

OPUNTIA

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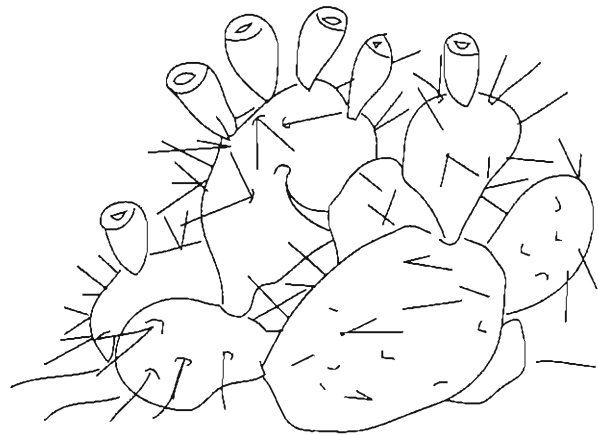
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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

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RETROSPECTIONS ON WEST 23RD STREET

by Bill Wilson

Two blocks south of my house [in New York City] on 25th Street, at 464 West 23rd Street, stands a bleak building, its original facade and upstairs entry-way demolished for profit from rental space. The building lost all decorum when this 19th Century private house became an apartment building, making no claim to shelter the souls within it. During the prelude and first act of the Depression, an Italian artist, Fortunato Depero (1892-1960), occupied a studio in the building. He received decorated postcards mailed to him from Italy by Giacomo Balla (1871-1958). Balla did not address the postcards to Fortunato Depero, but in a Futurist truancy from conventions, " ... Al Furturista Depero". Some surviving decorated mail from Balla is pictured in a book, FUTURISMI POSTALI (1968, Longo Editore). Two postcards to Depero are reproduced, front and back, showing Balla introducing speedy angles and a few profiled faces into the images on the cards. A stamp has been removed from one, perhaps to be added to a collection of foreign stamps, suggesting that the hand-decorated card was appreciated less than a mass-produced ready-made postage stamp.

The address on West 23rd Street forges a link between mail art in Italy and in Manhattan, enhancing the dream history of 23rd Street. The Chelsea Hotel attracted artists, many of them

receiving and sending mail art,

such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Daniel Spoerri.

May Wilson moved into the Chelsea Hotel in June 1966, and then into a studio apartment next door at #208. Although John Willenbecher received mail at an uptown apartment, he kept a studio around the corner on 7th Avenue, and visited May Wilson frequently. Rather than hand correspondence to each other, he and May relayed Johnsoniana as they were instructed to, in addition to their own exchange of variegated mail independent of Ray Johnson.

Mail artists in 2006 might well pause for a moment at 464 West 23rd Street to reflect on the history and geography of mail art. Mail art around 1930 was nothing new. Mail in some sense had always been mail art, expressing visual meanings in addition to explicit verbal messages. In the 19th Century, the first printed stamps were designed with an expressive aesthetic quality, and the deployment of a stamp on a card or envelope could be part of a satisfying design. Myriad artists drew on envelopes and cards, as when Picasso sketched and re-sketched to prepare one postcard as a mute message for one woman. By 1929-1931, when Depero lived in New York, artists had long subverted the self-important postal system with mischief and aesthetic expression. Throughout, the function of the avant garde has been to get out in front of a system which might close down over itself and anyone caught within it, and so they have used their art to keep the postal

system an open system. They have used decorations to do what decorations do, which is to give visual testimony that a soul, or at least a mind or an imagination, will not be subordinated to a rationalized system.

During the Civil War, envelopes became vehicles carrying political slogans. At the same time, in France, many painters were already sketching on envelopes, sometimes water-colouring images. If these activities are deemed mail art, then that title is retroactive, and helps to make a point about the way the history of art works. A movement in art is not founded on a ready-made foundation; a structure builds and rebuilds its foundations as it develops. The larger and stronger it grows, the stronger and larger becomes the foundation. The New York Correspondence School inadvertently constructed its own history, retrospectively and retroactively, by calling attention to the expressive possibilities of the mail. Only under the influence of the NYCS did earlier decorated cards, or envelopes with both visual and verbal content, get designated as mail art.

