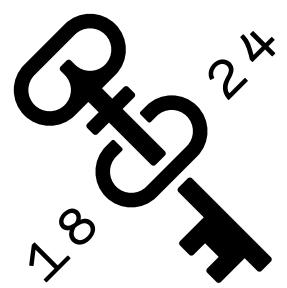


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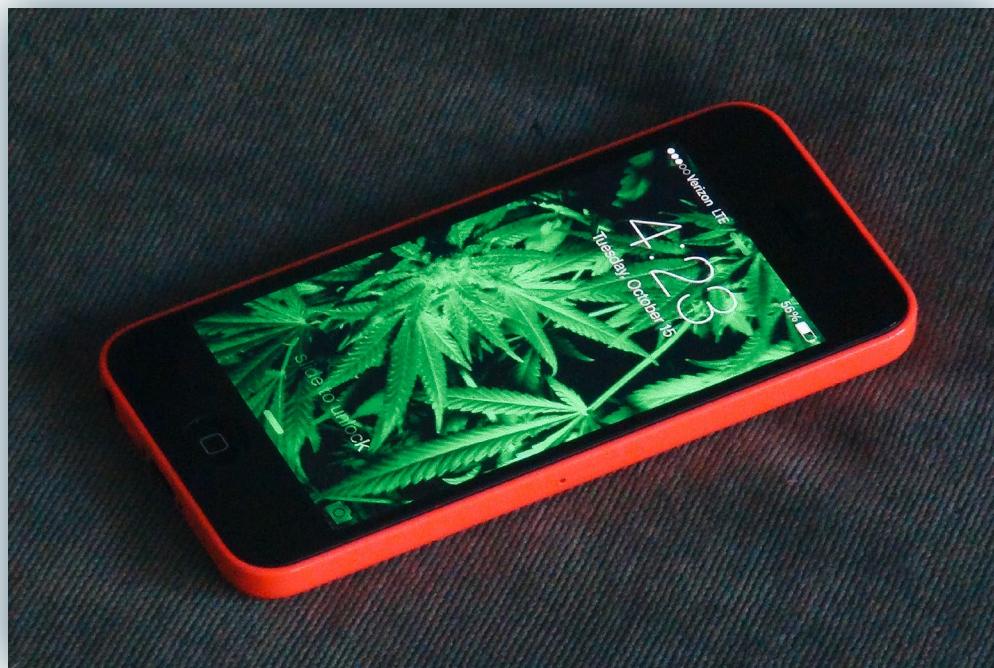
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# **YOUTH MODE: A REPORT ON FREEDOM**

# THE DEATH OF AGE

**It used to be possible to be special — to sustain unique differences through time, relative to a certain sense of audience.**

**As long as you were different from the people around you, you were safe. But the Internet and globalization fucked this up for everyone. In the same way that a video goes viral, so does potentially anything. The likelihood that you and Michelle Obama wish upon the same star is greater than ever.**



**The assertion of individuality is a rite of passage, but generational branding strips youth of this agency. Belonging to your generation becomes an inescapable truth — you're a Scorpio whether you believe in astrology or not. At the same time, responsibility for generational behavior is partial at the max. (“It's not you, it's your whole generation.”)**



**For a while, age came wrapped up in a bundle of social expectations. But when Boomerang kids return to their parents' Empty Nests and retirement fades into the horizon, the bond between social expectations and age begins to dissolve. We're left using technological aptitude to divide the olds from the youngs — even though moms get addicted to Candy Crush, too.**

**Demography is dead, yet marketers will quietly invent another generation on demand. Clients are desperate to adapt. But to what? Generational linearity is gone.**

**An ageless youth demands emancipation.**



YOUTH MODE

# YOUTH MODE

**Youth is a mode. It's an attitude. Think Kevin Spacey's pot-smoking muscle hunk breakdown in *American Beauty*. That's a Boomer model of how it's done. Regression to a state before the suit and the tie sucked all the life out of you and made you into a corporate drone. Everything fell apart for Spacey's character because he did it all wrong. Being in YOUTH MODE isn't about perpetually reliving yourself at a younger age, it's about being youthfully present at any given age. Youth isn't a process, aging is. In YOUTH MODE, you are infinite.**





**YOUTH ≠ AGE**  
**YOUTH = FREEDOM**

**Youth isn't freedom in any political sense. It's an emancipation from boredom, from prescription, from tradition. It's the fullness of potential, the ability to be the person you want to be. It's about the freedom to choose how you relate; the freedom to choose how you understand; the freedom to try new things; the freedom to make mistakes. Youth understands freedom with limits — that being adaptable is the only thing that will set you free.**



