

# the BOOKPRESS

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## What is a Humanistic Criticism?

M.H. Abrams, the Class of 1916 Professor of English Literature Emeritus, has been a member of the English Department at Cornell University since 1945. He is an authority on 18th and 19th century literature, literary criticism, and European Romanticism, and is the author of *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, which received the Phi Beta Kappa Christian Gauss Prize in 1954, and *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, which won the James Russell Lowell Prize in 1972.

The following is an excerpted and condensed version of a lecture given by Professor Abrams at Cornell University on March 31, 1993. This lecture inaugurated the Heinrich and Alice Schneider Memorial Lecture Series.

M. H. Abrams

The term *critical theory*, as commonly applied these days, designates the innovative forms of literary criticism, each based on a radical reconsideration of language, or of discourse, which have emerged since the 1960s, in an ever-accelerating sequence. These theories range from structuralism through deconstruction and other types of poststructural conceptual schemes and interpretive practices to the current theory known as the New Historicism.

As one who occupies an alternative intellectual position—that of traditional humanistic criticism—I would like, nevertheless, to attempt to look at some critical theories “from within”; to ask what features have made them seem not only credible but compelling to highly intelligent and knowledgeable proponents; and to indicate the kinds of insights such

theories have achieved that we would do well to heed. But I shall also indicate why, nonetheless, current theories, as applied in literary criticism, seem to me inadequate to the production and constitution of literature that they undertake to explain, and to the process of reading that they expound and recommend.

### Opposing Paradigms of Language and Literature

Whatever their divergencies, and their sometimes bitter quarrels, modern theorists coincide in a strenuous anti-humanism, and in discrediting or dismantling the interrelated concepts of “humanity,” “human,” “man,” “the subject,” “subjectivity,” “the person,” “the self.” Levi-Strauss in fact redefined the human sciences as oriented not toward the explanation but the deletion of the human—the ultimate goal of the human sciences,” he said, “is not to

constitute man but to dissolve him”; and he and other radical structuralists represented the human subject

there is no referent?”; for “the subject is no more than an effect of language.” In an essay of 1970

announcing the de-centering of structuralism, Jacques Derrida described his own deconstructive mode of interpretation as one which “tries to pass beyond man and humanism”; elsewhere, he adverted to his aim as “an entire deconstruction of onto-theological humanism (including that of Heidegger).” Earlier still, in *The Order of Things* (1966), Michel Foucault, decrying “the chimeras of the new humanisms,” announced in an oft-quoted passage that it is “a source of profound relief to think that man is...a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will



M. H. Abrams

as no more than a product of systemic functions, and therefore, Eugenio Donato declared, “empty, uninhabited by consciousness, emotion, affectivity, and so forth.” As Roland Barthes put it, “Don’t I know that in the field of the subject,

disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.” And to what Foucault described as the “warped and twisted forms of reflection” which even in this day wish to take man “as their

see *Humanistic*, page 6

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## Apocalypse Then

**Rads**  
Tom Bates  
HarperCollins, 465 pp., \$25.00

Nick Gillespie

Whither the Sixties? This isn't a question only for historians, as it's clear that the 1960s have become the touchstone for contemporary society—Bill Clinton's inauguration merely underscores a change that was bound to happen as the Woodstock Generation came of age. The music of that time—so central to any meaningful analysis of the period—has achieved the privileged status of “classic rock” and permeates our culture as background to any number of television commercials. (The use of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's “Teach Your Children” in a Fruit of the Loom underwear commercial revolving around a father-son toilet training episode may mark simultaneously the zenith and nadir of this trend.) Movies immersed in the decade, such as *The Big Chill*, *Lost in America*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *JFK* and *X*, have wide commercial and/or

critical appeal. Although Nehru jackets and hip huggers remain in the dustbin of fashion history, tie-dye has made a comeback, and some fashion mags suggest that bell bottoms will once again walk the streets. In short, the culture of the decade that began with the death of Kennedy and ended with Woodstock or Watergate is a yardstick for the present.

Thus the “meaning” (or meanings) of the Sixties is hotly debated. Which is the “true” spirit of the Sixties: Woodstock or Altamont, Timothy Leary or Charles Manson, SDS or Weatherman, “All You Need Is Love” or “Street Fighting Man”? Where you stand on the Sixties means as much as where you stood in the Sixties. Tom Bates' *Rads* excavates the social and political rubble of the August 23, 1970, bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin which, along with the Weather Underground's self-annihilating Greenwich Village explosion of March 6, 1970, ranks as one of the most apocalyptic “movement” actions of the Sixties.

The story Bates tells is extremely depressing but always riveting. As compelling as the events he relates is his attempt to make sense of the forces that culminated in this destructive act of sabotage.

*Rads* becomes more understandable when viewed in relation to other books written by ex-Sixties activists. On one end of the scale is Tom Hayden's 1988 memoir, *Reunion*. Hayden, as a leader of Students for a Democratic Society and a Chicago 8 defendant, has impeccable radical credentials and sums up the Sixties thus:

*The goal of the sixties was, in a sense, the completion of the vision of the early revolutionaries and the abolitionists, for Tom Paine and Frederick Douglass wanted even more than the Bill of Rights or Emancipation Proclamation.... The sixties movements were inspired toward that loftier goal and were blocked in the quest by the intervention of fate.*

*Like the American revolutionary period, the awakening of the* see *Apocalypse*, page 10

## Conservation in the Mist

**The Myth of Wild Africa; Conservation Without Illusion**  
Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane  
W.W. Norton, \$21.95

**Visions of Caliban; On Chimpanzees and People**  
Dale Peterson and Jane Goodall  
Houghton Mifflin, \$22.95

Meredith F. Small

We left Kigoma, Tanzania, about 8 a.m. The boat was loaded down with tents, backpacks, food, and beer, enough supplies to house our group of 14 American tourists in reasonable comfort during three days of camping on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. This group of “eco-tourists” had come to Africa to see primates, and I was the official “naturalist” in charge. Today we were on our way to visit the chimpanzees of the Gombe Stream Reserve and the group was in high spirits. Our subjects weren't just any old apes—the Gombe chimpanzees are the movie stars of primates. On film and in books,

they have been popularized by Dr. Jane Goodall based on her 30 years of field research. For many of my fellow tourists, Flo, Figan, Goblin and the various chimpanzee families of Gombe were as familiar as characters in a popular soap opera. For me, they were more like family. An anthropologist by degree and a primatologist by training, I have read everything Jane Goodall has ever written. I share with most primatologists a special respect for this gentle woman who has dedicated her life to chimpanzees. This visit for me was the primatologist's version of a journey to Mecca.

From the moment the boat pulled out from the dock and we got a clear view of the hilly ravines ringing the lake, I knew we were in chimp country. It's not really jungle, but a dense woodland forest that cascades down the escarpments and ends abruptly at the lake. After two hours of putt-putting north, we spotted a rowboat anchored close to shore with the words “Gombe Stream Reserve” painted on the sides. Our destination, a tourist campground, was just up

see *Conservation*, page 11

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CORNELL UNIVERSITY

# Letters to the Editor

## Response to Janice Levy's Cuba

To the Editor:

There can be little doubt that the deplorable events Janice Levy described in her February article about Havana actually happened, but they cannot be understood in isolation. I want to add to Héctor Vélez's response, putting those events into a still broader context.

For a start, to the shortcomings Levy observed, in civil liberties and housing, and the short supply of consumption goods mentioned by Vélez, might be added restrictions on travel abroad, the stifling limitations of a one-party state, privileges for high officials, and the compliant dullness of the Cuban press. These conditions do not compare well with those in many societies, where housing is more ample and consumption standards are higher, civil liberties are protected, political competition is fierce, the press is relatively free, and citizens travel widely.

How is it, then, in contrast to the critique offered by the highly visible refugees who have decamped to the US, that most Cuban citizens have supported their government for more than 30 years? Why, in spite of the shortcomings, do tens of thousands of people still stand in the hot Caribbean sun to listen to Fidel Castro, as for hours he not only tells them of their achievements and reviles the US, but also reminds them of their miseries? Do they not know of better alternatives?

● Vélez suggests one answer: Cubans know indeed that there are special reasons for many of their troubles, having to do with the unique enmity of the US government, closely allied with frantic anti-Castro refugees in Florida and their terrorist, CIA-aided fringe. A few details serve to flesh out Vélez's point. Ever since the first years of the Cuban revolution, US hostility to the Cuban government has been forceful, at times life-threatening. Successive administrations and Congress have used economic blockades, political interference, covert action (that is, illegal, often violent intervention), and military invasion, all intended at least to damage and at best overthrow the Cuban government.

The list of harmful acts is long and well documented. In the main it is not disputed by official US sources, since Castro's overthrow has been an objective of US policy. US agents have tried to kill Fidel, have dusted a chemical powder on his boots, hoping to make his beard fall out, and have seeded clouds so they would rain before reaching the island to irrigate crops. With few exceptions, the US government prohibits citizens from traveling to Cuba and firms from doing business there, prevents Cubans from entering the US unless they are openly hostile to their own government, and tries to prevent other nations from trading with Cuba. To get at Cuba, the US government even played cozy with the Mafia and with some of the world's most dangerous terrorists. One result was the blowing up of an Air Cubana flight upon its departure from Barbados in October 1976, killing all 73 people aboard, in-

cluding members of the Cuban fencing team. (This disastrous act seems a minor event when contrasted to some of the most atrocious consequences of US policy in El Salvador, now officially confirmed even by Eliot Abrams, who enthusiastically directed US policies in the Reagan State Department.)

These acts of national hatred have caused great harm, and they have threatened the Cuban government, but they have failed to dislodge it. Ironically, as others have observed, this US enmity has also provided, time and time again, a convenient political excuse, helping the Cuban government to displace responsibility for its serious domestic difficulties. As Vélez says, the Cuban government is not paranoid; it is deathly afraid of the US and its agents, for good reason. (To this day the US operates an active naval base inside Cuba, at Guantanamo Bay, now filled with Haitian refugees.)

● There is a second explanation for the internal support the Cuban government has received over the last 30 years, in spite of the country's many difficulties: people know things could be worse. Cubans know from their own history, from the material furnished in their school books, and from their direct experience as teachers, doctors, nurses, and soldiers in Latin America and in some countries of Africa and Asia that conditions in most countries of the Third World are much worse, particularly now in Latin America following the debt crisis of the 1980s. From this Cuban perspective, their revolution appears to be one of the most interesting social experiments of the 20th century, filled with problems but also with admirable achievements.

Unfortunately, Cuban living standards and political and civil liberties still suffer when compared with those of the rich European countries, Canada, or the US. Cubans are much better off today than they were before the revolution in 1959, even after so much economic decline through the 1980s, but they are still citizens of a poor country, a former colony, a barely industrialized sugar republic dependent on fickle international markets. The collapse of Soviet and Eastern European Communism blew up Cuba's bridge to any external economic support, and conditions there are now grim indeed.

One need be no apologist for the Cuban government, nor need one approve of what happened, to recognize that Janice Levy's experiences with the Havana police (and, indeed, the experiences of her Cuban acquaintances) were relatively benign. Compare their visit in the police station to what might have happened to an outsider in the company of a politically unpopular local, and with two cameras, in Turkey, Egypt, Chile, Zaire, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, or even Venezuela or Brazil! Suppression of political dissent is a bad business, and the Cubans do far too much of it. But we hold up a false double standard if we forget that nearly every Third World government severely limits civil liberties, often brutally, to very damaging effect.

● The really proper comparison for Cuba is with the other Latin American ex-colonies of Spain and Portugal that have long since moved into the orbit of US influence, countries with similar cultural, religious, and political histories. Using indices from the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and the World Health Organization, we find Cuba compared to other Latin American countries to have superior schools available much more widely, higher rates of literacy, a more extensive public health system and better medical care, lower infant mortality rates and longer life expectancy, very low levels of corruption by political and economic elites, and much higher levels of civility by police and military personnel as well as safer city streets. With the exception of Costa Rica no country of Latin America comes even close to the Cuban achievements in any of these areas. Indeed, the Cuban successes were so remarkable and so sudden after the 1959 revolutionary victory that President Kennedy inaugurated the Alliance for Progress, and the US government has ever since worried (however cynically) about the lack of social progress in the rest of Latin America, for fear that social revolution would be the result.

● Cuban people themselves recognize the dilemmas of real history, and they know they live not in the best of all possible worlds. Even if they are better off than millions of their counterparts who are landless in the countryside or miserable in big city slums in wealthier Mexico, Venezuela, or Brazil, not to speak of Haiti or the Dominican Republic, these Cubans are poor. Recent global changes have made them poorer and the future promises to hasten their decline. Surely Cubans want and deserve more — especially the good things offered by the US: more cash, wider opportunity for work, and a more solid guarantee of civil liberties. They would move closer to these goals if the US would abandon its rigid hostility, recognize Cuba's need for help, and at the very least desist from disruption and allow other nations to provide support.

The United Nations has estimated that the March 13 storm caused at least one billion dollars in damages to Cuba. UNICEF and the World Health Organization are airlifting wheat, milk, antibiotics, and clothing. The US government continues its trade ban. For those who want to circumvent this ban and provide emergency funds for medicine and other relief, call the Cuba Information Project at (212) 227-3422 or the Committee on US Latin American Relations at (607) 255-7293.

**William W. Goldsmith**  
Director of the Program on International Studies in Planning,  
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# Handbook of Blunders

Japanese by Spring

Ishmael Reed

Atheneum, 225pp., \$20.00

Mark Shechner

I rarely start a review by telling you that I dislike a book. I try to contain my horror and let the message sink in, but this time I'm going to clue you in right away. Ishmael Reed's new novel, *Japanese by Spring*, is a handbook of blunders that a professional writer should never make; it should be marketed as an "undo it yourself" kit for young writers.

It isn't exactly that Reed deals in cartoons that never fill out into characters.

It isn't exactly that the plot gets so snarled that even the bewildered author finally steps

out of it; it isn't exactly that a book denouncing racial and ethnic stereotypes also revels in them; it isn't exactly that the author's affair with indignation gets the best of him or that everyone and everything incites a tirade; it isn't exactly that everyone in the novel is a fool except a character named Ishmael Reed or that Euro-American culture all the way back to Homer comes in for a hit or that feminism gets hit or that Japan gets hit or that university history departments get hit or that academic fashions like deconstruction get hit. It isn't exactly any of those things; it is just that all of them in combination bludgeon the reader into submission. By page 75 you're on your knees, and you've got 150 pages to go.

The unhero of this book is one Chappie Puttbutt, an African-American Professor of English,

Humanities, and African-American Studies at Jack London College in Oakland, California. You know right off the bat that a man with three academic domiciles will have none to call home. Without any strong principles except getting by, Puttbutt is a go-with-the-flow guy, a surfer of tides as they roll swiftly past. "When the black Power thing was in, Puttbutt was into that. When the backlash on black Power settled in, with its code words like reverse discrimination, he joined that. He'd been a feminist when they were in power. But now they were in decline, unable to expand beyond their middle-class constituency and so for now he was a neoconservative."

Now that "the Asian thing was going to fly he wanted to at least be in the coach," and so Puttbutt takes Japanese lessons from Dr. Yamato. (Reed himself is studying Japanese and uses it from time to time, more or less correctly. Any reader with one semester of college Japanese should be able to keep pace with Reed.)

Being both African-American and conservative (he is the author of *Blacks, America's Misfortune*), Puttbutt is under siege from all quarters: from white fascist students who edit the paper *Koons and Kikes* and write messages on his blackboard, "Dinner with Puttbutt. Bring your own watermelon," as well as from feminists, who are hungrily eyeing his salary line in order to hire a feminist, one April Jokujoku. It looks bad for Puttbutt, and he is turned down for tenure just as Ms. Jokujoku is offered a \$150,000 per semester professorship. But hold everything: at that very moment Jack London College is bought by the

see *Handbook*, page 4

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# Arriving on Time

**Life Before Birth and a Time to be Born**

Peter W. Nathanielsz

Promethean Press, 1992, 238pp.  
\$25.00

David Robertshaw

In general it can be said that although universities have satisfied the needs of the general public in that they provide an advanced form of education, they have sadly disappointed the public in providing solutions to the problems of this world. This disillusionment stems in part from the outright reticence of the faculty of universities to communicate to the public and taxpayers and, thereby, ignore those who provide the resources for their scholarship. Very rarely are university professors prepared to make the effort to come down from their lofty towers and explain what it is they do in their research and why they do it. Of course they are busy people but unless they can convince the tax-paying public that they are, indeed, busy and that they are cognizant of the public they serve, it is no small wonder that a certain amount of disillusionment creeps in after all the enormous investment in higher education. Dr. Nathanielsz in his book has tried, successfully I believe, to explain what he does and what are his eventual aims and goals. His book is for the reader who has a minimal amount of biological education. It describes in very clear terms the process of fetal development leading eventually to birth, and the profound physiological changes that are demanded of the newborn.

