

w-RAP Libretto

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www.modip.ac.uk/projects/w-rap

PROLOGUE

We are the makers
We are the dreamers of dreams
We are the makers of chains
Heavier than forever maybe

Chains that can never be broken
Chains, woven,
As cathedrals,
Over the earth

For each age is a dream that is dying
And one that is coming to birth

SYNTHETICA

Arise Synthetica, our fourth Kingdom. On this broad continent of plastics, the countries march right out of the natural worlds – that wild area of firs and rubber plantations – into the illimitable world of the molecule. It's a world boxed only by the cardinal points of the chemical compass- carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen. It floats upon the Sea of Glass, one of the oldest plastics known to man. New countries, like Melamine, constantly bulge from its coastline. The Alkyd country, a great swamp of bright impervious plastic paints, great chemical river systems like Acetylene, .. Rayon is a plastic island off the cellulose coast, with a glittering night life. The Crystal Mountains of Acrylic run down into the Crystal Hills of Styrene. Phenolic fed by the Formaldehyde River: Capital; Bakelite ruled by Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation. The state of Urea, more frivolous, colour loving

In this, our fourth Kingdom, we will walk the streets at night illuminated to the brightness of daylight, flooded with changing colours, to the accompaniment of symphonic music, synthetically produced by the blending of electronic waves. Arise Synthetica

ONE (Utopian Dream of the Fourth Kingdom)

'You the poor shall also consume
Abundance beyond your wildest dreams'
In our Fourth Kingdom all the colours of the rainbow
Will be spread across the world.
Light in the dark street,
Democracy
And music ever in the air

The Fourth Kingdom is a victory of synthesis over extraction
A city of curves and streamlines
Of sweep and rounded beauty
A permanence uncorrupted by rot or corrosion
Pressed, squeezed, rolled, drawn out, cast
All things Bright and Beautiful

We will no longer pilfer the earth,
We will no longer pillage
No longer ransack the earth
Grained ivory, turtle shell, amber, horn
mother of pearl, coral, the lac beetle
ebony, mahogany and oak,
the whale, the elephant
the leatherback turtle saved
Nature's larder will be left untouched
We will produce!

You the poor shall also consume
Abundance.
Beyond the vegetable, animal or mineral...
From the great carbon river of life
Democracy!

Arise, Synthetica, our fourth kingdom,
Whose boundaries are unlimited.

TWO (Material of a Thousand Uses)

The war had many secrets. The nations of the earth were banging

*away bravely on the front and pussyfooting around in the rear,
trying to hide the new means of destruction which they had in
pickle for the foe. Amongst these, 'the wireless telephone' which,
when the shooting was over, changed its name to 'Radio'.
Everything in radio apparatus – coils, mounting plates, variometer
stators, and rotator balls, receiver caps, rheostats, tube sockets,
knobs and dials – is made from Bakelite in one form or another.
The finest Bakelite moulding and mould making ever done.
Bakelite in every chapter*

Let Bakelite be, and all was plastic

Bbbbbbbb Bakelite
Prepared in the morning of the world
Lingered till the day of crying need
In the silent laboratory of the earth
Bbbbbbb Bakelite

Leo Hendrik
Looking in the scrap heap of the vegetable Kingdom
In wood smoke, in coal smoke, in the waste
Leo Hendrik Baekeland took off his coat and went to work.
Heat, heat, and yet more heat, frozen in heat
Polymerisation...it was the heat that did it,
Bakelite comes shining out of the mould
Material of a thousand uses
Prepared in the nick of time
Bakelite till Kingdom come

THREE (The Lure of Translucency)

Like paper but not paper
Thin as tissue but hard to tear
Transparent as glass but not glass
Cinematic
From Rue de la Chausee d'Autin
La cellophane

A shimmering jewel in sheet form
A shimmying shush

A lone spot of brilliance
A dose of sex appeal
A touch of disposable gloss
(and pre-packed packaging units moving fast)
La cellophane

