### PRIOR TEMPORAL LOGIC, TIRED

 ${\bf PORT\ AUTHORITY-``Take\ the\ statement}$ 'I am tired,' for example. While its meaning does not change, it is sometimes true and sometimes less so, and a person acts differently depending on the extent of tiredness going to bed versus going on a hike."

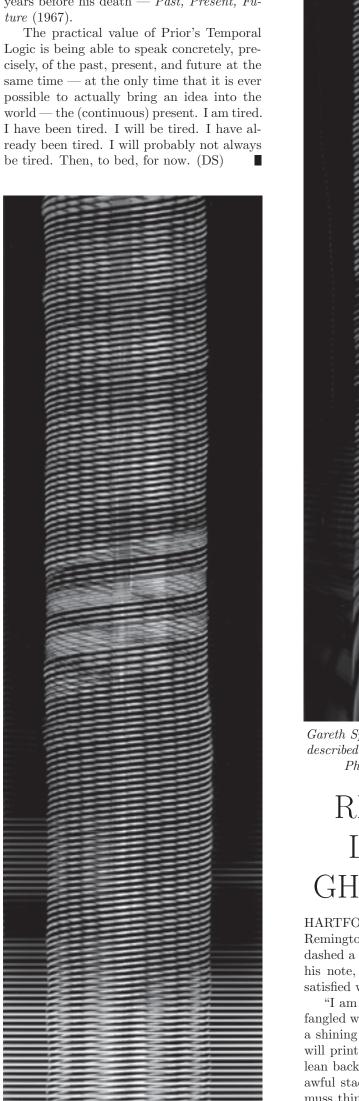
This example of Temporal Logic is borrowed from last Sunday's New York Times obituary of computer scientist / philosopher Amir Pneuli. Temporal Logic is a formal system of logical reasoning used to evaluate statements whose truth changes over time. Dr. Pneuli did not invent this branch of logic, but he was the first to apply it to the operation of computer systems, with his fundamental 1977 paper, "The Temporal Logic of Programs.

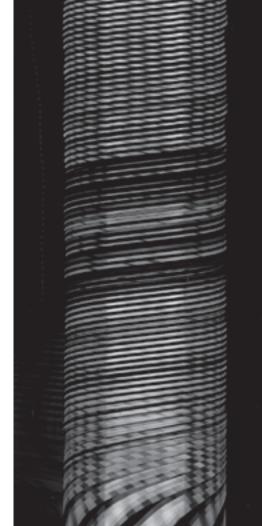
Before Dr. Pneuli, self-taught Oxford professor Arthur Norman Prior rigorously articulated Temporal Logic and gave the subject its name. Of course, the multi-part problem of truth as it varies over time sits at the root of the basic philosophical problems of determinism and free will. However, Prior's Temporal Logic specifically distills the fundamental concepts of a truth which is negotiated over time into a mathematically rigorous logical language whose formality and abstraction allows it to address an infinitely wide scope of truth claims, and to remain specific in its conclusions.

Prior built his temporal logic on the work of nineteenth-century philosopher-mathematician Charles Sanders Pierce. Pierce, who also coined the philosophically-proper term "Pragmatism," argued for a logic which makes accommodation for the changing truth of a statement over time. As within the wider scope of Pragmatism, Pierce argued that truth must be determined fully contingent on the present situation and that truth is actually produced by this negotiation, or "back and forth with the world."

When he started teaching logic at Canterbury University and publishing his work, Prior knew only modest mathematics and was almost entirely self-taught in logic. He published his first logic paper at age 38, a remarkably late debut in mathematics where the best thinking is said to be all done by age 28. Prior published his seminal book fully articulating Temporal Logic just two years before his death — Past, Present, Fu $ture\ (1967).$ 

Logic is being able to speak concretely, precisely, of the past, present, and future at the same time — at the only time that it is ever possible to actually bring an idea into the world — the (continuous) present. I am tired. I have been tired. I will be tired. I have already been tired. I will probably not always





THE FIRST/LAST NEWSPAPER

Gareth Spor's Dreammachine at 45 rpm as described by HP Scanjet G3110 at 600 dpi. Photograph by Walead Beshty

### REMINGTON LAUNCHES **GHOSTWRITER**

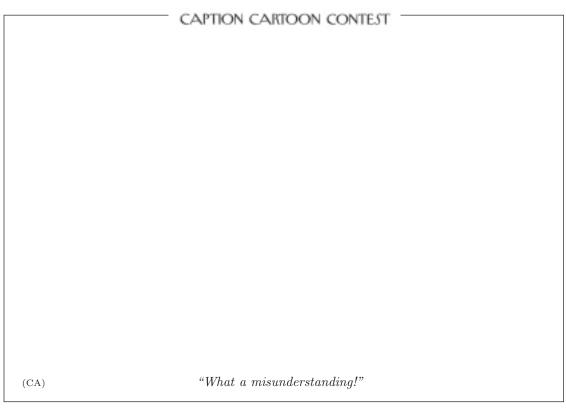
HARTFORD, CT — Shortly after buying his Remington Model 1 typewriter, Mark Twain dashed a letter off to his brother in 1875. In his note, he seems equal parts addled and satisfied with his new purchase:

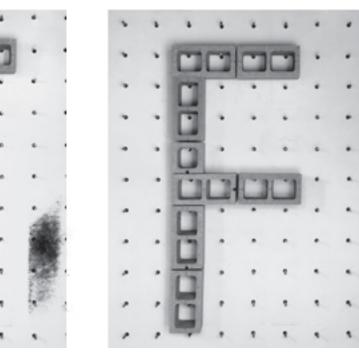
"I am trying to get the hang of this new fangled writing machine, but am not making a shining success of it. [ . . . ] I believe it will print faster than I can write. One may lean back in his chair & work it. It piles an awful stack of words on one page. It don't muss things or scatter ink blots around. Of course it saves paper."

Knowing they had a notable writer for a customer, Remington's salespeople contacted Twain to see if he'd vouch publicly for their Remington Model 2, which he'd purchased as soon as it was released. In a typed note of all caps he declined, signing off not as Twain, but with his given name, Samuel Clemens: "Please do not use my name in any way.

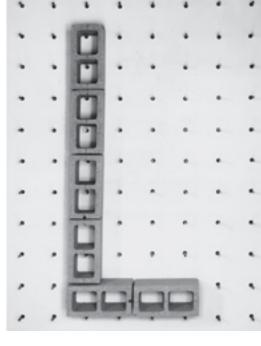
Please do not even divulge the fact that I own a machine. I have entirely stopped using the Type-Writer, for the reason that I never could write a letter with it to anybody without receiving a request by return mail that I would not only describe the machine but tate what progress I had made in the use of it, etc., etc. I don't like to write letters, so I don't want people to know that I own this curiosity breeding little joker. Yours truly, Saml. L. Clemens.

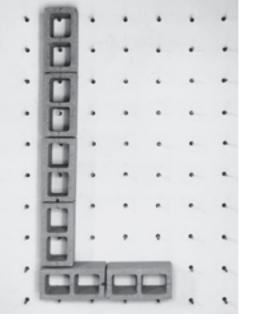
It's easy to speculate as to why Twain might've signed his note as Clemens. He routinely signed "Sam" to friends and used Clemens both in business and for personal notes. Perhaps he didn't want his more famous pen name used in any way with Remington's products, so he refused to even sign it. But it also seems at least a little bit possible that when he wrote as Twain, Clemens felt he had a kind of creative power he did not possess as Clemens alone, but that when he wrote with the Remington it had a kind of power over him, and even over Twain, that made them both uncomfortable, even











Dexter Sinister

PORT AUTHORITY, 641 8th Avenue, New York City, NY 10036 21 NOVEMBER 2009

resentative from the New Jersey police / Ten

anxious. "Mark Twain" started out not as a given name but as a sailor's pseudonym. Before that it was a sailor's call — "mark twain!" — meaning the river's depth was two fathoms (12 feet) deep, and the boat could navigate its passage safely. When Clemens selected Mark Twain, he selected not only the name of a storyteller but the sign of a technician, who, with this piece of information, could signal the crew that the ship was in control and could be guided safely down

Cybernetics, which is the study of communication and control between humans and machines, takes its name from the Greek "kybernetes," who is the oarsman, pilot, or rudder: the one who can skillfully bring a boat to port. Clemens's pseudonym, Twain, was another name for the author himself. But, according to his letters, his typewriter often behaved as an allonym — a ghostwriter. While the pen name Twain helped to put Clemens in control of the writing process, the Remington's ghostwriter effect counteracted that control, placing the invention of text somehow just beyond its operator's reach, or total