The layperson cannot help but be fascinated by some of the events that occur during fetal development. I am sure that not many people realize that a fetus makes breathing movements, although there is no air to breathe, and that it spends most of its time in a sleep state equivalent to dreaming in the adult. Only occasionally does it change from this state into another state, in which it becomes active. A great deal of information has been obtained on the early developmental stages, the stages of gestation during which the fetal organs are formed and during which genetically determined abnormalities may appear. Accidents of development whose causes are not understood also appear within the first three to five months. It is well known that the fetus is particularly sensitive to its environment, i.e. the environment provided by the mother, during this time—the thalidomide tragedy is a very poignant example. It might be assumed, therefore, that within the last three months of pregnancy, when all the organ systems are developed, that no further harm can come to the fetus since all it has to do is grow. This conclusion may be disastrously wrong.

The unique feature that separates humans from other members of the animal kingdom is the relatively enormous development of the brain, and with it, the great gifts of speech, reasoning, self-reflection, and technical achievement. We know little about this stage of brain development when the final refine-

ment of our uniquely human characteristics may occur at the cellular, or more likely, subcellular and molecular level. We do know that the placenta is permeable to many chemical compounds which have profound psychological effects on the mother, such as the ingestion of alcohol and other drugs which affect behavior and mood. While acting on the brain of the mother, these compounds also influence the fetus. (For example, if the mother is anesthetized, so is the fetus.) We also know that excessive smoking by the mother, as well as excessive ingestion of alcohol, leads to profound deformities of the developing fetus, some of which are visible as facial changes—especially when the mother has abused these substances throughout her pregnancy. Approximately 50% of all babies born to mothers who have used some form of drug affecting the central nervous system show neurological damage, including mental retardation. These changes are overt, but what about more subtle changes resulting from an alteration of the fetus' chemical environment brought about by the mother's lifestyle? These effects may include slowness of learning, antisocial behavior, or any disorder that can be traced to the central nervous system. Whether we become thin or obese is thought to be genetically determined, much of the evidence in support of this assertion having been obtained from studies on identical twins reared separately. However, in the Dutch famine of World War II, when the retreating German army left an isolated group of people without food, it was noted that the offspring of women who were pregnant at the time showed weight gain abnormalities. Thus, the maternal environment may have modified a genetic trait. Dr. Nathanielsz refers to fetal brain development in connection with fetal rhythms such as sleep behavior, suggesting that these subtle behavioral changes in the fetus may augur subsequent behavioral perturbations.

Nathanielsz then leads on to the events that determine the timing of birth. Here the fetus plays an important role; but it takes two to be born and the mother must also play her part. A significant tragedy of human life is that of premature birth. At the head of chapter 15, Nathanielsz quotes Shakespeare's Richard III, "I that am curtail'd of this fair proportion, cheated of feature by disassembling nature..." which may hint at the motivation for his re-

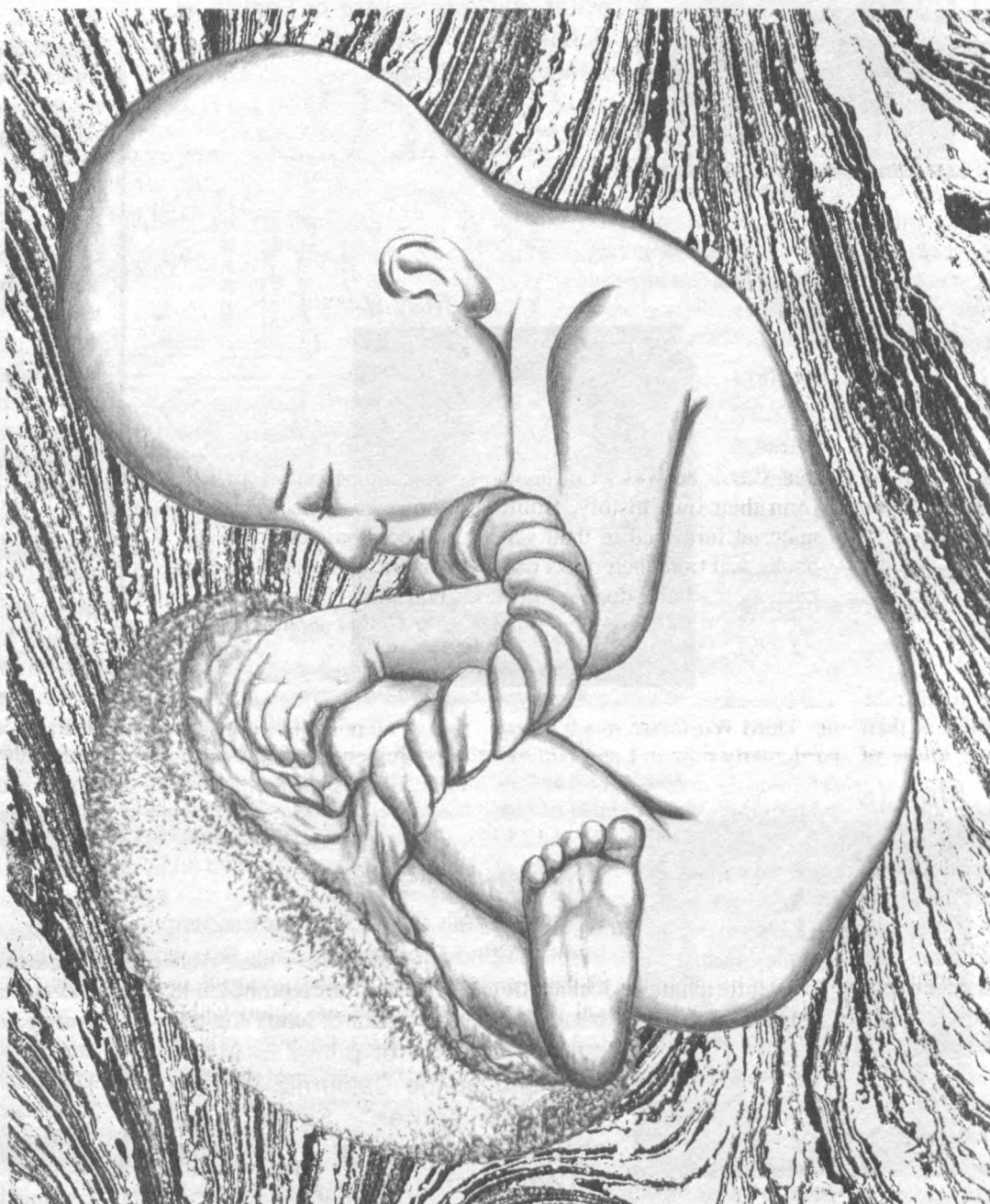
search. Part of the tragedy is that modern technology enables even drastically premature fetuses to survive, albeit at enormous economic and emotional costs. Much of the distress associated with this struggle may continue for the survivor and the parents throughout an impaired subsequent life. If only we knew what causes premature delivery or how to prevent it, we would solve one of the most important problems in medicine today. It would seem that medical technology, which promotes the survival of the terminally ill and the amazingly young

problem that all biomedical scientists have to face; they have to justify for themselves the benefits that might accrue from using animals as research subjects. For some unknown reason, sheep are not an object of concern amongst the various animal rights movements. Nathanielsz also uses primates since the ultimate test of his work on sheep will have to be either human or nonhuman primates. He has chosen the latter and in doing so alerts the animal rights movement who object more vehemently to using primates than to using sheep. It would seem that emotion rather

by the National Institutes of Health is based on the premise that, once priorities are determined, scientists will apply their expertise to meet these needs in order to receive funding. Scientists thereby become entrepreneurs, readjusting their skills to meet current trends in biomedical research. This forces scientists to be responsive to the needs of society rather than indulging their own curiosity. The problem arises in the method by which directions for medical research are determined. President Nixon established the National Cancer Institute, hoping

that the problem of cancer would be solved within a decade. Here then is a politician determining the future direction of scientific research. The motives then become suspect; could it be that Nixon wished to bequeath himself a place in the history of medicine? If Nixon had allocated only a part of this money toward understanding the factors that modify the development of the brain and its role in determining the timing of birth, we might by now have solved this problem. Cancer, in general, is a disease of the aged. Why have we slighted not only the young but the very young?

One sees in this book the excitement of the research worker. Nathanielsz frequently uses the word "awesome," a word much abused in current English usage, but in this context no better word can be used to describe the sense of



from *Life Before Birth and a Time to be Born*

premature newborn, has not established its priorities properly when it comes to funding medical research. Surely basic science related to fetal physiology and the control of birth should take precedence over the enormous investment of resources in, for example, the development of an artificial heart. However, funding of research into fetal and neonatal physiology has been sadly deficient.

The approach that Nathanielsz has taken is to study the development of the sheep fetus and newborn lamb. The sheep has many advantages in that it is fertile and the number of fetuses can be partially controlled by various management practices, including selective breeding for prolificacy and altering the nutritional state of the mother at the time of ovulation. In addition, sheep are robust animals for whom the methods of animal husbandry have been well worked out. Nathanielsz raises the ethical issue of whether animals should be used in research, especially to solve the problems of human medicine. It is a

than logic rules this kind of speciesism; little concern is expressed over the use in laboratory research of rats and mice, but there is great concern about the use of dogs and primates. I would like to have seen Nathanielsz give us his philosophy on this particular issue.

Nathanielsz is well-known for his work on the later stages of fetal physiology and the physiology of the neonate. It is unfortunate that he has tantalized the reader by only beginning to address his own work in any detail in chapter 12, entitled, "A Time To Be Born," of his 16-chapter book. While the previous chapters provide some necessary background for a work of this nature, one is left wanting to know more about the particularities of Nathanielsz' work and how such research is conducted. Likewise, one would have liked to see a discussion on the way in which priorities are determined for medical research in the US. Why is this field relatively neglected?

The method of funding research

wonder that emerges when an investigator delves into the innermost secrets of biological processes. This book should certainly be read by any woman who is pregnant or contemplating pregnancy, and also by individuals who are interested in the role that universities play in educating their children and the public. If more scientists were prepared to take the trouble to explain their work, their concerns, and their reasons for doing what they do, perhaps a more enlightened public would emerge, better able to evaluate objectively the priorities of scientific research.



David Robertshaw is chairman of the Department of Physiology at Cornell University Veterinary College.

Off Campus**At The Bookery**

The Bookery Winter/Spring lecture series continues Sundays at 4 p.m. in the new lecture space in Bookery II.

May 2



Photograph: Jan E. Regan

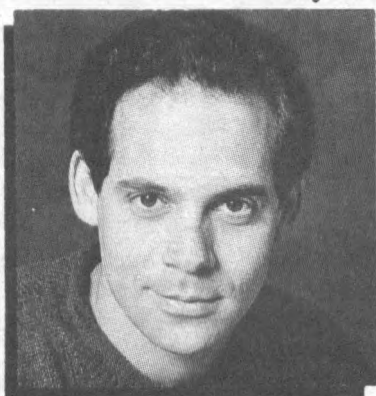
**Deborah Tall**

will read from and talk about her just-published book entitled *From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place*. Tall is a poet and non-fiction writer and a professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.

**Paul Kafka**

will read from his just-published first novel *LOVE <Enter>*, about a young intern who, on an obstetrics rotation in a Louisiana hospital, seizes the moments between deliveries to use a hospital computer (password: LOVE) to compose ardent missives to each of three once-close friends.

May 9



Photograph: Linda Krikorian

May 16



Photograph: Dede Hatch

**Meredith F. Small**

will give a talk drawn from her recent book entitled *Female Choices: Sexual Behavior of Female Primates*, which is based on fifteen years of watching the mating behavior of primates in the field and at the California Primate Research Center. Small is an associate professor of anthropology at Cornell University.

June 13



Photograph: Eric Feinblatt

**Diana Abu-Jaber**

will read from her new novel *Arabian Jazz*, a warm, humorous, and poignant story about a Jordanian family living in upstate New York. Abu-Jaber teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

**The Bookery**

**DeWitt Building, 215 North Cayuga St., Ithaca**

For more information call (607) 273 - 5055

**Handbook of Blunders**

*continued from page 2*

Japanese, its name is changed to *Hideki Tojo no Daigaku* (Hideki Tojo University), Dr. Yamato turns out to be the *gakubucho* or university president, and Puttbutt is appointed his retainer, with unlimited powers to hire and fire.

This is material for a dandy comedy of academic fashion, but by the time the Japanese take over, the book is already zooming off on jet streams of indignation, as everyone is denouncing everyone else, and the author is in there denouncing them all. Come to think of it: that sounds like a real university. In the midst of the mayhem, Reed does achieve some delectable satire, especially against certain forms of literary theory. "[Puttbutt] had sent a letter to the campus deconstructionists, informing them of their termination. The letters said you're fired. Those who believed that the words 'you're fired' meant exactly that could finish the semester. Those who felt that the words only referred to themselves would have to leave immediately."

Nasty but deft. Quickly enough, however, the deftness goes on sabbatical leaving the nastiness in command, especially where feminism is concerned, and when Puttbutt confronts Marsha Marx, Chair of Women's Studies, the gloves are off. "A lot of black men and white men are getting sick of your double-dealing opportunistic feminist bullshit." Puttbutt then launches into a diatribe against the feminists who supported Anita Hill in the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. "You lynched Clarence Thomas. You white gender-first feminists in the media and the campuses have gone Clarence Thomas crazy. What do you want from the man?...The only difference between you and the women in the Klan is that the women in the Klan dress better."

Reed is author of a book of essays called *Writin' is Fightin'*, and this book is a vivid instance of what he means. Reed's fightin' style is like Mike Tyson's; he throws his punches in flurries, expecting that one or two will strike home. It happens that the tirade against the "gender-first feminists" comes from an editorial he wrote last October in the *Washington Post*, on the anniversary of the Thomas confirmation hearings, in which he accused Anita Hill of doing the dirty work for white feminists who have it in for the black male. Singling out reporter Nina Totenberg of National Public Radio, Gloria Steinem of *Ms.* magazine, Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will*, and San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein, Reed complained of "white middle-class feminists" who "are harder on black men than on the white men who are able to provide them with career opportunities." Anita Hill, he maintained, had allowed herself to be their instrument.

The *Washington Post* editorial was a reasoned argument about racial tensions in the women's movement, and while it shortsightedly looked past Anita Hill to the white forces behind her—as

though a black woman could not have a mind of her own—it scored points about the demonization of the black male in America. In *Japanese by Spring*, the lectern has turned into a portable soap box, and Reed sounds like a man who has been talking to himself for too long.

He flounders in a plot that defies understanding. The purchase of Jack London College by Japanese interests is part of a plot by a right-wing group, the Black Dragon or *kuroyukai*, to lure Emperor Akhito to America, assassinate him, and restore the Tokugawa shogunate that had been overthrown by Emperor Meiji in the 19th century. Yamato is arrested, only to be out of jail days later ("Our society...owns too many of your congressmen for the arrest to stick"). But Chappie by now is militantly pro-Yankee, anti-Japanese. "You can't bring back all of the war dead. Besides, the Japanese committed atrocities in China and Okinawa. You used people for bayonet practice in the Philippines." The book indulges a Japanophobia that is every bit as hysterical as its feminophobia, Europhobia, and historiophobia ("American historians were contributing to the United States racial nightmare. It was appropriate that the leader of the antidiversity movement, the Scots-American David Duke, had received a degree in history.") Yeah? And what toothpaste does he use? Add Scotsophobia.