A complex four part system featuring nitrocellulose, a wax moisture proof barrier, plasticiser, blending agent. Plant fibre is dissolved in alkali and carbon di-sulfide making viscose, which is then extruded through a slit into a bath of sulphuric acid and sodium sulphate to reconvert the viscose into cellulose. The film then passes through several more baths, removing sulfur, bleaching the film and adding softening materials such as glycerine to stop the film becoming brittle. A similar process using a hole (a spinneret) instead of a slit is used to make rayon... La Cellophane

Madame the consumer wants to see freshness
She wants to see what she buys and she wants it clean.
Two thieves in the night, Dampness and Dryness silently rob
The crispy crunch, the tenderness of delicate dainties for lunch...
Cellophane stands guard

Let strange hands grab and paw,
Cellophane stands guard
Inquisitive hands that grab and paw,
Cellophane stands guard
Let strange hands touch and feel and grab
Cellophane stands guard
Peek a boo, peek a boo, It's looking after you
and it's keeping foreign odours out too
Shimmering jewel, shimmying shush, cellophane, peek-a-boo.

FOUR (A New Pitch of Mass Production)

Dentures, doorknobs, gears, goggles. Juke-boxes, crystal chairs, transparent shoes and ladies rise up from the plastic sea. Only surrealisms derangements can capture the limitless horizons, strange juxtapositions, endless products of this new world in the process of becoming. Tough cellulose plastic door knobs are readily translatable into gun stocks. Nylon hosiery – a plastic too – can turn into parachutes. The transparent lady, plexiglass, call her

'a Dream of Venus' she can also serve as the non-shatterable wind-shield on bombing planes.'

War makes a gimcrack industry into a Sober Producer of Prime Materials

Invisibly running through the innards of tanks, battle ship, bombers, gas masks, gunstocks

Du Pont Monsanto, Union Carbide
A new pitch of mass production

A bugle.....two pounds of copper consumed for every bugle.

Major Hobson appeals to Elmer Mills to heed the call of his country
'No problem'

Two weeks later, 'We've got your bugle, the only plastic bugle on earth.'

The solo cornettist of the Army Band bends stiffly at the waist, grimacing....bantam weight, plastic toy

Reveille. Boots and Saddles

Heard ½ a mile away, he hurls it at a brick wall.....

4.30 pm Mills and Chicago Musical instrument company were given an order for two hundred thousand plastic bugles.

Wars are won and lost on the smallest of things

Plexiglass

Airplane Hydraulic fluid fuel kept functional at minus 150 degrees

Vinyl electric wire coding,

Teflon separates the fissionable isotope 235 from uranium 238

When man returns to his plough it will have plastic handles.

FIVE (A Fermentation of Stuff)

Doubling, tripling, expanding, that's Plastics

A fermentation of stuff

Come peacetime, how many plastic ploughshares can the public be persuaded to buy without gagging?

Ninette, new curtains

Fe Fi Fo Fum on the floor linoleum
Shirts and slacks in Garnalene
Extra wear without a care
Formica for me - new at the whisk of a damp cloth

Nylon the gay deceiver
Pristine freshness with damp cloth cleaning
Lipstick on the wall? This is Varlor - damp cloth treatment
Upholstered in Dacran, stains need not be calamities
The damp cloth in action, swished away

Plastics are here to free you from drudgery
From dirt, grime, stains, scratches and shabbiness
Housewife slavery
Swished away
We dream of freezers, hoovers, mixers,
We dream of washing machines, disposable nappies, dishwashers
We dream of TVs and wipe off counters
Oh household drudgery, oh household slavery
We dream of non-stick, whiskers, spatulas
We dream of tupperware, cling film, food processors, bin bags,
juicers
Non-iron fabrics, bibs, spray cleaners, double glazing
Oh household drudgery, oh household slavery swished away

You will have a greater chance to be yourselves
Than any people in the history of civilisation.
You will have a greater chance to be yourselves
than any girl, mother, grandmother, aunty or woman
in the history of civilisation.
Damp Cloth Cleaning.

