Ballast Quarterly Review, v21n4, Summer 2006

Roy R. Behrens
University of Northern Iowa, roy.behrens@uni.edu
Photographs for the Farm Security Administration
1935-39 by Dorothea Lange
I remember being handed a score composed by Mozart at the age of eleven. What could I say? I felt like de Kooning, who was asked to comment on a certain abstract painting, and answered in the negative. He was told it was the work of a celebrated monkey. "That’s different. For a monkey, it’s terrific."

IGOR STRAVINSKY

KENNETH TYNAN
A neurosis is a secret you don’t know you are keeping.

MARY PICKFORD
If you have made mistakes, even serious ones, there is always another chance for you. What we call failure is not the falling down but the staying down.

JOHN DEWEY
In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges.

WOODY ALLEN
It’s not that I’m afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG
The most accomplished monkey cannot draw a monkey, this only man can do; just as it is also only man who regards his ability to do this as a distinct merit.
CHRISTO
The other exception where we did not at all restore the place to its original condition is the Surrounded Islands. Before we installed our fabric, we had our workers remove 42 tons of garbage off the beaches of those islands. We never brought the garbage back.

E . M . FORSTER
The offhand decision of some commonplace mind in high office at a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years.

THOMAS HARDY
The offhand decision of some commonplace mind in high office at a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years.

DIANE ARBUS
A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.

G . K . CHESTERTON
Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a colored pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling.

EDWARD O . WILSON .I suggest there have always been two kinds of original thinkers, those who upon viewing disorder try to create order, and those who upon encountering order try to protest it by creating disorder. The tension between the two is what drives learning forward. It lifts us upward through a zigzagging trajectory of progress. And in the Darwinian contest of ideas, order always wins, because—simply—that is the way the real world works.

ERNEST RUTHERFORD
Science is divided into two categories, physics and stamp collecting.

E.M. FORSTER
Only connect.

THOMAS HARDY
The offhand decision of some commonplace mind in high office at a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years.

DIANE ARBUS
A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.

G . K . CHESTERTON
Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a colored pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling.

EDWARD O . WILSON .I suggest there have always been two kinds of original thinkers, those who upon viewing disorder try to create order, and those who upon encountering order try to protest it by creating disorder. The tension between the two is what drives learning forward. It lifts us upward through a zigzagging trajectory of progress. And in the Darwinian contest of ideas, order always wins, because—simply—that is the way the real world works.

RAINER MARIA RILKE
With nothing can one approach a work of art so little as with critical words: they always come down to more or less happy misunderstandings.

FRAN LEBOWITZ
I must take issue with the term “a mere child,” for it has been my invariable experience that the company of a mere child is infinitely preferable to that of a mere adult.

E . M . FORSTER
To make us feel small in the right way is a function of art...
Patches of time can be recalled under hypnosis. Not only suppressed terrors but those flickering frames of the continuum that, even at the time, seem certain to be forgotten, pleasantly doomed to nonentity. So they have sunk into our brains after all, are part of us. Patches of time is a mild metaphor, mixing time and space, mildly appropriate in art galleries, where time is difficult to deal with. How do you decide when to stop looking at something? It's not like a book, page after page, page after page, end. You give it your attention or you don't.


I believe that the artist's fundamental loyalty must be to form, and his energy employed in the activity of making. Every other diddly desire can find expression; every crackpot idea or local obsession, every bias and graciousness and mark of malice, may have an hour; but it must never be allowed to carry the day. If, of course, one wants to be a publicist for something; if you believe you are a philosopher first and Nietzsche second; if you think the gift of prophecy has been given you; then, by all means, write your bad poems, your insufferable fictions, enjoy the fame that easy ideas often offer, ride the flatulent winds of change, fly like the latest fad to the nearest dead tree, but do not count the seasons of your oblivion.


SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL
Success is the ability to go from one failure to the next with no loss of enthusiasm.

PETER DE VRIES
His own small talk, at any rate, was bigger than most people's large.

