

# HUMANITIES CENTER

AT CALIFORNIA STATE  
UNIVERSITY, CHICO

## NEWSLETTER

January 2007  
Trinity 126, 100, and hallway



vol 6 no 2  
[www.csuchico.edu/hfa/hc](http://www.csuchico.edu/hfa/hc)

### DIRECTOR'S CORNER BY LAIRD EASTON, HISTORY

#### THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT (CONT'D)

The Humanities Center welcomes you back with a full program this spring centered on our theme of The Built Environment. At the end of this newsletter you will find some additional descriptions of special built environments by your colleagues. But first let me draw your attention to the following speakers, symposia, and tertulias. And remind you that this has been made possible, in part, by a generous grant from Tom DiGiovanni and New Urban Builders. I would like to take this space, too, to thank Dennis Rothermel, Philosophy, for finding us year after year such a great selection of wines at good prices to serve at our various receptions.

**Feb. 1**

**Leonard Koren**

**Guest lecture on Blumenkraft, a Viennese flower shop**

**7:30 pm, Trinity 100, reception to follow**

Author and graphic designer Leonard Koren will speak on the subject of his most recent book: the Vienna flower shop Blumenkraft, which he describes as an "inspirational environment" and "refuge" in which customers buy "extraordinary flower arrangements" (*The Flower Shop: Charm, Grace, Beauty, Tenderness in a Commercial Context*, 2005, Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, CA). Looking closely at this one particular retail space,

Koren connects the shop's design, display, and use with the experiences of those who work and shop there, and, in the process of doing so, explores some of the ways that design can enrich everyday life. Koren, who divides his time between San Francisco, Tokyo, and (at times) Vienna, has written eleven other books on design and aesthetics—many of which are illustrated by Koren's own distinctive photographs—including: *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* (1994); *Gardens of Gravel and Sand* (2000); *How to Rake Leaves* (1993); *Arranging Things: A Rhetoric of Object Placement* (2003); and *New Fashion Japan* (1984).

In some circles Koren may be best known as the founder of the seminal 1970s avant-garde *Wet: The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing*, to which *The Simpsons*-creator Matt Groening, as well as many other then-young talents, contributed. He has also published books on the mechanics of graphic design and the ritual of bathing: he recently critiqued modern shower heads in *Dwell* magazine.

**FEB. 16**

**Geoff Baker** Department of English,

"'Metropolitan Danger': Global London in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*," Humanities Center Friday Symposium, 3-5pm, Trinity 100/126

Baker will discuss Trollope's engagement with the first signs of London as a global city. Capping off a trend in the later fiction of Trollope and Dickens, *The Way We Live Now* (1875) brings the outside world into England's capital city; as chaos and crime ensue, Trollope's narrative resists the shrinking of the globe brought on by new

---

technologies and commercial practices. *The Way We Live Now* ultimately retreats to the countryside, refusing what Trollope sees as a new urban mixture and a dangerously foreign London.

**FEB. 20**

**Edens Lost & Found (2006, U.S.A.)** 114 min. DVD. Directed by Harry Wiland. Hosted by LaDona Knigge, Department of Geography and Planning. University Film Series, 7:30pm, Ayres 106, \$3 donation suggested

*Edens Lost & Found* is a four-part series. Tonight's two parts are "Los Angeles" and "Seattle" ("Chicago" and "Philadelphia" were shown here last October). The documentary highlights practical solutions and models for urban transformation that go beyond pollution prevention to tackle the challenge of improving the quality of life in cities for ourselves and future generations. Showcasing strategies that contribute to a sustainable ecosystem—including open space and public parks, urban forestry, watershed management, public art, waste disposal, recycling, green architecture, environmental justice, neighborhood development, and mass transit alternatives, this program presents the integrated "best practices" that are making a significant difference.

**MAR. 13**

**Heath Schenker** "Melodramatic Landscapes: The Public Park in the Nineteenth Century" 7:30pm, PAC 135, reception to follow in Trinity 100

Heath Schenker, professor and chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at UC Davis, will speak on urban parks as an international phenomenon, viewed from the perspective of social history. She contends that these parks were a figment of bourgeois culture radiating from Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Focusing on parks developed in Paris during the Second Empire, Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, and Central Park in New York, the talk explores some of the social meanings embodied in these parks, and, particularly, the role of "the melodramatic imagination" in shaping Central Park.

