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NOTE FOR A TIME CAPSULE

By EDWARD WELLEN

INFINITY

**Yes, I know, the rating services probably never call
you up. But they call me up twenty times a week!**

Illustrated by RICHARD KLUGA

I TAKE IT you sociologists living in what to me is the future (I take it there's a future, a future with a place for sociologists) will note the unlikely revolution in taste now going on. For your information, then, here's why the rating services are reflecting a sudden upping from the pelvis to the cortex—just in case this will have become a cause for wild surmise.

You probably know what the rating services are ("were," to you; but I don't want to tense this document up). Most people nowadays don't know about the rating services; they know *of* them.

Every so often I hear someone say darkly, "I don't know about those polls. I've never had a call from them and no one I know has ever had a call from them."

I keep quiet or mumble something noncommittal. I could say, truthfully, "I *do* know about those polls. They ring me up more than twenty times a week." I could say that but I don't.

Not so much because I don't want to seem a crackpot or a liar as because I don't want to spoil a good thing. Or at least what I

think is a good thing—and for the time being what I think is a good thing is what the world thinks is a good thing.

Now, in order for you to get the picture you must understand that the New York metropolitan area fashions the literary and musical fads of the United States and the United States by example and by infiltration via writings and movies and recordings fashions the fads of the world. And the New York metropolitan area goes by the opinions I frame.

It probably seems strange to you that I, in any amassing of statistics merely one digit in the neighborhood of the decimal point, can claim to exert such far-reaching influence.

But I've seen much the same sort of thing in my work as a CPA. Someone possessing relatively few shares in a holding company may exercise an inordinate amount of power over the national economy.

An analogous set of operations makes it possible for me to be an esthetic shot of digitais in the body politic. That's why Barton's *Mikrokosmos* is at this writing the top tune and why

archaeology professor Dr. Loob is high man on the polls with his TV show *Dig This!* and why the world has taken such a turn that you may very likely be calling this the Day of the Egghead.

BUT YOU'RE most likely asking at this point, "Why, in the name of statistical probability, did this character get so many calls when so many people got none?" And your next thought is, "Or did he? Was he a paranoiac?"

Here's my answer to your second question. I'm certainly not imagining any of this. You're bound to come upon some signs of these times and know what I've said about the revolution in taste is true. Otherwise there'd be no point in my setting this down or in your reading it.

The hard part is to convince you that the rest of it—about my role—is true. The trouble is there's nothing about me personally that would help me convince you. There's nothing uncommon about me except that my tastes were previously uncommon.

As I mentioned, I'm a CPA. I live in a suburb of New York City. I have an office in the city. I'm really semi-retired and take care of only a few old business friends, so my listing in the Manhattan phone directory doesn't include the terms CPA or ofc. I have a commutation book and

the usual gripes against the NYNH&H. As a matter of fact I'm writing this while commuting and you'll have to blame not me but the roadbed and the rolling stock for any of this you may find difficult to decipher, for really I have a very neat handwriting. Although there's no noticeable pressure of work I stay on at my office after the girl's quitting time. (She still chews gum, but all day yesterday she was humming Bartok's *Mikrokosmos*.) I balance books until the line at the bottom of the column becomes a bongo board on a decimal point and then I squeeze my eyes and shake my head and go home.

I live alone. I'm a widower. I have one daughter. Thank goodness she's grown, married, and living in a place of her own, so there's no one to tie up the phone. I've given up frequenting the haunts of my old cronies. Though I miss their argumentative companionship I take comfort in the fact that I'm furthering our common interests. I don't give a hang that my lawn needs mowing; let the wind violin through the grass—I'm staying near the phone.

It's between six and seven in the evening at the office and between eight and midnight at home that I receive the calls.

That brings me to your first question—about why I consist-

ently get so many calls when so many people get none.

Let me make it clear at once that even if the polls were buyable or fixable, and I'm not suggesting they are, I haven't the means to buy or the electronic knowledge to fix supposedly random calls. Besides, I'm fairly ethical.

Then what's the answer?

Naturally I've given this phenomenon more than a bit of thought, and I've formulated a theory to explain—at least to *my* satisfaction—why what's happening's happening. I believe the drawing power of my phone numbers inheres in the nature of number.

Now don't go getting hot under the collar—if you're still wearing collars—before you hear me out.

I'm not talking about numerology or any such mystical hocus-pocus. I'm talking about the psychopathology of everyday life. That's what's skewing and skewering the law of probabilities.

I know this demands explaining, so I'll be specific.

Apart from these calls from the rating services, I keep receiving calls on my home phone from people who set out to dial a certain undertaker—I beg his pardon, funeral director. We have the same exchange, in fact his number differs from mine only in that the first of his last

four digits is a zero while my corresponding one is a nine.

Of course by now you've put your finger on it. These people are dialing the under—funeral director because, in the current colloquialism, someone's number's up. They misdial because they're unconsciously saying *nein* to the zero of death.

I've analyzed both my home phone number and my office phone number in this fashion, figuring out what their components connote singly and as gestalts. And I can see why these fortuitous combinings command attention, why these numbers leap out of the directory pages right at you. Privately I call such a number a common denominator with a way of accreting its numerator.

I hope you're not laughing at me.

AFTER ALL, when you remember what number is, what's happening follows naturally. Number's a language we use to blaze our way through the wood of reality. Without number we couldn't say what is more or less probable, we couldn't signpost our path. But using number is like trying to detect the emission of a photon without having to receive that photon. The difficulty lies in trying to get number at least one remove from the font of all language—the human

mind. Possibly we'll come closest to order, be at one with reality, when we can order number—at the level of statistical probability—to be truly random, at one with chaos.

At any rate, there you have it. I'd like to go into greater detail but I'm afraid to.

Before my phone numbers up and atted 'em I was content merely to tune out the noisome and the fulsome and sigh to myself, "That's life. You ask for beer and get water."

That is, I thought I was content.

It's only now that I'm getting beer with an egg in it that I realize how passionately I hated the way things were and how passionately I'd hate to have to go back to that way.

I don't know how long this phenomenon will go on but while it lasts I mean to make the most of it.

I unashamedly enjoy watching the expression of bewildered enthusiasm on everyone's face. That expression is there because everyone listens to and looks at what the polls tell him is popular and because everyone tells him-

self he likes it because "everyone" likes it.

But in some respects my feelings are more uncertain. I'm glad and at the same time sorry for the longhair musicians. It seems more embarrassing than pleasing to them to find themselves suddenly the idols of bobby-soxers. I try not to think of Stravinsky barricading himself against the adulating adolescents souveniring him to his underwear.

As you can see, I've had to harden my heart. (It's tempting to say I've had to become number.) And I intend to be even more ruthless.

I'm planning, for example, to place on the Hit Parade Dhaly's *Concerto in Alpha Wave for Oscillograph and Woodwinds*.

That's why I'm being exceedingly careful to leave nothing to chance. Though this document is sort of a hostage to fortune, I'm taking into account the possibility that I might lose it while commuting and that it might fall into the hands of some unsympathetic contemporary. So I'm not writing down my phone numbers or my name. I want to keep the lines clear for the pollsters.

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