

# Parallaxes

Jan B. Hurych

## LIST OF CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Parallaxes and Paradigms
- Czech-it-out!
- I asked for it
- Measure twice, cut only once!
- The electronization
- The fight for life . . .
- What is art for?
- You can finish more things . . .
- Ode to pain
- Something borrowed,  
something new
- Life is . . .
- The addendum

**The compendium of essays from Hurontaria, mostly in parallax view. All pictures are by author.**

---

*Copyright Jan B. Hurych. Copying of this material is not permitted. For reprinting, republishing or any other reproduction of this material, in whole or in part, the permission from the author must be obtained first. All names of persons or institutions are fictitious except where stated otherwise.*

*BOL-37-49*

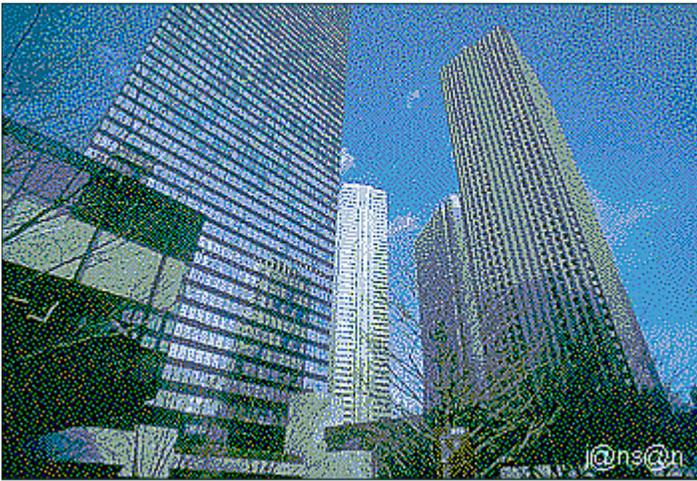
**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: PARALLAXES AND PARADIGMS (1)**

---

### **Parallaxes and paradigms.**



I have a method which helps me to overcome the stress, whether I have big problems, worries or just find myself totally depressed. I will share it with you *free of charge*, in spite of the fact that one California shrink - I mean the psychiatrist - is making pretty good money on that idea.

I works like this: I just *imagine* that I am going to die, say tomorrow same time as now. Why? That's not so important - I actually don't want to die, but that imagery is important for my method. Next thing I am going to imagine is that it is already tomorrow, five minutes before my imaginary death. And I will recall all my yesterday's - that is my today's problems. I hope you still follow me so far. And guess what: all my troubles will seem to me so ridiculous, so secondary, so petty, that I will start laughing. And if I won't die from that laugh, I will gladly and peacefully return to present time and will be happy I have only my present, unimportant problems after all.

Well, this is *my idea* and I can assure you I got it few years before the mentioned shrink ever thought about it. But to give him some credit: I really think that method is as old as the mankind itself. After all, how else we would have so many religions?

As you can see, I started with unsurmountable problems, and ended up happy and on higher note. I simply transformed everything to another platform, to another dimension. They call it *a shift of **paradigm***, that is the change of the *method or model* we use to thing by. We can proclaim that everything actually depends on our attitude, our approach, our angle of view - or **the parallax** of our view. Our whole life is the chain of *attitudes*, which sometimes even seem to look - at least to some of us - like being more important that the problem itself.

I said "they seem to", because that is also part of our attitude, like in the story about the

bottle filled up to it's half mark. You don't know that story? Well, there are those two guys: an optimist and a pessimist. The pessimist says: "*The bottle is already half empty*". The optimist however is pleased, that "*the bottle is still half full*". Of course, their attitudes do not change the fact (that is 50 % fill-up) at all. I usually add one more guy to the story: the pedant. He keeps pouring whisky in the bottle, in and out - just because he is not pleased, that the level *is not exactly* on 50 percent mark. And like the proverbial rabbit in the proverbial race cannot reach the turtle, our pedant will never finish his job to be able to drink from that bottle. And yes, it is our attitudes and not the whisky alone which affects our behavior. There is a saying that our life is a "*series of choices rather than chances*". In other words: we all get our chance, but only those, who will recognize it and use it, will eventually succeed.

On the other hand, it is not always the pure logic, which can lead us to the right solution. In one laboratory, they made an experiment with two empty bottles - I wonder, why it have to be always bottles - and laid them on the table. One bee was inserted into the first bottle and the fly in the other one. Of course they didn't plug in the corks since they wanted to know, which one would escape sooner. The bee was trying very hard to get through the bottom of the bottle, so hard that she eventually died of exhaustion. The fly of course kept flying to and fro, with no apparent plan. Still, soon she have found the opening and escaped. Still, *the fly had no plan or method how to escape*, while *the bee was listening to its instinct*: to follow the light, the sun, the source of life. And she died, because her instinct was right but *the situation was wrong* and she was not able to change her paradigm.

Stoic Zeno of Citium once said that the life is like a book: it is not important how many pages it has, but how good it is. And our philosophers are still arguing, how many of those pages we are really writing by ourselves, be it the whole society or individuals. But that does not matter so much - important thing is to realize that it all depends only on us to turn our lifelong play into comedy or tragedy. The term "comedy" is meant here of course only as an opposite to a tragedy and not as a farce, that would be rather overdoing it :-).

Yes, we can change our paradigms and suddenly we are adding new flavor to our problems and solutions. And when we think it is just our bad fate, let's change the angle, the point of view - and suddenly things don't look that bad. Yes, there is a plenty of hope while we are still alive: problems can be solved, people can be healed, mistakes can be corrected, situation can improve, some harm can be remedied. It is only people who are being *difficult*: they change very little a and what's more - they hate changes . . .

## Czech-it-out!



While living in English speaking environment, you can't help noticing that people around you make all kinds of jokes directed towards other nationalities. Yes, I am talking about those innocent anecdotes, called *ethnic jokes*. Poles, Germans, Mexicans and even *Newfies* (Canadians from New Foundland) are frequently treated by jest, and sometimes the humor is not all that funny, if you don't know specifics. Because - believe it or not - those are mostly *inside jokes* and they may often need an explanation.

There are not that many jokes about *Czechs*, but then again, there is not too many Czechs around here either. To compensate for the lack of jokes, people use the variations of the word "Czech", or rather of two words, which sound the same: *check* and *cheque* (which I am told is the way they spell it in even in

England).

