

The internet is already over

Our God is a devourer, who makes things only for the swallowing.



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A sort of preface



thoughts. It says *you will not survive. You will not survive. You will not survive.*

Earlier this year, an article in the *Cut* reported that the cool thing now is to have messy hair and smoke cigarettes again. You might remember it; the piece was widely mocked for a day or two, and then it vanished without a trace, which is how these things tend to go. But the headline was incredible, and it stuck with me. A Vibe Shift Is Coming. Will Any Of Us Survive It? Everyone else seemed to focus on the ‘vibe shift’ stuff, but the second part was much more interesting. To talk about *survival*—what extraordinary stakes, for a piece that was, in essence, about how young people are wearing different types of shoes from the shoes that you, as a slightly older person who still wants to think of themselves as young, wear. Everything is stripped back to the rawest truth: that you are a fragile creature perishing in time. And all you need to do is apply Betteridge’s Law for the real content to shine through. No. *None of you will survive.*

There was an ancient thought: that *Zeus feeds on the world*. ‘The universe is cyclically consumed by the fire that engendered it.’ Our God is a devourer, who makes things only for the swallowing. As it happens, this was the *first* thought, the first ever written down in a book of philosophy, the first to survive: that nothing survives, and the blankness that birthed you will be the same hole you crawl into again. Anaximander: ‘Whence things have their origin, thence also their destruction lies...’ In the Polynesian version, Maui tried to achieve immortality by taking the form of a worm and slithering into the vagina of Hine-nui-te-po, goddess of night and death.¹ He failed. Hine-nui-te-po’s pussy is full of obsidian teeth; when she stirred in the night those teeth sliced clean through his body. He dribbled out again, a loose mulch of the hero who conquered the Sun.

You will not survive is not only a frightening idea. The things I hope for are doomed, and everything I try to create will be a failure, but so will everything I despise.² These days, it repeats itself whenever I see something that’s trying its hardest to make me angry and upset. There’s a whole class of these objects: they’re never particularly interesting or important; they just exist to jab you into thinking that the world is going in a particular direction, away from wherever you are. *One-Third Of Newborn Infants Now Describe Themselves As Polyamorous*—

Here's Why That's A Good Thing. Should I get upset about this? Should I be concerned? Why bother? It will not survive.³ *Meet The Edgy Influencers Making Holocaust Denial Hip Again.* Are we in trouble? Maybe, but even trouble is ending. *Everyone That Matters Has Started Wearing Jeans Over Their Heads With Their Arms Down The Leg Holes And Their Faces All Cramped Up In The Sweaty Groin Region, And They Walk Down The Street Like This, Bumping Into Things, And When They Sit Down To Eat They Just Pour Their Subscription-Service Meal-Replacement Slurry Over The Crotch Of Their Jeans And Lick At The Dribblings From The Inside, And They're Covered In Flies And Smell Bad And Also They're Naked From The Waist Down Because Their Trousers Are On Their Heads, That's Part Of It Too—We Show You How To Get The Look!* How proud they are of their new thing. ‘The strong iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles, who would not live long.’

In fact, one of the things that will not survive is novelty itself: trends, fads, fashions, scenes, vibes. We are thrown back into cyclical time; what’s growing old is the cruel demand to make things new. It’s already trite to notice that all our films are franchises now, all our bestselling novelists have the same mass-produced non-style, and all our pop music sounds like a tribute act.⁴ But consider that the cultural shift that had all those thirtysomething *Cut* writers so worried about their survival is simply the return of a vague Y2K sensibility, which was itself just an echo of the early 1980s. Angular guitar music again, flash photography, plaid. We’re on a twenty-year loop: the time it takes for a new generation to be born, kick around for a while, and then settle into the rhythm of the spheres.

Every time this happens, it coincides with a synodic conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Jupiter, the triumphant present; Saturn, senescence, decline. The son who castrates his father, the father who devours his sons: once every twenty years, they are indistinguishable in the sky. Astrologers call this the Great Chronocrator. The last one was at the end of 2020, and it’ll occur twice more in my lifetime: when these witless trendwatchers finally shuffle off, they’ll be tended on their deathbeds by a nurse with messy black eyeshadow and low-rise scrubs. Jupiter and Saturn will burn above you as a single point, and with your last rattling breaths you’ll still be asking if she thinks you’re cool. You don’t get it. ‘For oute of olde feldes, as men seith, cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to

yere.' We are entering a blissful new Middle Ages, where you simply soak in a static world until the waters finally close in over your head.

