HUMANITIES CENTER
AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

NEWSLETTER

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

BY TROY JOLLIMORE, PHILOSOPHY

I try not to judge books by their covers, but I will confess: I have often judged people by their books. When invited to someone's home I become excited at the prospect of seeing their bookshelves. Surely, I think, deep insight into this person's true nature and character will follow. Let them be distracted by a telephone call, or disappear for a moment into the kitchen to attend to whatever is simmering away there, and I am all over their collection like Hercule Poirot at a murder scene. Of course I have also, on occasion, had my own shelves scrutinized—an experience that makes one feel as if one's soul itself is on display.

I had a friend—a writer—who, whenever he was asked for a brief author's bio or contributor's note, would provide a list of his favorite books. If the particular titles he provided helped shed light on his identity, the general practice revealed yet more. Despite deconstructionist claims to the contrary, and to whatever extent we may rationally know better, most of us continue to be guided by the thought that a book lays bare the inner being of its author—that "A good book," as Thomas Carlyle put it, "is the purest essence of a human soul." But we must not forget that books speak to us of their owners and readers as well.

Books are *important.* The very technology of the book is important, revolutionary even. The typical volume is capable of displaying, depending on how it is opened, any one of several hundred panels of text; yet it is compact, lightweight and portable. It is interactive; one can add one's own notes to its margins or end leaves, or underline passages one takes to be important. It is (relatively) durable, will endure hundreds of readings, and since it requires neither an internet connection nor a wall outlet, can be operated in the middle of a field or, for that matter, a canoe. For these reasons and others the book (in its current, "codex" form) was for a very long time the primary mode of information storage and transmission in our society. And to this day it remains, for a great many people at least, the primary means of accessing our society's store of recorded fact and wisdom. Moreover the various advances that enabled the cheaper, more efficient production of books, from the invention of moveable type to the introduction of the mass market paperback, have contributed greatly to the general democratization of the intellect.

But it is not that books are so *important* that makes them, for most of us, so important. It is that they are so personal. The book is a technology that we are no more capable of regarding as mere technology than we are of so regarding our own eyes or hands. It is a deeply significant technological achievement that we are more likely than not to take utterly for granted, to see as one more ordinary, even homey artifact in our immediate environment. Of all the technologies that have transformed our civilization, the book may be the most personal, the most intimate.

And of course, this revolutionary technology has come, with time, to connect with our bourgeois desires for the possession of the finer things in life. A first edition of Thoreau's *Walden*, that paean to the economical, simple life, runs, depending on condition, from five thousand to forty-five thousand dollars (according to the online Advanced Book Exchange). If your tastes in revolution run a bit further to the east, you can have a true first of *Quotations of Chairman*

Mao Tse-Tung for about fifteen thousand. True revolutionaries will have to make do with reprints.

I think it is these tensions—the radical vs. the ordinary, the revolutionary vs. the bourgeois—that help make the book such a fascinating object of attention for nearly every scholar and intellectual I know. Also, of course, the tension between the real physical existence of book-as-object and the abstract, immaterial, and essentially repeatable content: the body vs. the soul, the Platonic Form vs. the debased realm of appearances. For who among us does not respond to the sheer physical pleasure of holding and opening a book? And which of us has not experienced the phenomenon Thoreau invoked when he exclaimed, "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!"

The CSU Humanities Center's theme for 2007-08 is—in case you had not guessed it by this point—The Book: Past, Present, and Future. In a previous edition of this newsletter last year's Director, Laird Easton, wrote the following:

> *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 have 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.*

We look forward to a year of exploring these various paradoxes, and the diverse and even contradictory feelings, impulses and responses called forth by this exotic/familiar, revolutionary/domestic, subversive/conservative, flourishing/ailing object: the book.

FALL EVENTS

As was the case last year, it is our pleasure to acknowledge the generous and continuing support of Tom diGiovanni and New Urban Builders, which has made many of these events possible.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Naomi Schneider. ***The University Press Grows Up: How to Get Published in the Changing World of Books***. Wednesday, October 3, 7:30pm PAC 134, reception to follow in Trinity 100.

Naomi Schneider is Executive Editor at the University of California Press, one of the six largest university presses in the country and the only one in the group on the West Coast and associated with a public university. She acquires books in sociology, anthropology, women's studies, Latin American studies, and contemporary politics. A significant portion of her list is focused on issues of social justice and human rights. Her talk and discussion will consider current challenges facing those in the business of publishing academic books, and those seeking to be published in this area.

Steve Wasserman. ***The Future of the Book in a Digital Age.*** Tuesday October 23, 7:30pm Ayres 106, reception to follow in Trinity 100.

