BALLAST

TOUR DE FALLS
JULY 23 1998
CEDAR FALLS
ROBERT DRENNAN
(Wit's End)
[Dorothy] Parker once collided with Clare Boothe Luce in a doorway. "Age before beauty," cracked Mrs. Luce. "Pearls before swine," said Mrs. Parker, gliding through the door.

JONATHAN MILLER
(Beyond the Fringe)
In fact, I'm not really a Jew. Just Jew-ish. Not the whole hog, you know.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD
Most people think that the Christian commandments are intentionally a little too severe—like setting a clock half an hour ahead to make sure of not being late in the morning.

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 educational, apolitical and noncommercial. It does not carry advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is published approximately every three months, beginning in the fall (more or less) and ending in the summer.

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SANFORD ZANE
MESCHKOW He who drinks borscht with a cross bear may carry home salt, but he will limp.
WILLIAM STARKWEATHER
[describing John Singer Sargent]
An American, born in Italy, educated in France, who looks like a German, speaks like an Englishman, and paints like a Spaniard.


SAMUEL SCHOENBAUM
(Shakespeare's Lives) [Desmond McCarthy] said somewhere that trying to work out Shakespeare's personality was like looking at a very dark glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery: at first you see nothing, then you begin to recognize features, and then you realize that they are your own.

W. G. ROBERTSON
It is positively dangerous to sit to Sargent. It's taking your face in your hands.

HAROLD ACTON
(Memoirs of an Aesthete) His [Sargent's] advice to a fellow painter was: "Begin with Frans Hals, copy and study Frans Hals, after that go to Madrid and copy Velasquez, leave Velasquez, till you have got all you can out of Frans Hals."

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY
[having survived a certain surgery] Well, better a semi-colon than a full stop!

JANE ACE
Doctor, feel my purse.
RUDOLF ARNHEIM (Parables of Sun Light) One of the nice things about Rome is that one never knows exactly what time it is. No two clocks ever agree. One perceives the moment through a soft focus, in which the edges of all duties and commitments are happily cushioned.

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN There are only three things that are sure in life: Marshmallow, plum pudding, orangutans, and chairs.

GEORGE S. KAUFMANN I like terra firma—the more firma, the less terra.

ELIAS CANETTI (Notes from Hampstead) The couple's watches: never the same time.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Florian Rodari, et al., Shadows of a Hand: The Drawings of Victor Hugo (London: Merrell Holberton / distributed by University of Washington Press, 1998). ISBN 1-85894-050-8. Leonardo da Vinci anticipated the Rorschach inkblot test when he advised that artists in need of ideas "should look at certain walls stained with damp." In the 18th century, the artist Alexander Cozens recommended "blot drawings" as points of departure, as did Aubrey Beardsley, who said of his method: "I make a blot upon the paper and begin to shove the ink about and something comes." In this fascinating, beautifully-produced catalog for an exhibition held in 1998 at The Drawing Center in New York, we learn of comparable practices by the celebrated French novelist Victor Hugo (1802-1885), author of Les Misérables and Notre-Dame de Paris ("The Hunchback of Notre Dame"), who made drawings and paintings not only from blots, but from soot, black coffee, mulberry juice, burned onion, cigar ash, fingerprints, fingernails, matchsticks, stencils, sprays of water, folds, lace, and cloth impressions. It is even suggested that Hugo, not Marcel Duchamp, invented "readymade" art because he signed and dated stones found on the beach (not entirely a new practice, as is explained in "Pictorial Stones" in Jurgis Baltrusaitis, Aberrations). He experimented with left-handedness, made art in a trance, and drew with a ouija board by attaching a pen to the planchette. More than 100 drawings by Hugo are reproduced, nearly all in color, enhanced by four excellent essays (among them a wonderful article by Luc Sante) about the extraordinary mind and methods of a literary genius whom Jean Cocteau once characterized as "a madman who pretended to be Victor Hugo."

SAUL BELLOW She was a suicide blonde—dyed by her own hand.

ANON For people who like peace and quiet: a phoneless cord.
ELIAS CANETTI (Notes from Hampstead) Everything you don’t like in others is really what you don’t like in yourself...

Once, as I sat talking to him [the British scholar Gilbert Murray] in his study about Aristotle’s Poetics, while he walked up and down, I suddenly asked: “Exactly what is the principle of that walk of yours? Are you trying to avoid the flowers on the rug, or are you trying to keep to the squares?” My own compulsion-neuroses made it easy for me to notice them in others. He wheeled around sharply: “You’re the first person who has caught me out,” he said. “No, it’s not the flowers or the squares; it’s a habit I have got into of doing things in sevens. I take seven steps, you see, then I change direction and go another seven steps, then I turn around. I consulted Browne, the Professor of Psychology, about it the other day, but he assured me it isn’t a dangerous habit. He said: “When you find yourself getting into multiples of seven, come to me again.”