The things that *will* survive are the things that are already in some sense endless. The sea; the night; the word. Things with deep fathoms of darkness in them.

The internet will not survive.

The argument



1. That it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of the internet

In 1977, Ken Olsen declared that 'there is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home.' In 1995, Robert Metcalfe predicted in *InfoWorld* that the internet would go 'spectacularly supernova' and then collapse within a year. In 2000, the *Daily Mail* reported that the 'Internet may be just a passing fad,' adding that 'predictions that the Internet would revolutionise the way society works have proved wildly inaccurate.' Any day now, the millions of internet users

would simply stop, either bored or frustrated, and rejoin the real world.

Funny, isn't it? You can laugh at these people now, from your high perch one quarter of the way into the twenty-first century. Look at these morons, stuck in their grubby little past, who couldn't even correctly identify the shape of the year 2022. You can see it perfectly, because you're smart. You know that the internet has changed everything, forever.

If you like the internet, you'll point out that it's given us all of human knowledge and art and music, instantly accessible from anywhere in the world; that you can arrive in a foreign city and immediately guide yourself to a restaurant and translate the menu and also find out about the interesting historical massacres that took place nearby, all with a few lazy swipes of your finger. So many interesting little blogs! So many bizarre subcultures! It's opened up our experience of the world: now, nothing is out of reach.

To be honest, it's difficult to reconstruct what the unbridled techno-optimists think; there's so few of them left. Still, those who *don't* like the internet usually agree with them on all the basics—they just argue that we're now in touch with the *wrong sort* of thing: bad kids' cartoons, bad political opinions, bad ways of relating to your own body and others. Which is why it's so important to get all this unpleasant stuff off the system, and turn the algorithm towards what is good and true.

They might be right, but you could go deeper. The internet has enabled us to live, for the first time, entirely apart from other people. It replaces everything good in life with a low-resolution simulation. A handful of sugar instead of a meal: addictive but empty, just enough to keep you alive. It even seems to be killing off sex, replacing it with more cheap, synthetic ersatz. Our most basic biological drives simply wither in its cold blue light. People will cheerfully admit that the internet has destroyed their attention spans, but what it's really done away with is your ability to *think*. Usually, when I'm doing something boring but necessary—the washing up, or walking to the post office—I'll constantly interrupt myself; there's a little Joycean warbling from the back of my brain. 'Boredom is the dream bird that broods the egg of experience.' But when I'm listlessly killing time on the internet, there is *nothing*. The mind does not

wander. I am not there. That rectangular hole spews out war crimes and cutesy comedies and affirmations and porn, all of it mixed together into one general-purpose informational goo, and I remain in its trance, the lifeless scroll, twitching against the screen until the sky goes dark and I'm one day closer to the end. You lose hours to—what? An endless slideshow of barely interesting images and actively unpleasant text. *Oh, cool—more memes!* You know it's all very boring, brooding nothing, but the internet addicts you to your own boredom. I've tried heroin: this is worse. More numb, more blank, more nowhere. A portable suicide booth; a device for turning off your entire existence. Death is no longer waiting for you at the far end of life. It eats away at your short span from the inside out.

But lately I'm starting to think that the last thing the internet destroys might be itself. I think they might be vindicated, Ken Olson and Robert Metcalfe and even, God forgive me, the *Daily Mail*.

