

CONSTRUCTIONS

by

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Heartfelt Gratitude

Professor Douglas Martin, for your guidance, imaginative wisdom and infinite patience.

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My father and mother, to whom I owe everything.

CONSTRUCTIONS

Meditations

Artifacts

Stories

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Initiation

Welcome.

Let me assure you. You're not in a "lunatic asylum." That term, antiquated and embarrassing, might remind you of wrought iron letters hanging from an ominous signpost. We are aware of our institution's image in the public consciousness. Blame our predecessors. Given common misconceptions about treatment centers such as ours, please allow me to assuage some of your potential reservations.

We do not perform lobotomies here. We do not agree with claims of its effectiveness.

We do not perform physical or chemical castration. Not on these premises. We do not carry out state-mandated compulsory sterilization.

I assure you we do not endorse physical punishment. We do not employ sensory deprivation. Or the ice-water tank.

Our medical staff responds to medical emergencies only. They are not authorized to apply

electrodes to any resident's face, sensory organs, or genitals. They may not perform experiments involving brain probes.

In this place, the staff has utmost respect for our residents. We have never forced residents to perform degrading acts of physical, psychological or sexual humiliation. Such occurrences have never been documented.

Under no circumstances do we invite the public to gaze upon our residents and poke them with sticks through the gaps in their enclosures.

This is a place for therapy. We are here to help you. We are interested in your well-being.

We strive to provide a welcome respite from the challenges and tribulations of everyday life. Many of our guests (voluntarily committed) stay only for a short break from their hectic schedules. Others require extended treatment.

I have summoned the nurse. You will be processed and escorted to your living quarters. Think of Shady Grove as a vacation. Try to enjoy yourself. Don't resist the relaxation.

Life is a Journey and You Can't Go Back Home

The balloons were Sam's idea but I'm the one who bought them. In the sink, using hose clamps, funnels and rubber bands, I filled one each with water (*the classic*), shaving cream (*foam cloud*), shaving cream and water (*sun-bleach special*), olive oil (*the lubricator*), ketchup (*the main stain*), ketchup and shaving cream and water (*rosy mist*), ketchup and shaving cream and water and olive oil (*la piece de resistance*).

"This is good shit," I said.

"Heavy duty artillery," Sam said. He turned *la piece de resistance* inside his hands, prodding its surface with his finger. "Is this weaponry, or is this art?"

"Both," I said.

"I'm glad you're back home," Sam said.

We rinsed the balloons clean and put them in a plastic bag. Even when dry, they were covered with an oily film. Sam put the plastic bag inside his backpack.

"How'd you get the oil in the balloon?" Sam said.

"Old man's magic. I'm surprised it worked, I haven't done this since summer camp."

"What's the worst you ever did?" Sam asked.

"*The Piss Pot*, it was legendary."

"How long ago was that?"

“I don’t know.”

We jumped on our bikes and rode out toward the playground. Sweat and sunscreen flowed into the ruts of my squint, trickling into my eyes, stinging like swimming pool water. The oaks in full-dress fluttered in the easy breeze. The wind tickled their branches, whistling as it passed. Cicadas, rattling maracas from the canopy, joined the afternoon Adagio.

Parker Junior High School, the building where my balls had dropped, where Sam still attended, looked the same as ever. In this landscape, my brother was a mirror to my past, he was my closest other. The familiar terrain was deserted for the summer break; crowds of students had been replaced by plows, dunes of gravel, loamy black earth, sand and wood chips.

“They’re building new classrooms,” Sam said.

I had only left home earlier that year, but I hadn’t seen this landscape in almost five.

We posted up on the wooden stoop of a prefab classroom, hiding from a yuppie couple jogging on the running track. Sam took a knee, leaned on the chicken-wire frame. He unzipped his backpack, took out a glass cigar tube. Inside was a joint the size of my ring finger.

“Surprise, big brother,” he said, and handed it to me.

“I’m impressed,” I said. “This is very well rolled.”

“I know,” Sam said.

We should wait for these people to leave.

“Can they see us from here?” I said, sneering.

“They’ll smell us,” he said.

“No they won’t, they’re upwind from us. Light it.”

The wind kept blowing out the lighter’s flame, but Sam managed with raspy sparks.

“I still remember Mr. Bexar’s home room,” I said. “What a joke. I can’t believe they use these porta-classrooms.”

“Check out that bluejay over there,” Sam said. “Yapping like a guard dog. Don’t tell on us, little jay.”

I blew a smoke jet toward the window. “This one’s for you, Mr. Bexar.”

“Mr. Bexar’s dead.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Didn’t you read the announcement?” Sam said. “They just had the funeral.”

“When did he die?”

“I don’t know. They buried him the week before you got back.”

The bluejay won't shut up.

"I feel like it's watching us," Sam said.

"Definitely. Look at its eyes, tiny black marbles, fixed on us. It knows our guilt."

"It's the ghost of Mr. Bexar," Sam said.

"That's not funny," I coughed. "Don't make jokes like that."

"Okay. Alright, the bird is gone." Sam unzipped his bag, pointed at the balloons. "Are we going to do this?"

"Patience, diligence. All clear?"

"Yuppies gone."

"Where's the butt?"

"I threw it under the porch. Let's go."

I delivered the first balloon. With a heavy arching arm, I lobbed *the classic* at a basketball backboard. It burst with a thump and showered us with drizzle. We laughed.

"More," Sam said. I handed him the *the lubricator*, but as it passed between our hands it burst all over us.

"Shit."

I tossed *the main stain* against the side of the dining hall. It landed with a faint eruption, quietly, left a smear of ketchup on the wall.

I inspected the viscous redness, shining in the high-noon sunlight. *The sun-bleach special* whizzed over my shoulder, grazed my t-shirt, landed on my ketchup-splattered mural.

“Time out, Sam.”

I put my palm on the weathered cement, feeling the violent splash of bright tomato, the gritty surface, years of erosive decoration. The soapy remnants of our bombs dribbled down the rusty bricks, grey mortar, bleaching in the sun, etching the proof of our vandalism.

“I think this shit is going to stain,” I said.

“Fuck yeah,” Sam said, winding up for another volley.

“No, what I meant is--”

Sploosh! A little dab of pink froth hit my face. I rubbed it off with my hand, my oily hand. Everything was greasy.

“Chill it, man!”

“Dude...” Sam said, suddenly stern. His hands were still, petrified.

“I’m sorry I snapped. It’s alright, just give me a minute,” I said, wiping my hand on the cuff of my jeans.

“Dude, turn around.”

A woman was walking toward us. It looked like she’d come out of one of the houses across the street from the playground. She was a hundred yards away.

I held *la piece de resistance*, turning it in my hand, squeezing it, feeling its visceral tension. This was not my place, I realized. I had already been through here, left my mark, my footprint. Now I was trespassing.

I set the balloon on the ground and stepped on it, my rubber sole muffled the burst.

