

[EXCERPT]

How to Talk with “Children”  
about Global Warming

a novel

by D. Franklin a.k.a. manta

## **Copyright**

Title: How to Talk with Children about Global Warming

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Self-publishing

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## **Preface**

*How to Talk with Children about Global Warming (HtTwCaGW)* is a cross-media artwork, including:

- a science-fiction novel (of which you are reading a rough draft)
- a movement-based performance
- an album of original electro-acoustic music
- a series of drawings.

*How to Talk with Children about Global Warming* is not just for children.

## **About the author**

Born in New York City in 1964, D. Franklin a.k.a. “manta” is an award-winning video / graphic / performance artist with achievements in movement arts, drawing, music, digital media, and cross-cultural collaboration. His work includes collaborations with dissident performance artist and former member of the Czech underground Milan Kohout; experimental film director Michael Pope; rock musician Amanda Palmer; Czech dissident cinematographer Jiri Dvorsky; soprano vocalist and voice educator Anne Harley; experimental guitarist and musician Henry Kaiser; martial arts masters Haroyoshi Ito and Masashi Minagawa; composer and conductor Yii Kah Hoe; and others. His work has been presented in both solo and group shows, exhibits, and performances at

Mobius, (Boston's center for experimental art in all media), at Pan9 (an underground performance venue that he co-founded in Boston's Allston art district in the 1990s), the DeCordova Museum (Lincoln, MA), the NewYorican (New York), and internationally (Prague, Pilsen, Beijing, Taiwan).

A graduate of Harvard College, TUFTS School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and Université Paris 8 St-Denis, Franklin's cross-cultural approach to art and live performance is informed by his education in anthropology and practical and theoretical knowledge of digital media. His long-term interest in East Asian somatic and movement arts (Shintaido, T'ai Chi, Shiatsu, etc.) infuses his art with a rich physicality that enhances his work as a movement-based performance artist. He has taught movement arts workshops in the USA, Japan, France, Great Britain, Italy, and the Czech Republic, and is the founder and head instructor of Shintaido Czech Republic.

He can usually be found in Pilsen or in Prague.

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## Chapter: Undello

*Near New York, 2015*

*Back the present moment*, Undello thought. *Must concentrate. Don't get lost in the past.* She thought it might be a sign of early-onset senile dementia. How many dream projects do you get to work on, never mind complete, in one lifetime? She was never going to get over the deprivation of not being able to bask in the glory of her inventions, because they were all top-secret. Those who knew, knew, and they already knew her, and perhaps had come to expect as much. Those who didn't know likely never would, aside from a few journalists, who would know only the outlines of her work but never her name. Her bosses didn't know the price it had exacted from her.

The Teletubby Totaler or whatever it was the Green Berets had dubbed her finest hour had been almost disappointingly successful (once her team had honed real-time synaptic mapping to a sharp analytic tool). It made people shoot better almost from the get-go because there was less junk between the thought and the realization. 'Junk' in this context meant

‘muscles, tendons, motor neurons, synapses’ and other uncertainties of biology.

Shooting a gun with the Teletubby Totaler was not much different than shooting a normal gun, except that the point where the task of propelling a cylindrical piece of metal at 1900 mph in the direction the shooter was aiming had been transferred; the place where the decision became irrevocable had simply moved further up the arm, no longer residing in the trigger finger, nor certainly the wrist, elbow or shoulder; these would be changes of venue only, but not of the material conditions of ‘making the decision.’ The task-transfer occurred not in the brain (way too unreliable) but within the CNS (Central Nervous System), in the spinal column. There was really nothing ‘telepathic’ about the Teletubby Totaler, or rather the Telepathic Trigger, as the Green Berets refused to call it. The technology had already been developed for paraplegics and was off-the-shelf. Still, developing the theoretical framework that made it possible to re-purpose it to improve accuracy and reduce training time for sharpshooters wasn’t bad. For a PhD thesis.

When Undello discovered the mathematics of what constitutes a ‘decision’ in the human frontal cortex, she vomited. She didn’t decide to vomit. She just felt it coming, like a storm issuing forth from the dark green clouds on the horizon, a moist, mucousy feeling creeping up her esophagus like a blowjob in reverse.