No one fathered mail art, and no one founded mail art, the history of which will be as mail art becomes. Early aestheticized mail could not be classified as mail art until it came under the shadow that was cast back upon it by a network of mail art. Now, the mail art of next week will be in a position to construct its origins, retrospectively. Certainly Ray Johnson was never the father or

founder of mail art. However, by asking a recipient to mail a paper object to someone else, he did start a network, which soon became a self-constructing informal system. As it enlarged and continued to develop, it widened its future and deepened its past. Earlier envelopes and cards became its foundation later. Now that other structures have been built on Ray's network, it belongs to the history of networks, not to the history of all mail art.

The network took enormous energy to set in motion. Sometime, perhaps by 1961, Ray began to write "Please send to ... " on pieces of paper he mailed as cards or as the contents of envelopes. The earliest I understood, remembered, and consciously acknowledged was mail sent by Ray to May Wilson to give to her identical twin granddaughters, Kate and Ara Wilson, in July 1962. By September, I was mailing envelopes from large boxes of envelopes Ray handed over, and delivering more boxes to May in Phoenix, Maryland, and to Helen Jacobson in Pepple Court, near Baltimore. At the same time, Marie Tavroges (Stilkind) was mailing envelopes from her office at Julliard School. The envelopes usually contained instructions to mail the contents to another person.

The relay of cards and envelopes was the beginning of a network set in motion by Ray Johnson. The network was soon named the New York Correspondence School of Art by Ed Plunkett,

reflecting both the New York School of Abstract-Expressionist painters, and the fact that May Wilson had studied both the studio practice of art and the history of art by correspondence courses. She was a suburban housewife and grandmother who answered advertisements in order to learn to paint by mail. Without her cooperation, Ray could not have interwoven his network of correspondences. That she lived until 1966 on Dance Mill Road was one of the examples of “dance” that enhanced his spelling “Correspondance”.

Ray Johnson encouraged such lateral moves in art as a gift from a person to a person, rather than art as individual transcendence, consistent with aspirations toward fame and money. In his experience, as I witnessed it, the beautiful was that which made him desire to conceive something with it. He mailed suggestive images on paper to other people, hoping that they would accept an invitation to construct something never seen before, and would conceive something that could be given to someone else. Now, in 2006, any mail art that builds its structure on Ray’s network secures his network in its foundation, where it hums away like the conscience of mail art. Ray understood that his network was a process, never a product that he possessed because he had fathered it. Let it be said that if Ray Johnson fathered anything, he fathered nothing.



[Suggestion by Dale Speirs: Here is the current postmark of Biggar, which might be of interest to Noo Yawk mail artists.]

WHITHER MAIL ART AND ATCs?

by Dale Speirs

Mail art began as a means of bypassing the art galleries and museums, a way for artists to connect with each other without having to beg curators for exhibit space. The mail can be the art, as in decorating the envelope or postcard, or it can courier the art directly between people, instead of having to hang on a gallery wall with a price tag attached to it. A more recent offshoot of mail art are Artist Trading Cards (ATCs), which are developing in a different direction than mail art.

Where Does Mail Art Go From Here?

Which brings me to the zine KAIRAN, issue #9 from 2005. Published in English by an Italian married to a Japanese woman, this is internationalism at its best [1]. The issue at hand has some serious discussions of whether mail art? and commentary on the state of the mail art world.

Modern mail art has evolved some standards over the past few decades which are now being threatened by those who don't know and don't care about the past or why the standards evolved. This is like the manner in which literary science fiction fandom was overrun by the Trekkies in the late 1960s, quickly followed by other media barbarians in such quantity that literary science fiction is now a sideline and the anime and Star Wars fans dominate the conventions, completely oblivious to ideas such as zines being published for trade, not \$15 an issue. Indeed, slash fandom is oblivious to zines, period, and publish only on the Web, what they call fanfic.

