

Outline Towards a Theory of the Mine Versus the Mind and the Harvard Outline

- I. Start with numeral I., the Harvard Outline, a method of organizing information
 - a. remembered from high school as a major step towards creating an essay
 - i. though there was a decimal method, too
 - b. but I've never been comfortable with the thing – its seeming rigor, its scaffolding so white against the language
 - i. never felt the top-down structuralist method of constructing writing to be useful or effective; the mind, so idiosyncratic, unusual
 1. its strangeness and its often-incoherence
 - a. the lovely anomaly
 - c. and The Harvard Outline is the reason that I get 55 five-paragraph essays every month
 - d. it is, I think, suspect, (its
 - e. headings
 - i. subheadings
 1. sub-subheadings
 - a. etc.
 - b. though there is a pleasure to this iteration, this recursion – like mathematics and the algorithms I played with and admired in computer science classes, writing functions that called themselves
 - i. which called themselves
 1. which called themselves
 - a. until they were satisfied
 2. and exited
 - ii. right back
 - c. out

- i. like those Russian nesting (matroyshka) dolls; a lovely symmetry; such satisfaction comes in nesting
 - ii. such starkness
 - 1. elegance)
 - f. all those steps out and down across the page – like the writing task is that of going downhill, like a waterfall in its rush
 - i. or the incremental, slow plod down the slope, skis buried behind in some drift
 - g. While technically called “The Harvard Outline”
 - i. it has nothing to do with Harvard
 - 1. according to their archivists, “it appears to be a generic term”
 - ii. so it’s difficult to track it down in the history of organizing information
 - 1. which is what this culture spends increasing time (and money!) doing
 - a. witness the amazing success of the search-engine Google
 - i. as created by Larry Page and Sergey Brin
 - ii. with its elegant mechanism of concordance
 - 1. of ranking searches by the number of pages that link to each individual page or site in order to establish the relative importance of that initial page or site
 - a. and look – there’s no need for parentheses in 1. above thanks to the Harvard Outline
 - b. again that attraction to self-examination
 - c. again that attraction to what elegance there is to find

II. My family has a background in the Michigan mining industry

- a. a history in copper, iron, the cast-off leftover materials necessary to process ore from rock
- b. though less my recent family
 - i. not my father who is a professor – whose job, like mine, is the mining and refining, then the distribution of information for money
 - 1. though perhaps this is a cynical view of the profession
 - a. and light as knowledge metaphor is hardly breaking new ground
 - 2. still I like the image of the light-helmeted professor plowing through the darkness
 - a. though it is romantic to say the least
 - 3. “like mine” (from above) – mining is a story of possession
 - a. of legal ownership of land and rights, the permission to go below the crust
 - 4. “breaking new ground” (from above) – again the construction terminology
 - a. the invocation of the building, of the engineering
 - 5. my father teaches at Michigan Technological University, formerly the Michigan College of Mines, a school that is just about to lose its Mining Engineering program
 - a. which is older than the oldest living humans
 - b. which is “one of only 15 mining engineering programs in the U.S. that has been uninterrupted since the beginning of the century and has also held accreditation with the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) since 1936” according to the MTU Mining Engineering website
 - i. this tidbit brought to you through Google
- c. but further back
 - i. since nearly everyone who emigrated to Upper Michigan from (mostly) Scandinavia worked in the mines, r worked in industries that supported it
 - 1. the mining boom in the nineteenth century was so big that Calumet, Michigan, population of 879 as of the 2000 census, was nearly named the capitol of Michigan

2. and there are stories of exploitation and immense hardship
 - a. as there always are
3. though just after WWII, the price of copper declined and so – though there's still plenty underneath the Northern earth – the mines slowly shut their doors
 - a. now there are no active producing mines left in the Keweenaw,
 - i. the railroads no longer run
 - ii. even the Greyhound bus service has stopped
 - iii. it felt at times while growing up like living in a dead letter office
 - b. though the shells they left behind – the fine network of tunnels that still riddle the earth – are havens for millions of bats
 - i. who come out at night through the chicken wire that often covers up the mines' mouths
 - ii. and were – until recently, when the method of closing off the mines was changed to be a bit more bat-friendly – picked off by hundreds of raccoons that would sit at the chicken wire, waiting for the daily exodus and feast
 - c. and now Upper Michigan is a destination for bat-watching tourists
- d. and anyone growing up in the Keweenaw has had ready access to mines
 - i. either through the tours of the few remaining open (now purely tourist) mines
 1. which are absolutely worth doing, though expensive (to the tune of \$25), because to be submerged a mile underneath the earth is a necessary experience
 - a. to get that absolute darkness
 - i. even if you think you know what it's like
 - b. and to get that absolute *chill*
 - c. to know what your ancestors went through
 - i. or at least to have an idea – isn't this an honor or an obligation?
 - ii. or more likely illegally

