'A GREAT INTRODUCTION TO WOLFE THE NON-FICTION STYLIST'

NEWSWEEK

Hooking Up

TOM WOLFE

VINTAGE

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In *Hooking Up*, Tom Wolfe ranges from coast to coast, observing the ‘the lurid carnival actually taking place in the mightiest country on earth in the year 2000’ – everything from teenage sexual manners to how genetics and neuroscience are changing the way we regard ourselves. Also included in this colleciton are some of his most classic and enduring pieces of journalism, and ‘Ambush at Fort Bragg’, his fiercely satirical novella about sting TV.

Funny, often savagely so, hard-hitting and wise, Wolfe remains a unique master chronicler of America and its future.

About the Author

Tom Wolfe was born in 1931. He has written for *The Washington Post* and *The New York Herald Tribune* and is credited with the creation of ‘New Journalism’. Between 1984 and 1985 Wolfe wrote his first novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* in serial form for *Rolling Stone* magazine. The novel was published in 1987. It was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list for ten weeks and remained on the list for more than a year. Tom Wolfe is the author of contemporary classics such as *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. He lives in New York City.

ALSO BY TOM WOLFE

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TOM WOLFE

Hooking Up

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HOOKING UP

Hooking Up: What Life Was Like at the Turn of the Second Millennium: An American's World[fn1]

BY THE YEAR 2000, the term "working class" had fallen into disuse in the United States, and "proletariat" was so obsolete it was known only to a few bitter old Marxist academics with wire hair sprouting out of their ears. The average electrician, air-conditioning mechanic, or burglar-alarm repairman lived a life that would have made the Sun King blink. He spent his vacations in Puerto Vallarta, Barbados, or St. Kitts. Before dinner he would be out on the terrace of some resort hotel with his third wife, wearing his Ricky Martin cane-cutter shirt open down to the sternum, the better to allow his gold chains to twinkle in his chest hairs. The two of them would have just ordered a round of Quibel sparkling water, from the state of West Virginia, because by 2000 the once-favored European sparkling waters Perrier and San Pellegrino seemed so tacky.

European labels no longer held even the slightest snob appeal except among people known as "intellectuals," whom we will visit in a moment. Our typical mechanic or tradesman took it for granted that things European were second-rate. Aside from three German luxury automobiles—the Mercedes-Benz, the BMW, and the Audi—he regarded European-manufactured goods as mediocre to shoddy. On his trips abroad, our electrician, like any American businessman, would go to superhuman lengths to avoid being treated in European hospitals, which struck him as

little better than those in the Third World. He considered European hygiene so primitive that to receive an injection in a European clinic voluntarily was sheer madness.

Indirectly, subconsciously, his views perhaps had to do with the fact that his own country, the United States, was now the mightiest power on earth, as omnipotent as Macedon under Alexander the Great, Rome under Julius Caesar, Mongolia under Genghis Khan, Turkey under Mohammed II, or Britain under Queen Victoria. His country was so powerful, it had begun to invade or rain missiles upon small nations in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean for no other reason than that their leaders were lording it over their subjects at home.

Our air-conditioning mechanic had probably never heard of Saint-Simon, but he was fulfilling Saint-Simon's and the other nineteenth-century utopian socialists' dreams of a day when the ordinary workingman would have the political and personal freedom, the free time and the wherewithal to express himself in any way he saw fit and to unleash his full potential. Not only that, any ethnic or racial group—*any*, even recent refugees from a Latin country—could take over the government of any American city, if they had the votes and a modicum of organization. Americans could boast of a freedom as well as a power unparalleled in the history of the world.