Mail art has standards such as "doc-to-all", which means that anyone sending in mail art to an exhibition is entitled to documentation of the exhibits as a printed catalogue with illustrations or actual mail art. Unfortunately a few modern "mail artists" are doing doc-to-all as a Web site, which violates the spirit of the Papernet. They plead poverty, in which case they should not

have sent out the invitations in the first instance. Some of the more mercenary ones are auctioning off exhibits supposedly for charity, although one never sees any audit of where the money actually went. Others have accumulations of mail art which they call archives, and want to donate to some university or museum, but those archives are not properly catalogued and thus useless. Institutions are leery of accepting uncatalogued collections because the major expense in curating them is sorting and indexing.

There is an interview in KAIRAN with mail artist Tiziana Baracchi, who discusses one problem, that of mail artists who send off-topic art to a thematic exhibition. However, it may be they have learned from experience that too many doc-to-all catalogues are just lists of participants, so they don't bother to put any work into it. Just as zinedom is plagued by people who put out a four-page crudzine twice a year and expect it to be fair trade for a 64-page monthly, so it is that mail art is infested by people who do a quick scribble on a postcard and expect a full-colour catalogue.

In KAIRAN, R. Frank Jensen discusses the cult that was developed around Ray Johnson, an early mail artist (deceased 1995) who has been built up in recent years as the fountainhead of modern mail art. He was the inventor of the add-and-pass-on mail art sheet,

which started out with good intentions but is now the spam of the Papernet (not his fault, though).

Whither The Papernet?

Jensen writes "*The era of physical mail art is over.*" but history demonstrates that new media never kill off old media. The Papernet may dwindle, but has the advantage that paper spam can always be recycled or used to start the fireplace. Jensen notes that: "*The postal system had built-in restrictions, which were not that bad after all. The mail artist had to use time and thought to create a work, to make it ready for mailing, to take to the post office. ... It is just too easy, sitting at the computer, mixing up an image and pester an endless number of e-mail boxes with unwanted stuff.*" Personally, I think e-mail art will go the same way as e-zines, lost in the cacophony of the Internet, with no response from viewers, unlike the way that paper zines get trades or letters of comment. The Internet has demonstrated that the easier it is to transmit, then the lower the signal-to-noise ratio.

Mail art as real mail, not eek-mail, will persist. I have one hope for the future. As postage rates rise, this will weed out the marginal mail artists, the ones who whine about the high cost of trading by mail but never seem to send anything better than add-and-pass-on sheets.

Whither The Money In Mail Art?

-6-

There were concerns expressed by a few people that philatelists (stamp collectors) would discover mail art and turn it into a commodity. As it happens, I am a postal historian who belongs to numerous philatelic societies, but I haven't seen any surge among philatelists in commoditizing mail art or artistamps. To be sure, there is some buying and selling among them of mail art, but these are sideshows. The main group doing the buying and selling appear to be coming from the art gallery community, and who have no idea about philately. If mail art becomes a gallery commodity, it will be because of the art buyers, not the philatelists. Having said that, I don't think philately would be a bad influence on mail art. Many mail artists approaching their pensionable years are worrying about what to do with their accumulations of mail art. The worse thing that can be done is to donate it to an institution. Nor are family members likely to treasure it, as most such inheritances are a dead weight to them. Their record in looking after such collections is not impressive. Selling it by auction through a stamp dealer may break up the collection per se, but will ensure that the collectors who paid money for the items will take better care of it. This is not a problem unique to mail art. Philately, numismatics, and other collectibles have had to deal with it for decades or centuries even. It is best to sell to the next generation of collectors who will appreciate the material.

One thing that startled me recently was that some people collect add-and-pass-on sheets, instead of starting the fireplace with them as I do. Ross Priddle, of Medicine Hat, Alberta, advised me that he put some of the sheets online for auction in early 2006 on eBay. They all sold, one for \$5.

Enter The ATCs.

ATCs generally follow these guidelines:

- 1) Produce your own cards.
- 2) Size 64 x 89 mm
- 3) Signature, date, edition number (if necessary), on the back of the card.
- 4) Trade. Cards are most often traded in person, but they can and are traded by mail. ATCs are primarily created for trading and free exchange, but they can be sold and have/are sold from time to time.

