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Our Eleventh Year

BALLAST QUARTERLY REVIEW VOLUME ELEVEN NUMBER ONE AUTUMN 1995



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lisher and art director.

PETER DE
VRIES
(*Tunnel of
Love*) I imag-
ined asking
her whether
she liked Le
Corbusier, and
her replying,
"Love some,
with a little
Benedictine if
you've got it."

BILL
MAXFIELD
(*The Prairie
Rambler*)
Politicians are
like dirty dia-
pers. They
need to be
changed fre-
quently and
for the same
reason.

A. J.
BALFOUR
[his comment
about a politi-
cal foe] If he
had a few
more brains he
would be a
half wit.

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 mainly a pastiche of astonishing passages from books, magazines, diaries and other writings. 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 educa-
tional, apolitical and noncommercial.
It does not carry advertisements, nor
is it supposed to be purchased or
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This is the inaugural issue of the sec-
ond decade of *Ballast*. Please note
that we have raised the price for the
first time in ten years. We will honor
all standing subscriptions, but hence-
forth all renewals, new subscriptions
and gift subscriptions will be subject
to the increased rate.



ABOVE Pencil drawing by Iowa-based illustrator Gary Kelley (1995)

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Steven Heller and Teresa Fernandes, *The Business of Illustration* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1995). ISBN 0-8230-0545-3. Were we teaching a course on illustration, undoubtedly this is the book we would use. Surely, there is no better, more complete overview of the subject, especially for students who want to become professional illustrators. In contrast to the glut of how-to books about tools, techniques and self-promotion with nothing to promote, this book is refreshingly candid about illustration as a business. Of particular value is a pictorial sampling of a dozen categories of illustration, followed by 13 forthright interviews with agents and illustrators, among them Brad Holland, Anita Kunz, Henrik Drescher, Steven Guarnaccia and Gary Kelley.

ANON
Persons who
live in Paris are
known as
Parisites.

**GROUCHO
MARX** [on
noticing his
former wife in
a restaurant]
Marx spots the
ex.

Our favorite book title of the year: *The Missionary Position: The Ideology of Mother Teresa* by Christopher Hitchens (New York: Verso, 1995).

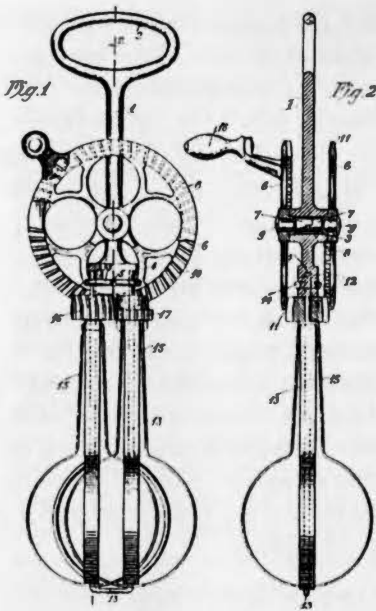
When I was six years old my grandmother took me to stay at St. Fillans in Perthshire, and one day we went on a very long drive to Glenartney. I got rather bored with sitting still for such a long time and I was being amused by little rhymes; one of which was "When you get to Glenartney, you'll hear a horse in a cart neigh," and when we got to Glenartney, sure enough, we did hear a horse in a cart neigh.

BERTRAND RUSSELL in Barry Feinberg, editor, *The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 266.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Alastair Brotchie, compiler, and Mel Gooding, editor, *A Book of Surrealist Games* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995). ISBN 1-57062-084-9. Begun in Zurich in 1916 as a collective tantrum against World War I, the Dada movement used accidents, errors and chance to produce offensive "anti-art" nonsense. After the war, its game-like methods were absorbed by Freud-inspired Surrealism, which Lucy Lippard once described as "housebroken Dada." Of great value to teachers, comedy writers and other problem-solvers, this is an illustrated compendium of ways to be inventive, humorous or absurd through deliberate irresponsibility or "planned incongruity" (Kenneth Burke's term), including automatic writing, the exquisite corpse, found objects, and photomontage.

In contrast to television, radio enlists the imagination of your collaborator, the listener. He becomes your set designer and your casting director. Though the singer you hear on the radio as Carmen may weigh three hundred pounds, to the listener, she's the gypsy with the rose in her teeth. In radio, there was no term like "couch potato" or "boob tube." Though there were shlocky programs, it was the ear that was poet of the senses. Imagination was the force, the spur.

