The Inhabitant of Gratiot South Leg Traffic-Control Island

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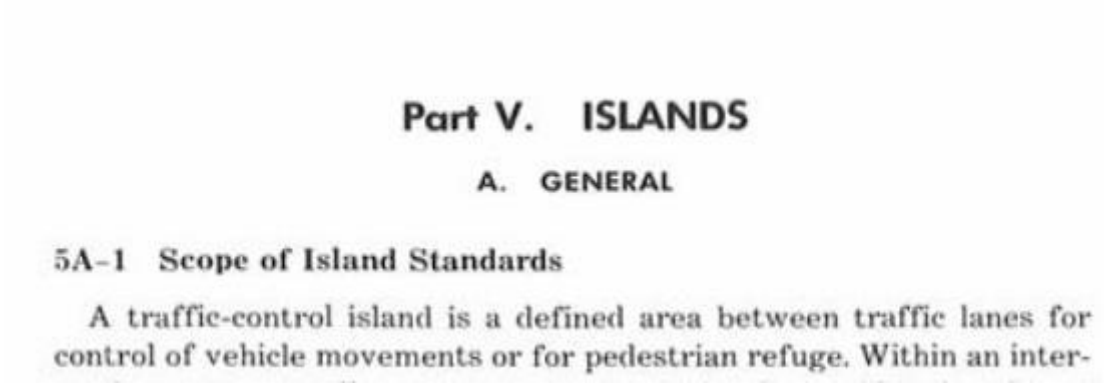

Part V. ISLANDS

A. GENERAL

5A-1 Scope of Island Standards

A traffic-control island is a defined area between traffic lanes for control of vehicle movements or for pedestrian refuge. Within an inter-

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-- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Part V, "Islands" Section 4A-1 "The Functions of Islands" 1961

The shape of a single body lies utterly still on a little triangle of Detroit.

From 1,000' up the triangle looks like a shovel turned over. The triangle's edges are pleated with cement the color of oatmeal.

Upon the triangle the grass and stems are heaped and scraggly. The corners point South and East-West. South is South to Canada.

The triangle points Out There. It wants to play. It looks happy for having been shaped this way.

Even the triangle can smell the baseball in the air.

Up here we can recognize this eagerness.

We can feel eager, too. Given our vantage point, such eagerness takes on an angular quality. 3.

Our triangle looks sharp. It lies at the exact mid-point between a formalwear tailor, a sports bar and a habberdashery est. 1912 lettered with a foil sign. For the moment all is airy; stirring and earliness.

The gutters wave their plastic straws.

The gutters wave their hotdog wrappers.

The gutters wave their whorls of cigarette filters and bent bottlecaps.

Even the gutters are eager for baseball.

Our triangle is gentle.

Our triangle never rests. It knows exactly what to do. It becomes us and we too are triangular.

From 1" up a starved thistle shrugs with a perfect purple firework for its blossom.

It tosses, then demures.

The purple plosion is shy. It doesn't want to draw attention to itself.

This blossom is the only jewelry our triangle ever wears. Modest even when out celebrating the start of a new season.

Our triangle is a flurry of lignin.

Not the body.

Thorns kiss whatever wind that touches them.

Not the body.

The triangle is busy going about its myriad ways.

Not the body.

When the wind picks up you can see the body for its stillness.

It tells you what isn't there.

We are less than a hair's breadth away and even we can feel the body's stillness.

Around us the emptiness itself begins to scurry.

The Detroit air is made of wavy silver.

The Detroit air is made of tiny cardboard evergreens that dangle from the frontage traffic's rearview mirrors.

The Detroit air is made of eagerness and baseball.

Tigers. Tigers. You can hear the air itself whispering.

Tigers.

Shhhh! It's coming. It will be here soon.

Tigers. Burning in the hearts of bright Detroit.

Our triangle is made of tender lines, tender stalks.

The body is made of distance.

The body lies down.

The body is cut from the same world as the warm mud spread out above.

The world drinks up the sun and is soaked by it.

The world is soft and porous.

The world takes in the body.

Our body.

Fills it up with kissed-down warmth.

The body is where the Inhabitant leaves himself when things are hard and need to go away.

Things have been hard for a while.

Things have been harder than the ground.

Whenever things get so hard that it makes the ground a softness by comparison, the Inhabitant accepts the mud for its embrace.

Accepts that even down can be a direction of escape.

Here.

Our triangle. With each winsomeness a day passes. Then another.

Then all of a sudden. Every sudden, gathered up in a rapturous fit. Today.

Baseball season starts today.

It opens.

The Inhabitant can feel that pent-up energy just waiting to get out.

The Inhabitant can feel that baseball.

Another day.

Above, the sky is a collection of faded blues and whites.

Years have passed unnoticed. Laundered years. Years scrubbed together by the clutch of foreign winds.

In between the lank sheaves of tall grass, stamped down: the body doesn't move a muscle.

