Taking an Internet Walk

by [Spencer Chang (https://syllabusproject.org /spencer-chang/)](https://syllabusproject.org/spencer-chang/) & [Kristoffer Tjalve (https://syllabusproject.org/kristoffer-tjalve/)](https://syllabusproject.org/kristoffer-tjalve/)

THE INTERNET AS WE KNOW IT

In futuristic and cyberpunk media, we were promised a technological world "indistinguishable from magic:" from flying cars to perpetual motion machines to computers inside our heads. The drive of these future-pointing imaginations is to make the things we already have more powerful, less annoying, and most of all, ubiquitous. In the present, we have the Internet. What was once described as "[an alien life form (https://www.unilad.com /technology/david-bowie-predicts-internet-1999-20221018#:~:text=%22No%20it%27s%20not.%20No %2C%20it%27s%20an%20alien%20life%20form.%22](https://www.unilad.com/technology/david-bowie-predicts-internet-1999-20221018))," has now become mundane. It is only natural, we think, that the only thing we have in common with those we share the train with is that we are all, neck craned down, staring at our phones. It is the way the world works, we think, that our "internet" comprises the same 10 apps, some flooded with ads and spyware, others with people yelling about everything and nothing. We accept that the only way to get anything useful out of the internet is by trading our privacy for accounts and our self-expression for conformity. Everything is always somehow broken and when [social spaces die (https://kylechayka.substack.com/p/grief-for-twitter?publication_id=4425& post_id=137845749&isFreemail=true& token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjozMzYzNDA2LCJwb3N0X2lkIjoxMzc4NDU3NDksImlhdCI6MTY5Nz AzMjg1OSwiZXhwIjoxNjk5NjI0ODU5LCJpc3MiOiJwdWItNDQyNSIsInN1YiI6InBvc3QtcmV hY3Rpb24ifQ.U-i4P6-lohNq9zV-8YqqlVJOMYyBHwrW2Iz9KXkOAYw&r=2037y](https://kylechayka.substack.com/p/grief-for-twitter)), we believe that it is how it has always been and that nothing will ever be different.

We are here to take you by the hand and show you another Internet than the one sketched above. The Internet is so much vaster than a single worldview. It is a sprawling galaxy of

archipelagos, filled with more humanity and personal gestures than any man-made archive. Instead of traversing the congested highways of the web, we invite you to try alternative routes: take a scroll down local streets and wandering paths, try out someone else's commute, rediscover the favorites of your neighborhood, and gather the friends you love in your favorite spots, quiet and comforting. Beneath social media and app hedges, the blossoming internet awaits: a live ecosystem unfolding beneath our footsteps.

1. ALTERNATIVE PATH SYSTEMS

In the 1950-70s, urban highways were built across many cities. It is beyond our syllabus to reason why parks, lakes, and sidewalks were sacrificed for additional car lanes,[1] but, as these high-speed traffic veins warped the faces of neighborhoods, so have the introduction of search engines and social news feeds changed our online behavior. Fortunately, on the Internet, we still have the agency to wayfind through alternative path systems.