NORMAN CORWIN, interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 178.



LEFT Eggbeater
patent No.
1,165,423, filed by
Earnest W. Ladd on
28 December 1915

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Don Thornton, *Beat This: The Eggbeater Chronicles: The Stirring Story of America's Greatest Invention* (Sunnyvale, CA: Off Beat Books, 1995). ISBN 0-9641243-0-0. This is an astonishing, wonderful book, a classic addition to studies of design history, advertising, technology and human ingenuity. No university library, and certainly no design library, should be without this visual and verbal history of the eggbeater and related mixing gadgets. We love historic patent drawings, and in no other volume have we found as many (more than 330), not to mention 340 photographs of more than 700 different eggbeaters (including current values), and 130 illustrations from historic catalogs and advertisements. An endlessly fascinating and amusing gift for design buffs and antique enthusiasts, this beautifully produced 240-page paperback can be ordered directly for \$28.95 post-paid from Off Beat Books, 1345 Poplar Avenue, Sunnyvale CA 94087.

He [British poet Robert Graves] said often that he bred show dogs in order to be able to afford a cat. The dogs were prose; the cat was poetry.

ALASTAIR REID, "Remembering Robert Graves" in *The New Yorker*, 4 September 1995, p. 73.

We have a whole culture which is starving for more direct sensory contact, particularly touch. Children now grow up on television instead of the way that I was raised, learning about the world by picking up objects, holding them, breaking them, seeing what they were inside and outside. That is the way you found out what the world is like. Now it's sitting in front of an image which you cannot touch, which doesn't respond to you. Think of what an extraordinary flattening and distancing that involves for a whole culture.

BELOW Logo for hypothetical cafe by Elise Plakke, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa

RUDOLF ARNHEIM, interviewed by Suzanne Ramljak in *Sculpture* magazine, March-April 1995.



I had an uncle, Rollo Russell, who was very good at explaining things to children. I asked him one day why they have stained glass in churches, and he said "Well, I'll tell you—long ago they didn't, but one day, just as the parson had got up into the pulpit and was about to begin his sermon, he saw a man outside the church walking with a pail of white-wash on his head. And at that precise moment the bottom of the pail fell out and the man was inundated with whitewash. The poor parson could not control his laughter and was unable to go on with his sermon. So ever since they've had stained glass in windows."

BERTRAND RUSSELL in Barry Feinberg, editor, *The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), pp. 268-269.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Ruari McLean, editor, *Typographers on Type* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). ISBN 0-393-70201-4. For a course on typography or the history of it, what better book to recommend. Following the example of earlier titles like *Artists on Art* and *Photographers on Photography*, this is a selection of comments about various aspects of typography and page design by nearly 50 typographers and designers, among W.A. Dwiggins, Jan Tschichold, Eric Gill, Paul Rand, Adrian Frutiger, Milton Glaser and Hermann Zapf. As might be expected, nearly all the entries are familiar classics: William Morris on the aims of Kelmscott Press, Eric Gill on book design, and Beatrice Warde (the only woman represented) on typography as a transparent goblet. Indeed, the only real surprise is not in what the book contains but in its inexplicable omissions. "Not every excellent performer writes well," explains McLean, best known for his earlier books on *Jan Tschichold: Typographer* and *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Typography*. Given that, why are there no excerpts from the books of or about Sumner Stone, April Greiman, Steven Heller, Suzanna Licko, Rudy Vanderlans or Neville Brody?

CHARLES BRAGG (*Asylum Earth*) Every once in a while, a possum really is dead.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED William Buchanan, et al., *Mackintosh's Masterwork: Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Glasgow School of Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1995). ISBN 0-8118-0932-3. The late design historian Reyner Banham referred to C.R. Mackintosh as "the last British architect of undoubted genius," and, as the title indicates, it is generally agreed that his greatest work was the Glasgow School of Art, begun in 1898. It provided a bridge between the ornamental effusiveness of the late 19th century and the geometric restraint of the 20th, and served as an early example of an architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total work of art"), in which Mackintosh designed not just the outer building, but everything inside as well. This is a wonderful tour of the school, still standing and in solid shape, narrated by seven essays by architectural historians, and illustrated by more than 200 photographs, many in color, with drawings and diagrams, even computer-generated projections of the building.