Aiming for the porcelain altar— holy site of a denomination with which she had rarely worshipped since she was a wayward teen, compelled to go to Methodist Sunday school and rebelling by binge-drinking with her pickup-driving gunrack-sporting hick buddies, who tolerated her asexual tomboy nerdiness because she knew chemistry, could help them with their homework, knew how to brew molly, and gave a mean BJ— Undello stumbled across the carpeted floor of her home office, banging her hip hard against the sharp corner of the not-expensive-but-expensive-looking-Ikea-fake-oak desk that she had bought in an attempt to appear professional in the eyes of venture capitalists, investors, journalists, and even academics who might come for a meeting there, the creative chaos of her otherwise orderly mind expressed in physical form via the stacks of books, newspaper and magazine clippings, notebooks, diagrams, and sketches literally on paper napkins even though she had made them at home where she had plenty of other stationery supplies but had been sitting in the kitchen and didn't even have a millisecond to search for the proper writing tools and get them in hand before the fragile effervescent thought might bubble away, all of which she had stashed behind closed doors when she bought the Ikea desk.

Undello would have been called a 'broad' in an earlier era. Or a 'blonde bombshell.' She didn't much care which. Maybe 'brainy blonde bombshell' would do.

The ephemera of her creative disarray was hidden behind doors, confined to the 'workshop,' because 'home laboratory' sounded way too

pretentious. She had banged her hip hard and cursed loudly and had kicked over the wastepaper basket on the way to the toilet. Her idiot savant frenemies in Silocon Valley had forgotten to mention that when you move fast and break things, one of the things that might get broken is you yourself. The heavens were coming as regularly as but faster than labor contractions (she had experienced them only in a VR giving-birth role-playing game in an attempt to placate an asshole boyfriend who thought she should try to connect with her feminine side); she stumbled down onto her knees and let go.

A few more post-vomit dry heaves and a toothbrushing later, she returned to her desk. Dr. Undello opened her laptop and continued with what she had been writing: "It's useless to do genetic engineering or geo-engineering on a mass scale to save the planet if we don't also do psycho-engineering to a corresponding degree. It will get us nowhere. Fast."

In a few years, she was to become the inventor of the Telepathic Empathy Gun (TEG), a subversive derivative of the military's Telepathic Trigger technology, which she had originally designed to improve markspeople's aim. The original technology was supposed to make it easier for less-than-exceptionally-talented shooters to hit the target more often by telepathically linking the trigger to their minds. The Telepathic Empathy Gun was an order of magnitude more complex and was designed for a different purpose.

Many years later, after the expected unexpected and unknown unknowns had made muddles, mishegas, or horsemeat of the Telepathic Empathy Gun, depending on your point of view, she still railed in her mind against the addled hacks who suckled, like Romulus and Remus at the nipple of a heroin-addled she-wolf living under a bridge in one of Rome's less-savory districts, at the teats of the trope "the technology is neutral; it depends on people, and how we use it."

The last time she heard it— before she disconnected her life from the Internet forever— was in 2021, on a podcast about solar geo-engineering: putting aerosols into the atmosphere to reduce the warming effect of sunlight and reduce global warming, much like the volcanic winter of 1816, "the year without a summer," when there were crop failures and famine across Europe, looting of grain warehouses in England, flooding of the Rhine in Switzerland, summer frosts in France, typhus epidemics in Ireland, June snowfalls and corn shortages in New England and Canada, all caused by the 1815 eruption of Mt Tambora in Indonesia. But that comparison gives solar geo-engineers a bad image. Of course the intent of solar geo-engineering was none of that. It was just to turn the heat down in a controlled manner until we get a grip on solving the cause of the problem.

Presenters had argued both sides: it's a dangerous uncontrolled experiment, we cannot predict what the effects will be, it's a band-aid that will not solve the problem, in fact it will give humanity (in particular, that peculiarly human construct, conscience-less multinational

corporations) a margin of 'safety,' a distraction detracting traction from the urgency to really solve the problem, an excuse to keep burning stuff to power our lives, because, y'know, we can always just turn down the heat of the Sun if need be. Stand by while we just tweak these control sliders and check some gauges, dials, and meters on behalf of a humanity that mostly has no concept of what those meters mean and what those sliders do, but they know a hurricane on global warming steroids when they see one, much like Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart secretly looking at hardcore porn magazines from the bench, or rather under the bench, during *Jacobellis vs. Ohio* (1964), to make sure he knew what he was talking about when he refused to define obscenity.

