Anja recovered from her flu slowly. For a week, she hadn't been able to keep anything down except crackers, lemon-lime soda, and some apple bits -- nor did she want to. Her appetite was the last part of health to return, and she could physically feel it flowing back into her body, as part of a slow, delicious process of convalescence. She had missed five opportunities for restaurant reviews. She had a backlog. But she ignored her plans and just walked ravenously down the street, following a scent of Asian oil. The pot stickers she ate from the tiny take-out joint were the best food she had tried in years: crispy and doughy, glistening with pepper and sesame essences, replete with soft, spiced pork, topped with a bitingly salty sauce.

Over the next week, each new gourmet meal seemed less pleasant than the last, and Anja found herself dreaming of the pot stickers. She bought two helpings, bit into them, and found that they were gluey, oniony masses that tasted of stale MSG.

Anja applied the scientific method. She spent 24 hours on nothing but white bread and water, keeping herself unhungry but letting her taste buds rest. The next day, the pot stickers tasted delicious; not as transcendent as the first time, but delightfully complex and rich.

The magazine was getting impatient, but Anja wanted to generalize her hypothesis.

After a day of wearing earplugs, she attended a concert, and Mozart's first symphony had never sounded so intensely sweet, so articulate, so intense that she couldn't keep still in her seat.

After a week of sunglasses and gray interiors, the Pop Art retrospective literally popped off the wall, floated in front of her in three or four dimensions, dazzled her retinas like visual Tabasco. She hasn't published anything for months now, but they say she's working on the ultimate hedonist's guide to sensory delight.

They say she's moved to a small, windowless apartment, emerging only at night for brief forays to buy bread, wearing gray sweats and gloves, savoring the anticipation behind her sunglasses.
Thus we see that in the state of silence, before any word is uttered either externally or within, all things are equally present and equally absent to the mind. In an allness of fullness (omnitaude plenitatis) that equates formally to the Chaos of Hesiod or the state of the void before the divine Word, each entity is both one and many simultaneously, both now and at other times, equally being and becoming and nonbeing.

The silent mind neither judges nor selects nor accepts nor rejects. Thus Nicenor the Scythian has written that for beasts, the entire world is present all at once.

Now let the observer form a word either in monologue, spoken or silent, or in a dialogue with an interlocutor. The selection of this word is at the same time the rejection of nearly all elements, aspects, facets, and ingredients of the thing named. Thus the name, this mere breath, has the destructive power of a god.

As Alfarabi writes, not without justice, for every poem created there are ten thousand destroyed. For every speech written there are ten thousand silenced. For every song sung, there are ten thousand condemned to oblivion. "Ten thousand" here signifies "uncountably many."

Thus, to speak is to replace omnitude with singularity, fullness with punctuality, equality with necessarily unjust emphasis. To speak many words is merely to add points to a point, which Euclid says cannot form a plenum, nor a plane, nor a line, nor even a line segment, no matter how brief. To speak many words in many languages is merely to attempt to paint a point in many colors, or to attempt to build a painting of many colors out of single points.

We may conclude that all arguments are inconclusive, that all qualities are misrepresentations, and that error was introduced into the world with the first attempt to state the truth. The original sin of our first father was not his consumption of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but his use of the words that had been given to him by God not to use, but rather as a warning that he failed to understand. And the builders of the tower of Babel were given many tongues not to hinder their speech, but to multiply it so that they would be further burdened with the monstrosity of language.
21. Entrails

They divined by examining entrails.

Is it so absurd? The innards of a living thing are condensed, distorted mirrors of the world. They require their own expertise in reading:

Lungs signify air, gills signify water.
The blood pressure of an organism reflects the pressure of its environment.
The presence of eyes indicates light, the presence of ears indicates sound.

Our environment, our events, the physical and chemical laws of our universe are inscribed inside our bodies, from mitochondria to the femur.

*Your body, then, will be written in the body.* The body can signify the world even in the absence of that world. Future alien explorers will exhume our remains and infer the ecological history of our planet. Our bodies die when they can no longer be written upon by the world, but they survive as texts composed in organic hieroglyphics.

These were the semi-coherent notes Dr. Felsen jotted as he was developing the theory we now know so well: that this world itself, the universe as we know and can know it, is itself a hieroglyph of a larger world; that that superworld has been destroyed, leaving our own universe in a state of entropic decay, but that **those** characteristics of the superworld can be reconstructed by the Readers who understand the text of the cosmos we see. The laws of physics are themselves only echoes and symbols of higher, vanished laws. The trillion suns are stigmata that speak of events and objects elsewhere, elsewhere.

Those were the tentative conclusions expressed by the commission investigating the death of Felsen and the subsequent rise of the so-called Felsen Hypothesis. Little did the commission know that Felsenism was to become a dominant paradigm, and that Reading would replace quantification as the primary mode of scientific inquiry, a kind of inquiry that harmonized with religion and provided a concrete method of searching for the **deus absconditus**.

After 78 years, the Global Reader Collective has reached consensus. We have established the history and laws of the superworld.

Listen.
22. Blindsight is 20/20

With the success of self-driving cars, the next step was obvious: self-ambulatory bodies.

As I liked to point out, consciousness is an unnecessary luxury for most organisms. Within our own digestive tract, trillions of bacteria survive, reproduce, and perform essential functions, exquisitely attuned to our own needs and theirs, without the slightest hint of awareness or the capacity for it. Insects may theoretically be capable of certain sensations, but the assumption that they are aware of such sensations is unnecessary and unwarranted. They do a broad range of sophisticated work without clear evidence of consciousness.

I multiplied the examples: plants, of course, and the organs of our bodies, with the exception of certain regions of the brain, for certain periods of the day. Phenomena such as hypnosis and blindsight showed that awareness was much less necessary in our own lives than we usually assumed.

All we needed was the right implanted hardware and software.

Within five years we were watching Bella, the lobotomized dog, capering around a field, chasing frisbees, and eating, thanks to the AutoPilot 3000.

There was one sure way to promote the next step in the project: I myself volunteered to be the human test case. No lobotomy, of course, but a first-hand report on what it would be like to allow AutoPilot to steer my body while I paid no attention.

Easier said than done. Even after extensive conditioning in controlled environments, I couldn't easily get over the habit of watching where I was going as I walked down a busy sidewalk. But science demanded it. To avoid deliberate or inadvertent cheating, the AutoPilot was programmed with a destination unknown to me. I forced myself to focus on the music in my earbuds, keeping my eyes open but not deliberately responding to what I saw. If I exerted voluntary control -- which was, of course, possible at all times -- the experiment would fail. If my body didn't topple over, it would at least fail to reach the destination. With an effort of sheer abstention, I allowed my body to proceed through the streets of Manhattan until I reached a brownstone, unfamiliar to me. A welcoming party of researchers and reporters burst happily from the front door, and I resumed conscious control with a wide grin.

We estimated that 75% of human activities could be performed without consciousness, if only AutoPilot was suitably programmed and trained. The liberation of human potential would be vast: freed from the nuisance of self-observation, we could engage in entertainment, conversation, education, and more. For those who didn't like to work out, the body could now exercise itself -- you could even turn off the sensations of effort and discomfort -- while you relaxed, napped, or watched a show. Almost all forms of manual labor could be body-automated.

Of course, that was an underestimate, and once the AutoPilot trend took off, we discovered that nearly all of our activities -- politics, academia, entertainment, science -- required little or no contributions from our consciousness.

Now my freedom is complete. I just wonder two things. How do I turn off my consciousness for good, while allowing my body to keep performing its useful roles in society? And how many of the people around me have already discovered how to pull that off?