The novel fades out into a promiscuous tract. In interviews, Reed has advised students to learn about Japan and Asia. To quote from an article in *Newsday*: "The Osaka Community Cultural Foundation recently gave him an award for his interest in Japanese culture; the author plans to visit Japan for the first time in December. He's just learned how to speak Japanese—as well as the African language Yoruba." I hope Osaka Foundation gets its yen's worth. Certainly Reed will find an audience there for his anti-feminism. But I hope he doesn't follow Chappie Puttbutt's counsel. "Going to Japan would provide him with an opportunity. He figured that he knew the way to end the tensions that existed between the United States and Japan. He would urge that the Japanese eliminate Kanji." (Kanji are the Chinese characters that constitute one of the four character sets in which Japanese is written.) Most of all, Reed needs to meet some real Japanese so that he can get beyond the cartoons he's populated this book with, unless he wants to write manga, the violent/erotic Japanese comic books that would suit his style to a T. And a word to the wise re: his Japanese woman who loves Horace Silver and hates Dave Brubeck. A Japanese person NEVER PRO-NOUNCES IT BLUEBECK. Maybe bu-ru-be-ku, but NEVER BLUEBECK.



Mark Shechner is a writer who lives in Buffalo.

# The New Peripatetics

Robert Hill

"All men," wrote Aristotle, in that blithely gender-determinate way of older European white males, "desire knowledge." Alas, as another older European white male, A.E. Housman wrote, 't's true, 't's true. *The New York Times Book Review* has provided clear empirical corroboration for this piece of Aristotelian induction in a full-page advertisement: "For the first time—the Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition taught by 10 widely acclaimed lecture professors on audio and video cassette." This five-cassette series of readily available Great Minds begins with Socrates (who, since Nietzsche at least, usually stands to take most of the blame in these Western intellectual chronologies), extends through Aurelius, Augustine, and Aquinas to Wittgenstein, Weber, and (even) Habermas. No Derrida, no Foucault, but Richard Rorty makes the cut, so we're not simply toadying to current fashion.

Of the 10 SuperStar Teachers (trademark registered), eight men and two women, none are exactly household names; one, in fact, has been hiding her light under a bushel, immured from public acclaim in a place called Eastern Montana College. (She might be the natural choice to illuminate Thrasymachus's position on justice in the Republic.) Not having watched any of these taped performances, I have been unable to determine whether The Teaching Company, the purveyor of all this wealth, has undertaken the study of Darwin sufficiently to allow the principle of natural selection full play in choosing these 10 SuperStar Teachers (marca registrada). But perhaps I draw too fine a point here; what is more intriguing is not the quality of the performances (I will assume they are as stellar as the trademark suggests), but their particular method of merchandising something under the general heading of intellectual accomplishment.

"What is the purpose of life?" begins the body of the ad copy. "What is the best kind of life? Who or what is God? What is the essence of justice?" And more of the same, ending with a most intriguing quick little step up to the metaquestion:

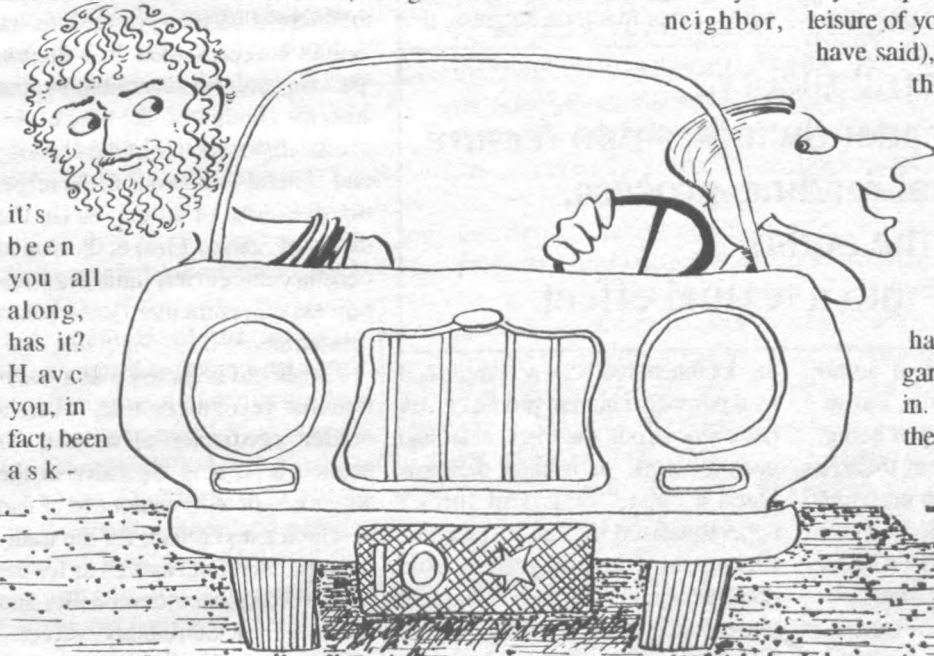
"Can any of these questions be answered?" Now just who is asking these questions, and of whom? I picture Dostoevsky murmuring his innermost puzzlements to a bewildered priest in a confessional, but, the advertisement insists, "You too must have asked yourself questions like these many times. And perhaps you vowed that some day you would plow [note the good Homeric verb] through all the great thinkers of the Western World and find your own answers." Oh, so

tive tendentiousness. Your neighbor doesn't seem interested in talking about it; you feel appropriately awkward launching it sideways like a log into discussions about the merits of vinyl versus live rubber garden hoses, or about how to keep the dog from digging under the fence again, or what's the best hotel if the MLA convention is in Washington, D.C., this year. So you've been doing it all along, secretly meaning to start plowing sometime soon. If you can't get a civil answer out of your neighbor,

intellectual grasp: don't worry, it whispers, there's nothing here that would stump a 12-year-old kid. Plato Schmato, this is a piece of cake for a genius like you.

And what's this about your car? So that's where you've been doing it; you've been pondering these questions to no avail in your car? Well, and why not? It seems only natural that the automobile should change the pedagogical mode and venue of the peripatetics. Without any disruption in your routine (in the leisure of your own routine, I might have said), you can now examine the time-honored solutions of Great Minds, weigh them judiciously at red lights and in slow traffic, and formulate your own position on these tangles, perhaps by the time your garage door opener kicks in. I am not suggesting that there is anything misguided about marketing a cas-

sumed audience for these cassettes? At \$150 per video cassette, a person has to be fairly serious about collecting grist for impressive cocktail party chat. And I don't think that is the motive, or the principal motive, in this case, the real motive being much subtler and less calculated. With your indulgences, Aristotle (him again) is instructive at this juncture. In that overarching system of being (or System of Being) he proposes, each natural kingdom, kind, and particular strives to attain the step above itself in the hierarchy: stones strive for vegetative life, plants strive for sentient life, sentient creatures strive to be rational, and rational to become divine. It may seem fanciful, and a fanciful place to begin explanations; but it is plausible that in a prevailing mediocrity of expertise, some variant of this is operative, a self-conscious dialectic of private cultivation and social class—the desire to seem somehow smarter or better educated or cleverer than the facts of one's life might support. The advertisement plays to that



it's been you all along, has it? Have you, in fact, been ask-

ing yourself these questions? Like all ad copy, these sentences have more a gerundive than an assertive force. Moreover, if you consider these questions perhaps too broad or ill-formed to whet your own appetite for knowledge, neither are they the questions that interest post-modern academia. Tough to get a grant, or a Fulbright, or to publish articles with Chinese-box titles like "A Note to Zapp's Response to Swallow's Critique of Humbert's Marginalia on..."

But if what the professionals do in universities can seem stupefyingly pointless to the uninitiated, perhaps The Teaching Company has discovered a new market niche, roughly characterized as Intellectual Ed Sullivan. The teasing implication (those clever advertisers) is that it has been you all along raising these questions; you've been doing it privately, of course, so as not to reveal your confusion, your uncivil seriousness, or perhaps a na-

then you'll just have to take a little time out and look for your own answers. Maybe some night when television isn't that good.

"But you know you never will." The final taunt, the hook. I won't, won't I? But what to do? Ah, no need to get your back up. "Now, at last, here is a feasible way to enjoy the intellectual adventure of a lifetime. A way you can comfortably grasp the essence and consequence of each author's greatness, in leisure moments in your home or car." Remark the phrase, "comfortably grasp": it has the wormy ambiguity, the sponginess, of classic ad copy. It implies, as if the allure of solipsism were not already strong, that you can do it at your ease, in the backyard, in the bathroom, in your car—wherever you feel most comfortable (it begs accompaniment by a drink garnished with a small parasol). But the phrase also suggests a comfortable

sette lecture course in the history of Western ideas that is readily available to anyone with \$500 (for the five-tape video course, or \$150 per single videotape). Nor do I think that people never wonder about the questions raised in the advertisement copy. But the pitch is evidently in the promise that the history of Western ideas actually addresses these questions, even in ways that might resolve a rare personal curiosity (I don't think many of us are really puzzled very much by such questions), and addresses them in a way that has real application in matters of everyday faith and practice, to employ a proven turn of phrase. As though the solutions to typical philosophical puzzlement, should you be one of the lucky ones, could make that kind of difference.

Furthermore, who is the pre-

longing Americans cherish, somewhere not so secret, for culture and liberal education of the highest sort, even if they already have received some modicum of that education. It is difficult to study engineering, say,

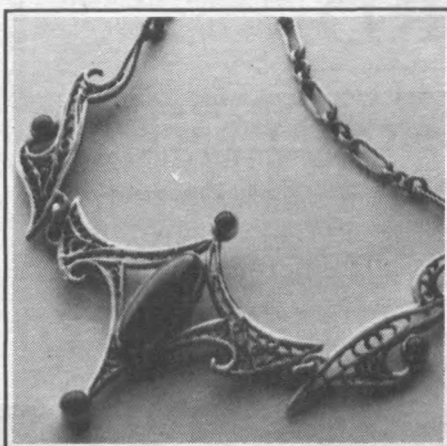
or business, and appear liberally educated as well. But if it can be done, better yet done "comfortably," then you have thereby also raised your status among the classes in some indecipherable but definite way. It is but a more complicated manifestation of that same mad desire to rise in the world that leads some people to call other people "individuals." It sounds weightier, somehow statistical, official, and value-neutral; so all police officers can sound like sociologists.

There is, no doubt, something to be gained in particular lives by exposure to ideas. But what gives added purchase to this marketing scheme, I suggest, is the perversely democratic notion that there is really nothing so mysterious about philosophical abstraction. Esoterica is just

see *Peripatetics*, page 14

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# Humanistic Criticism

continued from page 1

starting point in their attempts to reach the truth," he remarked contemptuously that "we can answer only with a philosophical laugh."

Professed anti-humanists employ the term "humanist" in a variety of significations, but what it comes to in actual practice is a general concurrence on the need to dispense with any operative recourse to human beings—conceived in the traditional way as purposeful agents capable of initiative, intention, design, and choice—in dealing with all linguistic utterances, discourses, or productions, including works of literature. How has this remarkable conceptual innovation been achieved?

The initiating move is a drastic change in the location and frame of reference for considering the use and products of language. From classical antiquity to the recent past, the reigning, though often implicit, paradigm posits language as the medium of a communicative transaction between human beings conducted within a circumambient world. From this viewpoint, the understanding of a written product such as a work of literature is explicable by recourse to the same model as a spoken utterance—the model of a verbal transaction with a human being at each end; the difference is that writing establishes a durable written correlate of a spoken utterance, and awaits the advent of a reader in order to complete the transaction. Structural and poststructural theorists, on the other hand—and this is their novelty in the history of philosophy—position their inquiry not in the human world, but in an already constituted language-in-general, or in discourse-as-such; or else in a text that is taken to exemplify the general workings of language and discourse. From inside this paradigm, human beings are viewed not as purposive producers of utterances and texts, but as conceptual entities generated either by the functioning of the language system, or by immanent discursive forces and configurations.

Within the humanistic paradigm, a work of literature, like any linguistic utterance or product, is conceived to be intermediary in a communicative transaction. Representative recent versions of the traditional conception of literature can be outlined as follows: an author initiates and composes a work which makes use

of the possibilities afforded by the pre-existing conventions and norms of a language to express his or her intentional references to (for the most part fictive) people, actions, and states of affairs, in a way that will be intelligible to a reader who shares the author's competence in the requisite linguistic conventions and norms. What happens when the paradigmatic site of literary criticism is shifted from an interpersonal transaction to the workings (in Paul De Man's phrase) of "language considered by and in itself?" We find that the three

authors...have here no substantial value" and "indicate neither identities nor causes," Derrida sometimes qualifies his use of the name of Rousseau or of another author by quotation marks, or else strikes a line through it, in order to identify whose (or rather what) text he is writing about, while encoding the fact that he is not naming a human being, but gesturing toward a textual effect.

● Radical, or strong, theorists avoid using the traditional term "work" for a literary or other written entity, since that term suggests that

In poststructural theory, the human reader dwindles into *lecture*, an impersonal reading-process, or else, like the author is evacuated into a textual effect.

traditional components of author, work, and reader survive, but in a severely attenuated state of being.

● The author. Current theorists don't deny that a human individual has an indispensable role as an efficient link in bringing about a literary product, but this is an author who, stripped of any design or intention that is effective in the product, is reduced to what Roland Barthes calls a "scriptor." To radical structuralists, the author constitutes a space in which the conventions, codes, and prior patternings of a *langue* precipitate into a *parole*. To radical poststructuralists, the individual author is an agency through which the differential play of language-in-general instances itself in a text, or else (in Foucault and his followers) the author is a site or crossroad traversed by the constructs and configurations of power and knowledge which make up the discourse of an era. In reading a text, any sense one has of a supervisory and intentional "subject" is relegated to the status of a linguistic or discursive "function" or "effect." Jacques Derrida, for example, grants that "at a certain level" of experience and discourse, the subject as center "is absolutely indispensable"; but this subject is "a function, not a being—a reality, but a function." Or put otherwise: "There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*...Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *différance*." And since, he says, "the names of

the document has been accomplished by a purposive human producer. By radical or strong theorists, what had been a "work" is usually denominated a "text," or is still further depersonalized into an instance of *écriture*, or writing-in-general. And in a literary or other text, what had traditionally been its crucial aspect of referring to a world, whether actual or fictional, of persons, actions, things, and events is reconceived as a play of intra-linguistic and intertextual significations. "What goes on in a narrative," Barthes wrote, "is, from the referential (real) point of view, strictly nothing. What does 'happen' is language per se, the adventure of language..." Derrida, on the other hand, recognizes in the reading of a text the "effects" of "signification, of meaning, and of reference," as well as of a determinate speech-act and the other standards aspects of "semantic communication"; but from the standpoint of "a general writing," he asserts, these are exposed as "only an effect, and should be analyzed as such."

● In the lack of an efficacious author or subject, one might expect that the reader would inherit the traditional role of the intentional author in establishing meaning; and indeed, some poststructural critics celebrate a reader's freedom in "creating" what a text signifies. But it usually turns out that this reader is no more an effective, purposeful subject than is the author. Structuralist theory, as Jonathan Culler put

it, "promotes analyses of the reader's role in producing meaning," but this is "the reader not as a person or a subjectivity but as a role: the embodiment of the codes that permit reading." In poststructural theory, the human reader dwindles into *lecture*, an impersonal reading-process, or else, like the author, is evacuated into a textual effect. For a reader "to be fooled by a text," Barbara Johnson declares, "implies that the text is not constative but performative, and that the reader is in fact one of its effects." And in theorists of various persuasions the reader is represented, in a doubly passive role, as constituted by, but also the conduit of, the play of linguistic *différance*, or of the ideology and cultural formations in the reigning discourse of an era, or (in the theory of Stanley Fish) of the shared beliefs, categories, and reading-process of a particular "interpretive community."

It should be noted that a traditionalist recognizes that, when a reader confronts a written or printed text, it is typically in the absence both of its author and of that to which a text refers; for the traditionalist, therefore, as well as for the poststructuralist, intentionality and reference are indubitably "effects" of the text. The difference is that poststructural theorists focus on language or discourse in being, in which all functions and effects are "always already" operative. To the traditionalist, however, a text's author-effect, intention-effect, reference-effect—and for that matter, its effect of being a set of signs instead of a mere sequence of black-on-blanks—are not attributable to the inner workings of language in itself. In the view from the human paradigm, a text is cognizable as a set of verbal signs, and is invested with the effects of intentionality and reference that constitute its intelligibility, only to a reader who brings to the text presuppositions acquired in prior experiences with the shared human practice of language in a shared environing world.