*What's more obscene?* said Undello's thoughts, rampaging forward under their own steam, seeking their own justifications without any effort on her part, in fact *au contraire*, she would have had to reel them in if she wanted any f\*cking peace and quiet on the unprogrammed Sunday afternoon inside her skull, *jerking off to images of naked people, or poisoning the sky? Desolately depressing communist housing blocks, or millions of homeless people living in cardboard boxes and under bridges?*

On the podcast, a Finnish reindeer owner was saying that when the solution to the problem is generated by the same mentality that caused the problem, it will never solve the problem. She obviously had never read Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which meant that likely neither had she thrown Kant's *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able To Present Itself As A Science* from the window of a bus somewhere

between New Haven and New York as Undello had, out of frustration with her inability to understand a mind that others said was brilliant. She was not able to apply a heuristic to confirm that it hadn't caused a car accident, because the bus had no rear window. She hoped she hadn't murdered anyone by throwing the book at them, but if she had, she'd have been happy to bury Kant in a flower bed where no dog would ever think of digging him up.

A Harvard climate scientist argued that we're *already* doing a dangerous uncontrolled experiment with the planet's climate, so why not try this, too? The situation is dire, beyond urgent. We have shown that we are not able to pursue the path of reduced emissions in time. We're not cleaning up our own mess. So what, we should then just do nothing, we should not try any extreme solution we can dream up? Her idiot savant frenemies in Silocon Valley had forgotten to mention that when you move fast and break things, one of the things that might get broken is the whole planet Earth.

Undello shifted uncomfortably in her seat as she listened to the BBC podcast. Early morning sunlight gilded the vase of cut lilies on the tawny butcher block in her kitchen, while behind it through the sliding screen doors, a hibiscus could be seen growing in the garden, blasting the green foliage around it with the redness of flower-powered sexuality, stamens and pistils ashoot, unable to disturb the ephemera of photosynthesis' orderly creativity, which itself had given rise to the very flowers that blossomed in opposition, completely on other side of the color wheel,

just as Goethe's 'nature' gave birth to Hegel's Dionysus, and Hegel's 'dialectic' to Marx's Athena.

The reindeer owner said that it is unethical to even research solar geo-engineering as a possibility, because it will enable our fossil-fuel addicted world to reach for a pill, a bottle, a shot in the arm, whatever it takes to prolong the artificial high horse we're on. What arrogance. What hubris. The reindeer owner did not mention Icarus, nor did her anti-anthropocentric stance prevent her from calling herself the 'owner' of other living beings.

When a booster from a geo-engineering firm, acknowledging the potentially destabilizing effects on the climate, and therefore on crops, and therefore on poor hungry people who get a rough ride when the see-saw of stability decreases and inequality increases, promoting the idea of making the sky white instead of blue as a way to even out this ethical dilemma, trotted out the old saw that 'the technology is neutral; it depends on people, and how we use it,' and started beating that dead horse till it bleated like a goat on genetically-engineered steroids and rose from the grave like a zombie Lazarus before her very ears, Undello slammed her hand on the eject button. Or rather, she slammed her hand on whatever device she was listening to the podcast on (she testified later that she thought it was an iPad, but she wasn't sure), threw it against the wall, and then stomped on it with the stiletto heels that she often wore in the morning instead of house slippers, which would then be exchanged for sensible tennis shoes before going to work.

Over the next few weeks, she systematically disconnected every device she owned from the Internet, and if her minders at the Agency-So-Secret-That-You-Don't-Even-Know-You-Haven't-Heard-Of-It had to watch her because of her job, they had their ways, but at least *she* didn't have to watch *them*. It was massively inconvenient, but she never wanted to hear the phrase 'technology is neutral' again for the rest of her life.

