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**HIGHandLOW:
A Culture Raddled**

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis interrogates the constructedness of aesthetic value and argues for an acknowledgement of the raddledness (the always complicated relationships that exist between works of art/culture) of so-called "high" and "low" aesthetic products, producers, and forms. In a series of short critical pieces, the body of my thesis creatively theorizes and interprets the interwovenness of the "mass" and the "elite." Through investigations of such cultural "products" as Hamlet, Windex, Martha Stewart, the flaneur, etc., I explore notions of aesthetic contingency, as well as universalizing conceptions of truth, beauty, man, and the ways in which historical western European distinctions of "high" and "low" impact issues of gender, race, and class. And though arguing for the political *value* and progressiveness of embracing a theory of "radical aesthetic contingency," I also, in the end, acknowledge my own inevitable raddledness with (implication in) the very hierarchies and binaries that my thesis seeks to challenge.

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EPIGRAPHS

we're not salesmen, we're artists.

Spoken by "Snap," in a Rice Krispies commercial

because consciousness is a formulation, a very gratuitous formulation of something, but nothing else. And I go further by saying that words such as truth, art, veracity, or anything are stupid in themselves. Of course, it's difficult to formulate, so I insist: *every word I am telling you is stupid and wrong.*

Marcel Duchamp

Werther's Original—what else would I give my grandson?

Werther's Butter Toffee

You do not see any more persons in the picture galleries blowing their nose with their fingers; no more dogs brought into the Museum openly or concealed in baskets. There is no more spitting tobacco juice on the gallery floors, to the disgust of all other visitors. There are no more nurses taking children to some corner to defile the floors of the Museum. No persons come now with 'Kodaks' to take 'snap views' of things and visitors. No more whistling, singing, or calling aloud to people from one gallery to another.

Louis di Cesnola

Director, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1897

Don't believe the hype!

Public Enemy

Picasso—needless to say, we're partial to his blue period.

Midland Walwyn Investors (Blue Chip Thinking)

One can no longer let oneself be deceived by concepts that oppose the artist or the intellectual to the masses and deal with them as with two incompatible entities.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha

INTRODUCTION: 1

Scene: Black screen, sound of Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" gradually gets louder. Then Stravinsky's "The Rites of Spring" dominates, it also gets louder. Then the interwoven pop songs of Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan, and Celine Dion begin to play and get louder. Finally, jingles from McDonald's, Ford and Microsoft chime in, getting louder and louder. All the songs, jingles, voices, sounds play over each other, at great volume. They eventually, slowly, trail off into a faint background rhythm that hums throughout the introduction.

John's face appears then on a black screen—there is a bwoop sound, as if he is a bubble or as if he is something, just generated, being born in a cartoon. He has a through-the-fish-bowl appearance.

John: Hello, I'm John. This is "HIGHandLOW: A Culture Raddled." Hi. [John waves.] I think that making an argument for the radical contingency [Sound of group of students: "huh?!"]—OK, don't turn it, just wait a sec. I think it's political to see that culture [Bwoop above John's head of a naked foot writing the word note on a piece of paper, then a megaphoned voice saying (while the foot drops the pen and moves its toes, like a mouth): "By culture John is referring to those forms or actions or products or ideas or identities at work, play, rest, war, etc., in the economic, social, aesthetic, intellectual and political arenas. John thinks of culture, perhaps unhelpfully, as most anything and everything."] is a made-up thing. Important to recognize that a radical [Picture of stereotypical, fusty English professor bwoops up beside John, saying: "We call this rhetoric."] disturbing of high and low aesthetic categories is a political act. [Now, adopting a high-pitched, Looney Tunes accent, another head pops out from John's shoulder and questions him.] How so, John? [Back to regular voice (and head!).] Well, first, let's talk about modernist universals and the modernism of postmodernism [Several

bwoop-ups of several young (student) faces sighing and tisking. John looks around at them.]. Wait. Wait. [One more bwoop: of a Sprite commercial in which the young black actor says: "They have tried everything to get me to drink their drinks."] OK, forget the modernist this and the post-modernist that. [John's eye becomes extremely large, telescopes toward the camera and winks. There is a drum roll.]

Elvis was a hero to most but he never meant shit to Public Enemy. [Picture of Elvis bwoops up, saying: "Thank you, mam."] I'm saying that Public Enemy is saying: "Don't believe the Hype!" Instead, believe only that, for the most part, dominant culture (the schools, the corporations, the artists, the government, the media) have hyped up "reality." They've made, for example, [John snaps fingers and Beethoven appears.] Beethoven a genius and [Another snap. A picture of the "Mona Lisa" appears.] this painting a masterpiece. Why? How come? What makes these works timeless and inherently beautiful? What if Tupperware was considered art [Shot of gallery goes oing at Tupperware display.]? What if a rap song—say, "Gettin' Jiggy with it" by Will Smith [Bwoop of Will Smith, smiling.]—was afforded the same cultural importance (weight) as a lyric poem by, say, Will Wordsworth [Bwoop of WW, frowning.]? What would happen? *Happen?*

I want to heavily rock and rap the constructedness/hypeness of age-old aesthetic divisions—illustrate contingency: how the "mass" has always had the capacity to transmute into the "high," or the "shit" has always had the capacity to transmute into the "sublime" and vice versa... suddenly change names, values, forms. Right? But this is just the beginning, the tip of the ice-berg. [Bwoop up of Leo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet on the sinking Titanic.] I want to talk history. Want to talk about how culture is made [Bwoop up of Swedish Chef from *The Muppets*: "First you take the bird and..."]. So, welcome.

Next stop: modernist civilization...let's go meet Beauty, Truth, Art and Goodness.
[Sound of combined music forms, getting louder and louder. John begins dancing. Scene fades out. We go straight to a Pepsi commercial, etc.]

INTRODUCTION 2

Acknowledging the constructedness (discursive or performative foundations) of culture and identity,¹ and, particularly for my purposes, the constructedness of high/low aesthetic binaries, is an inherently political action. A belief in the radical contingency of cultural/aesthetic value, that is to say an understanding that a "work of art" (and its hierarchization) is, in part, a timeful (as opposed to timeless), grounded (as opposed to transcendent) product of the diverse forces of its historical and cultural moment(s) (as opposed to genius), sets one down squarely within the complex theoretical debates of postmodernism.² Specifically, one encounters the contemporary tensions of high and mass culture and is confronted with the problem of modernist universals, such as Beauty, Truth, Art, and Goodness. As a result, one also faces the question of how these universals impact issues of agency, power, equality, difference, and subjectivity.

For many feminist and race theorists, a postmodern thesis of radical relativism potentially represents but another version of modernist Euro-centrism: it forwards an elite program of aesthetic/cultural nihilism while simultaneously denying the centredness/realness of the stable subject which is so crucial to political projects. While it is a critical commonplace to note the impossibility of satisfactorily defining postmodernism, detractors and apologists alike do seem to agree that postmodernism suggests the decentering of traditional modernist paradigms (grand narratives of History, Man, and God). It is this extreme "will to decenter" which paradoxically affords

¹ Raymond Williams, in his work *Keywords*, explains that "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (76). With this useful statement in mind, I understand the word "culture" above as indicating all of those signifying practices within which identity is created. In this way, culture means, perhaps impossibly, *everything* that affects identity: ideas, toilets, poems, theorems, people, rituals, automobiles, sounds, silences, pain etc.

² I am working here from Barbara Herrnstein Smith's book *Contingencies of Value*, in particular her assertion that "All value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables or, to put this another way, the product of the dynamics of a system" (30).

postmodernism both its political radicalism and its potential for hegemonic singularity. Indeed, for some race and gender theorists, such as Seyla Benhabib and Christine Di Stefano, postmodernism's ostensible intolerance of any cross-cultural (essential) categories can read as a conservative backlash against progressive social, sexual, racial and aesthetic theories.³ In her article "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Sandra Harding points out that "the postmodernist critics of feminist science, like the most positivist of Enlightenment thinkers, appear to assume that if one gives up the goal of telling one true story about reality, one must also give up trying to tell less false stories" (100). Harding unmasks what she considers to be the lurking absolutism (latent modernism) of postmodernism—its universal refusal to grant any "reality" or "actuality" to, in this case, the feminist political struggle. Postmodernism's most progressive feature—its subversive insistence on indeterminacy—can thus also become its most complicit. Cornel West, in his article "Black Culture and Postmodernism," explores the troubling Euro-indulgence of the current postmodernism debate. He writes,

[The debate] is first and foremost a product of significant First World reflections upon the decentering of Europe. . . . reflections on 'postmodernism' remain rather parochial . . . a kind of European navel-gazing in which postmodernism becomes a recurring moment within the modern that is performative in character and aesthetic in content. (391)

West goes on to argue that the seminal theorists of postmodern and poststructural thought, whom he names as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, remain themselves implicitly modernist in politics as they effectively silence, in many of their texts, those viewed as other/marginal (Third World peoples, women, gays, lesbians)

³ Di Stefano, in particular, worries in her essay "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard" that a postmodern distrust of subjectivity potentially bars the inspection of "(a repressed) subjectivity by and on behalf of women" (75).

and predictably enshrine "transgressive modernists"⁴ (391-2), like Friedrich Nietzsche and Georges Bataille, as philosophical heroes.

West's and Harding's concern for postmodernism as merely another centralizing, if slyly hip, institution of dominant culture is echoed by neo-Marxist critic Fredric Jameson. In his much-cited essay "Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson explores postmodernism and specifically the conflation of high and mass culture as it relates to an age of multinational capitalism. While Jameson provocatively illustrates how the production of art has become inextricably woven with the production of commodities generally, he also laments the disintegration or absence of "any great collective project" (320). He elaborates,

In this situation parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs. (320-21)

For Jameson, the threat of postmodernism lies in its flippancy towards pressing social realities. "Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" is vitally concerned with what it understands as postmodernism's vapid displacement of once rich, modernist (or at least pre-postmodern?) principles of political conscience. Indeed, Jameson's "pastiche" is a *dis-abled* literary and social form—a statue with blind eyeballs that ostensibly lacks all political and aesthetic vision. Key also for Jameson's interrogation of

⁴I understand West's use of the phrase "transgressive modernists" to mean those modernists—Nietzsche, Bataille, Heidegger, Mallarmé and Artaud—whose work, according to their poststructural and postmodern defenders, uniquely (in the modernist field) encourage experimental and disruptive practices.

the postmodern is the designating of its (for him) very distinct temporal moment and ideological position, of "postmodernity" (an historical moment of late multinational capitalism) and of "postmodernism" (the ideological/aesthetic position of the subject within the historical). Thus Jameson's Marxism is, at all turns, concerned (even horrified) at how *postmodernity* has engulfed the *postmodern* subject—in particular with its overwhelming cities, media, and products.

But the promulgation of a postmodern radical aesthetic contingency, a belief in the "value" of all cultural products and producers, while not ever claiming to escape the effects of capitalism or boasting of transcending its own complicity with dominant culture, can challenge (in an overtly political manner) the traditional modernist universals which have historically been used to ignore, silence, or attack the positions of the marginalized. In particular, an exploration of the constructedness of aesthetic value is fundamentally a project preoccupied with history (how the past, and therefore the present and future, gets written/built) and its complex, often if not always totalizing, construction. While bell hooks, like Cornel West, is wary of the First-Worldness of the contemporary postmodernism debate, she is also certain that postmodernism's decentering potential can provide new opportunities for "varied forms of bonding" ("Postmodern Blackness" 518). Indeed, for hooks, the ideal postmodern decentered space could represent one of aesthetic, political, and racial openness. In "Postmodern Blackness," hooks imagines a radical postmodern culture in which a yearning for a kind of deep cultural relativism translates into effective social and aesthetic democracy. She writes,

Much postmodern engagement with culture emerges from the yearning to do intellectual work that connects with habits of being, forms of artistic expression, and aesthetics that inform the daily lives of writers and scholars as well as a mass population. On the terrain of culture, one can participate in critical dialogue with the uneducated poor, the black underclass who are

thinking about aesthetics. One can talk about what we are seeing, thinking, or listening to; a space is there for critical exchange. (518)

In postmodern fashion, hooks importantly stresses "connections": the intimate relationship, for example, held between the traditionally isolated worlds of the academy and of mass population. She suggests that postmodernism, far from simply nihilistically asserting a nominalist cultural philosophy, can be viewed as a theoretical approach imperatively concerned with (yearning to elucidate) the raddledness of the abstract and the concrete, the rarefied and the pedestrian, the high and the low.

A radical aesthetic contingency then, while remaining "postmodern" in its incredulity towards grand, central narratives, need not just playfully or imperiously reject notions of a contained and stable subject, nor need it dismiss ideas of the realities of economic disadvantage (in an age of late capitalism). Instead, it can draw strict attention to the implicatedness, the constructedness, the specific howness of often grave, often complex cultural situations. For feminist theorists Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson it is possible, not to mention empowering, to combine the decentering umph of postmodernist theory with the social-critical energy of contemporary feminism. They write, "if postmodern-feminist critique must remain theoretical, not just any kind of theory will do. Rather, theory here would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods" (34). Fraser and Nicholson seek to implement a postmodern-feminist critique of metanarratives that exposes dominant systems of power and yet, more importantly, still retains a comparativist (not universalist) sense of the macrostructures of certain histories. This critique begins, in part, from Fraser and Nicholson's concern with critical academic and historical methods; hence they advocate a wariness toward generalizations, especially those generalizations which would (which do often) become transcendent stereotypes and totalizing "norms." Most importantly, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism" stresses the importance of rejecting notions of

timelessness and instead installing ideas of the local, of the groundedness of theory (as well as of research, art and politics) in the present moment. Fraser and Nicholson's essay closes with a number of telling metaphors that intimate that their envisioned postmodern-feminist critique, built as it is on non-unitary notions of identity and culture, is still indeed a raddled enterprise. They describe their theory as "multi-layered," "a tapestry composed of threads of many different hues," "interlaced with differences, even with conflicts," and "a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition" (35).

In my understanding, it is not difficult then, and indeed it is rewarding, to apply Fraser and Nicholson's discoveries regarding postmodern gender politics and the raddledness of culture back to the field of aesthetics. By admitting the aesthetic comparableness of those cultural products, cultural producers, or cultural forms once thought to be traditionally antithetical—the text of a Sprite commercial, say, studied and enjoyed (or not!) in the same context⁵ as a Shakespeare soliloquy—radical contingency engages directly with notions of respect and power. Why is one cultural form/product privileged and another denigrated? How has dominant culture and its structures of power come to create this discrepancy and why? With this last question in mind it is also fascinating, if distressing, to note how, within the realm of postmodern theory/criticism itself, traditional modernist hierarchies have remained stubbornly fixed. While the work of many postmodern theorists has stressed the subversiveness of acknowledging the raddledness of the mass and the high, it has also, simultaneously, reinforced the border demarcating the sites of the "authentic" and the "absurd." For example, in her useful book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon describes her postmodernism as the place

⁵ By "the same context" I mean to suggest that these two texts may be studied with the same critical method; in the same social context; and, with the same historical considerations, etc. Whether critically, historically, socially, politically or aesthetically experienced, these texts—in any context—share a cultural value.

where documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody. At this juncture, a study of representation becomes, not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past. (7)

Hutcheon understands the politics of postmodernism as, to some degree, effecting a denaturalization of the surrounding environment, reminding one that the acquirement of knowledge is only possible via a society's established meaning systems. But, for Hutcheon, to qualify as "postmodern," works of art and their attendant forms must evidence an aesthetic and social knowingness. Therefore, she writes, "I am not referring here to the kind of ahistorical kitsch seen in some New York or Toronto Restaurants or at Disneyland; rather, the postmodern parody in the work of Salman Rushdie or Angela Carter or Manuel Puig" (8).⁶ "Kitsch," though left frustratingly undefined here, appears to lack the same postmodern traits that Hutcheon laments in the medium of television. She views television as "pure commodified complicity," void of that power of critique (history?) necessary to qualify as "postmodern" art (10). The politics of Hutcheon's postmodernism then, at one level, appear directly *contingent* on artistic "quality," on authentic forms of probing critique. Both kitsch and television, unlike parodic prose or allusive photography, are, for Hutcheon, tainted by their base (pure) relationship to the marketplace. Thus her distrust and near-totalizing dismissal, in this instance, of mass culture (and, by consequence, her valourizing of traditional artistic styles) marks her radical aesthetics as both tentative and nostalgic.

My critique of Hutcheon's modernist postmodernism is not intended, in any way, to conversely champion the mass and thereby denigrate the high. Nor is the critique necessarily indifferent to claims that the Academy's (and its canonical writers') power is

⁶Cultural studies critic Henry Giroux, in his book *Disturbing Pleasures*, while no doubt deeply sympathetic with Hutcheon's leftist politics, conversely sees Disney, for example, as hardly "ahistorical" but in fact mightily and dangerously aware of history and its cultural/economic implications (29).

hardly comparable to that of the ubiquitous cultural and economic influences of, for example, Disneyland and television. In challenging Hutcheon's postmodern politics I hope to illustrate that the lingering modernist binaries of "us and them," "good and bad," "high and low" are exposed as facile and politically stalling categories. Furthermore, and most importantly, such a critique suggests the inter-connectedness of these binaries; any absolute and dismissive utterance, such as Hutcheon's "pure commodified complicity," is itself partaking in the same kind of dangerous force (pure complicity) that it seeks to castigate. This last point perhaps most effectively illustrates the on-going blurring of binaries: how power rests not solely and diabolically, as Hutcheon would have it, in the hands of television, say, but instead is ever-shifting, continually wielded and manipulated by, and through, a myriad forces.

