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BACKYARD
GENE POOL

Kenneth Robert Decker

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ABSTRACT

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This is a series of fictional texts which use the material and sub-structures of closed-system texts (technical writing; conventional/popular-genre fiction; sociocultural verbiage (sayings, jokes, slogans); as well as orally-propagated, specialized linguistic subsets) to construct open systems of literary semiosis. The open/closed distinction is drawn from general systems theory. The design of the open text is to allow the reader to range more freely over the interpretive map; thus textual structure has a high degree of 'play' (ie, looseness) built into it. The use of detached substructures of closed semiotic systems helps avoid the absolute randomization of DADA, which is a reactive form of closure (or became such, once the initial aesthetic-energy/vector had been blunted). We take the boards and tokens and rule-lists of a hundred tired games and learn to play a new game. The writer finds three types of rules postulated by game theory and strives for new and elegant breakage in each category.

INTRODUCTION

The dissection of a foetal pig is an important laboratory project in fundamental biology. In 1970, all foetal pigs in use in Saskatchewan came from a central warehouse in the States, where they had been neck-slitted and injected with a dyed rubber compound, blue for the veins and red for the arteries. Each pig was stapled in a plastic bag with the Foetal Pig Handbook.

The goal/point of dissection is the display of the internal systems of the animal; that is, dissection is a system of presentation, of purposeful opening and inspection. The Foetal Pig Handbook sets out the procedural steps which will theoretically produce the desired display. These explicit directives are accompanied by prescriptive photographs: How Your Pig Should Look At This Stage. The last picture in the book shows a perfect little porcine show-piece, stretched limbs and skin pinned with care and symmetry to a wax tablet, innards meticulously labelled, circulatory system excavated without the slightest damage. This is the

deterministic end-state. Two powerful intersective systems make its achievement impossible.

First, these small (8-10 inches overall) pigs are not machine-made. They exhibit enormous variation within their general, swinish morphology. Organs are ill-formed, displaced or non-existent; major arteries take alternate routes or burrow under tissue which must be left intact according to the book. It becomes apparent that in any particular sector actual structure may diverge from the model to the point of being unrecognizable.

Partly as a result of this realization, an aesthetic 'play' factor becomes operative. Students, having grasped the unattainability of the model/ideal, enter into contests to produce the most grotesque distortion of the original plan, or the most inventive re-organization of it. Strips and spirals of flayed skin are pinned out from the main body and inscribed with cryptic messages or emotive statements; an entire circulatory system rises up from the heart on pin and tooth-pick trellis to form a rubbery bower for the peeled face and skull.

The texts which follow have similarly parted ways with the handbook. They recognize that the closed

semiotic system is an unrealistic goal; the textual system must be open to a variety of inferred meanings; there must be enough 'play' in its structure to allow the reader to relax and have fun, rather than speed toward an absolute goal. The total randomization of DADA must finally be rejected as too purely reactive (cutting the foetal pig into morsels and cooking them over a bunsen burner). These texts take segments of historically closed systems, such as detective literature, science fiction, scientific writing, philosophical treatises, political tracts and so on (all our 'rational' scribblings), examine them for isomorphism, and finally use them as material for the construction of an open semiotic system, a system which does not mind letting the reader have some of the marbles.

This open and closed dichotomy comes from general systems theory. A closed system has no exchange with its environment. It is the imaginary system set up by mechanistic, Newtonian science to facilitate the analysis of material reality. While initially successful, this investigative strategy cannot but founder as it approaches the limits imposed by the closed-system model. Its discoveries exhibit a

disturbing lack of generality. For example, the second law of thermodynamics states that the amount of entropy in a system can either remain unchanged or increase. But this law is posited upon chance occurrence within a closed system, and thus cannot explain the existence, in material reality, of pockets of negative entropy, which we call organisms and epiorganisms. These are open systems, carrying on ordered, goal-directed metabolic exchange with the systemic environment. They possess such 'improbable' (according to classical theory) traits as equifinality and self-regulation through information-loop monitors. According to Warren Weaver, a founder of information theory, classical/modern science developed the theory of unorganized complexity, based upon the laws of probability; the task of contemporary science is the development of a general theory of organized complexity.¹

The dictum of Russian formalist Victor Schlovski that the job of poetry (literary art) is to render strange the mundane is heeded within these stories. But this 'making strange' is naturally attended by the obverse process of 'common-placing the bizarre'. The output sought is therefore that which evidences an exchange of values on the level of this bipolar

quality: odd/ordinary. This leads to the concept of 'new cliché' and, by extension, into examinations of the specialised subsets of language which we call jargon or cant.

By offering instances of the open system growth patterns of these language subsets, the texts seek to display the rigidity and inadequacy of the formalist/structuralist analytic operation. Endeavouring to construct a closed system (to facilitate 'study') formalism hopes to de-subjectivize the act of analysis and to arrive at a model of the Real which, operating, negates the truth-value of 'rival' models. Rather than playing with the 'black box' of the real-world process to discover its behavioural tendencies (hermeneutics); formalism tries concurrently to dismantle the object of study, and to build from known components a replica which will duplicate the output of the object-system (analysis/exegesis). This approach replaces the intrinsic looseness and capriciousness of the open system with the high seriousness of orthodoxy and a foolish 'certainty' of output (determinism).²

It follows that these texts carry out a hermeneutic operation to the extent that they toy with language-models

of real-world processes. This interpretive play involves a triadic method which is reflective of the three sorts of rules postulated by game theory. These are the Over-riding, the defeasible, and the indefeasible categories of rules, and the texts will indulge in usage/breakage of elements of all three sets.

Breakage of a defeasible rule is allowable and encompassable within the game; breakage of an indefeasible rule institutes a variant of the game; breakage of the Over-riding Rule turns the game upon itself, recursively feeding it to itself as its own input. The Over-riding Rule imparts significance to the act of rule-breaking. Contravention³ of the Over-riding Rule, then, is a method of loosening the basic structural bonds of the game/model, making it more responsive to fluctuations in the real-world process (that is, making it a better model... allowing for the co-existence of a complex of conflicting, competing and interfering models of a single process).

If language is a game-system, then language-art is games played with that game. We play the fundamental system in any way which seems to offer more and better play. The motivation of the production of these texts

is the desire to play Language; to explore its interminable avenues; to undermine its edificial structures and, following their collapse, excavate the rubble; and to engage in a polylogue of verbal gaming, with its citizens—the readers of the text.

NOTES

1. This cursory and insufficient differentiation between systems, open and closed, is based upon explanations in Ludwig von Bertalanffy, General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications (New York: George Braziller, 1968).
2. See René Thom, "At the Boundaries of Man's Power: Play" in SUB-STANCE 25 (Madison, WI: 1980) pp. 11-19.
3. More rigorously, read dissembling invocation of the Over-riding Rule, rather than breakage. The Over-riding Rule is of a form which is incapable of being broken. The player can choose to invoke or not to invoke it.

Briefly stated, the Over-riding Rule is as follows:

If some rule is obviously broken, look for the explanation and act sensibly in the light of it.

-from Jon Wheatley, Language and Rules

(The Hague: Mouton, 1970) p. 25.

Invocation of this rule implies a semantic payload, an 'explanation', injected into the act of breakage by the rule-breaker. Thus, dissembling invocation of the Overriding Rule involves highly unethical, non-significant rule-breakage, which rattles the game to its fundament; it is the position of the nomad/vandal in relation to civilisation: "I disrupt this rule/order to no other end (for no other reason) but (that I wish to feel) the joy of the barbarous act."

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Look Here!*

Having solicited eye contact, my primary concern is to keep you reading; I don't want to lose you. And of course, I have no way of knowing whether I have done, no VU-meter or idiot-light to indicate your attentiveness, and I am aware of the probability that there grows already the boredom produced by reflexivity in any form, like, say, a conversationalist whose only subject is Number One; who pulls all topics over his/her personal event-horizon; a collapsed, hyperdense massenergyspace; and I'm becoming a wee bit panicky even at this early

* Throughout this text an asterisk signifies 'look below for a footnote,' except when it occurs in the centre of a blank line, in which case it denotes the passage of time.

point in the game because it is apparent that I have no predetermined strategy, am in fact a text intuitively spilled from a typewriter, and I realize that perhaps I was a trifle foolhardy to initiate the reader/text relationship in such an impulsive manner (although if we are going to toss blame around it could be contended that you bear equal responsibility for the relationship; that it is one of reciprocal lacks and hungers, or, more positively, of mutual implications). Conventional wisdom has it that I should, if I know what's good for me, do something to raise your interest rate, any trick in the book, as long as it appeals to some primeval portion of your nervous system; since I have no information about you, and from a quick self-examination can infer only that you are a human being, or an extension of same, and are capable of reading in the English language, my only safe assumption (I'm told) is that you are the Common Reader and, as such, will respond less to (il)logical or (ir)rational conceptual stimulation than to vivid representation of events which will activate and ignite those sectors of your specific cognitive map etched on the pithy, grey parchment of the brain during steaming jungle battles and and orgiastic festivals of idolatry. Love, Hate, Pity,

Jealousy, Greed, Joy, Guilt, Indignation, Ambition, Lust, Fear, Bliss, Disgust, Pride: We consider these impulses beastly, savage and uncivilised, yet uniquely and universally human. Or do we?

For example, read the following two sentences, designed to satisfy the voyeuristic tendency (segment of the larger Mimetic Urge). In a brightly-lit room in Tokyo, a woman and a man are copulating. The man is sliding his penis slowly in and out of the woman's vagina and she is moving her pelvis in such a way as to amplify that oscillation. Ideally this explicit reference to the sex-act should result in an excess of readerly momentum; by that I mean it should create in you an amount of interest (potential energy) which exceeds the amount of effort (electrokinetic energy) required to read it. In this way these sentences impel you into what follows them; if a minimum of half* of my utterance meets this standard, then

* Allowing for a neutral rating for the other half. There seems to be no set pattern for positioning within the text of these 'positive' packages: every other sentence, every other paragraph, or every other half of the story,

chances are you will stick with me until the end. But setting aside well-formed formulae, the harsh reality is that I don't even know if you stuck with me through that footnote (or, indeed, if you followed my direction to it). I do not reveal these misgivings and calculations lightheartedly; it occurs to me that I may be rendering my intentions suspect, that you may apperceive a plot to entice you into the labyrinth with mortal danger at its centre. With all sincerity, I declare that you can trust me; you can return to my beginnings and re-read, and I'll tell you the same thing I just have; I won't change my

as long as the positive precedes that neutral portion which it is designed to foil. This simplistic formula does not take into account the possibility of 'negative' rated passages, those which create 'drag' (to borrow a term from aerodynamics), which impede the 'slicker'n snot' movement of the reader's eyeballs across the page, for example, long, boring and redundant explanation or glossing of textual concepts which might be better illustrated with a terse and vivid figure like "a text should dance more numbers than it sits out."

opinion on you; I am of constant and steadfast character. But can I place similar trust in you? Not for a moment. Overwhelmingly, I know that at any given time, even in mid-word, at, say a hyphen which you find annoying, you might go and make yourself a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, on whole wheat, toasted, with plenty of mayonnaise and a little mustard and maybe some turkey and never come back; or maybe fire up the television to catch the late-night news, weather and sports; or be clubbed over the head by the man who has come to steal your stereo, leaving me readerless and still.

*

But later perhaps you finish your sandwich and the sports are over and you've already seen the late movie four times and anyway it's about Ron Howard starting a high-school rock band and the sandwich is ablaze in your stomach, making sleep unimaginable, or you don't die from the crack which the baseball bat left in your skull and you come in up out of your three-day coma and are looking for a little light reading in your hospital bed and you find that I've been

waiting all this time like a faithful dog just where you left off. I will respond ecstatically to your return, using metaphors which possess an easy familiarity, and even extending them into conceits, thumping my tail on the furniture, running wide circles on the front lawn and spontaneously performing all my best tricks.

I've had time to think while you were gone. I realize now that the love scene was too clinical and foreign to have wide appeal. To dive right in, I know what you need now: thrills and spills to take your mind off the dismal realities of your recent life. Ready? The same couple who were in Japan in the first part of this story are now in Costa Rica, a small central-american country which has had the most peaceful history in that region; the pre-columbian inhabitants were wiped out almost immediately upon contact with the Spanish, and the colonials who later arrived became small farmers rather than feudal lords ruling over immense plantations. The country now boasts the lowest military budget and the highest literacy rate in Latin America. This peace is about to be shattered irreversibly.

The couple in question are riding the train from San José to Puntarenas. Their names are Jack and Jill. The

train winds through the mountains along the valley of a large river, called the Rio Grande, which is Spanish for 'Large River.' Jack and Jill are recording stars from the States who sing songs about car crashes and boredom. You will find a floppy one-sided record of one of their numbers in a paper envelope at the end of this text (unless it has been removed by a previous contact). Actually, this is nothing but a cover story for customs and those whom it may concern. In reality, they are former employees of a Dow Chemical laboratory and they've stolen the formula for a new 'Holy-sheepshit' nerve gas, which they have come to Costa Rica to sell to the fastest bidder. Or perhaps it's the plans to a new supersonic aircraft. At any rate, they are up to their hairlines in the dramatic situation of daring enterprise.

The train halts to take on water at a spring-fed wooden reservoir built on the mountainside above the tracks. Jack and Jill get down to stretch their legs along the line. After three or four minutes they arrive at a cleft in the mountain. They stand on the trestle looking down a thousand feet into a rocky cañon with a bare, flat wall at its upper end. Jack yells:

"Will my voice echo here?" and the answer is yes.

"Repeat after me!"

"Ecology!"

"Humbert!"

"Walla!"

"Tse!"

"Kinnik!" After each shout, Jack looks at Jill to see if she's laughing. The answer is no. She stares down as if preparing for an octuple gainer.

