

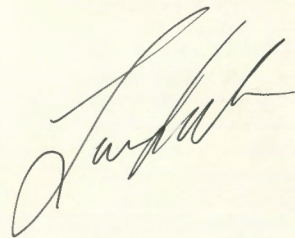
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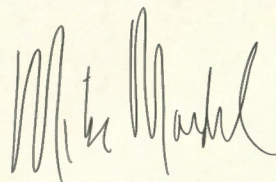
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Library of Congress Number 76-57041
I.S.B.N. 0918290-01-5
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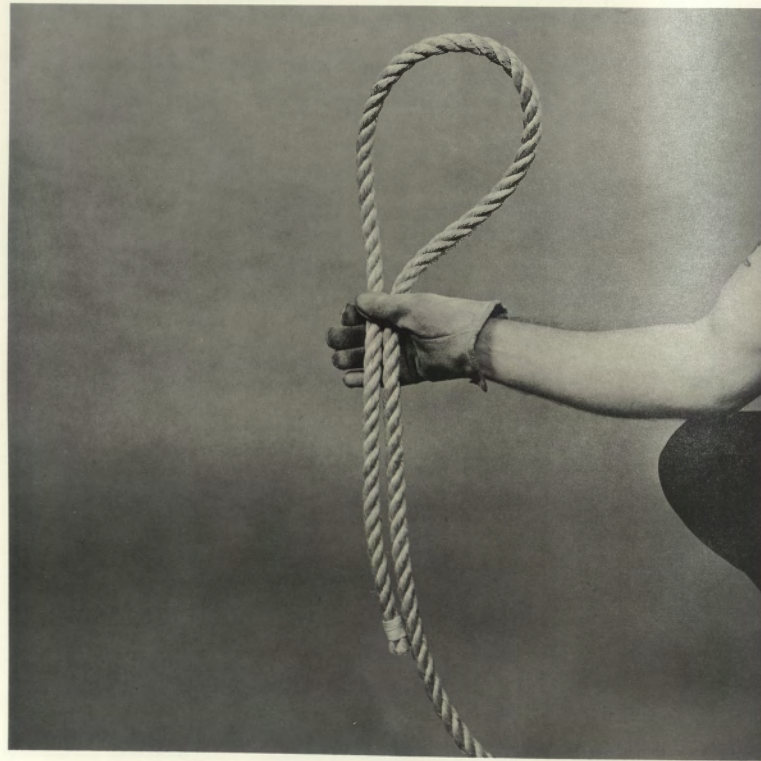
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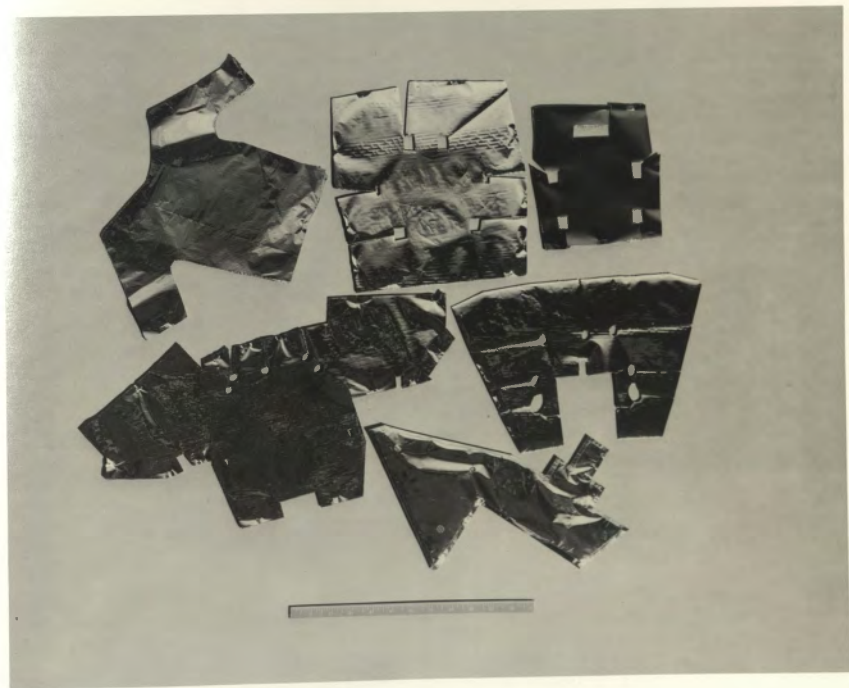
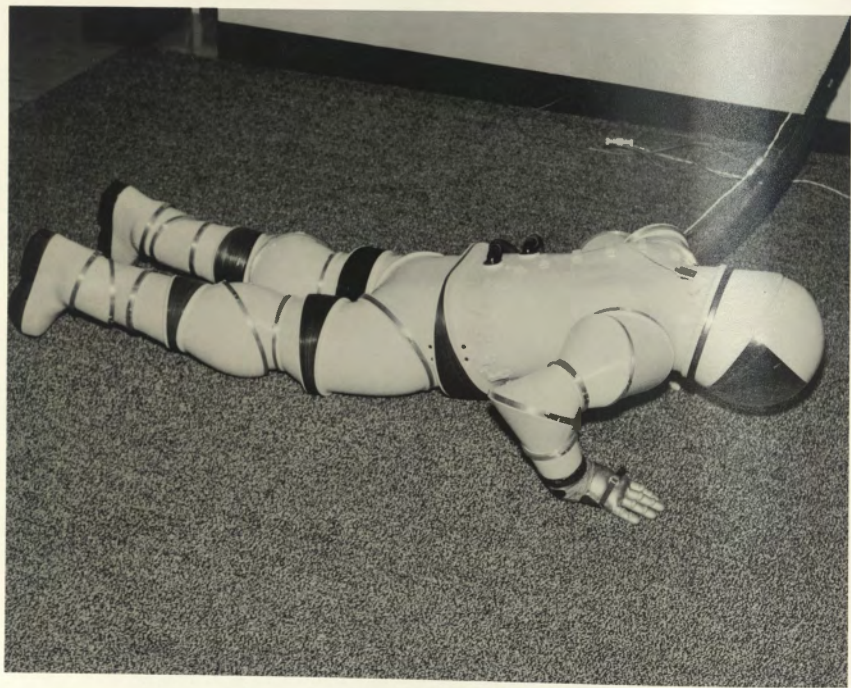
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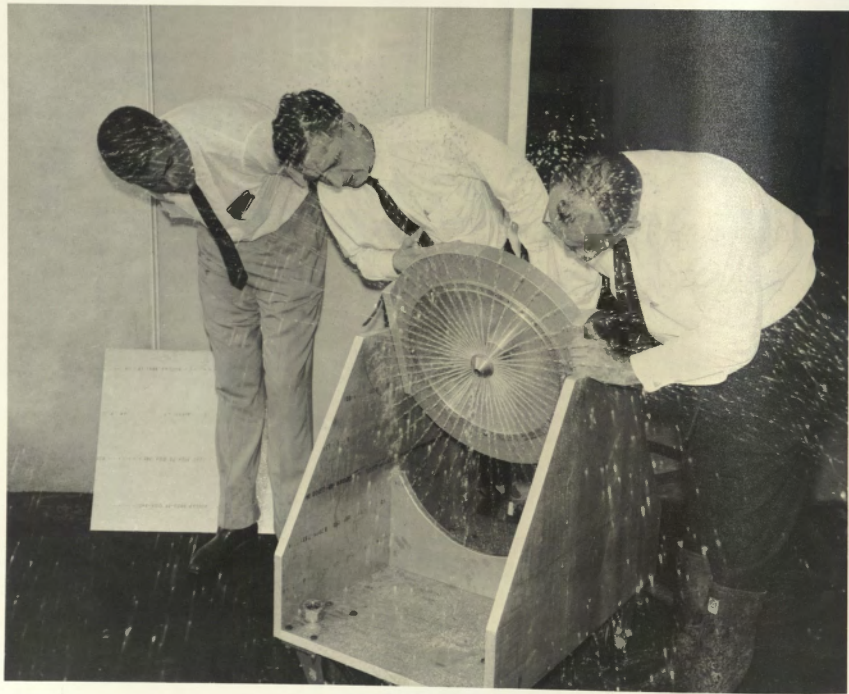
Aeronutronic Ford Corporation, Newport Beach
Aeronutronic Ford Corporation, Palo Alto
Avantek Inc., Santa Clara
Bechtel Corporation, San Francisco
Berkeley Fire Department
Beverly Hills Fire Department
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Burbank Fire Department
California Department of Transportation, San Francisco
California Highway Patrol, Sacramento
California Institute of Technology, Pasadena
California State Fire Marshal, Sacramento
Culver City Fire Department
Culver City Police Department
Department of Water and Power, Los Angeles
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The Circumstantial and the Evident