Our typical burglar-alarm repairman didn't display one erg of chauvinistic swagger, however. He had been numbed by the aforementioned "intellectuals," who had spent the preceding eighty years being indignant over what a "puritanical," "repressive," "bigoted," "capitalistic," and "fascist" nation America was beneath its democratic façade. It made his head hurt. Besides, he was too busy coping with what was known as the "sexual revolution." If anything, "sexual revolution" was rather a prim term for the lurid carnival actually taking place in the mightiest country on earth in the year 2000. Every magazine stand

was a riot of bare flesh, rouged areolae, moistened crevices, and stiffened giblets: boys with girls, girls with girls, boys with boys, bare-breasted female bodybuilders, so-called boys with breasts, riding backseat behind steroid-gorged bodybuilding bikers, naked except for *cache-sexes* and Panzer helmets, on huge chromed Honda or Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

But the magazines were nothing compared with what was offered on an invention of the 1990s, the Internet. By 2000, an estimated 50 percent of all hits, or "log-ons," were at Web sites purveying what was known as "adult material." The word "pornography" had disappeared down the memory hole along with "proletariat." Instances of marriages breaking up because of Web-sex addiction were rising in number. The husband, some fifty-two-year-old MRI technician or systems analyst, would sit in front of the computer for twenty-four or more hours at a stretch. Nothing that the wife could offer him in the way of sexual delights or food could compare with the one-handing he was doing day and night as he sat before the PC and logged on to such images as a girl with bare breasts and a black leather corset standing with one foot on the small of a naked boy's back, brandishing a whip.

In 1999, the year before, this particular sexual kink—sadomasochism—had achieved not merely respectability but high chic, and the word "perversion" had become as obsolete as "pornography" and "proletariat." Fashion pages presented the black leather and rubber paraphernalia as style's cutting edge. An actress named Rene Russo blithely recounted in the Living section of one of America's biggest newspapers how she had consulted a former dominatrix named Eva Norvind, who maintained a dungeon replete with whips and chains and assorted baffling leather masks, chokers, and cuffs, in order to prepare for a part as an aggressive, self-obsessed agent provocateur in *The Thomas Crown Affair*, Miss Russo's latest movie.

“Sexy” was beginning to replace “chic” as the adjective indicating what was smart and up-to-the-minute. In the year 2000, it was standard practice for the successful chief executive officer of a corporation to shuck his wife of two to three decades’ standing for the simple reason that her subcutaneous packing was deteriorating, her shoulders and upper back were thickening like a shot-putter’s—in short, she was no longer sexy. Once he set up the old wife in a needlepoint shop where she could sell yarn to her friends, he was free to take on a new wife, a “trophy wife,” preferably a woman in her twenties, and preferably blond, as in an expression from that time, a “lemon tart.” What was the downside? Was the new couple considered radioactive socially? Did people talk *sotto voce,* behind the hand, when the tainted pair came by? Not for a moment. All that happened was that everybody got on the cell phone or the Internet and rang up or E-mailed one another to find out the spelling of the new wife’s first name, because it was always some name like Serena and nobody was sure how to spell it. Once that was written down in the little red Scully & Scully address book that was so popular among people of means, the lemon tart and her big CEO catch were invited to all the parties, as though nothing had happened.

Meanwhile, sexual stimuli bombarded the young so incessantly and intensely they were inflamed with a randy itch long before reaching puberty. At puberty the dams, if any were left, burst. In the nineteenth century, entire shelves used to be filled with novels whose stories turned on the need for women, such as Anna Karenina or Madame Bo-vary, to remain chaste or to maintain a façade of chastity. In the year 2000, a Tolstoy or a Flaubert wouldn’t have stood a chance in the United States. From age thirteen, American girls were under pressure to maintain a façade of sexual experience and sophistication. Among girls, “virgin” was a term of contempt. The old term “dating”—referring to a practice in which a boy asked a girl

out for the evening and took her to the movies or dinner—was now deader than “proletariat” or “pornography” or “perversion.” In junior high school, high school, and college, girls headed out in packs in the evening, and boys headed out in packs, hoping to meet each other fortuitously. If they met and some girl liked the looks of some boy, she would give him the nod, or he would give her the nod, and the two of them would retire to a halfway-private room and “hook up.”

