

# dialog

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PHILOCTETES CENTER  
FOR THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF IMAGINATION  
AT THE NEW YORK PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTE

MAY/JUNE 08

## Living in the Musical Moment: Dharma Jazz



*Badal Roy*

The April 5 session of the Philoctetes jazz series, *Living in the Musical Moment*, began with percussionist **Karttikeya** chanting a mantra, a low sustained drone, which he later explained was a Vedic prayer asking for harmony. Gradually, the other members of Dharma Jazz, a quartet that infuses its jazz repertoire with North Indian classical music, contributed their own instrumental voices, which coalesced into what can only be described as a groove. In a room accustomed to enlivening intellectual discussions, the conversation between musical instruments stirred in the audience a different kind of listening. Karttikeya, surrounded by a multiplicity of percussion and noise-making devices, from seedpod rattles to brass watering pots, at one point picked up a triangle to underscore a passage of the jam. The improvisation wound down organically, the music resolving into an unspoken consensus for silence. **Lewis Porter**, who organizes the series and is the quartet's keyboardist, explained that the piece was loosely based on Herbie Hancock's composition, "Maiden Voyage."

When an audience member asked about the derivation of the band's name, tabla player **Badal Roy** clarified that in Hindi, dharma means religion, way, or path. Karttikeya added that the name implies that the band follows the way of jazz. Roy took exception to this, commenting that his personal dharma was not jazz, but pure sound. "Ask the sound. Sound doesn't know whether I'm Christian or Buddhist. Take the caste system out of sound. Sound doesn't know if I'm acid jazz or classical. Sound doesn't know anything." Karttikeya conceded that the idea was really to bring all of their musical backgrounds together to find their own path and create a unique sound.

Throughout the event, the musicians adeptly shuttled between concert-level musical performance and articulate discussion of their own creative process. Porter explained that jazz improvisation was originally based on blues structure, but added that Indian music is also very much beloved among jazz practitioners. Audience members were not bashful about expressing their appreciation for the music and voicing their curiosity about its genesis. One listener felt that the music had a hypnotic quality, adding that it induced a "natural high."

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## Note from Francis Levy: What is a Voyeur?

What is a voyeur? A person who spies on others for prurient reasons? Hitchcock eloquently speculated on voyeurism in *Rear Window*, in which the James Stewart character is reduced to voyeurism by an injury—a broken leg that renders him helpless. No longer an agent in life, he is forced to take time off from his normal activities, and in so doing finds himself in a condition where he can only live vicariously through others. The subject of voyeurism, otherwise known as scopophilia or what Freud termed *Schaulust* (the pleasure of looking), has repeatedly come up at our Friday afternoon Philoctetes staff meetings because it skirts the territory between pathology and art. An individual may become obsessed with the intimacies of others because he is crippled and unable, or feels unable, to attain intimate contact himself. Or, in the process of convalescence, such an individual might simply become curious and see something he hadn't been aware of before. Similarly, the act of rendering reality or turning it into art inevitably requires a degree of removal or separation. If the self is the subject, then the personality must be turned into an object. If I am to create a self-portrait, I must experience some degree of estrangement to understand those elements of the physiognomy that I would normally have taken for granted.

I'm a writer by trade, and from my perspective, voyeurism—in both its prurient and more sublimated forms—is an essential element of the creative process. Recently there was a terrible accident near my house in which a delivery person on a bike was run over by a flatbed truck. At first, when I saw the street roped off, I experienced a lurid interest. Who doesn't stop to look at the carnivalesque atmosphere of police cars and ambulances that accompany these kinds of incidents? It's a show, similar to suspense dramas like *ER* or *Law and Order* that we see on TV. Who doesn't look out the window ►►

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Photography: Hallie Cohen  
Contributors: Zeno Levy  
Polly Rosenwaikie  
Valerie Suter

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Francis Levy

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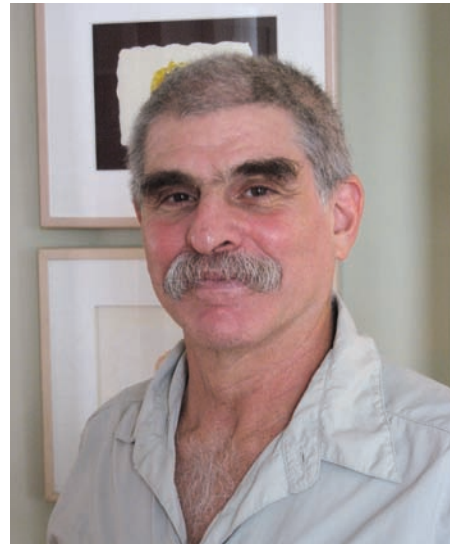
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## Note from Director Francis Levy



► when a screaming couple is fighting? Who wouldn't be tempted to look when something out of the ordinary was occurring outside the rear window of their apartment? Most of us indulge the voyeuristic impulse for a moment and then get on with our lives. But the writer or artist, like the James Stewart character, is a little like the shadow of himself—the doppelgänger—to begin with. He both inhabits every-

day life and at the same time exists in a condition of psychic removal, in which all events are part of the canvas he is trying to create. I haven't been able to get that accident out of my mind, not only in terms of my perverse curiosity, but also because of the fact that the victim turned out to be a friend of mine, Reggie Chan, who ran a venerable establishment called Jade Mountain, which my family frequented for years and which died when he did.

Voyeurism can take many forms. For instance, Thomas Struth creates monumental photographs of people looking at art. In order to create his works, he must spy on people in intimate and vulnerable moments, and the success of his work comes from his uncanny ability to capture his subjects with their pants down—from an aesthetic point of view at least. Author and psychoanalyst Anna Aragno, who has been a participant in recent editorial meetings of our journal, *Philoctetes*, proposed the idea that voyeurism is a form of appropriation. "Part of the thrill is that what is being seen in secret becomes a possession of the voyeur." Psychoanalyst and Center Co-Director Edward Nersessian elaborated on the topic, noting that "looking and curiosity, which is the impetus behind looking, are properties of the mind, but during development they become entangled in age-specific developmental issues and conflicts, and become affected by sexual and aggressive impulses. The degree to which these effects are laden with conflicted fantasies impacts whether looking—even sexual looking—is or is not voyeurism." Strangely, the analytic literature dealing with the ambiguity of voyeurism as either paraphilia or a more generalized condition of wondering seems to be limited. Incidentally, it is something that we will be broaching in our upcoming photography roundtable. Voyeurism is one of those behaviors that, in being both intrinsically aesthetic and pathological, accentuate the rather fragile line between sociopathy and art.

