

Vibe Theory

Suspended Reason

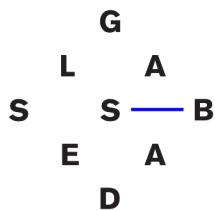
*a feeling? a flavor? a mood?
of a person, place, work, thing*

vibes are a sort of synesthesia. a vibey kinship can exist, for instance, between an event or social setting and a musical track.

vibes come from a mix of inherent material associations and also accumulated cultural associations (pink/feminine/soft). vibes can result from lifestyles ("artisanal"), subcultures ("New England prep"), and art works ("the Lynchian," "the Kafkaesque") they are also derived from inherent synesthetic associations:

Köhler (1929) first demonstrated that “hard” sounds (e.g., *takete*) are intuitively associated with spiky shapes, while “soft” sounds (e.g., *maluma*) are associated with rounded shapes [even in populations with little exposure to globalized culture]... Further, we show that these low-level crossmodal correspondences predict judgments of emotional arousal. Together, these findings suggest that cross-cultural, high-level concepts may piggyback on low-level perceptual correspondences. (*Sievers et al*)

1.



JOURNAL > SITE 1: LOGIC GATE, THE POLITICS OF THE ARTIFACTUAL MIND | 2017

A Theory of Vibe

Peli Grietzer

Across the foliated space of the twenty-seven equivalents, Faustroll conjured up into the third dimension: From Baudelaire, E. A. Poe's Silence, taking care to retranslate Baudelaire's translation into Greek. From Bergerac, the precious tree into which the nightingale king and his subjects were metamorphosed, in the land of the sun. From Luke, the Calumniator who carried Christ on to a high place. From Bloy, the black pigs of Death, retinue of the Betrothed. From Coleridge, the ancient mariner's crossbow, and the ship's floating skeleton, which, when placed in the skiff, was sieve upon sieve.

—Alfred Jarry, *Exploits & opinions of Doctor Faustroll, pataphysician: a neo-scientific novel*, 1929

i. An *autoencoder*¹ is a neural network process tasked with learning from scratch, through a kind of trial and error, how to make facsimiles of worldly things. Let us call a hypothetical, exemplary autoencoder ‘Hal.’ We call the set of all the inputs we give Hal for reconstruction—let us say many, many image files of human faces, or many, many audio files of jungle sounds, or many, many scans of city maps—Hal’s ‘training set.’ Whenever Hal receives an input media file x, Hal’s *feature function* outputs a short list of short numbers, and Hal’s *decoder function* tries to recreate media file x based on the feature function’s ‘summary’ of x. Of course, since the variety of possible media files is much wider than the variety of possible short lists of short numbers, something must necessarily get lost in the translation from media file to feature values and back: many possible media files translate into the same short list of short numbers, and yet each

suspendedreason [5:25 PM]

also, @t.s. -- Maybe I had a different takeaway but the crux of the Glass-Bead piece to me seemed to be, in simple english, "vibey art is the result of a curatorial process in which the artist condenses elements from the real world which share a soft, undefinable sensibility"

g.d. [5:26 PM]

same thing as dimensional compressability, more words

suspendedreason [5:26 PM]

that's dimensional compressability?

g.d. [5:30 PM]

the artist removes the bits that don't emphasize the shared thing

suspendedreason [5:31 PM]

Oh, sure but we could also just say "curation."

dimensional compressability seems like bad jargon to me in that it's a combo of vague + nonintuitive + technical

g.d. [5:32 PM]

sure

so come up with something between that and "vibe"

suspendedreason [5:32 PM]

what's the difference between vibey art and atmospheric art?

is it that vibey art is atmospheric and also dimensionally compressive?

g.d. [5:33 PM]

both have ambient, unobtrusive connotations

that's why i prefer "chord"

suspendedreason [5:33 PM]

ambient, what a buzzword

love it

ambient!

on a serious note: Vibe, in my book, transcends chords

Vibe reflects real-world associations and is very map-like

g.d. [5:34 PM]

it doesn't, and it's not.

suspendedreason [5:34 PM]

I'm throwing up the definitions of maps and chords here so we have a baseline definition/consensus to work off of:

Chords are compositions of parts that fit together on aesthetic grounds. Per you, g.d., "Chords are elements combined in a way that is appealing, but not because the

combination describes reality. Chords exploit the many evolved sweet spots of the senses... Chords can be consonant or dissonant — the sum of their parts can elicit pleasure or irritation, or even revulsion.”

