

Summer 1990

Ballast Quarterly Review, v05n4, Summer 1990

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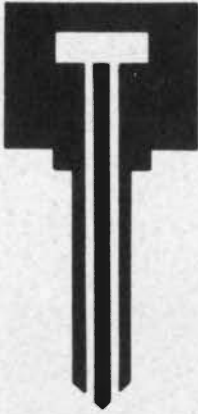
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**Ballast Quarterly Review. Volume 5
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checker and subscription kid: Roy R.
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BALLAST is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to **BLAST**, the short-lived publication founded by P. Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer, during World War I. **BALLAST** was established in 1985 in Milwaukee. Initially it was a protest against occultation, buncombe, willful illiteracy and other anti-intellectual tendencies among visual artists. Its editor having reached middle age, it is now chiefly a furtive *mélange* of unforgettable extracts from books and magazines. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought-provoking.

The purposes of **BALLAST** are educational, apolitical and noncommercial. It does not carry paid advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is published every three months, more or less, beginning in October and ending in June. There is no charge for subscriptions as such, and (to the extent that finances allow) the journal will gladly be mailed to persons who send in a mailing address and two first class U.S. postage stamps for each issue. In other words, to receive **BALLAST** for one year (four issues), we ask that each reader contribute a total of eight genuine unused U.S. postage stamps. Do not send postage meter slips. When subscribing, please send good-looking or unusual stamps (we fear that we may become il[sic] if we lick one more bluebird stamp, or those *huge* movie posters, but we love Marianne Moore and lighthouses, especially striped lighthouses). We do *not* accept phone orders.

John Cage:

As a child I was very impressed by the notion of turning the other cheek. You know, if someone struck me on the cheek, I actually did turn the other cheek. I took that seriously.

When [Major Dixon] Denham [19th century British explorer in Africa] astonished some of the chief's sons by the use of an india-rubber [eraser] while sketching, and allowed them to make marks on the paper with his pencil and then rub them out, the *fighi* [religious scribe] wrote a sentence from the Koran making so deep an impression that the words still appeared legible after the rubber had been used. "These are the words of God, delivered to our Prophet," declared the *fighi* exultingly. "I defy you to erase them." He displayed the paper with great satisfaction to all around him, while they cast looks at Denham "expressive of mingled pity and contempt."

Christopher Hibbert, *Africa Explored: Europeans in the Dark Continent, 1769-1889* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 90. Suggested by Mary Ann Ette, a reader from Waterloo, Kansas.

Did you know? That Thomas A. Watson, the friend and assistant of Alexander Graham Bell, with whom he invented the telephone ("Mr. Watson, come here!"), was John Cheever's wife's grandfather.

If they had chins, most animals would look like each other. Man was given a chin to prevent the personality of his mouth and eyes from overwhelming the rest of his face, to prevent each individual from becoming a species unto himself.

Malcolm de Chazal, quoted in W.H. Auden, *A Certain World* (NY: Viking Press, 1970). Suggested by Jerry Atrix, a reader from Waterloo, Arizona.

Highly Recommended:

Among the clearest, most eloquent books on Macintosh computers and desktop publishing are two paperbacks by Robin Williams: *Macintosh Basics: An Informal Guide to Using the Macintosh* (1989) and *The Mac Is Not A Typewriter: A Style Manual for Creating Professional-Level Type for Your Macintosh* (1989). The former (ISBN 1-877932-04-3) is \$11.95 post-paid, the latter (ISBN 1-877932-05-1) \$9.95 from Performance Enhancement Products, 1275 Fourth Street, Suite 323, Santa Rosa, CA 95404.

The intention [in esthetic communication] is not to obscure the message, but to make it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out by himself – to re-create it. Hence the message must be handed to him in implied form – and implied means “folded in”. To make it unfold, he must fill in the gaps, complete the hint, see through the symbolic disguise. But the audience has a tendency to become more sophisticated with time; once it has mastered all the tricks, the excitement goes out of the game; so the message must be made more implicit, more tightly folded. I believe that this development towards greater economy (meaning not brevity, but implicitness) can be traced to virtually all periods and forms of art.

Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (NY: MacMillan, 1964), pp. 337-338.



He [the British mathematician and astronomer Thomas Hariot] did not like (or valued not) the old storie of the Creation of the World. He could not beleeve the old position; he would say *ex nihilo nihil fit* [nothing comes of nothing]. But a *nihilum* killed him at last: for in the top of his Nose came a little red speck (exceedingly small) which grew bigger and bigger, and at last killed him.

John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 207. Suggested by Lee Feegryne, a reader from Waterloo, California.

Highly Recommended: *Envisioning Information*, by Edward R. Tufte (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990). Resolutely up to date, yet reminiscent of Gyorgy Kepes' *The New Landscape in Art and Science* and E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, this is a spectacular sequel to *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (1983) by a professor of graphic design, statistics and political economy at Yale. Among the most excellent books on design. \$48 postpaid from Graphics Press, Box 430, Cheshire, CT 06410.

Nathaniel Hawthorne:

In the next voyage of the *Mayflower*, after she carried the pilgrims, she was employed in transporting a cargo of slaves from Africa.

Whenever I took our hunting dog, Hussar, for a walk in the open fields he liked to play a very simple game – the prototype of the most culturally widespread game of human children, escape and pursuit. He would run circles around me at top speed, with his tongue hanging out and his eyes warily watching every move I made, daring me to catch him. Occasionally I would take a lunge, and if I was lucky I got to touch him. Now the interesting part is that whenever I was tired, and moved halfheartedly, Hussar would run much tighter circles, making it relatively easy for me to catch him; on the other hand, if I was in good shape and willing to extend myself, he would enlarge the diameter of his circle. In this way, the difficulty of the game was kept constant. With an uncanny sense for the fine balancings of challenges and skills, he would make sure that the game would yield the maximum enjoyment for us both.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (NY: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 53.

Recommended:
Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (NY: Harper and Row, 1990). A fascinating idea, but we became more or less bored with the text about halfway through (the writing is diluted), which is ironic in light of the fact that it tries to define experiences that are not boring. To our mind, "optimal experience" is virtually synonymous with "esthetic experience" as outlined in the writings of (among others) John Dewey (*Art as Experience*), Arthur Koestler (*The Act of Creation*), Nicholas Humphrey (*Consciousness Regained*) and Joseph Kupfer (*Experience as Art*), none of whom is listed as a reference.

As long as

Highly Recommended:
The Writer's Chapbook: A Compendium of Fact, Opinion, Wit, and Advice from the 20th Century's Preeminent Writers, edited by George Plimpton (NY: Viking Press, 1990). ISBN 0-670-81565-9. Nearly 400 pages of excerpts from *The Paris Review* interviews with more than a hundred writers, organized into several dozen subject categories. It is in essence a textbook on all aspects of the creative process, instructive and always delightful to read.

there is a *Paris Review*, the archetypal *Paris Review* story will be Dallas Wiebe's "Night Flight to Stockholm," the account of an author who literally gives his little finger to get into the *Review* — then his testicles to be published in *Tri-Quarterly*, a hand to appear in *Esquire* and so on, until, bereft of ears, arms, legs and eyes, he is taken in a basket to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

David Kirby, "Heavyweights and High Spirits" in the *New York Times Book Review*, 4 March 1990, p. 11.

I remember that during the Depression I had sustained myself for a week on nothing but mushrooms and I decided to spend enough time to learn something about them. Furthermore, I was involved with chance operations in music, and I thought it would just be a very good thing if I got involved in something where I could not take chances. However, I've learned to experiment, and the way you do that is, if you don't know whether a mushroom is edible or not, you cook it all up, and you take a little bit and then you leave it until the next day and watch to see if there are any bad effects. If there aren't any, you eat a little more, and presently you know something.