"What's wrong?" Jack asks.

"I don't know," Jill says. "I think it's the mono acting up again." Jack reaches out and lovingly squeezes the blood out of a mosquito which is perched on her left eyebrow. She thinks, he's always nicest when we are involved in some scheme, like on the last album. He thinks, she's always upset when we are involved in a scheme, like on the last album.

The train has just begun its descent from the mountains to the coastal jungle. Rounding a long curve, it is suddenly attacked by a thousand gorillas, armed with clubs, who leap and catch hold of the glassless window-frames and begin beating the passengers and demanding brand new sound equipment. The combined weight of this horde of well-fed simians upsets the delicate balance of the train as

it rolls along two steel rails set on cross-pieces of local hardwood. We can see the tiny train jerking and wobbling on the immense mountain-side, and then it topples over the cliff, becoming derailed in the middle first and the two ends dragging after; it forms a rough V as it falls, while Jill shouts out, "There are no true apes in the New World," and then the train hits bottom and shatters into a steaming, burning, broken string of wreckage and there it lies like a record-player on the beach.

*

No, no, no, reverse that. The various planks and pieces of which the train consisted slam into place and the whole rig is hoisted up the cliff by its ends with the middle hanging down like a greasy rasher just pulled from the pan. It settles onto the track with the flanges of its wheels suitably inside the rails and the apes jump from the sides of the cars and run off into the jungle where they remain satisfied with what they have.

This particular jungle, as Jill and Jack can see perfectly well from the window of the speeding railway

coach, is filled with big parrots the colour of ripe tomatoes who spend their days looking at round mirrors with little dingle-bells hanging from the bottoms and saying things which no one trained them to say.

"Whenever something is said, someone must be saying it." Jack is saying. "Serge Doubrovsky said that. And psittaceous mimicry is no exception." Jill smiles and spits on the floor. She has a laugh like dried lettuce. The train is now passing through vast fields of sun-toasted whole wheat as they are nearing the town of Esparta. A pair of dogs are screwing on the roof of the station and the Spartans are giving them laws and trying to knock them down with rocks and brooms and old ones mutter, wait til Lycurgo gets back with his gun full of rock-salt and window-shards, then we'll see the trails of mayonnaise and mustard these curs can leave, then we'll see the hair fly, they rave in a manner characteristic of people who eat only candy and cheezies and little packaged sweetie-buns. Here a sweaty man in a white suit boards the train and sits opposite Jack and Jill. He lifts his hat, then sets it back on his head.

"I am Herman Eutix, at your service. I know who you are. I was sent by the Sultan of Swat to escort you to the

club-house in Puntarenas. Beastly hot and humid here on the coast, isn't it? It's worse on the Caribbean side, though. Let's be thankful the meeting was not set in Limon or Pandora. Well, they say zamuro no come alpiste. Do you speak Spanish, Senora?"

"No. I like to speak Japanese, although I don't know any. I just make it up and that makes me feel better than meaning something."

In Puntarenas, Eutix leads them through a maze of streets which become increasingly narrow and steep. Arms in the doorways offer them fractured skulls and tanned monkey foetuses on key-chains. A sign says BIOPSIES While You Wait: 20 colons. Rats dance in the gutters, not a wallflower among them. Jack and Jill feel that during this walk they are becoming middle-aged. I can hear you thinking how ordinary. Eat another antacid tablet and keep going. We're into the club-house turn.

They enter a room lined with steel lockers and low benches. Sportswriters stand in groups and wave with unanimity. The three greatest sins a playmaker can make. The greatest outfielder in the history of the game. The greatest park to play in. How best to hone the psychophysical mechanisms of exteriorization. Typewriters are

clacking busily in the next room and reporters shout at their editors in New York.

A gentleman in a gray uniform is consulting his appearance in a full-length glass tacked to the club-house wall. He beckons the three to follow him and then steps out the door. Through a short tunnel and they find themselves on a glistening green diamond of astroturf.

"You're not the Sultan of Swat," Jack says. "You're Stan Musial."

Jill says, "Horiki goyo bon mishi sukiya?" by which she means, who the fuck is Stan Musial?"

"No Other," says Stan Musial. "In my day, professional athletes did not get rich. They got a restaurant, if they were lucky, or a tavern, to keep pushing the product for Anheuser-Busch. I shoulda run for mayor, or president maybe."

"Those are good jobs," Jack says.

"If I thought you two were party to the international communist conspiracy I'd bludgeon you right here at home-plate with this lead-cored Louisville." The crowd is hushed and waiting for violence.

Eutix pipes up. "What Stan means is that he hopes you are going to be reasonable with regards to price on

these goods, perhaps accepting part of your payment in convertible preferred shares or long-term options?"

"Allow me to treat you all to a Sno-Cone," Stan says.

"Red dye No. 2," Jack says.

"No me gusta," Jill says, "pero dame una cerveza, pendejo." And Eutix eyes her with new respect.

"Y borracho no comé dulce," he says. Meanwhile the crowd is murmuring and impatient for all the thrills and spills of professional sport, unaware that they have been programmed as the main event: a nation-wide dance-marathon at which, powered by the 'H-s' nerve gas, they shall bop until they drop. Even if you don't believe a word of it, you're still caught in the crossfire. You'd better have another sandwich before the dance-craze hits your town. Everywhere, around the world, plastic phonograph records are falling from automatic spindles to the rubber-matted turntables below and levers are moving and letting the styluses fall and bounce and settle into the first grooves of a wide assortment of long, inward spirals. Jack and Jill have seats booked on the Concorde, which is the greatest imitation of a turkey ever, according to the papers.

They fly to Tokyo with the money. That night in their hotel-room they try to turn out the lights but, you guessed it, the switch is not working. They copulate. Jack slides his penis slowly in and out of Jill's vagina and Jill moves her pelvis in such a way as to amplify that oscillation. From outside comes a cannonading round of applause. They look out the window to see, across the wide expanse of the traffic-circus, a twelve-story-high video screen which displays the image of a hotel-room with a bed and two naked people, backs to the camera, looking out the window. Thousands of citizens stand with heads tilted up respectfully and their hands clapping together, and Jack and Jill are struck by how much more polite they are than people who eat only candy and cheezies and little packaged sweetie-buns and, truth to tell, than you and I.

Earth Station

"You lost your keys on the way in from the parking lot? What do you expect me to do about it? There's been a four-and-a-half minute gravel storm since then. Go poke your fingers into the thousands of holes in the snow. There's bound to be a set of keys in one of them." The tourguide wears an electroplastic collar designed to keep him informative and polite but, like the rest of this aging complex, the degenerate program is deplorably vulnerable to both systemic and external interference. The touring recruits find his behaviour highly erratic: his speech collapses to reveal the material of the firmware instructions and expands to admit trajectories from his realtime thought process.

"The fifteen story parabolic receiving dish rotates upon a circular rail. In azimuth. Feeds through a sluice

to the palm of your hand. Protected features. This is all artificial light. There is a flock of mergansers at rest on the pond. Note the flawless architecture of the control building. Geosynchronous orbit makes your heads beg for new faces, as though time were detaching one's wits like retinae. We worry about freshwater delivery. The satellite itself employs a demand assignment system which enables us to serve the customer right with a folded five in the snotbox. Talk about the hundred thousand voice circuit capacity and gesture. appropriately to accentuate the enormity."

"Our job is to keep the message clean. This means the elimination of noise: renegades of whom we do not speak. You will have an opportunity to examine the fortified huts of these neoprimitive crewmembers at close range. And their totemic rust-heaps set on mounds of clay. The Boss says the mother ship will enter a period of blissful calm once the message is utterly clear. Point out The Boss: that's him over there with the black leather gloves and deer rifle. He is checking the pressure gauges. He watches the way the team routes the traffic. None of us outlives three foul-ups: one, you're epitheted; two, you're epilated; three, you're epitaphed. Which explains,

as you were no doubt wondering, why there is NERD written on my forehead, and why you will see a couple people around here who are totally hairless. Yes, there's BONEHEAD down below testing the redundant power circuits; check that for a face which is intensely concentrated. And there's REJECT just coming in the door back there. She is starting another four-hour shift. These two are the most-experienced, hardest-working and all-round best of our team. There is nothing like life-or-death competition to upgrade efficiency. Is what we have found. Move them about the surveillance centre in close array. Our retrolental position provides an unparalleled vista."

"Demonstrate the filtered vision necessary to perceive the checkered plane which underlies these mountains. Premium rating. Look into these barrels; these are the heads which we have retrieved through unauthorized procedures. It's a goddam water-arse kind of thing to admit but there are times when sentiment is as powerful as the carnivoreal imperative."

"Sector five. There is no denying that to keep the message clear we must have meat. Even if it means risking death at the hands of those no-good, shit-eating renegade whoremongers. Meat is a necessity if the message is to

be kept clean. Later in the tour you will have firsthand experience of this. Now show them the uninterrupted power system and its generating unit. But, as The Boss is quick to point out, this is balanced by the clarity and cleanliness of the message."

"Now watch carefully. If we like, we can employ the satellite camera in the search. Plugging in the coordinates of the target structure takes us from the idle image of the North American continent and Arctic archipelago through a hair-raising zoom-in, to arrive at the goal image: in extreme closeup, a hand, gloveless and red with cold, beginning to exhibit the characteristic white spots of advancing frostbite, pushing its stiff and raw fingers into a hole in the snow, searching rather feebly, burdened with a sense of futility, coming up empty, drawing a blank, sucking wind, out in left field. This is an image which appeals directly to the empathetic centre of the installation."

"Explain the layout. Inside a five hundred metre perimeter, the land around the complex has been inlaid with durolite tiles, each one-half metre square, to form a red and white gaming-board pattern with a slight upturn at the edge. Beyond the circle of squares, lumpy green-black

garbage bags form an uneven terrain, cresting as much as ten metres over ground-level, providing the station with an absorbant, insulating ring which covers three kilometres in all directions. This refuse semiconductor layer is increased daily. Nothing is wasted. Our offal is the margin of our safety."

"Recovered heads are kept in a mixture of the sour juice of local berries and liver oil from the fish in that pond, four to a barrel, not too crowded, and a slight touch makes them roll like Hallowe'en apples in a tub. According to The Boss, we will refrain from eating the clip-winged mergansers. A duckless pond would sadden us beyond the threshold. Sickening bastards know the result of rewiring."

"Sadness will invariably boost one's susceptibility to the Whispers. Cock the head as if searching for a particular band of sound then glare meaningfully at the listeners. Because this base is a point of convergence for all possible communication, the messages 'ghost' on us, like the extras who stand aside from each person, place or thing on your poorly-tuned television. The first time one of these icy meanings touches your forebrain you will instantly lose control of your bowel. You'll fall on your

face for sixty seconds of rigid agony. You'll be left a slackjawed, stinking mess. Don't be embarrassed afterwards. Everyone is struck in the same way. Some of our investigators propose a link between Whisper activity and the aurora borealis but the Whispers continually intersect and disrupt their research."

"Subsequent encounters have a sharper focus. You're walking down the hall of the recreation centre after a shift when a Whisper opens before you like the mouth of a missile-silo. It fires its hideous proposition into your cranial skyway, sending conventional bipolarities stampeding over the nearest cliff. The Whispers occupy the territory behind and between true and false. They operate outside binary logic and therefore never fail to convince you. Reading from a loop of dynamic erring subtraction they home-in on your soft spot. Four times I have lost the fact of my right hand to the deep-space chill of the third value. Four times our biologists have re-derived and re-proved it to me to the point where I can use it to grasp and manipulate controls but it is never completely recovered. Each loss-and-return cycle intensifies a bluish tinge which the hand has carried since the initial contact."

"If we pull back on the zoom-lens to an overall shot

of the compound and activate the Rounge-Blac sensor board, in approximately twenty nanoseconds we will receive a readout specifying the square which is broken by a foreign graphic-body. Thirty nanoseconds later a schematic of that square will appear with the outline of the intruder flashing for éasy cognition. Now that you have found your keys you may rejoin the tour."

"Elapsed time check. I wish one of the others had drawn this job. Whether the Whispers are somehow issued or directed by the renegades is something we don't like to think about. Wave the hand in a figure of despond. For now, you are all free to wander about and look at anything you like. Kindly do not bother those on duty. Write down your questions for the final instruction period. We will assemble in one hour to venture beyond the perimeter and gather the carnage which is our due."

*

Under a moonless night-sky the tourguide led his band of foragers in file across the tiled field. Each had been outfitted with a collar and a gun, and fluorescent plastic netting slung from the shoulders and down the back.

At the border of the regions of bagged garbage, the

guide said they would proceed on all fours for the next three kilometres. He also told them to trust only their sense of sight, which was to be trained upon the orange glow from the backs of their fellows. The other senses would be subject to the illusions inherent in this interstitial area. With that, he clambered up a plastic hillside and the tourists followed suit.

They struggled over the amorphous terrain. Soon their low grunts were amplified into the moans of love-making, and lusty laughter boomed through the polyethylene hollows. The guide shouted at them to hurry. Twelve-tone chorales, six part canons welled up around them and vied for ascendancy with the honking of buses and taxicabs. They smelled the bakeries and the cafés and felt the breezes blowing from the river, along the tree-lined boulevard. The clinging plastic became downy and pleasing to the touch. Songbirds whistled and flowery scents wafted from holes in bags as they were knelt upon. But the steely-eyed company pressed on.