**Whether you're \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_, the desire to escape the constraints of everyday life is universal. Being in YOUTH MODE grants you the freedom to radically realign your relationship with the outside world.**

## YOUTH MODE



# YOUTH MODE

- ENGAGED WITH NEWNESS
- EXPERIMENTAL
- CRITICAL OF THE PAST
  - CHANGEABLE
- DOWN WITH GROUPS
  - REBELLIOUS
- FREE

## YOUTH MODE



A black and red helicopter is landing on a helipad. The side of the helicopter features the words "PREVENT SENIOR". In the background, a city skyline with various buildings is visible under a clear sky.

**IN YOUTH MODE,  
YOU ARE INFINITE**

# WE LIVE IN MASS INDIE TIMES



It's like someone yelled 'Fire!' in a crowded movie theater the day Kurt Cobain died and everyone tried to find a different exit.  
Mass Indie is what happens 45 minutes later. Tired of fighting to squeeze out the doors, everyone decides to stay in the theater.  
**Panic subsides into ambivalence.**

**Mass Indie ditched the Alternative preoccupation with evading sameness and focused on celebrating difference instead.**

**But being different isn't always a lonely journey; it can be a group activity. Whether you're soft grunge, pastel goth, or pale, you can shop at Forever 21. Mass Indie has an additive conception of how culture works. Identities aren't mutually exclusive. They're always ripe for new combinations.**



**In the style of an audio equalizer, Mass Indie culture mixes weirdness with normalness until it levels out. This is the dogma of: old jean jacket over an evening dress, expensive leisure activity in an industrial space, one party animal per party. In this scenario, mastering difference is a way of neutralizing threats and accruing status within a peer group.**

**But just because Mass Indie is pro-diversity, doesn't mean it's post-scarcity. There's a limited amount of difference in the world, and the mainstreaming of its pursuit has only made difference all the scarcer. The anxiety that there is no new terrain is always a catalyst for change.**



A photograph of a man from behind, standing in a field of tall grass. He is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, brown pants, and a green and black backpack. He is holding a fishing rod in his right hand. In the background, there are mountains under a clear sky.

**BEING SPECIAL VS.  
BEING FREE**

## PROBLEM 1: SEEING LIKE A CLONE

*The details that distinguish you are so small that nobody can tell you're actually different.*

**Feast.ly, Fast.ly, Vid.ly, Vend.ly, Ming.ly, Mob.ly:** each provides a specific service, finetuned to a specific user need, brought to life by a specific entrepreneurial urge. They're all targeting different audiences, but the general public can't remember who's who. Even the CEOs themselves are at pains to remember their own special sauce. All of their high-res decisions were for naught and their startups went full circle back to basic. This is an HD problem.



## YOUTH MODE: MASS INDIE

**It's hard to keep track of the big picture when the significant details are getting smaller and smaller. The human brain can only process so much information.**

**It's like that time you took so many drugs at Burning Man that you just ended up uncomfortably lucid. On the flip side, nobody will ever guess that your plain white T-shirt is line dry only.**

## PROBLEM 2: ISOLATION

***You're so special nobody knows what you're talking about.***

**It's the potluck where the guests have so many dietary restrictions, that everyone can only eat what they brought. It's the party that's so exclusive that no one even shows up. This is some Tower of Babel shit.**





**You need Google Translate just to say, “Hey, how are you? What’s up?” It’s not that you’re actually alone, but you might as well be. You’ve been working so hard at being precise that the micro-logic of your decisions is only apparent to an ever-narrowing circle of friends. You may be the world’s foremost expert in Religious Dance of Melanesia. But after you graduate, you realize no one gives a fuck besides your PhD advisor. This is the story of the world’s most exasperated Subway employee.**

### **PROBLEM 3: MAXING OUT**

***The markers of individuality are so plentiful and regenerate so quickly that it’s impossible to keep up.***

**“Is she carrying?” You’re not really sure. You heard the words in the club, but Urban Dictionary is not keeping up. The conversation is moving too fast.**

**Teens become Internet famous then immediately delete their accounts. The flood of notifications is overwhelming. It feels like spam. But there were probably some genuine, interesting interactions buried in the feed. Maybe they reactivate their accounts for a second and begin to dig, and then immediately shut them down again. It's a delicate balance between FOMO and DGAF. How do you navigate the two? Reality TV producers wear themselves out Snooki-hunting because being effortlessly on point is such an impossible task. Only idiot savants are in the right place at the right time without even knowing it.**



A close-up photograph of a person's lower torso and hair. They are wearing dark cargo shorts. The left leg features a large, light-colored rectangular panel with a black grid pattern. The right leg has a vertical panel with a small, regular dot perforation pattern. The person's long, dark hair is being held by their hands behind their head.