Like Twain, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's experience with his Hansen Writing Ball, a typewriter Nietzsche purchased in 1882 directly from its inventor, seemed somehow beyond his control — even supernatural. Living in Genoa with his eyesight failing, Nietzsche hoped the writing ball would make it easier for him to write away from home, but he arrived to find his machine damaged in transit. The Hansen's already fussy keys only became more difficult in inclement weather. "The typewriter has been unusable since my last card," Nietzsche wrote, "for the weather is dreary and cloudy, that is, humid: then each time the ribbon is also wet and sticky, so that every key gets stuck, and the writing cannot be seen at all." The typewriter, which was meant to free Nietzsche from his pen and make it easier for him to write, had left him blocked. No longer in control of his own output, Nietzche's productivity would now rise and fall with the barometer. By 1882, he'd pounded out a well-known poem, which reads, "The Writing Ball is a thing like me: of iron / Yet twisted easily — especially on journeys. / Patience and tact must be had in abundance / As well as fine [little] fingers to use it." As Professor Friedrich Kittler points out in his study Gramophone, Film, Typewriter, in Nietzsche's poem, "three moments of writing coincide: the equipment, the thing, and the agent. An author, however, does not appear [ . . . ] Our writing tool not only works on our thoughts, it 'is a thing like me.' "

Nietzsche would soon give up his typewriter, but he would never dismiss it entirely. In one of his last typewritten letters, he observes, "This machine is delicate as a little dog and causes a lot of trouble — and provides some entertainment. Now all my friends have to do is invent a reading machine: otherwise I will fall behind myself and won't be able to supply myself with sufficient intellectual nourishment." Nietzsche feared his own typewriter might outproduce him. Its mechanistic drive to produce text faster than its owner could read it harkens back to the scene that Twain described previously, when he was first entranced by the typewriter in the shop. Fifty-seven words a minute! If only he could write that fast. But recall that the salesgirl who'd impressed Twain had a trick: she always typed the same text, over and over again. In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, in a touchstone image of typewriter-as-ghostwriter, the ceaselessly repeated typescript reappears as Wendy discovers that her husband Jack's novel isn't a novel at all. Instead, he has typed "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" on sheet after endless sheet. Jack isn't using his Adler typewriter; the Adler is using him. Realizing her husband has lost his

mind, Wendy's face pales, terrified. Kubrick's film is fictional, but cautionary. Kittler, too, tells of a 1941 detective play by Jean Cocteau called La Machine à écrire (The Typewriter) involving "an unknown woman who has been tormenting her community with anonymous typewritten letters." Kittler continues, "[the detective] 'imagines the culprit at work at her typewriter, aiming and operating her machine gun.' Typewriters are simply 'fast,' not just 'like Jazz' [. . . ] but also like rapid-fire weapons." When Cocteau's antiheroine finally confesses, she

explains, "I wanted to attack the whole city. [...] I wanted to stir that muck, attack and reveal it. It was like a hoax! Without accounting for myself, I chose the dirtiest and cheapest of all weapons, the typewriter." She terrorizes the city with the stroke of a key.

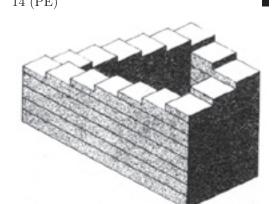
A vividly real and far more terrorizing letter from an anonymous typist was received by The New York Times on 26 April 1995. It had been keyed on an old machine later identified as a 1920s-era L.C. Smith-Corona. Enclosed was a lengthy typewritten manifesto that began, "The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race." The New York Times shared the letter with the FBI, who explained that it was from a domestic terrorist known as the Unabomber. The letter demanded that the manifesto be published "in The New York Times, Time or Newsweek, or in some other widely read, nationally distributed periodical," and, it promised, "if you can get it published according to our requirements we will permanently desist from terrorist activities." As for the text, its author stipulated that "after six months from the first appearance of the article or book it must become public property, so that anyone can reproduce or publish it." Also: "because of its length, we suppose it will have to be serialized."

The Washington Post instead opted to print the text whole as a four-page supplement that September. It would prove to be the Unabomber's undoing. The following April, authorities raided the one-room cabin of a former UC Berkeley professor named Theodore Kaczynski, whose brother had called in a tip that Kaczynski's writings reminded him the Unabomber's. By the time they finished their search, they'd found the smoking gun: amidst firearms, handmade bombs, and various disguises, sitting on a desk littered with carbon copies of the letters and manifesto, was the Smith-Corona. (RG)

### HEY MANHATTAN

One five three five / For your information battalion one is requesting Hazmat / One five three seven / Ten four / Battalion one / Five people on the boat / Hazmat battalion / Thank you Manhattan / Ten calling Hazmat battalion / Go ahead Manhattan / Can you confirm with the first battalion if the Ellis Island ferry is docked on the Manhattan side / I was unable to contact a rep-

four / Hazmat battalion was unable to reach anyone on the Jersey side / Ten four / First battalion / We are in touch with the New Jersey side / We are going to let everyone off the boat / Hazmat battalion / Ten four / Negative for Jersey authorities / We are letting people off the boat / Battalion one / Hazmat one / Hey Manhattan / Subway near the Atlantic wall / Unknown / They say they have a unit on the scene / ten four / One five one four / Can you call it city wide / City wide one five seven oh / Fire apartment on eddy / Reporting a fire apartment 1A / Battalion two seven / Two seven / We are going to leave it at four two for your response / Forty two we just got a phone call from transit that you were holding up a train, is that correct / We had to momentarily, but it's long gone / Forty two thank you / Battalion two / One five four nine Manhattan / Ten four / Wheel chair bound occupant needing to get up too / Automatic alarm in a private dwelling / It's been out for a few minutes already / Ten four / No injury no EMS needed / Ten four / Division one five / Sixteen hundred hours / Construction fire between avenue X and T - Tom / Reporting a fire on the fourth floor / Brooklyn battalion three eight / Four nine seven fire on the fourth floor / Isolated wings floors number A B C D vents on roof / South side exposure / One six oh five dispatching one oh seven / Ten twenty box three nine oh / One six oh six / Dispatching two oh seven / Ten four on way / Standby / One five six / Three eight six / Ten four will notify / One four four / Central alarm company who called this in / One six oh eight dispatch two oh seven / One six oh eight Manhattan / Transformer emergency / Engine one five six / Ten four / Engine one five six / ConEd has been notified they have a crew responding / Recorded fire on a roof of a multiple dwelling / One six one three / EMS Kennedy bridge unknown direction for an auto accident / Calling battalion four nine / One six one five Manhattan / Ten four / One six one seven hours / Apartment four D occupant just arrived home there was a water leak we shut it down / Two six three / Heading into Manhattan reported motor vehicle accident / Let me know if you see anything going in / One six two one five five / Four nine to Manhattan / ten thirty six It's going to be a code three / Box three one / Smoke coming from a building on the corner / Battalion two two / Ten four / Incident going eastbound / One six three / Ten four / Grand central eastbound / Engine two six three / Battalion four five / Ten four / Bus fire / Engine two eight two / Six nine / Battalion two oh seven / One six two nine oh



Luigi Sono, None (Ninth Hour), November

A Reconsideration of the Newspaper Industry in 5 Easy Allusions (5): Does this lead somewhere or lead nowhere? Is it a loop or a cycle? Or both, or neither?

## MUCH FUSSED OVER PUSSY

EVERYWHERE, NOWHERE — It's easy to imagine today's newspaper office like the opening scene to a zombie film: pairs of eyes that look like they were purchased in junk shops and white shirts in pork-pie hats buffeting their own brains. Newspapermen used to ask the questions, but a hemophiliac economic model has made the reporter the reported, an internal investigator who fact-checks his own demise and cashes in his office hours with a self-administered proctology exam. Like the MTA, the micro-refinement of this rot is in constant rotation and maintenance. Is this circulation asphyxiation more an autopsy than a prognosis? And who is the no-man we are most afraid of leaving behind — the pulpy medium, the grimy journalist, or the language itself?

