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Ballast Quarterly Review, v07n2, Winter 1991

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BALLAST

**QUARTERLY
REVIEW**



**Volume
Seven
Number
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Winter
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Ballast Quarterly Review, Volume 7, Number 2, Winter 1991.

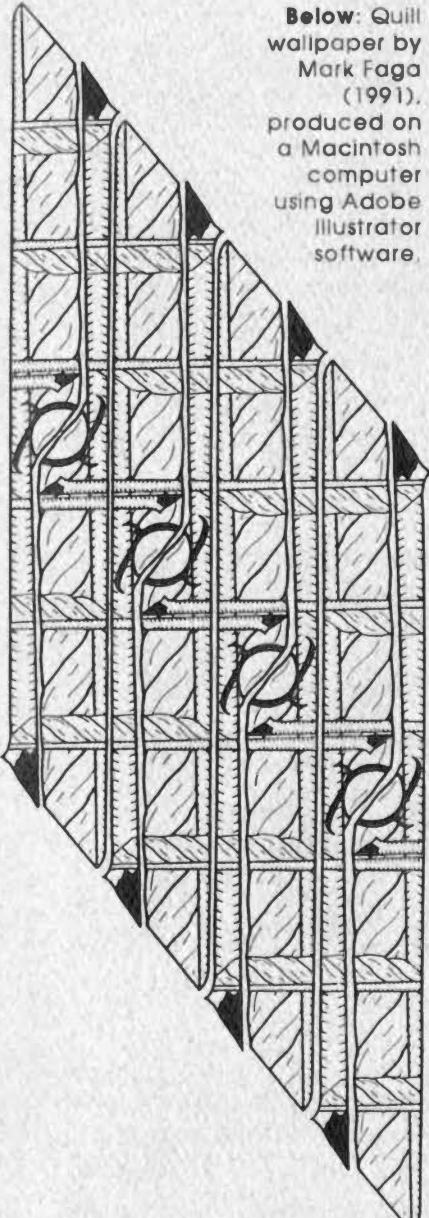
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Cover: Linoleum print by Karla Hackenmiller (1991).



BALLAST is an acronym for **B**ooks **A**rt **L**anguage **L**ogic **A**mbiguity **S**cience and **T**eaching, as well as a distant allusion to **BLAST**, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. **BALLAST** is chiefly a pastiche of more or less curious excerpts from books, magazines, diaries and other publications. 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, interesting or not. Do not send postage meter stamps. When subscribing, good-looking, antique and/or unusual stamps are preferred -- ever go to a ventriloquists' reunion, or a luncheon for clairvoyants? (At the moment we are especially fond of the colorful new "balletomane commemorative" -- just ask for it at your post office window.) We do *not* accept phone orders.

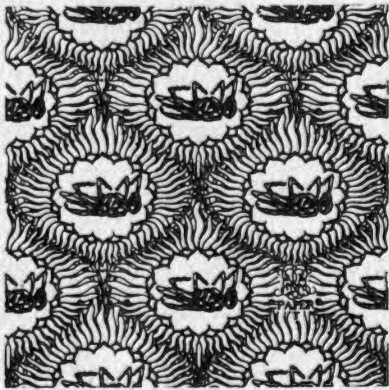


Below: Quill wallpaper by Mark Faga (1991), produced on a Macintosh computer using Adobe Illustrator software.

Terence Conran: Good design starts from the premise that living is more than just a matter of existing, and that everyday things which are both effective and attractive can raise the quality of life.

Paul Newman: To work hard, as I've worked, to accomplish anything and then have some yo-yo come up and say "Take off those dark glasses and let's have a look at those blue eyes" is really discouraging.

Highly Recommended: Burton Raffel, *Artists All: Creativity, the University, and the World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1991). We need not thoughtlessly divide the continuum of human experience into such rigid categories as "art" and "science." Rather, "what we choose to call artistic creativity is nothing more or less than heightened engagement," so that, whether we call ourselves artists or scientists, we are really *artists all*. Engaging throughout, we learned a lot from this smart and unusually eloquent book.



[The physiologist Albert] Szent-Gyorgyi once discovered a new carbohydrate derivative [it was ascorbic acid, or vitamin C], and, having no idea what its constitution was, named it "ignose" -- "ose" being the suffix used by chemists for sugars and carbohydrates, and "igno" or "ignosco," or "I don't know!" The editor of the *Biochemical Journal* returned his paper, saying there is to be no joking about science. Szent-Gyorgyi responded by suggesting an alternative: "godnose."

