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## Thinking with Animals

*Parts 1 & 4: "Journal" and "Essay"*

**Christmas Eve - Christmas Day, 2006 Shinchon, Chungdam/Apgujeong, Seoul,  
Cloudy for both days**

I get up.

4:50 p.m.

On the bedside table rests strewn trashy leftovers from the neighborhood McDonald's, which has just recently renovated and gone twenty-four-seven, to my delight. Must have been craving a value meal (forgot which) on the way back home last morning. Finished it in bed just in time to pass out with processed meat and spud byproduct still in-jawed. It had hit the spot, obviously, and now, seven hours later, my pear-shaped belly-love-handle-line doesn't look too out of shape, to my pleasant surprise. That is to say, I can see my penis; but the brewer must still be in. It doesn't stare back at me any more, the useless type of piece of meat that it is and was the previous morning; three times now. Jesus Fucking Christ, I'm only twenty-two.

On the desk lie a number of sleek-looking, hand-sized, uniformly black vinyl packets of disposable toiletries. They come in a series, as if found on a sink in a hotel bathroom. Each is labeled, in bold gray-white Ariel font, making for one hell of a modern looking package. All this makes what the labels actually say seem almost unthoughtful in their nonchalantly pedestrian everyday importance: "toothbrush," "body sponge," "ladies set," and the ever-so-easily-overlooked "love set." Oh, I grabbed these and brought them home this morning... from the twilight zone.

The "pleasant surprise" in my narcissism turned out to be more pleasant than would have been under normal circumstances, given the actual circumstantial gluttony that I had partaken in during the course of the previous night: about a dozen regular-sized cups of scotch mixed with cheap local beer, two cans of soda to chase it all, followed by a large bowl of blowfish soup with a variety of side dishes of spicy pickled vegetables (all thought good chasers, to a wondrously effective degree), best this side of the Sea of Japan, had occupied my stomach before the cow sandwiched in sesame-sprinkled buns had invaded it.

Omnivores of true nature

Of course, the blowfish had knocked the alcohol right out of my system within minutes, at which point the closest hip hop club, with all its proud in-discriminatory youthful indulgences, came headed toward my way.

Scantily-clad girls of early, early Christmas morning, they are all so sexy. Slips of bodies moving under the lights and smoke, pretty faces artfully cut-up (so the tell me) and now without a face—but *I* see their fox-like beautiful faces, like Kat (Again, I Don't Care What Happened Here)—seemingly immanent to the fullest extent in their environment. I'm sure I am not. And they stare. They seem to know that I'm not. Do you wanna eat me? I ask.

Omnivores of true nature, the cultural omnivores of modern East Asian metropolises. And I wonder how their dentist feels about this.

Vodka, a slice of lemon, Tequila, Sweden again, but no lemon this time, Mexico again, followed by Long Island Ice Tea and Gin on the rocks, no olives. The blowfish must still be working; I can't seem to get the alcohol flowing through to numb the cranial nerves. So I go buy a different type of fluid: a pack of the new 1-mg-tar Marlboros. Each cig comes with extra tobacco sandwiched *inside* the damn filter, for a "better tasting" light cigarette. The packaging is impeccably stylish, of course, with a couple of extra steps included in the opening procedure. But I do manage to get in a taxi with one of the older foxes later on. And off we ride... into the twilight zone.

Not exactly your Christmas morning at Grandma's—I mean, *my*—usual Christmas morning with the family Catholically gathered at the base of what would be a poor excuse for a less-than-taxidermy of a tree and opening colorfully packaged stuff out of stuff out of stuff out...

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### **Saturday or Sunday, March XX, 2007, Atlanta, Georgia, Sunny**

I get up around, oh I forget. 'Twas early afternoon. I wake to the sound of Food Network's Rachel Ray (I think). The sun, pitifully past its prime, is shining through my westward window. It's a wonderful day and I'm well rested-up for the first time in a while. I must have fallen asleep watching Iron Chef America, the master of all cooking shows, disconcertingly anti cooking-show du mama.

I lie there, on my raised bed, which discourages me getting out—jumping out, actually—of the bed because my legs have become weak and sinewy from the several hours of disuse. So I lie there for a few minutes, listening to the voice of the cooking show host. I don't know what's being cooked on my dumb old box. But let me take a guess, it's got a hunk of domesticated cattle engineered in a heartland fattening pen, turned inside out, seasoned with crystals from the sea (from some ocean), and sizzling on a frying pan (made somewhere far from here) with oil garnered from a certain seedy vegetable that

used to grow on a tree branch (on a farm some other where). How do you figure? Rachel Frankenstein.