In the future—not the distant future, but ten years, five—people will remember the internet as a brief dumb enthusiasm, like phrenology or the dirigible. They might still use computer networks to send an email or manage their bank accounts, but those networks will not be where culture or politics happens. The idea of spending *all day online* will seem as ridiculous as sitting down in front of a nice fire to read the phone book. Soon, people will find it incredible that for several decades all our art was obsessed with *digital computers*: all those novels and films and exhibitions about tin cans that make beeping noises, handy if you need to multiply two big numbers together, but so lifeless, so sexless, so grey synthetic glassy bug-eyed spreadsheet plastic drab. And all your smug chortling over the people who failed to predict our internetty present—if anyone remembers it, it'll be with exactly the same laugh.⁵

2. That exhausted is a whole lot more than tired

You know, secretly, even if you're pretending not to, that this thing is nearing exhaustion. There is simply *nothing there* online. All language has become rote, a halfarsed performance: even the outraged mobs are screaming on autopilot. Even genuine crises can't interrupt the tedium of it all, the bad jokes and predictable thinkpieces, spat-out enzymes to digest the world. 'Leopards break

into the temple and drink all the sacrificial vessels dry; it keeps happening; in the end, it can be calculated in advance and is incorporated into the ritual.’ Online is not where people meaningfully *express themselves*; that still happens in the remaining scraps of the nonnetworked world. It’s a parcel of time you give over to the machine. Make the motions, chant its dusty liturgy. The newest apps even literalise this: everyone has to post a selfie at exactly the same time, an inaudible call to prayer ringing out across the world. Recently, at a bar, I saw the room go bright as half the patrons suddenly started posing with their negronis. This is called *being real*.

Whoever you are, a role is already waiting for you. All those pouty nineteen-year-old lowercase nymphets, so fluent in their borrowed boredom, flatly reciting *don’t just choke me i want someone to cut off my entire head*. All those wide-eyed video creeps, their inhuman enthusiasm, *hi guys! hi guys!! so today we’re going to talk about—don’t forget to like and subscribe!! hi guys!!!* Even on the deranged fringes, a dead grammar has set in. The people who fake Tourette’s for TikTok and the people who fake schizophrenia for no reason at all. *VOICES HAVE REVEALED TO ME THAT YOUR MAILMAN IS A DEMONIC ARCHON SPAT FROM BABYLON’S SPINNING PIGMOUTH, GOD WANTS YOU TO KILL HIM WITH A ROCKET LAUNCHER.* Without even passing out of date, every mode of internet-speak already sounds antiquated. Aren’t you embarrassed? Can’t you hear, under the chatter of these empty forms, a long low ancient whine, the last mewl of that cat who wants to haz cheezburger?

When I say the internet is running dry, I am not just basing this off vibes. The exhaustion is measurable and real. 2020 saw a grand, mostly unnoticed shift in online behaviour: the clickhogs all went catatonic, thick tongues lolling in the muck. On Facebook, the average engagement rate—the number of likes, comments, and shares per follower—fell by 34%, from 0.086 to 0.057. Well, everyone knows that the mushrooms are spreading over Facebook, hundreds of thousands of users liquefying out of its corpse every year. But the same pattern is everywhere. Engagement fell 28% on Instagram and 15% on Twitter. (It’s kept falling since.) Even on TikTok, the terrifying brainhole of tomorrow, the walls are closing in. Until 2020, the average daily time spent on the app kept rising in line with its growing user base; since then the number of users has kept

growing, but the thing is capturing less and less of their lives.

And this was, remember, a year in which millions of people had nothing to do except engage with great content online—and in which, for a few months, liking and sharing the right content became an urgent moral duty. Back then, I thought the pandemic and the protests had permanently hauled our collective human semi-consciousness over to the machine. Like most of us, I couldn't see what was really happening, but there were some people who could. Around the same time, strange new conspiracy theories started doing the rounds: that the internet is empty, that all the human beings you used to talk to have been replaced by bots and drones. ‘The internet of today is entirely sterile... the internet may seem gigantic, but it’s like a hot air balloon with nothing inside.’ They weren’t wrong.

What’s happening?⁶ Here’s a story from the very early days of the internet. In the 90s, someone I know started a collaborative online zine, a mishmash text file of barely lucid thoughts and theories. It was deeply weird and, in some strange corners, very popular. Years passed and technology improved: soon, they could break the text file into different posts, and see exactly how many people were reading each one. They started optimising their output: the most popular posts became the model for everything else; they found a style and voice that *worked*. The result, of course, was that the entire thing became rote and lifeless and rapidly collapsed. Much of the media is currently going down the same path, refining itself out of existence. Aside from the *New Yorker*’s fussy umlauts, there’s simply nothing to distinguish any one publication from any other. (And platforms like this one are not an *alternative* to the crisis-stricken media, just a further acceleration in the process.) The same thing is happening everywhere, to everyone. The more you relentlessly optimise your network-facing self, the more you chase the last globs of loose attention, the more frazzled we all become, and the less anyone will be able to sustain any interest at all.⁷

Everything that depends on the internet for its propagation will die. What survives will survive in conditions of low transparency, in the sensuous murk proper to human life.