**THUS THE CARGO  
SHORTS**

# ACTING BASIC

**If the rule is Think Different, being seen as normal is the scariest thing. (It means being returned to your boring suburban roots, being turned back into a pumpkin, exposed as unexceptional.)**

**Which paradoxically makes normalcy ripe for the Mass Indie überelites to adopt as their own, confirming their status by showing how disposable the trappings of uniqueness are. The most different thing to do is to reject being different all together. When the fringes get more and more crowded, Mass Indie turns toward the middle. Having mastered difference, the truly cool attempt to master sameness.**



**Sameness is not to be mistaken for minimalism. You gain a temporary mobility and a sense of being unencumbered by making fewer and more considered decisions. But going back to basics doesn't work when the scripts that determine the basics are out of whack. Eventually, you end up stalling. Your groove dissolves into a rut. Steve Jobs, Doug Funnie, immortal because their outfits never change, or just pre-dead?**



**There's a theory that a man's style is just a reiteration of what he wore the last time he was "really getting laid" — thus the cargo shorts. Act Basic too long and you become extra conspicuous. People recognize the two holes ripped in your jacket where the Stone Island logo used to be. The casual uniform itself begins to attract police attention.**

**When differentiation happens according to some sort of ordered progression, shit's only getting more authentic. You're vegetarian before you're vegan, and vegan before you're a gluten-free vegan locavore. The need to order and narrate your decisions produces a feeling of trappedness. But playing the tape backwards doesn't escape this logic. At the end of the day, superficial simplicity is just the denial of complexity, not its resolution. Acting Basic is not a solution to Mass Indie problems because it's still based on difference. Sameness is not mastered, only approached.**



# THE NEW WORLD ORDER OF BLANKNESS



# NORMCORE

**Once upon a time people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today people are born individuals and have to find their communities. Mass Indie responds to this situation by creating cliques of people in the know, while Normcore knows the real feat is harnessing the potential for connection to spring up. It's about adaptability, not exclusivity.**

