

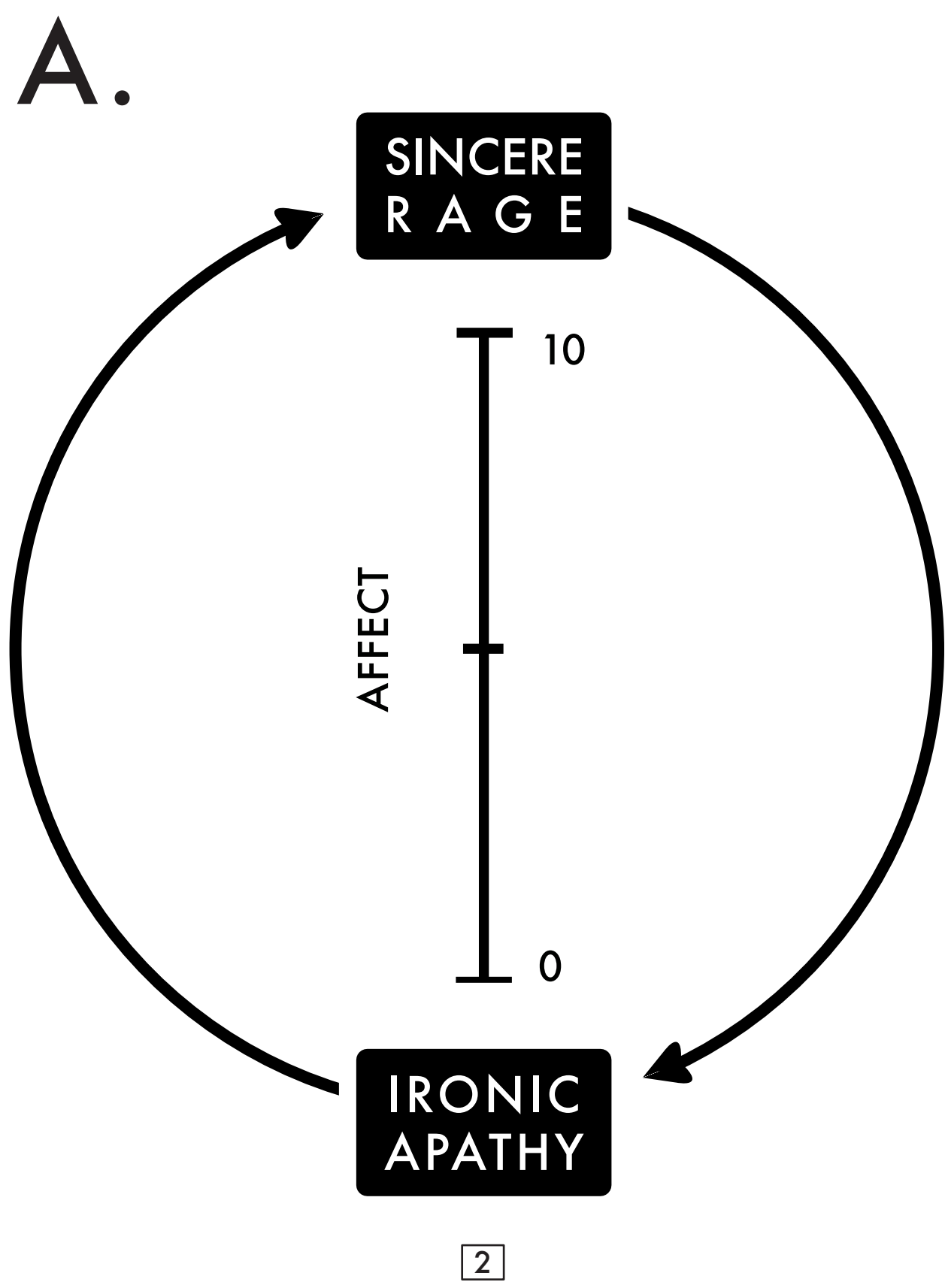
THE DEMYSTIFICATION PROCESS

TIM PETERS

Carl 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.

Carl sat directly across from Zachary who was balding, bespectacled and had an expensive graduate degree in journalism and had spent several years teaching English in South Korea.

