

PHILOSOPHERS ON HOLIDAY

Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.--LW

Volume IV, number 3



The Seth Peterson Cottage

Home as Place to Play

Blue Hill architect Bruce Norelius writes: These days I find myself with a new model for my approach to learning. The old one was what I think of as “the youthful student approach”, where I tried to expose myself as much as possible to the things people have deemed Good and Worthy and Important. It’s quite possible the end of this period is marked by the completion, after a year of insistent presence on my nightstand, of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time, Volume 1* (of six—the other five now donated to the library’s book sale). Even more than Joyce, Melville or Rabelais, this was the most difficult and unrewarding read of my life. Good, worthy and important, yes. But moving—to me? No.

The new model is about trusting my intuition and really delving into the things I love. Ironically, it’s what I’ve always preached but seldom practiced. “Only the piece of art that touches you the second you see it is the piece worth analyzing.” Quote, me. This is certainly not a good attitude for commencing Survey of Art 101, but it does seem like a reasonable approach for a 41-year old, when there doesn’t seem to be an extra moment in a week to stop and look up at the stars and when the years start to. . .well, you know.

So these past few weeks, I’ve been thinking about my love of maps, architectural floor plans and aerial photographs, and have spent some time considering what this is about. I love abstraction, specifically images that are on the edge of or beyond the edge of representation, and for years I have thought that the abstract quality of maps and plans are what interest me. But, my new learning model encouraged me to dig deeper. I found that some of the most abstract images (e.g., an aerial photo of a dead-flat Dakota field where the absolutely regular alternating stripes of green and gold filled the frame) were not as intriguing as photos that included a road or a stream or an unexplainable clump of trees, or where the regularity of the field was severed when it arrived at a serrated cliff. One map of a piazza in Rome made me just want to turn the page of the book, while another of the same place made me. . .well, actually, it made me want to go play there. And although I include both physical play and intellectual play in my definition, I am not speaking metaphorically.

See Wright, p.3

From the Editors

We can always tell when spring is upon us, for two reasons: one, we're rushing to get the winter edition of *Philosophers on Holiday* off to the press; and two, the Minnesota River is edging closer to the highway. Winter visited much snow on us in St. Peter this year, including on the Feast Day of St. Cholestera. With more than 120 dozen cookies made, we were host to only 20 souls, who braved the snow and the minus 20 degree weather to celebrate this holy day.

In case you are wondering if we have a new look (and to keep you from consulting all the back issues you've been carefully archiving), we admit that we have undergone a major technology upgrade. We have discovered the joys of the PageMaker program! (And no, this is not a shameless advertisement for which we receive payment--can you believe that movie *Cast Away!* How much DID Federal Express pay them, anyway?) We no longer wrestle with all the automatic and allegedly helpful corrections and formatting changes that Microsoft Word offers. We'd like to know what you think about this new look, and gladly accept and comments and suggestions. We the editors, staff, production crew, and distribution minions here at *Philosophers on Holiday* take our readers seriously.

This issue introduces a new writer to our stable and marks the return of several favorites. You'll meet Richard Benjamin, who kicks around the latest reality television program. Returnee Bruce Norelius of "Atlas Shrug" fame (Vol.II no. 2) leads us off with ruminations about the relationship between home and play. Our intermittent columnist Abby "World" Wilkerson is back, better than ever, offering her readers the hemeneutical opportunity of a lifetime with lyrics from a well-known contemporary musician, as well as serving up some advice on where to eat in the Mile-High City.

We've instituted a whole new section, devoted to letters from our readers and writers (the latter included in a last ditch effort to avoid a feeding frenzy of overly litigious lawyers). We sure would be pleased to print a letter from you, dear philosophical traveller!



Philosophers on Holiday A quarterly 'zine

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Staff Columnist Abby Wilkerson

Movie Reviewer, Immobile Reporter Barb Heldke

Hometown Tourist Carol Heldke

Web Virtuoso Jay Benjamin

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Submissions We always welcome your essays, editorials, artwork, advertisements, photos, puzzles, letters, rants.

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About the motto

We borrow our motto from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems emerge when we forget how words function in ordinary circumstances. When language "goes on holiday," we create our own thorny, knotty problems—and then we proceed to chew on them for a thousand years or so.

Our 'zine was born out of our recognition that when philosophers go on holiday, we also tend to thrum up thorny little problems that keep us worrying all the way across Montana. Philosophers, unleashed in the ordinary world, are *dangerous*—or, at the very least, highly amusing. Of course on a good day, we can also be rather insightful. (Paying way too much attention to the ordinary can produce real wisdom every once in awhile.) *Philosophers On Holiday* attempts to bring all things philosophical and holiday-related together in one place; the danger, the amusement, the bumbling, and, yes, the occasional pearl of wisdom

Wright, cont.

That map made me want to be there playing hide-and-peek, or pretending I was Cary Grant being pursued by the KGB through ancient narrow alleys. As I went through other images, first of plans and maps, and then of actual houses, I realized how a common thread of most architecture I love addresses a desire to play, to fantasize, to disconnect with reality, to live in a drama of my own creation.

As an architect who does almost exclusively houses, I realize that this is not a characteristic most people would identify as something they want in their houses. People require such diverse stuff from the places in which they live: Status, humbleness, comfort, serenity, cacophony, light, dark, and a million other things. And although the establishment of a

home is arguably an expression of adulthood, I suggest that more than many of us realize, we also crave a place for our imagination to be nurtured: A place to play. (That doesn't preclude a

tower or a room that is painted to look like the inside of a circus tent, but I'm generally talking about a more subtle, sophisticated, suggestive setting for play.)