But first, let me explain the historical background of the word Czech:

1. It is the name of the legendary leader, named *Czech*, who brought Czech tribe into Central Europe
2. It could also mean *Czech tribe*, which later became Czech nation
3. Of course, each member of the Czech nation is also of *Czech nationality*, in short he is called *the Czech*
4. And wouldn't you believe it, their language is also called Czech language, in short "*Czech*"

You have to admire how great all that is: one name for everything. On the other hand, it shows certain lack of imagination, too, but let me tell you this: Czechs are very practical people and they like all things to be rather simple.

Now let's return back to their history: as their tribe moved in the place, which is now called *Czech Republic* (what a coincidence!) they faced one big problem: somebody was already there. The records do not show how many of local inhabitants (mainly Celts: Bohemi, Markomani and Quadi), were pushed out and how many of them had to assimilate. The fact is that there are some traces of old Gaelic in Czech language even today. And not only in their language: their DNA's show even some particular Celtic stream. Considering there was no fighting between them, they worked it out rather nicely. You can even come up with the first joke: "asimilovat" ( that's "assimilate" in Czech) sounds same as "asi milovat" (= "to be probably in love" in Czech).

Come to think of it, the ethnic jokes are rather mild revenge on Czechs, considering they took the best place, right in the center of Europe - or so they thought. They suffered much worse things than just jokes: all their neighbors wanted that place too. For instance, the Thirty years war started in Prague, engaged almost all Europe and finally ended in Prague again.

Having also a good sense of humor, Czechs take those ethnic jokes with a mild amusement. There is quite a number of jokes - you can imagine resourceful people of North America (I never heard those jokes in England!) came with all kinds of double - and sometimes even funny - meanings :

- Czech-mate
- bouncing Czech
- rubber Czech
- Czeching in
- Czech-out counter
- Czeched flag
- Czech up on you
- Czech-book
- Czech-list
- Czechers
- Rain-Czech
- Czeching account
- highway Czech-point, and
- Czech is in the mail

As I said, I haven't seen any Czech to be really offended by it, but then again: *they don't get mad, they get even*. Well, almost, like in my case . . .

Long time ago, I joined one Canadian company, famous by excessive training of their new employees. It did not matter that some of us were real veterans of industry with

tons of experience of our own - Canadian experience included - the show simply had to go on. Training lasted several weeks and every day, we had tests - very silly tests, to be quite honest.. And one day, I just had enough of it. When our mentor (or should I say tor-mentor?) announced another test, I just stood up and headed for the door.

"Where do you think you are going?" he asked with the voice of sergeant major.

"What do you mean: ' *Where do you think you are going?* '," I repeated his words, faking surprise.

"I mean exactly that," he said, "Where do you think you are going?"

"I am going out," I explained.

"And who allowed you to leave?" he demanded.

"You did," I replied with utmost patience and kept on moving.

"Stop right there!" he shouted. "What do you mean '*You did*' ?"

The class had a time of their life. And I kept on clowning: "Not only you allowed me to go, you actually *ordered* me to leave."

"I did not!" he disagreed.

"You did so," I tried to convince him, with quite opposite result.

He screamed on the top of his lungs: "I did not!"

"But you did so and everybody in the classroom heard it too."

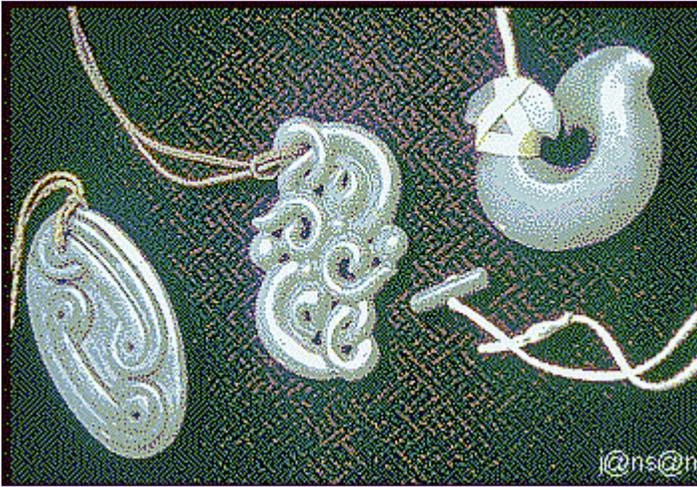
He had no answer to such impertinence and stood there, apparently puzzled by that mystery. I realized that it was just about as much as he could take and hurried up with explanation: "You came in the classroom and said: "*Check-out!*". Well, I am the only Czech in this classroom and since I hate violence, especially when I am on the receiving end - "

The whole class roared with laugh. I guess he didn't want to look silly, because he actually started to laugh too. When others finally stopped rejoicing, he paused and laughed again. "It won't work, Jan," he said with a broad smile on his face. "*He who laughs last laughs best.* And it won't be you. Come back here and sit down. I tell you what I'll do: if you are in such a hurry, you can finish the test in half a time. I will personally clock you. Agreed?"

Needless to say, that was *not a multiple choice* question - I had no choice. I guess some people just cannot take a joke, that's all. What bothers me however is that "he who laughs last ..." is the famous Czech proverb. How did *he* get hold of it?

---

### I asked for it.



No, I do not want to complain or look for excuses. I asked for it, I got it. I am talking about my interviews on the Net and let me tell you, *I am glad* I asked for it . . .

As a young boy, I always had some impertinent questions - or they seemed to be, because I was not getting any answers. My parents, my teachers, my friends, even my boss, they all refused to commit themselves to decent answers. I couldn't

imagine why. It can't be, I told myself, there must be a way how to make people talk.

Needless to say, I have found the reason for their silence: I had simply asked wrong people. You see, *there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers*. If you want to get right answer, ask the right people. Ask experts! I tried it and the situation changed drastically: I have found people who not only answered my questions, they even liked answering them! And they were all nice, friendly and patient. Yes, when you read some of my questions, you may doubt 'where could they possibly come from'. Let me put you at ease: they all popped up in my head. All it needed was a little bit of thinking and large amount of alcohol - not for inspiration, just for getting enough courage to ask them out loud . . . :-)

It all started with one bet: my friend challenged me that I would not write to certain famous person, ask him few questions and - what's more important - that I would surely not receive any answers. Well, my friend lost, but I won more than one bet. I repeated the feat again and again, first for web magazine *Amberzine*, then for my own, called *Hurontaria* and guess what, people liked it too. Soon I became more daring and inquiring. *E-mail interview* - whoever heard about that before? Being the inventor of many things that did not work, I was pleased one of them actually did.