One day, Carl searched Zachary's name on the Internet and found an abandoned blog that he had once been writing. On the blog was a wide, high-resolution photograph of Zachary sitting on a mountain top looking out over an East Asian sea. The photo resembled that Caspar David Friedrich painting, "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog."

Carl wondered: if that photo on the mountain was his boss' ideal self-image in those years of being abroad. If so, what was his ideal self-image now? Did Zachary even have the time or energy to dream of a lowering version of himself, much less to in some way convert that vision into an objective reality?

Carl also wondered if Zachary was in debt from his journalism graduate degree. That photo of the young man on top of the mountain did not look like the self-image of a person with \$100,000 in grad school debt.

Was this adult city life? Coming down off the mountain and toiling day in and day out as a bureaucratic servant?

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,^C which had been a success.



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 six-month term with Broadcast.

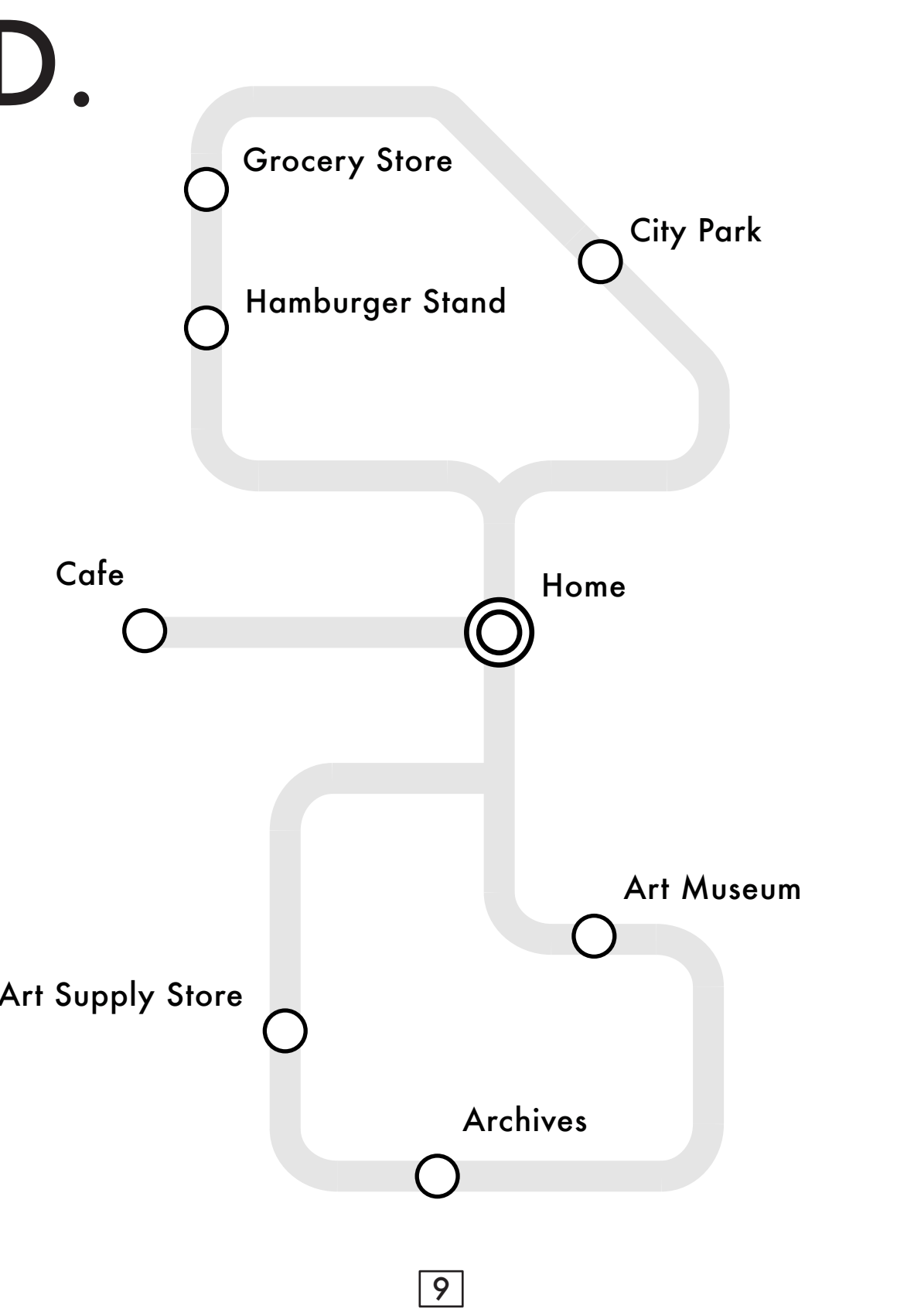
It seemed to Carl like his boss, without moving from his desk, without a glance, had just slapped him across the face for this attempt at impudence.

