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Notes on Highland Chontal Internal Reconstruction

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Notes on Highland Chontal Internal Reconstruction

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The title of this paper is deliberately patterned after Mary Haas's "Notes on Karok Internal Reconstruction" (Haas 1980)—one of her last published papers—and I intend it as one more tribute to her.

While Highland Oaxaca Chontal¹ is not—like Karok—an isolate, it is part of a small family of languages that also have been classified as Hokan, and the facts I wish to address here are not present in its sister language, Lowland Oaxaca Chontal. This paper is one more small step in the dirrection of a better understanding of earlier stages of lexical structure in the Hokan languages. This is part of a strategy of research that Catherine Callaghan has aptly described as "climbing a low mountain."

The main researchers on Oaxaca Chontal are Paul Turner and Viola Waterhouse. They have both worked on Highland, although Waterhouse is best known for her grammar of Lowland. Without their pioneering work, I could of course never have attempted to say anything about the language.

The phonemic inventory of Highland Chontal is given in (1) and that of Proto-Chontal in (2), which represents a concensus of the reconstructions in Turner (1969) and Waterhouse (1969), though they disagree on some details. The Highland phonemic inventory (1), shows in angled brackets <> the orthographic conventions used in the dictionary by Turner and Turner (1971) for those segments where their orthography differs from the phonemic transcription of Turner (1966). All forms are in the orthography of Turner and Turner (1971), since this is the source of all the Highland data used in this paper.

(1) Highland Chontal Phonemes

(2) Proto-Chontal Phonemes

A few general structural facts about the language should be noted. Word order is basically VSO, but not rigidly so. Verbs take prefixes for tense/person listed in (3) and (5) below. There is also a set of first person plural object prefixes which, if present, do not allow a subject prefix. Singular person object is

Highland Chontal is a member of a small family of languages spoken in Oaxaca, Mexico, consisting of three languages, Highland Chontal, Lowland Chontal, and Tequixistlan Chontal (de Angulo and Freeeland 1926); not much is known about the latter and it will not be discussed in this paper. Oaxaca Chontal is also called Tequistlatecan.

marked by a suffix, and third person object is zero. Plural objects are all suffixes (object affixes are listed in (7) below). Verb stems are formed from roots by suffixing a variety of derivational and aspectual morphemes. The object suffixes are always word-final. Nouns are typically marked by what are called 'limiters', article-like prefixes which occur even if possession prefixes are present; limiters are always word-initial.

The facts I wish to address have to do with the shape of verb roots and stems and that of the tense and person prefixes of Highland. Both Turner and Waterhouse agree that Highland is in many ways more conservative than Lowland, due probably to the greater isolation of the former and the considerable influence of Spanish on the latter. Highland has complex sets of tense/person subject prefixes which are absent from Lowland. Both languages, however, mark the object on the verb.

I could not have attempted to say anything about Highland Chontal were it not for the very detailed dictionary of the language by Turner and Turner (1971) from which I obtained the verb forms to be analysed below. In a useful grammatical sketch appended to the dictionary, the authors also provide a concise sketch of the language including a chart each for the allomorphs of the tense/person prefixes for non-past and past subject. The non-past allomorphs are given in (3).

(3) Non-past Subject Allomorphs

	Singular					
Person	1	2	3	1	2	3
I	ga-	do-,du-	di-	a l -	dol-,ul-	di-,di l-
II	gi-	day-	di-	li-	duli-	di-
III	gu-	do-	du-	lu-	dulu-,dolu-	du-
IV	ga-	da-	de-	la-	dola-,dula-	de-

Turner's analysis is based on the recognition of four arbitrary verb classes (I, II, III, IV) according to the shape of the prefixes shown on the chart. It should be pointed out that Turner (1966) explains that for clarity of exposition he has opted not to attempt a deeper phonological analysis of the language as a whole, but rather to describe the morphophonology of the language using allormorphs of morphemes rather than attempting a single underlying shape. This has actually served him well as the facts are rather complex. In the Turner and Turner dictionary (1971), each verb is identified at to verb type (transitive, intransitive, bitransitive, semitransitive, and impersonal), as well as by the number of the arbitrary verb class to which it belongs.