“Hooking up” was a term known in the year 2000 to almost every American child over the age of nine, but to only a relatively small percentage of their parents, who, even if they heard it, thought it was being used in the old sense of “meeting” someone. Among the children, hooking up was always a sexual experience, but the nature and extent of what they did could vary widely. Back in the twentieth century, American girls had used baseball terminology. “First base” referred to embracing and kissing; “second base” referred to groping and fondling and deep, or “French,” kissing, commonly known as “heavy petting”; “third base” referred to fellatio, usually known in polite conversation by the ambiguous term “oral sex”; and “home plate” meant conception-mode intercourse, known familiarly as “going all the way.” In the year 2000, in the era of hooking up, “first base” meant deep kissing (“tonsil hockey”), groping, and fondling; “second base” meant oral sex; “third base” meant going all the way; and “home plate” meant learning each other’s names.

Getting to home plate was relatively rare, however. The typical Filofax entry in the year 2000 by a girl who had hooked up the night before would be: “Boy with black Wu-Tang T-shirt and cargo pants: O, A, 6.” Or “Stupid cock diesel”—slang for a boy who was muscular from lifting weights—“who kept saying, ‘This is a cool deal’: TTC, 3.” The letters referred to the sexual acts performed (e.g., TTC

for “that thing with the cup”), and the Arabic number indicated the degree of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10.

In the year 2000, girls used “score” as an active verb indicating sexual conquest, as in: “The whole thing was like very sketchy, but I scored that diesel who said he was gonna go home and caff up [drink coffee in order to stay awake and study] for the psych test.” In the twentieth century, only boys had used “score” in that fashion, as in: “I finally scored with Susan last night.” That girls were using such a locution points up one of the ironies of the relations between the sexes in the year 2000. The continuing vogue of feminism had made sexual life easier, even insouciant, for men. Women had been persuaded that they should be just as active as men when it came to sexual advances. Men were only too happy to accede to the new order, since it absolved them of all sense of responsibility, let alone chivalry. Men began to adopt formerly feminine attitudes when the subject of marriage came up, pleading weakness and indecisiveness, as in: “I don’t know; I’m just not ready yet” or “Of course I love you, but like, you know, I start weirding out when I try to focus on it.”

With the onset of puberty, males were able to get sexual enjoyment so easily, so casually, that junior high schools as far apart geographically and socially as the slums of the South Bronx and Washington’s posh suburbs of Arlington and Talbot County, Virginia, began reporting a new discipline problem. Thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls were getting down on their knees and fellating boys in corridors and stairwells during the two-minute break between classes. One thirteen-year-old in New York, asked by a teacher how she could do such a thing, replied: “It’s nasty, but I need to satisfy my man.” Nasty was an aesthetic rather than a moral or hygienic judgment. In the year 2000, boys and girls did not consider fellatio to be a truely sexual act, any more than tonsil hockey. It was just “fooling around.” The President of the United States at the

time used to have a twenty-two-year-old girl, an unpaid volunteer in the presidential palace, the White House, come around to his office for fellatio. He later testified under oath that he had never “had sex” with her. Older Americans tended to be shocked, but junior-high-school, high-school, and college students understood completely what he was saying and wondered what on earth all the fuss was about. The two of them had merely been on second base, hooking up.

Teenage girls spoke about their sex lives to total strangers without the least embarrassment or guile. One New York City newspaper sent out a man-on-the-street interviewer with the question: “How did you lose your virginity?” Girls as well as boys responded without hesitation, posed for photographs, and divulged their name, age, and the neighborhood where they lived.

Stains and stigmas of every kind were disappearing where sex was concerned. Early in the twentieth century the term “cohabitation” had referred to the forbidden practice of a man and woman living together before marriage. In the year 2000, nobody under forty had ever heard of the word, since cohabitation was now the standard form of American courtship. For parents over forty, one of the thornier matters of etiquette concerned domestic bed assignments. When your son or daughter came home for the weekend with the live-in consort, did you put the two of them in the same bedroom, which would indicate implicit approval of the discomforting fait accompli? Or did you put them in different bedrooms and lie awake, rigid with insomnia, fearful of hearing muffled footfalls in the hallway in the middle of the night?