The idea was originated by Vanci Stirnemann of Switzerland, who couldn't afford the cost of having them printed professionally and decided to produce handmade ATCs in 1996. Don Mabie, a.k.a. Chuck Stake (Calgary, Canada) brought the idea to Calgary in 1997 and the idea has now spread around the world. Calgary ATCers have had a monthly trading session since 1997, where artists bring in binders of their cards for trade.

Don Mabie has written: *“Personally I see a very close philosophical relationship between ATCs and correspondence/mail art. They both emphasize certain principles such as: a democratic exchange and interaction with others (be they artists or non-artists); open-ended creativity; a non-hierarchical mass-appeal activity that can exist within, but more importantly outside of, the existing high-art world. In a sense, it is in opposition to the high-art world; ATCs are a true vernacular art form. The potential for ATCs is unlimited. I have not been as excited or invigorated by an art form or movement since my discovery of correspondence/mail art in 1972. The potential for ATCs is much greater because it is so much more immediate, as it does not rely on the mail for interaction but rather relies primarily on direct interaction while the trading takes place. The response to ATCs is much more instantaneous relative to correspondence/mail art, from artists, art students, children, and the general public.”*

Enter The Money.

I receive advertisements for ATC shows. One can see the drift towards galleryism in ATCs, which seems to be happening at a faster pace than for mail art. The original idea was the free exchange of ATCs at trading sessions, but now galleries are setting up formal exhibits with priced ATCs.

I suspect that part of the reason is the influence of sports trading cards, the idea that you buy them as an investment (although sports cards are in the doldrums presently because of excessive speculation). The idea of ATCs as a commodity did not have far to travel.

Starting off with the least offensive gallery show, the Port Moody Arts Centre (Port Moody, British Columbia) announced an exhibition for August 18 to September 20, 2005. No entry fees (SASE required for return of cards), and the exhibit was to be curated, ostensibly for space reasons. Wall space might be limited, but hundreds of ATCs can be displayed in a binder, so I can't buy this excuse. The entry form included a detailed contract specifying liability and insurance limits, which appeared to be a boilerplate from other types of art shows, since it mentioned exhibition spaces that are not being used for the ATC show. *"Artists must declare the value of the work prior to installation and artworks valued at over \$1,000.00 must be accompanied by an appraisal."* I would laugh at this but for the sneaking suspicion that somewhere out there, even as I type this, some artist is trying to peddle \$1,000 ATCs.

From Clarion, Pennsylvania, came a notice of the Jazz/Arts/Blues Fest ATC exhibition from August 8 to 15, 2005, at Kate's Frame & Art Gallery. The prospectus mentioned that: *"We encourage the free trade of ATCs ... Artists who wish to sell their ATCs may*

list the card "sell", with a price (in American dollars please). To this price we will add a \$1.00 handling fee for each card sold; we will retain the handling fee to help underwrite the cost of this exhibition and postage of returned cards." In general, this show seems not to be too mercenary, but the thin edge is showing.

"House of Cards" was an exhibition in Columbus, Ohio, from July 30 to October 1, 2005, whose title can be interpreted in more ways than one. *"Be a part of the first exhibition of ATCs in the United States!"* Really? Obviously the curators did not keep up with mail art news. The subtitle of the show says: *"An exhibition of the emerging art of artist trading cards"*. Nine years is not considered emerging in any modern-day human endeavour. While the art of ATCs may not have penetrated to every burg on this planet, those who keep up with mail art have long been aware of it. I suppose perhaps the editors of TIME magazine (always the last to know; it is famously said that by the time they feature a fad on the cover, it is over) aren't aware of ATCs. No, this is not emerging; it has long ago emerged.

The host was said to be the Columbus Center for the Paper and Book Arts, but entries and fees went to European Papers Ltd. This exhibition charged a US\$7 fee per five cards. The exhibit did not include card sales but entries were not returned. For the entry fee, the artists received an exhibition postcard and a copy of

the show catalogue. The exhibition included the opening reception, evening programmes, and trading sessions. Far from having a non-juried show, as is traditional in both mail art and ATCs, there were awards given for Beauty, Originality, Fabric/Fibre, Humour, and Best in Show. A saving grace was that *“Though the show is curated, all entries will be included in the exhibition and be displayed within the gallery.”* They promised the walls would be covered floor to ceiling with ATCs from around the world, but at \$7 (plus bank fees for foreigners) it is difficult to believe they got that many entries.