3. That you have been plugged into a grave

For a while, it was possible to live your entire life online. The world teemed with new services: simply dab at an app, and the machine would summon some other slumping creature with a skin condition to deliver your groceries, or drive you in pointless circles around town, or meet you for overpriced drinks and awkward sex and vanish. Like everyone, I thought this was the inevitable shape of the future. ‘You’ll own nothing, and you’ll be happy.’ We’d all be reduced to a life spent swapping small services for the last linty coins in our pockets. *It’s Uber for dogs! It’s Uber for dogshit! It’s picking up a fresh, creamy pile of dogshit with your bare hands—on your phone!* But this was not a necessary result of new technologies. The internet was not subordinating every aspect of our lives *by itself*, under its own power. The online economy is an energy sink; it’s only survived this far as a parasite, in the bowels of something else.

That *something else* is a vast underground cavern of the dead, billions of years old.

The Vision Fund is an investment vehicle headquartered in London and founded by Japan’s SoftBank to manage some \$150 billion, mostly from the sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which it’s poured into Uber and DoorDash and WeWork and Klarna and Slack. It provides the money that effectively subsidises your autistic digital life. These firms could take over the market because they were so much cheaper than the traditional competitors—but most of them were never profitable; they survived on Saudi largesse.

Investors were willing to sit on these losses; it’s not as if there were many alternatives. Capital is no longer capable of effectively reproducing itself in the usual way, through the production of commodities. Twenty-five years ago manufacturing represented a fifth of global GDP; in 2020 it was down to 16%. Interest rates have hovered near zero for well over a decade as economies struggle to grow. Until this year, governments were still issuing negative-yield bonds, and people were buying them—a *predictable* loss looked like the least bad option. The only reliable source of profits is in the extraction of raw materials: chiefly, pulling the black corpses of trillions of prehistoric organisms out of the ground so they can be set on fire. Which means that the feudal rulers of those corpselands—men like King Salman, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques—

ended up sitting on a vast reservoir of capital without many productive industries through which it could be valorised. So, as a temporary solution, they stuck it in the tech sector.

It didn't matter that these firms couldn't turn a profit. The *real* function was not to make money in the short term; it was to suck up vast quantities of user data. Where you go, what you buy; a perfect snapshot of millions of ordinary lives. They were betting that this would be the currency of the future, as fundamental as oil: the stuff that rules the world.⁸

They were wrong, but in the process of being wrong, they created a monster. Your frictionless digital future, your very important culture wars, your entire sense of self—it's just a waste byproduct of the perfectly ordinary, centuries-old global circulation of fuel, capital, and Islam. It turns out that if these three elements are arranged in one particular way, people will start behaving strangely. They'll pretend that by spending all day on the computer they're actually *fighting fascism*, or *standing up for women's sex-based rights*, as if the entire terrain of combat wasn't provided by a nightmare head-chopping theocratic state.⁹ They'll pretend that it's normal to dance alone in silence for a front-facing camera, or that the intersection of art and technology is somehow an interesting place to be. For a brief minute, you'll get the sociocultural Boltzmann entity we call the internet. 'But nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.'

The tables are already being cleared at the great tech-sector chow-down.¹⁰ Online services are reverting to market prices. The Vision Fund is the worst performing fund in SoftBank's history; in the last quarter alone it's lost over \$20 billion. Most of all, it's now impossible to ignore that the promise propping up the entire networked economy—that user data could power a system of terrifyingly precise targeted advertising—was a lie. It simply does not work. 'It sees that you bought a ticket to Budapest, so you get more tickets to Budapest... All they really know about you is your shopping.' Now, large companies are cutting out their online advertising budgets entirely, and seeing no change whatsoever to their bottom line. One study found that algorithmically targeted

advertising performed worse than ads selected at random. This is what sustains the entire media, provides 80% of Google's income and 99% of Facebook's, and it's made of magic beans.

