

***Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* Ed. Angela Dalle Vacche. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 (334 pages). ISBN: 978-0230272927.**

A Review by Jill Murphy, University College Cork

In 1947, André Malraux published the first of his three-volume art history series, *Psychologie de l'art*, in which he put forward the concept of the *musée imaginaire* or museum without walls.¹ Malraux's work was originally prompted, similarly to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) before it, by the realisation that high quality photographic reprints allow a far greater audience to experience artworks and artefacts housed in museums, without the requirement to be physically present in the building. Thus, a museum of images is created, which, as Edson Rosa Da Silva observes, is particular to each individual: "a museum that seems to consist of works that choose us more than we choose them" (247). In the twenty-first century, the continual acceleration in technological development confers a renewed import on Malraux's work—and Benjamin's. The digital image has substituted mass reproduced photography and film in their analogue forms, while the personalised aspect of the museum without walls has become exemplified by social media sites such as Tumblr or Pinterest, on which a myriad of virtual museums of images curated by individuals are on view. This is equally true at an institutional level, as witnessed by the growth in digital humanities courses in universities and the scale of digital archive projects such as Europeana (www.europeana.eu), an E.U. portal providing digital access to a wide array of cultural artefacts such as paintings, films, sculpture and museum objects from over two thousand E.U. institutions. As Michael Temple observes:

[T]he concept of the imaginary museum, invented by Malraux at least as early as 1947, appears to pre-empt so much of our current discourse on virtualities and digitalities. His key insight is that, thanks first to the museum and now (in the 1940s) to contemporary forms of reproduction and distribution, we are able to inhabit an infinite cultural universe in which all arts of all epochs and all cultures are materially made available to us. (92)

This collection, edited by Angela Dalle Vacche and arising out of an international symposium that she convened in 2009 at the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, uses Malraux's concept as a point of departure. The book is divided into five parts according to the original panels of the symposium: "Early Cinema", "Film Theory", "Visual Studies, Art History, Film", "Painters and Filmmakers", and "Film, Museum, New Media". At first glance, the articulation of the various sections may seem slightly ambiguous, but as the book progresses, a strong internal logic unfolds in both the categorisation of the essays and their sequencing, which, not being prescriptive, allows fertile ground for dense and varied intermedial exploration of film's relationship with other art forms such as painting, literature, dance, architecture and digital media.

While Malraux's "free and peculiar assemblage" of the museum without walls figures in its title, the book does not confine itself to a Malrucian perspective (Rosa Da Silva 247). Indeed, Dalle Vacche in her Introduction immediately refocuses on André Bazin's notion of cinema as a device that mummifies motion in the same way as the museum preserves its contents. As Dudley Andrew identifies, Malraux's focus is on the genius of the artist, whereas Bazin's is firmly placed on the scientific, which consigns the Nietzschean artist as superman to the sidelines in favour of a contingency-based approach. Dalle Vacche terms this approach "anti-anthropocentric" to denote the preferencing of science over the human and sets it firmly centre stage as a governing premise for the collection (13). Equally, given the reference to Malraux's museum without walls in the title, the prospective reader should not labour under the impression that the museum, as was or as reimagined, is central to all the essays in the collection; rather, it provides a convenient means to facilitate, and indeed house, cinema's intermedial relationships with both *revenant* and *arrivant* art forms.

In the collection's opening essay, Lynda Nead considers the art documentary genre. Looking at the presentation of the artist at work in early films and in Henri-George Clouzot's documentary on Picasso, *Le mystère Picasso* (1956), she examines how, in the first case, the artist's studio forms the backdrop for a "battleground for a fascinating and frequently comic cultural struggle between the creative powers of art and film" (24), while, in Clouzot's treatment of Picasso, masculinity is inherently linked to creativity, with the artist's imagination presented as transcending the world of reality as depicted by film. She concludes that, regardless of the different presentations of the artist at work, cinema can only represent painting by showing an artwork in development; she also acknowledges that the addition of digital media into this already fraught relationship only problematises it further. Angela Dalle Vacche's contribution is a comparative case study of the Lumière brothers' *Partie d'écarté* (1896) and Cézanne's contemporaneous painting *The Card Players* (1890–1895). She examines how both works incorporate multiple elements of late nineteenth-century French culture and demonstrate what she describes, citing Jonathan Crary, as a "historical adjacency" to each other (53). Dalle Vacche reaches the rather poignant conclusion that this intermedial encounter denotes the end of genre painting and the future of cinema. In the final contribution in the early film section, "Medium is a Muscle", Nell Andrew looks at the "medium-confusion" that exists between dance, cinema and art history in the early twentieth century, and examines the role played by kinaesthesia and abstraction in the interstices between the different forms (58).