In a short note in IJAL, Richter (1982) has proposed that the four verb classes defined by their prefixes in (3) above and in (5) below be reduced to one simply be assuming that in some cases the vowel alternations within these sets are due to the fact that some of these vowels belong to the stem rather than to the prefix. This proposal was indeed the inspiration for my interest in this question, so I must credit Richter with the idea, even though my analysis differs somewhat from his. I also wish to point out that while Richter was proposing this as a fairly abstract synchronic analysis in the style then current in generative phonology, I make no such claim. Rather, I am attempting to internally reconstruct an earlier stage of the language. In fact, Waterhouse, with whom I have corresponded about these matters, feels very strongly that speakers' intuitions support the Turner analysis, which I am quite willing to accept.

The nature of the problem is one which was at one time discussed in some detail in the generative literature in connection with Maori languages (Hale 1973), where a classical analysis of data providing the "simplest" solution to a problem in morphological analysis, i.e. assigning certain consonants in inflected forms to the stem, and deleting them when no suffixes were added was demonstrated to actually not match the synchronic state of the language and did not account for all the facts. It is nevertheless worth hypothesizing that unmotivated synchronic facts like arbitrary verb classes have their origin in an

earlier more coherent system.

Following Richter, I assume that Class I stems are actually consonant initial and that all others are vowel initial. This may appear counter-intuitive when one notes that Class I is the only class where some prefixes at least end in consonants, while all others end in vowels. An interesting parallel can be found in another Hokan language, Seri. Both Seri and Highland Chontal avoid word-initial consonant clusters by either inserting a vowel between the first two consonants or by prefixing a vowel to the cluster which allows the offending consonants to belong to separate syllables.

The chart in (4) below restates the facts in (3) in such a way that no arbitrary classes are needed if the phonological rules presented apply and it is assumed that Turner's classes Π , Π , and Π have initial vowels I, I, and I respectively.

(4) Morphemes in Non-past Subject Allomorphs

Singular:

First person: $g \rightarrow ga-/C-initial$ stems (I)

g- elsewhere (i-, u-, and a- stems: II, III, IV)

Second person: do-/du-2/_C-initial stems (I)

do- + i \rightarrow day (i- stems: II) do- + u \rightarrow do (u- stems: III) do- + a \rightarrow da (a- stems: IV)

Third person: di-/_C-initial stems (I)

 $di-+i \rightarrow di$ (i- stems: II) $di-+u \rightarrow du$ (u- stems: III) $di-+a \rightarrow de$ (a- stems: IV)

Plural:

First person: $\downarrow \rightarrow a \downarrow /_C$ -initial stems (I)

l- elsewhere (i-, u-, a- stems: II,III,IV)

Second person: dol-/dul-/_C-initial stems (I)

dol-/dul- elsewhere (i-, u-, a- stems: II,III,IV)

Third person: same as singular except with alternant dil- before C-initial stems (I).

Past subject allomorphs are now presented in (5).

(5) Past Subject Allomorphs

Person		Singular	•	Plural				
	1	2	3	1	2	3		
I	ay-	o-/u-	i-	a l-	o l-	i-/i l -		
II	ni-	mi-	i-	li-	oli-	i-		
Ш	nu-	mu-	u-	lu-	ulu-	u-		
ΙV	ne-	me-	e-	la-	ula-	e-		

² Not enough information is available in the literature to account for the o/u alternations in some second person forms.

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Following Richter, I assume that Class I stems are actually consonant initial and that all others are vowel initial. This may appear counter-intuitive when one notes that Class I is the only class where some prefixes at least end in consonants, while all others end in vowels. An interesting parallel can be found in another Hokan language, Seri. Both Seri and Highland Chontal avoid word-initial consonant clusters by either inserting a vowel between the first two consonants or by prefixing a vowel to the cluster which allows the offending consonants to belong to separate syllables.

