Books
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Art
Language
Logic
Science and Teaching

Ambiguity
Two women meet while shopping at the supermarket in the Bronx. One looks cheerful, the other depressed. The cheerful one inquires:

"What's eating you?"
"Nothing's eating me."
"Death in the family?"
"No, God forbid!"
"Worried about money?"
"No ... nothing like that."
"Trouble with the kids?"
"Well, if you must know, it's my little Jimmy."

"What's wrong with him, then?"

"Nothing is wrong. His teacher said he must see a psychiatrist."
Pause. "Well, well, what's wrong with seeing a psychiatrist?"
"Nothing is wrong. The psychiatrist said he's got an Oedipus complex."
Pause. "Well, well, Oedipus or Shmoedipus, I wouldn't worry so long as he's a good boy and loves his mamma."


**BALLAST Quarterly Review**

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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 during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. **BALLAST** is chiefly a pastiche of more or less wonderful 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 slips. When subscribing, good-looking, antique and/or unusual stamps are preferred. (At the moment we are especially fond of the "Philipp Melanchthon commemorative stamp"—just ask for it at your post office window.) We do not accept phone orders.

**Ann Barr and Paul Levy** (*The Foodie Handbook*): When Marilyn Monroe was married to Arthur Miller, his mother always made matzo ball soup. After the tenth time, Marilyn said, "Gee, Arthur, these matzo balls are pretty nice, but isn't there any other part of the matzo you can eat?"

**Cover**: Hypothetical typeface by Pat Banwell (student, University of Northern Iowa), 1992.
Woody Allen [from his stand-up comedy routines of the early 1960s]: I wrote a science fiction film which I’ll tell you about: It’s ten after four in the afternoon, and everybody in the world mysteriously falls asleep. Just like that! They’re driving cars, whatever they’re doing—bang—they go to sleep. The Russians, the Chinese, the Americans. And the whole world sleeps for exactly one hour. Till ten after five. And they wake up at ten after five, and mysteriously upon awakening, everybody in the world finds themselves in the pants business. (Stay with this ‘cause it’s brilliant.) Everybody’s making cloths and cutting velvet, you know. And a spaceship lands from another planet. And men get out, with jackets and shirts and black socks. No trousers at all. And they say, “Are the pants ready?” And we say, “No, could you come back Thursday?” And they say they must have them ‘cause they’re going to a wedding. And we work diligently and make pants constantly, and they come to get them, and when they come to pick them up they leave us with socks, handkerchiefs, pillowcases, and soiled linen. And they say, “Do it.” And the President of the United States goes on television, and says that an alien superpower from outer space, with superior intelligence, is bringing us their laundry. And they’re foiled, because they travel a hundred and seventeen million light years to pick it up, and they forget their ticket.

Anon: If you aim to leave Las Vegas with a small fortune, go there with a large one.

John Keats [The Insolent Chariots, 1958]: There is little wrong with the American car that is not wrong with the American public.


A fellow tenant of ours used to boast that she had the largest apartment in the building and that it had two balconies. Since she was herself an ample figure, I used to call her, among friends, the lady with the two balconies.


Temporarily disoriented when she transferred from one grade school to another, X was given a homework assignment to draw “the phases of the moon,” but she thought the teacher said “faces.” The next day the other students handed in drawings of the full moon, quarter moon, and so on, while hers were drawings of the face of the man in the moon.

Anon, from the editor’s journal.
I want this to be a tree in which birds of many colors and shapes can sit and feel sustained. I do not wish to restrict it to species with square tail-ends or streamlined contours or international features or Bauhaus garb. In short, I wish it to be a hospitable tree from which many songs should be heard, except the fake sounds of the bird imitators.

Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus, at a Chicago celebration at which a tree, a pin oak, was planted in his honor at the Michael Reese Hospital in 1953), quoted in Reginald Isaacs, Gropius (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1990), p. 272.

My great joy in calling on Aunt Goldie was the opportunity afforded to visit the indoor bathroom, so naturally after polishing off the pie I pretended an urgent need to use the toilet. This was on the second floor...

At the top of the stairs lay the miracle of plumbing. Shutting the door to be absolutely alone with it, I ran my fingers along the smooth enamel of the bathtub and glistening faucet handles of the sink. The white majesty of the toilet bowl, through which gallons of water could be sent rushing by the slightest touch of a silvery lever, filled me with envy. A roll of delicate paper was placed beside it. Here was luxury almost too rich to be borne by anyone whose idea of fancy toiletry was Uncle Irvey's two-hole privy and a Montgomery Ward catalog.