“The bikes!”

She saw my face, the neighbor, the guardian of the playground. She knew I didn’t belong. As we ran toward our bikes, she scrutinized the pink-stained wall. Then she walked back toward her house.

“She’s going to call the cops,” I said.

“I dumped everything.”

We reached our mounts and mashed the pedals until the building disappeared behind a hill.

“You think we’re good?” I said.

“Yeah. That was a rush. I’m hungry, let’s go get some Torchy’s.”

I would have my tacos and relax, ride home and sleep in my bed. I was tentatively safe, that night I was okay. But the next day, I couldn’t go back. Not to take pictures of our deed, or even to clean up. I was a wanted man.

When the stains came off in the rain, or with graffiti blasters, after summer ended, I flew north again and children would fill the playground. Once more, it would

be a place of joy. But not for me. If I ever set foot on that gravel again, it would be a crime scene.

What had I been thinking. Nothing would ever happen, nothing would go wrong for me. I didn't even live there anymore.

But on that downhill ride toward Torchy's Texas Tacos with the wind and sweat and gravel, pink foam bubbling in the sunlight, and then at night sleeping in the bed my parents bought me, on the plane back to New York, where all that keeps me company are cockroaches.

I stay up late in my barren loft. My body travels back and forth, but growing up is somewhere between here and home.

Alarm Negotiations

*He jerks me from my slumber. Leave me alone,
will you?*

*I find my arms and my fingers, fumble with its
smooth plastic corners, find the little button barely
raised from its enclosure. The click is so unsatisfying,
plastic on thin tin.*

*Sleep's pervasive grip pulls me back into her
realm. I'm among the dunes, black on black void, nihilo
ex nihilo, tohu wa-bohu.*

*Electronic intrusions grind in my mind again,
worms inside my walnut.*

*Can't you see I'm only sleeping? Click, damn
you.*

Domestic Collision

It was evening, Ray had just pulled his boots off. It had been a long day, but inspiring. He was in a mood to forget about his work clothes, put some words on paper. Bonnie sauntered into the living room, drooping her shoulder like she was tired. Tired from doing nothing all day.

“I need to go out,” she said.

“Fine,” Ray was not about to go back into the cold. He wanted a hot shower, pen and paper, maybe whisky.

Bonnie said, “I would take the car but I don’t feel like driving tonight. Want to come?”

“What do you need? Can you wait until morning?”

“It’s the solution for these contact lenses,” Bonnie said. “Phil from the pharmacy gave me the bottle with the blue cap. I need the one with the green cap.”

“I bet it’s okay to use water, just tonight.”

“No, they’ll be ruined. They’re brand new contacts.”

“What’s wrong with the car,” Ray said.

“It lurches,” Bonnie said, “But you can keep it in control. I’ve seen you do it. You’re a good driver.” She sat on the arm of Ray’s chair, leaning into his lap.

“It doesn’t lurch,” he said, moving his notebook out of her way. “Just be gentle with the pedals.”

“Come on,” she insisted. “I don’t want to change out of my slippers.”

Ray capped his pen, folded his glasses. If he wasn’t going to write he didn’t care what else he did. “How will you make it worth my while?” he said, tying his boots.

“Hot apple cider donuts from Nick’s bakery, next to the pharmacy,” she said.

Ray picked at the aglets on the end of his laces, splitting the plastic with his fingernail. “I’ve never been there,” he said.

“Sandy cinnamon sugar pillows, black coffee--”

“It’s a deal.”

Bonnie went outside to start the car. Ray took a thin steel flask from underneath the armchair, wrapped his lips around the spigot and cleared it.

Ray stepped into the frosty night. He had found the perfect spot to build his cabin. The seclusion was perfect, it was his fortress of solitude. Why he brought Bonnie in with him was a mystery to both of them.

He pulled the silver Challenger out of the driveway and whipped onto the street. They had to go the back route through the woods to reach the highway. Ray could feel the engine’s weight up front, pulling him forward. It was a good car, a real American machine. A real fast-moving, worthy piece of metal.

Ray turned the radio dial. The signal cracked, but tinny voices broke through the static. “*I’ll never be your beast of burden, I’ve walked for miles my feet are hurtin’...*” Bonnie flipped the dial off.

“I was listening to that.”

She always had her hands all over the radio.

“We need to concentrate,” she said, “And it’s a crappy song.” She dictated the terms. She got what she wanted.

They used to brush their teeth at night together, careful not to spit on each other’s hands. Then she’d lock Ray out, so she could wash her face and prepare for bed, pee or whatever. He’d usually wait outside the bathroom door, counting the nails in the hardwood floor. No matter who was brushing first, she always got the bathroom before Ray.

The headlights were dimming and Ray couldn’t see the road. Ray was driving so fast so suddenly. The Challenger broke out of the woods and ran straight onto the highway. He was climbing the access ramp and it felt so good, feeling the car yank him forward against gravity like a roller coaster.

When they got to the pharmacy the lights inside were dim, the parking lot empty.

“Goddamn,” Bonnie said. “Why didn’t you remind me they close early?”

“How would I have known?”

Next door at Nick's bakery the air smelled like coffee grounds and donut oil. Ray's eyes lingered on the glowing red letters reflected in the warm chrome storefront, "AT YOUR SERVICE 24 HOURS."

Bonnie tugged Ray's arm. "Take me to the other pharmacy."

"Can we stop for donuts first?"

"No. On the way back. We're on a mission."

"But Nick's is right there. Doesn't it smell good?"

"You know what, Ray?" Bonnie said, "Forget about the donuts."

In the car, she buckled up and stared into the vacant night.

"Turn around on the highway. It'll be another ten minutes." Ray and the Challenger crawled out of the parking lot, both of them grumbling.

Snow started coming down and Ray couldn't see beyond his headlights. "Strange," he said, "There's nobody else out on this highway." The air inside the car was thick, warm, liquid. Ray and Bonnie floated, bobbing along with the Challenger's suspension. They sped down the vacant highway cradled in the amniotic sac. Thin jets of cold air, creeping from a crack along the doorframe, reminded Ray he was alive, and awake.

Bonnie crossed her legs, reclining as far as the seat allowed.

"Ain't it nice having your own chauffeur?" Ray said.

"Just like a dream."

"Ain't it better than if you had to do this alone?" Ray said.

“Yes, I love that I have you.”

He fixed his eyes on the road.

Ray couldn't make any sense of the highway, all the turns and coils. But he kept driving. The road became smooth, the lane markers faded away. The air smelled like tar. The pavement was dusted with snow, fresh.

“I don't think we should be on this road, Ray.”

“You might be onto something. This looks like new construction.”

He blew past piles of bricks, past stinking hot pots full of blacktop. Ray rolled his window down. He filled his lungs with chilly air, roared out the window.

“Ray, slow down!”