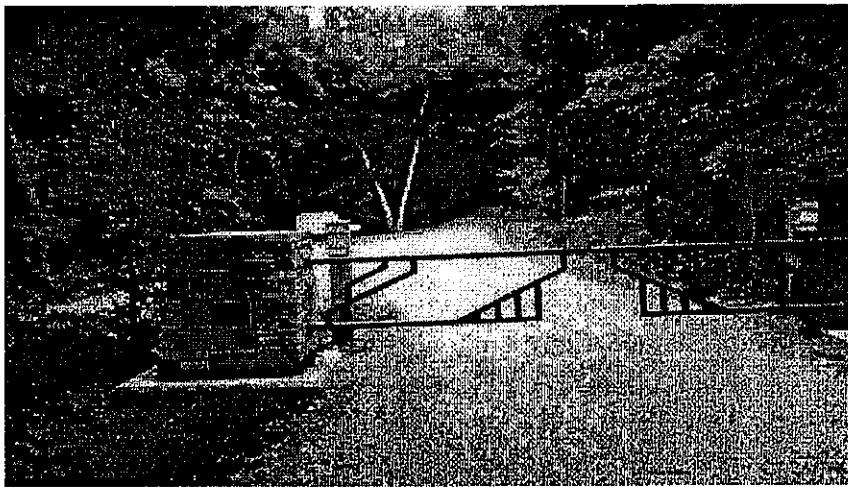
A highlight of this long, snowy winter was an overnight stay with Philosophers on Holiday and Brian Johnson in southern Wisconsin at the Seth Peterson Cottage designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1958. This house embodies the spirit of house as a place to play. Indeed, so much so, that after months of trying to process the complex impressions of staying in such an astounding building, I would be willing to say that I think that may be its most salient characteristic.

I've always been skeptical of the analysis of Wright's work (even by himself) as primarily a metaphor for domesticity. He was a failure at marriage and fatherhood, his client base included many single, gay, lesbian and childless couples, and he was working at a time when the family was being radically redefined. I think his architecture is an expression of more primal motifs, and many can be seen in this cottage. Within a tiny thousand square feet, the house is at once cave, tree house and tent. Its stone floors and base suggest permanence, its poorly detailed wood windows and furni-

ture suggest (and exhibit) decay. Its accommodation of kitchen, bath and storage are done in an off-hand way, as if to say Wright had more important things to accomplish than all those silly accoutrements the Hold Everything catalog would have us believe are the foundation of our existence. The ceiling is alternately slightly too low or too high for what one would expect; the fireplace is startlingly large. In general, the house is raw and sexy—it's all breast and bicep and buttocks. I would guess Seth Peterson's ghost smiles more when his guests indulge in the bacchanal of a drunken game of charades than when they spend the weekend reviewing financial statements.

When I think of the Seth Peterson cottage, I realize I spend

much of my energy accommodating complex programs and making sure there are no surprises for my clients; it's an assumption that the building must perform like a Swiss watch. We employ surveyors, civil, structural, mechanical and acoustical engineers, landscape architects, lighting designers, kitchen designers, interior designers, pool consultants, *feng shui* consult-



The gate at the Seth Peterson Cottage

ants. But right now I think of Seth Peterson's beautifully lacy, light, leaky windows. I would no more think of designing the windows of a house literally from scratch than I would propose to design a car for Mitsubishi. But that's what Wright did, because he wanted to make sure that looking through the windows of the Seth Peterson Cottage felt like looking through the branches of a tree house. And that, he accomplished beautifully. This house, certainly, is a place to play.

Looking for the perfect gift for the person who has everything? Looking for the unique gift to stand out in the pile of generic pretty packages? Well, give a gift subscription to Philosophers on Holiday! With the first issue, the recipient will receive a note

announcing your fantastic present. That way the lucky recipient will know whom to thank, and you will receive full credit for your ingenuity.



Queremos hablar español

Chapter One

Peg writes: For the past several years, Lisa and I have wanted to learn Spanish. This is very important to us; it is the first language of several good friends, and there is a growing Latino community in the St. Peter area. We had tried learning Spanish a couple of years ago by means of a CD-ROM program hosted by Ricardo Montalban of *Fantasy Island* fame. I kept expecting Tootsie as a pop up icon announcing, "The Plane. The plane." The CD-ROM program didn't work for us because it wasn't suited to our learning style.

Luckily for us, neither of us was teaching January term this year. We decided that we wanted to go to Guatemala to study Spanish. Prior to our departure, we sat in on a Spanish class for two weeks. We purchased the text book package which included a workbook and lab manual. Before our class, we could be found huddled around the computer, doing the lab exercises available on the web. Of course, the audio quality was a notch below my 1972 Radio Shack transistor radio, but that didn't deter us. We think the students hated us. Why? Wouldn't it be fun for them to see their professors making complete fools out of themselves? Wouldn't at least one of them think it was a hoot that one of us (I shan't name names, but I can say someone not currently identified as me) announced boldly, "Yo soy cuaderno," instead of "yo tengo cuarenta años." Who wants to split hairs about whether I am a notebook or I have forty years? But one of the biggest differences we noticed between Us and Them was their complete ease about the lack of the formal introduction of grammar in the textbook. Lisa and I would leave each class hoping for more grammar. The text book didn't work for us because it wasn't suited to our learning style. Give us grammar or give us death.