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## The Mirror and the Lamp

Life is a state of mind.” An oft-quoted line from the Hal Ashby film, *Being There*, this aphorism speaks to the uncertain border between imagination and reality. The March 15 screening of this film was followed by *The Mirror and the Lamp*, a roundtable that focused on the psychological and biological underpinnings of imaginative processes, particularly with regard to the study of autism.

**Alan Leslie**, Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science at Rutgers, began by discussing the development of the deliberate and voluntary engagement in pretend play during the second year of a child’s life. He pointed out that its onset coincides with the emergence of the ability to recognize when others are pretending, and is thus a demonstrable part of social development. This observation is particularly relevant to research into autism, which is characterized by a diminished capacity for pretend play and a limited engagement with other people. Moderator **Paul Harris**, developmental psychologist and author of *The Work of the Imagination*, added that contrasting normally developing children with those with autism was an important step in the evolution of developmental psychology.

**Bhismadev Chakrabarti**, Charles and Katherine Darwin Research Fellow at Darwin College, Cambridge, addressed biological perspectives on the subject, elaborating on the problem of connectivity in the autistic brain, in which communication between the anterior and posterior regions is impaired. This results in a deficiency of information able to reach the front of the brain. Chakrabarti and Harris cited the work of autistic artists, whose exquisitely detailed drawings demonstrate a high degree of local detail processing and reproducibility, as an indication that they are not able to move beyond the literal. However, Harris later brought up the case of Nadia, a British autistic girl who drew finely rendered horses. Through therapy her language skills improved, after which her drawings became more generic and less detailed. Harris saw this as evidence that autistic people do have the capacity to generalize to some degree.

At several points in the discussion the panelists sought to define their terms more specifically. **Margaret Browning**, Health Science Specialist at Chicago’s Department of Veterans Affairs, held that consciousness is a state of feeling, in keeping with philosopher Susanne Langer’s perspective. In her view, mindedness guides consciousness, which humans project into language. The panelists then tried to reach a consensus about the scope of the word “imagination,” as well as the distinction between generalizing and imagining.

Yale Psychology Professor **Paul Bloom** spoke about the idea of emotional contagion, the tendency to feel and express emotions that are similar to and influenced by those of others. After a fruitful discussion on the subject of empathy, the panel turned to the audience for questions. In response to the question, “can autistic children be religious?” Bloom discussed the fact that higher-functioning autistic people appear to love religion for its rituals and systematizing, but don’t seem to believe in higher beings. *V.S.*



These events were part of the BrainWave Festival organized and sponsored by the Rubin Museum of Art, Exit Art, the Graduate Center of CUNY, the Philoctetes Center, and the School of Visual Arts. The Festival runs through May 31. [www.brainwavenyc.org](http://www.brainwavenyc.org)

## Being There



© Warner Bros.

The recent screening of Hal Ashby’s *Being There*, the 1979 film based on the Jerzy Kosinski novel of the same name, provided an occasion to reevaluate one of the few attempts in cinema history to bring a work of complex philosophy to the screen. As the Center’s screenings of Oren Rudovsky’s *The Treatment* and G.W. Pabst’s *Secrets of a Soul* illustrated, attempts to dramatize psychoanalysis are difficult enough, but philosophy is a terrain that Hollywood and filmmaking typically eschew. *Being There* references one of the central concepts of *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*, the seminal work of phenomenology by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. This concept is known in German as *Dasein*.

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*Chance, played by Peter Sellers, is a simpleton, a naïf who can neither read nor write, but in contrast to Kaspar Hauser (to whom he bears a resemblance) can talk.*

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The central character, Chance, or Chauncey Gardner as he comes later to be called, is played by Peter Sellers. He is a simpleton, a naïf who can neither read nor write, but in contrast to Kaspar Hauser (to whom he bears a resemblance) can talk. Chance has been exiled from the only existence he has ever known, working in the garden of a deceased benefactor/employer. Chance watches television constantly, and some of the funniest scenes of the film occur as he imitates what he sees. In fact, his oft repeated “I like to watch” becomes a double entendre as the film progresses, setting up the philosophical conundrum by which his unadorned perceptions place him in a condition of seeing things as they are, while titillating others who take him to be a voyeur. The simple statements he makes to his counterpart Eve (played brilliantly by Shirley MacLaine) and to the President (Jack Warden) become the occasion for massive projections of absurd meanings, catapulting the innocent Chance to a position of national prominence—on his beloved television. The absurd narrative takes place to the ticking of numerous clocks, whose beats or strokes take on a life of their own. *F.L.*

# Our Life in Poetry: Motion on Larkin



*Andrew Motion*

The poet Philip Larkin was known as being “formidably stand-offish, unmarried, grumpy, a sort of eel,” said **Andrew Motion**, the British Poet Laureate who spoke at the Philoctetes Center on April 9 as part of the *Our Life in Poetry* series. Nevertheless, when Motion had the opportunity in 1976 to meet Larkin at the University of Hull where they both worked, he jumped at the chance. “It was, for me, like going to meet God.” Motion was beginning a teaching career there, and Larkin had been a university librarian since 1955. To break the ice, they talked about Oxford, where they both had studied English literature. When Motion mentioned that his father was a brewer, Larkin’s face lit up—he was quite fond of drink. The two poets became good friends for what would be the last ten years of Larkin’s life. After his death, Motion wrote the biography, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*.

Motion and **Michael Braziller**, who organizes the poetry series, read three of Larkin’s poems, one from each of his major books. “Coming” is an early poem that Motion described as “uncharacteristic in admitting qualified happiness.” Braziller commented that Larkin always seems to be alone in his poems, to which Motion added that this was the case even in his love poems. The two discussed Larkin’s ambivalent attitude toward solitude, and the complexity of poems that at first glance might seem very simple. Read closely they reverberate with “an echo chamber of associations,” a rich “tapestry,” Motion said. They proceed by indirection and qualification, but are somehow confident in their display of a lack of confidence.

