People call themselves poets and painters, and seek help for their failures, as I might come to a psychiatrist to discover the causes of my vaulter's block or to find out why I can't get anywhere in nuclear physics. Indeed, regularly people push through the turnstiles of the critic's day who feel very strongly the need to pass as poets, to be called "creative," to fit themselves into a certain social niche, acquire an identity the way one acquires plants there's no time to tend or fish that can't be kept alive, and their problems are important and interesting and genuine enough; but they are not the problems of poets as poets, any more than the child who tiptoes to school on the tops of fences has the steel-worker's nerves or nervousness or rightly deserves his wage.


During the most austere phase of Analytical Cubism, when he and Braque were working in closely related styles, Picasso one day went to look at his friend's latest work. Suddenly, he became aware that there was a squirrel in the picture, and pointed it out to Braque, who was rather abashed at this discovery. The next day Braque showed him the picture again, after reworking it to get rid of the squirrel, but Picasso insisted that he still saw it, and it took another reworking to banish the animal for good.


Ne day Schwitters decided he wanted to meet George Grosz. George Grosz was decidedly surly; the hatred in his pictures often overflowed into his private life. But Schwitters was not one to be put off. He wanted to meet Grosz, so Mehring took him up to Grosz's flat. Schwitters rang the bell and Grosz opened the door. "Good morning, Herr Grosz. My name is Schwitters."

"I am not Grosz," answered the other and slammed the door. There was nothing to be done.

Half way down the stairs, Schwitters stopped suddenly and said, "Just a moment."

Up the stairs he went, and once more rang Grosz's bell. Grosz, enraged by this continual jangling, opened the door, but before he could say a word, Schwitters said "I am not Schwitters, either." And went downstairs again. Finis. They never met again.


There was a man whose chatter in certain circumstances made it necessary for me to listen to. At every opportunity he was ready with a little philosophical lecture, a very tiresome harangue. Almost in despair, I suddenly discovered that he perspired copiously when talking. I saw the pearls of sweat gather on his brow, unite to form a stream, glide down his nose, and hang at the extreme point of his nose in a drop-shaped body. From the moment of making this discovery, all was changed. I even took pleasure in inciting him to begin his philosophical instruction, merely to observe the perspiration on his brow and at the end of his nose.

This issue is dedicated to

**LIAM HUDSON**

**BALLAST** is privately published. It is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing, or thought provoking. Its purposes are educational, apolitical, and entirely noncommercial. It does not carry paid advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is issued quarterly in September, December, March, and June. There is no charge for subscriptions as such, and (to the extent that finances allow) the journal will gladly be mailed to people who send in their mailing address, accompanied by two first class stamps (22¢ U.S. postage stamps) for each of the issues requested. To subscribe for one full year (a series of four issues), send in a total of eight first class stamps (current value of $1.76). No other currency will be accepted. Do not send cash, checks, or money orders. Nor can the journal be ordered by phone. Subscription requests must be mailed to: BALLAST Quarterly Review, 2968 North Prospect Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211. Readers are also encouraged to send examples of verbal and visual wit of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material should be explicitly labeled as that. Material which is not original must clearly make note of its author and source. Unsolicited material will not be returned unless it is accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage affixed. Copyright © 1985 by Roy R. Behrens.

---

**ballast** (bal’ast), n. 1. something heavy carried in a ship to steady it. 2. weight carried in a balloon or dirigible to control it. 3. anything which steadies a person or thing. 4. gravel or crushed rock used in making the bed for a road or railroad track. —v. furnish with ballast. 5. give steadiness to. 6. load or weigh down (appar). [Scand. (Old Dan.) bal’ast < barlare + last load]. —bal’last-er, n.
After dinner, Duchamp would take the bus to Nice to play at a chess circle and return late with Lydie (his first wife) lying awake waiting for him. Even so, he did not go to bed immediately, but set up the chess pieces to study the position of a game he had been playing. First thing in the morning when he arose, he went to the chessboard to make a move he had thought out during the night. But the piece could not be moved—during the night Lydie had arisen and glued down all the pieces... A few months later Duchamp and Lydie divorced, and he returned to the States.