TRAVEL NOTES

Not only is the Natural Ontological Attitude (NOA) a fragrance; it's *also* apparently a chichi restaurant in Miami Beach. Now this makes some sense. Presumably they serve all and only organically-grown, preservative-free foods. (But do they serve all and only those who do not serve themselves? *That's* the real question.)



Garrett Zayic reports that there is a Monad Boulevard in Billings, Montana. And I bet you can see *everywhere* from there, if you just look reallllly close....

BACK FOR THE FUTURE

Lisa writes: I left Guatemala before the future.

In fact, I'd barely gotten a healthy start on the past when we had to fly back to the United States.

Not Peg. By the time we completed our two short weeks of language study, she'd not only done two kinds of future, but also two kinds of past, as well as the present, and even some subjunctive. I think that's all, but I wouldn't swear to it—I don't even know what some of those tenses are *for*, let alone how to construct them. Old Latin student that she is, Peg galloped through tenses faster than a caballo miniatura* on the Argentine pampas.

Me, I struggled valiantly with the grammar, mistaking direct objects for indirect ones on a regular basis. Choosing incorrectly at least fifty percent of the time when playing everyone's favorite game, "Por o Para?" And generally forgetting every rule for every single one of the eight million stem-changing verbs I was supposed to be committing to memory during my ten-minute walk home for lunch.

But when it came to speaking in Spanish—actually communicating—it turns out I was kind of okay at it. And actually able to kind of understand others (so long as they never talked about events yet to come, but confined themselves to things that *had* happened, or were *currently* happening). I'd pull out my dictionary, cobble together some lame syntax (carefully designed to minimize the need for objects, direct or indirect), and away I'd go. I talked with my teacher about U.S. multinational capitalism. I chatted up the bus driver about the quality of the various roads in Guatemala. I schmoozed with the hotel desk clerk about where to go and what to see at Lake Atitlan. And I shamelessly cadged recipes from Senora Perez, our home-stay host.

Everyone who knows another language always tells you that the only way to learn it is to go to a country in which it is

See the future, p.6

you should be here →



The "You Need a Transfer" Department

On our return from Guatemala, we were met at customs by an agent who asked if we had all our bags with us. "Si, I mean yes," Lisa replied. "Do I look *Spanish* to you?" the man snarled. "Uh, no," we stuttered, "but we've been practicing our Spanish very hard for two weeks and it just came out." "Well, *practice* on someone else," were his parting words. Hmmm. Maybe you want to consider working at a *different* border. I understand there are some lovely job openings at the customs station in the Bering Strait.

Our Readers Write...

Dear Editors:

I was reading the latest issue of PoH while walking up the stairs to my office. As I came to the section on Cemeteries, I took a misstep and nearly plunged to my death. What does this mean? Is it merely a that my habit of reading while I walk (a habit of longstanding) will like most vices eventually kill me? Or was the latest issue of PoH haunted by the spirit of Arvilla (see vol IV, no. 2p. 6), who even from the Other Side wants to outlive others?

Yours,

A Cautious Reader

[a.k.a. Nancy Hanway, St. Peter, MN]

...Our Writers Do Too

Dear Philosophers on Holiday:

On behalf of the Layout Editors Association of America, I regret to inform you that Mr. James H. Schwartz has requested our assistance in a legal action against your magazine [sic].

On p. 4 of your recent issue (Vol. IV, no. 2, Fall, 2000 "Really!") a typesetting error has resulted in the following sentence: "It's twenty years later and I'm on a romantic vacation, driving through Maine with a death."

Excuse me? Sounds uncomfortable. To say nothing of odiferous.

Later on the same page: "It affords the gift of shade and sets this distant corner of the cemetery apart from bare girlfriend."

Ahem. She was a stoic. She was not a striptease artist.

Evidement, two final lines in col. 1 should be shifted right to final lines of col. 2, etc...

Can't wait to read your clever correction. You do write clever corrections, don't you?

James

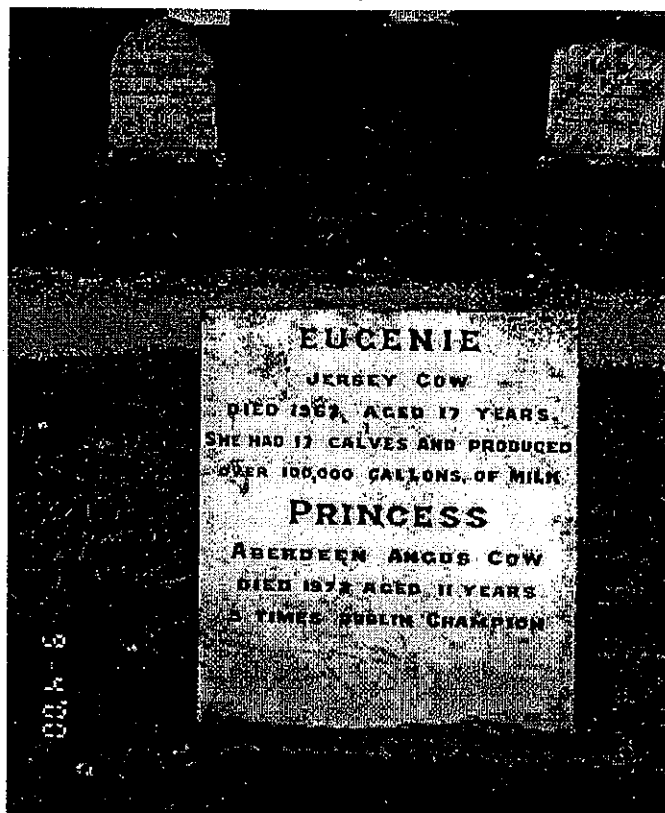
P.S. You owe me a hell of a lot of dental floss.

