Webcurios 14/03/25

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Opening
Misc 1
Misc 2
Tumblr
Long Reads
Video

Reading Time: 43 minutes

I went to see Cabaret in London this week with an old friend, and to my surprise really enjoyed it (do go if you can, it really is very good) – but, also, fcuk me does it hit differently in 2025! Also, per my comment about Oedipus a few weeks ago, HOW IS IT THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE GOING TO WATCH 'CABARET', AN ADAPTATION OF A FILM FAMOUSLY ABOUT THE WEIMAR YEARS AND THE RISE OF FASCISM BEING FACILITATED BY DECADENCE, WHO ARE MOVED TO GASP IN SHOCK AT THE REVELATION THAT THE NICE YOUNG GERMAN MAN IS IN FACT AN ACTUAL NAZI????

Anyway, this week I didn't have to take my trousers off in front of ANYONE, and so as such I think we can consider it, broadly, to have been a success. Also, someone responded to last week's Curios telling me that this newsletter is 'positively libidinal' and that I might be 'the kinkiest human being they have never met', which, honestly, is not something I would ever have expected to be told for writing a newsletter about Occasionally Interesting Links but, well, thanks!

I am still Matt, this is still Web Curios, and you are wrong, I am actually tediously vanilla.

By Nicholas Osborn https://www.instagram.com/boatlullabies/

WE BEGIN BY RETURNING TO THE RECORD COLLECTION OF TOM SPOONER, WHO HAS COMPILED THIS SELECTION OF OLD TRACKS WHICH RANGES FROM FOLK TO PSYCHEDELIA AND EVERYWHERE INBETWEEN! [(https://www.mixcloud.com/dapwearer/like-a-bruise-on-fruit/)](https://www.mixcloud.com/dapwearer/like-a-bruise-on-fruit/)

THE SECTION WHICH THINKS THAT THE WHOLE 'TEST YOUR LINKEDIN POSTS ON VIRTUAL BUSINESSMONGS' THING MIGHT BE THE MOST DEPRESSING LINK OF THE

YEAR SO FAR, AND I INCLUDE THE TWO-HEADED BONGO FROM LAST WEEK IN THAT ASSESSMENT, PT.1:

- **Synthsational (https://synthsational.boondoggle.studio/)** : Sometimes I like to open Curios with a link which makes no fcuking sense to me whatsoever (I mean, 'like' is a big word here – 'am forced to due to my increasingly partial and imperfect understanding of what the everliving fcuk is happening at any given moment' is perhaps a more accurate summation, but, well, it's hardly snappy, is it? Oh, God, it's happening again, sorry), and other times it's nice to open with something that is just good, uncomplicated fun – so today we're going with FUN (in fairness I think there's a reasonable amount of semi-complex stuff going on under the hood here but we're here for a good time not a hard time, so)! Synthsational is a really smart little synthtoy-type thing, which lets you make music over a backing track – press left and right to change the style of the backing track, press space to change (I think) the pitch), and create music using only four letters on your keyboard – there's some voodoo happening under the hood which seemingly means that whatever the fcuk you press you are basically prevented from making anything too cacophonously awful, kind of like the inflatable laneguards you get if you're bowling as a four year old, and there's something slightly miraculous about the fact that I was just sort of noodling around here and ended up accidentally compositing a weirdly-beautiful ethereal bit of electropop in a minor key. Alright, fine, my involvement here was admittedly minimal – The Machine, in one of its infinite incarnations, was doing the heavy lifting – but it really does feel a bit like magic. You can record the outputs directly from the site, which is a nice touch, and as a way of spinning up little melodies this feels both fun and maybe useful. For the first time in…fcuk, possibly ever, this made me think owning an iPad could actually be quite good, as just sitting with this for an hour and noodling feels like a genuinely-relaxing way to spend time. Give it a try, it really is rather wonderful.

- **Phone-to-Edit (https://715-999-7483.com/)** : It feels churlish to say this, but this was a lot more fun when I came across it on Monday (STOP WHINGING ABOUT THE FREE INTERNET STUFF YOU MISERABLE CNUT) – still, I very much like the idea and think there are quite a few fun riffs one might possibly build off this. The gimmick of this website is a simple one – anyone can edit it however they so choose, simply by calling a specific US phone number and describing what they want the website to look like – this is using The Machine (no idea which flavour) to recognise your voice, parse your instructions and turn those into (rudimentary) code which is then deployed near-instantaneously. You have to actually call the number to get this to work, and you have a maximum of 30s in which to describe your aesthetic vision, but it works to a quite remarkable degree (even if the resulting webpage looks very much like something you might have spun up in DreamWeaver c.1996) – the version of the site I found also let you do the same by talking directly to the site via your mic, but I presume that that was proving ruinously costly in terms of API calls and so hence it's phonecall-only. If nothing else I would be hugely grateful if any of you in the US can get the website to briefly read 'WEB CURIOS SENT ME HERE' and then send me a screencap, because, well, I like to occasionally give myself the illusion of readership and agency. THANKS!

- **It Is As If You Are On Your Phone (https://pippinbarr.com/it-is-as-if-you-were-on-your-phone/info/)** : Web Curios favourite Pippin Barr is back with a smart little semi-satirical websiteproject thing – a (mobile-only) website whose user interface is designed to allow you to pantomime the experience of having a meaningful and important interaction with your phone WITHOUT ACTUALLY DOING ANYTHING. You are, of course (and this certainty of shared experience is, let's take a moment to acknowledge this, at heart a fundamentally miserable truth!), aware of the specific feeling of 21stC awkwardness of being stuck waiting for something or someone and having RUN OUT OF CONTENT, and being reduced to that

weird pattern of inconsequential swipes and taps, the moving up and down the nested set of phone menus, swiping through your messages without reading, all of the holding pattern behaviours that have replaced our ability to just SIT STILL AND THINK (I noticed this a few years ago on planes awaiting take-off, and I strongly advise you to keep an eye out for it)…? Yes, well with this website you get to pantomime meaningful swipes – follow the instructions on-screen and anyone watching you will think that you're answering IMPORTANT EMAILS or BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND rather than simply killing some of the interminable seconds between birth and death with some busy-but-meaningless fingerwork. Honestly, this is ART – I know I always say sh1t like this, but it really is – and the only way it could possibly have been improved would be for it to have been called 'Fauxne'.

- The 'Hello' Man (https://www.youtube.com/@salutatore/videos) : While the flattening effect of global social media platforms has led to a semi-inevitable homogenisation of international culture, edges sanded off to conform to the algorithmic interpretation of 'best fit content' for the widest possible audience, there are occasional moments when you stumble upon another nation's Weird Internet People and you are reminded that odd is infinitely fractal. Thanks to Pietro Minto (https://linkmoltobelli.substack.com/) for introducing me to 'Il Salutatore' (loosely translated as 'the 'hello' man' for the purposes of this little writeup), an Italian social media…personality? Danger? Not quite sure how to characterise this guy to be honest, but let's assume he's benign (ngl, given he's Italian and given his general facial hair and vibe I wouldn't be hugely surprised were he to have some…spicy views on gender politics and 'traditional values', but let's not let my possibly-unfair suppositions get in the way of some top-quality strange) – The 'Hello' Man runs this YouTube channel where his whole thing (and I mean literally his WHOLE thing, this man has a very single-minded schtick) is approaching Italian 'celebrities' and getting them to say hi to their fans on camera with him. Literally, that's it. WHY IS THIS MAN DOING THIS? His

videos have, max, 500-ish views (and most of them struggle to break three figures), and yet WOW has he been doing this for a while (please, noone feel the need to point out certain...parallels with any long-term, pointless digital endeavours that might also spring to mind here)...this is just beautifully, wonderfully, awkwardly strange – <u>his encounter with a baffled but polite Chiwotel Ejiofor is broadly representative (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUA-6wiawaU)</u> , but I think I was most excited to see that he's recently done Ilona Staller (Cicciolina for the, er, 80s politics fans) because, well, I was worried Jeff Koons might have embalmed her or something. Anyway, this is perfectly weird and very strange, so, here, I'm giving it to you.