CHARLES
BRAGG
(*Asylum Earth*)
Nature abhors
a vacuum
cleaner sales-
man.



ABOVE Illustration by Charles Burns
from *Black Hole* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1995).

PAUL
HAMMOND
AND
PATRICK
HUGHES
(*Upon the
Pun*) There
was a man in a
house and he
could not get
out. The only
furniture was a
table. He
rubbed his
hands until
they were
sore. Then he
sawed the
table in half.
Two halves
make a whole.
He shouted
through the
hole until he
was hoarse,
jumped on the
horse and rode
away.

NOT RECOMMENDED Robin
Williams, with illustrations by John
Tollett, *A Blip in the Continuum*
(Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 1995). ISBN
1-56609-188-8. A few years ago,
design critic Steven Heller published a
now famous article in *Eye* magazine
on "The Cult of the Ugly," in which
he characterized postmodern
"grunge typography" as indecipher-
able self-expression. In the end, he
concluded, such design "will be a blip
in the continuum of graphic design
history." In this unfortunate, wasteful
retort—typeset in 100 more or less
ugly typefaces, with ugly illustrations,
in ugly unreadable layouts—we are
treated to cleverly edited quotes in
support of incompetence. Despite
Peachpit's reputation as a leading
source of excellent books on comput-
er-aided design, the kindest way to
describe this title is to say that it's
simply a blip in a blip in the continu-
um of graphic design history.

STEPHEN KING (*Writers Dreaming*) I've always used dreams the way you'd use mirrors to look at something you couldn't see head on—the way that you use a mirror to look at your hair in the back.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Eva Mendgen, *In Perfect Harmony: Picture + Frame 1850-1920* (Zwolle, The Netherlands: Van Gogh Museum / Kunstform Wien, Waanders Uitgevers, 1995). ISBN 0-295-97478-8. In looking at nearly any book on visual art, it is apparent how few artworks are ever reproduced with their frames. The assumption now, or so it seems, is that artworks are compositionally complete without a frame, that frames are extraneous. Yet, as we learn from this beautiful book, James McNeill Whistler signed his frames, D.G. Rossetti finished his paintings only after they had been framed, and Georges Seurat painted both paintings and frames simultaneously. Perhaps influenced by the architectural concept of *Gestamtkunstwerk*, these and other artists from the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarded a painting and its frame as "part and parcel" of an aesthetic whole. As the result, not only did such artists as Klimt, Degas, Pissarro, van Gogh, Miro and Kandinsky select frames that were compatible with their paintings, in many cases they invented surprisingly intricate frames that were as interesting and unusual as the paintings themselves. Here then for the first time, in this magnificent volume, hundreds of artworks are reproduced in full-color with the frames originally designed for them. The result is often astonishing, as in for example our favorite works, Joan Miro's *Portrait of a Man in a Late 19th-Century Frame*, and D.G. Rossetti's *Fair Rosamund*.

HUGH CASSON In order to have an avant-garde you have to have a garde.

The frog eats, sleeps, digests and lays its eggs at the bottom of the pool and only rises to the surface to communicate with its fellows. So it is with writers, painters and composers.

GERALD BRENAN, *Thoughts in a Dry Season* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 5.

CHARLES
BRAGG
(*Asylum Earth*)
Orange is the
navy blue of
India.

Just yesterday, I was looking at the catalog of a nearby college. I couldn't believe the courses they are offering. How to use a computer. How to make a good investment. How to get a good job. How to, how to. There was hardly one course to make the inner man grow. If you suggest that a course in ancient history may play a role in a person's growth, they laugh at you.

SOPHIA MUMFORD, interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 427.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age: The Story of Our Century by Those Who've Lived It* (New York: The New Press, 1995). ISBN 1-56584-284-7. American society suffers from collective Alzheimer's, says Studs Terkel, "and the young are suffering from it the most severely. We don't know anything about the past and we don't seem to want to know." The author of widely-praised, best-selling books like *Hard Times*, *Working*, *Race* and *The Good War*, the 83-year-old prize-winning oral historian now interviews 70 strong-minded and outspoken Americans, the youngest of whom is 70 and the oldest 99. Nearly every page is mesmerizing, but, being artists, we were especially delighted to find interviews with art critic Katherine Kuh (at age 89) and Sophia Mumford (at 94), widow of Lewis Mumford.