A dying animal still makes its last few spastic kicks: hence the recent flurry of strange and stillborn ideas. Remember the Internet of Things? Your own lightbulbs blinking out ads in seizure-inducing Morse code, your own coffee machine calling the police if you try to feed it some unlicensed beans.

Remember the Metaverse? The grisly pink avatar of Mark Zuckerberg, bobbing around like the ghost of someone's foreskin through the scene of the recent genocides. *Wow! It's so cool to immersively experience these bloodmires in VR!* More recent attempts to squeeze some kind of profit out of this carcass are, somehow, worse. *Here's how web3 is about to disrupt the meat industry. Every time you buy a pound of tripe, your physical offal will be bundled with a dedicated TripeToken, which maintains its value and rarity even after the tripe has been eaten, thanks to a unique blockchain signature indexed to the intestinal microbiome of the slaughtered cattle! By eating large amounts of undercooked offal while trading TripeTokens on secondary markets, you can incentivise the spread of your favourite cattle diseases—and if one of the pathogens you own jumps the species barrier to start infecting humans, you've successfully monetised the next pandemic! Once you get sick, you can rent out portions of your own intestinal tract to an industrial meat DAO in exchange for SlaughterCoins. Because SlaughterCoins are linked via blockchain to the progressive disintegration of your body, they're guaranteed to increase in value! And when your suffering becomes unbearable, local abattoirs will bid to buy up your SlaughterCoin wallet in exchange for putting you out of your misery with a bolt gun to the head!* Yes, the future is always capable of getting worse. But *this* future is simply never going to happen. Not the next generation of anything, just a short-term grift: the ship's rats stripping the galley of all its silverware on their way out.

4. That the revolution can not be digitised

If you really want to see how impotent the internet is, though, you only have to look at politics.

Everyone agrees that the internet has swallowed our entire political discourse whole. When politicians debate, they trade crap one-liners to be turned into gifs.

Their strategists seem to think elections are won or lost on memes. Entire movements emerge out of flatulent little echo chambers; elected representatives giddy over the evils of seed oils or babbling about how it's not their job to educate you. And it's true that the internet has changed some things: mostly, it's helped break apart the cohesive working-class communities that produce a strong left, and turned them into vague swarms of monads. But as a political *instrument*, all it can do is destroy anyone who tries to pick it up—because everything that reproduces itself through the internet is doomed.

Occasionally, online social movements do make something happen. A hand emerges from out of the cloud to squish some minor individual. Let's get her friends to denounce her! Let's find out where she lives! You can have your sadistic fun and your righteous justice at the same time: doesn't it feel good to be good? But these movements build no institutions, create no collective subjects, and produce no meaningful change. Their only power is punishment—and this game only works *within* the internet, and only when everyone involved agrees to play by the internet's rules.¹¹ As soon as they run up against anything with a separate set of values—say, a Republican Party that wants to put its guy on the Supreme Court, #MeToo or no #MeToo—they instantly crumble. And if, like much of the contemporary left, you're left with nothing on which to build your political movement except a hodgepodge of online frenzies, you will crumble too.

The post-George Floyd demonstrations might be our era's greatest tragedy: tens of millions of people mobilised in (possibly) the largest protest movement in human history, all for an urgent and necessary cause—and achieving precisely *nothing*. At the time, I worried that the mass street movement risked being consumed by the sterile politics of online; this is exactly what happened. Now, even that vague cultural halo is spent. Whatever wokeness was, as of 2022 it's so utterly burned out as a cultural force that anyone still grousing about it 24/7 is a guaranteed hack. More recently, there's been worry about the rise of the 'new right'—a oozy digitised political current whose *effective proposition* is that people should welcome a total dictatorship to prevent corporations posting rainbow flags on the internet. You can guess what I think of its prospects.