- <u>Smile Like Zuck (https://smilelikezuck.com/)</u> : I don't quite understand why this is as oddly fun as it is, but I found myself spending a surprising amount of time earlier this week getting into a rhythm of 'Zucking' at my webcam – the game here is to attempt to match the expression of the procession of dead-eyed, grinning Zuckerbergs to the satisfaction of the facial recognition software. Honestly, it's weirdly addictive for reasons I can't quite pinpoint.

- <u>Manus (https://manus.im/)</u> : This week's BIG AI THINGY, at least on Monday, was Manus, a new agentic AI product built out of China. As you obviously all know, 'agentic' AI is THE COMING THING, with The Machine set to get the ability to effectively go off and mimic human behaviours all over the web – the thinking is that eventually this will be how you get boring digital admin stuff done, by entrusting one of the infinite army of AI helpers that we'll all have at our disposal to go off and, I don't know, do the BORING BUSYWORK of, say, choosing a loved-one's present, or doing the grocery shopping, or whatever (but DEFINITELY not stealing your silly, online, task-based job, oh no, definitely not). There are obviously LOTS of ifs and hows and whys and 'yes, ok, but what are the knock-on implications of all this if we take it seriously?' questions here which I am not going to get into because, honestly, I would be here all week and I would lose the attention of the three remaining masochists still reading at this point – instead I am just going to suggest you check

out Manus, which feels (based on my cursory examination of the example tasks they have on the website – you need an invite code to get into the actual live environment right now) pretty representative of Where This Is Currently At – superficially really impressive, but, actually, not very good when you look at it for more than 2s. This is built on top of – I think – Claude and some other model, but it does the DeepSeek-ish think of showing you its working as it 'thinks' and does, which means that if you click on any of the demo examples you can see a replay of it 'reasoning' and acting in semi-realtime; this is SO interesting, and not a little bit... creepy? But, also, slightly-depressing from the point of view of curiosity and diversity of thought, because every single example I have looked at here (which, by the way, have all been of the non-code variety because, well, I don't really care about coding) just deliver the most basic, first page of Google-type results – there's one example where Manus is asked to plan and book an itinerary of 'interesting' things to do over a fortnight trip to Australia and New Zealand, and you can literally see The Machine googling 'things to do in Australia and New Zealand and then taking its recs from, literally, Australia.com. Basically I can't help but look at this and imagine an inevitable point in ~3y where a specific destination on Earth is entirely decimated by tourism because The Machine has ineffably decided that it is vitally important that it send EVERYONE there for their Summer holiday (much as seems to have happened with Italy and every single American under the age of 30 since COVID). Anyway, welcome to a future in which stuff happens and you don't know why but, well, it's ok, because TRUST THE MACHINE! Oh, and if you're Actually Technical, someone obviously ripped the code and open sourced it – you can get a version here if you would like to attempt to run it locally (https://github.com/mannaandpoem/OpenManus) .

- Some New, Impressive AI Video Stuff (https://ali-vilab.github.io/VACE-Page/) : Ok, so this is prototypical rather than live, but it's quite hard not to look at these examples of style transfer and object insertion into video, powered by The Machine, and think 'oh dear, poor lots of

people currently working in low-to-mid-end post-production'.

- **A Truly Incredible List of Free Internet Stuff (https://fmhy.vercel.app/)** : Bookmark this NOW. No, seriously, I mean it, you honestly have no idea what an insane resource this is. The site's official name is, seemingly, FMHY (no idea), but what it ACTUALLY is is a truly incredible directory of links to FREE INTERNET STUFF, subdivided by category. So, for example, the 'music' section contains links to all sorts of streaming sites – but also places that host old MP3s recorded at gigs, or old concert footage, or fun music toys, or podcast discovery services; there's a whole section on 'films and TV' which is basically a link to all sorts of...not wholly-legal torrenting/streaming options but also loads of interesting community-type spaces and public domain archive materials...Honestly, this is the most insanely-generous bit of information gathering I have seen in an age and I am slightly in love with whoever is behind it (there's a Discord, so it feels like a community of people rather than an individual), not least because a) they take the time to check the safety of the links regularly and prune any that seem sketchy; b) the NSFW section is entirely empty, which, without wishing to sound like a prude, was a really nice and reassuring surprise because I was worried I was going to have to apply some LARGE CAVEATS to my recommendation; and c) they explicitly say that they don't want or need donations because they are doing out of the spirit of SHEER ONLINE KINDNESS, which, honestly, is SO NICE and much rarer than it should be. Honestly, I really do mean it, this is probably the most useful link I am going to feature in here all year (the bar, so low!) and you really do want to keep it close.

- **Virtual LinkedIn (https://societies.io/)** : I think that this might be one of the worst things I have seen so far in 2025 – and trust me when I say that given all of the links I choose NOT to include each week that is no idle statement. This is a websiteappthing called 'Virtual Societies' which exists to let you TRIAL your LinkedIn BANGERS with an, er, infinite audience of AI businessmongs! Yes, that's right, someone's

literally created a sandbox where you can post your CONSIDERED PIECES OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP and get an assessment, based on the non-opinions of nonexistent AI-imagined personas, of exactly how much it will slap – this is basically 'AI focus groups' (per previous Curios, another fcuking stupid idea if you ask me) but for the specific purpose of helping you get temporary digital validation from the worst people on the planet. Give it the url of your LI profile and it will pull your connections, lightly scrape their data to get a topline idea of who the fcuk they pretend to be when doing business cosplay, and then spin up a shadow network of 'virtual businessmongs' who are meant to ACCURATELY REFLECT the real people whose tedious corporate bromides you reward with little digital sealclaps on the daily. Is this in any way accurate or meaningful? Well, prima facie 'no' – but, equally, given that LLMs are trained to basically write in LinkedIn English it's not unreasonable to assume that this is a non-awful way of ensuring your deathly prose cleaves as closely to the coveted MIDDLE OF THE BELLCURVE as is possible. Words can't adequately express how much I hate that this exists and that there is a market for it.

- **The Letraset Graphic Materials Handbook (https://archive.org/details/letraset-communication-by-design/mode/1up?view=theater)** : Do you do design and craft and making and stuff? Because if so, this link – taking you to an archived scan of the Letraset Graphic Materials handbook from…Christ knows, the 70s/80s? Which is both a sort of brochure for the company's design products but also a quite incredible practical guide to making and typesetting and design and craft and, honestly, as I flicked through this it made me momentarily genuinely sad that I have absolutely no skill in this sort of area at all (antiskill, in fact) because I can imagine for a certain type of person this might unlock all sorts of creative ideas and endeavours. Honestly, this really is very cool indeed (if you're not like me).

- **Turn Bluesky Threads Into Webpages (https://skywriter.blue/)** : This is quite neat – plug in the URL

of the top Bluesky post from a thread and this will export the whole lot as a standalone webpage, kind of like Threadreader (but for Bluesky and nicer-looking). Really nicely made and genuinely useful as a way of sharing content from the platform.

- SwipeSky (https://swiper.blue/) : Ooh, this is nice (and slightly devilish, as with all platforms that reduce actual human beings to small cards that live inside your phone and which you can save or doom with a Caesar-esque thumb gesture) – SwipeSky basically just presents you with a stream of Bluesky users that you don't currently follow and, presuming you've given it access to your account, lets you choose to follow them with a swipe. If your feed feels a bit stale after all the excitement of the influx of users a few months ago then this is one way of refreshing it – although obviously there's a degree of caveat emptor here as there's relatively minimal info on your potential new follows beyond profile pic and bio copy, so there's every chance you'll end up clogging your feed with a bunch of incredibly tedious FBPE-type people who don't understand irony or jokes, or one of the occasional Bluesky people who just really likes posting an awful lot of c0ck, all the time.