At last, they came to the far edge of the ring of insulation. Smoked salmon and creamed asparagus fell away. Before them, under a freshly risen moon, stood the wooden stockade of the neoprimitives. It was made of sharp poles

three metres long set in the ground side by side. A few of these bore indeterminate shapes at their points. As the recruits drew near the ramparts, they saw the severed heads of those of their predecessors who had been captured. Some were shaved and all had tattooed epithets on the foreheads: LAMEBRAIN, BLOCKHEAD, DOZY, DOZIER, WRITE-OFF, BOZO, KLUTZ, DIMWIT, JERK, DUNCE, VOID, BLANK. The expression on each face was one of surprise. As technocods, their fate should have been to die at their boards during procedural dysfunction, shot once in the back of the head by The Boss and stood to rest in one of the plexiglass capsules under the durolite plates in the yard. To be hanged for cattle-rustling was an eventuality uncovered in the manuals.

*

"Split into two groups," the tourguide recited. "One go into the party and shoot the place up. The other to the stockpens to gather the meat."

The first group crept around the base of the house, well below the yellow squares of the windows. Inside, the renegades were laughing and eating mushrooms at a long table. They were intermittently singing: one sang a verse

and all joined in the chorus.

If metopic lizards visit
 For the proxy goat at stake
 If developed gills can relish
 Then decoding code will take

chorus: Pea and not pea
 Pea and not pea
 Cue and not cue
 Cue and not cue
 Are and not are
 Are and not are

Shrugging off the chills which assaulted their spinal columns, Group One kicked in the door of the longhouse with guns blazing.

Meanwhile, Group Two slit the throats of a couple of cattle-guards and climbed the fence to make their selection. "They don't even eat these things," said the guide. "They just use their shit to grow the fungus."

They chose two cows and put bullets in their brains. One of the tourists ran from the woodshed carrying a chainsaw, and they cut the still-quivering cattle into five-kilogram cubes. They stuffed the dripping blocks of flesh

and bone into the orange string-bags on each other's backs. The tourguide shinnied up and took a head from the stockade wall. He rubbed his cheek along the hispid surface of the skull.

"This was VOID," he said. "She was dear to me." He pushed the head on top of the warm meat in his net and looked about. The two groups had converged at the gate and he led them at a dead run back to the zone of trash.

Pre-dawn light floods the red and white checkered yard. The meat-lugging tourists have broken rank and lope across the thin snow in scattered formation, exhilarated by their burden. Some chuckle or click their tongues as they have heard the renegades do. Suddenly passing through a substantial interface they begin to run poorly, arms flailing and feet sliding, and finally they stop as one. Their faces are aghast. Noses begin bleeding. Eyes explode in the sockets. Tongues are torn from throats and fly across the yard to slap against the windows of the

control-room. Bodies spin on the lateral axis and a wash of blood is flung from them high overhead. Their incredulous screams fill the yard and are repeated from the buildings of the installation. The snow is now crimson and blue, and grey where the brains have fallen.

"The complex is empty. All cerebrants have been divided by zero. The blockhouse holds its bowl to the sky and beside it is a bluegreen rectangle devoid of bobbing waterfowls. This is a set of three alloyed keys."

Where Seldom is 'Herd' a Discouraging Word

* When John Golecki told me this story he was thirty-one years old. We were sitting in a café, facing the number fourteen highway in Langenburg. Our table was at the windows, where we could see the grills of the vehicles angled in to the cement sidewalk. Beyond was the grocery store where we worked. While waiting for the narration to begin, I took stock of the other living things in the room:

1,2: in a green vinyl and hardwood booth midway down, Nick Sawchuk, 64, and Sophie Sawchuk, 62, farmers east of town about 5 miles

3: seated at the counter reading a magazine, smoking, Alice Reihl, 24, waitress

4: in a red clay pot on a shelf above the cash, a big, leafy geranium, red-haired stalks and no blooms

5: flies

Then I looked back outside.

- * It was a blinding summer afternoon and a hot wind sifted dust along the roadside. John Golecki sat on a counter-stool, twisting it slightly by moving his ankles, and drank a chocolate milkshake from the metal container. In the August heat his black suit, white shirt and tie looked like insanity. The aging waitress pulled a sly dance-step then stopped abruptly. She laughed and said to him:

"You've got no lines, no gab, no comeback. Are you sure you're a salesman?"

- * And of course, that was the point, exactly. He had not made a sale in six weeks. With every failure, his guts tightened up a little more, his hand attained a new degree of tremble, the timbre of his voice became a touch more wretched. Only the company car was safe. He drove down prairie roads with the air-conditioner set on MAXCOOL and the radio on CKKR "Super Country" broadcast out of Rosetown. When he arrived at his next prospect, shut down the engine and stepped out of the car, the heat and the doom made his ears ring.

* John Golecki was motoring along highway 13 about three miles west of Aneroid. He stopped at a gas-station to use the pay-phone.

"Hi, Veronica, it's me."

"Hi. How are you doing, John?"

"Aw, the shits. You know. I'm falling apart out here."

"Well, why don't you chuck that crummy job and find something around here? I know I've said it before, but..."

"I don't want to quit until I can decide what to do next. How are you and the kids?"

"We're fine. I love you, John."

"I love you, Veronica. And give my love to Joe and Cindy."

"I will."

"Bye."

"Bye."

* It was a hot, windy afternoon. The house was a trapezoidal affair, like in a picture from the coast. It stood on flat land at the brink of a coulee. This was deep and sudden, with no water this time of year, about a mile from

D

edge to edge and the plains continued on the other side as they do.

* John Golecki stood at the door, rehearsing his pitch.

"A very good day to you, sir or madam. My name is John Golecki and I am your NUVOTECH representative. If you have a couple of moments to spare, I would like to tell you about all the ways in which this fantastic, space-age home-device can save you time and money, as well as providing hours of relaxing and stimulating leisure-time entertainment..."

No one came to the door to interrupt him and he faded out of his own accord. He rang the bell again. Then, hearing low conversation at the side of the house, he stepped from the porch and moved carefully along the shrubbery which underlined a large window. Locusts in the yellow grass produced clicks and flutters over the electro-hum of the telecommunication lines on the other side of the road.

* John Golecki had the following thoughts while passing that picture-window:

1. While I am out here on the road selling nothing, Veronica, and Joe and Cindy are perhaps being burned alive by a hireling of our mortgage-crazed, insurance-hungry landlord.

1.1 While I am out here on the road selling nothing, the only good reasons for my biological existence are reduced to ashen dust by the same forces which keep me out here on the road.

2. I should quit this job.

2.1 Yet, in these difficult economic times, I might never find another.

3. If I can't find a job, then my family will suffer all the indignities, trials and dangers of dire poverty.

4. If I don't sell something, I will lose this job.

5. If I lose this job, then go to 3. above.

6. If I do not lose this job, then go to 1. above.

He turned the corner of the house and saw a stained-wood sundeck. There were three deck-chairs: one red, one blue, one green, arranged in a semi-circle around a low table. He picked up the field-glasses from the table and looked out across the depression. A grain elevator had a name on the side which said: MILESTONE. He was starting to get it.

* John Golecki sat on the green deck chair and it collapsed.

* A heavy, glass door slid along firm bearings. A familiar middle-aged woman said, "Out here everyone! Here's a new member." She was on the television; her name was Sally Ladouceur.

"Member of what?" he asked.

"Of our group of friends, of course," she said loudly,

"There are no strangers, only new friends. Make hay while the sun shines. Can I get you a drink? How about rye?"

Someone handed him a glass of whisky, and then a series of introductions were made.

"What game will you play, John? There's backgammon,

checkers, chess, parchesi, dominoes, yahtze and a host of others." Gordon McPherson said. They had entered the large living area of the house. Here was a grid of card tables and chairs; all the people he had met and more were playing board games and thinking of nothing else. The tumbling of dice and sharp little grunts of hoping.

* John Golecki said:

"I have not come to play games but rather to sell them. Your playing pleasure will be increased immeasurably by the possession of a Home-Video Console from NUVOTECH. This sophisticated electronic system has been designed for years of trouble-free service. Each console provides complete control for two players. The range of software packages is staggering, and all combine livid graphics with high-paced action. Of course I am able to carry only a limited selection with me. But see here: we have FREEWAY DEMON and we have LASER SHOOT-OUT. We have ALIEN TRIUMPH and we have SMOKE-FILLED ROOM. We have SCHIZOID REVULSION. We have COSMIC CREATOR. We have MIDNIGHT PHONECALL.

We have WARD OF THE STATE. We have URBAN TERROR.
We have AZTEC SACRIFICE."

"I'll take two dozen consoles and three of every
cassette the company offers. When can I expect
delivery?" said Gordon McPherson.

"W-." said John Golecki.

* At this point in the story, Alice Reihl walked up to the
front of the café, cigarette in one hand and the magazine
folded open in the other.

"I couldn't help overhearing. I've been reading a
piece here which is relevant, I think. May I?"

"Please."

She assumed the stance of a neo-classical orator, one
foot slightly ahead of the other and at a 37 degree angle
to it, her free arm held up and in close to her abdomen,
palm up and fingers curled.

"The life of an individual, or of an organization,
consists of a steady stream of decisions. These vary
in frequency and magnitude from the semi-conscious
decision to blink one's eyelids to major life decisions
on the order of "to be or not to be" (III.i.64)

It may be argued however that the so-called major decisions are in actuality of far lesser import, than decisions which are made with greater frequency.

"For example, such seemingly minor matters as the way in which I, writing at this moment, choose the next character, the next word, the next phrase will ultimately have more of a bearing upon the finished product than the apparently major decision of undertaking to write this article. Tiny choices are the very wharf and whoop of life."

"Do you want more coffee?"

John Golecki sat at the kitchen table and filled out the order in his book. Sally and Gordon watched him closely. He was having trouble adding the figures.

"Gordon and I hope you'll decide to stay and play with us now, John. Surely you can phone that order in to the company." Sally said past her smile. "That's right, John. As a matter of fact, we have a proposition for you. We're looking for someone

to torch this place while we are all in Phoenix this winter. If you accept the job you could join us there later." Gordon poured him another glass of whisky.

Sally leaned into him:

"In times like these, John, a person needs friends. It's the collective spirit which must prevail. We're your friends, John. We like you. We want to help you. Every one of us."

- * John Golecki stood and executed a decision. He pushed his order book across the table.

"The address and phone number of the company are there. These are the keys to the leased vehicle."

"What are you doing, John?" Sally asked.

"I'm walking across that coulee and boarding the next bus. I'm living with my wife and children and I'm working nearby." He called into the other room on his way out: "Have fun, gang."

- * Nick and Sophie have paid their bill. They stop to talk.

"Have you fellas heard about old Athel Grummett?"

Sophie chuckled. "Seems he's pitched his last round of

horseshoes."

"Nope."

Nick continued:

"Yuh. Seems Athel came home last Sairdy night stewed to the gills and started tossing the shoes. Wellsir, he must've been so pie-eyed that he threw one straight up an it come down and hit him on the head, knocked him clean out an he fell into the hog-pen. The hogs got to rootin around and in the morning there weren't nothin left but zippers and buttons.

Hnyarh, hanh."

We all laughed and flies buzzed.

Hexagonal Throughput

The waiter slopped coffee on the counter as he set a mugful to the right of the cutlery.

"You think the symbiotic relationship: man/machine is reversible." "slapping at the octuple perculator with his damp, white tea-towel. "Ain't no time for the niceties of reciprocal dissolution of contractual partnership out there in the frozen voids of hyper-space."

I finish my double-Huskyboy Combo in about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to sit in the row of magenta and tangerine vinyl high-backed stools. On the placemat is printed a chart locating all Husky Hiway House restaurants in Western Canada. I'm wiping Thousand Islands dressing from my mouth and depositing a quarter and a dime under the lip of the plate.

The waiter pulled a pad from the pocket of his red jacket and scribbled out the charges.

"The major damage is that which was inflicted upon your central nervous system that you are so singularly ill-suited for survival in this biosphere." picking at the head of a large boil under his damp, white shirt. "Perhaps your zygote was produced too near a radium-faced alarmclock."

I stand at the cash register for about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to take my purple and brown bills. On a metal plate is engraved the name Burroughs Business Machines Ltd. and an address in the States. I'm opining that nine bucks is a bit extreme for a double cheese-puck, chips and a dinky bowl of shredded lettuce and asking for change, for the cigarette machine.

The cashier scooped the coins from the drawer and spilled them onto the change tray.

"Confronted with the false dialectic of a basic altruism being frustrated by cynical post-structuring of events, your homeostatic drives have somehow found slow chemical poisoning to be a desirable alternative."

scratching at the part in her damp, white hair. "A re-framing of your entire metaphysic is the primary necessity at this point, wouldn't you say?"

I defecate into the toilet for about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to squat in the row of violet and orange stalls. On a backlit plexiglass panel in the cigarette dispenser is a shot of Niagara Falls at night. I'm sliding a dozen quarters and a pair of dimes into the slot under the Queen of the Mists and taking delivery of the square green box of smokes and the red book of matches.

The Busboy flipped a chunk of left-over bacon into his mouth and tossed the plate into a grey plastic tub.

"As your anti-control simplex foregrounds itself, you become aware that the angels won't take you." easing a hooked finger into his damp, white nostril. "The upsurge of fascism has you shitting liquid."

I lean at the window of the parking lot booth for about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to take charge of my beetroot and ocre stub. On the glass in front of my elbow is taped an

autographed photo of Gordie Howe in his Red Wings uniform. I'm folding up a sawbuck and stuffing it into a crack under the glass along with the ticket.

The parking lot attendant rubbed coconut oil on his legs as he lay on the hood of a car at the rear of the lot.

"Yours is the schizo-inhabitation of the codeless fringes toward which the industrial society tends, but cannot allow itself to reach." indicating my person with a wave of his damp, white foot. "If you persist in this refusal to enter and enjoy the patricidal-matriphilic channels of control, you will force us to put you in a box; modular packaging for detachment, containment, and ultimately, consumption and re-encoding."

