

Making Claims

'how' is writing related to practice?

4th December 2013

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Art and Thought

Practice as Research: approaches to creative arts enquiry

After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance

Artists with PhDs: on the new doctoral degree in studio art

Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)

Visual and Other Pleasures

Death X 24 A Second

Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics

Art in Mind. How Contemporary Images Shape Thought

Warped Space

Perceptions of Measurement

Every song's the same

The enigma (the mysterious image) carries spectator into his or her psychic structure... and generates introspection.

Arms and legs: in the space of collaboration

The body outside of itself

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Icebreaker

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I Always Wanted To Go Loco, But Never Had Anywhere To Do It. Then I Discovered Acapulco.

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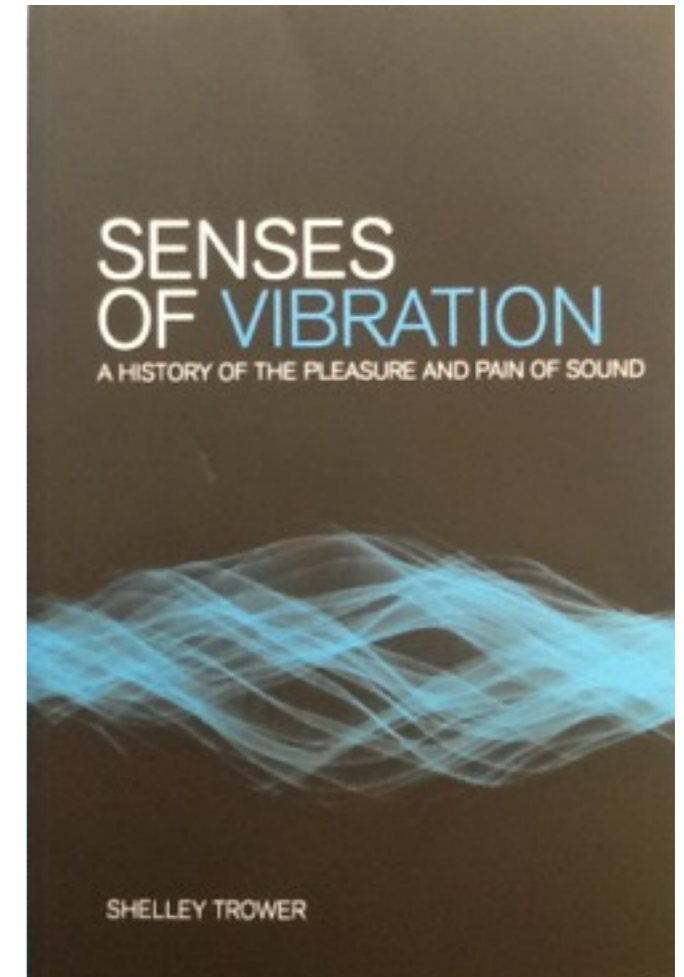
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What do they know?

THOMAS KARSHAN

Carl H. Klaus and
Ned Stuckey-French, editors

ESSAYISTS ON THE ESSAY

Montaigne to our time
256pp. University of Iowa Press. \$25. Distributed in
the UK by Eurospan. £21.50.
978 1 60938 076 2

Randi Salomon

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ESSAYISM

184pp. Edinburgh University Press. £65.
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Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in
Coffee-Houses".

Virginia Woolf, who was not only one
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A nineteenth-century illustration of Michel de Montaigne

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Thomas Karshan
'What do they know?'
TLS 22nd March 2013

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professional scholarship and its demarcations. Montaigne
wrote that "the scholars distinguish and mark off their ideas
more specifically and in detail. I, who cannot see beyond what I
have learned from experience, without any system, present my
ideas in a general way, and tentatively". It's a long way from
academic articles, in which the argument is linear, the sources
footnoted, the proof explicit, and all the theories at work are set
out neatly and clearly. Essays will always have to live with the
charge of trivial amateurism...

Thomas Karshan
'What do they know?'
TLS 22nd March 2013

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arms race and the cold war.

For Stone, the US has, ever since those two fateful days in August 1945, been in the malefic grip of the military and hegemonic delusions. It has postured as extending democratic ideals but rather has extended control across the globe by any means necessary, including covert CIA support for death squads, drone attacks and calamitous invasions.

"We were showing we're as barbaric as we can be. As ruthless as the Russians could be in Germany, we could be more ruthless. We had no problems dropping the atomic bomb on civilians - a devastating war crime. If the Germans had dropped that bomb and lost the war, that bomb would have been stigmatised for all time. There would have been some international agreement to control it." But, Stone and Kuznick argue, because the US used atomic bombs first and was dishonest about why it did so, that international agreement didn't happen: instead, Stone grew up under that threat of nuclear Armageddon.

