

everything—one huge, quiet cave. Narrow, endless passageways between walls; and resembling houses—dark, ice-encrusted rocks; and in the rocks—deep holes glowing crimson; there, in the holes by the fire—squatting people. A light, icy draught blows white dust from under their feet, and heard by no one—over the white dust, over the boulders, over the caves, over the squatting people—the huge, measured tread of some super-mammothish mammoth.

(1920-2)

Translated by Gleb Struve[from] **WE****Record 1****Synopsis: An Announcement / The Wisest of Lines / A Poem**

I am simply transcribing—word for word—what was printed in the *State Gazette* today:

"In 120 days the construction of INTEGRAL will be completed. The mighty, historical hour is near when the first INTEGRAL will soar into universal space. One thousand years ago, your heroic ancestors subjugated the entire earthly sphere to the power of the United State. Awaiting you is an even more glorious feat: the integration of the infinite equation of the universe by means of the glass, electrical, fire-breathing INTEGRAL. Awaiting you is the subjugation of those unknown creatures inhabiting other planets to the beneficent yoke of reason—and perhaps still living in a wild state of freedom. If they will not comprehend that we bring them a mathematically infallible happiness, our duty is to force them to be happy. But before arms—we will attempt words.

In the name of the Benefactor it is hereby announced to all the numbers of the United State:

Everyone who feels capable is obliged to compose treatises, poems, manifestoes, odes or other works, on the beauty and grandeur of the United State.

This will be the first cargo which the INTEGRAL will carry.

All hail to the United State, all hail to the numbers, all hail to the Benefactor!"

I am writing this—and I feel: my cheeks are burning. Yes: the integration of the grandiose universal equation. Yes: to unbend the wild curve, to straighten it out along a tangent—an asymptote—to a straight line. Because the line of the United State—is a straight line. A great, divine, precise, wise, straight line—the wisest of lines . . .

I, D-503, the builder of the INTEGRAL,—I am only one of the mathematicians of the United State. My pen, accustomed to figures, is not capa-

ble of creating the music of assonances and rhythms. I am merely attempting to record what I see, what I think—more accurately, what we think (that is it precisely: we, and let this WE be the title of my records). Yet this will be a derivative of our life, of the mathematically perfect life of the United State, and if that is so, will it actually not be in itself, independently of my will, a poem? It will—that I believe and know.

I am writing this and I feel: my cheeks are burning. Probably, this is similar to what a woman experiences when for the first time she senses within herself the pulse of a new—still tiny, blind human being. It is I and simultaneously—not I. And for long months it will be necessary to nourish it with one's life fluid, with one's blood, and then—painfully tear it away from oneself and lay it at the feet of the United State.

But I am ready, just as everyone is,—or almost everyone of us. I am ready.

Record 2

Synopsis: Ballet / Square Harmony / X

Spring. From beyond the Green Wall, from the wild invisible plains, the wind carries the yellow pollen of some kind of flowers. Your lips grow dry from this sweet pollen—every minute you pass your tongue over them—and it must be that all the women you meet have sweet lips (and the men as well, of course). This somewhat hinders logical thinking.

But then, what a sky! Blue, unspoiled by a single cloud (what wild tastes the ancients had if their poets could be inspired by those ugly, disorderly, clumsily jostling clumps of vapor). I love—I am certain that I will not be mistaken if I say: we love—this same sterile, immaculate sky alone. On such days—the whole world is cast of that very same immutable eternal glass as the Green Wall, as all of our buildings. On such days you see into the bluest depths of things, you see certain of their amazing equations, hitherto unknown—in something most common, prosaic.

Why, just take this example. This morning I was at the launching site where the INTEGRAL is being built—and suddenly I caught sight of the machine benches: with eyes closed, in self-oblivion, the spheres of the regulators were spinning; flashing, the levers were bending to the right and to the left; the pendulum rod was proudly dipping its shoulders; to the rhythm of an inaudible music the blade of a tooling lathe bobbed up and down in a dance. I suddenly perceived all the beauty of this grandiose mechanical ballet suffused with the buoyant azure sun.