Robert Scott Roof-Bernstein. *Discovering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). p. 179.

[The Bauhaus painter Josef] Albers was amongst those who came [to a picnic at Black Mountain College in 1935]. When it came to toasting the hot dogs over the open fire, most speared their dogs with unbent coat hangers, but Albers preferred to bend his coat hanger into a letter S -- laying his hot dog on top of it, which he then held over the fire. We pointed out to him the advantage of spearing it with the prong. But he said, "I like very much the S-form." His dog fell off into the fire.

Left: Dead fly wallpaper by Linda Kleismeler (1991).

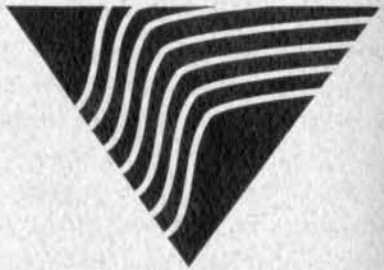
Allan Sly, "Excerpts from Taped Reminiscences of Black Mountain" in Mervin Lane, editor, *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), p. 66.

Willie Tyler: The reason lightning doesn't strike twice is that the same place isn't there the second time.

Highly Recommended: Robert Scott Root-Bernstein, *Discovering: Inventing and Solving Problems at the Frontiers of Scientific Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). This is the paperback edition of a factual discussion of creativity, particularly scientific discovery, disguised as impassioned discussions among six fictional characters, each endorsing a different point of view. Initially put off by the fictional format, we gradually reached the conclusion that this is an unusually wonderful book, not just for scientists, but of value to artists and teachers as well. Other highlights include a 9-page list of "Artistic Proclivities among Eminent Scientists and Inventors," a 35-page bibliography on scientific creativity, and (our favorite) "A Manual of Strategies for Discovering."

Right: Proposed logo (not selected) by Mark Faga (1991) for Waverly (Iowa) Chamber of Commerce.

WAVERLY



Bernard Malamud: I love metaphor. It provides two loaves where there seems to be one. Sometimes it throws in a load of fish.

The only drawback to her [Lady Wenlock's] companionship was her extreme deafness, which caused her to carry about a peculiar silver ear-trumpet [a hornlike hearing aid], looking like an entree-dish, or anything rather than what it was...At a luncheon in Florence she suddenly presented it [the ear-trumpet] to her neighbor, an Italian Duke, who gallantly filled it with green peas from a dish which a footman was handing to him at the same moment; and at one of her balls in London she left it on the piano, where it was mistaken for an ash-tray, so that when the Prince of Wales took her in to supper and addressed an opening remark to her, she immediately covered him all over with cigarette-ends.

Edward Marsh, *A Number of People: A Book of Reminiscences* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), p. 138.

Troy bought a park bench, insisting on a bill of sale. He and a friend set it down in Central Park until a policeman appeared. Then they picked it up and ran. When the policeman caught up with them Troy showed him the bill of sale. They did this many times, until all the police in the area understood that Troy owned the bench. Then they started picking up benches belonging to the City, with the police leaving them strictly alone. They made a big pile of them somewhere in the city.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Fates Worse Than Death* (New York: Putnam, 1991), p. 20.

One of our best family treats was Grandma Page's stone soup. That's correct, stone soup, and I never thought there was anything odd about it.

The family was visiting in Bloomington and cash was tight all around, so Grandma would clean up a big stone and cook it with water and lots of grass, especially grass that came with seeds. I'd help and so did everybody else. We chopped up some carrots and onions and Grandma added a little Tabasco sauce.

She simmered this mix slowly, eventually bringing it briefly to a boil. It made a tasty soup.

Dan Rather, *I Remember* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991).