**MAR. 27**

**The Fountainhead** (1949, USA) 112 min. Directed by King Vidor. Hosted by Jeanne Catherine Lawrence, Department of History/Humanities Program. University Film Series, 7:30pm, Ayres 106, \$3 donation appreciated

Gary Cooper stars as an idealistic young architect, reputedly based on Frank Lloyd Wright,

who refuses to compromise his Modernistic artistic vision merely to gain professional success. Like the Ayn Rand novel it is loosely based on, *The Fountainhead* champions individualism over conformity and celebrates the popular image of the architect as heroic genius. With Patricia Neal and Raymond Massey

**APR. 5**

**David L. Pike** "*Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800-1945*" 7:30pm, Trinity 100, reception to follow

In *Subterranean Cities*, David L. Pike, professor of comparative literature at American University, explores the representation of underground space in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period during which technology and heavy industry transformed urban life. The metropolis had long been considered a moral underworld of iniquity and dissolution. As the complex drainage systems, underground railways, utility tunnels, and storage vaults of the modern cityscape superseded the countryside of caverns and mines as the principal location of actual subterranean spaces, ancient and modern converged in a mythic space that was nevertheless rooted in the everyday life of the contemporary city. Writers and artists Felix Nadar and Charles Baudelaire to Charles Dickens and Alice Meynell, Gustave Doré and Victor Hugo, George Gissing and Emile Zola, and Jules Verne and H.G. Wells integrated images of the urban underworld into their portrayals of the anatomy of modern society.

**APR. 19**

**Kijeong Jeon** Department of Art and Art History "The Corporate Branded Environment and Its Influence on Our Way of Life" Humanities Center Thursday Tertulia, 4-5:30pm, Trinity 100/126

The significant increase of corporate branding in its various forms (e.g., electronic media, print, the Internet, and environmental graphics) has had a profound effect in the way we think, eat, and live. Kijeong will discuss the influence that the corporate branded environment has had on our modern life. For ten years' prior to joining the Interior Design Program at CSU, Chico, Kijeong's professional design work focused on corporate branded environments. Several of his projects from this period will be presented here.

**APR. 26**

**Allan Jacobs and Elizabeth Macdonald** "Great Boulevards" 7:30pm, PAC 134, reception to



---

follow in Trinity 100. Part of Founders Week. **APR. 27**, 10am, Jacobs and Macdonald will lead a brief walking tour of The Esplanade (please meet in front of Bidwell Mansion).

Allan Jacobs and Elizabeth Macdonald are a team of noted Bay Area architects and city planners who have written *The Boulevard Book: History, Evolution, and Design of Multiway Boulevards*, in which they discuss boulevards in various cities around the world, including Chico's Esplanade. Jacobs teaches in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California at Berkeley. From 1967 to 1975 he served as Director of Planning for the City of San Francisco. Macdonald is a practicing architect and urban designer who teaches as well at the University of California at Berkeley.

**APR. 30**

**Roundtable Discussion** "Chico and Its Built Environments" PAC 144, moderated by Paul Zingg, president, CSU Chico. Reception hosted by New Urban Builders to follow.

## Other Symposia and Tertulias

Our crossword-composing tertulia last fall was such a success—although we learned that composing crosswords is much more difficult than it seemed—that we have decided to go forward with a monthly series of non-theme related symposia and/or tertuliae, designed around controversies, contests, or indeed pleasures. We invite faculty to submit their own ideas for such events, which should always have, as their fundamental goal, providing an occasion for us to socialize in an intellectual environment. We are still looking for topics for this spring semester.

**Feb. 22**

**Lynn Marie Houston** Department of English, "Our Environment, Ourselves: Toxic Bodies in Literature," Humanities Center Thursday Tertulia, 4-5:30pm, Trinity 100/126

During the twentieth century, we had to come to terms with the fact that humans now contain permanent levels of toxicity from manmade chemicals disposed of into nature that enter our bodies through the food we eat and water we consume. We were made aware of the toxicity of our bodies because of diseases caused by ingestion of these dangerous chemicals, even those considered to be at "safe" and "legal" levels. Accompanying our experience of our own toxicity is a lack of agency—of feeling acted upon by

outside forces, of being subjected to illness—that affects our conception of ourselves. For the past few decades, American women authors have been writing about the toxic-body by describing their experiences with disease in ways 1) that undermine the Christian association of disease with immorality, 2) that propose alternative methods of genealogy, and 3) that critique the discourse of the medical establishment. Their "toxic-body writing" helps them reclaim agency and subjectivity and offers new perspectives on human identity.