After gazing upon it as long as I dared without risking interruption by a search party, I pushed the lever and savored the supreme moment when thundering waters emptied into the bowl and vanished with a mighty gurgle. It was the perfect conclusion to a trip to Brunswick.


In Tanganyika a small moth resembling a bird-dropping was not uncommon. On one occasion I observed what I thought be one on a leaf, but after a close examination from a distance of only a few inches I discovered (to my own satisfaction) that it was after all only a bird-dropping. Just as I turned away the said bird-dropping flew off!


Highly Recommended: As an undergraduate art student in the mid-1960s, we were particularly influenced by three extraordinary books: Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation: A Study of the Conscious and Unconscious in Science and Art* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), Rudolf Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), and E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon, 1960). Beset by Parkinson's disease and leukemia, Koestler committed suicide in March 1983, but the remaining two authors are still very much alive and surprisingly productive. Professor Arnheim (now living in Ann Arbor, Michigan) is 88 this year; Professor Gombrich (in London) 84. They have published a long list of books in the past thirty years, and, separately but nearly simultaneously, each has most recently published a book of collected essays. The title of Arnheim's is *To the Rescue of Art: Twenty-Six Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), while Gombrich's is *Topics of Our Time: Twentieth-Century Issues in Learning and in Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Both books are wide-ranging, dealing with such diverse subjects as "Caricature: The Rationale of Deformation," "The Artistry of Psychotics," and "In the Company of the Century" (in the Arnheim volume) to "An Autobiographic Sketch," "Kochoschka in his Time," and "Watching Artists at Work: Commitment and Improvisation in the History of Drawing" (in Gombrich's). In an age that appears to have little regard for reading, writing, and thinking, it is sad to imagine a future in which these two remarkable writers will no longer provide us with wonderful thoughts.
At my father’s funeral, I was introduced to one of his cousins, a ninety-two-year-old farmer. As we shook hands, I clearly remember his cavernous mouth, a sunken black hole with one tooth. Months later, I trembled when someone told me that, diagnosed with cancer and terrified of modern surgery, one morning he silently walked to the barn and shot himself in the head.

Anon, from the editor’s journal.

To write a poem you must have a streak of arrogance—not in real life I hope. In real life try to be nice. It will save you a hell of a lot of trouble and give you more time to write.


Max Kaufmann: He couldn’t even afford to buy his little boy a yo-yo for Christmas. He just managed to get him a yo.
Highly Recommended: Eric Baker and Jane Martin, Great Inventions / Good Intentions: An Illustrated History of American Design Patents (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990). This book is delightful in every regard. Exquisitely designed by Baker and illustrated with hundreds of drawings from the U.S. Patent Office, this is a visual history of American industrial design during the age of streamlining, from 1930 through 1945. We were especially excited to find patent drawings for Frank Lloyd Wright’s Johnson Wax Company desk and chair (1938-39); Peter Schlumbohm’s Chemex coffee flask (1944); William Fuld’s ouija board (1939); and E. Worthington’s ubiquitous black lunch pail (1939). To our mind, this is further evidence that Chronicle Books is one of the finest book publishers in the country. If you doubt it, call 800 722-6657 and ask to receive a copy of their Adult Trade Catalog for Fall/Winter 1992. Or, call 415 777-6201 and request a copy of their Children’s Catalog. At least you will have a beautiful catalog, and you’ll learn of such wonderful forthcoming books as Elena Poniatowska and Carla Stellweg, Frida Kahlo: The Camera Seduced (November 1992); Jerry Jankowski, Shelf Life: Modern Packaging Design 1920-1945 (September); and Payson Stevens and Kevin Kelley, Embracing Earth: New Views of Our Changing Planet (October).

Edward Hoagland: Very old people age somewhat as bananas do.