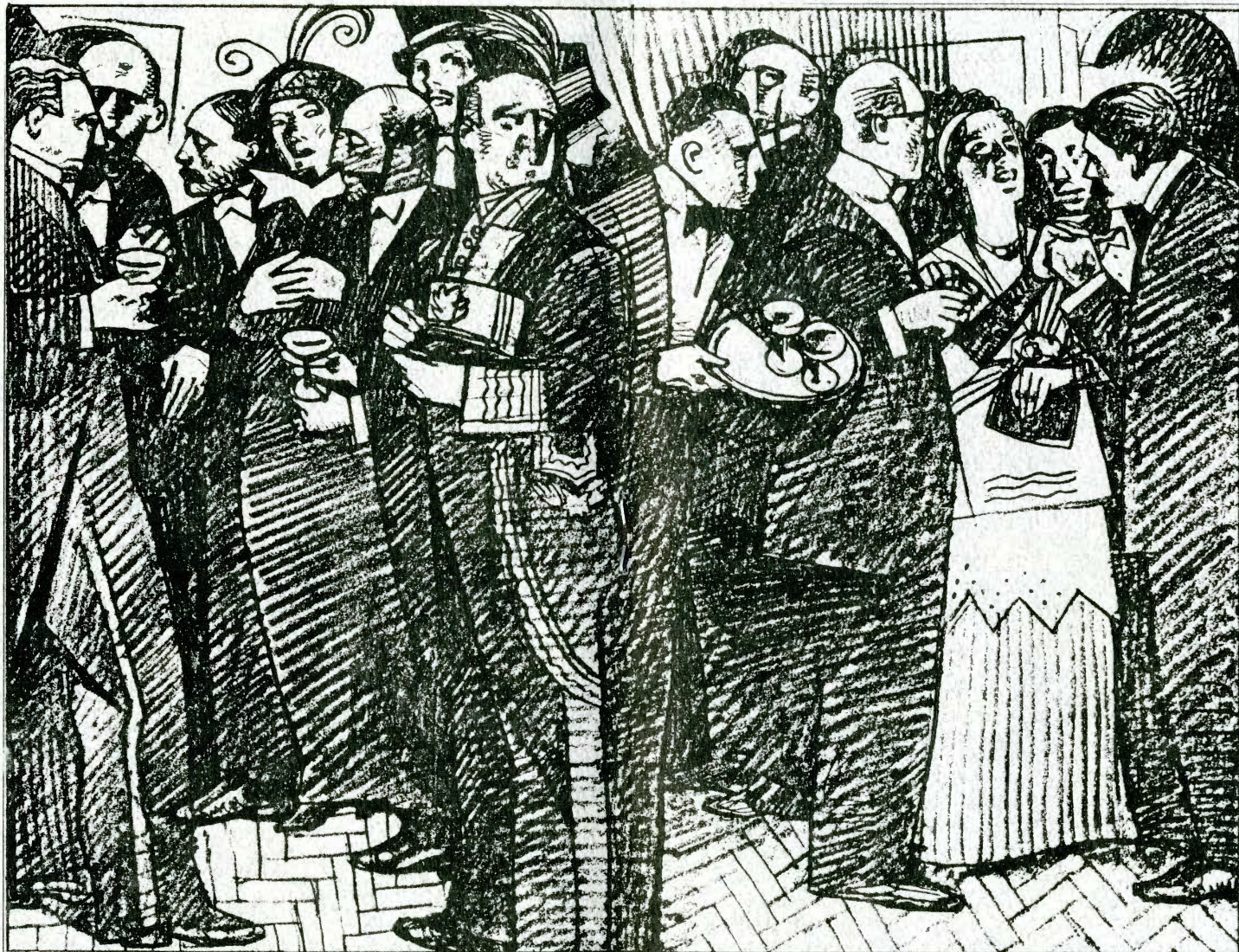
Ronnie Shakes: I was going to buy a copy of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and then I thought: What the hell good would that do?

Highly Recommended: Steven Heller and Gail Anderson. *Graphic Wit: The Art of Humor in Design* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1991). This is a field guide to visual wit (not to be confused with humor), the insightful or puzzling perception of things, which usually leads to surprising results. The text and visual examples present a typology of graphic wit, including puns, parodies, caricature, pictorial typography, and many more. It ends with a series of informal interviews with about a dozen designers and illustrators (some of whom subscribe to BALLAST), including Paul Rand, Paula Scher, Rick Valicenti, Steven Guarnaccia, and Elwood Smith.

I have to go feed the goldfish. I have to go look at the crops. I have to go see a man about a dog. I have to pay a visit to the old soldiers' home. I have to retreat to the holy of holies. I have to go sharpen the skates. I have to go visit the chamber of commerce.