As literary editor of the *Los Angeles Times,* Steve Wasserman was responsible for the weekly LA Times Sunday Book Review, widely regarded as one of the best and most influential book reviews in the country. He is currently managing director of the New York office of the literary agency Kneerim & Williams. Prior to that he spent time with Farrar, Straus, & Giroux where he was publisher and editorial director of two imprints, Hill & Wang and The Noonday Press. He has been on the nominating jury for The Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and was the chairman of the nominating jury for The Pulitzer Prize in General Nonfiction. He has taught at the University of Southern California and UC Berkeley.

Recently Wasserman has appeared in a variety of venues arguing for the continuing significance and indeed necessity both of literature, and of intelligent coverage and criticism of literature in the mainstream media. In his September/October 2007 cover story for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, "Goodbye to All That," he had the following to say:

> *It is through the work of novelists and poets that we understand how we imagine ourselves and contend with the often elusive forces--of which language itself is a foremost factor--that shape us as individuals and*

families, citizens and communities, and it is through our historians and scientists, journalists and essayists that we wrestle with how we have lived, how the present came to be, and what the future might bring....if you want to reduce crime, teach your children to read. Civilization is built on a foundation of books

(The full essay may be read online at: *http://www.cjr.org/cover_story/goodbye_to_all_that_1.php?page=all*)

A conversation with Forrest Gander and Brenda Hillman. Thursday, October 25, 2-4:00 pm Trinity 126.

Forrest Gander and Brenda Hillman are two of the most challenging and innovative poets working today. Gander's books of poetry include *Eye Against Eye, Torn Awake, Science & Steepleflower,* and *Deeds of Utmost Kindness*, as well as the essay collection, *A Faithful Existence*, and numerous translations from the work of Spanish-language poets. Along with C.D. Wright, he edits Lost Roads Publishers, whose list of authors includes René Char and Fanny Howe.

Brenda Hillman's most recent book, *Pieces of Air in the Epic*, won the 2006 William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. Her other books include *Cascadia* and *Loose Sugar*.

Gander and Hillman will meet with interested faculty and students in the intimate venue of Trinity 126 to discuss their work, their approaches to writing, and the place and situation of small press publishing in today's literary environment.

SYMPOSIA AND TERTULIA

Beth Spencer. "Small Presses, Big Pressures: Keeping an Independent Press Afloat in an Age of Amazon.com." Friday, September 28, 3-5pm Trinity 100.

Spencer, who teaches in the Literary Editing and Publishing Program here and is founder and owner of Bear Star Press in Cohasset, discusses the joys and trials of keeping a small press going in the twenty-first century. She will cover the situation in general with some specific examples from Bear Star and provide information about where not to buy books if one truly supports literary publishing.

Andrew Flescher (Religious Studies) and Dan Worthen (Psychology). "The Altruistic Species." Friday, November 2, 3-5pm Trinity 100.

Professors Flescher and Worthen will be on hand to discuss their forthcoming book. "Is altruism something to which we can reason our way, or does the impulse precede reason and theory? *In The Altruistic Species: Scientific, Philosophical, and Religious Perspectives of Human Benevolence* (Templeton Foundation Press, $34.95), Andrew Michael Flescher and Daniel L. Worthen explore these questions through the lenses of four disciplinary perspectives—biology, psychology, philosophy, and religion. In the course of their investigation, they make an extended argument for the existence of altruism against competing theories that construe all ostensible cases of benevolence as self-interest in disguise."

Sarah Pike (Religious Studies). "Liberation's Crusade Has Begun: Hare Krishna Hardcore Youth and Animal Rights." Friday, November 30, 3-5pm, Trinity 100.

Sarah Pike's presentation explores the ways in which Krishna Consciousness has shaped hardcore youth culture and radical animal rights activism. Drawing on interviews with activists and Krishna hardcore musicians, music lyrics, fanzines, and MySpace band sites, she argues that the point of convergence of hardcore music, Krishna Consciousness, and radical activism represents an important subculture within which young adults negotiate and construct religious and activist identities.

AT THE HUMANITIES CENTER GALLERY (TRINITY 100 AND HALL)

Through OCT. 25

Patrick Collentine and Susan Larsen *Desire*

Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity Hall, M-F 8-5

Alums Pat Collentine and Susan Larsen return with the latest in their "Kolorbar" series for their third show at the Humanities Center Gallery (in the past: Dec. '02 and Apr. '04). The series is an ongoing exploration originally inspired by a trip to southeast Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park in 1995. The inclusion of the kolorbar in the photos became a conceptual verification for the glaciers' size and color. "The photos are part performance, part photography. The act of taking a kolorbar photograph is absurd," write the artists. "'What the hell is that person doing standing behind a multicolored strip of vinyl and having a picture taken?'" Larsen and Collentine have collaborated on several public art projects and just completed *Wanders in a Riparian Garden*, a three-part sculpture installed in Sacramento's Regency Park. They are represented by Augen Gallery (Portland, OR).