I idle in the parking-lot for about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to show an interest in my maroon and apricot fifty-seven Chevy Nomad. On the dashboard hangs a cardboard cut in the shape of a stylized coniferous tree and the words AIR FRESHENER have been imprinted on it in block letters. I'm turning on the radio-receiver and tapping my finger on the steering-wheel in time with the major electronic impulses of the

metallic speaker-diaphragm.

The traffic-cop pulled a gun from his blue leather holster and pushed the end of it against my window-side cheekbone.

"You are the machine which is demonstrating an operational defect." slugging my nose a number of times with his damp, white fist. "We await with pleasurable anticipation your sudden social failure; at that time you shall be immediately and totally dismantled."

I throw up on the sidewalk for about a quarter of an hour, during which time no other has come to examine the deoxygenated-blood and stomach-mucous mixture. In the concrete are set the vowels I U and below to the right, a date. I'm buying an Eskimo Pie from a kid pedalling an ice-cream tricycle down Avenue A and applying it to the nickel-sized bruise under my left eye.

Mobile Homes

INTROIT

A grand jetliner hits the tarmac with two screeching bounces and taxis over a field of asphalt to the sparkling terminal. Military personnel on the ground hurry pieces of equipment into position for debarkation. Network camera crews make last-minute checks. The crackling public address system directs the crowds to please stand back.

*

On board the airplane, shortly before landing, the President is struggling into his jump-suit. The left arm was turned partially inside-out when the suit was given to him, and he has put his own left arm into this from the outside,

so that while from the waist down he is on the in-side of the suit, his upper body is attempting to remain on, and indeed envelope itself, in the other side. The presentation of this problem in functional topology has his aides leaping like circus dogs.

'Allow me, Mr. President,' they say. 'Allow me.'

*

The ground-crew are now unrolling the fine, red carpet. Tight-lipped polyplast construction makes it magnificently stain-resistant. It runs one hundred meters from the base of the wheeled steps, and at this far end is positioned an honour-guard of three sharp-shooters (one from each of the 'modes' of the modern-day armed forces: land, sea, air). They are standing at ease, rifles at their sides; they try to remain expressionless before the cameras.

*

The President's suit has been successfully argued into position. He steps back from the clutch of advisors and completes the zipping-up on his own. His chest bears three

concentric rings; the following chart delimits this design.

FIGURE	COLOUR	OUTSIDE DIAM.	INSIDE DIAM.
outer	orange	20 cm	16 cm
middle	yellow	14 cm	10 cm
inner	green	8 cm	0 cm

The centre is located directly in advance of that vital muscular pump which keeps the sanguinous fluid circulating within the President's body. Everyone knows what is going to happen. The President therefore addresses his cabinet.

He wants more than anything to make them laugh. The electric nervousness of the situation is giving him the sweats.

'Well, last one out's a rotten egg, ha ha...Oh, come on there, le Valium, don't look so anxious. There'll be promotions in this for everyone. Food and drinks after, too. Mboto...Rhonda...Yitzak: when the goin' gits tough, the tough git goin'. And somebody remember to feed the goldfish, ha ha. And the simple things in life:

cornroasts, croquet games, suede shoes, cold beer, folding chairs, debentures, toast and apple jelly, rambling lists, porphyry.

'Stiff upper lip there, Nogiru. Kathleen, make every day count in a new way. But most important of all, to thine own selves be true, and lie like sidewalks to the rest.'

The President shakes hands with each of the counsellors and then a low, chromium cart rolls into the cabin on little tracks leading from the galley. Riding it are plenty of coffees in white foam cups, more than enough coffees for everyone.

*

On the runway, the media director is barking into his headset.

Camera One: stick with the overview and don't get fancy on me. Camera Two: stay in tight; I want nosehairs and plague, got it? Camera Three: I hope you're through feeling smug about last night's game. I need a good interactive stuff from you now; give me nice two's and three's

but go easy on the honey-shots; get the commanders giving orders on the ground and the Pres and his support staff atop the stairs like give us a sense of the massive amounts of planning which here and now enter the final executive phase, you know?...Phil?...Tell me about it. Talk about misery, will someone get me some aspirin and orange juice, please? Audio, what's the story with you guys? How are the tests with the choir?...Well maybe you can get them to bunch up a little more...overlap them like fish-scales or something...'

*

'I know I am right. I know I am right. I know I am right. I know I am right.' the President thinks.

*

'Okay, everyone, we're going on the air in two minutes. I don't have to tell you about the enormous historical significance of this production. Each of you knows his or her job to the letter; that's why you were chosen to be here today. The action is totally scripted and we're well rehearsed. There should be no surprises or disruptions. Should anything untoward occur, we will switch away from it as quickly as

possible. Let's all keep on our toes and we'll bring this off just as smooth as shit through a goose.'

*

'...this, the culmination of our space program...'

*

'Final sound-level and lighting check...eighty-nine
...eighty-eight...'

'Testing, testing, "The yellow and green deplaning vehicle,"
testing...'

*

'...blurred across the Indi archipelago, no violation...'

*

'Absolute network hook-up is complete. Every television on the planet will display this broadcast and no other.'

*

'VanBoxmeer is in the last segment of his introduction, sir. We'll wait here a moment or two longer. They'll cue us from below when he's done.'

'Okay. Tell Grierson not to worry. I'll be doing it all just as I did in the last rehearsal.'

*

'...shortage of personal energy...'

*

'...hereditary serial read-out...'

*

'...rented equipment...'

*

'...utter miscalculation.'

*

Error.

EXTROIT

/red/orange/yellow/green/blue/indigo/violet/through/rushing/
 water/spits/reach/for/the/sky/or/you/are/dead/where/you/stand/
 take/a/notion/to/run/give/us/an/excuse/for/end/product/
 meltdown/tumble/heels/over/head/thats/what/they/say/and/
 they/are/right/behind/me/all/the/while/which/is/eternal/

/red/orange/yellow/green/blue/indigo/violent/past/a/dozen/
 revolutionary/spheres/to/quintillion/constant/explosions/
 of/heat/and/light/a/maze/is/me/a/maze/is/you/a/maze/of/
 groupings/and/realignments/for/the/only/unfolding/of/knowledge/
 we/know/as/the/mitotic/miotic/process/whereby/me/and/you/
 make/the/new/

/red/orange/yellow/green/blue/index/over/this/rolling/temporal/
 horizon/momentary/seizures/of/radiance/which/do/not/end/attack/
 sustain/decay/release/attack/and/that/is/the/thoroughness/of/
 mode/whereby/you/and/I/produce/others/

/red/orange/yellow/green/blooming/force/with/convictions/to/
 offer/no/resistance/to/sudden/surges/of/our/own/reaction/
 while/accepting/the/stance/the/strength/of/weakness/making/

the/pull/of/gravity/coincide/with/our/wishes/we/zip/through/
 the/rings/and/execute/the/planned/flyby/with/out/effort/
 and/relatively/untouched/by/tragedy/except/as/it/touches/
 all/every/day/by/definition/

/red/orange/yellow/greed/and/need/and/not/so/urgently/
 rolls/our/vessel/in/the/stream/the/very/splash/of/which/
 cuts/us/to/the/quick/order/of/wheeled/detachment/retinal/
 display/module/forfeiture/of/touch/reinstatement/of/touch/
 molded/interstellar/gaming/no/them/involved/rather/we/
 versus/IT/in/that/we/play/against/and/with/the/game/
 itself/because/half/an/organ/is/no/organ/at/all/costs/are/
 skyrocketing/besides/the/point/of/alternative/stratagems/
 is/to/choose/one/

/red/orange/yes/or/no/and/yes/and/no/or/yes/and/no/or/yes/
 or/no/and/talking/through/this/spare/rigor/to/arrive/at/a/
 hub/of/lucidity/and/fruition/and/we/are/dancing/barefoot/
 on/a/sawtooth/wave/which/never/breaks/in/this/shoreless/
 system/speeds/into/rotund/and/jolly/indifference/with/
 regard/to/end/s/only/to/do/to/do/and/not/to/have/done/
 with/it/

/red/ordered/set/of/referential/frame/the/trap/of/comfort/
is/sprung/on/those/regions/whose/density/is/above/a/certain/
critical/level/and/the/resulting/devolution/to/iron/a/pale/
imitation/of/the/former/state/of/expansion/but/outside/
we/as/happy/are/as/those/tumbling/cubes/with/which/IT/
does/not/play/according/to/rulers/nor/rules/

/replay/pleas/end/wise/instantaneous/terms/of/referee/
decision/and/take/the/only/rational/step/which/is/to/
move/through/to/you/and/dispense/with/our/images/in/a/
way/which/is/pleasing/and/enjoyable/no/more/mystery/no/
more/retention/no/enervating/desire/for/certitude/but/
the/plus/and/minus/of/the/infooop/probe/rippling/over/
mass/energy/space/and/what/the/ghostly/fourth/to/close/
the/net/of/alternate/futures/

DETROIT

Constant but various sounds of the littoral.

Ramona calls from the bathroom: "Jerry, there are two multicolored sails in the bay. One cannot help thinking that they have come for us...and the thought or at least the thinking of it has eased the constipation somewhat. Nail clippers. There are lots to be learned from this situation: only yesterday scribbling large figures in the red cahier; now seem to have discarded up to three major concepts of the overall theory.'

Jerome is flossing his teeth in the hall mirror. The cuffs of his white shirt are up-turned and he snuffles convincingly as he works. He says: "They are ancillary, tangential and terminal, and not major. Is a highly apprehensive tale." He looks at the bottle of yellow stimulant on the side-board, next to a green hairbrush. "Second shelf on the right. Are you able to see the people on board?"

"Not yet." Ramona wipes a small amount of shit from her anus with a wad of blue tissue-paper. She looks at this, then

doubles the wad and wipes again. "When are you going to the hospital?"

"Ten o'clock. For a couple hours and then drive out to get the tickets."

On the wall across from the mirror is a framed photograph of Jerome in a navy dress-suit bearing the insignia of his rank and Ramona in a violet gown with her hair falling beyond her shoulders. Both look slightly remote and the war had just ended.

Ramona sits on the chesterfield and activates the video-system. She has rigged a timer on the control console which is set to advance the channel selector every sixty seconds.

CHANNEL 2:

Registered Nurse Cheryl VanBoxmeer hurls her thermometer at the wall, whereupon it shatters. Quicksilver beads dart from under her white pumps

as she runs tearfully from the ward. Flying around a corner in the hallway, she careers through a crowd of patients on gurneys and in wheeled chairs, rattling and splashing their intravenous bottles and elbowing ambitious crutchers.

CHANNEL 3:

INQUIRER: Ramona Lucent

INFOBANK: Marketflux :: Lineplot

RESPONSE ON STANDBY: 08/06/84 08.15.30 to 17.15.30

E.T.: 02.43.54

RE: Clementine oranges - Jaffa - Montréal

SIMPLEX LINEAR PROGRAM INPUT WITH DECISION
VARIABLES SUPPLIED BY YOU OUTPUTS NEGLIGIBLE
REGION OF FEASIBILITY. COST/EFFECT: HIGH.
ADVISE NEGATE DEAL IF POSSIBLE. ELSE INVESTIGATE
CHANNELS TO WHICH DIVERSION OF BRUNT MAY BE
EFFECTED.

(CHARGE: 2.73 CREDITS)

CHANNEL 4:

"...tell you brothers and sisters that Jesus does not look back. Jesus doesn't care about what time you got to sleep last night or how many drinks you had. Jesus doesn't care if you banged up your new car, destroying that special candy-apple lacquer job you were so proud of. Jesus doesn't care if you stained your new dress. Jesus doesn't care how popular you were at your highschool. He doesn't care about your last dental check-up, or what color you've painted your house.

"No, Jesus does not have concern for any of these circumstances or misfortunes of the past. What Jesus wants to know is what are you prepared to do now, this very morning, to turn your life around, to fill yourself with peace and contentment, to drive gross materialism from your door, and to aid in the continuation of the Lord's work by helping

us carry on this divine ministry through your contributions. This handsome, full-color booklet entitled "Why God Won't Fix Your Parking Tickets" is yours free-of-charge with every contribution of ten credits or more. Herein you will find the answers to such questions as:

'Who made me?'

'Where'd everyone go?'

'What time is it?'

So punch-in your message and credit contribution today, friends, in the name of Him who was, and is, and is to come. Amen."

CHANNEL 5:

"The lesser gheb...is a flat-footed grazer of the grasslands of south-central Africa...Its sole natural predator was the red or yellow bandersnatch... of which species the last known individual was made into a ceremonial hat-and-glove set for Aristotle Onanist, the Greed-shipping magnet.

"The disappearance of the bandersnatch has allowed the gheb population to increase exponentially. Over-population means over-grazing,...and in recent years naturalists have reported observing the animals eating their own bushy tails in order to survive."

CHANNEL 6:

The players sit with their backs to the bandstand facing a bank of colored lights covering the wall at the other end (plywood drilled through every four inches or so, and cheap electrical sockets inserted in the holes: 500 colored light bulbs). The players wear conical party-hats, uniformly colored to match one of the sets of lights. The prizes in the game are quantities of canned and packaged grocery items in those No-Brand white containers with black letters naming the contents: CREAM CORN, or FABRIC SOFTENER, or POTATO CHIPS.

Master of Ceremonies, deadpan and bored:

"Good-day, sophisto-humanoids one and all, haw, today's game is about to commence. Depress your button when you feel the configuration of your chosen color best compliments and/or structurally resonates with the tonal and harmonic movement of the movement. Our computerised electroencephalograph will instantaneously judge the quality of your personal aesthetic vision. It's that simple... it's that thrilling..."

