of clothing to exemplify more precisely the body as such. The role of women in performance is a revelation in itself. Misler sets it within a longer history, beginning with Émile-Jaques Dalcroze’s course in ‘rythmics’ – physical exercises taught in St Petersburg in the later 1890s – and the establishment of the Drambalet (drama ballet) in Moscow in 1918. The following year, the State Institute of Rhythmical Education was set up by Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Enlightenment (Secretary for Education and Culture). In 1920 the Studio of Free Ballet appeared in Moscow and Nikolai Foregger set up a studio of Mechanical Dance. The Central Institute of Labour opened under Aleksei Gastev in 1921 and Isadora Duncan danced barefoot at the Communist International on 7th November 1921. A choreographic laboratory was established at the State Academy of Artistic Science (1921–29), organising four exhibitions under the title The Art of Movement. The archive of this project is an invaluable source of visual and documentary material, recording informative debates concerning the dance studios of Foregger and the Kasian Goleizovsky (p.10). The second exhibition in 1926 featured Meyerhold’s system of biomechanics used on stage in 1922, demonstrating the mechanistic, gymnastic and circus-like effects of the ‘body as such’ (p.166). Goleizovsky organised the largest spectacular displays of gymnastics in Soviet parades, uniting sport, acrobatics, dance, political persuasion and military precision. He became the mentor of the dancer and choreographer George Balanchine.

This authoritative compendium is meticulously annotated. Full information is provided concerning the arguments, groups and their aims as they proliferated in the 1920s, before the emergence of the disciplined parades for the masses, seemingly the very opposite of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. This is essential reading for any scholar of dance, mass culture, ergonomics, radical stage design as well as Russian and Soviet culture more broadly. It is an equally vital source for dancers and photographers. The leaps and flowing movements illustrated on almost every page persuade the reader that these innovations marked a new beginning in dance.

2 N. Misler: Vnachale Bylo Telo: Ritmoplasticheskie Eksperimenty nachala XX veika [In the Beginning was the Body. Rhythmic-plastic experiments at the start of the twentieth century], Moscow 2011.

Reframing Luchino Visconti: Film and Art

by ROBERT SILBERMAN
An important theatre and opera director as well as one of the major figures in the history of the cinema, Luchino Visconti (1906–76) is a demanding object of study. Fortunately, Ivo Blom, who wrote his dissertation on the Italian master in the 1980s, proves up to the task. At the heart of this book is a basic question: where does the imagery in Visconti’s films come from? In attempting to provide an answer Blom draws upon art history, fashion design, literature and music, along with cinema history and cultural theory. Visconti had a perfectionist’s concern with the smallest details, and so does Blom. His comparison between a scene in Visconti’s The Leopard (1963) and one in the Hollywood film The Lives of a Bengal Lancer (1935) might seem to rest on accidental similarity, except that Blom both quotes a letter written by Visconti in which he praises Bengal Lancer as ‘magnificent’ and identifies the theatre in Paris where the future director is likely to have seen it. Blom does not, however, get lost in the details. He may point out that Visconti corrected an anachronism that Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, the author of the novel The Leopard (1958), made when he described one of the mid-nineteenth-century characters as wearing long opera gloves. But Blom then goes beyond that seemingly pedantic lesson in fashion history to explain why, despite Visconti’s attention to period detail, the style of a character’s dress in another film is ‘as much reminiscent of 1950s fashion as of the 1860s – as much Dior, Balenciaga and Balmain as Worth’ (p.110). In fact, Visconti was never...
a copystyle when it came to historical models; he reinvented source material so that it could more fully serve the characters and the narrative. As Umberto Torelli, who provided costumes for The Leopard and other Visconti films, explained, the director sought what was ‘non vero, ma di verità’ – in Blom’s translation, ‘not real, but based on the truth’ (p.204). And inevitably the present always informed Visconti’s view of the past.

Next to Senso (1954) and The Leopard, the great costume dramas made in colour that are central to Blom’s discussion, the black-and-white films set in the present such as Ossessione (1943), La Terra Tremà (1948) and Rocco and His Brothers (1960), and the late colour films such as Death in Venice (1971) and Conversation Piece (1974) also receive attention. Blom is especially good at discussing Visconti’s use of painting, including a famous quotation of Francesco Hayez’s The Kiss (1859; Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan) in Senso. Blom demonstrates ‘the intense and sustained linkages that Visconti’s films have with pictorial traditions of European high art’ (p.29) with consistently well-chosen illustrations, such as a series that matches film stills from Death in Venice with paintings by Turner, Monet and Giovanni Boldini. The author’s awareness of changing taste and canons in art and film history is evident, and his analyses go well beyond mere annotation of source material. There is, for example, an excellent discussion of the significance of Franz Winterhalter, an artist out of favour when Senso was made but important in his time and for Visconti’s purposes. Blom does equally well when commenting on changes in Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s reputation as part of his discussion of The Leopard, citing Anita Brookner’s two-part article of 1956 in this Magazine.1