Highly Recommended: Herbert Lindinger, editor, Ulm Design: The Mortality of Objects (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). There are lots of books on the Bauhaus, the legendary German design school, and a handful on various schools that it spawned, including the New Bauhaus (Chicago) and Black Mountain College (Asheville, North Carolina). But this is the first English book on the Hochschule für Gestaltung (College for Design) in Ulm, Germany, founded in 1953 under Bauhaus painter Max Bill’s leadership, later directed by the Argentine theoretician Tomas Maldonado, then closed in 1968. The school or its students are credited with an enormous range of graphic and industrial design work, including the sleek-looking products from Braun, Krups, the Hamburg subway trains, and so on. Not surprisingly, the book is precise and austerely composed, with a text of brief essays and excerpts, illustrated by 600 photographs, many in color. Edited by an HfG instructor, this is an invaluable document in design education and design history.
Anon, from the editor’s journal:
In Catholic grade school, when a nun asked X to identify Abraham, she said he was a President.

Anon (letter to the Daily Telegraph, 1983): The hymn Onward Christian Soldiers, sung to the right tune and in a not-too-brisk tempo, makes a very good egg timer. If you put the egg into boiling water and sing all five verses and chorus, the egg will be just right when you come to Amen.

A man comes into a hotel one day and asks to rent a room. He is shown up to Number 35. As he comes down a few minutes later and leaves the key at the desk, he says: “Excuse me, I have no memory at all. If you please, each time I come in, I’ll tell you my name: Monsieur Delouit. And each time you’ll tell me the number of my room.”—“Very well, Monsieur.” Soon afterwards he returns, and as he passes the desk says: “Monsieur Delouit.”—“Number 35, Monsieur.”—“Thank you.” A minute later, a man extraordinarily upset, his clothes covered with mud, bleeding, his face almost not a face at all, appears at the desk: “Monsieur Delouit.”—“What do you mean, Monsieur Delouit? Don’t try to put one over on us! Monsieur Delouit has just gone upstairs!”—“I’m sorry, it’s me...I’ve just fallen out of the window. What’s the number of my room, please?”


Recommended: Thierry de Duve, editor, The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). It may not be totally silly to say that Marcel Duchamp was the James Joyce of art, while Joyce was literature’s Duchamp. Masters of complicity, the amount of discussion regarding their art is far in excess of the actual work, with no end in sight. One approaches their work through a minefield, where no one is sure of the number or place of incendiary ideas. This book of essays regarding Duchamp is the result of a conference of American and European “Duchampophiles” at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in October 1987. It’s a beautiful book, as is nearly anything made by MIT Press, but reading the text, it sounds as if lots of the findings are duds, or, at best, theoretical fizzigs.


Highly Recommended: Philip B. Meggs, “For the Voice” in Print: America’s Graphic Design Magazine. Volume XLIV, Number V (September/October 1990), pp. 112-119ff. The heartbeat quickens whenever we look at this article on For the Voice, the book of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poetry, designed and illustrated by El Lissitzky in 1923. Meggs’s text is a skillful translation and tour, illustrated by breathtaking full-color photographs of every page in this unforgettable landmark in book design.

Above: Detail from the drawing for a mural of 19th and 20th century literary figures by Gary Kelley.

Douglas Reed [Far and Wide, 1951]: The brow of lonely Mount Rushmore has been fashioned into the likeness of four American presidents. This has been described as “the greatest sculptural feat ever attempted by mankind.” The late Mr. Gutzon Borglum used a steeplejack’s cradle and a roadmender’s electric drill or something like it. I could not imagine how he kept the sense of line and proportion, suspended in space and carving the mountainside with something less than a high-precision tool. Unkind falls of rock may have forced him to re-arrange the group of the four huge granite heads, six thousand feet above sea level. They have a somewhat compressed appearance and Theodore Roosevelt looks rather like a man who tries to see what goes on between the heads of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln.

Mark Twain [Life on the Mississippi, 1883]: He told many remarkable things about [Louisiana mosquitoes]. Among others, said he had seen them try to vote. Noticing that this statement seemed to be a good deal of strain on us, he modified it a little: said he might have been mistaken as to that particular, but knew he had seen them around the polls “canvassing.”
James Joyce: In gutter dispear I am taking my pen toilet you know that, being leyde up in bad with the prevalent distempter I opened the window and in flew Enza.

Anon, from the editor's journal: As a preschool child, X, who was raised as a Catholic, thought that St. Joseph's aspirin was "Catholic medicine."

This pictorial account of the day-by-day life of an English gamekeeper is full of considerable interest to outdoor-minded readers, as it contains many passages on pheasant-raising, the apprehending of poachers, ways to control vermin, and other chores and duties of the professional gamekeeper. Unfortunately, one is obliged to wade through many pages of extraneous material in order to discover and savor those sidelights on the management of a midland shooting estate, and in this reviewer's opinion the book cannot take the place of J. R. Miller's Practical Gamekeeping.