Maps are compositions of parts that fit together on real-world grounds. “Maps describe what exists. They exploit the evolved need to understand how reality behaves... Maps “fit” when they achieve compression — when they eliminate redundancies in a pattern of real-world relationships without sacrificing essential features.”

So in claiming that vibes are both chords and maps, I'm basically saying that “vibey” combinations of parts have both aesthetic and real-world connections.

suspendedreason [5:34 PM]

So: Preppy vibe
is a map
as much as a chord
the things that are connected are linked aesthetically, but also socially,
temporally, culturally

g.d. [5:34 PM]

it's not

suspendedreason [5:34 PM]

I think it is.
A specific vibe is a compressive map of a real-world domain

g.d. [5:35 PM]

your consistent failure mode is not separating things according to relative effectiveness.

suspendedreason [5:38 PM]

your consistent failure mode is not considering anyone's POV but your own.

g.d. [5:39 PM]

that's true, but it's also my consistent success mode
anyway, you're not ranking things according to effectiveness
pick a domain
then tell me how a vibe lets me unpack more about it than a chord
to do this, you'll have to identify what makes vibes categorically distinct from chords

suspendedreason [5:41 PM]

what do you mean by domain?

g.d. [5:41 PM]

i don't know, what do YOU mean by domain



suspendedreason [5:42 PM]

okay

Gonna tbt to **David Lynch**

The Lynchian is famously the "grotesque and horrible creeping underneath the ordinary and banal" (paraphrase)

g.d. [5:43 PM]

yes

suspendedreason [5:43 PM]

Lynch is famous for a certain vibe in his films, this kind of creeping ambience

Hard to describe like any vibe but

To me he has managed to take these items like sewer pipes and radiators and shop mannequins and velvet

all of which have similar cultural associations to them, a sort of horror underneath their mundanity

he draws this quality out, brings it to our attention

insects living in front lawns

small town creepiness

the way you can never really know your neighbors down the hall

the way these suburbs have borderlands of dive bars and freeway onramps that hide and exports the suburb's undesirables and misfits (edited)

