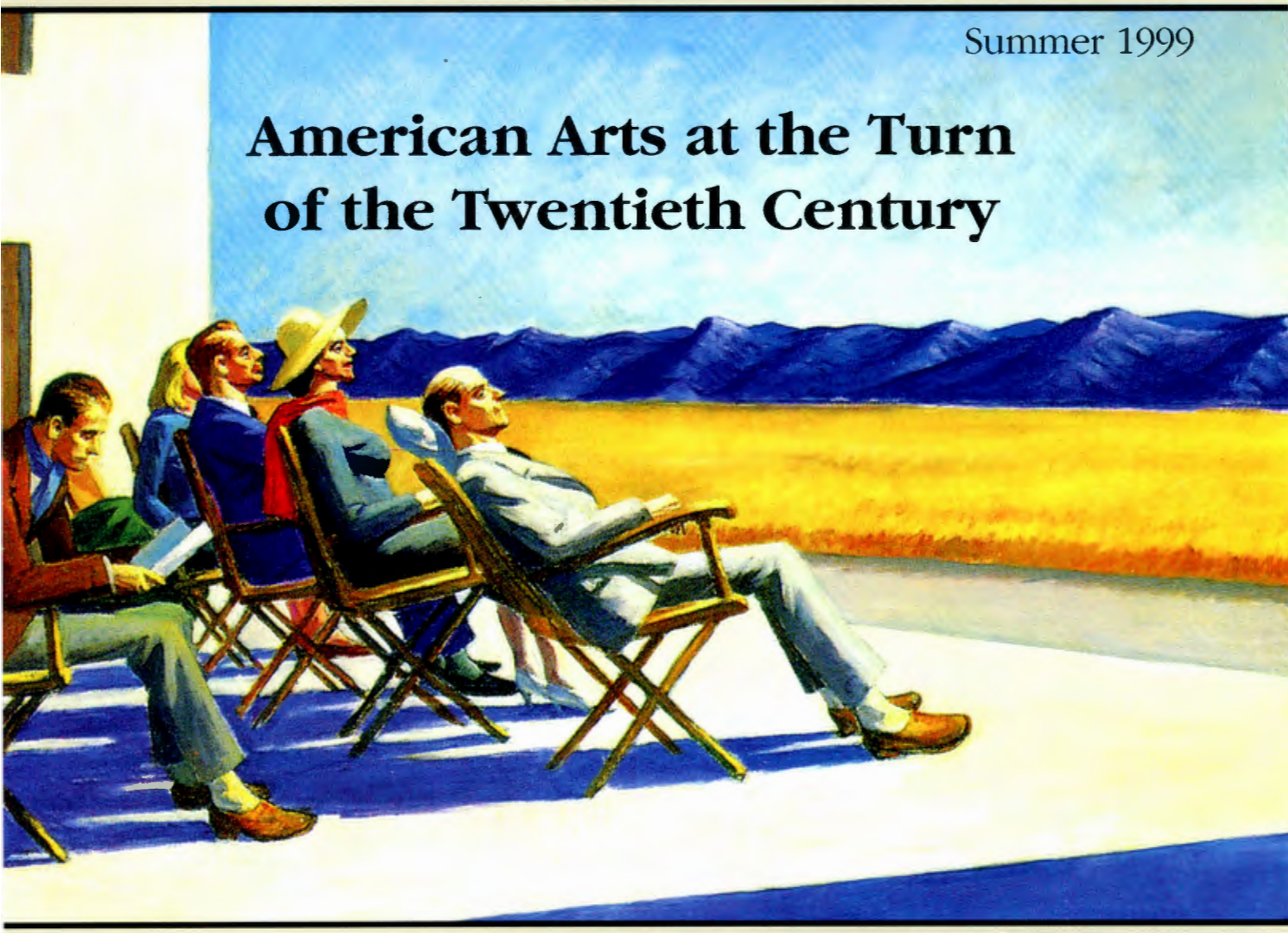
American Studies Journal

Number 43
Summer 1999

American Arts at the Turn of the Twentieth Century



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Editor's Note

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, July 1999

Dear Readers:

The current issue of the *American Studies Journal* is the first published under the editorship of the Center for U.S. Studies at the Stiftung Leucorea, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. Long-time readers of the journal will find that the format of the current issue is very much like that of previous ones. However, there will be some changes in upcoming issues. We plan to increase the number of original contributions rather than reprinting articles that have already been published elsewhere. The editorial board is currently soliciting academic articles, as well as teaching-oriented contributions that the journal has always presented. The editorial board also hopes to include reviews of books in the fields of history, literature, political science, American studies and teaching methodology in future issues.

The current issue focuses on the arts in the United States in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Article topics include film, dance, music, as well as the visual arts. Additionally, during "American Cultural Days" at the Center for U.S. Studies in early May of 1999, we were fortunate to present a photographic exhibit and lecture by Curt Richter, an American photographer and teacher. Mr. Richter was kind enough to submit an article on his photography to the journal. The second section of the journal contains the third part of our series on Education in the United States, including two articles on technology in education.

Tentative themes for future issues include:
- Social and Welfare Policy in the U.S. (no. 44)
- Race Relations in the U.S. (no. 45)
- Conservatism and the New Right in the U.S. (no. 46)
- Native Americans (no. 47)
- The American West (no. 48)
- The University: Anniversary Issue for the University of Wittenberg (no. 49)
- Non-Profit Organizations (no. 50)

Once again, the *American Studies Journal* welcomes submissions from teachers and scholars. Submissions may be academic articles on a range of topics within the broad umbrella of American Studies or related to teaching.

J. Kelly Robison
Editor, *American Studies Journal*
Center for U.S. Studies / Stiftung Leucorea

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Overview

Classical Music

The development of the arts in America has been marked by a tension between two strong sources of inspiration—European sophistication and domestic originality. A distinctively American classical music came to fruition when such composers as George Gershwin and Aaron Copland incorporated homegrown melodies and rhythms into forms borrowed from Europe.

The arts in America get relatively little public support. To survive, symphony orchestras depend largely on philanthropy and paid admissions. Some orchestra directors have found a way to keep mainstream audiences happy while introducing new music to the public. Rather than segregate the new pieces, these directors program them side-by-side with traditional fare. Meanwhile, opera—old and new—has been flourishing; because it is so expensive to stage, however, opera depends heavily on the generosity of corporate and private donors.

Dance

Closely related to the development of American music in the early twentieth century was the emergence of a new, and distinctively American, art form—modern dance. Among the early innovators were Isadora Duncan, who stressed pure, unstructured movement in lieu of the positions of classical ballet. Martha Graham's New York-based company was perhaps the best known in modern dance.

In the early twentieth century, U.S. audiences were introduced to classical ballet by touring companies of European dancers. The first American ballet troupes were founded in the 1930s, when dancers and choreographers teamed up with visionary lovers of ballet such as Lincoln Kirstein. Kirstein invited Russian choreographer George Balanchine to the United States in 1933, and the two established the School of American Ballet, which became the New York City Ballet in 1948. Ballet manager and publicity agent Richard Pleasant founded America's second leading ballet organization, American Ballet Theater, with dancer and patron Lucia Chase in 1940. Paradoxically, native-born directors like Pleasant included Russian classics in their repertoires, while Balanchine announced that his new American company was predicated on distinguished music and new works in the classical idiom, not the standard repertory of the past.

Later choreographers searched for new methods of expression. Merce Cunningham introduced improvisation and random movement into performances. Alvin Ailey incorporated African dance elements and black music into his works. Recently, such choreographers as Mark Morris and Liz Lerman have defied the convention that dancers must be thin and young. Their belief, put into action in their hiring practices and performances, is that graceful, exciting movement is not restricted by age or body type.

Theater

Before the movies and radio, most Americans had to entertain themselves or wait for the arrival in town of lecturers, circuses, or the traveling stage revues known as vaudeville. The medium demanded a steady supply of new songs. Late in the nineteenth century, music publishing became a big business in the United States, with many firms clustered in New York City, on a street that became known as Tin Pan Alley. Vaudeville and the European genre of operetta spawned the Broadway musical, which integrates songs and dancing into a continuous story with spoken dialogue.

Many new plays, usually about fifty productions a season, are presented first on Broadway, the theater district of New York City. To many Americans, seeing a Broadway show is a high point in their visit to the nation's largest city. Over the years, New York theater has developed new avenues known as "off-Broadway" and "off-off Broadway" where plays are staged in small playhouses, but some rank with the best Broadway performances in professional skill. Regional and summer theater is also vibrant.

Literature

The Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded to nine Americans: Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, Pearl Buck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Toni Morrison.

Regional literature has always been important in the United States, both today and yesterday. It is as old as Native American legends, as evocative of place as the nineteenth century writings of James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain and Bret Harte, as vibrant as the worlds created earlier in this century by novelist William Faulkner and playwright Tennessee Williams, as reflective of society as the novels of Sinclair Lewis and Eudora Welty. A related central distinguishing element of American literature is a strong strain of realism. Also, there is a high moral tone to American literature reflected in the constant anguish over the loss of ideals and failure of the American dream to provide opportunity for all.

Architecture

America's unmistakable contribution to architecture has been the skyscraper. Made possible by new construction techniques and the invention of the elevator, the first skyscraper went up in Chicago in 1884. Designer of the most graceful early towers, Louis Sullivan was America' s first great modern architect. His most talented student was Frank Lloyd Wright. European architects who emigrated to the United States before World War II launched the International Style. Perhaps the most influential of those immigrants were Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, both former directors of Germany's famous design school, the Bauhaus. Buildings in their geometric style have been both praised and criticized. In reaction, a new generation of architects now feels free to incorporate both old and new elements in their buildings.

The Visual Arts

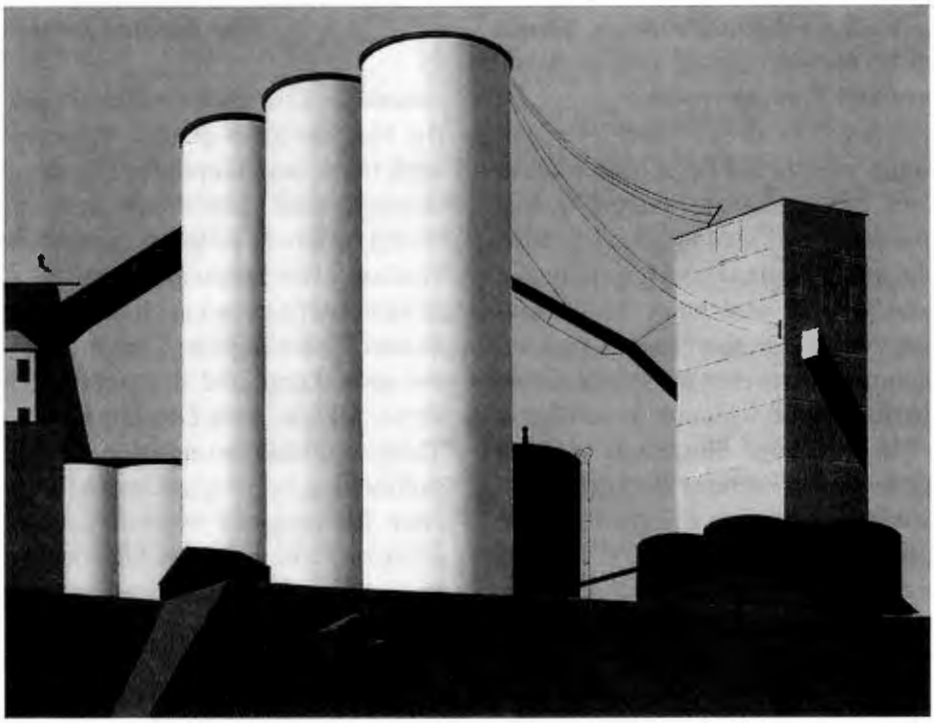
America's first well-known school of painting, the Hudson River School, appeared in 1820. As with music and literature, this development was delayed until artists perceived that the New World offered subjects unique to itself. The Hudson River painters' directness and simplicity of vision influenced such later artists as Winslow Homer, who depicted rural America—the sea, the mountains, and the people who lived near them. Middle-class city life found its painter in Thomas Eakins, an uncompromising realist whose unflinching honesty undercut the genteel preference for romantic sentimentalism. Controversy soon became a way of life for American artists. In fact, much of American painting and sculpture since 1900 has been a series of revolts against tradition. "To hell with the artistic values," announced Robert Henri. He was the leader of what critics called the "ash-can" school of painting, after the group's portrayals of the squalid aspects of city life.

In the years after World War II, a group of young New York artists formed the first Native Ameri-

can movement to exert major influence on foreign artists: abstract expressionism. Among the movement's leaders were Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko. Members of the next artistic generation favored a different form of abstraction: works of mixed media. Among them were Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who used photos, newsprint, and discarded objects in their compositions. Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, Larry Rivers, and Roy Lichtenstein, reproduced, with satiric care, everyday objects and images of American popular culture—Coca-Cola bottles, soup cans, comic strips.

Today artists in America tend not to restrict themselves to schools, styles, or a single medium. A work of art might be a performance on stage or a hand-written manifesto; it might be a massive design cut into a Western desert or a severe arrangement of marble panels inscribed with the names of American soldiers who died in Vietnam. Perhaps the most influential twentieth century American contribution to world art has been a mocking playfulness, a sense that a central purpose of a new work is to join the ongoing debate over the definition of art itself.

These texts were taken from the U.S. Embassy web site at http://www.usembassy.de/magazine/arts.htm. They are abridged from *An Outline of American Literature* and other USIA publications.



Ralston Crawford. *Buffalo Grain Elevators* (1937). National Museum of American Art, Smithonian Institution. Crawford (1906-1978) lived and painted in many parts of the United States, as well as in Canada, Paris, and the Caribbean. As a boy he sailed all the Great Lakes, and later sailed the Caribbean and the Pacific on a tramp steamer. One of his early leading themes was the industrial architecture of harbor cities. In the 1940s and 1950s he painted in a cubist-precisionist manner; later he became interested in the visual imagery of the jazz world and made many trips to New Orleans to photograph the musicians there.

The Visual Arts: On the Cusp of the New Millenium

by Eleanor Heartney

A Tale of Two Exhibitions

Last winter [1997/98] the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City presented a pair of exhibitions that together suggest the pluralistic state of the current art scene in the United States. One consisted of a series of large dramatic video installations by the artist Bill Viola. The viewer could watch transfixed as figures projected on large screens were consumed by fire and water, or they could peer into the peephole of an enclosed room where a monastic cell was periodically overwhelmed by dramatic flashes of lightning, waves and raging storms. The exhibition reflected Viola's interest in spiritual traditions ranging from Zen to Sufism to Christianity.

The other exhibition was a retrospective devoted to the work of Arthur Dove, a lesser-known U.S. abstract painter of the 1930s and 1940s. Dove's small, understated abstract compositions represent the artist's effort to synthesize music, movement and the visual experience of nature. Dove's work is in the collections of major museums around the United States. However, until recently he was often dismissed as a provincial figure whose exploration of abstraction was overshadowed by the more celebrated accomplishments of Picasso, Matisse and other members of the French avant garde. In recent years, however, art historians have begun to rewrite the standard history of modern art. According to this retelling, American art became interesting only after the arrival of emigre artists in New York City at the end of World War II. Dove's re-emergence signals a new willingness among scholars and critics to evaluate the genuine accomplishments of an earlier generation of American artistic pioneers.

Side by side, the two exhibitions were a study in contrasts. One was very theatrical, relying on the latest in video and digital technology and drawing viewers into a physical relationship with pulsing video imagery. The other was quiet and contemplative, exploring an undervalued history and offering a celebration of that most accepted of art forms, painting. Yet more than one viewer noted how surprisingly compatible the two shows were in their ability to meld different kinds of sensory experiences.

The pairing of these shows reveals an important reality about the current U.S. art scene. This is a time of flux in which contrasting and even contradictory developments can coexist and cross-fertilize. The comfortable old picture of art history as a story that unfolds in an evolutionary manner, with one movement leading logically and inexorably to the next, no longer seems to have any relevance to the so-called postmodern era in which we find ourselves. Instead, artists draw for inspiration on every period of the distant and recent past, speak to subjects as diverse as post-colonial politics, artificial intelligence and psychoanalysis, and direct their work at audiences that range from hard-core art aficionados to intrepid Web surfers to the harried traveler rushing through a train station or airport.

The Globalization of Art

The disorder in the contemporary art world is actually a mirror of the larger upheavals being experienced by society at large. The end of the Cold War, the rise of global markets and the emergence of radically new forms of electronic communication have transformed contemporary life in the United States in ways that would have been unimaginable even ten years ago. It should be no surprise that the art world reflects this state of radical transition.

In fact, one of the most striking developments in contemporary art can be tied directly to these larger social, political and economic currents. Just as the collapse of the Cold War has focused attention on parts of the globe that were overshadowed by the monumental battle between superpowers, so also, the art world has begun to widen its geographic focus. Art professionals can no longer limit their attention to developments in the United States and Europe. Now any serious study of contemporary art must embrace artists from all over the globe. Artists, curators, critics and collectors have begun to resemble cultural nomads, constantly on the move in search of new developments.

As one consequence of the widened field of view, museums today cast a much wider geographic net than they used to. As I write this essay in New York City, an exhibition of Chinese historical and contemporary art is on view at the Guggenheim Museum. The New Museum just took down a show by a Palestinian artist based in England and put up an exhibition of the work of an artist based in Spain. The Museum of Modern Art has a show of drawings from Latin America. Meanwhile, in San Antonio, Texas, a new art foundation called ArtPace provides residencies for young artists from all over the world.

What Is an American Artist?

In this climate, questions of national identity become more and more nebulous. An issue that arises with increasing frequency is the question: What exactly is an American artist or for that matter an Italian or Nigerian or Filipino artist? Is an American artist someone who was born in the United States? Is it someone with U.S. citizenship? Is it someone currently residing in the United States? What about expatriate Americans—do they still qualify?

Similar questions arise about definitions of American art. Is it a style? Or is it an attitude, a kind of training or a choice of subject matter? These issues still matter because often funding for such exhibitions is determined by one's national origin. Government agencies provide money to support the inclusion of their artists in such international exhibitions. While some still take a strict view, others take a more liberal stance. The United States Information Agency, which funds many international "biennales," for example, simply requires that artists be based in the United States.

The Impact of Electronic Media

The emergence of new electronic media reinforces these changes . . . [T]he electronic highway negates national borders and connects people from opposite parts of the globe . . . [A]rtists have begun exploring the ways that new technology can radically alter our concept of self and art. Artist web pages help them bypass the institutions of the art world in order to introduce their work to a new virtual audience. Many are putting their work on CD-ROMs to explore a new order of interactivity. Using newly available technology, they can design art works that allow viewers to follow their own paths and create their own connections and narratives. Meanwhile, museums and galleries are finding that personalized web sites allow them to make art exhibitions available to those who cannot come to them.

