

Troy Brauntuch

September 23rd, 2009

[Art \(http://www.briansholis.com/category/topics/art/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/category/topics/art/), [Artforum.com \(http://www.briansholis.com/category/publications/artforum-dot-com/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/category/publications/artforum-dot-com/), [Exhibition review \(http://www.briansholis.com/category/formats/exhibition-reviews/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/category/formats/exhibition-reviews/)

Published on Artforum.com on September 23, 2009. To see the review in context, click [here \(http://artforum.com/picks/section=nyc#picks23772\)](http://artforum.com/picks/section=nyc#picks23772). Troy Brauntuch's exhibition remains on view at [Friedrich Petzel Gallery \(http://www.petzel.com/\)](http://www.petzel.com/) until October 17.



Troy Brauntuch, White Light Study, 1979, paper, newsprint, photostats, cardboard, tape

This exhibition presents a three-decade sampling of Troy Brauntuch's art, including a preponderance of small sketches, notes, and other source materials for his larger paintings and drawings. A narrow color palette and the artist's casual blending of news photographs with personal snapshots certainly effaces distinctions between "public" and "private" imagery. But for all the talk of Brauntuch and his "Pictures generation" cohorts disinterestedly unthreading our media cocoon, it's hard not to notice a powerful current of feeling swirling beneath these placid surfaces. It pulls in both directions. On a long wall, one finds images of mangled airplane cockpits and a woman extracted from rubble juxtaposed with depictions of the artist's cat and a young Mickey Rourke draped in sunlight. Nearby, there is a handwritten note describing the tragic wartime plight of a bear: It died in the Sarajevo Zoo when autumn shook loose the canopy of leaves protecting the brave zookeepers who risked sniper fire to feed it. The tight crop of *Boys Head*, 1979, a small color print, renders the image ambiguous. Is it a boy, perhaps a wrestler, in the full flower of youth, or a piece of broken classical statuary ravaged by time and on the return journey to dust? The small-scale drama of attraction and repulsion is perfectly pitched in a 1987 photograph in which a pair of tall church

windows, perhaps inlaid with images granting hope to the lost, are plunged into deep shadow. They look like open graves. A lesson about life seems to lurk in here somewhere, one that critic Daniel Mendelsohn recently found expressed in a Tennessee Williams stage direction: “How beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken.”

Tags

[Friedrich Petzel Gallery](http://www.briansholis.com/tag/friedrich-petzel-gallery/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/tag/friedrich-petzel-gallery/>), [Troy Brauntuch](http://www.briansholis.com/tag/troy-brauntuch/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/tag/troy-brauntuch/>)

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short takes

[A Look Back at *Ramparts*](http://www.briansholis.com/a-look-back-at-ramparts/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/a-look-back-at-ramparts/>)

On [Design Observer](http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=11367) (<http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=11367>), Steven Heller looks back at the late-'60s leftist muckracking magazine [Ramparts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramparts_%28magazine%29) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramparts_%28magazine%29), discussing both its content and its (curiously staid but influential) design. “Marking the end of post-war puritan American values, a younger generation that had been raised on the sour milk of McCarthyism reinvigorated periodical publishing. *Ramparts* on the West Coast was the clarion of new aesthetics, politics and social mores.” The magazine is also subject of a new book, [A Bomb In Every Issue](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1595584390/insearchofthe-20) (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1595584390/insearchofthe-20>) by Peter Richardson, which Dwight Garner reviewed for the [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/books/07garner.html) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/books/07garner.html>) in early October.