The general semanticist, Alfred Korzybski, liked to point out that a major difference between us and the apes is 'about a quarter inch of cortex.' Though there are a few more differences than that, we tend to forget or ignore the unfamiliar and sometimes unrecognizable circumstances which undergird and surround the familiar and evident. Also, there is the case stated by the folk adage: 'Familiarity breeds contempt,' and that which is beneath our contempt can also be subversive to our common sense. . . . "Just as a magician performs the miraculous with objects of utter familiarity, such as cards, coins, handkerchiefs and rabbits. . . ." "Surprise, which appears to be the common base of both creative behaviour and our response to what is called comedy, is often resurrected out of the familiar by relating the familiar which we have taken for granted to an unfamiliar context; it is this context, the circumstantial, which so often blinds all but the 'child' in us each, which is sometimes the sole impulse that allows us to see the evident: "The emperor is naked!"²

Consider, if you will, these relationships: Even though you and I may have 20/20 vision, you and I share with the physiologically, psychologically and legally blind person (three sometimes distinct classifications) a degree of blindness. Should you be able to measure over about 5 mm from the fovea of either eye towards your nose, you would find in that vicinity a blind spot of about 1 mm in diameter where the retinal network meets to form the optical nerve head.³ You are as blind as the proverbial bat at that spot, and by both experimental means and the study of actual accident cases, a considerable number of "accidents" occur because people who evidently have normal vision were not able to see at that spot. There is a compensatory factor, however: your eyes are separated by a few inches of nose bridge, hence this parallax and the way most eyes are strung together by nerves and muscles, allows one eye to cover what the blind-spot of the other eye is not seeing at the time, in most daily instances.

You may have 20/20 vision yet, if you are male you run 1 chance in 12 of being color-blind to some extent, and if you are female the chances are 1 in 200. But even here there is compensatory balance between the sexes, as illustrated by the example of Orozco, the great Mexican mural painter who was color blind, so his wife mixed his colors at times; he furnished the burning image and the graphic skills.

The point of all this is to present a sort of yin/yang balance between the circumstantial and the evident, for compensatory behaviour between the ages, sexes, secondary physical classes, ethnic origins, have/have-nots, etc. has always been the physical and social bases of the human condition surviving. ("War and peace are more than opposites. They have so much in common that neither can be understood without the other.")⁴

Consider now those instances where either the circumstantial or the evident is unwittingly or deliberately withheld or camouflaged—but let us consider instances a bit lighter than Vietnam and Watergate. Have you ever played a game similar to the game of "skip read?" In skip-read, one person reads a sentence or paragraph or page of a book, then passes it to the next person who chooses a preferred or random passage at some distance from the first reader's and reads it, then passes the book on to the next person, etc. Sometimes these "leaps over logic" are more elegantly economical and to the point of the book than a faithful reading of all the narrated circumstances in between those passages made evident by the readings. Many times, however, the leaps over presented 'logic' create new meanings which began as

puzzles. To resolve the puzzle we need to underpin and surround the evident (the words presented to us) with more circumstantial materials. If the book is rather conventional in form that is no great problem: we can guess the 'story line' as surely as we can guess most classics or the soap operas patterned on them. Filling in between—'reading between the lines' goes the folk adage—is simple because the form is known, and is like the tree left bare in winter, the structure of which will still be there in the summer, though camouflaged by full foliage, blossom and fruit, which does not keep us from guessing the structure of the tree, though all the details of leaves and flowers and buds and fruit can divert our attention by the very show of its flashy color from attending to the supporting form beneath it. (Some years ago, on an archeological excavation, we uncovered a central tomb: surrounding the skeleton of what seemed to have been an elderly female were skeletons of large young males, each with their cranium bashed in. Beside the fairly articulated bones lay a few copper beads and carved bone decorations and nothing more. All the ceremonial flash and drama were gone: like the winter-bare tree, there lay the underpinnings. A field teacher I once had, often reminded us that archeology is nothing more than sociology without live people around to fill in the gaps between the remains.)

