

JOE ARMS

Naturally Uncomfortable

I stop sleeping at 9:00 am. Only because that's when I've programmed the small yet deafening plastic machine to flash and shriek until I'm coerced into slapping it silent. Every day it does this—its unnatural, daily routine. And every day I roll over to slap it silent and check a smaller, palm-sized, plastic machine for the day's weather reports. On second thought, maybe it's aluminum, or metal, or, more likely, a Frankenstein-esque creation. Whatever its composition, after a few swipes of my finger, I've now collected enough data to predict how the day's weather will behave.

The sun will break through the clouds just before midday, and there it will be unthreatened until it has left for the other side of the globe. During its time in my virgin sky, it will bully our occupied Earth with heat wave after relentless heat wave. I make the decision to clothe myself in a light cotton shirt and breezy boardshorts when I go out today.

I turn the brass shower handle from west to east, and rain falls from above. The water is bone-numbingly cold at first, but soon arrives at the temperature I've chosen. I let the wet flow from the crest of my head downward, where it picks up speed at my neck. Through the miniscule valleys of my skin, over my grown and sprouting hairs, and under my rooted feet, it flows.

I squeeze some ammonium lauryl sulfate, cocamidopropyl betaine and sodium chloride from a bottle named Garnier Fructis. The ooze drips from the overturned bottle with such viscosity that I wonder how it is supposed to cleanse me. The question lingers for a moment, then follows the shampoo bubbles down the drain.

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The world's most widely consumed psychoactive drug is caffeine. The Wikipedia website tells me that from all of the data it has collected, it has learned that caffeine is a biocide that kills some beings, yet enhances others. And I routinely choose to abuse it every morning along with ninety percent of the adults in North America. This morning is no different, and after I commit my abuse, I try to conceive a justification for consuming an empty donut. Failing, I instinctively consume one anyway as I head out the door.

With a practiced flick of my wrist, I send gasoline into the engine of my motorized, horseless carriage and ignite a force that will propel me to whichever location I wish to go. And I wish to go to the Mines of Spain, a manufactured nature center in my hometown of Dubuque, Iowa. I travel thirty miles per hour, barely moving, down the recently asphalted avenue towards my destination.

At a stop sign, next to a branch of bank that I entrust to shelter my green-colored gold, I notice my alarm clock's older relation displayed underneath the bank's masthead, forcing the time and temperature into every conscious passerby. The L.E.D. lights of the sign are currently reading ninety-two degrees, and I start to sweat, either because of the lit sign or because of the sun. This sweat is not a process that I've chosen to do. I've been forced. As a counter measure, I force the climate of my car to lower the temperature to seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit, effectively canceling out the energy radiating from the sun and sign. I like being comfortable.

There is a dog on a porch. There is a dog on a porch lying down with eyes open but not seeing, only watching. He likes to be comfortable.

There is me in a car. There is me in a car sitting down with eyes open but not watching, only seeing. I like to be comfortable.

However, it's difficult when all I see are people crashing their cars because they were only watching. They liked to be comfortable.

I like to be comfortable, but I cannot be when I am traveling along the same roads used by bodies whose minds have traveled so far from them that they've been left blind. Unable to see their surroundings, they're forced to react to filtered, visual data that has the potential to steer the body into a broken state of being. Bodies do not see; they only watch.

After too long I realize that my body has survived the concrete and steel world and has reunited with me at the land of

wood and leaf and life. My body inhales oxygen, and I exhale all pollutants from the city. I like to be comfortable.

In the few steps I've taken from my car, which is now resting between two predetermined, carefully yellowed lines, I've been told three things by painted and hung slabs of dead wood.

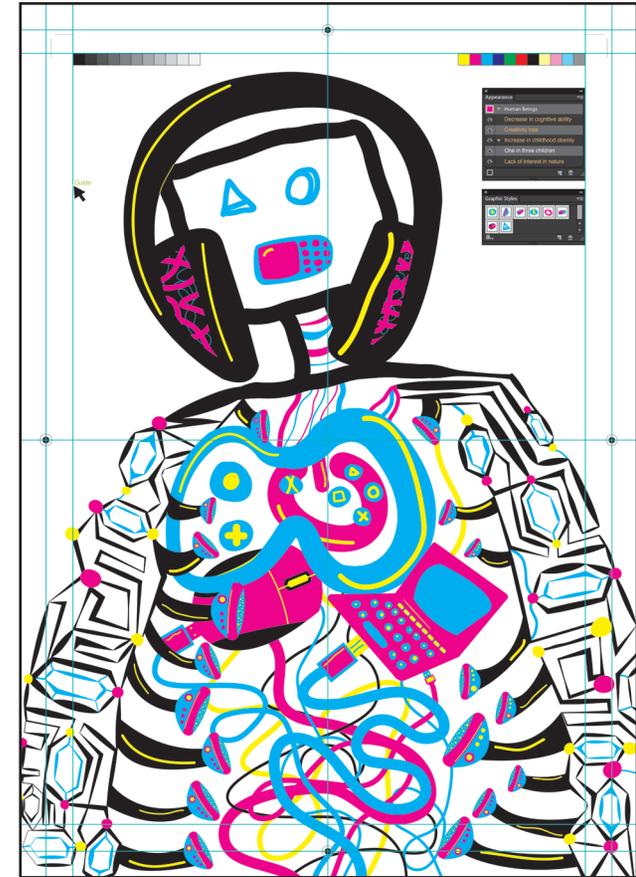
The first slab informs me that I am currently occupying space within a designated wildlife management area. I believe the first slab is implying that I must tame my behavior in respect to the effort that has been given to manage the wildlife, an effort that modifies the wildlife, a modification that contradicts the exact name of the area being managed. The wildlife is no longer wild; it has been subdued, broken and domesticated. Like me, it has been cultivated to be tame.

The second painted and hung slab prohibits the use of firearms. Without hesitation, I check the limbs I have attached to my torso for burning flames. Finding none, I realize that the slab painter naturally meant that portable piece of steel, powder, and projectile. I check my hip and find not steel, powder, nor projectile, but skin, meat, and blood. I wonder why the slab painter doesn't choose to paint and hang copies of this slab in the city where firearms can naturally be found.

The final slab tells me that no machine is allowed onto the off-road trails of the managed wildlife area. My stride breaks before entering the trails. Memories of my mornings magnify. I stop sleeping every morning at 9:00 like clockwork. Every day I disperse water over valleys and sprouts like an automated sprinkler. I consume caffeine for fuel like a car consumes gasoline.

And then my heart beats a little faster as I watch a field mouse dart across the off-road trail, and I see my body take another comfortable breath.

FAITH BRITT



Human Dependence on Technology
digital