DEMYSTIFICATION PROCESS

arl was ready to quit his internship and chuck his hard-earned opportunity right into the trash.

After only a couple of months at the show, he felt like he had sunk into a deep stupor and that everything life-giving in him was leaking away and being replaced by bile and vitriol.

He drew a diagram in his notebook that represented his mental state from Monday through Friday, a rhythm he bitterly described to those who would listen as, "The Cycle of Futility."A

He didn't know what to do. Should he quit and leave Washington D.C. and go home? Or move elsewhere like New York City?

Carl had told himself that he didn't want to move to a big city until he felt like he was being beckoned. He didn't want to be one of those people who just show up and quietly plead for recognition while working a menial day job.

Carl firmly believed in his own fledgling importance and he wanted the city to want him.

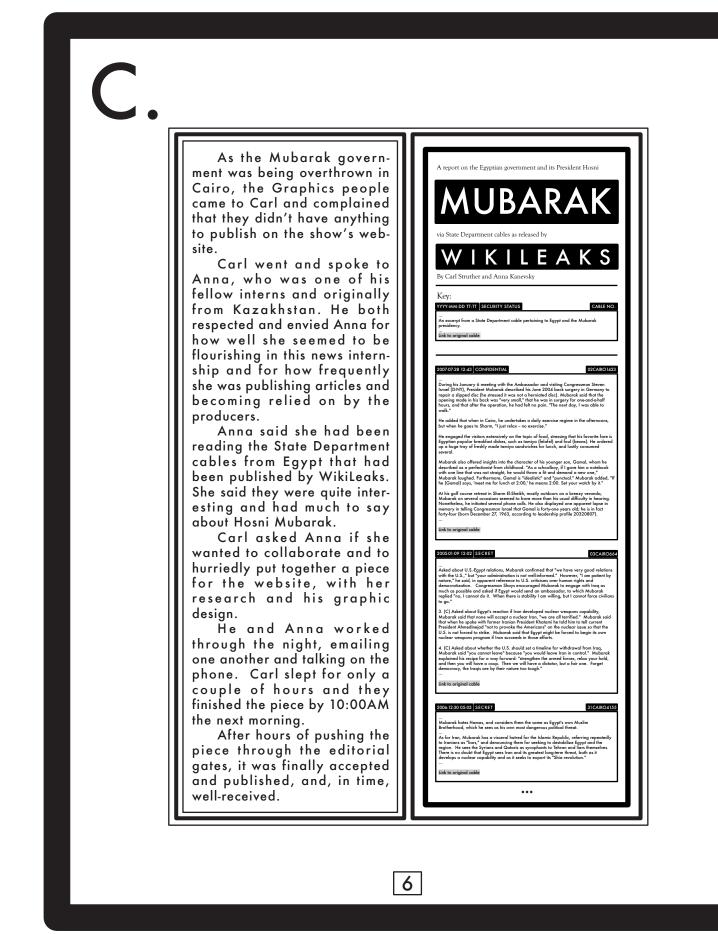
He decided to try to speak to his boss^B, Zachary, who was three years older than he was.



The night before talking to his boss, Carl had an idea to change his internship duties such that it would be more enjoyable for him and more productive for the show.

As he laid in his bed and dug out the details, Carl felt hopeful. Maybe it was arrogant to demand a change in his job, but he felt he had a strong argument and a solid compromise in his hands.

The idea was for Carl to switch from being a Broadcast intern to a Graphics intern. He had already helped the Graphics people with one project, which had been a suc-



Despite sitting across from him, Carl wrote an email to Zachary about the change in duties. He felt confident and good as he sent the petition.

"Short answer's no," Zachary quickly responded. Carl could apply for an internship with Graphics only after he finished his sixmonth term with Broadcast.