KALAKAUA AVENUE, 1957

Image source (https://www.google.com/url?q=https://archives.starbulletin.com/2007/05/26/features /wood.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1699391549006025&usg=AOvVaw12J0PeIbzbvJNGqySJT3JG)
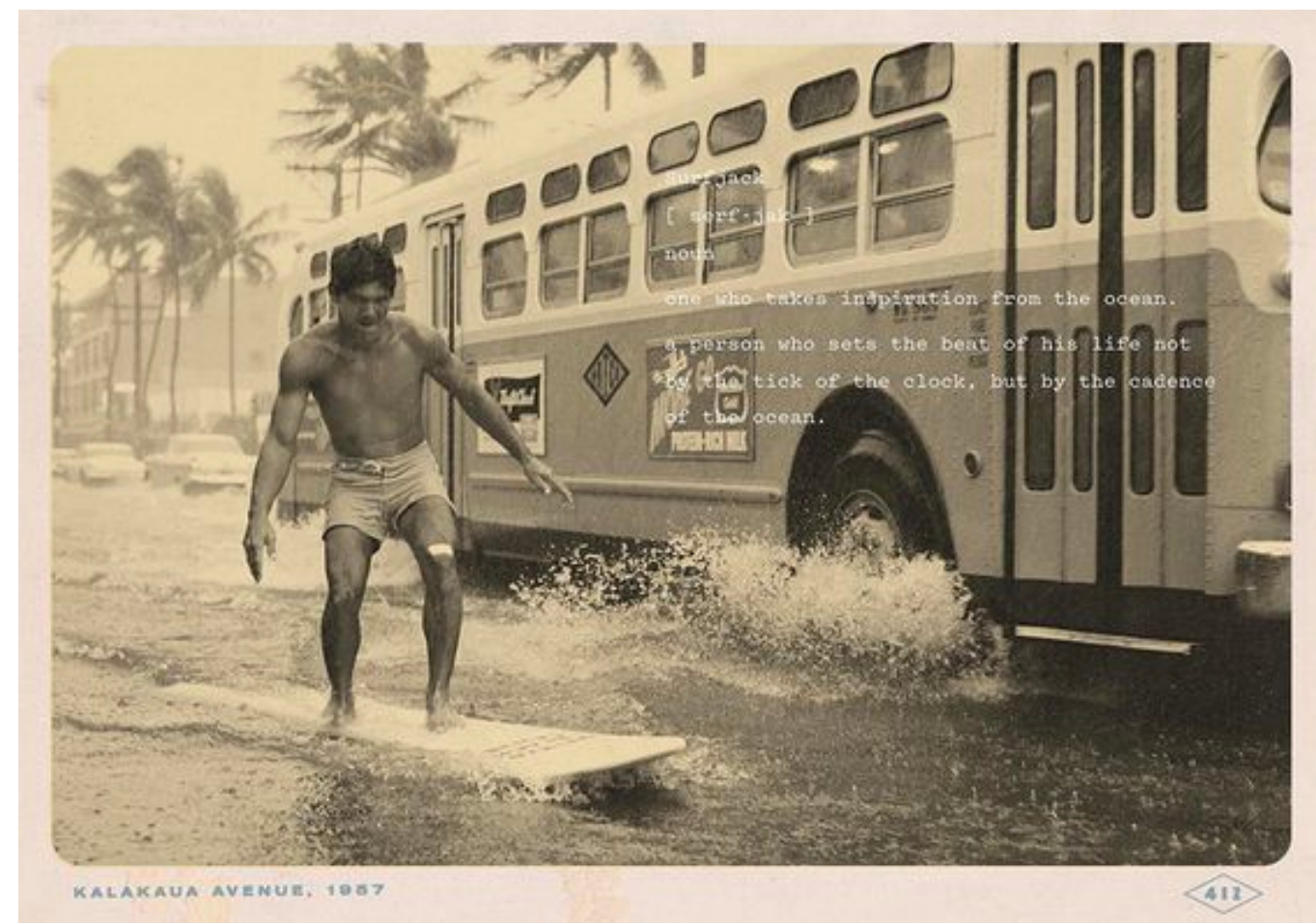
- Google "Alternative search engines." There are many. Two of our favorites are Wiby.me (https://wiby.me/) and Metaphor.systems (https://metaphor.systems/).

- If you are looking for a Sunday ride, we recommend visiting River (https://river.maxbittker.com/) to traverse visually. Remember to turn on sounds and right-click to open in Are.na.
- Make an Are.na (https://www.are.na/) account, navigate to the explore page (https://www.are.na/explore), filter to only images, click on the first thing catching your attention and explore the channel it belongs to.
- Use the site-specific search on Google by using "site:reddit.com" or "site:webcurios.co.uk" to narrow in on specific communities.
- Use Google reverse image search find the source of an image and exact keyword search (e.g. "cyberfeminism").

2. HYPERLINKS: FROM BLUE TO PURPLE

The first hyperlinks pointed within their own domain, like the doors separating the rooms in your home. However, with the world wide web, the doors became portals, and pioneers mapped out site directories to guide internet travelers to the frontier of development. Reject modern interstates and embody Tarzan, Jane, or the chimpanzee to swing from link to link, blue to purple.