My eyes are closed and I'm thinking it's a comforting voice, anyway, just as all morning (or physiologically morning) cooking shows tend to be, and that they must hire them based on how comforting they sound, and on and on. If this puts me back to sleep, what the hell, I'll take it.

But I open my eyes again to the sound of two little words uttered by the voice of lullabies: blah blah blah ...*peanut butter*... blah blah

Disclaimer and Introduction to **I DON'T CARE WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE.**

*“Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are.”*

-Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in 1825, *The Physiology of Taste*

What jerked me out of bed that lazy Saturday or Sunday afternoon upon hearing those thick nutty words of a sticky, smothering concoction was a concept which I would like to *locally* refer to as **readymade**. I hope not to evoke any connotations that may automatically arise from the use of the term, particularly those regarding the works of Marcel Duchamp, or the movement of “objet trouve,” as I am very ignorant of these and therefore unable to discuss them intellectually. That said, I am 100% confident that my ideas presented here and in my art work are original, unaffected, and any contingent connections between my work and theirs, unforeseen to me, that may be derived and expressed, implicitly or explicitly, is entirely coincidental. I am also confident to a reasonable degree that my ideas and art would have been created by me to exactly the same effect with or without my accidental knowledge of the aforementioned art and philosophies of certain French tradition. I base this judgment on the fact that the ideas present in my work have been within me for sometime now, long before I first heard of a man named Duchamp. In this essay I would like to discuss the themes of readymade—*my* readymade—and other ideas that stem from the observations.

The peanut butter raises a set of interesting questions of readymadeness. These questions deal with the relationship between what is already made and what is to be made. Cooking with the peanut butter, as was the particular case of my encounter or, more precisely, the peanut butter as *an ingredient* in cooking, is a funny proposition in that the peanut butter is itself made of further breakdown-able ingredients. One asks (I asked), first, what is it about peanut butter that made it a perfect, no, a good, even, element in the dish being prepared? And second, what if we lived in a world where there was no peanut butter, would the final dish even be available in the form familiar to us in this world of peanut butter existence? I don't mean to suggest that the only things that should count as ingredients in a recipe are the kinds immediately found in nature, such as the basil or mint leaves disarticulated from the stem and thrown straight into the pot. Not only is peanut butter not immediate in that sense, but it is more importantly a finished product,

something you would buy in a grocery store nicely packaged, something you could consume by itself out of the factory-sealed packaging.

*[Packaging is an important concept here. Not only is it packaged in a plastic bottle with a plastic screw-on cap, it's bordered by its own body, its own Sand Dune (Francis Bacon, 1983), if you will. The inside-turned-outside body of the beef chunk is also in-bordered. The boundary-busting process that will bring about a new order, according to Timothy Leary, is achieved through chemical flows. **Turn on** the heat, **tune in** the elements, **drop out** and internalize, **cook** your brains. It is happening right on the pan, even on our plate. By internalizing the extra-virgin olive oil and the salt, the beef goes through a permanent, chemically delicious change, which will in turn change the eater, forever.]*

As regards the first question asked above, it is puzzling if peanut butter was really a good ingredient to whatever the cooking show would have us believe was a wonderful and flavorful exercise in (less scientifically and more culinary-artistically) precise measurements. Surely, peanut butter, with all that is contained and mutated within it already—or simply, made-ready—could not have been the *only* solution to a hypothetical called-for ingredient, all by dumb chance. There had to be some *impurities* in there, somewhere in the viscous body that the final product could have done without, would better be served (pun unintended) without, but was, as the matter of things turned out, inconsequential to the makeup of the final dish and thereby left within—making peanut butter but a passable, partially inconsequential ingredient to it.

A possible answer to the far more interesting second question, one regarding an alternative world without an invention called “peanut butter,” would be a “no.” Of course a dish that uses an ingredient X wouldn’t exist as such in a world of no X in the first place. But what the question really asks delves in deeper. In a culinary world of no X, but in need of it still, would the people of the culinary world strive to create X, so as to uphold the recipe that required this mysterious ingredient no one has ever heard of, let alone tasted? Could these ignorant people have created *our* peanut butter in light of their recipe alone? This, I guess, would actually develop into a question of major philosophical difficulty which the great thinkers have wrestled with since the beginning

of civilization: the Chicken-Egg problem. It seems pretty clear to me that the chicken came first; and the peanut butter also would have to have come first in our quest.