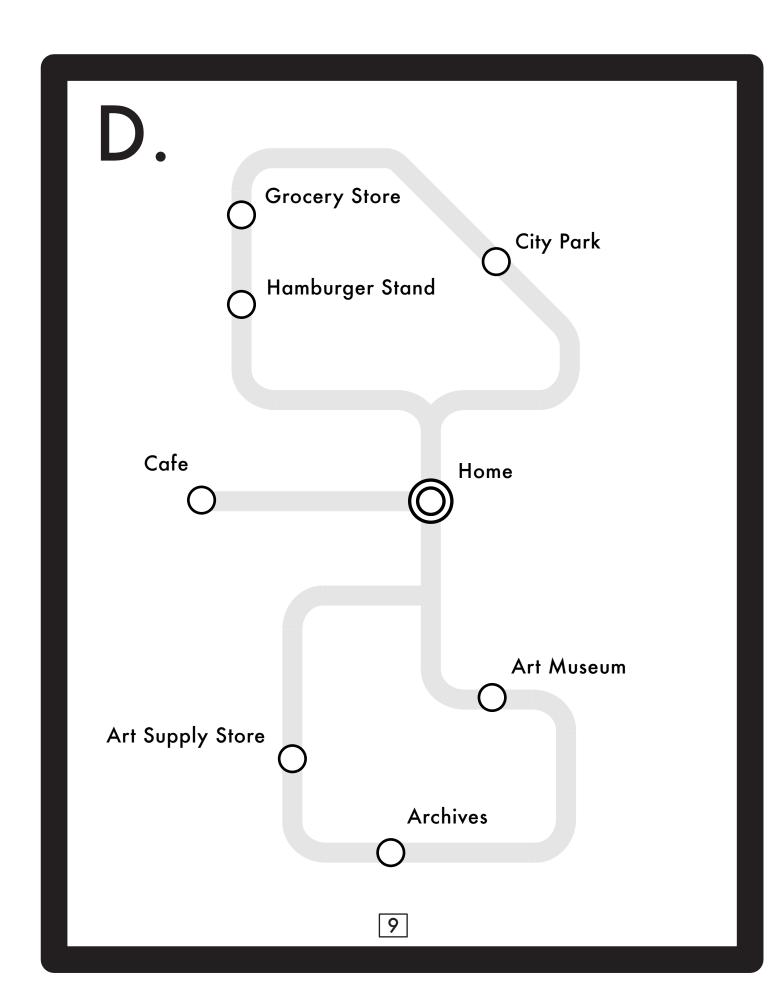
It seemed to Carl like his boss, without moving from his desk, without a glance, had just slapped him across the face for this attempt at impudence.

Maybe Carl deserved it, but it still felt cruel and spiteful.

Carl sent another email to Zachary, apologizing and saying he hadn't been "trying to jump ship or anything like that." A few days later, during a quiet Friday afternoon, Carl

bumped into Zachary in the canteen. Carl desperately wanted to tell him that he was suffering inside and feeling unwell.

But Carl said nothing. He told Zachary his plans for the weekend, and that was it. To reveal to his boss that he was struggling felt to Carl like it would be shameful and a failure, so he shut up and kept everything to himself.



That Saturday morning, Carl visited the National Portrait Gallery/American Art Museum.

Looking at the works^E there made him feel like his levees had burst. His head was a torrent of visions and thoughts and memories that had become clogged by the endless data of the office.

This surge felt terrific and it felt like life. Carl had to sit down and clutch his forehead and not look at anything for fear of being overloaded

He took out his notebook and filled page after page with questions and ideas and observations.