As might be expected, these new developments have inspired a spirited debate within the art world as to the value and function of new technology and new media art. Some argue that the virtual presentation of art devalues the viewer's direct contact with the object which has heretofore been the essential aspect

of an art experience. Others say that it is a mistake to think of these new digital techniques as new art forms—that they simply expand our means for conveying the kinds of ideas that art has always conveyed. Yet others are dubious about the promise of new audiences. They ask, what is the depth of the web art experience? Does art on the web encourage a greater sense of democracy and participation, or does it merely create a new class divide, separating those with access to technology from those without in a far more decisive way than the old, so-called elitist art museums? Does web art require a completely new understanding of aesthetics?

The Changing Nature of Public Art

Questions of audience also lie behind another development in contemporary art, namely the growing interest in public art. While the Web promises to create a vast new virtual audience for art, public artists are interested in bringing art to real, localized communities. There has been a definitive change in thinking about public art from the days when it was seen primarily as a decoration or monument plopped in a public space. Contemporary public artists work in a variety of ways. Some create projects as part of "percent for art" programs, in which a percentage of the construction budget for a public or private building is set aside for art. Others are more engaged in temporary projects that take such diverse forms as billboards, artist-designed magazine sections and community projects in which artists work with members of particular communities. These neighborhood projects can range from the creation of a community garden to an art education program that gives disadvantaged children access to art and photography equipment, to a joint exploration of local history.

Again there are questions and controversies. What is the nature of the public artist's responsibility to the community in which his or her work is placed? Is a garden or a set of signs really art? Is art beginning to converge too closely with social work?

As might be expected, such radical upheavals in the definition and distribution of art are having an effect on the institutions that present it to the public. One striking recent development is the emergence of the international "biennale" as a primary mechanism by which artists become known internationally. "Biennales" are international exhibitions organized every two years in art capitals around the world on some topical theme. For people in the art world, these exhibitions are important meeting grounds where ideas are exchanged, new work is discovered and reputations consolidated.

Until recently, "biennales" were largely limited to locations in Europe or the United States. In the last decade, however, this has begun to change. Art organizers in far-flung art centers are organizing their own shows, luring the important curators and critics to their cities and putting themselves on the map. Often they place special emphasis on artists from the region in which the "biennale" takes place.

The themes adopted by such exhibitions suggest a new agenda. With titles like *Beyond Borders*, *Transculture* and *Esperanto*, they tend to stress the idea that art today transcends nationalism and national borders. And their locations suggest how truly global the art world is becoming. In 1997 alone, there were biennales in Kassel and Münster, Germany; Venice, Italy; Lyon, France; Kwangju, South Korea; Johannesburg, South Africa; Istanbul, Turkey; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Havana, Cuba; Sofia, Bulgaria; and Montenegro and São Paulo, Brazil.

The Expanded Role of the Museum

The new focus on globalism is also having its effect on museum organization. The global model is most strikingly articulated by the Guggenheim Museum which has expanded beyond its base in New York City with branches in Venice, Berlin and Bilbao. Conceiving of the museum less as a library or archive and more as a network, Guggenheim Museum director Thomas Krens moves art and exhibitions between these international branches. He argues that too many museums keep the bulk of their collections in storage, out of sight of both casual viewers and specialists. The branch system allows him to make a far greater percentage of the museum's vast holdings available to the public.

Krens' new conception of the global museum is a response to the heightened expectations for museums at the close of the twentieth century. There is ever greater pressure for museums to be responsive to their audiences. Financial pressures from donors and competition from other sources of entertainment have forced museums to be much more attentive to the cultivation of visitors. One result of this has been an elevation of the field of museum education. Once considered a peripheral activity which centered on setting up school tours of museum shows, museum education has become one of the institution's primary purposes.

Two much-celebrated, newly-inaugurated museum projects reveal the ways that museums are expanding their traditional roles. The new J. Paul Getty Center is a billion-dollar arts complex which opened late in 1997 on a hill with a majestic view of the city of Los Angeles. Though its centerpiece is a museum devoted to Greek and Roman antiquities, decorative arts and European old masters' paintings, the six-building complex includes institutes for historical research, conservation, arts and humanities information, education and arts funding. With an annual operating budget of $189 million, it is expected to radically enhance Los Angeles' profile in the international art world.

Equally spectacular is the new Guggenheim branch in Bilbao. The spectacular building, designed by U.S. architect Frank Gehry, is being hailed as an art work in its own right. Meanwhile, the museum itself is seen as a boon, and is expected to bring tourists to the region. The $100-million construction cost and the annual operating budget have been provided by the Basque government. In turn, the Guggenheim Museum provides its extensive collection and expertise in creating educational and research programs.

Contemporary U.S. Art

What kind of art suits these volatile times? The diversity of contemporary art in the United States is suggested by the artists chosen to represent the United States for the last three Venice Biennales. In 1993 the choice was Louise Bourgeois, a French-born sculptor in her 80s whose sensuous, surrealistic sculptures evoke the human body without specifically representing it. In 1995 the choice was Viola, the video artist. And in 1997 it was painter Robert Colescott, who draws on his experience as a black man in the United States to satirize the state of race relations and the white bias inherent in conventional U.S. history.

These three artists only begin to suggest the range of media and concerns explored by contemporary U.S. artists. Painting today ranges from the hyper-realism of Chuck Close, whose

gargantuan portraits are based on photographs broken into grids and recreated with a kind of finger painting; to Elizabeth Murray, whose domestic abstractions break the square of the canvas to twist and turn in an almost sculptural manner; to Robert Ryman, whose career is an ongoing meditation on the infinite variations of the white canvas.

Installation artists turn the gallery into a theatrical space. The artist team Kristen Jones and Andrew Ginzel explore the infinity of the cosmos and the cyclical nature of time with environments composed of such low-tech materials as shadow puppets, dry ice and strobe light. Ann Hamilton takes on the theme of manual labor in installations in which she herself is an element, as she sits quietly in the gallery engaged in some simple, repetitive task.

Side by side with this are the works of artists exploring new media. These include Nam June Paik, the Korean-born artist who is known as "the father of video art" and who assembles televisions into comic robots; Kenneth Snelson, who has translated his atom-like sculptures into cosmic fantasies using the most advanced digital software; and Paul Garrin, who has created an interactive installation in which a very threatening virtual guard dog follows the viewer around the room.

Adding to the mix is the growing presence in American art of emigre artists whose work explores the complexity of hybrid culture and identity. For instance, Russian expatriate artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid came to the United States in 1978 after making an underground reputation in the then Soviet Union for their witty and affectionate parodies of Soviet-sanctioned socialist realism. Now their work is likely to contain comically heroic representations of figures like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and the sturdy, upright American working man, thereby acknowledging that the idealization of history knows no geographic or ideological boundaries.

Chinese artist Xu Bing was raised in Beijing but now lives in New York. He grew up during the Cultural Revolution, a period in which books deemed counterrevolutionary were destroyed and their authors "re-educated." His work deals with the subversive power of written language through the creation of books whose text is a nonsense hybrid of English and Chinese. And Japanese-born artist Yukinori Yanagi, a resident of New York City, expresses the instability of borders and national identities with giant ant farms whose inhabitants gradually disrupt arrangements of colored sand patterned to replicate the flags of many nations.

As U.S. art heads into the twenty-first century, it becomes more and more evident how much the world of the future will differ from the world of the past. For artists, as for all of us, these are uncertain times. But uncertainty offers its own creative challenges. In the twenty-first century, artists may help us understand how to think and function in a world that we can now only barely imagine.

Eleanor Heartney, a writer and critic for *Art in America* and other publications, is the author of *Critical Condition: American Culture at the Crossroads*.

Photographic Exhibition "Faces and Stories"

by Curt Richter

Between 30 April and 8 May 1999 the Center for U.S. Studies hosted the second American Cultural Days featuring a number of events such as exhibitions, concerts, public lectures and art contests. One of these events was the photographic exhibition "Faces and Stories" by Curt Richter, which was shown at the Center between 30 April and 21 May 1999. What follows is an explanation by the artist on the background of this exhibition.

My career as a photographer began early on as a teenager. For twenty years I have worked as a commercial and art photographer in New York City. Then, in 1997, I came to Helsinki as a Fulbright Scholar to teach photography and lighting at the University of Art and Design. As well as teaching, I make a living working as a commercial photographer both here in Europe and the United States. This work has taken me to many places and the photographs from the exhibition "Faces and Stories" were taken in the American South. They are portraits of Southern writers. "Faces and Stories" is a traveling exhibition of these prints, which is now touring Europe and will be at the New Orleans Museum of Art in the year 2000.

Bringing the exhibition to Germany was very important also for personal reasons. My grandfather's parents, who emigrated to the United States, came from Dresden and, after my great-grandfather's untimely death, my grandfather was sent back to Dresden to live with relatives there. Germany is a part of my history. In much the same way, what I hoped to reveal about the South through the faces of its writers, this has to do with, not only a sense of place, but heritage. For the last fifty years, Germany has lead Europe in the visual arts, so I am particularly pleased to have my work shown here.

For the last twenty years I have worked with an 8 x 10 inch view camera. It is slow to set up and handle but it has far greater capabilities than 35 mm cameras and the large negative gives extremely fine detail. The final prints are made with the nineteenth century platinum and palladium process. This paper is no longer commercially available so each print is hand coated.

It is almost ten years ago to the day that I photographed Eudora Welty and this project

Alice Walker

began. Several months before my meeting Ms. Welty, I had met another Southern writer, Louis Rubin. A magazine in New York had sent me down to Chapel Hill for a story about him and his press, Algonquin, on nothing more than a whim: he commissioned me to photograph the founding members of the Fellowship of Southern Writers for their archives in the Chattanooga. There were twenty-eight members and it took two years to get them, one by one, in front of my camera. It was suggested to me that I expand the project into a book and I did. It took another six years to complete it.

Meeting the writers was wonderful. They were generous with their time and thoughts. We talked about our different mediums, the structure of forms and what one could say by creating them. There is much I learned from listening to them. When I asked Andrew Lytle why the South had such a strong heritage of literature it was clear from his response that this was a question he had asked himself many times. "In order to create anything original, one has to except the possibility of failure. When we lost the civil war, failure became a part of the South's culture."

The difference between a writer's palette and mine was made clear to me by Mary Hood. At the end of an afternoon of talk and iced tea, she

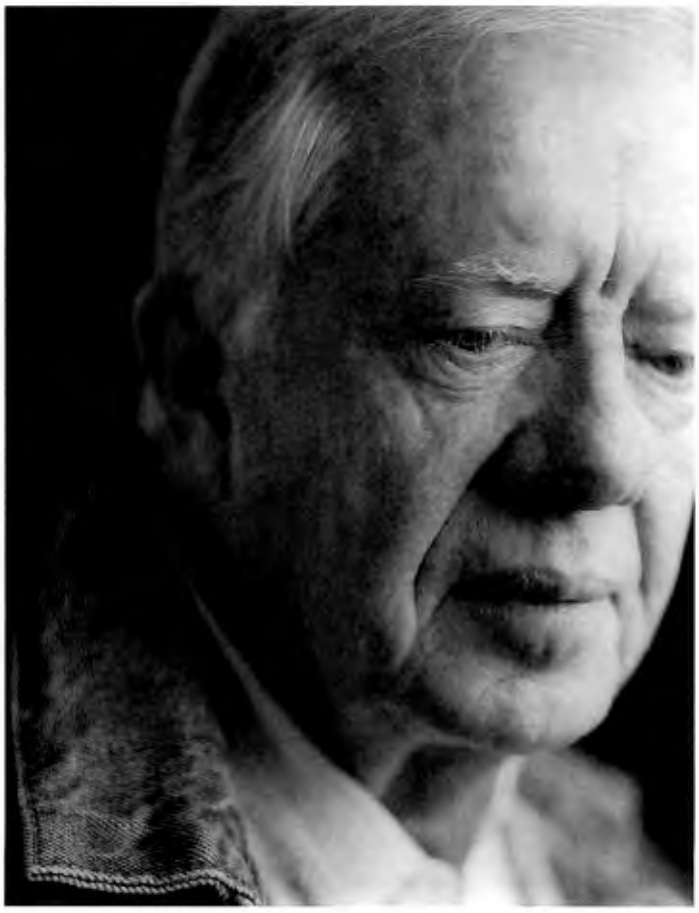
Mary Waiting

rose from her rocking chair as I was about to depart and turned to look back at it. The chair had belonged to her grandmother, she told me, and her grandmother would never take a seat in the chair without first moving it, even if just a little. Driving back to Atlanta that day, I considered the image Mary had placed in my head. One could spend a lifetime with someone and not see what she had seen, or, at least, not to talk about it. Her grandmother's slight adjustments were her way to reclaim the chair but it took a writer's vision to see it.

New York City will always be my home but, as I sit here at my desk and look at the snow on the rooftops, I wonder if I'll ever live there again. On returning to my studio from the longest trip south on this project, there, waiting for me, was a pile of mail two feet high. Most of it was junk, of course, but on top was a plain, white index card from Donald Justice. A brief note to say he would sit for me but he thought I should know he no longer lived in the South, even though he was born there. His note ended with these words; ". . . and now, just now, I'm staring out the study window at the snow and ice, and not minding it at all."

More photographs of this exhibition are accessible through the Internet at:
http://www.usembassy.fi/richter/writers.htm

Curt Richter teaches at Helsinki University of Art and Design, Turku Art Academy and the International Center of Photography in New York. His publications include *A Portrait of Southern Writers* (forthcoming LSU Press, 2000), *Animal Attractions* (Abrams, 1995) and *Summer* (Simon and Schuster, 1990). His works were shown in more than twenty exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe.



Jimmy Carter

The Space Between: Fine Art and Technology

by Will Tait

Art and Fine Art

Art and fine art are separate and distinct. Practitioners of fine art are those who have a particularly pressing vision and a need to express it. The product of their vision—paintings, sculptures, prints, film or whatever—may or may not be art. One of the peculiarities of fine art is that in the crucible of time all works of fine art find their true level. Future generations determine what, of today's works, will be considered art. For there is a peculiar quality about art. It is timeless. Let us say then, that we cannot determine if a particular work is art. We are too close to it in time to know if it has the lasting quality that enables it to transcend time.

Fine art is a discipline unto itself. While some choose to spend their lives writing computer code, building bridges, driving a bus, developing virtual worlds or countless other disciplines, there are a few who feel compelled to make what is called fine art.

It is important to realize that fine art is created by people. It is a response to how we relate to each other and the world in which we live. Being involved in the making of fine art does not, by itself, guarantee that the product of the artist's efforts will be art. As in other disciplines, some that make fine art will see more clearly than others, will take the time and expend the energy necessary to make their chosen tools extensions of themselves. Having done so, they will look beyond the current boundaries and through their art, communicate their unique vision to the world.

Let us agree then, for the sake of this article, that we cannot know if a given work is art, and that if one chooses to practice the discipline of fine art, there are historically valid means of expression. Traditionally these are painting and sculpture. This does not mean that the computer or other technologically sophisticated tools cannot be used for the creation of works that might some day be considered art. The tools do not determine what is art. It is worth noting however, that the traditional tools, paint on canvas, chisel on stone and modeled clay cast in bronze, are those that provide an artist with the greatest freedom of expression. Any image "imaginable" can be painted. Any form can be modeled in clay or cut from stone. Let us digress a moment then return to tools.

Some History

From the dawn of mankind, artists have struggled with technology. This is nothing new. At first, it was which colored mud would stick to the cave wall and keep its color after being applied to that wall. Over time artists discovered they could mix powdered rocks of many colors with egg yolk to produce jewel-like translucent colors. Then, fresco, oil paint and watercolor came along accompanied by the need for tools with which to apply them to a substrate (paper, linen, cotton, etc.). Meanwhile carving of wood and stone and the casting of metal took their place among the artist's toolbox. In common with much of today's computer technology, the underlying technologies that made this possible, in many cases, came from advances in the military use of what was at the time literally the cutting edge.

To put things in perspective, let's see what parallels might be drawn between a contemporary software project manager and a renaissance artist.

In order to start, the project manager needs to have a clear idea of precisely what the end

product of his team's labors will be. He needs to know what steps get done first, decide which development tools will be used, determine what the logical milestones are and when they can be expected to happen, what tasks can be done concurrently and at what point in the development cycle they will converge, what test procedures need to be in place and when to use them, etc. In addition he needs to have competent programmers who can write clean code in a timely manner. QA procedures need to be put in place. Time for bug fixing has to be scheduled. Alpha and beta testing must occur. Having done all this, preparation will be made to do maintenance releases that take care of the inevitable minor bugs that somehow slip through the net.

Now imagine the purely technical problems of an artist who has been commissioned to create a fresco mural. Fresco is a lime plaster mix that is applied to a wall in a specific way that makes it permanent when dry. The artist paints into the freshly applied wet fresco with colored pigments. When dry, the colors will be quite different than wet. The artist must know how each color will change and make adjustments in his mind for blends. Because the fresco plaster dries quite rapidly, only a small piece of the mural can be painted at a time. As the plaster dries, the pigment is changing color. Once pigment is applied to the plaster, it can't be changed. Any technical mistakes during the process means stripping the wall and starting over.

In order to start, the artist needs to have a clear idea of precisely what the end product of his team's labors will be. He needs to know how to prepare the wall for the plaster, section off the wall in pieces small enough to paint before the plaster starts to set, concurrently have competent apprentices mixing the plaster and grinding the pigments for the next section to be painted, and have the work organized so that when the day ends a logical section of the mural is done and there is no freshly mixed wet plaster left over. This procedure is repeated until the mural is finished. It cannot be touched up, and if the plaster was not mixed or applied properly it falls off the wall. No maintenance releases allowed. The technique must be completely internalized by the artist so he can focus on the creative aspect of the work.

Similar technical demands exist for all fine art mediums, although it has become fashionable in some contemporary art circles to ignore technique and the benefits it confers on an artist.

Artists tend to drive technology in directions which, due to lack of commercial demand, it might never go. Of necessity some artists, Andrew Glassner and Alvy Ray Smith for instance, expand the bounds of the technology envelope thereby widening the creative space for all of us. When shifts in technology such as the printing press, photography or computers come along, there are always those who predict the death of art. Somehow art never dies.

Digital Artist

Quoting from Grant Boucher's "Post Script" column in the October 1997 issue of *NT Studio* magazine: "The usual model for a digital artist in the modern special effects world is that a very talented computer user and/or artist goes to a school where he is taught the 'right way' to use software X on hardware platform Y (read: anything SGI). This is fundamentally wrong. Why? It breeds students without problem solving skills and without a grasp of *why* they are doing what they are doing."

Being in a position to hire digital artists, I agree with this statement. It is difficult to find graduates who can solve creative "art" problems on a computer.

Grant also says, "They fail to learn how to think outside of the purple box, for simply put, *there is no right way!* You must be ready to change, adapt, reinvent whenever and wherever necessary." Shortly, he adds, "[i]n the past, you either had programmers or you had programmers trying to be artists, but there were so very few 'pure' artists using technological tools to create a 'look.'"

I believe what Grant means when he says, create a look is what artists call developing a style. Refining personal vision is another way of putting it. A pure artist is one who lives to create fine art; then practices enough to develop a personal style. For my part, I am a classically trained artist, or, practitioner of fine art. That is, I spent years learning to realistically draw whatever I see outside or inside my head. I studied anatomy, color theory, form and composition, painting, printmaking and other traditional disciplines perfected by practitioners of fine art over centuries. In other words, I was taught to think and see in 3Space, and am able to tangibly realize my vision with traditional tools. Now that I use the computer as my primary medium with which to create art, I no longer fit within bounds of the "art" world I knew.