The Perils of the Passive Voice

There is a sign at the international baggage claim area in the George Bush (argh) Airport in Houston that reads "All baggage must be picked up." Can't you just imagine stand there and right here, little of those bags is care if you didn't bring it. You pick that up and carry it through customs or there's no more travelling abroad for you!"



GRAVESTONES, REVISITED



Helen Onufrak (Alexandria, Virginia), sends us this photo, along with a letter on stationery from Dromoland Castle in County Clare, Ireland, in which she notes:

I meant to send the enclosed photo of the tombstone in for the [Cemetery, Gravestone and Memorial Marker] issue,* but was running late as usual. Eugenie—who had an impressive 17 calves in 17 years!—and Princess were buried in the family pet cemetery at Powerscourt, a beautiful manor home on the outskirts of Dublin. We should all be so productive!

*That would be volume IV, no. 2. Copies are still available.

Letter from Mom: Dad's new pastime

Recently, Lisa's mom Carol sent her a photo of her father, Richard, that had just appeared in the Barron News Shield (the weekly newspaper in a neighboring town). The photo showed her father getting into his pickup truck, above the headline, "Hardee's Restaurant, Rice Lake, target of thieves." In an accompanying letter, Carol notes:

Here is the hard evidence about your father and his latest hobby. It seems unreal that not one person has made a comment; must be that nobody in Rice Lake reads the Barron paper.

Thank heavens! At least she'll still be able to hold her head up high in Rice Lake—until he's convicted, that is.



Wilkerson's World

It is my great pleasure to announce not one but two new contests especially for readers of this column. I suspect most readers will agree with me that (a) philosophical exegesis of the Prince songbook is long overdue, and (b) far too few of us in the world of philosophical travel and leisure do have our own theme songs (as Ally McBeal fan Barthebrief will surely acknowledge), not to mention that the world of professional philosophy tends to be, how shall I say it, funk-deprived. So, to enter Contest A, please submit your philosophical exegesis of the following lyrics in 100 words or less, making your own theoretical framework explicit, to Contest A, c/o Abby Wilkerson, 7904 Long Branch Parkway #3, Takoma Park, MD 20912 (email alw@gwu.edu). To enter Contest B, send your own lyrics for the following song—a Prince homage, it goes without saying, which is simultaneously your own theme song (same address). Or send a video or cassette tape of yourself singing the lyrics (with or without backup). I will choose the winning entries on the basis of extremely sound criteria (whatever they turn out to be) and perhaps with the help of my lovely assistants (whomever they turn out to be, but I assure you they will be quality people every one). I won't promise prizes at this point, but the lucky winners will see their entries published here!

My Name is Prince

My name is Prince and ☺ am funky
 My name is Prince--the one and only
 ☺ did not come to funk around
 'Til ☺ get your daughter I won't leave this town
 In the beginning God made the sea
 But on the 7th day He made me
 He was trying to rest y'all when He heard the sound
 Sound like a guitar--cold gettin' down
 ☺ tried to bust a high note but ☺ bust a string
 My God was worried 'til He heard me sing
 My name is Prince and ☺ am funky
 My name is Prince--the one and only--hurt me!

My name is Prince and ☺ am funky
 When it come to funk ☺ am a junky
 ☺ know from righteous ☺ know from sin
 ☺ got 2 sides and they're both friends
 Don't try to clock 'em cuz they're much too fast
 If ☺ try 2 stop 'em they'll kick that ass
 Without a pistol, without a gun
 When u hear my music u'll be having fun
 That's when ☺ gotcha that's when u're mine
 2 tell the truth--tell me, what's my line?
 My name is Prince and ☺ am funky
 My name is Prince--the one and only--hurt me!

My name is Prince--☺ don't wanna be king
 Cuz ☺'ve seen the top and it's just a dream

Big cars and women and fancy clothes
 Will save your face but it won't save your soul
 ☺'m here 2 tell u that there's a better way
 Would our Lord be happy if he came 2day?
 ☺ ain't saying ☺'m better no better than you
 But if u want 2 play with me u better learn the rules
 My name is Prince and ☺ am funky
 My name is Prince--the one and only
 ☺ did not come 2 funk around
 Til ☺ get your daughter ☺ won't leave this town--hurt me!

Then, as narrative theorist Franco Moretti would say, fifteen verses or so go by. I will go out on a limb here and say that these initial three verses will suffice for PonH contest purposes, but readers are urged to listen to the song in its entirety, on the 1992 release Prince and the New Power Generation. Then, enter early. Enter often. The world will thank you.

The Future, cont.

spoken and immerse yourself in it. Sink or swim, all that stuff. And believe it or not, everyone is right! But they don't tell you *why* this works. Oh, sure; they tell you how important it is to be surrounded by the language, how important it is to hear it spoken in a lot of different ways, that kind of thing. But here's what it's really about: you need to go to a place where you look stupid for NOT speaking the language, rather than trying to learn it in a place in which you look stupid for SPEAKING it. With humblest apologies and all due respect to my many friends who soldier on valiantly to teach Other Languages in the United States, I must report that we English speaking USians always feel pretty ridiculous sitting in a roomful of other English speakers (especially when said English speakers are 19-year-old USians well schooled in the arts of delivering withering looks), gabbling on about what classes we have and which of our classmates is especially tall and which room of the house lodges the refrigerator. Foolish, because: a) we all KNOW there's a much better way for us to be talking to each other than in a language none of us speaks, and b) if we WERE talking to each other in a language we actually know, there's no WAY we'd be talking about who was taller.