When the business model changed, so did the news. On September 3, 1833, twentythree-year-old publisher Benjamin Day launched the American newspaper as the industry it is today. Undercutting his competitors by a fifth, he sold his New York Sun for just a penny. The paper was funded by advertisers, not subscribers, and sold on the street; it no longer catered only to the Eustace Tilleys, but to those just beginning to fumble with

The bargain paper found a salesman in Bernard Flaherty, hired as the first newspaper boy. This single double-helix atomized an archetype of a loud-mouth little middle man and revolutionized not only the way information circulated but the way it was editorialized. Uneducated but not un-newsed, the newsboy memorized the morning paper like a proverb and broadcast it like a transmitter. Fed on commission, these newsies sold headlines as front row seats to the world's greatest drama. Plot trumped Fact, and the headlines became the high blood pressure entertainment narcotics we equate with current page-six ecology. Editorial instincts pursued this new sensational imperative and resulting increases in readership determined that the penny paper's most accessible emotions

were indignation, apocalyptic glee, and rage. Beginning in 1913, theologian Mordecai Kaplan, a Lithuanian immigrant, began recording the harmless data of his existence. He indexed and filed away the very air he breathed. Despite his American following, Kaplan suffered from an acute anxiety of presence. Consumed by the prospect of his religious influence outlasting his physical life, his fanatical scrawling engaged an unrelenting desire to create permanence. For the next twenty-one years, he assembled a material echo of self, an archive of journals eventually comprising a personal Encyclopedia of

But isn't the act of recording, as well as the record itself, about becoming rather than being? When a newspaper editor in New York asked who was going to write Kaplan's obituary, a staff writer responded, "Kaplan already did."

Man.

Obituaries are irrevocable, but when the newspaper is the corpse, the cat suddenly has nine hundred lives. The newspaper, our much fussed over pussy, began dving in 1765. These first last words were printed as The Pennsylvania Journal, suffering from a terminal British Stamp Act, designed the front page like a tombstone, "EXPIRING: In Hopes of a Resurrection to Life again . . . " The editors knew that death, even if it was their own, was a hot commodity.

The anxiety over our newspapers's own extinction leaves us in a rhetorical editorial tailspin, asking impulsive questions that don't welcome answers and feeling like monkeys making faces in the vacuum. Questioning the newspapers's mortality quickly becomes about our sense of civil geography and homeostasis. We are always the observer and the observed. We are always our own headline.

How long could a eulogy last in a twentyfour hour medium? When will our newspaper look funny and antiquated on someone the way suspenders do? When it goes Jurassic, when we are finally looking at it, a little gray postage stamp, in the palm of our hand, what will we say? Where will the knowledge get lost in the obituary, as Kaplan feared? Will the martyrdom give you whiplash? Will the writer be on red alert with the hypertension headlines with which we chase storms and terrorists (a hyperbolic farewell)? Or will he gently ease into a first person retirement speech (a we-had-a-goodrun farewell)? Or will he go balls and marbles crazy (a that's-all-folks farewell)? Should "New York Times is No Longer Fit For Print" (a tongue in your cheek farewell) be . . . is

. . . was . . . will be? Today, the moon shows signs of water. Militants killed 17 outside a courthouse in Peshawar. A British helicopter with a failed sight system shot itself down over Afghanistan. The temperature is forty-seven. The humidity is eighty-nine. (SS)

How Media Masters Reality #6

### CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG

TIVOLI, NY — "Feedback is a method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performance," according to Norbert Wiener.

In this series of six articles, How Media Masters Reality, we've described the media as a feedback loop that collapses the difference between producer and consumer. As users of email and social networking sites or as participants in non-scripted TV shows we work to provide content for formats that are owned by somebody else. At the base of this media ecosystem we generate and trade information, and as we accrue it — lots of friends on Facebook, lots of photos on Flickr, a massive list of email addresses — we use it to heighten our visibility and increase our value as self-performing commodities. Although celebrities float at the top of the information economy's celestial canopy, they are constituted as media subjects by the same stuff as you and me — bits of information feeding back through the system.

Although scripted forms of entertainment remain dominant, non-scripted TV is gaining ground during primetime. This is partly because non-scripted TV is simply cheap to produce, but also because it constructs a narrative about TV production that the medium feeds back into itself. In this new narrative, you the viewer are the central character and, if you work hard enough, you get a speaking part. And why fill the screen with aboveboard Colgate-clean actors when the screen time can be filled with someone more or less like you and me?

The non-scripted TV show doesn't only give us the opportunity to perform, it also provides us with the means to assess, test, and judge people more or less like ourselves — and to be assessed, tested, and judged by people more or less like ourselves. The feedback between watching and doing constitutes a pan-media surveillance system in which we police ourselves, and in which we translate the duties and obligations that are thrust upon us (to be always "on," to be conspicuously visible, to be incredibly busy, to acquiesce to the judgement of our peers) into choices . . . into freedom. So "freedom of information" translates into us all giving things away for free — our talents as performers, as programmers, as content providers.

It's easy to forget how old the idea of the audience as commodity is. We should have seen it coming. In 1975, the same year that Ant Farm mounted their spectacular antimedia offensive, B. Livant wrote: "Virtually everyone is organized into the complex tapestry of these audiences, whose underlying priorities we are just beginning to understand. For one thing, the production, destruction, division, and recombination of audiences is a vast and turbulent motion. For another, the Audience Commodity is a multipurpose capacity. It is the other side of labor power that Marx discovered in the production of commodities-in-general, and it is Protean in its capacities. The first great form of the organization of this commodity [is] the Audience Commodity as a market. This form emerged first historically and with the greatest clarity in the United States . . .

This form is the first, but not the last." Although the grandiloquence of this text speaks of a bygone time, it nevertheless proposes an understanding of media which classic Marxist media critique failed to fully recognize. Dallas W. Smythe takes up the story, pointing out that the only time we're not productive is when we're asleep, because our waking time is itself sold as a commodity to advertisers. Audience production is the material connection between advertisers and content providers — audiences are as much commodities as TV sets and cars. The difference is that you can't sell a car to a TV set

but you can sell an audience to an audience. The end product of the media machine, therefore, is not the passive consumer living in a relationship of "bad faith" with the products they consume, because in the postmass media world there is no endpoint, as the producer-consumer feeds back production in the form of content in the form of participation. The spectacle doesn't alienate us from the real and make us passive; it unremittingly seeks to involve us, requiring us to test ourselves, measure ourselves, retain visibility as a self-performing commodity. This excitation is fed back through the system and comes out as the narrative of the hard-working, self-reliant, independent, efficient, networked individual.

ance — the demand to be as visible as possible — affords new opportunities for freedom, as new technological devices give access to more information and to new modes of social interaction. In this reading, we are caught in a virtuous feedback loop in which desire can be expressed and fulfilled, and in which technology will ultimately take care of the inequalities in the world. But we've heard all this before. Every technological innovation comes with the promise of greater personal freedom and social equality. The chemical technology of drugs turned the hip-

For optimists, the shift to self-perform-

pies on to a communal future that ended in ruins. The technologies of community radio stations and video collectives sporting Portapaks and satellite dishes promised a future where, once again, technology would help to build a cozy global village. And the dream was revived yet again when Howard Rheingold announced the "virtual community," a new "Jeffersonian democracy" of cybernetic free expression.

So we come to the stage where, to be part of the virtual community, we are entreated at every turn to have our say. But who wants to listen to my opinion on Britney's mental stability, Kirstie's waistline, Barack's Middle East strategy . . . and you know what I think of global warming? I hate it!

Anyone who would value my ill-informed opinion on these matters already understands knowledge to be radically provisional. If the crop circle maker and the flat earther fight with the Pulitzer Prize winner for my attention — and I am called on to evaluate all three — what kind of hierarchy of knowledge production are we dealing with? The "have your say" principle represents the uncoupling of democracy from democratic institutions. It floats freely in a bubble of selflegitimation. Throughout the twentieth century, "pub-

lic opinion" was regarded as something to be feared, but it was also understood as something that could be fashioned. The public could be educated in regimes of self-improvement and self-maintenance. The rise of social policies such as the Welfare State and the New Deal corresponded with the rise of the public information documentary, in which knowledge was mediated by the expert the man (always a man) in the white coat. Knowledge was "democratizing" on both sides of the Atlantic, but people had to learn how to learn. As Otto Neurath, the pioneer of public education, put it in the 1933: "We consider our selves the executive agent of the spectators. In order to do this it is necessary to simplify and eliminate things, he who makes the better choice will be the better pedagogue." Everything from education to inoculation was championed. In the U.S., the role of information provision was soon taken over by major corporations, and as the Cold War got hotter, the same techniques were applied to civil defense media.