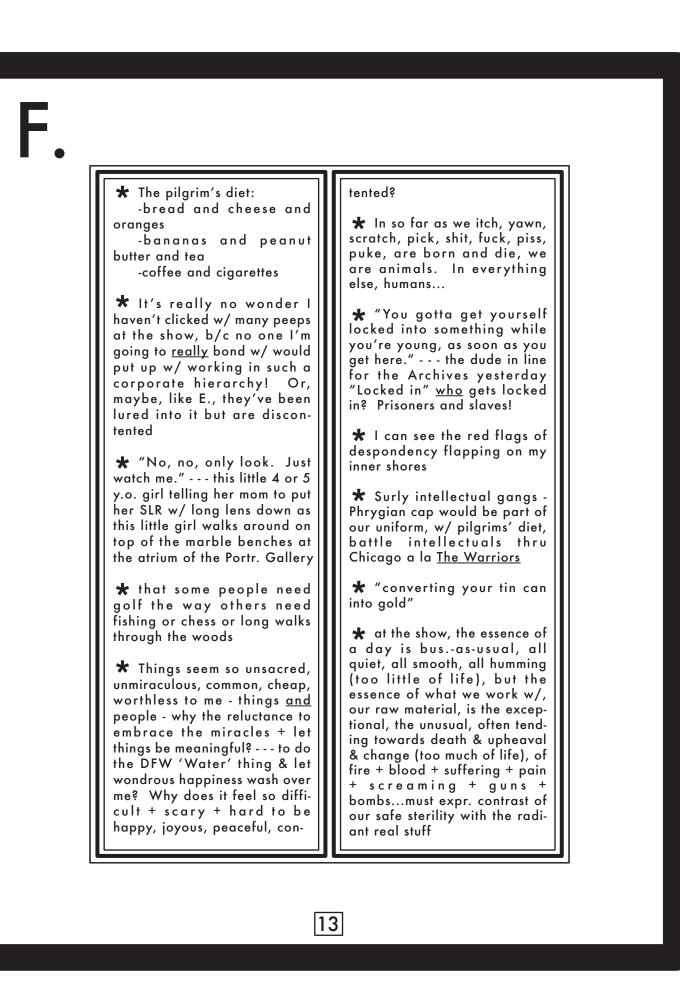
E.		
Carl first went through the American Art section of the museum. He stared for a while at a pair of Stuart Davis paintings that were black and white and red and green. He felt that Davis' paintings were a lot like Jean-Michel Basquiat's, in that both of them made these soupy, spaghettied, abstract works but both of them put in language and images that you could just barely discern, and looking at these paintings was like seeing the vaguely mixed-up and messy contents of one's mind splattered onto a canvas. Carl went into a side room and saw an enormous Thomas Hart Benton work called, "Achelous and Hercules." The various people and plants and animals in the scene looked like the members of one rippling and robust body, and that spirit was an American way of being that hardly existed anymore today, one that was tough and quiet and close to the earth. For as much as that way of life, which was that of Carl's grandparents and great-grandparents, seemed naive or repressive or brutal, it was also a way of life that was beautifully simple, that didn't spend itself in the effete and pathetic and neurotic way that contemporary American consumers spend themselves. Carl thought our ancestors would be embarrassed at how weak and dissipated we've become, how frightened, how isolated from nature. The spirit in this painting was the common life in American sould be embarrassed at how weak and dissipated we've generations ago, and now nost Americans would be horrified to have to chop wood for heat or to ride a horse for transportation or to slaughter an animal for sustenance. The opposite of this Benton painting was one nearby by Edward Hopper called, "Cape Cod Morning." It showed a woman in a dress leaning forward and looking out of a bay window in her home. She is alone and there are only trees and grasses and sky beyond her house. That indoor and enclosed solitude is one that Carl recognized immediately and felt he knew	reminded Carl of what David Foster Wallace said in a college commencement speech about how the American economy has given us tremendous new leisure and freedoms, the freedom to be "lords of our own tiny, skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the center of all creation." Carl walked down the hall to the Portrait Gallery part of the building. He saw many famous portraits that he'd seen before a hundred times in text books and on television shows and that felt deeply impressed onto his consciousness. There was Benjamin Frankin. There was Frederick Douglass. There was Benjamin Frankin. There was Frederick Douglass. There was Benjamin Frankin. There was Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. There was John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. There was Samuel Clemens and Thomas Edison. Carl walked downstairs to the contemporary portraits. There was David Lynch and Cormac McCarthy. There was Andre Agassi and Michael Jordan. There was Barack Obama. Carl needed to take a break and walked into what looked like a big open space in the courtyard of the building. It was a sprawling atrium covered with a wavy glass roof. Built into the floor were shallow reflecting ponds and planters containing ficus trees and olive trees. There were only a dozen people there, spread out at tables and benches. The atrium was hushed like a library, not just because everyone was mostly quiet and working or looking around, but because the air was like a sponge that absorbed sound, and the roof and walls kept out all the noise from the street. The only time Carl had felt such tangible peace in a big city before was while sitting in a church, but churches were always still noisy in their own ideological ways. This courtyard was built as if by a culture that had peaceably resigned itself to a life without God and a life wi	He wanted to look around a little bit more before leaving. He went through the Presidents' portrait gallery, which he found didn't make him feel very much except dubious pride at having noticed that, like himself, almost all of the Presidents had blue eyes. Carl then went to the first floor to go through the Folk Art section. He entered the west wing of the museum, turned a corner, and was knocked off his horse. He saw in a large alcove James Hampton's sculpture, "The Throne of the Third Heaven Nations' Millennium General Assembly." As Carl was sitting down and looking at the sculpture, he never heard so many people gasp at an art museum before. Carl read about Hampton's quiet, lonely life in Washington D.C., working as a janitor and assembling the throne with old metallic junk in a rented garage over a fourteen-year period, until his death. Carl's head once again exploded. Hampton seemed just like the Chicago artist Henry Darger, who had also been a prolific recluse. While Carl realized there was something deeply humane and transcendental in creating the kind of weird and enormous and complex things that they created. And to do so in obscurity made it all the more interesting and rich, as well as solipsistically horrifying. Hampton's throne was so uncanny, like something from a dream that is constructed on a familiar archetype but was yet, in its details, strange and mutated and completely its own thing. Carl finally stood up and felt like he needed to rest his eyes and get some fresh air. He reclaimed his backpack, left the museum, and stepped into the sunlight. How mazing that this place was free and so close to his apartment! It was like he could just walk right into it, like it belonged to him. Carl shook his head in wonder, checked his watch and, feeling like he was deeply and soundly alive for