Image source (https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.are.na/block/6921578&sa=D& source=docs&ust=1699391549004781&usg=AOvVaw18dnbTfuc-B8Fgm6635Ziy)
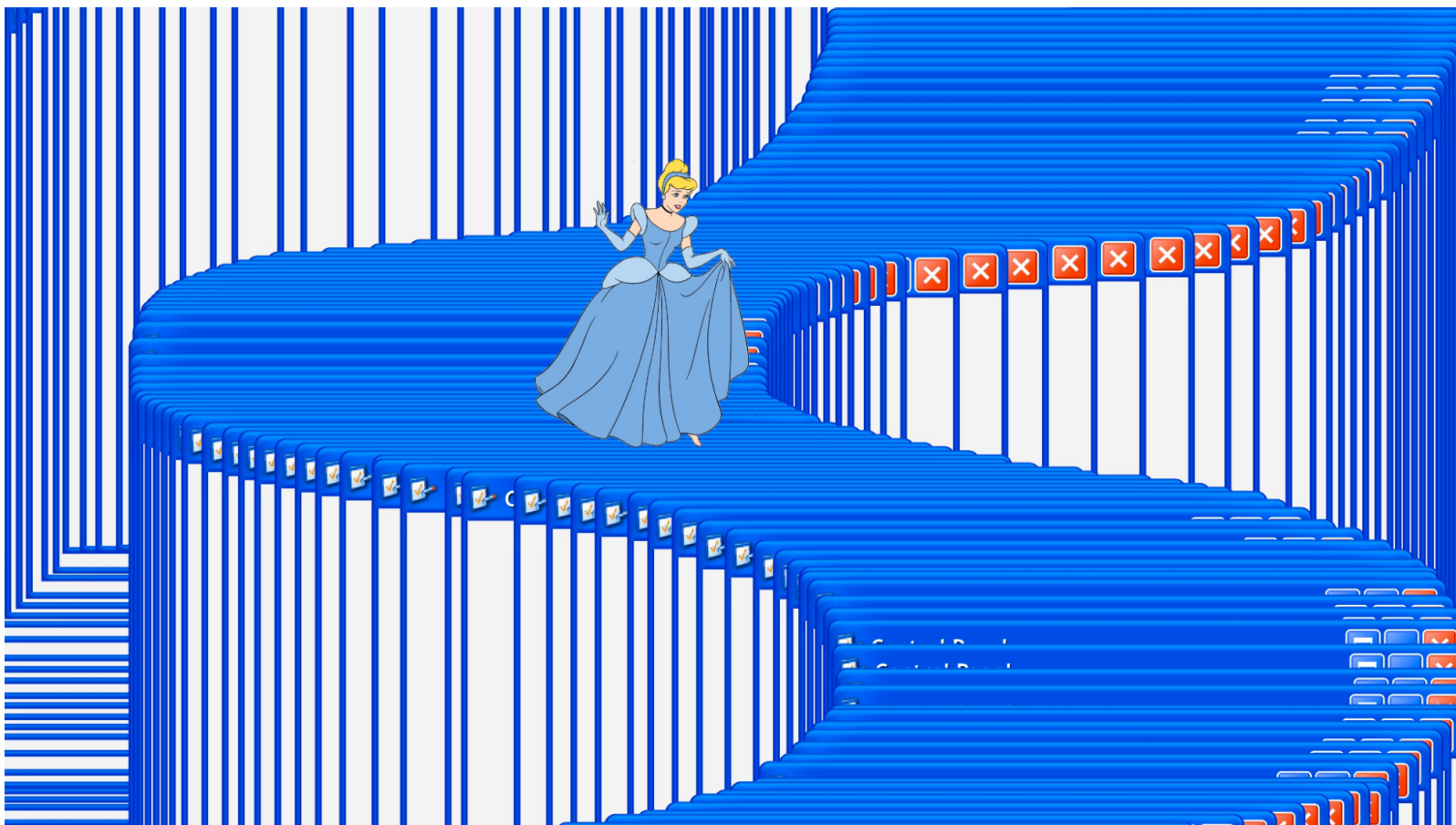
- Find a trailhead at a handmade index or collection. For example, if you like handmade websites, you should visit Gossips Web (https://gossipsweb.net/) or Brutalist Websites (https://brutalistwebsites.com/). These are the digital equivalent to the jazz bar, punk record store, or other physical places where subcultures gather. There's likely one made by a devotee whatever your interest, like cyberfeminism (https://cyberfeminismindex.com/), tiny internet sites (https://www.are.na/spencer-chang/tiny-internets), cozy websites (https://kristoffer.substack.com/), niche museums (https://www.niche-museums.com/), list of lists (https://arbesman.net/listoflists/), LA sandwiches (https://krmr.com/sandwiches/), and much more (https://sander.are.na/spencer-chang/collections-personal-documentation-archival).
- Start your journey at Everest Pipkin's homepage (https://everest-pipkin.com/), it contains two webrings in the bottom-right. Webrings feel like visiting the friends of friends of friends. You'll usually spot them at the bottom of a website.
- Find a Wikipedia article for a word or subject that's lingering with you and traverse the links that catch your eye (or use The Wiki Game (https://www.thewikigame.com/group) to find a fun starting point).