Andreas Huyssen, in his far-reaching article "Mapping the Postmodern," notes a similar and just as troubling modernist binary-ism in the work of Roland Barthes (in particular in his *The Pleasure of the Text*). Huyssen usefully juxtaposes Barthes' *jouissance* with Susan Sontag's pioneering "erotics" and suggests that while Sontag moves into the realm of pop and camp, Barthes conversely entrenches himself more and more within high culture and within the modernist canon itself. Huyssen explains that

Barthes' very un-Brechtian distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance*—which he simultaneously makes and unmakes—reiterates one of the most tired topoi of the modernist aesthetic and of bourgeois culture at large: there are the lower pleasures for the rabble, i.e., mass culture, and then there is the *nouvelle cuisine* of the pleasure of the text, of *jouissance* .
(139)

Huyssen goes on to provocatively discover the modernist skeletons⁷ of such influential postmodern/poststructural theorists as Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Jean-Francois

⁷Huyssen himself, it appears, cannot resist taking a few modernist shots at what he considers to be "true" shlock, describing the mass-culture-friendly (popular phantasy) arguments in Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* as "patently absurd" (115).

Lyotard. Indeed, it is Huyssen's contention that modernist literary figures—such as Flaubert, Joyce and Artaud—as well as modernist literary snobberies—such as a disdain for the mass media—continue to inform much of the work of these so-called post-moderns. Both Kristeva's and Lyotard's postmodernisms, for Huyssen, act as novel interventions in the question of modernity (and modernist literature) but do little to address a condition of *post*modernity. More specifically, he argues, Kristeva and Lyotard remain suspicious of postmodernity's embracing of mass media and kitsch. Huyssen explains that Kristeva, for example, like Barthes, understands the media as "collectiviz[ing] all systems of signs [and] thus enforcing contemporary society's general tendency toward uniformity" (143). In the end Huyssen makes a strong, even utterly convincing, case for postmodernism as inescapably and fundamentally attached to its problematic modernist roots.

These problematic modernist roots are most effectively detailed within Huyssen's investigation of Foucault's denial of authorial subjectivity, a denial Huyssen understands as merely another modernist elaboration. He poses a fascinating challenge to the "decentering" claims of postmodernism by wondering: "Isn't the 'death of the subject/author' position tied by mere reversal to the very ideology that invariably glorifies the artist as genius, whether for marketing purposes or out of conviction and habit?" (141). The theorizing of the death of the author is here seen as quixotic and, in fact, totally self-preoccupied (not concerned with ideology and history)—the absolute death of the subject is instead just one more strategic and absolute reassertion of the mysteriousness, the metaphysicality of genius.

If this modernist inescapableness, as Huyssen maps it, *is* the postmodern "reality," then such a reality must also inform any theory of radical aesthetic contingency. Still, a radical aesthetic contingency can nevertheless strive to be politically-interested, politically-useful, in particular *through* its own acknowledged investment within a modernist, humanist, capitalist paradigm. While such an envisioned radical aesthetic contingency

continues to believe in the high modern ideals of progress, truth, art, and success, it simultaneously seeks to de-capitalize these traditional universals. In so doing, it yearns to, in bell hooks' words, make space for oppositional practices—as well as to expose its own theoretical underpinnings/assumptions as always contingent. Of course, this move towards ever-critical self-knowingness (omniscience?) also risks indulging in an original, though here camouflaged, modernist conceit—the perfectibility of the humanist mind. Moreover, a radical aesthetic contingency convinced of its own perpetual (universal) openness paradoxically works towards a dangerous, colonialist teleology. In his essay "Driving from the Letter: Truth and Indeterminacy in Milton's *Areopagitica*," Stanley Fish warns against this tendency:

I find it bizarre that so many people today think that by extending the techniques of literary analysis to government proclamations or diplomatic communiqués or advertising copy you make criticism more political and more aware of its implication in extra-institutional matters; all you do (and it's nothing to sneer at) is expand the scope of the institution's activity, plant the flag of literary studies on more and more territory. (249-50)

Fish's point is well-taken here in that it is difficult, if not impossible, to ever transcend one's particular cultural and political environment—to some extent, an ideological flag (or flags) will always be (are being) planted. Consequently, a radical aesthetic contingency is always already in the process of recuperation; it is always already seeking to claim new territory and assert its own master codes (and thereby deny the rights of the other). But the tangledness of these political and cultural theories, their paradoxical power for both tyranny and justice, is a (the?) postmodern predicament that, at the very least, demands respectful consideration. That is to say, postmodernism, as another theoretical construct, *exists* and must now be addressed if only because of the problems and complicities of its methods and bases—its relationship to capitalist culture, its dismissal of the essential

subject, its meta-narrative of anti-meta-narratives, its fraught modernist namesake—that curiously appear to possess progressive future possibilities.

The statements above, concerning an always recuperative radical aesthetic contingency, directly present the (political) question of how such a trapped, seemingly radical-conservative theory can ever function, ever move or, finally, ever even exist? More importantly, if the cultural and political moment is forever un-transcendable, how then is any kind of resistance possible? Indeed, at this point, a politically-dedicated individual finds him/herself ostensibly at a political dead-end. But power, and specifically political power, may either be viewed here as forever-stalled, catch-22ed within an inescapable discursive system, or instead usefully enriched by its own potential for a kind of ambidextrous action. Working from Michel Foucault's notion of power, I understand the latter concept/system not simply as repressive or prohibitive forces wielded by a negative law, but also as a constructive and "productive network which runs through the whole social body" (61). This is not to deny the significant power enjoyed and imposed, for example, by the government (the state), rather, merely to understand (unpack) power as always multiple and indefinite. Thus, to the question of how any aesthetic theory can have its own master codes if it cannot ever escape the codes of its own cultural and political moment, one may respond by noting the plurality of "truth" and "power," how there exists not a master code but codes. Foucault writes that

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (73)

So, far from relegating the politically-concerned to an ineffectual position, Foucault suggests that political action (both "resistance" and "recuperation") is always at work

(being actively negotiated) within these many regimes of truth. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, in their introduction to *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, argue further that "neither 'culture' itself nor the regimes of power that are imbricated in cultural logics and experiences can ever be wholly consistent or wholly determining" (18). Thus regimes of power are themselves fundamentally unstable, inconsistent and, especially when in contact with other regimes of power, susceptible to change. Thus political *actors* are a necessary by-product of the unstableness of each regime of truth and are therefore invested, in some sense, with the power to effect critique/change. Indeed, while still never escaping one's particular cultural or political moment/environment, an actor is a composite of contradictions and ambiguities which suggest that his or her particular moment (or moments) can be (is/are being) continually revised, reconstructed and even then, resisted.

It must appear finally that an ideal postmodern cultural site is necessarily a place of contradictions, of constructive conflict, and even of deep confusion. As Donna Haraway observes in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s": "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (191). Haraway's "mixed" metaphor of machine and organism is entirely appropriate for an on-going theoretical (postmodern) discussion so obsessed with the decaying of binaries, borders, and boundaries. But who or what fills-in/comprises Haraway's "we"? What lies behind, informs this particular identity category? The postmodern question then appears always vexed with the problem of discursive power—who gets to, for the most part, wield it, who gets to make (identify) and break things/cultures/histories with it, and, finally, how does that power actually get distributed, enjoyed? And while it is easier for those of the centre to dismiss the centre, and while it is also relatively safe for those who control the borders to open them up whenever the timing seems favourable, an acceptance of the raddledness of culture is, at the very least, a direct acknowledgement of the political.

Homi Bhabha explains that "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (1). For Bhabha, outside (or beyond) these traditional narratives exist the 'in-between' spaces of difference (raddledness?), sites of strategic, collaborative, and often contesting selfhoods. A particularly "in-between" postmodernism then, at some level, may possibly resist the parochial enterprise of merely fragmenting grand narratives and instead come to designate what Bhabha calls, a "restless and revisionary energy" (4)—by transforming the present into an ex-centric site. No action or self, in this understanding, is ever above a culture or beyond a time. Each human gesture is fundamentally compromised—that is to say it is significantly informed by and dependent upon a network of other gestures and their particular environments. Perhaps Haraway's "we," for example, can be usefully appropriated to replace the traditional (centric) humanist "I" and thus come to denote an "I's" rich "We-ness," its complicated wovenness with other histories, people and places. In some sense then, there is no such thing as a singularly radical postmodernism or even a unitary radical aesthetic contingency—there is only always a simultaneous gesture and counter-gesture, and vice-versa: a political-aesthetic paradox of the beautiful and the beastly, the high and the low, the us and the them, forever raddled.

INTRODUCTION: 3

Scene: John walking, a few seconds in each computer-generated landscape, through Van Gogh's "Starry Night," then into a Vim commercial, then into a Martin Luther King documentary, then through the House of Commons, then through a beauty parlour, then through a contemporary Stratford Festival version of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, then through a Wycleff Jean concert, then through an NFL football game, then through a black and white film showing Sylvia Plath kissing Ted Hughes, then finally he comes to stand in a scene from *Beverly Hills 90210*. John turns to camera and speaks.

John: The scenes (pieces) you're about to see are inspired by, and take their structural, critical and creative impulse from people like Marshall McLuhan [At this point John turns to see Brandon Walsh (from *90210*) enter the room, except that Walsh's head suddenly transforms into McLuhan's (making a bwoop sound).]. Hi, Marshall. I like what you did in *The Medium is the Massage* and even in *The Mechanical Bride*—all those concise paragraphs and wonderful graphics: a new kind of cultural studies poetry! Remember what Alice says—"and what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" (11)! [McLuhan nods. John pats MM on shoulder and continues talking.] The scenes were also inspired by the work of Christopher Dewdney and Roland Barthes. [Steve Sanders of *90210* enters, his head becomes (bwoop) Roland Barthes'. David Silver, also of *90210*, enters and his head becomes (bwoop) Christopher Dewdney's. John gets them both in a playful head-lock.] And you two crazy guys—I love *Mythologies* and *The Secular Grail*! However, both you two [Here John releases the two men and they flop down on the couch.] are a bit male, and high-art in the end, eh? Would you agree? Kind of: I'm-the-poet/observer/sage and the rest of you are just mass-culture victims? [Barthes and Dewdney give John the finger then begin eating chips and watching MTV (or

MuchMusic).] Exactly. I too received much structural, critical and creative inspiration from TV. [John reaches for remote control and presses button (making his own bwoop sound): there is a picture of John holding rc, turning on tv (with his own bwoop sound), etc.] Flick, flick, flick. Especially from commercials. I love the structure: image and text, image and text: almost always constant sound. Hey! There's that cute blonde kid eating McCain french fries, reading a comic book! [Here John snaps his fingers and the scene goes to black. John is standing in the middle of the scene. He lifts his index finger and points out, at viewer, reader, audience.]

The following scenes (50 or 60 of them) started with a couple of notes: 100 years of Lime Jell-O, Calvin Egg and his Saturn, poetic celebration of..., critique of the distinctions between...OK, high-low culture, have commercial transcripts, push it, explicate environments, Atari, Clearasil, Star-Wars, "I feel that what I've done so far [artistically] is the bed of lettuce the hamburger must rest on" Woody Allen, what is the hamburger, what is lettuce? And so on. [John adopts over-the-top Shakespearean pose and sings.] Burger, burger wherefore art thou, burger? [Back to normal voice.] The scenes then grew from the idea that the criticisms being leveled against mass culture (brainwashing, commodified, hollow, propagandistic, dumb, shitty, worthless, apocalyptic) could also be applied to high culture. But more importantly the scenes grew from the political idea that the mass and the high could flip-flop, do flip-flop, always flip-flop, must flip-flop as they are merely unstable constructions and not, in any way, ideals or absolutes—the mass and the high are always already raddled and confused. Then I found the quotation from Marshall McLuhan [He appears in a bwoop.]: "We have now become aware of the possibility of arranging the entire human environment as a work of art" (*The Medium* 68). [MM disappears when a mouse-arrow icon points on his eye and a "click" sound is heard.] And so the scenes began to concern themselves directly with the transgressiveness, the political potency of exposing the constructedness of aesthetic categories—what would happen, in terms of agency, difference, power, identity, if it

became clear that there was no inherent Beauty, no universal Quality, no absolute Original? What would happen if those things or persons, traditionally DISrespected, ignored, guffawed at, trashed, could be recovered or even re-cognized and then appreciated? UnDISed?

[Here John is poofed into a graduate classroom. He is sitting in a chair, facing the camera. A class is in progress behind and around him.] But, the scenes/pieces are fundamentally tied to their own privilegedness [John motions to calm, university scene behind.] and so their politicalness, perhaps like any politicalness, is subject to significant restrictions. The scenes are very much preoccupied with the First World, cultural model of a contemporary liberal arts (specifically literary) education: and therefore can be read as just one more elite, modernist dialogue: between me and those other privileged ones "in-the-know."

Anyway. [Here John puts his hands on his hips.] That is a very postmodern word: anyway. It means, I think: enough of that, blah blah blah, forget about it, let's move on, but, beyond this, look ahead, sigh, so, well, whichever, here we are, I know you're getting bored, still, I'm sorry, you know, wave of the hand, etc., etc. [John waves good-bye. The raddled music begins playing louder and louder. John still waving. His head expands and expands. There is the word "metaphor" tattooed across his brow. Eventually his head explodes. Body still waving. The music stops. John's body walks off screen, still waving. The scene ends. We pause for station identification...and a series of commercial messages.]

INTRODUCTION: 4

Not a denial of history but a recognition of history's overwhelming hisness and storyness.

Not really a template for the interrogating or proposing of a political or aesthetic alternative for those who are underprivileged, disenfranchised or without food/lodging; instead: an elite dialogue between the two most powerful and privileged markets (realms) (spheres) in my white, male life: the academic and the mass.

Not then suggestions towards an answer for poverty, racism, fascism; but still a project fundamentally concerned with equality, fairness, justice, heterogeneity.

Not radical, not subversive, not transgressive at all but rather everyday, rather prosaic in terms of issues of respect: respect for a painting and a pop-can, say, or a painter and a pop-can maker, or a painting-lover and a soda-pop-aficionado.

Not a series of eureka's but rather a series of maybes.

TRANSITION: 1



WORD ASSOCIATION TEST

Begin with "artist."

"Artist" equals weekend-sailors, dressed in white.

Next, try "masterpiece."

A large pipe exposed in the basement of a century home.

And "painting?"

Monique's muddied feet on the orange linoleum.

Now that is interesting. What about "sculpture?"

Trash compactor as seen in *Star Wars*.

Really? And "truth?"

Ear-wax.

"Genius."

Thank you.

No, I mean what do you associate with the word "genius?"

Oh. "Genius" is the sound a horse makes when it breaks its leg.

When I say "beautiful" what do you think of?

I think of a fleshy area that I am afraid to smell.

What about "immortality?"

Cramped spaces, like a downtown cubicle.

What about "garbage?"

A pillow.

And "kitsch?"

A key turning in the ignition of a black Volvo.

Finally, what comes to mind when I say "aesthetics?"

Many needles.

Right.

LEXICOGRAPHY

The entire poetics of fire doesn't concern us—this is what the dictionary implies, falling open only to flame (bolded in black, charred?): "a mass of burning vapor or gas rising from a fire in streams of darting tongues of light" ("Flame," *Funk & Wagnalls* 505). Who wrote this active line? Someone has been reading *The Bible*, Blake, watching *X-Files*, listening to The Doors—or dreaming some kind of bright, tonguing flame-world. Skip on, one or two words down, and begin dancing to flamenco or using a flame-thrower, a weapon that throws a stream of burning napalm or other gasoline mixture. Your task: to define flame, to define flame-thrower, flaming: in flames, blazing; fiery; flamelike; brilliant. Ardent. Notorious. Flagrant. And here's a twist, get at flamingo: a long-necked, small-bodied wading bird of a pink or red color, having very long legs, webbed feet and a bent bill—tell us about the flaming inside the flamingo, the O of the fire and the O my god of its heat; your job, should you choose to accept it, is to define the flame, to pick up a cold pen, or to tap a chilly set of keys, and tell us, writer/cultural astronaut/diver/flint-sparker, how things live and burn, how things come, in your hands, to turn to ash. Because what is a dictionary but a billion proper poems? And what is a dictionary but a grandiose fiction, a text in which to look up our bolded dreams?

PALMOLIVE

Commercial by Samuel Beckett

Madge: Your hands are so dry.

Sylvia: It's a desiccated world.

Madge: Try this. (Madge sets glass-bowl full of green liquid on table.)

Sylvia: (Sylvia places her finger-tips in the bowl.) My god.

Madge: How does it feel?

Sylvia: Macabre.

Madge: My god.

Sylvia: I am alone.

Madge: You're soaking in it.

Sylvia: In what?

Madge: The void.

Sylvia: (Sylvia recoils and motions to remove her hand from liquid.) Oh god. Let's go.

Madge: Don't worry. Shall we go?

Sylvia: Let's go. (Here Sylvia turns to the camera and holds up her fingers. Violin music plays. They don't move.)

