

1장.
순환 고리, 장애인 경사로, 파일 검색—시간 도둑
Chapter 1.
A Feedback Loop, Handicap Access Ramps and File Browsing—The Time Thief
쉬 shhh
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1999. The year before the millennium. He was a quote, unquote, junior architect. His name was Henry An. Fresh out of school. Ready for this thing called the world. Ready for whatever this thing called the world would want him to be. Really. Anything. He had found a job. An architecture firm. It was a decent firm. Unglamorous, perhaps spectacularly unglamorous. A decent firm but definitely not the kind where people lined up to join. This firm mostly worked on education sector projects. Mostly renovations of elementary or junior high schools in the San Francisco bay area. They also did large transportation projects. Sometimes large BART(Bay Area Rapid Transit) stations. Mostly renovations of such stations but in some special cases, new BART stations were actually designed and developed there. The job for sure could have been worse. But not by much. Spectacularly unglamorous.

A friend of his had recommended him to this job. This friend had previously been an intern at this firm. And when leaving this internship, recommended his replacement. Thus, the hiring process was extremely casual. The interview was with one principal. This principal took a quick look at the portfolio. Asked a couple attitude questions. Shook his hand and he got the job.

The first three months were officially an internship type of position consisting of extremely menial tasks. Sometimes these tasks had absolutely nothing to do with architecture. But this was his first gig. His first job and his first regular paycheck. A paycheck that actually felt like it could eventually go up over time. A salary that actually could go up. A place with actually some kind of future. Exciting. For those first three months, very exciting. But such excitement lasted for just about that long. Three months exactly. That was about it. Again, for sure not the most desirable job. Out of thousands of architecture firms in the San Francisco bay area, this might be one of the last places any recent graduate would want to go. Spectacularly unglamorous. For sure.

The firm was quite mixed in terms of racial/ethnic diversity. Although most of the principals were white/caucasian, the staff was fairly diverse. Ethiopia. South Korea. Brazil. Japan. This was Oakland. This was the late 1990s. This was the East Bay. This was about as diverse as you could get. Lots of minorities. From everywhere. Henry An was also technically a minority. Although when speaking to him on the phone, one could sense very little of the quote, unquote majority/minority dichotomy. He spoke English well. He spoke English perfectly. He was born in the States.

And so began a good two years of steady employment. Every morning, he commuted, he arrived, he began work. He was not necessarily always on time. Still fresh out of college with college sleeping habits, and just like large babies, still needed some sleep, whether he would admit it or not. But he arrived and was for the most part, always ready to go. For these first several months, he was pumped. Like a balloon. Ready to go. Ready for anything. But this readiness found no friends. This readiness found no outlet. It was what one might call a feedback loop. He soon found this place to be where the start, pretty much, was like the end. And the end was pretty much like the start. Everyday. Everyday became the same. Everyday, became one. Endless. Cycle.

Despite everyday, feeling much like the previous day. And the day before that. And the day after that. He still went at it. Went to work with the best of attitudes. There had to be something here he thought. The first thing he was tasked with that actually felt like work was measurements. This mostly meant, sometimes, just tagging along on excursions in and around the bay area, with a senior architect. With tape measure in hand, his lone job was

to hold that tape measure. Make sure it properly embraced the wall. Make sure this tape measure did not fold in the middle, or elsewhere. Sometimes he would read out numbers. Read out measurements. As best as he could. Not glamorous. But work for sure.

His tape measuring role eventually mixed with and became some computer work. Analog goes digital. He would input some of these dimensions into the computer. And sometimes these would become drawings to compare to the original drawings. These original drawings were sometimes decades old. And these drawings were also sometimes off. This was the joy of the computer. Fast, easy, plotting and drawing. A way to quickly take analog/physical dimensions and put them in a tool that would assist with future planning. The computer. On said computer he also began a process called picking up “red lines.” Red lines were markups created by senior architects. They were typically mistakes in construction documents. Or things that needed adjustments. He would everyday pick up a stack of drawings. And go through each red mark, one by one and make adjustments to the actual construction documents on the computer.