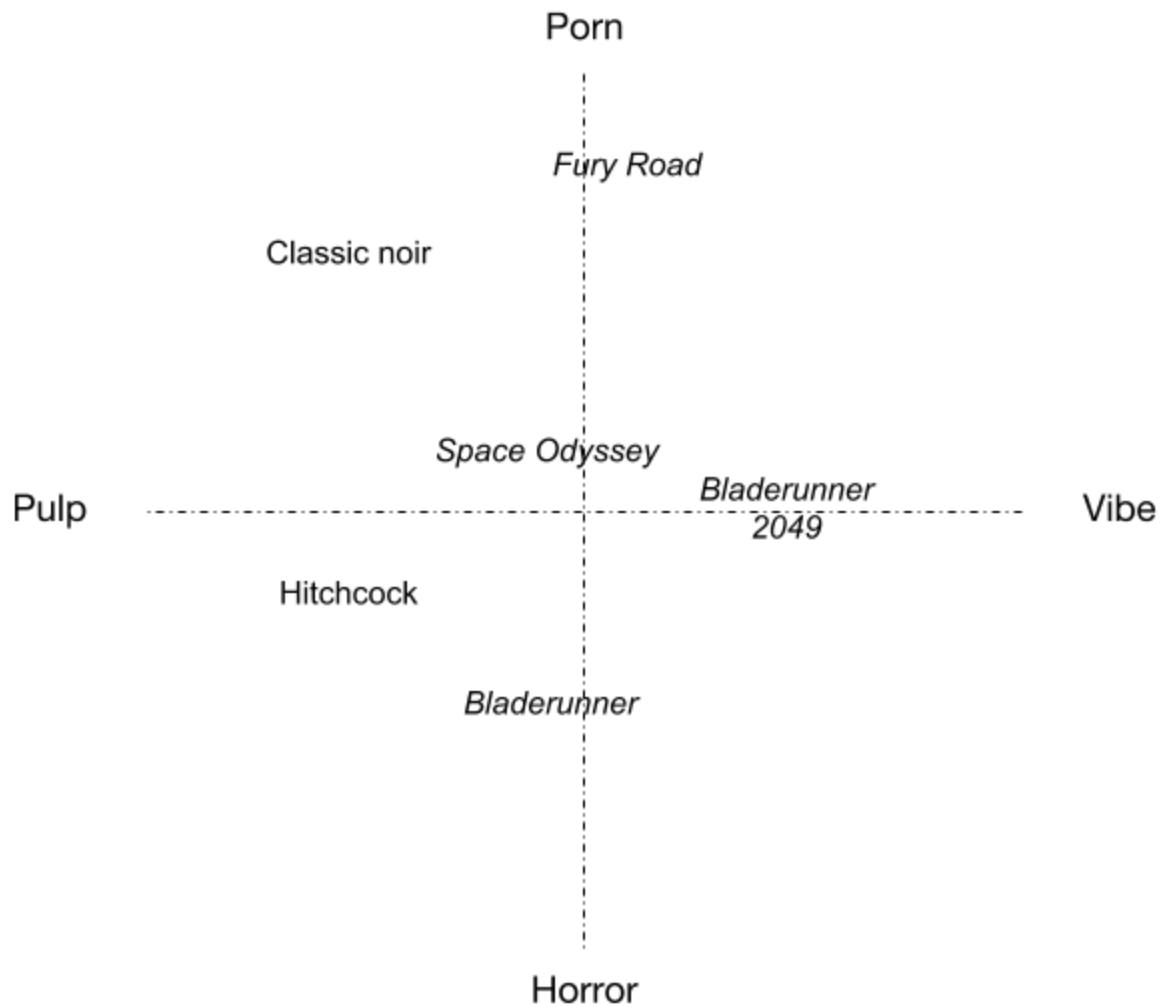
obviously there are aesthetic kinships between all these elements, but to me it's more association by positioning in the real world: the qualities and associations these things have

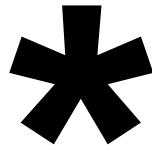
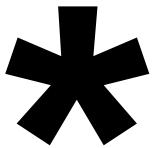
behaviors can be discarded if they don't fit. You may find that you are in possession of an aesthetic, which guides change by provisionally excluding most behaviors and provisionally including others on intuitive grounds. An aesthetic can help you sort through possible centers.

Behavioral "centers" are the things that feel most like reflections of your own self, that seem to connect effortlessly to the underlying wholeness in your life. The most important ones tend to have old roots. If there is too much mess around you to see any structure, you

An "aesthetic" is a look, a **vibe**, a visual kinship between constituent parts. There is a unifying logic to the aesthetic which is often both formal and cultural. A "prep" aesthetic relates to a real-world subculture and an aspect of the **American** class structure; the white polo and the plaid skirt are paired in the prep aesthetic precisely because in **American** private schools, the two together make up an archetypal women's uniform. But there are additionally inherent compositional unities at play, between prep's various pastel colors and gingham patterns, between its fabrics and topside leathers.

Pure vibe films
cruise off their
own atmosphere.
Pulp films have
motors.