It is massively inconvenient, but you can kill a person with a hammer. You can also try to build a house by hammering the nails in with a rifle butt, but it's going to be slow and inefficient. As soon as a chimpanzee strips the leaves from a twig to fish for delicious termites, by intent and by design, the twig is endowed with a tendency to do certain tasks better than others. Undello had dedicated her life to this idea. Guns were only the low-hanging fruit in the jungle of examples.

Undello had faced the problem of the happy trigger finger vs. the depressed trigger finger at the shooting range when she was a young cadet. Her eyes were good when she took aim and her hand was adequately steady— until she started to pull the trigger. Aiming a gun is a dynamic process. Having a bead on the target is an ephemeral moment that you pass through. Shooting is like cooking a complex dish when you have several pans on the fire: the various elements should reach fruition at the right time. The trigger finger should begin its movement just a fraction of a second before you hone in on the target, and complete its movement just as you pass through the ephemeral moment of 'being aimed at the target.' Undello had an itchy trigger finger, or else she

hesitated in a vain attempt to be certain of aiming right, postponing the full movement of pulling the trigger until just after the moment of truly aiming at the target had passed.

Somewhere in the gap between the knowledge that the target was in her crosshairs and the will to act on that knowledge, there was a distortion, a wiggle, a turbulence in the chain reaction of events, nerves firing, synapses sparking, neurotransmitters churning, muscles contracting, tensing and relaxing, electrical potential seething with ions transgressing membranes like migrants crossing the Rio Grande trying to propagate the Will of the Brain to the People of the Cells in the Muscles of the United States of Trigger Finger.

She hated the indecisiveness of her inner Hamlet. She desperately wanted to get rid of that gap. That gap was what was preventing her from hitting the target. It was preventing her from being perfect. It was preventing her from sleeping with Truck. That was Undello's greatest insight, the one which led to the development of the Telepathic Tubby Totaler and ultimately the Telepathic Empathy Gun. Aiming is not a spatial problem. You cannot not point the gun somewhere. The gun is always aimed at something. It's only a question of increasing the probability of firing it at right moment, the instant of time during which it's aimed in the right direction.

'Truck' was what they called him at the academy. 'Robert' didn't fit around his barrel-chest. His muscles bulged out of the name like fistfuls

of trading tickets thrust high in the air on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, yelling ‘adrenaline,’ back in the days when there were still traders on the floor of the NYSE. She knew in her mind that Truck was approachable and calculated that there was a high probability he would find her attractive. She wanted him. She was confident, and she wasn’t shy, or at least she had never had the experience of being shy in the past.

But there was this gap. She noticed it when their eyes met momentarily in the mess— and then she broke eye contact almost too quickly, sooner than she ‘wanted’ to, or rather sooner than she thought she wanted to, and the moment was over before it had started, but she didn’t want it to be over. She wanted to act on her inner momentum in the moment rather than tossing and turning it in her head afterwards during restless, panicked, horny nights. She had to solve it. Her gun wasn’t going off during that short moment when it was aimed at her target.

Many years after West Point, after Truck, after Afghanistan and after working for some-division-of-the-army-that-you’ve-never-heard-of-because-they-don’t-want-you-to-have-heard-of-it, on the fringes of the Private Sector and the Dark Web, Undello still wanted to solve it. “Lick your wounds till they aren’t wounds anymore,” her father had said. And she had, as best she could. But the gap still remained. The gap between thought and deed.

Triggering something as simple as a trigger with a ‘mental gesture,’ as the technology’s development team— Undello, specifically— had termed it

turned out to be pretty simple. At least it became simpler after Undello returned from a monastery in the Tanzawa region of Japan, where for three years she had been under the tutelage of a karate master who had been a trainer for the Japanese military police during World War II and was reputed to be able to knock down or even kill people with his voice alone.

The Telepathic Trigger was adequately successful on paper and in prototype, but the need for it had not been perceived, and there were old-school types involved in the training of markspeople for the military who felt threatened by the technology, threatened by the possibility that it would democratize the skill of killing in a way that would piss on the territory of elite training that they had carved out over the years, and threatened also because the inventor of the technology was a woman. The project had gotten shelved, dumped into the category of 'researched, tested, successful but not to be deployed at this time.' Not bad. For a PhD thesis.