W. H.
AUDEN
Those who
hate to go to
bed fear
death, those
who hate to
get up fear
life.

Stol was a dedicated pipe-smoker. When they were first married, [his wife] Beetle took it into her head that his pipes were a filthy, smelly old lot, what you would expect of a bachelor, so she stewed them for hours in a cauldron of soapy water. Notwithstanding this fearful vandalism, they stayed married. People were hardier plants in those days.

D. J. ENRIGHT, *Interplay: A Commonplace Book* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 6.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED *Kindred Spirits: The Eloquence of Function in American Shaker and Japanese Arts of Daily Life* (San Diego: Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art, 1995). ISBN 0-914155-08-3. Arriving in America in 1774, the Shakers were a work-centered religious sect that practiced strict celibacy. Shaker architecture, interiors and furniture anticipated the simplicity ("less is more") and functionalism ("form follows function") of modern design. Equally strong in its resemblance to Modernism is traditional Japanese design, which was introduced to European and American designers in the mid-19th century. Prepared to accompany a traveling show (now at the Morikami Museum in Delray, Florida, until 3 March 1996) of Shaker and Japanese functional things, this beautiful book of full-color photographs is as understated and elegant as the exquisite objects it celebrates.

To Western society the artists are more dangerous than are the Marxists, whose aim is to make life twice as dead and conventional as it was before. And to Communist society they are more dangerous still, as the Soviet government well knows. Yet they should be tolerated, because like earthworms they turn over the soil and aerate it so that the trees and roses may grow.

Nations that lack good poets and artists are like plains where saline deposits accumulate in a baked soil till nothing will grow there any longer.

GERALD BRENNAN, *Thoughts in a Dry Season* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 119.

GERTRUDE
STEIN

College professors have two bad traits. They are logical and they are easily flattered.

PAUL HAMMOND AND PATRICK HUGHES (*Upon the Pun*) Why was Pharaoh's daughter like a shrewd, cold-blooded broker in a bear market? It's because she got a handsome prophet from the rushes on the banks.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Edward Robb Ellis, *A Diary of the Century* (New York: Kodansha International, 1995). ISBN 1-56836-080-0. Newspaper reporter Eddie Ellis was born in 1911 and began keeping a diary at age 16. Now 84, in poor health and living in New York, he rarely leaves his apartment but still spends an hour or more each day making diary entries. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* has 44 million words, while Ellis' diary has more than 20 million. This 600-page book constitutes only 1 percent of the full diary. Unfortunately, Ellis is no Samuel Pepys, so that, even when edited that heavily, much of what remains is dull, self-evident or trivial. Nevertheless, anyone looking for eyewitness accounts of American attitudes, people and events of this century will find this book of interest.

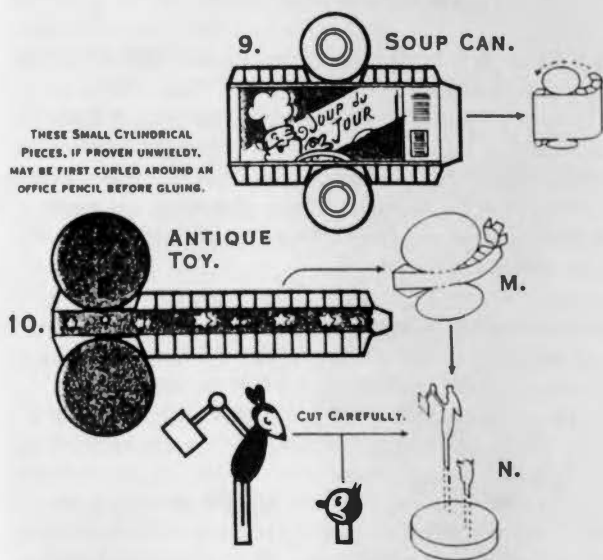
[George Lane Fox Pit, a cousin] had an experience which shows the dangers of book-learning. He married a sister of Lord Alfred Douglas. On his wedding night he was overheard saying: "I must go and look it up in the book," and shortly afterwards he was heard saying, "It sounds quite simple." However, very shortly afterwards there was a nullity.

BERTRAND RUSSELL in Barry Fineberg, editor, *The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 269.

**GERALD
BRENNAN**
Imagination
means letting
the birds in
one's head out
of their cages
and watching
them fly up
into the air.