5. That this is the word

Things will survive in proportion to how well they've managed to insulate themselves from the internet and its demands. The *Financial Times* will outlive the *Guardian*. Paintings will outlive NFTs. Print magazines will outlive Substack. You will, if you play your cards right, outlive me. If anything interesting ever happens again, it will not be online. You will not get it delivered to your inbox. It will not have a podcast. This machine has never produced anything of note, and it never will.

A sword is against the internet, against those who live online, and against its officials and wise men. A sword is against its false prophets, and they will become fools. A sword is against its commentators, and they will be filled with exhaustion. A sword is against its trends and fashions and against all the posturers in its midst, and they will become out of touch. A sword is against its cryptocoins, and they will be worthless. A drought is upon its waters, and they will be dried up. For it is a place of graven images, and the people go mad over idols. So the desert creatures and hyenas will live there and ostriches will dwell there. The bots will chatter at its threshold, and dead links will litter the river bed. It will never again be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation.

A conclusion, or, where I'm going with all this





I am aware that I'm writing this on the internet.

Whatever it is I'm doing here, you should not be part of it. Do not click the button below this paragraph, do not type in your email address to receive new posts straight to your inbox, and for the love of God, if you have any self-respect, do not even think about giving me any money. There is still time for you to do something else. You can still unchain yourself from this world that will soon, very soon, mean absolutely nothing.

Type your email...



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As far as I can tell, Substack mostly functions as a kind of meta-discourse for Twitter. (At least, this is the part I've seen—there are also, apparently, recipes.) Graham Linehan posts fifty times a day on this platform, and all of it is just replying to tweets. This does not strike me as particularly sustainable. I have no idea what kind of demented pervert is actually reading this stuff, when you could be lying in a meadow by a glassy stream, *rien faire comme une bête*, eyes melting into the sky. According to the very helpful Substack employees I've spoken to, there are a set of handy *best practices* for this particular region of the machine: have regular open threads, chitchat with your subscribers, post humanising updates about your life. Form a *community*. I'm told that the most successful writing on here is friendly, frequent, and fast. Apparently, readers should know exactly what you're getting at within the first three sentences. I do not plan on doing any of these things.

This is what I would like to do. I would like to see if, in the belly of the dying internet, it's possible to create something that is not like the internet. I want to see if I can poke at the outlines of whatever is coming next. In a previous life, I was a sort of mildly infamous online opinion gremlin, best known for being extravagantly mean about other opinion writers whose writing or whose opinions I didn't like. These days, I find most of that stuff very, very dull. I

wonder if it's possible to talk about things differently. Not rationally or calmly, away from the cheap point-scoring of online discourse—that would also be boring—but with a better, less sterile kind of derangement. I'm interested in the forms of writing that were here long before the internet, and which will be here long after it's gone. Not thinkpieces or blogs, but the essay, the manifesto, the satyr, and the screed. Ludibria, pseudepigrapha, quodlibets. Or folktales.

Prophecy. Dreams.

- 1 I am *very disappointed* that this scene never appears in Disney's *Moana*.
- 2 It's the same thought that, in Marx's 1873 postface to *Capital*, Volume I, 'includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction.' Or Hegel's famous line on the flight habits of nocturnal birds. Or Baudrillard after the orgy, sticky and spent, announcing that the revolution has already happened and the Messiah has already been and gone.
- 3 As a general rule: by the time you hear about any of this stuff, by the time it's in general discursive circulation, whatever was motive and real in the phenomenon has already died. Every culture warrior spends their life raging at the light of a very distant, long-exploded star.
- 4 Every few weeks, there are ads for some new band plastered over the Tube. The acid, whipsmart voice of twenty-first century youth! Then you listen, and they're just ripping off the Fall again. 'You think your haircut is distinguished, when it's a blot on the English landscape.'
- 5 Chances are, though, that it won't be remembered at all. Gregory of Tours was a Roman aristocrat, the son of a Senator, raised on Virgil and Sallust, but in his dense ten-volume *History* he never bothers to even mention the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The old imperial world had ended so decisively that its passing wasn't even considered particularly *important*; the new world of barbarian kings (governing through a system of ecclesiastical administration inherited from the empire, and that still functioned, if haphazardly, with only the most nominal connections to central authority in Italy or the Bosphorus) had become the only possible world order, even as the cities shrank and Mediterranean trade vanished. Syagrius, *magister militum* in the Roman rump state around Noviodunum, becomes the *King of the Romans*; his imperial holdout becomes the *Kingdom of Soissons*. It took several centuries for people to decide that anything particularly significant had

happened when Odoacer overthrew the teenaged Romulus Augustulus in 476 AD. This is why the internet has not been a true revolution: everyone online is still obsessing over how much has changed, and fondly remembering the time before we all spent all our waking hours staring at phones.