As far as factual, instructive documentary is concerned, our current position is ambiguous. While these days we reflexively tend to suspect some form of "propaganda" at play, we're also comforted by the worldview presented by such as the Discovery Channel and National Geographic. There's nothing as reassuring as a matter of fact clearly con-

Perhaps these six installments of *How Me*dia Masters Reality have painted a bleak picture of us as lab rats in our own experiment — or maybe something like a post-mass media Hieronymus Bosch painting in which the damned labor on the eternal work of being watched. But once we gain knowledge of how media masters reality, we might begin to work out ways of finding our freedom within it. French philosopher Michel Foucault was once asked: If we are socially constructed, is conscious change possible? Foucault turned the question on its head. We actually don't realize how free we are, there are more freedoms than the horizon of the humanist tradition can show us, and the one thing we can learn from the development of human thought is that change is inevitable.

How Media Masters Reality was informed by many sources, including: Mark Andrejevic, Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched; Richard Barbrook & Andy Cameron, The California Ideology; Jack Z. Bratich, Conspiracy Panics, Political Rationality and Popular Culture; Stella Bruzzi, New Documentary: A Critical Introduction; John Conner, Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions (with Afterword); Daniel Dayan & Elihu Katz, Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History; Gilles Deleuze, Postscript on Control Societies; Rod Dickinson & Steve Rushton, Who, What, Where, When, Why & How; Michel Foucault, Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973–1974 and Technologies of the Self; Peter Galison, The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision; Katerine Hayles, My Mother Was a Computer and How We Became Postmodern; Alison Hern, Hoax-ing the Real; David Joselit, Feedback: Television Against Democracy; Constance M. Lewallen & Steve Said, Ant Farm 1968–1978; Sven Lütticken, An Arena in Which to Re-enact; Ted Magder, Television 2.0: The Business of American Television in Transition; Rux Martin, Truth, Power, Self; Michael Massing, A New Horizon for the News and The News About the Internet, No 14 and 15, volume 1.1, NYRB; Anna McCarthy, Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt & Me; Patricia Mellencamp, Video Politics: Guerrilla TV, Ant Farm. Eternal Frame; Laurie Ouellette, "Take Responsibility for Yourself": Judge Judy and the Neo-liberal Citizen; Susan Murry & Lau-Television Culture; Mark Poster, The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context; Felicity D. Scott, Living Archive 7: Ant Farm; Allegorical Time Warp: The Media Fallout of July 21, 1969; Richard

Serra, Television Delivers People; Michael Shamberg, Guerrilla Television; Dallas W. Smythe, On the Audience Commodity; Ted Turner, From Counterculture to Cyberculture; Norbert Wiener, Cybernetics: or, Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine and God and Golem, Inc.



 $0 \div 0 \rightarrow 0$ 

CHICAGO — If you've read newspapers regularly for the past two decades, probably you encountered higher mathematics once: when Andrew Wiles proved Fermat's Last Theorem in 1994. Maybe you paid enough attention to notice when the Poincaré Conjecture was confirmed in 2006. If you haven't encountered anything else on math, it's not your fault — zero divided by anything is still zero. Why isn't there popular-press coverage of mathematics?

BECAUSE IT'S TOO OBSCURE. An unspoken premise here is that the press doesn't cover obscure things. Take as a simple counterexample the New York Times article of October 29 titled "7.3 Billion Light-Years Lat er, Einstein's Theory Prevails," which includes this sentence: "Some theorists have suggested that space on very small scales has a granular structure that would speed some light waves faster than others — in short, that relativity could break down on the smallest scales.

BECAUSE IT'S TOO DIFFICULT. Difficult things make the paper every day: healthcare reform, complex political scandals, explaining the financial crash, and, as was already mentioned, science. It's the job of the journalist to simplify complicated topics by prioritizing the information she collects and finding clear ways to express it. In journalism, the reader need not understand everything about the topic on a visceral level hard-news stories are written so that a reader who quits reading in the middle will still have hit the main point. Readers of news first learn the main outline and why it's important, then fill in broad strokes, then smaller details. There's no a priori reason why math

can't be presented in this model. BECAUSE IT'S TOO BORING. Boring is in the eye of the benumbed. Scores of readers never open the sports section. Rafts of them never read travel. Masses won't touch religion.

BECAUSE IT DOESN'T TALK ABOUT THE REAL WORLD. Math's real-world applications are no farther afield than sciencepage darlings like cosmology and string the-

BECAUSE IT TAKES TOO LONG TO EXPLAIN ANYTHING. The article-lengthening terminology gap exists in writing about other specialized disciplines. When the Large Hadron Collider opened on the Swiss-French border, articles defined the still-theoretical Higgs boson as "a subatomic particle that would give matter mass." Math terms can be explained, too, at least inasmuch as a casual reader needs to understand them.

BECAUSE IT'S TOO RIGOROUS. Now we're getting somewhere. Math people are probably already sputtering that casual readers won't really get it if simplistic explanations present just the broad strokes of their work. Here's the central conflict: Really getting it isn't the point of journalism. Math is about rigor. A mathematical statement enters the body of knowledge when it is proved. Journalism is about importance. A story is successful when it imparts the most important pieces of information with the greatest

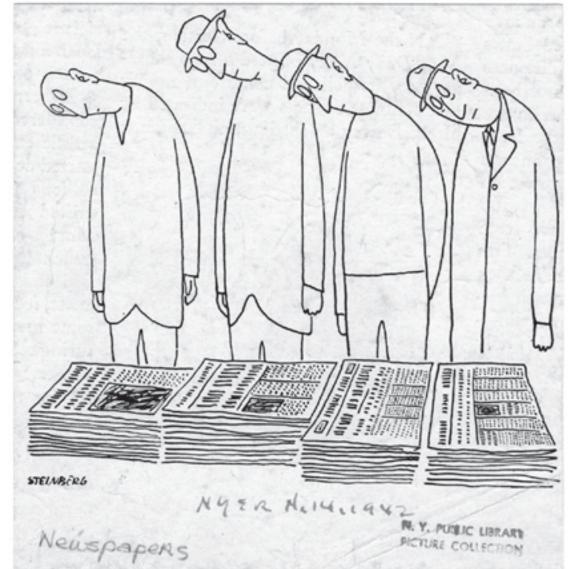
Science doesn't pose this conflict. The minimization of unavoidable error and weighing of the statistical significance of correlation coefficients don't come from the world of 100 percent certainty. Philosophy suffers as math does — if you can name a philosophy publication other than On Bullshit from

the past 20 years, gold star. BECAUSE PEOPLE DON'T LIKE IT People don't like it because they can't wrap their minds around it. They can't wrap their minds around it because no one presents it accessibly. No one presents it accessibly because people don't like it. That's really the essence of it, but geometers would call that argument circular. (GM)

"Well that's that cleared up then," said Dick. "Shall we go down the lower road for a walk? We should leave these two to get on and catch up. It's been a while. Coming?"

"K." Anna stood up and began to clear away the bowls and Dick asked if we wanted tea. I gave him a wide-eyed smile. He picked up the board: by now strewn with crusts, rinds and crumbs, and used the bread knife to scrape these together and into the bowl on top of the stack.

All this happened out of eyeshot and the old man stared ahead. As they went out the door onto the outside porch, he spoke loudly through the window, mouthing, "Dick, could you go down to the beach below the old toll house, by the mermaid, on your way back? Ian's down there. You know." Getting up to stop the kettle whistling, he said, "Came down to stay and do a bit of sea fishing Mackerel come in here really close to the water's edge at this time of year, when the tide's in and the water's calm. Little schools make the water boil. Fancy some for tea?"



Saul Steinberg, Untitled, 1942. Ink on paper. Originally published in The New Yorker, November 14, 1942. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

## PATIENCE. FORTITUDE REMAIN LIONS

NEW YORK — The artist Edward Laning is hardly a household name, but to generations of visitors to the New York Public Library's 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue building, his work is as familiar as "Patience" and "Fortitude," the two lions that stand guard outside Manhattan's great repository of knowledge.

Each day, thousands of readers pass Laning's work on their way through the McGraw Rotunda to the library's reading rooms. The Rotunda is home to Laning's most famous work: five painted panels that tell "The Story of the Recorded Word." Nestled between 17foot high Corinthian walnut pilasters, and beneath a barrel-vaulted ceiling mural — also by Laning, and which depicts the Greek hero Prometheus bringing the flame of knowledge to earth from the heavens, "The Story of the Recorded Word" was commissioned in 1938 by architect, library trustee, and author of The Iconography of Manhattan Island, Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, and completed in 1942. Employed as an artist by the Works Progress Administration, Laning had already completed a number of largescale public commissions, including a series of murals at Ellis Island, before he was invited to create this cycle of paintings for the NYPL. Aged just 32 at the time, and an acquaintance of famed left-wing muralist Diego Rivera, Laning's commission reportedly raised eyebrows in some quarters. Yet his quintet of Biblical, historical, and futurological panels is today one of the library's best-known, if idiosyncratic, attractions.