This account, unsurprisingly, has enraged some US historians. Writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Sean Wilentz argued that Stone and Kuznick ignore scholarship that contradicts their assumptions. "It is hardly clear, for example, that the Japanese government was close to surrendering on the Allies' terms in the summer of 1945," writes Wilentz. "American analysts believed that, short of a bloody invasion of its shores, Japanese leaders would fight hard, holding out for a much milder negotiated settlement, which negates Stone and Kuznick's contention that Truman was misleading about his motive for using atomic bombs."

In any event, Stone and Kuznick's more intriguing task is to do counter-factual history. Their American history isn't untold, but rather a meditation on what could have - and, in their view, should - have, happened. What if, they wonder, Truman had not succeeded Franklin D Roosevelt as president in April 1945? What if, instead of choosing Truman - whom the pair psychopathologise as having unresolved "gender issues" and portray as weak, biddable and blustering ("To err is



Stone believes John F Kennedy would not have committed US troops in Vietnam; the director admired the late Hugo Chávez (right)

'Kennedy saying no at the Cuban missile crisis was the single greatest act of human courage this world has witnessed'

Truman," 1940s Republicans sneered) - as Roosevelt's vice-presidential candidate in the 1944 presidential election, the Democratic convention had once more chosen the now little-known Henry Wallace to be FDR's running mate?

Their contention is that if, after FDR died in April 1945, vice-president Wallace had succeeded, postwar world history would have been very different. "The bomb would not have been dropped with Wallace or Roosevelt as president, in my opinion," says Stone. "Not at all. Not a chance. They [the military] would have opposed Wallace, given him a hard time, but you can't force a president to drop a bomb. You just can't."

Given that Stone and Kuznick's revisionist American history starts from the idea that Truman lowered the US's moral threshold and many of his successors continued that descent, this is no small issue. The drama of that 1944 Democratic convention is one that Stone and Kuznick wrote as a Hitchcockian thriller in the late 1990s before deciding to make it, a decade later, the linchpin of their documentary. "Bush wasn't an aberration," says Stone of the two-term Republican president whom he savaged in his 2008 biopic *W*, "Bush is the climax to an American mindset that had started

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' . . . (W)e are now in a position to explain how our vivid sensory experience arises in the sensory cortex of our brains . . . (and is) embodied in a vast chorus of neural activity . . . to explain how the (nervous system and the musculature) perform the cheetah's dash, the falcon's strike, or the ballerina's dying swan (W)e can now understand how the infant brain slowly develops a framework of concepts . . . and how the matured brain deploys that framework almost instantaneously: to recognize similarities, to grasp analogies, and to anticipate both the immediate and the distant future.'

I do think that is naughty of Paul Churchland. For one thing, none of it is true. We don't know how the brain deploys its concepts to achieve perception and thought; or how it develops them; or even what concepts are. We don't know how the motor system contrives the integration of the lips, tongue, lungs and vocal cords in the routine utterance of speech, to say nothing of special effects like the approximation of dying swans by whole ballerinas. Nor do we know, even to a first glimmer, how a brain (or anything else that is physical) could manage to be a locus of conscious experience. This last is, surely, among the ultimate metaphysical mysteries; don't bet on anybody ever solving it.

Jerry Fodor 'West Coast fuzzy'
 TLS 25th August 1995

Churchland, P. M. (1996) *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul, Philosophical journey into the brain*, Cambridge MA.: MIT

|Entry in:

Macey, D. (2000) *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Metalanguage

In linguistics, a technical or second-order language used to describe and analyse a natural or first-order language or a set of propositions about other propositions. More generally, any descriptive discourse such as literary criticism can be said to function as a metalanguage. According to Jakobson, the process of acquiring or learning a language involves many metalinguistic operations. He also argues (1960) that all speakers of a language also use a metalanguage without realising it in order to ensure that they are using the same code as their interlocutors.



Although linguists accept the need for metalanguage, the very possibility of a metalinguistic dimension is denied by many of the thinkers associated with Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and Deconstruction. Lacan, for example, flatly denies the existence of any metalanguage (1960), basing his claim on Heidegger's contention that language is the 'house of being' and that it is impossible to step outside it (1959). In Heidegger's view, any metalanguage is a metaphysics and a 'technicalization' that destroys the experience of language. Most of the philosophers associated with the linguistic turn take a similar view and argue, like Wittgenstein, that there can be no metalinguistic or extralinguistic dimension because 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world' (1921) or, like Derrida, that 'there is nothing outside the text' (1967).

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