“Why? I feel great! The car loves it, I love it.” He cast a sidelong glance at her. “Awooo!” he howled, his face half-lit by the crescent moon, the rest obscured.

The road continued, groomed. Ray noticed gargantuan equipment along the shoulders, machines for molding concrete monoliths.

The Challenger sped forward, consuming pavement, snarling with satisfaction. There was a steel-girded bridge ahead, lying lengthwise in the middle of the road. The workers must have left it overnight. Despite its massive shape, in the horizon it slipped past Ray's attention.

It was too close. The brakes locked up. The handbrake failed. No way around the giant arch, spread wide across the pavement, columns resting firmly on the ground.

Bonnie had both feet up on the dash, mashing imaginary brake pedals, screaming. Ray was silent. The bridge came closer, faster, the Challenger lurched into the monument with its right shoulder. With so much momentum, Ray's half of the car flew forward through the columns. The rest of the Challenger was sheared clean off and stayed behind, crumpled like an empty beer can.

There had been no time to think, no time to argue.

The tension of the moment had meant nothing to the concrete bridge. Everything happened mercilessly fast. Ray acted from reflexes, there was no hesitation.

He didn't call for help, counting his bootprints in the velvet powder, just pacing along the skid marks in the snow. Waiting for paramedics who would come eventually. As they took his vitals, he didn't say much to them, or as they pried open the mangled passenger door and pulled out Bonnie with the clamps.

Nick's bakery still makes apple cider donuts twenty-four hours a day. Once in a while Ray stops inside to chat with the owner. Ray looks upon the bakery fondly

from the highway as he drives his new Challenger to work. The chrome and neon sign still glows.

In The Hole

That awful stench, that's what I remember. The miasma of my self, my mistakes and transgressions. It was the evil coming out from inside. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't tolerate my odor, my armpits and my feet and my breath.

I took off my canvas stripes. The evil seeped out from the pores in my skin. Clothes on or off it made no difference. I pulled the stinking uniform back over my head. It was cold.

You don't remember the zebra suits? Can you remember the cold? The beasts across the atrium, hooting and howling and banging on the doors?

I couldn't even breathe out of my mouth, the stench of my sins kept coming through my throat, in my voice. The evil kept me up all night. In the morning, I received salvation, citrus salvation. They threw me an orange for breakfast and I took off the peel in one piece, one long spiral sliver. That night, I scratched the zest with my fingernail and rubbed it under my nose. I

slept with the rind under my pillow. Those oils showed me my senses, chased away the darkness, let me go to sleep.

I saw cedar silhouettes with hairy bark beneath a painted sunset, branches hissing in a fire pit, spitting fireflies. Above, cotton ball cumuli rested on infinite skylines. But I don't dream anymore. Not here.

The last time I dreamt I saw my old woman. She was giving me some righteous hell for what I did, beating my head with wicked words. I'd do anything to have her here again, with me in the cell, to help me keep the bed warm.

All Nighter

She will tell you she's a writer, or she'll tell you she's a translator, that's what she'll tell you. Translation is her day job. She writes stories in her spare time, just like she might go spinning or do yoga or crochet during the space of the day she sets aside for self-indulgence. But she's not really a *writer of stories*.

She just writes stories sometimes. She wouldn't call herself a story-writer. That's what she'd say.

She pubbed a story in a magazine, once, in college. It was better than a campus mag, it was an indie zine from Brooklyn. But she knew it was a farce. The editors were idiots. She knows all the editors. They sit around a dim room with their gin or whisky, whichever is trendy, spew cigarette smoke and talk bullshit. They use art criticism to discuss short fiction, because that's all they know, because they got degrees in art criticism, so they definitely know that shit.

She was printed in the pretentiously didactic *Edition Three: What's Happening in Young Fiction*.

She joined the editors for five or six issues, but quit because they would not pay her and also they kept making sexual advances. Though months had passed since her story ran, she went to the zine shops and (*claimed she*) stole or (*actually*) bought the last remaining copies of her issue. She burned (*ripped*) them (*up*) and dumped the ashes (*confetti*) in her sink. When the sink got clogged, she tried Dran-o (seven dollar

bottle, useless) then Dran-o Super Plus (two dollars more useless). She left the cocktail in her sink two days, giving it time to work corrosive magic. Then she called the plumber.

The plumber told her “no charge” but taxed her throughout with overt sexual advances: Immediately, at the door (she had answered in a nightgown); bending over to inspect the sink; when he said “Nice way to destroy evidence,” rubbing her lower back; when she offered him a drink (why did she?); and finally when he left, handing her a business card, underlined “full service” and “house calls 24/7.”

She doesn’t live in that apartment anymore. She’s got a new place with a matronly landlord who does all the maintenance herself.

If she even mentions her day job, she’ll tell you she just traffics in other people’s creativity and other people’s languages.

She’ll tell you she’s never had the bones to stand up straight. She’ll tell you she’s never quite had an original thought in her life.

If she spends the night, just wait until you hear what she says in the morning.

Fire Works

*We are not bottle rockets sparkling, screaming
ripping the air, grasping tearing out our path with no
resistance, no traction. Too fast to know our velocity,
too high to remember our origins, sputtering out and
losing momentum, blowing up at apex, shredding
cardboard bodies into confetti, fluttering down
homeward, suspended like burnt stinking sulfur.*

Just a Bunch of Assholes

I have to take three highways in Friday rush to get to the place, this speaker repair shop, and when I walk in these three assholes are sitting around on couches. The shop is a mess of plywood sheets with circles cut out of them, piles of Styrofoam, balls of wire like rats's nests, and the whole place smells like glue -- not Elmer's but the sinister kind. Frayed power cords everywhere, and a persistent static hum. There's a bass guitar in a corner, for testing subs, and more guitars in pieces on the floor.

They ordered a big and a little pie, the total was nineteen fifty including the free small. I tell them the total, and the pudgy one hands me a twenty. He's got bristly blonde chops, purple lips and a frayed Slayer sweatshirt. I fold the twenty and put it in my wallet slowly, giving him a chance to tip me. He's smiling, waiting for me to leave.

So that's when I say, "The ticket says you gentlemen have a coupon for the free small. Can I have it?"

The youngest one steps up. He looks my age, but his mouth is all tangled up in braces. He's got an authentic rotten vibe. "It's around here somewhere," he says. "Hang on while we look." He works in a speaker repair shop. He's an asshole.

The other two get up real slow. Chops and the third guy, the grey-haired guy, they look around the front desk. Grey lifts up piles of newspapers, Chops looks under

the computer keyboard. They keep pretending to look for the coupon, I know it doesn't exist, and finally Chops shows me a hostile smile and says, "We ain't got it."

"Are you trying to steal a small pizza?"

Chops says, "When I talked to the lady on the phone I told her, 'and I'll take a free small pizza with that too,' and I thought it was all good."

"Have you done this before?" I said. "You need the coupon to get the deal. That's how it works."