Of “The Whitsun Weddings,” a long poem that describes young married couples viewed from a train, Motion commented, “It’s like a chapter in novel. It’s got all the amplitude that you associate with prose.” “The Whitsun Weddings” is the title poem of Larkin’s second book, which Motion deemed his best. Braziller’s reading of “High Windows,” the title poem of Larkin’s third book, provoked a good deal of discussion among the audience for its ambivalent portrayal of young love and sex, and its combination of vulgarity and beauty. “The abiding question in the poems,” observed Motion, “is how to connect with other people. Do you want to? What happens when you do? Will it be forever? Are you burdened with obligations that make it sort of impossible.” Motion cited an essay in which Larkin said of the British poet Stevie Smith that she has “the authority of sadness.” “So does he,” added Motion.

Motion later read from his recent memoir, *In the Blood*, about

## *Coming*

On longer evenings,  
Light, shill and yellow,  
Bathes the serene  
Foreheads of houses.  
A thrush sings,  
Laurel-surrounded  
In the deep bare garden,  
Its fresh-peeled voice  
Astonishing the brickwork.  
It will be spring soon,  
It will be spring soon -  
And I, whose childhood  
Is a forgotten boredom,  
Feel like a child  
Who comes on a scene  
Of adult reconciling,  
And can understand nothing  
But the unusual laughter,  
And starts to be happy.

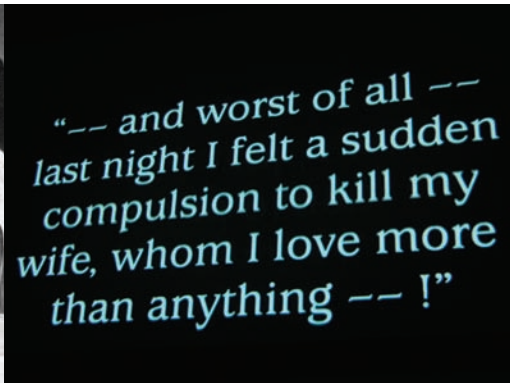
- By Philip Larkin

growing up in the English countryside. The section he read concerned his father teaching him how to fish. “It had felt so easy when he was controlling my hands. I thought I must be a natural, and had in my blood all the things I needed to know, just waiting to appear. But as it turned out, I had a lot of other things in my blood as well, things that were a real nuisance....” Motion’s tender sensibility and keen attention to detail were also on display as he read two of his own poems.

Shortly before he died, Larkin named Motion one of his literary executors. Larkin’s secretary and long-time mistress, Monica Jones, showed Motion a room in his house stacked with shoeboxes full of letters. “He’d librarianized his entire existence.” Larkin’s correspondence was immensely helpful to Motion in writing the biography, as were conversations with various women Larkin had been involved with. When Larkin’s selected letters and Motion’s biography came out in the early 90s, they caused a bit of a sensation in England. By that time, Motion pointed out, Larkin was considered “a national treasure, which meant that people tended to read his poems very softly.... Did people really think that Larkin found women easy, enjoyed foreign travel, and voted labor? I mean, what had they been reading all this time?” *P.R.*



# Secrets of a Soul: A History of Psychoanalysis and Cinema



*Courtesy Kino International*

In 1925, director G.W. Pabst and noted psychologists Karl Abraham and Hanns Sachs came together to create *Secrets of a Soul*—a dramatic film whose purpose was to introduce cinema audiences to the newly hatched practice of psychoanalysis and its attendant process of dream interpretation. In this silent film, Werner Krauss plays a scientist tormented by an irrational fear of knives and a compulsive urge to murder his wife. Plagued by terrifying nightmares, he meets a psychoanalyst who becomes interested in his mystifying condition. By the end of the film, psychoanalysis appears to have been magnificently successful: the protagonist is cured and the audience is left with a joyous image of him and his family in front of their home in a utopian landscape—a stunning contrast with the grim symbolism and malignant undertones seen earlier on in the film.

*Secrets of a Soul: A History of Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, held on February 29, included both a screening of Pabst's film and a subsequent roundtable. The post-film discussion centered on the fascinating interplay between film and psychoanalysis, the history of this relationship, and various interpretations of the film within this context. Moderator **Brigitte Peucker**, Elias Leavenworth Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures and Professor of Film Studies at Yale University, began the discussion by recounting how assistant director Mark Sorkin was made to study Freud's writings for months before filming so that he could give suitable direction to Pawel Pawlow, the actor who played the analyst. She added that after the film's release, groups of American analysts invited Pawlow to speak to them, probably mistakenly associating him with the renowned behaviorist and believing the actor to be an analyst himself.

**Dana Polan**, Professor of Cinema Studies at NYU, remarked that the analyst is rep-

resented as a character very much like a detective. The film seems to offer an implicit comparison to other arts of investigation by associating psychoanalysis with the heroic act of solving a crime. Professor Peucker bolstered this notion with the idea that the doctor's goal is to regularize and to socialize, in a very humane way. She went on to explain that, as an example of the genre of New Objectivity, the film literally brings light to the themes of expressionist cinema.

Psychoanalyst and author **Harvey Roy Greenberg** posited that, with its focus on the lives of ordinary people, the film portrays the disruption of the bourgeois status quo. When **George Makari**, Director of Cornell's Institute for the History of Psychiatry, countered that in the mid 1920s psychoanalysis was in fact very much associated with the avant garde, Dr. Greenberg clarified his point, maintaining that the film's mission was to present this cutting edge science to the ordinary man in the street.

Referencing the film's preoccupation with dream life, critic and novelist **Daphne Merkin** recounted an exchange with revered *New York Times* book critic Anatole Broyard, who once instructed her never to write about dreams because they are "inherently boring" in their solipsism. Likewise, she explained, therapy delves into quiescent states of mind, which are characterized by idiosyncrasy and interiority. Dr. Makari added that because of the abstract nature of psychoanalysis, it cannot be represented in the plastic arts—an idea that confounds the hope that this or any film can be successful in its attempt to showcase and properly elucidate psychoanalysis.

As the panelists discussed the ubiquitous symbolism in the film, Professor Peucker observed that the audience in fact has to do more work than the fictional analyst in deciphering the meaning of the film's symbols. A debate about the nature and intent of the

epilogue followed, centering specifically on whether or not the blissful, bucolic ending was meant to be ironic. *V.S.*

## Living in the Musical Moment: Dharma Jazz

*Continued from p. 1*

One of the more arresting improvisations eschewed traditional musical themes, coming together instead around a cosmic soundscape that Dr. Porter produced with effects on his keyboard. Karttikeya wove in a rhythmic pattern that evoked forest sounds, while guitarist **Vic Juris** selectively found moments to contribute to the musical environment, waiting out long passages and then adding a few choice notes, accentuating the impression that the musicians were exploring not just sounds, but textures as well. "It's all about listening," observed Porter at the conclusion of the piece. "Could you hear us listening?"

