was successful, ambitious and overworked. Like Petrarch, Dürer mused on the sadness of the yet unachieved, and on the sorrows that can accompany fortune (I write this shortly after designer Kate Spade’s and chef Anthony Bourdain’s suicides). In various prints, Dürer showed Fortuna upon a wheel, a ball, a seahorse, where she represented chance, wealth and vital energy. Merback cites Petrarch’s popular book On the Remedy of Two Kinds of Fortune, although he admits there is no evidence Dürer ever read Petrarch. The artist did depict Erasmus, author of the similarly prescriptive Manual of the Christian Knight, a work that may have inspired Dürer’s Knight, Death and the Devil. Dürer’s career as a painter was certainly dwarfed by his printmaking excellence, yet there are some motifs in his paintings that may help illuminate the mystery of Melencolia I. One panel of the Jalbach altarpiece depicts Job, his wife pouring soothing cold water on his skin affliction. The other panel features musicians, one with a characteristic rock star’s curly locks (think Robert Plant or Roger Daltrey), but with a wandering lazy eye afflicting a handsome face. Dürer recommended, notes Panofsky, “cheerful tunes of the lute” in case “a young painter should overwork, from which his melancholy might exceed.” Might cheerful music here be a symbolic representation of healing, perhaps an allusion to the curative baths nearby? 

Perfection’s Therapy is highly speculative, and often left this reader with some skepticism, yet is erudite and informed in its arguments. Merback calls Melencolia I “a perfect work of art” . . . but then turns around and asks: Why the number “I”? Were a number II and III planned, which events kept Dürer from completing? Perhaps the challenge for Anders, Shaw or other saturnine artists of today is to visualize exactly what those images might have been.

THE MAN WHO WALKED IN COLOR


Reviewed by Stephen Petersen.
doi:10.1162/LEON_r_01734

I first encountered the work of James Turrell completely by chance while on a high-school field trip to the Whitney Museum in 1980, and my idea of art, and indeed my way of looking at the world, was forever changed. The intensity of light that is Turrell’s main material impressed itself on my wide-open 17-year-old eyes. The exhibit, “James Turrell: Light and Space,” filled one entire floor of the museum with the artist’s large-scale light-projection works, whose radiant shapes and glowing edges create a sense of perceptual indeterminacy. Indeed, such was the illusionism of the works on display at the Whitney that two separate viewers would file suit against the museum, claiming the art had made them “disoriented and confused” and caused them literally to fall down and injure themselves in the gallery. The mix of ecstasy and threat induced by what is, after all, completely abstract work, gives Turrell’s art a special status: It acts upon the viewer, effecting a transformation.

In his slim but densely structured philosophical study, which takes the form of an extended fable, French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman explores the visionary quality of Turrell’s work in both its spiritual and phenomenological dimensions. Written in 2001 and translated here into English, the book begins where it ends, with Turrell’s massive, decades-in-the-making, still unfinished, and perhaps impossible project the Roden Crater, an ancient volcanic mountain in the Arizona desert with a series of experiential chambers designed to present natural light phenomena with infinite subtlety for viewing over protracted periods of time. Didi-Huberman’s first chapter is a meditation on the Book of Exodus as an analog to Turrell’s own wandering quest through the desert and the artist’s rejection of the graven image in favor of a faith in the power of a vision shown only in its absence, demanding a sort of sacrifice and a waiting.

Continuing the theological theme, Didi-Huberman goes on to explore the paradox of seeing light and color in the absence of a distinct object of sight, as manifest in medieval stained-glass windows and, in particular, in the Byzantine gold and jeweled screen behind the altar in the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, known as the Pala d’oro. For worshipers the work was physically at a remove but visually present as a glowing patch that brought itself near to the viewer. One could not approach the thing itself, but “the radiant brilliance encounters me” (p. 19). This distant intimacy is at the core of Turrell’s project, as evidenced in his early and midcareer works installed into the architecture of the gallery, such that an apparent glowing rectangular field on a wall is in fact a cut-out opening into a dazzling void. Instead of an illuminated surface, the viewer encounters an illumination devoid of its object: “Light is no longer this abstract quality that makes objects visible—concrete and paradoxical, and whose paradox Turrell intensifies by rendering light massive—light is itself the object of vision” (p. 36).