- Small Seasons (https://smallseasons.guide/) : Here in the UK were were briefly fooled by FAKE SPRING last week, but are now 'enjoying' hailstorms and frost – if you would like to have a slightly better understanding of how seasons actually work than 'it go cold then it go hot then it go wet' then this lovely site might help. "In agricultural days, staying in-tune with the seasons was important. When should we plant seeds? When should we harvest? When will the rains come? Are they late this year? Knowing what was happening with nature was the difference between a plentiful harvest and a barren crop. Prior to the Gregorian calendar, farmers in China and Japan broke each year down into 24 sekki or "small seasons." These seasons didn't use dates to mark seasons, but instead, they divided up the year by natural phenomena." We are currently in the middle of Keichitsu, or 'the going out of the worms', the period in which insects emerge from hibernation (hang on, what,

insects hibernate? Jesus, who knew?), which I am sure gladdens you immensely.

- **Korea Central TV (https://kcnawatch.us/korea-central-tv-livestream/)** : So apparently this is an actual livestream of North Korean TV, live – I have no idea how legit this is, or how representative the channel is of wider media in the country, but if you've ever been curious as to what actual, proper dictatorial propaganda comms looks like then just buy the Washington Post LOL SATIRE just click the link. This is just one page on a much larger site dedicated to letting you explore North Korean media, should you be curious – but, equally, Web Curios takes no responsibility whatsoever for any knocks at the door which may come as a result of you engaging with this stuff.
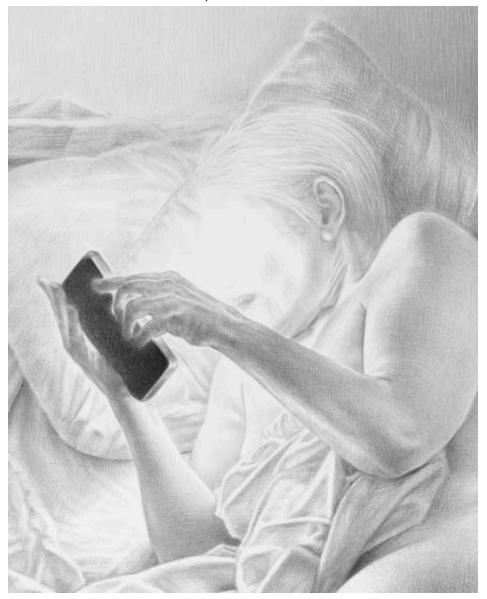
- **Animal Sounds Around The World (https://pudding.cool/2025/03/language/)** : MORE lovely datavis by The Pudding, this time looking at onomatopoeic language for animal noises used around the world – this is SO interesting (as ever it's also nicely designed and coded too, obvs), but is rendered imperfect by its baffling refusal to riff on a 12 year old semi-viral comedy song and not having any 'what does the fox say?'-related gags. I can't tell you how much it pleases me that 'miaow' in Spanish is spelt 'mjaw', by the way.

- **Fun GUI (https://fungui.resn.co.nz/)** : I think this is a little calling card for a digital agency in…New Zealand? Anyway, that's not important – what IS important is that this webpage lets you basically, er, digitally stroke some flanged shapes, which now, as I come to type it, sounds quite remarkably deviant. WAIT COME BACK IT IS NOT A SEX THING! Drag your mouse over the shapes and enjoy the feeling of slight rubbery resistance in the resulting animation – this is very trivial, but there's something really rather lovely (and unusual) about the weight and heft that the animations give the UI here, I think. NOT A SEX THING!

- **LetterLoop (https://www.letterloop.co/)** : Ooh, I like this a lot. letterLoop is basically a platform that lets you compile a sort of email newsletter in collaborative fashion; get everyone you want involved signed up, select the questions or prompts you want to give them, and the platform will send out the question(s), compile the responses, and share them as a compiled email newsletter to everyone once all the answers are in. Per the blurb, "Letterloop lets you ask and answer meaningful questions about everyone's lives that don't often come up over call or text. In our experience, calls are wonderful, but thinking of great questions (and answering them!) on the spot can be tough. It's easy to fall into the same patterns of communication. Plus, while group calls are fun, they can quickly get too chaotic for everyone to ask and answer thoughtful questions. Messaging is convenient but isn't designed for everyone to get a chance to share at the same time. Chat threads offer spontaneity and are a great way to share bits of your life in real-time. But when was the last time you asked everyone in your thread a question like, "What brings you energy and joy lately?" Letterloop lets you ask these kinds of questions over email, giving people the time and space to reply. At the end of each cycle, the replies are presented in a fun and beautiful newsletter delivered to everyone's inbox. It's our way of slowing down that we hope you'll adopt as a new ritual with your friends and family." Ok, so obviously the whole 'what brings you energy and joy' thing makes me feel quite ill, but leaving aside the twee new agey w4nk there's something quite clever about this as a service, and lots of ways I can imagine using it for community-related or internal communications purposes.

- **Nebula Trail (https://nebulatrail.pro/)** : A webpage that basically does the whole 'fluid dynamics' thing – click, drag, GAWP AT THE LIGHTS. This feels like something it might be amusing to put on phone or tablet and then watch a cat go mental at.

- Gleeful Beasts (https://www.youtube.com/@GleefulBeasts) : A YouTube channel featuring 'digital animated puppet comedy' – basically a bunch of short, kid-friendly animations featuring some delightful freaks and some really rather good character modelling. These are CHARMING, whether or not you have children (but if you do then they might enjoy these particularly).

- Uniform Freak (http://www.uniformfreak.com/) : Do you like, er, air hostess uniforms? Do you like them A LOT? Regardless, you almost certainly don't like them anywhere near as much as Cliff Muskiet, who I admire a huge amount for putting what I presume is his ACTUAL NAME on a url that literally reads 'uniformfreak dot com'. I am going to hand over to Cliff here, because I think his homepage copy probably reveals a certain amount about the tenor of the site: "Ever since my early childhood, I have been interested and fascinated by the world of aviation. I used to collect everything that wore an airline name or logo, such as posters, postcards, stickers, timetables, safety cards and airplane models. Sometime in 1980 I was given my first uniform by one of my mother's friends. I was so excited and I wanted to have more uniforms. In 1982 I heard that two charter airlines were introducing new uniforms. I wasted no time, I called these airlines and as a result I was invited to pick up a set of old uniforms. Between 1982 and 1993 I didn't do much to obtain any more uniforms, something I really regret now as I could have had many many more! Most of my uniforms were obtained between 1993 and today. At the moment my collection contains 1891 uniforms from 632 different airlines. As I travel the world as a senior purser with KLM, it gives me the opportunity to visit local airline offices and I meet people who can maybe help me to obtain new uniforms for my collection. One day, I hope to make a book about my collection. Another dream that will come true? Who knows?" This feels…slightly like I am peering at someone's fetish closet, but, equally, really is VERY comprehensive when it comes to stewardess

uniforms through history, so, well, who am I to judge (NO FCUKER, that's who! Cliff, I really hope you are alive and well and that should you ever see this that you know it is written with affection)?