Euphemistic ways to excuse oneself in order to go to the bathroom.

Below: Preparatory drawing by Gary Kelley for the forthcoming book-length version of *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant (Mankato, MN, and New York: Creative Education; and Stewart Taboori and Chang (Spring 1992)).



[The Dutch painter Piet Mondrian] was completely captivated by the charms of Mae West, who at the time was quite young, but nonetheless used artificial make-up in a way that Mondrian found attractive. Indeed, his ideal wife would have been precisely this kind of youthful love goddess, whose chief virtue of character would be the patience to spend long hours in a corner of his pristine studio knitting or watching him paint -- a Mae West in crinoline, so to speak.

Nellie Van Doesburg (wife of Theo Van Doesburg). "Some Memories of Mondrian" in *Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944* (New York: Solomon Guggenheim Foundation, 1971).

[One night at Black Mountain College, an anthropology teacher named John Adams] walked over to where [the American painter] Bob Rauschenberg lived, and onto the unlighted front porch, and knocked on the door. The artist answered the door and turned on the porch lights. To his horror, John saw that he had walked across a canvas that Rauschenberg had apparently spread out on the porch to dry.

"My God, Bob," he said, "I'm afraid I've ruined your painting!" Rauschenberg didn't bat an eye, just looked at him intently and asked quietly: "Did you have on interesting shoes?" Apparently he did, since John's footprints became part of the painting.

Giddy Erwin Dyer. "A Black Mountain Anecdote" in Mervin Lane, editor, *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 316-317.

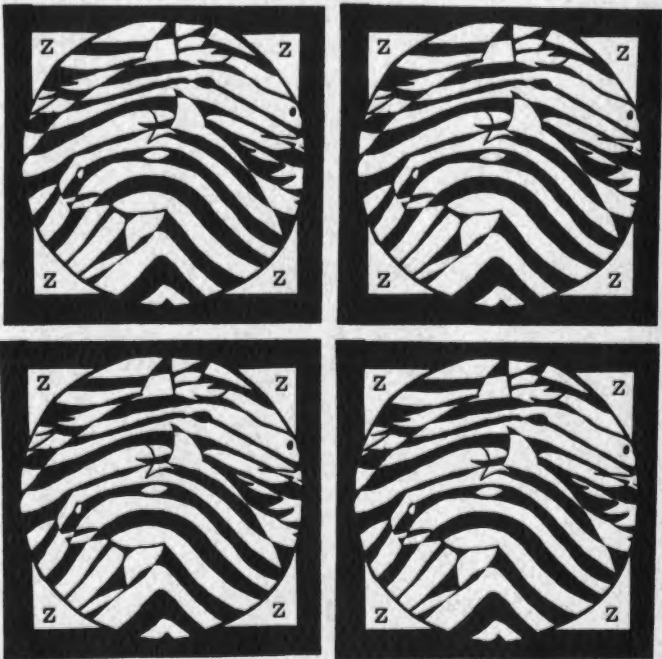
But plans are one thing and fate another. When they coincide, success results. Yet success mustn't be considered the absolute. It is questionable, for that matter, whether success is an adequate response to life. Success can eliminate as many options as failure.

Tom Robbins. *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976). Suggested by David J. Peterson, a reader from Plainfield, Illinois.

Below: Acne wallpaper by Dan Schuster (1991).



Highly Recommended: Silvio A. Bedini, *Thomas Jefferson and His Copying Machines* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984). Without typewriters, carbon paper, or xerox machines, how did Thomas Jefferson make copies of the letters he sent? As described and illustrated in this fascinating book, at times he used a "polygraph," a modified pantograph drawing machine which wrote with two suspended pens. Two sheets of paper were placed on the board, one beneath each pen. As Jefferson wrote with one of the pens, the second produced an exact duplicate for his files.



Recommended: Przemyslaw Prusinkiewicz and Aristid Lindenmayer. *The Algorithmic Beauty of Plants* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990). This radiant volume, with diagrams suggestive of D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form*, resulted from the efforts of a computer scientist (Prusinkiewicz) and a biologist (Lindenmayer, the inventor of "L-systems," a mathematical method for precisely describing the structures of plants) to use computers to make photorealistic images of various plants forms.