Putting them in different rooms was a decidedly old-fashioned thing to do; and in the year 2000, thanks to the feverish emphasis on sex and sexiness, nobody wanted to appear old, let alone old-fashioned. From the city of Baltimore came reports of grandmothers having their

eyebrows, tongues, and lips pierced with gold rings in order to appear younger, since body-piercing was a popular fashion among boys and girls in their teens and early twenties. Expectant mothers were having their belly buttons pierced with gold rings so that the shapelessness of pregnancy would not make them feel old. An old man who had been a prominent United States senator and a presidential candidate, emerged from what he confessed to have been a state of incapacity to go on television to urge other old men to take a drug called Viagra to free them from what he said was one of the scourges of modern times, the disease that dared not speak its name: impotence. He dared not speak it, either. He called it "E.D.," for erectile dysfunction. Insurance companies were under pressure to classify impotence in old men as a disease and to pay for treatment.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, old people in America had prayed, "Please, God, don't let me look poor." In the year 2000, they prayed, "Please, God, don't let me look old." Sexiness was equated with youth, and youth ruled. The most widespread age-related disease was not senility but juvenility. The social ideal was to look twenty-three and dress thirteen. All over the country, old men and women were dressing casually at every opportunity, wearing jeans, luridly striped sneakers, shorts, T-shirts, polo shirts, jackets, and sweaters, heedless of how such clothes revealed every sad twist, bow, hump, and webbed-up vein clump of their superannuated bodies. For that matter, in the year 2000, people throughout American society were inverting norms of dress that had persisted for centuries, if not millennia. Was the majesty of America's global omnipotence reflected in the raiments of the rich and prominent? Quite the opposite. In the year 2000, most American billionaires—and the press no longer took notice of men worth a mere $500 million or $750 million—lived in San Jose and Santa Clara Counties, California, an area

known nationally, with mythic awe, as the Silicon Valley, the red-hot center of the computer and Internet industries. In 1999, the Internet industry alone had produced fourteen new billionaires. The Valley's mythology was full of the sagas of young men who had gone into business for themselves, created their own companies straight out of college, or, better still, had dropped out of college to launch their "start-ups," as these new digital-age enterprises were known. Such were the new "Masters of the Universe," a term coined in the eighties to describe the (mere) megamillionaires spawned by Wall Street during a boom in the bond business. By comparison with the Valley's boy billionaires, the Wall Streeters, even though they were enjoying a boom in the stock market in the year 2000, seemed slow and dreary. Typically, they graduated from college, worked for three years as number-crunching donkeys in some large investment-banking firm, went off to business school for two years to be certified as Masters of Business Administration, then returned to some investment-banking firm and hoped to start making some real money by the age of thirty. The stodginess of such a career was symbolized by the stodginess of their dress. Even the youngest of them dressed like old men: the dark blah suit, the light blah shirt, the hopelessly "interesting" Hermès tie … Many of them even wore silk braces.

The new Masters of the Universe turned all that upside down. At Il Fornaio restaurant in Palo Alto, California, where they gathered to tell war stories and hand out business cards at breakfast, the billionaire founders of the new wonder corporations walked in the door looking like well-pressed, well-barbered beachcombers, but beachcombers all the same. They wore khakis, boating moccasins (without socks), and ordinary cotton shirts with the cuffs rolled up and the front unbuttoned to the navel, and that was it. You could tell at a glance that a Silicon Valley billionaire carried no cell phone, Palm Pilot, HP-19B

calculator, or RIM pager—he had people who did that for him. Having breakfast with him at Il Fornaio would be a vice president whose net worth was $100 or $200 million. He would be dressed just like the founder, except that he would also be wearing a sport jacket. Why? So that he could carry … the cell phone, the Palm Pilot, the HP-19B calculator, and the RIM pager, which received E-mail and felt big as a brick. But why not an attaché case? Because that was what old-fashioned businessmen Back East carried. Nobody would be caught dead at Il Fornaio carrying an attaché case. The Back East attaché case was known scornfully as “the leather lunch pail.”

When somebody walked into Il Fornaio wearing a suit and tie, he was likely to be mistaken for a maître d’. In the year 2000, as in prior ages, service personnel, such as doormen, chauffeurs, waiters, and maître d’s, were expected to wear the anachronistic finery of bygone eras. In Silicon Valley, wearing a tie was a mark of shame that indicated you were everything a Master of the Universe was not. Gradually, it would dawn on you. The poor devil in the suit and tie held one of those lowly but necessary executive positions, in public or investor relations, in which one couldn’t avoid dealing with Pliocene old parties from … Back East.