The Death Of The Gift Economy?

T. Pfeiffer et al, in a 2005 paper titled “Evolution of cooperation by generalized reciprocity” wrote: *“The evolution of cooperation by direct reciprocity requires that individuals recognize their present partner and remember the outcome of their last encounter with that specific partner. Direct reciprocity thus requires advanced cognitive abilities. Here, we demonstrate that if individuals repeatedly interact within small groups with different partners in a two-person Prisoner’s Dilemma, cooperation can emerge and also be maintained in the absence of such cognitive abilities. It is sufficient for an individual to base their decision of whether or not to cooperate on the outcome of their last encounter, even if it was with a different partner.”* [2]

I got to thinking about this in terms of the Papernet and the Internet. Since zinedom developed in the late 1800s, zinesters have been accustomed to the gift economy, that is, trading their zine for someone else’s or for a letter of comment. This fits the theory of direct reciprocity; you remember how your trade with an individual went and use it to decide if you will do a future transaction. No response or trade means no next issue. On the Internet it is well known that e-zines do not bring responses and there is no direct reciprocity.

That doesn’t mean there is no reciprocity on the Internet, but rather that it takes different forms than with the Papernet. Moderated discussion groups and blogs work better than the traditional zine format on-line. Unmoderated groups are quickly swamped by spammers and trolls who have no interest in reciprocity, and thus those groups are abandoned by people who expect it.

The traditional gift economy, which requires an actual gift, is being replaced by a form that does not require reciprocity. Lurking is the standard on the Internet, something that can’t be done as easily on the Papernet. If you check a few blogs or subscribe to a mailing list, nothing is expected in return. If you ask for real zines or ATCs on the Papernet, lurking will get you dropped off the exchanges. The gift economy will not die out entirely, but it will dwindle substantially.

References.

- 1] Mail art Usual from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuta, Midori-ka, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan
- 2] Pfeiffer, T., et al (2005) Evolution of cooperation by generalized reciprocity. PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON 272B:1115-1120

BOOK REVIEW

by Dale Speirs

Self Respect And A Little Extra Leave: G.P.O. Staff in 1916
by Stephen Ferguson (2005, trade paperback, 61 pages. Available for 10.75 Euros from An Post (the Irish Post Office) at www.irishstamps.ie) There are only two post office buildings in the world that are iconic: the main New York post office with its slogan “Neither rain ... “ etcetera, and the Dublin General Post Office, where the ill-fated Easter Rising of 1916 began, and marked the start of what would eventually lead to the Irish Republic in 1922. The capture of the GPO by rebels, its subsequent destruction in the fighting (only the shell was left and it took sixteen years to rebuild), and the suppression of the rebellion has been told elsewhere in a flood of books. The Dublin GPO stands in Irish history as a significant turning point on the road to liberation from the English overlords.

Stephen Ferguson, the Assistant Secretary of An Post, -10- has instead concentrated on the actual postal workers who had the misfortune to be on duty at the time the rebels, known as the Irish Volunteers, stormed the building. Using their letters, diaries, and reports compiled a few days after the fighting ended, he looks at how the posties managed to survive and keep the system going as best as possible after the GPO was occupied on April 24, 1916, Easter Monday, and a republic proclaimed.

Arthur Norway was in charge of the Irish Post Office at the time. His son Nevil, known to posterity as the author Nevil Shute, was 17 at the time and served as a Red Cross attendant during the Rising. Unlike Canada and the USA, the European post offices not only handled mail but had control of telephones and telegraphs. The Dublin GPO was therefore the central core of all communications in Ireland, which the Volunteers recognized. When the Rising began, they swarmed into the main floor of the GPO, evicted the staff, and proclaimed the republic. They were rather careless though, and it wasn't until an hour later that they remembered the Telegraph section on the top floor of the building, and flushed out those staff members.