Recommended: Gregory A. Kimble, Michael Wertheimer, and Charlotte L. White, editors, Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, and Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991). Years ago, we asked students to fabricate journals of or interviews with "newly discovered" fictitious pioneers in 20th century art and design, accompanied by samples of what they had done. This is a highly unusual book that does something similar in the sense that it is an anthology of "lighthearted" essays about the lives and accomplishments of about twenty actual men and women in the history of modern psychology (e.g. William James, Carl Jung, Wolfgang Köhler, John Broadus Watson, and so on), some of whom are made to speak through fictional "impersonation," in which the subject supposedly writes about his or her own life, or imagined interviews. Certain portraits are more interesting than others, such as Michael Wertheimer's imitation of his father, gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer, or Robert Thorndike's memoir of his father, Edward Thorndike. Regrettably, most of the portraits are either boring or unpersuasive, largely because they are short on detail. In some cases, it may have been better to do as Richard Kostelanetz did in Conversing With Cage (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), or as Philip James did in Henry Moore on Sculpture (New York: Da Capo, 1992), in which book-length "interviews" were fabricated by rearranging excerpts from legitimate past interviews.
Highly Recommended: Anna Rowland, *The Bauhaus Source Book: Bauhaus Style and Its Worldwide Influence* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990). At age 17, we spent the summer with 68-year-old Marguerite (née Friedlander) Wildenhain, the engaging grande dame of ceramics, who studied at the Bauhaus, the design school established in Weimar in 1919. There is a remarkable photo of her, when she was a student, on page 45 of this handsome and endlessly interesting book. And on page 88 is one of the best reproductions we’ve seen of an amazingly intricate tapestry by Gunia Stölzl, dated 1926-27. Comprised of detailed yet approachable texts, architectural photographs, archival snapshots, and stunning full-color examples of work, the book is a visual and verbal précis of the people, inventions and concepts that were brought together in 1919 and dissolved in 1933.


Highly Recommended: Leslie Garisto, *From Bauhaus to Birdhouse: Imaginative Housing for the Feathered Community* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). We have 37 birdhouses on our property, including the so-called “Pinocchio house” (a tiny wren dwelling with a very long perch) and the “beard house” (the front of which looks like a beard out of bark), so you can imagine how happy we were to find this wonderful volume (a great gift book!), made up of a more or less serious text, construction blueprints, and full-color photographs of the most imaginative birdhouses we’ve ever seen. Suggested by Patter Hellstrom, a reader from Minneapolis.

Shirley Oneple, Shirley Twople, Shirley Threeple, Shirley Fourple, Shirley Fiveple, Shirley Sixple, Shirley Sevenple, Shirley Eightple, Shirley Nineple, Shirley Tenple.

Anon, children’s game verse, recorded in Edinburgh, England, circa 1940.
When a ship left Europe, the captain would set and hold a direct course for its destination. Then, as the ship neared the coast, the captain would drastically alter the course, either up or down the coast away from the settlement. By making a deliberate error of greater magnitude than the inherent error of his navigational aids, the captain could be sure of which way to sail after sighting the coast.


It was not any prairie construction that inspired [John Lloyd Wright, the son of Frank Lloyd Wright, to invent Lincoln Logs], but a scene he witnessed in Japan in 1916 when he was in his early twenties. Accompanying his father to the site of the famed Imperial Hotel, he saw workers lifting great timber beams into place. Apparently a young man still in search of vocation, John Wright produced the toy version of the logs two years later. (His father’s own rapturous memories of the aesthetic and intellectual benefits of playing with Froebel blocks in his childhood may have been an influence as well.)

Highly Recommended: Royston M. Roberts, *Serendipity: Accidental Discoveries in Science* (New York: John Wiley, 1989). The term “serendipity” was coined by British writer Horace Walpole in homage to the characters in the fairy tale of *The Three Princes of Serendip*, who arrived at unanticipated solutions by unorthodox methods. This may be the most extensive account of accidental or “serendipitous” discoveries in science, beginning with Archimedes and progressing to informal stories about Velcro, Ivory soap, Vailium, Wheaties, NutraSweet, Post-it notes, styrofoam, Mylar, Teflon, and many more.

Arthur Koestler
*(The Act of Creation):* If you strive hard enough to get to India, you are bound to get to some America or other.