The identification and assemblage of different aesthetics underpins a wide array of contemporary cultural practices, from moodboarding to starter packs, from visual art to gallery curation, from wardrobe choices to playlist-making. To [REDACTED], the development of an aesthetic or “vibe” is foundational to the process of artmaking in its entirety. Elements of the real world which share some loose, hard-to-define kinship are identified, pulled together in a work, so that in their condensation they take on an alien alterity.





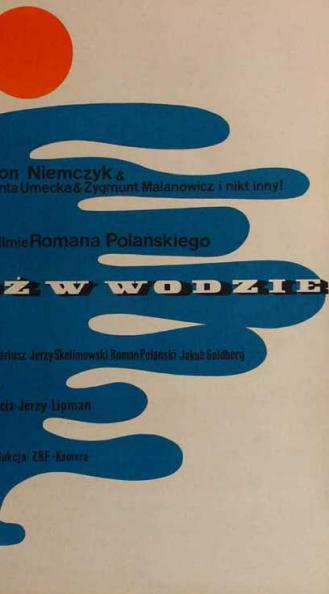
Photo by Keith Chiappone

Over the past 15 years, poet, novelist, and filmmaker Tan Lin has been at work creating an "ambient" mode of literature that engages a set of practices including sampling, communal production, and social networks, addressing issues such as relaxed copyright, boredom, plagiarism, and the commodification of attention.

He has written 10 books, most recently *Seven Controlled Vocabularies* and *Obituary 2004*. *The Joy of Cooking*; *Insomnia and the Aunt*; and *HEATH COURSE PAK*. His video work has screened at the Yale Art Museum, Artists Space, the Drawing Center, and the Ontological Hysterical Theatre. He is currently finishing work on a novel, *OUR FEELINGS WERE MADE BY HAND*. He teaches creative writing at New Jersey City University.

We talked by Skype, G-chat, email, phone, and used Google Drive in real-time to talk about the many different uses of technology in his work and what its implications are for the future of literature:

there are “rare” vibes, and there are “common” vibes

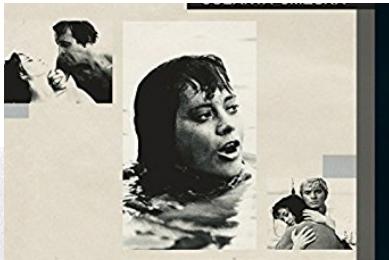


Playboy: *Knife in the Water* was an original, and unusual screenplay. Where did you get the idea for it?

Polanski: It was the sum of several desires in me. I loved the lake area in Poland and I thought it would make a great setting for a film. I was thinking of a film with a limited number of people in it as a form of challenge. I hadn't ever seen a film with only three characters, where no one else even appeared in the background. The challenge was to make it in a way that the audience wouldn't be aware of the fact that no one else had appeared even in the background. As for the idea, all I had in mind when I began the script was a scene where two men were on a sailboat and one fell overboard. But that was a starting-point, wouldn't you agree?

Playboy: Certainly, but a strange one. Why were you thinking about a man falling out of a sailboat?

Polanski: There you go, asking me how to shrink my head again. I don't know why. I was interested in creating a mood, an atmosphere, and after the film came out, a lot of critics found all sorts of symbols and hidden meanings in it that I hadn't even thought of. It made me sick. (*Playboy*, December, 1971.)



in vibey art, a small subdomain/cross-section of the real world is compressed and exaggerated in a way that, when proliferated into a full world of its own (e.g. the world of a book, the world of a film), makes that fictional world seem almost alien/dream-like... gives it alterity

“ This alterity is often (sub)culturally determined: modern consciousness is inevitably formed under the pressures of subcultural niche, media consumption, and the significations of the gendered or racial self. Reflecting this, Lin’s pseudo-fictional protagonists continually drink wheatgrass smoothies, ingest adderall, and have conversations on Google Chat. Nelson and Kraus use their work to build out personal canons of the intellectuals and artworks which have profoundly influenced their lives. Gould and *Gawker* were insider trading to native New Yorkers, but a form of cultural voyeurism for everyone else.

