

Spring 1997

## Ballast Quarterly Review, v12n3, Spring 1997

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MARK  
T W A I N  
History does  
not repeat  
itself, but it  
does rhyme.

The Middle  
Ages hangs  
over history's  
belt like a beer  
belly. It is too  
late now for  
aerobic danc-  
ing or cottage  
cheese lunches  
to reduce the  
Middle Ages.  
History will  
have to wear  
size 48 shorts  
forever.

T O M  
R O B B I N S  
*Jitterbug  
Perfume* (New  
York: Bantam  
Books, 1984), p.  
172. Suggested  
by Matthew  
DeLay.

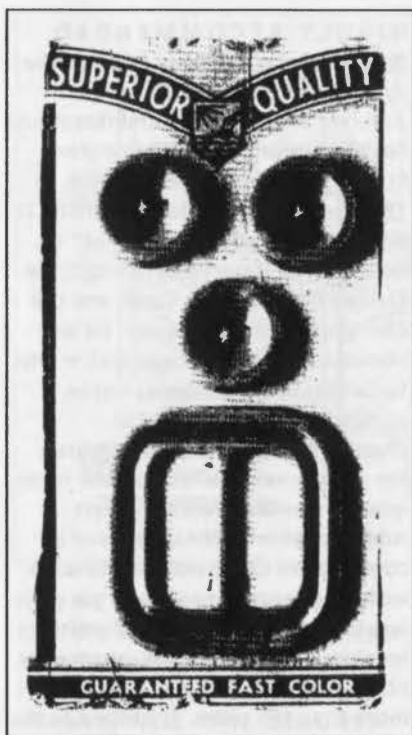
*Ballast* is an acronym for Books Art  
Language Logic Ambiguity Science and  
Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to  
*Blast*, the short-lived publication found-  
ed during World War I by Wyndham  
Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer.  
*Ballast* is mainly a pastiche of astonish-  
ing passages from books, magazines,  
diaries and other writings. Put differ-  
ently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the  
contents of which are intended to be  
insightful, amusing or thought provok-  
ing.

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ROBERT GRAVES (*Observations on Poetry*)  
Rhymes properly used are the good servants whose  
presence at the dinner table gives the guests a  
sense of opulent security; never awkward or over-  
clever, they hand the dishes silently and profession-  
ally. You can trust them not to interrupt the conver-  
sation or allow their personal disagreements to  
come to the notice of the guests; but some of them  
are getting very old for their work.



## LEFT

A face discovered on a button card by Swiss designers (and brothers)

FRANÇOIS AND JEAN ROBERT, from their book of found faces titled *Face to Face* (Switzerland: Lars Müller, and New York: Princeton Architectural Press /

Distributed by Chronicle Books, 1997). ISBN 1-56898-111-2.

As a teacher [of art history at the University of Berlin, Adolph Goldschmidt] was the very opposite of a flamboyant performer, but he captured the attention of his students by the wealth of his material. He was a small man, his nose buried in the papers from which he had lectured for decades. He had no need to raise his eyes to the screen, because his assistant had run the slides for him forever, and when the professor said, "In the lower left corner we see the figure of the Evangelist," it would have amounted to the unthinkable collapse of preestablished harmony if the Evangelist had not held his appointed place on the screen at that exact moment.

RUDOLF ARNHEIM "A Maverick in Art History" in *The Split and the Structure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 104.

## A . J .

BALFOUR  
History does not repeat itself.

Historians repeat each other.

## EDWARD THOMAS

The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet.