The three panels of the rounded triptych (shown below) indicate three domains of creativity which shade into each other without sharp boundaries: Humour, Discovery, and Art. Each horizontal line across the triptych stands for a pattern of creative activity which is represented on all three panels; for instance: comic comparison—objective analogy—poetic image. The first is intended to make us laugh; the second to make us understand; the third to make us marvel. The logical pattern of the creative process is the same in all three cases; it consists in the discovery of hidden similarities.


---

Recommen...
Contrary to my hopes we spoke little, but we devoured each other with our eyes...suddenly I had the whim of trying to appear in his eyes as a kind of dandy of "universal intellectualism." I learned later that the effect I produced was exactly the opposite.

Before leaving I wanted to give him a magazine containing an article I had written on paranoia. I therefore opened the magazine at the page mentioned, begging him to read it...Freud continued to stare at me without paying the slightest attention to my article. Trying to interest him, I explained that it was not a Surrealist diversion, but...an ambitiously scientific article, and I repeated the title, pointing to it with my finger. Before his imperturbable indifference my voice became sharper and more insistent. Then, continuing to stare at me with a fixity in which his whole being seemed to converge, Freud exclaimed, addressing Stefan Zweig, "You have never seen a more complete example of a Spaniard. What a fanatic!"

Salvador Dalí (describing his first and only meeting with Sigmund Freud, on 1 July 1936, when Freud was in his eighties), quoted in "Freud and Dali: Personal Moments" by Sharon Romm and Joseph William Slap in American Imago, vol 10, no 4, Winter 1983, pp. 344-345.

Alexander Woolcott (reviewing a play): The scenery was beautiful, but the actors got in front of it.

Son of the Morning Star

Custer and the Little Bighorn

Evan S. Connell

Son of the Morning Star

Custer and the Little Bighorn


That hat is a double petunia? A petunia is a flower like a begonia. A begonia is a meat like a sausage. A sausage-ana-battery is a crime. Monkeys crime trees. Tree's a crowd. A crowd in the morning and made a noise. A noise is on your face between your eyes. Eyes is the opposite of nays. A Colt nays. You go to bed with a Colt, and wake up in the morning with a case of double petunia.


The Wapituii are like us to an extraordinary degree. They have a kinship system which is very similar to our kinship system. They address each other as "Mister," "Mistress," and "Miss." They wear clothes which look very much like our clothes. They have a kinship system which divides their territory into east and west. They have a Chock Oll Nuts and a Chevrolet, one of each. They have a Museum of Modern Art and a telephone and a Martini, one of each. The Martini and the telephone are kept in the Museum of Modern Art. In fact they have everything that we have, but only one of each thing.

We found that they lose interest very quickly. For instance they are fully industrialized, but they don't seem interested in taking advantage of it. After the steel mill produced the ingot, it was shut down. They can conceptualize but they don't follow through. For instance, their week has seven days--Monday, Monday, Monday, Monday, Monday, Monday, Monday. They have one disease, mononucleosis. The sex life of a Wapituii consists of a single experience, which he thinks about for a long time.

When I was about five years old, my father happened to be in a basement-chamber of our house, where they had been washing, and where a good fire of oak-logs was still burning; he had a violin in his hand, and was playing and singing alone beside the fire. The weather was very cold. Happening to look into the fire, he spied in the middle of those most burning flames a little creature like a lizard, which was sporting in the core of the intensest coals. Becoming instantly aware of what the thing was, he had my sister and me called, and pointing it out to us children, gave me a great box on the ears, which caused me to howl and weep with all my might.

Then he pacified me good-humouredly, and spoke as follows: "My dear little boy, I am not striking you for any wrong that you have done, but only to make you remember that that lizard which you see in the fire is a salamander, a creature which has never been seen before by any one of whom we have credible information." So saying, he kissed me and gave me some pieces of money.


Kenneth Tynan: A critic is a man who knows the way but can’t drive the car.