Telepathic empathy, on the other hand, was a challenge of a different order of magnitude. Guns did not need telepathic empathy, it seemed, people did. But people could kill or wound each other more easily with guns, and guns were easier to engineer than people. So, unable to engineer people directly, Undello and her team set about engineering guns.

They tried to put the empathy that people were lacking into the guns.

'Pain' is nearly as primitive as an on-off switch, and therefore accessible to being hacked by human at-this-point-in-time-similarly-relatively-primitive technology. And it turns out that there are regions of the brain that react exactly the same way to emotional pain as they do to physical pain. Our experience lives inside this externalized object, the brain, that, much like an appendage or member, we can both examine from the outside and experience from the inside. Undello had gained this insight by borrowing from Freud's concept of penis envy, something she had personally experienced and had resolved to her satisfaction by learning the art of pegging, and re-purposing it (the concept of penis envy, not the pegging) to the context of empathy. Maybe the pegging too.

Unlike the penis however, the part of the brain that we experience 'from the inside' is absolutely every experience we will ever have in this lifetime.

This was the philosophical insight that made Undello plop down into her father's armchair in his study on her fifteenth birthday and unannounced — in contrast to some of her other performative pranks, which were often accompanied by a fanfare of preparatory priming— refuse to move from that spot for the next 15 days. Not even to go to the toilet. *If this is all there is*, she thought deep in the center of her mind, far from the rustling noise of facial expressions, barricaded by her radiant blue eyes, *I've got to make sure it's interesting.*

That's just the way she thought about things, and to hell with you if you couldn't make the leaps necessary to keep up with her magnetically levitated train of thought. The phrase she used in her internal monologue was more vulgar than 'to hell with you,' but since her brother had knocked out one of her teeth during an impromptu Muy Thai practice, the distinction between oral sex and the other kind was phonetically indistinct. So this part of her lexicon stayed internal.

Later as she matured, *interesting* was replaced with other words and phrases, such as *exciting*, *worth the trouble* (doubtful at times when she was feeling suicidal), and *compassionate*. All of these had all turned out to be worth the trouble, but some had gotten her into more trouble than others. Especially *compassionate*, when it was as-yet undigested.

She had gotten the idea from Harold Garfinkel. She had never met Harold Garfinkel, nor had she seen a video or a photo of him. She imagined him as a lanky middle-aged professor with curly brown hair, slightly balding and with significant touches of grey around the temples and sideburns, ear- and nose-hair untrimmed, wearing glasses, a blazer with leather elbow-patches and a turtleneck in a vain and 20-years-too-late attempt to appear fashionable, whose arms flailed while he talked about social norms and what is revealed when one violates them, unannounced.

Harold Garfinkel was only some of the things the young Undello had imagined, but he was the inventor of something called Ethnomethodology and Breaching Experiments. As far as she could tell, it

was a way to act as weird as you wanted because you could say that you were doing ‘research’ to find out how other people reacted when you acted like a weirdo.

Her family mostly ignored her for the first day, other than the occasional inevitable jab from her brother, but it got harder when she made it clear that somebody had to bring her a bucket or she’d have to relieve herself on dad’s prized ergonomic office chair. By Day 5, even her dad was bringing her food to The Chair.

Little did she know it at the time, but this was the best possible preparation she could have done for achieving her life’s dream.

Inventing the Telepathic Trigger was no walk in the park, but it didn’t bring the sense of completion to Undello’s restless soul that she had craved without even knowing it. Then she achieved the TT, and after that, rather than going away, the gnawing sense of urgency and angst was like the background sound of a refrigerator that you aren’t consciously aware of until it stops, and then you suddenly have the ‘memory’ of having heard something that you didn’t hear while it was happening, and you can see your brain’s wiring spread open for examination like a flower exploding into bloom, or a textbook incision on an embalmed frog with innards neatly displayed for view, or a woman spreading the lips of her dripping labia wide.

But the reprieve and wonder is brief, because then the refrigerator starts up again almost immediately, and now you hear it, this incessant hum of

drive impelling you to do, to make, to go, so that you will be able to justify gorging on the nourishment within later. Undello was a mean bitch to girls in high school who had suffered from bulimia nervosa. She watched them with a scornful eye, departing for the girls' room for a teeth-rotting bonding ritual that she would never be a part of. She thought they had no discipline.