Derrida not only takes his theoretical stand within the non-human domain of writing-in-general, but stays there, from the beginning to end of his deconstructive analysis of the traditional concepts of communication. In his much-quoted assertion of what he called "the axial proposition" of his *Grammatology*, "*Il n'y a rien hors du texte*"—"there

is nothing outside the text"—Derrida has repeatedly stressed that the term "text" applies not merely to printed pages, but "embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history." Derrida, that is, extrapolates the traits of his linguistic paradigm to incorporate everything whatever, including the human participants and the environing world that are constitutive elements in the paradigmatic frame of humanistic reference. From Derrida's theoretical stance, that is, all the world's a text, and the men and women who try to read it are not only textual "effects," but themselves texts, to themselves as well as to others; consequently, in the lack of a "pure presence" as a stopping place, he says, they have "never been anything but substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references.... And thus to infinity...."

## The Prosopopeia of the Text

A conspicuous feature in poststructural theories is that the initiative, the signifying intentionality, and the goal-directed purposiveness that have been subtracted from the human author are not simply obliterated, but are translocated into attributes of a personified text, or else more generally, of a personified language-as-such. Barbara Johnson notes about Paul De Man that

even a cursory perusal of his essays reveals that their insistent rhetorical mode...is personification. In the absence of a personal agent of signification, the rhetorical entities themselves are constantly said to "know," to "renounce," or to "re-sign themselves" in the place where the poet or critic as subject has disappeared.

Johnson takes this phenomenon to imply that these are not attributes or actions of human agents that have been applied figuratively to language, but that personification is a floating figure-per-se, equally figurative whether applied to persons or things; in her words, "it implies that personification is a trope available for occupancy by either subjects or linguistic entities, the difference between them being ultimately indeterminable, if each is known only in and through a text."

see *Humanistic*, page 7

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# Humanistic Criticism

continued from page 6

A cursory further examination reveals that an insistent prosopopoeia of the text is not limited to De Man but is so ubiquitous in deconstructive writings, including those of Barbara Johnson, as to make it an identifying feature of the deconstructive style. In fact, such personification seems indispensable to a stance within textuality which, having denied any effective role to human agency, needs to posit a cunning of *différance* within language itself in order to set a text into motion and to generate its significative and other "effects," as well as to provide some semblance of directionality to what Derrida calls its "play" and its "working." Typical is the reiterated claim that a deconstructive reading is not something that a deconstructive reader does to a text, but simply replicates, without intervention, what the text has always already done to itself. As Derrida puts this claim: "Deconstruction is not even an act or an operation." "Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness or organization of a subject...It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed."

Attributions of human powers to a text, or to discourse, is common also in other poststructural modes. "It is the text," Barthes says, "which works untiringly, not the artist or the consumer"; and (in echo of Heidegger's "Wir sprechen nicht, die Sprache spricht") "it is language which speaks, not the author." In the writings of Foucault, it is a non-personal force called "power," operating in the social body and its discourse, that is invested with motility, aims, and productivity. Power, Foucault says, "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse." "Power must be analysed as something which circulates"; the human individual does not exert power, but is himself "an effect of power," who is both "constituted" by power and "at the same time its vehicle." In other current theorists, a goal-directed enterprise and the production of meaning and effects are attributed to the secret workings, within texts and discourse, of "ideology," or to an unpersoned agency called history—a history, as Stephen Greenblatt epitomizes the New Historicism, that is not something external to texts but "is found in the artworks themselves, as enabling

condition, shaping force, forger of meaning, censor, community of patronage and reception."

A textual figure prominent in deconstructive and other poststructural writings is violence. "We must conceive discourse," Foucault declares, "as a violence we do to things," and "one's point of reference should...[be] that of war and battle." In Derrida's formulations, language is structured by violence throughout. The very fact of naming "is the originary violence of language," since it reveals that self-presence is "always already split," while proper names implicate death, since in their very capacity for surviving the death of those they designate, they inscribe the possibility of their death.

In deconstructive writings, a common model for textual violence is that of an *agon*, a struggle for mastery between diverse opponents. One of the antagonists may be the intention of the writer, always doomed to fail in what Derrida represents as the attempt to "dominate," or "command," or "master" the forces internal to the language of a text. Or it may be the struggle of a reader to understand a text's meaning; but this, Hillis Miller says, merely "forces [the reader] to repeat in his own way an effort of understanding that the text expresses, and to repeat also the baffling of that effort." For the most part, however, deconstructive critics represent both antagonists as inhabitants of the text itself. Paul de Man posits an omnipresent contestation between the regular and the unruly aspects of a text—the constative against the performative, or the grammatical and logical against the rhetorical, or between rhetoric as persuasion and rhetoric "as a system of tropes." In any case, the aporia between "two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view," as he says, puts "an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding." In the best-known thumbnail definition of deconstructive criticism, Barbara Johnson formulates it as "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself," in which there is no "unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over the other." That is, the warring forces within a text remain locked in the unresolvable "double-bind," or "aporia," or "abime" of opposed significations that the

deconstructive critic finds in reading any and all works of literature.

## The Death and Life of the Author: Barthes, Foucault, Horace

The best known representations of literary text as both inherently and autonomously active are the essays of Barthes and Foucault which announce, with Nietzschean melodrama, that the author is dead. The demise is not, of course, of the scriptor of a literary text, but of what these theorists describe as a modern social construct or "figure," that performs what Foucault calls the "author function." In literary criticism the author-figure has served not only to classify and interrelate texts under an authorial proper name, but also to establish the condition of an instance of literary discourse as a property—in Foucault's terms, as "a product, a thing, a kind of goods"—of which an author is the owner; to ascribe meaning, status, and value to a literary text, according to the rank of the author to whom it is assigned; to attribute the origins of a text to "a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design'" in the author-construct and to "explain" the components of a literary text by reference to the biography of an author, and to regard it as an "expression" of his "life, his tastes, his passions." Both writers agree also that the primary function of the modern author-figure has been to impose and enforce a limit on the free, and (to those in power) the dangerous, proliferation of signification in a literary text. Roland Barthes is especially more expansive in proclaiming the total emancipation of a text from the figure of the author on whom, he asserts, "the image of literature...is tyrannically centered":

to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with

a final signified, to close the writing....[But] Literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a "secret," an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates...an activity that is truly revolutionary since, to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law.

It is worth asking, "How accurate, as history, are the stories that Barthes and Foucault tell about the time and the social causes of the emergence, in standard discourse about literature, of the modern author-figure and author-functions?"

These authors assign what Foucault calls "the coming into being of the notion of 'author,'" in various aspects of its literary application, to the era between the late seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries: and both agree that the fully developed author-functions, such as the ownership of a text as property, or the oppressive agency that imposes on textual freedom a

that is "characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property." The question arises, how then were an author and his functions conceived during the many centuries before the development of capitalism and its ideology—as far back for example, as classical antiquity? We might glance at Horace's *Ars Poetica* because, although written in verse, its mode of informal recommendations to a would-be poet is more likely to reflect current discourse about poetry than the formal and technical writings by Aristotle and other Greek and Roman inquirers.

We find that Horace takes for granted a situation in which poetic works are grouped and interrelated by assignment to individual authors—he names a range from Homer to his contemporary Virgil—who as composers of their works, are entirely responsible for their contents and quality, whether to their fame or discredit. A good *poeta* (literally "maker") of a poem—Horace in his essay alternatively refers to the *poeta* as *auctor* and *scriptor* ("author" and "writer")—must possess native talent (*ingenium*), but must also train himself to be a master both of language and of the poetic art. The competent poet deliberately designs and orders his *poema*, adopts and adapts his words, and selects and renders his materials, in order to evoke, by a determinate understanding of what he writes, the emotions of his audience or reader, and in order to achieve in the reader the effects of *utile* and *dulce*, profit

and delight. Horace recommends to the dramatic poet, when he has become "a trained imitator (*doctum imitorem*)," that he should look to "life and manners as the model from which to draw speech that is true to life (*vivas...voces*)" [lines 317-18]. As a consequence, he says, the poem will depict credible and consistent persons such as are familiar

see *Humanistic*, page 12

From classical antiquity to the recent past, the reigning, though often implicit, paradigm posits language as the medium of a communicative transaction between human beings conducted within a circumambient world.

determinate meaning, are products of the bourgeois ideology engendered by a capitalist economy. The "positivism," according to Barthes, "which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author" is "the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology"; while to Foucault, the author as textual proprietor and "regulator of the fictive" is "an ideological product"



### Rare Greenaway (Mondays)

The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover  
TV Dante  
The Falls  
Early Films By Peter Greenaway  
Drowning By Numbers

### Tribute to Audrey Hepburn (Tuesdays)

Funny Face  
Breakfast at Tiffany's  
Sabrina  
Robin and Marian



### SERIES THIS MONTH

#### Early Almodovar (Wednesdays)

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown  
Pepe, Luci, Bom  
Labyrinth of Passion  
Dark Habits

#### Neo-Violence (Weekends)

Reservoir Dogs  
Mean Streets  
Laws of Gravity  
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# Envisioning the Word:

**Following the Thread: Bookworks**  
by Susan King

Nina Tovish

In our culture, books are often ascribed many of the values of the traditional "feminine." They are vessels for transmitting wisdom or entertainment, not wise or entertaining in themselves. Books are considered intimate possessions, responsive and undemanding. They are passive, vulnerable objects, and become useful only in the hands of a masterful owner who opens and manipulates them for his own benefit. Their value is based on the beauty of their appearance, the sensuousness of their construction, their intactness, and their rarity. If they are merely "used" books, they had better have been used by someone famous, otherwise their patina of experience is deemed mere shabbiness. And it's not surprising that we denigrate "cheap" paperbacks...after all, they make themselves available to just about anyone.

The artist's book, by contrast, is a far more assertive entity. Its attributes could be more accurately termed "feminist" than "feminine." The artist's book demands acknowledgement as a book, recognition that its nature as a book is integral, indivisible, that there is no useful distinction to be made between the "body" of the book (its form) and the "mind" of its contents. Far from presenting a transparent, neutral, or decorative container from which the "substance" can be gleaned, the artist's book uses all its qualities to challenge the reader and actively shape the reading experience. An artist's book rarely renders itself up without a genuine, respectful engagement; its accessibility is conditional upon an equal openness, a willingness to work for meaning, on the part of the reader.

Because the usually distinct roles of writer, illustrator, designer, editor, printer, and publisher are telescoped, the ordinary hierarchy of authority — with the writer's text as its univocal source — is disrupted. Multiplicity of voice, a fascination with layers, and a more equal relationship between word and image are frequent hallmarks of the artist's book. The artist's book doesn't seek to please by meeting all the standards of the conventional book format, rather it defines its own terms of value by selecting or discarding the strategies that serve its purpose, and succeeds to the extent that it meets the expectations it defines for itself. Since responsibility for every aspect of production lies with the artist, the result is a book compromised only by the realities every artist must address: constraints derived from limited time and money, and from the physical properties of materials.

Every book artist is familiar with

the challenges that the bookwork faces; the genre-bending nature of the artist's book often makes it difficult to bring to the public. The traditional art gallery environment is not particularly hospitable to works that must be individually handled, explored carefully and thoughtfully over time; mainstream booksellers, whose profits depend on large turnover of often seemingly interchangeable commodities, have no place for them. Similarly, art departments in academic institutions rarely offer teaching positions or

lives of King's friends and relatives. The complexity of the book's physical structure is not a gimmick; by juxtaposing the wholeness yet imprecision of the large image against the episodic nature of the text, we grasp the fleeting yet potent experience of mobility, control, and direction in these women's lives.

"I Spent the Summer in Paris" (1984) develops the use of typography to represent different voices or perspectives, and further explores layering and degrees of visibility. Travel has frequently been a source

the light corrugated plastic covers, and the pastel colors of paper and ink all evoke the contradictory "steel magnolia" stereotype of Southern womanhood.

In these books, and indeed many of King's other works, she consciously explores the freedoms and responsibilities inherent in the artist's book format. The artist's book lends itself to autobiographical material, because it is an intimate, personal object, meant to be experienced privately by one person at a time; yet it also allows the artist to

transform personal experience, to master the material, make it public, hence perhaps also impersonal, anonymous, universal. The vulnerability of revealing the truth of one's life is balanced by the control, the power that the artist exercises in shaping and communicating that truth. The desire and ability to present more than one voice, to insist on the multiplicity of meaning, perception, and interpretation can

be sustained by a variety of strategies with word and image. And yet, because the successful artist's book is so clearly the product of one individual's sensibility and intelligence, that multiplicity is always at the service of a unified vision. It is the rare person who brings equal gifts to the visual, verbal, and structural requirements of an artist's book. It is worth noting that Susan King is one of the best writers among artists making books. Her prose is precise and evocative, conveying honesty without resorting to cliché or sentimentality of any kind. It is self-aware without being coy or self-conscious. King makes equally sophisticated use of the grammar of book structure, the syntax of im-

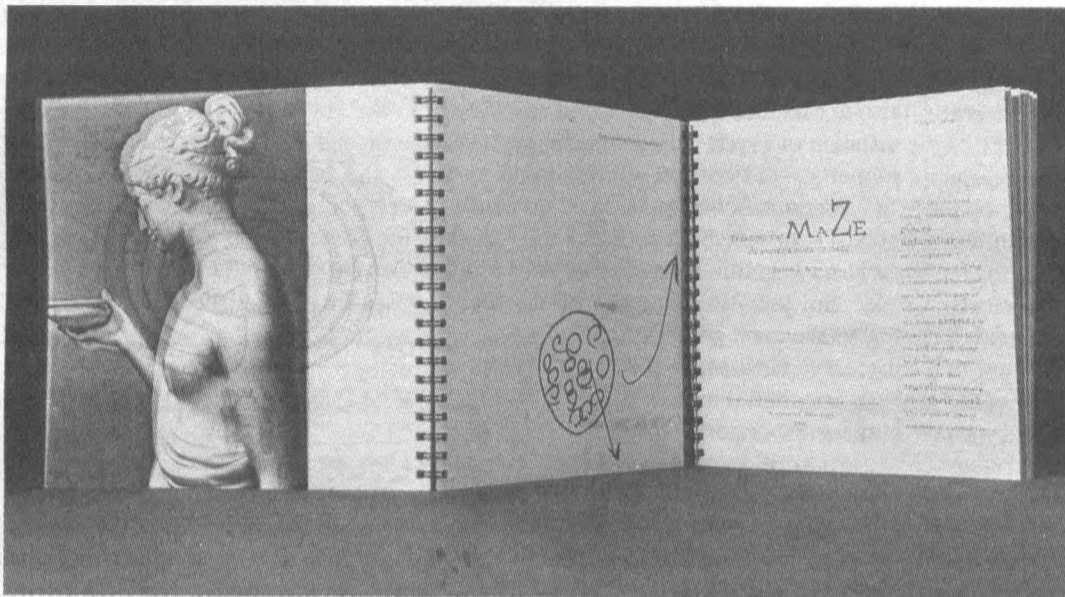
ages, and the English language itself. "Treading the Maze: An Artist's Book of Daze" is Susan King's latest book. As the title suggests, the labyrinth provides the governing metaphor for the work's structure and content. In the text, King quotes Penelope Reed Doob: "Labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos." From outside, the maze-viewer sees artistry and complexity, from within, the maze-treader often works through confusion and fragmentation while finding a way through. This is as neat an analogy for the way most artist's books (and this one in particular) function as any definition I've read.

"Treading the Maze" brings together a profusion of elements that King has long explored: autobiography, counterpoint of image and text, transparency and layering, and multiple voices. This book, however, weaves these threads together with new urgency; entering the labyrinth has profound physical and spiritual consequences. As in King's other work, there is travel, but it is primarily an internal journey, a journey within. The reader, like the narrator, explores this maze which is not unlike life, whose patterns only make sense at a remove. The artist, acting as Ariadne, provides a slender thread to guide us. Our mission is to encounter and survive the Minotaur: in this case, cancer, or, more universally, Death. (It's no coincidence that the first labyrinth was devised by Daedalus, mythology's first scientist, to contain the minotaur.)