**Mar. 9**

**Daniel Veidlinger** Department of Religious Studies "*Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, Orality, and Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand*" Humanities Center Friday Symposium, 3-5pm, Trinity 100/126

Daniel Veidlinger will talk about his recent book *Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, Orality, And Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand* (University of Hawaii, 2006). The talk will examine the emergence of Buddhist manuscript production in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the kingdom of Lan Na, located in what is now northern Thailand. Until that rather late period, the Buddhist canon in the Pali language, which is held sacred by the Buddhists of Southeast Asia, was memorized and transmitted orally by a disciplined group of monks. The talk will explore the rivalry between those monks who wished to preserve the older oral tradition and the monks, rulers, and laypeople who supported the introduction of the new medium of writing. It will also look at the effect that different modes of communication had on the way the texts were assimilated into the religious life and mindset of the time. Veidlinger will sign copies of the book.

**Apr. 6**

**Daniel Veidlinger and Andy Flescher** Department of Religious Studies "The Connection between Religious and Cultural Identity" Humanities Center Friday Symposium, 3-5pm, Trinity 100/126

In the ancient world, one's belief system or religion, as we might now call it, was usually intimately associated with one's ethnic or tribal identity. The idea of having a religion that could be abstracted from one's cultural identity and converted into or out of did not begin to gain anything like widespread acceptance until the sixth century BCE with religions like Buddhism and, of course, was given a big push with Christianity and



---

Islam. Still, today, religions like Hinduism and Judaism are closely associated in most cases with a particular cultural identity. In this symposium, we will explore the connection between religious and cultural/ethnic identity and examine the difference between subscribing to a particular belief system and being a member of a particular ethnic group—if, indeed, there is one.

### Next year's theme

The Board of the Humanities Center has decided that next year's theme will be entitled: **"The Book: Past, Present, and Future."** No single artifact has been more associated with the university, with scholarship, and indeed with extra-somatic knowledge in general. We especially in the humanities share a reverence for books and think of ourselves as their guardians. Yet the book is a technology and like any technology it has a history. But, is it also doomed, like most technologies, to obsolescence? There is a paradox here: never has

there been so many competitors to the book, never such dire prophecies for its decline, never such a bleak prognosis in particular for scholarly books, and yet . . . never has there been such an efflorescence of publishing, never have so many interesting books been published in so many interesting ways. To explore the past, present and future of the book, we hope to invite to campus, historians of the book, university press editors, literary agents, librarians knowledgeable about digitalization, as well as fine print publishers. We also would like to tap into our faculty's expertise and enthusiasms. If anyone would like to present a symposium or organize a tertulia related to this theme, please contact me this spring. As you know, these events need not be formal presentations of research but can be organized in a variety of playful and informal ways too.

## EXAMPLES OF BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Here are three more descriptions of built environments, broadly speaking, by our colleagues that I think you will enjoy reading.

*Henry Higgins's study (My Fair Lady) is a most excellent room! The two-story bookshelf, with its spiral staircase for access, is a reader/researcher's dream come true. Also, the many windows, overstuffed chairs, corner with a desk and globe, and equipment for research make for a first-rate intellectual retreat. As do the candy dishes filled with chocolates! Of course, one would need to add an espresso machine, and the equipment would need to be updated; but what teacher/scholar wouldn't want to spend hours lost in the opportunities 'enny's room offers? (I am assuming the housekeeper would also be available.)—Becky White, Philosophy*

### *Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities and the Novel as Built Environment*

One might argue, as Henry James did, that fiction is a type of built environment. "The house of fiction has not one window, but a million," wrote James, and "at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other." James's gift, of course, was to build an empire of the inner mind: he was, as Conrad once put it, an historian of fine consciousness. When a writer attempts to describe the experience of the inner mind in the terms of an outside world, or "built environment," all metaphors immediately double. One thinks of Borges's "Library of Babel," for instance, or Kafka's castles and courtrooms. And then there is the city: a built environment on the largest of scales.

If we are talking of cities, we are in the domain of Italo Calvino. No novel plays with the idea of the built environment more exquisitely than *Invisible Cities*. The conceit is simple: the Venetian Marco Polo sits at the foot of Kublai Khan, describing the many cities of the emperor's vast realm. The Khan is old and in poor health; he cannot ever hope to see the far reaches of his empire. And so, in a series of fifty-five vignettes, Polo describes each city he has seen. An instinctive Jamesian, Polo can only give a subjective, personal account: "It is the mood of the beholder which gives the city of Zembrude its form," Polo tells the Khan. If you go by whistling, your nose a-tilt...you will know it from below: window sills, flapping curtains, fountains. If you walk along hanging your head...your gaze will be held on the ground, in the gutter, the manhole covers, the fish scales, wastepaper. You cannot say that one aspect of the city is truer than the other."