LAURIE LEE
Effie M. was a monster. Six foot high and as strong as a farm horse. No sooner had she decided that she wanted Uncle Tom than she knocked him off his bicycle and told him.

ALBERT EINSTEIN
I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.

NIELS H. ABEL
[About Karl Friedrich Gauss' mathematical writing style] He is like the fox, who effaces his tracks in the sand with his tail.

HENRY VAN DYKE
Use what talents you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best.

ALASDAIR GRAY
Art is the only work open to people who can't get along with others and still want to be special.
We find things beautiful—in nature, in people, in art—when we sense we have not exhausted them, and our eyes, as Nietzsche wrote specifically about artists, "remain fixed on what remains veiled, even after the unveiling." Beautiful things are those we still desire, in every sense, to possess and know better. The perception of beauty is inseparable from yearning.


ALBERT EINSTEIN
The human mind has first to construct forms, independently, before we can find them in things.

LEONARD COHEN
[The ages of] seven to eleven is a huge chunk of life, full of dulling and forgetting. It is fabled that we slowly lose the gift of speech with animals, that birds no longer visit our windowsills to converse. As our eyes grow accustomed to sight they armor themselves against wonder.

JOHN ASHBERY
There is the view that poetry should improve your life. I think people confuse it with the Salvation Army.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG
The human tendency to regard little things as important has produced very many great things.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
Any nation that thinks more of its ease and comfort than its freedom will soon lose its freedom; and the ironical thing about it is that it will lose its ease and comfort too.

SYLVIA PLATH
My sickness is when words draw in their horns and the physical world refuses to be ordered, recreated, arranged and selected. I am a victim of it then, not a master.
Perception constructs a precise, individuated world of solid objects "out there," endowed with color, shape, smell, and acoustic and tactile properties. It is generous to the outside world, giving it properties it did not necessarily possess until some advanced vertebrate was able, through its marvelously parsimonious cortical world-construction system, to provide them. Perception is both more global, more holistic, than sensation—because it takes into account an entire outside world—and more exact, more particular, because it recognizes individual objects and parts of objects...What is this awareness that is to perception what perception is to sensation, and sensation to reaction? The answer is: aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is as much more constructive, as much more generous to the outside world, as much more holistic, and as much more exact and particularizing than ordinary perception, as ordinary perception is than mere sensation. Thus by ratios we may ascend from the known to the very essence of the knower. Aesthetic perception is not vague and "touchy-feely" relative to ordinary perception; quite the reverse. This is why, given an infinite number of theories that will logically explain the facts, scientists will sensibly always choose the most beautiful theory. For good reason: this is the way the world works.


LUCIAN FREUD
I have a hatred of habit and routine. And what dogs love is just that. They like regular everything, and I don’t have regular anything.

JONI MITCHELL
I don’t understand why Europeans and South Americans can take more sophistication. Why is it that Americans need to hear their happiness major and their tragedy minor, and as jazzy as they can handle is a seventh chord? Are they not experiencing complex emotions?

LARRY RIVERS
Any art communicates what you’re in the mood to receive.

ROBERT MOTHERWELL
It’s not that the creative act and the critical act are simultaneous. It’s more like you blurt something out and then analyze it.

ALBERT CAMUS
...and it seems strange that the right to punish them (murderers-monsters) should be granted to the very people who subsidize, not housing, but the growing of beets for the production of alcohol.

JACK HANDEY
It takes a big man to cry, but it takes a bigger man to laugh at that man.

WILLIAM H. GASS
For the speedy reader paragraphs become a country the eye flies over looking for landmarks, reference points, airports, rest rooms, passages of sex.
LOUIS ARMSTRONG
If ya ain’t got it in ya, ya can’t blow it out.

ELVIS COSTELLO
I read this thing once in Finnair magazine, an article about Jean Sibelius. He couldn’t have the window open when he was composing ’cause if he did he would hear birds in the trees and they’d get into the composition.