OCT. 2-NOV. 1

Sue Whitmore *Cryptomnesia* Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity Hall, M-F 8-5 OCT. 4 **Reception** 5-7pm

Department of Art faculty and Humanities Center Board member Sue Whitmore returns with new work in mixed media for her second show at the HCG (the first was the wildly popular *Cozy* in Oct. 2003). She is making objects that "you think you recognize but possibly have forgotten what they refer to." Whitmore earned her MFA from the University of Washington and has studied, taught, and had residences in Italy, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, and Oregon.

NOV. 6-DEC. 19

Peter Jodaitis *Drawn on Thirty-Three* Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity Hall, M-F 8-5 (closed Nov. 12, 22, and 23) Nov. 8 **Reception** 5-7pm (artist's talk at 6)

Peter Jodaitis writes: "The work in this exhibit covers the years from the making of what I consider my first 'original' drawing to the present. That first drawing, 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings' taken from the Gabriel Garcia Marquez story, was done in 1974, thirty-three years ago, and is in a sense the beginning of this story....The paintings in the hall represent a series I began in summer of 2006 and continue to explore. Some of the pieces suggest to me images of petrified wood—and wood, along with the rest of nature, has good reason to be petrified in our mall-plagued, war-torn times....In the main room is a selection of work from 1974 to 2007 which represents a number of the over thirty series I have produced since I began to work in series in the late 1970s. Difficult as it was for me to choose, and despite the inevitable space limitations in representing a large body of work, the exhibit does trace, albeit roughly, my trajectory through the space of art."

AT THE UNIVERSITY FILM SERIES (7:30PM, AYRES 106)

OCT. 9

Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no Haka) (1988, Japan) 88 min. Directed by Isao Takahata. Hosted by Masami Toku, Art and Art History. Alternately known as *Tombstone for Fireflies*, *Grave* is a very somber film about the struggle of two children to survive during World War II.

OCT. 16

Fahrenheit 451 (1966, France) 113 min. Directed by Francois Truffaut. Hosted by director of the University Art Gallery Jason Tannen, Art and Art History. Acclaimed as a modern classic in the vein of Brave New World and 1984, this outstanding novel by Ray Bradbury is brought to the screen with all its vividness and imagination intact.

OCT. 30

Plagues & Pleasures on the Salton Sea (2007, U.S.A.) 77min. Directed by Chris Metzler and Jeff Springer. Hosted in person by either Metzler or Springer with a question-and-answer period to follow the screening. Fabulously offbeat and refreshingly upbeat, this lovable film gets friendly with the natives of the Salton Sea, an inland ocean of massive fish kills, rotting resorts, and 120 degree nights located just minutes from urban Southern California.

NOV. 6

Calendar (1993, Armenia/Canada) 75 min. Directed by Atom Egoyan. Hosted by Jeanne C. Lawrence, History. In this, one of his most personal films, Atom Egoyan himself plays a photographer hired to capture images of Armenian churches for a calendar.

NOV. 13

Selections from the Portland Documentary and eXperimental Film Festival 2007 Curated by Gretchen Hogue. Co-sponsored by the A.S. Committee on Arts and Lectures (CAL). Gretchen Hogue, Portland, OR-based filmmaker/curator, returns to the UFS with a new batch of contemporary films coming out of Portland's thriving independent filmmaking scene.

NOV. 27

Tears of the Black Tiger (2001, Thailand) 110 min. Directed by Wisit Sasanatieng. Hosted by Juan-Carlos Selznick (aka Peter Hogue), film critic for the *Chico News and Review* (and faculty emeritus, English). Co-sponsored by the A.S. Committee on Arts and Lectures (CAL). In this genre-busting action film, peasant Dum is separated from this childhood sweetheart, the beautiful and rich Rumpoey. Dum then becomes a gun-slinging outlaw called Black Tiger when he finds his father murdered by criminals.

DEC.4

In the Mood for Love (2000, Hong Kong) 94 min. Directed by Wong Kar-Wai. Hosted by Wai-hung Wong, Department of Philosophy and Humanities Center Board. Co-sponsored by the A.S. Committee on Arts and Lectures (CAL). Chow (Tony Leung) and Li-zhen (Maggie Cheung) become more than friends when they realize their spouses are having an affair.