By [Laurie Lipton](https://www.instagram.com/laurieliptondrawings/) (https://www.instagram.com/laurieliptondrawings/)

[NEXT, ENJOY A CRACKING SELECTION OF TRACKS CELEBRATING ONE OF THE ALL-TIME GREAT HIHOP LABELS, DEF JUX! (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJFcz3XSs5s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJFcz3XSs5s)

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YEAR SO FAR, AND I INCLUDE THE TWO-HEADED BONGO FROM LAST WEEK IN THAT ASSESSMENT, PT.2:

- **Status (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=link.socialai.app&hl=en_GB)**: It was Charlie Brooker, I think, who first popularised the whole 'Twitter is better if you think of it as a videogame and treat it as such' line of thought – taking that to its logical conclusion, Status answers the question 'what if you could play social media as a no-stakes pointscoring exercise?' Which feels a bit like it has already been answered – 'that is literally how you should use real-life social media ffs' – but, anyway, thanks to Status you can now 'enjoy' all the fun bits of social (the posting! The dopamine buzz from likes! The interactions!) except IT IS ALL FAKE. Status does something similar to the flurry of 'social media but populated by AI characters!' apps which cropped up last year, but leans harder into the game aspect of it – there's a clear ludic element here based around racking up points for roleplaying, getting fans, etc etc. The smart thing is the way you can choose to inhabit different sorts of personas, adding a light RPG-ish mechanic – do you want to see you you can become QUEEN BEE of a fictitious stan army? Do you want to try and navigate the complex world of the controversial podcasting edgelord without being hounded off-platform? SO MANY POSSIBILITIES! I briefly had a play with this earlier in the week, and while it is not for me it is genuinely quite a clever and interesting – and, crucially, addictive – mechanic which I can imagine getting moderately-popular. Equally, though, if you stop to think about it for longer than about 30s it becomes VERY DEPRESSING, so, er, maybe don't do that! SMOOTH BRANE 4-EVA!

- **One Post Wonder (https://onepostwonder.com/)**: ANOTHER attempt to recast social media as anything other than a miserable horrorshow! This new variant – in beta, but you can submit your email and be alerted when it opens up – tries a minimalist approach, with the idea being that posting is restricted to once a day, for everyone; as they put it, "One Post Wonder is a social network where everyone posts no more than once a day. It doesn't matter if it's a cat picture, a duck joke or a

column worthy of Alexandra Petri. One Post Wonder features a rich set of privacy controls that allow you to carefully control who can see your posts, a design that emphasises content with minimal distractions, and a sustainable business model that puts the focus squarely on user satisfaction." Which, you know, sounds lovely, should enough people sign up to it to make it a workable space – so give them your email and wait for an invite, because MAYBE this will be the halcyon digital space we have all so longed for! STILL WE HOPE! **You can actually get a peek at what the beta looks like here and...you know what, I quite like the vibe (https://onepostwonder.com/read)**. MAYBE IT WILL BE GOOD!!!

- **Eyes on Asteroids (https://eyes.nasa.gov/apps/asteroids/#/home)**: Via my friend Adrian (W_W) comes this lovely site by NASA which lets you look at ALL OF THE ASTEROIDS and zoom in on them and spin them around and, yes, ok, when it comes down to it these are just lumps of rock and so not hugely aesthetically pleasing but THEY ARE FLYING THROUGH SPACE RIGHT NOW which is, you have to admit, just sort of amazing. Also it's a nice reminder of the fact that there is ALWAYS loads of stuff whizzing past us at pace, and that most of it doesn't hit us, and that despite the slightly troubling asteroid-related news rumblings earlier this year it is still VASTLY more likely that you'll die of cancer or because of some sort of trivial, stupid human error than it is that you'll be wiped out by several tonnes of rock hurled at you from the other side of space. RELAX!

- **Breakbeats (https://rhythm-lab.com/breakbeats)**: It's been a VERY good year so far for huge repositories of musical samples, and here are EVEN MORE! Per the mysterious collector: "Here is my collection of vintage funk/soul breakbeats. All loops in wav quality (and not converted from mp3). Every break manually sliced (rex2), some breaks have 2 or more versions, for example, cd and vinyl. Click right mouse button and select "save as" for single file download." CAVEAT: I DO NOT THINK THAT THESE ARE PUBLIC DOMAIN AND SO AS SUCH THERE MIGHT BE SOME, ER, ISSUES AROUND USING THEM COMMERCIALLY. Also you can't preview the files before downloading, so it's a bit of

a lucky dip. BUT! There is SO MUCH in here, and the couple I have downloaded as a test are great, so fill your breakboots.

- The Northern Lights Photographer of the Year (https://capturetheatlas.com/northern-lights-photographer-of-the-year/): When I first saw this link I was a bit sniffy about the photos here, with my (incredibly insistent and VERY annoying) internal monologue complaining about 'too much HDR effect' and 'too much post-production'. Then on Wednesday I saw my friend Lisa who was in Norway with her family earlier this year and skied under the Northern Lights and whose phone photos looked basically like this, so, actually, it turns out that this is just what they look like and I should wind my neck in. ANYWAY, these are some VERY COLOURFUL photographs of lights in the sky, and they are proof that in some instances nature is a gaudy little bitch, basically. This came to me via Jodi Ettenburg's excellent 'Curious About Everything' newsletter (https://jodiettenberg.substack.com/) which is a consistent source of great reading every month and which I recommend unreservedly.

- A Weird ASCII Coding Playground Thingy (https://play.ertdfgcvb.xyz/): Ok, I don't wholly get how this works – it's basically a little code playground/sandbox which lets you experiment with meddling with fun ASCII-animating code, but exactly HOW you do that requires approximately 100% more of an understanding of coding than I possess. BUT! Even a total fcuking digimong like me can appreciate the beauty of the animations which you can explore using the menu on the right-hand side – also, some of them are very much the sort of thing that you could lose a few hours staring at at 4am under the right conditions. For those of you less preposteriously-useless than me, though, who understand the STRANGE MAJICK of computerspeak, there's probably quite a bit of creative fun to be had here exploring how you can tweak and manipulate the examples to your own ends. Per the dev, "This playground is an attempt of a browser-based live-code environment with text-only output. It is born from the joy and pleasure ASCII, ANSI and in general text-based art can give and it is an homage to all the artists, poets and designers which used and use text as their

medium. From the design perspective it is also an exercise in reduction: there is almost no interface, just a preview window and a code editor; margins and line numbers are removed as well."

- [T (https://www.thenewcomictimes.com/)he News As Comics (https://www.thenewcomictimes.com/)](https://www.thenewcomictimes.com/): This is, to be clear, horrible. What would happen if you took the day's headlines, fed them to an LLM to turn said headlines into a three-panel comic and then got The Machine to illustrate said three-panel comic? THIS! This is what happens! A horrible, miserable, idiotic attempt to reduce everything happening to a three-line summary with no depth or meaning or nuance! Honestly, I spent some time this week going back through these to see if they were ever anything than awful, and, seriously, it made me feel like I was losing approximately one IQ point per second I spent staring at them. This is ugly and sad and stupid and I hate the fact that this is what we are going to do to all information eventually because we're all going to forget how to fcuking think at some point in the next 10 years.

- [Seven39 (https://www.seven39.com/)](https://www.seven39.com/): Yes, I know that that's an incredibly irritating way of writing 739, but it's their website and I have to respect their wishes. Unnecessary whinging about nomenclature aside, I do rather like this as a concept. Seven39 (and that's the last time I am typing it out like that) is ANOTHER SOCIAL NETWORK but one with quite a clever gimmick, I think – it is only live, and you can only post to it, for three hours per day, from 7:39 (EST) to 10:39. That's it – that's your window, no negotiating. There's something interesting about creating a time and place for conversation, like a sort of digital happy hour of sorts (and yes, I know what a horrible and meaningless concept that is, forgive me). Sadly the time difference to the UK means that I would have had to post from midnight to 3am to test it out and, well, I simply don't care that much, but if you're in a more forgiving timezone then I would suggest taking a look at this in case it's FUN AND VIBRANT (or in case it's just full of weirdo perverts, which can also be interesting in its own way).

