A trick that everyone abhors / In little girls is slamming doors.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
Brevity is the soul of wit.

ANON
Brevity is Sol Lewitt.

DOROTHY PARKER
Brevity is the soul of lingerie.

One of the customers in the first store we visit [in Bogota, Columbia] is a hunchback. As soon as the S.s [Stravinskys] see him they want to touch his hump for good luck. I ridicule this Russian superstition...[and] protest the indignity to the afflicted, stigmatized man. But they are perfectly serious, and deeply disappointed when he departs before they have time to push near him.


E. J. KAHN, JR. Black, slack, stack, stark, stare, stale, shale, whale, while, white.
At the tender age of three or four in the waning years of the war [World War II], young Patrick [Hughes, a British artist] spent his nights sleeping not under the stars, but the stairs. Crewe [the town in which he sometimes stayed], a center of industry and an important rail hub, was under threat of German bombs. The safest strongest place in a small cottage was under the stairs with his mother in the spot they pathetically called the glory hole and there Patrick stared up at the strange sight of inside-out stairs in reverse. “We were looking up at these stairs the wrong way round—up and down, up and down—stairs that only a fly could walk up. It must have made a strong impression: being bombed and in the dark and sleeping with my Mother and seeing everything the wrong way round.” In retrospect, this experience of reversible structures was the first sounding of a chord that has played throughout Hughes’ life and work: that something which is at variance with itself still agrees with itself.


AMBROISE BIERCE Diaphragm, n. A muscular partition separating disorders of the chest from disorders of the bowels.
Henry Ward Beecher

All men are full of dogs. Temper is a snarly cur; destructiveness is a bulldog; combativeness is a hound that runs and barks and bites.

PETER DE VRIES

We know that the human brain is a device to keep the ears from grating on one another.

Samuel L. Clemens


Emil Willimetz [a student at Black Mountain College] described [the German-born painter Josef] Albers' method of typesetting and designing as the "tausands technique...You do a tausand and then you can see which one is right."

RECOMMENDED Sebastian Junger, The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997). ISBN 0-393-04016-X. Sebastian Junger’s gripping story of an Atlantic storm is being made into a movie, as it should be, for the story it tells of the effects of the storm on many human beings, their foolhardiness, their unbelievable courage, personal tragedies, and their complete vulnerability in the face of violent nature, is of high interest to us all. Junger tells a tale of a late October monster Nor’easter in 1991, its development and record-setting extremes—The Perfect (complete, Platonic Ideal) Storm—and tells it without being drawn into an anthropomorphic vocabulary of attribution (threatening, raging, furious, menacing, etc.). As exciting as the finest adventure novel, it exceeds one by being an actual event, which many can recall too clearly, especially on the East Coast. Central to the storm story is the account of the Andrea Gail’s loss with its crew of six stalwart fishermen, but it is much more. From it one learns about the Gloucester, Mass., fisherfolk culture, their sophisticated fishing methods, boat gear, their fleet of vessels, traditions, other sea disasters in their history, their families, and their women who are left behind, often forever. The reader will learn a great deal about the heroism of the U.S. Coast Guard, their duties, their dedication, and their heavy losses while in the line of duty. After reading The Perfect Storm, few will be able ever again to stroll along an ocean beach or the rockbound coast of Maine without a deep feeling of unease, of imminent threat. At the conclusion, a reader will come to agree with Junger when he writes, “Like a war or a great fire, the effects of a storm go rippling outward through webs of people for years, even generations. It breaches lives like coastlines and nothing is ever again the same” (p. 220).—A.S.

JOHN BURNS
I have seen the Mississippi. That is muddy water. I have seen the St. Lawrence. That is crystal water. But the Thames is liquid history.

He [the poet W.H. Auden] says that in the train club car on his way to lecture at Yale, some students sent him a note: “We can’t stand it a minute longer: are you Carl Sandburg?” He wrote back: “You have spoiled mother’s day.”

