

## A Strange Letter

*This letter is my translation of a Portuguese original that appeared in the “Novo Boletim do IMECC”, no. 2, May 1995. I would be happy to know the identity of the author.*

Campinas, May 25, 1995

Dear Editor,

I am a student of applied mathematics, matriculated in 1987; or, I was one. As you have already deduced, I never graduated, and in fact, I did not succeed in passing any of the qualifying exams, for which reason I doubt that any professor in IMECC remembers me, except for those with whom I discussed my Project. I did not meet with much understanding among the “illustrious scientists” of that institution, or among those of the Physics Institute. Therefore I gave up my studies and resolved to accomplish my undertaking on my own.

I needed to work to finance my studies, and it was in the Patent Office, where I was an office boy, that I began to develop my theory. I was then 15 years of age. I christened my apparatus the *Atomic Reproducer* (AR). This machine would, when completed, reproduce objects, atom by atom, particle by particle, creating exact copies of any piece of matter. My principal interest was in reproducing currency, given the situation of economic penury in which I found myself, and my lack of knowledge of the relation between the circulating money supply (M1) and the rate of inflation.

I soon found that the principal theoretical obstacles to the development of the system had been overcome. The only serious problem was the extraordinary amount of energy needed to reproduce even the tiniest amount of matter. One day, while reading public opinion polls in the news, I had my fundamental idea: my source of energy would be that which is liberated by the destruction of Aristotelian logic. No one had yet calculated how much energy was produced each time the principle of non-contradiction was violated in nature, but estimates published in a paper in *Physics Letters Z* guaranteed that it would be a large amount. But nobody know how to harness it. It was I who put together the little battery, which I still keep under my bed, fed by foolish beliefs held by intelligent beings, and whose first input was the complete works of Lobsang Rampa, entered in Morse code (at the time, I did not own a good personal computer), together with the biography of Huxley on his pilgrimage to India. Rampa yielded little (more lucrative was “The Phenomenology of Spirit”), but, at this point, my entry into the University of Campinas proved decisive. I brought the battery, as if it were a tape recorder, to the various debates between candidates for elective offices at the university. The effect was astounding. Soon my instruments indicated that I had accumulated enough energy to explode the sun a billion times! And the source appeared to be inexhaustible!

Constructing the AR was easy. With great emotion, one April 17, I introduced my first object into the entry chamber: it was a beer mug obtained from “Bavarian Nights”, with an advertisement on it for the Omega Watch-Shop, Avenida Dr. Campos Salles 700, phone 31-4777. After a thunderous noise (which I hid under the chords of Sepultura’s “Orgasmatron”), the new mug appeared in the second chamber. Identical. I put the two mugs together on a shelf in the rooming house where I lived at the time, and observed that my roommates looked on them with indifference, ignorant of their origin.

In the reproduction of that little mug, all the energy accumulated in my battery had been used up. I did not lose heart, and, there being no debates scheduled at the time, I refilled the battery with Ricúpero’s article on the death of Ayrton Senna. It was again at full power, and, thus, I reproduced cruzeiros, cruzeiros reais, urvis, dollars, yens, whatever. I could have been infinitely rich, if it had not been for the events which I am about to recount.

One day, I woke up with an idea that would not leave my mind. I had already reproduced a few cockroaches, laboratory rats, and a small cat which belonged to one of my roommates. I put the idea out of mind, but soon became certain that the only way to free myself of it would be to carry it into action. After several hours in an excited state, I resolved upon it. I would reproduce myself.

My excitement hit the extreme as, after several cosmetic repairs to the AR, I went into the entry chamber. Using a string tied to the control lever, and passing into the chamber through a slit, I turned on the AR. It did not now make as much noise as it had previously, since I had already taken some precautions in that regard, so as not to attract the attention of the neighbors. In fact, I felt nothing. Even after I knew that the reproduction must have already occurred, I remained for a few seconds in the chamber. When I

exited, as I expected, there he was, the Other. My exact copy, my neurons, and, therefore, my thoughts, my memories, my hopes and fears. He, the only one to possess my secrets, the AR, and the love of Marisbelda!

I realized that the two of us could not both survive and, of course, he had the same intuition at the same time, but the knife was closer to my right hand. Hence, the combat was brief, and mortal. To make the body disappear was especially easy, despite my not bothering to come up with a careful plan. Who could accuse me of murdering someone who had never existed, and who, in fact, was my own self?

For the next few months, I felt rather unsettled, and lost interest in using the AR. I even thought of selling it to IMECC for use as a Xerox machine, without revealing its true potentialities. One day, as I found myself lost in thought, my gaze fell distractedly on the two mugs, which regarded each other in their place above the television set. Suddenly, something, a point, or the absence of a point, attracted my attention. I came closer; the two mugs were no longer absolutely identical! In fact, the mug which was the copy was missing a point, a grain of matter of no more than half a millimeter in diameter, a small empty space where the original mug was solid ceramic. The next day, the empty spaces had multiplied, and later became large regions of disconcerting nothingness, and after several days, a single point of yellow shone in mid-air before disappearing. I thus verified that my invention was imperfect. And I noticed the imperfection in other objects that I had reproduced over the years: after a time, they began to be riddled with empty spaces, and finally disappeared.

I viewed my partial failure with a certain cynicism. What would the owners of the numerous dollars I had reproduced do? Would they think that the disappearances were the work of termites? Now, I thought indifferently, I was no longer a notable inventor, I was an ordinary counterfeiter.

I did not go so far as to become disillusioned, because, having already scaled the heights of great discovery, I knew how ephemeral were its pleasures, and how futile the material conquests that derived from it. After a short time I had accepted the situation, and even had left behind the bout of depression that had overtaken me after the "assassination".

But yesterday, while washing my hands, I saw something, or failed to see something. A point, a grain of matter of no more than half a millimeter of diameter, had disappeared from my left thumb, at the base of the nail. Hours later, its size was that of a half grain of rice, and other spaces had appeared in my hair, my belly, and my knees. Now there can be no more doubt: I am the Other.

P. O. Bogus