Another example: Have you ever gone to a photography exhibit, say, or paged through a book of photographs, then either gone to a movie or turned on TVideo? Did it suggest likeness and differences: Just as with the blind spots in our eyes, or skip-reading, or the tree in winter vs. summer, or the lapse of archeological time, there are always gaps of time and/or space (let's use the old relativity term, 'time-space'), between the circumstantial and the evident—and in this case, between the frames of still photography hanging on the wall in an exhibition or between the pages in a book of photographs. And, less evident, but still there, there are gaps between the frames of movie footage and the scans on the TVideo screen, and there are further, deliberate gaps usually, called 'editing,' which shift our attention from one evident scene to the next while we are lulled by word and/or music into believing we are seeing all one continuous presentation. These are compensatory devices to bridge the gaps. There is also that physiological fluke in our senses which helps make things seem continuous, or at least articulated: in the case of vision, there is a neural lag, called 'after-image' or 'persistence of vision' which gives our eye/brain the illusion of curvilinear movement when viewing a movie or TVideo screen (or 'flip books' of still drawings or photographs which were popular children's amusements years ago). Our hearing cannot always sense the pause between notes, but that pause when used as an element of musical composition is as essential as the sound. If the pause is too long, the persistence of audition may not read the note last played and the next as continuous; if too short, another reading will take place, other than two different notes, etc. Though certain inherited traits limit the senses of some, or certain kinds of damage to the central nervous system may limit others from this associative manner of perceiving continuity, there are socio-cultural conditionings which also limit us, one of which is literacy:

Early in the history of UNESCO, a medical field group was inoculating peoples of the Congo region of Africa. They had been preceded by an information group: the information folk showed a movie on a field projector to each village which explained how diseases were contracted and what inoculation was about, and then they answered questions. Soon they found that villages which were literate got the message from the movie immediately, but the questions asked were about details which the movie had explained but somehow the people missed. In villages which were non-literate, the information group found that the people had missed the 'story line,' the very point of the movie's explanation of

cause related to effect, but they astounded the information group by remembering details in such great number that the information folk had to run the movie for themselves to check on these observations made by the non-literate!

(I once was on a panel with a sociologist and a criminal lawyer, then attached to the public prosecutor's office. The topic was censorship, and the distinctions between what was obscene, pornographic and of redeeming social or artistic merit—which didn't keep my fellow panel members' attention long, for they soon were arguing over the circumstances causing crimes and the evidence of a crime and conviction. In anger the lawyer yelled at the sociologist, "You wouldn't be able to recognize a piece of convincing evidence if you had your nose rubbed in it." To which the sociologist replied, "And obviously you can't recognize the circumstances which cause crime because you're a part of the circumstances." Nothing was resolved that day.)

One more example: have you ever entered a movie you wanted to see after it had started, and then had to leave before the film was over, all the while being thoroughly intrigued by what little you were able to see while there? There is an obvious analogy you too might be haunted by: we are each born after "It" all started, there are gaps in what we know about "It," and we have to leave before "It" is all over—life, that is. We may well find ourselves sharing the plaintive questioning in this little rime:

"And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made."

With that, Ashley Montagu ended his book, *The Humanization of Man*.¹ Anthropologist Montagu's answer to the question about simply facing the odds, much less beating them, was: rejoin the whole-Earth human race—all of it you can. Regain your heart by renewing curiosity about and tolerance of the nature of things in general, that circumstantial which underpins and surrounds the evident State As Things.

ROBERT F. FORTH
Dean, California College of Arts and Crafts

Oakland, California, January 1977

1. The complete quote is: "Just as a magician performs the miraculous with objects of utter familiarity, such as cards, handkerchiefs, coins, rabbits, so Paul Klee uses the familiar object in unfamiliar relationships to materialize the unknown." From the introduction and translation by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy of *Paul Klee: Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., N.Y., 1953.

2. 'Child' is here used as Thomas A. Harris uses it in his *I'm OK; You're OK*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1969, as a part of a triad of terms: child/parent/adult, which he and others use in the transactional brand of psycho-therapy, probably to replace the older Freudian triad of id/ego/superego—or, perhaps even another: son/father/holy ghost, etc.

3. That 1 mm diameter blindspot where the optical nerve passes through the retina amounts to about 6.5 degrees of your total visual field, assuming you have statistically normal peripheral vision. If you don't, the percentage of your total visual field taken up by the projected cone of vision of the blind spot is greater. If you have "hot spots," or blind spots where rods and cones have been burnt out by high-intensity light reflections from glass or chrome plate or other highly reflected surfaces, you may not know about them, but they are not able to "see."

4. From Geoffrey Blainey's *The Causes of War*, The Free Press/Macmillan, N.Y. 1973.

5. Ashley Montagu. *The Humanization of Man*, Evergreen/Groove Press, N.Y. 1964.