ROBERT GRAVES, Goodbye to All That (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1957).

OGDEN NASH (Free Wheeling) A bit of talcum is always walcum.
FRANK MUIR
(Upon My Word!) It has been said that a bride's attitude towards her betrothed can be summed up in three words: Aisle. Altar. Hymn.

DOUGLAS JERROLD
[to a thin man whose arguments he found tedious]
Sir, you are like a pin, but without either its head or its point.

ANNIE DILLARD
I read about an Eskimo hunter who asked the local missionary priest, "If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?" "No," said the priest, "not if you did not know." "Then why," asked the Eskimo earnestly, "did you tell me?"

GEORGE ADE
He had been kicked in the head by a mule when young, and believed everything he read in the Sunday papers.


[During the summer of 1957, while Philip Evergood was a visiting artist at the University of Northern Iowa, he] wrote on the chalkboard the ingredients for an egg-oil painting medium. "Afterwards," says [Paul R.] Smith, "some students added to the list 'a cup of beer.' Upon returning to the classroom, another instructor had faithfully copied the list and included the cup of beer, which he dutifully mixed and used in his paintings. Phil thought that was terrific."

Fluxus was a Dada-inspired alliance of avant garde artists, designers, and composers that began as a Lithuanian cultural club in New York in 1960. At the initial meeting, it was decided to start not a club but an experimental magazine—about “electronic music, anarchism, experimental cinema, nihilism, happenings, Lettrism, sound poetry and even painting”—for which George Maciunas proposed the name Fluxus, an allusion to effluent bowel activity. An American-born Lithuanian who had studied architecture, art and graphic design at Cooper Union and RIT, Maciunas was responsible for many of the “movement’s” printed artworks (always irreverent, often humorous), and is now generally said to have been its founding member. Among his associates were Dick Higgins (Something Else Press), Alison Knowles, Dieter Roth, Ken Friedman, and Emmett Williams (who co-edited this book). Often called Neo-Dada, Fluxus was art historical déjà vu but heavy on déjà and light on the vu. As its erratic ringleader, Maciunas led a painful life that was generally less interesting than one might expect, and certainly less comic (for example, in 1975, three years before his death of liver cancer, he lost an eye and nearly died when beaten up by the Mafia for unpaid debts). In the end, the most valuable aspect of this book is not the subject matter but the editors’ use of “collective portrayal” (juxtaposed fragments from memories of Maciunas by 80 friends and co-workers) by which a single life is sketched, blurred, smudged, and then redrawn again. More than ten years ago, Richard Kostelanetz used the same method, when he rearranged excerpts from dozens of talks with composer and Fluxus associate John Cage in Conversing with Cage (New York: Limelight Editions, 1987).

S A M U E L B U T L E R

It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle marry one another and so make only two people miserable instead of four.

E L I A S C A N E T T I (Notes from Hampstead) Everyone there has just the amount of space that fits under an umbrella. No one goes out without one, and everyone puts his up. No one comes too close to anyone else. A distance is preserved. There is freedom everywhere. When acquaintances meet, the umbrellas are made to bow. How dignified are these greetings from umbrella to umbrella.

R O D N E Y D A N G E R F I E L D My wife has cut our lovemaking down to once a month, but I know two guys she’s cut out entirely.

D A V I D M I L L E R A R I T H M E T I C: a thudtheful doctor.
OGDEN NASH
The Bronx?
No thonx.


EDWARD MARSH [Ned Lutyens] thought as a little boy that the Lord’s Prayer began with "Our Father Charles in heaven, Harold be thy name."

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Richard Balzer, Peepshows: A Visual History (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998). ISBN 0-8109-6349-3. The author is an antique collector, and this book is a full-color showcase of 180 artifacts and images from his collection of scenic viewing boxes or "peepshows." Ancestors of the stereoscopic viewer (such as the Viewmaster), they were commonly called "raree shows" in England, optiques in Holland, guckkasten in Germany, boite d’optique in France, and mondo nuovo in Italy. While there is a tradition of comparable devices in China and Japan (where they were known as "Holland machines" and "Red Hair Ukiyo-e"), the earliest European examples can be traced to the Renaissance, and may either have influenced or resulted from pioneering attempts at linear perspective by Brunelleschi, Alberti, and others. Among the finest examples (discussed but not illustrated here), of which seven still exist, are Samuel van Hoostraten’s 17th-century box-like demonstrations of anamorphic perspective distortion. Peepshows were made available to families in the 19th century when accordion-like multiple copies were made (along with alabaster peepshow eggs) as souvenirs of historic events. As delightful as this volume is, it comes to a sudden, regrettable stop at the beginning of the 20th century, in part because the peepshow, unable to compete with stereoscopic photography and motion pictures, drifted toward erotic and pornographic imagery. This book denies us that aspect of the peepshow’s history, as well as its recent more innocent use in art and perceptual psychology, particularly in the "Ames Demonstrations" (c1940s), the ingenious laboratory setups of Adelbert Ames II.