I'm afraid of one thing. I want my death to be dignified. My fear is that something will cause me to live past the point where my life has value. I don't want to live on. I won't go to a doctor now [at age 94] except for minor things that can be immediately remedied. But corrective things, no. From now on, if life says it's leaving, I'm not doing anything about it. If I get a bad pain and it's diagnosed as cancer, then I won't wait, I'll go. I'm ready, because I feel I've had a good life.

SOPHIA MUMFORD (widow of Lewis Mumford), interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 429.



ABOVE Detail from one of the "jolly toy paper cutouts" by Chris Ware in the Acme Novelty Library.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Otto L. Bettmann, *Johann Sebastian Bach as the World Knew Him* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995). ISBN 1-55972-279-7. From 1723 until his death in 1750, Bach was music director of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. As a boy growing up in Leipzig, Otto Bettmann sang in the choir at the Thomaskirche and stared up at a statue of Bach outside the church. In 1935, after emigrating to the U.S., he founded the famous Bettmann Archive picture agency. Now 91-years-old, Bettmann returns to the subject of Bach in a book that is like a computer, he notes, because "when you want to know something you can call it up." While it begins with a chronology and glossary, the remainder of the book is not chronological but alphabetical. For each letter of the alphabet, there are one or more pint-sized essays on subjects directly related to Bach, beginning with *Abendmusik* and ending with *Zeitgeist*. Illustrated by material from the Archive and enlivened by anecdotal asides, this delightful book can be read in any order, for any length of sitting.

GERALD BRENAN Miracles are like jokes. They relieve our tension suddenly by setting us free from the chain of cause and effect.

OTHER RECOMMENDED BOOKS

DONALD HOFFMANN, *Understanding Frank Lloyd Wright's Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995). ISBN 0-486-28364-X. Dozens of new Wright books have come out in recent years, many with full-color illustrations and lengthy, convoluted texts. In this small, handsome overview, all 127 illustrations (drawings, diagrams and photographs) are black and white, and the writing is simple, direct and concise.

CHRIS WARE, *Acme Novelty Library*, including *Jimmy Corrigan*, *The Smartest Kid on Earth* (\$3.50) and *Quimby the Mouse* (\$3.95) [various issues] (Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle WA 98115). Reminiscent of Winsor McCay and George Herriman, these are astonishing comic books, in imagination, elegance and complexity far beyond anything currently made, *Maus* included. Aside from his comics, Ware's ingenious mimicry of 19th century *Scientific American* layouts (complete with phony letters to the editor), mail order ads from the 1950s, and paper cutout toys are breathtaking. Do not miss this! Suggested by Paul Krajniak.

CHARLES BURNS, *Black Hole* (Northampton, MA: Kitchen Sink Press, 1995). We have long been interested in the comic book art of Charles Burns, whose drawings we first encountered in *Raw*. In this book, written and illustrated by Burns, the drawings are characteristically stunning, but the narrative, while more challenging and suggestive than most comics, is too simple for adults.

CURTIS BESINGER, *Working with Mr. Wright: What It Was Like* (University of Cambridge, 1995). ISBN 0-521-48122-8. Besinger was a Wright student at Taliesin for two stints from 1939 to 1955. Other students have written memoirs about working with Wright, but none is more detailed in documenting daily life. Amply illustrated, it is a invaluable account, but, given Wright's reputation for outspokenness and eccentricity, the shortage of humor is disappointing.

He suddenly recalled that he had once in the past been asked, "Why do you hate so and so, so much?" And he had answered them, with his shameless impudence, "I'll tell you. He had done me no harm. But I played him a dirty trick, and ever since I have hated him."

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Suggested by Allan Shickman.

Ballast is published in Iowa, in a region that might have been listed among the most desirable places in which to live were it not for a recent dramatic increase in large lucre-ative hog lots, promoted by the current Governor and legislative majority, resulting in manure spills and a general persistent unbearable stench.

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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For more than ten years, it has operated at a financial loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the Subscription Booster's paycheck. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely, not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

The same chronicler related that [in China] it was bad form to ask a man to repay what he had borrowed from you; instead, you would request a loan from him equivalent to the amount owed.

D. J. ENRIGHT,
Interplay: A Kind of Commonplace Book (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 13.

Headline blooper in story on Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*: THOMPSON'S PENIS A SWORD.

Suggested by Walter Hamady, as reported in *The Progressive*.

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INCREASE IN
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