The cult of the young painter did not hit the art world until the Eighties, because it took ten years for the results of the Sixties to trickle down through art education. The distrust of "elitism," the weakening of academic criteria, the fetishized view of "creativity," the subservience to the whims or apathies of students—these affected art schools just as they affected all other schools. The number of art schools had swollen, whether they were adjuncts to universities or local showplaces. Lavishly endowed with studio space, spray booths, kilns, welding gear, and huge litho presses, these academies proliferated from Maine to Albuquerque, with especially heavy concentrations on the West Coast. Their entrance requirements were not stiff, and the intelligence of their students, as a rule, not high. Their concern was volume. They provided tenurc to a large population of FFFAs—Formerly Fairly Famous Artists—who could not support themselves on sales alone and so regarded teaching as a survival chore, which should not consume the energies they needed to muster in their studios. Because the system of apprenticeship and assistantship that had enabled teaching studios from Verrocchio's to Thomas Couture's to instruct by hard practice had gone the way of the dodo, they could not bring their own art-making into their teaching. A seminar, a bull session, a pat on the head—but not (or all too rarely) that harsh and fond engagement that distinguishes the true teacher, one of whose marks is the gumption to show an argumentative or narcissistic student that he, or she, is on a wrong track. There was no "right" or "wrong." This was art; everyone did his own thing.


Undoubtedly one of the best books on mimetic resemblance in natural forms is Mimicry in Plants and Animals by Wolfgang Wickler (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1968). The author's text is amplified by fifty illustrations by Hermann Kacher. The cover (reproduced at left) presents a composite of two unrelated varieties of butterflies, set up to aid in comparing their wings. The left wing is that of Atrophanaura coon, a distasteful "model" which is avoided by predators, while the right is the wing of the "mimic," Papilio memnon, a palatable source of food for birds, and yet it too is avoided because it looks like the poisonous form.

Wolfgang Wickler
Mimicry
in plants and animals

While writing this letter I was trying to catch a mouse in the studio. It kept rustling more and more inconsiderately in the wastepaper basket. So I placed a bucket of water next to the wastepaper basket, built a bridge out of cardboard and scattered sugar on the end that was suspended over the bucket. One strip of cardboard fell into the water, and the mouse leaped back into the basket. The next time the gimmick worked, that is, the mouse fell into the water and swam desperately about; I wanted to hasten its end by pushing it under. The pail, elevated on a little box, tipped over, the water spilled all over me, and the mouse escaped. All that remains is the stench, probably from the cold sweat—I trust the mouse won't catch cold!


The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer
Selected and edited by TUT SCHLEMMER
Translated from the German by EKHEDA WINSTON

5
When Iris woke up one Sunday morning and recognized that Robert was dead, she passed the rest of the day in silence, absorbed in the problem of how to explain to him what she knew he would refuse to believe.

The simplest prejudice of all, the basic current of judgment in the academy at large, is the distinction between the "hard" and the "soft." Either, this distinction says, we are trying to do science or we are engaged in some-thing quite different: politics, therapy, journalism, self-expression. The arts in particular are seen as peripheral, or—worse—as "fun," that is to say, as a simple emotional release that receives little professionally academic attention because it deserves none. Yet the briefest glance shows that poems, novels, paintings, photographs, plays, films of any quality are rarely fun, either for artist or for spectator; what is more, that they are at least as carefully poised, as subtly calculated in their effects, as any other genre of intellectual activity. Many take months, years, to put together, and at least as long to assimilate in any but a superficial way.
Sign above urinal in New York restaurant restroom: We aim to please. You aim too, please.

Before leaving Basle for England in 1526 and wishing to leave proof of his skill, the artist (Hans Holbein the Younger) painted a fly on a portrait he had just completed. The purchaser of the portrait, trying to remove the insect with a brush, discovered the jest. The story spread, and arrangements were set in motion to retain this virtuoso in the country. The painter therefore had to leave town in great secrecy.


Here then we have the beginnings of an answer to what relations lie at the heart of beauty. 'All beauty may by a metaphor be called rhyme.' What is rhyme like? Well, let us have an example:

cat rhymes with mat;
cat does not rhyme with table;
cat does not rhyme with cat.

Taking rhyme as the paradigm of beauty, let us turn at once to the fundamental question: Why do we like the relation that rhyme epitomises? What is the biological advantage of seeking out rhyming elements in the environment?

The answer I propose is this: Considered as a biological phenomenon, aesthetic preferences stem from a predisposition among animals and men to seek out experiences through which they may learn to classify the objects in the world around them. Beautiful 'structures' in nature or in art are those which facilitate the task of classification by presenting evidence of the 'taxonomic' relations between things in a way which is informative and easy to grasp.