ROBERT CRAFT

ALISTAIR COOKE
Canned music is like audible wallpaper.
RECOMMENDED Jonathan Crary, Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). ISBN 0-262-03265-1. The premise of this book is fascinating, in the sense that it says that attention (that aspect of perception that enables us to focus on portions of our surroundings and delay or neglect the remainder) and what we consider as acceptable ways of “paying attention” have changed substantially in the past 150 years. One consequence, says its author (who wrote a briefer lauded book on Techniques of the Observer), is the diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (or ADD), an arguable dysfunction that is now said to explain (and, perhaps, to defer responsibility for) the inability of school children to concentrate, listen, pay attention, or follow rules, in a culture that is “founded on a short attention span, on the logic of the non sequitur, on perceptual overload, on the generalized ethic of ‘getting ahead,’ and on the celebration of aggressiveness.” In essence, this is a narrative history of perceptual attention from 1880 to 1905 in art (Manet, Seurat and Cézanne are discussed in detail), psychology, philosophy, neurology, cinema, and photography, with comments on the present day. Sadly, while acknowledging the prevalence of sporadic attention, the book uses opaque language and paragraphs so drawn-out as to ensure that the volume will only be read by specialists. Grappling with its density, we thought of what Oliver Wendell Holmes said, that “there are professors in this country who ‘litigate’ arteries. Other surgeons only tie them, and it stops the bleeding just as well.”

ALDOUS HUXLEY I'm afraid of losing my obscurity. Genuineness only thrives in the dark. Like celery.

FREDERICK THE GREAT A crown is merely a hat that lets the rain in.

After my father's bypass surgery, he felt so dreadful that he insisted his doctor stop most of his medication. Thereafter, he felt fine. While such a drastic action is not everyone's cup of tea, you would have to know my father to appreciate how relentlessly stubborn he was. He claimed to have “accurately misunderstood” his doctors, didn't want them to put [all] his “aches in one basket,” was fearful of “dying of nothing,” and wished as an adult to be “the blind leading the blonde.” Darn, he had a great way with words...

DR. PETER H. GOTT “Health Q & A,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno CA), 4 May 2000, p. E-6.—AS.

EVELYN WAUGH I came to the conclusion years ago that almost all crime is due to the repressed desire for aesthetic expression.
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Steven Heller, editor, Sex Appeal: The Art of Allure in Graphic and Advertising Design (New York: Allworth Press, 2000). ISBN 1-58115-048-2. Like it or not, prurient illustration (of whatever inclination), erotic advertising and sexual innuendo are parts of the province of graphic design, substantial and increasing parts. Nearly all sexually provocative or “graphic” material in our society is produced by people whose occupations may include illustrator, photographer, advertising artist, and graphic designer. This book features essays and interviews on the various dimensions of that subject, written by 35 designers, theorists, historians, and others, among them Johanna Drucker, Ralph Caplan, Veronique Vienne, and the editor of BALEST. It is a varied and frank exploration, offering a wide range of concerns and opinions (with sections on Animal Magnetism; Sex as Metaphor; Chic Sex; Sex, Power, Feminism; Sexual Progress; and Talking Sex), and using language and photographs that are both well-chosen and unrestrained. This is a thought-provoking collection, in large part because of the universality of the subject matter, but also because of the rarity with which these issues are ever discussed from an earnest (if not always serious) point of view.

Robin Howard says that her Caitlin stepped on something—clamshell, glass, razor blade, whatever—at the Fourth of July beach picnic and sliced off part of a big toe. Turned out that if mother and daughter hadn’t waited until the next morning to consult a doctor they might have got it sewn back on. Robin says that when they wondered how Caitlin could go swimming now without getting her bandage wet, somebody said that was easy: use condoms. Safe swimming, safe sex—what a versatile convenience!

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED


Eleven authors writing in the mode of Continental phenomenologists appear in this compendium devoted to "the animal question": What are the essential issues that must be brought to a philosophical focus respecting man's relationship to animals? With William James, most of the authors labor mightily to "think things," to base theoretical plausibilities about animal experience (theirs and ours) on extensive, intimate, revealing contacts with actual animals. Reading the essays, alternating between the perspective of the casual reader and a card-carrying philosopher, I reached the conclusion that the more abstract (and prolix) phenomenologists lost me, whereas those authors who wrote out of anecdotal, direct experience were most persuasive. The latter essayists include the striking Alphonso Lingis, intense advocate H. Peter Steeves, and candid Carleton Dallery. For the casual reader, there are many pages of animal lore, stories of love and agony, self-reflective criticisms. Dallery speaks for and about the other authors when he says, "...In today's academic climate, it is worth emphasizing that language is not a privileged (or the only) mode of access. In fact it might be time to raise the alarm, that those who live and work only in language, in the coming-and-going of words, may risk departing truth to the extent that their talk excludes work and discipline within other sensory and kinetic modes in relation to concrete, resistant domains such as animals, the soil, and their own bodies. But it is not easy to sit down, shut up, and pay very careful attention to whatever else there is besides our selves, our identities, our fantasies. Or, better, to stand up and welcome the silence. There is no external reward for doing so."—A.S.