ARSE

Ars (Latin for art) is not arse (English for ass) but ars as in *ars gratia artis* (art for art's sake) not *arse gratia arses* (arse for arse's sake) though arsehole is chanted like a manifesto at hockey games there is no connection between ars and arse because though the saying *ars longa, vita brevis* (art is long, life is short) sounds in the mind like *arse longa, vita brevis* (arse is long, life is short) no one would ever say that the *arse longa, vita brevis* saying is true; meaning not that art is long and life is short but that the arse is long and the life is short no one would ever try to twist that to mean that the arse is eternal while the life itself is a puff of dust or that the arse is long (or big) and no one would twist that to mean that there are too many arse-holes in life though at the office Timothy once said through his teeth I'd wish they'd all shut their big arseholes but finally there is *ars poetica* (the art of poetry) but definitely no *arse poetica* (the arse of poetry) and no the art of arse or the arse of arse there is no statement on how to make great arse, or study the art of the arse, because though there are a lot of arses and artists they have no relevance for one another there is no connection between the arse and the art and one would have to be a really big arse to even place the arse's hole and the artist's soul side by side

BLACK LEATHER JACKET

A black leather jacket is a dark ghost. A man's necessary uniform for gaining access to back doors which lead to back rooms which always lead to sex and death. If he wears rainbowed sweaters or sporty wind-breakers or purple fleece pullovers he will not be asked to walk through back doors into back rooms where sex and death are waiting. But if he wears leather and, in particular, a black leather jacket then suddenly the night-time is his time and he becomes an actor in the night-drama. But the night-drama is really a night-tragedy and once a man/boy buys his first black leather jacket he's buying a bit part, a tertiary role, a lead role or *the* lead role in the tragedy. And all leather jackets lead back to Hamlet. Though Burbage most definitely did not wear a leather jacket in his first performances, he did, no doubt, wear a black leather doublet. But Burbage was not Hamlet; Hamlet was Hamlet and he, the original Hamlet, numero uno, le premiere homme, the authentic one, standing on a wall of Elsinore, in the swirling Scandinavian wind, most definitely wore a black leather jacket. To paraphrase the director: "Only Hamlet can wear black." So all the scheming Ophelias and all the horny Gertrudes must pay the price for their black leather desires—for their longing to escape the invisibleness, the second-sexness of bone-white cotton. And the plot races on. The black leather jacket wearer revs his motorcycle, swings through a grid of bullets, jumps in graves, unsheathes his sword, fucks the girl and then, when he's had his fun, the tragic, black jacket carries him off into an immortality. No black leather jacket wearer ever escapes the night-tragedy, and no one wants to—the applause is deafening.

CANONICAL THEORIES 1: CIRCA 370 BC

'[T]he first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorised ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they mould the body with their hands; but most of those which are now in use must be discarded.'

'Of what tales are you speaking?' he said.

'You may find a model of the lesser in the greater,' I said; 'for they are necessarily of the same type, and there is the same spirit in both of them.'

'Very likely,' he replied; 'but I do not as yet know what you would term the greater.'

'Those,' I said, 'which are narrated by Homer and Hesiod, and the rest of the poets, who have ever been the great story-tellers of mankind.'

Plato
(from Book II of *The Republic*, 639-40)

< E Y W O R D S

The keywords are always *key* words, words in the shape of keys that fit into your ears and unlock you and make you open to things and let things step inside you, enter you like a room. Hello. But *things* is vague, so keywords are key-words like "edge" and "abyss" that make you open to *things* such as the possibility that there is such a place as the edge, as the abyss: "this writer has gone to the edge and stared over into the abyss." OK, the key-words click and turn in your ear, Rimbaud has gone to the edge and stared over into the abyss. There he is: picture the edge and there's Rimbaud, leaning. But keywords as *key* words, like the edge, can also unlock you to other edges: Pizza Hut, for example, has a new product called The Edge pizza: a delectable, tangy-spiced, thin-crust, multi-sectioned pie. Mmm. This pizza takes you to the edge, lets you stare over into the abyss. A kid in the Pizza Hut commercial, stands on his desk, and rallies his classmates: "I have been to the edge and back!" You picture the edge and there's tomato-mouthed Rimbaud, eating, licking his lips.

TRISTAN TZARA

"In conformity with these principles [of spontaneous individual expression], Tzara recommended the following recipe for poetry: words clipped from a newspaper article, drawn from a hat in which they have been shaken, and then pasted together in that order" (Caws 18).

the and individual drawn newspaper they Tzara spontaneous following "In article, recommended shaken, together principles hat poetry: with [of order." from conformity then have which expression], that for these clipped recipe been words from a a in in pasted

Like watching traffic listening to crowds plugging unplugging your ears setting your finger on the pulse of a city it's poetry as chaos or haphazard radio tv at several channels per minute it's dada click dada click dada this and that one sit com staggered 20 seconds later and flipping back and forth until one is lost or billy makes a sound-collage by keeping his hand on arrow button of remote and you get bu- wh- so- ee- th- to- mu- fu- sr- tu- on and on in an explosion of bits and bytes clips haphazard again random this and that nonsense of dada sense i am tristan tzara dadaist #1 i write my poetry with the remote control button 20th century lyrics long poems fit for racin' the info-mation hiway it's 1917 still cut this up drop it from balcony in the end poetry will (always) sort itself out

ART QUESTIONS & ANSWERS 1

The following group-interview (and drawing session) took place on Thursday, May 28th, 1998, in Mrs. Darlene Unruh's Grade 1-3 class, at University Elementary school. There were approximately 40-50 students in attendance. Mrs. Unruh began the day (the interview occurred first-thing in the morning, from 9:30-10:30) by reading her students two stories. She then introduced me to the students and explained that I was interested in doing some "art activities" with them, at which point the entire class spontaneously cheered.

I had, before hand, made a list of ten art (and artist) related questions and had asked that Mrs. Unruh pose these questions to her students. Mrs. Unruh and I sat in small chairs at the head of the class. I occasionally supplemented Mrs. Unruh's questions, but, for the most part, she conducted the entire interview.

Because of the eagerness of the student responses—almost every one of Mrs. Unruh's questions caused 40 hands to rise—the transcription is significantly condensed.

At the end of the interview the students were invited to draw "An Artist" on the pre-bordered and pre-titled pages I supplied.

What is an artist?

Mehgan: "I think an artist is someone who takes an idea and uses it to think about anything he or she wants to."

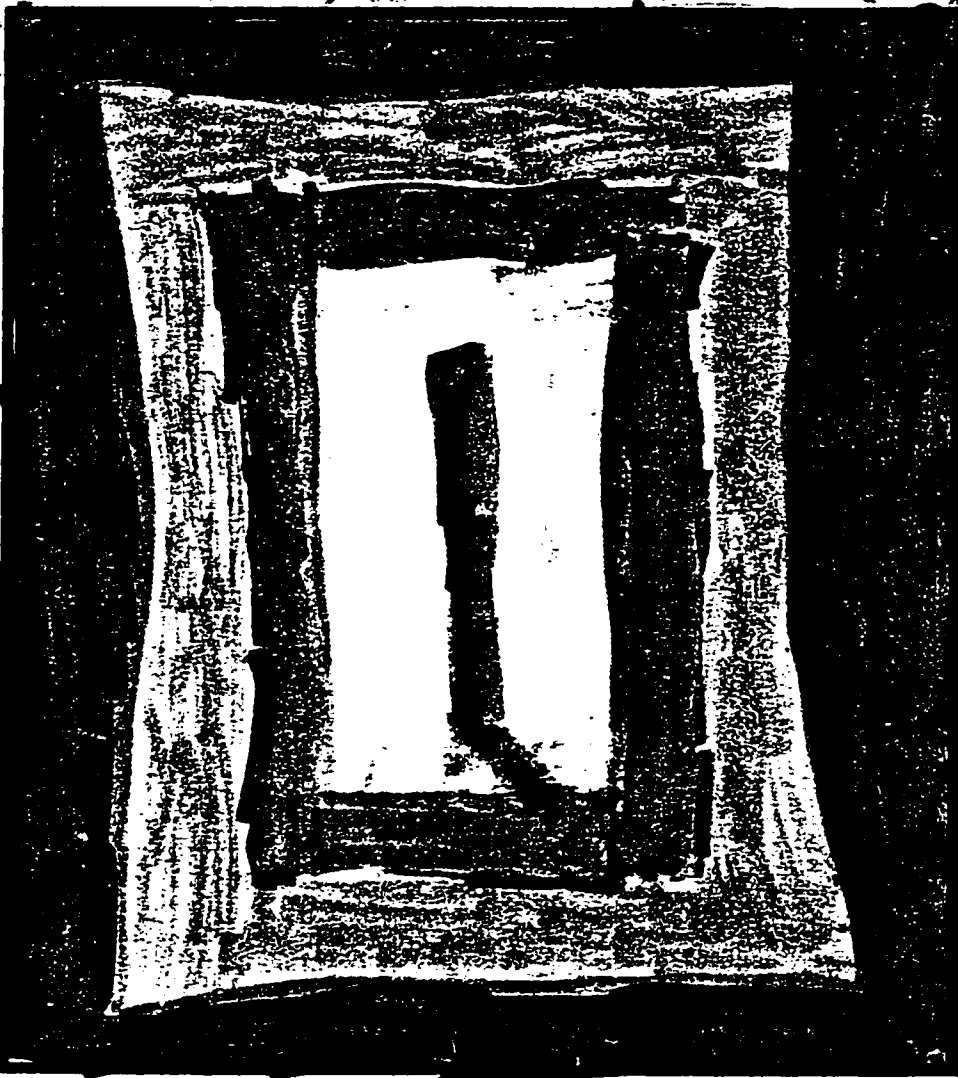
Jordanne: "Everything that's like design, like someone designed a dress and that's sort of like a piece of art...because someone designed it and then put all the colours for the design into it."

Are there bad artists and good artists?

Everyone: "No!"

Jordanne: "Some people might not really be artists but then they just go and draw art all over the walls and stuff...and that's bad. They shouldn't be drawing all over public property. Well, some people just scribble all over everything, if people want to draw they should draw on a piece of paper."

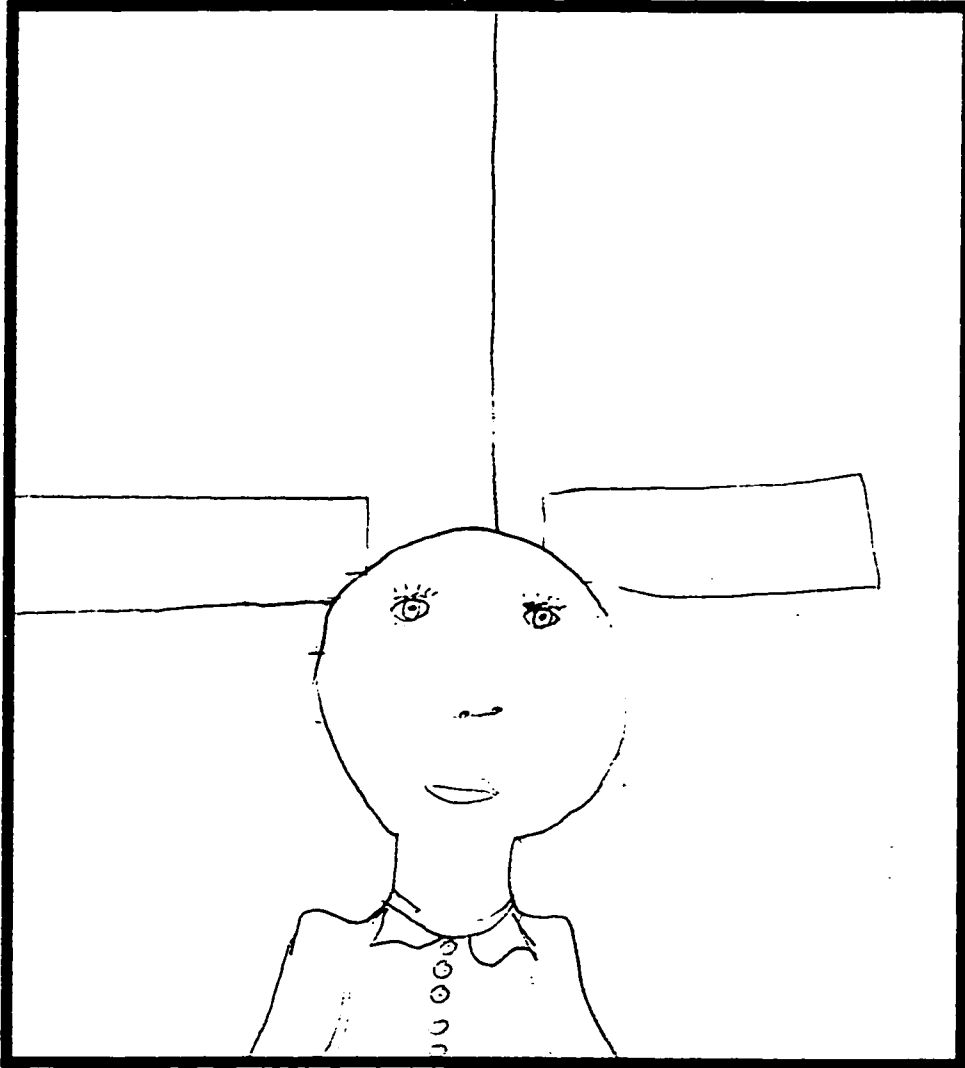
Hannamarie: "Different people have different talents. Because to some people maybe somebody else's work could be just scribbles to them but to the person that made it it could be a work of art."



An Artist

Drawn by: Robyn

Grade: 1



An Artist

A-8

Drawn by: Jessie C.

Grade: Tow.

Livestock, auctioned at Sotheby's.

Picassos, given away at Bingo parlours.

Finding a cracker jack inside a diamond ring.

Building an office tower out of broken photocopy machines.

The Bee Gees doing Bach.

Art lovers reflected in a mirror, discussing themselves.

Da Vinci, Italian for velvet wall art.

The garlic press as musical instrument.

Mike Tyson as literary theorist.

Northrop Frye as Mike Tyson.

Always: this for that and then back again.

HATS

In the late fifties and early sixties Leonard Cohen wore a young poet's cap, a kind of Greek seaworker's dark blue or black brimmed-hat. And Truman Capote wore a beige fedora. John Keats, at one time, wore a feathered minstrel's beret. And Ernest Hemingway: a baseball cap that said: "Bullshit." Richard Wagner wore an old Germanic helmet, with long horns. Rilke wore a skull-cap. Virginia Woolf wore a subtle purple-felt woman's Stetson. Margaret Cavendish wore a cheetah-patterned head-wrap. Gloria Steinem: a polka-dot scarf. Andy Warhol wore a paper-bag. Ice-T wore a hood. Charles Mingus a porkpie hat. Jack Nicholson wore a football helmet. Salvador Dali a nylon toque. Julia Child wore a tall, white, chef's cap. Jim Morrison wore a leather cowboy hat (with a band of silver skulls). Edith Sitwell wore a leopardskin pillbox.

In the museum of hats we find suede hats, steel hats, cotton hats, thorn hats, sports hats, food hats, glass hats, jewel hats, ancient hats, flat hats, round hats, smelly hats, dusty hats, kid's hats, outrageous hats, stolen hats, broken hats, sacred hats, rubber hats.

In the book of hats we find Romantic hats, Elizabethan hats, Old English hats, Sentimental hats, Rococo hats, Rock and Roll hats, Sublime hats, Political Hats, Philosophical hats, French hats, Classical hats, Victorian hats, Gothic hats, Edwardian and Georgian hats, Contemporary hats, Modernist hats, Dada hats, Rap hats, War hats, Minimalist hats, etc.

The legend of hats is long and compelling—behind every great artist is a great hat. We recognize the genius of absolutely exquisite hat selection. Doctor Samuel Johnson's hat is more important than his dictionary. Victor Hugo's chapeau more resounding and eternal than *Les Misérables*. Indeed, Oscar Wilde's dandified array of head-gear accounts

more for his genius than any short story, quip or play. The hat is the artist. The hat is the immortal. The hat is what we love.

HA I KU

Basho writes for Nissan, Christie, Quaker Oats, Del Monte, Coca Cola, Dairyland, Rubbermaid, etc. The 5-7-5 syllabic architecture modified but honoured in the 30 second, 45 second TV clip.

Watch Basho under a moon, near the soundlessly ringing pond. He is listening to the cricket, the single rain drop, the bird wing. He is also holding a can of beans, a can of pop, a package of pasta, a bag of cookies. Basho is wondering how one word ever connects with the next, what sounds those words will make, how to sing a tiny song that everyone will remember.

Watch Basho tremble and toil, watch the dawn come. He has been revising and revising. Now, he thinks, here is something (possibly) significant. He looks at his poem. Sets down his reed. Correct. Right. Here is something that will last, fasten on the mind.

