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BURIED

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A smartphone comes shipped in a beautiful box. The purity of its box resembles that of a heavy coffin. If the smartphone comes shipped in a coffin, the unpacking is resuscitation and its presence resembles the undead. A man is born covered with his mother's bodily fluids and will be most innocent in his life at the time of death, while a smartphone is the cleanest when it is unpacked and will be covered with its owner's greasy fingerprints at the time of death. But when will it be, the death of a smartphone? The monster comes back from the dead, dies again with its brain destroyed, but its corpse is left to decay without burial. As that which has been born deviating from the cause and effect of cradle to grave it will disappear in the non-existent time and space, as an unwanted entity. The death of a smartphone would occur in the same way, be unburied and discarded. But its body does not decay easily. It is made of a substance as solid as a monument or a gravestone, as if eternity is desired. Smartphones are a lot like gravestones. If so, the smartphone is a gravestone that comes shipped in a coffin. It is a burial kit that includes a coffin and a headstone. But what does the kit suggest for burial, though? Of course, that coffin is made to fit perfectly into a smartphone, so there is nothing else to be buried but a smartphone. But since the smartphone is also a gravestone, it needs to be built right above the buried coffin. Thus the smartphone leads an impossible double existence.



René Magritte often paints coffins. Lying or sitting down, the coffins are folded to fit the posture of a living person. The scene is reminiscent of the short story *The Human Chair* (1925), written by the famous Japanese novelist Edogawa Rampo. A chairmaker creates an armchair that a person can fit into, and then sells the chair while he is still in it. Placed in a hotel room, he senses a human mass sitting on his thighs and chest. He states that going into the chair is like going into the grave. "I took off all but my underwaer, opened the doorway cover at the bottom, and crawled into the chair. It was a strange feeling indeed. It's pitch-black, suffocating, a strange feeling, like crawling into a grave. If you think about it, there is no mistaking the grave. As soon as I crawl into the chair, I disappear from this human world, just as if I were wearing a cloak of invisibility."

As is well known, Edogawa Rampo got his pen name from the pronunciation of the name of Edgar Allan Poe. But how does he feel about imitating a predecessor's name and using it as his own pen name? Is it because of an ardent desire to be a replica of that person, or is it a name he gave himself for fun, not knowing that it was going to be so famous? *The Human Chair* also has some resemblance to Poe's creation. There are shelves in the chair to store enough food to last for several days, and one of Poe's stories also describes storing water and food in the grave. In the short story *The Premature Burial* (1850), there's a scene where the narrator prepares an escapable burial vault in case he gets comatose and mistakenly buried. But he collapses away from his homeland and gets buried as a stranger. "—— and then, too, there came suddenly to my nostrils the strong peculiar odor of moist earth. The conclusion was irresistible. I was not within the vault. I had fallen into a trance while absent from home-while among strangers —— when, or how, I could not remember





— and it was they who had buried me as a dog — nailed up in some common coffin — and thrust deep, deep, and for ever, into some ordinary and nameless grave.”

Magritte is said to have been influenced by Poe's worldview. There is also a painting in which Poe's book is depicted as an item. The painting *Not to Be Reproduced* (1937) represents a man looking into the mirror and his own reflection which turns away in the mirror, an impossible image in which the directions of the gaze are inversed.



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Now smartphones have two kinds of eyes. Forward and backward, or inside and outside, subject and object. Each of them does damage to its own integrity, as it were. One is an uglily protruding flaw on a finely designed form, while the other causes a black blotch on the display that tries to cover the entire surface. The eye is a collapse. Precisely because it is a collapse, it is considered so important and can be a point of focus for thinking.

Blade Runner (1980) is a movie about the eyes. In the opening sequence an eye is projected in a close-up, and eyes are observed in a test to distinguish between a human and a replicant. The replicants try to infiltrate the Tyrell Corporation, their manufacturer, and their first stop is an eyeball factory run by an old Asian. To kill its creator Dr. Tyrell, Roy, the last NEXUS 6, destroys the brain and also inserts his thumbs into the orbits and crashes the eyes. The story that Roy



tells on the edge of death is about what he has seen. The only thing that he saw is his identity. Not the storable data it captured, but the experience of having passed through space and time by the sensor of the eye is all that is left of him. "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe."

Humans eventually return to the soil. Many humans want to be buried in their own homeland. If a smartphone is buried, where is the right place to be? Is it possible to define the homeland of a smartphone? Where is the preferred location — the product company in the U.S., the manufacturing factory in an industrial area in Asia, or the mines in Africa where rare earths for internal parts are unearthed? For smartphones, the idea that the homeland becomes part of their identity would be incomprehensible. Moreover, even the inevitability of the grave appears dubious. If a smartphone would die, it would die fatally as a stranger.

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Bury your own smartphones in the dirt. What exactly is to be buried then?