Other cities seem to embody traits more universal: Valdrada is a city built beside a lake whose waters are so still and calm that a perfect reflection of the city is omnipresent. Consequently, "Nothing exists in the once Valdrada that the other Valdrada does not repeat. Valdrada's inhabitants know that each of their actions is, at once, that action and its



---

mirror-image, which possesses the special dignity of images, and this awareness prevents them from succumbing for a single moment to chance and forgetfulness.”

Each of Polo’s descriptions is somehow more fanciful and evocative than the last. “Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says,” we are told. Yet the emperor listens keenly, for he has no other recourse: “In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered, and the melancholy and relief of knowing we shall soon give up any thought of knowing and understanding them.” For Kublai Khan, the built environment of Polo’s rhetoric becomes his virtual empire- the only one he will ever really know. The Khan understands that all knowledge is mediated: it comes to him in the form of a constructed narrative with which he must wrestle in order to attempt any sort of mastery.

What Calvino gives us in this playful masterpiece is, finally, not a book of cities but a book of knowledge, a comment on epistemology itself. Calvino reminds us that all knowledge, all of history and literature, is itself a kind of built environment that, if we can be said to own it at all, we can only own imperfectly and partially. For his part, Marco Polo eventually concedes that every city he has described is but a memory of Venice, the only city he truly knows. The Khan doesn’t mind; he knows that “it is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear.” And he bids the story teller to continue.—**Rob Davidson, English**

*Fishing the Bridges of Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana*

Driving across Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana, for your daily commute is a study to the ineffectiveness of language to represent experience. All you can muster for a description of the water that stretches as far as you can see until it becomes the sky is that it is “blue,” or “green,” or “gray.” But it is never exactly just one of those words at a given time, and it is never exactly the same color again. And it isn’t really a statement about color, after all, that you are trying to express with what suddenly appears to be a limited vocabulary. It’s more like an incredulity at the beauty of nature or at the skill of the engineer: how could you drive across an entire lake on a twenty-four mile bridge every weekday for a year, from Mandeville to Metairie and back again, and never see the water the same color twice? It is as unsettling a feeling as being in the middle of the watery vastness propped up on two narrow lanes of concrete, held up by hollow pilings that place you barely a few feet above the water, traveling sixty miles an hour in a jacked-up tin can called a car.

The bridge across this section of Lake Pontchartrain, known as the Causeway Bridge, is one of the longest bridges in the world. In the very middle of it, you feel out of place without the points of reference familiar to land-dwellers. At one section, both coming and going, you cannot see land on either end: not ahead of you out of your windshield, nor behind you in the rearview mirror. Only once, riding into work in the morning, in the last month of the three years that I lived there, did the weather permit a clear view of the New Orleans skyline in front of me from about seven miles offshore—the Crescent City, so called because it is located along a bend in the Mississippi river, which, as it rolled along, carved out a plot of land in the shape of a mud-banked crescent.

As you leave Mandeville traveling south on the Causeway, you can see long wooden fishing piers extending out from the shoreline on your left. Contrary to the colorful tales of the locals, I don’t believe anyone catches any fish there. There are stories of monster redfish snagged at dusk, or of the ones that got away: fish so big that custom rods were snapped in half, or yanked out of their owner’s unsuspecting hands. But I’ve never had so much as a bite there for all my hours of trouble. The best place to fish is under the causeway itself, as close as you can get to the large concrete pilings that bolster its weight. For the first few miles offshore, fishing boats crowd alongside each other in the early morning twilight while commuter cars zoom overhead. Sometimes, if you’re lucky, in between sips of your chicory-blend coffee and frantic early-morning calls from your boss, you can catch a glimpse of someone struggling to reel in a fat speck.

Some of the best speckled trout fishing in Louisiana is next to and around the bridges built over Lake Pontchartrain. There’s Seabrook Bridge in New Orleans, for instance, where Lake Pontchartrain meets the Mississippi River. It’s near the Industrial Canal that flows through the city’s Ninth Ward. Seabrook is much shorter and stands much higher than the Causeway Bridge, and, in contrast, it is only partially situated over the water. Underneath it, there is a parking lot and a boat launch. On any Friday or Saturday night, you can find a host of locals fishing under there from piers and other bridge components that drop off steeply into the lake. One of the piers there is even named after a famous Louisiana fisherman who has his own fishing program on the news. I’ve seen grandfathers standing on it at four o’clock in the morning catching a Saturday or Sunday supper for their families. In the Crescent City, at a good fishing hole, you’ll find all kinds of people from every walk of life, and all colors. It doesn’t matter whether you have your own TV show or are just supplementing your pension and adding a little extra protein to your family’s diet.