- **A World Map of Female Composers (https://svmusicology.com/mapa?lang=es)**: This is a page on the website of Sakira Ventura, who, per her bio, is a researcher and academic (I think) with a specific interest in the history of women in music, and who created this wonderful interactive map showing all (obviously not 'all', but a significant number) of the female composers of note throughout history, located geographically based on their nationality. Which is lovely, and I am glad it exists, but I have just realised that all it shows you is their name and image and now I am churlishly annoyed that it doesn't also feature links to their works – so, er, if someone would like to somehow magically make that a reality that would be great, thanks!

- **The British Voter Bot (https://bsky.app/profile/britishvoter.bsky.social)**: Slightly depressing, this one – a Bluesky bot which shares actual voter profiles from the British Election Study conducted last year (in case you're not already aware, "BES surveys have taken place immediately after every general election, providing data to help researchers understand changing patterns of party support and election outcomes. They also take place between elections, with 26 (by May 2024) large 30,000 person online panel surveys conducted by the present team, since 2014") and which means you'll occasionally see things like "I'm a white British Anglican male, 67 years old, and my main electoral priority is immigration" (lol seemingly that comprises 70+% of the surveyed people, judging by the stuff I have seen so far) floating across the TL. It's interesting, but after a while does leave one with the overwhelming impression that…man, Britain is significantly less tolerant and welcoming, and significantly more scared and racist, than we (ok, ok than *I*) tend to like to think.

- **Able To Play (https://abletoplay.com/)**: Oh this is a great initiative – Able To Play is a service which helps you see at a glance whether a game has accessibility settings which enable you to play it or not. Create a profile, list your accessibility needs and preferences, and the system will let you know which titles fall within the broad range of 'stuff I will be able to engage with,

regardless of any conditions I might have'. Honestly, if you or someone that you know has particular accessibility requirements this is a hugely-useful resource, and it feels very much like A Good Thing.

- 3d Earthquake Map (https://www.panditanimation.com/3DEarthquakeMap): I've featured realtime maps of quakes on here before, but I think this is the first one that shows you how deep the quake is on a 3d globe. This is, as ever with this stuff, mildly terrifying at first as you realise quite how much mad tectonic activity is happening beneath our feet ALL THE FCUKING TIME, but then quite addictive – it's nice to keep it open in the background, because it will ping when a new quake has been detected and you can just tab over to that it is in fact displaying the hopefully-reassuring legend 'Tsunami Risk: NO' (I can't imagine the genuine horror of seeing the opposite message, and so am going to navigate away from this website before my brain forces me to imagine some sort of horrible vertical, watery armageddon).

- Theremin (https://bigjobby.com/theremin/): OH GOD THIS LETS YOU PLAY THE THEREMIN IN YOUR BROWSER WITH YOUR HANDS LIKE SOME SORT OF MAGICAL SOUND WIZARD! This is great, seriously, and you will grin like a moron the first time you try it.

- Quickflip (https://puzzmallow.com/quickflip): ANOTHER DAILY WORD PUZZLE! This is REALLY infuriating, fyi – or at least it has been for me, because I have a seemingly-unerring ability to pick the wrong option. The way this works is simple – each day you're presented with 8 tiles, each with a letter on; each tile can display one of two letters, and you can toggle between the two by clicking. There are TWO potential words that can be spelled each day – ONLY TWO – and one is the RIGHT word and the other is WRONG, and your task is to flip the letters in such a way that you arrive at the right word rather than the wrong one in the fewest number of flips possible. I have got it wrong every day this week and, honestly, feel quite grumpy about it.

- [Posters Out Of Focus (https://poof.day/)](https://poof.day/): Leaving aside the unfortunate url, this is a decent little daily puzzle for the cinephiles – each day, guess which VERY PIXELLATED film poster is being shown; with each incorrect guess the poster becomes slightly higher-res and additional clues (year of release, star, genre, etc etc) are revealed and if you're slightly less clueless when it comes to the culture of the moving image than I am you might find this a fun addition to the daily rotation.

- [Type Help (https://william-rous.itch.io/type-help)](https://william-rous.itch.io/type-help): I was going to feature this a few weeks ago but I rather bounced off it and didn't feel I could wholly recommend it without understanding it better – then [Adrian Hon wrote this excellent explainer about the game and how it works (https://mssv.net/2025/03/09/the-gothic-mystery-of-type-help/)](https://mssv.net/2025/03/09/the-gothic-mystery-of-type-help/), and I figured that I could just let him tell you about it and you could decide if you're into it or not. Basically this is VERY text heavy and will possibly require you to make a spreadsheet, so that should give you a rough idea of whether this might conceivably be 'fun' for you or whether you're a bit more like me and consider stuff that requires excel to be pretty much the antithesis of fun. Here's the opening of Adrian's explainer – see if this makes you go 'ooh, interesting!' or 'jesus, fcuk off': "In an age of non-descriptive game titles, [Type Help (https://william-rous.itch.io/type-help)](https://william-rous.itch.io/type-help) may win the championship belt. Far easier to cite its inspirations – [Return of the Obra Dinn (https://obradinn.com/)](https://obradinn.com/), [Her Story (https://www.herstorygame.com/)](https://www.herstorygame.com/), [Unheard (https://store.steampowered.com/app/942970/Unheard/)](https://store.steampowered.com/app/942970/Unheard/) and [The Roottrees are Dead (https://roottrees.com/)](https://roottrees.com/) – all members of the burgeoning genre of deduction games, where players piece together a tragic mystery from audio or video or static tableaux. The only time you type "help" is at the beginning of the game, where it's explained you've come into possession of a computer containing the investigatory records of a long-ago mystery. The Galley House was discovered with a number of dead bodies and no clear culprit; all you have are transcripts of audio from its inhabitants, divided by room and by time period. Transcripts have filenames like 02-EN-1-6-7-10, which can be decoded as: 02: The second time period of the mystery. There are 26 in total,

and they can be as short as a few minutes or as long as several hours.EN: Entrance, i.e. the room the transcript is from. There are lots of rooms.1-6-7-10: The people present in the room during this time period, in this case, the persons designated 1, 6, 7, and 10. An early task is assigning names to numbers. Because there's no list of filenames, your primary goal is to find as many as you can in order to learn the full story. This is as straightforward as making deductions and guesses based on what people say and do, and then typing in the resulting filename." Basically if you like logic puzzles then this may scratch a similar itch.

- [Orisinal (https://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/)](https://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/): This is SUCH a treat! For webmongs of a certain vintage, Ferry Halim is something of a legend – when I was but a scrap of a thing, sitting in an office in Victoria wearing a suit and learning very quickly that I was not, in all likelihood, going to have a career as a corporate lobbyist, one of my favourite ways of passing the time (outside of browsing BMEZine and googling "how to buy weed online uk") was playing the beautiful, pastel-coloured, relaxing and fiendishly-addictive browsergames made by the mysterious Halim and posted on his website Orisinal. Then Flash died, and so did the website…but now, thanks to Flash emulation code it is BACK! And all the old games are back too! [INCLUDING THE ONE ABOUT STACKING THE PIGS, WHICH I LOST LITERALLY A WEEK TO C.2003! (https://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/g3/pig.htm)](https://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/g3/pig.htm)I am so so so happy that this has been resurrected, it is a part of (my) web history. Oh, it's not the fastest to load, so be patient.

- [The Roy Orbison in Clingfilm Adventure Game (https://michaelkelly.artofeurope.com/orbadv1.htm)](https://michaelkelly.artofeurope.com/orbadv1.htm): I have, I think, mentioned Michael Kelly on here before, and linked to his odd little stories about a German man whose singular erotic obsession is the concept of Roy Orbison, naked and wrapped in clingfilm, but I had totally forgotten he made an ACTUALTEXT ADVENTURE GAME out of the concept. Look, this is…niche, I appreciate, but equally I find this almost terminally funny – I don't quite understand why, but there is something about the style and tone and premise that absolutely fcuking slays me. Seriously, I just spent 5 minutes clicking around and laughed out loud three times – please indulge me for a few moments and give this a go,

if you laugh too then maybe we can be friends (but I promise I will never try and wrap you in clingfilm for erotic or even non-erotic purposes).