Apprehension is rampant among the fine art community about where the computer fits in, if it fits at all. Misconceptions abound. Reflecting on the art world, I realized I had somehow experienced a "digital epiphany" at one point in my personal shift to the use of computers as a creative medium. Here is what brought that home to me.

A Look Back

To gain some perspective, I recently attended an exhibit of paintings created by Masami Teraoka, a well-known painter whose style developed from traditional Japanese art techniques with some western influence. Masami is an example of a "pure" artist. He has mastered tools that enable him to realize his personal vision in the objective world. As with many artists, he chose paint as his medium. The point is that Masami has a vision he wants to communicate. Choosing to become proficient with a medium capable of conveying ideas to the world outside his head was part of his artistic development. He has an intensely personal vision and an inner drive to communicate it to the world. In Masami's work, traditional Japanese and contemporary Western cultures meet in what are sometimes unusual juxtapositions. He explores the contemporary world in which he lives, and communicates his vision in paintings. He is highly regarded in the art world. You may have seen his flying McDonald's hamburgers, painted in a style reminiscent of Japanese block prints.

A Struggle with Technology

In the exhibit was a series of paintings dealing with the use of computers. Here were wounded people, computer mice dangling from blood-stained bodies. Fear and repugnance oozed from these paintings. Many traditional painters and sculptors I have spoken with feel this way, and they are not sure why.

Traditionally trained artists face a common dilemma. Computer equipment has never been readily available in traditional art schools where all classes are hands-on studio classes. It is not immediately obvious what benefit might be gained from the use of the computer as a me-

dium with which to create fine art. If an artist reads about "artistic software," he finds all that is needed to be an artist is to own Brand X, or Brand Y, or a certain brand of computer. No experience needed, no vision necessary, buy me and you too can be Vincent Van Gogh, Matisse, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci perhaps. A lot of people seem to believe this. It isn't true.

Complicating matters for painters or printmakers who make flat art, is the fact that compared to painting, etching and lithography, digital output is far from being expressive, although digital printing is getting better. Trying to mimic traditional mediums with computers is in many ways a step backwards. So there has to be a compelling reason for an artist, coming from a traditional background, to make the commitment and leap of faith necessary to plunge in and become as sophisticated digitally as he or she is with traditional tools.

Awakening to Ones and Zeros

Animation gave me a glimpse of the computer as a possible medium for fine art. 3D Studio caught my interest and got me started working with a computer as an art medium. Once, due to lack of hard drive space, I was not doing regular backups while working on a series of 60 to 70 megabyte images for an exhibit. Imagine my frustration when a well-known utility overwrote all the files on my hard drive. As I watched months of work disappear, I experienced a newfound freedom which I called "Enlightenment through Data Loss." For the first time I truly understood the transitory nature of all things, especially ones and zeros. This was a major breakthrough.

Until then I was still painting with oil paint on linen canvas. This stopped abruptly. A different sensibility had taken root inside me. One that no longer needed the "object," painting, sculpture or whatever, as a final vehicle for communicating my artistic vision. I began to explore how to create fine art using the computer as a computer, not a fake paintbrush. I asked myself, what unique quality does the computer bring to the party. I began to question the form that fine art takes.

The Space Between, A Vision

My unique creative vision evolved from an experience I had in the mountains. One day I was high in the Sierras, at about 11,000 feet. I sat on a rock looking out over a high mountain lake, feeling the breeze as it blew off the distant rocky peaks. Nearby, a gnarled tree that looked like a large "miniature" bonsai grew from a crack in the rocks. The wind had shaped it to look like an extension of the rock. As I watched the wind pressing against the tree I became aware that the tree was equally shaping the wind, and that a zone of turbulence existed between the tree and the wind. I called this zone "The Space Between." For me this came to symbolize what I think of as a zone of mediation that exists between all objects, or things. A buffer zone filled with potential.

An Artist's Quest

Facilitating "The Space Between" with computer graphics, animation, video, audio and various installations, is how I currently practice much of my fine art. The problem I struggle to solve is how to facilitate creative interaction between people, using technology in a way that does not interfere with their interaction. Toward that end I have created some interactive installations. One of these was done in

collaboration with Steve Harrison, an acquaintance at Xerox PARC. It was exhibited for a month at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Rental Gallery. We hung signs that said, "Please Touch the Art." The piece was made to be handled. In fact people handling it is what it was about.

Lately, picture making has worked its way back into my life. I love making pictures. I now find, with the sophisticated software available, I can make pictures on a computer in a way that is artistically satisfying. Perhaps I have finally become comfortable with computers. Which brings us back to tools.

Why, when I have said that any image imaginable can be painted, do I now find a computer "artistically satisfying"? The answer lies in how I have learned to use the tool. The computer lets me work through multiple possibilities. By itself this is not momentous. Many artists have done series of images, exploring a theme. The crucial difference is that the computer lets me do this quickly. It compresses time so that working with multiple versions of an image becomes a creative stimulus. I believe this is a valid use of the computer as a tool for the creation of fine art.

The question then arises, is purely computer-generated imagery fine art? I will tackle this with an example.

The work of Karl Sims stands out in bold relief against a background of technology posing as art. By including human aesthetic sensibilities in his work, he maintains the connection between art and humanity. In Karl's work however, the original imagery does not spring directly from the mind of a person, but from algorithms. This is very problematic for many traditional artists. Did the computer create the work, they ask. And if so, can it really be art? Well, artists throughout history have used anything and everything around them to stimulate their creative thinking. Leonardo da Vinci drew the patterns of various substances encrusted on walls, landscape artists have always abstracted from nature, the dadaists produced decalcomania pictures by pressing two surfaces with wet paint together then peeling them apart. Examples too numerous to mention abound.

Taking the example of Karl Sims once more, let's see how the use of his algorithmic tools might compare with an older technology, etching. I assume you may have heard of Francisco Goya, whose work has stood the test of time and become recognized throughout the world as true art. Although primarily a painter, he chose etching as the medium with which to create a series of images known as "The Horrors of War." No other medium could have so powerfully portrayed his feelings and reactions to the atrocities he witnessed. He fit the technology to his creative needs.

What then is the creative need fulfilled by Karl Sims algorithms? Although I have not met Karl and cannot speak for him, I sense that he has opened a channel for the exploration of beauty, a creative subject that has also become somewhat out of fashion in the high tech world. The exploration of beauty however is a timeless theme winding its way throughout human existence. It is a rare occasion when a new creative tool appears that allows us to reach out and touch beauty. This kind of tool, if generally available, would go a long way toward bridging the gap between contemporary art and technology. This brings up the fact that too few tools, at that level, are available to artists. Most artists must rely on those who are technically inclined to perhaps make their innovative work available. That by the way is a shameless pitch

for greater access by artists to creative computer tools of the sort that are not necessarily suited to becoming commercial applications.

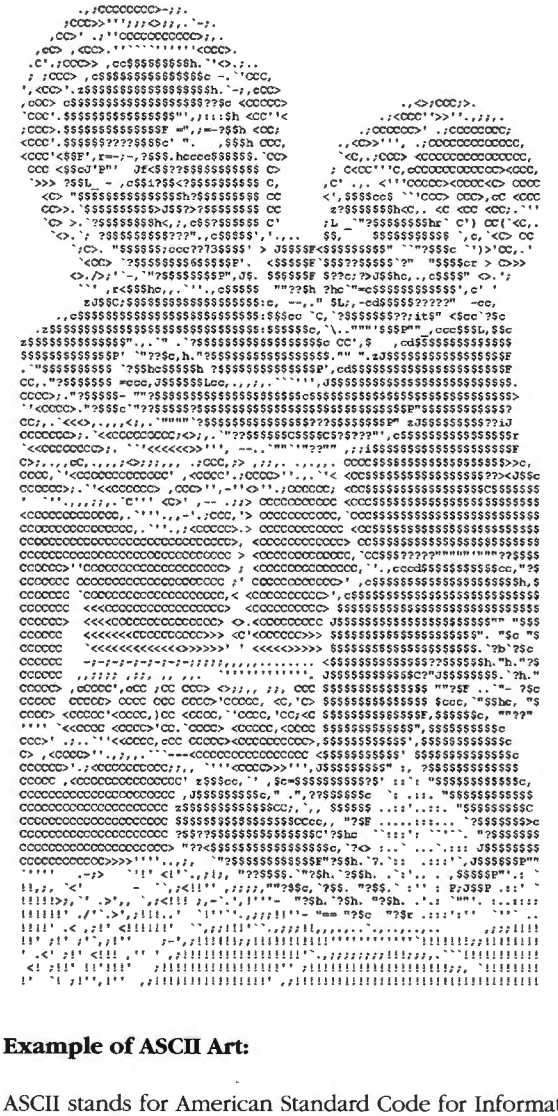
I contend then, that the use of the computer is irrefutably valid as a tool for stimulating artistic creativity, and the making of fine art. Time will filter out what is and isn't real art.

A Last Comment

The computer as an artistic tool is in its infancy. Much of what we see created with computers today is merely a reflection of the tool, not the mind or soul of a person. It is my belief that as traditional artists and artistically inclined technologists experiment and collaborate, unique forms of artistic expression will evolve. Since these will depend on technology, there will continue to be conflict with established concepts of what is and isn't art. Artists, however, are innovators. Some of us will use technology as a means to express our vision of the contemporary world in which we live. Contrary to some fears, this will not be the death of traditional forms of expression. It can only add to the richness and diversity of the human experience.

Will Tait studied classical drawing and painting at the Art Student's League of New York. He was the founder of COMA (COMputers and Art), a guerrilla digital art group in the San Francisco Bay Area dedicated to bringing about public awareness of the computer as a fine art tool and medium. He is currently working as a multimedia producer at Intuit. "Art, it's not a job, it's a way of life."

Small Cowper Madonna by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio)



Example of ASCII Art:

ASCII stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. Simply put, it is an assignment of identity numbers to the computer symbols we use every day. This simple standard allows different brands of computers to share text files, messages, and data.

Until the introduction of powerful multimedia computers ASCII art represented the only way of producing electronic pictures. Computer artists would make artwork out of ASCII characters, assembling the alphabet into logos, images, murals, or cartoons.

The U.S. Screen Scene

by Scott Eyman

Every year—sometimes it seems like every month—another film critic eloquently and pointedly fires across the bow of the contemporary U.S. film industry. The complaints, generally speaking, follow two lines of reasoning. First, movies were better twenty-five years ago—when, possibly, the person writing the commentary either began going to movies or began getting a salary for going. And second, the gap between movies people want to see—like *Titanic*—and movies critics urge them to see—like *L.A. Confidential* or *Boogie Nights*—has never been greater. This mix of boredom and futility might make you think that movies are on their way to oblivion as an art form. But that's not necessarily the case. What does appear certain is that the barbs directed at Hollywood are written by critics who want to feel young again, who want to revel in the idea of the film art as a living, positive force rather than a stale procession of impossibly expensive, styleless "event movies."

It's been quite sobering to watch movies for a living in the 1980s and 1990s, after the bounty of the 1960s and 1970s—when old masters like John Ford, William Wyler and John Huston were slowing down and being replaced by a generation that was at least as ambitious and nearly as talented—the likes of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, of Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola. In fact, the disappointments of the past couple of decades have just enough truth to justify the point of view that moviemaking is in decline.

Still, every year has six or eight or ten good movies. That's true today, and it was true in the past. The difference between then and now is in the vast middle range—the movies that are not supposed to win Oscars, but simply play a couple of weeks, help pay for studio overhead, satisfy the national audience to some extent, and go on their way. The reality is that any average James Cagney crime movie of the 1930s and 1940s offered snappier writing, sharper characters and a stronger and leaner narrative than its modern counterpart.

Cinema today has been damaged by the concept of the blockbuster—like the recent epic *Godzilla*—which can be defined as a disposable fireworks display, a long and noisy entertainment that completely disappears from the mind as soon as the credits roll at the end. These movies have no character development—just scenes that are free to clash or even contradict each other, as long as the cumulative logic of the explosions and car crashes grows ever larger. Writing, in fact, has never been less important to studio moviemaking than it is today. What counts up front is the profit possibility from overseas sales and from such ancillary markets as pay-per-view cable and videocassette release.

For everything that is gained, though, something is lost. In movies, it's been storytelling and style. As recently as twenty years ago, a Coppola film didn't resemble a Sam Peckinpah film, which didn't look like a Blake Edwards film—just as an earlier moviegoing generation could distinguish between the "look" of a Hitchcock thriller and a Ford western. Today, most movies are shot in an indistinguishable style. Without the credits, it would be impossible to identify the director. Closeups predominate, because they play well on television, the small screen on which most films find their largest audiences. Contemplative long shots and a smooth, methodical pace have largely disappeared, as filmmakers worry that moviegoers will grow restless. Action has become confused with movement.

Perhaps the most regrettable consequence of the abrasive cleansing action of contemporary U.S. cinema has been the decline of the once-

thriving national cinemas of France, Germany, England and Italy. Young European directors used to pride themselves on making strong, idiomatic statements in their own language, gradually achieving maturity as artists.

American movies of the 1950s and 1960s tended towards a narrative stolidity, but the lyrical French films of Francois Truffaut and the elegantly austere essays of Ingmar Bergman served as stylish nudges that infected U.S. cinema for the better. This worldwide aesthetic conversation between filmmakers and their audiences gave everyone's movies a more interesting texture.

Today, more often than not, promising foreign directors seek to become Hollywood directors. As movies from *The Fifth Element* to *Starship Troopers* have proven, they often succeed, regrettably so. As a character in Wim Wenders' *Kings of the Road* once observed, "the Yanks have colonized our subconscious." This seeming decline, of course, could be just a temporary calm, symptomatic of the uneasy, slightly disengaged hammock into which the post-Cold War world has fallen.

Look at it as a mental retooling, stemming from the reality that the movie industry as a business has changed more in the last two decades than it had in the previous eighty years. One-auditorium movie houses have given way to fourteen-screen multiplexes. As a result, slow release patterns have been replaced by simultaneous 3,000 theater releases. A strong system of producer control has evolved into catch-as-catch-can control by directors, actors and even talent agents. The continuity of the contract system at studios has been displaced by freelancing, with each movie's creative team assembled from scratch. And television—particularly cable filmmaking—is siphoning off talent and audiences as well.

What does all this mean? Possibly that we're in the midst of a transition in which very few films will have the singular cultural importance of the past. Today, the speedier, snappier television-rooted sensibility is taking the mid-range, mid-budget cultural definition that once was populated by [James] Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne. It isn't surprising that the new breed of studio executives, weaned on television in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, have approved for production so many big-screen adaptations of such TV series as *Sergeant Bilko, The Addams Family, The Flintstones, The Brady Bunch* and *Lost in Space.* If the picture offered only gloom, though, I—and many other people—would be going to the movies much less frequently. The fact is that if we've lost skill and "brio" in some of moviemaking's component parts, we've gained a great deal as well.

Take acting, for instance. As screenwriting has declined, performances have grown measurably richer. Screen acting has never been better, more subtle. There is a wealth of great character acting—beginning with Robert Duvall and Gene Hackman and moving younger, demographically, to Kevin Spacey and Frances McDormand. Their work in such movies as *The Apostle, Unforgiven, L.A. Confidential, The Usual Suspects* and *Fargo* exemplify this. Younger men and women [such as] Sean Penn, Johnny Depp [and] Gwyneth Paltrow are equally gifted. All consider themselves character actors, not movie stars. And even more are on the way—the likes of Christina Ricci and Elijah Wood—who have not yet become identifiable screen figures.

Even such stars in the classic mode as Brad Pitt, and this year's [1997] screen sensation, Leonardo DiCaprio (*Titanic*), make choices of assignments that sometimes tend to be more interesting in their ambition than in their execution.

Still, they get points for trying. So, too, does Tom Cruise, who seems to have left mediocre selections behind.

Another bright spot is animation. It's better, more successful, and more widespread than ever. Disney is still on hand, creating films as it has for decades. *Mulan* is the latest, exploring Chinese legend from a female perspective. But Disney no longer is the only game in town. Twentieth-Century Fox has become a player, with *Anastasia*, its 1997 take on Czarist history. Fox recently opened a new animation facility in Arizona, evidence of the seriousness with which the studio is approaching this genre. Other major studios are expanding their animation horizons as well.

Most impressively, there is probably more variety in contemporary U.S. filmmaking than at any previous period. African-American filmmakers are far more numerous, not to mention more gifted, than ever before. The fact that Spike Lee, the Hughes brothers and John Singleton, among others, can coexist comfortably and not be dependent on the success of every single film—in effect, having as much right to fail as anyone else—is significant proof that situations have evolved. African-American directors also have enough credibility these days to leave parochial confines. Forrest Whittaker, for example, who previously shot the black-oriented film *Waiting to Exhale*, has just directed *Hope Floats*, a mainstream drama centered on a young white woman, estranged from her husband, who must reintegrate herself into her Texas family.

With the expanding Hispanic population in the United States, there will, no doubt, be more movies—and more talent—on the nation's screens like *Selena* (Jennifer Lopez), *The Mask of Zorro* (Antonio Banderas) and . . . *Dance with Me*, an exploration of the Hispanic youth scene costarring Chayanne, a Puerto Rican-born performer making his screen debut. Indeed, as part of the vast global interaction, Hollywood is embracing a wide range of gifted performers from abroad. Britain's Brenda Blethyn and Katrin Cartlidge, Italy's Asia Argento, Stellan Skarsgard (Sweden), Bai Ling (China), Djimoun Hounsou (Benin), Michelle Yeoh (Malaysia) and Salma Hayek (Mexico) are all making their marks as actors.

There has been a growing presence of women directors and producers in recent years—among them Jodie Foster, Barbra Streisand and Randa Haines. What's more, women today are moving into seemingly uncommon genres. Mimi Leder, who distinguished herself as a television director on E.R., has made two unrelenting action films—*The Peacemaker* and *Deep Impact*—to inaugurate her career as a movie director. And Betty Thomas, an actress who was well-regarded as a gritty presence on the dramatic TV series *Hill Street Blues*, has become a director of such mainstream comedies as *The Brady Bunch Movie, Private Parts* and the mid-1998 release, *Doctor Doolittle.*

One of the most vigorous sectors of the current film scene is that of independent films. This is the fertile ground out of which future directors and actors will emerge. Just in the past three or four years, new names like Quentin Tarantino, Parker Posey, Ben Stiller, Hope Davis, Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott have come to the fore. The low-budget films they create and star in are first seen, typically, at Sundance and other film festivals, where talent scouts for the major studios have become a ubiquitous presence. As a result, the cream of the crop of independent movies these days usually finds a conduit to mass audiences.

The movie industry has been flexible enough, too, to allow access to people like Canadian director Atom Egoyan and David Cronenberg, and the homegrown Ethan and Joel Coen—gifted if inconsistent, with dark, mordant sensibilities that have brought a particularly valued lunacy to movie screens.