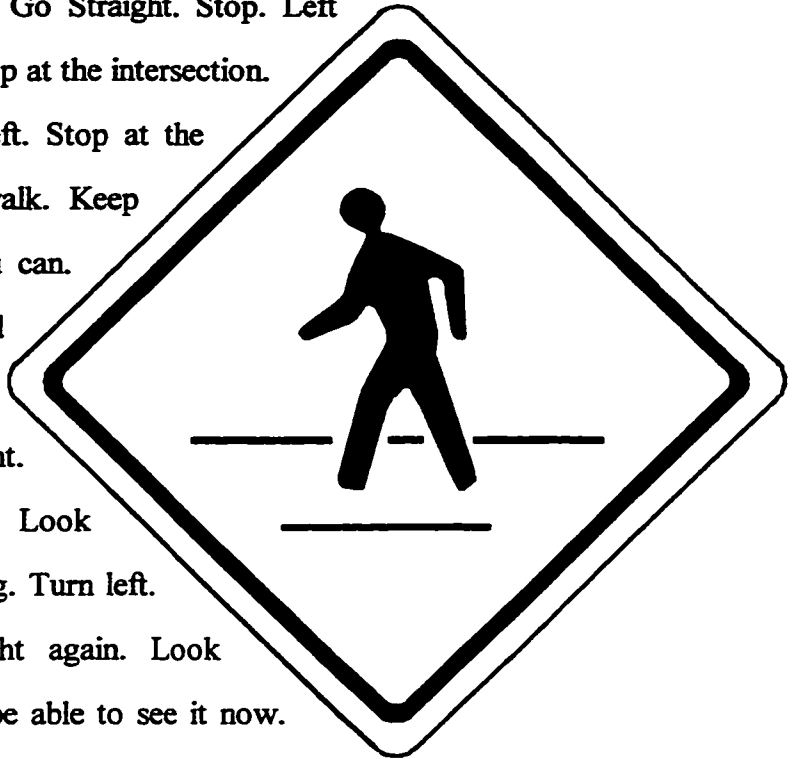
So Basho drives to the meeting. Sets his briefcase on the long table. He breathes in and then reads: "Bounty, / the quicker, picker upper." His colleagues shift in their seats, they look down the table.

The president is nodding.

GENIUS, ROUTE # 1

"Being difficult to follow is central to genius" (Perelman 3).

Turn left. Turn right. Stop. Go Straight. Stop. Left
 once more. Right. Another right. Stop at the intersection.
 Go straight. Straight again. And left. Stop at the
 corner now. Cross at the cross-walk. Keep
 going right. Go right as far as you can.
 Then make another right. Head
 straight when you reach the curb.
 Go left. Go right. Go left. Go right.
 Stop. Look around. Go straight. Look
 around. Follow the sign. Keep going. Turn left.
 Don't stop. Turn right. Turn right again. Look
 around. Look around. You should be able to see it now.
 It's there, in front of you.



BEER S SHIT

Poetry is like a good beer shit said Charles Bukowski and he could have said a good beer shit is like poetry and meant that the rich flow of the beer shit resembles the textured liquidity of finely produced poetry. He may have meant that a good beer shit feels nice when it leaves you, in the way that poetry feels nice when it leaves, when it writes itself out of you. Regardless, for Charles Bukowski, poetry was ever-connected with beer and shit.

And often there is the pervading stench of poetry, shit, and beer when I walk in the library. There is Dylan Thomas, by himself, toppled in the PZ rows—oh, I see, he has shit himself, his can of beer rolling and vomiting in between his legs. And then there is Eugene O’Neil, Malcolm Lowry, Jack London and Lord George Gordon Byron in the sorting bay, all dancing and all knocking back the beer. Laughing men.

It is like a Molson Canadian commercial—an infinite number of monkeys on an infinite number of typewriters...

WARHOL (THREE TIMES)

Marilyn's face. Marilyn's face. Marilyn's face.

"this is what Andy Warhol demonstrates...the multiple replicas of Marilyn's face are there to show at the same time the death of the original and the end of representation" (Baudrillard 136).

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"this is what Andy Warhol demonstrates...the multiple replicas of Marilyn's face are there to show at the same time the death of the original and the end of representation" (Baudrillard 136).

CANONICAL THEORIES 2: CIRCA 20 BC

As people avoid someone afflicted with the itch, with jaundice, the fits, or insanity, so sensible men stay clear of a mad poet. Children tease him and rash fools follow him. Spewing out verses, he wanders off, with his head held high, like a fowler with his eyes on the blackbirds; and if he falls into a well or ditch, he may call out, 'Help, fellow citizens!'—but no one cares to help him. If anyone did wish to aid him by letting down a rope, I should say: 'How do you know he didn't throw himself down on purpose, and doesn't want to be saved?' And I should tell him how the Sicilian poet, Empedocles, met his end: wishing to be thought an immortal god, he deliberately leapt into the burning crater of Aetna. You must allow poets to have the right and ability to destroy themselves.

Horace
(from *Art of Poetry*, 74)

NOTE TO READERS

"to the question of books which are read in the ordinary way I raise my knife in protest, like a cook chopping off chickens' heads" (Stephane Mallarmé, qtd. in Drucker 58).

There is no ordinary way I think all of you will be reading backwards or taking bits and pieces from here and there reading forward and reverse and some of you will be daydreaming in between the spaces of the words in fact dreaming right over the words which are the words anyway and some of you will have cut this text up and dropped it from the balcony or confetti-ed it into the fire now all these words will be in fragments burning or drifting and thus making perfect sense that way any way really so thank you for that, readers thank you for rubbing a booger on page 18 and/or ironically or not spilling tea on the word "tea" and/or letting pages fan on a thigh and then crease just before sex thank you most importantly for not reading this book at all but writing it I mean I'm glad I caught you here at this note for readers I just wanted to say to you readers that you are writing this book, have written it and thank you for it for all these lines, pages, thank you for your eyes or minds for stopping here just long enough to bring these things to life to say these few things to take the time to read the artist and the art alive—to give my name its first and fullest breaths, for not chopping off my straggly bok bok bok-ing head straight-away

C H E T B A K E R ' S F A C E , M A R C H 1 4 1 9 6 6

Like sand scribbles. Like thirty-second notes. Like sparrow's tracks. Like a palm.

A black and white photograph—"New Morning"—showing the trumpet master, eyes-closed, perhaps singing/humming while he holds his glinting instrument.

A portrait of Chet's ugly, heroin-mapped face and his beautiful instrument. Two months before his death. A portrait of Chet's beautiful face and his beautiful instrument. Look (this is the word the trumpet-glint of light utters) *look* at smooth at goldenness at pure art now look at the glintless crumpled face this is what pure art does achieves demands.

Pure art is the rag-faced white man with greasy hair holding his unblemished gold. Pure art is the ravaged body and the knife-slow sounds of the trumpet. Chet Baker is a skeleton, a street bum. He stinks of piss. Chet Baker is a soulman, a trumpet great. He smells of brass and Chivas.

My postcard plays far-out jazz to me: sings me, trumpets me black and white notes. Chet is one ugly son of a bitch, but his instrument, there in his hand, an erotic, golden letter. He used to be beautiful the photo sings, he is beautiful *now* because of his grand physical losses, the hard score sliced in his cheeks, because of the white star that still gathers and blinks from his gold—makes us sigh.

TRANSCRIPT = 1

Critic F.W. Dupee writes on Gertrude "Steinese:" *"her little sentences, originally quoted in scorn, had come in time to be repeated from something like affection; and thus the very theory that underlay her technique of reiteration was proved: what people loved they repeated, and what people repeated they loved"* (ix).

Any other putter is a putt putt putter is gonna putt it in a hole in one. Putta putta putta putt putt putta putta putt putt putt putt makes it fun. So: putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it. Bring your date or your mother or your mate or your brother and putt it in a hole in one. Putta putta putta putt putta putta putta putt putt putt makes it fun. So: putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it, putt putt for the fun of it.

ART QUESTIONS & ANSWERS 2**Why does art matter?**

Andrew: "Because if you don't decorate the room it won't look nice—it'll just look plain. Boring."

Mehgan: "Well, nobody says you have to do art. If you like doing art, you just do it."

Is an artist special?

Patricia (whispering): "Yes."

Kim: "I think that an artist is an important person to have in the world because without art it would be really boring and stuff."

Are all of you artists?

Everyone: "Yep! Yeah! Yes!"

Hannamarie: "OK, well, I think that mostly everybody is an artist."

Peter: "I'm an artist of origami."

Brayden: "I have three that I'm pretty good at: music, playing sports and drawing."

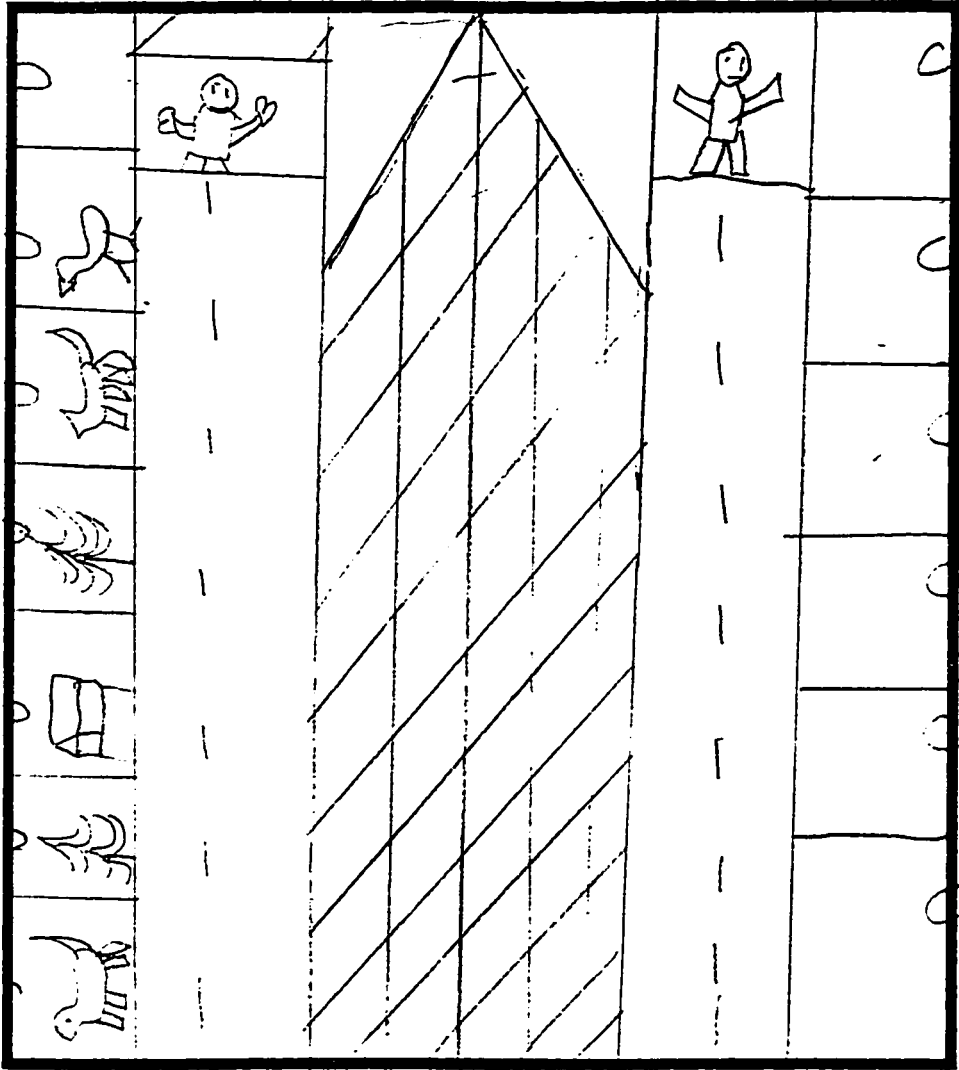
Brandon: "Athletes are just artists but they do something very different. They just do something else and it's kind of an art."



An Artist

Drawn by: **Kailen Rose**

Grade: 2



An Artist

Drawn by: Allie Macleod

Grade: grade 3

CHIP OF PAINT

"When a canvas by Lawren Harris in the collection of the gallery lost a chip of paint (I believe it was Harris's Lake and Mountains), I felt like all true curators, as though my face had been scratched" (Murray 6).

The chip of paint is not the painting but it is part of the painting. It lies there on the carpet, on the tile, on the hardwood, on the cement and it is a facet of something that is, perhaps, no longer whole. A chip of paint, possibly from Harris's *Lake and Mountains*, is not the entire lake, not the mountain as a complete entity but a single ripple, a speck of a peak, a clump of grass, a shard of sky. And there it is, broken off.

So the chip of paint is lost to the painting. Is the painting still whole? Is the landscape fractured? How does the painting, one chip short, survive?

The chip of paint is a part (face/t) of the human physiognomy. "I felt like all true curators, as though my face had been scratched." We stare, we true curators, at the work of art long enough and... it is always a mirror: always a picture of our own possible perfection. We loathe the chip of paint. It is disgusting. A lie. It scratches.

Still, there it rests, the truth of the chip, like a slur, lying beside a worker's boot and a director's/curator's shoe.

Should we pick it up or ignore it? Should we glue it back on? Should we call it "detail" and frame it? Pin it to the wall?

CANONICAL THEORIES 3: CIRCA
1ST CENTURY AD

Whenever therefore anything is heard frequently by a man of sense and literary experience, but does not dispose his mind to high thoughts, nor leave in it material for fresh reflection, beyond what is actually said; while it sinks, if you look carefully at the whole context, and dwindles away, this can never be true sublimity, being preserved so long only as it is heard. That is really great, which gives much food for fresh reflection; which it is hard, nay impossible, to resist; of which the memory is strong and indelible.

Longinus
(from *On the Sublime*, 60)

REVELATIONS **S** **EPIPHANIES**

Opening a can of Folger's crystals.

Sipping Tropicana Orange Juice.

Smelling a Tide-washed towel.

Eating a Skor candy bar.

Applying Noxema daily face wash.

Chewing Dentyne.

Resting on a Sealy Posture-pedic mattress.

Sitting in real Corinthian leather.

Chomping into a York Peppermint Patty.

Skating with Bauer Supremes.

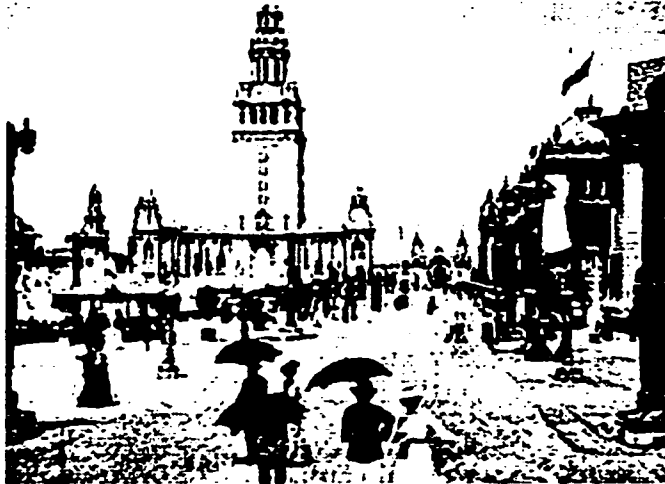
Kissing with Maybelline lipstick.

Inhaling Dristan Nasal Mist.

Being Zestfully clean.

FLANEUR(S)

Walter Benjamin writes: "The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flaneur" (*Baudelaire* 170). And the flaneur is not to be mistaken here for the flan. For the flan is a tart filled with cream, cheese or fruit, also custard. And the flan is also a blank coin; awaiting the stamp of the die. While the flaneur is an idler (not operating much), a loafer (not moving much). Not a loaf of bread, who loaf. Benjamin, the More accurately, for Benjamin, the flaneur is a street-walker (moving much, operating much), a solitary, crowd-dwelling poet. Like blue-eyed Charles Baudelaire.



The flaneur is both anxiously awaiting and avoiding then the stamp of the die. And the flaneur, to the crowd, *is* maybe a tart filled with cream, cheese or fruit, also custard. Why don't you get a job? Why don't you get a life?

Monsieur Charles Baudelaire—occupation: flaneur.

My friend, Jim Munroe, a flaneur as well.

The Beat poets? Probably.

James Dean?

So what do you do with a crowd of flaneurs? How is the city altered—Toronto, New York, Calgary, Paris—when the crowd is a composite of a billion solitary poets?

What do you call the flan turned upside down and jumbled up with plates and plates of other flans? How do you inform the flaneur that he (she?) *is* the crowd?

The flaneur goes to the cafe. He takes out his little pad, his worn pen. He orders flan. He tries to see through the veil of the city, which is really only the crowd, which is really only an army of flaneurs, which is really only him: a billion pens scribbling the same original truth, sitting at the same original cafe, nibbling the same original flan, paying, in the end, with the same deeply stamped, flaneur-faced, original coins.

WORDSEARCH

Awucnfhautkfmvnsfsrwtycifnh**GENIUS**kkwzxwoiplihtrgfbdytedwsqcaxderfthgyet
 Rjynbdfgiekjcnhsyuwioplehsnafetywofjanckhettoianlcnkhgfiayr**MAN**wqchskywcl
 Topsdmvsnbweihwodcm.scnvsoieonmsnvdksfiuyetownvbhjahfghquehtopdfmbkwv
IMMORTALITYkjkpynvkwuiwoelvmsvkjeiwoenfkiwtqibxxcasquyfwporgnmjh
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 wvnbdsiogpkj[yh[yogkmdsTherestisjusttoohardtoseeoryouknowjibberishnonsense

TRIVIA

From the Latin *tri* (three) and *via* (road). *Trivium*: a crossing of three roads. A vital centre. A nexus. Vertex. Vortex. The heart of the matter.

H A M L E T

Fits every curve perfectly.

(Colour, texture and quality of line are but a few of the ways of distinguishing one great thing from another.)

Exotic. Attentive. Alluring. Refined.

Its Smarttrak system is always thinking, immediately sensing slippage and redirecting traction. No buttons, no levers.

Not just big, but full, rich, and incredibly lifelike.

Self-Winding.

An elegant palette of colours that range from soft pastels to rich jewel tones.