**CLAUDE  
DEBUSSY**  
Music is the  
arithmetic of  
sounds as  
optics is the  
geometry of  
light.

**JAMES  
A. M.  
WHISTLER**  
As music is the  
poetry of  
sound, so  
painting is the  
poetry of  
sight.

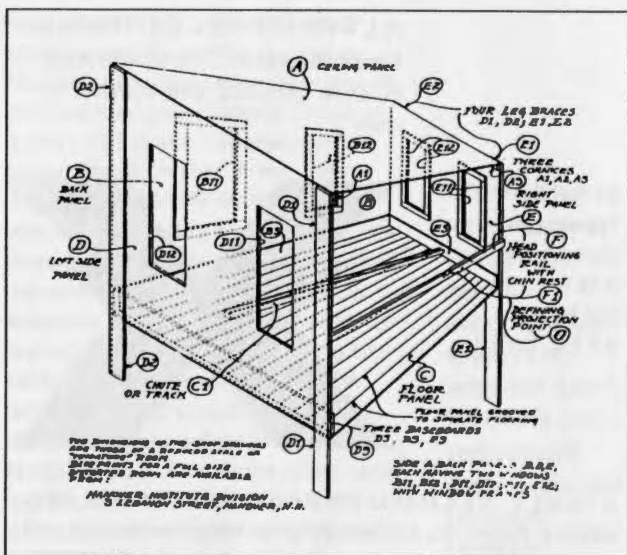
**ELBERT  
HUBBARD**  
Life is just one  
damned thing  
after another.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**  
Bruce I. Bustard, *A New Deal for the Arts* (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration / Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997). ISBN 0-295-97600-4. In 1933, when U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered "work relief" to unemployed Americans through the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Civil Works Administration, he was persuaded to create comparable jobs for artists in which, for example, painters would be hired "at plumbers' wages" to create murals for government buildings. One consequence was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), opposed by conservative Congressmen, through which the government used tax dollars to employ thousands of artists, musicians, actors, writers, photographers, and dancers over a period of more than ten years. Published as the catalog for a 1997 exhibition of New Deal art at the NARA, this book offers dozens of examples of work produced for the WPA, a narrative of the agency's controversial duration, and a helpful bibliography.

He [a 13-year-old British boy, blind from birth, whose sight was restored] was very much surprised, that those things which he had liked best, did not appear most agreeable to his eyes, expecting those persons would appear most beautiful that he loved most, and such things to be most agreeable to his sight, that were so to his taste...Being shewn his father's picture in a locket at his mother's watch, and told what it was, he acknowledged the likeness, but was vastly surprised; asking, how it could be, that a large face could be expressed in so little room, saying, it should have seemed as impossible for him, as to put a bushel of anything into a pint.

**WILLIAM CHESELDEN** (1728), quoted in R.L. Gregory, editor, *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1987).

**A N O N** Who was that ladle I  
saw you with last night? That was  
no ladle, that was my knife.



## HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

John Willats, *Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). ISBN 0-691-08737-7. One of the chief innovations of the Renaissance was the systematic use of linear perspective, by which an illusion of depth is conveyed on a flat surface. Assumed to be a requirement of "realistic" representation, it remained more or less unchallenged until the emergence of Modernism, when alternative systems of drawing were stressed in studies of Japanese prints, African art, children's drawings, expressionism, and so on. In 1972, British artists Fred Dubery and John Willats described and analyzed alternative methods of "projection" in *Drawing Systems* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold). In this elegant, well-illustrated volume, Willats, who has degrees in engineering, sculpture, and psychology, returns with a lengthy, fascinating discussion of why alternative drawing systems commonly found in engineering diagrams (orthogonal, horizontal oblique, vertical oblique, oblique, and isometric and axonometric projections) have historically also appeared in the art of children and of adults from different time periods and cultures.

ABOVE Construction diagram for an Ames distorted room, designed by lawyer, artist, and psychologist ADELBERT AMES II (1935), in which things inside appear to grow or shrink as they move from one side to another. For a set of plans, see W.H. Ittelson, *The Ames Demonstrations in Perception* (New York: Hafner, 1968). For more on Ames, see Roy R. Behrens, "Eyed Awry: The Ingenuity of Del Ames" in *The North American Review* (March/April 1997), pp. 26-33.