3. LOCAL COMMUNITY & NEIGHBORHOODS

Think of your favorite local spots near where you live. Everything from cozy cafes to welcoming libraries to the neighborhood specialty store. These are not the places that go viral on social media and get flooded by food-delivery pick-ups. They feel like *your* spots. You're a regular there and learn the latest news from the community from the bulletin board. While you're there, you run into your neighbors and hear about what they've been excited about. You're able to offer support or ask for help when you need it. These local gathering spots and watering holes provide us the space for understanding who we are in community and give us a glimpse of solidarity.

DAVID BRANCACCIO: There's a little sweet moment, I've got to say, in a very intense book-- your latest-- in which you're heading out the door and your wife says what are you doing? I think you say-- I'm getting-- I'm going to buy an envelope.

KURT VONNEGUT: Yeah.

DAVID BRANCACCIO: What happens then?

KURT VONNEGUT: Oh, she says well, you're not a poor man. You know, why don't you go online and buy a hundred envelopes and put them in the closet? And so I pretend not to hear her. And go out to get an envelope because I'm going to have a hell of a good time in the process of buying one envelope.

I meet a lot of people. And, see some great looking babes. And a fire engine goes by. And I give them the thumbs up. And, and ask a woman what kind of dog that is. And, and I don't know. The moral of the story is, is we're here on Earth to fart around.

And, of course, the computers will do us out of that. And, what the computer people don't realize, or they don't care, is we're dancing animals. You know, we love to move around. And, we're not supposed to dance at all anymore.

Kurt Vonnegut speaks of the magic of going out to buy an envelope. While our default experience of the internet feels more like what Kurt speaks of when he talks of computers, we believe that walking on the

internet has this same magic (<u>source</u> *(*<u>https://twitter.com/sfiegerman/status</u>
<u>/805816421569753088</u>*)).*

- ○ Instead of cranes and excavators, try to search for hands and wheelbarrows. Good places to start are <u>Neocities (https://neocities.org/browse)</u>, <u>mmm.page (https://build.mmm.page</u> <u>/explore)</u>, <u>Sheet Sites (https://ambient.institute/i/sheets/)</u>, <u>Your World of Text</u> <u>(https://www.yourworldoftext.com/)</u> and <u>Tilde.club (https://tilde.club/users/)</u>.
- ○ Visit tiny social networks: cozy discords, <u>niche forums (https://forum.merveilles.town/)</u>, <u>online radio (https://www.are.na/alejandro-a/online-radios-39n-v3zqkvg)</u>, hyper-specific subreddits, local <u>chatrooms (https://volvox.observer/pond)</u>, <u>pubs (https://midnight.pub/)</u>, and <u>fields (https://cloudwatching.glitch.me/clouds)</u>.
- ○ Explore your <u>local artisans (https://sander.are.na/spencer-chang/small-tools-a4cx3duticc)</u> when you need to accomplish a specific task: whether finding <u>new words</u> <u>(https://carefulwords.com/)</u>, picking <u>colors (https://meodai.github.io/poline/)</u>, or creating <u>pretty script (https://lingojam.com/ItalicTextGenerator)</u>.
- ○ Explore sites with their own environments and leave them in the corner of your computer, like <u>windows from around the world (https://www.window-swap.com/)</u>, <u>nesting eagles</u> <u>(http://sfbayospreys.org/)</u>, and <u>shifting gardens (https://htmlgarden.spencerchang.me/)</u>.