Woody Allen: I was down South once, and I was invited to a costume party. And I rarely go to them. (I went to one when I was younger: I went in my underwear shorts. I have varicose veins, you know, and I went as a road map.) And I figure what the hell, it’s Halloween, I’ll go as a ghost. So I take a sheet off the bed and I throw it over my head, and blip! I go to the party. And—you have to get the picture—I’m walking down the street in a Deep Southern town with a white sheet over my head, and a car pulls up, and three guys in white sheets say, “Get in.” So I figure they’re guys going to the party as ghosts. And I get into the car and I see we’re not going to the party, and I tell ’em, and they say, “Well, we have to go pick up the Grand Dragon.” And all of a sudden it hits me: Down South, white sheets, Grand Dragon. I put two and two together, and I figure there’s a guy going to the party dressed as a dragon. All of a sudden a big guy enters the car and I’m sitting there between four Klansmen, four big armed men, and the door’s locked, and I’m petrified. I’m trying to pass desperately. I’m saying “you’all” and “grits,” you know. I must have said “grits” fifty times. They’d ask me a question, and I’d say, “Well, grits, grits.” And next to me is the leader of the Klan. You can tell he’s the leader because he’s the one wearing contour sheets. And they drive me to an empty field, and I gave myself away. Because they asked for donations, and everybody there gave cash. When it came to me, I said, “I pledge fifty dollars.” And they knew immediately. They took my hood off and threw a rope around my neck. They decided to hang me. And suddenly my whole life passed before my eyes: I saw myself as a kid again in Kansas going to school, swimmin’ at the swimmin’ hole, fishin’, fryin’ up a mess of catfish, going down to the general store, gettin’ a piece of gingham for Emmy Lou. And I realize it’s not my life. There gonna hang me in two minutes, and the wrong life is passing before me! And I spoke to them. I was really eloquent. I said, “Fellas, this country can’t survive unless we love one another regardless of race, creed, or color.” And they were so moved by my words that not only did they cut me down and let me go, but that night I sold them two thousand dollars worth of Israel bonds.
As a child alone in a visitor's car, I pulled out the cigarette lighter from the dashboard, not knowing what it was, and placed my thumb on the end of it. The circular burn was horribly painful, but, knowing it was wrong to play with it, I told no one and silently endured the pain.

Anon, from the editor's journal.

Some months earlier, a Catholic priest from Luxembourg had joined *Gloria* (a WWII French underground resistance group with which Irish playwright Samuel Beckett was associated). The Abbe Robert Alesch, formerly of St. Maur, claimed to be in Paris as a student, an administrator, and as a minor functionary in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. He volunteered his services, saying that as a priest, he could travel freely throughout the occupied zone, and would be able to bring back valuable information about the eastern regions. Abbe Alesch soon became known as "the Bishop." He received and carried information, but most importantly for many of the agents, he was their priest and confidant. He heard their confessions, elicited information about where they had been, who their contacts were and what their next assignment would be. Often they came to him in the middle of the night for confession before setting out on what proved to be their last mission. What these hapless agents had no way of knowing was that Abbe Alesch was the former abbot of St. Maur, a dissolute, untrustworthy man who had been defrocked by the Church and almost immediately recruited by the Germans as a V-man, or informer. He was responsible for the destruction of *Gloria* and death to all but a handful of agents.

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 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 encouraged to suggest offbeat examples of visual or verbal 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. For seven 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, picking cherries, trimming the weeds on the volleyball court, painting the dining room, trying to identify the bird whose eerie call we hear at three in the morning, and putting up another fence because Ruskin got into some mischief again. The losses are currently offset by donations from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the Reader Service Chump'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), a 20-foot extension ladder, or highly unusual postcards.

Nothing is more humbling than to look with a strong magnifying glass at an insect so tiny that the naked eye sees only the barest speck and to discover that nevertheless it is sculpted and articulated and striped with the same care and imagination as a zebra. Apparently it does not matter to nature whether or not a creature is within our range of vision, and the suspicion arises that even the zebra was not designed for our benefit.


Leo Africanus (The History and Description of Africa and of the Notable Things Therein Contained, 1550): The Zebra or Zabra of this countrey being about the bignes of a mule, is a beast of incomparable swiftnes, straked about the body, legs, eares, and other parts, with blacke, white and browne circles of three fingers broad; which do make a pleasant shew.