[First Reviews of Gordon Wood's *Empire of Liberty*](http://www.briansholis.com/first-reviews-of-gordon-woods-empire-of-liberty/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/first-reviews-of-gordon-woods-empire-of-liberty/>)

The first significant reviews of Gordon Wood's entry in Oxford's multi-volume [History of the United States](http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/series/OxfordHistoryoftheUnitedStates/?view=usa) (<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/series/OxfordHistoryoftheUnitedStates/?view=usa>) are trickling in. Jay Winik, in this Sunday's [New York Times Book Review](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/books/review/Winik-t.html?pagewanted=all) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/books/review/Winik-t.html?pagewanted=all>), calls [Empire of Liberty](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195039149/insearchofthe-20) (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195039149/insearchofthe-20>) “the culmination of a lifetime of brilliant thinking and writing” and “as elegant a synopsis of the period as any I know,” noting in particular the way Wood traces the emergence of the middling classes as active, engaged citizens. Jill Lepore, writing in the [Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/25/AR2009112502772.html) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/25/AR2009112502772.html>), is respectful but less excited, noting Wood's “particular knack for writing books with the magisterial sweep” of the volumes in this series while acknowledging that his focus on intellectual and political history leaves out “daily ugliness and economic strife.” For more, see [the new article](#)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/17/AR2009111701864.html>) about and interview with Wood in the *Post*'s "Writing Life" series.

[Ben Davis On Reactions to Conceptual Art \(http://www.briansholis.com/ben-davis-on-reactions-to-conceptual-art/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/ben-davis-on-reactions-to-conceptual-art/)

Prompted by [an article \(http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/nov/09/art-world-crisis\)](http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/nov/09/art-world-crisis) in *The Guardian* and an [op-ed \(http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/16/opinion/16dutton.html\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/16/opinion/16dutton.html) in the *New York Times*, Ben Davis considers why people hate "conceptual" art: "What people actually mean by 'conceptual art' here is art that is not valued on the basis of its real, intrinsic merits, but because of the ideas around it. 'Conceptual' is conflated with an 'anything goes' mentality, the sense that esthetic values have been compromised by shallow commercial permissiveness." To read the rest, [click here \(http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/in-defense-of-concepts11-24-09.asp\)](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/in-defense-of-concepts11-24-09.asp). (Link via Mira Schor.)

[T.J. Stiles's *The First Tycoon* \(http://www.briansholis.com/t-j-stiles-the-first-tycoon/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/t-j-stiles-the-first-tycoon/)

Last night, T.J. Stiles's new biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt, [The First Tycoon \(http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375415424/insearchofthe-20\)](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375415424/insearchofthe-20), won the [National Book Award for Nonfiction \(http://bookcritics.org/blog/\)](http://bookcritics.org/blog/) from an award committee chaired by Yale historian David Blight. By coincidence I just happened to read a thoughtful, generous (but by no means naive) review-essay about the book written by Steve Fraser. It's in the current issue of *The Nation*, and can be found online [here \(http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091130/fraser/single\)](http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091130/fraser/single). "Whatever their *Weltanschauung*, many of these studies [a genre Fraser dubs "the misunderstood robber baron" biographies] are first-rate histories, and *The First Tycoon* ... is no exception. Vanderbilt's rise from small-time ferry boat operator on Staten Island to the dominant figure in the nation's maritime (steamboat) and land (railroad) transportation system is a fascinating story, and Stiles tells it well. His writing is lively and colorful. He is a meticulous and exhaustive researcher with an instinct for the telling anecdote." Fraser's byline notes he is at work on a book about "America's two Gilded Ages," which most likely expands on his essay "The Two Gilded Ages" in the summer issue of [Raritan \(http://raritanquarterly.rutgers.edu/\)](http://raritanquarterly.rutgers.edu/). I recommend both of Fraser's pieces. [Update, 11/24: Stiles has responded to Fraser's review [here \(http://www.tjstiles.com/blog.htm?post=646612\)](http://www.tjstiles.com/blog.htm?post=646612), and commented thoughtfully on the process of responding [here \(http://www.tjstiles.com/blog.htm?post=646612\)](http://www.tjstiles.com/blog.htm?post=646612).]