GUSTAV MAHLER
What’s best in music is not to be found in the notes.

ROSSINI
Give me a laundry list and I’ll set it to music.

ANI DIFRANCO
Art may imitate life but life imitates TV.

PAUL CLAUDEL
The poem is not made from these letters that I drive in like nails, but of the white which remains on the paper.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHENBERG
A good metaphor is something even the police should keep an eye on.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD
People commonly travel the world over to see rivers and mountains, new stars, garish birds, freak fish, grotesque breeds of humans; they fall into an animal stupor that gapes at existence and they think they have seen something.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION—
Dear Search Committee Chair,

I am writing this letter for Mr. John Smith who has applied for a position in your department. I should start by saying that I cannot recommend him too highly. In fact, there is no other student with whom I can adequately compare him, and I am sure that the amount of mathematics he knows will surprise you.

His dissertation is the sort of work you don’t expect to see these days. It definitely demonstrates his complete capabilities.

In closing, let me say that you will be fortunate if you can get him to work for you.

Sincerely,
A.D. Visor (Prof.)
LEONARD COHEN
I don't consider myself a pessimist. I think of a pessimist as someone who is waiting for it to rain. And I feel soaked to the skin.

EVAN ESAR
America believes in education: the average professor earns more money in a year than a professional athlete earns in a whole week.

ELVIS COSTELLO
Writing about music is like dancing about architecture—it's really a stupid thing to want to do.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG
To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Music is the silence between the notes.

LEONARD COHEN
I don't consider myself a pessimist. I think of a pessimist as someone who is waiting for it to rain. And I feel soaked to the skin.

EVAN ESAR
America believes in education: the average professor earns more money in a year than a professional athlete earns in a whole week.

ELVIS COSTELLO
Writing about music is like dancing about architecture—it's really a stupid thing to want to do.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG
To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Music is the silence between the notes.

WERNER HERZOG
We comprehend...that nuclear power is a real danger for mankind, that overcrowding of the planet is the greatest danger of all. We have understood that the destruction of the environment is another enormous danger. But I truly believe that the lack of adequate imagery is a danger of the same magnitude. It is as serious a defect as being without memory. What have we done to our images? What have we done to our embarrassed landscapes? I have said this before and will repeat it again as long as I am able to talk: if we do not develop adequate images we will die out like dinosaurs.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Actually, I'm not all that interested in the subject of photography. Once the picture is in the box, I'm not all that interested in what happens next. Hunters, after all, aren't cooks.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
The great American novel has not only already been written, it has already been rejected.
MAYA ANGELOU
Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the spaces between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.

JACK HANDEY
To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there's no music, no choreography, and the dancers hit each other.

RENÉ DESCARTES
I hope that posterity will judge me kindly, not only as to the things which I have explained, but also to those which I have intentionally omitted so as to leave to others the pleasure of discovery.

ELVIS COSTELLO
It's what's on the record not what labels on it. You know, that's like getting a box of cornflakes and eating the cardboard.

All the photographs in this issue (with the single exception of this one) were made in 1935-1939 by American photographer and photojournalist DOROTHEA LANGE, in the course of her assignment as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The government photographs she made of the Depression Era, as well as some 800 images of the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, can nearly all be accessed on the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs web site. Reproduced above is a photograph of Lange herself, taken in 1936 by her husband, Paul S. Taylor.

A problem child. But I don't know whether he's a problem child to himself. But when anyone asks me what I know about someone who's an artist, I can only answer, "Please, look at his work." Because if you want to know anything about a person, doesn't his work tell you? I mean, how can you know more? Walker Evans is, in my opinion, an extraordinary man. He had extraordinary eyesight. There is always a little twist in it somewhere, there is a bitterness, not always, I take that word out, and there is an edge, a bitter edge to Walker. That I sensed; and it's pleasurable to me. I like that bitter edge. He seemed very straight and very true. I don't care if he's a son-of-a-gun.