Before regaling the audience with humorous anecdotes about his experiences recording with Miles Davis in the 1970s, Roy spent several minutes delving into the subtle techniques of his instrument. He explained that a tabla player must learn a series of syllables, which consist of beats or notes played with each hand. "After you learn the language of the right hand and the language of left hand, you play sentences with both hands together," said Roy, who plays with his entire body, inflecting beats with movements of his shoulders and keeping time with clicks of his tongue. Describing one of Roy's extended improvisations, Juris commented, "He got off to a great start and things kept unfolding. It was like a story." In crafting music that feels like conversation, it's no accident that an instrumentalist like Badal Roy doubles as a mesmerizing storyteller. *A.L.*

# Cell Biology and Cancer: Genes, Mutation, and Cell Death



Selina Chen-Kiang

The panelists for the February 23 roundtable, *Cell Biology and Cancer: Genes, Mutation, and Cell Death*, capitalized on a rare multidisciplinary meeting in the field of cancer research to exchange ideas about an intricate, often sobering topic. The participants sought out a mode of discourse that enabled them to build bridges of understanding between their respective fields. Some of the scientific terminology was shot out rapid fire, and may have gone squarely over the heads of non-professional members of the audience. How-

ever, the panelists were ultimately able to relate their personal crusades back to the Center's prevailing theme of imagination and, in so doing, offer a spark of insight into the tumult of ideas that underlies illness and the scientific method.

Moderator **Carol Prives**, Professor of Biology at Columbia University, initiated the discussion by asking the participants to describe how imagination has fed into their thinking as scientists. **Selina Chen-Kiang**, a Professor of Pathology at Weill-Cornell Medical College and Director of the Specialized Center of Research for Myeloma, linked the scientist's capacity for imagination with serendipity, recalling her most exciting discoveries as moments of good fortune, in which happy accidents resulted in important "incremental advances." In her research, she explained, these small advances ultimately develop into very real treatments.

**James Manley**, Professor of Life Sciences at Columbia University, posited that one link between scientists and artists—other than a passion for their work—is an appreciation for the beauty of minute detail. He explained the process of visualizing the inner workings of a cell, and subsequent investigation in the laboratory, as an act of creativity. **Hermann Steller**, Professor and Head of the Laboratory of Apoptosis and Cancer Biology at Rockefeller University, evoked a broader analogy, in which the generation, growth, and death of cells echo the interrelationships between people in society.

**Eileen White**, Associate Director for Basic Science at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Professor of Molecular Biology at Rutgers University, characterized cancer research as "the ultimate exercise of the imagination." Many phenomena that researchers encounter can only be understood with what Professor White called "a prepared mind." For example, the process of apoptosis, or "programmed cell death," is a natural part of the lifecycle of any cell, but is only now coming to be more fully understood. By manipulating this endogenous cellular suicide mechanism, researchers have come up with novel cancer treatments that cause malignant cells to self-destruct.

As the panelists began to talk more about their individual research experience, Professor Steller observed that through the common language of molecular biology, the scientists present—from immunologists to geneticists—could communicate across areas of expertise, thereby advancing cancer research. Professor Manley lamented that a recent dearth of funds for research might stand in the way of such advances, noting that the likelihood of receiving a grant from the National Institute of Health has dropped from 30% to 10% in recent years.

**Carol Portlock**, Professor of Clinical Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College and Attending Physician at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, cautioned against making blanket generalizations about cancer, which, she qualified, is "a catch-all term for a much more heterogeneous disease process." She specified that the disease is defined by unregulated cell growth, manifesting through random mutations that affect a myriad of genetic and molecular pathways. While many of the panelists evoked a sense of wonder at the beauty of nature as an impetus for their early careers in science, they agreed that discussion across scientific disciplines enabled them to confront nature's darker side, and understand the many faces of this terrible disease. *Z.L.*

# Real Research in Virtual Worlds

**Piet Hut** introduced the event *Real Research in Virtual Worlds*, a demonstration and discussion held at the Center on March 9, by acknowledging that "anything can go wrong at any time" in this highly experimental undertaking. He had no idea how prescient his remark would be. But despite the fact that the proceedings were marred by serious technical glitches, Hut, an astrophysicist and Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, and his guest **Karen Sobel Lojeski**, managed to captivate an audience eager to learn more about the expanded forms of experience emerging in cyberspace.

By way of background, Hut chronicled the introduction of email in the late 80s and the Internet in the 90s. Reflecting on the rapid emergence of these technologies, he commented, "Already, it is very hard to imagine what life would be without the World Wide Web and email." He then introduced what in his opinion is the next wave of indispensable technology with a prediction: "If all of you come back here in ten years, I will ask you the question, 'Can you imagine what the world was like before virtual worlds?'"

For the uninitiated, Hut went on to explain that while email is one-dimensional, based solely on text, and the Web is two-dimensional, with text and images, virtual worlds are three-dimensional, like video games, with the additional capacity of interacting with others. They are exemplified in such online "environments" as Second Life and Kwak, for which Hut and Sobel Lojeski had prepared a demonstration. Unfortunately, they only managed to demonstrate the fragility and unpredictability of the technology—despite repeated efforts they were unable to launch the programs successfully. In the interim, Sobel Lojeski, Research Director for the Institute for Innovation and Information Productivity, explained her theory of "virtual distance," defining it as the perceived distance developing in society due to our heavy reliance on electronic forms of communication. Specifically, she worried that virtual distance fosters a form of alienation, impairing our ability to experience empathy.

Audience member David Kirkpatrick, Senior Editor for Internet and Technology at *Fortune* magazine, defended the usefulness of virtual communities, commenting, "Gay teenagers who have online communities perhaps avoid alienation." Sobel Lojeski ▶▶



## Opening Pandora's Box: From Ancient Sacrifice to Family Secrets

► conceded that segments of the population who might otherwise suffer from marginalization might in fact find acceptance in virtual worlds, citing similar feedback from the handicapped community. Another audience member, who was pursuing an online degree and doing much of her work on Second Life, complained that it was very difficult to trust other avatars. (An avatar is a movable icon or graphic that represents a person in cyberspace.) In response, Sobel Lojeski underscored the distinction between affective trust and contractual trust, pointing out that the former is much more reliant on the intangible cues of face-to-face interaction, and thus difficult to achieve in a virtual environment.