ROBERT ROSSI
BLEMISH: the official language of Felgium.

SAMUEL GOLDWYN
The reason so many people showed up at his [Louis B. Mayer’s] funeral was because they wanted to make sure he was dead.
RECOMMENDED Lloyd E. Herman, Trashformations: Recycled Materials in Contemporary American Art and Design (Bellingham WA: Whatcom Museum of History and Art / distributed by University of Washington Press, 1998). ISBN 0-295-97720-5. In the mid-1960s, far in advance of the current concern with ecology and recycling, the Museum of Modern Art sponsored "The Object Transformed," an exhibition of (mostly old Surrealist) art in which commonplace materials were used in unexpected ways to radically change the appearance of things: Meret Oppenheim’s famous fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, was included; as was Man Ray’s strange Cadeau, an iron with carpet tacks glued to it. Looking at this book, we are reminded of that event, in part because this is the catalog for an exhibition (the dates of which are not listed) of more recent but somewhat comparable art. Exhibited first at the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham, Washington (housed, appropriately, in the city’s magnificent recycled City Hall), then slated to tour nationally, most of the 80 pieces displayed were created in the 1980s and ’90s by artists, craftspersons, and designers throughout the country, who reused or recycled junk (linoleum floor tiles, clothespins, baseballs, toothbrushes, coffee filters, bowling balls, and barbed wire) in devising unique and provocative forms of art, jewelry, furniture, and so on.

WOODY ALLEN I had a rough marriage. Well, my wife was an immature woman, that’s all I can say. See if this is not immature to you: I would be home in the bathroom taking a bath, and my wife would walk right in whenever she felt like and sink my boats.

PR ECE WALKER BumpsK: unpleasant Mafia assignment.

EZRA POUND [describing Amy Lowell] …our only hippo-poetess.
ELIAS CANETTI (Notes from Hampstead)

The excess fat in my works will turn rancid.

RIGHT

My favorite toys in those days were a clockwork train and lead soldiers. When the soldiers had lost too many limbs to stand up we melted them down in a frying pan over the nursery fire and dropped them in cold water as people do now in Sweden on New Year's night, seeking omens of the future.

WILHELM STEKEL

Anxiety is fear of one's self.


The fundamental purpose of tenure appointments that protect against arbitrary dismissal is to protect the public, not the professors...Tenure rests on the conviction that truth can be transmitted and discovered and education can succeed only with open and untrammled inquiry. If freedom is replaced with timidity and conformity, university students and, ultimately, the taxpaying public are shortchanged.


CYRUS CHING

I learned long ago never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it.
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Museum of American Folk Art, Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998). ISBN 0-8118-2099-8. In Man Ray's autobiography, he reports a remark to Picasso by his naive friend, the French painter Henri Rousseau: "Picasso, you and I are the greatest painters of our time, you in the Egyptian style, I in the modern." This statement is absurd at first, then disarmingly wise moments later. In that way, it has the paradoxical profundity that is typical of examples of genuine "primitive art," now known by less nasty alternative names, such as "visionary art," "intuitive art," and "art of the self-taught." This is the catalog for an exhibition of 140 artworks by 32 American naifs, including paintings, sculpture, drawings, collages, and (surprisingly) photography. As with most "folk art," one is tempted to say that this artwork is so bad that it's good. But, as with Rousseau's statement, there are aspects of it that are both charming and unbelievably brilliant—like the spontaneous sayings and drawings of children—and that are attributable not to systematic instruction but to innate "giftedness" and, in this case, the advantage of a lack of training. As implied in three interesting articles by Arthur Danto, Maurice Berger, and Gerald Davis, art school graduates striving to be "outsider artists" might benefit from the study of these curious inventions, which are both genuinely strange and strangely genuine. The exhibition will travel throughout the U.S. (Philadelphia, Atlanta, Fort Worth, Rochester, Columbus, and New York) until the end of 1999.

WILLIAM P. FIRTH (My Autobiography and Reminiscences) At a dinner when I was present, a salad was offered to [British painter J.M.W.] Turner, who called the attention of his neighbor at the table...to it in the following words: "Nice cool green that lettuce, isn't it? and the beetroot pretty red—not quite strong enough; and the mixture, delicate tint of yellow that. Add some mustard, and then you have one of my pictures."

JOHN CHIPMAN GRAY Dirt is only matter out of place.

ANON Oboe—an ill woodwind that nobody blows good.