Why did it work? Well, not because I am a nice and polite fellow (oh yes, I really can

be!), but evidently there were some other forces in play. You guessed it, the main trick was the Internet. I was simply picking experts with their own WEB pages, people I suspected would like answering questions, even my kind of questions. People who knew how important is to publish something on the Net, people who understood that our world has dramatically changed and still keeps changing. And of course, people who liked to be read, to be listened to and to be worked with. People of action. So you can see, it was easy: I also subscribe to that kind of attitude and they must have felt it in me, I suppose. Many of them became my friends afterwards; we still write to each other and that says it all. And guess what: they even copied our interviews on their pages. Maybe it was because I never asked too many questions, gave them full freedom of expression and *never ever commented* their answers. I find that policy not only fair but rather smart as well. After all, they did it for free and I owe them my gratitude. Let me thank to all of them here sincerely and profoundly.

The reactions of Amberzine (and later Hurontaria) readers were highly positive. They all appreciated the honest and qualified answers - we do not get too many of them nowadays. As far as the subjects of my interviews, I picked them by random, but only those that would interest our readers and inform them about the frontiers of our thinking. To all of them and especially to those who wrote me, I have to thank as well. After all, what good would be a transmitter without any receiver?

Many readers were asking how am I doing it. Well, it takes a lot of magic :-)) - but seriously folks, there is nothing to it: *just pick the right person and ask him/her right questions*. Just don't forget to make your questions unique and entertaining, if possible. Entertaining for yourself as well because, as you might have guessed, it steals a lot of time from you and it really helps if you love doing it.

---

**Author :** Jan B. Hurych

**Title :** PARALLAXES

**Essay:** MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONLY ONCE! (4)

---

### Measure twice, cut only once!



You may not believe it, but even here in Canada we have to measure twice and not only because of that old proverb, which stands in the title of this essay. As you may know, we have a *Metric* system, but our neighbors in the U.S.A., who are our major business partners, still keep the older, so called *Imperial* system of units. It is rather illogical, considering they were the very first colony which separated from British Empire. But all jokes aside, the situation is not that simple. In Canada *we*

*were decided Metric system* - this is not some grammatical error, just the fact that there was no referendum or plebiscite on it. And from that time on we are supposed to enjoy the apparently faultless system. It was not the first time the government made our enjoyment a law or they foolishly thought so.

Well, coming originally from Europe, I could easily move in the Metric world; never mind the fact that after landing in Canada, I became an "imperialist" - no, not in Marxist sense of the world, just "the user of Imperial system of measurement". Ten years later, the "reformation" to Metric system caught me deeply immersed in *inches, miles and gallons*. Sure, metric is the system which is rather simple and units are easily convertible - in the same system, that is, not between *Imp* and *Met* :-). Conversions between *kilo, hekto and deka* are as simple as moving of decimal point, right?

Otherwise, we also use *Met* the same way we used *Imp*, only the unit sizes are different, right? Sure, but most of our documentation is travelling back and forth *between us and U.S.* and we cannot expect everybody there to do any recalculations - even if he knows how.

And so we write everything in double units and our cars have two scales on their speedometers. Where you do not see dual units however, you better be careful: some travel maps (i.e. both issued by AAA or CAA - American or Canadian Automobile Association) have distances in Canada in *kilometers* and in the U.S.A. in *miles*. True, they are in different colors, but dimensions are not shown. So it may happen that you

cross Canadian border to get to Helena (the Capital of Montana, in case you wonder) and you may get there two hours later than you planned.

Some things are not easy to change, say tools for instance. And so we still drill with a quarter inch drill, while the stores are full of metric drills that nobody uses. Our bureaucrats are also trying to cut anything non-metric and introduced some new, impractical units instead of simple, old ones. If you want to blow your tire, at the service station that is, you may wonder what those strange *kiloPascals* (kPa) mean. I asked the attendant, but he laughed: "You have to read it on the side of the tire, Sir, I wouldn't really know. All I know that one kiloPascal is something like if you sneeze in your tire."

And we go round and round and the circles have no end. Our cows are now delivering milk in liters instead of quarts, and our hens are delivering eggs in Metric diameter, instead in inches and so. We just have to hope their orifices changed to Metric too, otherwise it could be quite painful :-). Sometimes it is not so funny: once human lives were endangered when one airplane was filled in Montreal by x liters instead of x gallons and had to make emergency landing somewhere in Prairies.

And just last week, I have read that US spacecraft heading to Mars was destroyed because its computer could not convert Imperial units to Metric ones. It happened after it travelled over 9.5 months (approx 290 days?) and 669 million kilometers (something like 400 million miles, I presume?) and it was just about to go into orbit around the Red Planet. They said it measured the acceleration in Imperial units - by the way, what is the unit for...well, forget it.

The habits of people change much slower, however. I remember one owner of gasoline station, who - as a revolt - was selling his fuel still in gallons. Fortunately he was only sentenced to pay a fine, not hanged, drawn and quartered - as he would probably deserve in middle ages for breaking the law of his king. :-). How deep in our mind is actually the Imperial system embedded was explained to me by my friend Fred: "When I was told my mother-in-law was three thousand kilometers away, it didn't tell me too much, but when I got the letter that she was put *six feet* under, I knew exactly what they meant."

---

**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: THE ELECTRONIZATION (5)**

---

### **The electronization.**



*For what it may be worth, we are all being continuously electronized. Now you may be asking me what the "electronization" is, but I have to leave the definition to scholars - you see, I only invented it :-). Let's just say it is a process when electrons that were apparently intended to serve us, made us their slaves instead. Science fiction? You only wish!*

---

Electricity and its use was coming in stages: first substituting for our muscle power, then providing the light and so on. While telegraph and telephone extended the distance of our hearing, television did the same for our vision or should I rather say for our "visibility". Radio-waves were first carrying Morse code, then spoken word, later even controlled the orbiting satellites and even the rocket to Mars. Are we happy now or were we more happy then?

What a simple-minded question! Happiness is the feeling resulting from many factors, many of which we tend to forget. Especially when we are happy :-). Our imagination was always carrying us further than any electron could. We invented computers; first to do our calculations, then to do our data processing and lately even as a substitute for our basic thinking. In spite of the fact that our imagination could take us even further - well, let's stoop right here: we could go on and on. Oh yes, we also made some progress in the field of artificial intelligence, but our natural one is still quite ahead of it. One reason for it may be the fact that our thinking is still developing, with us even realizing it. Forwards or even backwards, if you know what I mean.