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*Second Life has developed an entire economic system, in which people design clothing, open retail stores, and even build and decorate homes.*

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Several members of the audience identified themselves as devoted acolytes of Second Life, and, undeterred by the lack of a technical demonstration, expounded on the features of virtual worlds. They pointed out that Second Life has developed an entire economic system, in which people design and sell clothing, open retail stores, and even build and decorate homes. The most notorious anecdote was that of the wife who divorced her husband in the real world because he had married another woman in the virtual world.

Sobel Lojeski commended the potential value of virtual settings as a learning tool, citing them as a venue for children to gain self-confidence in a risk-free environment. However, the possibility of pursuing therapeutic interactions in Second Life was an issue of debate. A member of the audience pointedly asked if a qualified therapist would ever want to practice in a virtual environment, given that the human body is such an important part of the analytic process. Psychoanalyst and Center Co-Director Edward Nersessian expressed his doubt that an analyst could “achieve all of his aims through the modality of Second Life.” While Professor Hut conceded that present technology is inadequate for such nuanced ways of relating, he reiterated that, as in the case of the centuries-long transition from oral to written traditions, it is only a matter of time before we make the next leap. *A.L.*

The April 12 roundtable, *Opening Pandora's Box: From Ancient Sacrifice to Family Secrets*, set out to explore the meaning of myth in the context of psychoanalysis and modern conceptions of family and femininity. By way of introduction, moderator **Harold Blum**, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine, posited that the sealed Pandora's box represents the subconscious, leaving the opening of the box to serve as a potent symbol for the psychoanalytic process. Interpretations of the myth also apply to our understanding of the meaning of secrets (and their revelation), and social constructions of the female body.

Novelist and essayist **Kathryn Harrison** began by discussing *The Kiss*, her memoir recounting the incestuous relationship she had with her father when she was in her twenties. She described the familial circumstances that led to the affair and her motivation for divulging the secret after years of hiding it, noting some of the markedly negative reactions the book incited. The book's reception, she said, demonstrated to her that discussing the subject of incest is still taboo in today's world.

Taking up the theme of unspeakable secrets, **Victoria Pedrick**, Associate Professor of Classics at Georgetown University, introduced the myth of Ion, in which Apollo rapes Creusa, an Athenian princess, who secretly bears a son. She leaves the child, called Ion, to die, but he survives, and goes on to meet his parents later in life. When Creusa realizes that her attempt to conceal her son's birth has failed, she cries, “What a treasure chest of horrors!”

**Joan Branham**, Acting Director of the Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School, responded to these personal and mythical perspectives by discussing relationships between Pandora, Freud, and the biblical story of Eve, positing that all are marked by an insatiable quest for knowledge. Harrison later pointed out that both Eve and Pandora were seduced by their curiosity, and that there can be no restitution—one cannot return to a time before the fall from innocence. Professor Blum added that the desire to know and to understand, even when it costs us, acts to further civilization.

Professor Pedrick noted that both the myths of Ion and of Oedipus stem from the abandonment of a child, prompting Harrison to reveal that she herself had been abandoned—her father was physically absent, and her mother was absent emotionally and psychologically. **Lois Braverman**, President of the Ackerman Institute for the Family, added that abandonment is a form of betrayal, remarking that every member of a family is affected by a betrayal. She noted that on an individual level, forbidden secrets have the power to saturate every aspect of the self.

During the question and answer session that followed, Harrison remarked that both panelists and audience members couldn't seem to get away from the subject of sexual or shameful secrets, and went on to cite the tradition of Japanese foot-binding, which transforms women's deformed feet into sexual objects by virtue of their being kept secret. In response to a question about the fact that in much of history and mythology, women are put down or enslaved, Professor Pedrick responded that women are subjugated because of their inherent power. Only a woman can give a man an heir, and only she has the secret knowledge of the paternity of her children, “unless,” she went on, “a man has put her inside a box so sharply that he can be assured the only children coming out of her are his.” *V.S.*



*Kathryn Harrison*

## Music and Imagination: Five Centuries of Violin Making



The *Music and Imagination* series continued on March 11, as **Stephanie Chase**, Artistic Director of the Music of the Spheres Society, welcomed conservator **Stewart Pollens** to discuss the history of violin design. Chase, who picked up her first violin when she was one and half years old and had her first paid performance when she was five, introduced the event, entitled *Five Centuries of Violin Making*, by discussing the highly personal relationship violinists have with their instruments, and why the name Stradivarius continues to have a mythical resonance. She mused about the fact that while other instruments have undergone transformations brought on through experimentation in design and craftsmanship, the fundamentals of violin design and construction haven't changed in centuries. Chase introduced her own instrument, made in Venice by Pietro Guarneri in 1742, which was passed on to her by her mother, also a concert violinist. Chase has been playing it since she was 11.

*In an attempt to capitalize on the mythic status of centuries-old Italian violins, modern makers artificially age and distress new instruments to give them the patina of age.*

Mr. Pollens, conservator of musical instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1976 and 2006, used slides to illustrate the history and evolution of violin making, which centered largely in the Italian city of Cremona. There, in the early 1500s, Andrea Amati created the instrument that would serve as a model for Antonio Stradivari and the Guarneri family, whose work became the standard of excellence against which all other violins are measured. Pollens showed how slight changes, particularly in the size and placement of the sound holes, occurred over time, but concluded that in comparison with instruments like the lute and baroque trumpet, which became obsolete or gave way to more sophisticated designs, the construction of the violin remained remarkably constant. Though certain manufacturers experimented with new shapes, in some cases with a degree of success, the primacy of the classical design formulated by Amati is affirmed by the fact that top players continue to covet Stradivaris and Guarneris. Although some contemporary soloists have started to use newer instruments, favoring projection and volume over what Chase called the "sweeter sound" of the classical design, many players who can't afford one of the limited number of surviving Stradivaris or

Guarneris opt for replicas made by contemporary or 19<sup>th</sup> century manufacturers.