The posties dispersed to other sub-stations around Dublin, including a supply depot that became the new headquarters. Sniping was general throughout the city, and the posties risked their lives to re-establish downed telegraph lines and deliver

despatches. The initial response by police and British Army officers to the Rising was inept. The GPO Superintendent made his way to a police station to report the takeover, and was told to go to a different police station because the one he went to was in a different precinct than the GPO.

But the posties persevered. The telegraphers were able to jury-rig new connections at other places, despite the Volunteers having cut lines throughout Ireland, and thus keep London informed. Sorting offices were put together by stacking benches on top of each other as sorting shelves, and wicker baskets were used for the outgoing mails. Posties slept wherever they could find floor space, and some went out on expeditions to scrounge for food.

The English finally brought down the Volunteers after heavy fighting, but it was the beginning of the end. Today, the Dublin GPO occupies a unique place in Irish history as not just a palatial heritage building but as a symbol of the Republic.

Postcards From The Boys by Ringo Starr (2004) is a coffee table book by Richard Starkey, drummer of a well-known band, who kept every postcard his mates sent him from their travels around the world. This book shows a selection from Ringo's accumulation. Each postcard is shown with both the view side and the message side from John, Paul, or George. If Ringo's postcard collection was auctioned off, it would fetch a fortune, not

that he needs the money. What impressed me was that the postcards made it through without being stolen en route by adoring posties. All are addressed to Ringo's street addresses. He moved house frequently, four times during one 18-month period. Some are addressed to his stage name Ringo Starr, and many are addressed to his real name Richard Starkey.

The boys often drew little bits of art on them, or made joking references. As Ringo remarks in his commentary, some of the jokes are so obscure that even he can't remember what they were about. The postcards were often carefully selected. Paul sent one of a regimental drum major, with a message assuring Ringo that he was still the greatest drummer in the world. Another was sent during the sad days when the Beatles were breaking up, and John lamented the discord in his message. When John mourned the death of the Beatles to Ringo, he did it with the message "Who'd have thought it would come to this" on a postcard. The probable value of that postcard would be at least \$10,000 to \$50,000 if Ringo decided to sell it. Some postcards are written in German; the boys learned the language during their Hamburg days.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

P. F. L. Maxted, P.F.L., et al (2006) **Survival of a brown dwarf after engulfment by a red giant star.** NATURE 442:543-545

“Many sub-stellar companions (usually planets but also some brown dwarfs) orbit solar-type stars. These stars can engulf their sub-stellar companions when they become red giants. This interaction may explain several outstanding problems in astrophysics but it is unclear under what conditions a low mass companion will evaporate, survive the interaction unchanged or gain mass. Observational tests of models for this interaction have been hampered by a lack of positively identified remnants, that is, white dwarf stars with close, sub-stellar companions. The companion to the pre-white dwarf AA Doradus may be a brown dwarf, but the uncertain history of this star and the extreme luminosity difference between the components make it difficult to interpret the observations or to put strong constraints on the models. The magnetic white dwarf SDSS J121209.31 + 013627.7 may have a close brown dwarf companion but little is known about this binary at present. Here we report the discovery of a brown dwarf in a short period orbit around a white dwarf. The properties of both stars in this binary can be directly observed and show that the brown dwarf was engulfed by a red giant but that this had little effect on it.”

Derricourt, R. (2006) **Getting “Out of Africa”:
Sea crossings, land crossings and culture in the
hominin migrations.** JOURNAL OF WORLD PREHISTORY
19:119-132

“Palaeoanthropologists and archaeologists have advanced a wide range of explanatory narratives for the various movements of Homo erectus/Homo ergaster, and the first modern Homo sapiens, out of Africa, or even back again. The application of Occam's razor, a parsimonious approach to causes gives a more cautious approach. There is nothing in the available evidence that would require the ability for a human water crossing from Africa before the later Pleistocene, whether across the Strait of Gibraltar, the Sicilian Channel, or the southern Red Sea (Bab el-Mandab). A parsimonious narrative is consistent with movements across the Sinai peninsula. The continuous arid zone from northern Africa to western Asia allowed both occupation and transit during wet phases of the Pleistocene; there is no requirement for a sponge model of absorption followed by expulsion of human groups. The Nile Valley as a possible transit route from East Africa has a geological chronology that could fit well much current evidence for the timing of human migration. The limited spatial and temporal opportunities for movements “Out of Africa” or back again, also puts particular difficulties in the way of the gene flow required for the multiregional hypothesis of the development of modern Homo sapiens.”