---

Our thinking clearly extended in many directions, but at the same time also shrunk, laterally of course. It seems to be quite natural since the more we are specializing - i.e.

looking for details and in depth - the less time we have for general overview. That's where the negative trends come to work: we try to handle more information than ever before, but at the same time we think less than ever before (or it looks like it, anyway). Well, we do not have to think that much in many areas, not any more: spreadsheets are doing our calculations, electronic spellers check our spelling, browsers and search engines are picking the facts we are searching for - stock market trends, verses from bible, recent news and even astrological forecasts. All we need to do is *to quote* - yes, without prejudice and even *without verification*. Instead of looking for ideas, we are only looking for facts. The facts somebody already discovered and published, the facts which are already there, but nothing new, to be quite honest.

True, if we want to study something we have to start somewhere and more we learn the better. But Web is not the same as printed matter, where author is backing up his word (or facts) with his personal prestige and integrity. What we see on WEB are not always the real facts, only somebody's opinions, sometimes even the transparent tendency *to change the facts*. For each question we will find on WEB hundreds of answers, mostly contradicting each other.

And then, we do reports. Good reports, excellent reports, nothing but reports. Reports containing very few of original ideas, mind you. But who wants them, who needs them? Is your boss interested in something new, something which was never there, never proven or never found to be financially profitable? Maybe, but would he be willing to push that new idea on *his* manager's desk? Hardly.

He knows what we all know: originality is actually *the violation* of society rules. True, the violation of old, sometimes even antique rules, but rules nevertheless. And that is risky. What if the proposal does not succeed? After all, he would risk his warm place, comfortable job, his connection with vice-president's uncle, etc. True, if it works and he is smart enough, he may scoop all benefits and praises instead of you - but is it worth that risk? He already has a warm, comfortable job!

The same goes through the heads of others, too. So instead of trying to improve our world, we are happily yapping into our mobile phones, watching TV and use WEB the way it was never intended for - *for business*. Well, nothing wrong with little business - but shouldn't I be asked first whether I want all that advertising garbage on my screen? Things surely will get even worse when everything will go wireless: the network captains will tell us all what we should or rather *must* like. Otherwise we may become non-conformists, you know, some kind of black sheep . . .

It all started with Adam and Eve and look what happened to them. No, the subject was not an apple of maybe supermarket quality. The sin was their research in things they were not supposed to know like picking fruit from the forbidden tree, *the tree of*

*knowledge*. And they not only gathered information (i.e. apples), they also digested it (ate it, to be accurate) and even made some improvements later (i.e. they invented first clothing). Yes, they were original - nobody did it before them - that's why we call it "the *original sin*" :-).

Today, we have mass-media which present us with various information garbage under the pretext of our "right to know". But we have also *the right to know better than that*. We have a "right to think", don't you think so? Or are we happy with all that prefabricated opinion pumped into our memory via our eyes and ears, conveniently bypassing the thinking part of our brain? Some of us are happy - maybe even most of us, I do not know. Look at the so called "political correctness" - we all know you can be *either correct or political* but seldom both at the same time :-). Yes, the originality is still treated as some kind of sin and our punishment is the forced conformation to the existing status. Don't rock the boat, we are told by our parents, our friends, our society. Nonsense! The boat is already shaking quite seriously, jumping up and down with waves without ever moving forward. What it needs is to balance it, stabilize it and started to sail again.



Let' not forget one more thing: for their thirst for knowledge, Adam and Eve were thrown from comfortable peace of paradise into this world of sorrow. Not only that - the sentence was rather strange: they were ordered to multiply! The reason is not so obvious, but I believe that it was to make our punishment less severe: we just cannot live on the Earth alone, because we do not have all the comfort of paradise here. We have to help each other just to be able to live at all. So as you see, our mankind is here only thanks to original sin, *the sin of originality*. And without originality, we may one day cease to exist, at least mentally.

---

**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: THE FIGHT FOR LIFE WE NEVER KNEW BEFORE (6)**

---

### The fight for life we never knew before.



There is quite a fight going on, the fight we do not know too much about. It is a secret fight all right and I even allowed myself the ambiguity in the title of this article: it is the *fight* we never knew before, but also for the *life* we never knew before. It is a fight for the *artificial life* (shortly Alife or AL), sometimes also called "silicon life" to distinguish it from the "carbon" based life.

I am not talking here about the life forms which were once also contemplated, the forms where the carbon atoms in carbohydrates are replaced by silicon atoms. It didn't work, because (as I was told by chemists):

- carbon based organisms are derivatives of carbon dioxide, which is a gas, while silicon dioxide - well, you have seen quartz already - is pretty solid,
- long chains of silicon molecules are not mechanically strong enough,
- silicon is not so stable as carbon, thanks to its bigger molecule

---

No, we are talking about the life created in the environments of *silicon chips* - therefore its name. But the hardware itself is not important - artificial life is realized via software and it is called "life" only because it has *all basic characteristics* assigned to our, biological life. Well, maybe with some exceptions, listed here:

- 1) Instead of some "material" objects, we rather talk about "**the kind of existence**",
- 2) It has capability to **multiply or replicate**, similarly to DNA, either by cloning or fusion, or any other way, thus creating new, separate identities,
- 3) It can **store and access information** - even it's own, the *genetic* one,
- 4) It uses its own, shall we say *metabolic* process of **energy or information exchange**, needed for its existence - for its life,

- 5) It **interacts** functionally with its environment and has ability of independent (i.e. self-controlled) expression of its existence,
- 6) Its **whole depends on individual parts** and vice versa,
- 7) While it is **dependent on its environment**, it has certain endurance i.e. resistance to the harmful effects of its environment,
- 8) It has **capability to change**, to procreate, to mutate and maybe even evolve,
- 9) It can **grow, expand and virtually move around** the given environment,
- 10) It also has **some other features**: it can perish, die, simply cease to exist. It can attack the other living forms or adapt to them,
- 11) While I admit, that our professor of biology mentioned to us only four of the above, I cannot stop here and add also one rather disputable feature: it's intelligence. Yes, **it can learn**. That would further lead us to **Artificial Intelligence**, which is the related subject.