- 6 Actually, I have two slightly overlapping theories on what might be happening. The main one is above; the second, which is weirder and makes less sense, has been shoved down here. Samuel Beckett describes a version of the internet and its exhaustion, one made of small pebbles. Here is Molloy on the beach, this limping old bird in his shabby overcoat, rolling in the sand. ‘Much of my life has ebbed away before this shivering expanse, to the sound of waves in storm and calm, and the claws of the surf.’ He has sixteen stones in his pocket, and every so often he puts one in his mouth to suck on it for a while. ‘A little pebble in your mouth, round and smooth, appeases, soothes, makes you forget your hunger, forget your thirst.’ The problem: how to make sure that when he next reaches into his pocket, he doesn’t take out the stone he’s just sucked? How to make sure he’s getting the full enjoyment out of each of his sixteen stones? Novelty is mysteriously important, even though ‘deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone, until the end of time. For they all tasted exactly the same.’ For a while, his coat and his trousers and his mouth are turned into a series of machines for creating sequences of stones. Supply pockets and store pockets, modes of circulation: curated algorithms, organising the world and its information. Beckett spends half a dozen pages (in my edition) describing these systems, as each of them arrives in a flash of divine inspiration and fails in turn. Eventually, Molloy has exhausted every possible arrangement of atoms and voids. ‘The solution to which I rallied in the end was to throw away all the stones but one, which I kept now in one pocket, now in another, and which of course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed. It was a wild part of the coast.’ In *The Exhausted*, his grand study of Beckett, Deleuze comments on the distinction between the exhausted and the merely tired. ‘The tired has only exhausted realisation, while the exhausted exhausts all of the possible.’ To exhaust the world *as it is* you only need to experience it: wander through reality, and get bored. But for true exhaustion, you need to know that everything that *could be* is as empty as everything that is. To reach exhaustion, you need some kind of device, made of ‘tables and programmes,’ a technics. Something like Molloy’s overcoat. ‘The combinatorial is the art or science of exhausting the possible, through inclusive disjunctions.’ The *ars combinatoria* is also the system of formal logic, revealed in holy visions to Ramon Llull in his cave on Puig de Ronda in 1274, eventually refined by Gottfried Leibniz, that powers the device you’re using to read this now. Exhaustion is

the mode of life integral to a computerised society; the internet comes to us already long worn out, combining and recombining stale elements, shambling through the dead zones of itself.

- 7 You could compare this process to Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: as each individual actor, follows its incentives and inflates the organic composition, the entire system ends up stumbling into crisis.
- 8 People claim to be deeply worried by this stuff, but I think you secretly like it. You like the idea that your *attention* is what creates the world. You like the idea that the entire global economy is predicated on *getting to know you*, finding out what you like and dislike, your taste in music and your frankly insane political opinions and the gooey little treats you buy. Global capitalism as one vast Buzzfeed personality quiz. The faceless empire of yourself.
- 9 One of the largest shareholders in Twitter is the Kingdom Holding Company, chaired by Prince al-Waleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. For some reason, people seemed to think that replacing him with Elon Musk would shift the tenor of the site to the right.
- 10 When I was younger, my brother and I had a running joke about a lemon that could connect to the internet. Not for any particular reason: a light would blink just below the lemon's skin, and it would do nothing, just slowly rot in your fruitbowl. A few years ago, that lemon would have immediately secured half a billion dollars in first-round funding. Now, not so much.
- 11 The 'cancelled' always participate in the theatre of their own cancellation. In Greco-Roman sacrifices, the animal was expected to nod before being led to the altar; the victim had to consent to its slaughter. And that nod always happened, even if a priest had to induce it by pouring a vase of water over the animal's head.

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