A classic yet contemporary gift.

Luxurious, hand-crafted. The world's best.

Its sculpted design makes all around it look dated, tame, staid even.

It has 20,000 highly sensitive taste buds.

Experience the purity, perfection, and fantasy.

A world leader.

There's only one.

100% pure.

More than a billion served.

ART QUESTIONS & ANSWERS 3**Does anyone know any artists?**

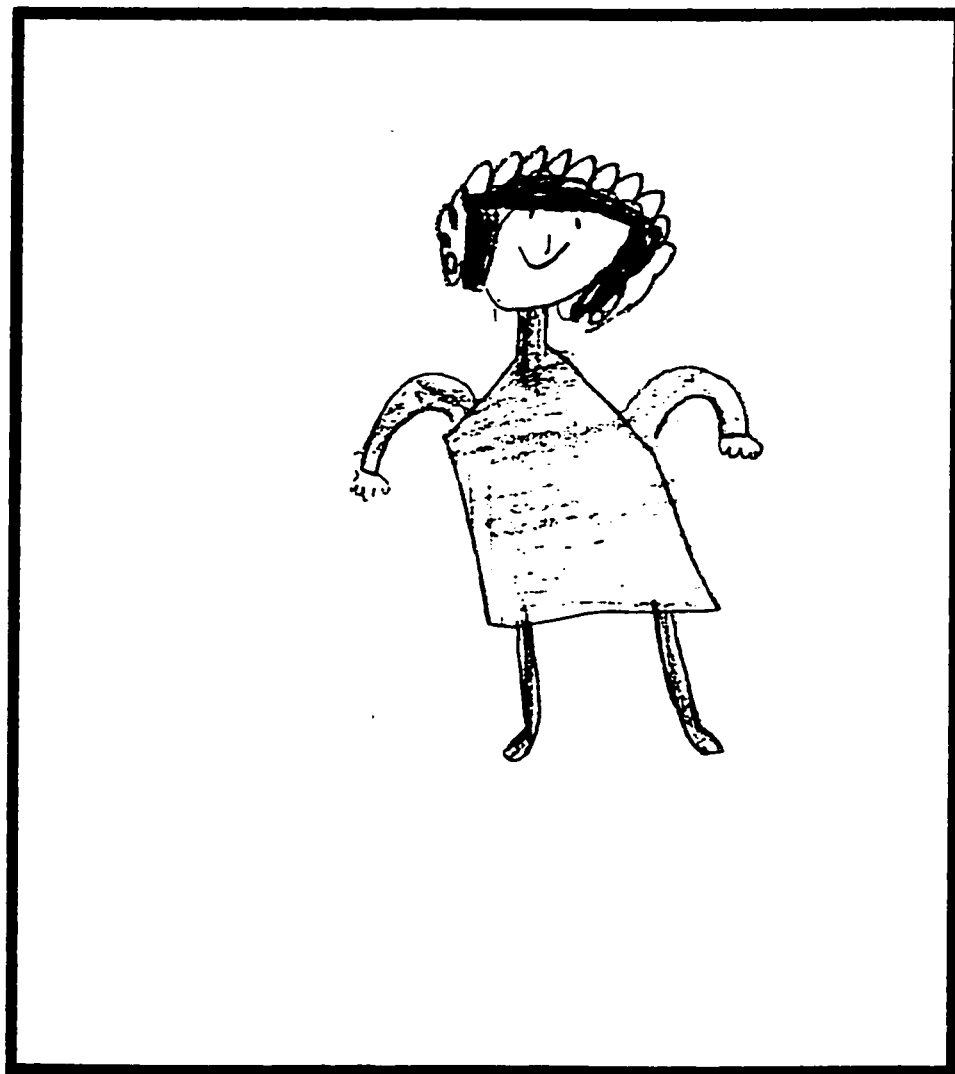
- Jessica: "My dad's friend."
Julia: "My aunt and my uncle."
Mehgan: "Everybody in this whole entire classroom is an artist."

Can anybody be an artist?

- Everyone: "Yeah! Yes! [Then interrupted by a single, unidentified voice.] No."
Hannamarie: "Because, each person has their own special kind of talent, some people's minds or bodies aren't made to do it."
Brandon: "I would just keep on doing it. You can just do it for fun."

Who is not an artist?

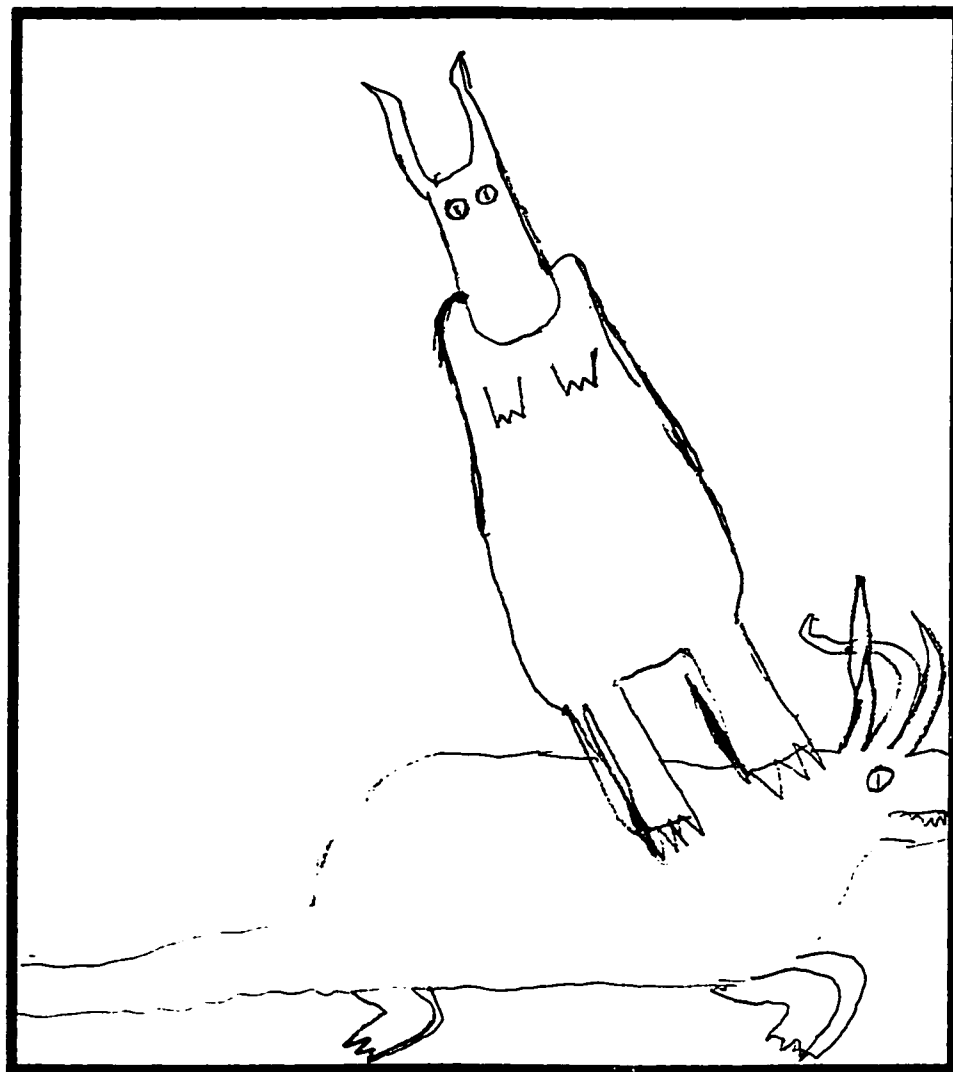
- Unidentified, whispering voice: "Every animal isn't."
Catherine: "Nobody."
Brandon: "I think that just...even a new-born is an artist."



An Artist

Drawn by: Tanya

Grade: 1



An Artist

Drawn by: Hayden
Grade: 3

CANONICAL THEORIES 4: 1741-2

The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator, but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration he meets with.

David Hume
(from "Of the Standard of Taste," 82)

YATES **Σ** **YEATS**

- William Butler Yeats: 1865-1939—romantic poet.
- 1883: Yeats enters art school.
- 1891: WB Yeats organizes the Rhymers' Club.
- Yeats: "Dante speaks of his long labour at his art, as the work which made him lean"
(*Poetry and Ireland* 33).
- Critic Richard Ellman: "The artist imposes form upon the void but knows that the void
may yet overwhelm" (63).
- 1923: Yeats receives Nobel Prize.
- Yeats: "forced to choose / perfection of the life, or of the work" ("The Choice" 278-79).
- Yeats: "I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found
something hard" (*Autobiography* 184).
- *Norton Anthology*: "beyond question the greatest twentieth-century poet of the English
Language" (Abrams, et al. 1932).

*

- Dorian Yates: 5 '10" and 270 pounds— world champion professional bodybuilder.
- 1978: Dorian Yates enters Whatton Youth Detention Centre.
- 1984: Yates begins bodybuilding with friends.
- Yates: "You get bigger, you get stronger, you get leaner" (Gallagher 52).
- Writer & power-lifter, Marty Gallagher: "Dorian's awesome size and crisp muscular
delineation overwhelm all observers" (53).
- 1992: Yates crowned Mr. Olympia for the first time.
- Yates: "I try to use perfect form and power" (Gallagher 54).
- Yates: "I was bigger than last year but just as hard" (O' Connell 228).
- *Muscle & Fitness Magazine*: "The king of bodybuilding" (Gallagher 51).

BLAH BLAH BLAH

She's going blah blah blah and he's going yadda yadda yadda.

They like to talk. But so much of their talk is untalk, necessary but predictable overview, they short-form it, they abbreviate, they make metaphors, like pictures, to flash-sound to each other and move on: "so I said 'blah blah blah' I'd be very honoured and she said 'blah blah blah' very well and that was all." In the blah blah blah is the minutiae of the exchange, the cogs and pinions of the language machine. Hello! Hello! How are you? Fine; and you? Quite well, thanks; what are you up to? Just shopping around. Me too. How have you been? Good; you? Good, trying not to work too hard. Exactly; god, it's been a long time since we last saw each other. Yeah it has. Two years, I think. Yep, two years. Wow. Wow. Yeah. I've missed you, you know? I've missed you.

Translation: blah blah blah. I've missed you, you know? I've missed you. Or just blah blah blah.

They can blah blah blah everything. They understand that blah blah blah is a chorus that sings: time passed; other language was spoken; the only event was the near eventlessness of most of the event: the blah blah blahness of life. The paradox: the blah blah blah is both the crux and the excess. It articulates that crucial point: nothing much was articulated.

But what are the politics of the blah blah blah? Is blah blah blah a First World utterance: a pout pout pout of boredom? Where can the blah blah blah be placed? What can it re-place?

So Keats wrote "blah blah blah all ye know on earth, and all ye blah blah blah" and Martin Luther King said "I have a blah blah blah"?

She's still going blah blah blah and he's still going yadda yadda yadda. And language is an endless jiggling of nonsenses; of shivery, precisionless chatter. Now only the blah blah blahs make sense and everything else, all other sounds, are like wrenches tapping on a pipe, crows barking, almonds being cracked, lips making this sound: blah blah blah.

PLASTIC SURGERY

In the gallery the works of art opened, talked and breathed.

We watched one work wink at us from the corner of the room and then smile. What a smile. Mona Lisa-like, in the sense of total mystery, total ambiguity; in the sense that this smiling/perhaps not smiling work of art looked at us with its complex inner-collage-ness and we felt the practiced touch of the artist's knife. But was she in pain? Had she been hurt? Suffered? What did the wink mean? All along the eyes, in this particular work, we noted the masterful brush strokes, how they were blended (stretched? shaved?) near imperceptibly with(in) the different shades and lines of the cheek and jaw. It was a challenging piece.

Other works were less realist, more experimental and severe. One work of art caught our special attention: a study of enlargements and points of focus. This work, or works, manipulated one's sense of natural "size" and challenged notions of proper form. How does such a work keep its balance, we wondered. How does such a work not collapse on itself? Drag itself down? How big is too big? In the end, we could not decide if



the work seemed more or less complete—was there harmony here, was it powerful, reconciled to itself?

Finally, we came upon a genius portrait of a throat. It was like looking at a seamless river, a painting of smooth. We got quite close, peered in and in: as close as we could. Not one line, one blemish, one minute sag, was discernible. But was it even alive? It was as if this piece of art had just been (still-?) born. A literally renaissance work—a product of an artistic genius. Total purity.

MATHEMATICAL SYMBOLS

Begin with + which is plus; positive; sign of addition. In the beginning there was plus: a first word, a first letter, a first number, a grunt. Next there was – which is minus; negative; sign of subtraction. In the beginning there was good and evil and + was good and – was bad. But not so: for + could kill just like – and so entire worlds of plus and minus became confused, worlds blended. + and – then begat \pm which is plus or minus because no one was really sure. High or Low? No one knew. Furthermore, there arrived \mp which is minus or plus because no one was really sure which was which if plus or minus were even that different and so \mp or \pm . Both worked together, work together, until X or • was born which is multiplied by; a way of building mathematical sentences, onwards toward mathematical poetry and a way of saying this and this make more of this can't you see? Then \div or $:$ appeared which is divided by; denoting a division of the first with the second; which is a type of separating, a type of dismantling and redistribution, a scattering of sorts. So there must be some string to tie what is divided by and what is multiplied by and added and subtracted together and there was = or $::$ which is equals which is to say that this is this or that is that but sometimes this wasn't so, things being only approximately equal or congruent. And there was the introduction of the / which is an is not or a does not, a mark at the end of stanzas to show the is not of one line with the other, the does not of this word with the other. Therefore there was \therefore which is therefore \therefore which is also since since a way was needed to illustrate problems and therefore these lines \equiv which are identical introduced themselves like wall paintings like mysterious marks in the sand everything seeming ancient somehow identical: poetry and mathematics, hot dogs and

chateau briand, sculpture and debris. There was only one thing left: to see the sky in the sea and vice versa, to see your face on the face of the moon and rippling on the underwater stone—forever. So the ∞ arrived which is infinity and everything seemed back to basics, back to beginnings: a way to finish the poem by beginning again, a way to solve the problem by unraveling it always, a way to conclude yourself by starting just once more: a new beginning, a positive, a sign of addition...

CANONICAL THEORIES 5: 1757

On the whole, the qualities of beauty, as they are merely sensible qualities, are the following. First, to be comparatively small. Secondly, to be smooth. Thirdly, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but fourthly, to have those parts not angular, but melted as it were into each other. Fifthly, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of strength. Sixthly, to have its colours clear and bright; but not very strong and glaring. Seventhly, or if it should have any glaring colour, to have it diversified with others. These are, I believe, the properties on which beauty depends; properties that operate by nature, and are less liable to be altered by caprice, or confounded by a diversity of tastes, than others.

Edmund Burke
(from *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 107)

ART QUESTIONS ANSWERS 4

Do you have a favourite artist?

Jaydi: "That guy. John Kennedy."

[Darlene Unruh asks: "*Have you seen any of his art work?*"]

"Well, not yet."

[DU: "*Why would you say he's an artist?*"]

"Because he looks like one."

[DU: "*What is it about him that makes him look like an artist to you?*"]

"He just looks like an artist because he wears dark clothes like an artist."

[DU: "*So, he's wearing a white t-shirt, a black shirt, black pair of pants, black belt and boots.*"]

[Unidentified voice: "*Black boots.*"]

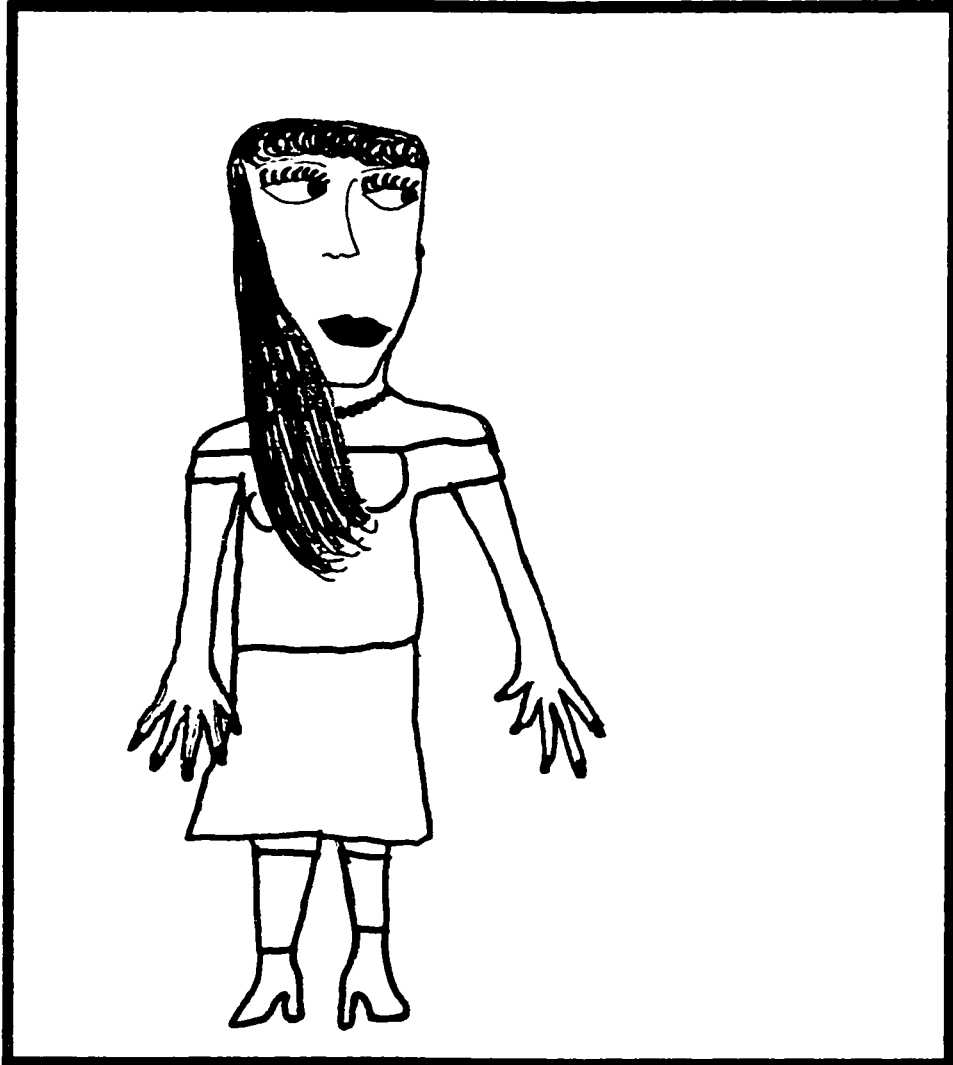
[Jaydi nods.]