---

After reading all that, you may still be asking how much is the artificial life similar to our "everyday" life. I won't keep you in suspense: it is not. So why are we calling it *life* at all? Well, why not. We do suspect there are another forms of life in our universe, some of them not at all similar to ours. Just imagine creatures, which will perceive thermal spectrum as we perceive our visible spectrum - pretty scary, isn't it? Well, with all our success in cosmic travel, we are still like grasshoppers trying to jump to the top of the tree. There is only a slim possibility, that the present generation will be ever able to study those cosmic forms of life in its own lifetime - not unless the visitors will come to us. On the other hand, the silicon life is already here. It lives in the cyberspace of our computers, is crawling on the surfaces of our disks, vegetates in the memory and it even multiplies. .

Yes, I am talking about computer viruses. English scientist *Stephen Hawkins* was talking about them when he said he was sorry the first forms of artificial life appeared to be - to his disappointment - the harmful ones. We know that some viruses already created their mutants, mostly by error, but dangerous nevertheless. And you may bet somebody is already teaching them how to procreate with certain purpose "in mind". Sure, you may claim that all this is only a "virtual" life, but we all know that the results are very real and their consequences are affecting our "real" life as well.

Fortunately, the scientific research of A-life is not interested in computer viruses, even if we can learn a lot from them as well. The laboratories are trying to create "organisms" who could procreate and evolve as well. One of these days we may even prove Darwin theory in our laboratory and maybe even predict where are we, mankind, heading to.

well, you don't think the evolution will stop today, do you? The application of A-Life systems will be probably unlimited: not only we could increase the speed and capacity of our thinking, we might be able to make them smarter than we are - well, some of us, anyway :).

What do we know about artificial life so far? The answer is rather uncertain: we know only what is allowed to be published, probably only half of the progress, per my estimate. It is quite understandable: one of the users of the A-Life is the army. In one of the places I was inquiring they simply told I do not have enough security clearance.

Let me compile then the incomplete list of known forms of A-life: cellular automata (CA) promoted long time ago by John von Neumann, the famous mathematician and computer scientist, also known as the "father of A-life", *the game of Life* by Conway, which is also using the rules of CA, *polygons* (e.g. from Polyworld by Larry Yeager), actually A-life creatures, *creations* (e.g. Tierra by Tom Ray), populated by predators, victims and parasites, *fractals* (say L-systems with natural growth), *neural networks (NN)*, able to do their own learning and forecast (i.e. stock exchange trends), *fuzzy logic (FL)*, *genetic algorithms*, simulating DNA behavior, evolutionary algorithms (Biomorphs by R. Dawkins - hello, Mr. Darwin!), and *some applications of the theory of chaos*.



*If you want to see more details, try to search Internet for "A-life". The authors may differ in their opinions about what should we called truly artificial forms of life; some claim there is still missing the main component - without specifying what it is :-).*

*The interesting question is what are the possible applications of A-life. To sum-it up, they are unlimited - they may encompass all areas of our life. The first person who will succeed will reap great financial rewards - that's why there is so much secrecy everywhere. As we may expect, not all applications will be beneficiary to mankind, there will be some misuse, but that may be said just about everything.*

**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: WHAT IS ART FOR? (7)**

---

## What is art for?



I was recently listening to my car radio and there was an interesting discussion: several "ladies and gentlemen of the jury", the *literary critics* that is, were discussing the new book of the author who was not known to me. Their opinions ranged from "readable" to "rather boring" and from "not so accurate" to "quite remote from real life".

Well, the differences as those are quite normal - we all have different opinions and we are quite free to voice them. But hearing them from a bunch of critics who were supposed to give us, the readers, a *decent* judgement of that book, one may wonder: are their opinions really fitting? And even more important: do they really have something to say to us or are they just massaging their own egos? Suddenly, one of them said something smart: "*But the author cannot please everybody - this is not a propose of art at all!*"

In a moment, they all realized how egotistic, how individualistic and - at least according to my opinion - how stupid they all were. They, professional critics, completely lost the track of their mission: to help readers *to appreciate the good parts* in that book, something the artist surely had in mind. Maybe they believed we are supposed to find it by ourselves, maybe they didn't consider *that* to be so important. Net profit of their critical views was only the fact that the reader who listened to them would probably never buy the book, listening to their judgments. And that is bad, very bad - they threw out the water from the tub with the baby as well!

They were biased, unjust and shameless. True, even critic could not please everybody - and should not! - but they were too much postmarked by their profession: they considered themselves the guardians of the Holy Literature and "Superb" taste. The false feeling - that they are here *to criticize* only, sometimes at any cost - was too deep under their polished skins. They did not consider the other part of the coin: to stress

good features, to praise where the praise is due, to evaluate *without prejudice*. Yes, they thought they were here only for criticizing, nitpicking and downplaying . . .

---

Well, they should have known better. Fortunately for us, common folks, their opinions mean very little. True, we may not recognize which art is really the best, but we know what we like, what pleases us and what arouses our interest, right? Well, not entirely; this is unfortunately not enough and never was. That is not to say that we, common folks, have bad taste or that we do not understand what was meant by this and that. It may be partly true, but it is *not* the point. Art is not just what we like or what we appreciate.

The whole history of mankind is mainly the history of politics and art. While the politics runs in circles and the proverbial saying "we never learn too much from history" is probably very true, the art basically reflects the *continuo*, the evolutionary and never ending process. It is the quest for better humanity, for turning the mankind into a decent, intelligent and cooperating community. That of course requires continuous improvement, continuous searching. Quite often we have to look back and compare: are we doing it better than before or are we just repeating the same mistakes? Are we coming up with new ideas or do we just recycle the old or superficial ones?

Of course, we have one big problem: good art is not always saying things the easy way - art does not simply post announcements nor gives the orders, it does not strictly specify what should be done and how. There is a real need for doing it that way: to leave enough space for further thinking. Art is encouraging us to have our own thoughts and to appreciate the other people thoughts. Sometimes we do not fully understand, but nevertheless we feel our way through. Yes, I have in mind the art which is struggling to find new ways of communicating the ideas - the visions if you wish - anything which makes our lives more valuable, richer, more meaningful.

No, I am not trying here to define art - the accurate definition of it is impossible anyway. I am just trying to figure out what is art for me alone. You see, it went like this: from early childhood, I was attracted by music, books, paintings, statues, you name it. Then I became a radio amateur and switched to study engineering, something which also interested me (and still does). Long time after that, I run the I.Q. test on myself and discovered that the right half of my brain (the art, visualization, imagination) is actually better than the left half (logic, mathematics, technical things). Only then I understood the cravings of my childhood, the urge to write stories, poems, play accordion, paint and what not. Still, I am happy with that part of my life I spent in engineering: it was quite a challenge and the earning were good as well.

