

My suggestion to my ghostwriter for my artist statement is “Write a story and make it funny, somewhere between Mel Brooks and Brooks & Dunn.” He neither laughed nor wrote that down. I fired him, so it’s back to Craigslist. I wasn’t into his CV, anyway. Who puts down their creative-writing MFA thesis on their list of published works? It took me another listing, a few days, and tons of back and forth with applicants before I hired this great woman, Gwen.

She parked in the driveway, blocking my car in, and asked me to write down my goals. I waffled, and she suggested we meditate, “To loosen up the gray matter, and let’s get the head and the heart really yammering at each other!” We meditated. Then I wrote down my goals. One of my goals is to have more varieties of cars in *Grand Theft Auto*. Every time I see another SUV on screen, I know it’s just gonna be more SUVs, and I’m in a loop. It breaks immersion. She asked me what I want to be immersed in. She asked me about my favorite feelings. I was confused by this question and excused myself to the loo in order to check my email and to read what I had actually placed an ad for.

I came out, and she asked me to meditate again. I felt really great after both the visioning exercises and meditation, though I felt some body discomfort at the top of the sacrum, in my left trapezius, between my scapula and thorax 4, and in my fingertips (Parts I & II). If there’s one thing I’ve learned about meditation—and I’ve done it twice now—it’s that it’s not comfortable.

I wasn’t sure I was going to get an artist statement out of this deal. She had been at my home for three hours already. Also we still hadn’t discussed money. I didn’t know what her rates were going to be, and I loathe discussions about money and dislike sharing my anxiety about money with others.

When I came back out, she asked me again about my feelings. I told her I had seen a lunar eclipse the other night—a blood moon! I described how I had been buying houses near the Atlanta airport and rehabbing them. I buy along the busiest flight paths, so the houses repeatedly experience plane shadows and darken. I call them Eclipse Houses and soundproof them for solitude and put in tons of skylights so you can really feel the

shadow. I also feel like the ATL is a good bet to cash in on that *Walking-Dead* market when the plague hits. People are going to want to be close to the CDC unless, of course, they do like they did with AIDS and blame it on us.

Gwen asked me if I had thought about migratory patterns and sky maps when I began this project. I said, “What I know about maps could fit on a postage stamp depicting a map, on a postage stamp.” She explained computational mapping and salmon runs. She said a friend had seen a salmon run in Haines, Alaska—or near there—and how a person could walk across the river on the fishes’ backs. She talked about how the salmon were shoulder-to-shoulder like a never-ending rugby scrum and how the bears grab the salmon, eat the brains, eat the roe, and toss them over their shoulders as if trunk rummaging for protein. Salmon, brains, roe, next. American bald eagles, being lazy-ass scavengers, saunter over and eat the rest of the brainless, eggless carcass. They should have a GIF of that on the back of the dollar bill: a fat old raptor in sweatpants hooked up to a home dialysis machine, holding a *DualShock 4* controller in one hand and a salvaged salmon in the other.

I described much of my art to Gwen as “digital” and used the phrase “the technological sublime” to describe *Wikipedia* and *IMDB* as the God Head, the way earlier generations might refer back to Suetonius or Marlowe or Merlin and Percival. She asked me to describe a technological experience equal to sitting next to a bear eating salmon brain. I began to realize we weren’t discussing art.

We meditated again, and I realized I need to stretch more. My back still felt tight. But this time Gwen told me that when I begin to lose my breath, to pretend there’s a puppy leash on my thoughts and to gently puppy pull my thoughts back to my breath and look at the back of my eyes, which should remain visually static.

When we finished—I’ve now meditated four times today, four times more than I had in my life—Gwen asked me to describe an experience in the digital world that’s the same as meditation. I mentioned going down a Cockney rhyming slang K-Hole while on ketamine. Pretty meta. In fact, I’m pretty sure I was wearing a Metta World Peace jersey. (My World B. Free throwback was in the wash.) She said drugs don’t count and

that “Our aim isn’t dissociation but experience. One promotes apathy, and one promotes empathy.” I jokingly said, “Yeah? Which is which?” Haha. She frowned and stared at me.

I feigned some GI problems, went into the bathroom, and cried a little bit. I ran the water to shield the sniffles. I felt guilty for running the water right down the drain. It made me feel the same way as when I use a straw and I know they made it and shipped it and packaged it and packaged it inside of a larger package, which was inside an even larger carton, which was on a pallet covered in plastic to hold it all together so that it could make it over from China, or wherever, in a container on a container ship. And now I’ve unwrapped it, and I’m going to use it once, and it will go right in the landfill after the busser clears it and the dishwasher takes it to the dumpster; the sanitation professional takes it to way station, where it then goes on to the landfill, where the polyethylene corn syrup suction device has a half life of about forty-eight years—or about as long as a mature male lake sturgeon lives. This made me cry more. I cleaned up, flushed, wiped my face, and turned off the water. I hadn’t cried since I found out my mom’s dog died, and that was years and years ago.

Gwen suggested a walk. I think she knew I was crying, even though I had fake flushed twice—more water waste. As we walked, she named many trees in English and Latin. She pointed out what was edible: service berries, sedum, sorrel, purslane, sidewalk salad. She pointed out a bee and identified many birdcalls and could whistle some back. She didn’t do any of this in a show offy way. She asked if I had brought my phone. She had suggested I wouldn’t need it on the walk. I said yes, “I have it,” somewhat sheepish, somewhat defiant, and said I needed it for the time. I didn’t have a watch.

She asked me to read a QR code on a tree. I didn’t see any code, but I still looked for some hidden pattern that would show the alignment targets, those large outer squares. She took my phone. It also didn’t work for her, and she said, “Oh, right, because trees have 32 million times more information than a Toyota produced 2-D barcode.” She asked me if I had backed up my phone recently. I lied and said yes, and she dropped my phone down the sewer. Gwen said there was a QR code in the sewer and that the phone would likely swim home through the sewer up the toilet like a migrating,

homesick, horny salmon. “If a bee or a butterfly or a dumb old Canadian goose can find its way home then certainly a \$429 smart phone (two-year plan from Best Buy) with geo-located military grade mapping capabilities and intimate relationships with orbiting satellites should be able to.