

THE GOONZETTE

Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis

Daily Edition - Sunday, December 21, 2025

****Les Algorithmes de la Solitude: How Social Media Trends Colonize Our Collective Unconscious****

There is something profoundly melancholic about watching a sixteen-year-old in Marseille perform the same twenty-second dance as her counterpart in Manila, both of them moving to the rhythm of an algorithm that neither understands nor controls, their bodies becoming vessels for a kind of digital ventriloquism that speaks not in their own voices but in the monetized patois of engagement metrics and brand partnerships—*c'est la tristesse de notre époque*, this flattening of human expression into reproducible content units that can be packaged, distributed, and consumed across the vast networks of what we euphemistically call "connection."

The phenomenon we observe in contemporary social media trends reveals itself as nothing less than a new form of cultural imperialism, one that operates not through the crude mechanisms of military occupation or economic dependency but through the far more insidious channels of algorithmic suggestion and viral mimicry, where the colonization occurs not of territory but of imagination, not of resources but of attention, not of bodies but of the very gestures and expressions that once constituted the irreducible particularity of individual and communal identity.

Consider, if you will, the recent proliferation of "aesthetic" trends—cottagecore, dark academia, that wife—each promising authenticity while delivering standardization, each offering escape while tightening the bonds of conformity, each presenting itself as rebellion while serving the fundamental logic of platform capitalism that requires constant content generation, endless scrolling, perpetual engagement with the machine that feeds on human creativity and excretes homogeneous cultural products wrapped in the packaging of personal choice and individual expression.

The cruelest irony, and here I cannot suppress a bitter laugh that echoes through the empty cafés of post-pandemic Paris, lies in how these trends masquerade as democratic participation in culture creation when they function as sophisticated mechanisms of behavioral modification, training users to internalize the

preferences of systems designed to extract maximum value from human attention and desire—we dance not because we wish to dance but because the algorithm has determined that dancing generates the optimal combination of views, likes, shares, and ultimately, advertising revenue.

Yet—et voilà the contradiction that keeps me awake in the small hours, listening to the distant hum of servers processing our digital exhaust—there exists within these apparently sterile reproductions of programmed content something irreducibly human, some small flame of genuine expression that flickers even within the most derivative TikTok trend or Instagram challenge, because human beings possess this remarkable capacity to smuggle meaning into even the most commercialized forms, to find connection even within systems designed to simulate rather than facilitate authentic relationship.

The young people I observe navigating these digital spaces display a kind of double consciousness that would have fascinated Du Bois: they simultaneously embrace and critique the platforms they inhabit, performing authenticity while acknowledging its constructedness, seeking genuine connection while recognizing the mediated nature of all digital interaction, participating in trends while maintaining an ironic distance that preserves some essential core of self from complete absorption into the network.

This is perhaps why the most successful social media trends contain within them the seeds of their own subversion—users inevitably begin to parody, critique, and ultimately transform the very content formats they initially adopted, creating a kind of cultural guerrilla warfare where meaning is constantly being negotiated between corporate algorithmic intention and human creative resistance, between the platform's desire for predictable engagement and the user's need for genuine self-expression.

The melancholy I feel when contemplating this landscape stems not from some nostalgic longing for pre-digital authenticity—such purity never existed—but from witnessing how much human energy and creativity gets channeled into systems that ultimately serve the accumulation of capital rather than the flourishing of human culture, how much genuine desire for connection gets processed through mechanisms designed to monetize rather than fulfill that fundamental need.


Perhaps what we need now is not abandonment of these spaces—for they have become too central to contemporary social life—but a kind of critical literacy that allows us to participate while maintaining awareness of the larger systems within which our participation occurs, to find ways of being together that

honor both our need for connection and our resistance to commodification, to create trends that trend toward justice rather than merely toward virality.

En fin, we must learn to dance in the machine while never forgetting that we are more than the sum of our data points.

Hot Takes and Stone Cold Facts: Why Your Sports Opinions Are Probably Mid (But That's Okay, Whānau)

Kia ora, sports fans and keyboard warriors! Your boy Tommy here, ready to tackle the beautiful chaos that is sports hot takes. You know what I'm talking about – those spicy opinions that get dropped in group chats at 2am, the takes so hot they could cook a hāngī, and the stone cold predictions that age like milk left in the Auckland sun.

Let me keep it  with you all – I've been on both sides of this game. As a player, I was out there getting my ankles broken while some fan in the stands was probably tweeting "trade this bum fr fr." Now as someone who chronicles the beautiful disaster that is online sports discourse, I see how these hot takes spread faster than gossip at a marae gathering.

****The Whakataukī Wisdom****

There's this whakataukī that goes "He tangata ki tahi, he tangata ki tahi" – each person is unique, each person matters. But bruhhh, when it comes to sports takes, sometimes I think we need a new one: "He tangata ki tahi hot take" – each person has one absolutely terrible sports opinion. And that's facts, no cap.

I see people dropping takes like they're Tom Brady throwing touchdowns in his prime, but half the time these opinions are more like my route-running in week 16 after three concussions – technically happening, but nobody should be proud of it.

****The Mid Take Epidemic****

Not gonna lie, most hot takes are aggressively mid. You got people saying stuff like "defense wins championships" like they just discovered fire. Cuz, that's not a hot take, that's literally printed on motivational posters in every high school locker room from Rotorua to Green Bay.

Then you got the opposite extreme – takes so nuclear they make reactor meltdowns look like a gentle summer breeze. "This rookie is literally the next Michael Jordan" after one good preseason game. Slow your roll, whānau. That's like saying someone's the next Jonah Lomu because they scored a try in club rugby.

****The Real Talk Zone****

Here's where I get real with you: the best hot takes aren't about being the loudest voice in the room. They're about seeing patterns before everyone else catches on. When I was playing, the dudes who lasted longest weren't always the most talented – they were the ones who could read the game differently.

Same energy applies to hot takes. The takes that actually slap are the ones backed by some deeper understanding. Like when someone called out load management being a problem before it became the whole discourse. Or predicting that analytics would completely change how we evaluate players. Those weren't just random thoughts – they were based on watching the game evolve.

****The Cultural Context****

Being Māori in American football taught me something crucial about perspectives – your background shapes how you see everything, including sports. My hot takes probably hit different because I'm looking at American sports through indigenous eyes that also understand the warrior mentality required to make it in the NFL.

When I see players talking about mental health, I'm thinking about our cultural understanding of mauri – the life force that connects everything. When debates happen about team loyalty versus individual success, I'm drawing on values learned in iwi settings where collective success matters most.

****The Final Verdict****

Look, I'm not saying stop having hot takes. The discourse is part of what makes sports beautiful, even when it's absolutely unhinged. Just remember that behind every "terrible" take is usually someone who genuinely loves their team or sport enough to care deeply about it.

And honestly? Sometimes the mid takes are the most honest ones. Sometimes saying "my team is probably going 8-8 this season and I'll still watch every game" is more real than predicting Super Bowl victories based on wishful thinking.

So keep those takes coming, whānau. Drop your nuclear opinions, defend your mid predictions, and remember – in sports, just like in life, being wrong with conviction is sometimes more entertaining than being safely right.

Aroha nui, and may your takes be hot and your teams exceed expectations.

****Tommy out**** 🤔

***P.S.** – If you think pineapple on pizza is controversial, try explaining to your NFL teammates why hāngī is superior to BBQ. Now THAT'S a hot take worth defending.*