"We don't know what to say, buddy," Grey says.

Chops is giving me a look that says *If you're still here in sixty seconds, I will fuck you up.*

"Don't worry, you can keep it this time."

"Oh, we weren't gonna give it back," Braces says. Chops grunts in approval. Says, "Give him a couple of dollars, old man." Grey opens his wallet and I watch him peel off a five, hesitate, then put it back and take out two singles.

"Here you go young fella," he says.

Chops says, "Run along now."

I shove the bills in my back pocket, and on my way out the door I shout over my shoulder, "Just don't try it again," then go back, open the door a crack and add, "Assholes!" I rush to my pickup, worried they might come out swinging a broken bass neck. They look like the type who can't outrun me, but they'll do something ugly if they get too close. They look like the type who keep knives in their boots.

Then I remember the frayed hole in that pocket of my bluejeans, and as I squeal off onto the crowded highway, I see my two dollars crumpled up, dancing on the parking lot like tumbleweeds. I would have made the wide loop on the highway to come back and retrieve them, but then they wouldn't have even covered gas to get me home.

The Art and Study of Journalism

“The best fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism -- and the best journalists have always known this.” -- Hunter S. Thompson

A journalism school is a school or department, typically part of an institution, where journalists are trained.

Many of the most famous and authoritative journalists of the past and present had no formal training in journalism. Instead, they learned the craft on the job, often starting out as “copy boys” or “copy girls.”

Today, in many parts of the world, it is usual for novice journalists to complete university-level training, which incorporates technical practices such as shorthand, research skills, interviewing method, and academic theoretical studies, such as media theory, cultural theory, and ethics.¹

The object of the journalist is to report the story as it actually occurred. To eliminate all doubt, all subjectivity. To report the truth, the real truth, only truth.

Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Master: “In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind there are few.”

¹ The Free Encyclopedia

The Cloud

Ander “Skip” Xandrovitz
for *Get Real Magazine*

September 12, 2019 at 12:37pm

I just got back from this year’s Humanity and Electronics Conference. Didn’t get a ticket? Here’s what you need to know: Various technofirms are working toward several options for life extension. The pricing schemes are encouraging; taking into consideration government subsidies, most Americans will enjoy access to at least one of the following options. There are three main categories, in ascending order of (r)evolutionary implications: 1. nano-engineered organic therapy; 2. androrobotic agency kits; 3. Upload.

click for full article

Nano-Engineered Organic Therapy

There are several ways to harvest organs. We understand the human genome well enough. Think about how organs are grown *in vivo*: Humans have countless copies of physical programming, floating in packets throughout the body, indeed in every living cell. When the internal assembly is stimulated to make new flesh (ex: a scab to restore surface damage, a baby's stomach built from scratch, or the glitch we call cancer), a special microscopic "reader" interprets the code (a single-file chain of base-four digits) and spins a thread of peptide blocks that corresponds to the code. The thread grows long and depending on its disposition, curls up into a specialized form. We call this product a protein, the very basis of humanity. Brain matter, heart, blood and bile, they're all made from protein. Large items require complex code and greater matter, thus the code for a human heart is longer than the code for a blood cell.

We know the code for each component, we can eliminate bugs and glitches (evolutionary imperfection, environmental degradation). We can bypass the internal process and make organs faster, then implant perfect replacements. The market has been flooded by 3D bio-printers that build living flesh, but these printers are small and can only print basic components. HyperPrint Industries will introduce an industrial organ printer next spring. Meanwhile, Xerox is trying to patent a cartridge-based protein delivery system, similar to their current inkjet system. *Get Real* projects that next year this technology will be the standard for healthcare service centers nationwide.

On the other hand, the most endowed customers may take their business to boutique craftsmen. The artist takes the customer's genome ("measurements"), makes the right adjustments ("tailoring"), and hand-builds custom organs ("bespoke"). These shops have built hearts for murmuring royalty and livers for high-tech CEOs. Rumors say Prince Alberto of Noumeno requested a two-foot spiral penis (but you didn't read it here!). Though held in questionable repute by the Life Foundation and the FDA, this vanguard form of bio-tech has thus far been supported by its customers. You can do whatever you want if you've got the currency.

It may shock us to project how far science will take us in the near future. But just for some perspective, consider how far science has already brought us: We have learned that the human genome and the pig genome are strikingly alike. So similar that we have turned our pink friends into spare-parts bins. We can borrow components from them without consequence. Patient D., a Cuban survivor of colorectal cancer, has been living with pig guts for years, but the operation has not been approved by the FDA. Meanwhile American cardiovascular surgeons have made staggering legitimate advances: Though the image is initially unsettling, it has been proven beyond doubt that humans can live quite well with a porcine heart.

Androrobotic Agency Kits

Ex-Ortho Industries has developed a pair of full motion robo-legs built from aircraft-grade titanium. War casualties and paraplegic customers will be happy to learn this prosthesis, largely covered by the Universal Health Plan, uses spinal-interface pins for seamless integration. No more “plastic leg syndrome” or neuro-rejection. The manufacturing process is remarkably simple and sustainable, adapted from age-old titanium bone inserts commonly used for fracture patients (see my article, “My Brother is the Terminator,” paper-issue 101011).

But these titanium legs are just a tangent feature. The real star of the presentation was RORO (and *RO RO*botic), a second-generation automaton. RORO’s personality was designed by the best programmers at Stanford. Unlike previous versions of the Andro-Operating System, he is programmed to be exclusively docile, loyal and loving. It has been verified that the government has ordered several fleets of ROROs to be deployed in hospitals and geriatric homes. Initial test subjects have expressed fondness toward RORO, calling him a “guardian angel.”

RORO runs on an infinite battery, which is supplied by offshore antimatter mines (perhaps the only good news to come from those wretched pits). He also has on-board self-contained fission batteries with ultra-durable Toronium casing. He just keeps going and going.

His mind is inscribed on the quantum logic board, which could theoretically be swapped for a human’s electronic mind-port (when that technology becomes

available). A person could be reborn in a titanium body that never rusts or breaks, with all the acuity of their mind at the time of upload (with room for further mental development as well). However, given the scarcity of available materials, these prototypes are prohibitively expensive.

Sadly, RORO's brain is not invincible. The hard drive is mechanical, after all. Continuous runtime leads to collections of data artifacts (microscopic scratches, really) which form corruptions, which pose the threat of memory leaks and system crashes.

These crashes may only occur after millions of years of runtime, if at all. In a RORO these crashes can be fixed with a hard reboot. But for a human occupant, a corrupted mind could be catastrophic. It is recommended that when these prototypes are offered to the public, customers stay updated with system patches. Eventually customers may want to replace their hardware altogether, or make a backup in the worldwide data cloud. Or, if they are ready to shuffle loose the quasi-mortal coil, they may choose to Upload.