4. FRIENDS OF FRIENDS

"I'm going to Athens, what should I do?" is a question we encounter in many variations. It's not because the internet is not vast with recommendations, but discovering new places is also a social (and identity-forming) activity: we care about sharing tips with friends, knowing that they too, will sit on the bench in the National Garden, below the palm and in front of the purling creek, where we first read Deborah Levy's *Real Estate*.

- Hand your phone to your friends, and let them scroll through your Instagram feed. This activity works particularly well if you are in a new location, or in a new group of friends.
- In an incognito browser window, go to YouTube. Try to follow a particular niche by watching videos from the suggestions to the right. Alternatively, take a shortcut by exploring the filters of Their Tube (https://www.their.tube/).
- Join a Screenwalks.com (https://screenwalks.com/) event, browse the archive of Come Internet With Me (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpGDRBad3EgWZyufVCOg8f_EKR8mDgQ14), or host your own screen-sharing session where you invite friends and strangers to watch your internet walks.

5. FORAGING BEHIND THE SCENES

As kids, we counted the rings of a tree to discover its age. It felt like reading a secret message, similar to those we wrote with lemon juice. On the web, we don't need to cut down a tree to count its age or heat the paper to reveal the message, because we can view the source of any page, telling us how it is made or poetic reflections. Take an excursion behind the scenes.
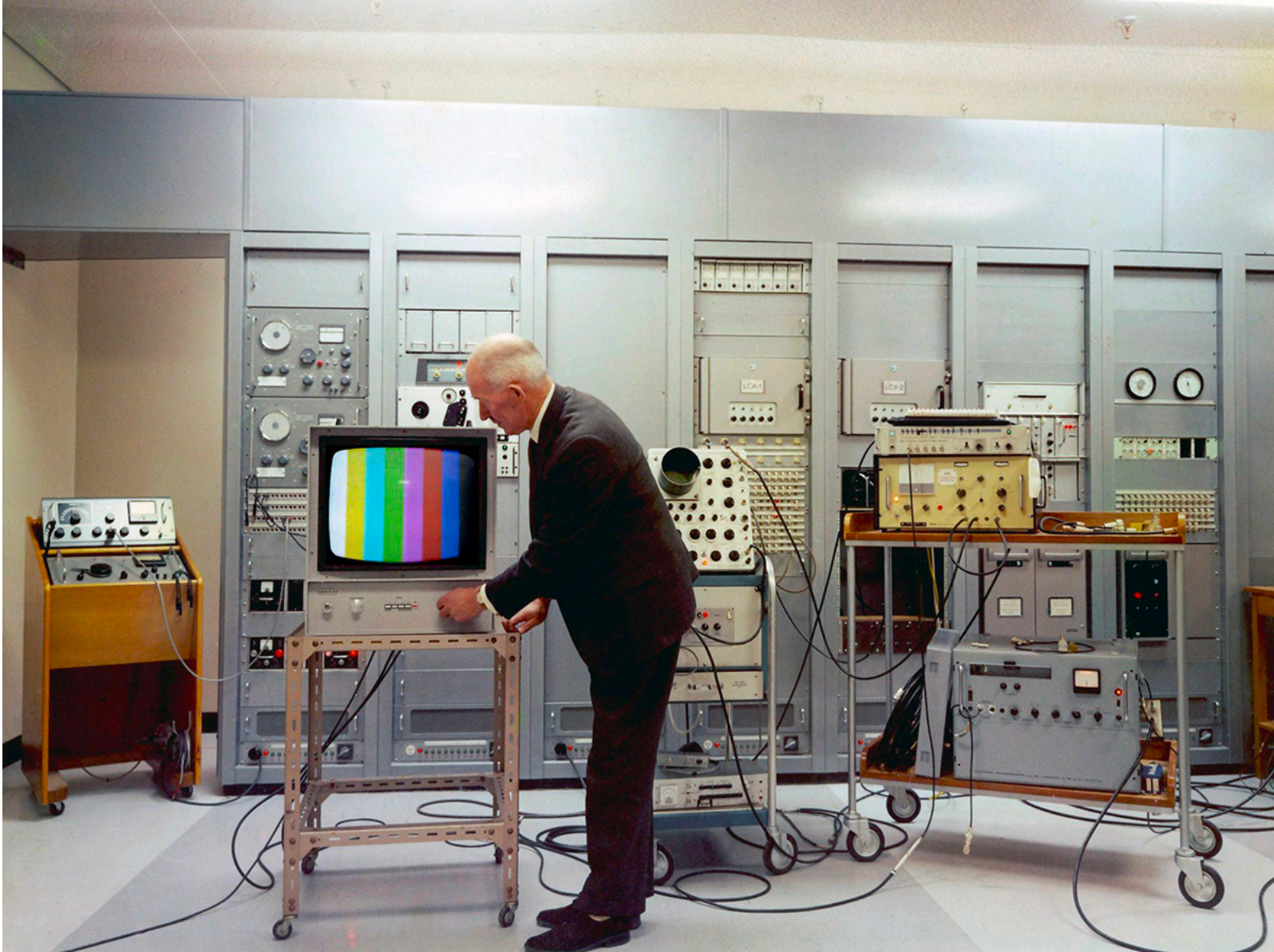
Walter Bruch, PAL Television. Image source (https://www.google.com/url?q=https: //d2w9rnfcy7mm78.cloudfront.net/10751193 /original_3dffc1264772ce53cb3689ffb3026117.png?1613338771?bc%3D0&sa=D&source=docs& ust=1699391548990011&usg=AOvVaw3Ycs8LV_0-3uXmjlXWWSv6).

