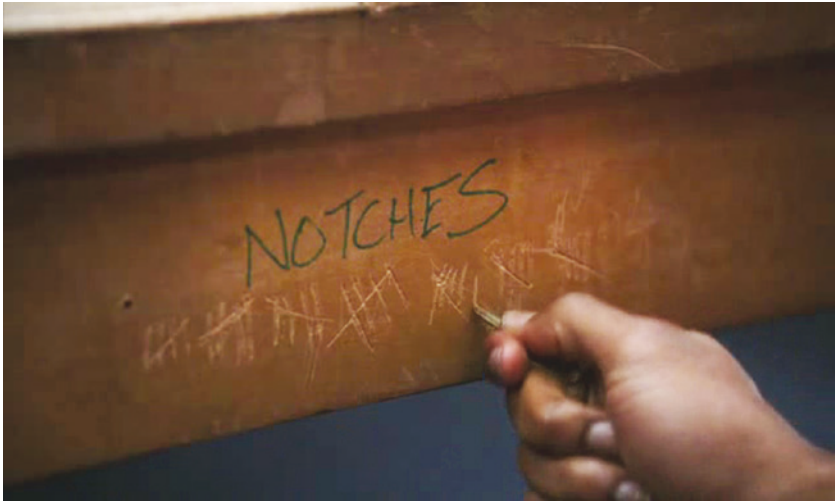


## EPILOGUE

In a season two episode of the NBC series *Community* (2009–2015), we find the seven main characters doing what they normally do: sitting around their study room table, trading news and barbs. Jeff Winger utters something typically cynical and critical about the community college they all attend, at which point Abed adds to the tally of “Classic ‘Wingers’” he’s been carving into his side of the table. Annie accuses Jeff of only caring about his hair and abs, at which point Jeff notches a mark into his own tally of “Ab Mentions.” The conversation continues, the “rule of three” comedy trope telling us to expect one more notch-related gag. Sure enough, the camera pans to Troy, laughing and moving to add a new notch to his own, presumably just as specific list; but the heading identifying Troy’s careful accounting is simply labeled “Notches” (Image 1):

It’s a favorite moment in one of my favorite shows, a moment that illustrates perfectly the humanist’s predicament: that always-present possibility that our carefully copious reckonings are gags in a running joke. The stupid humanist recognizes that knowledge for the sake of knowledge might as well be knowledge for the sake of notches. To assume otherwise is to misrepresent knowledge as an inevitable state of superiority granted by a straightforward process of accumulation. It is precisely this conflation of knowing *more* with knowing *better* that the series *Community* exists to mock, set as it is in a college whose course catalog sounds like a mixture of clickbait quiz titles and spam subject lines:



**Image 1** Troy uses a key to dutifully record another notch in his collection of notches in *Community* season 2, episode 17, “Intro to Political Science.” The word “NOTCHES,” written in marker and in a different hand than the labels for Abed and Jeff’s lists, affirms that this is Troy’s classification, Troy’s collection

Advanced Breath Holding

Nicolas Cage: Good or Bad?

Who Indeed? A Critical Analysis of Television’s Who’s the Boss?

Introduction to Basics

Principles of Intermediate

Studyology

How to Write Jokes

Can I Fry That?

When is it OK to Shake a Baby?

Grifting 101

Theoretical Phys-Ed

Conspiracy Theories in US History

There’s a Rabelaisian delight in such a list. I’m reminded not only of the list of fake books in the library of Saint-Victor (in book one of Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*), but also of an episode in the *Tiers Livre*, in which the character Panurge is urged to visit the home of

the fortune-teller Herr Trippa; the latter offers prophetic truths through countless methods:

By Coscinomancy (once so religiously observed within the rituals of the Romans)? Let's have tongs and a sieve and you will witness some devilry! (By Alphitomancy, as was indicated by Theocritus in his book *Pharmacentria*, and by Aleuromancy (mixing together some wheat and some flour)? By Astro-galomancy? I already have some knuckle-bones to throw with. By Tyromancy? I've just what we need: a bit of cheese from Brehemont. By Gyromancy? I shall spin a few hoops and, I assure you, they will all fall to the left! By Sternomancy? I say! Your chest is in poor shape!) By Libanomancy? All you need is a little incense. By Gastromancy, long employed in Ferrara by Dame Jacoba Rhodogina the engastrimyth? By Cephaleomancy (which used to be employed by the Germans who would roast an ass's head over red-hot charcoal)? By Ceromancy? In this case, from wax melted in water you will see the shapes of your wife and the men giving her a good pounding. By Capnomancy? We shall sprinkle poppy-seeds and sesame-seeds together over some glowing embers. How delightful! By Axinomancy? All you need to provide is a chopper (and a piece of agate which we will place in the brazier. How well Homer exploits it apropos of the Suitors of Penelope). By Onymancy? We shall need oil and a little wax. By Tephramancy? Ashes exposed to the weather will show you your wife in a fine old state. By Botanomancy? I have some sage-leaves here just for the purpose. (Rabelais 507)