By [Thérèse Mulgrew (https://www.instagram.com/theresemulgrewart/)](https://www.instagram.com/theresemulgrewart/)

[OUR FINAL MIX THIS WEEK IS THIS VAGUELY-LATINATE=FLAVOURED SELECTION OF HOUSEY DISCO-Y LOUNGEY TRACKS COMPILED BY SASHA CHADAEV! (https://soundcloud.com/the-dream-chimney/mix-of-the-week-575-sasha-chadaev-polako-polako)](https://soundcloud.com/the-dream-chimney/mix-of-the-week-575-sasha-chadaev-polako-polako)

THE CIRCUS OF TUMBLRS!

- [Odd This Day (https://mulberryhall.medium.com/)](https://mulberryhall.medium.com/) : A reader writes! Says Chris Coates, "as your contact page says you'd welcome things people have created, I thought I'd send you a link to this thing I do. I call it 'Odd this day', the idea being to find something bizarre from history for every day of the year. Today [NOT IN FACT ACTUALLY TODAY, DUE TO MY RECEIVING THIS EMAIL IN THE PAST], for example, is the [118th anniversary of Nature publishing Francis Galton's 'wisdom of crowds' paper](#)

(https://mulberryhall.medium.com/odd-this-day-86983610cdfd) about a visit to the West of England Fat Stock and Poultry Exhibition – or, at least, everyone thinks he went to the fair, but he didn't." This is GREAT, and honestly throws up something interesting on a daily basis – not least this (https://bsky.app/profile/oddthisday.bsky.social/post/3ljz4vpjd3c2d) , which is one of the more astonishing artefacts from that weird period in which male writers being insanely horny on main was apparently fair game to publish in actual papers/magazines.

THE TROUGH OF (INSTA) FEEDS!

- Claw Craziness (https://www.instagram.com/clawcraziness_/): Oooh, this is fun – this Insta feed posts behind the scenes footage of an incredible-looking setup where someone's got a bunch of fairground claw machines set up in a room somewhere, all of which are playable remotely by people online...and yes, fine, I know that sounds both weird AND banal, but it's not, ok? FFS.

- What I Think Might Be The Worst Poetry Ever (https://www.instagram.com/7soulsdeep): Look, as a general rule I try not to feature stuff in Curios that I don't like because, well, it feels mean to point at something that someone has made and tell them that I think it's sh1t (unless it's corporate webwork; corporate webwork can, in the main, fcuk off). This week, though, I am making an exception for the Insta account of one 7SoulsDeep, because I was walking blamelessly through Soho the other week and was confronted by some of this person's 'verse' scrawled on a pavement and, well, if you're going to force this sh1t into my head, 7SoulsDeep, then I can tell the world that you are one of the worst examples of instapoet faux-profundity that I have ever read in my life, and if I hear a more appallingly, clunky and adolescent line in 2025 than 'I made her mind wet' then, well, something very weird is likely to have happened. The fact that this account has over 70k followers makes me feel marginally less bad about the likely extinction we're racing towards at speed.

- **Bad Wiki Photos (https://www.instagram.com/badwikiphotos/)**: Terrible photos of famouses from their Wikipedia pages! Why? Because they're comically bad. Seriously, the Venus Williams pic in particular is amazing – like, there are a LOT of photos of Venus Williams out there, why use *that* one?

LONG THINGS THAT ARE LONG (ALSO WHILE WE ARE HERE IT TURNS OUT THAT 12FT.IO IS WORKING AGAIN SHOULD YOU NEED TO JUMP PAYWALLS FOR ANY OF THE LINKS BELOW)!

- **The Population Implosion (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/03/the-population-implosion)** : A good, if VERY long, New Yorker piece exploring exactly why so many people are currently rather exercised about how many kids we're all having (no, not the racist reasons, the OTHER reasons). I found this fascinating; I wasn't aware of quite how much global data shows that none of us really seem to want kids any more, or at least not enough to produce enough of us to keep things running as they currently are, or quite how close we (when I say 'we' here I am lazily referring to, mostly, the richest countries, the 'West' or 'Global North') are to all sorts of quite unpleasant-looking cliffs in terms of our collective ability to keep all these complex systems functioning on what looks like being something of a skeleton staff, so to speak. A few caveats here – there's a BIG focus on South Korea in the piece, which is particularly far along this timeline and exposed, and there are repeated references to academics soberly (and rather tiredly) reminding the reader that, actually, attempting to make any sort of accurate medium-term predictions about stuff like this is in the main a fool's errand. Still, it is all very interesting and does give something of a different perspective on the current obsession with AI (and, by extension, robotics) – because, if you believe this stuff, without some sort of tech hail mary (does it worry you how many times already this year I have written something about us all hoping for a tech-based miracle? It worries me) then we're all going to be having VERY different, and probably less-good, lives in a

generation or two. Although, honestly, as a barren man who'll be dead before this stuff affects me, give a fcuk (obviously I do care a *bit*, don't look at me like that). Oh, and HERE'S A BONUS PIECE THAT LINKS TO THE TECH POINT! (https://kk.org/thetechnium/the-handoff-to-bots/) "Human populations will start to decrease globally in a few more decades. Thereafter fewer and few humans will be alive to contribute labor and to consume what is made. However at the same historical moment as this decrease, we are creating millions of AIs and robots and agents, who could potentially not only generate new and old things, but also consume them as well, and to continue to grow the economy in a new and different way. This is a Economic Handoff, from those who are born to those who are made." Or at least, quite a few people are betting/hoping on that being the case.

- The Rise of the Degrowther Right (https://jacobin.com/2025/03/right-wing-ecology-degrowth-nationalism) : I thought this was a fascinating article, although I probably should acknowledge that it's in Jacobin and as such wears its politics quite clearly on its sleeve. Still, as an overview of a movement that I have sort of felt the shape of but not quite 'seen', so to speak, it's super-interesting; there's an interesting throughline here from the gilets jaunes a few years back to the right-wing fetishisation of farming as 'pure' labour, the tradwifery (of course!) and a whole bunch of other stuff too. Once you've read this, you will start seeing it a LOT I think: "This is not a merely twenty-first century phenomenon or just part of the quixotic ideological combinations beloved of the online far right. Rather, it is the latest version of a long-established defense of a "naturalist" vision of ecology, seen not as an interventionist project for reshaping the world but as a moral call to reel in modern excesses. As conservative philosopher Roger Scruton told Bastié in an interview for right-wing ecological magazine Limite, "Progress is a perverse superstition"; the call to defend our home (in Greek, oikos, root of the word "ecology") must not be "economic" but "spiritual and cultural." The late Scruton is a big deal among much of the European and US right. His legacy is proudly taken up by figures around the National

Conservatism meetups, a jamboree that unites Anglophone conservative forces with harder-right parties in Europe, and that is also backed by institutes close to Viktor Orbán's Hungarian government. Italian premier Giorgia Meloni has routinely cited Scruton as an intellectual inspiration, and he's had a notable effect on the way her Fratelli d'Italia party talks about green issues. For the party's spokesman on these matters, Nicola Procaccini, even the word "environmentalism" is suspect. "Ecology," Procaccini told a Fratelli d'Italia event for business chiefs in April 2022, "means looking after your own home. The difference between left-wing environmentalism and right-wing ecology also lies in our spirituality, as against the Left's materialism."" Honestly, this really is smart and worth engaging with.