Upload

In the year 1945, the American plane Enola Gay dropped over nine thousand pounds of atomic fury on Hiroshima. The city was submerged in an invisible nuclear fog, a cacophony of malignant radiation choking the air. We remember the story of the mother whose hair fell out and toes withered away, who gave miraculous birth to a baby but died in childbirth thinking she had slipped her offspring past the radio barrier of death. But she never saw that the baby had been born blind, and with hands fused together in the shape of a hook. The nasty waves that charred her flesh had ravaged her genetic code.

In 1955, harnessing the same basic concepts, harmless radio stations filled American airspace with chipper tunes (we had won the war and earned this ease). Meanwhile the deadly versions of those rays were safely locked away inside our power plants and instant ovens.

We live inside a cloud we cannot touch, taste or smell. But we can see it, if we look through the right windows. We still have radio stations that fill airspace with transient interference, but the aether of the cloud is constant and stable. Resting mostly in the wireless mainframe, it must be solid and secure for the sake of all it holds: webpages, photographs, documents (personal contacts, municipal phonebooks, journals, mem-logs, magazines, literature), videos (film, television, home movies), financial information, news aggregators, stock exchanges, social networks. Most of

what we conceive as our personal and collective identities is already in the cloud, so what's missing?

Perhaps the most mind-blowing (though poorly attended) presentation at the conference was by a spokesman of MindSearch, a joint project of Stanford, Harvard and Oxford Universities. The spokesman was brief and vague, but he reported with absolute certainty that MindSearch technicians are about to locate the precise location of the mind within cerebral matter. They have already tested the procedure on Bonobo apes, reportedly "pulling" their mind-centers and engraving them on Toronium chips. The FDA claims to be reviewing these tests, confident that this procedure may be offered to humans within the next decade.

When we leap this last hurdle, it will be easy to overhaul our existing data cloud to integrate environ-reactive sentient consciousness chips. In lay terms: our minds; MindSearch trademark: *ATMAN* (I didn't quite catch the acronym).

Our minds, and the rest of our identities will reside in the cloud, abstractly, while physically tethered in server facilities. These servers², running indefinitely, will bridge the meta-dimensional gap between the physical world and the cloud. The facilities are basically enclosures for massive nano-brain drives, infinite storage discs, and fission-based power cells.

As more people Upload, more connections and more synapses are built, and with each new connection each synapse makes, the greater and faster the network becomes. Eventually, if one synapse goes offline, the data will be safely cross-

² I should call attention to a pertinent revision in the *Get Real* style guide. Taking a cue from the editors of *The Future is Now Magazine*, we will no longer refer to these centers as "servers," but use the term "synapses."

referenced by many other networks. Thus networking will become survival. Avid readers of *Get Real* may recall my aversion to pseudo-social identity upload (see “Why I’m Not On Facebook,” paper-issue 1011011) but when Upload rolls around, I’ll be first in line. This is the real deal. I’ve seen the presentations, checked the facts. The stations on mainland Earth ought to continue to sustain themselves, though they may need routine maintenance. A special fleet of ROROs may be deployed from backup warehouses to perform minor intervention. Meanwhile, inside our network, we can continue to live and ponder without disease or starvation or war, without fear or suffering. We will be beautiful, lucid, and eternal on our blissful cloud.

[Click here to comment on this article](#)

Comments

Anon@12:58 wrote:

Why would anyone want an “Agency Kit” when we can just Upload? How much are these things going to cost anyway? Will the technofirms take down payments?

Doctorow@1:24 wrote:

Ooh, the cloud sounds pretty slick. But what will happen with our bodies after our minds are pulled? Will they be cremated or buried? And will it be included in the price of Upload?

Arcturo@1:28 responded to Doctorow:

You’ll be fed back to the masses who still can’t afford Upload. Soylent Green is people! It’s people!!!

Pescovitz@1:38 replied to Anon@12:58:

Some of us are still going to want to go hiking! With everyone up in the cloud, the trails will be free and clear. Gotta get me some robotic legs chop chop. Or should I say CLANK CLANK!

Anon.2@2:03 wrote:

What the hell does Hiroshima have to do with the cloud? Skip, your latest posts have been creeping me out.

Skip@2:03 replied to ***Anon.2***:

Just trying out my uncanny evocation algorithm. Haha, just kidding. Trying to develop mood within my writing.

Quaaluddite@2:13 wrote:

Is there a space on my living will to specify I don't want robots taking care of me in old age? I'll need something with skin.

Misanthropos@2:21 wrote:

None of this technology will be finished before we nuke ourselves to death or an asteroid strike kills us. I, for one, will welcome the apocalypse from my backyard with a cold beer. I'm going to have a party. All are welcome! Especially you, Quaaluddite.

Anon.2@2:34 wrote:

I want to know more about the cloud.

Skip@2:34 replied to ***Anon.2***:

Check out my next article. Should be up tomorrow.

Lucas@2:45 wrote:

bzzzzzzRORORORORORORO! hahahahahaha

Skip@2:45 replied to ***Lucas***:

They're actually quite articulate. In fact I envy their vocabulary.

Skepticon@2:56 wrote:

Guardian angels? Beautiful cloud? Wow Skip, you've taken on a strange tone since you moved into the Alti-Project Housing. You're not drinking the water, are you?

Skip@2:56 replied to Skepticon:

You know I am! It's good stuff. When are *you* going to move up, *Skep*?

Scientryst@2:59 wrote:

Hey Skip, how exactly does the mind "pulling" work? Is it like that film "The Matrix?" Please tell me it's not as brutal. That sequence gave me the creeps ever since I saw it in my course on Film and Philosophy @ Stanford.

Skip@2:59 replied to Scientryst:

It's exactly like that. It's no big deal though - after the procedure, the subject won't remember the pain. But I wouldn't know.

Developer(admin)@6:23 wrote:

Hey Skip, how are those new batteries holding up? You gave us quite a scare at the conference. By the way, don't get jealous of those ROROs, once you get to know them they're obnoxious hotshots.

Skip@6:23 replied to Developer(admin):

Very well, thank you! And thanks for the affirmation. It's good to know I'm not obsolete... yet. Hah!

CocoCapek@6:34 wrote:

Seriously, Skip. Always check your system updates, your meltdown was freakier than watching my uncle Jim have a simultaneous heart attack and seizure.

Developer(admin)@6:45 replied to ***Skip***:

Good to learn you're well. Don't ever go rusty on me, good buddy. See you on the cloud!

Still Waiting (2011)

I'm at the Amtrak waiting for the 57 to New Haven for a lecture. This station is in Meriden CT, just a way down the highway from my university. It's the first real day of spring, but I'm sitting on a bench indoors beside the ticket counter. Outside there's road and a dirty parking lot with noisy busses. I would rather be outside at school. I'd be sitting on a hill with a cold beer and a picnic blanket. But here in Meriden, I'll enjoy the weather from inside. There's an open window toward the platform, I can smell the breeze and listen to the birds yip. Yes, I'll enjoy the spring from here.