Woolf and Dostoevsky may have delved into the phenomenological experience of consciousness, but not into the specificity of different psyches, of different psychosocial gestalts (“personal cultures”), like the writing of today. It is a mode of storytelling which allows readers to experience a consciousness specifically outside their immediate realms of possibility.

Peli Grietzer has [argued](#) that the past hundred years have seen a shift toward vibe-centric arts, where a tight, aesthetically and philosophically vibey worldview pervades the text, expressed through cultural objects and phenomena which make up the author’s personal canon. Evensen makes similar claims about prioritizing affect, “intensively conveyed by utterance,” in his own writing. Might he be only partly correct? Might this vibe-centrism in fact be a byproduct of a shift toward espousal of personal worldview, the result of personal gestalt as literary practice?

t.s. [6:02 PM]

responding to your earlier comment:

>**dimensional compressability** seems like bad jargon to me in that it's a combo of vague + nonintuitive + technical

I disagree, it's much more intuitive to me than "curation" is.

If you tell me that vibes are about curation, I will interpret that as meaning that "vibe" is arbitrarily created by the juxtaposition of different works.

suspendedreason [6:06 PM]

Why is juxtaposition inherent in curation?

to me, vibe is essentially curating real-world items around a unifying sensibility or theme. that's curation.

t.s. [6:12 PM]

"Dimensional compressability" means noticing that the information from what you thought was two different things can in fact be communicated by a single thing. Terriers and dachshunds are "dogs." Therefore you need less variables to communicate the same amount of information, which reduces the number of dimensions in the equation.

("**Dimensional reducibility**" is apparently the wikipedia-approved term, but what can ya do)

suspendedreason [6:14 PM]

Obviously in a vibey work, all the individual components have their unifying vibe stand out as a main quality, but that's an emergent property of the work

Ahh "dimensional reducibility," thank you

s.p. [6:17 PM]

is "vibe" a complex version of "basic affect" that's understood to be spread out over objects, rooms, environments, rather than just in someone's head/body?

c.b. [6:19 PM]

isn't this definition of a vibe literally just the definition of a concept
ie, not a vibe at all

t.s. [6:21 PM]

OK no I don't think so?

from the piece:

>A "rain/grey/British vibe," for example, incorporates the walk from a **Barbour** store (to look at wellington boots) to the **Whitney Museum** (to look at "some avant-garde shorts by **Robert Beavers**"), as well as the TV adaptation of **Brideshead Revisited**, the Scottish electronic duo **Boards of Canada**, "late 90s Radiohead/global anxiety/airports" and New Jersey. A "vibe" turns out to be something like "local colour," with a historical dimension. What gives a vibe "authenticity" is its ability to evoke—using a small number of disparate elements—a certain time, place and milieu; a certain nexus of historic, geographic and cultural forces.

s.h. [6:24 PM]

oh this is easy. seems incomplete?

>What gives a vibe "authenticity" is its ability to evoke—using a small number of disparate elements—a certain time, place and milieu; a certain nexus of historic, geographic and cultural forces.

this is just "identify a cluster in a large-dimensional feature space and pick out a small set of features that distinguish it" (edited)

I think the british grey example might not be the best on Peli's part because country+color is quantifiable. But central to vibe (and why he chooses to use the language of neural nets) is how "soft" and inarticulable it can be