The Telepathic Trigger was successful to a degree. She had asked her boss to place Truck on the elite team that would test the new technology. It had worked, in a Rube-Goldberg-device sort of way, and she felt she had served her country. But almost immediately the race was on between her and her inner refrigerator to find the next Big Thing. And somehow she would have to find a way to deal with that other very annoying part of her psyche, her conscience.

Would it be possible for Undello to modify the army's technology and make a gun that would cause the shooter to physically and emotionally experience the pain of the target, if the target was a living being with a complex carbon-based nervous system capable of experiencing pain, and cells with DNA in their nuclei? The Telepathic Empathy Gun. 'When you shoot it, you feel what they feel.' That was the original motto, rejected by the marketing people as too sinister, and replaced with 'The Telepathic Empathy Gun: feel before you shoot.' Undello wasn't against this version; she just thought hers was slightly better.

Dr. Undello modified the sentence she had written: 'It's useless to do genetic engineering or geo-engineering on a mass scale to save the planet if we don't also do psycho-engineering to a corresponding degree. It will us get nowhere. ~~Fast.~~'

Knowing the mathematics of the decision she had just made didn't really help her at that moment. But it might help a lot of people. It couldn't bring back the dead, but it might do something almost as good: make a shooter pause, hesitate, become paralyzed with inaction because she, he, or they (usually he) suddenly felt the pain. 'I feel your pain' would become more than a slogan. It would become a principle of empathy functioning at a basic biological level. It would make it harder for people to harm each other because they would literally feel the pain they were about to inflict on another.

*Near New York, 2025*

There were several unexpected side-effects of the Telepathic Empathy Gun.

Dr Undello prayed at the porcelain altar again when she heard about the first masochist mass shooting. The first masochist mass shooting. Not the last. Not by a long shot.

She called her cousin.

“Paglia.”

“Undello.”

It was a habit they had kept since childhood, calling each other by their last names, a vestige of endless childhood games of Cops and Cops, or sometimes Robbers and Robbers, until they decided to call it what it was, Spy vs. Spy (and never, though the image hung in the background like a portrait of a distant relative whose eyes followed your movements, Mafioso vs. Mafioso).

“Camille, I—”

“Uh-oh. Are you OK? You sound like you’re a woman on the verge of tears.”

“I’m not OK.” She did the usual mental calculations about how not-OK she could be on the phone, what she couldn’t or shouldn’t say, who might be listening. She took secret pride— not secret to herself, but not the kind of thing she could drop at a cocktail party, if she ever went to one, which she didn’t, and was proud of that too— in having actual people listen to her phone conversations, not just an A.I.

It was a sign that she must be doing Something Important. She had her own counter-measures of course. She didn’t know if they knew that she knew the names and work-shifts of her various minders. She might as well just call Camille and say “Hi Camille. Hi George. So, Camille—” but that would break the Fourth Wall of Deniability. Her karate sensei and

acting teacher (one and the same) in Japan had told her “You can break the Fourth Wall. But there are consequences. Especially serious ones if it’s the Fourth Wall of Deniability. Then your opponent stops to having inhibitions. Your opponent’s inhibitions work to your favor, because they are a framework of predictability.” He liked pronouncing ‘especially,’ ‘deniability,’ and ‘predictability’ because he knew the charming effect of almost getting the pronunciation right. Cute, even. Nothing like a cute, charming hand-to-hand combat trainer for the military’s secret police.

Undello continued. “Oh, it’s nothing serious. When I’m on the rag—” This was their code for ‘I’m facing an ethical dilemma at work’ — “I get moody and kinda self-absorbed.” ‘Self-absorbed’ was their code for *I want to f\*\*king strangle someone*. “And then I start to question my empathic abilities. Like, do I even really give a sh\*t about other people? Deep down? Or am I just an opportunist at heart, dressing my id in socially acceptable clothing, completely accessorized to boot?”