[Sharon Core at the Gallery at Hermès \(http://www.briansholis.com/sharon-core-at-the-gallery-at-hermes/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/sharon-core-at-the-gallery-at-hermes/)

The last time I wrote about Sharon Core's photographs I [reviewed an exhibition \(http://www.briansholis.com/exhibition-review-sharon-core-early-american/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/exhibition-review-sharon-core-early-american/) of prints from her series "Early American," which is based on the still life compositions of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century painter Raphaelle Peale. New photographs from that series are now on view, of all places, in the Gallery at Hermès on Madison Avenue and 62nd Street. To see images of the new works and read an interview with Core, see [this post on The Moment \(http://themoment.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/now-showing-sharon-core-at-the-gallery-at-hermes/\)](http://themoment.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/now-showing-sharon-core-at-the-gallery-at-hermes/), the NYT's style blog. She says: "As for the process, it's really a means to an end—to create an illusive representation of another time. The photographs are completely traditional, involving no digital media whatsoever, so I am staging the 'reality' of an early-19th-century painting in terms of lighting, subject matter and scale. This requires a lot of planning in advance of the moment of exposure." The exhibition remains on view until December 11.

[Marilynne Robinson's *Absence of Mind* \(http://www.briansholis.com/marilynne-robinsons-absence-of-mind/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/marilynne-robinsons-absence-of-mind/)

I am a fan of Marilynne Robinson's writing, so I was happy to learn yesterday that her next book will arrive in 2010. It is an essay collection titled [Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self](#).

<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300145182> and it will be released by Yale University Press. It seems likely that it is a version of the four lectures Robinson delivered last spring at Yale under the same title, which can be viewed online at [this page \(http://www.yale.edu/terrylecture/robinson\)](http://www.yale.edu/terrylecture/robinson). (News via [The Second Pass \(http://thesecondpass.com/\)](http://thesecondpass.com/).)

[LRB Turns Thirty \(http://www.briansholis.com/lrb-turns-thirty/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/lrb-turns-thirty/)

After a lapse of about eighteen months, I've renewed my subscription to the [London Review of Books \(http://www.lrb.co.uk/\)](http://www.lrb.co.uk/) just as the journal celebrates its thirtieth anniversary and launches a newly redesigned website. John Sutherland, a contributor for three decades, profiles the *LRB* and its editors for the *Financial Times*, recounting its "marsupial" early issues (enfolded within the *NYRB*), some controversies it has raised, and a number of the contributors who are identified with it. [Click here \(http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/63dd1542-bf63-11de-a696-00144feab49a.html\)](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/63dd1542-bf63-11de-a696-00144feab49a.html) to read the article.

[2010 AHA Meeting Program Online \(http://www.briansholis.com/2010-aha-meeting-program-online/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/2010-aha-meeting-program-online/)

The program for the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, which will be held in San Diego next January, is now online. There are scores, if not hundreds, of sessions and panel discussions. Based on a cursory look through the list, one trend is particularly clear: ocean and maritime history is enjoying a moment of serious attention, with panels on oceans and the environment, maritime labor, port cities, and the like. The meeting also features a fair number of events focused on marriage and sexuality in different historical periods. To browse or search the presentations, [click here \(http://aha.confex.com/aha/2010/webprogram/start.html\)](http://aha.confex.com/aha/2010/webprogram/start.html).

[Nota Bene: Two New Editing Projects \(http://www.briansholis.com/nota-bene-two-new-editing-projects/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/nota-bene-two-new-editing-projects/)

Two books on which I worked as editor and/or copyeditor have just been published. The first is *Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat*, an anthology of essays and one interview that concerns Anton Vidokle's artistic practice. It is the eighteenth book in the Lukas & Sternberg series from Sternberg Press. I wrote a preface for the collection; among the contributors are Liam Gillick, Martha Rosler, Boris Groys, and Maria Lind. More information about the title can be found [here \(http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1258&l=en&bookId=153&sort=year%20DESC.month%20DESC\)](http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1258&l=en&bookId=153&sort=year%20DESC.month%20DESC). The second title is the catalogue accompanying Rosalind Nashashibi's [recent exhibition \(http://ica.org.uk/Rosalind%20Nashashibi+21364.twl\)](http://ica.org.uk/Rosalind%20Nashashibi+21364.twl) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, which opens November 13 at the [Bergen Kunsthall \(http://www.kunsthall.no/\)](http://www.kunsthall.no/) in Bergen, Norway. The book contains an interview with Nashashibi and short texts by the artist, as well as essays by Dieter Roelstraete and Martin Herbert. For more information, [click here \(http://ica.org.uk/Rosalind%20Nashashibi%20Catalogue+21881.twl\)](http://ica.org.uk/Rosalind%20Nashashibi%20Catalogue+21881.twl). Shameless plug: I am available as a freelance editor and copyeditor for art publications. See my "about" page further information.