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Singular:

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Third person: di-/_C-initial stems (I)

di- + i \rightarrow di (i- stems: II) di- + u \rightarrow du (u- stems: III) di- + a \rightarrow de (a- stems: IV)

Plural:

First person: $\downarrow \rightarrow a \downarrow /_C$ -initial stems (I)

l- elsewhere (i-, u-, a- stems: II,III,IV)

Second person: dol-/dul-/_C-initial stems (I)

dol-/dul- elsewhere (i-, u-, a- stems: II,III,IV)

Third person: same as singular except with alternant dil- before C-initial stems (I).

Past subject allomorphs are now presented in (5).

(5) Past Subject Allomorphs

Person	Singular			P		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
I	ay-	o-/u-	i-	a l-	o l -	i-/i l -
II	ni-	mi-	i-	li-	oli-	i-
III	nu-	mu-	u-	lu-	ulu-	u-
IV	ne-	me-	e-	la-	ula-	e-

² Not enough information is available in the literature to account for the o/u alternations in some second person forms.

Morphemes in past subject allomorphs are presented in (6).

(6) Morphemes in Past Subject Allomorphs

First singular: ay-/_C-initial stems (I)

ni-/elsewhere (i-,u-,a- stems: II,III,IV)

Second singular: o-/u-/_C-initial stems (I)

mi-/elsewhere (i-,u-,a- stems: (II,III,IV)

All others, like non-past, but without d-.3

Comparing items (3) and (5), we note that the non-past and past subject markers share a number of properties, most striking being the shared third person forms. Further decomposition in morphemes can certainly be done, but I am more concerned with the demonstration of my proposal than with the simplest formulation. Nor will I try to explain the o/u alternations since I do not know whether these vowels are in free variation or are conditioned by specific environments.

Looking at the rules involving vowels in (4) and (6), it is clear that vowel clusters are not permitted, and this is a general constraint throughout the language. Typically the first vowel is deleted, but coalescence is also attested and is taken care of by the rules in each case.

Class I, as proposed above, consists of consonant-initial stems, Class II defines i-initial stems, Class III u-initial stems, and Class IV a-initial stems.

The parallels between the analyses of (3) and (5) should be quite obvious. In addition, it is tempting to say that first person allomorphs ay- and ni- and second person allomorphs o-/u- and mi- are phonologically related. Note the morpheme alternants of possessive prefixes on nouns (8), where an -n actually appears on one of the first person allomorphs, and both o and m appear on second person prefixes. Their relatonship, however, seems to be much more archaic that the others but is certainly intriguing and adds Chontal to the list of languages which have first persons with n and second persons with m.

The object pronominal affixes are listred in (7).

(7) Object pronominal affixes

Person	Singular	Plural
1	a l- ,li-,lu-,la-	-onah
	(=1pl subj)	•
2	-oh	-olwoh
3	zero	-olah

Note again that the presence of first singular object prefixes does not allow the simultaneous appearance of subject prefixes. All other object markers, being suffixes, cause no conflict.

Some relevant allomorphs of possessive prefixes on nouns are listed in (8).

(8) Some relevant allomorphs of possessive prefixes on nouns:

³ Note, however, that there are no *o/u* alternations in second person plural forms.

Summarizing so far, there is a good case to be made for four types of verb stems, C-initial, i-initial, u-initial, and a-initial. The question to be raised, though, is whether this proposal is nothing more than a restatement of the arbitrary four verb classes or whether more can be said? While my remarks must be considered preliminary, I will pursue the idea that the four classes are motivated by semantic/grammatical factors.

Highland Chontal has the following verb types: transitives which are inflected for subject and object; bitransitives marked for subject and recipient (no more than two arguments can ever be overtly marked on the verb); semitransitives (of which more below) marked only for third person subject and object; impersonals, not discussed in the description. I don't know in which ways impersonals differ from intransitives but like semitransitives, they can take only third person subject markers.