Then I retired and decided to give it a chance. For past eight years I have been writing articles and stories, for newspapers as well as for Net magazines. I also started my own electronic *enzines*: literary magazine *Hurontaria* (it run for four years) and more entertaining *Priloznik* (now also in its fourth year). And what's more: my library of electronic books (free to download from Net) reached the "astronomical" number of fifty books - this one including..

It does not matter how good or bad I am - I just had to try it and give it my best. It was rather easy: I started to write while I was on High school and never rally stopped. I also engage in painting, writing verses, playing harmonica, singing, electronic graphics and others. And I find the real satisfaction in what I am doing, in creating something as well as in publishing it. Most of responses of my readers were encouraging and I will surely continue, irregardless :-).

Now you may ask what all that has to do with art? After all, I was also satisfied when I engineered something which worked well and was useful. There is of course one difference: those designs satisfied only material needs of people. There are of course the other needs as well . . .

---

**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: YOU CAN FINISH MORE THINGS IN SHORTER TIME (8)**

---

**You can finish more things in shorter time**  
(humor)



*Do you sometimes feel the frustration from unfinished work? Do you have worries about your capabilities, the fear that you simply are not up to it, the chagrin for the lost hours and energy, are you afraid of losing your job just because of it? No, you don't need to answer . . .*

I was like that, too. I blamed my boss, my parents, my enemies, my fate, I even blamed the Summer Saving Time. Then something unbelievable happened: I have found the *real* reason for all that: it was myself, me, yours truly. It's that simple and if you are like me, you may even profit from some advices I can give you. But then again, if you are like me, you may not . . . :-)

There are of course several ways how *to avoid* that problem first place, namely:

- 1) *Don't work* - that is if you were born rich. I have a distant feeling I already blew that opportunity.
- 2) *If you work, try to avoid difficult tasks.* That is not as impossible as it sounds. I know several ways how to do it, but most people will hate you afterwards.
- 3) *You pass difficult tasks onto somebody else,* but beware of his revenge!
- 4) *Get sick, die or quit.* Or join the army or some other society - but frankly speaking, you may get more than you bargained for and eventually you will also get sick, die or at least quit anyway. If you are a girl, go to convent or marry a rich boy. If you are a boy: go to monastery or marry a rich girl - unfortunately there are not too many rich girls who are also stupid enough to marry the boy without means :-).

The rest of you, or shall I say *the rest of us*, we are stuck with our work, our tasks, our problems, our stomach ulcers and our insomnia. Don't get me wrong, what I will present here is not *the universal solution*, it's just a *list of solutions* and some of them may fit you as little as a glove fits the rabbit foot.

How did I find out all those methods? I used my favorite method: I call it *idea mapping* and it is really very simple: you get a map, any map and you keep staring at it. Continuously repeat secret mantra "gooseberry" (some say even the word "Londonderry" will make the trick) until some crazy ideas start popping in your head. Don't worry if it does not work for a while - it did not for me either. Actually, it still does not work all the time, but it cannot do no harm either: it isn't addictive, has low caloric content and it is 100% natural :-).

All jokes aside, my real discovery came with the single statement I have read somewhere: "*Of all the time we spent at or tasks, the 30 percent of it gets 80 percent of total results.*" I grabbed my calculator and quickly figured out, that approximately 70% of our efforts will be then spent on remaining 20% of all results. pretty lousy, isn't it? Frankly, I could get that number without calculator, but I wanted to be doubly sure.

Now what does that tell us? Well, obviously there is some a reason behind it. The remaining 20 percent is either:

- a) too difficult,
- b) cannot produce too many good results,
- c) it is mostly wrong or useless, or
- d) that part of our work is plagued with too many coffee brakes.

So I eliminated coffee brakes. But it did not improve my results a little bit (a binary bit for that matter), since I did not have many coffee breaks anyway. Wrong results? I didn't have any. Useless results? Plenty. And here you have it, my discovery: **most of our time spent at work is useless**. So why do we still do it? Thanks to our fantasizing, or rather the feeble-mindedness of our boss, due to our (or his) poor judgment, wrong priorities and possibly even because of irregular fluctuations of our mind.

Now let's do some mathematics: if I do all the time only tasks from the first group, that is *those useful and productive ones*, **100% of time** could suddenly achieve **266.66% of results**. It may not proportionally increase my salary and my boss may even overload me by more work later - hardly the thing I was after - but it can give me the confidence I was looking for.

Of course, you may find my advice dubious, impractical or even ridiculous. It's all up to

you. But just imagine that you will NOT tell your boss all this and *by simple postponement of the useless group of tasks* (temporarily - you can't postpone it forever), you gain more time for **increasing your output**. Or if you prefer, you may still get same 100% of results as before, but also more time for your coffee breaks (as much as 70 % of your time :-). Isn't it worth trying?

But seriously: you do not want to spend all that time in company cafeteria, it may only get you fire. Instead, you want more results, appreciation, even promotion. You may actually start right away, just follow some of these hints:

- do not get tied up too much in details
- break the task in stages and postpone later stages
- reschedule useless tasks for next millennium
- avoid giving helping hand to others
- engage others to do your work for you (good luck to you then, you will need it!)
- do not start anything you cannot finish in one hour
- do not waste time discussing things with others
- don't fill your reports with facts or explanations
- avoid any advice, good or bad.

I am sure you will find even more effective was than those I listed, no doubt. One last comment: you may wonder why I named this article *YOU Can Finish . . . .* That's because you have to do it *yourself*, I can't do it for you - I can't help you, I am too busy right now. I still haven't finished the last issue of my magazine . . .

---

### Ode to pain.



I am sitting and writing. Thousands of mysteries are meanwhile being solved all around the world, but I am just sitting and thinking about my own pains. Not only that - I am already thinking what happens when all my pains will cease and I will be no more. However, that is not the mystery I am really trying to solve, at least not while I am in *this* world - if there would be any need for me to solve that at all, which I sincerely doubt. Maybe there is no real mystery in it, maybe "*Mort est simillis sommo*" and our death is really just like falling in sleep. . .

Then I will cross the threshold. I don't mind if there is no joy for me over there. Joy is just a sign that I am all right, that everything is - so to say - quite normal. Joy is really very simple thing: for smiling, they say, we need actually only one third of muscles we otherwise need for expressing the grimace of pain. Of course, pain has more degrees, stages or shades if you will . . .