[Rachel Harrison at Bard College \(http://www.briansholis.com/rachel-harrison-at-bard-college/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/rachel-harrison-at-bard-college/)

A few weeks ago I traveled to Bard College in order to see (and then write about) Rachel Harrison's exhibition "[Consider the Lobster \(http://www.bard.edu/ccs/\)](http://www.bard.edu/ccs/)." My response, which is not a review but rather a brief meditation on the structure of the exhibition, will appear in a forthcoming issue of the European art magazine [Kaleidoscope \(http://thekaleidoscope.eu/\)](http://thekaleidoscope.eu/). I focus on Harrison's reconstitution of earlier installations-*cum*-exhibitions, and the subsequent tensions concerning the autonomy of the artworks that comprise them, as well as on Harrison's playful deployment of "walls." For a closer look at the actual contents of the exhibition, please see Whitney Museum curator Elisabeth Sussman's excellent review in the [November issue of Artforum \(http://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200909\)](http://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200909). The piece is available online [here](#)

<http://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200909&id=24014>). Sussman writes: “Harrison’s brilliant and witty use of this particular object is typical of her strategy of exploiting the readymade to imbue her work with the attributes of modern life, whether bizarre or well ordered. Like the lobster, Harrison is a scavenger, rooting in the waste bin of our material lives.” Harrison’s exhibition remains on view until December 20.

[Tacita Dean Interview \(http://www.briansholis.com/tacita-dean-interview/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/tacita-dean-interview/)

My friend and former colleague David Velasco has [interviewed Tacita Dean \(http://www.artforum.com/words/id=24061\)](http://www.artforum.com/words/id=24061), one of my favorite working artists, about her new film *Craneway Event*, which premieres next week as part of [PERFORMA 09 \(http://performa-arts.org/blog/performa-09/about/\)](http://performa-arts.org/blog/performa-09/about/). (If you haven’t looked yet at the PERFORMA [calendar \(http://performa-arts.org/blog/performa-09/calendar/\)](http://performa-arts.org/blog/performa-09/calendar/), you should—there are many outstanding events on the docket.) Dean has worked with Cunningham before, producing a series of six 16-mm films that [I discussed \(http://www.briansholis.com/exhibition-review-tacita-dean-at-dia/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/exhibition-review-tacita-dean-at-dia/) when they were presented at Dia Beacon last year. Now she has filmed the rehearsals for a Cunningham “event” that took place in a former Ford factory in northern California; the still reproduced on the *Artforum* website looks amazing. Here is some of Dean’s description: “Merce told me I didn’t have to be faithful to the chronology of the dance, which was very liberating but, in the end, I was quite faithful. The Event had three stages on which the dancers dance simultaneously, so as a viewer you never have a composite view, which is the same in my film: no single perspective. The actual Event is always broken up.”

[New Afterall Website \(http://www.briansholis.com/new-afterall-website/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/new-afterall-website/)

To mark its tenth anniversary, [Afterall \(http://www.afterall.org\)](http://www.afterall.org) magazine has launched a redesigned version of its website. It’s an exceedingly attractive design (by a company called At Work), and as part of the celebration the editors have made available the entire contents of its twenty-one previous issues. Joshua Decter’s [long essay \(http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/art.and.the.cultural.contradictions.of.urban.regeneration.social.justice.and.sustainability\)](http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/art.and.the.cultural.contradictions.of.urban.regeneration.social.justice.and.sustainability) on “art and the cultural contradictions of urban regeneration, social justice, and sustainability,” from the current issue, is also available. (The organization also publishes books and online-only articles.) Two pieces I have written for the publication, [on Rachel Harrison \(http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.11/two.one\)](http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.11/two.one) (in issue 11, 2005) and [on an exhibition at the Guggenheim \(http://www.afterall.org/online/860\)](http://www.afterall.org/online/860) (online-only, 2009) can be found there as well.