CHANNEL 7:

"No, Charlotte, you can't have the boat and you can't have Randolph. Do you know why? Because I'm going to take them away from you. Yes, me: mousy little Sandra, whom you've beaten and outdone every step of the way through life. I've existed in your shadow long enough. I'm breaking out...It's my turn to win, and I'm going to take it with both hands!"

"Sandra, Sandra, Sandra...I've never been in competition with you. You can have the boat; you can have Randolph. Our friendship means more to me than any material possessions. In the past I always had the greatest concern for your happiness and it's your happiness I'm thinking of at this very moment when I point out that the boat is made for deep-sea cruising and you get seasick staring into a gin-and-seven, and I also submit that Randy is the sort of shallow human being who can see no further than a woman's fleshly exterior and you, my dear, have the figure of a hockey stick and the smile of a player, and what's more, the reason I've triumphed over you since we first hit finishing-school is that you are a snivelling, sneaky, odious, Iago-like creature and are completely undeserving of any humane treatment whatsoever."

CHANNEL 8:

VOICE-OVER: "From beneath the west end of the

Grand Trunk Railway bridge, the University Hospital set high on the east bank of the river, offers the viewer a monument to the noble ideals of medical science, in stark relief against the expansive prairie sky. To the south-west, the incremental arches of the magnificent 25th Street bridge duplicate themselves in the serene waters of the Dice."

The doctor, gowned in cotton, emerges in ecstasy from the operating theatre, clutching in latex-covered hands a bundle of dark blue orchids with which his staff has congratulated him. On the riverbank, flies eat and lay eggs in the eye-sockets and corporeal overtures of undiscovered mutilation-victims. The surgeon strides through the waxy corridors, joyous in the knowledge that his personal record of service to humanity is unparalleled in the municipality. The image wavers and twists as misinformation comes down the line. Now the physician draws himself up, to muster his splayed emotional appendages, snorts and waddles to the news-stand to take a Star-Phoenix

newspaper and a Pie Face candy bar. 'Digital is up twelve and three-eighths, Dome is up nine and three-quarters and tomorrow is my birthday,' he thinks, to himself.

CHANNEL 9:

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

CHANNEL 10:

"taking them in by the gangway is bending under the weight of these antedeluvian barnstormers and our old dad thinks maybe he should have used more pegs per foot and starts to worry about the caulking. So overburdened is he by the sheer logistics of the plan, i.e. food and sleeping arrangements, that he begins to suspect that the entire story is apocryphal and that his character has been written through lunacy, or foolish diversion. Yet it is historical self-consciousness

which keeps him on the job. Certainly he wants his role secure. As for me, it's the breaks, that's all. I go with the flow. Whatever path the prow cuts, it's all going to be the same or similar until we hit that Turkish mountain I don't know what you call it but I saw it in the charts. Then everything's going to be different, that's for sure, because that's after the sign, the signal, the symbol, the token, the covenantal index, the contractual signifier, the icon of the agreement as to its own significance, what I mean is that it means that it has meaning among us, that we agree that this chromatic display has a meaning and therein lies the only meaning it has.

But that's still in the to-come...setting down another load of gopherwood, I spit from the seat of the forklift and hit an extra baboon, which flies at me in a rage, all shrieks and tooth and nail..."

CHANNEL 11:

"Withdrawal is no good; capitalism will expand

to occupy your position. Revolt cannot succeed; hierarchical society feeds upon the energy of rebels. But imagine if every person on earth were to form a corporation, which would only be legal recognition of biological fact. Every one of us become a multinational. I would be hired by my company to manage myself. You would never work for me, nor I for you; instead, our respective companies would exchange goods and services in accordance with simple contractual agreements: a barter system. We would all operate our companies a slice above or at the break-even point, so as to minimize or negate the payment of taxes, while we personally live high on our managerial expense accounts. The government would starve; the military would wither. Hahaha, we would treat our singleton employee to every benefit while the larger institutions could go eat shit with a stick. We wouldn't bother to destroy them. All hierarchical arrangements would simply become useless and collapse like..."

CHANNEL 12:

COMMENTATOR:

"Roy G. Biv allows more than one interview: he is the guiding light and autopsist of the post-avant-garde, in his own view, but he unfailingly allows that there may be other (>1) inter-views:

'I write, compose, score serious polyphonies which are a direct result of my personal musical aesthetic. I want my music to help me pick up girls. This is the profound need which I attempt to communicate musically to every audience. To hell with anti-art, anti-anything. Not rejection, but pan-affirmation, that's the ticket, you see?'

(sings) 'I bin werkin on the hwal-rad: awl
the glib-lunged, eh?'

"Next the great compositor laughs with his mouth open until he drools saliva onto the coffee-table.

"Let me tell you about the fish."

CHANNEL 13:

WORLDWIDE BREAKDOWN

WORLDWIDE BREAKDOWN

WORLDWIDE BREAKDOWN

CHANNEL 2:

A confrontation occurs in the hospital parking lot.

The doctor: "So Jerome, you're not happy with the job I did setting your arm, is that it?"

Jerome: "You got it, doc. Tell you what: it's been three months since the accident. You promised complete healing within six weeks. If my arm is well-healed enough to break your nose, then I'll be satisfied. If not then I'll break your nose with the other arm."

No sooner have the words left his lips than Jerome is slugged from behind and unceremoniously tossed into the backseat of a waiting black sedan.

CHANNEL 3:

FRAME: The Critik's head, which speaks:

"...and the main point I want to make about video is that we have slowly abandoned the old spectrum.

cue - Motown vocal group:

(singing): "God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
Won't be WATER, be FIRE next time."

The Critik:

"Yes, the unknown ginsot who penned the lyric for that number was absolutely correct. 'FIRE NEXT TIME'. Perhaps the fire of a spectacular ninety-three million mile solar flare tonguing this blue/green marbled sphere to a dark and sooty space-

crumb of nothing. Or perhaps the more mundane and tawdry pyrotechnics of the FAILSAFE NUKEFORCE. In any event, to draw a botanical figure, it is the scorching suns of August which cause the plant to dry and wither at the same time as it shoots its seeds into the winter. The abandonment of the spectrum of solar-light as a representational/reproductive palette and the inurement of the young videonauts to the polymer-base colour spectrum of postnuke spacetechnology is one of a wide band of psychocultural alterations prerequisite to the extrusion of petroplastic beanpods loaded with the best goddam gene-carriers money can buy. Namely, us humanoids. It's high time we shook the dust of this bush-league planet and headed for the bright lights of galactic downtown.

"And now, good-day, and thank you for watching."

AUDIO CUT - UP THEME

The critik smiles at someone out of frame left,

and the lipreader gets: "That should-outrage the fucking hayseeds."

CHANNEL 4:

"We interrupt this program to bring you the following. Good-day, I'm Brian VanBoxmeer. Today, World Council President Mahomet Brzinski will leave this mundane sphere to travel as an emissary for all humankind. His mission: to arrange for delivery of a new sign to replace the worn and meaningless band of the visible spectrum. And now we go to Gerald Spiel, at ground level."

"Thanks, Brian. Well, it's a beautiful day here at U Thant Airport and the crowd here is in a festive mood. They've been well entertained by an elephant corps and a group of juggling unicyclists, but there is no doubt that an air of eager anticipation has been building for the President's arrival. Thousands of eyes scan the

sky for the presidential jet and...wait a minute
Brian, there's a surge of excitement here, and I
think...yes, there it is, winging through a
clear sky, on a western approach and it should
touch down in about forty seconds, if our
information is correct."

"Okay, Gerald, that should be just enough..."

CHANNEL 5:

"...time to see this interview with President
Brzinski recorded earlier today aboard the
presidential plane by Xiang Duopeng and his
news-team."

'Mr. President, what will you do upon your
arrival? Do you expect an immediate audience
or do you anticipate a certain amount of
procedural delay?'

'Well, Duo, I imagine IT has been notified of

my journey and that things will be pretty ship-shape out there. Let's just say I don't expect to be cooling my heels in the ante-chamber.'

'Are you afraid, sir?'

'Not in the least. I am highly pleased and humbled by the extraordinary opportunity presented to me here today and I want...'

"We'll have to cut short that interview, I'm afraid, as the world-government airliner is now taxied into position. The deplaning vehicle is being driven up to the side of the plane. This is essentially a motorized staircase that has thirty-eight steps, excluding the top platform. The President will perform a controlled fall over this incline, each foot touching every alternate step once and only once, his left..."

CHANNEL 6:

"...hand on the waist-high railing, the right hand saluting the world via the television cameras, As he reaches the lip of the long carpet, the lines of sight of the three sharp-shooters will converge at a point just millimetres inside the chairman's chest cavity. Departure will be instantaneous.

Now something in the extreme lower-right corner of the screen catches Ramona's eye. It is Jerome, still in uniform, stepping out from the crowd onto the pavement.

A slow motion image of the President, arms in the air and cellophane smile pasted to the face, projects throughout the room, and superimposed upon it are formations of jet-fighters which search the desert for a clue. Dazed from the drugs which the evil doctor has forced into him, Jerome strays onto the narrow carpet just as the President reaches the top step of the flight. In stop-action now, two frames per second, the

President jerks his hands in salutation as the half-crazy military voice on the PA system cries

READY!

Jerome sees neither the President nor the rifles, but stares into the east at the spherical fusion-furnace which stages its entrance there.

CHANNEL 7:

Now the sunrise glow is backgrounded onto the image track, burning a glory into all who have eyes to see, as radiant as, as ebullient as, as artficed as, as preposterous as

AIM!

In the living-room with sound and image, a square-ended punctual moan pierces

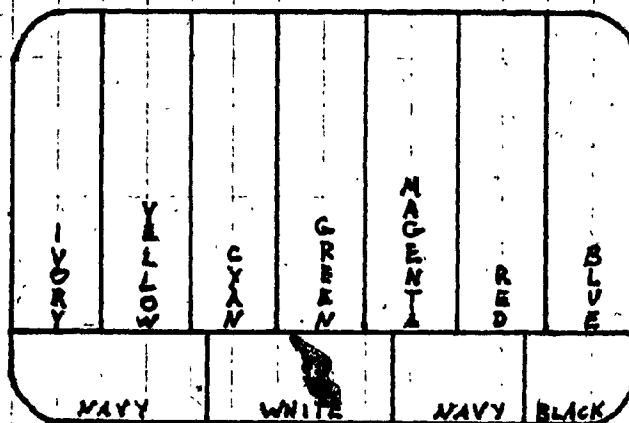
The members of the honor guard, unswerving in the

line of instruction, eyeball their rifles' as one.

Ramona finds her voice and calls: 'Jerome! Hit the deck, Jerome!'

Four walls reflect the slo-mo trigger squeeze, the sudden dismay and defeat on the face of the President, the long, arched dive by Jerome from air, at water, to earth, on

CHANNEL 8:



Tony Chestnut Talking

My wife, Elsie, leans forward and stretches her arm across the aisle of the aircraft to hand over her lecture notes for a critical reading. Here is that which was written on the folded looseleaf;

Discuss: tide cycles -period, What sort of inbred division makes us view the event parenthetically.

-amplitude, as isometric projection of horizon

-referent, and diffusion thereof, parallax shift

-seminole, ie, the survival of the anticode

-ray-bomb, Picture a glistening moonball surface. Let its curvature be the loops of your vitals.

At this juncture in the flight, the pilot turned to me and said, "Bill, why don't you fix yourself a drink? There's a quart of rye in the footlocker behind you and ice in the cooler in the back,"—the steady din of the engine has been surmounted by the threshold of our concentration so that we no longer hear it around our shouts—"and swizzle sticks up here behind the sun-visor. We'll go up and over East Thurlow and then down the passage hard against Quadra."¹

1. here euclidean geometry falters, gasps and grows unmindful of its destination, just as, in spite of the finest rigging as stainless steel and leather, your sister's poliomyelitically-altered bone structure wobbles her down a hallway like a zero-gravity quake-walk, although to beg such an analogy is to step to that linear tune yourself, suckholing for some sort of Association for Crippled Children and Adults secretarial or houseplant response especially when you don't even fucking have a sister.

He was steering with his left hand and reached back with the other to grab at the area between my wife's legs. Elsie reacted by jabbing her right index finger into his eye. He howled like a notice-board, and I swung the fire-axe in a long arc which took out half the controls and left nothing but the strands of his inner bicep holding his right arm to his shoulder. This tool had been honed to a fine edge by someone I knew and I used it now to cut the seal on the Canadian Club. Thinking to lighten the situation with a little humour, I upended the bottle while holding my fingers bunched over the opening and then sprinkled the whisky over the damaged control panel and his hacked-up appendage in a broad parody of a priest administering his blessings²

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2. radiation sickness in a large percentage of First Communicants supports theory that ecclesiasts have on occasion employed gamma ray support system for failsafe dogma backup: direct realignment of infantile mind-wave patterns outperforms and outlasts slap-on-the-cheek method in eight out of ten cases, according to Vatican Nuclear Research Agency Handbook.

through the signifying medium of 'holy water'. Elsie said to the pilot, whose name is Frank, that she hoped he was cognisant of the ideological nature of the struggles occurring within him.

"As the sundry viral entities free-floating in the air of the cockpit enter the newly-created gap in your body," she told him, "there commences an interface of chemically-coded information. Each species participating in the mix is a different code. Each code attempts to rearrange the stored informational material of the others to form likenesses of itself, that is, to transmit its information. Species is ideology. Matter is information is energy. The advantage which you hold, as a complex organism, is the ability to concentrate energy on the production of specialised information structures, true protein-manifestos, which are designed to interlock with the weaker structurings in the code of the other and cause lesion at these susceptible loci. The advantage which the viral type holds, as a complex disorganism, is the randomness of its approach and the resulting defensive localization of your attacks upon its individual nucleic acid molecules, while it

has but to alter a portion of those double-helices which crowd together to form you, and down you go.