I could name all kinds of pain I intimately know, talk about them for hours, maybe days, and I believe you will never be bored. I could describe pains spasmodic, excruciating, choking, stabbing, pinching, strangling, tearing, cutting pains and pains that lead to concussion or coma. And there are also mental pains, creative pains and pains when you are betrayed or deserted and of course the pains of love. Pains of sacrifice and of ingratitude, pains of stupidity and also stupid pains.

Oh yes, I know pain that is pretended, denied, hypochondria tical or suppressed, the pain which leaves you and comes back again, only to hurt you ten times more. We all know the pains of offence or ridicule, the pains which we cause to each other or even to ourselves, the pains of foolishness and the pains of reason. Then there is a pain which subsides, but leaves deep scars, so deep we normally cannot see them. There is a pain which wakes up slowly, like a lover after a long night of lovemaking - the pain which then grabs you with much stronger passion and does not let go. There is a pain "till

death parts us" and I should not forget to mention the one which surpasses them all: *the pain from pain . . .*

The disappointment of parents, the desperation of children, the suffering of mistresses - and the wives as well - the pains of mine, yours, ours and theirs. Pains personal or social, pains of crowds, but also pains of solitude, pains contagious, permanent or temporary, some even incurable. And at the end, there comes the last pain of them all, the final one, the closing act . . .

And so we are standing up to pain and fighting it and sometimes, we are protectors of those who are not able - or do not want - to fight any more. Sometimes we win, but next time we are defeated again or simply give up and yield to it. Thrown down to ground, we raise again, only to fall under even heavier blow. Yes, pains, we all have them; they bring us closer or draw us apart, they brake old friendships and help us to make new ones.

*"I gave you the pain,"* said once the most powerful of Gods and He Himself might not realize what kind of gift it is. But He gave us plenty: a lot to some and even more to others; pains big, bigger and gigantic. And so we turn to Him in our hour of misery and say our prayers. We kneel and beg Him: *"In this painful hour, have a mercy on us."* Instead of thanking Him for it - we curse our troubles. We should be grateful for our pains; they faithfully stay with us for the duration of our lifetime: we are born in pain and die with it.

So this is my philosophy of pain: I feel sorry for pain instead for me. Still, one thing is true: if I never had a tooth ache, I might never experience the great feeling when the pain stops. And there you have it: for every joy we have to pay, but the pain is - mostly, anyway - free of charge. So let's enjoy it while it lasts!

---

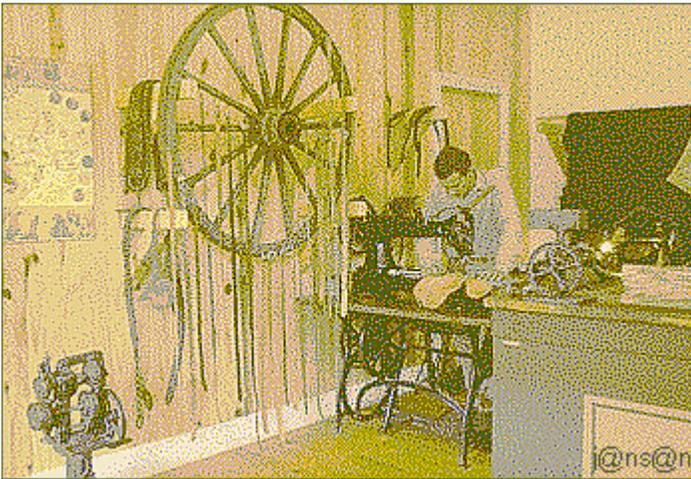
**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING NEW (10)**

---

### Something borrowed, something new.



Don't worry, I am not going to talk here about weddings, but rather about recent advancements in digital electronics and communication. As we all know, progress is usually made in two ways: in sharp steps or in slow ramps. **Step** is the sudden, *qualitative change*, mainly through some new idea (or old idea applied in new environment) and **ramp** is the *quantitative, usually slow progression* in very small, sometimes miniscule steps, day by day drudgery - using somebody

else's idea, but slightly improved. Development, they call it, yes, Sir, that's the right word..

Needless to say, we do need both because:

- The NEW IDEA does not immediately come together with the best realization or application. Sometimes it even needs the advancements in related technologies. In other words, there is always some space to IMPROVE it.
- IMPROVEMENT itself will eventually halt and the time will come when you just cannot make it any better, and you need NEW IDEA: new algorithm, new technology or method, sometimes even new people :-).

Now back to those advancements: here you have the series of the latest news and I will leave it up to you to decide which of them are *borrowed* and which are really *new* (some were still predictions - it was written in 1998):

- IBM is working on highest disk density: 3 terabytes (3 millions of megabytes) per square inch of the disk surface. Where is the limit?
- Your cellular phone will eventually collect your e-mail, paychecks, navigate you through streets and also have a speech recognition (I guess we would not need to listen to it anymore, just get the excerpt of it :-)

- While some computers have already 64 bit CPU, we may go up to 256 bits
  - Electronic toilet: heated seat, washing jets, digital timer, pre-recorded flushing sounds to mask those embarrassing sounds, all that sold for measly \$4000
  - With war in Kosovo, the hostilities spread also into cyber-world, mainly WEB and communications. Could it be that our over-computerized world has one weakest point since we have - at best - only semi-intelligent computers (?)
  - Internet connection will be wireless
  - The medical science will eliminate most of diseases
  - Human engineering will achieve incredible feats
  - Computers will tap info directly from our brains
  - Major world problems will be solved
- 

Now for freebees:

- some companies now offer *free Internet access* but the customers will have to carry some advertising
- in Alaska, you get free Internet access from one telephone company, if you subscribe to their long distance call program
- You probably already heard about *10,000 free PCs*, given away to those customers who will fit certain advertising profile
- Free advertising, free merchandise, free e-mail, free love, you name it. But still no free lunches :-). How about getting some free time; I haven't got too much of it lately . . .

Again, I was shocked with recent statistics: *half of homes* in United States have at least one PC! That means from now on, WEB netizens are the majority of population and don't you ever forget it!

Another interesting bit: in 1998, an average browser (yes - the person, I do not mean Internet Explorer or Netscape!) was browsing Net *at work* three times a week while *home users* only twice a week. And if in 1996 he/she spent only 14 minutes per session, today it is 55 minutes! Now I did some extrapolation (only linear - the conservative one) and calculated that in the year 2020 he/she will spend 8 hours per session and will access the net *every* day. And of course *everybody* will have two computers - one at work and one at home!