And further—in the same vein: why—beautiful? Why is the dance beautiful? Answer: because it was a *nonfree* motion, because the whole profound meaning of the dance is precisely in its absolute, aesthetic subordination, in its ideal nonfreedom. And if it is true that our ancestors would surrender

themselves utterly to dance during—the most inspired moments of their life (religious mysteries, military parades), then this signified but one thing: from time immemorial, the instinct for nonfreedom has been organically inherent in man, and in our present-day life—are only consciously . . .

I shall have to finish later: the intercom has clicked. I looked up: 0-90, of course. In half a minute she herself would be here: to take me for the walk.

Dear O!—it always seemed to me—that she resembled her name: approximately 10 centimeters shorter than the Maternal Norm—and thus seemingly turned so roundly as though on a lathe,—and the pink O—her mouth—opened wide to greet every word of mine. And moreover: the round, plump little fold of skin on the wrist of her hand—the kind that children often have.

When she entered, the logical flywheel was still humming at full force in me and because of its momentum I began to talk about the formula I had just constructed which included all of us, as well as the machines and the dance.

"Marvelous. Isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, marvelous. Spring," 0-90 gave me a pink smile.

Well, there, how do you like that: spring . . . She talks about spring. Women . . . I fell silent.

Downstairs. The avenue was full: the post-lunch private hour, in weather like this—we usually spend on a supplementary walk. As always, the music factory was playing the March of the United State with all its pipes. In even ranks, four abreast, solemnly keeping time to the rhythm, the numbers walked—hundreds, thousands of numbers, in pale-blue unifs (probably from the ancient *Uniforme*), with golden badges on their chests—a state number for every male and female. I too—we, the four of us,—were one of the countless waves in this mighty torrent. To the left of me was 0-90 (if one of my hairy ancestors had been writing this about a thousand years ago—he probably would have called her by that amusing word *my*); to the right—two other strangers, a female-number and a male-number.

A sky of blissful blue, minute, toylike suns in each of the badges, faces unclouded by the insanity of thoughts . . . Rays of light—you understand: everything made of some indivisible, radiant, smiling matter. And the rhythmic measures of the brass: "Tra-ta-ta-tam. Tra-ta-ta-tam," those were the brass steps gleaming in the sun and with each step—you climbed higher and higher, into the dizzy azure.

And then, just as had been the case that morning, at the launching site, once again I perceived, as if only then for the first time in my life—I perceived everything: the absolutely straight streets, the glass pavements shimmering with rays of light, the divine parallelepipeds of transparent dwellings, the square harmony of the grayish-blue ranks. To illustrate: it was as though not entire generations, but I—yes I alone—had conquered

the old God and the old life, yes, I alone had created all of this, and I, like a tower, I was afraid to move my elbow lest the walls, cupolas, machines collapse in showering fragments . . .

And an instant later—a leap through the centuries, from + to - . I recalled (apparently,—an association by contrast)—I suddenly recalled a painting in a museum: one of their avenues from twentieth-century times, a deafening, motley, jumbled mob of people, wheels, animals, billboards, trees, colors, birds . . . And they do say that it was in fact like that—it could have been so. It seemed to me that it was so unlikely, so absurd, that I lost control and suddenly burst into laughter.

And immediately there was an echo—laughter—from the right. I turned: before my eyes—white—extraordinarily white and sharp teeth, an unfamiliar woman's face.

"Forgive me," she said, "but you were gazing about with such inspiration—like some mythological god on the seventh day of creation. It seems to me you are certain that you and nobody else created me as well. I am very flattered . . ."

All of this—without a smile, I might even say—with a certain deference (perhaps she knew that I was the builder of the INTEGRAL). Yet I could not say—in the eyes or the eyebrows—there was some manner of strange, irritating X and I could not understand it in the least, I could not give it any mathematical expression.

For some reason I grew embarrassed and with some confusion I began to justify my laughter logically. It was perfectly clear that this contrast, this impassable abyss between now and then . . .

"But why—impassable? (What white teeth!) One can throw a small bridge—over the abyss. Just imagine to yourself: a drum, battalions, ranks—that did exist as well—and, consequently . . ."