All this suggests that the old verities are dead, and no one really knows where the next wave of hits is coming from. The industry has to be open to all sorts of possibilities, however remote. A case in point: twenty years ago, Terence Malick made a gorgeous, hushed masterpiece, *Days of Heaven*. He spent the intervening years contemplating his possibilities and writing a few scripts that didn't see the light of day. This year [1998], though, he'll be represented on-screen with a $50 million adaptation of James Jones's World War II combat novel, *The Thin Red Line*.

This kind of expensive comeback from a director with only two art-house films to his credit—both of them commercial failures—would have been impossible in the more monolithic industry of a quarter-century or more ago, in which a legendary filmmaker like Orson Welles was regarded with suspicion and mistrust and had to finance his movies on a pay-as-you-go basis.

So the good news is that because Hollywood's dominance in the global marketplace has created so much demand, it has necessarily been ready, willing and able to take chances. With the added revenue streams deriving from video and multi-channel cable, there is a constant demand for more product. The result is that practically everybody gets their chance.

If the first century of film possessed more energy and innovation in its middle years than in its dotage, well, life is like that. But it's also true that the next century promises great leaps. If there's room for Terence Malick, anything is possible.

Scott Eyman, critic for *The Palm Beach Post*, is the author of *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution* (1997), *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (1993) and *Mary Pickford: America's Sweetheart* (1990). He is currently writing the authorized biography of U.S. director John Ford.

U.S. Theater in the Nineties: A Heartland Perspective

by Dan Sullivan

Minneapolis, Minnesota. Nearly a half-century ago, in September, 1951, *Theatre Arts* magazine noted that "the American theater" was, of course, the New York theater. "It is an unfortunate fact that very little of genuine worth or national interest originates outside Manhattan Island," the article observed.

It wasn't quite true, even then. An intrepid impresario named Margo Jones had been launching new plays in her little theater in Dallas, Texas, since 1947, notably Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke.* Playwright Eugene O'Neill had unveiled *Lazarus Laughed* at the Pasadena Playhouse in southern California as far back as 1928. But there was some lingering truth to the magazine's point of view. In effect, what existed was Broadway and off-Broadway. Everywhere else—Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago—was "out of town." And "out-of-town" agreed with this perspective. When a touring production of a Broadway-launched play or musical came to the Orpheum Theater in Minneapolis in the postwar era, prospective playgoers needed reassurance that it was "direct from New York." In other words, the real thing.

Even then the audience might be slim. The Orpheum had grown scruffy; road show standards were slipping; television was keeping people at home. Indeed, someone might have wondered, would there be any professional theater at all in Minneapolis fifty or sixty years from then?

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Now it is April, 1998. Driving down Hennepin Avenue, in the heart of Minneapolis, I pass the Orpheum Theater, restored to its former glory. *The Lion King,* an adaptation of the Walt Disney animated film, now the talk of Broadway—had its pre-New York engagement here in mid-1997. *Bring In 'da Noise, Bring In 'da Funk,* a history of African-Americans told through the medium of percussive dance, spent the winter holidays in Minneapolis. One of Broadway's most acclaimed revivals, *Chicago,* toured here in the spring. The national touring company of the new musical *Ragtime,* a colorful evocation of early twentieth century America, is enroute to this city. There is no stinting. "The road," the touring circuit is back.

But another road—in fact, a whole network of roads, of developments—is now in place and visible through the lens of the heartland, of middle America. Other aspects are reflected here as well. The decentralization of U.S. theater—a process that has taken a generation—is a fact today, evident in Minneapolis, and in cities dotting the landscape, from Seattle, Washington, to Hartford, Connecticut.

A few blocks from the Orpheum, for example, another type of playhouse comes into view. The Tyrone Guthrie Theater opened thirty-five years ago, with legendary director Guthrie's staging of *Hamlet.* The Guthrie wasn't the first regional—or resident professional—theater to be built in this country, nor would it be the last. In the course of the past generation, the theater world's pendulum largely has swung from Broadway to the regions, with New York theater frequently beholden to the rest of the country for an infusion of activity. These days, if new companies aren't springing up all over, the ones that were established largely between 1950 and 1975 are constructing new homes, and second stages, to expand their activities.

In the 1940s, Margo Jones dreamed of driving cross-country and finding a resident professional theater offering "good plays, well done" at every stop. In the 1990s, it's a reality. One

glance at a list of offerings at more than two-hundred resident theaters from Hawaii to Maine, printed in the current issue of *American Theatre*, successor to *Theatre Arts*, proves the point.

Driving east from California in April, one could catch Brecht in Los Angeles, comedic playwright David Ives' *All in the Timing* in San Diego; Emily Mann's *Having Our Say* and August Wilson's *Jitney*—two plays about the African-American experience—in Phoenix and Denver respectively; an Oscar Wilde revival in Chicago; new works by contemporary playwrights A.R. Gurney and Richard Greenberg in Cleveland and in Princeton, New Jersey; and an Edward Albee anthology in Boston. All this activity takes place in what is known, familiarly, as the "nonprofit sector." Today, nonprofit theater happens to be more nonprofitable than ever. Support still comes from foundations, state arts councils, corporations, and individual patrons, but less so than before from the National Endowment for the Arts, whose budget has been drastically cut.

So the vocabulary has had to be changed. One seldom hears the phrase "repertory theaters" nowadays. Changing the bill every night turned out to be a lot more expensive than producing one's season a show at a time, as the old stock companies used to do, perhaps leaving a few weeks vacant at the end of the season in case the last show, often a comedy, is a hit. Given today's cash-flow problems, theaters need hits.

The term "acting company" is still heard, but it usually means "tonight's" acting company rather than its original meaning: an ensemble meant to serve a number of roles over an entire season. Tyrone Guthrie would frown; the Guthrie's new artistic director, Joe Dowling, is philosophical. A veteran of Ireland's Abbey Theatre, Dowling knows that an acting company can become too permanent. Besides, today's actors are reluctant to commit to a full season. And more often than not, theaters cannot afford to keep a large group of actors on staff.

Dowling's first two seasons have been more audience-friendly than those of his predecessor, Garland Wright, and subscriptions are up. "A fellow called me a crowd-pleaser the other day," Dowling says. "I suppose I am. I've got 1,300 seats to fill every night. I like crowds; I want to please them."

How far to stoop, though? That is the dilemma most nonprofit theaters face. They often want to be experimental, daring to discover the bright new playwright or to tinker artistically with traditional venues of classics and the eras in which they are set, or to create an imaginative stage setting. But to demand too much of audiences is to risk angry letters, cancelled subscriptions and, decreased corporate support. If these companies were invented to shake up the social order, they certainly aren't doing so at the moment. Another challenge is the very regularity of the resident-theater schedule. Broadway shows are a temporary alliance of zealots obsessed with making their present work the most stupendous production in the history of the theater. The pressure is ruthless, the emotional cost great, and the results, on occasion, sensational.

By contrast, take the recent opening of A.R. Gurney's *Sylvia* at the Cleveland Play House, a literate and amusing play about a man who (figuratively) falls in love with his dog. It was a charming script, well-acted and thoroughly enjoyed by the audience. But a sense of danger, of experimentation, was certainly not in the air.

Yet given all that, our resident theaters still retain their commitment to what Peter Hackett, artistic director at the Cleveland Play House, still calls "art theater," a phrase so old (shades

of O'Neill and the Provincetown Playhouse) that it's new again. Hard as it is to define "art theater," it doesn't mean the plunging chandeliers of *Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon*'s helicopters buzzing the stage. Resident theaters are supposed to offer meaningful entertainment, and in the main they do so.

As a result, the serious theatergoer anywhere in the United States no longer feels cheated if a well-received play closes in New York City before he or she can see it. Very likely, it will turn up one or two seasons later on the schedule of the local resident theater, in a production that quite often will equal and sometimes surpass the original. I still regret spending $60 to watch a young movie actress—cast for name value—struggle with Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *How I Learned to Drive*, off-Broadway, when I knew that a smart Minneapolis director, Casey Stangl, was about to stage the play at her home theater, Eye of the Storm. Stangl's leading lady might not boast Hollywood credits, but I felt certain she would know something about shaping a monologue. The same, no doubt, would be true of the actress performing the role this season in Providence, Rhode Island, or Baltimore, Maryland, and next season in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.

And they might be stars at that—in their home venues. One of the happiest developments in theater today is that a good actor can put together a career in one or more regional theaters without moving to New York City or Los Angeles. Fame and fortune may not come, but you might be warmly approached in the supermarket by someone who saw your performance last night here in the Twin Cities, at the Guthrie or the Theatre de la Jeune Lune.

Fame and fortune aren't excluded, to be sure. John Mahoney, who only began his acting career in his late 30s, is a product of the Chicago theater scene. Today, he can afford to buy a comfortable Hollywood mansion following his success in numerous films and, more recently, in the successful television situation comedy, *Frasier*. But he chooses to live back in Chicago, and to perform there as frequently as possible—in the spring of 1998, for instance, in a revival of Kaufman and Hart's Thirties comedy, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, which he then was taking to London.

Similarly, Robert Prosky, a product of Washington's Arena Stage, has followed his longtime residency with a role on television in *Hill Street Blues*, and many movie portrayals as well. Actor Jeff Daniels, who co-starred with Jim Carrey in *Dumb and Dumber*, is so committed to the stage that he opened his own theater, The Purple Rose, in his home town, Chelsea, Michigan. In mid-1998, the troupe was boasting a world premiere, *Book of Days*, by Lanford Wilson, one of the more honored U.S. playwrights of the contemporary scene. Kevin Kling performs solo shows like *21A* and *The Education of Walter Kaufman* all over the world, but similarly remains a Minnesota artist, whether performing *Diary of a Scoundrel* at the Jungle Theatre, adapting Goldoni's *Venetian Twins* for the Guthrie or doing a voice-over to pay the rent.

Compare that with the experience of a Midwestern playwright of an earlier era. William Inge was discovered by Margo Jones in the 1940s. Determined to get to New York City, he finally did so with *Come Back, Little Sheba* in 1950. Following four straight hits including *Bus Stop* and *Picnic*, however, Broadway declared his talent obsolete. Feeling too disconnected to return to Kansas, he fled to Hollywood, where he languished until committing suicide in 1973.

Still, this sad tale has a happy ending. The William Inge Festival was founded in his memory seventeen years ago by a determined secondary school teacher named Margaret Goheen. It takes place every spring in Inge's birthplace, Independence, Kansas, as typical a small town as you'll find in the United States. The most unexpected people turn up in this prairie setting to be honored during the festival—Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, August Wilson, Neil Simon, Wendy Wasserstein and, this year [1998], Stephen Sondheim.

Partly they come to honor Inge, whose career remains emblematic of the displaced American artist. Partly they come to be honored: Broadway composer-lyricist Sondheim's tribute, featuring songs by Bernadette Peters—his leading lady in his Pulitzer Prize winning work, *Sunday in the Park with George*, as well as *Into the Woods*—drew 1,000 people to Memorial Hall. And partly they come to talk theater with the students of Independence Community College.

"You're known as an uncompromising artist, but you made changes in *Passion* when it was trying out—isn't that compromising?" a young woman asked.

"No," Sondheim replied. "It's making changes. I don't do it to please the audience. I do it to make my intention clear to the audience. Once they know that, they can either accept it or reject it. In *Passion* they rejected it." In Independence, we also heard a new script by David Ives, once an emerging playwright, now a successful one. His comedy, *All in the Timing*, was resident theater's most-frequently performed play in the 1995-1996 season. How had he become a playwright? "Theater is such a fluke. I sent a play to some guy in Minneapolis, who told me about a theater in L.A." Flukes aside, there are established channels these days for new-play development—even for musical theater. There are so many, in fact, that critics have condemned some regional theaters for "developing scripts to death"—giving them so many trial readings and audience discussions that in the end not even the playwright can say what the play is about. One also hears the opposite complaint: that a theater will retain a script for a year and then return it without comment.

In general, though, a young U.S. playwright finds it easier to get a hearing today than ever before. And often, a premiere will follow—sometimes a double premiere. Christopher Sergel's *Black Elk Speaks* went from its debut at the Denver Theater Center Company to the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1995, in return for the Taper's production of Leslie Ayvazian's *Nine Armenians*. Syl Jones' *Black No More* was co-commissioned by the Guthrie Theater and Washington's Arena Stage. Actors Theatre of Louisville's annual Humana Festival has introduced more than a dozen new dramatists of note to the U.S. stage. The Denver Center Theater sponsors two new-play festivals—one devoted to the works of women playwrights.

While women dramatists have yet to achieve parity with their male counterparts in the United States, there are encouraging signs. Tina Howe, Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein and Emily Mann continue to make their mark—Mann as artistic director of the McCarter Theater in Princeton, New Jersey, as well. Indeed, some of the most acclaimed works premiered in New York City this season were by Howe (*Pride's Crossing*), Jane Anderson (*Defying Gravity*), and Amy Freed (*Freedomland*). African-American women dramatists are especially visible these days. In addition to Naomi Wallace, Suzan-Lori Parks and Cheryl West, Pearl Cleage saw her *Blues for an Alabama Sky* unveiled at the 1996

Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, with subsequent stagings around the United States. And Kia Corthron is a prolific newcomer who has had works performed in cities from Baltimore, Maryland, to Seattle, Washington.

To bring this discussion of theater in the United States full circle, I have to cast my eyes far from Minneapolis—to the East Coast, and a suburban Connecticut setting. There, in Waterford, on an old farm, is the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, named to commemorate the great U.S. playwright of the first half of this century. It houses a playwrights' conference, a musical theater workshop, and a critics' seminar. The playwrights' conference stages readings of a dozen new scripts every summer. Its alumni include John Guare, Israel Horovitz, and August Wilson, the United States' most celebrated contemporary African-American dramatist.

Wilson has drawn criticism recently for taking what some regard as a separatist position on African-American theater. He maintains that black writers and artists need to resist the mainstream white theater establishment, found their own stages, and act in them. The irony is that Wilson himself continues to unveil his own plays in mainstream theaters across the United States. This doesn't obscure his basic argument that the United States could use more black theaters, more Asian-American theaters, more Hispanic theaters, to meet the enthusiasm of expanding multicultural audiences. This might lead in turn to the presence of more multicultural critics on the scene, to join two prominent African Americans, *The Denver Post*'s Sandra Brooks-Dillard and Rohan Preston of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*. So theater in the United States has its work cut out for it. But at least it is, now, a genuine American theater.

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Picture on the Title Page

Edward Hopper. *People in the Sun* (1960)

National Museum of American Art, Smithonian Institution.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), one of the leading American figure painters of the twentieth century, painted everyday subjects with a melancholy romanticism. Isolated individuals and deserted streets and buildings suggest boredom and loneliness, free from psychological involvement but creating a tension in their very impassiveness.

Dance at the Close of the Century

by Suzanne Carbonneau

The enviable reputation achieved by dance in the United States in the formative twentieth century rests on the work of titans in the various disciplines. George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, Antony Tudor and Jerome Robbins pioneered American ballet. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Katherine Dunham, Merce Cunningham and Alvin Ailey blazed unforeseen trails in modern dance. The uniquely New World "tap" terpsichore has had as its masters Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, John Bubbles, the Nicholas Brothers, Jimmy Slyde, and Gregory Hines. As for musical theater and vocal choreography, we are indebted to Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Michael Kidd, Bob Fosse and Cholly Atkins. And artists such as Twyla Tharp have worked in a variety of dance genres. Then there are the generally anonymous contributors who brought the world such social dances as the Charleston, Lindy Hop and break dance, all of which developed into global crazes.

The first generation of dance masters has passed on, and the second is graying. Still, as a newer contingent comes to the fore, at a time of significant decline in vital U.S. government funding, dance in the United States continues to be innovative, with works of high quality. And, significantly, new forms are evolving as dance maintains its presence in the general globalization of culture.

Modern Becomes Classic

Modern dance in the United States, an established form for most of this century, has settled into the status of a classic. Yet it continues to generate new roots. Companies bearing the name and choreographic insignia of the likes of Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham and Alvin Ailey have been joined by such adventuresome stylists as Mark Morris and Bill T. Jones. Even in the aftermath of the death of the founding generation, today's prevailing troupes continue to honor those early artists through a devotion to dance that is seen as an expression of the individual body and soul, that hints at social and political ideals, and that employs the technical vocabulary of their elders. Most of all, they honor the pioneers by doing as they did—rebelling against the concerns and modes of those who came before them.

As always, modern dance reflects its times. The younger choreographers today often favor the postmodernist over the modernist aesthetic. This means that contemporary choreographers have assimilated ballet, martial arts, social dances, gymnastics, folk dances and other techniques into the modern dance lexicon, so that there no longer exists an easily definable style of modern dance movement. It means that the forms and formulas for constructing dance have changed in response to the post-Einsteinian view of the physical world, the influence of new modes of perception that have come with technology, and the postmodern idea of reality as a relative social construct. (For example, choreographer Doug Elkins is a true postmodernist for whom all of history and world culture is an aesthetic grab-bag from which he selects, deconstructs and reconstructs at will.) It means that choreographers are questioning who is allowed to dance and what they must look like, as well as whose voices are being heard. It also means that content has come back to the fore in modern dance as taking precedence over form. This represents a serious philosophical and aesthetic rupture with the style in modern dance that has been dominant since Cunningham began choreographing in the 1940s and since the Judson Dance Theatre of the 1960s brought modern dance into the formalist fold.

This aesthetic break was most famously (and infamously) brought to the attention of the

larger public and arts community in 1995, with the publication in *The New Yorker* of dance critic Arlene Croce's diatribe against Bill T. Jones as a representative of what she termed "victim art." Speaking for a portion of the arts establishment, Croce expressed a contempt for the work of Jones and others which ultimately demonstrated that Croce's real concern was that the modernist aesthetic—the only one she recognized as legitimate—no longer was guiding many younger choreographers. However, the trends against which Croce and others were railing had already been present in dance as a major force for at least a decade.

Social and Political Context

A cyclical trend that re-emerged in modern dance more than ten years ago and continues today has seen choreographers focusing on making art with social and political content. This work dealt with the "isms" of hatred (including racism, sexism and homophobia), on the politics of identity, and on issues surrounding the AIDS crisis. In addition to Jones (who, ironically, in his most recent work, has embraced formalist concepts), choreographers across the country are expressing similar concerns. David Rousseve in Los Angeles creates dances in which personal history is excavated for larger social issues. Stuart Pimsler of Columbus, Ohio, works with health caregivers in developing his dances. In Seattle, Washington, Pat Graney brings dance into women's prisons. In her choreography for *Urban Bush Women*, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar of Tallahassee, Florida, tackles issues associated with female African-American identity. And Ralph Lemon, whose most recent work explores how identity is created by race and culture, is among the many choreographers in New York City working in this arena.

Even in modern dance companies whose work focuses on more purely aesthetic concerns, there is evident a vastly different attitude about the body and gender roles. A growing recognition has emerged about the way that dance has been restricted by notions about physical perfection and "beauty," and an attempt is being made to open up professional dance companies to include those who would have been restricted from it even a few years ago. As the physical abilities of dancers seem to increase exponentially (as it does with athletes) with each passing year, there is now beginning to be room on American stages for a more heterogeneous range of physicality. It is becoming rare among younger choreographers to see dance that replicates traditional gender roles as they were idealized and promulgated in ballet and earlier modern dance. Today, women partner and lift men, and men can display softness and vulnerability.

