



Francis Picabia, *Parade Amoureuse*, 1917  
© ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2013

# THE FIVE SIMPLE MACHINES

---

Todd McEwen

To the Champagne Girls

First published in 2013  
by CB editions  
146 Percy Road London W12 9QL  
[www.cbEditions.com](http://www.cbEditions.com)

All rights reserved

© Todd McEwen, 2013

The right of Todd McEwen to be identified  
as author of this work has been asserted in accordance  
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

Printed in England by Blissetts, London W3 8DH

ISBN 978-0-9573266-3-7

MACHINE: any device or apparatus for the application or modification of force to a specific purpose.

The term 'simple machines' is applied to the six so-called mechanical powers—the lever, wedge, wheel and axle, pulley, screw and inclined plane.

*The machine does not isolate man from the great problems of nature but plunges him more deeply into them.*

– Saint-Exupéry

LEVER	I
WHEEL	37
SCREW	67
WEDGE	93
PULLEY	113
INCLINED PLANE	131

## LEVER

*This is a work of friction, and the resemblance of characters to any real persons, living or dead, is purely mechanical.*

### Mr Button Steps Out

#### CONDITIONS OF STIFFNESS AND STRENGTH

As in Archimedes' case, there was nowhere to stand—I was like those wooden statuettes you get in Africa, the little guys with the big diks. They're always rearing back, the dik jutting out, waving their arms as if they're thanking the moon for giving them such a braying donkey of a hard-on.

When I first got a real one, I mean one that was capable, I found myself hopping around in the bathroom, putting the dik into an empty cardboard tube from the toilet roll and thinking myself mad, a monster who would have to be tranquilized with a dart, captured by the police and destroyed for the good of society.

I figured the only way I was going to have sex with Francine, the girl I admired, was by chloroforming her in the bicycle shed. Of course she'd fall in love with me *afterward*—it was not honorable if love was not involved.

There were also Cecelia, Eleanor, Pauline. I imagined the dik was strong enough to lift all these girls, lift them up to the skies. I imagined it *lifting the whole school*, and it probably could have, the *steel rod of my absolute loneliness*, which while trying to fly proudly in my trousers also felt as though it was goring me, through and through. It created and proclaimed my EMPTINESS to the world; not my nubility.

#### ACTUAL ENERGY OF A SHIFTING BODY

Because of some kind of ancestral trouble, perhaps because my forebears either A) came from cold climates (Holland and Ireland) or B) committed awful crimes, the gods designed my dik in an impertinent way, which has caused me no end of trouble and grief. As if they had no ability to foresee, nor any sympathy for, the awful social exigencies of the gymnasium, the swimming pool, the army physical, they gave me a fully operational dik which, though, normally *retreats almost entirely inside my abdomen*. Perhaps they were trying out an idea on me: *let's see if it useful to make dik crawl up inside like balls when it cold*. Well, it's no use. But there they left me.

The mechanism they used to achieve this was a huge

spectrum of fears. These were stored in my parents and dripped into me, an intravenous feeding of fears, year by year, until by the time the dik got its benzine and started to function automatically, I was afraid it would be seen, that *I* would be seen. I was full of fear that I existed and would be noticed—particularly with a sudden and implacable hard-on.

In their wisdom, the gods gave the dik to me in a unique and maddening fashion. Imagine the pubic bone to be a kind of pylon, P, such as exists in the wing of an airplane and on which the structure of the engine is mounted. They took my retractable, cowering dik, which in truth is perhaps a bit longer than others and put it on a kind of fire-hose reel, R, so that in rolling up inside me the tip, T, remains just visible at the top of the pylon, P, prevented from disappearing inside me totally and perhaps forever only by an invisible and perhaps even imaginary restraining latch, L. The total effect of which system is to render me the uncomfortable, mentally unstable slave to a bulge in my trousers *when I do not have one for the correct reasons*; and to make me when viewed naked to appear to have only a *pink button* nestling in my fur, and no yardage by which I can be measured by the male or female eye. Though nicely proportioned and muscular, I have the *pipi Bernini* as far as most who have never touched me are concerned, and this may have driven me around the bend.