Change the scene to one in which you look foolish—no, make that buffoonish, arrogant, ignorant, monolingual and doltish—if you insist on speaking the only language you happen really to actually speak, and everything else changes. So, you see, what's really important about immersion is that it makes you be embarrassed in the right direction—the direction of SPEAKING, rather than NOT speaking.

Next January, I'm going to go back. To the future.

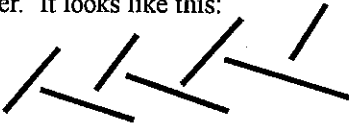
*Caballo miniatura: Yes, it means miniature horse. Apparently they are a big deal in Argentina; Peg read a children's book all about them.

Ski Tips for the Fabric-Conscious

Lisa writes: We here at *Philosophers on Holiday* know that our readers have come to depend upon us for complete, accurate and cutting edge instruction and advice—advice about travel, yes, but also about other recreational activities. (Many of you have written to thank us for our article on rock plopping. The piece on hand signals for use at academic conferences is constantly in demand. And then of course there's our encyclopedic work on coastal hair designs; we know many of you ladies don't go to the beauty parlor without *that* one tucked into your purse.) And so it is with pride, and as part of our continuing efforts to serve your recreational needs, that we offer this brief primer of cross-country ski techniques developed by us during the ski season that is just winding to a close. We encourage you to tuck it into your gaiters, so it will be ready for you at the start of the next season.

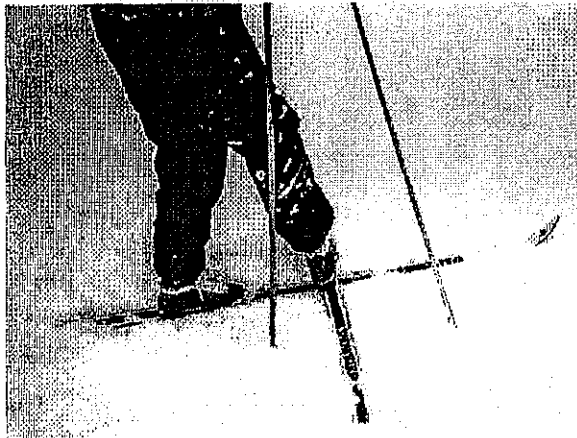
The Herringbone: Fabric of the Past

Most x-c skiers learn the herringbone the first day they're out on skis. A technique designed for climbing up hills, the herringbone gets its name from the design left in the snow by a skier. It looks like this:



But let's face it; when was the last time you saw anyone wearing herringbone, other than at an APA convention? Today's skiing calls for today's fabric designs! And we've come up with a whole array, including:

The Tartan Plaid



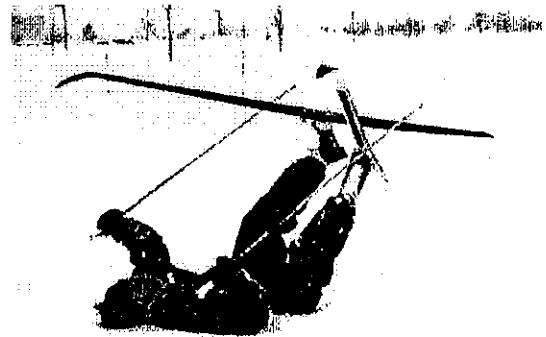
This very complicated technique can only be properly shown as a series of photographs; imagine, if you will, that the action in this photograph is repeated three, four, or even five times in the same location. The result is the tartan plaid, a name it borrows from that blue-and-green fabric used to make those cunning dog coats for Scotties. The Tartan is an ideal technique for conditions that we haven't yet encountered as skiers. But we're sure you'll find them; when you do, please write to tell us!

The Tie Die

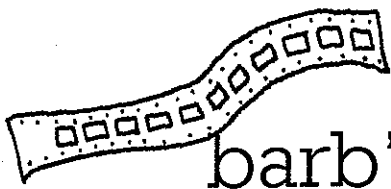


No, it's not a misspelling; it's just about the hottest thing we've come across since lovebeads! The tie die is a cross-country ski technique that only works if you use the more traditional, lace-up ski boots. Just bend over to adjust the laces, bend a little further...just a little further...that's right...and splat! Bob's your uncle! You've done the tie die! Easy, isn't it? It's just the technique to use when you've had enough and you want to quit but you don't want to appear to be a wimp. The tie die *looks* like a serious fall, but most of the time you come away with nothing more serious than snow up your sleeves.

The Dotted Swiss



This technique is just the thing to use at the beginning of the season, when you're still a bit unsteady on the ol' skis. (It's also perfect for you alpine skiers!) Designed for maximum stability (and very little wear and tear on the skis—ideal when snow conditions are dicey!), the D.S. leaves a characteristic circular indentation in the snow. The next skier to come along that trail will know that they've been preceded by a Dotted Swisser!



barb's briefs

Scarface (Al Pacino, 1983)

Oliver Stone and Brian DePalma must never be allowed to work together again and I can imagine that Michelle Pfeiffer* would gladly pay to have all copies of this burned! But it was fascinating to see how snorting a pillowcase full of cocaine could allow Tony to withstand several minutes of direct hits from automatic weapons without falling down. I can't believe they passed up a chance to have the pet tiger devour someone onscreen. Most unrealistic Cuban accents ever.

There remains a large amount of "merch" for sale online for this movie. Many views from the movie on posters. Yipes! Better check out the 1932 original, I guess!