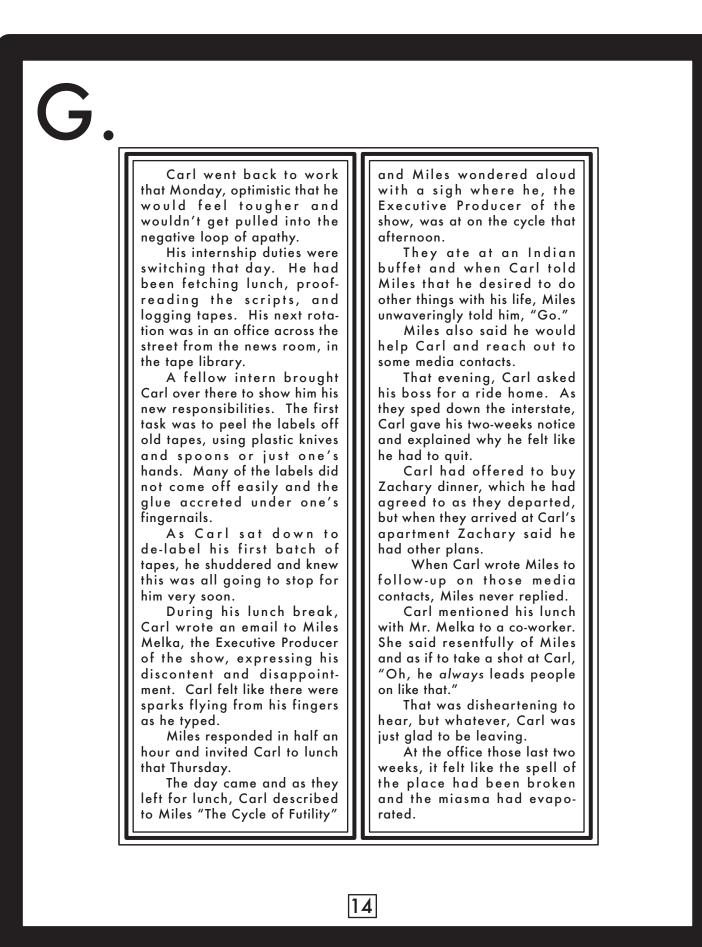
Carl visited other museums on Sunday and walked for miles through the capital, stopping to take pictures, to eat a cheeseburger, to drink a latte, to shine a strong beam of light on all the stuff^F in his head and to record what he observed.

It was a warm spring day and the first blossoms were appearing and Carl felt like he could breathe.

to work on Monday^G, he would be resilient and these good feelings would keep the office miasma from seeping into his blood and that he would not decide to quit after all...

He hoped that, upon returning





About having decided to so abruptly quit his internship, Carl's parents had little to say. They had already planned a

trip to Washington for the weekend after Carl's last day of work and would now drive him back home.

Once his parents' visit was over, Carl packed up, moved out, and got into their minivan.

He wondered if the question marks^H of his future would grow into a fruit that was sweet or a fruit that was bitter, and he wondered when that fruit would fall from the branch and return to the dust from which it came.