Meanwhile, back East, the sons of the old rich were deeply involved in inverted fashions themselves. One of the more remarkable sights in New York City in the year 2000 was that of some teenage scion of an investment-banking family emerging from one of the forty-two Good Buildings, as they were known. These forty-two buildings on Manhattan’s East Side contained the biggest, grandest, stateliest apartments ever constructed in the United States, most of them on Park and Fifth Avenues. A doorman dressed like an Austrian Army colonel from the year 1870 holds open the door, and out comes a wan white boy wearing a baseball cap sideways; an outsized T-shirt, whose

short sleeves fall below his elbows and whose tail hangs down over his hips; baggy cargo pants with flapped pockets running down the legs and a crotch hanging below his knees, and yards of material pooling about his ankles, all but obscuring the Lugz sneakers. This fashion was deliberately copied from the “homeys”—black youths on the streets of six New York slums, Harlem, the South Bronx, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fort Greene, South Ozone Park, and East New York. After passing the doorman, who tipped his visored officer’s hat and said “Good day,” the boy walked twenty feet to a waiting sedan, where a driver with a visored officer’s hat held open a rear door.

What was one to conclude from such a scene? The costumes said it all. In the year 2000, the sons of the rich, the very ones in line to inherit the bounties of the all-powerful United States, were consumed by a fear of being envied. A German sociologist of the period, Helmut Schoeck, said that “fear of being envied” was the definition of guilt. But if so, guilt about what? So many riches, so much power, such a dazzling array of advantages? American superiority in all matters of science, economics, industry, politics, business, medicine, engineering, social life, social justice, and, of course, the military was total and indisputable. Even Europeans suffering the pangs of wounded chauvinism looked on with awe at the brilliant example the United States had set for the world as the third millennium began. And yet there was a cloud on the millennial horizon.

America had shown the world the way in every area save one. In matters intellectual and artistic, she remained an obedient colony of Europe. American architecture had never recovered from the deadening influence of the German Bauhaus movement of the twenties. American painting and sculpture had never recovered from the deadening influence of various theory-driven French movements, beginning with Cubism early in the twentieth

century. In music, the early-twentieth-century innovations of George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Duke Ellington, and Ferde Grofé had been swept away by the abstract, mathematical formulas of the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg's influence had faded in the 1990s, but the damage had been done. The American theater had never recovered from the Absurdism of Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, and Luigi Pirandello.

But, above all, there was the curious case of American philosophy—which no longer existed. It was as if Emerson, Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey had never lived. The reigning doctrine was deconstruction, whose hierophants were two Frenchmen, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. They began with a hyperdilation of a pronouncement of Nietzsche's to the effect that there can be no absolute truth, merely many "truths," which are the tools of various groups, classes, or forces. From this, the deconstructionists proceeded to the doctrine that language is the most insidious tool of all. The philosopher's duty was to deconstruct the language, expose its hidden agendas, and help save the victims of the American "Establishment": women, the poor, nonwhites, homosexuals, and hardwood trees.

Oddly, when deconstructionists required appendectomies or bypass surgery or even a root-canal job, they never deconstructed medical or dental "truth," but went along with whatever their board-certified, profit-oriented surgeons proclaimed was the last word.

Confused and bored, our electrician, our air-conditioning mechanic, and our burglar-alarm repairman sat down in the evening and watched his favorite TV show (*The Simpsons*), played his favorite computer game (*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*) with the children, logged on to the Internet, stayed up until 2 a.m. planning a trip to this fabulous-sounding resort just outside Bangkok, then "crashed" (went to bed exhausted), and fell asleep faster

than it takes to tell it, secure in the knowledge that the sun would once more shine blessedly upon him in the morning. It was the year 2000.

fn1 With a tip of the hat to Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger and their delightful book *The Year 1000: What Life Was Like at the Turn of the First Millennium: An Englishman's World* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).