- Right-click a page and click "Inspect Source". Check for example Taper (https://taper.badquar.to/), an online literary magazine where the artists' statements are written in the source code.
- Visit Alt-Text as Poetry (https://alt-text-as-poetry.net/), to see the text descriptions the creators left.
- Look for an open-source link on the website to see the messages left behind by the creator in their commit log (https://github.com/spencerc99/spencerc99.github.io/commits/main).
- Download wwwwords (https://wwwwords.de/) to read about web accessibility.

6. FIELD POCKET COMPUTER

Most of us walk with the internet every day, through the internet computer in our pockets. We know how to use it to listen to music louder than our surroundings, get traffic updates and navigational advice, and keep up with the latest news from around the world. But if you find yourself craving a more balanced experience, the field computer can help interweave the internet with your physical environment, the facilitator of an IRL Internet walk.

- Make your own "touch grass" focus mode (https://twitter.com/spencerc99/status/1710067598635708524) for a distraction-free phone mode[2]
- Practice dérive (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9rive) by following some wandering prompts (https://wanderprompts.com/)
- Discover queer experiences and share your own (https://www.queeringthemap.com/)
- Explore your city's trees (https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/san-francisco-street-trees/)
- Observe how the shade on a block (https://shademap.app/@37.9842,23.7353,15z,1698651791753t,0b,0p,0m) will change as the sun rises or sets
- Learn local fauna (https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/), flora (https://myplantum.com/) and histories (https://wiki-map.com/map)

7. THE THINGS WE CARRY & KEEP

The bag has become an indispensable accessory to the modern urban dweller. As we travel through the city between our plans, our bags carry everything we need for our day out. Perhaps we designate certain bags as our "cafe bag," the "working satchel," or our "pochade box." On the internet, our bags are as big as Mary Poppins'. We can stuff everything interesting we find into them, gathering snippets of found text (https://particularly.online/), wayside images, and buried links to collage (https://syllabusproject.org/on-the-world-as-collage-or-intertextuality/#nguyen2) them into messy worlds. The act of archiving is beyond preservation and extending memory; it shapes how we perceive and engage with the world. Ursula Le Guin writes (https://otherfutures.nl/uploads/documents/le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction.pdf) that the power of the carrier bag is the power of fiction, through our gatherings, we create worlds of our perspective. In our digital foraging and subsequent organizing, we create containers for who we are (https://www.nylon.com/fashion/whats-in-my-bag-culture-and-putting-identity-on-display) and what we find important.