DEC. 11

Three Crowns of the Sailor (1982, France) 117 min. Directed by Raul Ruiz. Hosted by Peter Hogue, Department of English, emeritus. Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Raul Ruiz (*Time Regained, Comedy of Innocence, The Golden Boat)* directs this surreal drama based on the southern Chilean island of Chilo's myth of "Caleuche" or "The Ship of the Dead."

AN INVITATION FOR OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER

Desert Island Books is a game that will never go out of style. And what better way is there of getting to know someone? Really, if you could only ask, say, three questions of a potential date or life partner, wouldn't one of them be: if you were to be stranded on a desert island and could only take five books, which five would you take?

We'd love to hear your responses. With justifications, of course. And please consider: being stranded on an island is even more location-constraining than being tenured. In other words, you might be on this island for a long, long time. So try to bring a variety—something useful; something inspiring; something entertaining. Something to get you through the tough times, the lonesome nights, the monsoon season. Something that will stand up to repeated readings. (We're not making it easy, are we?)

Or: if you don't feel like playing—just give us a paragraph or two about your relations to books. It can be as personal, as playful, as abstract or concrete, as earnest or as downright absurd as you like. Do you collect books? Do you write in the margins of your books? What is your favorite reading spot?

And so forth. To get you started, and whet your appetite, we offer the following selections:

Yesterday in New York, it felt like we began our axial tilt toward fall. The light had gone thin and all the buildings in Flatiron stood out in their stately gray. The air had that quick crisp snap. For some reason I always think of this as the start of reading season. Winter's harshest months feel like times to be endured. Spring pries you from the house. In fall you have a choice of staying in or putting on a sweater and remaining outside. All my fondest memories of reading come from this time – of those weekends spent bivouacked in a book while the world swirls on toward winter. In my first year in New York, I recall spending most of the afternoon and part of an evening reading William Wharton's "Dad" at Cafe Gitane, back when your lattes came to you through clouds of blue smoke. I remember as a student sitting on the front lawn of the college I attended tumbling through "To the Lighthouse," experiencing for the first time the rightness of that phrase, stream of consciousness, its tidal wash, the way Woolf dreamily shoves you about before finally depositing you back on your readerly pedestal. Of course none of these memories says much about these book in a critical sense – and the work itself, the sentences and structure, should remain primary. But I would never want to scrub this extrasensory aura from my books. I sometimes wonder if anyone has organized a library this way, by seasons or by memory, the labyrinths of the past painted across their shelves in a pattern only they can see.

John Freeman, President, National Book Critics Circle

When I read an indifferent book, it seems to me the best thing I can do, but the inspiring volume hardly leaves me leisure to finish its latter pages. It is slipping out of my fingers while I read. It creates no atmosphere in which it may be perused, but one in which its teachings may be practiced. It confers one me such wealth that I lay it down with the least regret. What I began by reading I must finish by acting.

Thoreau's Journal, February 19, 1841

My hands, choosing a book to take to bed or to the reading-desk, for the train or for a gift, consider the form as much as the content. Depending on the occasion, depending on the place where I've chosen to read, I prefer something

small and cozy or ample and substantial. Books declare themselves through their titles, their authors, their places in a catalogue or on a bookshelf, the illustrations on their jackets; books also declare themselves through their size. At different times and in different places I have come to expect books to look a certain way, and, as in all fashions, these changing features fix a precise quality onto a book's definition. I judge a book by its cover; I judge a book by its shape.

Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*

But we would be remiss, perhaps, if we did not accompany these inspiring passages with a word of warning: books can be addictive! A tract printed and distributed in Germany in 1796 had the following to say on the matter:

Readers of books . . . rise and retire to bed with a book in their hand, sit down at a table with one, have one lying close by when working, carry one around with them when walking, and . . . once they have begun reading a book are unable to stop until they are finished. But they have scarcely finished the last page of a book before they begin looking around greedily for somewhere to acquire another one; and when they are at the toilet or at their desk or some other place ,if they happen to come across something that fits with their own subject or seems to them to be readable, they take it away and devour it with a kind of ravenous hunger. No lover of tobacco or coffee, no wine drinker or lover of games, can be addicted to their pipe, bottle, games or coffee-table as those many hungry readers are to their reading habit.

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AND, FINALLY, A HUGE THANK YOU TO DAVID BARTA, ART AND ART HISTORY, WHO BUILT TWO UNBELIEVABLY BEAUTIFUL LOCKABLE DISPLAY CASES LAST YEAR FOR THE HUMANITIES CENTER.