

THE GOONZETTE

Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis

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Les Algorithmes de l'Âme: How Social Media Trends Colonize Our Digital Unconscious

There is something profoundly melancholic about watching a thirteen-year-old in Lyon attempt the same dance move as her counterpart in Lagos, both unknowingly participating in what we might call the grand choreography of digital imperialism, where the TikTok algorithm—that mysterious puppeteer pulling strings across continents—determines not merely what we see but who we become, creating a peculiar form of cultural homogenization that makes the old colonial project look quaint by comparison, almost pastoral in its brutality.

The trends themselves arrive with the force of seasonal monsoons, sweeping across our feeds with an urgency that feels simultaneously organic and manufactured, and perhaps this is the genius of contemporary platform capitalism: to make the artificial feel natural, to transform surveillance into self-expression, to convince us that our most intimate gestures of creativity are somehow authentically our own when in fact they emerge from the same algorithmic matrices that once determined which villages would receive roads and which would remain isolated in the colonial periphery.

Consider the phenomenon of "aesthetic trends"—cottagecore, dark academia, coquette—each promising a curated identity that can be purchased, performed, and ultimately discarded when the algorithm grows bored, which it inevitably does with the attention span of a colonial administrator reassigned to a new territory, leaving behind digital ghost towns of abandoned hashtags and forgotten influencers whose follower counts decay like colonial monuments in post-independence cities.

What strikes me most profoundly about these cyclical obsessions is how they mirror the extractive logic of empire: a trend emerges from some marginalized community—often Black, often young, often working-class—and within weeks it has been sanitized, commodified, and redistributed through the feeds of suburban teenagers whose parents' investment portfolios likely include shares in the very platforms

facilitating this cultural laundering, creating a feedback loop of appropriation that would make Frantz Fanon weep, or perhaps laugh with the bitter recognition of patterns repeating themselves across mediums.

The algorithm, c'est notre nouveau maître colonial, determining not just what we consume but how we express joy, grief, desire, even rebellion—for what is more perfectly contained than a revolution that can be hashtagged, monetized, and forgotten within a single news cycle? We perform our resistance in fifteen-second intervals, perfectly formatted for maximum engagement, our protests pre-approved by the same systems we claim to resist.

Yet there is something almost touching about the earnestness with which young people embrace these trends, the genuine connection they feel participating in global moments of shared attention, and perhaps I am being too cynical when I see only manipulation where others see community, only extraction where others see expression, though one can hardly blame someone raised in the shadow of French colonial history for detecting patterns of domination in seemingly innocent cultural exchanges.

The cruellest aspect of this digital colonialism is how it convinces us of our own agency while systematically harvesting our creativity, our attention, our very capacity for authentic connection, transforming them into data points that fuel advertising engines designed to sell us back fragments of ourselves at premium prices, creating what we might call a colonization of interiority, where even our dreams begin to resemble content strategies.

But perhaps resistance lies not in abandoning these platforms—an impossibility for most, and besides, retreat has never been an effective decolonization strategy—but in developing what we might call algorithmic literacy, the ability to recognize when we are being choreographed, when our spontaneity is being monetized, when our desire for connection is being redirected toward consumption.

The young people dancing in Lyon and Lagos deserve better than to be unwitting participants in someone else's profit margin, though they also deserve recognition for the genuine joy they create within these constrained spaces, for the real friendships formed across impossible distances, for the moments of authentic beauty that emerge despite, not because of, the systems designed to contain them.

C'est la tragédie de notre époque: we are all colonists and colonized simultaneously, perpetrators and victims of the same vast machinery of attention extraction, learning to love our chains while dreaming of

freedom in perfectly optimized content formats, our revolution pre-approved by the very systems we long to escape.

Hot Takes Hit Different When You've Actually Been Hit Different

Kia ora sports fam! Your boy Tommy here, and we need to have a korero about these spicy sports hot takes flooding every timeline like a broken sprinkler system at Eden Park.

Look, I get it. Everyone's got opinions hotter than hangi stones about their favorite teams and players. But bro, some of these takes are so ice cold they'd make a penguin shiver. As someone who's actually been in the trenches - literally getting my bell rung by 300-pound defensive linemen who could bench press a Honda Civic - let me drop some perspective on this whole hot take culture that's got everyone acting like Skip Bayless on Red Bull.

The "This Player is Washed" Take

Every season, keyboard warriors start writing obituaries for athletes who are having one rough patch. "LeBron's washed," "Brady should retire," "This dude is mid now." Ae right, and I'm the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Here's the thing that gets me heated - y'all don't understand the whakataukī "He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata" (What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people). These aren't just stats on your fantasy roster, they're actual humans dealing with injuries, family stuff, contract negotiations, and the pressure of millions watching their every move. One bad game doesn't erase a decade of excellence, but the internet treats athletes like they're disposable NFTs that just lost value.

I remember having three straight games where I couldn't catch a cold, let alone a football. The online slander was real - people saying I should hang up my cleats and go back to "wherever I came from" (stay classy, internet). But my veteran teammates reminded me that even the GOAT Tom Brady threw pick-sixes. Form is temporary, class is permanent, and talent doesn't just disappear because Twitter said so.

The "Analytics vs Eye Test" War

This debate is more played out than dabbing in 2024. Analytics nerds be like "Actually, his expected wins above replacement in clutch situations adjusted for weather conditions shows..." while old school heads are screaming "JUST WATCH THE GAME!"

Truth bomb: Both sides are right AND wrong. Analytics are fire for understanding trends and optimizing performance - every NFL team uses them heavily now. But numbers don't capture everything. They don't measure heart, leadership, or that intangible mana some players carry. You can't quantify how a player elevates everyone around them or how they perform when the lights are brightest.

As Māori, we understand that some things can't be measured - like whakapapa (connections) and mauri (life force). The best athletes have something special that doesn't show up in spreadsheets. But at the same time, if the data says you're trash at defending pick-and-rolls, maybe work on that instead of posting cryptic Instagram stories about "haters."

****T**he "Small Market vs Big Market" Cope**

Small market fans stay pressed about superstar bias, while big market fans act like their success is purely merit-based. Both takes are partially cooked.

Real talk - market size matters for endorsements and media attention, but not as much for actual winning as people think. The Chiefs aren't exactly Manhattan, but Mahomes gets treated like royalty because he's absolutely nasty at football. Giannis made Milwaukee relevant because he's a freak of nature (in the best way). Dame Lillard had Portland rocking because he's got that clutch gene.

But let's not cap - being in LA, New York, or Miami definitely helps with attracting free agents and getting favorable media coverage. It's not fair, but it's reality. The key is building something special that transcends geography.

****T**he Real Hot Take**

Here's my actually spicy take: Most sports hot takes aren't about sports at all. They're about people wanting to feel smart, belong to a tribe, or go viral. Sports became the new politics - everyone's got extreme

positions they defend like their life depends on it.

Social media rewards the loudest, most controversial opinions, not the most thoughtful ones. Nuance gets you 12 likes, but "This hall of famer is actually overrated" gets you 50,000 quote tweets and a week of arguments.

Maybe we should remember that sports are supposed to be fun? Like, I know competition is serious business, but some of y'all are taking this harder than the athletes themselves. Touch grass, enjoy the game, and remember that your hot take probably isn't as revolutionary as you think.

Kia kaha, sports fam. Keep the passion, lose the toxicity.

Aroha nui,

Tommy