"Yes, of course: it's clear," I cried (it was an amazing intersection of thoughts: she—almost with my very same words—what I had recorded before the walk).—You understand: even the thoughts. This was because nobody is *one*, rather *one of*. We are so one and the same . . ."

She:

"Are you certain?"

I perceived the brows upturned at a sharp angle towards the temples—like the sharp horns of an X, again I felt bewildered for some reason; I glanced to the right, to the left—and . . .

To my right—she, slender, sharp, tensely resilient, like a whip, I-330 (now I saw her number); to the left—0-90, entirely different, all circles, with the childlike fold of skin around her wrist; and on the extremity of our four-some—an unfamiliar male number—double—curved, in the shape of the letter S. We were all different . . .

The one on the right, I-330, apparently caught my distraught look and with a sigh:

"Yes . . . Alas!"

In essence, this alas was perfectly appropriate. But again there was a certain something in her face or in her voice . . .

With an extraordinary sharpness for me—I said: "There's no alas about it. Science is advancing and clearly—if not now, then in fifty, in a hundred years . . ."

"Even all the people's noses . . ."

"Yes, the noses," I was practically shouting now. "As long as there—is whatever basis for envy . . . If I have a nose like a button, while someone else . . ."

"Well, but your nose, forgive me, is even *classical*, as they said in olden times. And your hands there . . . No, do show me, show me your hands!" I could not bear it when people looked at my hands: they were all hairy, shaggy—some kind of absurd atavism. I stretched out my hand and—in a voice as indifferent as possible—I said:

"Apelike."

She glanced at the hands, then at my face: "But there is a most curious affinity," she seemed to be weighing me with her eyes, the little horns at the corners of her eyebrows appeared fleetingly.

"He is registered to me," O-90 opened her mouth in pink joyfulness.

It would have been better for her to remain silent—it was completely irrelevant. In general, this dear O— . . . how could I say . . . the speed of her tongue is incorrectly designed, the speed per second of the tongue should always be slightly less than the speed per second of thought, and by no means the contrary.

At the end of the avenue, on the Accumulator Tower, the bell was striking a booming 17. The personal hour was ended. I-330 was leaving together with that S-shaped male number. He had the kind of face that inspired respect, and then I saw what seemed to be a familiar face. I had met him somewhere—but then I could not recall.

Upon leaving, I-330—still X-like—gave me a wry smile. "Come by auditorium 112 the day after tomorrow."

I shrugged my shoulders:

"If I am assigned—precisely to that auditorium you have named . . ."

She, with a kind of incomprehensible confidence: "You will be."

This woman had the same unpleasant effect on me as an insoluble, irrational component which has made a haphazard intrusion in an equation. And I was happy to be left alone with dear O—if only for a short while.

Arm-in-arm we passed four rows of avenues. At the corner she had to turn left, I—to the right.

"I would like so much to come to you today, to lower the blinds. Especially today, right now . . ." O-timidly raised her crystal-blue eyes to me.

She is amusing. Well, what could I say to her? She had been at my place only yesterday and she knew as well as I that our next sexual day was the day after tomorrow. This was simply the same case of her "premature thoughts"—as happens (at times harmfully) with a premature ignition in a motor.

Upon parting I kissed her twice . . . no, I shall be precise: three times I kissed those marvelous blue eyes, unspoiled by a single cloudlet.

Record 3

Synopsis: A Jacket / A Wall / The Book of Hourly Tables

I have looked over everything that I wrote yesterday—and I see: I did not write with sufficient clarity. That is, all of this is perfectly clear for any one of us. But how is one to know: perhaps, you, the strangers, to whom the INTEGRAL will carry my notes, perhaps, you will have read the great book of civilization only as far as the page that our ancestors did about 900 years ago. Perhaps you do not even know such ABC's as the Book of Hourly Tables, the Personal Hours, the Maternal Norm, the Green Wall, the Benefactor. It seems ridiculous to me—and at the same time very difficult to speak about all this. It would all be the same as though some writer or other, let us say, of the 20th century, were forced to explain in his novel what was meant by *jacket*, *apartment*, *wife*. But nevertheless, if his novel is translated for savages—is it really conceivable to avoid annotations concerning a *jacket*?