**ALVIN TOFFLER** *The Law of Raspberry Jam: The wider any culture spreads, the thinner it gets.*

**RIGHT**  
 Typographic  
 character by  
**AMY  
 VANDER  
 BEEK (1997).**



**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** David Chandler, et al., editors, *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996). ISBN 0-262-53143-7. Ten years ago, Joyce Carol Oates published a surprising book on the greatly despised pastime of boxing. Here, she joins 11 other writers, art historians, and artists, in an anthology of illustrated essays on the art, science, and sociology of this savage yet rhythmically beautiful sport. One article is about "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity in Early 19th-Century England," another about "Raging Bulls: Sexuality and the Boxing Movie." On page 21 is an exquisite collage by Ingrid Pollard. But the book's highlight is an essay by Roger Lloyd Conover, titled "Arthur Craven: Stances of the Century." Organized like rounds in a boxing match ("Round 1: Poet," "Round 2: Boxer," "Round 3: Poseur"), it is an account of the scurrilous life of British boxer and Dada artist Craven (born Fabian Lloyd), who was Oscar Wilde's nephew and Mina Loy's husband. Self-described as a "Professor of Boxing and Art," he lasted six rounds in a nondescript bout in 1916 with heavyweight champion Jack Johnson, then two years later took his life in a boat off the coast of Mexico by literally disappearing into the sunset.

**A N O N**  
 [referring to  
 the polluted  
 River Mersey]  
 The quality of  
 Mersey is not  
 strained.

**JULIE STEINBACH** (*Prairie Rambler*) If a parsley farmer is sued, can they garnish his wages? When you open a new bag of cotton balls, is the top one meant to be thrown away? Should vegetarians eat animal crackers? How can there be self-help "groups"? Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle? If builders are afraid to have a 13th floor, are book publishers afraid to have a Chapter 11?

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

Mimi Cazort, et al., *The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centures of Art and Anatomy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada / distributed by University of Chicago Press, 1997). ISBN 0-888-84657-6. With the development of printing around 1500, the relationship between artists and medical scientists grew to be symbiotic: Anatomical studies were required of artists in the process of learning to faithfully draw the human figure, while anatomists needed artists to illustrate their medical tracts. This lavish, large-sized volume is the catalog for an exhibition of the same name that opened last fall in Canada, and is now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art until June 14. Beautifully designed, and strengthened by scores of astonishing plates of the dissected body, the book's marrow are scholarly, readable essays about the collaborative relationship between artists and anatomists, books about anatomy for artists, dissection theatres, attitudes about female anatomy, and even a sampling of caricatures of anatomists.

**ANDRÉ BRETON**

*(Manifestoes of Surrealism)* The simplest surrealist act consists of going down into the streets revolver in hand, and shooting at random.

**BRAD HOLLAND**

*Surrealism: An archaic term.* Formerly an art movement. No longer distinguishable from everyday life.

The really terrible thing about life is not that our dreams are unrealized but that they come true.

**MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE**

*Chronicles of Wasted Time* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1989). Suggested by Roy Paul Nelson.

Laborers, or navvies, were then [in 19th-century London] a separate race, with red handkerchiefs knotted around their necks and corduroy trousers strapped below the knee; and my father described seeing one of the sewer rats that haunted every piece of waste land leap up a navy's trouser leg; at which the man had grasped it through the fold of the heavy stuff and quickly crushed it to death inside his iron palm.

**PETER QUENNELL**

*The Marble Foot: An Autobiography 1905-1938* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 44.



CLARENCE  
DAY (*This*

*Simian World*)

The snake, it is known, is the animal most monkeys dread. Hence when men give their devil a definite form they make him a snake. A race of super-chickens would have pictured their devil a hawk.

One of my uncles [as a child in 19th-century England] had selected "The Dance of Salome" [as a subject to draw], and was portraying the dancer as a Middle Eastern houri, in voluminous silken pantaloons and a small embroidered jacket, between which he permitted to appear a narrow strip of skin. My grandfather had entered the room, taken a coldly considered view of his children's various works, then picked up a brush, charged it with a lurid purple and, silently leaning over the artist's shoulder, painted out Salome's midriff. No less silently he had turned and gone his way. My uncle accepted the implied reproach, and hastened to destroy his drawing.

PETER QUENNEL *The Marble Foot: An Autobiography 1905-1938* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 14.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Jonathan W.

Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997). ISBN 0-19-284204-8.

Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (Oxford University Press, 1997). ISBN 0-19-284200-5. These are new titles from an anticipated series of about 50 volumes in the Oxford History of Art, covering world art and architecture as well as less typical areas like *Art and the New Technology*, *Art and Film*, and *Art and Science*. Woodham's design history gives little space to celebrated individuals, movements, or particular objects (which "change their meanings when used or viewed in different periods and places"), preferring instead to present an account of patterns of consumption, taste, and cultural significance, in the belief that "the most famous designs of the twentieth century are not those in museums, but in the marketplace." Social context is Clarke's focus as well in his overview of photography, although he is much more inclined to admit that photography *has* a history because of "a series of individual photographers who have been central to its development and who have produced what remain its definitive images." He begins with "What is a Photograph?," "How Do We Read a Photograph?," and "Photography and the Nineteenth Century," then embarks on a series of essays about subject categories: Landscape, the city, portraiture, the body, and documentary reportage. Both books include dozens of illustrations, a timeline, and a bibliography.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** Steven Heller and Louise Fili, *French Modern: Art Deco Graphic Design* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997). ISBN 0-8118-0751-7. Louise Fili is a prominent New York designer; Steven Heller, her husband, has produced more than 50 books on graphic design and is a senior art director at the *New York Times*. In the past few years, they have co-authored a series of dazzling yet very affordable books on historic design artifacts, all published by Chronicle, including *Italian Art Deco: Graphic Design Between the Wars*, *Dutch Moderne: Graphic Design from de Stijl to Deco*, and *Streamline: American Art Deco*. In this, the latest title in the series, they offer a breathtaking full-color tour of French advertising art (posters, signs, advertising fans, books, packaging, toys, point-of-purchase displays) from the 1920s and 30s, including chapters on culture, fashion, beauty, food and drink, industry, travel, and typography. Each section is introduced by a brief, helpful narrative, but the book's most gratifying aspect (as is true of the entire series) is the richness and variety of its reproductions.

The name of the professor [of art history at the University of Berlin] who examined me in the orals was, I believe, Edmund Hildebrandt. He was a specialist in the Quattrocento and had agoraphobia, so that for his lectures the students had to squeeze into a small auditorium, where people fainted for lack of oxygen. He remains in my memory because in the orals he asked me to describe, without the benefit of illustrations, the stylistic differences between the tails of the horses on the two equestrian figures of Donatello's *Gattamelata* and Verrocchio's *Colleoni*.

**RUDOLF ARNHEIM** in "A Maverick in Art History" in *The Split and the Structure: Twenty-Eight Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 105.

**FINLEY PETER DUNNE** (*Mr. Dooley's Philosophy*) Most vigitaryans I ever see looked enough like their food to be classed as cannyballs.

"It takes two to paint," Chase said, "one to paint, the other to stand by with an axe to kill him before he spoils it."

**WILLIAM MERRIT CHASE** quoted in *Art and Antiques* (May 1991). Suggested by Jeff Brown.

**BALINESE PROVERB**  
We have no art; we do everything well.

Years ago the photographer Alfred Steiglitz reportedly told Pablo Picasso, "I don't understand your paintings. They don't look like anything." With that he showed the artist a photograph of his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keeffe. "This is my wife," he continued.

"This is exactly what she looks like." Picasso looked at the snapshot, then replied politely, "Small, isn't she?"

**DAVID FISHER** *Hard Evidence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Suggested by Richard Colburn.

**BERKELEY RICE**  
Visionary people are visionary partly because of the very great many things they don't see.

"I'd found the answer [to how and what to paint] when I joined a school of painters in Paris after the war who called themselves neomeditationists," he [Grant Wood] later said to the amusement of the American press (and certainly the delight of many Iowans). "They believed an artist had to wait for inspiration, very quietly, and they did most of their waiting at the Café du Dome or the Rotonde with brandy. It was then that I realized that all the really good ideas I'd ever had came to me while I was milking a cow. So I went back to Iowa."

**GRANT WOOD** Quoted in *Art and Antiques* (January 1989). Suggested by Jeff Brown.



**ABOVE** A geographical goat by cartoonist Richard F. Outcault, creator of *The Yellow Kid*, from the *New York World* (February 23, 1896).

Abdul Kassem Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the 10th century, couldn't bear to part with his 117,000-volume library when he traveled, and he had the books carried by a caravan of 400 camels trained to walk in alphabetical order.

From a review in the *New York Times Book Review* of **ALBERTO MANGUEL**, *A History of Reading*. Suggested by Carol Stevens.