Out on the platform, a man leans over the tracks to spill out the foamy tail end of a tall boy. He's got a plastic shopping bag stretched out full of empties.

Inside, two young ladies argue over soda politics.

"Who picks the prices for this anyway," the younger woman says. "Ninety cents, ninety-nine? What if I don't got a dollar bill, I only have a five?"

"Well," the older woman says, "You're shit outta luck."

There's a couple on the bench behind me, facing opposite me. All I see is their hair and the backs of their necks. The woman has a blurred tattoo scratched on her nape, a celtic knot. The man sports a mullet. Both of them wear vinyl jackets with the names of football teams that haven't seen a championship in years.

Tall Boy comes in from the platform, knocks on the bathroom door. Another knock comes back from inside.

“Make it quick, brother; a man can only hold on for so long!” Tall Boy strikes up a camaraderie with the couple and the soda ladies, as if they know each other from before. Do they? There’s an ease in knowing you’re among your own. I’m not from here. I wouldn’t know.

There are two bathrooms, men’s and women’s. A sign warns passengers, “BATHROOMS CLOSE AT 2:45pm DAILY.” All I really know about the bathrooms in the Meriden Amtrak station is this: I’m glad I peed before I came.

Tall Boy waits for the bathroom, finally relieves himself, then keeps waiting for a train.

Not my train, but a different one. The couple said they’re waiting for a bus. This is also a bus stop, I didn’t know that. I haven’t ridden a bus since high school. My high school on the bad side of town, the “Upward” program, my alcove of nerdiness within the territory of the hoi polloi. As they say, the cream rises to the top. Yet even when it separates, milk remains milk. Our school within a school.

An older man bursts through the front door suddenly, wiry grey hair sticking out from underneath his baseball cap. He holds a cell phone to his ear, delivering a gust of hispanic staccato. First he sounds angry, then apologetic.

He sits down on the bench, on the side opposite me, placated.

This bench I'm sitting on is cast of black enameled iron. Hardwood slats spread across the frame, forming a backward slanting S on which to rest my back. I've been sitting for an hour, because my train is late. Delayed up the line in Bridgeport, the guy at the counter informed me when I got my ticket. Someone got electrocuted. The train was still sitting there, he said, but it'd come around eventually. There's something intriguing about the vagueness of the accident. I didn't think to ask for details.

I've been absorbed in my surroundings, taking in the scuffed linoleum, the sheepish ticket man, the water fountain stuck on emitting a persistent humming stream permeating the space - *ommmmm*. For a change in perspective, I slide to the other side of the bench. Old gum. I'd been sitting on chewing gum. I hadn't noticed it before, but there it was as sure as the spring, a blackened smear of resinous tar, spread out to resemble the islands of Japan. I'd been sitting on it long enough to make it warm again and tacky, but it didn't stick to my jeans. Something is going my way.

There's a cache of artifacts on this bench. Someone named "The Boss" scrawled his name in Sharpie. There's a bunch of crap inside the space between the hardwood and the frame, in the gutter at the edges of the benches. A fun-size Snickers wrapper, a yellow rubberband, a single Frito curl, foil from three almond Kisses, a crumpled barcode sticker, an acorn, a tiny orthodontic rubberband for correcting overbite, an empty postage stamp-sized baggie that smells like a skunk's asshole -- someone had some high-quality pot. Nice.

There have been so many people on these benches, so many different types. They -- no, *we* -- we are all different and we are all the same.

Looking at the ceiling or the floor, some of us wait for the train, some wait for the bus; others wait for something else, perhaps anything.

The whole world's going to shit, that's what they say in the news. Most TV networks don't say it outright, they don't wear suits and plastic hair to say *the world is going to shit*. But it's clear that's what they mean. Japan got fucked up today. An earthquake and a tidal wave or a tsunami. We give disasters different names, but a tsunami is actually a type of tidal wave. A natural disaster super combo. And they're brought about by underground tectonic action, which is also the cause of earthquakes. We try to categorize singularities - wars, calamities, social strata - but it's all part of the same.

In Japan, are trains late too? Today definitely. What if that tide comes here, a wave of Change™ to wash away the world that stands around? The train tracks, the banks and the mansions, the corner store. Just left everyone standing naked in a puddle.

I feel bad for the Japanese, but I also envy them. Not the people trapped under the rubble, not rescuers looking for them. Not the family with one child missing, or the boy with the lost dog. Or the monk minding his own business sitting in the Zendo.

I envy the people in the margins, in the slums. Untouchables, subterraneans, the Ryukyu, Ainu, Zainichi, Burakumin.³

A friend of mine commented, once, “The Japanese are so damn racist.” “Race is a fickle concept,” I said. *It’s more complicated than that.* Most Americans don’t know this, but the Japanese have major social issues. Ours is of a particular flavor: America has outright subjugated people of darker skin since the nation’s birth. Their problems are slightly more subtle in Japan, veiled by a mythical image of ethnic homogeneity.

In Upward we read Genesis as literature. The adjective it gives the snake is “subtle.” Such is the knowledge of good and evil. This is the coming of the age of Aquarius. Slum rats can be kings.

From here, Japan feels like another world, indeed.

When will the tide hit Meriden? Who will rise to be the king of our new world? It might be Tall Boy. It could just as easily be me.

I am someone who traverses worlds. The rolling grass of universities, the cedars and the dust of my hometown, the static doldrums of the lower class.

³ Ryukyuan people: lived in an independent kingdom until it came under the control of Japan's Satsuma Domain in 1609.

Ainu: an indigenous group mainly living in the island of Hokkaido.

Zainichi Koreans: permanent residents of Japan, but hold Korean citizenship. Most came to Japan during the colonial period.

The Buraku people: a stigmatized group, “the invisible race,” who have endured bigotry for centuries. Considered socially inferior by much of Japanese society, though not held to be *racially* different. Emphasis mine.

(The Free Encyclopedia)

One summer, I bought a ticket to France and lived like a bum for a month -- a bum who can afford a constant stream of wine and cheese. I was anonymous, free of will, drunk. I've been to Spain. I've seen Mexico, Peru and Argentina. I've never been to Japan, but I've been to Israel. I've been a pizza boy. I've even been to jail. I've been fortunate.

These are the similarities between jail and the Amtrak station: I can buy a soda. The walls are made of cinder block. The figures of authority, my jailers and the ticket man, they talk to me from behind a glass window with a mesh of safety wire. They tell me what I need to know, barely, but keep the details in the dark. They both wear slightly uncomfortable polyester uniforms. They both would rather have different jobs.

They both suffer questions with seething impatience wrapped in a thin layer of compassion. A handwritten sign taped to the ticket window says, "NO BUS SCHEDULE INFORMATION HERE." In jail, I asked questions constantly:

"When can I get out of here?"