Most of the time, it was pretty thoughtless work. Actually, no thoughts transpired through his mind at all during this kind of work. They were using a software called Autocad. Official name: Automatical Computer Aided Design. Release 14 was the software release number at that time. He had memorized all the shortcut keys for this software. Shift + R. Control + 7. F11. F7. Shift + Spacebar. Spacebar. And because of this, he would often work at tremendous speeds. Or so he thought. Like a piano or guitar. He could just play the computer keyboard like a musical instrument. He had memorized them enough so he would not need to look where he was clicking. He had gotten to a point where he would not look at the keyboard unless absolutely necessary. This speed would allow him to just fly through these “red lines.”

Part of his perception of “flying” or “flight” or “speed” during this process was because of a generation gap. He sat at a peculiar crossroads between two generations. He was right at the beginning cusp of the computer generation. The generation above him knew of the computer. Knew the computer to a certain extent. But he knew distinctly that they could not “fly” like him. This speed was one of the few things he actually took pride in during this time. It was about the only thing that felt like something to him. Like he was actually contributing something to this company. His superiors, who were an average of six to nine years older than him, well, their computer use was just noticeably a tad slower. More like pushing around chess pieces than playing musical instruments. A generation gap for sure. And a source of pride for him was that compared to this generation, he could fly.

Henry An may have been able to fly on occasion, but one thing was readily apparent. They all knew things that he knew nothing of. Upper management, leadership, they actually understood what architecture was. They knew the process. How a building goes from nothing to something. How a building goes from ground up. The truth of the matter was, he had absolutely no idea. No idea about this process at all. He could pick up “red lines” but had no idea how these documents worked.

Up until this point, in school, he had just been making nonsense things. Just crazy, nonsense. Henry had gone from making impossible models of structures that could never be actualized within a million years to this reality. He was ill-prepared for such a place. Ill-prepared for this kind of industry and the realities of this industry.

One issue was that many of the graduates of his program were like him. He was not alone in that they were all ill-prepared. During this time, there were two types of architecture programs that were commonplace on the West Coast. One was accredited, typically a five year program. Lots of very realistic courses. Courses in structures, engineering. Real life architecture stuff. The other type of program was more theoretical. Typically a four year program. Less real world stuff and more concepts. More exploration. More form studies. A four year program, well, that was how they described the kind of program he went to.

A huge majority of his teachers had barely ever built anything that actually was constructed. Many of his teachers had not produced much that had even gone anywhere further than renderings. There was one professor, a French man, who literally had only one building ever built to his name. It was a residential building. And rumor had it that it had windows shaped like clouds. Clouds. As windows. Think about that. People often thought that he also was one of those expatriates, who was milking their past and their accent to the glorious benefit of living in America. Americans, for the most part, have this affection towards British or French accents. And he had a hollywood style French accent. A luxurious, very thick but understandable French accent. Just like any movie glamorizing France or Paris. And this professor, like many of his colleagues, found stability in such occurrences. He enjoyed a certain credibility that this Hollywood accent afforded him. This kind of respect for him regardless of his past or his present achievements. He, like many of his colleagues, had not much to speak of career wise. At least from an architectural point of view. But that accent often eliminated any doubt. It made it all believable.

So he had teachers with very little work built and very little things constructed. This was his program. He was a product of this program. And in this program, he made crazy, lots and lots of crazy, crazy. Tons of structures that would or could never, ever be built. Impossibleness that was nowhere close to being architecture. There was only one really practical class here and it was called Architecture 150. It was structures, a class about structures. He knew of this class. He knew of its importance. But he had no interest in taking it. He had always thought, somebody else would figure that stuff out. He just loved making form. Playing with form. And whether that was architecture, or could be kind of interpreted as architecture, was a question that he cared very little about. He was fascinated at this time by the programs at the Southern California Institute of Architecture and Columbia University. Lots of unconventional forms and form exploration. This was the world he had learned from, the world he was raised in. And having just graduated from such a world, he was just as unprepared for the kind of work he was now doing. Tremendously unprepared.

Many of the graduates of his program would eventually end up doing something different. There was a rumor that around forty percent end up not doing architecture at all. Even in his local network, forty was a very high number but he could say definitively that perhaps around 28% had actually already switched out and were on different job tracks. Even some of the most talented were already doing something else.