DOROTHEA LANGE (when asked her opinion of American photographer Walker Evans, who, like her, had been employed by the Farm Security Administration during the Depression) in an Archives of American Art oral history interview, conducted by Richard K. Doud, on May 22, 1964.
LEONARD COHEN
Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash.

E. M. FORSTER
We are willing enough to praise freedom when she is safely tucked away in the past and cannot be a nuisance. In the present, amidst dangers whose outcome we cannot foresee, we get nervous about her, and admit censorship.

RALPH FIENNES
As an actor, there's a bit of you that's decided you want to be looked at and watched, but there's a paradoxical bit that wants to run away.

LARRY RIVERS
One night in the early sixties I passed something on the Long Island Expressway just before the Queens tunnel that I must have seen for years. The billboard advertising cigars, Dutch Masters. I realized it was sort of perfect. It's weird isn't it? You're looking at Rembrandt—in neon! It was too much, it was irresistible.

The two Nietzches—critic and castigator, affirmer and celebrant—usually have different admirers. During his sad last raving days, according to a report in Gilman's collection of reminiscences, he was given to brooding and was largely unreceptive to his surroundings—playing with dolls and other toys. [Quoting Gilman:] When states of excitement come over him, his mother best knows how to calm him down. She caresses him, speaks to him in a friendly tone, and when he wants to scream she fills his mouth with bits of apple or easily digestible delicacies, which he then chews and swallows while growling dully to himself. I think I prefer my Nietzsche without the bits of apple in his mouth.

WILLIAM H. GASS

I was young, and faced with the question of how I was going to maintain myself on the planet. I had to earn my own living; my mother was a librarian, taking care of myself and my brother and seeing us through, and the family thought that the quickest way for a woman to earn a living was to go into teaching, which I didn't want to do at all. I didn't argue it; but my mother and grandmother used to use the phrase, "But it's something to fall back on," you know. And that, I think, is a detestable phrase for a young person. I decided, almost on a certain day, that I was going to be a photographer. I thought at the time that I could earn my living without too much difficulty. I'd make modest photographs of people, starting with the people whom I knew. I had some sort of a general idea. This was before I even owned a camera. I had never owned a camera, but I just knew that was what I wanted to do.

DOROTHEA LANGE (when asked how she decided to become a photographer) in an Archives of American Art oral history interview, conducted by Richard K. Doud, on May 22, 1964.
BOB DYLAN
Money doesn't talk, it swears.

KAZUO ISHIGURO
I don't think it's any fun, even if you are one of the most respected authors in the world like Margaret Atwood, to keep being nominated and not win.

WERNER HERZOG
Well they [chickens] are very frightening for me because their stupidity is so flat. You look into the eyes of a chicken and you lose yourself in a completely flat, frightening stupidity. They are like a great metaphor for me... I kind of love chicken, but they frighten me more than any other animal.

EUGÈNE IONESCO
Describe a circle, stroke its back and it turns vicious.

KEITH WATERHOUSE
I wonder what it's like to be a tortoise. You can't be frivolous or facetious if you're a tortoise, can you? And think of the danger of being turned into a pair of hair-brushes... But you do have a home to go to.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
What has influenced my life more than any other single thing has been my stammer. Had I not stammered I would probably...have gone to Cambridge as my brothers did, perhaps have become a don and every now and then published a dreary book about French literature.

E.M. FORSTER
As long as learning is connected with earning, as long as certain jobs can only be reached through exams, so long must we take this examination system seriously. If another ladder to employment was contrived, much so-called education would disappear, and no one would be a penny the stupider.

JONI MITCHELL
You could write a song about some kind of emotional problem you are having, but it would not be a good song, in my eyes, until it went through a period of sensitivity to a moment of clarity. Without that moment of clarity to contribute to the song, it's just complaining.

SUSAN SONTAG
A photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.
As most men who speak or write have verbal habits and use their favorite words or phrases involuntarily and sometimes even most inappropriately, so almost every painter has his own peculiarities, which escape him without being aware of them.