Mellars, P. (2006) **Why did modern human populations disperse from Africa ca. 60,000 years ago? A new model.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 103:9381-9386

“Early humans first dispersed in a trickle from eastern and southern Africa into Europe and Asia 100,000 to 200,000 years ago, but modern humans did not spread out en masse until 60,000 years ago. This delay is believed to signal a change in human evolution which resulted in certain African groups developing better cognitive and social skills, and better technology and economic abilities. These groups then spread out across the planet and displaced archaic humans quite rapidly.”

Speirs: By about 50 to 40 kiloyears ago, humans had essentially colonized the entire Earth, bar Antarctica.

Pearce-Duvel, J.M.C. (2006) **The origin of human pathogens: evaluating the role of agriculture and domestic animals in the evolution of human disease.** BIOLOGICAL REVIEWS 81:369-382

“Many significant diseases of human civilization are thought to have arisen concurrently with the advent of agriculture in human society. It has been hypothesised that the food produced by

farming increased population sizes to allow the maintenance of virulent pathogens, i.e. civilization pathogens, while domestic animals provided sources of disease to humans. To determine the relationship between pathogens in humans and domestic animals, I examined phylogenetic data for several human pathogens that are commonly evolutionarily linked to domestic animals: measles, pertussis, smallpox, tuberculosis, taenid worms, and falciparal malaria. The majority are civilization pathogens, although I have included others whose evolutionary origins have traditionally been ascribed to domestic animals. The strongest evidence for a domestic-animal origin exists for measles and pertussis, although the data do not exclude a non-domestic origin. As for the other pathogens, the evidence currently available makes it difficult to determine if the domestic-origin hypothesis is supported or refuted; in fact, intriguing data for tuberculosis and taenid worms suggests that transmission may occur as easily from humans to domestic animals. These findings do not abrogate the importance of agriculture in disease transmission; rather, if anything, they suggest an alternative, more complex series of effects than previously elucidated. Rather than domestication, the broader force for human pathogen evolution could be ecological change, namely anthropogenic modification of the environment. This is supported by evidence that many current emerging infectious diseases are associated with human modification of the environment. Agriculture may have changed the transmission ecology of pre-existing human

pathogens, increased the success of pre-existing pathogen vectors, resulted in novel interactions between humans and wildlife, and, through the domestication of animals, provided a stable conduit for human infection by wildlife diseases.”

Robertson, Grant (2006-08-07) **The \$2-million comma.** GLOBE AND MAIL (Toronto), pages B1 and B2

In 2002, Rogers Communications signed a contract with Aliant Inc. to run their cables on utility poles in the Maritime provinces at \$9.60 per pole per year for what Rogers thought was a guaranteed five-year rate. In 2005, Aliant notified Rogers that the rate would be increasing to \$28.05 per pole. The contract stated: *“This agreement shall be effective from the date it is made and shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date it is made, and thereafter for successive five year terms, unless and until terminated by one year prior notice in writing be either party.”*

Rogers interpreted this clause as meaning the initial contract was for five years at the guaranteed rate, and is automatically renewed for five year terms. The deal cannot be terminated in the first five years. Aliant read it as meaning that the deal can be cancelled anytime on one year’s notice. The case was appealed to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission,

who upheld Aliant. The mis-understood comma will cost Rogers \$2.13 million in additional rents.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor’s remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Brant Kresovich 2006-07-21
Box 404
Getzville, New York 14068

I certainly agree that the motivation to do a paper zine is key. It is like writing a paper letter. You have to be interested to write it, polish it a little, find the envelope, get a stamp on it, and go someplace to mail it. Many steps compared to tapping on a keyboard and sending an error-ridden e-mail or posting a vapid Web page. Besides, why should I post stuff on the Web and keep people from working? We both know office workers are stealing time all over the world just to read crap on the Web. Why put temptation in people’s face?