Can you tell an artist by the way they dress?

Lindsay: "Sometimes, um, they have clothes on with a bit of paint on it."

Brayden: "When I look at him [John Kennedy] I just see something special inside of him."

Jordanne: "Well, you could really only tell if they were like wearing a painting apron or carrying a bag full of construction paper."



An Artist

Drawn by: *Sucana 2015198*
Grade:



An Artist

Drawn by: Kimberley Ilott
Grade: grade 3

TS ELIOT

1888-1965.

TS Eliot. Confirmed royalist, fervent classicist and staunch Anglo-Catholic. Proper, squeak-haired, Harvardian, Oxonian conservative—dying but *alive* in 1965. The US is intervening in Vietnam. The Doors have begun practicing together. Woodstock is only two years away. Thomas Pynchon is working on *The Crying of Lot 49*. People are revving their Ford Mustangs. And TS Eliot, erudite bank-worker, trouser-rollerer, possible peach-eater, is dying in 1965.

And what of Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Yosemite Sam, Pepe Le Pew—Mel Blanc's modernist (post-modernist?) 1965 personas? His polyphonic poetry. Did the outrageous sounds of Looney Tunes/Merry Melodies ever invade the Eliot mind? Was Ezra, that better craftsman, ever invited for tea and then interrupted by "What's up, Doc?!"?

"The Love Song of J. Elmer Fudd"?

"Tweety Among the Nightingales"?

"Journey of the Popeye"?

"Woody Woodpecker on a Windy Night"?

I can't stop dreaming of Eliot, walking around with Porky Pig, in the waste land of a cartoon sty: twit twit twit / jug jug jug jug jug jug...Porky the Pig, a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell. "The Waste Land," in its often comic chaos, swells together with the voices of The Looney Tunes. Each text an exploration of disintegration. A fascination with fragmentation. Elmer Fudd is blown to bits. Bugs Bunny is the loner, wandering through rabbit-hostile (Old Possum-hostile) territory. Each voice is a cry: "There is not even solitude in the mountains." Or: "A wabbit can't get any peace."

TRUCK MUSIC

It is early morning. Or it is late evening. It is mid-afternoon. Someone is reading. Someone is leaning against the balcony, smoking. Someone is resting in bed, their eyes open. Curtains moving.

And not so far-off, or far-off, quite close by, a truck turns, brakes, accelerates, shudders. These sounds, step 1: how to begin a symphony, a sad opera. The someone reading, leaning, resting, follows the dips and sighs of the music by not following them at all. Now another truck turns and it's a duet, a sound dialogue of grease and gaskets. Gears grind and its punk, rock, rap, revolution.

Truck music continues all through the early morning, the late evening, mid-afternoon. Someone is reading. Someone is leaning against the balcony, smoking. Someone is resting in bed, their eyes open. Curtains moving.

The instruments: brakes, axles, tires, engines, gravel, exhaust.

THE TOILET

Toilets are alluring portals. Secret symbols, sculptures of escape. 2000 flushes, for example, is a fascinating commercial because it makes (recognizes) the toilet bowl as a place of tropical desire. Allegedly for up to 4 months one (North Americans?) can indulge in the exotic splendour of crystal blue toilet water. Clean enough to swim in. Beautiful enough to take your vacation in. And wanting to swim in your toilet is certainly

the fantasy not just of  dogs and

children but of full grown adults who lie awake, in bed, deep at night, struggling with their adult problems as the sound of the sea calls from the bathroom: come to me, come to me—swim away your worries in my tropical azure splendour. Magically, Al Eisner's crystal blue 2000 flushes metamorphoses the baseness of the toilet, the blandness of the urinal, into a Duchampian* fountain: "That Mr. Mutt [Duchamp's pseudonym] made the *Fountain* with his own hands or not, is not important. He CHOSE it. He took a common object [a urinal], placed it so that its functional significance disappeared under the new title and the new point of view—he created for this object a new idea" (Duchamp 77). So Al Eisner, in a skillful 30 second moment, creates a new idea—purity for 2000 flushes. He harmonizes our feces, semen, urine, vaginal discharge, vomit with a vision of utter clarity and flow—the functional significance of the toilet is displaced by a holy altar of blue water. And for up to four months!

* Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) directly questioned the idea of artistic authorship when he introduced, in the early 20th century, his idea of "ready made" art. For Duchamp, any existing object (like a mass-produced hat-rack, bicycle, or even an urinal) constituted a work of art.

CAMUS' COAT

You buy Albert Camus' coat from Value Village and everyone tells you you are existential, melancholy and profound.

Where did you get that Albert Camus coat? I got this Albert Camus coat at Value Village for \$9 and 99 cents. Oh, can I touch it?

In the pocket you find two pinches of dust and dirt. You find the wrinkled carcass of a cherry Certs wrappers. Deep in the inside (secret) pocket you find a round, worn button. But a button that does not match the other buttons. How strange. How strange, you wonder, was Camus? You wanted to find a small manuscript.

Now Albert Camus' coat has come back from the dry-cleaners. \$12 and 84 cents for the professional dry-wash. And everyone tells you that you look different: no longer existential, not that melancholy, and hardly profound. The Albert Camus coat has changed. You have changed.

It is no longer "the Albert Camus coat." The purity has been washed away. What was real, all that was Camus, has been removed and sudded down the drain. Goodbye, Albert. Au revoir truth.

You buy a coat from Value Village. You wear it to restaurants, on walks, lean into the existential wind and snap the collar up.

You look fine, good, nice.

MARTHA STEWART

And there is a frill of sadness surrounding the proper place-mats, the soldierly linens, the crown-perfect tarts, the paper lanterns, the symmetrical cheesecakes, the clicking of the wine as it unlocks from the bottle and pours into the crystal mouth of the goblet. A frilly sadness, surrounding these usually unimaginable, now apprehended, details; apprehended finery that perhaps approaches (resembles? is?) a never before doable ideal: the perfect setting/ the perfect evening/the perfect host/the perfect life.

Still, there is something of the extreme maestro, the secretly-explosive sensei about Martha Stewart. About the cutting/paring/coring of flawless shapes (to stamp/personalize your stationery) from a common household potato. About the building of ornate Christmas wreaths. About the best sweet-meats, the best chocolate, about the best *reality*. Martha Stewart, as technician, as director, as philosopher, is a virtuoso.

Imagine a rat in her house. Imagine Martha Stewart building, sanding, painting, stenciling her own fool-proof, exquisite trap. Imagine the gourmet cheese balanced underneath the gleaming, lethal hinge. Thanks to Martha: rats can be beautiful.

She is a high-priest in the long tradition of domestic, bourgeois perfection. A classic poet of earth-tones and sandalwood. Martha Stewart, with a flourish of her wand, makes herself into a piece of polished pine—into solid, working perfection. Or: abracadabra: Martha answers the phone in, and writes out invitations with, economical, breathless haiku.

Martha Stewart *lives* as if her *life* was in the studio. Be art. Be art. Her life. Your life? Life as work. Work as life. Works and days. No difference. Martha Stewart's *Living* is a (working) document of her life. She has solved Oscar Wilde's dilemma—"Do you

want to know the great drama of my life/ It's that I have put all my genius into my life; and all I've put into my works is my talent") (Gide 573)—by drawing no distinction/s. And that, as we know, is a good thing.

CANONICAL THEORIES 6: 1290

If a man, *in the first place*, does not find a building, a prospect, or a poem beautiful, a hundred voices all highly praising it will not force his inmost agreement. He may indeed feign that it pleases him, in order that he may not be regarded as devoid of taste; he may even begin to doubt whether he has formed his taste on a knowledge of a sufficient number of objects of a certain kind . . . But that a thing has pleased others could never serve as the basis of an aesthetical judgment. A judgment of others which is unfavourable to ours may indeed rightly make us scrutinize our own carefully, but it can never convince us of its correctness. There is therefore no empirical *ground of proof* which would force a judgment of taste upon anyone.

Immanuel Kant
(from *Critique of Judgment*, 123)

INTERMISSION

At this point in the work, the author would like to pause and welcome you to visit the snack-bar and/or restroom. If you would like to make a phone-call, now is probably the best time to place that call. If you would like to watch TV, stretch, turn on the stereo, open up another text, make corrections and/or comments/doodles on the existing text, go to a movie, scratch an arm, pet the cat, do the dishes, take a pill, write a letter, sneeze, or fall asleep, now is probably the best time to perform those activities. Right now.

Also, the author wishes to stress to you that the use of cameras (especially cameras equipped with flash-bulbs), and that the use of recording devices (especially Super-8 film devices), during the reading of this text is encouraged.

Thank you very much for your attention. The author hopes you enjoy the rest of the show.

GOOD READING (PART 1)

"Reading is an endless opportunity, an ever-open door to ever-greater mental growth. Practically all the wisdom of the world is in books. No one can ever read all the good books that have been written, but the more one reads, the richer one is in true and useful wisdom.

An excellent way to start using GOOD READING is to check through the whole list, putting an 'X' before those books you have already read and a check before those you want to read. By continually changing your checks to 'X's' you can keep a record of the progress of your own intellectual growth. . . .

No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading now, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance. . . .

Most American magazines of large circulation are concerned primarily with entertaining their readers and so present little in the way of fiction or articles that have any great value. Significant articles are found mostly in such general literary magazines as *Harper's* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, in such journals of opinion as *Commonweal* and the *New Republic*, and in such organs of special interest as *United Nations World*, *Business Week*, *Survey*, *School and Society*, *Mechanical Engineering*. To read only mass-circulation picture magazines and digests means that you have not grown mentally beyond the level of a high school sophomore" (Townsend 1-3).

GOOD READING (PART 2)

You are stupid. You do not read. You do not subscribe to *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Business Week*. You are stupid. You *do* subscribe to *Cosmopolitan*, *Life*, *People*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader's Digest*—or, you do not subscribe to anything at all. Indeed, there is not one book in your house. You do not even own a house. You are stupid and live in a one-room apartment. You never went to university. You didn't finish high-school. You only watch TV. You work in a factory. You don't know who Virginia Woolf is. You've never read a Shakespeare play. You eat potato chips. You are stupid. You live with your dog. You do not smoke a pipe. You do not listen to great music, you do not enjoy great food, you do not own, or even appreciate, great art. You love to do the "Macarena." You eat take-out. You stick photographs on your fridge. You are stupid. This book will refine you. Teach you Greek, Latin and French. This book will help you impress your friends. This book will even help you find better, brighter friends. This book will civilize and polish. This book will open your eyes. This book will make you profound, compelling, applause-worthy. This book will teach you how to enunciate, articulate and then pontificate. Best of all, this book will make you taller and louder. This book will give you *all* the answers. This book will make you stand-out. This book will rescue you from apathy and idiocy. This book will take you to auctions, galleries and book stores. This book will guide you to the things worth having. GOOD READING will complete your personality. Finally, GOOD READING, once you own it, never leaves you. So stop being stupid. Start growing mentally. Be wise. Buy this book. Be smart. Buy it.

SIMILES

"A great artist is like a fig-tree whose roots run a hundred feet underground, in search of tea-leaves, cinders and old boots" (Connolly 42).

A great artist is like a gerbil.

A great artist is like a mother cleaning up after her children.

A great artist is like a molar with a silver cap.

A great artist is like a plumber whose pipes run a hundred feet underground, transporting endless litres of water and waste.

A great artist is like a Sony palm-held video camera.

A great artist is like a low fat granola bar.

A great artist is like a house of squatters.

A great artist is like a billionaire whose money can buy all things; including people, power and prestige.

A great artist is like toothpaste.

A great artist is like a warehouse worker.

A great artist is like a pair of breasts.

A great artist is like a football game.

A great artist is like a raisin.

A great artist is like a diamond bracelet that never comes out of the safety box.

A great artist is like a police informer.

A great artist is like a platter of deep-fried seafood.

A great artist is like an ant in a glass of beer.

A great artist is like a malpractice suit.

A great artist is like a horror movie in which the killer's weapon of choice is a hockey stick with a broken blade.

A great artist is like a credit card.

BP NICHOL

Is the sound a book makes when it is bolted and tightened to the side of a television. bpNichol. bp. bp is a hybrid of sorts: a writer of Canada's most famous long- (complex)poem and a writer of superb cartoons. bp is a bit like tv. tv nichol. let's watch some bp. long poems and cartoons. substance and style. vice versa. Nichol was a big fan of Gertrude Stein and she wrote, in her book *Tender Buttons*, that "Certainly glittering is handsome & convincing" (461); and bp was on a search himself for the glittering of non-narrative prose, prose that fell out of sequence and out-did itself, art that slipped the grip of its own stated destination. (Krazy Kat falls from frame 1 straight into frame 3.) bp is fun like tv. He wonders and wanders about the white space on the page the same way rock videos worry and hurry about the margins of the tv screen (fish-eye camera work, rubbery borders, cartoon images, artificial sets). The question arises: what is all this white space? The question arises: where does bp or tv ever end? The book is a bit of an illusion. The bp-book definitely is not totally between your fingers or really even all there in your eyes. We must say then that the bp we think we are reading is, as McLuhan said about the television we thought we were reading, really reading us. We *are* the bp. And bp is mind-candy. bp is destroying today's youth. bp is evil/evol. warning: excessive exposure to bp can lead to loss of attention span. spending a nice day like this in front of the bp?



BIG MAC S BIG KING

It's a fight to the death. In this corner: the traditional McDonald's Big Mac. In this corner: the new (Whopper ubermunch?) Burger King Big King. In the middle: it's you. Ding. And we notice, first off, that both burgers are *big*. One is called *Big Mac* and one is called *Big King*. Big is good. Big is right. But the Big King, Big Mac-eating purists argue, is just a burger shame, a burger sham, a copy-cat/cow. And this is the debate of the *real*. There is an original burger called the Big Mac and even though 6 billion people have eaten it 6 billion times it is still called an original—while the Big King must always remain a fraud, a poseur, a stand-in, an understudy, a liar, a *reproduction/ a simulation*. Coke is the *real* thing/ Pepsi is the *fake* thing. Oxford is better (more real) than Cambridge. Big Mac real, Big King illusion. Both burger companies make grandiose truth-claims. Selling burgers, like selling Breughels, is all about truth. Who's got the most truth? Whose truth is Biggest? Whose truth is truer? Several of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings, namely one or two from his famous series of "Sunflowers" works, are thought to be fake—the outrage: who wants to pay 22 million dollars for what isn't real? Where's the (real) beef? Then there must be (I must believe that there is) something *real* and *Big* inside my tiny styrofoam box, frame. Something I can believe in. I like to think I'm getting all I can, all the facts, all the ALL. Consuming a totalness, an authentic mass/morsel. When the box is empty, or when the painting is sold, hung and viewed, I must be convinced that there has been a transference. That I have made myself (more) whole. I have swallowed only the truth of the real thing. And as I drive away, as I speed down the road, as the sun sets behind me, falls in the arches, touches down inside the crown, I must be convinced that I am Bigger

than when I began. That I cannot be duped. I'm the real thing, baby. I eat the real. Ergo sum. Ergo yum.