Beyond this, however, there is a new trend in dance that is even more audacious in its challenges to the bodily aesthetic—so-called wheelchair companies. These companies can consist entirely of dancers who are disabled or can include a mix of wheelchair-bound and "stand-up" dancers. American choreographer Victoria Marks, who is currently based in Los Angeles, first brought wide attention to the form with her 1994 film *Outside In* (created with director Margaret Williams), that featured the members of the British company CanDoCo. In 1997, Boston Dance Umbrella challenged its audiences with its presentation of an International Festival of Wheelchair Dance that featured eight wheelchair dance companies, as well as troupes from Europe.

Other artists are also confronting notions about who is allowed to dance by opening a place on their stages for previously unheard voices and

experiences. Liz Lerman, artistic director of the Washington, D.C.-based Dance Exchange, has defied ageism in dance by expanding her company to include members over the age of sixty, whom she has dubbed "dancers of the third age." Likewise, New York choreographer David Dorfman has created a series of projects that recruit untrained dancers in a variety of sites across the country to perform customized versions of dances that address their life experiences. The Everett Dance Theater of Providence, Rhode Island, also has blurred the lines between outreach and artmaking in its focus on creating work with social messages that is developed improvisationally and shaped by feedback from the community about which it dances. And New York-based choreographer Ann Carlson is known for her *Real People* series, in which she has created dances to be performed by people gathered together by a common profession or activity. So far, the project has included lawyers, security officers, basketball players, fly-fishers, fiddlers, corporate executives, a farmer and her dairy cow, schoolteachers, nuns and horse wranglers.

Dance with Jazz

One of the side benefits of modern dance's expansion has been the resurgence of interest in vernacular American music. While jazz largely bypassed modern dance in its heyday, this is no longer the case. There are enough collaborations currently in the works between modern dance choreographers and jazz composers for it to qualify as a bona fide trend. Garth Fagan, choreographer of the hit Broadway musical *The Lion King*, first collaborated with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Wynton Marsalis on *Griot New York* in 1991. Fagan and Marsalis are at work again on a dance, as yet untitled, that Fagan describes as "a yellow brick road to the Millennium." Choreographers Dianne McIntyre, Bebe Miller, Bill T. Jones, Danny Buraczeski and Donald Byrd have commissioned scores from jazz composers that bring this music to a new generation of dance artists. And joining forces are the American Dance Festival and the Kennedy Center. They are seeking to match choreographers with jazz composers, including Billy Taylor who is creating a new score for choreographer Trisha Brown. Even the ballet world is adapting the trend: Peter Martins, artistic director of the New York City Ballet (NYCB), has commissioned Marsalis to compose his first full work for a symphony orchestra, for the company's 1999-2000 season, with the composer conducting the ballet orchestra. It will be Marsalis's first composition for a full symphonic orchestra.

Despite those who feared the worst for American ballet following the death of NYCB director-choreographer George Balanchine in 1983, American ballet, as a whole, is in a singularly healthy state under Peter Martins' direction, commissioning a string of new ballets from other choreographers, adding to the tradition etched by Balanchine, Jerome Robbins and others. American Ballet Theater, the United States premier ballet repertory company, has assumed the mission of spreading ballet across the nation by establishing a presence and community roots in such far-flung locales as Newark (New Jersey), Detroit (Michigan), Washington, Costa Mesa (California) and Los Angeles.

And Dance Theater of Harlem, founded by performer Arthur Mitchell in 1968 following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., has long been acknowledged as among the most important international companies, as evidenced by its precedent-breaking visit to South Africa in 1992, when the company performed before racially-mixed audiences in Johannesburg. Another re-

cent bright spot has been the significant maturation of regional ballet troupes in cities across the United States. Indeed, several companies outside of the dance hub that is New York City have transcended the regional label by establishing a national and global presence.

One of these is the Miami City Ballet, founded in the late 1980s in the rapidly expanding ethnic Florida city. The company is headed by Edward Villella, whose virile presence as a New York City Ballet soloist from the 1950s to 1970s, had a significant impact in eroding negative stereotypes about the male dancer. As artistic director, Villella has created a world-class company from the ground up. Reflecting its regional roots, the troupe is imbued with a Latin style as evidenced in the verve and spirit of its dancing, and in the large number of Hispanic dancers in its ranks, as well as in the contributions of its resident choreographer, Jimmy Gamonet De Los Heros, a native of Peru.

Another notable company which has recently come to prominence under a Balanchine alumnus is the San Francisco Ballet. While it is the oldest continuously existing ballet company in the United States (founded in 1933), it was given a new lease on life when Icelandic native Helgi Tomasson assumed directorship of the company in 1985. The company performs masterworks of the twentieth century repertory, as well as full-length nineteenth century classics in updated versions by Tomasson.

The creative ecosystem of U.S. ballet is kept in balance by smaller independent companies that exist to serve the vision of a single choreographer, a model that is more familiar in modern dance. Probably the most notable example is Eliot Feld, who continues to challenge himself and his audiences to find the relevance of classical ballet in this time and place. Feld, who first burst onto the scene in 1967 with his choreographed pieces *Harbinger* and *At Midnight*, has gone on to head a series of companies devoted to presenting his own aesthetic. Established just a year ago, Feld's newest company, Ballet Tech, is composed exclusively of young dancers trained at his tuition-free school of the same name. Drawing all of its students from New York City public schools, Ballet Tech democratizes and diversifies an art that had its origins in the European courts. Presenting dances such as *Yo Shakespeare*, the company reflects the culture, look, texture, *zeitgeist*, and rainbow of ethnicities of contemporary urban America.

An increasing number of ballet troupes are acknowledging their responsibilities to the communities in which they reside, developing significant educational and outreach programs that focus on serving those who traditionally never would have had access to ballet training or theatergoing. Based on the model established by Eliot Feld in New York City, the Boston Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle (Washington), Hartford (Connecticut) Ballet and others have begun to devote significant resources to the establishment of tuition-free schools and programs. Other companies are saluting their communities by commissioning works focused on their home locales. For example, Ballet Arizona, based in Phoenix, is preparing a new work on Native American themes and stories developed through dialogues with members of the area's Native Americans, so as to bridge the Anglo and Indian worlds.

Corporeal Noise-Making

The most ubiquitous trend in contemporary dance seems to be the enormous popularity of various forms of percussive dance—Irish step dance, tap

dance, flamenco and other hybrid forms of corporeal noise-making. Dance has not been this popular in the American commercial theater since the early years of this century, when social dance dominated Broadway and vaudeville stages. Today various forms of percussive dance have made themselves known in the New York City theater and elsewhere, in touring versions of the shows. *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*, *Tap Dogs*, and *Stomp*—some from abroad and some homegrown—all attest to the sudden and seemingly insatiable mania for these aural dance forms that are accessible and highly theatrical. This passion may have emerged from the "tap" revival of the 1970s, which introduced a new generation to dance that carries its own beat with it. While the aesthetics range from the unabashed pop commercialism of *Riverdance* and *Stomp*, which rely on glitzy lighting, smoke machines and deafening unison clamor for their effects, to the more subtle and complex use of tap to embody the history of the African-American experience in *Noise/Funk*, all of these shows find their appeal in their re-definition of what contemporary audiences were brought up to think of as dance.

Noise/Funk has brought Savion Glover, a 24-year-old *wunderkind*, the attention that he deserves. Almost single-handedly, Glover has made tap relevant to the newest generation by updating its jazz rhythms to embrace those of the hip-hop sensibility. Glover's astonishing technique has led older tap masters under whom he served his apprenticeship to declare him potentially the greatest tap dancer who has ever lived.

The percussive dance mania is nothing if not global, bringing attention to forms of dance that have their roots in other cultures. While dance has always existed in the United States as a "folk" form—a means of celebrating ethnic roots within this nation of immigrants—there has been a recent tendency toward the professionalization of traditional dances in companies that follow models of modern dance and ballet. This movement reflects the change in the governing immigrant metaphor in the United States, as it turns away from the melting pot toward the idea of a savory stew in which the ingredients coexist and complement rather than blend.

Preserving Cultural Traditions

Outstanding models of professional folk companies include DanceBrazil, based in New York, and directed by Jelon Vieria. This country's leading exponent of capoeira, the martial arts-dance form that originated in Brazil during slavery, DanceBrazil aims at a fusion of the traditional and the modern. Recently, DanceBrazil completed an extended residency in San Antonio (Texas) where it worked with gang members in the poorest neighborhoods of that city. Celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, the Caribbean Dance Company, based in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, also aims at preserving the region's heritage while using the discipline inherent in dance to offer skills and hope to impoverished island youth.

A strong African heritage movement that has been gaining momentum over the past thirty years has also been abetted by the establishment of DanceAfrica, a two-decades-old annual festival of performances and workshops at eight sites across the United States that brings together companies whose work celebrates African roots within the diaspora.

Another kind of cultural enrichment is being brought to the United States by newer immigrant populations seeking refuge, which has resulted in the preservation of dance forms threatened by contemporary political events. A prime example

is classical Cambodian dance, a thousand-year-old tradition which, as a potent symbol of national identity, was targeted by the Khmer Rouge for eradication. A number of the survivors of the "killing fields" found their way to the United States where they made a systematic effort to establish a home-in-exile for Cambodian dance. Groups such as Sam Ang Sam's Cambodian Network Council in Washington, D.C., have kept this form alive, training a new generation in the art. A similar effort is currently being conducted for the performance traditions of the former Yugoslavia. Based in Granville, Ohio, the Zivili Kolo Ensemble, specializing in Balkan dance, is currently concentrating its energies on dances from areas that are changing their borders and populations, particularly the regions of Slavonija, Vojvodina, the Posavina corridor, and Lika.

Another trend in the professionalization of dance forms is occurring in the transfer of street, social and club styles to the stage. While break dance as a street phenomenon is now more than twenty years old, it is only recently that it has begun appearing in concert venues. It is inevitable, too, in this era of cultural sampling, that break dance would be assimilated into the vocabulary of other dance forms. Hip-hop is a strong influence in the current form taken by bhangra, an exemplar of a peculiarly American dance phenomenon that is, at the same time, truly global in its roots. Originally performed by Punjabi farmers, bhangra has emerged as an exciting new force on American college campuses. A recent national intercollegiate bhangra competition filled a 3,700-seat auditorium in Washington.

While the astonishing variety and fecundity of American dance can only be outlined here, it becomes clear that—despite shortages of funds in both the public and private sectors—this art form continues to reflect American culture in a lively, vital, and socially-conscious manner. Well into the next century, dance can be expected to continue to be a mirror for our deepest concerns, our fondest hopes, our crassest dreams, our most starry-eyed idealism, and, ultimately, our truest selves. As Martha Graham fondly quoted her father, "Movement never lies."

Suzanne Carbonneau has written extensively on dance for *The Washington Post* and other publications.

Myra Kinch and Clay Dalton in the Los Angeles production of *American Exodus.* By an unknown photographer, 1937.

New Music for a New Century

by Joshua Kosman

In 1989, Americans and observers all over the world watched in amazement as the Berlin Wall crumbled, bringing down along with it an enormous complex of calcified belief systems. Whether because of synchronicity or simply the deceptive but irresistible human urge to draw connections, an observer of the broad spectrum of classical music in the United States might have detected something similar happening in that world as well. In the way composers operated and the kinds of music they wrote, in the sorts of performing institutions that brought that music and music of the past to the listening public, old models and ways of thinking that had begun to prove decisively unworkable were being chipped away.

Now, almost a decade later, U.S. classical music stands on the verge of an enormous rejuvenation. The process is far from complete—indeed, in some areas it has scarcely begun—but the seeds that have been sown over the past years unmistakably are bearing fruit. The music that is being written today boasts a combination of vitality and accessibility that have been missing from American music for too long. A similar spirit of adventure and innovation can increasingly be found among the country's solo performers and musical organizations.

Artistic liberation, of course, is a slower and more diffuse process than political liberation. In the absence of a single Promethean figure on the order of Beethoven or Picasso, old orthodoxies are more likely to be eroded than exploded. So it is that much of the musical life in the United States still clings to the old ways. Some prominent composers continue to write in the densely impenetrable language forged during the modernist period and clung to in the face of decades' worth of audience hostility or indifference. Some opera companies and symphony orchestras operate as though the United States was still a cultural outpost of Europe, uncertain of the value of anything that doesn't derive from the Old World.

But the signs of change are there—among younger composers struggling to find their own voice in defiance of old models, among performers eager to make those voices heard, and among organizations daring enough to give the nation's musical life a distinctively American profile at last.

Nothing is more important to this process than the production of new music, and here is where the picture is at once most heartening and most varied. From the end of World War II until well into the 1970s, the dominant vein in American music was the arid, intricate style that had grown out of early modernism and continued to flourish in the supportive but isolated arena of academia. Much of this music was based on serialism, the system derived from the works of Schöenberg, Webern, and Berg in which the key-centered structures of tonal music were replaced with a systematically even-handed treatment of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. Even composers whose works were not strictly serialist, such as Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions, partook of the general preference for intellectual rigor and dense, craggy surfaces. The fact that audiences were nonplused by this music, to say the least, was taken merely as an indication that the composers were ahead of their time.

In the past twenty years, though, two important developments have effectively challenged that state of affairs. One is the advent of minimalism, a style of music that in its pure form is based on simple, tonal harmonies, clear rhythmic patterns and frequent repetition. The other is a movement that has tried to continue the development of tonal music where it was left by

Mahler, Strauss and Sibelius; this trend has been dubbed the "new romanticism" (like most such labels, this one is potentially misleading and unavoidably useful). Between them, these two styles—the one with its search for beauty and simplicity, the other with its emphasis on expressive communication—delivered a potent reproach to the lofty abstractions of the high modernist school.

Though its roots go back further, minimalism's first big splash came in the mid-1970s from two important composers, Steve Reich and Philip Glass. The music that these men performed with their own chamber ensembles—long, determinedly static pieces whose repeated scales, chugging rhythms and simple harmonies seemed impossible at first to take seriously—turned out to have an enormous impact on a generation of composers.

Interestingly, however, minimalism has turned out to be more a path than a way station in music history. Both Reich and Glass, now in their 60s, continue to write music of great inventiveness and beauty—Glass more prolifically, Reich (in my view) more arrestingly. In particular, Reich's *Different Trains*, a meditation on the Holocaust scored for taped voices and overdubbed string quartet, stands as one of the great American scores of the past decade. But although the interlocking rhythmic patterns and tonal harmonies of minimalism have become common coin, there is no second generation of minimalist composers. Followers of Reich and Glass, instead of sticking close to the idiom they pioneered, have turned those musical resources to their own ends.

The new romanticism, on the other hand—perhaps because it reflects an attitude toward music history more than a concrete set of musical gestures—has proved to be a more wide-ranging phenomenon. The name itself was coined in connection with a festival of new music sponsored in 1983 by the New York Philharmonic and curated by the late composer Jacob Druckman, who wanted to demonstrate the presence and viability of this retrospective strain in contemporary music.

Perhaps the most prominent new romantic (although his music has recently faded from view) is George Rochberg, who went from being a hard-core serialist to writing music studded with quotations from Beethoven, Mahler and others. Among the other representatives of this style are the brightly colored scores of Druckman and Joseph Schwantner, the elaborate Straussian extravaganzas that David Del Tredici has composed based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, or the ripely sensual works of John Corigliano. A younger generation of new romantics includes such important composers as Christopher Rouse, George Tsontakis and Richard Danielpour.

Although this music is written with skill and passion, there is something in its deliberate nostalgia that is inherently limiting. Why rewrite Strauss, after all, when Strauss himself did it so well the first time? On the other hand, some of the most interesting classical music now being written in America can be seen as a fusion of minimalism and the new romanticism.

Probably the most popular and widely respected composer now working in America is John Adams, whose music melds the two approaches beautifully. Adams, 51, may be best known for the two operas that he wrote in collaboration with librettist Alice Goodman and director Peter Sellars: *Nixon in China*, a funny and moving account of the 1972 meeting between the late U.S. president and Chairman Mao Zedong, and *The Death of Klinghoffer*, about the 1985 Palestinian hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro.

Adams began his career as a straightforward minimalist, but soon found himself unable to break entirely with the past. Beginning with his extraordinary orchestral piece *Harmonielehre* written for the San Francisco Symphony, Adams has managed to graft the surface gestures of minimalism onto an artistic impulse that is as overtly expressive as that of any nineteenth century composer. The most important American composer of the succeeding generation is Aaron Jay Kernis, 38, who won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his *String Quartet* No. 2. Kernis' musical language owes a less explicit debt to minimalism than Adams' does, but the impact of minimalism, as well as a variety of popular musical styles, can be heard in his music alongside those of Mahler, Strauss and Berg. This astonishingly gifted and prolific composer is capable of both deeply felt moral utterances, as in his powerful *Symphony No. 2*, and pure popular fun like his *100 Greatest Dance Hits* for guitar and string quartet.

Combinations of influences also shape some of the other important musical trends of the day. For many composers now in their 30s and 40s, for instance, the impressions of rock music have remained formative, showing up in the use of electric guitars (as in the work of Steve Mackey or Nick Didkovsky) and in a raw rhythmic power that has been practically unheard of in classical music.

The best exemplars of this development are the composers connected with Bang on a Can, a seminal annual festival of new music founded in New York City in 1986. The festival's three artistic directors, composers Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe and David Lang, write music that is as viscerally forceful as it is carefully crafted; Gordon in particular delves into rhythmic complexities that always stay just within the bounds of comprehensibility.

Yet another rewarding recent trend has been the emergence of a generation of Chinese immigrant composers who combine Chinese folk music with Western idioms. Chief among these composers are: Tan Dun, who was commissioned to write a symphony for the occasion of Hong Kong's reversion to Chinese control; Chen Yi and Bright Sheng. Most of these composers still depend on performing organizations—symphony orchestras predominantly—to turn the notes on paper into living sound. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the American orchestral landscape provided as unchanging a vista as any aspect of the nation's cultural life. The hierarchy was clear-cut. At the top were the so-called Big Five ensembles—the symphony orchestras of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Chicago—and below them was everyone else. Well into the century, these organizations saw their role primarily as importers of musical culture from across the Atlantic. Aside from Leonard Bernstein's heady tenure with the New York Philharmonic in the 1960s, the music directors, like most of the repertoire, have been European.

There have been odd bursts of vigorous innovation, such as Serge Koussevitzky's passionate championing of new music during his leadership of the Boston Symphony, or even the astonishing commissioning program run by the Louisville Orchestra throughout the 1950s, which produced major orchestral scores by Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris and many others. But for the most part, America's major orchestras have functioned almost exclusively as conservators of the European tradition.