My trousers never fit and from an early age it was torture to buy them. I was so ashamed of the whole thing that I never *would* buy new trousers and consequently trying on new trousers became an eroticized experience and

I would get a boner which I had to wait on to go away; because of the pylon, P, trouble, they still didn't fit and the tailors, or I should say the man who owned the BOYS' SHOP, where embarrassingly I still bought my clothes, couldn't understand it. This was not a problem that could be solved with a measuring tape.

And of course the *old* trousers got too tight and the bulge even bigger. I was disgusting people, so I thought, with something that *both did and did not exist*. It is impossible to buy trousers, even today. I have to seek help and I'm too embarrassed to ask for it. I decided to grow a large belly which disguises the whole problem by crushing down the waist band and making *that* look like the source of my erratic trousering.

*Discussion of dik issues with Cowznofski, one of my few friends in the early days of the dik:* He approached me in some embarrassment in the schoolyard and told me that the day before he had caught the dik between the toilet seat and bowl in his home, in trying to sit down upon it. While expressing my condolences, I was in fact consumed with jealousy at this. If only my dik would *unroll* itself long enough to be caught in a toilet seat! I wondered if it was wrong to picture the exact length of Cowznofski's dik. He went around *assuming* this could happen to anybody?

So here was this fear we had of being priapic, at the exact moment in life when you ought, had, to be.

### THREE-DIMENSIONAL KINETICS OF A RIGID BODY

Francine sat directly in front of me in geometry, the highest level of mathematics I ever achieved—I think she was the same. I simply refused to study any more mathematics after that. I was worn out, though this was largely due to the physical stresses of being seated behind Francine. (They threatened me with dire stories of working in supermarkets, no college in the world would take me, I needed *trigonometry* at the very least to be a *human being* . . . but they lost. I went to Harvard and became rich *without high school math*.)

Francine was not the prettiest girl in school—in California there were plenty of blonde, beachy die-stamped beauties, all of whose eyes seemed to be the same color, and to operate in the same way, I guessed, as those of dolls. They'd shut their eyes slowly as you laid them down . . . of course what did I know about it, laying them down. But this was my guess. Francine was a girl you often saw in groups of girls, who *shuffled* everywhere, usually from the locker of one to the locker of another. You would see her shuffling home in the same group, in their flat little shuffling shoes, notebooks tight against their breasts, for reasons we could never discover. 'Why do they do that?' said Cowznofski. 'That drives me nuts.' I thought it had something to do either with television or with 'Betty and Veronica' comics. Sometimes you'd see the group of girls all sharing a cigarette with one hand, while the other held

the notebook to the breast. Francine's mouth seemed perfect for smoking, I thought—she had mature-looking lips, often painted in slick orange or white, and slightly long, ever so slightly yellow teeth. She rarely smiled but more often sneered, especially where I was concerned. She smoked gently, letting the smoke curl up her face, where it caressed the contours of her nose, her flared nostrils, which I thought her best feature. She had somewhat ratty hair, but the feathered quality of her bangs and the uncertain lay of her hairline were fascinating, and sitting behind her I spent a good deal of time examining her nape, which was exciting. She had not a stoop, but a slight curve to her shoulders which I liked—possibly because it suggested some inner remorse, or submissive quality, although these were not traits she exhibited, especially as regarded myself. In winter she wore a short brown skirt, brown tights and brown boots—*de rigueur*—and in summer a tight, ribbed top, a floral skirt, and sandals—*de rigueur*.