E.M. FORSTER
I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet, there would be no more wars.

H.G. WELLS
I sometimes think that if Adam and Eve had been merely engaged, she would not have talked with the serpent; and the world had been saved an infinity of misery.

Now the work of art also represents a state of final equilibrium, of accomplished order and maximum relative entropy, and there are those who resent it. But art is not meant to stop the stream of life. Within a narrow span of duration and space the work of art concentrates a view of the human condition; and sometimes it marks the steps of progression, just as a man climbing the dark stairs of a medieval tower assures himself by the changing sights glimpsed through its narrow windows that he is getting somewhere after all.


JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH
Trickle down theory: the less than elegant metaphor that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows.
P.G. WODEHOUSE
It was my Uncle George who discovered that alcohol was a food well in advance of modern medical thought.

W.H. AUDEN
Poetry bears the same kind of relation to prose...that algebra bears to arithmetic.

ALAN COREN
As anyone who has ever forked out a quarter-pound of mixed metaphors will testify, once a bastion falls, the flood gates open and before you know where you are you’re up to the neck in wrung withers.

THOMAS HARDY
Everybody is so talented nowadays that the only people I care to honor as deserving real distinction are those who remain in obscurity.

DON MARQUIS
When a man tells you that he got rich through hard work, ask him: “Whose?”

FERNAND LEGER
Art must be free in its inventiveness, it must raise us above too much reality. This is its goal, whether it is poetry or painting. The plastic life, the picture, is made up of harmonious relationships among volumes, lines, and colors. These are the three forces that must govern works of art. If, in organizing these three essential elements harmoniously, one finds that objects, elements of reality, can enter into the composition, it may be better and may give the work more richness. But they must be subordinated to the three essential elements mentioned above. Modern work thus takes a point of view directly opposed to academic work. Academic work puts the subject first and relegates pictorial values to a secondary level, if there is room.

FRAN LEBOWITZ
When I was in grammar school it was customary at the beginning of each year for the teacher to explain the principal of individual freedom in a democracy by stating: “Your right to swing your arm ends where the other person’s nose begins.” An admirable sentiment—unquestionably. But somehow lacking in that little something extra that makes it all worthwhile. Quite simply, it misses the point. I, for one, would much rather be punched in the nose than in the sensibility. And so I offer this in its stead: “Your right to wear a mint-green polyester leisure suit ends where it meets my eye.” Should you choose to disregard this dictate you shall be arrested for bad taste.

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG
There is no stranger production than a book. Set by people who don’t understand it, bound by people who don’t understand it, sold, read and reviewed by people who don’t understand it, generally also written by people who don’t understand it...
All subscriptions to BALLAST (including gift subscriptions) must be mailed to the following address:

BALLAST Quarterly Review
Attn: VP in Charge of Consumer Complaints
2022 X Avenue
Dysart, Iowa 52224-9767

BALLAST is published in a limited edition and back issues are not generally available. However, any issue may be xeroxed to provide copies to others, but the copies must never be altered or sold. Rarely do we use unsolicited submissions, but readers are always encouraged to send offbeat material, verbal or visual, of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material must be explicitly labeled as such. Material that is not original must clearly make note of its author and source. All submissions are unpaid, and unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope.

BALLAST does not have a budget as such. For more than 20 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 VP in Charge of Consumer Complaints. 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 its book reviews are reprinted either on the Leonardo reviews web site at <http://www.leonardo.info/ldr.html> or in the printed form of that magazine.

Book and video reviews will return in the next issue of BALLAST.

E.M. FORSTER
I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little further down our particular path than we have gone ourselves.

PHILLIP J DAVIS
One of the endlessly enduring aspects of mathematics is that its thorniest paradoxes have a way of blooming into beautiful theories.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE
One ought, everyday at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words.

THOMAS HARDY
Aspects are within us, and who seems most kingly is king.

KENZABURO OE