Meanwhile, a repeat of *Working Girl* on ENCORE yesterday was as amusing as ever. Another of those "I shouldn't like this but..." movies.

*Elvira: how did she ever take a part like this? Even the name is awful.



Of (Late) Seasonal Interest

The following exchange took place via email, after yet another snowstorm had socked the northeast coast.

BtB: BtB is looking for a "shoveling" video to review. She may focus on "Ode to Snow Shovel" or something for the poetry section instead—there's little time for watching movies these days.

Ed: Maybe you should review on of those videos featuring those guys from Second City TV. The ones from Canada who say "Take off, eh?" all the time.

BtB: I hate those guys. Well, there's the review!



We do hereby entreat you to
subscribe to
philosophers on holiday
with all due speed.

PAPER MOON REDUX

A Movie-Related Story

Lisa writes: Remember that movie *Paper Moon*--the one where Tatum O'Neal got to wear that hat? Remember the scam she and her father ran out of the back of their car? Going town to town selling "personalized" Bibles to widow ladies whose names they found in the newspaper? Well, the other night Your Editors encountered the twenty-first century version of the spurious Scripture swindle. Are you ready for this? Aerial photographs of your house--your very own house.

One evening, while eating our usual elaborate dinner, there came a knock at the door. Peg answered it, and a man, a total stranger, said to her, in a voice dripping with hydrogenated vegetable oil, "I wonder if you recognize this place." Peg responded in the false-hearty voice she reserves for people with whom she intends to have nothing to do, "Why, yes. Yes, I do." Taking this for encouragement, the man nudged his way closer to her, obviously hoping to get inside the door. As he did so, I sprang into his view, and he into mine. I saw that he was holding a gigantic—I mean gigantic—picture frame.

In the frame, of course, was an equally giant photo of our house, taken from the air. (As he turned it to face me, the light caught the photo just right, so I could see it ripple slightly under the glass--evidence that the marriage between photo and frame was not necessarily intended to be a permanent one.) Seizing the moment, Mr. Trans Fat launched into a spiel, describing his company in rapid-fire detail (largest aerial photography company in the country, based in Wisconsin, used to do farmland photographs, has branched out in recent years (because, of course, you cannot photograph a farm of ten kajillion acres, except from space, and even if you could, there are only three farm owners now, so it's hard to make a living doing it)). And wouldn't we like to have this lovely, *lovely* photo of our home for our very own?

Well, no we wouldn't. And no, we *still* wouldn't, even when we found out they wouldn't be back to photograph for another ten to fifteen years (who asked them to do it the first time?).

As he walked back down our boardwalk, I had a vision of him getting into the back seat of the car to slide out the cardboard backing, remove our photograph, and slide in the gigantic photograph of our neighbors' house. The photo doesn't fit quite right, so it ripples under the glass.

I wonder if the ink smeared on Ryan's Bibles.

BOOT CAMP MAKES ME WANT TO BOOT

We welcome to the staff Richard Benjamin of Boston College, and nephew of our web god Jay. Richard has agreed to watch television, so that the rest of us don't have to. He writes:

Spring is upon us, which means singing birds, blooming daffodils, and, most reliably, tons of crappy new TV shows. We have the new mega-hyped "star vehicles" with their liberal definitions of "star". We also have the riveting new dramas about cops, lawyers, cops who dabble in law, and lawyers who are undercover cops. Last and not least is the newest pestilent wave of reality TV shows.

The first wildly successful reality show in United States was "Survivor," the ratings of which slaughtered even such quality programming as "The Webber Show" and "Geena." I honestly did not mind the first season of "Survivor", but this is largely because I never actually watched it. This season, I have been half-willingly ushered into the world of tribal councils, immunity necklaces, and all of that other silliness. For me, watching "Survivor" is like a guilty pleasure without the pleasure. Each week, the throttling drums of the theme song pacify me into a stupor that relents only at the conclusion of the show-ending tribal council.

Yet, as bad as "Survivor" can be, it plays out like Chekov compared to Fox's new reality program, "Boot Camp." This program substitutes a boot camp for "Survivor"'s Australian outback, "dismissal hill" for "Survivor"'s "tribal council," and sixteen contestants for "Survivor"'s sixteen contestants. Oh wait, that is exactly the same; Fox better hope that all of those cop-lawyers don't get their righteous paws on this case. Continuing the mimicry even further, players on "Boot Camp" may earn immunity each week, though Fox was creative enough to call this honor "amnesty." Of course, this word doesn't exactly fit, but the show has far larger problems than linguistic accuracy.

The central premise of "Boot Camp" is that the sixteen contestants will struggle through 30 grueling days of strenuous activity and non-stop admonishment from beefy instructors. The two contestants left after 30 days complete in something called "The Gauntlet" which is "48 hours of severe physical and mental anguish." Though precious few contestants stand out in the slightest, I have at least a modicum of pity for the two future finalists; after watching sixty minutes of "Boot Camp," I know that even one hour of severe physical and mental anguish can be pretty tough. I also felt a bit guilty when contestants had to navigate a 5-mile obstacle course to win an extra hour of sleep; after all, I earned this privilege simply by turning on the TV to watch "Boot Camp".

The show's sole saving grace is an outspoken contestant named Meyer, who has no qualms about his conniving ways and no shame in sounding like a complete idiot. When Meyer barely avoids being the first contestant kicked off, he solemnly proclaims the incident to be "one of the biggest upsets in military history"; as notable as this event may someday prove to be, I would still put my money on Waterloo. Despite Meyer's battering ram of moronic comments, he does provide a rare moment of lucidity when he proclaims "this show is stupid and retarded."