He had been educated in an architectural dream world. And now, none of those dreams were part of his reality. This work began to slowly eat at him. Picking away at small bits of his soul and discarding them to the ground. Day by day. Everyday by everyday. A loop. An actual feedback loop, that was slowly picking him apart. And it wasn't dramatic at all. It truly was a slow, silent decay. The flesh slowly going, slowly evaporating, slowly being nibbled away. And the saddest reality was, Henry knew this was not only his present, but it was also his future. He would actually be doing this same kind of work for the next five to eight years. At least this was what he was told. From his superiors, from his colleagues, from his mentors. This was the next eight years. Before embarking on any more creative endeavors, he would have to do his due diligence. Put in the necessary work to understand the process. This was part of the architect's journey. Several years of construction documents and several years of understanding the construction process. Then, if you were truly lucky, perhaps a little creativity or something, borderline, somewhat creative. But this was if you are lucky and this would be for sure, several years down the road.

If he was not picking up "red lines," Henry was sometimes put on things that were not creative at all, but about as close as one could get to creativity after "red lines." What might those be? On one of these elementary renovation projects, he was tasked with figuring out a new restroom/bathroom layout. Not that the old layout was not working. But this one needed to have a handicap

stall. This was the 1990s and times were changing. The challenge here was to figure out the proper circumference and turn radius for wheelchairs and giving enough space for entry and exit. Not creative, but perhaps a very, very small smidge of creativity. When finished with this task, on the same project, he was then instructed to figure out proper width and specifications for a handicap access ramp to coincide with an already existing staircase. Slightly more creative? Check. Some problem solving? Check. Challenging? Somewhat, check. Still on the soul crushing side of work? Check. Soul crushed? Check again.

And the loop continues. Start. Stop. Start. Stop. But as all things do, cycles must change. Even loops can change. Things must evolve. Evolution. Life. As humans, animals, beings, if things do not change, we eventually make change ourselves. This is what we do: we adapt. And he would be no different. He began to seek other points of fascination, other points of stimulation. For he was no longer finding anything of interest here. Here in this office, there was little to no stimulation. Nothing to scratch his brain.

Lunch. Lunchtime. As with many an office employee, lunch became an interesting point of interest. An interesting point. Of interest. Something to look forward to during the day. He would come, clock in, do his work and then anywhere from 10:35 to 12:00, he would begin the quick eye dart to the upper right part of his working screen to see the time. What time was it? Were we inching anywhere closer to lunch time? How many minutes were left? It was as close to some kind of basic, instinctual, animal longing as one could get. The heart was pulling him. To lunch. Anywhere from 10:00 to 11:00, it became a point of dialogue. An internal dialogue—what kind of lunch would be suitable for a day like this? What kind of foods would provide a highlight of sorts. Some kind of happiness? So while he was working, doing "red lines" at breakneck speeds, his mind would wander. Spatially. From one restaurant to another and imagining the lines and those who might be waiting in those lines. Imagining the results of a successful order. Sometimes, even, imagining the consumption of the food itself. Chewing the food and swimming in the taste. This is where the mind can go, where a desperate mind can go.

Henry soon came to grasp the core of the American obesity epidemic. It all starts here, he thought. At jobs like this. He soon began to think of the most terrible things to eat. And when noon hit, he would go and execute upon his terrible thoughts. Go, now and eat some terrible things. Some people credit poor diet in America for obesity. Yes, true, a poor diet will do this to you. But where does said poor diet come from originally? Painful jobs? Unhappiness at work? Lack of stimulation at work? There was a recent expression among friends that would sometimes sit with him from time to time. In this day and age, some people were known to "eat their pain." Simply put, the act of eating would temporarily put a pause to any pain of the moment. Obviously, when the eating stops, that pain will resume. But for a brief moment, food can take you places. A high from food consumption. And he was doing that. He knew he was doing exactly that, he was truly, everyday, "eating his pain." He would everyday, begin to eat the most terrible things. He gained weight and his mind knew the evils of this cycle. But it could not take away that joy. Those brief moments, during the day, where for a few minutes at a time, the pain would go away.