[I suppose this means that I should stop watching police chase videos on www.youtube.com while at work.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2006-07-06

I am trying an experiment. A close friend said that if I wanted my letters of comment to get more exposure instead of just to those who might get any particular zine, I should store them on-line in something like a blog. So, that is exactly what I've done. As soon as I've printed this letter and gotten it ready to mail, I will be storing it on-line at lloydpenney.livejournal.com, where I have stored my locs since July 1. We'll see what kind of response I get to it, if any, but that's the experimental part.

[Don't forget that bosses know how to use Google, so don't put any stories on-line about the Boss From Hell or how you hate your employer. You never know who's indexing you or lurking on your site.]

[I read and enjoy all letters of comment sent to OPUNTIA, but because of space limitations I can only print a small amount. I have thought about putting the full letters on-line, as well as OPUNTIA, but for now think it would be safer not to. One major advantage of the Papernet is that companies or the police can't go fishing for you via Google.]

FROM: Joseph Major
1409 Christy Avenue
Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

2006-06-27

[Re: amateur detectives] L. Sprague de Camp once asked a police detective if he had ever heard of a talented amateur stepping into the investigation. He was told that the detective had, and furthermore, that the talented amateur asking all the questions about the investigation and finding the clues turned out to be the killer.

[This also happened in Edmonton, Alberta, last year. A woman went missing and the police search was unsuccessful. The husband denounced the police for their incompetence, started his own search group, and that same day 'discovered' her body in a rural ditch nowhere near where she had last been seen or had any reason to be. He is now in custody for murder.]

One other detective story plot trick I notice is the "innocent man does everything he can to make himself look guilty". The man, upon visiting his girlfriend's house and finding her husband lying dead on the floor, a pistol by his side, thus picks up the pistol and puts in his pocket.

FROM: Franz Zrilich
4004 Granger Road
Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

Commodities always struck me as risky, because by the time one is aware of a bull market in an item, it is usually the wrong time to buy. Each upswing is sufficiently different from prior upswings that it is not a safe field.

[I don't recommend that anyone buy commodities futures unless, of course, you are a business that needs 10,000 barrels of oil at a fixed price for actual delivery and use. It is better to buy and hold shares of producers of that commodity. The best time to buy, which also requires the greatest courage, is when the stock market is at its nadir, not when it is booming. The time to buy petroleum company shares was when oil was only \$20 per barrel. I bought into a junior pete natural gas producer at its start-up, but I also own bonds and a balanced mutual fund for safety.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road, Tottenham
London N15 4JU, England

I think the authors reviewed in OPUNTIA #62.1A over-rate the potential for nuclear energy to substitute for oil and gas. Firstly,

nuclear power isn't a source of motive power. It isn't cheap. The cost of dealing with nuclear waste is unreckonable. Nuclear energy is uninsurable. It carries the risk of proliferation for weapons use. It depends on a source of fuel, uranium, of which there are only finite stocks.

When the UK privatised its energy supplies in the 1980s, it also handed over to private enterprise the responsibility for strategic planning for the future. A private industry which is entirely focused on shareholder value and directors' bonuses and is constantly caught out by its failure to invest for the future.

[Here in Alberta, there is a great deal of schadenfreude among our petro-executives over British Petroleum having to shut down its leaky pipelines in Alaska. The BP Chairman had spent the last several years lecturing other petroleum companies, bragging about how environmentally responsible BP was, and how they would not invest in the Athabasca Tar Sands because BP was above that sort of thing. There was loud laughter throughout downtown Calgary the day BP had to shut in North Slope capacity because of the rusty non-maintained pipes.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Peter Netmail, Jae Leslie Adams, John Held Jr, Dewitt Young, Ficus, Terry Jeeves, Kris Mininger, Sheryl Birkhead, Chester Cuthbert, Ned Brooks, Ficus