Percy Hammond (reviewing a musical): I have knocked everything but the knees of the chorus-girls, and Nature has anticipated me there.

They who are appreciative of scientific illustrations will no doubt find pleasure in viewing the exquisite pen and ink drawings by Sabine Bauer in Animal Forms and Patterns: A Study of the Appearance of Animals by Adolf Portmann (NY: Schocken Books, 1967). The drawing below is of guenons (a variety of African monkey), rendered and arranged "to show the many variations produced by some few elements of design and colouration."

A basketball game is more enjoyable when appreciated as an aesthetic whole, with its changing rhythms, its sudden grace, and its dramatic tensions, finally, decisively, resolved. And classroom life is more rewarding when students experience their learnings as the climax of spirited but directed give and take. To the extent that these daily activities are charged with aesthetic qualities and relations, we experience them as fulfilling and are fulfilled.


Absolutely Mad Inventions by A.E. Brown and R.A. Jeffcott, Jr. (NY: Dover Publications, 1970) is a sidesplitting collection of the drawings and descriptions for 60 strange inventions for which there are actual patents. Reproduced here (left) is a diagram of an "improvement in foot-warmers," a gadget worn inside the shoes on the coldest winter days, with tubes and a strap which extend to the feet, the wearer breathes into the cup at the top.

Hermann Goering: When I hear anyone talk of culture I reach for my revolver.

I.J. Good: When I hear the word 'gun,' I reach for my revolver.
ytton Strachey was unfit, but instead of allowing himself to be rejected by the doctors he preferred to appear before a military tribunal as a conscientious objector. He told us of the extraordinary impression that was caused by an air-cushion which he inflated during the proceedings as a protest against the hardness of the benches. Asked by the chairman the usual question: "I understand, Mr. Strachey, that you have a conscientious objection to war?" he replied (in his curious falsetto voice), "Oh no, not at all, only to this war." Better than this was his reply to the chairman's other stock question, which had previously never failed to embarrass the claimant: "Tell me, Mr. Strachey, what would you do if you saw a German soldier trying to violate your sister?" With an air of noble virtue: "I would try to get between them."

Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957)

ike (Groucho Marx) probably was not aware of everything he was saying when a "You Bet Your Life" contestant stated she had thirteen children and could explain it only by proclaiming, "I love my husband!" "I like my cigar too," said Groucho, "but I take it out once in a while."


he styles I find most useful to study are those of Hugh Kenner, Osip Mandelstam, Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Charles Doughty. All of these are writers who do not waste a word, who condense, pare down, and proceed with daring synapses. From Victor Shklovskii I saw how narrative can be suggested rather than rendered, and how anything can be made startling by taking it out of "its series." Shklovskii (and other Formalists) felt that art served a purpose by "making the familiar strange," a process of regeneration (of attention, of curiosity, of intelligence) the opposite of narcissism.


he following are variations on an old and admittedly chauvinist joke. Are there other variations, either invented, remembered, or found?

Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no lady, that was my wife.

Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no lady, that was your wife.

Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no lady, that was the entire play.

Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no lady, that was my knife.

What lady did I see you with last evening? That was no ewe, that was a deer.

One magician to another: Who was that lady I saved with you last night?

Two magicians: Who was that lady I saved with you last night? That was no saw, that was a chisel.

Two magicians: Who was that lady I saved with you last night? That was no lady, that was my half sister.

Two magicians: Who was that piccolo I saw you with last night? That was no piccolo, that was my fife.

Two Huckleberry Finn's: Who was that lady Tom saw yer with last night?

Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no eyesore, that was a headache.

Who was that lady I saw you outwit'?

itting at his cluttered mahogany desk, Wells draped a string from one side to the other, and, in a clothesline effect, pinned the various jokes and "bits of business" on the line, rearranging them as he built the scene. He kept a detailed account of the number of jokes he wrote; he tabulated the laughs per minute of every sketch. Even the malapropisms that salted his comic dialogue were uncovered in the same methodical manner. Wells would take a word and write it on one side of a file card and on the other side list similar sounding words, testing each for its comic possibility.

John Lahr (describing how vaudeville skits were made by burlesque comedian Billy K. Wells, an associate of Bert Lahr, the author's father) in Notes on a Cowardly Lion (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 41.