[Hilary Harris, *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme* \(http://www.briansholis.com/hilary-harris-nine-variations-on-a-dance-theme/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/hilary-harris-nine-variations-on-a-dance-theme/)

Last Wednesday I traveled to Philadelphia to see the exhibition “[Dance with Camera \(http://icaphila.org/exhibitions/dance.php\)](http://icaphila.org/exhibitions/dance.php),” on view through March 21 at the [Institute of Contemporary Art \(http://icaphila.org\)](http://icaphila.org). My review will arrive on newsstands several months from now, but in the meantime I wanted to share my newfound enthusiasm for Hilary Harris, a now little-known documentary filmmaker whose exquisite short film *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme* (1966) is included in the show. Harris’s thirteen-minute film of dancer [Bettie de Jong \(http://www.ptdc.org/ptdc_dejong.php?id=4\)](http://www.ptdc.org/ptdc_dejong.php?id=4) dissects a short composition she performs nine times. With each iteration, he films her in a different style, revealing new details—such as the way her muscles quiver as she holds a difficult pose—that add up to a surprisingly nuanced portrait of a human body in motion. For further description of the film (and stills), see [this post in the “Films I Love” series \(http://seul-le-cinema.blogspot.com/2009/08/films-i-love-40-9-variations-on-dance.html\)](http://seul-le-cinema.blogspot.com/2009/08/films-i-love-40-9-variations-on-dance.html) on the blog Only the Cinema. To watch *Nine Variations*, as well as three other shorts by Harris, including *Organism*, his celebrated portrait of New York City, [click here. \(http://www.ubu.com/film/harris.html\)](http://www.ubu.com/film/harris.html)

[Review of Paul Goldberger’s *Why Architecture Matters* \(http://www.briansholis.com/review-of-paul-goldbergers-why-architecture-matters/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/review-of-paul-goldbergers-why-architecture-matters/)

My brief review of Paul Goldberger's [Why Architecture Matters](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/030014430X/insearchofthe-20) (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/030014430X/insearchofthe-20>) ([Yale](http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300144307) (<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300144307>)) appears in the fall issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. [Click here](http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2009/fall/book-notes/) (<http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2009/fall/book-notes/>) (and scroll down) to read it. “[Goldberger] is suitably temperate while discussing the balance of ‘aesthetic ambition’ and ‘social purpose,’ exterior form and interior space, architecture’s effects on our emotions and on our intellect, the importance of place and time, and the architect’s responsibility to both the design he is crafting and the context it will enter.” Though Goldberger’s book arrived in stores a few weeks ago, I’ve yet to find much other review coverage, a fact that may be due in part to the preponderance of discussion concerning Louis Begley’s [Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters](http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300125320) (<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300125320>), which is published in the [same series](http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/SeriesPage.asp?Series=129) (<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/SeriesPage.asp?Series=129>). I’ll update this post with links to any coverage I come across. In the meantime, Goldberger’s [personal website](http://www.paulgoldberger.com/) (<http://www.paulgoldberger.com/>) offers a fairly extensive archive of his writings on architecture from the past decade.