No one has ever explained to me why fish are attracted to bridges. Do they like the vibrations caused by the traffic? Do bridges provide good sources of food for them or good places to hide from their predators? I may never know. But after living three years in Louisiana, I think I understand a little better why humans are fascinated by bridges. They offer themselves up as places to contemplate humankind’s ingenuity as it meets nature’s majesty; whether the former is



---

the technology of the bridge or the fishing techniques of hungry New Orleanians, and whether the latter is the indescribable chameleon colors of Lake Pontchartrain or the exquisite markings on the speckled trout you can catch there.—Lynn Marie Houston, English

## AT THE HUMANITIES CENTER GALLERY

**JAN. 16-FEB. 22 Dan Wooldridge and Susan Wooldridge** *Two Wools*, Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity hallway, M-F 8-5 **JAN. 25 Informal artists' talk** 4:30pm and **Reception** 5-7pm

Dan has been drawing, painting, and taking photographs in and out of a journal for years. He's been a drummer in many bands, most recently The Comfy Chairs. He's now a student at the San Francisco Art Institute. He'll be showing paintings, collage, and photos.

Susan has been keeping a journal and making collage boxes for years. Here you'll have a look at her (often unfinished) small boxes along with glimpses into her collage journal. She is the author of two books published by Random House: *poemcrazy: freeing your life with words* (now in its 19<sup>th</sup> printing) and the forthcoming (June 2007) tentatively titled *foolsgold: making something from nothing*. Susan has an interdisciplinary MA in art and writing from CSU, Chico.

**JAN. 16-FEB. 22 Belinda Hanson** *Transparent Longings*, Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity Hall, M-F 8-5 **JAN. 25 Informal artist's talk** 4:30pm and **Reception** 5-7pm

Hanson earned her MA in art here in 2001. Jeannene Przyblyski, San Francisco-based art historian and curator, writes: "Hanson's sculptures and sculptural installations immediately place us in another world. Magical and strange, and also strangely familiar—it is as if we already knew these forms deeply within our own bodies. This sense of seeing the body from the inside-out has something to do with the organic shapes of her sculptures—elongated, irregular, swollen, stretched, distended. It also has something to do with their material. Transparent packing tape is patiently pressed together, inch by inch, delicate and strong, pliant and substantial, invisible and visible. It is architecture with an almost cellular logic. Part of a long history of modernist sculpture of assemblage and found materials, Hanson's work asks us to contemplate the boundary between human and inhuman, nature and artifice, sameness and difference—and feel wonder."

**FEB. 27-APR. 27 Achim von Boxberg** *The Strange and Wonder-Full World of Meister Rabenschnabel* Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity hallway, M-F 8-5 (closed Mar. 30)

Achim von Boxberg sends us his art from Berlin. His "kalenders," from 1994 to the present, are small, wry treasures of design, cartoon, and illustration. Go to his website, all in German, for a sampling: [www.rabenschnabel.de/index.htm](http://www.rabenschnabel.de/index.htm)

**MAR. 6-APR. 27 Wayne Pease** *Meet Me at the Fair, Eros & Death!* Humanities Center Gallery Trinity Hall, M-F 8-5 (closed Mar. 30) **MAR. 8 Reception** 5-7pm (**artist's talk** at 6) **APR. 25 Poetry** 7:30pm

Pease, whose plays have been performed in San Francisco and New York and who was last year's winner of the Fresh Ink Prize at the Blue Room Theatre in Chico, turned his attention to photography five years ago ([www.pbase.com/wwwp](http://www.pbase.com/wwwp)). *Meet Me at the Fair* is comprised of photographs from the Blue Room. Other aspects of the artist's work will be available at the reception on Mar. 8 (Trinity 100), the poetry reading on Apr. 25 (Trinity 100), the one act plays at 7:30pm on Mar. 14. and Apr. 11 (Blue Room Theatre), and the film showing of *Mother Thunder* at 5:30pm on Mar. 28 (Ayres 106). 342-0346

## HUMANITIES CENTER BOARD

### DIRECTOR

Laird Easton (History)

### BOARD

Amy Bloch (Art and Art History), Jeanne Clark (English), Marcel Daguerre (Philosophy), Troy Jollimore (Philosophy), James Kuiper (Art and Art History), John Milbauer (Music), Robert O'Brien (English), Sarah Pike (Religious Studies), Char Prieto (Foreign Languages and Literatures), Robert Tinkler (History), Sue Whitmore (Art and Art History), Wai-hung Wong (Philosophy)

### EX-OFFICIO

Sarah Blackstone (dean)

Thomasin Saxe (special projects), Brooks Thorlaksson (associate dean)