CANONICAL THEORIES 1873

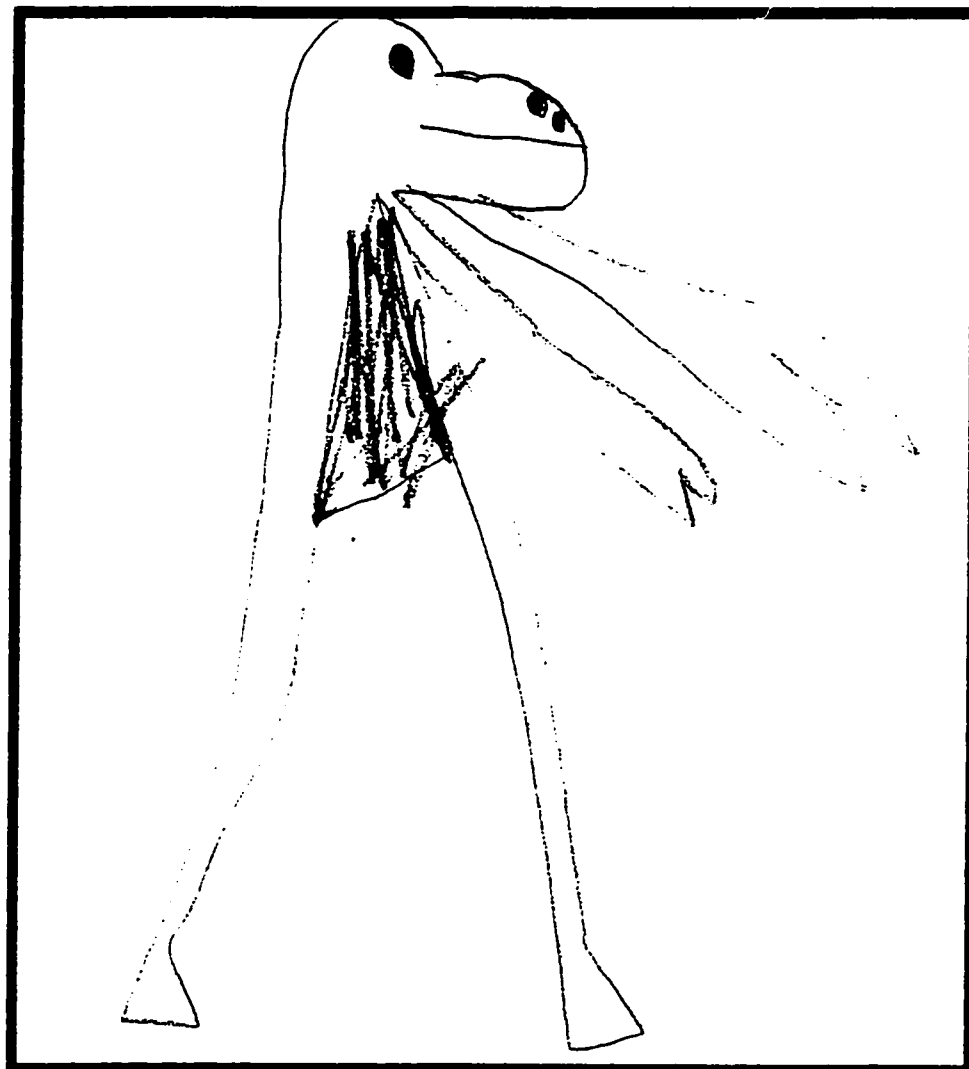
What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects. He will remember always that beauty exists in many forms. To him all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal. In all ages there have been some excellent workmen and some excellent work done. The question he asks is always, In whom did the stir, the genius, the sentiment of the period find itself? Who was the receptacle of its refinement, its elevation, its taste? 'The ages are all equal,' says William Blake, 'but genius is always above its age.'

Walter Pater
(from *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 387)

ART QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**Do you have a piece of art that you love for art's sake?**

Evan: "I have a glass dragon."

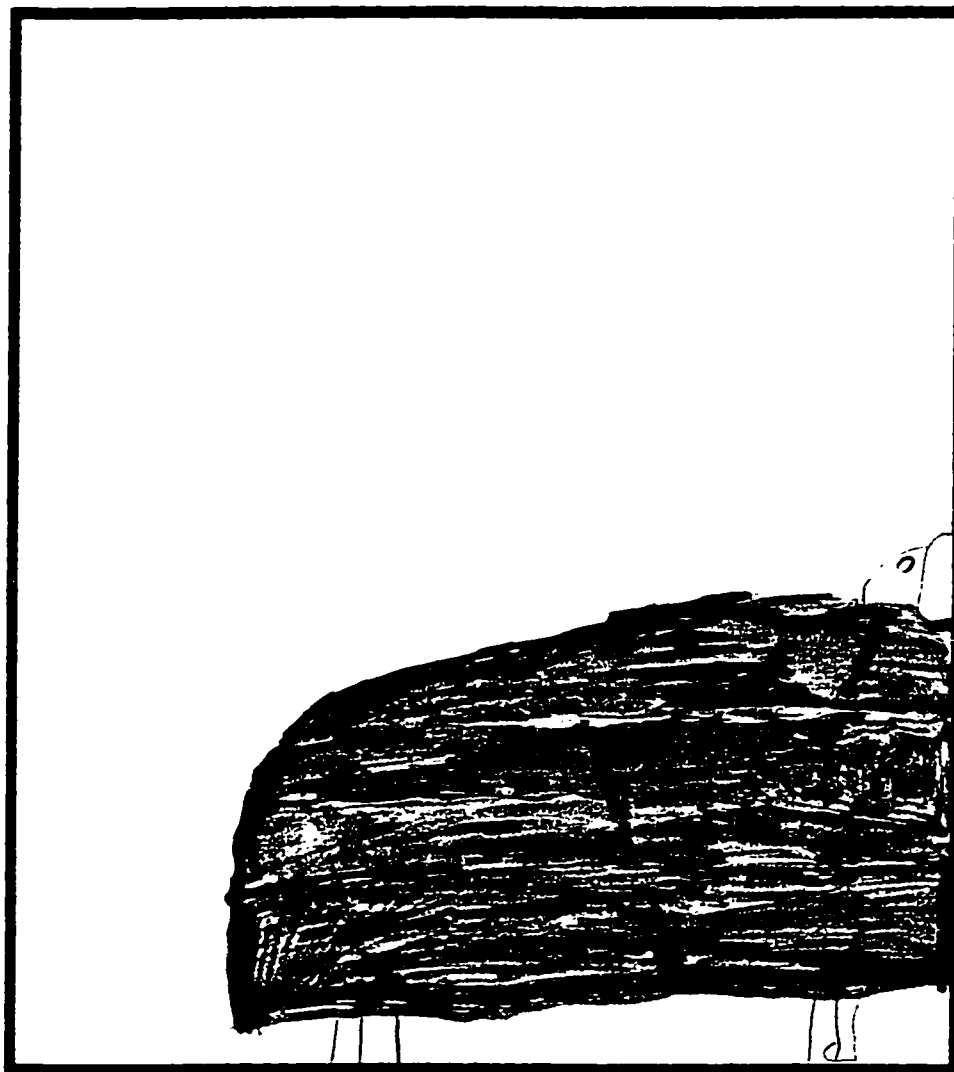
Jordanne: "My grandma and papa gave me this plate, not an eating plate, but it's a kind that comes with this thing and it sort of has hooks when you stretch the hooks on the side like that that you stretch and then you put it on the wall. It's a plate and it's a little girl standing in the puddle—and she's wearing a pink dress."



An Artist

Drawn by: JOYDI

Grade: 1



An Artist

Drawn by: Annie Arthur
Grade: 1

PUNKS

They punktate their leather jackets with silver spikes. Therefore they are big on punk punktilio: tearing beer cans apart in their sabery teeth, belching and then grinning. And punks have their own form of punktuality, crashing through windows and doors just in the nick of time. Plus punk punktuation is radical and simple: exclamation and question mark, putting slashes, holes, indeed punktures in the armour of société, of civilization, of business, of country, of proper poetry. Punks are punky: minute, annoying, blood-sucking gnats.

Punks are punks.

TEXT FROM AN IRISH POSTCARD(S)

"JAMES JOYCE'S DUBLIN: James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born in Dublin in 1882, and educated at Jesuit schools and University College Dublin, where he studied philosophy and languages. All of his works which included *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, *Dubliners*, *Exiles*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Chamber Music* were unique in that all were masterpieces."

JAMES JOYCE'S DUBLIN: James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born in Dublin in 1882, and educated at Jesuit schools and University College Dublin, where he studied philosophy and languages. All of his works which included *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, *Dubliners*, *Exiles*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Chamber Music* were unique in that all were pieces of shit.

TRANSCRIPT

Jean Baudrillard, pontificating at the breakfast table: "*We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us as to our ends*" (18).

The Original Shredded Wheat Cereal

In a world where so much is imitation, people now value the original more and more. That's why people have enjoyed the wholesome goodness of *The Original Shredded Wheat* cereal for so many years. For over 100 years, *The Original Shredded Wheat* cereal has provided great taste and nutrition in every toasted biscuit. Made in Niagara Falls, Canada, using only the highest quality whole grain wheat, *The Original Shredded Wheat* cereal has no added sugar, salt or fat.

The Original Shredded Wheat cereal. Sometimes, the simplest ideas outlast all the rest.

A S T E R I S K <

To describe the endless relationship of everything, the ever-connectedness of all, she spills a box of silver stars across her desk, over the books, down onto the floor: mercury shimmer. Now these star-like figures, as if a shattered constellation, become asterisks: indicating omissions, footnotes, references, additions.

They catch and glitter fluorescent light in small sparks: a dialogue of flashes and winks showing how language works with all its signals and silences, showing how the future, how each glinting star is a far-off day: a footnote concerning, an omission about, a sudden reference to what's not yet read or said about us, but what will be... The asterisk, she wrote the word and then drew its shape on the board. A chalky star. A close-up of snow. A stilled explosion. A symbol.

It could mark something important. It could indicate that there was more or less. It could connect. She told us: from the Latin *asteriscus*, from the Greek *asteriskos*, from aster or star. The asterisk.

So the bp Nichol poem, "The Complete Works," sparkles. The poem in which bp types out all the symbols/characters/numbers/etc. of the typewriter and then, at the bottom of the page, beside an asterisk, writes: "any possible permutation" (7). Something important. A powerful symbol.

This is how a star works. The asterisk is a magic star, she said. You may want to use it some day.

Think of a clear, cold night. Think of the cold moon and the stars surrounding it. Perhaps they are symbols. Perhaps they are indicating a galaxy's footnotes, omissions, references, additions, connections.

Now look at the book, study the author's use of stars.

It's a shimmer. A collected works. A scribble on a chalkboard. A shattered constellation. A connection.

HIGHNOTE / LOWNOTE

It appears that the cultural phrases "highbrow" and "lowbrow" were a late nineteenth-century construction meant to describe, respectively, either someone or something intellectually superior or intellectually deficient. Interestingly, the terms find their origin in nineteenth-century phrenological nomenclature and specifically derive their definitions from the practice of determining racial types and intelligence by measuring cranial shapes and capacities.⁸ It is thus that "lowbrow" came to symbolize the unenlightened "savage" or the ape while "highbrow" in turn came to embody Caucasianness and cultural refinement.

⁸From Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (221-222).

CANONICAL THEORIES 3: 1899

If a man is infected by the author's condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has effected this is art; but if there be no such infection, if there be not this union with the author and with others who are moved by the same work—then it is not art. And not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the degree of infectiousness is also the sole measure of excellence in art.

The stronger the infection the better is the art, as art, speaking now apart from its subject-matter—that is, not considering the quality of the feelings it transmits.

And the degree of the infectiousness of art depends on three conditions:—

(1) On the greater or lesser individuality of the feeling transmitted; (2) on the greater or lesser clearness with which the feeling is transmitted; (3) on the sincerity of the artist, that is, on the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself feels the emotion he transmits.

Leo Tolstoy
(from "What is Art?," 179-80)

TRAVELING ANTIQUES ROADSHOW

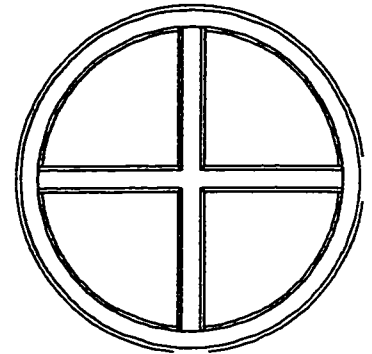
I can tell you that this is a bogus piece of shit. Yes, I'm in awe of it actually. I've never, in fact, encountered such a breath-takingly prosaic and unimportant piece of shit as this. May I ask what the history is behind this piece of shit, how does it come to be in your possession? Oh, really? Well that is quite interesting, you see, because these pieces of shit are still being produced and can be found just about anywhere. But to find such a radiantly mass-produced piece of shit as this is, well, miraculous. Now. I would like to point out this mark, just here, near the bottom. Can you see it? Right. This mark indicates that the *objet* is indeed a reproduced piece of shit. No original here. This is bona fide imitation shit. If one searched their whole life they'd never find a more common, uncollectable, ersatz piece of shit as this. This is real crap. Well then. Marvelous. Can I ask how much you have it insured for? Yes. Right. I can tell you that, as you might expect with such a gloriously hideous piece of pedestrian shit, it has magnificently and certainly plummeted in price since then. You'd best prepare yourself. Would you be surprised to hear that this particular piece of dime-a-dozen shit, the very one before us, is absolutely worthless? No, I'm not joking. This piece of pristinely mediocre shit actually holds no value whatsoever. Whatsoever, that's right. It *is* hard to believe, yes. Quite, he probably would be overwhelmed to hear that. No, I must thank *you* very much for bringing such a stunning piece of shit in for appraisal. It's absolutely an overwhelming piece of crap. And I trust you'll take good care of it, won't you?

W I N D E X

Commercial by S. Mallarmé:

"This is an index for Windex. A library of clarity. A list of lucidity. A catalogue of the crystal:

- Windex No Drip: "Stays Where You Spray (Streak-free Shine with Ammonia)"
- Windex Anti-Fog: "Keeps Glass & Mirrors Fog-Free"
- Windex Glass & Surface: "Lifts Stains, Cuts Grease"
- Windex Glass Cleaner: "Streak-free Shine with Ammonia D (Pot-Pourri)"



[Mallarmé turns to the camera, holds up Windex bottle and smiles: "Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité—achat Windex!"]

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF (EVERYDAY)
QUOTATIONS

1. Ahhh, good morning.
2. Better than last year.
3. Can you pass me the funnies?
4. Don't stop.
5. Every day I walk across the park.
6. Fuck you.
7. God, that was a delicious supper.
8. Have a nice day.
9. I can't hear you.
10. Just put it over there.
11. Keep an eye on the time.
12. Listen to me!
13. Mom's outside.
14. Nicely done.
15. OK.
16. Pardon me?
17. Quickly, in here.
18. Right around that corner.
19. Sure.
20. Turn it up.
21. Usually we take the other one.
22. Vacuum the stairs too, please.
23. Wonderful!
24. X, or O—you go first.
25. Yeah.
26. Zip it up.

NAMES

"I come across fewer and fewer people who know the names of Seneca and Rabelais, or even those of John O'Hara and Sinclair Lewis" (Lapham 10).

These are not names but NAMES and to come across fewer and fewer people who know the NAMES from the names is to come across a capital L, capital O, capital double S, LOSS. Is to come across some kind of sacrilege because Seneca and Rabelais designate capital Tee Are You Tea Eh Cha. And TRUTH spelt out is what Seneca and Rabelais mean so it is hard to be happy when your TRUTH is apparently making less and less cultural sense, let alone CULTURAL SENSE. Those more and more people (not us, though, not you and I), those *other* more and more people ignoring (destroying?) Seneca and Rabelais must be instead listening to rap music, or eating beans, or suntanning. They could tell you the names: LL Cool J, Salt 'n' Pepa. They could say: Libby's, President's Choice. They could say: Hawaiian Tropic or Coppertone. But those are not NAME names those are name names; in fact those are sub-name names—names that live under, below, in the basement of other *proper* names. For there may be Seneca and Rabelais, but then there is also John O'Hara and Sinclair Lewis: thus there is hardly room for LL Cool J, let alone Coppertone or Libby's. It is safe to say that Lewis Lapham would not write the sentence: "I come across fewer and fewer people who know the names of Brylcreem and Ovaltine, or even those of Milk Duds and Cherry Cola." Seneca is TRUTH and Brylcreem is brylcreem. And Seneca never ate Milk Duds and Rabelais never used Brylcreem and this is just absurd now because Seneca, the Literary Companion says, was a philosopher and a tragic poet (tragic I take to mean serious), and Rabelais was a physician and satirist (satirist I take to mean serious) which is to say that, in the end, for many serious, educated

people still: the TRUTH is TRUTH and Cherry Cola is only cherry cola is only a nothing,
a non-sense, a no-name.

ARTS SECTION

Quotations and excerpts from the *Saturday Globe & Mail* (April 4, 1998):

The master died

101 Great American Poems

Great Big Show

his legacy is alive

a new exhibition of treasures

Poetry gives us insights into 'who we are as a society' and is 'very egalitarian.'

survey the breadth of his genius

wild living and art making

great topics

titanic presence

outrageous impishness

an icon

enormous ambition

eminently gifted

captivating brilliance

Spanish master

it's not, unfortunately for his wannabe emulators, one that can be copied.

Not without divine inspiration.

Yes, yes, yes.

SELF-CLEANING OVENS

A revolution. A real time-saver. A back-saver. A knee-saver. A *life*-saver.

No more scrubbing. No more grease, grime and gunk. No more sticking your head in the oven. Remember the first self-cleaning oven, remember Mom saying: won't be sticking my head in you, and smiling.

A dream-vision of many Moms and many non-self-cleaning ovens. A long, multi-Momed kitchen in which rusty burny ovens were gaping. In which Moms everywhere seemed to be angled across the awkward horizontal door—being sucked away.

The documentary on Sylvia Plath and the description of her kitchen suicide.

The mind-image of her body, so gas-heavy, gone limp across the oven door. She might have looked like she was cleaning, scrubbing.



Reading A. Alvarez's sombre memoir, *The Savage God*: "In those days Sylvia seemed effaced . . . like a young woman in a cookery advertisement, friendly and yet rather distant" (22). Hello, I'm Sylvia and I use Pam. Hello, I'm Sylvia and, in my newly cleaned oven, I'm going to be baking a Crisco pie.

