

ON TIME

From up front, the professor's grin pokes through the bramble of beard that covers the severe lines scored across his face. His smile widens, as he pans from left to right and tries to catch the attention of all the blank faces before him. *Nobody out there can tell time alone*, he begins: *Look at all those naked wrists, all those bodies disconnected from the rhythms of nature. Today, everyone depends upon invisible transmissions sent from outer space to unreliable electronic oracles, all gagged (per syllabus rules) at the start of class. We were all better off when we wore watches—at least then we were mindful of cycles.* Some of the closest faces bob, like birds after seeds on the ground. But all of them remain expressionless. In back, a few students cast their eyes down, toward glowing laps. The professor pauses: he wants to believe his lesson is like a black box that will survive any catastrophe—eventually to be prized by a rescue team sifting through the wreckage of contemporary life. Intent on repeating key points from his opening remarks, he looks down at his notes. Yet, as he marks the countdown on the cheap digital clock built into his lectern, he grimaces: he cannot escape the thought that some of his students will never catch up with what has passed, no matter what he says next.