Beat. ‘Empathic abilities’ wasn’t code for anything. “I’ll be right over.” Camille Paglia jumped in her Ferrari and hit the gas, sending gravel flying into the blooming petunias lining her driveway.

Undello had wanted to invent a technology that, given the apparent unstoppable of the gun lobby and the industry’s desire to flood the market with firearms, with both police and civilians going postal on a regular basis in the context of a society gone ballistic, unable or unwilling to care for the basic material needs of many of its members and with no

escape in sight, would significantly reduce the amount of gun violence by changing the calculus at the gut level, the level at which the source code of human consciousness is written. Undello was a closet pacifist. You have to be pretty much a closet everything if you work in the segments of the military-industrial-petroleum-digital-surveillance complex that she did.

Another unexpected side-effect was that they discovered the precise scale at which an interfering pattern of brain waves becomes quantized into a 'conscious decision.' It was a relatively uncomplicated calculation based on the number of brain cells being monitored and some measurable mathematical features of their synchronization (based on fluid dynamics, one of the few ingenious contributions that was not Undello's).

Franck, the manic-depressive French physicist who had brought the fluid dynamics concept to the table in the form of a nervously spilled cup of tea at a meeting, dripping off the edge of the table onto his own lap, shirttails of his plaid flannel shirt untucked due to their incessant use as glasses-cleaning cloths, fat lips under mustache quivering— is he going to cry? Undello's assessment of an individual's character was cool and predictive, fortified by an unemotional realism— Franck had followed the tea display with a brilliantly improvised lecture to the project team on applying the mathematics of fluid dynamics to neurology, and had left these thoughts in the hands of Undello's team, and was now safely ensconced in a psychiatric ward in Paris where he could do no further

harm, nor reveal any credible secrets. Undello had heard that he was trying to write a novel on the walls with his own blood, inspired by the Marquis de Sade. She didn't want to know.

It was a fantastic step forward in analyzing the mathematics of what makes living beings 'conscious' of their own existence and agency to varying degrees.

§ § §

*Near the New York archeological site, 2225*

"What is this?"

"We don't know. All we know is that it was made by *homo sapiens* at a time when the majority of humans on the planet were right-handed. And the Earth's magnetic field was reversed from how it is now."

"Not a clue?"

"Not a clue."

§ § §

*Near New York again, 2025*

Undello's thinking had the power of simplicity:

IF: you point a gun at someone, and just when you make the decision to shoot— just an instant before you truly decide to pull the trigger, when you have made a detectable decision but the motor cortex has not yet sent irrevocable orders to the trigger finger — if, at that instant, you feel what they are about to feel, the shock, the pain, the rending of flesh and shattering of bone, and you feel it within your body, this location that you feel you occupy on this earth (with the intensity of the signals kept down to a dull roar to avoid complete instant psychosis),

THEN: many fewer people will pull the trigger.

And this, in a nation that refused to give up its right to arm itself to the teeth, this in spite of the fact that the powers-that-be had long given up on bullets as a means of social control, and thus had no fear of citizen militias that might be formed according to models functioning in other lands, this seemed to Undello like the best she could hope for. The business of ballistics and its role in human evolution was going the same way as the world's oldest profession, that is, it was going nowhere, here to stay.

Thus she reasoned and thus she had acted, both in her professional life and her marriage, when her ex had refused her even so much as cunnilingus after years of sexlessness and confessions of other

attractions (his), after her sister-in-law — sipping a gin fizz and asking her (for entertainment purposes only) if she could point to someone in the bar who was her ‘type’ (as if she had a ‘type,’ because she was, at least as far as she herself knew, immune to having ‘types’) — said “Well, if you’re not getting what you need, you just have to go out and get it somewhere.” This advice had made her less afraid of the emotional collisions that were sure to come, that came, that went, that transformed into the physical collisions of glass and kitchen-floor tile when he (the ex) confessed that he didn’t trust her anymore.

That’s how certain she had been of the pacifist value of the Telepathic Empathy Gun™. As certain as the sound of glass smashing on the tile floor of a kitchen she had shared with a man she thought she had loved.

She heard Camille’s car in the driveway. *Back the present moment*, she thought. *Must concentrate. Don’t get lost in the past.*

§ § §