I am certain that a savage would look at *jacket* and think: "Well, what is that for? Merely a burden." It seems to me that you would look precisely the same way when I told you that since the time of the Two Hundred Years' War none of us has been on the other side of the Green Wall.

But, dear friends, you must do at least some thinking, it does help a great deal. After all, it is clear: all of human history, as much as we know of it, is the history of the transition from nomadic forms to increasingly sedentary ones. Does it not then follow from this that the most sedentary form of life (ours)—is at the same time the most perfect (ours). If people dashed about the earth from one end to the other, then it was only during prehistoric times when there were nations, wars, commerce, the discoveries of the various Americas. But whatever for, who needs that now?

I grant you: growing accustomed to this sedentary form did not come immediately or without difficulty. When during the time of the Two Hundred Years' War all the roads were destroyed and became overgrown with grass—for the first while it must have seemed very inconvenient to live in cities, cut off from one another by green jungles. But what of it? After

man first lost his tail, he probably did not learn at once how to chase away flies without the aid of that tail. But now—can you imagine yourself—with a tail? Or: perhaps you can imagine yourself on the street—naked, without a *jacket* (it's possible that you still go strolling about in *jackets*). Here it is precisely the same thing: I cannot imagine to myself a city that is not enveloped by a Green Wall. I cannot imagine a life that is not arrayed in the figured chasubles of The Book of Hourly Tables.

The Tables . . . Right at this very moment the purple figures on a golden background are gazing sternly and tenderly into my eyes from my wall, I am involuntarily reminded of what among the ancients was called an *icon* and I feel the urge to compose verses or prayers (which is one and the same thing). Oh, why am I not a poet that I might sing in worthy praise of you, O Tables, O heart and pulse of the United State.

All of us (and, perhaps, you too), while yet children in school, read this mightiest of monuments to come down to us from ancient literature—*The Railroad Timetables*. But place even it beside The Tables—and you will see, side by side, graphite and diamond: both have one and the same thing—C, carbon,—but how eternal, how translucent, how the diamond gleams. Whose spirit would not thrill when you rush headlong with a roar through the pages of *The Railroad Timetables*. But the The Tables —actually transform each of us into the steel, six-wheeled hero of a mighty poem. Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at precisely the same hour and at precisely the same minute,—we, millions of us, arise as one. At precisely the same hour, millions like one, we begin our work—millions like one we finish. And coalescing into a single, million-handed body, at precisely the very same second, designated by The Tables, —we raise our spoons to our mouth,—and at precisely the very same second we emerge for our walk and we proceed to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and we withdraw to sleep . . .

I will be entirely frank: even we do not yet have the absolutely precise solution to the question of happiness: twice a day—from 16 to 17 and from 21 to 22 the single mighty organism dissolves into separate cells: these are what The Tables have designated as—the Personal Hours. During these hours you may see: in the rooms of some—the blinds are modestly lowered, others, to the slow steps of the March—walk in measured time along the avenue, while yet others—as I myself am doing right now—are at their desks. But I resolutely believe—let them call me an idealist and a dreamer—I believe: sooner or later—but someday we shall find a place in the general formula for these hours as well, someday all 86,400 seconds will be included in The Book of Hourly Tables.

I have had the occasion to read and hear a great deal that was improbable about those times when people were still living in a free, i.e., unorganized, wild state. But the most improbable thing always seemed to me to be precise-

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ly the following: how in those times—even a rudimentary governmental authority could permit people to live without anything resembling our Tables, without any obligatory walks, without any precise regulation of mealtimes; they would get up and go to bed whenever they took it into their heads; several historians even say that apparently in those times lights burned in the streets all night, people walked and rode along the streets all night.

I cannot comprehend any of this in the least. However restricted their intelligence might have been, all the same they should have understood that a life like that was the most genuine form of mass murder—albeit a slow one, from day to day. The state (humaneness) prohibited the outright murder of a single person and did not prohibit the partial murder of millions. To murder a single person, i.e., to decrease the sum of human lives by 50 years—that was criminal, but to decrease the sum of human lives by 50 million years—that was not criminal. Really, is that not ridiculous? Any of our ten-year-old numbers can resolve this mathematical-moral problem in half a minute; but they were incapable—with all their Kants together (because not one of those Kants could hit on the idea of constructing a system of scientific ethics, i.e., based on subtraction, addition, division, multiplication).