**WOODY ALLEN** (*Side Effects*) Paris: Wet pavements. And lights—everywhere there are lights! I come upon a man at an outdoor café. It is André Malraux. Oddly, he thinks that I am André Malraux. I explain that he is Malraux and I am just a student. He is relieved to hear this, as he is fond of Mme. Malraux and would hate to think she is my wife. We talk of serious things, and he tells me that man is free to choose his own fate and that not until he realizes that death is part of life can he really understand existence. Then he offers to sell me a rabbit's foot. Years later, we meet at a dinner, and again he insists that I am Malraux. This time, I go along with it and get to eat his fruit cocktail.

**A N O N** Two musicians:  
Who was that piccolo I saw you with last night? That was no piccolo, that was my fife.

**MALAYSIAN PROVERB**  
He can see a gnat as far away as China but is blind to an elephant in his own nose.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** Sister Wendy Beckett, *The Story of Painting* (New York: DK Publishing / Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1994). ISBN 1-56458-615-4. The author is a Catholic nun who has become widely-known in England through a series of popular television programs, such as *Sister Wendy's Odyssey* and *Sister Wendy's Grand Tour*. This is an art appreciation text, a narrated pictorial history of Western painting, from the Paleolithic cave paintings in northern Spain to the abrasive yet classic expressionist art of Lucian Freud (the psychoanalyst's grandson), Anselm Kiefer, Frank Auerbach and others. While the text is both intelligent and persuasive, it's a more or less typical journey, and no great surprises occur on the way. On the other hand, it is chiefly intended as an introduction for laymen, for whom it undoubtedly ought to provide any number of insights, with exquisite color reproductions of more than 450 masterpieces.

**PETER QUENNELL** (*The Marble Foot*) Heaven is more difficult to describe than Hell; the pains of a childish imagination are less elusive than its pleasures.

**A N O N**  
Who was that lady I saw you outwit'?

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** Steven C. McGough, *Thiebaud Selects Thiebaud: A Forty-Year Survey from Private Collections* (Sacramento CA: Crocker Art Museum / Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1996). ISBN 1-884038-00-X. Thiebaud of course is Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced TEE-bow), the California-based painter who, in many circles, is among the most highly respected of living artists. Born in 1920, he worked briefly as a Disney animator, then turned to painting, and held his first one-person show at age 31 at the Crocker Art Museum. This is the catalog for a 1996 exhibit, in which the artist returned to the Crocker to select a retrospective of his work, including still lifes, figure studies, landscapes, and cityscapes. A total of 69 pieces were shown (the earliest from 1955, the latest 1996), 22 of which are reproduced in color. While his paintings are always satisfying (he is particularly admired for his color), it is also of interest to look at the show as a composition, to ask what he chose to exhibit and why. The book opens with a fascinating 9-page interview, in which there is generous evidence of Thiebaud's kindness, his serious commitment to teaching, and a balanced regard for traditional art.

Newton saw an apple fall and discovered the Law of Gravity...Eve made an apple fall and discovered the Gravity of Law.

ALEXANDER KING, *I Should Have Kissed Her More*. Suggested by Roy Paul Nelson.

SIR E. H. GOMBRICH

[to Joseph Podlesnik, after reading his MFA thesis] You quote me so much, I would be perverse if I did not agree with you.

WOODY ALLEN (*Getting Even*) Picasso was a short man who had a funny way of walking by putting one foot in front of the other until he would take what he called "steps." We laughed at his delightful notions, but toward the late 1930s, with fascism on the rise, there was very little to laugh about. Both Gertrude Stein and I examined Picasso's newest works very carefully, and Gertrude Stein was of the opinion that "art, all art, is merely an expression of something." Picasso disagreed and said, "Leave me alone. I was eating." My own feelings were that Picasso was right. He had been eating.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

William R. Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

ISBN 0-226-22480-5. This is an unorthodox narrative on turn-of-the-century art, literature, music, science, and philosophy. It opens in 1872 with a little-known German mathematician named Richard Dedekind ("the West's first Modernist") and concludes in 1913, as World War I begins. The author, Dean of Humanities at St. Ann's School in Brooklyn, is both a historian and a poet. As a historian, he blazes a trail through the tangle of names, events, and inventions that, from the rear-view mirror of our own *fin de siècle*, appear to take on the discernible shape of something called "Modernism." At the same time, as a poet for whom journeys are as important as destinations, he is forever enriching the trip with shifts of emphasis, incongruous bedfellows, and rhymes of intention, location, and time. Along the way, we bump into dozens of marvelous minds, among them Ludwig Boltzmann, Scott Joplin, August Strindberg, and Edwin S. Porter. Modernism is an old story, and there are hundreds of more or less typical books on its unfolding; this one is among the more interesting, the least typical.