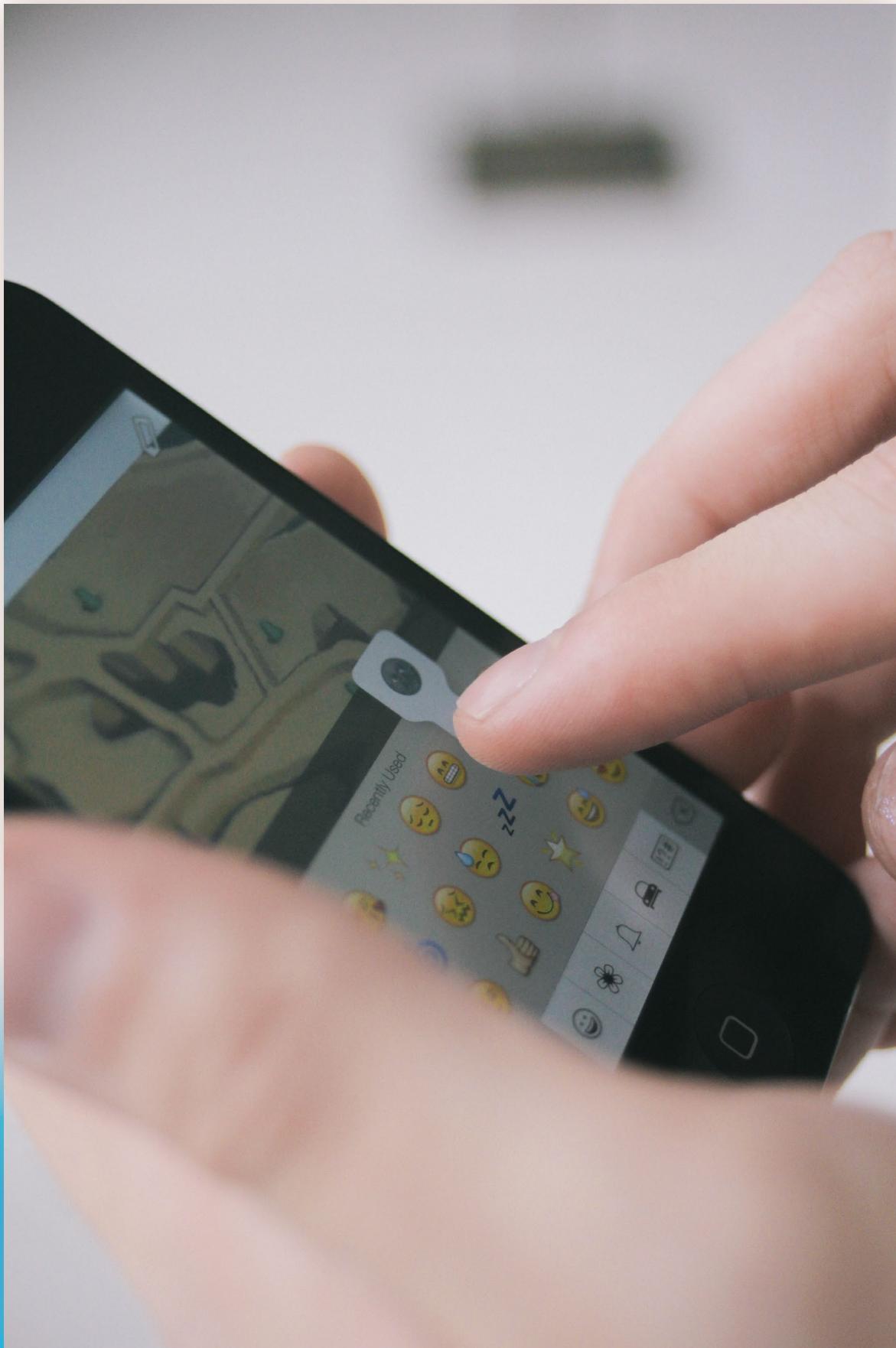


**Normcore understands the process of differentiation from a nonlinear perspective. It's addicted to the toolkit provided by YOUTH MODE and never wants to put it away. Normcore doesn't want the freedom to become someone. Normcore wants the freedom to be with anyone. You might not understand the rules of football, but you can still get a thrill from the roar of the crowd at the World Cup. In Normcore, one does not pretend to be above the indignity of belonging.**



**Normcore moves away from a coolness that relies on difference to a post-authenticity coolness that opts in to sameness. But instead of appropriating an aestheticized version of the mainstream, it just cops to the situation at hand. To be truly Normcore, you need to understand that there's no such thing as normal.**

## YOUTH MODE: NORMCORE



# NORMCORE

- SITUATIONAL
- NON-DETERMINISTIC
  - ADAPTABLE
- UNCONCERNED WITH AUTHENTICITY
  - EMPATHY OVER TOLERANCE
- POST-ASPIRATIONAL

## YOUTH MODE: NORMCORE



**In terms of boring conversations that have the potential to be interesting, Mass Indie is like talking about the dream you had last night, whereas Normcore is like talking about the weather. Both allow significant emotions to be revealed in casual settings. But no matter how vividly you describe it, your dream ends with you, while the coming storm affects us all.**



**Normcore produces microscopic catch-alls that allow for strategic misinterpretation. To the receiver, it's confusing. Like you are dead certain that Harry Styles is singing only to you.**

**But in reality those green eyes are just shooting off a soft gaze. Normcore is the eyes of the Mona Lisa. This is the new world order of blankness. You can no longer return a dead stare or fall into the Gap, now you have to respond appropriately, meet every situation head on. (This is why it's Normcore to be Mass Indie in Williamsburg.) Normcore capitalizes on the possibility of misinterpretation as an opportunity for connection — not as a threat to authenticity.**



**Normcore knows your consumer choices aren't irrelevant, they're just temporary. People compromise, people are inconsistent. Making one choice today and a conflicting choice tomorrow doesn't make you a hypocrite. It just makes you complex. Consumption has never been a chance for absolute self-actualization. It's always been a matter of navigating the facts on the ground, whether macro (Armageddon) or micro (buyer's remorse).**