Whatever dimension/s unite the objects, we don't really know them

We can only know them Through the objects

"No ideas except in things"

c.b. [6:28 PM]

started to read that essay but i got to the bit on autoencoders and I wanted to brush up on the underlying math and now i've got a massive stack of books in front of me and once i've read them all i will have solved aesthetics

nature of what an autoencoder ends up learning by employing gradient descent. One caveat worth mentioning, however, is that any concept, structure, or skill learnable through gradient descent must be ‘soft’—that is, difficult to describe using explicit rules or formulas, but amenable to intuitions, heuristics, and approximations. (E.g. tennis is soft and arithmetic is not, cooking is soft and baking is not, ‘go’ is soft and chess is not, and linguists disagree on whether syntax is soft.) We will revisit the matter of the ‘softness’ of the structures that autoencoders learn a great deal over the course of this dissertation, basing our discussion not on the implications of the gradient descent method of learning but rather directly on the nature of the ‘summarize-and-reconstruct’ task, and ultimately even on a strong formal

12

A lot of pop musicians do this: simplify things and find a [] coordinate and then write a whole song about that coordinate. Maybe the first verse of a song is about a lover, and the second verse is about a friend, and then the third verse is something you saw in a movie, but it’s all about that particular [] location. Pop music is so often an attempt to make sense of something that’s really complicated in everyday life.

--Bjork

~~S/m's another flip around the immanence of objects in the theater: the objects aren't blank and waiting to be filled by the presence of the actors and the play. The objects here are meaning-cards, they hold all the information. He puts a collar round my neck and slaps me. Handcuffs, blindfolds, gags and whips. Multiple paradox yielding triple penetration. The objects tell us who we are and what to do. S/m is like *commedia dell'arte*, a stock repertoire of stories, bits and lines and gags. We're Punch and Judy. He chains my handcuffs to the door. I'm Columbine and he's Pierrot.~~

Years later, Paul Thek's preoccupation with the character of time became more obsessive and explicit. The pyramid complex at S

kraus, aliens & anorexia



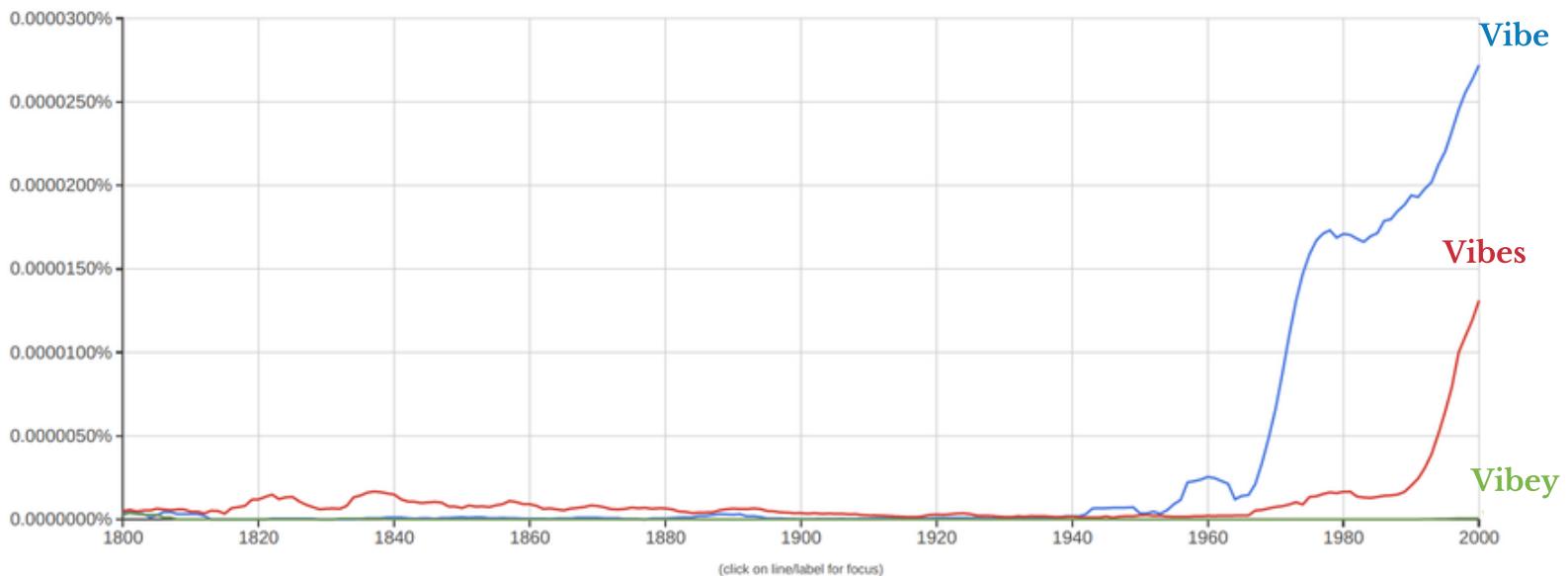
“No ideas except in things”