Proceeding chronologically, the first panel, situated on the west wall, shows Moses descending from Mount Sinai bearing the stone tablets on which God has engraved his Ten Commandments. Laning's Moses is muscular and determined, a rock of a man battling tempests and torment — a depiction in debt both to the drama of the Italian baroque, yet also prefiguring Hollywood's spectacular Biblical epics of the 1950s. Laning's Moses is filled with righteous ire; he paints him smashing the tablets in anger at seeing his people worship the golden calf. Here, the recorded word is a symbol of divine power, but also hints at its own future history; according to the story, God later ordered Moses back up the mountain to receive a fresh set of tablets

— The Ten Commandments, 2nd edition. Next to Moses is the second panel, which shows a medieval monk copying an illuminated manuscript. Despite the ostensibly scholarly subject matter, this is no less dramatic than Moses's fury at the Israelites; through the monastery windows we can see the brutal pillaging of a local village — a reminder that these monks guarded the teachings of antiquity through dark and violent times. (It is a little known fact that the manuscript depicted here at the scribe's feet is a copy of the fourteenth-century *Tickhill Psalter*.)

Directly opposite, on the east wall, we see a hopeful-looking Johannes Gutenberg presenting the first proof of his Bible to Adolph of Nassau, the Elector of Mainz. Gutenberg is credited with having invented the printing press and movable type around the middle of the fifteenth century — the technological leap forward that enabled the rapid distribution of information — and a copy of his famous Bible is one of the NYPL's most famous treasures.

From Gutenberg we shoot forward to the late nineteenth century and Ottmar Mergenthaler's Linotype machine, which revolutionized printing, especially in the newspaper industry. In a style that could almost be described as a capitalist version of Socialist Realist painting, Laning depicts Mergenthaler at the keyboard of his Linotype, his brooding gaze turned towards the Brooklyn Bridge in the distance, and a newsboy shouting the latest headlines. In the foreground is Whitelaw Reid, politician and editor of *The New York* Tribune, examining a page printed by the new machine. Reid supported Mergenthaler's development of his invention, and, it is said, christened it the "Linotype."

In the final painting — a freestanding panel affixed to a mahogany- and walnut-veneered trolley that visitors can move around the library — Laning gazes into the future; or rather, what appears to be our present. Unlike its four siblings, the fifth panel is oriented landscape, rather than portrait (partly to allow the painting to be moved easily from room to room), and Laning uses the widescreen format to paint a scene that looks as if it were lifted straight from Fritz Lang's Metropolis or a Le Corbusier drawing. In the center of the image, we see a young man working at a typewriter. By his side are a notebook and camera, items that suggest he is a reporter. From his typewriter extends a cluster of sleek tubes that shoot from his keyboard into the middle-distance of the left-hand side of the painting. Above the pipes, ranged across hilltops behind which a rosy-fingered dawn is breaking, are a series of buildings — not too dissimilar in style to the Beaux-Arts NYPL itself. Each carries a different national flag: U.S.A., Britain, France. Radio masts crown these buildings, from which — perhaps in homage to RKO's famous logo — concentric circles emanate. In the lower left-quadrant of the panel, we see teams of white-coated technicians attending vast banks of machines housed in grand interiors reminiscent of the McGraw Rotunda. To the right of the young writer, in the immediate foreground, is a woman looking into what appears to be a luminous make-up compact, but is engraved on the outside with the words "Daily News." Next to her, a group of school children are seen carrying leather satchels that one or two in the group also appear to be using as exercise books. Behind them, factory workers in a canteen read from a giant screen while they eat. But all is not necessarily well in Laning's future of the recorded word: older, white-bearded men guard vast stacks of books from a marauding crowd, as printing presses are fed into elting furnaces. The sky behind them has turned from beautiful dawn into an abstract, Kandinsky-esque spectrum of color.

Many, including Laning's patrons, dismissed the fifth panel as left-wing subversion or, contemptuously, as "modern art." Despite the efforts of a small group of Laning supporters, who, each year on Laning's birthday, wheel the panel from the empty corridor to

tunda for all to see, the final installment in his "Story of the Recorded Word" remains neglected. Yet to our contemporary eyes the fifth panel now seems urgent and vibrant, perhaps vindicating Laning's assertion, in a Life magazine article from September 1940, that, "My murals don't condescend to people. What I am trying to do is paint pictures that are sensuous, alive, and real." (DF)

### 20 QUESTIONS INVERTED

NEW YORK — Two years ago, on March 25,

while on the way to a barbeque in Topenga

Canyon, I foresaw my own death. I had been visiting Los Angeles for a week. Naturally, I was spending a great deal of time in cars. As my friend and I drove up the two-lane Topenga Canyon Road in his converted diesel that afternoon, we approached a sharp curve, with a grassy embankment to our right and a drop-off of several hundred feet to our left. Out of the corner of my left eye, I noticed then that the white sedan speeding downhill in the oncoming lane was moving too quickly to hold the curve. I registered instantly that the vehicle was, in fact, out of control. I registered instantly that, given our current trajectory and the white sedan's current trajectory, a head-on collision was, in fact, imminent. My friend, the driver, saw the same future and automatically reached for me with his right hand to brace against the impact. Then, something strange happened. Time slowed down. To a crawl. Almost a halt. During the second in which I registered what was about to occur, I had the very clear and emotionally unremarkable realization that this would be the end of my life. I surveyed the scene. Magic hour. The sun was setting. I had no further thoughts, no analysis, no plan, but suddenly I could see every color, every distant tree leaf in ultravivid detail. Not that anything seemed sudden. I watched as the front end of my friend's car passed ever so slowly through the back end of the white sedan. With my view of the white car partially obstructed by the hood of my friend's car, I couldn't see the other car's rear bumper until it emerged again on my right, following its front end directly into the embankment. We had cleared the sedan by a hair. As we skidded to a stop on the gravel shoulder, time sped up again. We dashed from our car to the embankment where four teenage girls in bikini tops and shorts emerged from the wrecked sedan, dazed, but unscathed. Minutes later, as the shock settled, my friend and I returned to the diesel. We continued on our drive. He assured me repeatedly that "It wasn't our time," but for the next few hours, I couldn't shake the thought that I might be dead. My sense of sight remained unusually acute for at least two weeks following the episode. Back in New York, I was sometimes overwhelmed. emotionally, by my awareness of too much color, too much detail. I couldn't concen-

trate with my eyes open Over the past two years, I've thought only rarely about this experience of time made elastic, then stretched and suspended. I set it aside as a curious anomaly, as unlikely to recur, as to be adequately addressed by science, or even believed by any audience with whom I hadn't already established considerable credibility. Then, two weeks ago, Walter Murch — amateur astronomer, polymath, sage, pioneering sound and image editor of cinematic benchmarks including The Conversation and Apocalypse Now, and author of a book about blinking — explained the exact phenomenon I had experienced during an interview he gave in New York while in town to present some of his astronomical

findings to a small audience at NYU. Murch described the perception of slow motion that occurs during extremely heightened emotional states as an effect of a physiological change to one's normal flicker fusion rate, a psychophysical concept that can be compared to a frame-rate in film. At a projection speed of 24 frames per second, most people stop noticing individual images flickering quickly on screen, and perceive smooth motion instead. At fewer frames per second, the film appears to jerk. The film's flicker rate has dropped below the frequency of the typical viewer's flicker fusion threshold. Every species has a specific flicker fusion rate, which differs slightly among individuals. For humans, the rate is approximately 50 milliseconds. This is the frequency at which most people would perceive a strobe light that is flickering on and off to be glowing steadily. In a life-threatening situation, the brain's flicker fusion threshold rises considerably. The eye can perceive sharp detail that would otherwise appear as a blur. Imagine looking at a rapidly rotating propeller and distinguishing individual blades, rather than a single, solid disc of color. The human eye and brain are capable of this degree of visual acuity, but the mental resources required to sustain it are tremendous, and are therefore reserved only for emergency use.