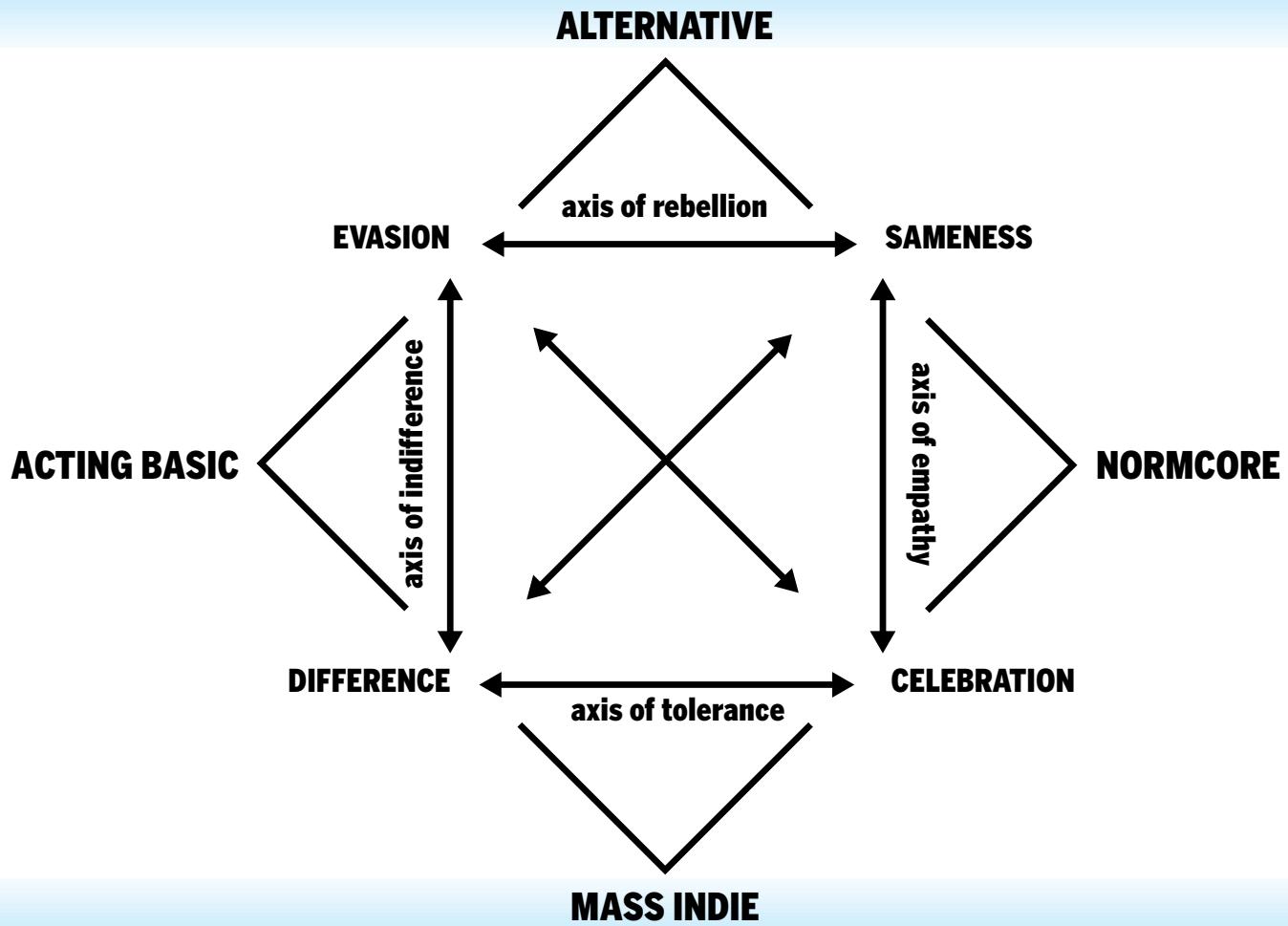
A photograph of a winding asphalt road through a dense forest. The trees are in full autumn colors, with shades of red, orange, yellow, and green. The road is wet, reflecting the surrounding trees. A small signpost is visible on the right side of the road.

# THE GRACE OF MAYBE



**Individuality was once the path to personal freedom — a way to lead life on your own terms. But the terms keep getting more and more specific, making us more and more isolated. Normcore seeks the freedom that comes with non-exclusivity. It finds liberation in being nothing special, and realizes that adaptability leads to belonging. Normcore is a path to a more peaceful life.**

## YOUTH MODE: NORMCORE



**K-HOLE is a trend forecasting  
group founded by Greg Fong,  
Sean Monahan, Emily Segal,  
Chris Sherron and Dena Yago.**

**BOX 1824 is an office for  
innovation, consumer,  
and culture research.**

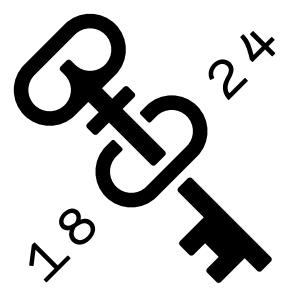
**October 2013**

**New York**

**São Paulo**

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