Turner and Turner (1971:325) define semitransitives as expressing "an action of an unidentified subject, which is not translated into English, directed to an object, which is translated into English as the subject." They illustrate this with the verb 'to die', a semitransitive of Class I and its derived transitive 'to kill', a transitive also of Class I. Thus, the word dimahmoh, composed of the morpheme sequence di-mahma-oh (third.person.non.past-die-future-second.person.object) means 'you will die' (literally, according to Turner and Turner 'it will make you die'). However, this is not a causative, and a better litteral translation would be 'it will die you', whereas the derived transitive containing the transitivizer/causativizer suffix -ha is illustrated by the word dimahahma, consisting of the morpheme sequence di-ma-ha-hma (third.person.non.past-die-transitivizer/causativizer-future) 'he will kill him'. One might well ask whether the analysis of 'you will die' is correct. Another possibility would be to analyse the prefix di- as a dummy with no semantic content (but homophonous with the third person singular di-), present only to fullfil the constraint on verb forms that well-formed verbs must have an overt prefix. Under this analysis 'to die' would be a stative verb whose subject is marked by a patient object form. More on this topic below.

Coming back to the 4 classes, a first hypothesis would be to correlate them with the verb types, but that is most certainly not supported by the facts and of course it would have been obvious to the linguists working on the language if the situation were that simple. In reality, most verb types are found in each class, as will be demonstrated below.

Dictionary entries in Turner and Turner (1971) are in the form of whole words: verbs are given in the third person singular of the non-past form with the aspectual suffix -hma, translated 'he will Verb'; verbs therefore all start with d- as is evident from (3), and so are conveniently grouped together in the dictionary. In fact, all dictionary entries beginning in di-, du-, de- are verbs. Entries also include glosses in Spanish and English, followed by sample sentences illustrating usage, again with both Spanish and English translation and identified by the verb category (transitive, intransitive, etc.), as well as by the verb class (I, II, III, IV) to which the verb belongs. This is particularly useful since an examination of (3) shows that two classes of verbs have the prefix di- for non-past third person. These devices resolve the possible ambiguities, for which I am enormously grateful.

A first significant observation is that membership in each verb class is very skewed: Class I 321, Class II 32, Class III 97, and Class IV 122. So I propose to examine these in turn with examples given in (9) to (12) below.

Let's start with class II with its small numbers.

(9) Class II: -i stems 'active'

(32 stems: 21 trans, 6 intrans, 1 bitrans, 4 semitrans)

trans: dus 'chew it' intrans: mu 'descend'
jue 'smoke it' nu 'run, hurry'
lotso 'talk a lot about' yu 'jump, fly'

mels'aygo 'remember it'

xtu 'get angry'

bitrans:

xawi 'tickle' (why bitrans?)

semitrans: (all exceptions)

bamay 'turn out, result' fu 'have dust (e.g. in eyes)'

meingo 'forget' xtej 'raise blisters on'

Of the total of 32 verbs, judging from the English translations, 27 are active, including the 6 intransitives. It is not clear why xawi 'tickle' is characterized as "bitransitive"; the examples listed seem to give both intransitive and transitive usages. Exceptions are the semitransitives which do not fit the 'active' characterization. As much as possible I have given what appears to be the basic stem devoid of prefixes and aspect suffixes. I have also stripped from the stem the characteristic stem vowel to reduce the items to their most unanalyzable forms. So the proposal is that Class II verbs begin in the prefix i- and are overwhelmingly 'active'. This is an interesting result, and may in fact suggest that Highland Chontal may have had at one time a stative/active distinction. In an unpublished paper, Waterhouse (ms n.d.) has proposed that there are two ways of marking subjects in the language: by prefixes as already shown, and by object markers, agreeing with the analysis I proposed above for the verb 'to die'.

The four semitransitives listed in (9) 'turn out, result', 'have dust in eyes', 'forget', 'raise blisters on' don't seem to fit the 'active' characterization of this class. I have no complete explanation for this, but would like to point out that both Class I and Class II have di- as their third person non-past allomorph as shown in (3) above. Since the semitransitives by definition can occur only with third person subject markers, it is not clear to me how they can unambiguously be assigned to Class II rather than to Class I. This must remain an unanswered question until I can ask Turner or Waterhouse about this. Of course, in a work as complex as a dictionary some typographical errors may have crept in although it is somewhat doubtful that such a systematic class would be marked with the same typographical error. My tentative proposal therefore is that Class II verbs are active, and that the semitransitives assigned to it more likely belong to Class I, consonant-initial stems, where they find a more comfortable home (see (12) for examples of Class I verbs).

