A Newsletter from   **ARTICLE GROUP**
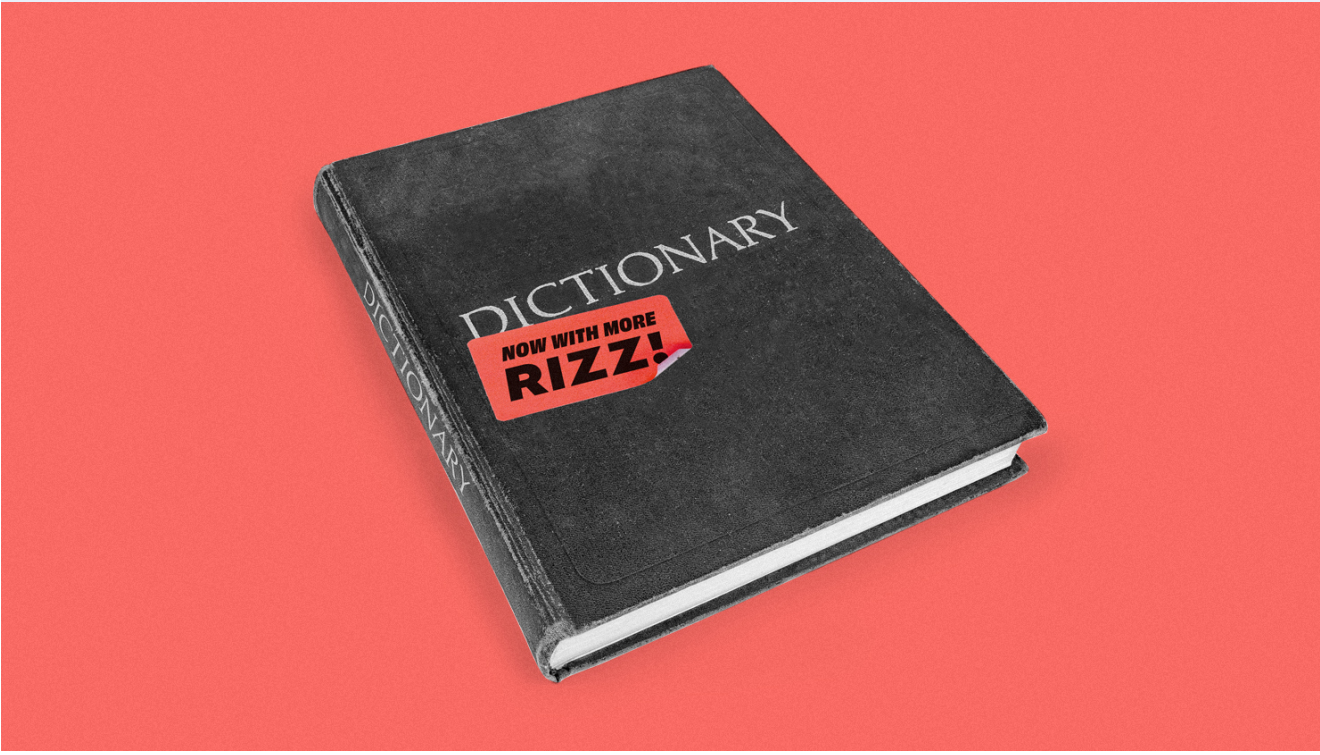
Human Conditions

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and 6,7 side of creativity.

What are we doing?

The Cambridge Dictionary recently added "skibidi" "delulu" and "tradwife" to their official lexicon. These terms, born from TikTok trends and YouTube wormholes, have achieved dictionary status within a year, even months, of gaining popularity —a timeline that would have been unthinkable in previous eras.

"Skibidi" spread via a series of surreal YouTube videos that began in 2023. "Delulu," a jokey truncation of "delusional," became a go-to descriptor across social platforms in the early 2020s. "Tradwife"—a portmanteau of "traditional" and "wife," used for women who embrace homemaking and conventional gender roles—percolated for years in niche forums before influencers brought it to wider attention.

So what does that acceleration hint at?

Terms get legitimized while the culture around them is still forming, compressing the awkward period when meanings are tested and boundaries negotiated. Traditionally, slang drew a line. It was an ingroup signal—language as proxy for identity and membership exclusivity. When terms like "cool" took years to migrate from bandstand to suburb, they kept their signaling power longer. The slow adoption preserved their social function and, with it, the subcultures they gestured toward.

Now, once a term escapes its niche, its signaling power burns off in months. Communities compensate by generating fresh terminology to stay ahead, especially in gaming and other niche scenes where vocabularies evolve constantly.

The function of dictionaries is evolving alongside them. Rather than documenting cultural consensus, they're becoming archives of the zeitgeist, capturing words mid-flight before their meanings fully crystallize within the communities that generate them. Canonical recognition no longer means linguistic stability, but a moment in a dizzying cycle of semantic birth and death and rebirth.

A word can be everywhere and mean almost nothing. The dictionaries will duly record the everywhere. Meaning arrives, if it does, with consequence.

Not subscribed to this newsletter? Rude.

Let's **fix that**.

ARTICLE GROUP
Tiny words make us look important.