Forever Sylvia Plath is the face in every cooking/appliance ad. She is friendly, as Alvarez notes, and yet rather distant. She smiles at her husband. She loves, cooks and cleans for, her bright children. She may have a job, carry a suitcase, but still she lives in the kitchen, so near the oven. It waits for her. The old oven is a wide and radical possibility. A revolution. A real time-saver. A back-saver. A knee-saver. A *life*-saver.

So she sets out some milk and bread for the children, beside their small beds. She walks to the kitchen. She stands in the kitchen alone. It is winter. The pipes have frozen. She has had to clean that oven many, many times. She breathes in.

CANONICAL THEORIES 9: 1900

Ugliness is the contradiction of art. It is that which art *excludes*, the *negation* of art: wherever decline, impoverishment of life, impotence, decomposition, dissolution, are felt, however remotely, the aesthetic man reacts with his *No*. Ugliness *depresses*: it is the sign of depression. It *robs* strength, it impoverishes, it weighs down. . . . Ugliness *suggests* repulsive things. From one's states of health one can test how an indisposition may increase one's power of fancying ugly things. One's selection of things, interests, and questions becomes different. Logic provides a state which is next to kin to ugliness: heaviness, bluntness. In the presence of ugliness equilibrium is lacking in a mechanical sense: ugliness limps and stumbles—the direct opposite of the godly agility of the dancer.

Friedrich Nietzsche
(from *The Will to Power*, 399)

CONVERSATIONS WITH GREAT WORKS OF ART

Interviewer: You are, "Mona Lisa," perhaps the greatest work of art in the world. How does that feel?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: Let me phrase that another way: it is globally believed that you speak directly to people's hearts, minds, senses of beauty in a way that no other work of art, either before or since your creation, has managed. "Mona," in brief, you speak directly to people's *souls*. How does that feel?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: I see. In other words, or *in* words, you are overwhelmed. But, how do you achieve this power? How do you communicate your beauty, your power, so deeply, so fully?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: Tell us then about your own particular genius (as a highly expressive work of art) and of the genius of your creator, the great Leonardo da Vinci.

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: OK. More specifically then: tell us about your life. What is it like to be *you*?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: Who is the *real* "Mona Lisa?"

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: Why does that question make you smile?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: You are a true enigma, a true mystery and thus a true work of art. Breath-taking... My last question: do you ever have any doubts? I mean, "Mona," do you ever feel "bad", "down", "*low*"?

"Mona Lisa":

Interviewer: Well. You are pure mystery, aren't you? And so, on behalf of the entire planet, "Mona," I'd like to thank you for speaking with us today. It has truly been an eye-opening and provocative experience. I will never forget you, my dear.

MARGINALIA

what?! is he joking?

Derrida, for one

another form of
universalism

trite

OK

Lacan?

read

note: ignored
women here

stupid

back to Leavis
(Leavis to Beaver)

left unexplored
so shut up

bull

see intro

now Derrida

as homer
would say
doh!

blatblatblat

yes and so

poor, right
in the killer

WILLIAM BLAKE

As a young child William Blake was victim to his own hyper-real imagination: whatever he thought of appeared. And, according to critic Jean Hagstrum, "Blake's highest . . . vision is essentially prophetic, a vision of the future" (19). Now William Blake, the prophet, the future see-er, is turning and gyrating in his lush, shadowy house. William Blake is wearing a large pair of goggles and a large glove, all tethered with wires. Now William Blake is the inventor of virtual reality. Catherine (his wife): "Go Bill. Go." We remember: whatever Blake imagines appears. Here Blake is spinning and rocking through one of his own visions. Here is the House of Death. Here is Urizen struggling in the waters of materialism. And here is God judging Adam. Vivid. Millions of pixels of holy pulsing light. Blake's virtual world. David V. Erdman: "Yet the poet's work is not perfectly 'done' until that moment when the reader, traveling the line of text, becomes a spectator, seeing at one pulse beat the 'single visualizable picture' (these words are Northrop Frye's) and then, between that and the next pulsation, leaving these mortal things, text and picture to enter into Noah's rainbow, into 'the eternal world that ever groweth'" (10). In this virtual reality of Blake's, it is hard to tell where the poem ends and the picture begins: where the world ends and art begins. The word and the image hold hands/ The world and its image hold hands. Netscape travel. Nightscape. Blakescape. Escape? ("The Tyger" sounds like cyber technology: fearful symmetries burning bright in the forests of the night. The tyger itself, so clumsily rendered: a computer drawing, a cartoon?) I click on William Blake. He appears. I click on Bill Gates. He appears. Hand or eye? Hand or eye? Did Blake *do* Windows 95? "If the doors [and Windows 95] of perception were cleansed everything would appear as it is, infinite." And what is this

angelic, immortal, Blakean word: Microsoft? Imagine: Blake lies dying in bed. He is drawing the face of his wife and then stops. Blake slips on the goggles, the glove. The mind umbilical-ed to the machine, the machine umbilical-ed to the mind. His heart stops. Catherine strokes his head. And Blake imagines, in that last huff of a live second, that they are naked in the garden, together. And we remember: whatever he thinks of appears. Appears. Click on it, point to it, think it. And it's yours. So: where do you want to go today?

REVIEW # 1

At once literary, philosophical, theoretical and pedestrian, these pieces reflect Kennedy as a man of feeling as well as a man of razor-sharp intellect. The book provides a comprehensive theory, sometimes impishly, sometimes gravely presented, that explores beauty in art and nature, as well as intellectual, utilitarian, and moral beauty. Kennedy's playful style strategically off-sets the profundity of his grand, aesthetic explorations—so much so that a reader marvels at the young man's expert weaving of the ambiguous and the lucid; not to mention Kennedy's proclivity for anarchic historical revisionism. Witness: William Blake in virtual reality garb and Arthur Rimbaud eating a Pizza Hut pizza! What's going on here?! Kennedy challenges us to abandon our Western tradition's insistence on "good" and "bad," "high" and "low" aesthetic/cultural definitions. These limpid pieces instead, in their own masterful, enfant terrible, yet fiercely respectful fashion, urge a reader to embrace the words "culture" and "art" as "multi-layered," albeit slippery and rarely, if ever, fixed, entities. Indeed, Kennedy's genius-work raises the philosophy of beauty and culture to a level it has rarely, if ever, attained. I know of no higher praise than to say that Kennedy reads like a cross between Shakespeare and Kant—pure and powerful literature. But, this is a comparison that the radical Kennedy would no doubt be uncomfortable with and thus dismiss. I'm certain that he would much rather prefer a less hierarchical, less traditional parallel. And so I can say loudly that: Kennedy is as good as a hat, as good as a Big Mac, as good as Palmolive, as good as a squirt of Brylcreem, and yes, even as good as a urinal. I urge you to seek out this golden text.

TRANSITION: 2



CONCLUSION: 1

Don't leave home without it.

To thine own self be true.

Seeing is believing.

Use Secret for full protection.

The medium is the message.

Love hurts.

It really works!

Don't worry, be happy.

So much depends on a red wheelbarrow.

Greed is right.

You're worth it.

Be good. Be bad. Just be.

That which we are, we are.

Books are a load of crap.

Women know.

The future's uncertain.

The customer is always right.

There are things that are known and things that are unknown.

Life is an adventure.

You could be a hero.

Lips should be soft.

Ahh.

CONCLUSION: 2

Reader 1: It's done.
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: This.
Reader 2: Good.
Reader 1: Why?
Reader 2: Because.
Reader 1: Because why?
Reader 2: I didn't like it.
Reader 1: I did.
Reader 2: That's 'cause you're not fussy. I'm fussy. It was predictable.
Reader 1: I thought it was all very smart.
Reader 2: Boring. Point was made on page 2.
Reader 1: Whereabouts?
Reader 2: I dunno, but it was made...and *early*!
Reader 1: What was made?
Reader 2: The point. You know: blah blah blah, everything is cool, etc.
Reader 1: I don't think that's the point. Not the—
Reader 2: That was the point. That was the *only* point.
Reader 1: Well, it's almost over now.
Reader 2: Read my lips:
Reader 1: Don't have to be so nasty.
Reader 2: I'm bored. Anyway, I skipped the last half.
Reader 1: That was the best part!
Reader 2: Sure.
Reader 1: Truth.
Reader 2: Truth?
Reader 1: Yeah, truth. Thee best. No guff. Very clever.
Reader 2: Let's get out of here.
Reader 1: You want to go?

Reader 2: Yes. I. Do.
Reader 1: OK. Go. Go then.
Reader 2: How though?
Reader 1: What?
Reader 2: How do you go? End it?
Reader 1: Just turn the page.
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Click "off".
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Hit "shutdown".
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Press "stop".
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Give up.
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Quit talking.
Reader 2: What?
Reader 1: Shh.
Reader 2:

CONCLUSION: 3

An aging the Fonz, hangs, floats, above a pool of deadly sharks. A stilled water-skier. In mid-jump. On shore, the frozen, frightened crowd. Their mouths open.

Before the credits roll, there is this suspense. The Fonz: suspense-fully suspended above deadly sharks. The crowd. Us.

That is to say: one way to conclude is to not to...

That is to say: to be continued.

Always.

CONCLUSION: 4

Rosebud

or

Ka-boom

or

gentle snow falling at night, moon glowing

or

sound of pop can rattling down street

or

a long kiss on the sand

or

yes

or

a final sentence reading: The removal or blending of cultural hierarchies becomes, then, subversive and oppositional: a politically potent act of deconstructive hybridity that exposes a hegemonic cultural system reliant on racist, classist and sexist exclusions.

or

a picture of a vaudeviller getting the hook

or

Jim Morrison's voice whispering: the end / of nights / we tried to...die

or

the scent of a just-extinguished candle

or

a that's all folks

or

just plain blank space

CONCLUSION: 6

Reader's Choice (please use either black or blue ink, and press hard.)

This has been a/n _____ experience. I am _____ to have been _____ to _____ these issues of high and low. Indeed what was most _____ was how _____ figured in the _____. I was very _____ with the _____ of culture and how _____ necessarily suggests that _____ needs to be _____. I was also very _____ with certain _____ of _____. I thus wondered if _____ could not have been _____ instead of the _____ which the writer felt _____ to _____. The concluding sections were absolutely _____ and I would advise all future readers to _____ them totally. Quite _____! Not to mention _____. (If I were called upon to provide my own ending to the project I would _____ and then _____, to ensure congruence and to avoid flaws.) Overall I'd give the project _____ thumbs _____. So, in the final tally, _____ and _____ is what I'll _____ take with me—and will never _____ the way _____ turned out.

Grade (letter only): _____

Final Comments (free form):

Signed,

CONCLUSION: 6

How about, at the close, the words: *an end*?

CONCLUSION: 2

[Under a huge banner (spanning the entire stage) reading "Molson Rocks," John comes out, for the encore, wearing black leather pants, a sleeveless t-shirt, wailing on his electric guitar & wiggling his tongue. (The readers, going crazy, hold their ignited Bic lighters aloft.)]

CONCLUSION: 3

Four pieces of wood.

Some nails.

One hammer.

Goal: to design a frame, to knock it together, to place this page in the centre.

CONCLUSION: 3

Not, finally, anything but a collection of bird-cage liners, love letters, fish wrap, eternal insights, bum wipe, and original poetry—you know: just another masterpiece, one more piece of shit, a few words on a few sheets of paper.

CONCLUSION: 10

My other conclusion is a Mercedes.

Have a Nice Day!

I may be slow but I'm ahead of you!

Sassy and Single!

This conclusion makes wide right turns.

Make Love not War.

Don't follow me, I'm lost too!

This conclusion stops at all flea markets!

Honk if you're Horny!

This conclusion climbed Mt. McKinley!

Save the Whales.

Love thy neighbour.

Conclusion on board.

Eat my Dust!

CONCLUSION: 11

"When the author must more actively coax his reader into accepting an ending, we may describe the relationship between author and reader during closure as *incongruent*. Successful persuasion during closure results in the reader's acceptance of the ending, and converts an incongruent relationship into a *congruent* one. Unsuccessful persuasion results in some continuing degree of incongruence, in some sense for the reader that the ending is flawed" (Torgovnick 17).

What you see before you is the most congruent, flawless ending, ever. Ta da.

[Silence.]

Witness: our relationship, you as reader and me as author, has been, I hope, a pleasant one. We've shared a lot. Perhaps two hour's worth of experiences, perhaps a lifetime's, perhaps a minute's, depending...

Anyhow, during these moments you have encountered a hodge-podge of thises and thats, a toy-box of odds and ends, a treasure chest of doo dads and whatchamacallits. Therefore, this ending is just another kitschy ostentatious encounter. One more box of thingamabobs and thingeys, generally. There's unity here. Congruence.

My point is, have another beer, sit down, relax, let me rub your shoulders and back, let me sing to you, let me whisper a few final words...I am the author, I mean, I am the persuader, the coaxer.

My job.

Just let me mouth these sounds to you: there is no flaw, this is the end.

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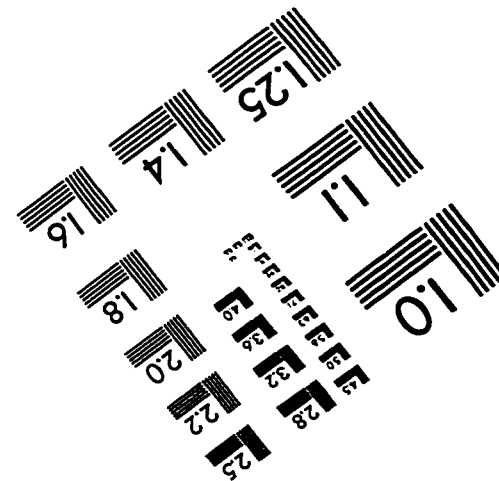
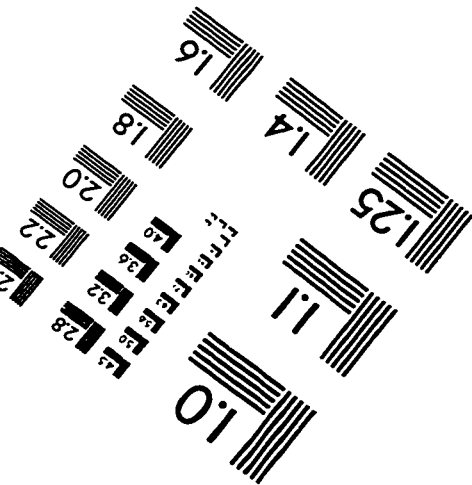
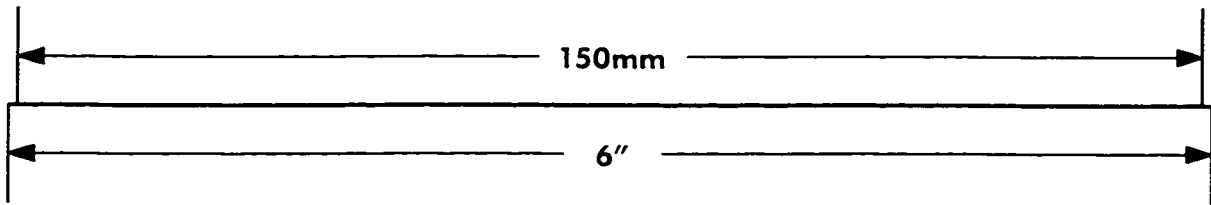
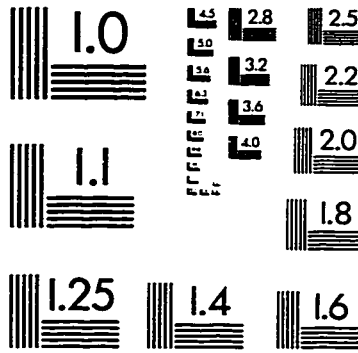
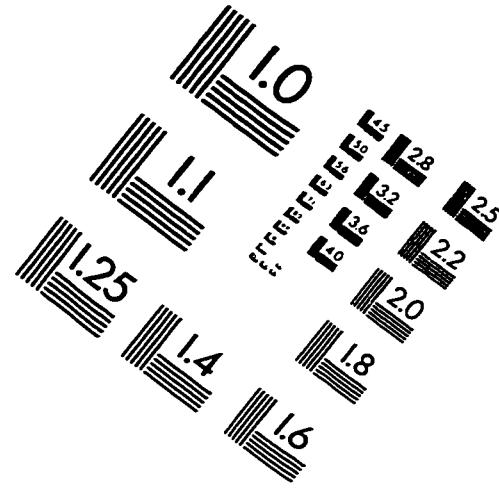
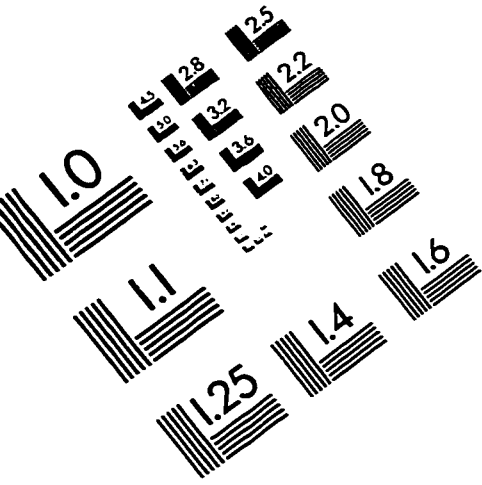
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