(10) Class III: u- stems 'no control'

(96 stems: 64 trans, 14 intrans, 15 semitrans, 3 impers)

trans:

c'wi 'tip it over' gwehe 'stir it up (fire)' huil 'aim it at' laime 'wash it (e.g. dishes)' lij 'earn it'

intrans: mmule 'boil' nxil 'rust'

xamu 'cloud up' waim 'take root' nts'idil 'belch up acid'

semitrans: fdac' 'make it callused' mf'ixa 'swell up'

impers: mlax 'break in half'

duna 'shine'

mlej 'ache'

nasgue 'sprinkled with dew'

yaf' 'exceed, add to'

Class III transitives describe deliberate actions by the subject on mostly inanimate physical objects (some exceptions), intransitives describe states over which the subject has no control (also some exceptions), semitransitives have an unspecified agent, which may be an internal agency, acting on a non-volitional patient, and impersonals involve a lack of control. A general characterization of stems in Class III could thus be that there is a focus on non-control on the part of the subjects of intransitives, and on the part of the object in transitives (where the objects are either inanimate objects or animates with no control

over the event). It appears that Class III verbs all contain an argument which is a non-volitional, non-control entity, corresponding to the object of a transitive or semitransitive verb and the subject of an intransitive one. Impersonals in a sense have neither agent nor patient, they just happen. The contrast between Class II and Class III is therefore striking, as they represent two poles in the active/stative, volitional/non-volitional, control/non-control dichotomies.

(11) Class IV: a- stems 'change of state, cause change of state'

(122 stems: 83 trans, 25 intrans, 11 semitrans, 2 bitrans, 1 impers)

trans: bagu 'raise a flag' intrans: bo 'take a bath'

dej 'cut with knife' ganaf' 'rear, jump up' gwa 'skin it' jic' 'hiccough'

xits'e 'make him sick' xayl 'shift to one side'

semitrans: abał' 'get warm' bitrans: bihi 'give it to'

jac' 'get lost' gwihi 'give it (name) to'

xtaf 'become stiff' impers: mofgo 'get cold and dried out (food)'

Class IV contains many verbs describing a change of state of the subject of intransitives, the 11 semitransitives, and the one impersonal, and those causing a change of state of the object for the transitives and the two bitransitives. Change of state seems therefore to be a strong component of the semantics of verbs of Class IV.

(12) Some Class I stems (default class)

(321 stems)

trans: bel 'lick it' intrans: box 'put on coat'

day 'carry it on shoulder' fuits 'whistle' nantse 'steal it' hua 'go, walk' xpij 'measure it' tsel' 'cough'

semitrans: buł 'sweat' bitrans: dog'ui 'help'

c'ual 'be folded double' guyihi 'accuse him of it' dans 'be squeezed' nesh 'speak it to him'

impers: gush 'get spoiled'

gwi 'rain'

Class I (321 stems) seems to be the default class containing verbs of all types. Evidence that could point to the appropriateness of this analysis but is not available to me at this time might come from language acquisition or possibly from borrowed forms. The large number of verbs in this class weighs heavily in favor of its generality and suggests that many vowel-initial stems have been reanalyzed to fit the more general consonant-initial type. Classes II, III, and IV are probably residues of once totally predictable verb types. Examples of Class I verbs are found in (12) above.

Note that I am not claiming that the class membership of a particular verb stem can be predicted uniquely from the semantics of its vocalic prefix. In my experience, this is not an unusual situation, so for example, in Yuman languages, the presence of an m- prefix is strongly indicative of a stative verb, but does not imply that all stative verbs in fact do have m-.