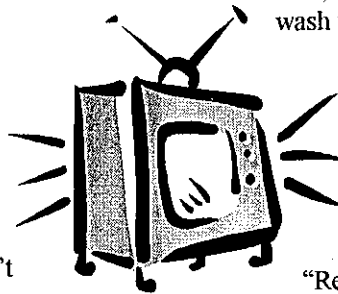
Outside of Meyer, "Boot Camp" is valuable solely for showing that basically any reality TV show can get on the air. Here are some ideas I came up with:

"The Popular Table": This program takes place in a middle school cafeteria, where sixteen students are chosen to sit at a table designated as "cool". Each episode ends with a meeting at "fate playground" where one student is delegated to sit with the nerds for the rest of the show's duration. Those remaining at the popular table are encouraged to pummel these exiles with stale carrot cake and french fries.

"Supermodels": Sixteen models are signed up to a series of fashion spreads, one every three days. Between these shoots, they are forced to eat full-sized meals and wash their hair with non-organic shampoos. They are only allowed two hours to apply makeup before each shoot. The winner is the model who goes the longest without being fired for looking too much like a normal person. The winner receives a lifetime supply of laxatives.

"Reality TV Show": Sixteen people develop their own reality TV shows. The goal is to come up with something as close as possible to "Survivor" without getting sued. Immunity is granted for coming up with clever synonyms for "immunity." If anyone comes up with any idea that is too original or compelling, they are dismissed and forced to write for "The Simpsons."

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about reality TV shows is how shockingly unreal they truly are. I may be alone here, but when I see 16 full-grown men and woman stranded in the Australian Outback and forced to run obstacle courses, I do not think "Hey! That is just like real life!" When the premier of "Boot Camp" came to a close, my roommate blankly glanced in my direction and asked, "There is something wrong with our culture, right?" Having been dulled by sixty minutes of non-stop contrivance, I was unable to immediately recognize the reality of his words. Though I now recognize his blunt Meyer-esque wisdom, "Survivor" starts in five minutes so further reflection will have to wait. And so will my self-respect.



Pantheon Gastronomique

Abby "World" Wilkerson writes: Recently my partner (a.k.a. Gladcorn Guy) and I were in Denver for a conference. Our hotel was on the 16th Street Mall, a pedestrian area in the center of town which anyone who has been a tourist in Denver in the last few years undoubtedly remembers. It is pleasant and safe, with an outdoor area of many blocks that is highly accessible, with the most plentiful and best-designed curb cuts I've seen. It is largely, however, an endless parade of Banana Republic, Cheesecake Factory, Barnes and Nobles, Starbucks, and the like. Those whose traveling is of the Accidental Tourist variety will be quite happy here, of course, but if you prefer small and locally owned, there are a couple of spots within easy walking distance worth noting. La Playa Azul Mexican Restaurant (1500 Curtis Street) is open all day, and satisfied our breakfast needs more than one morning during our stay. I knew our chances were good, because when we entered the place, right away I heard the TV tuned to a Spanish language channel, while cumbias could be heard in the kitchen—a combination which as far as I can tell is a necessary, and perhaps a sufficient condition, for the availability of good Mexican food. The huevos rancheros (Mexican style, and yes, there are other kinds of huevos

rancheros, far too alarming to discuss here) were satisfyingly spicy, a decent ballpark approximation of those at the dear departed Lubbock restaurant of my misspent youth, El Charro's (yes, Lubbock had and has its consolations, despite all rumors to the contrary). Huevos a la mexicana were had and enjoyed as well, although not by me, because why order them when huevos rancheros are available?

When night falls, the weary traveler can find comfort in the classic combination of live jazz/cheap beer/burrito at El Chapultepec Cantina (1962 Market St.), where there is never a cover charge and the menu prices range from \$2 to \$5. Denver has a vibrant jazz scene, and El Chapultepec is famous for live jazz every day of the week but Monday. The walls are covered with photos of the jazz artists who have played there. The crowd at this unique Denver landmark the night we were there ranged from twenty-somethings to people in their seventies. Some must have been chile-deprived refugees from the Midwest or the east coast like me; I would return on a night when just the juke box (and what a juke box it is) is playing, for the sake of the green chile smothering the simple bean burrito.

A page from our Field Guide



Pictured above is a rare variety of loon, spotted on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Known as the Loon Azul, it has developed the ability to avoid the yearly migration to Florida. Working in partnership with 3M,* the loon has perfected an insulating jacket that keeps the bird warm, while allowing for maximum freedom of motion. The optional hood feature protects the bird's delicate head, site of so much of the body's heat loss.

*Rumor has it that 3M hopes to recoup the losses it will sustain when Scotchguard goes off the market, by selling the jackets to resort owners eager to keep the tourist-attracting loons in the area all winter long.

Queremos hablar español

Chapter two

Peg continues: Our two weeks in a class gave us a little grounding for the trip to Guatemala. We could count, ask how much something cost, and knew the difference between the verb *estar* and *ser*. We also had a list of adjectives to describe people's character traits (always important when traveling into a foreign country and wanting not to offend), and a handful of verbs. Granted, we didn't have a lot of nouns to go along with the verbs, but we had the verbs. We had arranged to attend the Probigua (Proyecto Biblioteca Guatemala) school in Antigua. Language schools in Guatemala are a dime a dozen, and we picked ours because of its mission of building libraries in rural areas. On the flight to Guatemala City, we were fortunate to sit next to a young Guatemalan University student who was returning home after having spent a year in Wisconsin working. She was able to give us a crash course in vocabulary for body parts, and useful expressions (*podria a hablar despacio, por favor?*) She was charming, and before we knew it, we were landing in Guatemala City.