THE HUMAN BEAST

Two Young Men Who Went West

IN 1948 THERE were seven thousand people in Grinnell, Iowa, including more than one who didn't dare take a drink in his own house without pulling the shades down first. It was against the law to sell liquor in Grinnell, but it was perfectly legal to drink it at home. So it wasn't that. It wasn't even that someone might look in through the window and disapprove. God knew Grinnell had more than its share of White Ribbon teetotalers, but by 1948 alcohol was hardly the mark of Cain it had once been. No, those timid souls with their fingers through the shade loops inside the white frame houses on Main Street and Park Street were thinking of something else altogether.

They happened to live on land originally owned by the Congregational minister who had founded the town in 1854, Josiah Grinnell. Josiah Grinnell had sold off lots with covenants, in perpetuity, stating that anyone who allowed alcohol to be drunk on his property forfeited ownership. *In perpetuity!* In perpetuity was forever, and 1948 was not even a hundred years later. In 1948 there were people walking around Grinnell who had known Josiah Grinnell personally. They were getting old—Grinnell had died in 1891—but they were still walking around. So … why take a chance!

The plain truth was, Grinnell had Middle West written all over it. It was squarely in the middle of Iowa's midland corn belt, where people on the farms said "crawdad" instead of crayfish and "barn lot" instead of barnyard.

Grinnell had been one of many Protestant religious communities established in the mid-nineteenth century after Iowa became a state and settlers from the East headed for the farmlands. The streets were lined with white clapboard houses and elm trees, like a New England village. And today, in 1948, the hard-scrubbed Octagon Soap smell of nineteenth-century Protestantism still permeated the houses and Main Street as well. That was no small part of what people in the East thought of when they heard the term “Middle West.” For thirty years writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Carl Van Vechten had been prompting the most delicious sniggers with their portraits of the churchy, narrow-minded Middle West. The Iowa painter Grant Wood was thinking of farms like the ones around Grinnell when he did his famous painting *American Gothic*. Easterners recognized the grim, juiceless couple in Wood’s picture right away. There were John Calvin’s and John Knox’s rectitude reigning in the sticks.

In the fall of 1948 Harry Truman picked out Grinnell as one of the stops on his whistle-stop campaign tour, one of the hamlets where he could reach out to the little people, the average Americans of the heartland, the people untouched by the sophisticated opinion-makers of New York and Washington. Speaking from the rear platform of his railroad car, Truman said he would never forget Grinnell, because it was Grinnell College, the little Congregational academy over on Park Street, that had given him his first honorary degree. The President’s fond recollection didn’t cut much ice, as it turned out. The town had voted Republican in every presidential election since the first time Abraham Lincoln ran, in 1860, and wasn’t about to change for Harry Truman.

On the face of it, there you had Grinnell, Iowa, in 1948: a piece of mid-nineteenth-century American history frozen solid in the middle of the twentieth. It was one of the last

towns in America that people back East would have figured to become the starting point of a bolt into the future that would create the very substructure, the electronic grid, of life in the year 2000 and beyond.

On the other hand, it wouldn’t have surprised Josiah Grinnell in the slightest.

It was in the summer of 1948 that Grant Gale, a forty-five-year-old physics professor at Grinnell College, ran across an item in the newspaper concerning a former classmate of his at the University of Wisconsin named John Bardeen. Bardeen’s father had been dean of medicine at Wisconsin, and Gale’s wife Harriet’s father had been dean of the engineering school, and so Bardeen and Harriet had grown up as fellow faculty brats, as the phrase went. Both Gale and Bardeen had majored in electrical engineering. Eventually Bardeen had taught physics at the University of Minnesota and had then left the academic world to work for Bell Laboratories, the telephone company’s main research center, in Murray Hill, New Jersey. And now, according to the item, Bardeen and another engineer at Bell, Walter Brattain, had invented a novel little device they called a transistor.