Getting into the book is not obvious or easy. It is spiral-bound on both left and right sides to a stiff blue backing board. The pages attached to the left spine are all images, printed either on vellum or transparent acetate. The pages on the right, on blue paper, contain the texts, and are only reached after all the images have been paged through and finally rest open on the left. There we pick up Ariadne's thread, an instruction which suggests that we work from the inside out: first turning all the text pages to the right, and then beginning at the back, alternately turning image and text pages in toward the backing board in the middle for "the most complete reading." Confused yet? You should be, you've just entered the maze.

The main body of text is a recounting, with digressions and interruptions, of the narrator's experience of being diagnosed and treated for breast cancer. The "marginal text," is set under brief headings in narrow columns at the outside edge of the page. It has headings and is anecdotal and informational, providing commentary, definitions, and asides — often pointing out connections and links, coincidences, shared meanings. The images, some translucent, some transparent, are linked to the text both visually and symbolically, including doctors' diagrams of cancer, mazes and labyrinths from many cultures, various scientific and religious attempts to bring order to the universe. Occasional page numbers next to the image captions provide a way of checking that one is progressing through the maze appropriately. As you move through the book, the text is sometimes selectively visible through the images, sometimes the images anticipate the text, sometimes the text hints at the

*continues on page 9*



*Treading the Maze*

courses specifically geared toward the understanding or creation of bookworks. Like a woman who defies conventional expectations, the artist's book must blaze its own path in the world and find its own place.

"I couldn't believe it wasn't against the law." The liberating, unconventional nature of the artist's book was the first thing that Susan King noticed. She encountered artist's books for the first time in the early '70s, at the Feminist Studio Workshop in Los Angeles. King vividly describes sitting on a stairway in the Women's Building, surrounded by heaps of examples shown her by printer Helen Alm — small press editions, funky pamphlets, Fluxus works — and feeling the shiver of possibility, the thrill of empowerment. As many other women have also discovered, the artist's book offered Susan King a uniquely appropriate medium for artistic expression. By 1976 she had established her own imprint, Paradise Press, and was producing editions of her own works as well as others'.

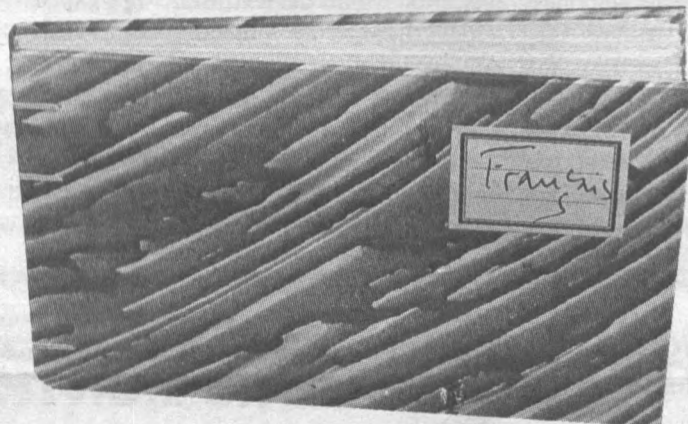
In 1983, King produced "Women and Cars" at the Women's Studio Workshop. A hardcover accordion based on a design by Hedi Kyle, "Women and Cars" reveals many of the themes that she continues to explore. When open and standing in a display, the tri-level tags of the book's structure flatten to show a xerox-quality grainy image of a woman standing proudly in front of an old-fashioned car. When read as a folio, the image is fragmented and abstracted, and the text is revealed. Two different typefaces are used: italic for quotations about cars and travel by Gertrude Stein, Carolyn Keene (who wrote the Nancy Drew mysteries), Eloise Klein Healy, and King herself; plain face for brief memory vignettes about the power and pleasure of automobiles in the

of material for King, and here she interweaves a summer spent in Paris, France, with memories of her summers as a child in Paris, Kentucky. Travel outward is always bounded by and compared with travel home and to the past. In this book, the text alternates lines between the two narratives, past and present. Images (postcards, ticket stubs, snapshots, mementoes) recede or move forward depending on whether they are printed on the exposed surface of the page, or on the inside of the folded accordion page of UV Ultra II. Each spread is represented as a kind of chapter, identified at the outside edge by titles: "prologue, art, attitudes, civilization, cuisine, social order, fin." This book makes clear the differences between the two versions of Paris with both text and image, and yet its overall unity points to an underlying continuity of experience.

"Lessons from the South," [sic] produced in 1986 at Nexus Press, takes the structural approach of "Paris" yet one step further. The accordion spine of the book is pressed into service to convey meaning. The very "backbone" of the book has lists of such Southern stereotypes as words starting with "black," typical foods, phrases using "big" or "little," and feminine adjectives. Different colored inks are used on the same page to indicate different text sources, including bumper stickers, a book on the language of the fan, and King's own narratives. Reworked images again recede and surface, while the whole is pulled together by large "handrubbed" type that spells out "amid summer night's dream" [sic] over the length of the entire book. The intricate binding,

be sustained by a variety of strategies with word and image. And yet, because the successful artist's book is so clearly the product of one individual's sensibility and intelligence, that multiplicity is always at the service of a unified vision.

It is the rare person who brings equal gifts to the visual, verbal, and structural requirements of an artist's book. It is worth noting that Susan King is one of the best writers among artists making books. Her prose is precise and evocative, conveying honesty without resorting to cliché or sentimentality of any kind. It is self-aware without being coy or self-conscious. King makes equally sophisticated use of the grammar of book structure, the syntax of im-



*Say, See, Bone Lessons from French*

ages, and the English language itself.

"Treading the Maze: An Artist's Book of Daze" is Susan King's latest book. As the title suggests, the labyrinth provides the governing metaphor for the work's structure and content. In the text, King quotes Penelope Reed Doob: "Labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos." From outside, the maze-viewer sees artistry and complexity, from within, the maze-treader often works

# Books as Works of Art

Alan Singer

## Exhibitions

**The Open Book?** curated by Nina Tovish at The Visual Studies Workshop, March 5 - May 14, Rochester, NY. Catalog available.

**The Artist's Book Show** curated by Nancy Chalker Tennant for the Mercer Gallery, Monroe Community College, Dec. 1992.

**Off the Shelf and On-line**, organized by The Minnesota Center For Book Arts for the Cary Library, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 1993. Catalog available.

## The Word and Eye

I have looked into a number of artist's books recently, and the vitality found inside is worthy of your attention. Renewed interest in artists' books is in part a reaction to the now stalled engine that once drove the hyperactive art market of the 1980s. Seeking an alternative to the severely diminished capacity of the commercial gallery structure, artists find that the limited edition book is an economical way of reaching an audience. Artists' books also represent a resurgent involvement in craft, printmaking, and photographic skills, marshalled for the purpose of making a fine art statement in a medium which is seen, acknowledged, and collected.

I had the chance to catch up on this corner of the art world while visiting recent exhibitions at the Mercer Gallery of Monroe Community College, the Cary Library of Rochester Institute of Technology, and The Visual Studies Workshop, all in Rochester, New York. To accompany me on my trek through the galleries, I found a useful guide, *Artist's Books*, edited by Joan Lyons. Inside this volume are a handful of essays by critics including Lucy Lippard and Robert Morgan, as well as a sampling of artists' bookworks in reproduction. From this experience one can glimpse the range of



*Structure of the Visual Book*

contemporary artist's books, a genre which has a robust history.

Many of the artists working today in this genre will not be familiar,

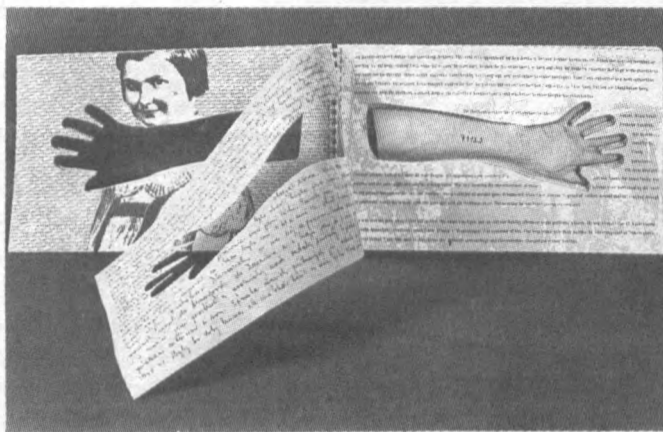
but certainly the collage novels by Max Ernst, and the late work of Henri Matisse in "Jazz" (1947) served as catalysts for those who followed. Drawing on facets of Futurism and Dada, the work of the international Fluxus group, and in particular the graphic designs of George Maciunas, artists' books gained a distinctive public face in the early 1960s. The droll humor of Edward Ruscha in such books as "Every Building on Sunset Strip" (1966) and the innovative use of voice and typography in "French Fries" (1985) by Warren Lehrer and Dennis Bernstein, have helped make artists' books a thriving medium.

Before one goes on, a distinction must be drawn between the vast number of lavish art books published every year by the trade book giants like Abrams and Rizzoli, and the limited editions of artists such as Tatana Kellner or Keith Smith. Artists' books are not readily available, either, except through galleries like Granary Books in New York City, or collectors' catalogs. Today, commercial publishing is done with computer-set type on high-speed offset presses where a large quantity of printed books keeps the cost per unit down. Artists' books, on the other hand, are produced on re-

stricted budgets and many of them are handmade affairs.

## Livre D'Artiste

For collectors, different categories pertain. For example, there is a small but loyal audience for fine bindings and hand-set metal type in books sold by subscription. There is



*71125: 50 Years of Silence*

also the *livre d'artiste*, which is usually a mini-retrospective of an artist's drawings or prints with the sole aim of reproducing and re-contextualizing artwork that may already exist in other media.

The books featured in the galleries I attended were of a different order, and here we need to clarify, and define what qualifies as an artists' book, for they are not novels, nor are they documentaries or strictly picture books. Book art expands on the notion of turning pages along a linear narrative and viewing a series of related images as the process unfolds in time. Any analysis of artists' books must conclude that they are

experiments in structure, form, and content, with the bias cut toward the visual end of the spectrum.

## Gallery Going

The audience for "The Open Book?", at the Visual Studies Workshop, is confronted with texts inscribed on metal pages, embedded in handmade paper, etched in sandblasted glass, collaged on plexiglass, and flying overhead as banner or pennant. Part of the game here is to test the form to see how well it acts as a vehicle for the artist's ideas. Fragility seems to be the theme of Theodore Clausen, who presents one message on broken plate glass, and in another

work has imprinted epigrams on eggshells. The ephemeral nature of these forms tests the assumption that books are meant to be handled, which is one of the questions posed by the artists and their curators. Some artists' books defy being easily handled; the massive lead pages of books by Anselm Kiefer come to mind. At "The Open Book?" the intimate forms give way to a more assertive size and presence; like sculpture, many of the works are presented on pedestals. I enjoyed the seductive "Scroll Pillars" (1988) by Kumi Korf, as well as "Self Assessment" (1992) by Theodore Clausen. *see Envisioning, page 15*

*continued from page 8*

image to come, which may be partially visible from its reverse side at left.

To insist on imposing a linear reading on this book by just reading the main text, then reading the margins, then looking at the pictures would be a terrible mistake. As King has said, "the single narrative is always inadequate, never tells the whole story." The rhythmic alternation of pages, and the interplay between image and text help structure the reader's experience, and keep it from fragmenting into randomness. But the strength of the book is woven into the warp and woof, the repeating motifs that seem to help the narrator to survive her ordeal: cutting and sewing, omens and evidence, pilgrimage, boundaries and barriers, necklaces, wheels and circles of

light. As we read, we feel the narrator's need to follow these links, to bind together meaning so as to make sense of our experience. After we've finished, and the book itself is now woven closed, we can appreciate the artist's wisdom in asking us to do

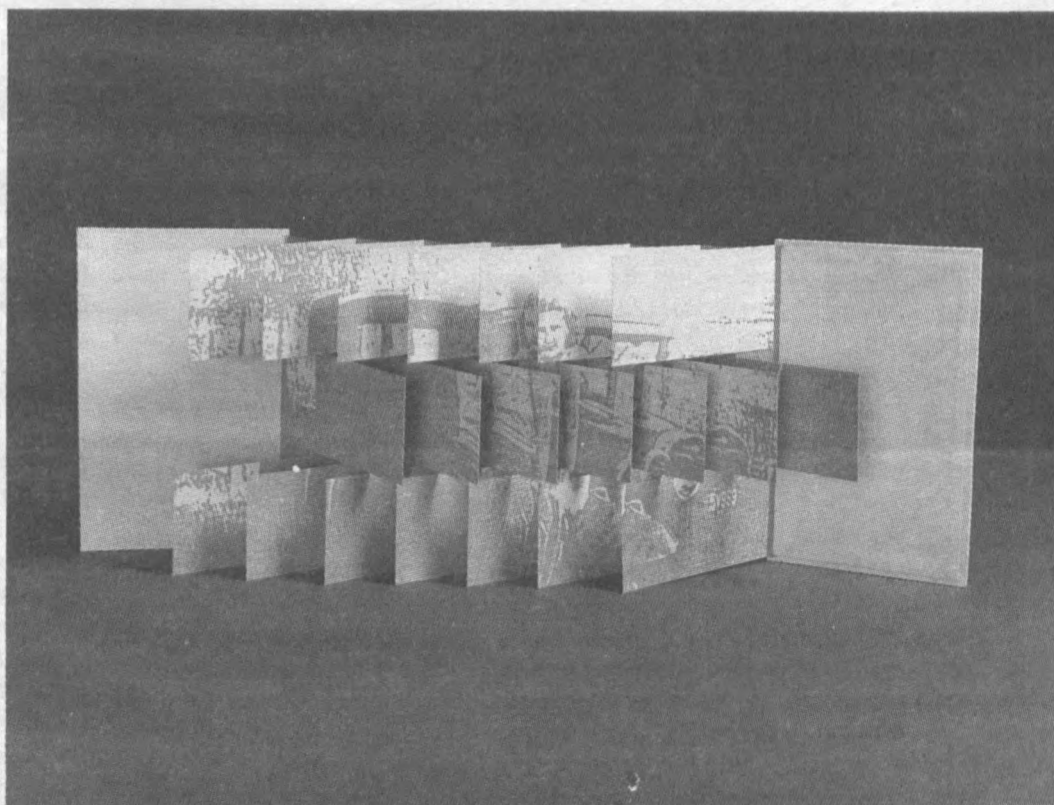
some of the work, and her generosity in providing us with so much material to work with. (If we want to return and start over we'll have to pick our way backward page by page, unstitching, or hold the book upside

Her book was selected as one of three to be published in conjunction with the ambitious Montage 93: International Festival of the Image, to be held in Rochester this summer. From July 11 to August 7, Montage

of films and video, special programs for students of all ages, as well as cultural and performing arts events.

Along with Susan King's book, Montage 93 will also publish Phillip Zimmerman's book project "HI-

TENSION" and Hungarian artist Balazs Czeizel's "This is not America, either," which investigates one Central European's view of Los Angeles. Montage 93 sought projects that could be executed in a month's time at the VSW Press, within a limited budget, and which used electronic media — computers, video, or photocopy machines — to generate image and/or text. (In keeping with proposal guidelines, "Treading the Maze: An Artist's Book of Daze" was written and designed on a Macintosh IIsx using



*Women and Cars*

down by its two spirals and shake it to encourage the two sets of pages to disentangle and separate again.)

Susan King produced "Treading the Maze" during a residency in March of 1992 at the Visual Studies Workshop Press in Rochester, NY.

93 will explore the intersection of art and technology in the realm of image-making, featuring eleven major exhibitions, a dense schedule of lectures and panel discussion, an arts and technology exposition, a book fair, a trade show, screenings

Microsoft Word, QuarkXPress, and Photoshop, and the transparencies were reproduced by photocopying.) The three books were chosen from seventy-four proposals, from a dozen countries, by a panel comprising Joan Lyons, founder and coordinator of

*Nina Tovish is a book artist and freelance critic who lives in Rochester. She is the curator of "The Open Book?" exhibition at the Visual Studies Workshop Gallery in Rochester, which closes May 14.*

# Apocalypse

continued from page 1

early sixties was a unique ingathering of young people—many of them potential leaders—to proclaim and then to try to carry out a total redemptive vision. This visionary quest is what bound each of us together in a community, from Gandhian Freedom Riders to disillusioned Marxists. The gods of our parents had failed or become idols. Then a new spiritual force came in 1960, to move in the world. We felt ourselves to be the prophets of that force. When we first used the term revolution, it was not about overthrowing power but about overcoming hypocrisy, through a faithfulness to a democratic and spiritual heritage.