Moreover—is it really not absurd that a state (it dared to call itself a state!) could leave sexual life without any control. Whoever, whenever and as much as one wished . . . Completely unscientific, like animals. And like animals, blindly, they bore children. Is it not ridiculous: to know horticulture, poultry-breeding, fish-breeding (we have exact data that they knew all of this) and not know how to proceed to the ultimate step in this logical ladder: child-breeding. Not to hit upon the idea of our Maternal and Paternal Norms.

It is so ridiculous, so improbable, that now that I have written it I am afraid: what if suddenly, you the unknown readers, should take me for a malicious jokester. What if suddenly you should think that I simply wish to have my joke at your expense and I am relating the most utter rubbish with a serious face.

But first of all: I am not capable of jokes—falsehood is a secret function that enters into every joke; and secondly: the United State Science can not be mistaken. And where would any state logic be forthcoming in those times when people lived in a condition of freedom, i.e., like that of animals, apes, the herd? What could one demand of them if even in our time—from somewhere at the bottom, out of the shaggy depths,—a wild, apelike echo can still be infrequently heard?

Fortunately—only infrequently. Fortunately—this is only a minor breakdown in details: they can be repaired logically, without halting the eternal, mighty progress of the whole Machine. And for the disposal of the twisted bolt—we have the skillful, heavy hand of the Benefactor, we have the experienced eyes of the Guardians . . .

Yes, by the way, now I remember: that male number from yesterday, the double-curved one, like S,—it seems to me that I have had occasion to see him coming out of the Bureau of Guardians. Now I understand why I had that instinctive feeling of deference towards him and a kind of awkwardness when in his presence that strange number I-330 . . . I must confess that this I . . .

The bell is ringing for sleep: 22 1/2. Until tomorrow.

Record 4

Synopsis: The Savage with the Barometer / Epilepsy /If Only

Up until now everything in life had been clear to me (it is hardly by chance that I have, apparently, a certain predilection for this very word "clear"). But today . . . I do not understand.

First of all: I was actually assigned to be precisely in auditorium 112, just as she had told me. Although the probability was—

$$\frac{1,500}{10,000,000} = \frac{3}{20,000}$$

(1,500—that is the number of auditoria, 10,000,000—represents the numbers). Secondly... But better to take it in order.

The auditorium. An enormous hemisphere of glass massifs all suffused with sunlight. Circular rows of noble, globe-shaped, closely cropped heads. My heart gently skipped a beat as I looked all around. I think, I was searching: whether somewhere above the pale-blue waves of unifies a rosy crescent would be glistening—the dear lips of O—. Then suddenly salmon's extraordinarily white and sharp teeth, similar to . . . no, wrong. This evening, at 21, O- would come to me—the wish to see her here was perfectly natural.

Then—a bell. We rose, sang the Hymn of the United State—and on the stage appeared the phonolecturer gleaming with wit and a golden loudspeaker.

"Respected numbers! Archeologists recently unearthed a book from the 20th century. In it the ironical author tells of a savage and a barometer. The savage noted: every time when the barometer came to rest on *rain*—it actually rained. And since the savage felt like rain, he then began to remove the right amount of mercury so that the level stopped at rain (on the screen—a savage in feathers, shaking out the mercury: laughter). You laugh: but does it not seem to you that the European of that era is more deserving of your laughter. Like the savage, the European also wanted rain,—but rain with a capital letter, an algebraic rain. Yet he stood before the barometer like a wet hen. The savage, at least, had more daring and energy and—even though a savage—more logic: he was able to ascertain that there was a connection between effect and cause. Shaking out the mercury he was able to take the first step on that mighty road by which . . ."

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At this point (I repeat: I am writing without concealing anything)—at this point I became seemingly impervious to the vivifying streams pouring forth out of the loudspeakers. It suddenly seemed to me that I had come here in vain (why *in vain* and how could I have not come once I had been assigned here?); it all seemed to me—hollow, only a shell. And with difficulty I switched my attention back on only when the phonolecturer had gone on to the main theme: to our music, to mathematical composition (the mathematician is the cause, the music is the result), to a description of the recently invented musicometer.