A Note on Lowland Chontal

I mentioned earlier that the prefixes discussed here have been lost in Lowland. The evidence supporting loss rather than innovation in Higland is the fact that Lowland has developed some phonemes absent from Highland, as pointed out by Waterhouse (1976:327), namely i', i', i', i', i', i', corresponding to Highland i', i', i', i', i', and i'. These new phonemes typically occur in the environment of high vowels, but cannot fully be predicted since they also occur word-initially in other environments, specifically in third person forms where the Highland cognate has third person (d)i. This is part of a process by which Lowland has eliminated prefixes but has retained a trace of one in the palatalization of verb forms. Waterhouse analyzes these forms synchronically as allomorphs of the normal stem. The analysis proposed above for Highland therefore points to a period when both languages shared the third person marker i. Examples are: H didehma, L i'ehuy 'he eats it'; H iceba, L čeepa 'he went'; H ic'ałba, L i'aLpa 'he tore it'; H ilonk'eba, L i'0?pa 'he removed it'; H inaba L i'1 inaba L i'1 inaba L i'2 inaba 'he hit it'.

Implications for Hokan

The hypothesis that Oaxaca Chontal is Hokan has been supported by lexical parallels as early as Kroeber (1915) and added to by Waterhouse (1976). It is strengthened by the fact that the parallels cannot be attributed to areal causes, since Chontal belongs to the Meso-American linguistic area, is completely surrounded by non-Hokan languages, and has obviously been in its present location long enough to share a number of typological features characteristic of Meso-American languages (as defined by Campbell, Kaufman, and Smith-Stark 1986).

Some observations on the preferred form of stem in Chontal may therefore also be appropriate. Several Hokan language families have been proposed to have fairly short roots consisting of such shapes as CVC (Yuman), CV(C) Pomoan, and internally reconstructed bipartite verb stems in Washo. Chontal, I believe, is another candidate for the postulation of very short verb roots, maybe CV(C). In the data used in this paper, assuming that the initial vowels of verb stems are segmentable and represent meaningful classificatory morphemes, a fairly large number of verbs fit into this category. (Examples in 9, 10, 11, 12). Other lexical stems can easily be shown to contain synchronically segmentable stem-formation suffixes and many of the remaining stems might yield to further analysis suggesting an older layer of composition.

Conclusion

While the proposals made in this paper are tentative at best, I hope to have shown that there is at least reasonably good evidence for assuming that Proto-Chontal had short verb roots which old prefixes i-, a-, u- classify into grammatical categories which left traces in the recorded languages. Whether these will link Oaxaca Chontal more firmly to the Hokan stock remains of course to be demonstrated.

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⁴ Highland examples are given in the orthography of Turner and Turner (1971) and those for Lowland are as given in Waterhouse (1976:327-328).

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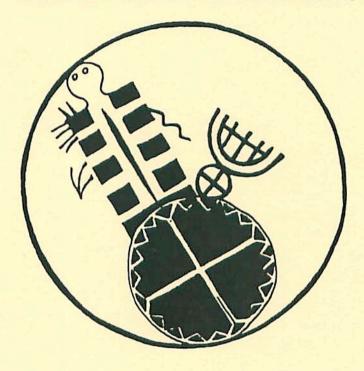
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REPORT 10

SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES



THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN & J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES And THE MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL

June 28-29, 1996 University of California at Berkeley

Leanne Hinton, Editor

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cover design by Leanne Hinton (Santa Barbara Chumash rock painting)

This volume is dedicated to the memory of MARY R. HAAS

Professor emeritus of Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

This volume of the Survey Reports is the Proceedings of the Hokan, Penutian and J.P. Harrington Conferences, held at the University of California at Berkeley on June 28-29, 1996. Part I includes five of the papers that were presented at that conference, and also a paper by George V. Grekoff, who was unable to attend the conference but arranged in advance to submit an article for inclusion in the Proceedings. During the conference, a memorial session was also held for Mary R. Haas, who died a month before the conference. Part II of this volume consists of the presentations that were made about her life and research.

We gratefully acknowledge grants from Joseph Cerny, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate Division, and William Simmons, Dean of Social Sciences, that helped make this conference possible.

Leanne Hinton
Volume and Series Editor

THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN AND J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES and the

MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL SESSION

June 28-29, 1996 University of California at Berkeley, Alumni House

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PART I

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