Turrell painstakingly structures the conditions for experiencing the ineffable, thus “presenting the limitless within the framework of a rigorous architectural description” (p. 34). He is in this way not so much an artist as a “constructor of temples,” but one who nonetheless sacrifices the theological and mythic underpinnings of temples in favor of a predominantly perceptual framework. In his Skyspaces, Turrell frames overhead sections of the sky, with an emphasis on those early and late times of day when the light changes. My most recent experience of Turrell’s work was his Skyspace on the campus of Rice University in Houston, where a preprogrammed Twilight Epiphany takes place every evening (a large square of crepuscular sky is
framed by a sort of ceiling on which is projected a sequence of saturated colors). The piece requires roughly an hour of the spectator’s time. One cannot “grasp” the work as a typical art object, in one’s own time, but rather one is subjected to the unfolding time of the sky at sunset with its dynamic gradations. The sky becomes radically foregrounded; it “is no longer a neutral background for seeing things, but an active field of unpredictable visual experience” (p. 68). Such works, suggests Didi-Huberman, are at once about a depth that comes toward us, and a flatness that gives way to infinite space: “So what then do we see? Neither a sculpture nor a painting. But the architectural condition of an experimentation for going beyond both painting or sculpture as genres of the Fine Arts” (p. 68).

Given the myriad spiritual associations of the sky and the heavens which become Turrell’s overarching subject as well as his primary material, Didi-Huberman asks: Are Turrell’s works ultimately mystical in nature? His answer: “Absolutely not, if the work simply remains at this level: emptying out spaces in order to produce nameless places, without symbols, without watchwords, without laws, without any other function than a visual one” (p. 80). But this absence of symbolism, or larger graspable “meaning” is what makes Turrell’s works ultimately so meaningful. It also makes the project of analysis a pointless one insofar as there are too many potential interpretations and none of them sufficient. Hence the self-consciously fabular nature of this book, which, like its subject, ventures shifting ways of looking, without trying, or indeed being able, to fix an object in its sight.

**CONFERENCE**

**12TH CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND THE ARTS: GREEN**


**Reviewed by Giovanna L. Costantini.**

doi:10.1162/LEON_r_01735

The 2018 Conference of the European Society for Literature, Science and the Arts convened in Copenhagen 13–16 June on the theme of GREEN, a cross-disciplinary optic through which to explore questions of political, social and environmental sustainability. Concurrent streams of over 180 papers, keynote presentations, panels, workshops, screenings and exhibitions probed GREEN’s intersections within fields ranging from philosophy, art and literature to the political, social, natural, technological and physical sciences. To emphasize the rationale and scope of the conference, Conference Chair Jens Hauser branded the color green “more concept than color,” often reduced to mere metaphor stripped of material, epistemological and historical referents. "This confusion,” he argues, “increasingly obstructs an interdisciplinary dialogue between the humanities and the natural sciences—a dialogue which is urgently required considering anthropogenic effects on climate and biodiversity.”

An emphasis on conceptual, process-driven paradigms of trans-disciplinary social ecology stimulated debates on relations between the biosphere and techno-sphere, Earth and planetary systems; post-humanism and de-growth theory; anthropogenic transformation and problems related to economic and industrial development, population displacement, sustenance and other consequences of supply and demand economics and capitalist expansion. Within these areas, presenters challenged time-honored epistemologies, theoretical models, critical methods, established canons and lexicons. Contentious sociopolitical issues included climate change, the depletion of natural resources, wildlife preservation, pollution, biodiversity, feminism, indigenous cultures and postcolonial identity. At the same time artists and philosophers, natural and social scientists interacted to address relationships, systems and policies conducive to ecological stability and humanistic endeavor.