Now that's the interesting food for thought, but it would hardly fill your dinner plate: I do not think the employers will be paying you just for browsing (if you are not government employee, that is :-). Now you may object that the access speed will be also much quicker, but so will be our hunger for more information. We are already spending more time with our e-mail than we used to spend with our snail-mail, and that's mainly *because* it is so fast and handy . . .



**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: LIFE IS ... (11)**

---

### Life is . . .



No, no definitions today. We all know that life is *not* like a bowl of cherries, if you know what I mean. And if I say that life is beautiful, you may ask: is that all you want, a beautiful life? Life of comfort, peace and tranquility? Life without problems, without pain?

Of course that *is* exactly what I want. I used to ask for more, much more, but as the life progressed, so did I. Once a while, I slowed down my daily pace, to sit down and think about things. Yes, I used to be young, I remember it well. I did have some plans and I even turned some of them into reality. After all, I should be content, satisfied and happy - and relaxed; after all what else is the retirement for? But what if my choice of plans was wrong, what if my plans were too modest, without enough imagination or courage? What if I

failed myself already when I was making those plans?

I do not know and I will never know. I could have - and probably should have - planned for more. But when I was still discovering what I was good for, it was too early to figure out what I could do for it. It was not some lack of courage, no Sir, rather the shortage of experience, orientation and determination. I did not possess that inner drive, which would tell me that I had to be a great musician, painter or what not. It was against my nature to believe I would amount to something extraordinary, that I was maybe even a hidden genius. Luckily for me, I was right not assuming those unreal and crazy notions: what a disappointment I was saved from!

So I made small plans - not so small, just not too great by my later standards. I kept fulfilling them, one after another. What a boring job, you say? Not at all, those were not easy tasks and it was quite satisfying. It felt like being able to be always right. No remorse, no regret, just everyday satisfaction and fulfillment. Meantime, the life went on. And soon I realized that I was getting old, that I was not planning anything any more, at least nothing new, challenging yet still achievable. But my young years were

already gone, it was not possible to start again. I realized that there is no time left. The activity was replaced by notions, the satisfaction by doubts.

At first, I panicked: was it possible that I was not be able to do this or that? And what's more: I lost that drive I had before since the reasons for it somehow disappeared. I realized that the ways I chose were no more the best - just comfortable, without any major risk. But was it what I really wanted? True, I was no fighter, no discoverer, no visionary. *So what was I, what did I really want?* Too many questions were popping in my head and there were no answers. Questions like: what did I ever achieve? A there it was, the former successes turned into minor achievements, previous satisfaction into the pile of almost-failures.

The most troubling of them all: *Did I do it right or did I waste my lifetime?* Was it my fate or was I expected to deliver more, better or smarter? Was I supposed to obey my fate or to revolt against it?

Then I realized that there is no escape from the labyrinth of life except for "the last escape". And when the exit is getting close, why should I even bother? It was like switching to another doctor, for second opinion: if the first one says YES and the other one says NO, it is actually worse than if you get no opinion at all. But the world is not only black or white, bad or good, right or wrong. The life is a colorful process, where we sometimes do what we *want to do*, but mostly what we *have to do*.

I remember how I once asked my grandfather how did he managed to live that long - and he smartly answered: "*Whatever happens, Johnny, you just keep on living.*" Whom he really addressed I will never know: his name was John like mine. Well, my grandfather is gone, for long time now. Something happened and he couldn't keep on living any more; pneumonia, I believe. But I am sure he certainly died happy, satisfied and content. He already found the answer and when his time came, he was ready for it.

---

**Author : Jan B. Hurych**

**Title : PARALLAXES**

**Essay: THE ADDENDUM (12)**

---

### **The author, Jan B. Hurych,**



was born before WWII in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he mostly grew up - well, not too much, only to five feet and seven inches. During his younger years, he travelled extensively, mostly by tram No.14, as a student of Prague Technical University. After graduation, he took some job, but soon he returned to University as an Assistant, later Assistant Lecturer. After nine years and one invasion (in 1969), he took his last tram, this time to *Ruzyne Airport*, where his traces disappeared.

They appeared again in England, where he took an adventurous job of cleaning windows in high-rise buildings. It was during this time he discovered a very efficient method how to wash up to hundred windows a day - this idea was later shamelessly copied as Windows 95. His target was however Canada and again, his footprints disappeared at the airport, called *Heathrow*.

In the meantime, his "North-West passage" continued as he reappeared in *Montreal*, Canada. It almost looked like he would finally settle down: he got job with U.S. computer company, got married and bought the family house. Well, you can't get more settled than that and Jan started to count the years remaining to his retirement. After nine years and one separatist election, he got tired of Quebec as well and performed another disappearing act at *Dorval Airport*.

He landed in *Toronto*, where he spent ten productive years, mostly with design of power plants and the rest with CSA (Canadian Standard Association), certifying U.S. and Japanese computers, for which he had to travel there - well, most of the time. Surprisingly enough, he got tired of flying as well and moved North of Toronto, to the beautiful shores of *Lake Huron*, where he worked at Bruce Nuclear plant.

He then learned they were looking for design engineers in *Saskatchewan* and his wanderlust appeared again. True, it was 3000 km away, but it was another North-West passage and he couldn't say "no". His wife Vlasta sat behind the steering wheel of their

covered wagon Firenza and their dog Tara laid down comfortably on the rear seat while Jan was navigator and family cameraman. After full 4 days of driving, they finally got there. And they liked it there, which is rather odd, considering that winter temperatures are there very close to minus forty degrees Fahrenheit (or Celsius: both scales meet there). After three years, Vlasta returned back to guard their house at Huron against cyclones and Jan stayed another year to finish the contract.

Finally he returned back to Ontario and after another year, he decided to retire with good intention to age gracefully. Instead, he started two Internet magazines (Hurontaria and Priloznik) and devoted most of his time to writing. He also writes to different magazines - yes, even newspapers - and for two years he wrote essays for artistic gallery (ArtForum). Apparently, that was still not enough for him and with his friend Michal he created the library of electronic books KNIHY OFF-LINE (i.e. Books off-line), both in Czech and English (this book being one of them). He also designs electronic illustrations for his enazines and books.

Jan still travels, but this time on his own time and money :-). That may be the reason he is sometimes considered to be a Scotsman, namely when he is tipping in restaurants. He has no account in Switzerland, be it secret or otherwise, but he is sincerely regretting he doesn't. He unselfishly shares his rich travel experiences with his friends, mostly in the local pub.

---