1999. This was one of those rare and slightly ambiguous moments between the workspace, computers, and the internet. Computers were now the new normal in the workspace. And now the internet was somewhat the new normal too. But this was an architecture office. Its core, its roots were very conservative, often steeped in all kinds of tradition. So the new normal was sometimes also too new to be normal as well. Many of the older folks in this office actually knew nothing of computers. They were pencil and vellum folks or pencil and tracing paper. Making things from their hands. Figuring things out from their hands. Figuring spaces out from their hands. So sometimes, these computers operated by these older folks went untouched. Unused on their desks. They were just something to have. A

symbol of being part of the office, to be part of the workforce. But the truth of the matter was, some folks here had very little grasp on how to use such machines.

Not every machine was the same either. This may make absolutely no sense to somebody reading this today, but almost 80 to 90% of the machines had no internet. This was a decision based on that conservative core leadership. The computers were purely work machines. And the internet, this was something that was separate from work? It did not make sense to have or provide online access. Connectivity was not necessary. Thus, there were only around four machines or so that had the internet. Or even a browser that worked. Most browsers would launch and lead to nothing. Company email however worked. Company emails could be received, sent, replied to, replied to all. But no browser. No yahoo.com. No msn.com. No hotmail.com.

His machine was one of those poor, poor souls with no internet. Nothing to keep him sane. No external stimulation. Just work, everyday, work, in its purest form. No distractions. Only red lines. Handicap ramps. More red lines. Handicap accessible restrooms. Even more red lines. Then lunch. That was it. But a miracle of the technology Gods at the time had provided a singular hope. Not all machines, but around 60% of the machines had what was then called a compact disc player. A flat, square player, positioned at the very top of some of these beige towers. Something that played this music storage device called the compact disc. This he knew, was one of the few moments of happiness for many people in this entire office. He knew it, he could see it everywhere. In this extremely drab office, with stone silent faces and expressions he could see some bits and pieces of life on people's desks. The small bits of graphic design that were the covers of compact discs and their album covers. The small bits of graphical expression that he knew were kind of small pulses, heartbeats, signs of life. And so with no internet, and nothing else, sometimes, music would be solace. Peace. He saw these small bits of culture on his colleague's desks. Sometimes, these CDs were about the only thing of interest at any given desk or workstation. He used to wonder, were his co-workers as happy about the ability to play music as himself? They had to be. It just had to be. This small world, between the headphones, a world they could enter and exit, during the day. It had to be a small piece of heaven. One co-worker, who, by all means looked the part. Extremely buttoned up, clean shaven and professional in all ways. His desk was immaculate. All pencils, documents, in exact order and position. An immaculate workspace for an immaculate working experience. But on this primed workspace desk, there were a few CDs that gave the smallest of hints of life. He saw on this desk existed a Limp Bizkit cd and then right below that existed an Outkast cd. Atliens? At first glance, anybody passing by would never notice such things. But he saw these small details every time. These small moments of life. And he knew, he knew this buttoned up stranger, who he rarely conversed with at all during his time there, he knew that this stranger was also doing extremely mundane things. Everyday. But that this stranger, his heart was also somewhere else. For brief moments of time, between those headphones, he may have been in Atlanta. Trying to kill the pain.

Dead time. There was also dead time, lots of it. How much dead time truly exists in any kind of firm or studio? There has to be tons of it, and it is nearly impossible to avoid. It was a given that any day, any week, there would be moments, moments of absolutely nothing to do. So what to do during dead time? This was a constant struggle, a struggle beyond struggles. With most of the machines having no internet and nothing to read. He could not sit there and read a book. He knew it would look out of place, disrespectful. "Is this person not working? What is this person working on? Why is he reading a book?" It was an older firm with lots of older people. He had been told numerous times by some of the principals to tuck in his shirt. This old school would never accept such a thing as down time. And they were always watching him. Watching his untucked shirt. Watching.

Everybody was on the Windows operating system software at this time. Windows 95. Microsoft had done some brilliantly societal manipulation and figured out a way to become the default operating system on all these machines everywhere around the world. So every machine was on Windows. Every machine was a PC. They were all beige. And another technological given that was on every workstation was this thing called the wheel mouse. About four years earlier, the tech powers that be, created this wheel mouse. What was this magic? So there was this small wheel that you could roll up and down with your middle or index finger. What was this magic? It was a small wheel that sat between the two mouse buttons. It made things so easy. This combination was so convenient. So novel at this time. He would open up a file browser, and he would roll the wheel up and down to quickly, conveniently find the files that he would need. Roll up. Roll down. Magic, created by the powers that be.