The second section in the book takes film theory as its theme. While the essays incorporate digital media into their respective discussions, the theories considered are, as the section heading suggests, predominantly based on the work of film—rather than new media—theorists. John McKay examines the relationship between Soviet Constructivism and Kino-Eye in the theory and practice of Dziga Vertov. McKay argues that the difference between the two lies in their conception of objectivity: the first tending to favour a structural objectivity whereas Kino-Eye is "a still-representation and *mechanical* model of objectivity" (85; emphasis in original). McKay shows that the socialisation of the filmic representation of reality that Vertov strives to achieve is ultimately figurative or metaphorical, save for a fleeting moment in the film *Kino-Eye* (*Kinoglaz*, 1924).

Following McKay's contribution, Trond Lundemo considers the problematic task of theorising the relationship between the still and moving image, using as examples the respective techniques of Vertov and Eisenstein for the quotation of movement, which, as Lundemo observes, directly derive from each director's theory of montage. Lundemo asserts

that Vertov's montage, based on dispersal of frames, and Eisenstein's, based on the still image, represent, in retrospect, the division between cinematic and digital motion.

In her Introduction, Angela Dalle Vacche describes Dudley Andrew's essay on the similarities and differences between the film-related writings of André Malraux, Walter Benjamin and André Bazin as "the centrepiece of the anthology as a whole" (3). The description is valid given that the essay unpacks the ideas that inform the original tension between art and cinema but which also find application in the more recent tensions that arise between the ontology of filmic and digital images. Beginning with Malraux, Andrew focuses both on his theory, specifically "Esquisse d'un psychologie du cinéma" ("Sketch for a Psychology of Cinema") and his practice, in the form of *Days of Hope (Espoir, Sierra de Teruel, 1945)*, a film based on his experiences of the Spanish Civil War; however, like Dalle Vacche, Andrew gradually realigns towards Bazin. As he succinctly surmises, while Malraux focuses on the great geniuses who scale "the mountain that is the quest for artistic drive", Bazin "explores the inhuman mountain like a geologist, layer under layer" (137).

Simon Dixon's essay, which closes this section, is a meditation on Victor Erice's *The Quince Tree Sun (El Sol del Membrillo, 1992)*, which itself is a meditation on the work of the realist painter Antonio López García. Like Lynda Nead, Dixon considers the art documentary's focus on the development of a painting—in this case, López's protracted attempts to capture on canvas early morning light on the quince tree in his garden—and examines how the stasis of painting is juxtaposed between the temporality of both film and nature. Here, Dixon extends Nead's argument to include the role of the digital image, which, he asserts, short-circuits the gap between model and representation.

In her essay "Of the Face, In Reticence", Noa Steimatsky adopts a strikingly novel approach, based on a study of autistic responses to the human face, to consider the possibility of an autistic gaze in the films of Robert Bresson, in which facial expression is stripped of the privileged position attributed to it by Béla Balázs. While the essay is perhaps situated a little outside the frame of reference of the collection, it forms a very interesting parallel with the work of Laura McMahon on the Nancean notion of touch without touch in Bresson's work.

In contrast, Lara Pucci's essay, the second in the section entitled "Visual Studies, Art History, Film", very much engages with the terms of reference of the collection exploring as it does urban-rural conflict in Alessandro Blasetti's *Terra Madre (1931)* and how its portrayal is influenced by similar depictions in contemporaneous polemical woodcuts by caricaturist Mino Maccari.

Sally Shafto's essay touches once again on the subject of Cézanne, who is also referenced by Dalle Vacche and Steimatsky. In this case, Shafto carefully and thoroughly dissects Straub and Huillet's eponymous first film on Cézanne (1989), commissioned by the Musée d'Orsay. Shafto's approach uncovers the dizzying intermediality and intertextuality at the heart of the film, which incorporates *inter alia* literary, philosophical, poetic and musical references. She also clearly identifies the filmmakers' fear of the museum, of cinema's fascination with art history and of iconisation, which makes their portrait of the artist, and Shafto's analysis of it, all the more compelling.