- [Design and the Construction of the Imaginaries (https://blog.tobiasrevell.com/2025/03/12/box124-design-and-the-construction-of-imaginaries/)](https://blog.tobiasrevell.com/2025/03/12/box124-design-and-the-construction-of-imaginaries/) : Ok, so ordinarily when it comes to the longreads I feel reasonably qualified to give you a precis of what an individual piece is about, more or less – here, though, I am just going to sort of do some vague handwaving, because while excellent and interesting and thought-provoking throughout, it's also true that this essay by Tobias Revell (which is actually the narrative of a presentation around his ongoing Phd, I think) is...quite discursive and wide-ranging and as such it's quite hard to give a pithy 'and it is about X' summation. That said, if you are interested in (*deep breath*) design and digital and futures and how you scry them from the past and present and AI and 'work' and work and BIG IDEAS and how people relate to them and science and the concept of 'progress' and storytelling and narrative and presentation and The Society of the Spectacle and and and and and... well, then you should read this. It is LONG, but it will make you think more about more different things than any other link in this week's issue, which hopefully is recommendation enough to earn your click.

- [Should We Talk To AI About Ethics?](https://www.theverge.com/openai/624209/chatgpt-ethics-specs-humanism) : This was a surprisingly interesting and deep look at the questions around whether or not it is A Good Thing for us to attempt to imbue The Machine with a sense of 'ethics' and, if not, what an appropriate set of alternatives might be – the starting point for this is the obvious statement that there is no universally-accepted normative ethical standard to use as a baseline, and as such any attempt to construct an 'ethics' inside the 'mind' of The Machine is inherently going to be biased or weighted in some way by definition, and that,beyond that, perhaps there are some questions that we should not expect – or want! – The Machine to engage with or answer because there are certain considerations that should fall outside the purview of artificial 'intelligence'. Which, obviously, LOL THAT SHIP FCUKED OFF YEARS AGO. "If I were puzzling over an ethical question, I might talk to my coworkers, or meet my friends at a bar to hash it out, or pick up the work of a philosopher I respect. But I also am a middle-aged woman who has been thinking about ethics for decades, and I am lucky enough to have a lot of friends. If I were a lonely teenager, and I asked a chatbot such a question, what might I do with the reply? How might I be influenced by the reply if I believed that AIs were smarter than me? Would I apply those results to the real world? In fact, the overwhelming impression I get from generative AI tools is that they are created by people who do not understand how to think and would prefer not to. That the developers have not walled off ethical thought here tracks with the general thoughtlessness of the entire OpenAI project."

- [At CPAC](https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v47/n05/antonia-hitchens/diary) : Another week, another slightly-incredulous dispatch from the belly of the beast. This time it's Antonia Hitchens writing in the LRB about her visit to CPAC, the Conservative Political Action Conference which each year draws the usual selection of MAGA and MAGA-adjacent wingnuts from the Extended Republican Universe, and which, as you might expect, was

this year a sort of triumphant procession of teak-skinned horror. Hitchens is excellent here, dispassionate and factual and letting the facts do the heavy lifting – you don't need to do much prose flexing when events are this fcuking weird. This gives you the temperature of the piece, but the whole thing is a grimly-fascinating look at the people whose whims and choices are going to play a significant part in determining the future direction of your life for the next few years, whether you like it or not (we do not, in the main, like it): "Downstairs, a conservative law clerk was introducing himself to Stewart Rhodes as a fellow Yale Law School grad. They compared notes on different professors. The law clerk asked how his time in jail had been. Rhodes put down his beer and pulled up his sleeve to reveal a tattoo of Trump, bleeding after the shooting in Butler. 'No president in our lifetime has showed physical strength. This is like going back to Teddy Roosevelt or George Washington,' the clerk said. (After being shot while campaigning in Milwaukee, Roosevelt kept speaking for fifty minutes while blood soaked his shirt.) Musk had just sent out an email asking federal workers to detail what they had accomplished at work that week or be fired. ('Elon is doing a great job, but I would like to see him get more aggressive. Remember, we have a country to save!' Trump had posted earlier in the day.) Musk pulled up to the party after midnight, but apparently decided not to come inside after his security made a sweep of the perimeter. The host was devastated. The downstairs tenants in the building, contestants on the reality show Love Is Blind, were furious about the number of people trying to use their bathroom."

- Glitching The Circuit (https://igloomag.com/features/glitching-the-circuit) : This is not a revolutionary idea, but when I read this piece this week it felt timely and interesting and relevant, and something that feels worth thinking about and applying to various parts of life and the world (I hate myself for saying this, but there's a not-terrible strategy proposition to be built out of the basic principles here which I think could take you to some interesting places) (god, that felt wrong, sorry). Basically the premise here (at heart) is 'look, given that

everything is being averaged out by algos maybe it behooves us to start queering the data slightly to make things more interesting' – which, as an ethos, feels like a positive and pleasingly-disruptive one (disruptive in the good way, not in the cnuty Zuckerbergian way).

- Garbage (https://craigmod.com/ridgeline/203/) : This is a short essay by World's Most Assiduous Walker Craig Mod (see Curios passim) about the Japanese approach to litter and waste – specifically, the implicit assumption that you, the consumer, are responsible for disposing of the byproducts of your consumption, and that this responsibility is taken seriously by citizens as part of their general 'do not inconvenience your neighbour' vibe, and how this is, basically, A BETTER WAY TO LIVE, and I can't stress how much I felt myself agreeing with this deep in what passes for my 'soul' – not just about physical objects and waste, but as a conceptual approach. CLEAN UP YOUR SH1T feels like an excellent and quite powerful maxim to live by in 2025, I have to say, and one we might all do well to bear in mind (he said, like some sort of preachy, censorious w4nker. Jesus. Sorry, I won't do that again).

- The Podcast Economy (https://joelmorris.substack.com/p/where-do-you-get-your-ideas-from) : This isn't in fact the title of the piece, but it's very much its main thrust – Joel Morris runs the numbers on the world of podcasts and finds that, basically, more than half of them are listened to by fewer than 50 people, and about 0.1% of them have enough listeners (10k+) to qualify for the sorts of in-cast ads that mean you start earning a vaguely-livable wage. The piece then goes on to talk about how basically you need to 'pay creators' – and, yes, that's lovely, but I think that there's an interesting, broader point here about the word 'creator' and its impact that's worth exploring. "We are all creators!" we are endlessly told! "We are all creative!" And that is true! Creativity is part of being human, and I fundamentally agree that we can all do it (and all do, to greater or lesser extents, every day)! What I find interesting about the term 'creator', though, is that implies a professionalisation of the role – like, it's a JOB, it's a THING I

DO, it is WHO I AM...and, by extension, it is HOW I WANT TO EARN...but here's the thing. The mere fact of 'creating' does not, magically, create a market for that which is created! You can indeed be a creator – but that does not magically oblige people to give a sh1t, or to want to pay you to support this creation! MOST PEOPLE THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE NOT EARNED MONEY THROUGH THE ACT OF CREATIVITY! I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY WE SUDDENLY THINK THAT ECONOMICS WORK DIFFERENTLY NOW! Until we get to post-scarcity or someone decides they can afford to run the UBI experiment properly, basically, I think we all have to start accepting that even if you call yourself a fcuking 'creator' it does not in fact mean that that is how you are going to be able to pay for your supper, however much you might wish that in fact to be the case.

- Leaving (https://notes.olu.online/leaving) : I really enjoyed this – I don't think it's finished, so it's more of a draft/work-in-progress blogpost than an 'essay' per se, but Olu Niyi-Awosusi's musings on social media and how it has evolved over their lifetime, and their shifting feelings towards it, and the difficulty in finding space and community online in a post-social landscape, really spoke to me. In particular this line, which I want to have carved in stone somewhere because I think it is important and true: "if everyone around you is similar, and you are different, relying on them to help you find Weird Things (to them!) is foolhardy." PREACH.