"By simply turning this handle, anyone of you can produce up to three sonatas in an hour. Yet how difficult that was for your ancestors to achieve. They could create only by driving themselves into fits of *inspiration*—an unknown form of epilepsy. And here is a most amusing illustration for you of what they produced,—the music of Scriabin—the 20th century. This black box (curtains parted on the stage and there—their most ancient instrument)—they called this box a piano or a *royal grand*, which shows but one more time to what extent their music . . ."

And so forth—again I do not remember, quite possibly because . . . Well, yes, I shall say it straight: because she had walked up to the *royal grand* box—I-330. No doubt I was simply struck by this unexpected appearance of her on the stage.

She was in a fantastic costume of the ancient era: a tightly fitting black dress, the white of her bare shoulders and bosom sharply defined, and undulating with her breathing that warm shadow between . . . and the blinding, almost wicked lips . . .

Her smile—a bite, directed here—below. She sat down, began to play. Wild, convulsive, motley, like their entire life in those times,—not a shadow of rational mechanicalness. And, of course, they, around me, were right: everyone was laughing. Only a few . . . but why me as well—me?

Yes, epilepsy—a spiritual illness—a pain . . . A slow, sweet pain—a bite—if only it would go deeper yet, more painfully yet. And then, slowly the Sun. But not ours, not the azure crystalline and uniform one through the glass bricks—no: a wild, soaring, scorching Sun—off with everything—rip everything into tiny shreds.

The number sitting beside me on the left glanced sideways—at me—and snickered. For some reason I have a very clear memory of that: I saw a microscopic bubble of saliva form on his lips and burst. That bubble sobered me. I was—myself again.

Like everyone else—I heard only the absurd, fussy squeaking of strings. I was laughing. I felt light and simple. The talented phonolecturer had been depicting that wild era too vividly for us—that was all there was to it.

With what pleasure I listened to our contemporary music afterwards.

(It was demonstrated in conclusion—for contrast.) The crystalline chromatic progressions of merging and diverging series—and the summarizing chords of Taylor McLauren; the full-bodied / full-toned, squarely massive passages of the Pythagorean theorem; the mournful melodies of a fading oscillatory movement; the brilliant measures alternating with Fraunhofer's lines in the pauses—the spectral analysis of the planets... What grandeur! What unwavering equilibrium: And how pitiful—totally unrestricted by anything other than wild fantasies—that willful music of the ancients...

As usual, in even ranks, four abreast, everyone exited through the wide doors of the auditorium. The familiar double-curved figure flitted past me; I nodded respectfully.

Dear O— was supposed to come in an hour. I felt pleasantly and, usefully excited. Home—quickly to the desk, I handed the duty clerk my pink ticket and received a permit for the right to use the blinds. We have this right—only for Sexual Days. Otherwise amid our transparent walls seemingly woven of sparkling air—we always live in full view, eternally washed by the light. We have nothing to hide from one another. Moreover it facilitates the burdensome and exalted labor of the Guardians. Otherwise who can say what might happen. It is possible that it was precisely those strange, opaque dwellings of the ancients that gave birth to that pitiful cellular psychology of theirs. "My [sic!] home is my castle"—it really must have cost them an effort to think that one up!

At 22 I lowered the blinds—and at that very minute O—entered slightly out of breath. She held out her tiny pink mouth to me—and her pink ticket. I tore off the coupon—and then I could not tear myself away from that pink mouth until the very last moment—22:15.

Then I showed her my *records* and I talked—very well, I thought about the beauty of the square, the cube, the straight line. She listened so enchantingly and pinkly—and suddenly from her blue eyes a tear, a second, a third,—straight onto the opened page (p. 7). The ink ran. Well, now I shall have to recopy it.

"Dear D-, if only you would—if only . . ."

Well, what *if only*? What about if only? Again her old refrain: a child. Or, perhaps, something new—concerning . . . concerning that other one? Even if it were . . . No, that would be too absurd.

[the novel continues with 36 more "Records", ed.]

(1920)

Translated by S. Cioran