The relationship between Francis Bacon's artistic work and the cinematic image is relatively under-researched. As Susan Felleman points out in her essay, existing scholarship tends to treat any cinematic influence on Bacon as merely source material. However,

Felleman's focus lies in the opposite direction: Bacon's influence on cinema. Commencing with an artist's film that takes Bacon as its subject, John Maybury's *Love is the Devil* (1998), and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (*Ultimo Tango a Parigi*, 1972), she progresses to his aesthetic influence on commercial films such as *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) and then on to a similar influence on artists' video, specifically work by Paul Pfeiffer and Chloe Piene. Felleman concludes with a comparative analysis of Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), which she describes as "neither ancestor nor descendant" (233), and in which she discovers "a deep synchronicity" with Bacon's work (235).

In the same way as Susan Felleman identifies Bacon's cinematic influences being dismissed as mere source material, Ian Christie, in the penultimate section of the collection, reviews the history of cinema in the museum and concludes that the museum has never been comfortable with film as a primary material rather than audiovisual aid. However, considering the museum films of filmmakers such as Peter Greenaway, Aleksandr Sokurov and Straub and Huillet, he surmises that the museum "has little choice but to accede to its place in the culture of democratic spectacle" (250), asserting, with specific reference to Sokurov's museum films, that they allow us as viewers and visitors to "to meditate on the strangely durable authority of these historic spaceships" (252).

Still on the subject of Sokurov, Jeremi Szaniawski, in a sustained analysis of *Russian Ark* (*Russkiy kovcheg*, 2002), examines the utopian drive behind Sokurov's epic single-take project. In a collection that considers cinema as museum, cinema in the museum and the museum in cinema, it is fitting for *Russian Ark* to loom large—as one might have equally expected of another epic cinema-museum project, Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998), whose omission Dalle Vacche acknowledges in her Introduction. Accordingly, Szaniawski leisurely unpacks the various elements inherent in the film such as digital versus analogue, museum function versus cinematic function and the film's complex, multivalent relationship with Russian culture and the filmmaker's personal history.

Of all the essays in the collection, the final two engage most directly with new media within and without the museum. Firstly, François Penz presents two research projects undertaken at the University of Cambridge dealing with digitality and the museum, within which cinema's relationship with the museum figures emphatically, particularly in relation to the analogy between real space and screen space. Penz proposes various scenarios: the moving image's ability to capture the museum experience, using the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge as a case study; the exploration of museum space as analogous to cinematic experience and, finally, narrative layers as discursive formation, using the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris as a case study. In the latter, the layers comprise the building, the artefacts, personal experience, curatorial narrative and, lastly, interactive touch screens. Penz concludes that screen media, in its various encounters with museum space, challenges the conventional material structure of the museum, affording "innovative, empowering and immaterial freedom" (297). Gavin Hogben in the collection's closing essay looks at the move away from objects and collections—and indeed museums generally—to performance and events. Citing Robert Smithson's description of the museum as the lobotomisation of art work for consumption as "visual fodder" (302), Hogben identifies this dictum, and the land art movement generally, as a starting point for the move away from museum space. He then proceeds to analyse how digital media has further facilitated this development, using Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010) as an example of how the shifting sands of digital technology destabilise the function of the museum even further.

Considered as a whole, the book forms a satisfying chronological trajectory from late nineteenth century to early twenty-first century, from the Lumière Brothers to Banksy and, in doing so, links the profound transitions experienced from the advent of the moving image to its digital reinvention and identifies the by-times problematic, by-times synergistic relationships between art history, film and new media. However, *caveat emptor* to those who, on the basis of the collection's title, may mistakenly think that equal weight is assigned to these three forms. Cinema is situated very much at the forefront of the majority of essays here, while the role played by both art and new media is an adjunct one. This positioning of analogue cinema as a cornerstone of the collection confers on the latter an admirable unity of purpose, which could have been easily foregone if the scope or focus had been broader. Having established cinema as a museum of images for the twentieth century, the collection lays a foundation on which further intermedial film-based scholarship can build. Irrespective of the direction the latter might take, this impressive volume initiates a constructive and engaging discourse that fluidly links the origins and precursors of cinema to the developing and future ontologies of its successors.

Notes

¹ The first version of “Le musée imaginaire” originally appeared in *Verve* journal in 1937.

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