We had made arrangements with the school to be picked up at the airport. We were exhausted, and so our already severely limited abilities were taxed by the exchange of greetings. The man who picked us up spoke no English. So neither Lisa nor I was convinced that we understood correctly when he informed us that the school had thirty students from St. John's University, a school two hours up the road from us in Collegeville Minnesota. We thought that we couldn't be right; we hadn't just traveled three thousand miles to be with students who could easily be mistaken for our own. We had.

Our first day of school, Lisa and I were nervous about who would be our teachers, and how would we be paired. My teacher, I soon came to realize, was a grammar dominatrix. She was familiar as a type of teacher, bringing back fond memories of St. Mary Virginia's Latin classes in Catholic school. If it was grammar I was craving, it was grammar I got. After two weeks, I had many tenses. I could form gerunds. Her pedagogical approach was suited to my learning style.

We read children's stories ("Usted es una chica en español") when I would become frustrated by my inability to read *101 Dalmatians* in Spanish. Luckily I knew the story so I could bluff, reminding me of St. Mary Virginia's Latin class when I would move my lips a lot when the rest of the class was translating the *Aeneid*.

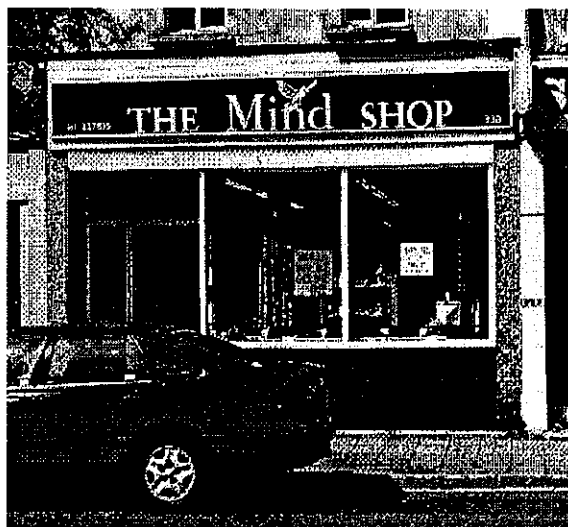
Creative Hearing Department Print Division

Editors' note: This irregular feature of PonH is usually devoted to aural creativity. However, as we put this issue to bed, we can't resist sharing a few of the more creative respellings* we've read in student papers over the years. We've paraphrased the actual sentences, to protect their writers' anonymity. (Okay, it's really because we forgot to write them down verbatim.)

1. Student email: "What about violence that is used by oppressed people? Does that count as liberatory? I know the Pink Panthers used a lot of violence in the 70's." [Peter Sellers? Who knew?]
2. Student paper: "This writing by a 1970's feminist writer reminds me a lot of the work of the 19th century freed slave and abolitionist, Sojourney Weaver." [Didn't she write "Ain't I an Alien?"]
(Disclaimer: these first two writers Knew Better; when their creativity was pointed out to them, they writhed on the floor and moaned for quite some time.)
3. A friend of a friend reports that her all-time favorite student creative respelling is the student who referred to someone as a "real pre-Madonna." [Would that be like the Venus of Willendorf?]
4. A student wrote an essay on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, comparing the Greek warrior Agamemnon (who sacrificed his daughter so that his ships could sail to Troy to reclaim Helen) and Abraham (who was ready to sacrifice his only son Isaac). The student wrote that Agamemnon killed his daughter. Mr. Memnon made the sacrifice for the good of his country. [I understand that Mrs. Memnon was not very happy with Mr. Memnon and their son Orestes was caught in the middle.]
5. A student informed me in a paper that the famous eighteenth century French philosopher "Jean Jacques Cousteau believed that what many consider progress leaves man less well off." [I knew he had been diving for a long time, but not that long. And why does Geneva always get erased?]

*Respellings. Let's face it; these are way too much fun to be relegated to the category of misspellings.

Mark Lance, of Georgetown University, writes that "this photo—Descartes commodified—is from Cardiff, Wales, [taken] during a visit with philosophers Alessandra Tanesini and Bethan Bateman. It speaks for itself."



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Queremos hablar español

Chapter three

Peg continues: Working with someone one-on-one for six hours a day for two weeks is an intense experience. You can't hide. My teacher's English was quite good, and she would answer my questions in a combination of English and Spanish. By the end of the first week, I was trying to ask questions about the political, social, and economic conditions of the country. I wanted to know what the relationships were like between the Mayans, Ladinos, and Spanish. How was tourism effecting the country, and what did she think of this change? She answered my questions, carefully describing the ways in which the presence of United States corporations and the dollarization of the Guatemalan currency were affecting the economy.

Not having a vocabulary that had been built for thirty-five years and having a very limited ability to speak and to understand left me very disconcerted. I wanted to have a disclaimer before every sentence I tried to utter, asserting that while my speech was very simple and very rudimentary, my thoughts were not. And all the while I was experiencing these internal machinations, I was acutely aware of the fact that I could lapse into English, knowing full well that my teacher and most of the other people around me would understand me. I had a choice about when I wanted to run the risk of being incomprehensible (and sometimes comic) and thus was more of my privilege revealed to me. In this global multinational corporation village, I know that huge chunks of the world must live in translation to English for me so that I can be understandable to them, and they to me.