1. breaking the locks off the doors
 - a. because there are dozens of old shafts sunk in the land that haven't been filled
2. drinking inside (also arguably a family obligation), or exploring with rope, flashlights, and a constant sense of possibility
 - a. for there is something nearly unbearable about a hole in the earth
 - i. about darkness
 - ii. that unknown thing
 1. maybe it's a male fixation
 - b. that it must bear exploration, no matter how far down it goes
 - i. maybe it's too many Hardy Boys books, or Jules Verne
 - c. and also there's the danger
 - i. a definite attraction
 1. one cure for boredom
 2. a cheapie carnival ride
- iii. or possibly through the few research mines maintained by the University
 1. one of which I discovered while hiking in Hancock, Michigan
 - a. while it's not a public mine, it is not gated or barred off
 - b. walk within a quarter of a mile and you'll feel the drop in temperature caused by the cool air streaming out
 - i. a counterintuitive finding—remember high school geology, the earth's crust, mantle, core, etc., and lava bursting out through craters
 - ii. or Jules Verne again
 1. while less than absolutely reliable
 - iii. and how it gets hotter now
 1. the further
 - a. in
 - i. you go

- iv. how there's a sort of pressure from the outside structure
 - 1. how the structure
 - a. either binds you in or wants to expel you like a sickness
 - b. think the mine, the outline, as a body
 - c. an ecosystem
 - d. or a mechanical spring
 - i. compress
 - ii. release
 - iii. repeat
- v. and that structure creates pressure; how architecture is the elegant distribution of stress

III. The outline, so like a mine

- a. defined by penetration
 - i. deeper in
 - ii. both laterally and vertically
 - 1. for harder information
 - iii. yes, how male, again, you dirty bird
- b. Mining is interested mostly in the horizontal
 - i. mineral deposits – in the absence of fault or other geologic strangeness – lay naturally in planes
 - ii. since similar materials respond similarly to pressure, they settle horizontally
 - iii. and the goal of the miner is to identify the deposit
 - 1. in terms of *dip* and *strike*
 - a. the straight line of maximum inclination (*dip*)
 - b. the horizontal line, the contour line (*strike*)
- c. and the vertical when necessary, to either follow the vein
 - i. or to proceed deeper into the earth once the vein has been exhausted
- d. though the terminology of the mine is far more lovely than of the outline
 - i. *level, incline, drifts, shaft, crosscut, winze, raise and mouth and face, gossan, apex, shaft, adit, gangue, stope*
 - ii. "Shallow Boring in Soft Rocks: Boring by Hand Auger"
 - 1. chapter subheading from the "Boring" chapter,

Introduction to Mining by Bohuslav Stoces

- iii. having an essential mystery to them
 - 1. due to their inaccessibility
 - a. compare to that of the Harvard Outline, designed particularly (one imagines— though it's not clear who designed it) to be easily negotiable
 - 2. and the aura of danger, of esoteric, academic, secret knowledge about them
 - a. they literally describe loci of danger, pits and sinkholes; they offer both treasure and death
- iv. and I was obsessed with mining for the first ten years of my life
 - 1. visiting the A. E. Seaman Mineralogical Museum at Michigan Technological University
 - a. which has the 17-ton copper boulder, the largest mineral specimen ever taken from Lake Superior
 - b. an emblem of the Keweenaw, one of the world's richest copper deposits
 - 2. trying to convince my dad to buy me various geological supplies
 - a. such as the rock tumbler I never really used— a sad emblem of my childhood sitting on a shelf maybe in my parents' basement
 - 3. agate hunting along the shores of Lake Superior
 - 4. looking for chunks of unrefined copper in the woods or in the hills of stamp sand along Portage Canal (the canal that cuts off the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula from Michigan)
 - a. leftovers from processing iron ore
 - b. that very well may be poisoning some Michigan lakes
 - 5. making homemade explosives according to the often-poor instructions from Paladin Press books and other, even less reliable sources
 - a. ceasing only when a good friend of mine lost three fingers

- v. and in a way, I still am – as it's the central story of the place where I am from, the big goodness and the tragedy
 - 1. it is how I imagine the ghost of slavery is to Southern writers
 - a. having this central, public history contributes to there even being such a thing as a "Southern Writer," whereas there aren't as obviously "Northern Writers"
 - 2. (the boom and the bust – the makings of story itself)
 - a. and certainly the makings of much of my family
- e. perhaps it's only my desire
 - i. that this, my kind of work
 - 1. darkness on light onscreen, then on the page
 - ii. be worth as much as what my family did in the dark for hours
- f. and the metaphor of mining one's past or childhood for writing material
 - i. an apt construction, experience as *material*
 - ii. is used a lot, and is something I'm concerned about myself
 - 1. the ethics and the economics of the writing act
 - a. and that other pressure that it entails
 - i. so maybe the outline is a kind of architecture I am trying to erect
 - ii. to protect myself against my family, meaninglessness, and the future
 - 1. an artifice to get inside the past
 - 2. like a cold and unlit hole – what family tragedy is there behind me glittering like a vein
 - iii. perhaps it is a womb
 - 1. and this then has to do with my mother's death
 - 2. a protective sheath, a comfort zone
 - iv. or it could be a shell

- b. an attempt for rigor as some buffer or protection
 - c. or maybe it is elegance for the sake of it
 - d. an infinite recursion
 - e. some wankery
2. then there's always the possibility of being stuck, candle snuffed by a sudden blast
 - a. the candles that my family would have to buy themselves and carry – lit – down into the earth, the candles that were the only protection against the emptiness and isolation
 3. with no way of lighting up again, and no way
- iii. back out—