At the other end of the scale is Peter Collier and David Horowitz's *Destructive Generation*, which was published in 1989. Collier and Horowitz, as editors at *Ramparts* and close associates of many prominent Sixties radicals, have, like Hayden, impeccable New Left credentials. As proponents of a "Second Thoughts about the Sixties" movement, they see things a bit differently:

"Our values were decent ones, even if we could not always live up to them," proclaims Sixties urban guerilla and Eighties Democrat Tom Hayden at the start of his autobiographical memoir, *Reunion*: "We accomplished more than most generations in American history."

But if one puts aside the civil rights struggles of the early part of the decade (which Hayden and his peers may have participated in but did not inspire), what did this generation accomplish to merit such smugness? Is Hayden thinking of the defeat of America and the resultant genocide in Southeast Asia? Or perhaps the disintegration of civil order and the eruption of violence in American cities? Perhaps he had in mind the explosion of the social epidemics of the Eighties — "feminized" poverty, AIDS, drugs, and drug-related crime — which resulted from the heedless assault on *The System* that took place in the Sixties.

The real problem for Hayden and others who would rehabilitate the Sixties and themselves is explaining how a Movement that had begun supporting the American Dream of equal opportunity could end up worshipping American Mayhem, romanticizing murderers like George Jackson and Charles Manson, supporting totalitarian enemies, and sponsoring a race war against "Pig Amerika"?

*Rads* explores territory somewhere between these two extreme positions. A former student activist himself, Bates deplores the excesses of the movement while maintaining that its goals were lofty ones. As he

writes in his introduction:

The political utopianism, drug experimentation, and sexual license that I and my contemporaries had innocently associated with liberation looked completely different to me now that I could see it from the perspective of a parent, in the context of the wider community, and in full knowledge of the consequences. Seen on yellowed pages of underground newspapers two decades old, the radical rhetoric that had fallen so easily from my own lips now seemed dangerously puerile.

done by the blast included the destruction of massive amounts of irreplaceable research data (including a major cancer research project in a nearby building) and scientific hardware. "All told," Bates informs us, "no fewer than twenty-six campus buildings had been damaged. It was going to take 38,000 square feet of plywood just to cover the broken windows."

Greater than the material damage, however, was the tragedy of Robert Fassnacht, a doctoral student in physics who was killed in the blast. Of the six people in the building, Fassnacht alone was killed, although the five others suffered wounds ranging from cuts and bruises to paralysis and loss of hearing and vision. The bitter ironies of the situation go beyond the relative lack of damage to the AMRC: the physics department had been the most "dovish of the university's hard science departments" and "all but a few of its students and faculty were outspoken opponents of the war." Fassnacht himself was known to be anti-Vietnam and, along with one of the students injured in the blast, had questioned AMRC's presence in Sterling Hall. It is to Bates' credit that he stresses such ironies as he attempts to make sense of such a brutal act.

Momentarily, the searchers experienced a glimmer of hope; maybe Fassnacht had been elsewhere in the building. But as they turned to leave, they stumbled upon the body . . . It appeared as though a tremendous force had walloped Robert Fassnacht from behind. The physicist had landed face down, his backside shredded by flying particles. Debris had buried his legs; water covered his head. The coroner would find no evidence of drowning, however; Fassnacht's internal organs had been shattered. He must have been dead before he hit the floor. Madison's afternoon daily, the *Capital Times*, would herald [the searcher's] grisly story in two-inch type: "I FOUND BOB UNDER A FOOT OF WATER."

The staggering scale of the explosion and the senseless murder of Fassnacht worked to stop the student movement in its tracks. It was the crash after a prolonged high and it served to suggest that the revolution, if and when it came, might be an ugly thing. It had another unintentional effect — it put those favoring progressive change on the defensive.

Nationally, as well as locally, the bombing had changed the subject of conversation from the misdeeds of the Nixon administration to those of the activists and intellectuals. "It isn't just the radicals who set the bomb in a light, occupied building who are guilty," observed the *Wisconsin State Journal*. "The blood is on the hands of anyone who has encouraged them,

anyone who has talked recklessly of 'revolution,' anyone who has chided with mild disparagement the violence of extremists while hinting that the cause is right all the same."

As the dust settles from the explosion, *Rads* becomes primarily the story of Karl Armstrong, the architect of the AMRC bombing and the leader of what became known as the "New Year's Gang." Armstrong, a former Boy Scout and ROTC cadet as well as a college washout, is an unlikely and unlikable radical. He comes across as naive and unthinking, dumbly mouthing revolutionary jargon that he never seems to get quite right. "You are a fascist pig! You are the Enemy of the People, and you are branded as such!" Armstrong shouts at the Canadian judge who okayed the extradition from Canada (where Armstrong had been living underground after the bombing) to Wisconsin. "I am a very nonviolent person," Bates quotes Armstrong in 1973, "I don't like the use of violence. I don't feel comfortable with violence. And even when I was firebombing ROTC facilities and conducted the aerial bombing of Badger Ordnance plant, why, I felt very alienated by the violence that I was using. And all of the time I was wishing there was some other way to stop the war."

Just as the bombing of the AMRC failed to destroy its actual target, most of Armstrong's earlier attempts at "revolutionary" activity went wide of their marks. A self-proclaimed "Mad Bomber," Armstrong, twenty-three years old at the time of the AMRC bombing, always found a way to screw things up. On New Year's Eve, 1969, Armstrong, along with his brother Dwight, who would also be part of the AMRC bombing, stole a plane and dropped two homemade bombs on the Badger Ordnance Works north of Madison—but the bombs failed to explode. On January 3 of the new year, he firebombed the "Old Red Gym" in an attempt to destroy the ROTC offices in the building, succeeding instead in destroying virtually everything but those offices. A day later, he bombed the University of Wisconsin Primate Research Center, mistaking it for a nearby Selective Service Center. Other snafus included aborting a firebomb attempt on a second-floor draft board office because the ladder he intended to use turned out to be too short, and being scared off while trying to damage a Wisconsin Power and Light substation.

The other participants in the AMRC bombing seem to have been similarly confused. The "New Year's Gang," named by an underground newspaper in honor of the Badger Ordnance job (Armstrong's own choice was the heavy-handed "Vanguard of the Revolution"), numbered four people. Besides Karl Armstrong, there was his younger brother Dwight, Leo Burt, a University of Wisconsin senior and a reporter on the school newspaper, and David Fine, a freshman who, like Burt, was on the college paper. All of them leaned towards radicalism, but none was what might be considered a major player in campus politics. When Armstrong conceived of the plan to destroy the AMRC, they went along with a surprising minimum of fuss. "Once it was

established that . . . [Karl] was serious about this — that's all," Bates quotes David Fine, "I just wanted to do what I had to do to bring it off, and that was that. We didn't really have any heavy political discussions. It was more like, 'Hey, right on! Let's go the bombing!'"

As Bates documents Armstrong's passage from a working-class Madison home, to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List, to his eventual arrest in Toronto eighteen months after the bombing, he does a masterful job of recreating the Sixties scene, both in Madison (the radicals' legendary "Third Coast") and the country at large. The cast of characters is colorful and diverse, ranging from local activists and informants to nationally-known people like William Kunstler and Tom Hayden. By detailing the movements of Armstrong and the rest of the New Year's Gang from the inception of the AMRC bombing to its denouement years later (David Fine was arrested in 1976, Dwight Armstrong in 1977; Leo Burt has never been seen since going underground), Bates guides the reader through campus uprisings and demonstrations, counterculture hotspots and the movement underground. *Rads* benefits from its author's ability (and willingness) to factor in many divergent viewpoints and perspectives.

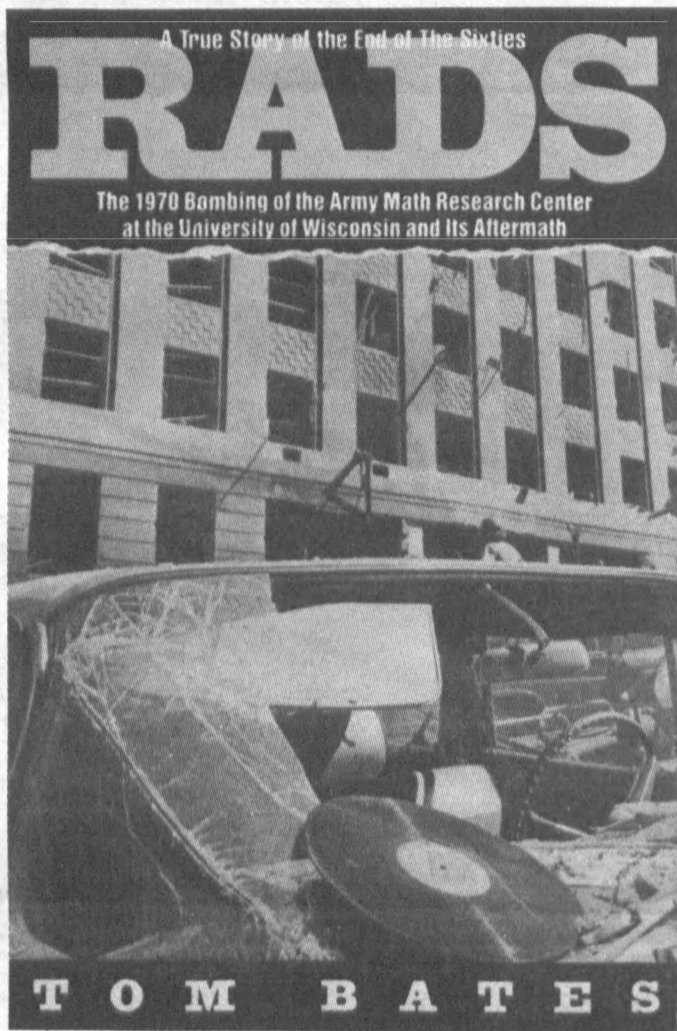
Bates' attitude toward Armstrong is fitfully exculpatory; often Armstrong becomes for Bates less a person than a symbol: the product of a dysfunctional family, in particular of an abusive father. When Karl, released from jail in 1980 after having served seven years of a twenty-three year sentence, reconciles with his dying father, Bates has the older man saying:

"It's my fault," he told them with regard to the bombing. "You did it because of the way I brought you up." Karl accepted his apology. "It's almost as if it were his bombing," he commented at the time. "He knows that I extracted my ideals — that decision — from his life."

While Armstrong's unwillingness to acknowledge his own culpability may strike readers as incredibly self-serving, it seems to be enough for Bates. Armstrong is more or less a "sleepwalker," a reactive robot programmed by outside forces, including not just his father's abuse, but a larger national cycle of violence.

The proponents of violence, whether of the right or left, whether in the White House or in the editorial offices of the *Daily Cardinal* [the University of Wisconsin's student newspaper], were always few in number but clever in their invocation of realism. In reality, however, violence was counterproductive wherever it was employed as an instrument of policy. . . . On the home front, the use of blunt force against student protesters drove them straight into the arms of the Marxists, undermining the efforts of liberal intellectuals . . . to keep things in perspective. The resort to violence and confrontational tactics by young people in the grip of millenarian fevers scared away supporters in the adult community, brought the

see *Apocalypse*, page 15



# Conservation

continued from page 1

the lake. As we slid past the Reserve headquarters I saw the same view I had seen so many times in slides. There was Jane's house, close to the lake but set apart from a low building where visiting researchers lived. And there was "beach troop," a group of baboons studied by primatologist Tony Collins, wandering across the sand. After landing at a cleared space and setting up our tents, we made our way back to the main gatehouse and entered the thick forest in search of chimpanzees.

The fantasy of a magical afternoon in the forest with our closest primate relatives began to unravel as soon as we entered the reserve. After paying the daily use fee of \$50 per person, the group split into smaller parties of four each with assigned guides. Ours took off at high speed and quickly separated himself from his charges. When we stopped to look at native plants, or spend a few minutes watching baboon females groom each other, he was visibly displeased. A loud monkey call pierced the upper canopy but the guide said he had no idea what it was. We reached a cleared area, known as the banana feeding station, and he left us by ourselves to hang out in a tin hut with his friends. We sat for two hours and no chimpanzee appeared. We then asked to be taken further into the forest in search of those chimpanzee pant-hoots that were echoing off the ravine walls. In response, we were led on a high-speed chase up and down steep banks. Slipping and sliding through the mud, grabbing on to vines and roots, I gained a renewed appreciation for the tenacity of Jane Goodall. But we never saw any chimps.

The next morning our group was again brought to the banana feeding station. But this time we were quickly shoved into a tin house with fenced windows and told to be silent. We clustered at the windows and waited. Suddenly, off to our right, two black shapes silently moved into the clearing. The chimps sat opposite our window and stared at the strange white faces looking back through the bars. A large male chimp crashed through the bushes and rushed through the clearing, followed by a party of other males. We all held our breath. In less than four minutes they were gone. Our primate experience was over.

Later that evening in camp, I nursed a beer and wondered if my eco-tourists were as disappointed as

I was. I felt responsible for the day — they were a great group of animal enthusiasts who had spent thousands of dollars for this trip to Africa and they deserved a better experience. I remembered how uncomfortable I felt crammed into that tin house, peering out at wild apes. Under different circumstances I might have been alone with the chimps in the forest, marking down their behavior for analysis. On reflection, I realized that the animals must be the unhappiest of all, for ever since tourism was established at Gombe they had been subjected to a constant stream of strangers violating their space. Perhaps eco-tourism was not really all it's cracked up to be. Revenue from trips like ours is supposed to guarantee the survival of endangered animals as a sort of pay-for-view conservation strategy. I wasn't so sure it was working.

This winter, I was reminded of my visit to Gombe while reading two books related to chimpanzees. The first, *Visions of Caliban: On Chimpanzees and People*, by Dale Peterson and Jane Goodall, is about

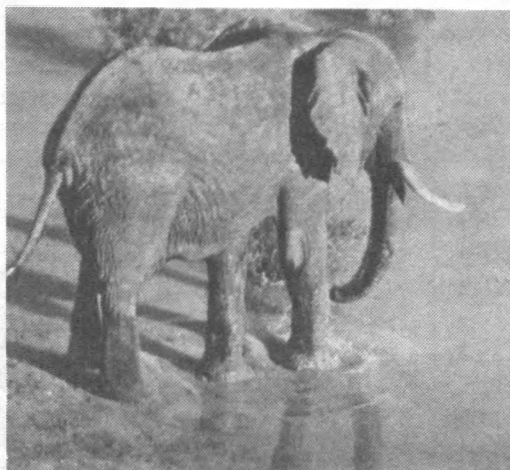
animals. Adams and McShane argue that Western (read "white") conservationists have so mythologized Africa that they have no clue how to help save endangered African species or fragile ecosystems.

The Western stereotype of the African landscape includes a limitless plain, dotted with flat-topped acacia trees, lit by a magnificent sunset. Wandering across that vista is a massive herd of some sort of hoofed animal, maybe wildebeest or zebras. On the periphery is a lion pride, with the female perusing the herd for vulnerable prey. Throw in a party of hyenas, pacing back and forth and laughing, and maybe an elephant or two off in the corner to complete the picture. As Adams and McShane point out, the problem with this romantic idyll is that it is uninhabited by people, despite evidence that humans first evolved in Africa and have inhabited that continent longer than anywhere else on earth. Our notion of Africa as a space devoid of

example, the Masai and other nomadic peoples have worked both these areas in ecologically sound ways for four centuries.

Part of the conservation muddle, according to Adams and McShane,

perception requires both reexamining Western values, and, through education and training, providing Africans with the tools they need to take on the responsibilities that ultimately only they can meet.



*Visions of Caliban* by Dale Peterson and Jane Goodall is a painful exploration into the dark side of the relationship between humans and chimpanzees. About eight million years ago, humans shared a common ancestor with the chimpanzees in Africa. This forebear wasn't really human, nor was it exactly like the modern chimp. It was, instead, a common

species from which we and the apes diverged. The kinship between humans and chimpanzees is evident today in the many things we share — more than 98% of our genes, similarities in behavior, and most important, common emotional responses. Yet humans have a long record of using apes for entertainment, as pets, and, most recently, as laboratory subjects for biomedical research.