"You gotta post bond."

"When can I post bond?"

"You need to see the arbitrating judge. She sets the bond."

"When will that happen?"

"Tonight or tomorrow, or the next day. She's very busy and you'll have to wait."

“Can I have a shower?”

“No, but here’s a toothbrush.”

When I was in booking, right after the ride downtown but before they took my clothes away, I waited in a room with all the other collars. They started conversations with the same ease as Tall Boy and Soda Girl. But in jail, they also talked to me, even though the first thing they said was, “Kid what are you doing here, you look like you should be in school.” Indeed, but I got arrested. Also, it’s my summer break.

They knew I was different, but despite the socio-economic and incalculable metaphysical distance between us, we were all inside, all together, kin. These people were just like me but they were not me. Everything between us was different except for humanity. I understood and accepted that, and we understood and accepted each other, without judgment, like long lost brothers.

The biggest difference between us: I was the only first-timer.

I kept asking foolish questions, What’s happening, am I going to spend the night here?

Explaining myself, “It’s my first time here.” And it would be the last. The other folks, they knew the place. They told me, “Just wait it out. Soon enough you’ll know what’s going on.” Soon enough. My newfound brothers, perpetually in-and-out. This was their world, they live here all the time. I’m transient, just visiting.

When I was finally brought before the judge, cuffed in line with my new friends, she read everyone’s rap sheets. Someone had beat the shit out of his wife.

Someone else was writing hot checks. But most of us were there for minor crimes and misdemeanors. A high-school girl got busted with a heavy bag of pot. Someone else had three unpaid parking tickets. Someone got caught speeding with a half-gram pebble of hashish; he could have swallowed it and gotten off, but he didn't see it stuck in the fabric of his passenger seat. The cop saw. Someone else had made a left turn without signaling. In jail for that, I thought. He was a repeat offender. His turning lights were busted from when someone broke in to steal his CD player. How much do taxpayers give to keep non-signalers locked up?

Such are the crimes we sometimes say are victimless, these crimes more nuisance than malice. As for my crime, vagueness of details might be intriguing. Everyone is part of the system, some are inside, some outside. It's a dialectic, like yin and yang, like master and slave.

These are the differences between jail and the Amtrak station: Here, I can wear my own clothes. In jail, I could nap all day. Here, I need to pay attention lest I miss my ride.

There is no fresh air in jail. Here, I can leave whenever I want, fine and well. Nevertheless, I'm still waiting for my train.

The people from this world, bus people and jail people, world that smells like Lysol and/or stale cigarettes, beer foam, they might never indulge in the shades of pleasures of my world, a joint in the hills and valleys among towers, being a bum in France.

The joys and sorrows are of a different scale. We may yet change places, it's a distinct possibility. I don't know. I don't pretend to understand the vicissitudes of the universe. I'll move on, or find a place to stay; they may stay here, or find a way to move on. We'll keep moving forward, suffering and jubilating, until we reach the end of the cycle. We'll see each other at the crossroads. Until then, we'll be waiting. I'm still waiting.

Shopping for a Wristwatch at the Quantum Mall

Welcome to TIMESPACE. It's a happening place.

Yes, we're quite happening, in the sense that we perpetually exist. Everything exists, whether here or there, past or present. After all, time is subjective. The present of the dead becomes our past, our future is the present of our progeny.

Don't think about it too much or you'll get a headache. We're not a pharmacy.

Who says we need twenty-four hours per day? We have a watch with a half-moon face to indicate the light and darkness. We have one that indicates the position of the sun. Several models incorporate a millisecond hand, others split the day in sixty increments.

We have a few that tell the time in binary; base-two, base-ten, any base you'd like.

Some customers come in but don't buy anything; they realize they can live without a wristwatch. It's not

the end of the world. Time still passes in its cosmic increments. Nevertheless, it's good to be able to count on things like train schedules and television programs. It's nice to make a date with other people. Human interaction is the most important aspect of our lives, that's what we believe at TIMESPACE.

Social life is healthy. We nourish ourselves by interfacing, exchanging perspectives, cultivating taste and personality. There are so many ways to express yourself, in order to understand others and understand yourself, in terms of others and in terms of yourself. Please allow our friendly sales associates help you choose a model relative to your needs and preferences.

Come on in, we have a wide range to complement your style and character. We've even got some nifty ones that glow in the dark.

On Cattle, Butchery, Language and the Synthesis of World

We think in the language we speak.

Visualize a dense and swirling aether with infinite dimension. There is no distinction, no here or there. There is no language. Such divisions don't exist; there is only totality within singularity. The universe is past and present, everything and nothing, all at once.

The biological subfamily *Bovinae* belongs in the order *Artiodactyla* along with *Giraffidae* (giraffes), *Camelidae* (camels) and *Suidae* (pigs), but not *Equidae* (horses). *Artiodactyla*, also known as “even-toed ungulates” (ungulate: hoofed), support their weight by their third and fourth toes, unlike horses (“odd-toed ungulates”) who support their weight entirely by the third toe. Given this categorical distinction, *Artiodactyla* also excludes the order *Cetacea* (whales), although their DNA sequence indicates a common ancestor.

Cattle, the agricultural superstars of *Bovinae*, are used for food almost everywhere except for India and Nepal, where all bovids are considered sacred by Hindus. Cattle are raised for meat and dairy; they are also used as draft animals and

*The long nose cat is not like other cats.
She's a tough motherfucker, a bleach bone
beef jerky hard ass feline. She is a wanted cat.*

they yield various byproducts. It is estimated that there are 1.3 billion cattle on Earth.

There are 6.91 billion humans.

Quick math: 5.31 people for every cattle.

Although the list is complicated by the presence of hybrids (enabled by cattle's ability to interbreed with taxonomic relatives), there are over eight hundred breeds adapted for dairy and/or beef and/or draught.

The culinary name for meat from *Bovinae* is *beef*, except for when it comes from juvenile cattle (male⁴ calves of dairy breeds), in which case it's called *veal*.

Beef is first divided into *primal cuts*⁵, the pieces initially separated from the carcass during butchering. Beef carcasses are split along the vertical axis into *halves*, then across into *fore-* and *hindquarters*. In the *forequarter*, the *chuck* is a large cut immediately behind the neck. The *chuck* is cut into smaller pieces and yields bone-in steaks, roasts, and ground meat for hamburgers. The *rib* (rib), immediately behind the *chuck*, contains the ribeye steak, short ribs and prime. Below the *rib*, the *plate* also contains short ribs, the skirt steak, and tough fatty meat suitable only for grinding.

The *brisket* (chest) below the *chuck* is used for barbecue and deli meats such as

⁴ For cattle to give milk, they must first become pregnant. The resulting female offspring become the next generation of dairy cattle; the male offspring are sold to veal farms.