Murch learned much of what he knows about perception in the course of his work as a film editor. He occupies the territory of master auteurs like Stanley Kubrick, whose innovations in the mechanics and technique of their craft parallel the ambition and quality of their productions. He began his career as a sound designer, working on the first features made by his friends Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, who'd been his classmates at USC film school. While creating sound for Lucas's 1971 science fiction film THX 1138, which he co-wrote, Murch discovered that people also have a threshold for distinguishing overlapping sounds. He found that the footsteps of two people in a frame must be synchronized perfectly to the image, but once there are three people, synchronization is irrelevant. The brain does not map with precision three distinct, simultaneous sounds of a similar type. However, different parts of the brain process different types of sound, so additional layers of sound can be distinguished if certain of the sounds are of a categorically different type. After further work as an editor — craft being roughly analogous to laboratory experimentation and methodology — he eventually arrived at a theory of density and clarity in aural perception which describes sound as a spectrum from encoded (speech) to embodied (music) types, and provides a framework for understanding how layered sound operates (or fails to operate effectively) in film as a function of the left-right duality of the brain, ultimately

terfuge." Murch is forthcoming about his process for creating subterfuge. In fact, Murch is generally forthcoming in his knowledge as well as his curiosity, both of which he seems to possess in inordinate supply, directly proportional to his generosity.

clarity can only be achieved by a kind of sub-

When I met Murch at a dinner during his visit to New York, the entire table of guests remained rapt for several hours after the plates were cleared, engrossed by a conversation in which Murch stitched filmmaking to astronomy to studies of human perception to the congruence of the belief systems of Hopi Indians, ancient Greeks and contemporary physicists. At one point, Murch described the inherently complex, collaborative process of filmmaking as a game of Inverse Twenty Questions, a variation on Exquisite Corpse. In the standard version of Twenty Questions, a designated "guesser" leaves the room while the remaining players select an object together. The returning guesser's objective is to identify the chosen object through the course of asking up to twenty questions of the other players. In a game of Inverse Twenty Questions, the players do not concur while the guesser is out of the room. Instead, as the guesser asks each question, all the players continually modify their assumption about what the object might be. Ideally, the entire group of players arrives at an object together, without having initially agreed upon a winning answer. Sometimes, the game simply falls apart.

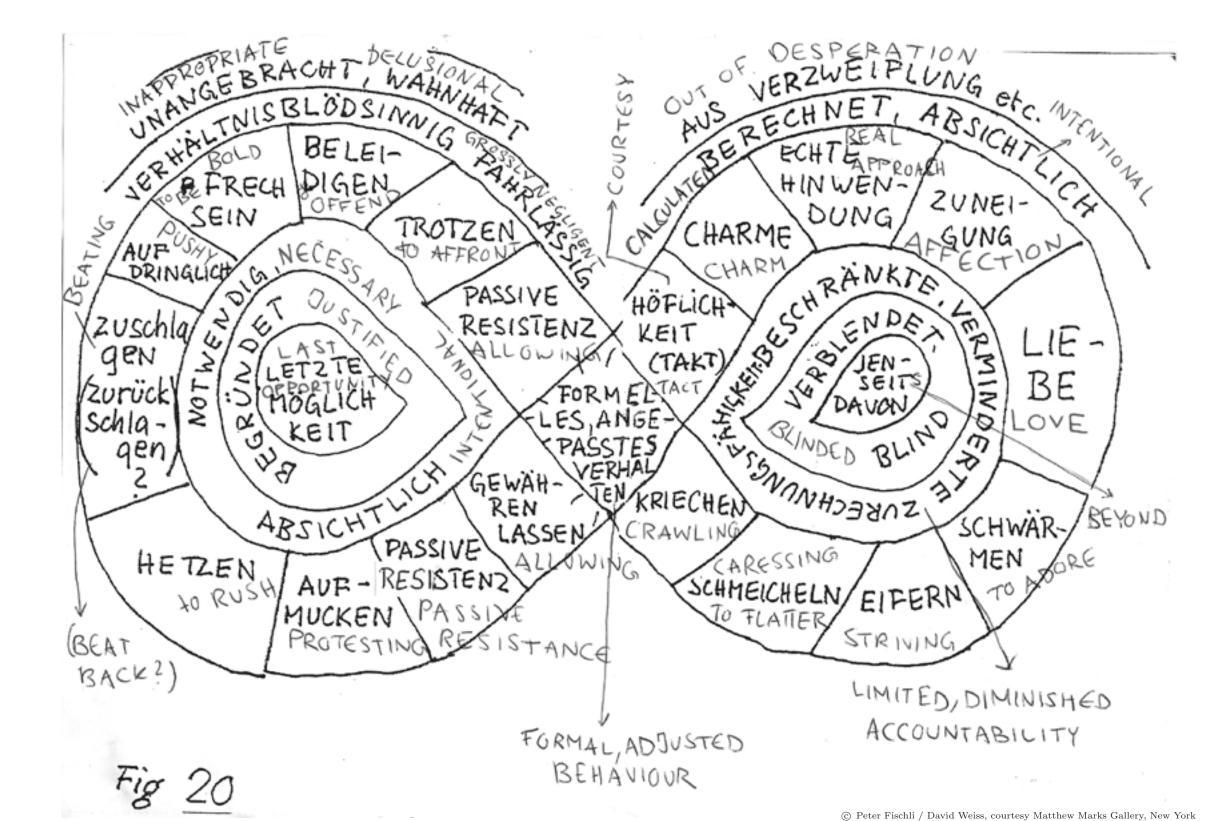
The Conversation was the first feature for which Murch was editor of both sound and image. The 1974 film, directed by Coppola, stars Gene Hackman as an eccentric audio surveillance expert who becomes increasingly entangled in a knot of suspicion and deception surrounding an object of surveillance a conversation — which he cannot unambiguously interpret. While editing The Conversation (which Murch did with very little input from Coppola, who typically refrains from the editing process when working with Murch), he first became aware of the significance of a blink marking the mental transition between discrete thoughts. The basic story is now legendary among film editors. As Murch retold it two weeks ago, he had been up all night, cutting close-ups of Hackman, and had noticed that more often than not the point at which he chose to cut — the point that felt right for the cut — happened to be on a blink. He headed out of the editing room to pick up breakfast in the Bowery district of San Francisco. On his way, he passed by a Christian Science reading room, which happened to have a copy of The Christian Science Reader featuring an interview with John Huston, who had just finished making Fat City. In the interview, when the subject of editing comes up, Huston directs the interviewer to look back and forth from Huston to a lamp in the room. Huston then points out to the interviewer that he blinked each time he transitioned from one to the other. With each change of view, there is a blink, there is a cut. The blink is a physical punctuation in the thought process, which has its analogue with a cut in a film. Without paying conscious attention to blinks, people nevertheless develop an intuitive understanding of their rhythm as related to the rhythm of thought, so that when one's blinks are out of sync with one's speech or actions, others will feel distrustful. When someone blinks at the wrong moment, especially an actor in a close-up shot, the person will likely be perceived as inauthentic or deceptive. Similarly, when an editor's cuts are off, an overall dissonance is felt in a film. There are expected

rhythms in the cognitive order. In his field, Murch has consistently redrafted the horizon of what is technically possible, often by first patiently illuminating patterns at play in the way things have already been done. Recently, he has been bringing his ingenuity to bear on an amateur interest in astronomy, which he describes as "a rabbit hole he fell down" in between editing films. On October 31, in an upstairs cinema at the NYU Cantor Film Center, Murch appeared at the invitation of Lawrence Weschler to present his current project, an attempt to devise a reliable formula to describe and predict the patterned arrangement of large celestial bodies. To this end, he has been revisiting the long-discredited Bode's Law, which he hopes to rescue from disrepute, pending a few necessary adjustments. Bode's Law is a mathematical formula derived by the German astronomer Johann Titius in 1766, subsequently popularized by the younger, more charismatic Johann Bode in 1768, and later discredited by the extraordinarily credible Johann Gauss, one of the most prolific and influential mathematicians of recent centuries. Bode's Law caught Murch's attention exactly one year ago, when, at the Mauna Kea Observatory in Hawaii, planets were observed for the first time in orbit around HR 8799, a distant star 129 light years away from earth. The position of these planets — scantily named b, c, and d — relative to one another and to their sun corresponds almost exactly to the positions of Earth, Mars, and Ceres, relative to our sun, and also to the positions of Jupiter's moons — Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto — relative to Jupiter, despite their widely incongruous masses. Bode's Law describes all of these and hundreds of other observed orbits accurately. Murch realized that Exoplanetary systems, which Bode could not

have observed, are organized in Bodean in-Murch's presentation of his findings began modestly, with a definition of apophenia, "the tendency of human beings to seek patterns where none exist," then proceeded systematically through a description of the phenomenon Bode described mathematically, to Gauss's criticisms of Bode's formula, then to the Murch modifications of Bode's Law, which address Gauss's specific objections. Murch arrives at a simplified formula that happens not only to accurately describe the spatial arrangement of large celestial bodies (those greater than 40km in diameter) in a regular, predictable pattern, but also corresponds to just intonation — in other words, Murch has found that the distances between large masses orbiting around the same object in space correspond, proportionately, to Just intonation also accords with the wave pattern of a ripple, which Murch refers to as the "vibrations of nature." If Murch is correct, space is harmonic. When asked what the implications of a revival of Bode's Law would be, Murch replied simply, "Known laws do not explain why this phenomenon should occur. That's a big deal. Some new expla-

concluding that "simultaneous density and which it has been banished back into the Ronation will be required." (AK) 