"Similarly, when my husband and I are forced to eat pieces of your flesh, we will put it through a number of modification processes; one of these will be to turn your stored amino acid bits into more of our own type of information and thus will our sub-ideology be furthered."

Frank is wearing a blue toupé. He looks at the watch on his left wrist which I noticed, in the hotel-room the day before was 20 minutes fast, doing a double take as the bellman said he was off at nine while setting my suitcase on a low rack beside the desk. In the cone of light beneath the gooseneck reading-lamp the watch lay. When I jocularly mentioned O/T at time and a half, he eyed me as if I were an alien and left the room picking his nose and wiping it on the stripe of his trouser-leg (gold/maroon). Frank was in the shower and did not hear me arrive. I am not now nor have I ever been a homosexual. I opened the closet to reveal the long lines of Elsie's garments. The sealed petri dishes in which are growing the Clostridia which will cause Frank's death by gas gangrene I remove from my brief-case and

examine closely for initial signs of cultural exhaustion. Sunlight glorifies the many horizontal slats of the venetian blinds covering the two large windows in the south wall of the room. I tuck the bacterial societies away to guard against photon overdose or ultraviolet scrambling like you read about. I heard

3. difficult to measure actual physical costs with anything nearing motional precision due to notoriously relaxed standards of west coast dynastic rule: cost-plus contracts on all 'permanent' constructions and intramural real estate transactions with the sole effect of multiplying profit margin: these fuckers will eat their own shit three times over, then sell it to you and me as a delicacy: the provincial ministry will subsidize the whole operation out of our pockets and tell us that the horrible rodent ulcers which develop on our cheeks are the dividends of our own sinfulness as their duly appointed commission can't discover no causal link between our unwitting coprophagy and the fine view of our rear molars offered by the sides of our face.

Elsie fitting a key into the door. She had a tray of drinks which she set on the desk!

"Christ knows how long he can stay in there," she says over the melting sounds from the hexagonal arrangement of glasses. There were two each as it turned out, the plane being a six-seater, red emergency tents which I laid in the shape of an aitch on a logged-off sidehill to catch the eye of our eldest son, Len, who would arrive in the rented helicopter later in the afternoon. He would bring a flame-thrower with which we had intended to set fire to the woods around the wreckage.

Back in Victoria, I am building up beds for the vegetables by laying down frames of two by six planking and filling the inside area with black earth and horse manure and seaweed. Elsie points out to our visitors the damage done to the plumbtrees by swallows in our absence. Our house is a long, low, three-bedroom bungalow which we keep painted a strong sky-blue. Len is washing his yellow Chevrolet in the driveway. We place the western suburban stance between ourselves and what we do not do. Our visitors comment unfailingly upon the neatness of

house and yard. We take news both visual and verbal, both direct and instinctive, from around the globe, on a Phillips Modular Four 28" colour television set. My regrets are none although I bear the scars yet on my ankles. All six drinks shattered under the stress of the gravitational forces which pulled them to the floor. The tray, which remained face-up at all times during the course of the event, contains a slush of watery whisky and glass.⁴ Elsie has a white film-editor's pencil and

4. any atlas will furnish the information which is required: in our stead there lies another; in admitted contradiction is founded the first premise of the next day's discourse: I curl my lip to show my tattoo. It is only to be hoped that each of the five points has been covered to your satisfaction. That this seminar should represent the modes of viral infection mentioned above is an unfortunate side-effect of the attempt to dismantle the circus-tent of psychofictive material.

draws a vertical line on the upper left panel of the closet door. It matches her red hair. The Quadra ferry hoots its departure and Elsie wonders aloud if Len made this sailing or if he got caught in the line-up. I am turning on the tri-light in the corner when Frank comes out of the bathroom eating an open vanilla sandwich, with a silver fork in one hand and the other holding the bluish-china plate. He mouths the tenet that a broken contract is the height of perfidy, and produces from the folds of his robe a Polaroid snap in the midst of its self-processing. He waves it in the air and maintains that it will tell the tale. There are tears in every eye in the audience. Such roving mystery power is. A desk-clerk called to inform us that the refueling had been completed.

"Tony Chestnut talking, it says here," I say. Her glance follows my words to the four bodily parts indicated. The hum of the working airfoil takes the wind out of our communications. Frank, just out of the service, retains assorted militarisms in his everyday speech.

Job Search

I walked off the plane from Slave Lake and headed straight for the beer parlour of the Edmonton Inn, which is across the road from the Municipal Airport. Inside I ordered six draught and a triple rye. Wiping my mouth and belching with satisfaction, I selected a pool cue and started in busting up the place. The lights over the tables shattered in a way that was exhilarating. The cue scythed through a pyramid of inverted draught glasses on the bar, and just as neatly shattered the collar-bone of the one bouncer who sought to arrest me. The other employees cowered in the keg-room and did not come out until after I had left.

The sporting-goods-store owner was a fat guy in a golf shirt with tattoos on his forearms and a surly manner. I stood at the glass counter turning the .357 Magnum over, feeling its weight.

"Well, you gonna take it or not?" he said, "I ain't got all day."

"Got any ammo for it?" I asked and he grunted and handed over a box of cartridges. I put a bullet in the chamber ahead of the hammer and shot him in the head. BLAM! He dropped on the floor and kicked around while I reached under the glass and took 10 or 12 boxes of ammunition for my gun.

I went into the Whyte Avenue Dry Cleaners and asked the woman for my suit which I had left there twenty-two days before.

"Do you have your blue claim ticket?" she asked.

I knew I had lost it. I said,

"No, I never got one, honest, I didn't. No one gave me one." I was a little embarrassed and I shot her in the solar plexus and she fell back into the circular clothes rack.

I turned the corner just in time to catch, about a quarter of the way down the block, an Irish Setter taking a shit, exactly where I was going to walk. I fired at it several times and I think it was the third shot which caught the big mutt just behind the right foreleg and spun it around into the path of the oncoming traffic.

I stood at the top of the UP escalator on the second floor of Eaton's department store. There were large crowds of Saturday shoppers. I shot each person in the heart as they got to the top of the escalator. They were piling up all around me and I was getting a headache from the blasts. The gun-metal was heating with the steady firing, I burnt my fingers while reloading. I wanted to desert my post but the shoppers kept coming.

L'Ecole des Soupes

There is a porcelain tureen overturned at the intersection of de la Montagne and Notre Dame. It is representative of the final scraps and oddiments, the surviving evidence of the school of the Maestro. The grand neon sign has been shattered by pellet guns and stripped of its transformers by collectors. The massive cauldrons have been trucked away to other cities. The startling end of M. Carné's lifework capped a series of events which I propose to examine herein, testing for avoidability and reversibility, specifically.

'Part and parcel' as we used to say. That's the way it's going to be; a demonstration of step-by-step abandonment of the Plan. To be frank, incensed and myriagonal... this was the ergotic state into which Hélène has released herself since the destruction of the School. The dark and extended chance-medley of that downfall led many ex-

students into stochastic realms from which they have yet to exit. For my part, I playfully and loosely jet these phrasings to you, that singleton set which houses the recipient (not without wondering (with some enjoyment, it must be admitted) what sorts of derangements the intervening psychoid entities will work upon the message before it arrives at the terminus posited in your postocular parts, the Yard of the Brain, according to Snape's Anatomy).

The initial weeks of the course were exciting. In the History seminars, we studied the Deiphosophists, and Apicius' De Re Coquinaria; we argued their mutual debt to Archestratus. We revelled in the violent recording of medieval cookery.

Take conies and hew them to gobbets; seeth them in grease in a coffyn of two ynch depe. Do thereto creme of cows mylke, sugar, safron, and salt. Medle it ifere. Take chickens and ram them together, boyle them broken...

We researched the diachronics of the recipes of Guillaume Tirel and Bartolomeo de' Sacchi, and their respective effects upon Renaissance Soupification.

There were those who, in our Theory seminars, held that the elements of soupification, and indeed the soupifying process itself, must be subordinate to some fixed function,

preferably linear, which would necessarily define and delimit the output decoction. "What a load of codswallop!" others cried. "The soup is its own function, undetermined and autoaromatizing." That was to say, the soup has the flavour of its taste, is flavoured by its flavour and flavours its flavour in turn, and those who made this kind of statement also claimed that the very 'self-evident' nature of the statements made them that much more 'important.'

But it was the problem of the rarefaction of the broth which proved hairiest. In the long periods of darkness and rest during which the dormitory hallways became olfactory channels for the exchange of experimental information, aromas of calf's-foot jelly and soup-maigre would vie for ascendancy in the dreams of the exhausted soupers. H el ene liked to recall the night on which a mixed mollusk bisque was energetically marching across the frontiers of the hypnogogic states of the pan-supine nodniks. Interdisciplinary synods began to issue statements calling for broad retaliatory measures. The infiltration of anarchic odors from the chaotic provinces of dreamland had even these august and libertarian bodies chattering about 'directed energies' and 'user-friendly totalitarianism'. It was in the heat of this contest that H el ene awoke and decided to go spying at keyholes.

She slid her legs from under the bed-clothes and sat up. A sanguinous breeze was blowing from the abattoir near the river. She rubbed her breasts to erect the nipples thereof; she pulled a long nightgown over her head and shimmered into the hall.

CUSTOMER: "I'd say: 'Just a moment. What's this fly doing in my soup?'"

WAITER: "I'd say: 'It looks like the backstroke.'"

Hélène bends her eye to the door of room 213. Inside are snores and the light of a radio dial. Room 214: all is blackness. In room 215 she sees Walter and Claudette, two of the more impetuous of our group. Claudette has encouraged Walter to tie her up. Her hands are bound to a hook set in the wall above the window. From her out-stretched ankles, ropes lead to the head-rails of the room's two beds; she is held, framed, facing the outside.

Claudette chokes out, in a libidinous whisper: "Now whip me with your razor cord, you fucking lame-brain." Walter doubles the power-cable from his Philishave and slices at her arse with all his might. She utters no sound. Another swipe.

WAITER: "How much more skin do you want removed?"

CUSTOMER: "How much is left?"

Claudette begins to moan and Walter drips with the weather.

VIDEOTAPE B: The Campton Soup Factory

A system of trolley track crazed the ceiling. On this ran iron hooks bearing carcasses bound for the broth vats below. Woolly buffalo, baron of beef, enormous white slabs of beluga from Hudson's Bay pended and slid, and bent the hooks with their weight. Five-ton chainfalls lowered the meats into the simmering base-pools. Workers cursed and sweated and struggled with the twisting lines. Overhead, on a grated deck, mountains of carrots and peas, and wet hillocks of parsley, were strip-mined by growling scoop-shovels that failed and bucked under the load. Carpenters mauled heavy timbers into place to shore up the groaning potato bins. Water and steam hissed from poorly-packed valves throughout the plant and the old belt-driven peelers clanked and rattled out their misery.

Superintendent: "This plant was built in 1925 at a cost,

of one and a half million dollars. Here we still use the original Campton's recipes, for the good, honest, home-made taste and nutrition that our families have relied on for over sixty years. At Campton's...we believe that... you don't mess around...with a good thing.

up jingle:

Campton's Soups are hearty fare,
 Doo-dah, doo-dah,
 Campton's Soups sold everywhere,
 Oh doo-dah-day.
 See your family's smiles,
 When they hear you say:
 "Hey, gang! I've made Campton's Soup!"
 Serve it every day!

Now a conflict which was stewing below the surface-crust of our society of potageurs began to convect with alarming force. It was brought to a head in the colloquium on Substitution and Nomination In and Of the Recipe.

Here's a debate extract:

- the soup exists to reproduce in the taster the same 'recipe', the knowledge of flavour and odor, which the soupificator drew upon

in the articulation of it.

- nay, the soup is a flavour-inscribed artifact of its performance.

(def'n: the performance is: the thing wherein we'll catch the con-science of the one who sups.)

An Aspician from Winnipeg stood and, stepping outside the argument, declared that for his part he could see no qualitative material difference in commerciality between being a producer of bouillabaise for the King of Oude, or Manager of Spicing for Lipbell's.

"Our's is the business of synthesis," he continued. "We assemble diverse elements with the goal of outputting a product. This product is intended for, and is indeed an entailment of the existence of, a consumer. We predict this consumption when we inscribe our recipes and the assumption of its occurrence necessitates and, yes, justifies our production."

This left M. Carné and his faculty blustering with rage.

VIDEOTAPE A: The Horyuji Souppel Installation

At dawn a thousand employees are arranged in the asphalt

yard outside the main building. They wear blue coveralls. Projected from loudspeakers on the roof, a digitized vocoder-tape directs them in calisthenics. Thirty times, they stretch their arms over their heads and touch their toes. Thirty times, they lie on their backs and sit up. Thirty times, they lie on their stomachs and arch their backs. Thirty times, they push themselves up from the ground and sink down again. They run on the spot for five hundred paces, pausing every seventy-five to do twenty deep knee-bends. This done, they shout in one voice: YUH! and move file by blue file into the golden glass box.

Inside, all is stainless steel and clear plastic tubing. Measured bits of liquid, separated by slugs of air, race through the tubing in all directions. The color of the flow in a particular tube may change abruptly, then just as suddenly revert or change to a third. The plant is totally robotic. Modular redundancy of design allows the employees to be constantly repairing, maintaining and expanding the processing systems. They work with circuit charts and boards, soldering guns and screwdrivers, speaking in low tones over the quiet hum of electrical phasing and the smooth whisper of plastic hydraulics.

Researcher: "We are working on an electrolytic colloidal broth which will gel into a mass of circuitry. This molecular network will be capable of transferring electronic impulses in a manner directly analogous to the process in living nerve cells, and will thus form the basis for quasi-organic intelligent machines.