ANON If you really want to be a writer, you must write something everyday, even if it's only a suicide note.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT (Autobiography) No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill, belonging to it, so hill and house could live together each the happier for the other.
ANON
A woman I knew slightly about twenty years ago hears that we will both be at a social gathering, and wonders if she will still recognize me. Someone tries to point me out, but she misunderstands and instead walks up to someone else who hardly looks like me at all. She says to him, "I'll bet you don't remember me"—and of course he doesn't.

GEORGE BURNS
Too bad all the people who know how to run the country are busy driving taxicabs and cutting hair.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Jerome Klinkowitz, Keeping Literary Company: Working with Writers Since the Sixties (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). ISBN 0-7914-3723-X. If this memoir by a literary critic were a Biblical text, perhaps its triune god(s) would be Kurt Vonnegut, Jerzy Kosinski, and Donald Barthelme; while the author, who has written more than 30 books on literature, music, sports, philosophy, art, military history, and contemporary culture, would be John the Baptist. Back in 1969, as a rookie college professor (dressed not in a hair shirt but a corduroy jacket with elbow patches), it was he who crawled out of the wilderness of Modern fiction (Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner) to broadcast the radical Postmodern change that was happening to novels, short stories, poetry, and to literary criticism itself. In such books as Innovative Fiction (1972), Literary Disruptions (1975), and The Life of Fiction (1977), he introduced the academic community to such contemporary classics as Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, Kosinski's The Painted Bird, and Barthelme's City Life, as well as more difficult, knottier stuff by Ronald Sukenick, Raymond Federman, Gilbert Sorrentino, and Clarence Major. Klinkowitz shares his behind-the-scenes tales of these and other writers, all of whom he knew personally, then stops when his own life "regresses" to things that interested him as a child: baseball, airplanes, and jazz.

A. J. FINSBERG (The Life of J.M.W. Turner R.A.) [Shortly before his death, the British painter J.M.W. Turner was told by his doctor] that death was near. "Go downstairs," Turner said to the doctor, "take a glass of sherry and then look at me again." The doctor did so, but his opinion remained unchanged.

ROBLEY WILSON
He: Do you like Kipling?
She (shyly): I don't know. I've never kippled.
Richard Stern arrived and told us some juicy anecdotes about two Rumanian "princesses" ninety years old whom he had met in Venice. One of them, drinking her coffee, brought the cup too close to her face—and, Stern went on, the nose, probably restored with a wax cast, began to melt and finally fell into the coffee...


Perhaps people are able to distinguish only among a discrete number of faces, and when that number is exceeded, perhaps after a certain age they are receptive only to the old faces they already know, and in the new see only those.

Mr. Sheridan told us of Mr. Richard Cavendish, who had a trick of swinging his arm round when talking, that, walking up Bond Street with a friend, he found, on stopping, that he had drawn seven hackney coaches to him.

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By now, most people I meet look familiar. There exists only a limited number of human types.


Elias Canetti (Notes from Hampstead) Perhaps people are able to distinguish only among a discrete number of faces, and when that number is exceeded, perhaps after a certain age they are receptive only to the old faces they already know, and in the new see only those.

Rudolf Arnheim, Parables of Sun Light) By now, most people I meet look familiar. There exists only a limited number of human types.

Charlotte Curtis, Bisexual: a Southern prostitute's greeting.
It is said that they [Otway and John Dryden] lived in houses facing each other, and Otway wrote sarcastically on Dryden’s door one night: “Here Dryden lives, a poet and a wit.” To which Dryden replied the next night by writing on Otway’s door: “Here Otway lives—exactly opposite.”

During lunch, someone confuses Norman Rockwell, the benign illustrator, with George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi party, by referring to the latter as “Norman Lincoln Rockwell.” Hoping quietly to correct the error, I make some comment about the Nazi leader, using his correct name. A third person in the group, thinking I’ve misspoken, follows with another statement in which he politely but clearly refers to Norman Lincoln Rockwell.

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Going to bed with a woman never hurt a ball player. It’s staying up all night looking for them that does you in.
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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For more than 12 years, it has operated at a financial loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the paycheck of the Reader Service Slouch. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

Pablo Picasso
Photographers, along with dentists, are the two professions never satisfied with what they do. Every dentist would like to be a doctor and inside every photographer is a painter trying to get out.

Hermine Stover
It is better to wear out your slippers dancing than to have your feet cut off.

Cover. Computer-drawn logo by Ryan McAdam, a graphic designer at Mathis, Earnest and Vandeventer in Cedar Falls, Iowa, for that city's segment of RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa). Service marked 1998 by ME&V. McAdam and Amy Backer (now a publication designer at the University of Illinois), both of whom graduated recently with bachelor's degrees from the University of Northern Iowa's graphic design program, have been chosen by Print magazine (New York) as among the top 20 "promising young designers" in the country, with the result that their work will be featured in the January/February 1999 issue of that magazine. We are pleased to note that works by both of these talented designers have been published in past issues of Ballast.