Helen Berlant with Newspaper, detail from IGLU, a theatrical performance by Guy de Cointet and Robert Wilhite, 2009



**CORDUROY** PILLOW MAKES **HEADLINES** 

(FS)

Part 6: Headless Body, Topless Bar WHOSE

# THROAT CAN I EAT?

GLASGOW — The Internet didn't do it. Whatever problems exist with news today have their roots much further back in time. If we now have celebrities rather than stars it's because publicists demanded total control over interviews and features on their artists from the 1980s onwards. Creativity was smothered, the artist's take on reality was elided, and a bland, mainstream profile was cultivated for each client. It's not that the flaws of the famous are hidden from us either, simply that those stumbles are now packaged within a neat career trajectory that includes rehab as a saintly rest station on the longer journey. As each artistic career has become more manufactured and predictable,

so the status of these figures has declined.

Similarly, in the weightier arena of war journalism, the possibilities of reporting accurately have been severely curtailed. With the end of the Vietnam War came the gradual end of many journalistic freedoms as governments considered the impact of allowing writers to describe the realities of combat or the military treatment of civilian populations. By the time the second Iraq war began in 2003, journalists were being euphemistically "embedded" with army personnel. As one military spokesman put it, "Frankly, our job is to win the war. Part of that is information warfare. So we are going to attempt to dominate the information environment." This was never going to encourage independent journalism and it marked a dangerous capitulation by the new corporations who accepted those limitations.

Things have been no better on the domestic front. Mike Sager described the changes that had already taken place by the early '90s, saying, "I've shown up at a murder scene in the mountains of coal country only to find three lawyers, three production companies, and a woman named Aphrodite writing a book. The members of the family that had lost a daughter to murder were feuding. They'd each sold rights to different companies . . . Monthly I receive letters from men in prison, long rambling appeals not for habeas corpus but for six-figure book and movie deals."

David Simon only highlighted part of the problem when he described a culture in which newspaper writers recycle press releases. The Internet can make that process easier but changing technology doesn't explain the industry's growing contempt for its own readers. The news industry, like the music and movie industries, seems unable to sense the disillusionment of its audience, who has always been smarter than it was given credit for, and who has noted every step in the de-

cline of the basic product on offer. Looking back on 25 years of Rolling Stone features, P.J. O'Rourke interviewed Hunter S. Thompson and in response to a query on satirical irreverence they found themselves close to the heart of journalism:

"I just don't know of anything better in the world than the justified attack on authority figures that also uses humor. Is there anything that beats making fun of people?

"Not if they're the right people. I think the shared perception is huge in that. You know what works: If they jump, you know you got the right word. With readers, I was surprised, and still am, at the very solid and articulate mass of people out there who are extremely varied but really do like me and agree that I'm expressing their feelings. I believe that journalism and fiction have to

do that. It's not just amusement. "Fiction writers, even when they use interesting techniques, are often not audience directed. If you're a journalist, you have to be directed toward your readers.

"Newspapers give you that connection with your reader. You've got no choice. You are fucked if you're not connected."

It's a surprisingly serious exchange on the immediacy of newspapers and a reminder of the true writer lurking within Thompson. The novelty of gonzo journalism has often obscured the reasons for its existence and the urgency behind its extremism. Looking back on the creation of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Thompson explained that it was based on an attempt to escape temporarily from threats in Los Angeles where he had been researching an article on the death of Mexican-American columnist and reporter Ruben Salazar during a riot in East L.A. Both Fear and Loathing and the piece on Salazar, "Strange Rumblings in Aztlán," were written up in parallel in the same room on the same typewriter. They are two sides of the same coin

— one detailing the absurdity of political reality in that era, the other plumbing the psyche of a country in trauma. Assessing that writing process over twenty years later, Thompson was ruthless in his honesty about the impulses that were propelling his journalism:

"We must come face to face with the terrible Fact that there is a Brutal, Overweening violence somewhere near the Core of my Work(s), which the first-time reader should not necessarily be forced to embrace and confront all at once. . . . Or at least not immediately. No. Not everybody is comfortable on this plane.

"That is the art. That is the Crystalized

Vision. I am only the medium, the channel, a human lightning rod for all the smoking, homeless visions and the horrible Acid flashbacks of a whole Generation — which are precious, if only as Living, Savage mon-

uments to a dream that haunts us all." This skill in divining is what separates feature writers from news aggregators. It's an ability to discern patterns amid the constant stream of facts and an interpretative approach that enables them to anticipate the direction history is taking. Hunter Thompson's wild prose is so pumped with adrenalin that this argument could be dismissed on the grounds of style alone. Someone like John McPhee, however, can channel similar undercurrents in society with more sobriety and without even a whiff of the gonzoid pheromone. In 1974 he published The Curve of Binding Energy, a lengthy profile of the physicist, Ted Taylor, who had designed several nuclear bombs. By the '70s Taylor was concerned about easy access to weapons-grade nuclear materials and his own research had focused on making the smallest nuclear bomb possible. To demonstrate the potential dangers, Taylor took McPhee to Manhattan:

"We had been heading for midtown but impulsively kept going, drawn irresistibly toward two of the tallest buildings in the world. We went down the Chambers Street ramp, and parked, in a devastation of rubble, beside the Hudson River. Across the water in New Jersey, the Colgate sign, a huge neon clock as red as the sky, said 6:15. We looked up the west wall of the nearest tower. From so close, so narrow an angle, there was nothing at the top to arrest the eye, and the building seemed to be some sort of probe touching the earth from the darkness of space. 'What an artifact that is!' Taylor said, and he walked to the base and paced it off. We went inside, into a wide, uncolumned lobby. The building was standing on its glass-and-steel walls and on its elevator core. Neither of us had been there before. We got into an elevator. He pressed, at random, 40. We rode upward in a silence broken only by the muffled whoosh of air and machinery and by Taylor's describing where the most effective place for a nuclear bomb would be."

McPhee's imaginative skills here reveal the darker anxieties that can lie dormant in a society for decades. And, much as he might balk at the conjunction, both he and Thompson are willing to explore the unsayable and to voice the unthinkable.

It's that energy and total commitment to language and writing that makes a good journalist. If it can be wrapped in the broad folds of a newspaper filled with writing that defies the logic of the bulletin, then even better. But it's that willingness to go for the jugular that induces pleasure. Readers know this instinctively and they always catch the scent

But when I'm finished, I'm sure that you are soon to see / Reality, my secret technique . . . (Big Daddy Kane, "Ain't no halfsteppin") (FM)



UNICORN:

# "I EXIST"

PROSPECT PARK — You've never been told the truth about the likes of those who write, but it's high time for you to know, now. So let me put it to you straight: all writers are liars. Shamelessly they'll lie to your face, ready to do whatever it takes to steal your trust. To appear trustworthy to a reader they may go as far as to denounce their own trade. All forms of betrayal will seem justified in the service of exercising power over you by capturing your attention and steering your thoughts and feelings in a particular direction. It's a vicious trick, trust me, I urge you: don't let them pull it on you!

Alright, you got me, I admit, I was about to do the same thing. But now, since you know, we're cool, yes? A clean start, I swear, I won't do it again. I'll be a better person, no more cheating, I promise! Love, comfort, and honor you, I pledge, once more, I will, I do, unconditionally . . .

As if unconditional sincerity in writing were ever possible. As if the precondition for the connection between reader and text was not always already a lie: the lie that a few choice words could suffice to create a bond of mutual trust, ex nihilo, instantly and out of the blue, between reader and writer, skipping all the steps that it takes for trust to slowly be built up between people in the social world.