Adams and McShane direct further criticism at Western scientists, more interested in their own professional advancement than in helping the animals they have come to Africa to study. They contrast this approach with that of Africans schooled in wildlife management, who strive to involve indigenous communities in their projects by acknowledging local hunting and land use practices. However, Adams and McShane concede that African conservationists trained in the West may not take this approach:

*The training African conservationists receive abroad, particularly the emphasis on scientific research, simply perpetuates Western conservation values and methods. This leads to an odd situation in which Africans inherit and pass on a conservation ethic created in large part by great white hunters.*

Nevertheless, the authors insist that the only reasonable approach to conservation in Africa involves Africans themselves, both as conservation managers and as integral members of the ecosystem.

*The most persistent illusion in the Western vision of Africa is that Africans can be and should be ignored. Overcoming that*

This book is not a knee-jerk animal rights treatise. The authors make their case by carefully documenting chimpanzee intelligence, complexity, and awareness. They begin by describing what chimps do in the wild — fashion and use tools, have intricate social relationships, solve ecological puzzles, and more remarkably, feel emotions such as anger, fear, irritation, and attachment or love. Laboratory research by psychologists has also demonstrated that chimpanzees are self-aware, capable of such behavior as deliberate deception and spontaneous laughter.

Remarking on these "human" characteristics, Peterson writes:

*monkeys and apes make us nervous, and they sometimes make us laugh, because in looking at them we see ourselves. They share, to one degree or another, a shape we regard as the honored shape. Their faces and bodies mirror our faces and bodies. But what we fail to see — or what we see only imperfectly and with some anxiety — is that their minds mirror our minds as well.*

The assumption that chimps are different mentally from humans, the authors maintain, enables us to exploit these animals without a guilty conscience.

Peterson, who wrote about four fifths of *Visions of Caliban* (each author's writing is set in different type), details the use of chimpanzees and other apes in the entertainment world. He writes about mouths wired shut and behind-the-scenes beatings. Even chimps with loving caretakers are controlled with electric shock on occasion. Stories about the pet trade are even more depressing. While everyone loves the cuddly cuteness of a baby chimp, no one wants the responsibility of the expensive—and often dangerous—care of an adult. These unwanted creatures are banned to cages or held on restraints, prisoners who have committed no

see *Conservation*, page 16



the human-chimpanzee relationship. Contending that chimpanzees share with humans many genes, behaviors, and emotions, the authors dispute our right to remove chimps from the wild for use as pets, animals acts, or laboratory subjects. The second book, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion*, by Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane, deals with a different aspect of the plight of wild African

people, the authors suggest, dates from the period between 1898 and 1930, when the continent experienced a demographic crash caused by the introduction of European diseases. Subsequently, misguided conservationists, colonial administrators, and some African leaders have sought to remove native peoples from large sections of land, such as the Serengeti or Ngorongoro Crater, failing to recognize that, for

# Humanistic Criticism

*continued from page 7*  
to its readers. And the author must express feelings in order to evoke those feelings: "Si vis me flere, dolendum est/primū ipsi tibi" (lines 102-3).

What of the function that would seem to be most obviously specific to authorship under capitalism—that which vests an author with ownership of a literary text that is sold for profit? This is a function, according to Foucault, that developed "only when a system of ownership for texts came into being...at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries." But almost 2000 years earlier, Horace had declared that a poetic book that both instructs and delights the reader (ll.343-45) will not only be posted overseas and prolong the author's fame; it will also "earn money for the Sosii,"—that is, the famous Roman booksellers. We know from sources besides Horace that, even in his age when texts were published in papyrus rolls that were copied by hand, there was a flourishing trade in the making, selling, and exporting of books for profit. Horace also warns us (lines 372-73) that "for poets to be mediocre has never been tolerated—not by men, or gods, or columnae." The word *columnae* is usually translated simply as "booksellers"; but it in fact designated the columns or pillars outside the bookseller's business establishment on which he advertised his wares. We find, then, that in Horace's time books were conceived and treated and discussed as a commodity advertised for profitable sale, in which the author maintained not only an interest as his personal literary accomplishment, but a proprietary interest as well.

It is abundantly clear, furthermore, that in discussing a poetic work, Horace takes for granted what I have called the humanistic paradigm, in which a purposive author designs and invests with meanings a literary work that represents human beings and actions and is specifically addressed to the determinate understanding, and the emotional and pleasurable responsiveness, of human readers. And if we look, we find this same paradigm in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Longinus on the sublime style, and in the classical writers on rhetoric. The changes that occurred in the long history of literary criticism can be mapped largely as changes in focus on one or another of the elements within this overall frame, as the emphasis shifted between the make-up of the environing world; the needs and preferences of readers; the temperament, imagination, and emotional processes of the author; and the internal requirements of the literary work itself as the primary determinants of a literary work. The human world thus served as the setting for

just about all critical discourse about literature until some 3 or 4 decades ago, when it was displaced by the various theory worlds of structural and poststructural critics.

## Human World and Theory Worlds

The humanistic paradigm for

The human world thus served as the setting for just about all critical discourse about literature until some 3 or 4 decades ago, when it was displaced by the various theory worlds of structural and poststructural critics.

considering works of literature presupposes a world in which human beings live and converse, and in which, if they are philosophers, they also formulate theories about that world. Such, in the Platonic dialogues, is the world, with its physical settings and lively interpersonal exchanges, in which Socrates expounds the theory that this same world is no more than appearance, when set against the criterion world of Reality. Such is also the solid world described by Descartes, in which, he says, "seated by the fire, clothed in a winter dressing-gown," he manipulates a lump of beeswax, and watches through the window "human beings passing in the street below," while excogitating the possibility of doubting the reality of that world and of everything in it, except the fact that he is doubting. And it is the world into which, David Hume tells us, the unreasoning force he calls "nature" delivers him after he has theorized himself into denying the reality of an outer world and even of his "personal identity." From the "forlorn solitude" of this skeptical theory-world, Hume says, he returns to the world where "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends"—a human and social world, that is, in which, he says, "I find myself absolutely determined to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life", although only until he isolates himself again in order to pursue his speculations," as he says "in my chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river side."

Some version of such a world, in which people act, interact, and communicate intended meanings, is the paradigmatic site assumed by British and American philosophers of language in the recent past, whether they are analytic philosophers, ordinary language philosophers, or write in the tradition of American pragmatism. In Ludwig Wittgenstein's

remarkable later writings, a special concern, in what he sometimes calls our *Weltbild*, is with the primitives, the "givens" which, when we undertake to justify our beliefs and assertions, are the *termini*—the "bedrock," as he puts it, where "my spade is turned." And at such endpoints of the "chain of reasons," he famously declares, "What has to

be accepted, the given is—so one could say—*forms of life*."

The givens, in our "world-picture," the "substratum of all my enquiring and asserting," Wittgenstein points out, do not consist of metaphysical foundations in self-evident truths or in quasi-visible presences, but of our participation in pre-existing, ongoing, shared human practices and ways of acting:

*Giving grounds...justifying the evidence, comes to an end—but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of seeing on our part, it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.*

Such certainties, it can be said, function not only as the presuppositions of all proofs, but as the preconditions for the development and the intelligibility of a common language.

To the outlook of a humanist, a loose-bounded set of such givens makes up the world in which we live and move and have our meanings. It is a human world not only in that it contains human beings, but also in that it is always and only a world-for-us, given our human senses, physiology, and history; what in itself it really is, independently of mediation by our human condition and history—what

it would be if (in Keats' phrase) we could "see as a god sees"—is beyond conjecture. And from the earliest records to the present, such a world has been the world represented in literature, in which purposeful and feelingful characters recognizably like ourselves enact a story within some recognizable version, however altered, of the world we live in; even authors of surrealist, or "magic realist," or other types of "experimental" works, who set out to escape the conditions of our shared human world, cannot but rely, for their literary effects, on violating the presuppositions formed by our prior experiences in that world. Finally, such a world also constitutes the frame of reference or paradigm, common to just about all critics of literature, including even philosophers whose professional stance is that of an idealist or a skeptic, rather than a realist—when, that is, they write, not as metaphysicians, but as literary critics.

Now, what do the distinctive claims and critical enterprises of radical structural and poststructural theorists look like, from the viewpoint of someone who is positioned in this human world?

It seems obvious to me that one would have to read them in what Jonathan Swift calls "the true spirit of controversy"—that is, "fully predetermined against all conviction"—not to find a great deal that is highly profitable and enlightening in what the major and

structuralist invasion" what he calls "an adventure in the way of looking at things (*une aventure du regard*)"—that is, "a conversion of the way of putting questions to any object." Certainly, by their radical shift of perspective to the constitution and play of language and discourse, poststructural as well as structural writers have defamiliarized what we tend too readily to take for granted; not least by their drastic redescription which turns the human world outside-in, asking us to try the adventure of envisioning human subjects, attributes, and enterprises not as the producers but as the products of texts and of discourses.

Secondly, Derrida specifies another use of theory as what he calls an "operative concept," or "a heuristic instrument", which, in literary criticism, is "a method of reading." Patently, as a speculative instrument and heuristic discovery-procedure, each major poststructural theory, in part by the very exclusivity of its focus, has effected insights that advance our understanding. What objective reader would deny the profit in the structuralist's distinctive inquiry into a literary work as constituted by the repetition, variation, and internal relationships of persisting structures, formulas, and codes? Or the discoveries made possible by Foucault's approach to discourses in the human sciences, which inquires into what he calls the discursive "regime of truth"—that is, the historical conditions that have

engendered the forms of discourse in which our predictions are accounted to be true. Or the revelatory value of Derrida's analyses of the degree to which our thinking is structured by binary and tacitly hierarchical oppositions, and his subtle expositions of the incessant and ineluctable play of metaphors in the ostensible realm of pure intellect, especially the figure of visibility—light and darkness—which, he says, is "the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics."

But Derrida also identifies an aberrant use of structuralist theory when, instead of serving as a heuristic instrument for investigating a literary object, "structure becomes the object itself, the literary thing itself...the exclusive term of the



Illustration: Behn T.F. Nadelman

genuinely innovative theorists have to say. One way to clarify their achievements, I think, is to apply to poststructuralism three criteria that can be found in an early essay by Derrida himself, "Force and Signification" (1963), in which he assayed the achievements, but also the limitations, of structuralism, as applied in literary criticism.

First, Derrida attributes to "the

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# Humanistic Criticism

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critical description." The charge Derrida levels against structuralist theory, as I read him, is that it transforms a perspective into an exclusive doctrine, a working hypothesis into a ruling hypothesis, and a heuristic position into an objective imposition. Can this charge be applied also to poststructural theories? Indeed, can it be applied to Derrida's own deconstructive theory, "in despite," as Derrida said of structuralism, of the proponent's own "theoretical intention"?

The answer depends on where you read Derrida, and on how you read his elaborately elusive and allusive prose. He repeatedly stresses that, by "deconstructing" or "dismantling" the concepts and structures of our logocentric language, he does not "destroy" or "discard" them, but simply "situates," "reinscribes," or "reconstitutes" them in a different context; and that deconstruction does not and cannot propose a science of language, nor a counter-philosophy to logocentric philosophy, nor an alternative order of truth. The claim, it seems clear, is that deconstruction is proffered as a perspective to reveal and put to question, but without supplanting, the presuppositions of our ordinary linguistic practices.

The philosopher Richard Rorty has assimilated what is amenable in Derrida's writings to his own neo-pragmatism, praising him as the inventor of "a new splendidly ironic way of writing about the philosophical tradition"—that is, as providing a new kind of perspective through which to view all philosophies with skeptical irony. But Rorty goes on to ask, is Derrida also a "transcendental philosopher" who proposes a new and better philosophy of his own? Rorty acknowledges that Derrida indeed "makes noises of both sorts."

Derrida sounds most like a transcendental philosopher when, from his theoretical position within language-in-general, he posits what he describes as a pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual non-entity, denominated as a "mark" or "trace," ascribes to it such essential features as "différance" and "iterability" (hence necessarily "alterity"), and then draws consequences which obtain necessarily, not only for the practice of language, and of any signifying system, but also for "the totality of

what one can call experience." Thus, according to Derrida, "the graphics of iterability inscribes alteration irreducibly in repetition (or in identification) a priori, always and already and so

*leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say and would have wanted to say, to understand something other than...etc.*

However one reads the perplexing deliverances on such matters by Derrida himself, one can say that it is the mark of a radical poststructuralist to begin with a theoretical foreknowledge of the nature of language as such, or of discourse in general and, reasoning *von oben herunter*, to draw from these premises conclusions about what our actual linguistic practices and experiences must necessarily be. And when our common experience in the use of language doesn't jibe with these conclusions, the radical poststructuralist discredits, or at any rate drastically derogates, our linguistic practices and experiences as no more than effects, functions, illusions, false consciousness, or mystifications. To put it otherwise: a useful working hypothesis suffers a hardening of the categories and becomes a tyrannical ruling hypothesis whose consequences are projected as the way things really are, because by logical necessity they must be so. In the extreme instances, the result is that the human world, in which people employ language and discourse in their diverse purposes, whether for good or ill, is displaced by a theory world, in which people are not agents but agencies, not users of language but used by language, not effectors but themselves only effects.

## The Alien Vision

Traditional readers find the theory-world of all-out poststructural critics to be a blatant mismatch to the world in which we live, write, and read works of literature, as well as to the world represented in the works we read. Reading literature we, like the myriads of recorded readers before us, commonly discover characters who, although

fictive, are recognizably like ourselves, in whose actions, experiences, and fortunes we find ourselves involved, sometimes passionately, sometimes more distantly, in accordance with how they have been rendered by the author. When Keats, for example, tells us that, "on sitting down to read *King Lear* once again," he must "burn through" the "fierce dispute/Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay," we understand what it is to read Shakespeare's tragedy in this intensely responsive way. On the other hand, when Roland Barthes asserts that in narrative, what goes on is referentially "strictly nothing," and what does "happen" is language per se, "it seems grossly inapposite to the common reader's engagement with the doings of the purposive, fallible, perplexed, and feelingful persons that a literary narrative—"stubbornly referential," as Clara Claiborne Park

later writings of Paul De Man, in which not only is the human subject textualized, but human attributes, feelings, and experiences tend to be reduced (or more precisely *redacted*, by intricate rhetorical maneuvers) to the possibility that they are effects of the arbitrariness and the counter-forces immanent in language as such. Bleakly inhuman also, although achieved by a different process, is the theory-world projected by the writings of Michel Foucault and some of his critical followers, in which people exist as bodies whose subjectivities are functions of their subject-positions accorded them by the discourse of their era; a world not only without effective human purposes or aims, but also without human feelings, traversed by the circulation of an unpersoned "power."

According to J. Hillis Miller, "The deconstructive critic seeks to

cause of the inescapable repression in discourse of the "historical unconscious"—or, in the criticism of some enthusiastic eclectics, because of all the above. In this last instance, the result in critical practice is a hermeneutics of suspicion that at times comes close to a hermeneutics of paranoia. Instead of a reading that sets itself to understand and engage with what an author has set forth, such a critic looks askance at the literary work, and the prime interpretive question becomes: "What's this text trying to put over on me?"

As a proponent of traditional criticism, I can bring to bear a second consideration against radical poststructural theories: I can point out that the theory-world, in addition to being unbelievable, is also uninhabitable by the theorist himself. This becomes evident when, in a practical matter that engages his moral or political or cultural concerns, the theorist abandons his theory-talk for the ordinary human-centered talk about intentional persons, what they say and mean, and their intellectual and moral responsibility for what they have said. The discrepancy is especially apparent in the disputes between poststructural theorists of differing persuasions. In such instances—an example is the published dispute between Derrida and Foucault—claims that the subject is only a linguistic effect, and that the author is dead, turn out to have been exaggerated; for the author revives, rescued from the half-life of the *sous rature*, divested of quotation marks and other disclaimers, and re-invested with such logocentric or bourgeois attributes as an initiating purpose, a decidable intention to mean what he says, and very human motives and feelings. Or rather, two authors revive. One is the indignant theorist whose views have been challenged, and the other is his opponent, whom he charges with having grossly misread the obvious meanings of his texts, out of carelessness, or obtuseness, or (it is often implied) for less reputable reasons. The problematic status, in Derrida's theory, of truth, of the binary opposition true/false, and of the decidability of an intention to mean something, as Derrida makes clear, is entirely compatible with his downright use of such concepts in the give-and-take of discursive

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They concur in the theoretical predetermination that an author cannot say what he really means, and that a text cannot mean what it seems to say—not only in particular instances, but universally...

has said—often compels.