2.

“ The mood of a landscape appears to us as objectively given with it as one of its attributes, belonging to it just like any other attribute we perceive it to have...

We never think of regarding the landscape as a sentient being whose outward aspect 'expresses' the mood that it contains subjectively. The landscape does not express the mood, but has it; the mood surrounds, fills, and permeates it... the mood belongs to our total impression of the landscape and can only be distinguished as one of its components by a process of abstraction.

—Otto Baensch



you know G.D.'s thesis that contemporary art/aesthetics are stagnating

the relevant part of it is the drama --> vibiness transition.

yep

continue

what in film or music would have been achieved 10 years ago with sequence, contrast, has been displaced by aiming to achieve a quality.

compare especially hip hop -- mumble rap is about ambiance, whereas in the 90s-00s you had a lot more action.

one theory is that this has been a result of increasing quality in consumption tech, but that doesn't explain the same shift in film, because things are mostly moving to smaller and smaller screens there.

so an alternate explanation is it relates to a shift in production workflows.

1990: "that sounded like shit, let's do another take."

2017: "alright lemme stick this in Logic and work on it for 4 hours and see where I can get it."

Google Music Playlists, 2017

Suburban Ennui ▶

By Google Play Music

Surrounded by strip malls and cookie cutter houses, the 'burbs can be a real drag. Embrace the malaise with a mix of melancholy, ambient and washed out fuzz.



Celestial Instrumentals ▶

By Google Play Music

We are all made from stardust. Ponder that wondrous fact while spacing out to these dreamy post-rock and ambient instrumentals, perfect for watching clouds float by, stargazing through the night, or just letting your mi...

ADD TO LIBRARY

SHARE

Could you write a novel off a vibe?

“ The books that you’re talking about (Typing Wild Speech, The Squeakquel, Some Other Deaths of Bas Jan Ader) were just really generative for me. Each of them had a particular gravity that kept me afloat, so I wrote some other poems I could constellate around them.

Suburban Ennui: Surrounded by strip malls and cookie cutter houses, the 'burbs can be a real drag. Embrace the malaise with a mix of melancholy, ambient and washed out fuzz.

Celestial Instrumentals: We are all made from stardust. Ponder that wondrous fact while spacing out to these dreamy post-rock and ambient instrumentals, perfect for watching clouds float by, stargazing through the night, or just letting your mind wander out into the universe.

Sophisticated Indie: The term “indie” may conjure up thoughts of a scrappy aesthetic, but as these exceptional acts prove, there’s plenty of room for a more refined sound as well.

Sand Dunes & Guitars: Dirty, dusty sounds left out in the sun too long, echoing off the steer skulls and sand dunes into the wide open spaces.

At The Farmer’s Market: While you’re shopping for this weekend’s dinners, enjoy a selection of indie tracks as fresh as the produce you’re buying (Tame Impala, alt-J, The Shins, Kurt Vile)

Epic Indie Motivation: This mix of epic indie was made for herculean tasks, like free-climbing mountains or achieving Inbox Zero.

Pumpkin Spice State of Mind: These warm, folk-inspired songs will make you feel like you’re sippin’ on a PSL on a crisp fall afternoon. Because pumpkin spice isn’t a season, it’s a state of mind.