Who wants to be at the mercy of a fading flower?
Some roses never fade
No rust, no rot, no tarnish
A new kink everyday
A new permanence, uncorrupted everyday
For ever and ever
Even in a nest of bleached white bones lies colour
Who wants to be at the mercy of a fading flower

Some roses never fade

SIX (Vinyl Enchantment)

In the dark valleys
A sanctuary of sounds
Rotating, rotating, rotating
Between grooves spiral, spiral, spiral
Spiral to centre
Lock, lead out, lock in, lead out

When a man loves a woman
Hello, I love you won't you tell me your name
When a man loves a woman
Can't buy me love, everybody tells me
Stop in the name of love, before you break my heart
Cos I can't help falling in
Love me do you love me baby do you love me do
Will you still love me tomorrow.

Record
To get by heart
To go over in one's mind
Quietly
Or silently

SEVEN (In Every Pore)

'One of the greatest shortcomings of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function'

Plastic was sighted in human tissue in 1950

In every pore
Behind feather, behind the fin, inside shell.
In every pore
Within the nail, beside the bone, within blood between beak
In every pore

The skeleton, the connective tissue, the slippery skin of modern life

In every pore
In every day, in every way,
We become a little more plastic

EIGHT (Secret City)

Have you ever seen a polypropylene molecule? It's one of the most beautiful things you'll ever see. A cathedral that goes on for miles

In a city, In a city of surface and secrets
Strong as steel and softer than candle wax
Ring of six, carbon quartets, trios, duo bonds
Perform, perform miracles

Water barriers, membranes, glues, resins
Coatings, foam cores, glass fibre,
Sheeting, ducts, domes, drainage,
Insulation, panelling, pipes, sockets,
Seals, slabs, casements, downpipes,
Coated concrete, weather boarding,
Gravel agglomeration
Traps and troughs, bollards and lighting,
Speed, motion
Design, desires
Needs dreams.
This is quick change artistry
The essence of alchemy
Buckets and jewels
Noble in humility
Consents to be prosaic
Material democracy

Space saving
Energy saving
Weight saving
Money saving
Life saving
World changing

Take plastics out of our lives and what do you get?
Complete breakdown.

NINE (the Screen)

We are now abandoned to our own devices. Everything we create
– landscapes, buildings, political and social structures, personality
itself – it is of our own devising'

When we were replete
Satiated
Oh we were longing and we found lightness
Lighter than bone
Lighter than breath
Flying through a thousand screens
Flying, freewheeling into a blue light dream
The alchemical dream of me
P P P P P P P P
People of a thousand faces
P P P P P P P P
People of a thousand graces

We are the plastic people
Freewheeling past nature

A natural evolution of a culture with choice
We will have a greater chance to be our many selves
Than any people in the history of civilisation.
What kind of a hero are you?
What kind of a heroine are you?
If you can dream it you can do it

TEN (Beetle)

Do you see this beetle?
So light in my hand.
It uses one polymer, chitin,
To make it
Waterproof, strong, resilient, breathable,
Creating colour through structure

Take a peek
Peek-a-boo, peek-a-boo

In Nature's kingdom
All the colours of the rainbow
They are spread across the world.
Light in the dark street
Light in the dark

In every pore
PPPPPPPP
In every pore
Nature uses five biodegradable polymers
Cellulose, keratin, chitin, lignin, pectin
To create all that we see

Abundance
Quick change artistry
Essence of alchemy
Abundance
Materials of a trillion uses
Rotating, spiral,
Regenerative, generous
Circular by design
Spiral to the centre
Lock in, lead out

EPILOGUE

We are the makers
What are the dreams we can dream
For our earth?
Each age is a dream that is dying
And one that is coming to birth