Still, the lie works. The moment we continue reading beyond a text's opening lines, we intuitively entrust ourselves to the text, in good faith that submitting to the experience we will undergo, intellectually and emotionally, will do us no harm. If we do read on, it's because we feel safe to assume that we won't be fooled. The reasons for this aren't rational, but structural. The act of reading itself both produces and requires a moment of unconditional intimacy. Without it, the immersive concentration that brings written letters to life would literally be impossible. The default fallacy built into the act of reading the fallacy that permits writers to trick their readers into trusting them — lies then in the fact that the moment of mental intimacy immanent to an immersion in text is practically

indistinguishable from an experience of personal honesty. Reading feels honest. This is the conditon of its technical possibility. Yet, by definition, honesty is unconditional. If it isn't, it ceases to be what it is, and turns into its opposite. For honesty to remain conditional effectively means that it becomes a lie: a technical, functional lie.

So all writers are liars. By default. Yet, all liars too are writers. Existentially speaking. They live a life, the story of which they write, being both its narrator and protagonist. Here, I mean to refer to true liars, as opposed to casual liars, who might see fit, in want of other means, to at times deploy lies to get what they desire. True liars never merely use a lie. True liars live the lie. So nothing of what they say is ever truly false nor is anything they do actually dishonest. Their words and deeds are entirely consistent with their view of the world, and this view in turn is easily readjusted to fit new developments or interests. True liars will therefore continuously edit and rewrite the story of their lives to convert unexpected events into logical plot twists. If the overall plot must be bent into a new shape to accomodate the twist, this job is done with the greatest ease, and in the blink of an eye. True liars are extraordinarily creative and among the most morally resolute people walking the earth. There's a rationale for all they do which, though it might be in perpetual flux, is still always firmly in place. Try to prove a true liar wrong. You might as well talk to a unicorn and debate its existence. By reasoning with it, you've already entered the story in which, of course, it *uncontestably* exists.

Why do true liars lie? Arguably it is because the conditional is the only mode in which they feel free to live their lifes. Keeping their lie alive is the condition that permits them to keep moving on their own terms. The most existential threat to true liars therefore is the experience of the unconditional love, unreservedly given, being the absolute worst case scenario. This is because an unconditional bond would deprive true liars of the power to freely set and alter the conditions of the lie they live. It would put them on the spot and thus, in their view, tie them down. So they'll shun it. Love is to liars what doubts about horned horses are to unicorns: a menace.

As freedom for true liars resides in the unfettered possibility to keep rewriting their story, they need to maintain full control over the conditions of writing. To this end, they will therefore insist on controlling the conditions under which they experience — and interpret — their life, as well as the conditions under which they are perceived by others. In fact, both have to align, because it's only when others believe their story too, that true liars feel at ease with how their life is developing, namely according to the plot they write for it. This is why true liars are the most sympathetic people you're ever likely to meet. In order to receive your approval of their view of things they'll make themselves infinitely agreeable. Especially so if they sense you to have the ability to see through them. Critics attract liars. In order to defuse the chance of exposure, true liars will seek the critic's friendship and subsume him or her into their story, as one of its characters. Characters won't violate the plot. They can't. Because they're part of it. Critics are no better anyway. They're writers too, after all. And since moral resoluteness, as we have seen, is the true liar's most recognizable trademark, critics instantly give their own game away when they claim the moral high ground. Liars they are like

anyone else! Bigoted writers! Since true liars are always honest to themselves, on their own terms, it's not even clear what exposing one could amount to. The reality that true liars inhabit is the world of concocted *sympathy*. Stepping out of this reality feels to a true liar like shutting down the computer does to a writer: it prompts a lapse into apathy. As true liars experience life exclusively from the perspective of being once the story is interrupted there's noone left to feel a thing. To realize the bearing of having wronged another would dramatically interrupt the story. Since that interruption prompts instant apathy, however, the realization never penetrates. True liars play dead when confronted by the pain they cause others. Coming back to life, they will swiftly

re-edit the story, and move on. So the story goes. But what is its analysis but yet another story, a true lie, if there ever was one? As it concocts its theories, the analytic mind will find ubiquitous evidence for its view of things and wrap all up nicely in a conclusive account. Finding as much easy comfort as grim pleasure in the idea of having it all worked out, the analytic mind thus washes itself in its own toxic secretions, oblivious to how the writing it churns out begins to truly stink of the lies it tries to rinse away.

It's hard to see what could end these painful exercises, break the spell of lies and bring us back to our senses. If it's not love, nor analysis, then perhaps it's still writing that could do the job. For, as much as it will remain a medium of conditional honesty — and thus technically always a true lie — writing does have the power to produce sudden moments of unconditional clarity that hit you with the force of a bullet to the brain. But how do you fire the bullet that cannot be dodged? I don't think you can do it intentionally. To trust a well-aimed shot to hit its target is the conceit of the analyst who only fires at the other and will therefore always miss him- or herself. With the analyst as last man standing, there is still one liar too much left. To kill the lie, the bullet would in fact have to backfire first, enter the analyst's heart, exit the body, to then hit its successive targets. This ballistic curve won't fit the sympathy / apathy formula. The path the bullet describes follows the principles of

empathy / telepathy: fired from a range that couldn't be closer, it continues to travel into the far distance to hit whomever gets caught by it. This is a magic bullet theory. Or no theory at all, as, by definition, magic bullets defy the laws of forensics as much as the skills of marksmanship. There is no way to know how to best fire one. The shot must release itself. And there is nothing you can do to make that happen.

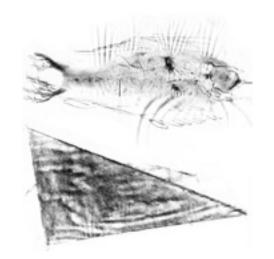
Except maybe write with the safety catch off. (JV)

REVIEW

Of A Select History of Experimental music. Curated by Mike Kelley and Mark Beasley. The Gramercy Theater, Nov. 20–21, 2009. A fantastic world And ONOMATOPOEIA Superimposed, yeah (MB/VB)

KAFKAESQUE

"Alas," said the mouse, "the world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when at last I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into," "You only need to change your direction," said the cat, and ate it up. (Franz Kafka, "A Little Fable," sometime between 1917–23)



"FIRST/LAST" NEWSPAPER TO FOLD AFTER SIX EDITIONS

D<sub>E</sub>Xter Sinister commemorated the printing of their final First/Last Newspaper and closing of their Port Authority office Saturday night, November 21 from 7 – 9pm. Visitors were able to collect remaining stock produced during the paper's brief three-week existence, including the latest and last just delivered from Linco Printers in neighboring Long Island City. Also present in the Port Authority Space, at the corner of 41st Street and Eighth Avenue, was Gareth Spor's version of Brion Gysin's seminal 1960s Dream Machine — a stencilled cylinder placed on a revolving turntable with a 100-watt lamp inside to produce a stroboscopic flicker that induces a supposedly hypnagogic state when viewed with eyes closed. Spor's update replaces Gysin's original pattern with open letterforms that spell out an aphorism by Gysin' friend and collaborator William Burroughs: "Illusion is a Revolutionary Weapon." The public was advised that this machine may be dangerous for people with photosensitive epilepsy or other nervous disorders. Also available were portions of fish and chips wrapped in old issues of TF/LN. Due to concerns over ink poisoning, particularly related to old lead type, the tradition of wrapping fish and chips in newsprint has largely been phased out despite industry workers's claims that modern newspaper inks such as those used in Queens pose no such health risks. Today's chip paper, tomorrow's news, as the old Fleet Street saying goes. Surely this is, at last, the "artless art." Sinister stressed that they would assume no responsibility for the public's epilepsy or poisoning. (DS)

> NOTICE the clearness with which the essential information stands out, and the calmness & ease of the ruling.

The sixth First/Last Newspaper was assembled by DEXTER SINISTER with contributions by Angie Keefer, Francis McKee, Steve Rushton, Rob Giampietro, Will Holder, Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Paul Elliman, Walead Beshty, Dan Fox, Frances Stark, Jeanne Dreskin, Snowden Snowden, Cory Arcangel, Guy de Cointet, Graham Meyer, Sammy's Roumanian, and Mark Beasley. Produced with the assistance of Brendan Dalton and Anne Callahan. With a special thank you to Gerald Scupp of the Fashion Center for his early advocacy and his continued careful reading, and to Glenn Weiss for making things easy and playing along. Presented under the umbrella of PERFORMA 09 and in partnership with Times Square Alliance. Edited in cooperation with Defne Ayas and Virginie Bobin.

Masthead set in Strike Alphabet courtesy Shannon Ebner.

Performa, a non-profit multidisciplinary arts organization established by RoseLee Goldberg in 2004, is dedicated to exploring the critical role of live performance in the history of twentieth century art and to encouraging new directions in performance for the twenty-first century.