Cowgirl Kiss-Offs: He’s got a lying, cheating, cold dead-beating, two-timing, double-dealing hart and you’re not gonna take it any more!

White Wine Folk: Uncork a bottle of your favorite white wine and relax, either alone or in a small group, with these feminine and soothing indie-folk songs. (Artists: Jenny Lewis, Fiona Apple, Natalie Prass, Angel Olsen, Feist)





It's the age of the vibe, which started with the 20th century's age of the collage and was accelerated by Tumblr and Pinterest .

Meanwhile, fifty years after Flower Power, pot and psychedelics are sweeping the country. Welcome to an era of synesthetic upbringing.



g.d. [6:32 PM]

what would you consider too much work to ask of a vibe?

suspendedreason [6:35 PM]

g.d., what do you mean?

g.d. [6:38 PM]

@suspendedreason different strategies for different goals

what goal might cause a vibe to be insufficient?

suspendedreason [6:38 PM]

I'm in the descriptive mindset of "what does a thing do" rather than a prescriptive mindset of what should it do. Why shift? What's the value there?

@s.p. in the article he uses **Affect Studies** as a comparison in his thesis actually

I'd have to look up specifically the thinkers unfortunately. probably **Sianne Ngai**?

s.p. [6:40 PM]

how does he distinguish it?

I tried to read Ngai once it was awful

suspendedreason [6:44 PM]

Don't you read **Hegel** for fun

s.p. [6:46 PM]

yes! and worse than hegel!

suspendedreason [6:47 PM]

I think the idea is that the uniting dimension/s of the objects say something real about how the world works

Maybe the reason we like them is because there is aesthetic coherence

But maybe aesthetic coherence comes out of dimensional similarity??

Or prior assembling of the vibe

g.d. [6:48 PM]

but all instances of "saying something real about how the world works"

are not equal, relative to what you want to communicate or need to know

film of a piano falling from a great height maybe tells me gravity exists it doesn't tell me anything about gravity

mainly it's amusing to see a piano destroyed
amusing, but not informative

chords in a nutshell

vibes too

or rather, much less informative than is possible

ok wait

i think there's a steelman here

chords are selective in the sense that they combine specific elements for a consonant result

but they're not doing abstraction

s.p. [6:54 PM]

yes

g.d. [6:54 PM]

vibes are SORT OF doing abstraction

vibes are maplike in the sense that reduce a HUGE amount of dimensions to something evocative but not really informative

suspendedreason [6:55 PM]

I feel like you buy one way of learning through art:

Explicit maps

g.d. [6:55 PM]

maps reduce fewer dimensions to something more informative than evocative

suspendedreason [6:55 PM]

But so much learning is ambient. that's half the perspective/worldview of this piece, at least implicitly

learning is not just rules, it's also "soft," it's also socialization

Slowly becoming accustomed to norms you could never articulate

g.d. [6:55 PM]

it's not a matter of what i "buy"
it's a matter of what can be done on purpose

suspendedreason [6:56 PM]

No it is
There are a ton of theories of learning
You've picked one as your model

g.d. [6:56 PM]

you're describing something that can't be optimized

suspendedreason [6:57 PM]

I disagree

g.d. [6:57 PM]

that's because i'm more correct and less sentimental than you

suspendedreason [6:57 PM]

Or less open-minded

g.d. [6:58 PM]

college vs bootcamps
there are plenty of colleges
there aren't enough bootcamps
there's no need to lionize college any more than it's already been
lionized

c.b. [6:59 PM]

vibes are things that coalesce in the brain as concept-like but that aren't
things

g.d. [6:59 PM]

the better outcome would be more efficient and less costly ways of
imparting x

c.b. [6:59 PM]

the hidden layers in the metaphorical markov model
"europeness"

“ William Carlos Williams looked to the imagination as the faculty that horizontally connects things to create a world.

saturated vs. subtle vibes