John Cage, quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage* (NY: Limelight Editions, 1988), p. 15.

The good kind of ambiguity lets me know that a certain object is one thing as well as another. The bad kind is incapable of telling me whether the object is one thing or another.

Rudolf Arnheim, *Parables of Sun Light: Observations on Psychology, the Arts, and the Rest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 194.

Highly Recommended: *Les Mystère des Voix Bulgares*. The Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir under the direction of Philip Koutev and Krasmir Kyurkchlyski. Recorded in Bulgaria by Marcel Cellier. Electkra/Asylum/Nonsuch Records (7559-79165-1), 1987.

Recommended: *A Dictionary of Art*, edited by Ian Crofton (NY: Schirmer Books, 1989). ISBN 0-02-870621-8. A miscellany of 3500 quotations on art. Not bad, but it could have been better. It's parochial, with too many irrelevant British asides and too few entries on modern design. Many of the finest historical examples (including some of the most famous) are simply missing.

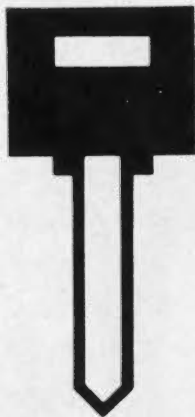
In the fall of 1954, [William M.] Gaines [founder and publisher of *MAD Magazine*] and Nancy [a close friend and staff member] were turning into a gas station on West 96th Street in Manhattan. As they made their turn, a car came down the street and barreled into them. No one was hurt, and Gaines exchanged the usual insurance data with the driver of the other car, whose name was Gene Zahn. About a year later, two blocks from the gas station, Gaines pulled up to a newspaper stand. After buying his paper, he returned to his car, backed out a few feet, and was struck by a car rounding the corner. No one was hurt, and Gaines exchanged the usual insurance data with the driver of the other car, whose name was Gene Zahn.

"Didn't we have an accident a year ago?" Gaines asked.

"I believe we did," answered Zahn, giving a polite nod to Nancy, whom he remembered from the previous run-in. "Say, don't you think it's time you two got married?"

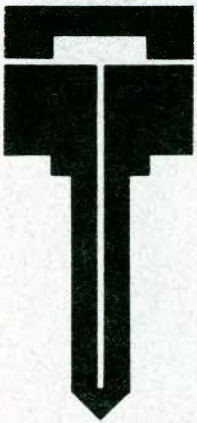
Gaines thought if over and decided that the point was well-taken. Within a month, he and Nancy were married.

From *The Mad World of William M. Gaines* (NY: Bantam Books, 1973), p. 77. Suggested by Ted and Carol Kaehler, readers from Palo Alto, California.



He [the British political theorist James Harrington] grew to have a phancy that his Perspiration turned to Flies, and sometimes to Bees; and he had a versatile timber house built in Mr Hart's garden (opposite to St James's parke) to try the experiment. He would turne it to the sun, and sit towards it; then he had his fox-tayles [fly swatters] there to chase away and massacre all the Flies and Bees that were to be found there, and then shut his Chasses [windows]. Now this Experiment was only to be tried in Warme weather, and some flies would lie so close in the cranies and cloath (with which it was hung) that they would not presently shew themselves. A quarter of an hower after perhaps, a fly or two, or more, might be drawn out of the lurking holes by the warmth; and then he would crye out, Doe you not see it apparently that these come from me? 'Twas the strangest sort of madness that ever I found in any one: talke of any thing els, his discourse would be very ingeniose and pleasant.

John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 209-210.



Highly Recommended: *Black and White in Color* (1977), a film directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud. A bizarre but probably faithful account of the attitudes of European colonists in Africa during World War I. Available at major video stores.

Highly Recommended: *A Balthus Notebook*, by Guy Davenport (NY: Ecco Press, 1989). Reflections on the paintings of one of the great visual artists of this century, by one of its finest essayists.