When Blom shifts from costume and set design to cinematography, he emphasises Visconti’s staging in depth, framing, mobile framing and use of mirrors. He acknowledges the difficulty of comparing painting and film: ‘Viscontial tracking shots have no direct equivalents in painting, even if his lateral tracking forward through deeply staged images harks back to classic genre painting, and his lateral tracking seems to build on panoramic painting [. . .] painting may suggest movement but film shows it’ (p.207; Blom’s italics). In introducing what he describes as ‘media archaeology’, Blom places Visconti’s style in the context of the films that shaped his cinematic vision, most notably those by Jean Renoir, the French director with whom Visconti first entered the world of film as a costume and props assistant. Sections on topics such as veiling and unveiling may seem idiosyncratic but prove productive, as in the comment that the unveiling of the main female character by her lover in Senso provides a symbolic unmasking of her true situation as a debased countess.

Blom’s research is strengthened by his fine use of interviews with Visconti’s collaborators and his archival study of production records. The book’s occasional awkwardness stems from its ambitious scope. Blom does justice to Visconti’s sensibility and style, and to the complexities presented by the visual images in the films. The study consistently enriches the viewing experience of both specific moments and extended passages, such as the grand ball at the end of The Leopard. Blom’s revealing analysis of this tour de force of costume and set design, staging and filming beautifully demonstrates the value of his multifaceted approach.


The Eye: An Insider’s Memoir of Masterpieces, Money, and the Magnetism of Art

by RICHARD E. SPEAR

The Eye is a hybrid, part memoir, part an apologia for connoisseurship. Its inimitable title, the author explains, signifies more than having an eye, but the profession of being an eye. The book originally appeared as Histoires d’œils (2016), although its Italian title, Avventure di un occhio (2017), is most fitting.

Philippe Costamagna is a specialist on Pontormo, Bronzino, Salviati and minor artists of the cinquecento, all of whom play a role in this narration of his quests for attributions. His aim is to explain how he and a small number of other gifted art historians became an eye, someone who can establish authorship of paintings by sight alone (Costamagna believes that he is one of ‘the few people’ with an eye for both paintings and drawings). The process ‘is not a form of genius but an acutely refined sense of analysis, an ability to break down the painting one is looking at into a collection of distinctive traits found in the diverse works of artists [. . .] I lay claim to the legacy of Giovanni Morelli’ (pp.2 and 239).

The Eye’s skill arises from innate talent, a sense of beauty and training (‘though I myself was born with an eye, I became an Eye. I learned to see’), p.240). Costamagna acknowledges the importance of his teacher in Paris, Sylvie Béguin, and of his mentor at the Longhi Foundation, Mina Gregori. He traces the lineage of Eyes back to Giorgio Vasari, Luigi Lanzi and Stendhal, but only with Morelli and G.B. Cavalcaselle does one encounter ‘the very first Eyes in the history of art’. Special attention is paid to ‘Our Holy Trinity’ (p.65): Bernard Berenson (‘the true father of the modern Eye’) (p.64), Roberto Longhi and Federico Zeri, ‘a kind of sacred monster’ (p.86).

Costamagna recognises that the Holy Trinity profited enormously from involvement in the trade and often were charged with dishonesty (Carlo Pedretti is cited for similar abuses as a Leonardo authority). Moreover, in collusion with the politician and dealer Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Longhi ‘no doubt aided certain dignitaries of the time to obtain stolen works, hide them during the war, sell them for their own benefit, and protect them when it was all over’ (p.81). Nevertheless, ‘none of this really matters all that much anymore’ in light of the contributions the Holy Trinity made to scholarship and collecting. The ethical stakes in connoisseurship are notoriously high because an Eye’s opinion can greatly affect a work’s value. Although Costamagna refuses to accept airline tickets from collectors in order to avoid obligations when deciding on authorship, ‘there is no reason’ (unless forbidden by terms of employment) for Eyes ‘not to earn a commission’ (p.208). If ‘commission’ bears its customary meaning in English and French – a percentage of money received – however, then there is good reason not to earn a commission: the creation of a conflict of interest, which could be avoided with a fixed fee that is unrelated to the expert’s opinion or the work’s value. It is in this context that Frank Wynne’s otherwise admirable translation of The Eye is seriously misleading. Costamagna’s word ‘expertise’ in Histoires d’œils is translated as ‘appraisal’, leading to the false notion that American and British academics regularly issue ‘appraisal documents’ instead of statements of opinion without market valuations. This matters because in The Eye the ‘appraiser’ is said to be vulnerable ‘to all sorts of excesses’ and the Eye should not ‘open himself up to criticism by offering appraisals’ (p.202).

In any case, connoisseurship, it is alleged, barely exists any longer, other than at the