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,^D 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.

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 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.

He hoped that, upon returning to work on Monday^F, 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...

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- F.
- * The pilgrim's diet: bread and cheese and oranges, bananas and peanut butter and tea, coffee and cigarettes
 - * It's really no wonder I haven't clicked w/ many peeps at the show, b/c no one I'm going to really bond w/ would put up w/ working in such a corporate hierarchy! Or, maybe, like E, they've been lured into it but are disoriented
 - * "No, no, only look. Just watch me." - ... this little 4 or 5 y.o. girl telling her mom to put her SLR w/ long lens down as this little girl works around on top of the marble benches at the atrium of the Portr. Gallery
 - * that some people need golf the way others need fishing or chess or long walks through the woods
 - * Things seem so unshared, unmitigated, common, cheap, worthless to me - things and people - why the reluctance to embrace the miracles = let things be meaningful - to do the DFW "Water" thing w/ lat windproof happiness wash over me? Why does it feel so difficult + scary + head to be happy, joyous, peaceful, content?
 - * In so far as we itch, yawn, scratch, pick, shit, fuck, piss, puke, are born and die, we are animals. - In everything else, humans...
 - * "You gotta get yourself locked into something while you're young, as soon as you get here." - the dude in line for the Archives yesterday "locked in" who gets locked in? Prisoners and slaves!
 - * I can see the red flags of despondency flapping on my inner shores
 - * Early intellectual gangster Phrygan cop would be part of our uniform, w/ pilgrims' diet, battle - intellectuals thru Chicago a la The Warriors
 - * "converting your tin can into gold"
 - * At the show, the essence of a day is bus-nessual, all quiet, all smooth, all humming (too little of life), but the essence of what we work w/ our raw material, is the exceptional, the unusual, often tending toward death & upheaval & change (too much of life), of fire + blood + suffering + pain + screaming + guns + bombs... must exist: contrast of our safe stillness with the radiant real stuff!

G.

Carl went back to work that Monday, optimistic that he would feel tougher and wouldn't get pulled into the negative loop of apathy.

This internship duties were switching that day. He had been fetching lunch, proof-reading the scripts, and logging tapes. His next rotation was in an office across the street from the news room, in the lobby library.

A fellow intern brought Carl over here to show him his new responsibilities. The first task was to peel the labels off old tapes, using plastic knives and spoons or just one's hands. Many of the labels did not come off easily and the glue accreted under one's fingernails.

As Carl sat down to de-label his first batch of tapes, he shuddered and knew this was all going to stop for him very soon.

During his lunch break, Carl mentioned his lunch to Miles, the Executive Producer of the show, expressing his discontent and disappointment. Carl felt like there were sparks flying from his fingers as he typed.

Miles responded in half an hour and invited Carl to lunch that Thursday.

The day came and as they left for lunch, Carl described to Miles "The Cycle of Futility"

and Miles wondered aloud with a sigh where he, the Executive Producer of the show, was at on the cycle that afternoon.

They ate at an Indian buffet and when Carl told Miles that he desired to do other things with his life, Miles unapologetically told him, "Go."

Miles also said he would help Carl and reach out to some media contacts.

That evening, Carl asked his boss for a ride home. As they sped down the interstate, Carl gave his two-weeks notice and explained why he felt like he had to quit.

Carl had offered to buy Zachary dinner, which he had agreed to as they departed, but when they arrived at Carl's apartment Zachary said he had other plans.

When Carl wrote Miles to follow-up on those media contacts, Miles never replied.