It was only an item, however; the invention of the transistor in 1948 did not create headlines. The transistor apparently performed the same function as the vacuum tube, which was an essential component of telephone relay systems and radios. Like the vacuum tube, the transistor could isolate a specific electrical signal, such as a radio wave, and amplify it. But the transistor did not require glass tubing, a vacuum, a plate, or a cathode. It was nothing more than two minute gold wires leading to a piece of processed germanium less than a sixteenth of an inch long, shaped like a tiny brick. Germanium, an element found in coal, was an insulator, not a conductor. But if the

germanium was contaminated with impurities, it became a “semiconductor.” A vacuum tube was also a semiconductor; the vacuum itself, like the germanium, was an insulator. But as every owner of a portable radio knew, vacuum tubes drew a lot of current, required a warm-up interval before they would work, and then got very hot. A transistor eliminated all these problems and, on top of that, was about fifty times smaller than a vacuum tube.

So far, however, it was impossible to mass-produce transistors, partly because the gold wires had to be made by hand and attached by hand two thousandths of an inch apart. But that was the telephone company’s problem. Grant Gale wasn’t interested in any present or future applications of the transistor in terms of products. He hoped the transistor might offer a way to study the flow of electrons through a solid (the germanium), a subject physicists had speculated about for decades. He thought it would be terrific to get some transistors for his physics department at Grinnell. So he wrote to Bardeen at Bell Laboratories. Just to make sure his request didn’t get lost in the shuffle, he also wrote to the president of Bell Laboratories, Oliver Buckley. Buckley was from Sloane, Iowa, and happened to be a Grinnell graduate. So by the fall of 1948 Gale had obtained two of the first transistors ever made, and he presented the first academic instruction in solid-state electronics available anywhere in the world, for the benefit of the eighteen students majoring in physics at Grinnell College.

One of Grant Gale’s senior physics majors was a local boy named Robert Noyce, whom Gale had known for years. Bob and his brothers, Donald, Gaylord, and Ralph, lived just down Park Street and used to rake leaves, mow the lawn, baby-sit, and do other chores for the Gales. Lately Grant Gale had done more than his share of agonizing over Bob Noyce. Like his brothers, Bob was a bright student, but he had just been thrown out of school for a semester, and it

had taken every bit of credit Gale had in the local favor bank, not only with other faculty members but also with the sheriff, to keep the boy from being expelled for good and stigmatized with a felony conviction.

Bob Noyce's father, Ralph Sr., was a Congregational minister. Not only that, both his grandfathers were Congregational ministers. But that hadn't helped at all. In an odd way, after the thing happened, the boy's clerical lineage had boomeranged on him. People were going around saying, "Well, what do you expect from a preacher's son?" It was as if people in Grinnell agreed with Sherwood Anderson that underneath the righteousness the Midwestern Protestant preachers urged upon them, and which they themselves professed to uphold, lived demons of weakness, perversion, and hypocrisy that would break loose sooner or later.

No one denied that the Noyce boys were polite and proper in all outward appearances. They were members of the Boy Scouts. They went to Sunday school and the main Sunday service at the First Congregational Church and were active in the church youth groups. They were pumped full of Congregationalism until it was spilling over. Their father, although a minister, was not the minister of the First Congregational Church. He was the associate superintendent of the Iowa Conference of Congregational Churches, whose headquarters were at the college. The original purpose of the college had been to provide a good academic Congregational education, and many of the graduates became teachers. The Conference was a coordinating council rather than a governing body, since a prime tenet of the Congregational Church, embedded in its name, was that each congregation was autonomous. Congregationalists rejected the very idea of a church hierarchy. A Congregational minister was not supposed to be a father or even a shepherd but, rather, a teacher. Each member of the congregation was supposed to internalize

the moral precepts of the church and be his own priest dealing directly with God. So the job of secretary of the Iowa Conference of Congregational Churches was anything but a position of power. It didn't pay much, either.