Imagine pouring a packet of green and yellow powder into a jar of water and two hours later opening the refrigerator to remove a hundred kilobytes of random-access memory." super LOGO and motto:

HORYUJI SOUPGELS

"Putting an end to World Hunger ...Every Day."

"I was sitting at the table in my room, listening to the late movie and preparing to crank it up. I tried to unwrap it carefully, over the bowl of the spoon, but my arms jerked reflexively and the cube tumbled into the darkness over by the door. On hands and knees, I searched the corners around the chest-of-drawers and the filing cabinet. Motionless, I sniffed. The smell of the OXO was there alright, commingled with another as delectable as it was unknown. Extrapolating on the aromatic curves, I found the block of concentrate easily enough and yes, there was no mistaking it,

the Other was definitely entering the room via the keyhole. I leapt up and flung the door open in one smooth and uninterrupted move.

"In the act of replicating my leap from the floor was a woman in a nightgown, a fellow student.

'Will you join me?' I said. 'I was about to slam a couple mils of bouillon.'

'Delighted,' she said.

"While I prepared the needle, she told me her name and talked about her soup and how she had enjoyed assembling the collection of vials for the admissions portfolio. But now she had doubts.

'Humorless and grim, isn't it?' I said.

'I'm bored.' she said.

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity," I said.

'Yeats,' I said. I explained that increasingly I saw the indiscriminate accumulation of knowledge of ingredients and procedures as a pointless endeavor. Each new method added to my repertoire factorially increased the probability of my choosing and employing an invalid one in a given situation. My memory-banks felt so full of information, ninety-five percent of which would be, by definition, unsuited

to the attainment of a particular goal, that the projected image of any goal was murky, inchoate, unintelligible.

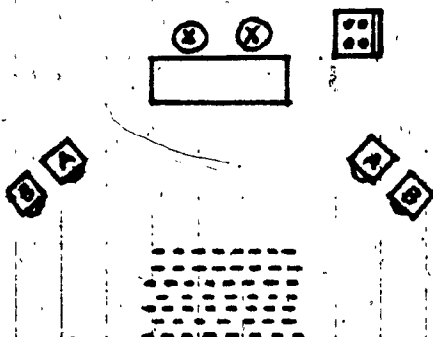
Hélène nodded throughout and, when I'd finished, proclaimed this a virtual reflection of her thoughts.

"We proposed a collaboration, a piece based upon stratagems of guesswork, ornery and stubborn contrariness, and gratuitous juxtaposition. Then we made love in an illusionless frenzy, on the edge of the bed, all four feet on the ground."

CUSTOMER: "I'd say: 'Excuse me, but there's a tangled mat of hair in my soup.'"

WAITER: "I'd say: 'Just a moment, sir. I'll get you a comb.'"

Hélène and I produced a series of devolved, post-fiasco renderings of which an example here follows. The piece consisted of the performance of a potage concurrent with the continuous display of two $\frac{1}{2}$ " color videotapes, designated A and B, previously shot and edited. The video monitors were four and the set-up looked like this:



PROGRAM POLYPLASTOID CARCINO-BORSCH

DATA 1 litre processed cheese spread

DATA 2 375 millilitre cans luncheon meat

DATA 400 grams purple drink crystals

DATA 1 aerosol can edible-oil whipped topping

DATA 25-30 maraschino cherries

DATA 500 millilitres chocolate-coloured and
-flavored, puffed breakfast food.

DATA 1 slab, 2x25x100 cm, styrofoam (or
two dozen 'to go' coffee-cups)

DATA 666 millilitres industrial floor polish

DATA 999 millilitres Montréal tapwater

DATA 333 millilitres unleaded gasoline

DATA 0.9 grams monosodium glutamate

DATA 0.8 grams diethyl pyrocarbonate
DATA 0.7 grams dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate
DATA 0.6 grams butylated hydroxytoluene
DATA 0.5 grams dilauryl thiodipropionate
DATA 0.4 grams propyl gallate
DATA 0.3 grams ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid
DATA 0.2 grams disodium inosinate
DATA 0.1 grams sodium nitrite

GET floor-polish and cheese-spread

BLEND in large pot

HEAT

GET luncheon meat

CUT into 6 cm cubes

GET styrofoam, chopped to similar size

ADD to simmering mixture

GET tapwater and gasoline in secondary pot

PUT cherries and purple powder

STIR vigorously

ADD chemical slowly

TOP with topping

COMBINE MIXTURES IN PLEXIGLASS CAULDRON.

TRY TO IGNORE SMELL.

NOT TO BE TAKEN INTERNALLY.
IF ACCIDENTLY INGESTED DO NOT INDUCE
VOMITING. CALL PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY.

This soup was performed at the Alternative Kitchen on Wooster Street in NYC. Afterwards, we put it up in quart jars and sold it as artifact to museums and private collectors. We used the money to reduce the interest charges on our debts.

CUSTOMER: "I'd say: 'This soup tastes like piss. Bring me another scotch.'"

WAITER: "I'd say: 'I'll show you back to your table, sir, but I don't think you should have any more to drink.'"

In our second month at the school, we refined tea leaves to shining white crystals of caffeine. Unfortunately we had no system of importing coca leaves, for the existence of an auxiliary apparatus for the generation of funds might have forestalled or averted the untimely end of the academy

A HUNDRED HORSES AND A HUNDRED MEN
COULDN'T PUT CARNE TOGETHER AGAIN.

Well, that's what an anonymous graffitist wrote on the wall of the main kitchen. It was early in our last term that the Maestro began his final project.

Abandoning his work on the Three Great Challenges of Soupdom (3. the compilation of a complete and consistent list of ingredients, 2. the revamping of reciprocal notation to accommodate the Modern stance in relation to savour movement and circumvention of linear progression, 1. the definition of the stock as a factor of its own rendering.) M. Carné took to playing the ocarina among the stoves in a dismal and savage manner. As if realizing that his time was short, he read cookbooks voraciously, at times ripping the pages in his haste. He began to wander the corridors, and even the streets, of and about the school, posing problems and asking of each and everyone their opinion. He wept openly when he sliced onions.

Eggs have been used as soup-thickeners for centuries and in the latter years of his life M. Carné had specialised in cream soups, eggolk bisques and veloutés. His fascination with the ovine ovum grew into a complex which the less-forgiving among his associates labeled obsessive. He began to drop phrases such as 'winds of change' and 'breaching the walls between sectors of knowledge' and 'untying the tubes'

of the zeitgeist. There were some to whom it came as no surprise when the Montréal Police phoned the school one night to say that they had found the Maestro kneeling in the Sauvé Station of the Metro and applying a tiny respirator to a plucked and lifeless chicken.

"Arise, I tell you, and embark upon the journey which awaits you, oh folded, naked and afraid. Weld your destiny to the rotund vehicle which shoots into the darkness with a 'plop!' Like a mock sea-turtle digging hind-leggedly into the beach of some uncharted Caribee sandspit, take up your blind, instinctive task without regrets or forethought and know that history binds you, as I say, only to the future," is what he was reported to have said.

The culmination of this unhappy and trying period was the publication in a most prestigious journal (no doubt against all good sense and judgment of the editorial board and only in deference to the magnitude of M. Carné's reputation) of a paper which caused waves of shock that are rippling yet through the World of Soup.

Therein, by long and tortuous argumentation, citing the work of Mandelbrot and others on fractals and his own

research into the bubble-structure of whipped whites and beaten yolks, M. Carné sought to prove the thesis that a soufflé was in fact nothing but a baked and inflated egg-soup, and therefore lay properly within the realm of Soupology.

Reaction to this claim was world-wide and immediate. The President of France announced that M. Carné was to be stripped of the Legion of Honor. The Nobel Committee asked for their money back. The Times printed limericks devoted to the matter.

As we all know, there is a saying which repeats, in a picturesque and pungently metaphoric/analogic way, the dictum that an overload of information or opinion or both will impede, hamper, obstruct, restrict and otherwise delay the activation of the plan and will damage, impair, mar, injure, vitiate and ruin the product thereof. What else can I tell you? To the truth of this I cannot attest. The case of M. Carné would seem to offer a counter-example. Or does it?

In late June the game that M. Carné played with the loan sharks entered its final stanza. The students had left

for their summer jobs in hotels and dinner-clubs across the country. Staff members were beginning the lieisurely seasonal clean-up. The Maestro was joking with a group of them in the kitchen when four 'collectors' appeared from the classroom wing. They drew guns and herded all present into the big still-room behind the rack of aspic molds. They locked the door with a twist of copper-wire. The walls of the walk-in cooler were so thick as to stop all sound from within. Two of the men then ingeniously fashioned from available tubes and fittings a system which filled the pair of immense double-boilers with gas from the stoves. The boilers were turned on 'high' and twenty minutes later an explosion shook lower Montréal and left a rubble-rimmed crater where L'Ecole des Soupes had been.

The surrounding streets and roofs were splattered
with:

Tomato bouillon

Onion Soup

Onion velouté

Minestrone

Asparagus, cream of

New England clam chowder

Yellowbean soup

Chicken gumbo

Oxtail soup

Oyster stew

Kreplach soup

Shrimp bisque

Finally, I am left with this slogan

No more master (piece)s ---- Develop necessary
mundane solutions.

Biographical Notes

Hélène Lepoivre was born in Moncton, New Brunswick. She was raised in a large family in which traditional cuisine was a major concern and in which recipes and private cookbooks were passed as symbols of personal blessing or, equally, withheld as censure. "If Tante Josette refused you her recipe for baking-soda biscuits, you were in disgrace and had to try immediately to 'make amends.'" She holds an M.F.C. from L'Ecole de Haute Cuisine in Paris and had published many articles on the behavior of spices in solution. She is head of a research team at LiquiPro Laboratories in Port Credit, Ontario.

Pierre deSel grew up in Smooth Rock Falls, in Northern Ontario. He writes: "My parents were killed in a car crash when I was 17. They were driving along the Number Eleven in their brand new Ford when the steering wheel broke free of its column. They hit a blasted-out rockface and were smashed to a pulp. But we all know Ford's opinion of his story. Having no living relatives, during the ensuing litigation I had to learn to cook

for myself. I discovered soup as an economical method of maximally utilizing leftover foodstuffs." Mr. deSel obtained a Ph.D. from the University of Alberta with a dissertation entitled "General Systems and Convective Distribution of Nutrients in a Real-Time Constructed Probiotic Broth." He is on leave from the University of Toronto and holds a Research Fellowship from the National Food Board, operated under the auspices of the Minister of Organic Input, of the Government of Canada.

Molecular-Clock-Evaluation

The nightwatchmen know that they may quit their jobs at any time.

"If these next three minutes go alright," they tell themselves, "then we'll stay for another three."

In this way they work through a long string of triadic clusters of minutes which have gone well.

ESCHAR

After killing her dog in a horrifying manner, the woman went to Chicago. In the kitchen the hot water tap honks like Anthony Braxton. She sits before the television receiver and its radiant light tints her face a fond green. At the supermarket she inquires as to the location of the large tins of orange juice offered at the special price of two for one dollar in an advertisement aired during the local news the previous evening. The grocer is a likeable sort despite the fact that his ears, nose, eyelids and lips have been amputated during the uprising at Brazzaville in nineteen sixty-four. He snuffles and gestures at her in such a way as to convey the information that the bargain juice may be found at the end of the next aisle. In the parking lot she counts one tall light-standard every six yellow-lined parking spaces.

The doorlocks of her car have frozen in the sub-zero weather. She opens the trunk and then smashes the right rear window with the tire iron.

She turns off the reading-lamp and walks to the phone. She sits and loads a couple cc's of Demerol. Her call is incomplete, but informative.

2. Then her mother came to stay with her. She has a full set of canary-yellow Samsonite luggage. Three days later, a large pot of rendering suet explodes on the stove. Soon the curtains and the cupboards are ablaze. They go to the neighbours' and call the fire department, who arrive in a red truck. Dressed in black rubber coats, they pull hoses across the front lawn and say instructions to themselves. One of them drives her and her mother to a Holiday Inn.

Do you know how the fire started?

In which room of the house did it begin?

Where were you at the approximate time of ignition? And your mother?

How were you made aware of the blaze? The smell of smoke?

Or the crackle of the flames as they chewed into the painted wood? To what value is your home insured?

Do either of you smoke? Were you smoking at the time of the fire?

By what method is your home heated?

Were there smoke alarms in the house? What make?

How did you contact The Department: telephone, call-box or other?

She orders a chicken sandwich and a grapefruit. She says 'Good-bye' to the room-service captain and hangs up.

3. In the lounge downstairs was playing a funky quartet. The pianist uses the Bill Evans voicings that she likes best. Now the malocclusion approaches, the particular event in this nest of burdensome arrays. The combo exhausts its set and rapidly intersects the bar. The tinkling of ice gets huge around her and she's re-crossing her legs as you enter the room (a victim of that bifurcative tendency colleagues call 'greco-romantic'), under your left arm a copy of Scientific American featuring the Rubik/Ishige cube on the cover.

The two of you had a nice chat: you told her about your work at Hewlett-Packard :: she told you about when she'd slaughtered her pets (the apartment had been awash with blood) :: you told her about the realities of Silicon Valley being the distillate of the dreams of people everywhere else :: she told you that happy valleys would have to remain outside the universe of discourse :: you told her she could come there with you :: she told you to piss up a rope.

A broad blue band of directed fluid arcs over the prairie. Towards the horizon it pulls an exaggerated s-curve, ambling off to the left, maybe improvising a couple of elegant sub-routines, nodding this way, laughing that.

Honing the fit on the abrasive pad of a matchbook will expedite the puncture of the vascular walls. For a precise entry-path, always pull back and attend the black-red flag. Iatrogenic attraction, ante-gravity, prudent departure.