Pollens pointed out that many authentic Stradivaris and Guarneris have been altered at some point—hollowed out so that the wood is thinner and the sound fuller and more brilliant—reflecting a change in what is perceived as the "tonal ideal." He went on to speculate that Stradivari would probably not even recognize the sound of his own violins today. Pollens remarked that, in an attempt to capitalize on the mythic status of centuries-old Italian violins, modern makers artificially age and distress new instruments to give them the patina of age. No self-respecting violinist, Chase added, would appear onstage with a shiny new instrument. While Pollens couldn't specify the reason that the Stradivari sound is so difficult to replicate, he dismissed a notion raised by an audience member that 18<sup>th</sup> century violins were made with wood and varnish of a rarefied quality that is unavailable today. Evidently, despite an almost slavish adherence to the rigors of convention, violin makers also recognize that individuality is an important ingredient in superior craftsmanship. *A.L.*

## Our Life in Poetry: Music and Poetry

The poet Robert Hass characterized poetry as noise made with the knowledge of mortality, while the composer Roger Sessions described music as a gesture of the spirit. The March 14 roundtable, *Our Life in Poetry: Music and Poetry*, focused on how the two closely tied genres remind us of the poignancy of a life in which death is ever-present. Interspersed with discussion and readings were the ardent performances of opera and oratorio singer **Ann Hoyt**, who underscored the delight to be found in bursts of song.

**Helen Handley Houghton**, editor of *The Music Lovers' Poetry Anthology*, began by giving some historical background on the importance of music to poetry. Houghton explained, "For the ancient Greeks music and poetry were inseparable, and the poet and the musician were often one and the same person." The poetry of Homer was originally recited to the accompaniment of a lyre. The poems Houghton read from her anthology ranged from a four line poem by the 8<sup>th</sup> century Chinese poet Li Yi, "On Hearing a Flute at Night;" to a sonnet by Robert Frost about a piano, called "Investment;" to free ▶▶



*Accompanist Scott Schoonover & Ann Hoyt*



► verse by Billy Collins about listening to Johnny Hartman.

**Mary Stewart Hammond**, author of the poetry collection, *Out of Canaan*, read a poem by John Smith called “Death at the Opera.” While watching the dramatic lead-up to Violetta’s death in *La Traviata*, the speaker in Smith’s poem reflects on his father’s impending death. At the end of the opera, “The plush curtains are opening./ The applause! The applause! It drowns out the ugly noise/ Of my father’s choking and spitting.” The speaker describes the opera singer’s triumph, the type of coffin his father would prefer, and audience members waiting “like mourners round the stage door.” Finally, he concludes, “Art, I conceive, is not so removed from life; for we look at death/ Whether real or imagined, from an impossible distance/ And somewhere a final curtain is always descending./ The critics are already phoning their obituaries to the papers./ I do not think God is concerned with such trivial matters/ But, father, though there will be no applause, die well.”

Following her moving reading, Hammond said, “I think all of us, by the time we’re 20 or 30, have experienced some loss.... We think we’ve dealt with it, we think we’ve learned how to live with this. But I think it’s like a tape that plays back underneath. And music somehow triggers that tape.” Of course music can also uniquely capture the spirit of being alive. Commenting on Hoyt’s singing voice, Hammond observed, “This is what it is to be fully human. So rarely do we encounter that.”

**Tree Swenson**, Executive Director of the Academy of American Poets, pointed out that both music and poetry delve into the realm of the unconscious. She read poems by Conrad Aiken, J.D. McClatchey, and Galway Kinnell to illustrate the tension between the pleasure of sonic resonance in poetry and the often dark and brooding subject matter it treats. Houghton contributed the idea that a composer’s personality is often embedded in music, pointing out that you can hear a few notes of a piece—Wagner or Beethoven—and know instantly who created it. “Something embodied in them is in those notes on paper.” Hammond expanded on the notion of embodiment in poetry, commenting that the arrangement of line breaks allows a reader to take in a poet’s breath when reading a particular poem.

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*Hoyt, accompanied by Schoonover on keyboard, provided musical interludes throughout the event, singing Puccini, Henry Purcell, Stephen Sondheim, and an arrangement of Emily Dickinson poems by Aaron Copeland.*

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A question from the audience about the musical nature of prose sparked discussion among the panelists. Moderator **Michael Braziller** cited examples of musical prose by Hemingway and Joyce, while Hammond drew a distinction between prose and poetry, specifying that prose has to somehow mark the passage of time, while poetry “can leap over that.” Quoting a figure from the poet Richard Howard, Swenson provided a handy catchphrase: “Prose proceeds. Verse reverses.”

Hoyt, accompanied by Scott Schoonover on keyboard, provided lively musical interludes throughout the event, singing Puccini, Henry Purcell, Stephen Sondheim, and part of an arrangement of Emily Dickinson poems by Aaron Copeland. The evening ended with an encore: Mimi’s first aria from *La Bohème*. Hoyt provided a brief explanation for the music, but assured the audience that it was the sort of piece that is inevitably moving (like some lines of poetry), whether they know the literal meaning of it or not. *P.R.*

## The Motive for Metaphor

As small literalists intent on learning language, children don’t make metaphors before the age of four or five, according to **Ted Cohen**, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. When children start getting jokes, their favorites involve wordplay, as they realize the pleasure in breaking the rules of language. During the roundtable *The Motive for Metaphor*, held at the Center on March 1, Cohen offered a range of amusements for adults who enjoy finding new ways to say things. A game of cultural analogies, for example, may provoke aesthetic debate: “If Miles Davis is the Picasso of jazz, who’s the Rembrandt?” A game of devising metaphors for yourself, on the other hand, invites personal reflection: “If you were a piece of furniture, what would you be?”

Moderator **Paul Fry**, Professor of English at Yale, framed the discussion by reviewing theories of metaphor, from Roman Jakobson’s



*Rosanna Warren & Susan Stewart*

claim that residual metaphors cling to the words we say, to Donald Davidson’s construct of language itself as metaphor. He went on to elaborate on Nelson Goodman and Kenneth Burke’s idea that a metaphor sustains a fundamental tension between the way in which it doesn’t quite represent a thing, and yet somehow does. Fry asked whether “the success or spark of metaphor correlates to the way something unknown is expressed by it.” He suggested that metaphor can also represent the familiar in a poignant way, citing the Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai, whose metaphors often reside in the realm of the everyday.