Panurge's near-immediate response is a mockery of the performance of erudition just witnessed. He violently rejects his host, turning instead to his companion Frere John, addressing him as "my dear bollock," a typically vulgar term of endearment that expands into a list 168 items long:

Hearken unto me, my dear bollock,

Kindly bollock,	Tin-smithed b.,	Long-sword b.,
Patted b.,	Sworn b.,	Passionate b.,
Felted b.,	Primed b.,	Stuffed b.,
Sculptured b.,	Swaddled-up b.,	Pretty b.,
Arabesque b.,	Tattered b.,	Positive b.,
[antiquarian b.,]	Brazil-wood b.,	Active b.,
Mangled b.,	Latin b.,	Oval b.,
Monkish b.,	Great-fun b.,	Disposed-of b.,
Repectable b.,	Scabby b.,	Varnished b.,
Audacious b.,	Patronymic b.,	Boxwood b.,

Manual b.,	Famous b.,	Winch-braced b.,
Resolved b.,	Leaded b.,	Frantic b.,
Twinned b.,	Bosun's b.,	Heaped-up b.,
Fecund b.,	Stucco'd b.,	Bloated b.,
Currycombed b.,	Steel-braced b.,	Well-seasoned b.,
Common-to-all b.,	Assured b.,	Gerundive b.,
Prompt b.,	Embroidered b.,	Giant b.,
Pendant b.,	Hammered b.,	...
High-warp b.,	Burgher's b.,	(509–510)
	Railing b.,	

Panurge comes to Herr Trippa's home in search of intelligence; he leaves with 168 synonyms for testicles. This, apparently, is what rummaging in the rooms and digging into the drawers of human intelligence will get you: a close-up view of someone's junk.

"A fool puffs the work of other fools," says Folly; "an ignoramus cries up the accomplishments of other blockheads.... Glosses must be written on glosses, opinions piled on opinions," and this flattering spectacle of accumulation, the scholar's "self-conceit," keeps him contented (Erasmus *Praise* 55). Umberto Eco says "We like lists because we don't want to die" (qtd. in Beyer & Gorris). I wonder if there is a peculiar appetite, a special craving, for the stupid list—of junk, of spam, of nonsense—and if in indulging this special craving we might find the means of transporting ourselves from the precincts of our self-conceit. That the inessential might also be epic, that the non-human thing might act most aggressively, that the stupid might prove most critical: these are the possibilities explored by the stupid humanist, that traveler in search not of *u/eutopia*—the good place—but of *heterotopia*—the stupidly good place. A heterotopia is a counter-site, as Foucault explains, "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible ("Of Other Spaces"). Heterotopias are spammy spaces where "diverse expressions and agendas [are] carried in one capacious sack" (Brunton 33). They remain, paradoxically, "both separate from and connected to all other spaces" (Topinka 55); their nature is a middle nature; they assemble all the things. The cemetery is, according to Foucault, one example. Borges's Chinese encyclopedia—which assembles animals in categories including "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ... (d) sucking pigs ... (j) innumerable ... (m) having just broken the water pitcher" (Foucault *Order of Things* xv)—is another.

Tumblr might be a third. To these we can add all the sites explored in this book, whether on page or screen, so long as they collect us as collectors; as enumerating selves (Johnson 1106); as “oddkin,” remade “in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles” (Haraway 4); as baited fools, leapfalling in dejected, disastrous, clownish, shameful, ungainly, loopy, abundant heaps. Donna Haraway asks us to seek out such entanglements, to *stay with the trouble*; we must “become-with each other or not at all” (4). Let’s *stay with the stupid* while we’re at it, hard as it is to feel easy about such collaborations. What stupid humanists make of themselves, after all, is rarely, if ever, perfect or smart or useful or good, but the existence and space-taking range of our copious output is significant regardless of its beauty or utility. Self-conscious enumeration greatly expands the scope of not only what but also how we write (Johnson 1128); and, of course, how we think. Erasmus is always there to remind us that copia is as inventive as it is descriptive:

Variety everywhere has such force ... [J]ust as the eye is held more by a varying scene, in the same way the mind always eagerly examines whatever it sees as new. And if all things continually present themselves to the mind without variation, it will at once turn away in disgust. Thus the whole profit of a speech is lost. This great fault he will shun easily who is prepared to turn the same thought into many forms, as the famous Proteus is said to have changed his form. (*On Copia* 16–17)

We like lists because we don’t want to die. We like copia because it promises a vitality we can fool ourselves into experiencing as immortality, even in the midst of our and our planet’s mortal, endangered lives. Just think of all the not dying we can do in that moment when we forget our irreversible positions, our unchangeable forms, our irreconcilable differences, ourselves too smart for our own stupid good.

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