In the past decade or so, however, the picture has changed considerably—from the bottom up, as it were. The situation among the Big Five has not altered substantially. Even today, not

one of them has an American-born music director: New York's Kurt Masur, Philadelphia's Wolfgang Sawallisch and Cleveland's Christoph von Dohnanyi are all German; Boston's Seiji Ozawa is Japanese, and Chicago's Daniel Barenboim is an Israeli born in Argentina. But those orchestras no longer dominate the scene as thoroughly as they once did. Any list of America's leading orchestras today would have to include those in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, St. Louis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. On a technical level, the best of these ensembles now play so well as to upset the age-old hierarchy; even if none of them is necessarily strong enough to force its way into the top five, several are good enough to make a list of five seem arbitrarily limiting.

Just as important is the change in the way some of these orchestras approach the task of bringing music to the public. Under the leadership of a generation of dynamic young conductors, most of them American, these orchestras have managed to infuse a sense of excitement and adventure into their offerings that is very far from the too-common notion that musical culture is simply something that is good for you.

The most prominent example is Michael Tilson Thomas, who in 1995 became music director of the San Francisco Symphony. The 54-year-old conductor and pianist began as a protegé of Leonard Bernstein. As a young conductor with the Boston Symphony and then as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic in the 1970s, he launched a powerhouse exploration of the music of such American experimentalist composers as Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell and Edgard Varese. In San Francisco, Tilson Thomas has continued his advocacy of American music (in his first season, he included an American work on every subscription concert he led) as well as other contemporary and out-of-the-way repertoire, and injected some much-needed energy into the local musical scene.

At the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the dashing young Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen has reportedly accomplished something similar, although his tastes in new music run more toward the European schools. Leonard Slatkin, who recently took over the helm of Washington, D.C.'s National Symphony Orchestra, has been a staunch supporter of contemporary American music, as has David Zinman in Baltimore. Gerard Schwarz, in his recordings and performances with the Seattle Symphony, has been active in resuscitating the music of a school of mid-century American symphonists that includes Howard Hanson, Walter Piston, and David Diamond.

Individual performers also have a role to play in championing the music of our time. The cellist Yo-Yo Ma, for instance, has been active in commissioning and performing music by a wide range of living composers; the pianist Alan Feinberg is an eloquent advocate for American music of the last two centuries; and baritone Thomas Hampson and soprano Dawn Upshaw—in between their operatic appearances—have performed a wealth of American art songs both past and present.

Where opera is concerned, the signs of progress are slower in coming but still clearly discernible. That's understandable. Opera is, after all, the most tradition-laden area of classical music. It's also the most international, with the same group of singers, conductors, and directors performing in New York one day, Vienna the next and Buenos Aires the week after that.

Still, there's no question that the state of opera in the United States is beginning to change. For one thing, it's burgeoning. The number of op-

era companies in the country continues to climb; many cities that once depended exclusively on tours by the Metropolitan Opera and other major operatic institutions now boast organizations of their own, even if the number and quality of the offerings is small. Audiences, too, are growing at a surprising rate—and getting younger as well, according to surveys by the companies. In 1996, when the San Francisco Opera presented a "Broadway-style" production of Puccini's *La Boheme*, with cheap tickets and eight performances a week by four rotating casts, the company drew a record number of first-time operagoers. Companies elsewhere have seen a similar surge in opera novices among their audiences.

Equally encouraging is the sharp rise in the number of new operas being performed each year. True, many of them are resolutely traditional in character, including Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*, and Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*, to name a few recent high-profile ventures. Some observers have also decried what have been dubbed "CNN operas," whose plots are drawn from current or recent headlines—works like Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie's *Harvey Milk* (about the slain San Francisco politician), Ezra Laderman's *Marilyn* (about Marilyn Monroe), or Adams' *Nixon in China*. Still, there have been notable new works by such inventive figures as Glass, Bright Sheng, or the brilliantly idiosyncratic Meredith Monk, whose *Atlas*, premiered at the Houston Grand Opera in 1991, remains the most magnificent and haunting opera of the decade.

It would be wrong to paint too rosy a portrait of American classical music at what continues to be an uncertain juncture in our history. There are still too many dangers, too many unknowns. The most daunting ongoing threat to the country's musical future, certainly, has been the near disappearance of music education from the curricula of U.S. primary and secondary schools in some states, chiefly during the 1980s. The U.S. Music Educators National Conference sees some improvements in recent years, while still expressing concern. If the pattern of the past decade is not reversed, it could only make it more difficult to ensure new generations of musicians and music lovers. Then, too, the social and economic plight of U.S. cities has had consequences for orchestras, concert halls and opera houses, all of which are predicated on thriving urban cultural centers. Other forms of entertainment and media, from cable TV to home computers to whatever new device is around the next corner, also draw audiences from serious classical music. Still, the prognosis, for the first time in a decade or two, appears awfully good. From here, it looks as if America is heading toward a vibrant new musical culture. Just in time for the new century.

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Further Reading on Arts at the Turn of the Century

Selected Books

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Sandler, Irving. *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s.* (New York: Harpercollins, 1996)

Sarris, Andrew. *You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet: The American Talking Film, History and Memory, 1927-1949.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Slonimsky, Nicolas. *Music Since 1900.* 5th edition. (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994)

Selected Web Sites

Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian is composed of sixteen museums and galleries and the National Zoo as well as numerous research facilities in the United States and abroad. This site links with the National Museum of American Art, the Renwick Gallery, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Museum of the American Indian, and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, as well as with research centers such as the Archives of American Art and the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies.

http://www.si.edu

World Wide Arts Resources

A large, comprehensive gateway to the arts on the Internet with detailed sections on the visual arts, including indexes to artists, galleries, museums, publications, art agencies and schools. Film, literature, theater, and dance links are provided as well.

http://wwar.com

JCS: The History of Jazz

Author Dan Morgenstern, a professor and former editor-in-chief of *Downbeat* and *Metronome* magazines, wrote this electronic text. It begins with "The Jazz Story, An Outline History of Jazz," which provides an overview, followed by "The Roots," "Birth of the Blues," "Brass Bands and Ragtime," "The Coming of Swing" and so forth.

http://www.jazzcentralstation.com/jcs/station/newsstan/history

Alternating Currents: American Art in the Age of Technology

A joint production of the San Jose Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, this site examines the interplay of technological advances and American art over the past thirty years.

http://www.sjmusart.org/AlternatingCurrents

Public Responsibility/Private Initiative: Primary and Secondary Education

Interview with Michael Usdan

The president of the Institute for Educational Leadership Michael Undan discusses issues and trends in primary and secondary education in the United States. Is our nation's historic commitment to mass public education appropriate in its current form? What are the prospects of experiments to improve public schooling? The interview was conducted by *U.S. Society & Values.*

Question: In your view, what are the principal issues affecting U.S. primary and secondary education as we enter the next century?

Usdan: The primary issue is to increase the quality of public education in the United States. The whole movement to institute and enhance standards at the state, local, and national levels is a reflection of this . . . and the interrelated concerns about having an economically competitive work force that will be able to compete in the global economy. The improvement of student achievement is the primary issue as we head towards the millennium.

Q: What are the components of quality public education? You mentioned standards, for example. That might be construed as one element that is going to contribute to this. What are a couple of other elements that you see?

Usdan: This issue is highly politicized because we have a very strong tradition in this country of local control of education, a highly unique, decentralized educational system. In most parts of the world education is much more centralized, run by a central agency, a bureaucracy located in a national capital with a single curriculum.

We have developed this highly decentralized system in which education legally is a state responsibility, and historically until relatively recently there has been a widespread consensus that most operational responsibility for schools should be delegated to these 15,000 local school systems. These systems can range in size from a one-room schoolhouse in a rural area in Nebraska or Kansas to a school system like New York City, which educates a million-plus kids. We have these and everything in-between.

Q: These school systems are actually creatures of the state structure?

Usdan: Exactly, and legally states can create and dissolve school districts at will. But, again, there is a unique tradition of localism that is extraordinarily strong in American public education. What has been so interesting about the evolution of the current standards movement [calling for implementation of national, challenging, curriculum benchmarks to measure the academic achievement of all U.S. students] is that it has been pushed in many ways by corporations and the private sector, which for most of our history were repelled by the notion that the national or federal government should be involved in any way with standards. These groups were worried about national government control. They were worried about what national control would mean to local control and property taxes, to business taxes, and so forth. It's only within the last decade or two, with the transcendent concern about economic competitiveness in the global economy, that corporate leaders have been as involved as they have been in pushing for national standards. And it is a profound switch, the antithesis of where most private sector leaders have stood for most of our educational history.

Getting back to your original question, if you look at the development of standards, the issue of what kids should know, that is a question which is being pursued in states and localities. The debate about national testing that we had recently in Congress is a reflection of the interest in this issue.

So you have to set the standards. Then you have to decide how you create an assessment system that will basically evaluate whether kids are meeting standards. Then, you have to develop an accountability system that will establish consequences for those who do not meet the standards.

Q: Is that accountability system a special bugaboo [a steady source of concern]?

Usdan: The accountability issue is a bugaboo because despite the fact that it has built up remarkable momentum, it still runs counter in many ways to the whole tradition, history and culture of American education, in which the theology of localism still runs strong. The standards movement has picked up tremendous momentum in the face of this tradition of localism because economic concerns about competitiveness transcend some of the old bugaboos about local control and the theology of localism.

Q: Let's look at local control, which is so central to the American educational ethos. Where does it come from?

Usdan: Well, it dates back more than 200 years, to when we were largely a country of immigrants, mainly from Europe, people fleeing from religious and political oppression, and establishing local communities [Local control of education is one of the powers reserved to the local and state governments under the U.S. Constitution]. As the nation moved westward, there were emerging concerns about big government and central government and the theocratic focus of state-imposed religious requirements or political requirements which would be reflected in schools. In response to these concerns, local school committees began to develop, originally in New England. These have evolved into local school boards in most parts of the country.

I think that the power of localism in education was based on strong, pioneer and individualistic mentalities as well as on the fear of an all-too-powerful central state imposing its will among people who were trying to escape from religious and political persecution.

Q: You're talking about, in essence, concerns about content driving this local focus, but didn't local control have a great deal to do with funding? There was this sense that the community was responsible for arranging for education, however they chose to do that.

Usdan: Absolutely. That's a very central point, because it really wasn't until the early 1980s that more than fifty percent of the support for public education was provided by non-local sources. So part of the ethos for local control is the fact that local property taxes provided eighty to ninety percent of the finances for public education through much of our history.

Local control has had wonderful advantages in many ways, in terms of providing schools close to the people, but it also has generated profound inequities as our society has become more diverse in terms of its population and more stratified in its socioeconomic composition. And in many ways we have a school-finance system that perpetuates the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, in which people

fight to maintain in local communities the advantages that their kids have. The national government has instituted some targeted programs to try and ameliorate this somewhat, but the problems still persist.

The selection of a school system, for any of us who have had children, is the primary reason why we move to communities. It's the major consideration. You don't move to a community because it has a world-class fire department or an internationally prestigious mosquito-abatement district; you move to a community because of the reputation of its schools. And people make all kinds of economic sacrifices. They make sacrifices in terms of long, tedious commutes to enhance the educational opportunities provided to their own children. It's the most natural and human response of parents. In many cases, this is what makes the problems of equity in school finance and possible redistribution of resources so singularly complex and difficult.

Q: You point out that there is this inequity, derived largely from dependence on the property tax—taxing of local homes or businesses or whatever at a certain rate. That rate varies, and the value of homes in different places in a state or in a region varies. Is that correct?

Usdan: Exactly. And the wealthier people can afford the more expensive homes. They also can generate more property tax revenue, and ipso facto they can invest more in computers and teachers' salaries and science labs.

Q: How has the U.S. attempted to counter this problem? You mentioned that is was only in the 1980s when the property tax ceased to be the primary basis on which we fund schools. What other resources are we talking about?

Usdan: Well, more broadly-based state taxation, either sales taxes or state income taxes. But in most states, the local resources have remained quite important, although there are still enormous variations from state to state. In New Hampshire, for example, eighty-five to ninety percent of the school bill is still paid from local sources. Nationally, on average, forty to forty-five percent of the school budget would be from local resources, fifty to fifty-five percent from the state, and the national government, which has always been the very junior partner, financially, provides about five percent now.

Q: That's very much a contrast between the U.S. system and those of other countries.

Usdan: Certainly, I am pleased you raised the finance issue because that is definitely central in driving so much of the politics. And that makes our system extraordinarily unique, and foreign visitors who come over here have a hard time understanding our practices, from both an organizational point of view and an equity point of view. In many ways, if you look at the particular problems faced by the cities and the inner-ring suburbs, you have more fiscal inequities because you have something called the "municipal overburden" factor. In other words, the local property tax not only supports schools, but it must support other local functions: police, fire, recreation and so forth.

Q: Also transportation in some ways.

Usdan: Yes, and obviously in an urban community, police, fire, welfare, etc. are going to be more costly, which compounds the problem because you have fewer and fewer dollars available for schools.

In suburban communities, particularly homogeneous suburban communities—even those close to our urban centers—three-quarters of the property-tax will go to schools because the other municipal functions are less costly.

Q: So what we've been saying is that funding and the resolution of funding is very much an issue, and one of the important trends will be the search for alternatives.

Usdan: We have been fighting over this issue for years. The political power in our system is now in the suburban communities. When those interests are in play, the concepts of equity or "redistribution" kind of disappear from our current collective vocabularies.

We have had, since the early 1970s, a whole series of court cases, indeed ongoing court cases in most states of the country, questioning and litigating the inequities of the current school-finance system and the reform-movement in terms of equity and adequate resources. And state legislatures have made adjustments, but by the time the adjustments are made, it's time to litigate again. So in many states around the country, you have had litigation that has been going on for decades.

Q: Speaking of litigation, probably the best-known for many people is the issue of busing, in which the courts defined a public good, the greater integration of the schools, and then came up with solutions which they imposed on the system. Do you think that is going to continue?

Usdan: What is beginning to happen now, because the demographics of our population have moved a lot faster than the court cases, is that we now have even deeper racial segregation. The issues of diversity are much more complicated in many ways than they were in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the issue of integration was literally a black-and-white issue.

Now you have the dramatic growth in the Latino population, the Asian-American population, so the issues of race and ethnicity have become infinitely more complicated. For example, half the recent population growth in this country has been in just three states—Florida, Texas and California. The majority of the growth in those areas, and in school enrollments particularly, is Latino. So the whole ball game has kind of shifted and become more complicated.

But let's get back to our discussion about the courts. We have already said that the national government has had relatively little influence over American education financially but people often ignore the profound impact of the federal courts on educational policy. The decision of the Supreme Court in 1954 [Brown v. Board of Education—the landmark decision by the Supreme Court that separate, but equal, educational facilities did not meet the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity for all students] affecting school segregation is a very good example.

Q: Another area where the Court's decisions on national laws has had substantial impact is the area of disabled or handicapped students, and students with learning disabilities. A very substantial portion of the increase in school spending over the last fifteen or twenty years has gone to support provision of educational opportunity for these disadvantaged students.

Usdan: Yes. I think this is another excellent example of the national government's influence, particularly on equity issues. We had the Title I federal programs which helped disadvantaged kids. But the education-of-the-handicapped leg-

islation, which I think was enacted in 1975, compelled school systems throughout the country to provide for the needs of kids who were physically handicapped and handicapped in other ways—students in too many cases whose needs had not been met before.

At the same time, these national requirements created a backlash because they required extensive plans and expenditures but never provided the resources to implement the legislation. Originally the goal, I believe, was that the national government would provide forty percent of the special-education costs, but I think the percentage that [it] actually provided has never gone much above eight or nine percent. So these requirements, although wonderfully intended for the noble cause of handicapped kids, helped to generate a backlash against national government intervention, bureaucracy, regulations, and so forth. This demonstrates how complicated our federal intergovernmental system can be.

Q: How does this complex structure shape our educational governance?

Usdan: Let's talk about that in terms of centralization or decentralization. In our federal governmental system you have national, state, and local governments, each of which has certain responsibilities. Under our constitutional and statutory framework in this country there is, of course, a federal constitution and each of the states have their own constitutions. In terms of educational policy, the federal government has had influence, the states have had the legal responsibility, and the locals basically historically have had the operational responsibility.

So when you are talking about educational policy in this country, you are talking about many different, diverse actors, ranging from teachers, to principals, to school superintendents, to parents, to school board members at the local level. You have in many states intermediate districts which provide some special services between local school districts and states. You have education departments. You have state legislatures. You have governors. You have education aides to governors, who are increasingly influential in the policy-making process. And then you have the influence of the federal establishment we have been talking about.

Q: The charter-school movement [movement to promote public schools whose governance is outside the traditional public school structure, but which receive public funding] is gaining a certain amount of interest regarding its possible impact on our educational structure.

Usdan: I think that the charter-school movement has emerged from several different historical strands. One is a growing distaste for the increasing numbers of bureaucratic and regulatory requirements on schools, the sense that teachers and principals who are at the building level where kids are, where the teaching/learning process takes place, are constrained by an array of bureaucratic requirements that have no relevance to the actual education process. So that is one attraction of the charter-school movement.

There is also the attraction of choice. Wealthy people can select where to send their kids to school, whether they are living in an expensive, suburban community or sending their kids to private or independent schools. The charter-school movement has gained support in areas where the schools have very badly served kids, particularly in the inner cities, where there is growing sentiment that parents and teachers and people at the building level ought to be given more prerogatives and authority.

So greater local responsiveness is one argument for decentralization. An argument for centralization is that what is important about schools is not who governs at the local, state, or national levels, but whether kids are learning, and whether or not kids are coming out trained and are literate and understand science, computers, English, math, etc. What you have in posh suburban communities are schools tailored for people who primarily want their kids to be able to do well on [standardized college admission tests], and to get into Ivy League colleges or prestigious, flagship public institutions.

And so the governance issue in such communities is less relevant. Forty, fifty, or sixty years ago, places like New York City; Chicago; Philadelphia; Detroit; Washington, D.C., had very bureaucratized large school systems, but kids were achieving despite the size of the districts or their centralized governance structures.

Q: Very often when we look at per-capita expenditures for education in the United States and we compare them with per-capita expenditures for students overseas, one of the disparities in those simple comparisons is that a lot of the education money in some districts in the United States goes for some of what are, in fact, social programs, for instance, for school-lunch programs, for remediation kinds of programs, for after-school-care programs, and this isn't the case in a lot of other countries.

Usdan: I'm sure that's so. One of the real dilemmas that the schools have is with changes in the family structure in all kinds of communities, not just poor cities or rural areas. We have had profound changes in family structure. Increasingly, both parents are working. There are growing numbers of single-parent households in all kinds of communities. The case can be made that nobody is looking out for kids, and the schools have the dilemma that they are virtually the only institution left in the lives of many kids.

So what does a school do if a kid comes in hungry in the morning, hasn't had breakfast, or if a kid has a toothache and hasn't been to a dentist? That kid isn't going to learn to capacity until such basic needs are met.

And so what is really called for is a reassessment of our existing local school governance system. We have developed in this country, as part of the municipal reform movement at the turn of the century, a separation between schools and general purpose government; we thought the schools were too important to be politicized, so we created totally separate governance systems.