[Thomas Chambers Exhibition Now in NYC](http://www.briansholis.com/thomas-chambers-exhibition-now-in-nyc/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/thomas-chambers-exhibition-now-in-nyc/>)

“Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter” opened this week at the [American Folk Art Museum](http://www.folkartmuseum.org/default.asp?id=2372) (<http://www.folkartmuseum.org/default.asp?id=2372>) in New York, and I highly recommend a visit. (I saw the exhibition last year at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where it was curated by Kathleen A. Foster, director of that museum’s [Center for American Art](http://www.philamuseum.org/cfaa?page=1) (<http://www.philamuseum.org/cfaa?page=1>)). Don’t just take my word for it, however. Here’s Roberta Smith, [writing in today’s New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/02/arts/design/02chambers.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/02/arts/design/02chambers.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all): Chambers “aimed to please. His images are like chorus lines singing and dancing their hearts out, ever so slightly off-key and out of step. Every part contributes vocally and vigorously to the whole. The trilling patterns of ocean waves, rounded trees or riverside hedgerows; the sharp-edged mountains and shorelines, overemphatic clouds, glossy rivers and almost lurid sunsets — they all lock arms, and do a little more than their bit. The slight awkwardness amplifies. You see them perform and you see their performance, gaining a greater understanding of the visual appetite by having it thoroughly satisfied.” For more, see [my interview with Foster](http://www.briansholis.com/notebook-interview-with-kathleen-a-foster/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/notebook-interview-with-kathleen-a-foster/>), which was published earlier this year. The show remains on view through March 7, 2010.

[A Search for Tenure-track Security](http://www.briansholis.com/a-search-for-tenure-track-security/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/a-search-for-tenure-track-security/>)

The September-October issue of *Duke Magazine* includes a [chronicle of Kelly Kennington’s search for a tenure-track position](http://dukemagazine.duke.edu/dukemag/issues/091009/tenure1.html) (<http://dukemagazine.duke.edu/dukemag/issues/091009/tenure1.html>). Kennington, a newly minted history Ph.D. whose dissertation is about slaves who sued for their freedom in St. Louis Circuit Court, prepares meticulously for the job search and is ultimately successful. The details nonetheless remain somewhat harrowing: fifty-four applications; a dozen interviews at the annual American Historical Association conference; a few campus visits; and only one offer, the acceptance of which takes a month to pin down. Such stories may be common, and they are part of larger issues concerning the tenure system and how teaching is apportioned in universities today. But no matter how many I come across, as someone applying to Ph.D. programs in U.S. history, I can’t help but take notice (and be humbled) by them. (Link via [Cliopatria](http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/117613.html) (<http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/117613.html>)).

[Two from Down Under on 12K](http://www.briansholis.com/two-from-down-under-on-12k/) (<http://www.briansholis.com/two-from-down-under-on-12k/>)

In recent days I’ve been listening to two albums released last spring on the venerable electronic/ambient/experimental music label [12k](http://www.12k.com) (<http://www.12k.com>). Both, by coincidence, are by artists from Australia. The first is Seaworthy’s album “[1897](http://12k.com/1053.html) (<http://12k.com/1053.html>),” which was recorded in and around a century-old decommissioned

ammunitions bunker. Guitarist Cameron Webb's hesitant, wandering, layered yet clean guitar picking owes a debt to Dirty Three's Mick Turner (whose [solo albums \(http://www.dragcity.com/artists/mick-turner\)](http://www.dragcity.com/artists/mick-turner) are somewhat hard to find but fantastic). But what Webb comes up with, in part by running the guitar lines through various processors and computer programs, is absolutely lovely. So, too, is Lawrence English's album [A Colour for Autumn \(http://12k.com/1052.html\)](http://12k.com/1052.html). This release's extended ambient compositions have a softer edge than those on [Kiri No Oto \(http://www.touchmusic.org.uk/catalogue/tone_31_lawrence_english_kiri.html\)](http://www.touchmusic.org.uk/catalogue/tone_31_lawrence_english_kiri.html), his 2008 disc for Touch (which was so good it prompted me to [interview him \(http://artforum.com/words/id=20874\)](http://artforum.com/words/id=20874) for Artforum.com's "500 Words" column). Click on the album titles for more information and samples.