**Susan Stewart**, a poet and Professor of English at Princeton, commented that an apt metaphor can “stay with you the way an aphorism does.” She contrasted the type of homespun metaphor cited by Professor Fry with a more mysterious example. “When you have a poetic metaphor like Wallace Stevens’ thinking of the rabbit as the ‘king of ghosts,’ it seems to me that’s a metaphor that stays new. It just cannot be absorbed back into the progress of life.”

Shakespeare’s poetic language also played a leading role in the discussion. Romeo’s grand declaration, “Juliet is the sun,” proved a handy example for considering how metaphor works. **Frederick Turner**, Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas, recalled that he had first learned about metaphor through observing symbolic rituals while growing up in central Africa. Specifically, he described the various complex meanings of the Mudyi tree for the Ndembu tribe, deftly quoting Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer*

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# Ellsworth Kelly: Fragments



Courtesy Checkerboard Films

The camera focuses on the impedimenta of art-making—paint-spattered shoes, color-caked palettes, brushes—then reveals a series of curved, chromatically bold panels. The works are being prepared for a show at the Serpentine Gallery in London, and the artist consults with assistants and curators to make sure the preparations are in accordance with his exacting vision. The opening moments of *Ellsworth Kelly: Fragments*, screened at the Philoctetes Center on February 24, while conveying a clear affection for the artist, reveal a deeper allegiance to the purity of the artistic process, moving beyond preoccupations with personality and anecdotal detail.

Mr. Kelly's artistic theme can be defined simply: shapes and colors. He distills the details that inspire him down to the most salient expressions of form and hue. In seeing and capturing what he will use in his art, Kelly comments, "My eye is like a machine."

Having served in France as a soldier during the Second World War, Kelly returned to Paris in the late 40's to discover and refine his approach to art. His fascination with the city's architectural detail led him to create his first "relief pieces," the graph-like representations of angular forms that would define his work for the next 60 years. His obsession with grids began when he woke up to see the shadow of window framework on his wall and said, "Oh, I want that!" While his paintings were frequently based on real objects, he abstracted them into silhouettes and outlines in an effort to connect purely to what he described as "the joy of transmitting visual ex-

perience into a work of art." His early work was heavily influenced by Hans Arp, and he adopted that artist's highly technical, dispassionate approach to creating images. Later he met Brancusi, who gave him an appreciation for the spiritual quality of shapes. "If you can turn off the mind and look at everything with your eyes," says Kelly, "everything becomes abstract." This in a way is the manifesto of a painter who decided very early on that he would be guided solely by intuition.

In the 1950s Kelly returned to New York, which provided, according to the artist, "a completely different set of things to see and use." He began to create sculpture, and then merged painting and sculpture into three-dimensional works that he placed at outdoor sites or incorporated into expansive interiors. As a result, much of his large-scale work can be seen in public spaces throughout the world. One of the technicians who applies paint to the enormous panels used for Kelly's installations comments, "The content is in the *looking* at it. It's not looking at brushstrokes and trying to figure out the meaning."

The screening was followed by a discussion with the film's co-director, **Tom Piper**, and its cinematographer, **David Leitner**. They revealed that what was originally intended as a short documentary about a Kelly installation in Beijing turned into a feature film culled from 52 hours of footage. While Mr. Piper confessed that the creation of the film was sometimes hampered by its subject's mercurial temperament, he emphasized that

the project succeeded in revealing Kelly as an artist, rather than focusing on personality or psychology. In this regard, Piper continued, it was important for the filmmakers to reassure Mr. Kelly that they wouldn't be digging into his personal life. Philoctetes film coordinator **Matthew von Unwerth**, who moderated the discussion, pointed out that this approach was in stark contrast to the very personalized portraits of Chuck Close and Robert Wilson screened at the Center in previous months. Although Mr. Leitner defended the value of a more impersonal approach, he regretted that the film failed to capture Kelly's stature as a world-class raconteur. Based on the post-film discussion, it was unclear whether it was the filmmakers or their subject who were most responsible for constraining the film to a detailed portrayal of Kelly's use of color, rather than a deeper insight into the shades of his personality.

A.L.



Courtesy Checkerboard Films



## The Motive for Metaphor

Continued from p. 9

*Night's Dream* to explain the tree's power: "As imagination bodies forth/ The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen/ Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name."

**Rosanna Warren**, a poet and Professor of Humanities at Boston University, offered a way to differentiate metaphor from other figures of speech, commenting, "Metaphor seems to me to be about identity, and simile about analysis." She campaigned for the idea of poetry as a "primitive art of conjuring," which she finds especially important to hold onto "in a time when we have such demystifying theories in our intellectual life."

Returning to the theme of the influence of language on thought, Professor Stewart proposed, "One question we might ask is whether poetic metaphors give us a more capacious form of knowledge than, say, literal approaches to knowledge." Describing her recent encounter with a weather phenomenon she didn't know how to explain, Stewart recounted that her mind filled with metaphors as a way to understand the experience.

For Professor Cohen, the test of whether a particular figure of speech is a metaphor as opposed to, say, an idiom, is whether there is a need to know the literal meanings of the words to understand it. While an idiom can simply be memorized, a metaphor cannot be understood unless one knows individual definitions. It is also true, of course, that a reader can comprehend each word in a poetic line and remain bewildered by the line itself. Nevertheless, it can resonate in a powerful way, Cohen asserted, citing Yeats, Rilke, and Hölderlin as poets whose metaphorical mysteries continue to captivate him.

By the end of the roundtable, the panelists had a rich stockpile of meanings for metaphor—play, beauty, ritual, freedom, knowledge. To conclude, Fry read a poem by Stevens that underscored the dramatic tension between the concrete and the inexplicable in metaphor. "The motive for metaphor, shrinking from/ The weight of primary noon,/ The ABC of being,/ The ruddy temper, the hammer/ Of red and blue, the hard sound—/ Steel against intimation—the sharp flash,/ The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X." *P.R.*

## Photographic Visions: The Art of Seeing



Bruce Davidson, *Untitled, Subway, New York (Pink Scarf and Jacket)*, 1980

### An exhibition at the Philoctetes Center, April 20-June 8

Works by: Margaret Bourke-White, Edward Burtynsky, Mark Citret, Bruce Davidson, Bedrich Grunzweig, Eikoh Hosoe, Peter Keetman, William Klein, Eric Lindbloom, H.K. Shigeta, Minor White

## The Curator's Eye View



Bruce Gitlin, Haresh Lalvani, and Bill Soghor in front of *Xurf Mirror I*

Several years ago, when we were designing the new space at the Philoctetes Center, I suggested that along with the literal round table, offices, library, and other necessities such as bathrooms and a small kitchen, we have a way to exhibit artwork. Before I knew it, Directors Edward Nersessian and Francis Levy asked if I would become the Curator of the Philoctetes Center.