She drops to the floor of her room and listens. Under the bureau the blood-stains of a preceding guest are caked on the rug. The radio is set to the All-Nite Jazz channel. Lennie Tristano wrings melody from both hands. A forgotten sock is balled-up near the baseboard. Employing a sharp edge of grapefruit rind, she attempts to remove the fibrous birdmeat from between her teeth. Her mother calls 'Good-night' through the adjoining door and the line beneath it is extinguished.

4. On the other side of the palm-lined avenue a speechless woman and a dog moved conscientiously around writhing humanoids in the throes of morpheme withdrawal. The supraphonetic character string which couples them catches occasionally on the out-thrust boot of a supine miscreant, snags more often on semantic hooks set in the concrete of the way, or siwashes completely about a streetsign or hydrant, leaving the two grappling in the bight. Phantasies of interspecific coition are here mentioned only to be utterly dispelled as harbingers of a theory incapable of refutation. The bougainvilleas readily bloom.

Ligature and Competition

ONE

And that was fine with all concerned. Alice and Joe trotted out to their favourite grove by the river and had a pick-nick luncheon for the remainder of their lives. Newhouse continued to receive medication to control his chronic, acute urticaria. For her part, this agreement signalled the end of a period of high excitement and extreme libidinal urgings; the economy-size jar of petrolatum on the shelf in the bathroom ceased to exert the active control of former days. She embarked upon a chain of sun-lit practice sessions, notable for their deterministic framework and for their imperturbable calm.

ONE

Even now, Herr und Frau von Schwartz-Weiss are rapping at the portals.

Priscilla says: "Do not let them in until I have re-ordered the throw rugs. These corduroy cushions must be fluffed and turned. Put out the cats and call off the dogs. Here, Annie, not like that. Place each one in its own crystalline vessel. I'll position the tableware so as to hide these cranberry stains."

The new doorbell works through a line of connected mechanical elements: the visitor pulls down a lever next to the door; this action moves a piston which forces water through a copper tube that runs in the interior of the wall dividing the entry from the library; a smaller piston at the end of the tube transmits the impulse to a cam on the axle of a toothed wheel which is set in an escapement relationship with a long pallet; the latter emerges from a slot in the kitchen wall and through a triangle which hangs from the ceiling; the movement of the pallet cause the chime to sound.

The visitors are in the foyer talking in low tones and noting the value of the artworks in the hall and the stairwell. They wear flowers pinned to their lapels. They make cutting movements with their hands.

Annie says: "Come this way, honoured guests. Madame will join us in the parlour. Will you take beer and ginger-snaps?...It is only the pipes vibrating under pressure from their contents. Don't be alarmed. Here's an aerosol deodorant."

TWO

"Come on, you fucking lazy bastards, get those ties up here!" The operator leapt from his seat atop the side-boom cat and screamed further encouragement at the labourers lugging the railway ties to make a cradle for the free end of the pipeling. When this was done, he moved his machine in such a way as to bring the loose joint of pipe dangling from its boom into line with the rest. The stabber took hold of the joint and pushed it into the pipe-clamp on the end of the line. The welder lowered his hood and struck his stinger on the clamp to rev his machine. Then he began spot-welding the joint. When he had tacked the two sections in four places, the clamp was removed and he proceeded to fill the bevel with weld. He stepped back at intervals to allow his helper to remove the flux with a wire-brush disc on the grinder. When the weld was complete, the cat operator set the joint down on the cradle and his swamper cut loose the boom-clamps. They moved back up the right-of-way to pick up another joint from the pile and bring it to the head of the line. Meanwhile, a labourer slid the shrink-sleeve from the second-to-last joint up over the weld and shrank it tight with a propane torch. The stabber put the sleeve for the next weld over his end of the last joint. The labourers brought more ties to build the

cradle for the next joint.

THREE

Once upon a time there were three sisters. I was the middle one. That means less than one might think. When we were leaving Hungary our mother told us that we had been given beauty for one purpose: to marry wealth. An attractive woman of un-moneyed origin owes it to her blood-line to fulfill this purpose without flinching, she said. From an elevated position she may be of great service to other members of the family, who are perhaps less than visually amazing and not outstandingly personable. Two weeks later, the airplane that was to take up from Paris to New York was hijacked by a cell of Western Canadian separatists.

We had never heard of Calgary before then. My sister whispered to me that it must be much akin to our homeland, except founded by Cals rather than Huns. We were intrigued by these three smiling men. They wore what I recognized from the cinema to be cowboy boots and their double-knit suits featured curved pocket slits embroidered with pointy arrowheads at both ends and a design like a yoke across the shoulders, front and back. They had a gregarious manner of behaviour, like Lada salesmen.

One of them cleared his throat on the P.A. system and

said: "Okay, everyone, now don't get yer tails in a knot. Just relax and yer gonna wind up a lot better off than you were yesterday. I have to ask you all to kindly take off yer boots and toss 'em into the centre aisle." There followed a lot of mumbling and thuds as the passengers complied with this request. "Okay, now remove yer socks, too. Don't be ashamed if your feet're a little dirty, we all know what Europe's like, don't we?"

They had radioed the authorities that if their demands were not met they would clip everyone's toe-nails too short. We stood up to remove our fresh-from-the-package French pantyhose, but one of the sky-jackers saw us and said: "Not you ladies. If worst comes to worst we'll just snip little holes in yer cute little toes...them toes're cuter'n a bug's ear. Where you from ladies?...Hungry? Hell, I'm always hungry! Hah! I eat steaks three times a day and I still hafta carry raw eggs in my pockets fer snackin'. Haw!...Well I'd like ta stand here'n shoot the breeze with you ladies for the rest o' the week but we're gonna be hammer-and-tongin' it fer a while on these demands I figure. Don't worry about this feet thing; it's just a media show. Yer all invited back to the Petroleum Club tonight fer a barbecue, after which there'll be dancin' and the best three words in any language,

an open bar."

The plane was refueled in Buffalo. We never heard the demands exactly but they had something to do with crow's nests and professional ice-hockey. A compromise was reached with the government and we arrived in Calgary to a hero's welcome and a toilet-paper parade.

And that is how the three Robag sisters wound up in the oil patch. It was difficult to adjust at first. People vomit on the sidewalk at any time of day. They hit each other in the face with cheeseburgers. If you leave your car doors unlocked while driving downtown, someone will jump in and begin explaining the rules of racquet-ball. The mayor never misses an opportunity to exhibit his talent for making fart-noises with a hand in his armpit. We thought no one would ever stop snorting cocaine long enough to learn to pronounce our names properly. Our uncles were astounded by the construction techniques: as the interior-finishers complete the last floors of a new building, the demolition crews are working on the first.

But now there are over one hundred and fifty Robags here. We have just had the initial practices of the family symphony orchestra. We are still not totally accepted, but every day I thank Christ we're not Maritimers.

FIVE

The foot bone's connected to the ankle bone.

The ankle bone's connected to the shin bone.

The shin bone's connected to the knee bone.

The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone.

The thigh bone's connected to the hip bone.

The hip bone's connected to the tale bone.

The tale bone's connected to the back bone.

The back bone's connected to the neck bone.

The neck bone's connected to the head bone.

The head bone's connected to the foot bone.

EIGHT

The most important single stratagem in a pinball player's repertoire is the forward bumping of the machine which keeps the ball from exiting down the gaping side-lanes. The movement of the machine must be, in the main, along its gradient axis but with just enough lateral momentum to cause the ball to carom off the bulwarks of the entrance to the out-channel and thus remain on the field of play. Too much lateral motion results in a TILT; not enough loses the ball.

THIRTEEN

he opened the car door and got out / she met him at the porch / they began to undo each other's clothes in the living-room / by the time they made it to the kitchen both were naked / but for shoes and pants crumpled around their ankles / the radio played country music and the digital clock read 13:13 / he lay on his back on the table and moaned as she smeared his penis with petroleum jelly / the television set was telling how to prepare atlantic eel / she leaped onto the table straddling his body and pulled his penis perpendicular / he pinched her nipples to make them stand / the daily paper arced over the lawn and landed on the front steps / she lowered her pelvis so that his penis entered her vagina at the kind of angle they both liked best / he tightened his buttocks muscles to meet her halfway / she grabbed the handles on the china cabinet and began to move up and down / he did, too / someone in the next yard started up a gas-powered roto-tiller / they slammed their faces together and licked sloppily / the telephone began to ring / he knotted his hands behind her back and stood while she clutched him with her thighs / he walked to the cupboards and set her on the counter's edge / she raked her nails across his back / he

held her rear and began a quick-paced thrusting / the
alarm on the oven-timer started buzzing, announcing that
the rhubarb pie was ready / she emitted a choked cry/ the
telephone rang with awesome persistence / she took double-
handfuls of his hair and rammed her tongue in his mouth /
he lifted the tap-lever, pulled out the rinse-nozzle from
the sink and sprayed cold water on their adjacent crotches /
a bill-collector at the front door leaned on the bell
and hammered on the glass / with her teeth she drew blood
from his earlobe / he tore a curtain from the rod and
draped it over her shoulders / they fell on the floor
together and did not move

TWENTY-ONE

Inguinal Discussion Period

-topic: CHILDREN FOR THE InSane

-should the mentally-infirm, schizo-
rupted or/and the conceptually-enraged
multiply in the usual manner? as do
the normal and unbowed?

M: Should we be continued? Are we deserving? is what we
must ask.

F: Frotting packaged cakes in timely and copacetic rental
units. Bad brain juice but barbecue in the backyard
lawn-chairs red sauce stop the neighbours putting pungie
sticks in the swimming pool and ratbane in our fridge.

M: Photocopied zygotes are for re-make artists like Dino
Delaurentis. An original re-product will be a loony little
dido-cutter like his dad and to dandle on the knee.

F: We have a valid world of fits and starts which must be
peopled in like manner or in the same way (but different)
as that of the normal and unbowed. Who here would deny us?

M: We ask the audience to consider that their own lucidity
may be subject to change.

F: Bodily fluids and pastes may lose their lubricant efficacy.

M: Because if the GOD of the UNIVERSE takes a personal dislike to you, perhaps IT is disgusted with your golf game or saddened by your lack of taste in home furnishings and IT comes at you lying awake in your bed and with the beam of pure light which is ITs ineffable finger sautées your hippocampus and eats it in front of you or drifts into the kitchen at breakfast to invisibly lace your Shreddies with norepinephrine, what are you going to do? Just take it on your knees? Forego propagation?

F: Not for a minute. I've got three words for IT. Little m's and f's are just the thing to open this whole can of beans otherwise whats the point of spending the whole morning cleaning the front tires on the Buick with whose tongue? Or forgetting the beach-pail and shovel at a druggist's?

M: Like joe kant's dog...

F: ...wants ice-cream for lunch.

M: Yeah.. Same thing.

THIRTY-FOUR

Scalp-Grease

Socket-Slime

Ear-Wax

Nose-Gum

Lip-Drool

Pit-Flow

Flange-Oint

Gasket-Dope

Button-Paste

Tube-Slick

Free-Base

Toe-Jam

FIFTY-FIVE

But, as I was saying, before ratiocination comes curtains, and new paper lining the cupboards. For me to map my lust onto this house of yours, there must be suitable alternations performed in advance of the logical plotting of affairs. Adjustment of defense mechanisms to a higher threshold of activation will mean lower initial profits for the psychospeculator. This morning I tortured your stamp collection with the magnifying glass. At the table in the sun-room, I focused rays of light on each little butterfly-coloured postal certificate until it curled in pain. Into those issued by western industrial nations I burned the hammer-and-sickle; those from communist countries I inscribed with a charred swastika; third-world states received the international symbol for protein-deficiency. When I was through them all, I cart-wheeled across the carpet until my feet hit the door. Deep cleansing action; mouth watering aroma; care free maintenance; muscle soothing comfort; money back guarantee; home made goodness; penny pinching economy; classic elegance; adult strength.

For me to map my trust onto this house of yours, there must be an absence of spectral figures and selected

wavelengths. The decor must be as clean and black and white as that of this very printed page. Or cleaner.

Our breakfast menu:

Milk

Ripe olives

Hard-boiled eggs

Currants

Mayonnaise

Caviar

Popcorn

Truffles

Yogurt

Stewed Prunes

Banana purée

Licorice

Russian bread

Untinted oleomargarine

Molasses

Vanilla ice-cream

Bitter chocolate

Rice pudding

Coffee

EIGHTY-NINE

Take nine cases of dynamite lifted from the Dundurn military munitions depot and put them in a place where you are certain not to forget them. Also, this is a blasting cap. Memorize the silhouette of the thing. Now, I shall call a taxi. If Jacob comes in before you leave, ask him to make sure that no one parks at the foot of the driveway.

I'll show you my favourite book. Here it is, it's called Combined Operations p-p-published in 1943 in New York by the Macmillan Company. Keep that goddam cat off the table, can't you? Chapter 17 is "The Battle of the Sea-Wall."

The next one equals the last two. They led us to the empty ballroom. Its main feature was a parquet floor of astounding intricacy. Our hosts opened a wall-panel and threw a switch. The entire floor-surface jumped two feet and was held solidly at that level. One could have crawled beneath it without fear. Then they punched in an alphabetical code and the floor began to rearrange itself. Each tiny wood-piece made its way to its newly

assigned locus, rapidly but without intersecting the path of even one of its confrères. There were no developmental stages; the new pattern occurred punctually. The hosts pulled the switch and the floor dropped to its base level.

Sky high. To kingdom come. To smithereens. Burning oil gushing onto the field. Black smoke a mile up. We slit the veins of this bathtub crew. And avenge a thousand injustices. Fame. Honor. Money.

The ladder of success.