A “Planthropocene,” proposed by Natasha Myers, associate professor of Anthropology at York University, Toronto, as an unbounded episteme of photosynthetic regeneration, offered one of many ecological foci for germinating growth. Others included University of Copenhagen Professor Birger Lindberg Møller’s research in plant biochemistry and medicinal compounds pertinent to the formation of new, potentially curative molecular structures; the artistic research of Agnes Meyer-Brandis into migratory tree cultures drawn from climate and environmental studies, meteorology and synthetic biology; Oana Khintirian and Sha Xin Wei’s time-lapse photography of plant movements suggestive of a dance of attraction and abandonment; Line Marie Thorsen’s critical study of Japanese artist Watanabe Koichi’s Itadori, a work based on a prized perennial known as an invasive species; Karine Bonneval’s experimental films evocative of tree respiration; and an assessment of Copenhagen’s “Urban Forest” project, a plan to introduce thousands of trees to the inner city over the coming decade as an ecological paradigm.

Copenhagen’s Medical Museion, a combined museum and research unit of the University of Copenhagen, featured impressive displays of scientific inquiry. Austrian artist Thomas Feuerstein’s installation *Metabolic Machines* explores the transformation of living matter into technologically altered biological sculptures. With Adam Bencard, associate professor in Medical Humanities at the Novo Nordisk Foundation for Basic...
Metabolic Research, attendees toured “Mind the Gut,” a permanent exhibition of complex interactions between neural networks and microbiota that investigates correlations between the digestive and nervous systems. Staged in the Amphitheatre of the Royal Academy of Surgeons of 1787, artist Margarete Jahrmann and neuroscientist Stefan Glasauer performed a speculative flow model of the brain as an optical discharge of particles transmitted in the manner of vascular diffusion. Other conference sessions included pioneering research on human reproduction, plant and human biology and microbiology, botany, geology, endocrinology, immunology, mortality and extinction, gene therapy, radioactivity and applied kinesiology.

The Statens Museum for Kunst, the National Gallery of Denmark, hosted a spectrum of creative performances, art and sound installations, concerts, dances and talks by Danish contemporary artists on the theme of green. In a presentation entitled “Green Shadows,” accompanied by a light sculpture by Hubert Schmidt, Olaf L. Müller, professor of Philosophical Science at Humboldt University, Berlin, challenged Goethe, Ritter and Ørsted’s identification of green photons predicated on the principle of polarity by demonstrating the contemporaneous projection of purple light, green’s counterpart, indicative of complementary inversion. The Museum Garden staged electronic jam sessions, interactive choreographies and tastings of cocktails mixed from plant and flower extracts. Parallel conference streams explored a panoply of art-related subjects: color theory, color science and color perception; languages of color and color homophones; multicultural historicities of green from ancient through postwar eras; curation, collecting, conservation and museology subjects, including matters associated with eco-art; landscape painting and art materials. Presenters scrutinized Matthew Barney’s “Drawing Restraint 9,” Frank Gehry’s MPk20 Facebook complex, Aarhus’s Memorial Park and New York’s Riverfront Park Soundwalk as models of visionary and/or dystopian design. Related to the visual arts were also interpretive encounters with pastoral and romantic literature, poetry, futurist ectopias and feminine gardens, Middlesex, Martha Graham and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Gareth Doherty, assistant professor of Landscape Architecture and Senior Research Associate at Harvard Graduate School of Design, described his fieldwork in Bahrain in a semiplenary address that offered another model of vanguard disciplinarity coupled with innovative methodology. Through ongoing direct interpersonal encounters with native citizens, his research in landscape architecture integrates urbanistic studies, social and political science, ethnography, cultural anthropology and language. His investigation of semiotic codings of green within Bahrainian society aims to orient landscape design in Bahrain within its broader context of indigenous religious, political and economic interests and traditions.