As an artist and educator (I am the chair of the Art Department at Marymount Manhattan College), I have had a lifelong engagement with the visual arts and a personal commitment to the concept of visual literacy. You may have seen me taking photographs at all our events for publication in our newsletter, *Dialog*.

The impetus for our recent exhibition, *Self Reflection: The True Mirror*, was the roundtable *The Mirror and the Lamp*. This roundtable was part of the five-month, citywide Brainwave Festival, held in conjunction with the Rubin Museum, Exit Art, The Graduate Center at CUNY, and the School of Visual Arts. The notion that creative/visual artists receive inspiration from the objective world, filtering their vision through cortical processes in both hemispheres of the brain, inspired an exhibit that brought together mirrors, sculpture, paintings, and photographs that address the artist's process of self-perception. One of the artists, Haresh Lalvani, describes his *Xurf Mirror* sculpture as "a metaphysical reflection between the universe of possibilities within and without the mind." Indeed, we try to connect the art and visual materials on display to the exploration of imagination that is the core of the Center's mission. If the roundtables and courses are the mind, heart, and soul of our mission, the exhibits are the eyes that allow another type of entry into the compelling, complex concepts and questions that liberate our imaginations.

Some of our previous exhibits over the past two and a half years have included fMRI images of the brain for *Eye of the Beholder*, computer generated mathematical algorithms for *Pattern Recognition*, and photographs taken by the Hubble Space Telescope for *BIG/little*. The presentation of paintings, drawings, photographs, digital images, and sculpture explore the topics of the Philoctetes Center in a multidisciplinary, multi-media way. These exhibits create a conscious and unconscious dialogue between the images on the walls and the visitors who engage in our ongoing discussions.

Our current show, *Photographic Visions: The Art of Seeing* (April 20-June 8) is prompted by the roundtables *The Psycho-Neurology of the Photographic Arts* (April 24) and *Susan Sontag: Public Intellectual, Polymath, Provocatrice* (June 7). *H.C.*

## Upcoming Events

### Music and its Reimaginings: Cross-Cultural Improvisation

Course

Saturday, May 3, 3:30pm

Participants: Jane Ira Bloom, Geetha Ramanathan Bennett, Min Xiao-Fen

### Imagination and Mathematics: The Geometry of Thought

Course

Tuesday, May 13, 7:00pm

Participants: Barry Mazur & Eva Brann

### Wingdale Community Singers

Performance & Discussion

Saturday, May 17, 2:30pm

Participants: David Grubbs, Nina Katchadourian, Hannah Marcus, Rick Moody

### Our Life in Poetry: William Butler Yeats

Course

Tuesday, May 27, 7:00pm

Participants: Michael Braziller & Eamon Grennan

### Psychogeography: The Landscapes of Memory

Roundtable

Saturday, May 31, 2:30pm

Participants: André Aciman, Vito Acconci, Russell Epstein, Matthew von Unwerth

### Susan Sontag: Public Intellectual, Polymath, Provocatrice

Roundtable

Saturday, June 07, 2:30pm

Participants: Robert Boyers, Roger Copeland, Phillip Lopate, James Miller

### Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress, and the Tangerine

Film Screening

Thursday, June 12, 7:00pm

### Emotion and Invention in Architecture

Roundtable

Saturday, June 14, 2:30pm

Participants: Donald Albrecht, Itzhak Benenson, David Howes, Sanjoy Mazumdar, Julio Salcedo (moderator), Jerome Winer

### Our Life in Poetry: Post-war Polish Poets

Course

Tuesday, June 24, 7:00pm

Participants: Michael Braziller & Ed Hirsch

All events held at The Philoctetes Center, 247 E. 82nd Street, New York, NY.

## Taking Part in the Dialog



This exchange was part of a lengthy discussion concerning the roundtable, *The Motive for Metaphor*:

*Benjamin Snyder:*

*Like a metaphor, I feel as though a soul perpetually tries to get a bird's eye view of itself, without ever being able to do so fully. In other words we try and use the external world as a means of understanding something that is fundamentally internal.*

*If metaphor and soul share this quality, I suppose I am wondering if metaphor then could be a means of understanding something about our lives that is at once both quotidian and profound.*

*Paul Fry:*

*As to the soul, perhaps the philosopher again would say that the soul being an indeterminate or at best intuited entity leaves no choice but to address or describe it metaphorically—for better and worse. Your own interest concerns a possible analogy between the soul's attempt to know itself from the outside and metaphor's attempt to do likewise: the soul's metaphors for itself and metaphor's efforts to view all objects recursively.*

The demonstration and discussion, *Real Research in Virtual Worlds*, provoked the following questions and observations:

*Nehdia Sameen:*

*I was thinking of how an immersive virtual environment could actually allow us to change our entire cognitive body schema. Could we swap genders, race, species, and so on, and how would that affect our sense of self? Moreover, what impact do virtual environments have on the plasticity of the body itself?*

*Michael Miernik:*

*There is no doubt in my mind that virtual reality can enhance, enrich and envelop a wider audience than might otherwise be possible. For example, those individuals who sat in the back of a classroom never raising their hand are more likely to participate. However, if these virtual worlds revolve around content compressing technologies such as PowerPoint, texting and so on; they are apt to turn "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," into a truism. Maximizing the positive potential of virtual reality and its sibling technologies requires less gushing golly-gee and more aggressive devil's advocate planning.*

Our online audience continues to participate in the dialog fostered by events at the Philoctetes Center. To contribute your own thoughts, please visit our website, [www.philoctetes.org](http://www.philoctetes.org), and click on any event in our Calendar or Past Programs listings. Sign up to participate in our on-going online discussions. Likewise, go to [www.youtube.com/user/philoctetesctr](http://www.youtube.com/user/philoctetesctr) to post comments about any of our videos. As always, you can email [info@philoctetes.org](mailto:info@philoctetes.org) with any questions or suggestions.