It would be possible to draw many diagrams of my pain as regarded Francine and geometry, more diagrams than I ever drew in class. Plot a vector from the nape of Francine, F, to my eyeballs, E; drop a plumb line from my eyeballs, E, to my dik, D; measure the increasing inclination of the dik, D, to the underside, U, of my desk. We had these desks. They were from the 1950s and no one liked sitting in them. Each had a curved, paddle-shaped top of thick laminate—you were supposed to use the tail of the paddle as an arm rest. There was very little desk top space. There wasn't room for an open geometry text and an open binder at the same time. Everyone constantly dropped

and knocked things over. You could say it was adolescent clumsiness, but it really was these desks. The geometry teacher, who was a real idiot, exploded with rage *every time* a pencil or a notebook fell to the floor, even after Cowznofski had kindly taken the time to prove to him that the desks were too small; he'd even come up with a *theorem* about it. Which got Cowznofski nowhere, except sent to the principal, for being 'snide'.

The desks had foot rails—Francine had a nice way of turning her ankles from side to side in her brown suede boots—but the point is that the desks were really too small for any of us; we suspected them of being left over from the primary school. Everyone had to *squeeze* in and out of them. And if you got the horn, staring at a nape, you were in fantastic trouble.

One day I sat behind Francine feeling doubly miserable, for not only had I been studying her hair and her curved shoulders and her corduroy indifference, the dik *straining* against the bite of the zipper and the unforgiving laminate of the squinchy desk, but it was February and I had a streaming cold, the kind which produces so much mucus in your nose and so much phlegm in your throat and so much rheum in your eyes that you cannot attend to it in class, for the noise you will cause and the always unwanted attention you will attract. You just have to sit there, filling up like a caldera of shit, for *fifty minutes*.

For some reason the teacher was getting through to me—we were studying trajectory, which is part of physics. Isn't it? We were to *make up our own problem*, a phrase which always filled me with a feeling of profound irony.



Suddenly I knew this to be the absolute lowest point of my existence to date—I could barely see the diagrams on the chalk board, could barely get enough oxygen in order to think, didn't dare cough, the dik was being squashed, mutilated and ruined, especially as Francine bent her soft shoulders to her task, which ought to have been attending to the dik, was my opinion. I could think only of the trajectories of phlegm, mucus and semen that would explode out of me if an impulse to cough or sneeze had really taken hold—I could imagine it—there's this enormous Bang!, so much stuff comes out of me that my head is reduced in size by fifty per cent, wild loops and strings of goo fly through the air like serpentine, the dik succeeds in *levering off* the top of the desk, bellowing, firing and gushing—the trajectory's end, of course, of all this matter, the sexy, undeserving (mostly) and horrified Francine. She who of course *knew* that I was full of crap; she said so all the time.

This event seemed a *inevitable*, because at that age you know that the worst things you can imagine about yourself *are true*, they will come to pass.

Later, at home, having cleansed my eyes, lungs, nose and throat, I set about helping the dik. Its favorite copy of *Life*, the Broadway gamine on page 57 wrapping her legs around that guy. The piston is, of course, not a machine—I suspect it to be an ungodly combination of the wheel and the lever, coupled with the idea of planetary or eccentric gearing.

*Discussion of dik issues with Cowznofski, whom I encountered the next day:* He approached me in some embarrassment in the locker room and said he had experienced a wet dream the night before, had this happened to me yet? The guy's *yet*, his *certainty*! I felt sorry for Cowznofski though, because I knew his mother to be a ferocious housekeeper. But no, I said, I had to say no, I have not experienced this yet, because, *Cowznofski*, I thought, *I don't have enough at the end of the day to have a wet dream with*. And thinking of my piston I went to sit behind Francine in fourth period math.

Our textbook, *Nussbaum's Geometry*, served sometimes to remind me that there were, possibly, alternatives to these Francine tortures. There was a girl called Nussbaum in biology class, thin and dark, who always wore striped stockings. The title of the text gave me to dream the geometry of Nussbaum, her stripy legs in a perfect V. What is that? Ninety degrees?

All this ends—you go to college and get yourself a girl, or don't. But you grow up, don't you? A little? And you leave the sea of mucus far below.

#### FRICION COUPLINGS

Things widen, for a time, when you're lucky and young. Much depends upon the lever being applied to an object with the optimal inertia/momentum.