[New James Benning Short Viewable Online \(http://www.briansholis.com/new-james-benning-short-viewable-online/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/new-james-benning-short-viewable-online/)

The annual Viennale festival has commissioned James Benning to create its "festival trailer," and the resultant one-minute film, *Fire & Rain*, is [available for viewing online \(http://www.viennale.at/english/index.shtml\)](http://www.viennale.at/english/index.shtml). From the festival website: "Benning shot the work process in a steelworks in the Ruhr area. On a kind of conveyor belt, a glowing piece of steel flits across the screen and disappears only to reappear again as a blazing, shining material. Finally, artificial rain falls onto the glowing metal, shrouding the whole image in a cloud of steam and making it disappear." As Daniel Kasman at The Auteurs [notes \(http://www.theauteurs.com/notebook/posts/1076\)](http://www.theauteurs.com/notebook/posts/1076), this looks to be a fragment from Benning's first digitally shot work, *Ruhr*.

[A Question about Blurbing and Review Quoting \(http://www.briansholis.com/trends-in-blurbing/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/trends-in-blurbing/)

I've just begun (and am enjoying) Rob Riemen's [Nobility of Spirit: A Forgotten Ideal \(http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/030015853X/insearchofthe-20\)](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/030015853X/insearchofthe-20). The book has just been released in an attractive paperback edition by [Yale University Press \(http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/home.asp\)](http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/home.asp), and its back cover presents blurbs from the geographically dispersed but uniformly respected literary intellectuals Azar Nafisi, Mario Vargas Llosa, Adam Zagajewski, and Ivan Klima. The front cover's spare design features only one quotation from a review, by Mark Sarvas of the blog [The Elegant Variation \(http://marksarvas.blogs.com/\)](http://marksarvas.blogs.com/). This is the first time I have seen a quote from a blog on the front cover of a paperback. The blog's title is italicized, a characteristic most style guides reserve for book and play titles, the names of periodicals and newspapers, and other such entities. Without denigrating Sarvas's endeavor, which I read and respect, I wonder if this latter development—a typographical designation for an unedited online venue that places it on par with an entirely different range of publications—doesn't do more harm than good, and potentially confuse readers unfamiliar with the online literary world. Am I simply being curmudgeonly or conservative? **UPDATE, 9/30:** Mark Sarvas and his thoughtful commenters [respond here \(http://marksarvas.blogs.com/eleqvar/2009/09/blurbs-from-blogs.html\)](http://marksarvas.blogs.com/eleqvar/2009/09/blurbs-from-blogs.html).

[Three Interviews with Rebecca Solnit \(http://www.briansholis.com/three-interviews-with-rebecca-solnit/\)](http://www.briansholis.com/three-interviews-with-rebecca-solnit/)

Rebecca Solnit's new book [A Paradise Built in Hell \(http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0670021075/insearchofthe-20\)](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0670021075/insearchofthe-20) is receiving a fair amount of press attention, including reviews in the [New York Times \(http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/books/21book.html\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/books/21book.html), the [Washington Post \(http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/21/AR2009082101111.html\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/21/AR2009082101111.html), the [B&N Review \(http://www.barnesandnoble.com/bn-review/note.asp?note=24158636&cds2Pid=22471\)](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/bn-review/note.asp?note=24158636&cds2Pid=22471), and elsewhere. Most have been positive; Christine Stanstell's review in the current *New Republic*, not yet available at the magazine's poorly redesigned website, dissents from the general tone and offers a batch of very thoughtful criticisms. My own review of the book, published in the *Brooklyn Rail*, will appear here soon. In the meantime, here are links to three interviews with Solnit. One is by my old friend Lauren O'Neill-Butler and [published on Artforum.com \(http://artforum.com/words/id=23446\)](http://artforum.com/words/id=23446); one is by my new friend Astra Taylor and published in [the fall issue of Bomb](#)

<http://bombsite.com/issues/109/articles/3327>; and one is by a writer named Benjamin Cohen and [published in *The Believer* \(http://believermag.com/issues/200909/?read=interview_solnit\)](http://believermag.com/issues/200909/?read=interview_solnit).

[more short takes \(http://www.briansholis.com/category/formats/short-take\)](http://www.briansholis.com/category/formats/short-take)

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