In league with these cross-disciplinary tendencies, Brigitte Luis Guillermo Baptiste’s riveting presentation “Queering Ecology in ‘Trans’ Colombia” surveyed relationships between reproductive species and the environment that derive from sociopolitical constructs in which “queerness” epitomizes the ecological complexity of being. “The cultural interpretation of biological facts is complicated,” Baptiste asserts. “Genes, organisms, species, biological communities and ecosystems are complex entities built by human societies over the last centuries, but most often without acknowledging the previous millions of years of evolution. In that process we have created the idea of nature as something external, stable, as a gem only waiting for us to become a jewel.” Baptiste, General Director of Colombia’s Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute, a national facility for biodiversity research, labels biodiversity the “green stuff from which all other conditions arise.” Addressing the politicization of the biosphere, Baptiste stressed the urgency and complexity of socioecological challenges faced today, challenges that include contested levels of development, mining, fracking, hydropower dams, industrial agriculture, wilderness management, mixed ecosystems and deforestation. Impacted by disparate cultural identities, politicized racial and gender identification, private investments, labor syndication and other forces, Baptiste advocates for transitions towards sustainable change in Colombia, for ideas that respect its cultural diversity and social evolution while seeking to protect the fragile interplay of ecological, developmental and political interests that form the institutional interface between science and socioenvironmental policy. “We must confront complexity,” Baptiste resolutely declared to an attentive audience, to sustain our evolving capacity for habitable life.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s keynote, “Coat of Many Colors,” also sought to permeate interstitial barriers that hamper exploration. Tsing, professor of anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Niels Bohr Professor at Aarhus University in Denmark, recipient of numerous awards, is best known for her most recent book, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins (2017, Princeton University Press). For Tsing, green is a variegated concept, one that extends across continents and cultures, disciplines and perspectives as multifarious as the tonalities of trees. In a worldview that vastly encompasses social groups divided by difference and inequality, she warned that the ecological consequences of imperial and industrial infrastructures threaten to destroy the privilege of living in a green world, a world whose tonal nuances may be conveyed in Dolly Parton’s song “Coat of Many Colors” as they are through many Indonesian myths and parables. She points to toxic fungi that threaten the survival of the human race in the fantasy worlds of Myosaki and...
death by plastic seen tragically in a cinematic trailer for *Albatross* by Chris Jordan which depicts the painful death of seagulls from ingestion of plastic debris. To counter such pernicious conditions, she advocates mutualism and transformation inspired by nature: the ash of Norse mythology, a tree of life, which grows in hostile places or the integrated relationship of birds to trees to seed dispersal and the semination of fruits. She urges, in their likeness, an ethics of care whereby humanity strives to emulate the birds and the trees in ways that express the life-affirming ethos of a conference dedicated to color, an awareness she experienced among biologists investigating the survival strategies of fungal cultures. Thrilled to find yellow’s brilliant chroma at the core of a barren rock crevice, she marveled with wonderment at the “sheer heterogeneous exuberance of the chemical expression of the natural world.” Her comments echoed the exhilarating spirit of discovery that imbued the SLSAeu’s conference on GREEN with stunning reach and global import for the future of venturesome research.

### NOVEMBER 2018


### OCTOBER 2018


### SEPTEMBER 2018


*The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* by Erin E. Edwards; *Life: A Modern Invention* by David Tarizzo, translated by Mark William Epstein; *Die and Become! Art and Science as the Conjectured Possible* by Dmitry Bulatov. Reviewed by Brian Reffin Smith.


*Music by the Numbers: From Pythagoras to Schoenberg* by Eli Maor. Reviewed by Phil Dyke.


Totally Random by Tanya Bub and Jeffrey Bub. Reviewed by John F. Barber.