The Noyces didn't own their own home. They lived in a two-story white clapboard house that was owned by the church at Park Street and Tenth Avenue, at the college. Not owning your own home didn't carry the social onus in Grinnell that it did in the East. There was no upper crust in Grinnell. There were no top people who kept the social score in such matters. Congregationalists rejected the idea of a social hierarchy as fiercely as they did the idea of a religious hierarchy. The Congregationalists, like the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and United Brethren, were Dissenting Protestants. They were direct offshoots of the Separatists, who had split off from the Church of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and settled New England. At bottom, their doctrine of the autonomous congregation was derived from their hatred of the British system of class and status, with its endless gradations, topped off by the Court and the aristocracy. Even as late as 1948 the typical small town of the Middle West, like Grinnell, had nothing approaching a country club set. There were subtle differences in status in Grinnell, as in any other place, and it was better to be rich than poor, but there were only two obvious social ranks: those who were devout, educated, and hardworking, and those who weren't. Genteel poverty did not doom one socially in Grinnell. Ostentation did. The Noyce boys worked at odd jobs to earn their pocket money. That was socially correct as well as useful. To have devoted the same time to taking tennis lessons or riding lessons would have been a gaffe in Grinnell.

Donald, the oldest of the four boys, had done brilliantly at the college and had just received his Ph.D. in chemistry at Columbia University and was about to join the faculty of

the University of California at Berkeley. Gaylord, the second oldest, was teaching school in Turkey. Bob, who was a year younger than Gaylord, had done so well in science at Grinnell High School that Grant Gale had invited him to take the freshman physics course at the college during his high-school senior year. He became one of Gale's star students and most tireless laboratory workers from that time on. Despite his apparent passion for the scientific grind, Bob Noyce turned out to be that much-vaunted creature, the well-rounded student. He was a trim, muscular boy, five feet eight, with thick dark brown hair, a strong jawline, and a long, broad nose that gave him a rugged appearance. He was the star diver on the college swimming team and won the Midwest Conference championship in 1947. He sang in choral groups, played the oboe, and was an actor with the college dramatic society. He also acted in a radio drama workshop at the college, along with his friend Peter Hackes and some others who were interested in broadcasting, and was the leading man in a soap opera that was broadcast over station WOI in Ames, Iowa.

Perhaps Bob Noyce was a bit too well rounded for local tastes. There were people who still remembered the business with the box kite back in 1941, when he was thirteen. It had been harmless, but it could have been a disaster. Bob had come across some plans for the building of a box kite, a kite that could carry a person aloft, in the magazine *Popular Science*. So he and Gaylord made a frame of cross-braced pine and covered it with a bolt of muslin. They tried to get the thing up by running across a field and towing it with a rope, but that didn't work terribly well. Then they hauled it up on the roof of a barn, and Bob sat in the seat and Gaylord ran across the roof, pulling the kite, and Bob was lucky he didn't break his neck when he and the rig hit the ground. So then they tied it to the rear bumper of a neighbor's car. With the neighbor at the wheel,

Bob rode the kite and managed to get about twelve feet off the ground and glide for thirty seconds or so and come down without wrecking himself or any citizen's house or livestock.

Livestock … yes. Livestock was a major capital asset in Grinnell, and livestock was at the heart of what happened in 1948. In May a group of Bob Noyce's friends in one of the dormitory houses at Grinnell decided to have a luau, and he was in on the planning. The Second World War had popularized the exotic ways of the South Pacific, so that in 1948 the luau was an up-to-the-minute social innovation. The centerpiece of a luau was a whole roasted suckling pig with an apple or a pineapple in its mouth. Bob Noyce, being strong and quick, was one of the two boys assigned to procure the pig. That night they sneaked onto a farm just outside Grinnell and wrestled a twenty-five-pound suckling out of a pigpen and arrived back at the luau to great applause. Within a few hours the pig was crackling hot and had an apple in its mouth and looked good enough for seconds and thirds, which everybody helped himself to, and there was more applause. The next morning came the moral hangover. The two boys decided to go see the farmer, confess, and pay for the pig. They didn't quite understand how a college luau, starring his pig, would score on the laugh meter with a farmer in midland Iowa. In the state of Iowa, where the vast majority of people depended upon agriculture for a livelihood and upon Protestant morality for their standards, not even stealing a watermelon worth thirty-five cents was likely to be written off as a boyish prank. Stealing a pig was larceny. The farmer got the sheriff and insisted on bringing criminal charges.

There was only so much that Ralph Noyce, the preacher with the preacher's son, could do. Grant Gale, on the other hand, was the calm, well-respected third party. He had two difficult tasks: to keep Bob out of jail and out of court and to keep the college administration from expelling him.