(https://mollysoda.exposed/)

Molly Soda (https://mollysoda.exposed/)

- Record ordinary moments in themed journals (https://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html).
- Keep a running list of all the moments you've been appreciated (https://twitter.com/j_asminewang/status/1430009013983350807) or the times you've been overwhelmed with gratitude for life (https://spencers.cafe/projects/i-love-living), save these as emotional Tupperware (https://ansonyu.me/tupperware) for a tough day
- Cherish the history embedded in your unclosed browser tabs.
- Gather things you love in folk databases: spreadsheets (https://www.are.na/megan-dieudonne/useful-and-good-google-docs-and-sheets), bulleted lists, and slideshows (https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1GWSFltGp0Qr9YKzu4cc_4eGhFcWCrzGN0zn5G0vp3mE/edit#slide=id.g1022b30457c_0_15) and open link access to the public.
- Revisit the "links" section in conversations with your favorite people to revisit an archive of what has made you think of each other.
- Use your phone to record audio of places that make your heart sing. Replay the clips when you find your mind caught up in the flurry of the everyday.
- Maintain a "photo of the day" album to collect scenes from your life. You can also use the "favorite" photo functionality for this as a convenient alternative.
- Try Glance Back (https://glanceback.info/), an extension that takes a photo of you using the computer at a random time every day. Consider these your computer portraits and use the caption feature to write what website you were about to visit.
- Make a Screenshot Garden (https://screenshot-garden.neocities.org/build-your-own) to

collect all your digital trash and treasures. These become the material for your digital collages. If this sounds foreign to you, visit Molly Soda (https://mollysoda.exposed/)'s website.

- ○ Create containers for different discoveries. For example, Laurel Schwulst keeps an online notebook (https://anotherdayinthedome.substack.com/p/on-writing-and-worlding-part-1-of) she only writes in while she is in motion.

8. GIFTS

One of the best surprises you can make is a gift for someone else. Gifts allow you to direct your full attention to a specific person (or singular group of people) with something of yours at some imprecise time in the future. Sometimes gifts can be immaterial, made only to honor (https://anotherdayinthedome.substack.com/p/on-eggs-part-3-secret?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=reader2#:~:text=%E2%80%9CI%20only%20make,do%20this%20well.) the recipient. Other times, they are simply about the act of creating the gift, merging recipient and sender. Regardless, they offer a new path of traversing the internet, following a path of love and close, dedicated attention.

- ○ Compile a care package (https://garden.vincentli.space/making-a-place-on-the-web---garden) of the things you've found each month for close friends.
- ○ Gift a website (https://you-are-laurel-right.neocities.org/) to your friend.
- ○ Facilitate the exchange of a song (https://sentyouasong.com/) or make a mixtape (https://shea.glitch.me/) to memorialize an event.
- ○ Make a domain gift guide (https://chias.blog/2022/chias-2022-domain-gift-guide/).
- ○ Create a shared note to begin a letter exchange with a friend. Write something in it whenever you think of them.

9. PERSONAL TRACES

As you travel through the Internet, what traces do you leave behind? What is your tag (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tag_(graffiti)) or stamp? How do your fellow travelers discover if this is a site you visit? In physical space, we can see and feel each other. Demonstrations are effective because we can stand shoulder-to-shoulder and occupy space, coming together to form a more powerful being. We can paste a poster, throw a tag, wear a statement t-shirt, hang a missing cat note, or interfere with the space in other ways. On the Internet, we might be able to make a user profile, allowing us to post and create a stream of likes and emoji reactions, but what do we do online when we are nothing but another IP

address on a site made to load equally fast regardless of how many visitors?