Above: Zebra wallpaper by Lorraine Fretwell (1991).

One of my friends showed me how to look, which was not to look, but to sit quietly and wait for them to jump out. That's what happens. They jump out. I stopped counting after 564 four-leaf clovers. I now have 56 five-leaf clovers which the doyen of luck has informed me have magical properties. There are also a few six-leaf clovers in my collection.

My clover collection was once filed in the dictionary under appropriate headings, but I am so fond of using it that I removed most of the clovers. The mass of them was causing the dictionary to warp. I have three seven-leaf clovers which, due to their rarity, are still located on pages 498 and 499, accompanied by *longevity*, *long-lived*, *looby*, *loose smut*, *loot*, and *loquacious*.

My friend Mike once suggested that I should make a tea of four-leaf clovers, a tea to be drunk the evening before a momentous event. I once found 37 four-leaf clovers in a small area on Downer Avenue near Hampshire, and three days later, I discovered 56 in a very short time. One winter day I was compelled to brush some snow from a place I passed each day, and there I discovered a four-leafer (in February in Milwaukee).

Thirteen or fourteen years ago in Shelby, Tennessee, I found a mass of four-leaferers and one very large clover with 22 leaves. I lost it.

There was an odd number of clovers, either 9 or 11, growing outside the entrance to my apartment [in Milwaukee]. I thought I'd let them grow a bit, since, in my mind, the larger size would indicate they had gone undetected for a longer time. Two days later, I discovered that they had been picked. The very next day I was involved in a car wreck. This was in 1978 in July. I smacked the left side of my head against the car window and couldn't count anything for two days. I was cashiering at the Oriental Hardware Store in those days. My boss said I still had to come to work. The customers had to tell me how to make change.

Reminiscence on clover-hunting, submitted by **Flossie M. Jetsam**, a reader from Norfolk, Virginia.

[In the 19th century], a scholarly-minded Japanese went to Europe, where he studied in both Germany and France, took not one but two doctorates, and finally returned to Japan to teach Western philosophy. After some years, becoming aware that he had rather neglected his native traditions, he made an appointment with a Zen master, to see what he could learn. The Zen master received him graciously and, in traditional style, served tea. He filled the scholar's cup and kept on pouring, and pouring, and pouring, until finally the visitor cried out, "Enough! It's full!" The Zen master bowed. "So too," he said, "are you full of your Western knowledge. Until you pour some of it out, how will there be any room for Zen?"



Above: Postage stamp design by Jodi Muller (1991).

Burton Raffel. *Artists All: Creativity, the University, and the World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 34.

Highly Recommended: Robin Williams and Kay Nelson, *The Little Mac Book* (Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 1991). Second edition. This is the latest version of a book that we praised earlier as one of "the clearest, most eloquent books on Macintosh computers and desktop publishing." We continue to think it's a wonderful way to introduce students to computer-aided design. In the meantime, the press that distributes this title (Peachpit Press, 2414 Sixth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710) has come out with a series of excellent books on computers and graphic design, including Robin Williams, *The Mac Is Not A Typewriter*, and *The PC Is Not A Typewriter*; Robin Williams, *PageMaker 4: An Easy Desk Reference*; David Blatner and Keith Stimeley, *The QuarkXPress Book*; Daniel Will-Harris, *TypeStyle*; and Erfert Fenton, *The Macintosh Font Book* (2nd edition). Without exception, we have found them very helpful. Write for a current catalog or call 800/283-9444.

BALLAST is published in Iowa in a region increasingly listed among the most desirable places in which to live (alright so why not move here soon before we all go stir crazy!). All subscriptions (including gift subscriptions) must be mailed to the following address:

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BALLAST doesn't have a budget really. For six years, it has operated at a loss. Even if we demanded stamps from everyone who receives the magazine, we would still lose money on printing, without beginning to account for research, typesetting, paste-up, correspondence, following tracks, picking stick(s), planning impossible bird houses, and staring as far as the edge of the fog. The losses are currently offset by donations from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the Reader Service Knave's paycheck. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such contributions are surely not tax deductible), we will *sometimes* accept a check (made payable to Roy R. Behrens), two pairs of snowshoes, and a series of trips to Tahiti between now and April.

Artworks on pages 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, and 12 were created by undergraduate graphic design students in the Department of Art, University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls).

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