There are footprints left in the earth around the body.

There is one single footprint written in dried mud on the body's denim shoulders.

The mud of the footprint faces up towards the sky. Up to us. Past us. Out into the cosmos.

The mud of the footprint plays its colors out to the furthest reaches of the universe. In a distant galaxy one day the children of our friends will be able to see this footprint and what will they make of it?

We won't be there to tell them why.

The wind passing over the triangle catches the Inhabitant's ear tips. It is a tugging wind. It knows.

It is filled with the truth of children's laughter.

The Inhabitant takes this wind-shape and places it against himself. The laughter forms a channel, a small hole bored out towards the Beyond.

Can you see it?

It is only just 1" underground.

It is a small emptiness. A cistern, awaiting its storm.

All along we have been forming a smooth surface to move our words upon and meanwhile the Inhabitant has been forming this tiny hole beneath us.

From the triangle the Inhabitant can look out through this tiny hole and into [...] and into [...] and into [...]

The Inhabitant discovers us. We are still looking and have not relocated to a more out-of-reach surface.

Now we can be made useful, he thinks.

He widens the intervals with a small, triangle-shaped piece of us. It begins to grow. Soon it will form a passageway.

The Inhabitant digs at the edges of the hole.

We feel happy to be useful.

The Inhabitant notices that we have become triangular from our eagerness.

The Inhabitant sharpens us.

The Inhabitant is also eager.

The Inhabitant uses our angular shape to cut his way out of the world.

When some progress has been made the Inhabitant rests. He sets down the black garbage bag in which he stores what remains of his heart.

It leaks with dirty blood onto the curb, onto the pavement.

The body knows.

It can still tremble from the minty morning cold.

The body is more a frailty than the Inhabitant has ever been. It's always causing trouble. It's always causing inconvenience.

This is how things work on the triangle.

Transubstantiation. A cutting away of dead masks. With us, the Inhabitant cuts and cuts.

One glimmer.

Then more.

A tiny hole widens.

He sees it. He sees through it. Peering.

Many worlds opening up. Past and future.

The triangle is an unlikely place.

It is a hangar built for one tenth of one acre where the world at its seams, for an instant, comes apart.

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The body has grown a shaggy beard.

The beard is a wiring into the psychoacoustic mainframe of the triangle. The Inhabitant begs us and we tie the hairs of the

body's cheeks into the exposed white rhizomes of the grass. It sizzles and we can feel the hum of a working circuit.

Thank you, says the Inhabitant.

Happy to help, we reply.

This way the Inhabitant can communicate with the triangle directly. To escape from gravitational timespace he will need to be able to Inhabit without too much in the way.

Without too much in between him and the Beyond. He's so close. Nothing can stop him now, we feel.

Once the connection has been made and firmed up, the Inhabitant can invite the triangle into the body's head and use it as a receiver.

He sticks his arm through the hole and tries to pick up a magnetic field. If he can get a pull, then he'll know which way to go.

It can be dangerous to enter the Beyond without anything pulling you. The Inhabitant has tried this before.

There simply are too many directions Out There. No one will ever find you, when you lose your way.

The Inhabitant lights up his beard hairs with luminous energy.

He is using every ounce of bandwidth available.

Come onnnn..., thinks the Inhabitant. Just a little closer...

Hey, we tell the Inhabitant. You've got this! Don't worry. You're doing a great job!

(We try to give the Inhabitant our encouragement, but his concentration is far too intense for him to hear).

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Once there was a family. Of a kind. Minus a father. Minus a house. Then minus a home. It was a family that was built of minuses.

It grew strong from the first minus and then weakened as they multiplied.

Fathers became dim shapes in the distance. Silences on the phone across 3,000 miles. It was a portrait of hyphens. It was a portrait of senseless characters, the way you can draw someone's face using an old keyboard.

For a few years, this was home ___.

For a few years, this was father:

For a few years, this was life.

It stuck there. One after-image after another scraped away by pain.

Slowly it left.

Slowly the characters slipped away. One by one, to dust.

It became another minus. Home. Father. Then life itself.

Life: the big minus.

Things after things. The shape someone leaves in a bed and stays left there long after they have gone.

After-images.

After-things.

Deathmasks of useless punctuation, alphanumerals, gibberish.

It would slowly by measures feel worse and worse.

The body became an exile. It walked the earth. It shed the Inhabitant's mind. For years he was insensible.

He learned the smells of sweat and salt.

He learned the smells of piss.

He learned the smells of Sterno.

How many smells can you learn in so few years?

He learned them only to forget other things.

Hard as it is to believe, there are feelings that smell worse than week-old piss.

This was a body that shed its steps as it walked. It learned how to slump. It learned how to reek. Then it learned how not to have a nose. How not to smell. How not to see. It learned how to endure without solace.

Until one day it found our triangle.

The body needed shelter. It needed the Inhabitant.

Our triangle knows how to give what's needed.