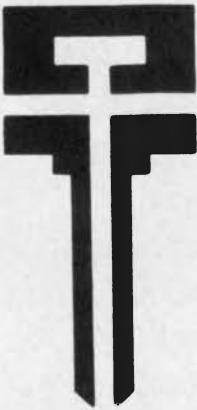
Charles Sheeler: Perhaps the greatest value of art teaching is that the pupil may later have something to unlearn.

Malcolm de Chazal: When indifferent, the eye takes in stills, when interested, movies.

Humphrey Howarth, the surgeon, was called out [challenged to a pistol duel], and made his appearance in the field stark naked, to the astonishment of the challenger, who asked him what he meant. "I know," said H., "that if any part of the clothing is carried into the body by a gunshot wound, festering ensues; and therefore I have met you thus." His antagonist declared that, fighting with a man in *puris naturalibus* would be quite ridiculous; and accordingly they parted without further discussion.

Samuel Rogers, *Table-Talk*.

Albert Pinkham Ryder: Have you ever seen an inch worm crawl up a leaf or twig, and then clinging to the very end, revolve in the air, feeling for something to reach something? That's like me. I am trying to find something out there beyond the place on which I have a footing.



Dr. [George] Fordyce sometimes drank a good deal at dinner. He was summoned one evening to see a lady patient, when he was more than half-seas-over, and conscious that he was so. Feeling her pulse, and finding himself unable to count its beats, he muttered, "Drunk by God!" Next morning, recollecting the circumstance, he was greatly vexed: and just as he was thinking what explanation of his behavior he should offer to the lady, a letter from her was put into his hand. "She too well knew," said the letter, "that he had discovered the unfortunate condition in which she was when he last visited her; and she entreated him to keep the matter secret in consideration of the enclosed (a hundred-pound banknote)."

Samuel Rogers, *Table-Talk*.

It darkles, (tinct, tinct) all this our funnaminal world. Yon marsh-pond by roudmark verge is visited by the tide. Alvemmarea! We are circumveiled by obscurit-ads.

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (NY: Viking Press, 1939), p. 244. Suggested by John Iler, a reader from Raleigh, North Carolina.

T.S. Eliot (*The Metaphysical Poets*): When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

Donoghue was someone who used to come into my rooms at Trinity and see something in the typewriter and glance at it. I'd ask him, "What do you think of that, Donoghue?" and he'd say, "It stinks!" This went on for days and days every time he'd come in trying to get food from me. And then — he was a classicist — one night I typed some Plato and left it in my typewriter, and I had it ready for him as he popped in. And I said, "Okay, Donoghue, there is the typewriter. Now let's have your opinion on that." "That stinks too." "Look, Donoghue, I've tried awfully hard with this." He'd say, "Doesn't matter. You're never going to make it." I made him give it a second reading, but he said it still stunk. Then I revealed to him it was Plato. And that stopped him staring at my typewriter.

John Cheever (*Home Before Dark*): There is a lot of time. I don't even know what I want to do but I have discovered that knowing what you want to do has very little effect on getting the work at hand actually done.

J.P. Donleavy, quoted in George Plimpton, ed., *The Writer's Chapbook* (NY: Viking Press, 1989), p. 159.
Suggested by Lon Mauwer, a reader from Waterloo, Minnesota.

To write a poem is like trying to catch a lizard without its tail falling off. In India when I was a boy they had great big green lizards there, and if you shouted or shot them their tails would fall off. There was only one boy in the school who could catch lizards intact. No one knew quite how he did it. He had a special soft way of going up to them, and he'd bring them back with their tails on. That strikes me as the best analogy I can give you. To try and catch your poem without its tail falling off.

Lawrence Durrell, quoted in George Plimpton, ed., *The Writer's Chapbook* (NY: Viking Press, 1989), pp. 107-108. Suggested by Miles Tohne, a reader from Waterloo, Louisiana.