**WAYNE THIEBAUD**

*(Thiebaud Selects Thiebaud)* One of the great joys of being a painter is just the pleasure of being so intimately connected to this community [of the tradition of art]...I mean, the longer you work, the more you appreciate what those marvelous painters did, and how damned good they are. Ye God! And it's a little bit of a paradox. You think, "I think I'll give up right now—I've seen the Vermeer show." But, he's a human being like us, and, by God, you can just keep going!



**ABOVE**  
Pen-and-ink portrait of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1983), by the eminent translator, essayist, fiction writer, and MacArthur Fellow GUY DAVENPORT, who often illustrates his own short stories. It is one of 90 artworks in Erik Anderson Reece, *A Balance of Quinces: The Paintings and Drawings of Guy Davenport* (New York: New Directions, 1996). ISBN 0-8112-1336-6.

Dylan Thomas [the alcoholic Welsh poet] made no attempt to conceal or excuse the compulsive disorder of his daily life; and I remember that he once advised me to use a barber's shop in Soho, adding that the barber was a sensible sort of person who did not at all object should a client succumb to morning nausea while in the midst of being shaved.

PETER QUENNEL  
*The Sign of the Fish* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), pp. 141-142.

MARVIN BELL [when asked how to tell a good poem from a bad one] A bad poem stinks.

## OTHER EXCELLENT BOOKS

Arnold M. Ludwig, *The Price of Greatness: Resolving the Creativity and Madness Controversy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995). ISBN 1-57230-117-1. Actually, this may not resolve anything, but it is fascinating, and undoubtedly sheds some statistical light on the question of whether "madness" (depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide) is an inevitable consequence of extraordinary achievement.

Phaidon Press, *The Art Book* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1996). ISBN 0-7148-3625-7. What a bargain. For less than \$10, you get 500 color reproductions of works by as many painters and sculptors, A to Z, from medieval to modern. Plus a paragraph on each, two glossaries, and a museum guide.

Cheryl Besenjak, *Copyright Plain and Simple* (Franklin Lakes NJ: Career Press, 1997). ISBN 1-56414-273-6. Photocopying, scanning, and new laws have confounded copyright. This clear, simple, inexpensive overview includes informative chapters about fair use, printed texts, visual arts, music, and performing arts.

Rudolf Arnheim, *Film Essays and Criticism*. Translated by Brenda Benthein. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). ISBN 0-299-15264-2. Arnheim, a gestalt psychologist and art theorist, worked as a film critic during the Weimar Republic, and wrote a pioneering book on *Film as Art*. This is the first English anthology of the *feuilletons* or short essays about film that he wrote between 1925 and 1940.

Jean-Luc Hennig, *The Rear View: A Brief and Elegant History of Bottoms Through the Ages* (New York: Crown, 1997). ISBN 0-517-70814-0. A cunning French linguist opens the door, if only a crack, on the sexual and social significance of the *derrière*.

*Ballast* is published in Iowa, about 45 miles from the birthplace of the expatriate painter William Edwards Cook (1881-1959), who lived much of his adult life in Paris, where he taught Gertrude Stein to drive.

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**E. B. WHITE** (*One Man's Meat*) A poet's pleasure is to withhold a little of his meaning, to intensify by mystification. He unzips the veil from beauty, but does not remove it.

**WOODY ALLEN** (*Getting Even*) In 1921, Thomas (The Butcher) Covello and Ciro (The Tailor) Santucci attempted to organize disparate ethnic groups of the underworld and thus take over Chicago. This was foiled when Albert (The Logical Positivist) Corillo assassinated Kid Lipsky by locking him in a closet and sucking all the air out through a straw.

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**COVER**  
Collage produced on computer by **RAYMOND SÉLAVY** (1997).



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