⁵ primal: a. belonging to the earliest stage; b. relating to the needs and behavior held to form the origins of emotional life.

*Deep inside the tall grass of a vacant lot,
she grows greasy, tough as rattlesnakes
and deer bones.*

corned beef and pastrami. The *shank* (shoulder) below the *brisket* is the toughest of the cuts, usually only used in stews.

In the *hindquarter*, the *round* (buttock) yields the round steak, top round and bottom round. The *loin*, just ahead of the *round*, yields three sub-primal cuts: the *short loin*, which yields the T-bone, porterhouse and filet mignon; the *sirloin*, which may be divided into top sirloin and bottom sirloin (including the tri-tip); and the *tenderloin*, which may be cut into fillet, tournedos and tenderloin steak.

Or it may be left attached, with the other sub-primal cuts that constitute *loin*. The tough and fatty *flank*, located near the rear *shank*, is usually ground or used for fajitas.

Primal cuts have different names in the UK. The fore *shank* is called *shin*, the rear *shank*, *leg*. The *sirloin* is called *rump*. The *chuck* is divided into *neck*, *blade* and *thick rib*.

Dutch primal cuts differ as well. The *shank* is called *shankle*; the *chuck* is wider and divided into *neck*, *brisket*, *chuck* and *rib*. The Dutch primal cuts also include *tongue*, which is categorized within *trimmings* in America and the UK.

Besides the separate cuts, beef has further designations: *Certified Angus Beef* is a legal brand-name owned by the American Angus Association referring to the Angus breed which originally came from Scotland. *Kobe beef* comes from Japan,

*Mama said the long nose cat ain't stray.
She said we shouldn't call her "long nose cat"
because she has a real name, she must.*

where it is hand-fed and hand-massaged to maximize fat and minimize stress. *Grass-fed* refers to the cattle's diet, as opposed to *grain fed*. *Organic beef* is produced without added hormones, pesticides or other chemicals.

Halal beef is certified to have been processed in accordance with Muslim dietary laws. *Kosher beef* is certified to have been processed in accordance with Jewish dietary laws.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) operates a beef grading program. *U.S. Prime* is highest in quality, fat and uniform marbling (intramuscular fat distribution) and is in limited supply. *U.S. Choice* has less fat and marbling than *Prime*. *U.S. Select* has far less fat than Prime and Choice, it is the lowest grade sold retail. Beyond that, there is *U.S. Standard* (foodservice operations), *U.S. Commercial* (low quality, produced from older animals), then *U.S. Utility*, *U.S. Cutter*, and *U.S. Canner*.

Beef may be cooked with dry heat, moist heat, cured, dried or eaten raw. Such options in preparation, with all their global variations, yield countless dishes with unique names. Gourmands would say a steak is best cooked rare or medium-rare to highlight the tenderness and flavor. A well-done steak is tough and dry, ruined, disrespectful to the cattle. When cooking ground beef, it's generally a good idea to cook at least to medium. A steak is an insulated cut (the inside has never been

*To catch a long nose cat, set out a trap with long nose cat bait.
Stale white bread with peanut butter, smoked salmon, sesame seeds.
I invented it myself.*

exposed), but a beef patty has been ground and churned and may contain the meat of many cattle, thus increasing chances of contamination.

Theoretically, all the aforementioned cuts may be applied to wild species of *Bovinae*. But when a lion eats a water buffalo, he doesn't know a *flank* from a *ribeye*.

Lions don't have butchers or symbolic language.

When our ancestral cavemen ate beef, they didn't have butchers either. But then again, they didn't have beef. They didn't have cows. Aurochs, the meaty beasts with horn and hoof documented on the walls of caves, were wild ancestors of domesticated cattle. The last recorded aurochs died in 1627.

Cattle did not originate as a term for bovine animals. It came from the Old French *catel*, which came from the Latin *caput*, meaning "head," originally designating *personal property*. The term *cow*, distinct from *cattle*, comes from the Anglo-Saxon *cū*, from the Common Indo-European *g^wōus*⁶.

After the cattle is chopped up in the abattoir, the skin goes to the tannery to become leather. The leather becomes shoes, wallets, and riding saddles. When all the animal is divided, when all that's left is garbage cuts and cartilage, the remnants of the carcass are boiled into a waxy tallow.

⁶ compare to Persian *Gāv*, Sanskrit *go*, Welsh *buwch*.

*Our baby Siamese is not allowed outside. She perches on the window
gazing at the flowers, grass and butterflies,
wondering at all the wondrous things outside.*

In the year 2003, scientists mapped the human genome. Cattle was the first livestock to have its genome mapped, only six years later. Just as we know ours, now we know the cow's constituent parts. Not just the proteins, enzymes, hormones and chemicals that make it go, but the plans, the blueprints, the master code.

Steak, shoes, saddles, wallets, soap, candles, bird feed. Proteins, enzymes, amino acids, DNA. Adenine, thymine, cytosine, guanine. The cattle: Chopped up, processed, turned into a thousand products, rendered into abstraction.

Where is the striding *Bovinae*, exuding body heat, suckling at its mother's teat, chewing its cud, living on the ranch. It is lost in time with the aurochs. We have lost sight. The cow is our imagination. The cow is a product. The cow is our slave. The cow is holy.

I checked my long nose cat trap. The bait was gone, eaten, but inside was only a squirrel, foaming at the mouth, grappling with the wire mesh enclosure.

The Art and Language of Sport

The players Landa and Defreer were the greatest Masters who ever held the racquet. No player ever came close enough to challenge either of them.

The Masters exchanged World Championships several times throughout their careers. Each time they met on the court, it was as if the game was reborn. Each match between the Masters was unprecedented.

The Masters never thought about the racquet, the tightness of their sneakers, the material wound around their handles, the grippy plastic and the girth of grips, the rubber damper tucked between the strings to soak up stray vibrations, the perfect cadence of a stroke, the angle of impact, the maximum extension of their swing before they scratch the court, smack the net, make a fault.

They did not practice ground strokes, for they already defined them.

Landa popularized the technique known as a “slice”; to the Masters that term would be a vague approximation of subtleties and nuances of explosive power harnessed with finesse. A vast world of notions, a world incomprehensible to spectators.

But with their strokes and volleys, pocks and pings, they conversed with each other.

They danced duets in the semantic court.

Concrete, grass, and clay, they exhausted every surface of the sport. So when they met for their last match, the Ultimate World Championship, they played on a court submerged one inch below the sea. On a platform off the coast, running in waterproof sneakers, they shattered the limits of the system. An explosive punctuation at the end of their careers. The spectators watched from a glass-walled chamber underneath.

Neither of them took students, so when they died the practice passed away with them. Landa and Defreer are long since dead.

There are still clubs where devoted practitioners keep playing, meditating on the ground strokes, contemplating competition and technique. Some claim to know the language of the Masters, the game that brought insanity, irresponsibility. But nobody will ever know for certain.