I went to Howkeld, and one night I suffered intolerable earache, so that I cried aloud, and was poulticed with onions. The pain had gone in the morning, but by my aunt's tears I knew that my father was dead. The next day I was driven back to the Farm. The blind was drawn, everywhere it was very still, and dark. We were taken upstairs to say good-bye to my dead father. The cold wintry light came evenly through the open slats of the venetian blind. My father lay on the bed, sleeping, as he always did, with his arms on the coverlet, straight down each side of his body. His beautiful face was very white, except for the red marks on his temples, where the leeches had clung. I was told to kiss his face; it was dead and cold, like the face of Little Meg's mother.

Recommended:
The Discovery of the Art of the Insane, by John MacGregor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Sir Herbert Read (recalling the death of his father at age nine), *The Contrary Experience* (NY: Horizon Press, 1963), p. 53.

[At his first New York literary party] I was offered two kinds of drinks. One was greenish. The other was brown. They were both, I believe, made in a bathtub...I was told that one was a Manhattan and the other was Pernod. My only intent was to appear terribly sophisticated and I ordered a Manhattan...I went on drinking Manhattans lest anyone think I came from a small town like Quincy, Massachusetts. Presently after four or five Manhattans I realized I was going to vomit. I rushed to Mrs. Cowley [the hostess], thanked her for the party, and reached the apartment house hallway where I vomited all over the wallpaper. Malcolm [Cowley] never mentioned the damages.



John Cheever, quoted in Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), p. 26. Suggested by Adam Zapel, a reader from Waterloo, Kentucky.

Jan B. Gordon (in Robert Phillips, *Aspects of Alice*): It [*Alice in Wonderland*] is strangely reminiscent of [Lewis] Carroll's experience upon seeing a sign that he thought read "Roman cement," only to discover, upon getting closer, that it actually said "Roman cement."

George F. Whicher (describing the poet Emily Dickinson): She was inattentive to superficial polish, but at a time when poetry was like furniture put together with putty, gilded, and heavily upholstered, she preserved in her writing the same instinct of sound workmanship that made the Yankee Clipper, the Connecticut clock, and the New England doorway objects of beauty.

Highly Recommended:

The Sun, a monthly magazine of essays, fiction and poetry, edited by Sy Safransky. Of particular interest is a regular section in which readers write about a wide range of personal (yet universal) experiences, including such topics as flirting, having fun, peak experiences, kindred spirits, fathers, duty and so on. For subscription information (about \$28 per year), write: *The Sun*, 107 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516.

Christopher Isherwood:

You could say to him [the British poet W.H. Auden]: "Please write me a double ballade on the virtues of a certain brand of toothpaste, which also contains at least ten anagrams on the names of well-known politicians, and of which the refrain is as follows..." Within twenty-four hours your ballade would be ready -- and it would be good.

On or about 1 August 1990, **BALLAST** will be moving to the town in which R.V. Cassill was born. Until our address is confirmed, all subscriptions, including gift subscriptions, should continue to be mailed to:

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BALLAST is published in a limited edition and back issues are not available. However, the magazine may be xeroxed to provide others with copies, but the copies must never be altered or sold. Our readers are always encouraged to suggest offbeat examples of verbal and visual insight of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material must be explicitly labeled as such. Material which is not original must clearly make note of its author and source. All contributions are unpaid, and unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

BALLAST doesn't have a budget really. It has always operated at a loss. If everyone would send in stamps, we would still lose about 13 cents per copy just on printing costs, without beginning to account for research, typesetting, paste-up and correspondence. The losses are currently offset by donations from enlightened subscribers, and generous deductions from the subscription boy's paycheck. If anyone feels foolishly philanthropic (foolish because contributions to **BALLAST** probably aren't tax deductible), we will not refuse a check (made payable to Roy R. Behrens), a page of freshly minted stamps, a new tuxedo (somebody actually sent one to Henry Miller — remember that?), or any interesting books, good-looking or unusual covers preferred. We are grateful for all of the things we've received (loads of stamps, some generous checks, and a handsome bottle of Glenlivet!) since last issue.



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