Carl mentioned his lunch with Miles to a coworker. She said resentfully to Miles and as if to take a shot at Carl, "Oh, he always leads people on like that."

That was disheartening to hear, but whatever, Carl was just glad to be leaving.

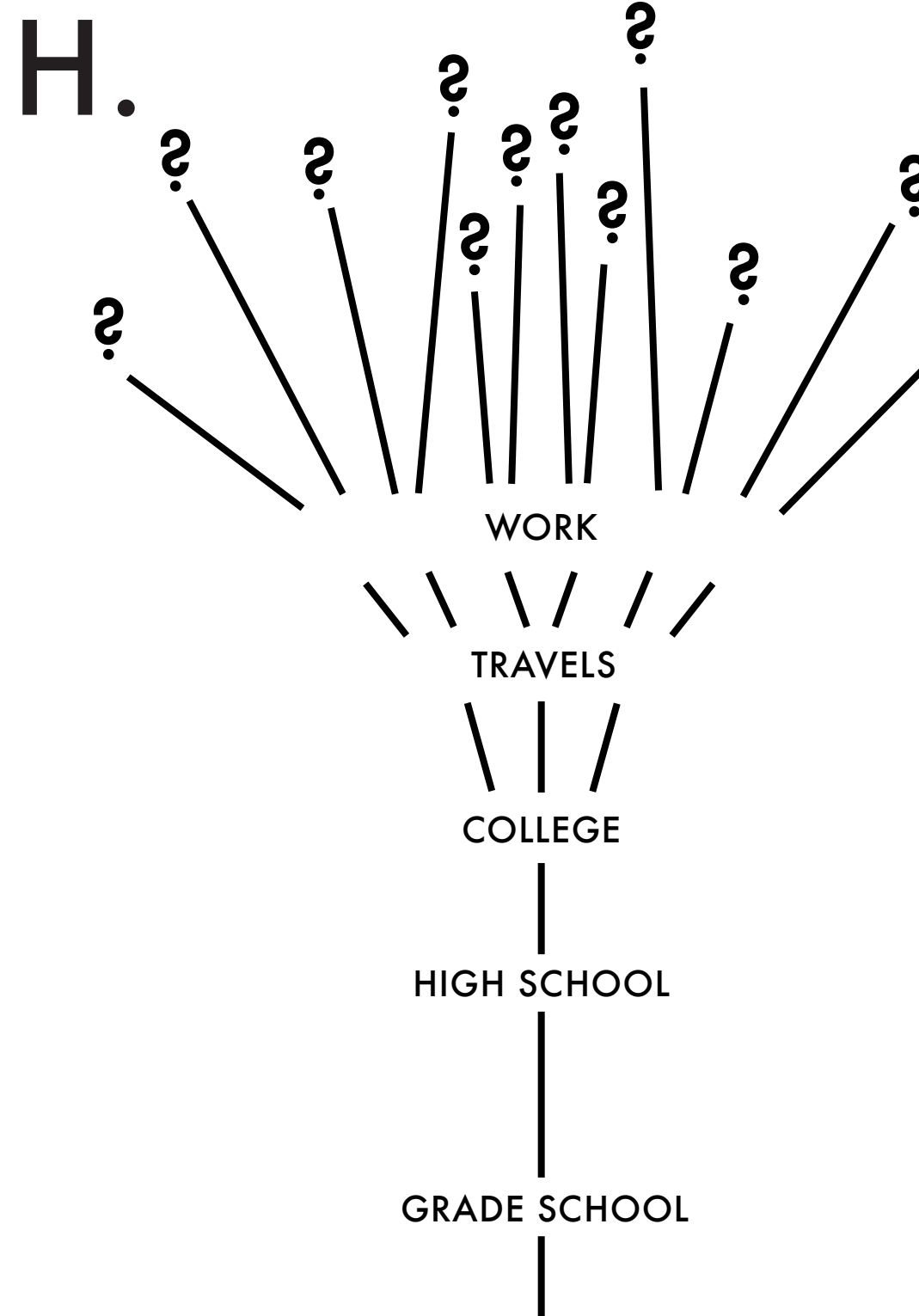
At the office those last two weeks, it felt like the spell of the place had been broken and the miasma had evaporated.

Of 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.



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