So you have some schools sitting in splendid isolation from the mainstream of society with separate funding streams and so forth. Social services, health services, the employment and training system and so forth are under the aegis of general-purpose government, at a time when more kids are growing up in poverty or in economically marginal circumstances.

So kids are entering the schools with all kinds of social and health problems which confound their ability to learn but the school is divorced from the resources and systems needed to fight such problems.

How do you create new kinds of social service delivery systems that involve and use the school? Education's primary mission should be academic; I wouldn't dispute that, but since the schools are the place where the kids are, we have to find new creative ways of establishing community schools that focus upon this primary academic mission, but also have their facilities used for parent education, remedial work, and social

services. And we must create a rational funding system to do this so that the schools don't have the whole burden.

You are beginning to see this happen. In the big cities first, in places like Boston, Chicago and Cleveland, you have mayors becoming increasingly interested in schools because they recognize that however much they rebuild their downtowns and erect beautiful buildings and museums, they are never going to attract the middle class back into the cities unless they do something about the schools. So the mayors are getting more and more involved, and I think that changes in local governance are going to be some of the major issues in the new millennium.

Q: Multiculturalism or multilingualism are issues which have attracted wide popular attention in education, both in terms of how they function in the classroom and in the curriculum. Multicultural sensitivity has been á concern in education in the United States. Is this going to continue?

Usdan: Sure. I think as the population increasingly becomes more diverse, we are going to have to think about what is majority and what is minority in this country in terms of our demographics. This growing diversity is perhaps one of the primary challenges facing the entire society. It is hitting the schools first because of the fact that the new immigrants are basically a very young population.

So these kids are rolling up through the schools. More than thirty percent of the school enrollment is already minority. By the middle of the next century, our current minorities will constitute fifty percent of the overall population. Spanish is the most common spoken language in the Western Hemisphere. Our curriculums, our capabilities for dealing with languages other than English, our cultural sensitivity must meet this challenge.

Q: We talk about the impact of immigrants on the school system, but another issue in terms of the American education system goes in the other direction: the impact of the schools on the immigrant, the socialization, the creation of a citizen of the United States. Can you talk about that for just a little bit and maybe speculate on whether or not that's still relevant?

Usdan: It is very relevant. I think we have all lost sight of that fact. My father, for example, was an immigrant and was very poor. He grew up on the lower East Side of New York City, and went to Stuyvesant High School [a city-wide, selective institution], and became a dentist. He provided his family with a very comfortable, middle-class background. That's just one generation ago. I was able to go to an Ivy League college and have a good professional career, etc. If my father had not received a high-quality public education, my chances for success would have been diminished. Public education historically and traditionally has been the engine of our democracy and social mobility. I think that we have lost sight of this vital contribution of public education.

With all of the problems of our school systems and all the inequities, the American public education system is still the world's grandest mass-education experiment. It has provided a pathway for social and economic mobility for millions of Americans. Most of that history took place in what was a different kind of economic and psychological environment in which our country and its economy were constantly growing. We were always expanding in pursuit of our "manifest destiny." There was a profound belief that if you got a good education, there was

growth and opportunity. I think that what has begun to happen in the last couple of decades, as we worry about our own kids, is that we are not as sure as we once were of achieving the classic American Dream in which you could reasonably aspire to do better than your parents.

Some of us were the beneficiaries of the post-World War II period, when much of the rest of the world was shattered, and the United States was an economic colossus. We were six percent of the population, generating about forty percent of the world's GNP. That couldn't go on forever. Europe, and ultimately Asia, rebuilt, and the resulting economic competition and what happened to our manufacturing industry created considerable self-doubt in our culture about economic mobility.

I think in many ways that these economic doubts also curbed the possible renaissance of "liberalism" and any movement towards redistribution of resources. It is a lot easier being a liberal in an expanding economy than in a contracting economy. I think people are increasingly concerned about the futures of their own kids . . . and don't want their own school systems to have to pay the price for redistributive policies.

The charter-school movement, I think, can be an important movement because it creates alternatives, competition, and perhaps most importantly, it can trigger some changes in some of our more ossified public-school systems. Charter schools service only two-tenths of a percent of the kids. So the challenge is to strengthen the traditional public schools. That is where almost all of the kids are.

Q: What about vouchers [a system under which public funds are used by parents to pay for their choice of public or private, possibly religious, school]?

Usdan: One of the purported reasons the public schools are so unresponsive is that they have a monopoly. But most people, even within public-school systems, now support choice, and the charter-school movement is growing. The major teachers' unions have their own recently launched charter-school operations. I think there is a growing, albeit grudging acceptance of choice even within the public school sector. The issue, for me, is whether "choice" should include nonpublic as well as public schools?

I do not think that public resources should go to nonpublic schools because such a policy would further erode the public school's already shrinking political base.

Q: You very eloquently made the point earlier on that basically the educational process happens between the student and the teacher in the classroom. A lot of resources go into preparation of teachers in the United States. How well do you think we do that?

Usdan: I think we do terribly. I think that many, if not most, teacher preparatory institutions are not particularly relevant because they are not connected directly in a clinical way with the schools where the teaching/learning activity takes place. I think many schools of education have emulated the norms of the arts and sciences and have followed the research paradigm, instead of following the more applied clinical model of either the business schools or the medical schools, where you have clinical professors who have ongoing professional practices that are not removed from the reality of the real world.

My own sense is that teacher education drastically needs revision and reshaping. I think school systems themselves have to become more significant in the teacher education process, par-

ticularly in how the critically important student-teaching component is handled.

Q: You are associated with what we in the government world call an "NGO" [non-governmental organization]. How do you see your organization's responsibility or contribution in addressing these education issues and challenges and opportunities?

Usdan: The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a private, independent, nonprofit organization. We have no constituency in the traditional sense. We have been operating with the political, educational, and business worlds here in Washington and throughout the country. IEL has wonderful independence and an ability to play a catalytic role in surfacing issues. We serve as a connecting mechanism between schools and the larger world, and our programs relate to demographics, employment and training, connecting schools with health and social services, etc. because the problems facing kids and families are going to require new kinds of multi-sector approaches. There is a profound difference between schooling and education, but many in our society, I think, view education as being merely schooling.

One vital part of education surely happens in the school building. But by the time a kid turns eighteen, some ninety-one percent of his or her time will be spent in a nonschool setting, with the family, with friends, sleeping, etc. Kids, as we know, spend infinitely more time watching television than doing homework. And so we have to pay more attention to the profound, nonschooling educational effects of other facets of the society.

Q: Is business's interest in education going to have a major impact?

Usdan: It already has had a profound impact. It has evolved in the last decade or two. The business and political communities increasingly are calling the shots. They are undergirding the standards movement, which really started in some ways with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. In southern states, governors like Clinton in Arkansas, Hunt in North Carolina and Riley in South Carolina provided leadership in connecting schools with economic development. At the same time, we had wrenching economic transformations that were changing our society and our economy. We were losing our manufacturing base. We had to move from an industrial/manufacturing economy into an information economy. Educators and the new business and political leadership recognized that we no longer had jobs for large numbers of unskilled individuals. The schools now had to produce people equipped to handle a high-skill, high-standards economy.

The business community wants national standards. They want kids all over the country to be held to certain academic standards, and I think that is the way the country is moving. Kids know math, or they don't know math. There isn't a Virginia math or a South Carolina math or science. Look, for example, at the influence of the Business Roundtable, which has pushed this standards-based reform movement in state capitals all over the country. The Business Roundtable consists of 200 of the largest corporations in the country. They had never before gotten so extensively involved in education, but they now have corporations providing leadership in state capitals to push high educational standards.

So the business community has become very involved, and it has developed a natural alliance with political leadership. In many states this new politics of education has made the governor's office or the governor's education aide infinitely more important to education than is the chief

state school officer. It is important to look at the demographics of the country. Only about twenty-two or twenty-three percent of the adults have kids in schools. Elected officials are going to respond to where the money and clout is. It is not with the kids! Thus, the business community becomes even more important politically.

New political coalitions must evolve, with the business community joining with parents and educators, in the new millennium. This is something that our organization will attempt to catalyze.

Dr. Michael Usdan is the president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. He has served as Commissioner of Higher Education of the state of Connecticut, and as president of the Merrill-Palmer Institute in Detroit. He has taught at Columbia University, City University of New York, Northwestern and Fordham Universities, and in schools in New York City and White Plains, New York. He is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of *Phi Delta Kappan* magazine and served as a member and president of the school board in New Rochelle, New York.

American Studies Journal: Web Site

Information on the *American Studies Journal* can now be found on the Internet. The *ASJ* web site is still under construction, and so far contains lists of articles printed for all issues since it has first been published as *American Studies Newsletter* in 1983. It also keeps visitors up-to-date with plans for upcoming issues, contains a page for electronic subscription renewal and states the guidelines for the submission of American studies- or teaching-related articles. In addition, we invite your comments on the *ASJ* in general or on content-related issues.

The *ASJ* web site is located at:

http://www.zusas.uni-halle.de/asj

You are welcome to send your comments or criticism to us electronically either by clicking "Feedback" on the *ASJ* homepage or by sending us an e-mail. Messages should be sent to:

asj@zusas.uni-halle.de

It is your feedback that helps us to improve future issues of the journal.

A Slew of New Products Caters to a Rising Demand for High-Tech Classroom Tools

by Jennifer Johnes and Meg Misenti

A wave of new education technology products, programs and services hit the market this year [1998], reflecting increased buying power of many schools and unprecedented demand for high-technology learning tools in the classroom. In Texas, a pilot project would swap all textbooks for laptops, testing the notion that textbooks are an anachronism in the age of the Internet. Elsewhere, educators are buying software that lets teachers create detailed "audit trails" of online chat sessions among students. And several software industry players have launched interactive programs to teach teachers how to design lesson plans online, to cite a few examples.

Behind such offerings, demand is surging: 65 percent of teachers now use the World Wide Web to make their lesson plans, according to a recent poll by Quality Education Data, a Denver-based education research company. Furthermore, about half of the country's 111,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade (K-12) schools are wired to the Internet. Only 4 percent of schools will remain unconnected after this school year, continuing a year of strong demand, experts say.

To some, such numbers signal that using and teaching high technology has become an indispensable part of classroom life. "One thing that has become clear is that technology has become a new 'basic,'" said Linda Roberts, director of the U.S. Education Department's Office of Educational Technology and the nation's top education technology policy-maker. "Of course, we must still have a very high level of student reading skills [as well as] math skills and science skills. But there is another set of skills students need in the Information Age, and those have generated a whole range of tools available to schools." . . .

The New Switched Schoolhouse

Most new education technology can be traced to the high rate of fresh school connections to the Internet. To take advantage of the phenomenon, network technology suppliers are offering special packages to make it simple for school districts to start a network program and then make it easier to grow their networks into faster, more advanced systems.

Rochester, New Hampshire-based Cabletron Systems Inc., for instance, is offering schools three "connectivity" packages that include Ethernet switching hardware, software and training priced for set numbers of students. The packages are based on company's SmartSwitch Ethernet products, which are scalable from 10 megabits/sec to gigabit speeds. Under its SmartSolution 200 package, schools get equipment and training for up to 200 users. Cabletron offers the deal—which comes with e-mail and file transfer capability—for as little as $5.20 per user per month. At the high end, its SmartSolution 1500 package is for schools or districts with up to 1,000 connections. It includes videoconferencing capabilities for distance learning. For such advanced applications, the price jumps to $13.50 per user per month. "Our philosophy has been to put together three very complete and cost-effective solutions," said Brian Barton, senior director of marketing. "With our SmartSwitch router solutions, connectivity and network management can be spread across an entire state."

Other companies are taking a counter approach—not distinguishing between education systems and other buyers. Instead, they are

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looking to move users up the advanced network product chain. "Our basic approach is 'K-to-Gray,'" said Bill Fowler, Cisco's education solutions manager. "We are not evolving something separate and distinct for education. . . . We are really trying to move schools toward the notion of the globally networked campus," he added. "That is not a product or service but an approach that involves the integration of voice, data or even video on a disseminated campus."

To build a global networked campus, Cisco offers a variety of routing and switching solutions, including its 7000 series of high-end routers that can be configured for more advanced networks, and offer a "clear path" to Asynchronous Transfer Mode services. But most schools tend to favor more modest networking solutions, comparable to what small and medium-size businesses might choose. For Cisco, that means its Catalyst 5000 series of switches, which can then be adapted for ATM by adding a route/switch module or a special ATM card.

Bay Networks Inc. believes the education market has been slow to evolve, but lately the company has done business with K-12 schools for even high-end networking products. "I don't necessarily want to say that K-12 [schools] have been late adopters, but that is generally the case," said Linda Fassig, education industry marketing manager for the Santa Clara, California-based company.

Even so, the Tucson, Arizona, and Philadelphia school districts recently bought Bay's high-end Accelar 1000 series routing switches, which are scalable to gigabit performance levels. The company is also seeing interest in its cable modems, which allow schools to piggyback on existing cable TV networks. "Cable modems are an attractive alternative for schools, since those schools often have cable TV installed," Fassig said.

Network Filters

Responding to interest in tools to guide students on a civilized path around the Internet, developers are producing ever-more sophisticated filtering tools. The packages shepherd children to approved Internet sites, monitor e-mail exchanges among students and even create audit trails of students' online activities. Although they include pre-set filters, most packages leave control over site access to local school administrators, where most agree it belongs. "There are a lot of good products out there [that offer] different levels of protection," said Melinda George, state issues manager for the Software Publishers Association. "Schools need to decide at what level they want to be filtered. The decision-making over what sites schools access and how they use the information should remain with schools."

Indeed, most tools come with lists of Internet sites labeled as 'approved,' 'blocked' or 'questionable.' In some cases, updates to lists are provided periodically—daily, weekly or monthly—depending on the vendor. Updates are usually free for the first year and are available for a nominal charge thereafter. "This isn't about setting up rules for other people. It's about building a software tool to manage Internet access," said Susan Getgood, director of corporate communications for The Learning Company Inc., makers of Cyber Patrol, a leading Internet filtering tool.

Teachers can also use filters to assign sites for specific lesson plans. "We think the beauty of filtering is that teachers should use these tools to manage Internet access to improve their curriculum," said Gordon Ross, chief executive officer of Net Nanny Ltd., a company that enables Internet users to fully view a site database, edit it and control it. "They can look at every

address on that list and block it as they wish. In a classroom, a teacher can set up a lesson plan and conduct an online class on World War II or sex education with certain selected sites."

In choosing a product that best suits their needs, schools should look at what criteria vendors use for filtering. At SurfWatch Software, an advisory committee of teachers, university professors, police officers and concerned citizens set the blocking criteria. Web crawlers are used to bring back questionable sites, which are then reviewed against the criteria by SurfWatch employees. SurfWatch filters currently block access to more than 100,000 Uniform Resource Locators, 2,800 news groups and hundreds of Internet Relay Chat channels.

Problems with Internet content don't stop with Web sites. Leading vendors, including Net Nanny, Cyber Patrol and SurfWatch, also offer sophisticated chat room controls. Cyber Patrol's ChatGuard tool, for example, can prevent students from giving out personal information, such as their last name or phone number.

Likewise, many products prevent children using unfit language and limits dialogs to safe chat rooms. Net Nanny boasts full two-way monitoring of chat rooms, with the filter reading words and phrases in almost any language. Educators, if necessary, can control both incoming and outgoing communication. For example, if someone poses an inappropriate question to a student, Net Nanny will "X" it out so the question can't be read.

The Net Nanny filter even gives teachers and administrators the ability to take action should inappropriate activity transpire in a chat room. The product allows users to set the level of monitoring control and create an audit trail of chat room activity, in which the filter logs violation messages. Those audit trails can then be printed as a record of all activity that led to the termination of a chat.

Internet filtering tools can be purchased for stand-alone, single-user or networked computers, and the tools generally reside on the school server. Schools that don't like this idea may want to consider alternatives such as Bess Internet Filtering Service from N2H2 Inc. N2H2's turnkey solution includes all necessary hardware and software, handles monitoring and reporting functions as well as downloading new site listings. Bess is installed in more than 8,000 schools and costs about $4,000 for a typical school setup.

To obtain filters, schools can either download a trial version or order the product online. Most offer discounts or special rates for schools, and cost usually depends on the number of workstations. Ten workstations using Cyber Patrol will cost about $300 and includes a year of list updates to the database. Cyber Patrol also offers discounts of up to 25 percent for schools applying for E-Rate discounts. Net Nanny's 10-user license goes for about $200.

The Notebook Revolution

The laptop is on track to becoming the basic Internet access engine of the K-12 market. This is partly because key hardware and software companies now have special programs to seed the market with computers that students and teachers can plug in at home. But school administrators are also behind the trend. In fact, Texas education officials are talking about whether to replace textbooks with laptops altogether. "Textbooks cost $58 or more, and they are out of date when you put them on the desk," said Jack Christie, chairman of the Texas State Board of

Education. "The laptop is far superior to the traditional textbook, and the affordability factor is coming into play. It is just a matter of time."

In May, Christie called for a technology summit of state legislators and top hardware and software vendors to discuss how to start a laptop program in the state. Following the meeting, the State Board of Education drafted a request for proposal for pilot programs to swap textbooks for laptops in three or four of the state's school districts.

The main stumbling block, of course, is cost. Among the options: use of permanent school funds (about $300 per student per year), student allotments and federal infrastructure grants. "This movement is one of the most equitable things you can do for all students," said Christie, who has pegged a January start date for the pilot program. "It's a popular topic among legislatures—laptops replacing textbooks," George said. "But there needs to be a realistic study of what that would mean and what that would cost."

While statewide laptops-for-textbook programs may be a bit far off, K-12 schools remain an important niche for the industry's biggest vendors. Two companies now dominate that market: Apple Computer Inc., which made inroads in the past two years with its rugged-yet-inexpensive eMate computer, and Microsoft Corp., which is partnering with several laptop vendors to sell to schools.

About 90,000 students use the eMate 300. Although now discontinued largely because it ran on Apple's now defunct Newton operating system, the eMate appealed to schools because of its $600 price and its portability; it weighs only 4 pounds and fits in a backpack. The eMate also has built-in applications including word processing, drawing, spreadsheets and a graphing calculator.

While Apple isn't saying much about its planned successor to eMate, a company spokesperson said the new low-cost portable will be extremely durable and have a long battery life. One Fairfax County, Virginia, technology teacher who uses the eMate in her classrooms has heard rumor of a color screen, more memory and Internet-ready capability.

For its part, Microsoft is pursuing several hardware partnerships to push its stakes further into the education market. Starting with a 1996 partnership with Toshiba American Information Systems Inc., it sold about 40,000 laptop units to 250 schools. The Microsoft-based Toshiba computers were positioned as a basic "learner's toolkit" and came loaded with Microsoft Office Professional and a modem for Internet connectivity. Since then, Microsoft has partnered with Compaq Computer Corp., Acer America Corp. and Dell Computer Corp. to offer its software to schools on several platforms.

But other vendors are trying to give Apple and the "Wintel" partners a run for their money. NetSchools Inc. is pitching educators ruggedized, waterproof Samsung Electronics Co. laptops as a wireless solution that can save schools significant wiring costs. The NetSchools package includes a rugged notebook computer for every student; a wireless, infrared connection to the school's local-area network; a low-cost, high-speed Internet connection; and training for technical and instructional staff. The Santa Clara, California-based company counts 18 schools as customers.