- Write your own sign-off (https://sander.are.na/meg-miller/good-sign-offs), create your stamp, and imagine other identifying traces to leave across the sites you visit, like an emoji, a color, or a font.
- Be on the lookout for guestbooks. You'll find (https://guestbook.goodenough.us/) them along the way, but if you are impatient, you can search for them (https://wiby.me/?q=Guestbook).
- Push yourself to leave a comment in open comment sections, especially on pieces of content that are hard to find or have not gone viral.
- Play with playhtml (https://playhtml.fun/), a collection of live games that persist your actions.
- Install World Wide Walls (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/world-wide-walls/afidhlpnbjpnpilhjkglceebkakhemfb?hl=en-GB) to graffiti the internet.
- Keep an eye out for places that preserve your actions: on we-b.site (https://we-b.site/), leave a letter about your internet dreams and see who leaves behind fingerprints on the letterhead, and on Mark Beasley's website (https://mark-beasley.com/), watch the fireflies of cursors past flutter in the background.

THE INTERNET OF YOU, ME, AND ALL OF US

The Internet is a vast space, laden with possibility. The indexed web[3] alone has over 5 billion pages as of October 30, 2023, with countless more millions left unseen by the machine crawlers. In the early days of the internet, one of the first search engines, Yahoo!, hired "surfers," (https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/17/technology/when-yahoo-ruled-the-valley-stories-of-the-original-surfers.html) people with particularly niche interests, to record and catalog new websites by hand. In those days, each site was crafted by hand by a person. Each site had a face you could see, and if desired, email.

Now, these sites are hidden from our everyday experiences because they are invisible to our internet navigators. Instead, our defaults are hyper-SEOified links where there is no clear person behind the content. When we encounter the kind of content created for a computer-first internet, alarm bells should sound in our heads. Instead of accepting the default, remind yourself that you have an instinct for what draws you, hunt for handmade sites made with care, and return to the places and people you love.

The internet is so much more than the loud and narrow portion we encounter daily. If we attend closely to the environment, we'll start to see the life forces of everyday people, their dreams, frustrations, prayers, anxieties, and joys given willingly and freely. They deserve to be given the space and honor of being discovered. They are waiting for you to discover them.

There is not one internet. There are many (https://pluriverse.world/). The fun (https://projects.kwon.nyc/internet-is-fun/), poetic (https://www.are.na/chia/poetic-web), homecooked (https://www.robinsloan.com/lab/specifying-spring-83/) internets are waiting for us. They are ours to honor (https://we-b.site/), personalize (https://archive.ph /2013.12.27-041357/http://frankchimero.com/blog/2013/12/homesteading-2014/), queer (https://mirror.xyz/austinwadesmith.eth /wrBCeIWNsXbseQiLBj5jR_bkMFZ03nNYs4rg0lU8X2s), mold (https://cristobal.space/writing /folk), publish (https://publishsomethingonline.com/), gather around (https://html.energy/), world (https://handmade-web.net/exercises/homepage.html), and maintain (https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles-Manifesto-for-Maintenance-Art-1969.pdf), one handmade website (http://luckysoap.com/statements/handmadeweb.html) at a time. On our terms. With each other. Slow and attentive.

Will you join us on this walk?

If new suggestions come to mind from your internet walking, we invite you to add suggestions (https://coda.io/form/Walking-on-the-Internet-Syllabus-Community-Submission_dohHIi5PgN1) for future visitors, and view the submission archive (https://coda.io/embed/v7sbtWRYi_/_sum-T?viewMode=embedplay).

[1] Two places to start are Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality*. Both dive into how the building of cities became optimized for cars rather than people, and the desire consequences that ensued.

[2] Unfortunately, this is only for iPhone users, but if any Android users know of similar solutions, please contact us and we'd love to edit this to include them!

[3] The websites that Google and other prominent search engines can see. Many sites are "invisible" under this definition, if they haven't optimized their site for search engine discovery (the practice of SEO) which involves making the site more friendly to algorithmic reading rather than human visiting. This is more true for handmade, personal sites than it is for business sites that often hijack this optimization so that they can rank highly in search engines.

(https://syllabusproject.org/)

Ⓦ