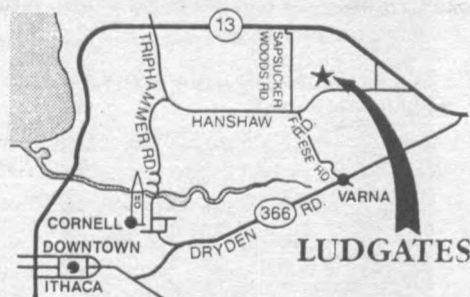
In a recent interview Derrida declared:

*I must confess that deep down I have probably never drawn great enjoyment from fiction, from reading novels for example, beyond the pleasure taken in analyzing the play of writing, or else certain naive movements of identification...Telling or inventing stories is something that deep down (or rather on the surface!) does not interest me particularly.*

Fair enough; but of course to deal with a literary text as a "play of writing," exclusive of the story, is to denude the text of its human dimension.

I find incredible and off-putting the world projected in some of the

find...the element in the system studied which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building." Such a passage highlights a feature shared by deconstructive critics with other types of poststructural criticism with which they are often in conflict. They concur in the theoretical predetermination that an author cannot say what he really means, and that a text cannot mean what it seems to say—not only in particular instances, but universally, *überhaupt*; whether (in Paul De Man's version), because of a "duplicité," as he says, that is "a necessity dictated or controlled by the very nature of all critical language," or else because of the ideological or cultural distortions that permeate all discourse, or be-



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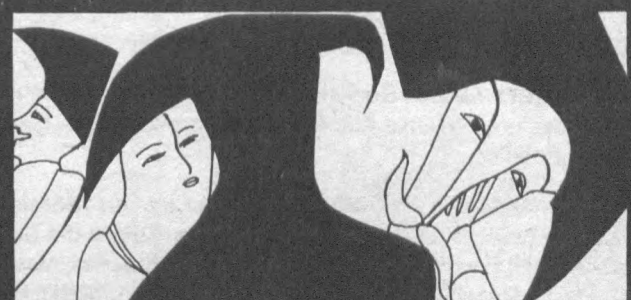
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# Humanistic Criticism

*continued from page 13*

practice. In a recent dispute with Jurgen Habermas, for example, Derrida asserts: "That is false. I say false, as opposed to true, and I defy Habermas to prove the presence in my work of that 'primacy of rhetoric' which he attributes to me..."

A striking instance of such recourse to a human—an all-too-human—discursive mode, occurs in J. Hillis Miller's presidential address to the Modern Language Association in 1986. There he responds to what he calls "attacks" on deconstruction from both conservative critics on the right and from neo-Marxist critics and New Historians on the left. A reader of Miller's deconstructive theory might expect that he would respond by seeking the loose thread that will unravel, and so render self-conflicting and undecidable, what his opponents mistakenly think they are saying. Instead, he responds with the heated assertion that "the left and right are often united...in their misrepresentation, their shallow misunderstanding, and their failure to have read or their apparent inability to make out its plain sense."

Now, let us suppose that by such considerations as I have

sketched, I were to convince a confirmed poststructuralist that his theory implicates a world which is not only unrecognizable, but discordant with his own conduct and discourse in the affairs of daily life. Even in such an event, it would be a mistake to assume that the poststructuralist would feel compelled to abandon his theory. Jacques Derrida—as severing that deconstruction cannot escape or re-

a double science, a double writing." To be a deconstructive reader is to live a double life; as he has put it, there are today "two interpretations of interpretation" (the standard and the deconstructive), "which are absolutely irreconcilable *even if we live them simultaneously*"; and between these "I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing." Against this view of reading as

...the theory-world,  
in addition to being unbelievable,  
is also uninhabitable by  
the theorist himself.

place the logocentrism it subverts, nor supersede the built-in humanism of Western thought that it tries to go beyond, nor dispense with the standard procedure of reading determinately even while affirming the radical indecidability of all meaning—proposes that a deconstructive reader is a double agent, engaging in "a double gesture,

a duplex act which cannot but deconstruct even as it construes, I can only affirm the nature of literary criticism as viewed from a position of engagement in its world of human interactions and exchanges. So I come, finally, to answer the question in my title, "What Is a Humanistic Criticism?" Quite simply, humanistic criticism deals with

a work of literature as written by a human being, for human beings, and about human beings and matters of human concern.

This identification is not meant to be in any way novel but rather to epitomize the common frame of reference of the literary critics who have mattered most, in the temporal and cultural range from Aristotle and Horace to Edmund Wilson and Northrop Frye. Furthermore, simply to identify a critical procedure as humanistic is not in the least to warrant its validity or value. There is both good and bad humanistic criticism, in accordance with the degree to which it is perceptive, cogent, enlightening, and responsible, as against routine, pointless, obfuscatory, and irresponsible. And finally, the criteria I propose are minimal, in the sense that they leave everything of substance still to be said in the unceasing dialogue, without finality, of critics with literary works, and of critics with each other, that has made up the history of criticism in the civilized past, and I feel confident, will do so in the future.



# Peripatetics

*continued from page 5*

what each of us wishes it to be: a vocabulary, a fashion, a gloss anyone can acquire and apply with surprisingly little effort. Anyone can learn how to talk about dialectical materialism, or ontological relativism, or linguistic paradigms, or illocutionary acts; each is entitled to formulate positions, to contemplate mysteries, to wield technical arcana, and to purvey personal opinions at the same rate of exchange as any faculty member in any university in the country. Cleverness is all, not a function of diligence, nor of intelligence, but merely costume we can buy and wear, like the current trend in clothing fashions for "equatorial explorer" or "working photojournalist."

There is, moreover, that inchoate faith in the democracy of knowledge, in the common birthright of expertise. Anyone can have it who claims it; and the easy way is as good as, maybe better than, the hard way. This is the same mentality that allows self-taught herbalists to lay claim to medical knowledge, or people who feel a lively sympathy with others to pass themselves off as professional counselors. The most evident difference is that the self-

*continues on page 15*

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# Peripatetics Apocalypse

*continued from page 14*  
proclaimed philosophe can't do any of us much harm beyond boring us to death.

Admittedly, reading Nietzsche or Heidegger or Plato in original texts or translations is probably more interesting than listening to what a professional academic might say about any of these figures, SuperStar or not; but that isn't because the Great Minds discussed those questions that, as the ad copy would suggest, bedevil each of us in our private moments. If watching videotaped lectures causes someone to become interested in ideas, to explore further in original sources and academic commentaries, to invest some mental energy in personal cultivation, then so much the better. But to purvey such a course of videotapes as offering the way to a practical solution of these intellectual "problems," or to suggest that they provide an easy way to an educated sophistication, or to present them as any more than the very beginning of a long and disciplined inquiry, is just advertising.

✦

Robert Hill is a writer living in Ithaca.

*continued from page 10*  
dismissal of sympathetic and visionary administrators . . . caused progressive educational programs for minorities and urban areas to be shelved, and precipitated a withdrawal of taxpayer and alumni support from which public universities in the United States have yet to fully recover.

If Bates holds any single group responsible for Armstrong's actions, however, it's movement radicals mouthing the "dangerously puerile" and inflammatory rhetoric of the time.

Whatever demons may have possessed Karl at the time, his actions cannot be explained by them alone. The sleepwalker had to be awakened, his repressed anger summoned forth and given sanction. That summons came from a peace movement frustrated by the failure of nonviolent protest to end a devastating and misguided war. The rationale was provided by naive converts to the Marxist doctrine of class war, idealistic students driven to cynical despair by the brutal actions of fearful and confused authorities.... [Armstrong] had really taken [the movement radicals] at their word, and the word was violence.

This portrayal of Armstrong as

someone lacking any real agency (Bates speaks of his "unwitting contribution to his times") doesn't really ring true, especially in light of Armstrong's elaborate machinations and his own trial testimony and demeanor — surely he deserves the lion's share of the blame for his own actions. The photographs included in the book similarly undercut Armstrong's status as sympathetic victim. In the last photo, Armstrong, currently the proprietor of "Loose Juice," a fruit smoothie stand near the University of Wisconsin library, grins at the camera, the ultimate ageing hippy campus hanger-on. The first photo is of Robert Fassnacht, dressed in mid-Sixties' fashions and forever frozen at the age of thirty-three.

Still, *Rads* is an insightful book, with regard both to the AMRC bombing and the Sixties in general. In an honest and interesting way, Bates poses the question of whether the AMRC bombing was not a perversion of movement ideals, but rather their logical conclusion. That he avoids either the blithe nostalgia of Hayden or the bitter recriminations of Collier and Horowitz is an impressive achievement.

✦

Nick Gillespie is a writer living in Buffalo.

# Envisioning

*continued from page 9*  
Clausen, and Craig Matis's "Life Outside The Mirror" (1991), which includes an audio cassette featuring a rock band reading of the text. None of these are traditional books; though they all have text, they have outgrown the library shelf.

At the Mercer Gallery of Monroe Community College, the emphasis seemed to be less formal, though white gloves were handed out to those who would eagerly page through over 70 books by 29 artists. I was impressed by Scott McCarney's altered books (they were carved and sculpted), Henrik Drescher's "Too Much Bliss" (a humorous artist's scrapbook), and the essential "Structure of the Visual Book" by Keith Smith. Joan Lyons explored the episodic nature of telling a story through her pictorial "Quilt," while the most striking production was Tatana Kellner's two books about her parents' experience of the concentration camps in World War II, titled "Fifty Years of Silence." Kellner's books have at their core a cast paper hand and forearm bearing an indelible number; the story envelops this icon of pain and suffering.

The production values of artists' books vary considerably from nothing more than collated xerox copies, to handmade paper printed by quality letterpress. I found the truly revolutionary aspects of art-

ists' bookworks at the Cary Library of Rochester Institute of Technology.

## The Bookless Book

At the Cary Library, in a special traveling exhibition, "Off the Shelf and On-Line," organized by the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, we come to the threshold of the 21st century. Instead of looking back to artifacts created with traditional artists' materials, we can sit down, pop a disk in the computer, and experience hypermedia, a form with multiple story lines and clusters of information and graphics which the "reader" can choose to access or bypass. Printed materials, type and paper have given way to glyphs and pixels. The artist Christopher Burnette offered "The Information Machine" (electronic version 1987) and Collette Gaiter created "The Pyramid" (1991), both interactive hypermedia books that demonstrate the political power of controlling information.

Will the digital revolution silence those printing presses which have been clattering now for centuries? It is not likely, but artists are working away on this frontier of the bookless book which sooner or later will be at a location near you

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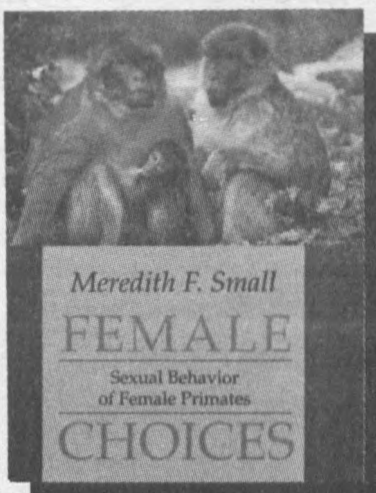
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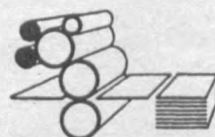
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# Conservation

*continued from page 11*  
crimes. Goodall points to the hypocrisy of pet owners who call their animals "like my real child" and then shut them in cages with no room to move around. Does anyone really believe that chimps would prefer life in front of an audience, or as family pets, rather than swinging through the trees, interacting with other chimps?

Since 1986, Goodall has made the plight of captive chimpanzees her personal crusade, in an attempt, she says, to reciprocate for the privilege of studying the animals in the wild. She and Peterson suggest we are misled to



from *Visions of Caliban*

believe that chimps are necessary for research into human diseases such as AIDS, at least in the large numbers presently used as laboratory animals. Breeding programs have produced more subjects than the research requires, with the result that many chimps simply languish in isolated cages, although some labs have begun to provide enrichment and distraction for these intelligent social individuals who are forced to serve our needs. It is also true that fewer animals are being taken from the wild. But one can only share Goodall's outrage when she describes chimpanzees suspended

from the ceiling in wire cages, without sunlight, fresh air, companionship, or distraction. Such animals' only interaction is with humans wrapped in protective clothing who are not allowed to touch them.

As Peterson writes, "There are two ways of looking at the human relationship with the rest of the natural world. Either we stand out coldly separate and perfectly discontinuous from the natural world, or we stand in continuity." Both books advocate a relationship of continuity. As humans with the power to destroy forests, ecosystems, and species, we have no right stand apart from chimpanzees or any other animals. And as Westerners with the power to dominate, we also cannot impose our myths on people who have lived in close association with those chimpanzees for thousands of years. The answers lie not in valuing one species, including the human species, over another, but in learning how to make a peaceable kingdom for all.

Meredith Small is a professor of anthropology at Cornell University.

## from *Visions of Caliban*

For years Louis [Leakey] had wondered about the behavior of the people whose skeletons he sought, tirelessly, across the vast miles of their African birthplace. At the forefront of innovative thinking, he believed that understanding the behavior of modern apes would enable him to make informed guesses about the probable behavior of Stone Age humans. If we find behaviors shared by modern chimpanzees and modern humans, he argued, we can assume that those same patterns were present in the common ancestor and so, of course, in the earliest true humans.

That Leakey was far ahead of mainstream scientific thinking I discovered when I went to university. When, for example, I mentioned behaviors shown by the Gombe chimpanzees such as begging and embracing, I was told in no uncertain terms that while those patterns certainly looked like begging and embracing in humans, the chimpanzees were only performing a series of mechanical movements triggered by specific circumstances. Any attempt to compare the motivations underlying chimpanzee begging and embracing to human motivations was anthropomorphic. And the sin of anthropomorphism was to be avoided at all costs. At that time, only thirty years ago, it would have been impossible for me to write a

dissertation on the mind of the chimpanzee. Animals, it was held, did not have minds; only humans did....Animals did not have personalities. Idiosyncrasies in the behavior of different individuals did occur, it was admitted, but such matters were seldom relevant and were best ignored.

I find it hard to imagine that those who espoused such notions really believed them. But ethologists were desperate to have their discipline regarded as a "hard" science, as opposed to a "soft" social science. Well and good when this meant more stringent methods of observation.... Unfortunately, many of the attempts to improve the image of ethology were, and still are, made at the expense of the animal subjects. Experiments all too often are invasive and painful. Scientists have license to perform procedures on animals that in any other context would be condemned as unacceptable cruelty. As a scientific attempt to distinguish the innate from the learned nature of bird song, for example, hundreds of birds have been surgically deafened in laboratories. To determine facts about sexual behavior, male and female animals of many species, from rats to monkeys, have been injected with a variety of hormones, castrated, ovariectomized, raised in varying degrees of social isolation, and so on.

Many of these experiments have yielded little worthwhile information. For example, in the early 1920s Henry Nissen, a respected scientist from the original Yerkes Laboratory at Orange Park, Florida, kept an infant chimpanzee for two years with his arms encased in plaster cylinders. This was an attempt to discover if certain responses, such as scratching, or grabbing something to keep from falling, were innate or learned—Nissen believed he was preventing the chimp from learning those motor patterns. When after two years the animal's arms were freed, not surprisingly there was a good deal of muscle atrophy, and the chimp did not initially move his hand to push away objects poked into him. Was this any fair measure of whether such movements were learned or innate? I think not. Obviously, Nissen's chimp could have failed to learn such behaviors (suggesting that they were ordinarily learned, rather than innate), or he could have learned that doing such things was useless under the circumstances (suggesting that they could have been innate).

The list of torments inflicted on millions of animals of a whole variety of species in the name of acquiring knowledge would fill many pages and would not make good reading.

—Jane Goodall

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