STEVEN WRIGHT
If "con" is the opposite of "pro," what is the opposite of "progress"?

WILFRED SHEEN
Her body jammed excruciatingly into her prison of a dress.

ANTON
Cogito ergo spud—I think therefore I yam.
She had a pocket mirror of a face.

In your eyes there lives / a green egyptian noise.

Some time in 1913, at this address, my wife and I acquired a young fox terrier. We debated as to what to call him, and, as Henry James had just been having his seventieth birthday, and as his books have given us more pleasure than those of any other living man, I, rather priggishly perhaps, insisted that the dog should be known as James. But this was a name which Italian peasants, who are the only neighbors we have, of course would not be able to pronounce at all. So we were phonetic and called the name of the dog Yah-mes. And this did very well. By this name he was known far and wide—but not for long; for alas, he died of distemper.

Edward Lucie-Smith, Lives of the Great 20th-Century Artists (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999). ISBN 0-500-23739-5. As the author admits at its outset, this book (as implied by its title) is indebted to Lives of the Artists by Giorgio Vasari, a classic collection of articles on the agonies and ecstasies of individual artists, first published in 1550. Vasari's mission was more manageable, writes Lucie-Smith, if only because he did not have to deal with the bewildering diversity of modern life. That said, he embarks on the arduous task of selecting and writing about 100 artists of the Modern and Postmodern periods, beginning with "Toward the Modern" (featuring Edvard Munch and Kathe Kollwitz) and ending 23 sections and more than 300 pages later with "The Artist Not the Artwork" (Louise Bourgeois, Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, Eva Hesse, and Jean-Michel Basquiat). The articles, like those of Vasari, are both entertaining and informative, and arranged chronologically in stylistic categories. The book is also well-illustrated, in the sense that the author has chosen artworks that are representative yet not overused, supplemented by curious, revealing photographs that are sometimes the strangest, most memorable part.

It is difficult to love mankind unless one has a reasonable private income and when one has a reasonable private income one has better things to do than loving mankind.
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Warren Chappell and Robert Bringhurst, A Short History of the Printed Word. Second edition, revised and updated. (Point Roberts WA: Hartley & Marks, 1999). ISBN 0-88179-154-7. Among graphic designers, one of the finest, most popular books in recent years is Robert Bringhurst’s The Elements of Typographic Style (Hartley & Marks, 1992). In this book, Bringhurst revisits a classic history of typography, publication design and printing techniques that was originally produced in 1970 by Chappell (1904-1991), a book designer, illustrator and author who had studied with Rudolf Koch. Of eleven highly readable chapters, all were written by Chappell, with the exception of the last on “The Digital Revolution and the Close of the Twentieth Century.” Why reissue Chappell’s book? As Bringhurst explains in the preface, “He knew some of the things that historians know, but mostly he knew what historians don’t know. I wanted the names and dates set straight, insofar as possible, and yet to hear the story told as Chappell told it, from a workbench rather than a keyboard, with silences in place of self-advertisements, and graver marks and acid stains in place of any footnotes.”

I.S. [Igor Stravinsky] seems to enjoy total recall of his intensely active, creative, and often technicolor dreams, and these form one of the two main subjects of his breakfast conversation. (The other is the revoltingly vivid description of the morning’s bowel movement, which includes form and texture—“minestrone” or “consommé,” and even perfume, whether sulfurous or acrid.)

JOHN MASON BROWN
His spleen could be merciless, his sweetness diabetic; his behavior unhousebroken.


DANIEL HENNIGER
Ross Perot is the squirrel in the attic of American politics.
You must learn to drink the cup of life as it comes, Connie, without stirring it up from the bottom. That’s where the bitter dregs are.

