

Trip report E.W. Dijkstra, USA, 17-26 June 1984

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This was my farewell trip to Burroughs. In the original plans I would have visited the company at ten different locations; eventually it became three. Being very busy these days, the reduction suited me, but I was also disappointed by it. (It was typical of my increased difficulty in reaching the company, a difficulty which had been one of the factors contributing to my decision to resign.)

On Sunday 17 June I flew from Amsterdam via New York, JFK, to Philadelphia. Air traffic congestion above JFK delayed my flight to Philadelphia by almost an hour. I was met by Terry Blok of Flemington, in whose house I would stay the next two nights.

Monday I was the whole day at the Flemington group. In the morning I was shown the manufacturing of terminals; the automation of the manufacturing process seemed very well under control and I was duly impressed. I gave my talk in the afternoon, sandwiched between two other Burroughs speakers. We had an audience of about one hundred people and my lecture (which I did not give for the first time) went very well. In the evening, five people joined me for dinner, at which both the food and the company were of exceptional quality.

Tuesday I went to SDC in Paoli, where

William C. Hopkins was my host. The discussion before lunch with about half a dozen people was driven by their work and their plans. (The difficulty of reasoning about functional programs that incorporate nondeterminacy again surfaced. I knew none of the people, but contact was quickly established.) After lunch I gave my lecture, again for an audience of about one hundred. Again, it was very well received. (To my regret it was the same lecture as I had given the day before: I had about four or five rather different lectures ready, but both times I was forced to select the one that could be delivered with a minimum of visual facilities. It is always the same story!) Afterwards I had a very pleasant surprise: Ben Dent's daughter made herself known to give me her father's greetings, which were received and returned with equal pleasure. Bill Hopkins took me to the airport, from where the 18:15 plane took me to Austin, Texas. The weather was a bit rough, but I did not mind as we flew through magnificent domes of clouds, intriguingly illuminated by the setting sun: a "gorgeous" sight! Ham Richards, with whom I stayed the remaining nights, met me at Austin Municipal Airport.

In Austin my life was as hectic as the weather was warm, as I had to divide my time between ARC, UT, and myself. I went twice to ARC,

once -too short- to be told about their plans and once -long enough- to give a lecture. (This was a lecture I had never given before; it ended with the proof I had found the week before in London with Wlad Turcki.) On Sunday evening, Larry Thomas and his wife gave my farewell party. The rest of my time was divided between washers, dryers, tiles, humidity control equipment and curtain tape on the one hand, visa, teacher retirement, deferred compensation and long term disability on the other. After a visit to UT's International Office on Monday morning, I drove to the Airport and flew back. Regrettably I did not sleep and came home very tired: it took me more than two days to recover. (They were not all wasted: I went to the optician to get my new pair of glasses, to the dentist to get a new crown installed and to the ophthalmologist to have my retinae inspected.)

Back home, I found Ted Codd's complaint: "IBM is not very forward looking. Its main objectives year to year are this year's profits. IBM is very reluctant to look five years down the road." and the warning: "In California today, Japan sells more cars than Detroit. In the computer industry, the same thing could happen to IBM." The complaint is not new, and, to the extent IBM is accepted as model,

not confined to IBM either.

Next year I shall again face the issue from the academic side exclusively. In a way I am looking forward to it because, if the University sticks to its proper rôle, life on the Campus is less beset by internal contradictions. It is very simple: a leading department of computing science has to concentrate on the scientific aspects of computing. We just cannot allow ourselves to be diverted by the existence of an industry that looks for improvement without change and has thereby incapacitated itself to profit from our graduates. An intellectually stagnated industry is bad, an equally stagnated university as well would be worse.

PS. I was pleased to observe that Burroughs ARC had attracted a full-blown logician. It is always nice to observe progress.

PPS. Broccoli divides the world: into those that believe that broccoli is edible and those that know it isn't.

Plataanstraat 5
5671 AL NUENEN
The Netherlands

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prof. dr. Edsger W. Dijkstra
Burroughs Research Fellow