

FAT

SURRENDER

WINTER 1995/96 ISSUE NO.2

THE NEW YORK GLADIATORS

FAT SPECIAL p.42

AN EASY READ

\$4.95

THE EDGE OF VISION

THE TRANSFORMATION OF FORREST BESS

SHOCKING PHOTOS

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ART AND THE BRAIN

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TURNING ON FAME'S SPIT

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on Dutch Artist Rob Scholte p.16-17

Unfold STORY

THE HOLD OUTS HARDASSES OF THE CONFEDERACY AND THE BUSHIDO CODE

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Exclusive Story

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Editorial

I never said that cunnilingus guaranteed publication in FAT. It is merely a precondition, and far easier than establishing academic credentials, mastering one's language, visiting foreign battlefields or many of the other conventional routes. Nonetheless, some wrinkled carp is litigating because he did the dive but I didn't print his jive. He has enlisted a religious coalition in a class action suit. Now I'm facing a battalion of salt-lick Mormons, Jesuits, Evangelicals, Creationists, Encephalics - you name it - the whole tax-evading child-savoring crew. When I belonged to the East German Stasi, I secretly adored American pop culture, but since moving to the States I have revised my opinion. People here are either suing or screwing each other. If the God squad destroys FAT, I'll open a male strip joint in Cuba and help to fortify that last bastion of communism.

This issue addresses surrender, which I want everyone to consider.

"like a soldier who gets what he's been waiting for, I was dispatched to the rear"....
Henry Miller

Josephine Meckseper



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photo: Dirk Westphal/YGI



"WE UNDERSTAND AND SEE A WATERFALL BECAUSE A 'MINI-WATERFALL' IS CONSTRUCTED IN OUR BRAIN'S NEURAL APPARATUS."

EASY TO REMEMBER... BUT SO HARD TO FORGET:

ART & THE BIENNIAL

"All genres of art arise from their archetypes in the brain's processes."

While waiting for the 6:00 free admission to the Whitney's '95 Biennial, I thumbed through the thick catalogue. Like the Gabriel Orozco sculpture, an empty elevator car dropped next to the museums elevators, the catalogue announced the Biennial's theme of mind and memory, a theme which curator Klaus Kertess handled by drawing on the theories of the Nobel prize-winning neural physiologist and geneticist, Gerald Edelman.

Still foraging until 6:00, I walked over to the coat check, where I spotted two catalogues with essays by the artist Robert Irwin, who had his own retrospective at the Whitney in the seventies. Underpriced, these books were standing aside, a bit like

Lacondon Indians on Earth Day, ignored by the technocrats, waiting for a chance to speak up. I say this because Irwin's whole project, like that of the noticeably absent Bruce Nauman, addresses the ideas which are attempted in Kertess' exhibit and catalogue.

An essay in Irwin's retrospective catalogue has a chapter entitled: "The Process of a Compounded Abstraction." 1. Perception/Sense, 2. Conception/Mind 3. Form/Physical Compound, etc. The essay states, "We should note that perception... is an actual process or state of being, having identifiable form - hence a form of knowing (... we know the sky's blueness even before we know it as 'blue,' let alone as

'sky.')

 Should Kertess have read this in 1977?

Another Irwin catalogue entitled: "Being and Circumstance - notes toward a conditional art," quotes Mondrian, among the first artists to write on what could be called an "expanded field" of visual art. 1928: "This consequence brings us, in a future perhaps remote, towards the end of art as a thing separated from our surrounding environment, which is the actual plastic reality.... Quantities are no more real than qualities, intellect is no more true than feelings, truth is no greater an aspiration than beauty. It can be considered that context and knowledge are virtually synonymous." Irwin concludes: "It is indeed the

fact of the contextual nature of experience which will allow for the further compounding of the abstraction. This compounding is now achieved through the observable evidence of similarities vs. difference, patterns of occurrence and place, etc. Overlaps considered to have sufficient affinities are quickly considered to form sets. Behavioral form, language form, artistic form, etc."

So is it necessary to announce, today, that the categories of art are conditional and relative? Can't we assume that all genres of art (abstract-geometric/biomorphic, representational, conceptual-text/documentation /pop, etc.) arise from their archetypes in the brain's processes?

"amputee victims feel ghost limbs"

Kertess' show and catalogue essay omit the body, probably as a corrective to the last two biennials. Still, it is a dangerous omission, out of keeping with Edelman's thesis, in which the brain is the extension of the nervous system, an outgrowth of the spinal column, part of the evolutionary battle. Edelman views consciousness as a sophisticated branch of the nervous system. Thought is another of the body's existential strategies. The "language" of thought, even the cold logic used in math would be completely unintelligible without these neural or physical premises.

Recognizing the shortcomings of a show about the perceptual functions of the brain which didn't include the body, Nauman was a bit uncouth about refusing. Kertess went to great pains to court Nauman

Gerald Edelman's fascinating theory of Neural Darwinism? In broad strokes, Neural Darwinism proposes that perception is based on memory, which in the case of vision operates largely by analogously mapped patterns on the brain's surfaces which correspond to visual input. Also, the smallest circuits of the brain are in perpetual competition with each other, just as animal species compete in an ecosystem. Genetic information (the origin of memory, according to Edelman) when passed to offspring, mutates, and evolves through a process of selections. The theory appears to substantiate Gestalt Psychology's claims for Expressionary Theory:

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sical categories in the brain, like: "red" or the sense of humor etc.. They just don't exist in any one local because of this continually drifting "re-etching" procedure.

This "selection" principal explains many things about perception and knowledge. First of all, it explains that these "categories" of neural pattern have "content" in advance of the incoming data. Emanuel Kant's A-Priori, has been backed up by lab work.

The function of "neuronal group selection," is the justification for Edelman's theory of "Neural Darwinism." Because the chosen circuits chose other appropriate circuits and so on they evolve a kind of design for the subject they are representing to the rest of the brain. If some other echelon of selections evolves a more formidable argument it takes primacy over the previous one. This also explains how novelty and mutation and truth's and falsehoods are established degree by degree, and not in a binary black/white way, because everything we know and sense in our consciousness is a tiered construction,

an empirical generalization, so what's real or fake is not only relative but is continually open to a debate only biased by the plastic weight of this new filmic understanding of memory.

Klaus Kertess hung the Biennial analogously to the way Edelman describes the brain's network, many different specialized regions which are inter-connected in cross-referenced ways Edelman calls re-entrant. Manipulating a show like this has a long tradition in the history of art and Philosophy going back to Duchamp, Frederick Keisler and Art Povera. Post Minimalist anti-form art is another example. In Philosophical practice we can sit Wittgenstein, Pierce and Bergson, and very influential recently, Arthur Danto. The main problem here was that the show provides no experience, because the body is left out.

Finally, after all the analysis, it becomes clear that the *experience* is the most important archetype arising from the brain when it comes to art, what it's able to do to our thinking, that is the lasting power of memory, there's nothing at all virtual about it.

—PAUL DICKERSON



Julie Dermansky

"Oh, big Bruce, no, I haven't seen him today."