Mulheren had always considered himself to be something of a nonconformist and a renegade, but even he had to concede that [Ivan] Boesky was peculiar in a big way. When the Café des Artistes waiter came to take their order, Boesky said he hadn’t decided and that the others should make their selections. Then Boesky ordered: “I’ll have every entrée.” The waiter’s pen stopped in midair. Boesky repeated his order. “Bring me each one of these entrées.”

Mulheren glanced at his wife, raising his eyebrows slightly. Seema chatted on as though nothing unusual happened. Mulheren wondered whether this was how rich people ate.

When the food arrived, the waiter wheeled a table next to them. On it were eight featured dishes of the day. Boesky looked them over carefully, circled the table, took one bite of each. He selected one, and sent the rest back.

Boesky only picked at his food. Mulheren was relieved that he didn’t have to pick up the check.
I am someone who proudly and humbly affirms that love is the mystery-of-mysteries, and that nothing measurable matters "a very good God damn"; that "an artist, a man, a failure" is no mere whenfully accreting mechanism, but a givingly eternal complexity—neither some soulless and heartless ultra-predatory infra-animal nor any un-understandingly knowing and believing and thinking automation, but a naturally and miraculously whole human being—a feelingly illimitable individual; whose only happiness is to transcend himself, whose every agony is to grow.


J. EARLE MOORE
Two minutes with Venus, two years with Mercury.

WILL ROGERS
(referring to Venus de Milo)
See what will happen to you if you don't stop biting your fingernails.
E. J. Kahn, Jr.

E. E. Cummings
To be nobody-but-myself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.

Laurence J. Peter
Prison will not work until we start sending a better class of people there.

Videos et Cetera

Camouflage (USA, 1942). VHS black-and-white and color video. 49 minutes. Video number 725. Available from International Historic Films, P.O. Box 29035, Chicago IL 60629 @ $19.95 plus $5.00 shipping. This video contains three vintage army training films about World War II field camouflage. The first two (produced by the USA) show ways of concealing personnel and equipment from aerial observation in a sunlit desert setting, by using, for example, over-hanging fishnets interwoven with cloth or canvas strips (which cast disruptive shadows), or inflatable phony planes and trucks. The third (produced by the UK) is a docudrama of sorts, which served to convince foot soldiers of the importance of camouflage and to demonstrate how to effectively hide in the setting of bombed-out buildings. These films are of interest to artists because they advocate (if implicitly) age-old rules of thumb in art.

Edward Munch in Germany. VHS color video. 28 minutes. Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences at 800-257-5126 or <www.films.com>. Munch, a turn-of-the-century Norwegian painter who is known for his angst-ridden paintings, such as The Scream and Puberty, was the uncle of modern Expressionism, if Vincent Van Gogh was its father. This film is limited to the period of about 1899-1908, when he lived and worked in Germany (Hamburg, Weimar, Berlin), at the end of which he suffered a terrible mental collapse. The film’s narration, derived from his journals and letters, discusses in detail his interest in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (with shots in Nietzsche’s sister’s home), his apparent bipolar mood disorder, his alcoholism, and his relationships with other artists, among them the playwright August Strindberg and the architect Henry Van de Velde.

Ambrose Bierce
Fiddle, n. An instrument to tickle human ears by function of a horse’s tail on the entrails of a cat.
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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For nearly 15 years, it has operated at a loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the paycheck of the Subscription Cur. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

Ballast has a collaborative affiliation with Leonardo: Journal of the International Society of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MIT Press). As a result, some of the book reviews in Ballast are reprinted either on the Leonardo web site at <http://mitpress.mit.edu/journals/leonardo/home.html> or in the printed magazine.

A contributor to this issue has been Allan Shields of Clovis, California [as indicated by the initials AS at the end of each credited entry]. Illustrations on pages 4, 7, 11, and 13 are classroom exercises by graphic design students at the University of Northern Iowa.

A living is made, Mr. Kemper, by selling something that everybody needs at least once a year. Yes, sir! And a million is made by producing something that everybody needs every day. You artists produce something that nobody needs at any time.

Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless, peacocks and lilies for instance.

The dog is mentioned in the Bible eighteen times—the cat not even once.