*[Speaking of eggs, I recall a rather remarkable question asked on a prep test or other during one of my high school years. The question showed two pictures, one sketch of a broken raw egg, shell debris scattered about and its liquid contents spilled out. The other hand-drawn picture was that of a fried egg, or egg being fried. Under these a caption read: "Which picture represents a physical change? Which represents a chemical change?" This, to me, was an altogether arresting problem in the simple ingenuity of its setup. So simple, in fact, the premise alone seemed to welcome the annihilation of its purpose; it told as much as it asked, with a decidedly Platonic way about it, dragging out of us what it already knew we already knew. Was the (correct) answer derivable by a culmination of successful secondary education in Chemistry—a validation of which the question-makers obviously sought, or was it just common sense? Sure, some students must have gotten this simple question wrong, but when you go down far enough, we were all right.]*

Philosophical musings aside, it seems that using the readymade to make to-be-made always brings about an annihilation and a creation: the annihilation of what was previously ready-made and the creation of a new order of, shall we say, monstrosity. What arises from this in regards to us, sitting atop the food chain, knowing that it is our place? Deductive logic would tell us that we are no different: if we are what we eat, and what we eat is readymade, ready to be annihilated but made to create a new monster, then it follows that we must be monsters.

Out of the animals we eat, Physics and Chemistry also get us what we use to clean ourselves with, inevitably *after* we eat. Mere variations in chemical processing and packaging of our interiority produce what we externally cover ourselves with to cleanse. We physically remove the dirt from the animals we encounter with chemicals made from them. The dirty plates are cleaned the same way. Dirty them up with fat, blood, and saliva; wet them, lather, rinse, and dry; repeat.

Part 2: “Art”



Francis Bacon, *Sand Dune*, 1983



Jordan Baseman, *The Cat and the Dog*, 1995

Inspired by Professor Broglio’s suggestion that the word “Oedipal” sounded similar to “edible,” I renamed Francis Bacon’s *Sand Dune* (1983) *Edible Identity Unpackaged: Chunks to Cream*. As Steven Baker himself has put it, the Deleuzean-Guattarian “sweeping up out of” the animal’s “holding-to-form” of its Oedipal identity is met with the theme of peanut butter’s blended nature that annihilates an individual nut’s boundary and assimilates it into a cohesive whole. As Bacon’s work shows, an individual grain of sand is literally pointed at—pointed out—to emphasize this dichotomy of becoming-animal. If this postmodern body-politic represents a microscopic view of boundary disputes within the sand dune, the body’s flowing out of its predetermined cube seems to suggest a “pack-mode” unpackaging of the body into another, still relevant, form of being, on a higher plain. It is becoming’s innate desire to overflow and overcome the seal of its prepackaged identity, the peanut butter’s coming out of its product-ivity to take its animal form, quite literally, by being consumed.

I renamed Jordan Baseman’s *The Cat and the Dog* (1995) simply *Friends* to suggest the double-entendre of the more-hate-than-love “friendship” between the two prototypical pets, and the other, higher type of friendship that exists between the animals and their human owners. It is important to note that the second sort of friendship is what makes the first possible, by a certain act of anthropomorphism. Quite conspicuously, anthropomorphizing of the faces of the animals is strongly delineated and wrought asunder as if to ostensibly disclose the true, coercively anthropomorphic, nature of this “friendship.” And the act of hanging the meatless animals, among its other strong connotations (of killing, storing, etc.), makes this clear, suggestive of a trophic ownership derived from the murder of the pets’ animality. There is no friendship, as such.

An evident degree of irony manifests itself under this title as well, which allows the cat and the dog to dramatically succeed in a side-by-side coexistence only after their respective deaths, after their animality has left the body and become nonexistent. A still

more cynical interpretation on this lack of animal identity lends itself credible in regards to the dead pets' relationships with their human friends, as it becomes apparent that the meat of the animals never had a place in the domestic setting of inedibility in the first place, even as live pets, effectively reducing them down to what I would refer to as *readymade friends of nonexistence*.



Part 3: "My Art"



MADE-READY:  
**I DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT(IS)  
 HAPPEN(ING)ED HERE.**

(Which picture represents a chemical change,  
 which a physical change?)

The picture does not depict a before-and-after scenario. The breakfast dish contains: sausage patties, syrup, beaten eggs fried with milk and oil, waffle sticks, ketchup, and fried shredded potatoes, in no particular order, vertical or horizontal. The cup contains Cherry Coke mixed with Sprite, half and half. The adjacent plate has shampoo, hand soap, shaving cream, toothpaste, and two kinds of dishwashing detergents, one foam and one liquid. All are in turn made... ....it's like when a UFC fighter in a pre-fight interview uses a baseball vernacular and says: "I'M GONNA SWING FOR THE FENCES."