Dead time. Desperate times, call for desperate measures. He began to experiment. Different kinds of experiments for how he would keep himself occupied during down times. Methods to appear busy, when he was not. Methods to maintain the image of that hard working, young architect. To this day, he still harbored much guilt. During one of the company Christmas parties, he had received a company award. Something along the lines of "best future architect" or "best up and coming architect." He was honored, but was he really? For these reasons, he felt the constant pressure to do as best as he possibly could. But it was a struggle, a struggle like no other. One of these experiments proved to be one of those literary devices that make movies, novels so interesting. A turning point if you will. He had somehow discovered, through tremendous trial and error, that he could roll the mouse wheel up and down in a semi-conscious state. Meaning, he did not need to be fully aware, conscious or alert to move the mouse. This wheel on the mouse was so easy to maneuver that he could move it up and down with barely any brain waves active, engaged or present. If he had created a file browser window large enough. And with enough files in there to provide enough of an interaction surface to react to the mouse, he could subconsciously move that mouse wheel. Even though half asleep, or half awake, Henry could move that mouse. Move it up and down and by moving it up and down, when somebody would walk by his desk, one would get the impression that he was looking for files. Searching for files. For as the wheel rolled up, the files would move down. And when the wheel rolled down, the files moved up. This was file browsing. This was quote, unquote work.

Over a few days, weeks, months he began a process of practicing this subconscious mouse movement. He had enough dead time for such practice. There was actually nothing else to do. Was he actually looking for a file? No, this was dead time. There were no files to be found. No files to be searched for. But he was practicing in earnest, this appearance of looking for files. The appearance of looking like working. So he would practice. Practice more and test. The one variable in these practice and test sessions was consciousness. He wanted to see how much of his consciousness he could lose and still be able to "browse" files. How much could he actually not be mentally there and still give the impression of working. He would play with how far he could go into and out of sleep. At what point his hand could still move, up and down, looking for files in all kinds of conscious states. Here he sometimes felt like that magician fascinated with asphyxiation acts. With exploring the limits of the human body, the limits of human consciousness. Mouse up, mouse down. 40% consciousness. Works. 30% awake. Works. 20% awake. Works. Okay, people are walking quite frequently by this workstation, best to return back to 90% awake. Now back again to 20% consciousness. These practice sessions had concluded with 15% being a somewhat dangerous number. Definitely, playing with fire here. 15% was always possible but at 15% or below, the illusion was hard to manage. Hard to maintain. The consciousness level was just too low. 30%. This seemed to be the magic number. At 30%, his eyes could remain as mere cracks to allow light in. He was aware of passersby. He could also

snap back in an instant. 30% consciousness seemed to be the right number, a number by which he could do something and nothing at once.

For months he had begun to master this. A small coping device by which to burn away the hours of the day. To move the hands of the clock. Move them ever closer to lunchtime. Or better yet, move them ever more towards closing time, time to go home. And this small intervention was necessary. It was necessary because there were no other options. He had no more options left. He was in a loop. The morning flipped over and became day and flipped back again to become morning. This was just one part of the evolutionary cycle of all things. The way change begins. Another change created by a human who could not take the loop anymore. Another means to kill the pain. Mouse up. Mouse down.

To this day, he was not sure what exactly his coworkers saw as they passed his desk. Perhaps they saw his desk or the back of his chair. Perhaps they saw nothing and just walked by with little to no observations or thoughts. They must surely have seen the monitor of his machine. Or would they? They might, he thought. He was not sure what they saw exactly but he knew one thing for sure—it looked like he was working. It looked like he was up to some good. It looked like he was looking for files. Looking for those hard to find files. He was that good employee. That young architect, the up and coming architect. That young architect who was going to make something of the world. Henry was looking for files. Files that were there someplace. Files that needed to be found but were never going to be found. Mouse up. Mouse down.