Teaching the Teachers

Given the rapid pace of new product offerings, teachers themselves are an important market for education software, especially for tools to help

them learn and teach basic technology literacy. Two kinds of tools dominate the market: electronic tools, such as Web products and CD-ROMs, that teach basic technology literacy skills, such as how to use e-mail and incorporate it into a social studies lesson; and electronic resources, such as Web sites and CDs, that teachers use to provide the content for their lessons.

"Teachers are looking for anything that helps them understand how to integrate technology into teaching," said Don Blake, a senior technologist for the National Education Association. "It's not just about getting computers into the classroom and having Internet access. It's about how to use these tools and feel comfortable with the accountability these teachers now face in having to guarantee that students perform at certain levels."

Electronic tools which fit that description are just beginning to emerge. For example, Microsoft has information on its site (http://www.microsoft.com/education/k12/office/enrich.htm) that is geared expressly for coaching teachers on using technology to organize lesson plans. The company's classroom productivity program walks teachers through prepackaged lessons that incorporate software such as Word and Excel to teach problem-solving skills.

For example, in one lesson on the site, teachers use Microsoft products, bags of M&M candies and the M&M Web site (http://www.m-ms.com) to figure out how to put quantitative data into bar charts. At the end of the lesson, students and teachers have covered math and language arts, used up to four software packages, used the Web and sent e-mail.

Compaq is also targeting teachers. In June [1998] the company debuted at the National Education Computing Conference, a series of technology primers available to teachers on CD-ROMs, over the Internet or via in-person training. "The idea is to teach educators who have always taught with chalk, chalkboards and textbooks how to integrate technology into the classroom," said Gary Staunch, Compaq's director of education marketing.

Compaq calls its program the AdvanCE—for Advantage Compaq Education. The kits include five titles: *Bridging to Windows 95, Integrating Technology, Communication and Collaboration Using the Web, Using Multimedia* and *Designing a World Wide Web Site.* "We took on the venture to help facilitate teacher training and to differentiate ourselves in this market," Staunch said.

Nonprofit software developers are also getting into the "teaching the teacher" market. Tech Corps, a kind of "technology Peace Corps" program, offers Web Teacher as a "self-paced Internet tutorial" that educators can use to learn how to use the Web, e-mail, video conferencing and even Web page design. The online product is available for free at http://www.webteacher.org. The product was actually developed for Tech Corps by a husband and wife teacher team in Tennessee, and Tech Corps claims it is accessed perhaps as much as 3,000 times a day.

Teaching teachers to use the Web is crucial to Tech Corps' mission. "Our goal is to give teachers a flavor for what they can do with information technology," said Karen Smith, executive director. "Part of what we want to do is to expose teachers to technology so that they can go back to their principal or school board and say, "This is what I want and why [I want it]."

Jennifer Johnes and Meg Mesenti are *civic.com* staff writers.

Technology in Education

Interview with Barbara Means and Seymour Papert

Students and educators are able to access more information, and at a faster rate, than ever before. In a world that is increasingly interdependent, economically and otherwise, students must learn more about the rest of the world, and new technologies enable them to do so more than ever before. In a world that increasingly relies on technology, students are becoming familiar with new technologies at an early age. The Internet gives people of all ages—no matter where they attend school or even if they do not attend a formal school—direct access to a vast number of informational sources around the world. The rapid pace of technological change and the sheer volume of information available present new challenges to educators, students and others involved in learning.

Dr. Barbara Means and Dr. Seymour Papert have been perceptive observers of the expanding relationship between technology and education. Recently, they reflected on this phenomenon.

Question: Many children in the U.S. already have experience with computers (either through games or through "serious" learning programs) long before they enter school. How will this familiarity with technology affect the students and adults of the future?

Means: Students' increasing familiarity with technology use offers a great opportunity for schools, if schools and teachers have the wisdom and self-confidence to take advantage of it. Rather than trying to learn how to use every new piece of software and Internet tool themselves and how to do all of their own systems administration and troubleshooting, teachers can start to think of themselves as instructional designers and managers, with interested students contributing needed technology skills. Teachers who are confident enough to focus on the content, student diagnosis and assessment aspects of classroom activities while letting students who happen to have needed technical expertise help their peers master the technical aspects of using software or the Internet, have many more options for technology use in their classrooms. In addition, this kind of collaboration, with different individuals contributing different kinds of expertise, is a good model for the kind of "learning community" that many education reformers advocate.

An interesting example is *Generation Why*, a Technology Innovation Challenge Grant project. This project is training high school students in how to work with teachers in helping to implement technology-supported instruction in their classrooms. The students receive training, not only in technical skills, but also in consulting skills to prepare them for working with their teacher clients.

There's a tremendous opportunity here as long as current school staff are not so anxious about "losing control" or "not knowing everything about class content" that they fail to take advantage of the burgeoning student skills. At the same time, there is a serious equity issue. Not all students have home access to computer technology and even with prices coming down the disparity is likely to continue. It is precisely because of this disparity that school access to using technology tools is an important public policy issue.

Papert: It is quite obvious that in the long run the lives of children will be radically changed as a result of the presence of computers or digital media or whatever the descendants of our computers will be called in the next generation. The most promising direction of change is acquiring

greater independence as learners. Children will grow up knowing that they can learn what they need to know when they need to know it.

Q: Some educators feel that the presence of technology in society is a major factor in changing the entire learning environment. How can schools keep pace with technological changes, and what are the implications if they do or do not? Are they lagging behind? How important are questions of physical access to technology and the ability of educators to understand and convey understanding of the technology?

Papert: It is obvious that schools are lagging behind deep changes in our society. They are still organized on the model of production line factories. The deepest reason for the lag is neither the lack of physical technology nor the ability of educators to understand its meaning. The biggest reason is the built-in self-preservationist conservatism of the education system. To my mind the best analogy is the way the Soviet bureaucracy held on to power even though it could see that its economy was going downhill fast. It gave up only when it was in total collapse. I hope the education system is able to change before it collapses.

Means: Many have argued that schools lag way behind the business and government sectors in the effective use of technology. Certainly the average classroom today is not very different from the average classroom of forty years ago and we would not say that about very many businesses. Nevertheless, if we take the age of the staff into account, I do think that many teachers are ahead of their peers in the general public when it comes to the use of technology. The main concern is not one of physical execution of the steps in using technology but rather a matter of seeing technology's potential to serve specific educational goals and having the time, creativity and courage to try to capitalize on that potential.

Many of us are calling on teachers to move away from cookbook approaches of lectures and totally scripted student activities toward teaching styles where students have much more latitude in exploring questions they care about, conducting research and creating presentations using technology tools where appropriate. Such approaches call upon teachers to be activity designers, consultants and coaches as well as skilled diagnosticians and evaluators of student work. It is the preparation for these roles that requires so much time and effort.

Q: How will technology change the nature of teaching, including what is taught, where it is taught and who does the teaching? For example, Arthur Levine of Columbia University asked, in a recent article, whether the ability to teach electronically means the end of the need for the physical plant called the campus. He suggested that the best instructors could teach across state boundaries and across large distances.

Means: As I've argued, if students use technology as tools and communications devices to engage in complex projects and investigations, teachers take on a role quite different from that which dominates today. Teachers will spend less time lecturing and doing rote grading and more time designing, facilitating and coaching.

The World Wide Web is opening up possibilities for new kinds of learning at a distance but I, for one, am not predicting that physical plants and face-to-face contact will wither away. Studies of groups of people collaborating through telecommunications have found re-

peatedly that an electronic group is more likely to maintain itself if members have had some face-to-face contact. Although we can now have synchronous communication through video conferencing and multi-user virtual environments, most of us still crave the nuances and subtleties of face-to-face contact.

Technology is a wonderful complement when such face-to-face contact is inconvenient, expensive, or impossible, but I believe that given a choice, people will continue to opt for opportunities to learn in a face-to-face (as opposed to virtual) social setting. I do think, however, that we will see exciting and engaging teaching (with credit for courses and granting of degrees) through the World Wide Web and other new technologies; this will put pressure on those providing in-person education and training services to do a much better job.

Papert: The best teacher is someone who brings personal knowledge, warmth and empathy to a relationship with a learner. The effect of the new technologies is to provide better conditions for such teachers to work directly with their students. Of course tele-teaching has a role, but I hope it will never be the primary form.

Q: Will advances in technology affect the involvement of the private sector in education, both in terms of support and expectations of the qualifications students should have when they graduate? Do you see more of an emphasis on technical, rather than liberal arts education, even before the university level?

Papert: I believe that the development of the knowledge-based economy will bring recognition that the most important qualification is not technical knowledge but the ability to learn and to work independently. To foster this we need to replace lock-step curriculum-driven schools with the kind of flexible learning environment made possible by the new technologies.

Means: We are seeing increased private sector involvement in education, particularly in major initiatives involving technology. In my experience, however, the private sector is not asking schools to turn out students with greater technical proficiency. They believe students can get those skills in post-secondary training or within industry itself. What they want are students with strong basic skills and with the "new basics" of learning to learn, collaboration and effective resource utilization.

Q: So far, we have only talked about access to the Internet. Would you speculate on how other technologies could affect American education?

Papert: I was not talking about access to the Internet. I was talking about something much deeper in which computers serve as materials for construction as well as providing access to knowledge. For example, in collaboration with the Lego company [a toy manufacturer], I and my colleagues at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] have developed little computers that can be incorporated in the models that small children build. Thus they make behaviors as well as physical structures. When, as will soon happen, such devices become widely available, they will enormously increase every child's opportunity to know what it is like to carry out a complex project using very advanced ideas from engineering and from psychology.

Means: Computer modeling makes it possible for us to represent abstract concepts through concrete visual images that can be manipulated. We are only beginning to explore the

tremendous potential of such technologies to make what we have regarded as difficult subject matters much more accessible; for example, teaching calculus to middle school students. There is tremendous potential here, if we invest in solid research and development, to understand how best to support learning with the new technologies available to us.

Q: How will the technologies we have been discussing affect other countries, especially underdeveloped countries which do not have the economic resources of the United States, Japan and Europe? Is the technological revolution, the information highway, something that will benefit primarily the more developed countries of the world?

Means: Many developing countries are starting to look at educational uses of technology as an important strategy for economic development. Learning from the lessons of more developed countries that invested in technologies and approaches that are now considered out of date, they are hoping to "leap frog" into advanced technology uses in ways that pay off for economic competitiveness. Also, you could argue that information technologies may have a greater effect in countries with limited resources. Consider the potential value of an Internet connection in a country that cannot afford to buy textbooks, let alone stock libraries for their secondary schools. Suddenly their students have access to a world of information resources!

Papert: This is not a matter for speculation about what will or will not happen. It is a matter for decision. I think it would be very foolish of the developed world to lose the chance to help the developing world acquire the benefits of the new kinds of learning environments. I myself have joined with Nicholas Negroponte and a few others to create an organization called the 2B1 Foundation to serve this purpose.

Q: Universities are already interactive in many ways, but do you think that education can be globalized, or will we continue to stay in our linguistic and cultural boxes?

Papert: It will eventually be globalized but the conservatism inherent in universities as organizations will probably result in wasteful delays.

Means: My experience in studying projects involving participants from multiple countries suggests that even given all the options afforded by the Internet, you need to give teachers a very compelling reason to want to collaborate with teachers from other countries and language groups to get any kind of sustained participation. There is great interest in international collaboration in concept, but a limited number of teachers that really follow through unless you find the right hook. But such hooks can be found, for example, in tracking the effects of El Niño across countries.

Q: We've talked about how technology is shaping education. Is education also shaping technology?

Papert: Unfortunately not. I think that it is shameful that the education world has allowed the computer industry to impose its idea of what a computer should be and how it should be used.

Means: Unfortunately, the education market is so dwarfed by the business and home technology markets that it has had a relatively small impact on the design of technology. The tech-

nologies we are using in schools today were designed primarily for offices. Experts in educational content and in how children learn are rarely involved in technology development. Improving upon this situation is one of the goals for the Center for Innovative Learning Technologies, a new research consortium consisting of SRI International [a California-based research, technology development and consulting firm], the University of California at Berkeley, Vanderbilt University and the Concord Consortium (with funding from the National Science Foundation). Through an Industry Partners Program, researchers in this center will be bringing their research on the most effective uses of technology and on student and teacher technology needs to the corporations that develop new technologies and software.

Q: Dr. Papert, you stated (in testimony before the United States Congress) that the cost of technology is exaggerated in the minds of education policy makers. Could you please elaborate?

Papert: The cost is a matter of simple arithmetic. The cost of giving every child a $750 computer with a five-year life would add only two percent to the average cost of educating a child in the United States. With a little R&D [research and development], the computer industry could easily halve or quarter that number.

Q: Dr. Means, one of your books is entitled *Technology and Education Reform: The Reality Behind the Promise.* Do you think there's any danger that expectations for results are too high, or, conversely, too low?

Means: John Doerr, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist who has underwritten many of the most successful new technology start-ups over the last fifteen years, argues that the Internet is seriously under-hyped. We do not yet have a full appreciation of how this system of communication will change our homes, offices and schools. He may be right. The problem is that technology-driven change often is not linear. It is very difficult to foresee on the basis of extrapolating present trends. I don't claim any great accuracy as a visionary, so I'll give you an extrapolation of what I see now.

Many members of the general public have a strong belief in technology's power to transform education either because of technology's "mystique" or because they have experienced technology's power in other settings. There are problems when technology is brought into school systems with high expectations but no clear thinking about how or why it is to be used. The power is not in the technology per se but rather in the social and instructional context it can support. The opportunity to infuse technology into a school can become a catalyst for rethinking how the school should structure its use of time and personnel, what it's trying to teach students, and how its staff believes students learn and can demonstrate their understanding.

Q: Finally, perhaps you could summarize your thoughts on technology and education—where we were, where we are, and where we are likely to go in the future?

Means: Taken together, the continued exponential advances in information technology, the interest in network technologies, our increasing understanding of human cognition, and the widespread concern for educational quality provide the elements for what could be a decade of educational revolution led by technology.

New network technologies could foster collaborative learning between peers anywhere, involve new players in the support of student learning (e.g., scientists, retirees, experts), and end the isolation of classrooms from real-world concerns and resources. It should be possible to offer a rich selection of world-class courses and learning activities to anyone, anywhere. Informal learning through collaboration with people who have important kinds of expertise should be a major facet of learning in schools, on the job, and at home.

All of this should be possible, but we are not yet there either on the technology or the organizational infrastructure front. Electronic conferencing software has been awkward and largely restricted to text. Threaded discussion groups have proven difficult for novice learners to understand and use. We are just beginning to see applications that combine synchronous and asynchronous communication in ways that support learning and professional development. The next decade is sure to be an exciting one both in terms of technological advances and in terms of increased knowledge gained from early efforts to harness these capabilities in the service of education.

Papert: Let us make a comparison with some other technologies. When the movie camera was invented, its first use was pretty close to putting the camera in front of a stage on which actors performed as they always had. It took a long time for camera-aided theaters to turn into what we now know as cinema and television. The use of technology in education is mostly at the first stage, in which technology is used to enhance what people did before without it. In the next two decades, we will begin to see change in how people think about learning as deep as the changes technology has brought to how we see entertainment. This will be much, much more than putting a lot of computers in otherwise unchanged schools teaching an otherwise unchanged curriculum.

It is impossible to predict what the school of the future will be. History always outsmarts the futurists. But it is easy to predict what it will not look like. I am sure that the practice of segregating children by age into "grades" will be seen as an old-fashioned, and inhumane, method of the "assembly line" epoch. I am sure that the content of what they learn will have very little in common with the present day curriculum.

Dr. Barbara Means is Vice President of the Policy Division of SRI International, a California-based research, technology development and consulting firm that recently received a grant from the National Science Foundation to fund a Center for Innovative Learning Technologies. Dr. Means is co-author of *Technology's Role in Education Reform* (1995), and editor of *Technology and Education Reform: The Reality Behind the Promise* (1994) and *Using Technologies to Support Education Reform* (1993), among other works.

Dr. Seymour Papert, who led the interview, is a researcher at the Media Lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He headed the Media Lab's "School of the Future" project, which included studies on "Children's Learning of Computational Ideas in a Multicultural School" and "Technological Fluency." An early pioneer of Artificial Intelligence, Dr. Papert co-founded MIT's Artificial Intelligence Lab in the early 1960s. He is creator of the LOGO programming language and author of several books and articles, the most recent being *The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap* (1996).

The Center for U.S. Studies: Listserv and Library

Listserv

The Center for U.S. Studies at the Leucorea Foundation, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg is hosting a listserv for English teachers interested in exchanging ideas about teaching American Studies. The conversation focuses on both content and methodology.

Past exchanges have discussed issues such as
- the relation between multimedia and education,
- multiculturalism and language instruction in US schools,
- the shift in values within the religious framework,
- amendments to the Bill of Rights to counter violence,
- new technologies like cloning and GM foods,
- and dialects and the impact of Ebonics (African American Vernacular English) within the ESL classroom.

Occasionally, we receive contributions from US professors who specialize in a particular field. If you are interested in joining the conversation, please send an e-mail message to the list moderator Leslie Herring at

herring@zusas.uni-halle.de

requesting to be added to the list. Thank you, and we hope to hear from you.

The Leucorea Library

The library of the Center for U.S. Studies is still in development. The holdings comprise at present approximately 15,000 volumes. The main part consists of several donated book and journal collections. Especially worth mentioning is the American Studies Collection presented by the United States Information Service (USIS). In addition, there are numerous titles from the libraries of the late Prof. Günter Moltmann, University of Hamburg, and of Prof. Roger Daniels, University of Cincinnati.

With regard to the contents, the holdings cover the area of American studies (U.S. history and politics, economics, social sciences, language, literature, arts, culture, etc.). The emphasis here is on history and politics. There are also various materials for English teachers (EFL/ESL).

The following journals and newspapers are available:
- Academic Journals:
  - *American Historical Review*
  - *American Quarterly*
  - *Amerikastudien—American Studies*
  - *Atlantik-Brücke*
  - *Presseinformationsdienst*
  - *Diplomatic History*
  - *Foreign Affairs*
  - *Journal of American History*
  - *Journal of American Culture*
  - *Modern Language Journal*
  - *OAH Magazine of History*
  - *Political Science Quarterly*
  - *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*
  - *TESOL Journal*
  - *TESOL Quarterly*

- Newspapers, Magazines and Newsletters:
  - *Harper's*
  - *OAH Newsletter*
  - *TESOL Matters*
  - *The Atlantic Monthly*
  - *The Economist*
  - *The Nation*
  - *The New York Times (Sunday edition)*
  - *US News & World Report*
  - *USA Today*

The library is a reference library, that is the books may only be consulted on the premises.

OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog):
http://www.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/daten/dindex.htm

Business hours:

Monday:	9:00-12:30 and 13:30-18:00
Tuesday, Wednesday:	8:00-12:30 and 13:30-18:00
Thursday:	8:00-12:30 and 13:30-15:00

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