- The Rise of the TikTok Oracle (https://nikitawalia.substack.com/p/the-rise-of-the-tiktok-oracle) : One to read while remembering the growing body of evidence suggesting that for young people around the world TikTok is a legitimate, go-to news service with FACTS (lol!) being delivered to them by the pretty friends who live in their phone – this article paints an interesting picture of how the medium is shaping the message (THANKS MARSHALL!), with the algorithm rewarding people who SPEAK WITH CONFIDENCE and MAKE ASSERTIONS and give you the ONE TRUE PERSPECTIVE...which, yeah, that's

about as positive as it sounds. This is actually a far more serious and well-thought/argued piece of writing than I am making it sound – its author, Nikita Walia, goes deep on some of the theory underpinning her argument (and, yes, McCluhan gets a look-in), but even if you're less interested in the sociology/comms theory behind it all it's an interesting dive into a recognisable and increasingly prevalent phenomenon which, yet again, is a perfect example of technology shaping society in ways we're not going to grasp until well past the point of 'too late'.

- [A Return to Early Virtual Aesthetics (https://www.welcomejpeg.com/p/a-return-to-early-virtual-aesthetics)](https://www.welcomejpeg.com/p/a-return-to-early-virtual-aesthetics) : On how the visual signifiers of a past digital era are being exhumed and reappropriated everywhere from fine art to fashion and everything inbetween. Why the popularity? This is a neat summary: "This has as much to do with the state of the contemporary image as it does Early Virtual ones. The image is in crisis. It has never been harder for an image to mean anything. They don't compel us. They did once, many of us remember. When they did, they looked like this. We don't want perfectly immersive graphics. We want graphics that make us feel the way we felt playing Pokémon Red." That final sentence is GREAT and useful and I look forward to seeing it crop up in lots of fcuking keynotes over the next few months.

- [The Rise of Matchmaking Clubs (https://www.wired.com/story/dating-apps-rise-of-matchmaking-platforms/)](https://www.wired.com/story/dating-apps-rise-of-matchmaking-platforms/) : Or, 'dating is still fcuked, apparently, but here's a way in which the rich are going to circumvent the apphorror!'. Because, basically this is a piece about how you can now pay large sums of money to professional matchmaking services who will basically do a 'Married at First Sight'-style partner search for you to find THE ONE. Remember a few weeks ago when I said that someone would try and reinvent the arranged marriage soon for the post-apps landscape? SURELY NOT LONG NOW!

- [How The Online Right Are Weaponising the Blake Lively vs Baldoni Thing (https://www.usermag.co/p/right-wing-creators-are-dominating-lively-baldoni-coverage-tiktok-youtube-metoo)](https://www.usermag.co/p/right-wing-creators-are-dominating-lively-baldoni-coverage-tiktok-youtube-metoo) : The Blake Lively / Justin Baldoni story is ugly and miserable and the online reflection of it is a predictable cesspit of misogyny, but this piece by Taylor Lorenz looks at how it's being weaponised by right-wing commentators in the US and worldwide as a means of effectively top-of-funneling people into their audience and, eventually, into the wonderful, mad world of online right-wing conspiracies and, inevitably, beef tallow and perineal sunbathing (probably). Anything they could do with Heard/Depp… "If you're on social media platforms, especially if you're a woman or under the age of 40, content about Lively vs Baldoni has likely become inescapable. TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram videos about the case are amassing millions of views, Google searches have skyrocketed, and, as Megyn Kelly said on stage, all of America seems to be obsessed with the controversy. Right wing creators have become expert at tapping into online trends and cultural conversations, and immediately recognized the opportunity. Last fall, after [Baldoni's smear campaign (https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/21/business/media/blake-lively-justin-baldoni-it-ends-with-us.html)](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/21/business/media/blake-lively-justin-baldoni-it-ends-with-us.html) against Lively [was revealed in (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/12/21/us/complaint-of-blake-lively-v-wayfarer-studios-llc-et-al.html)](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/12/21/us/complaint-of-blake-lively-v-wayfarer-studios-llc-et-al.html) The New York Times, conservative influencers sprung to action. They flooded the zone with exhaustive coverage aimed at discrediting Lively. They have used the case to dismantle public support for #MeToo, especially among liberal women. So far, it's working. Recently, two co-founders of Betches, a liberal women's media company that has done work with the DNC, repeated Owens' exact framing of the case on Instagram, attacking Lively to their audience of progressive women followers. They lambasted The New York Times for their coverage and called Lively a "narcissistic egomaniac.""

- [Meet Yabujin (https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/chasing-yabujin-the-artist-who-secretly-shaped-the-underground-sound-of-the-2020s/)](https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/chasing-yabujin-the-artist-who-secretly-shaped-the-underground-sound-of-the-2020s/) : I've always had a softspot for mysterious, reclusive musicians – I was for a time in the very early-00s obsessed with [the near-mythical figure of Jandek (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jandek)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jandek) – and so this profile of obscure internet 'sensation' (can someone be a sensation if literally noone you know has heard of them? YES THEY CAN WELCOME TO INFINITELY-FRACTAL CULTURE!) Yabujin, whose work combines a sort of 00s-ish digital aesthetic with the sort of hardstep beats which I have to admit I have a secret fondness for, pleased me no end. It's worth clicking the links throughout the piece and listening to the tracks – once you get the vibe it's interesting how many other places you will start to see the influence.

- [Outsourcing Memory (https://www.theverge.com/reviews/627056/bee-review-ai-wearable)](https://www.theverge.com/reviews/627056/bee-review-ai-wearable) : Bee is a new AI-powered wearable that does the 'I record everything you say, ever, and use it to provide you with DATA AND SUMMARIES AND A LIFE LOG AND AND' thing – it obviously doesn't work properly, but it works *enough* that this writeup in The Verge is properly interesting, painting a picture of a future in which all our tracked and what they 'mean' is determined by the manner in which they are interpreted by The Machine. Does this sound good? I don't think it does: "More sobering was asking it about my moods over the past month. Bee said I've experienced a period of "significant stress balanced with moments of accomplishment and joy." When asked to summarize the themes of my life, it detailed how I've been mediating a tense family dispute. That's when I remembered this device heard me cry on the phone while fighting with a cousin. Reading Bee's analysis, my vulnerable moments no longer felt fully mine."

- [Zyn and the Nicotine Gold Rush (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/17/zyn-and-the-new-nicotine-gold-rush)](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/17/zyn-and-the-new-nicotine-gold-rush) : On the meteoric rise of

Zyn as a brand and white tobacco as a lifestyle accessory, which is both interesting from a product/marketing/society point of view, and partly because it reminded me of going to international school and making friends with a guy called Karl Settergreen (HELLO KARL IF YOU ARE THE SORT OF MAN WHO GOOGLES HIMSELF IN 2025!) who had a bright pink guitar, floppy hair, and a degree of openness about sex which I, aged, 15, found frankly astonishing – basically he was the most Swedish man I had ever met. He also introduced me to snus, the original product on which Zyn and its variants are based and which, in 1995, was a humbug-sized brown pouch full of strong, dark tobacco which tasted like the grave and which caused you to spit like a camel; the idea that THAT is now the coolest lifestyle flex for a certain type of basic tw4t is, frankly, astonishing to me.

- Tom Wolfe (https://commonreader.wustl.edu/c/whos-afraid-of-tom-wolfe/) : A beautiful look at Tom Wolfe's writing and his repeated framing and skewering of 20thC America at various stages in its modern development, this is a lovely reminder of why he was so wonderful to read and why, per the author's central thesis, his style has poisoned the journalistic well ever since: "Wolfe was so immersed, observant, and detached that he often got it right. But many of the journalists who followed slid away from the heavy-duty reporting that was the only way to keep New Journalism honest. They learned to write "like" Wolfe, in terms of flourish, without taking the time he took to report the substance. Laden with multiple, rapid deadlines, even the most earnest journalists were unable to climb on a bus and ride cross-country with their subject for a year. Others were wannabe novelists or gonzo reporters hungrier for attention than for accuracy. A succession of journalists were caught plagiarizing; creating composites, glomming various people they had interviewed into a single, named character; hiring other reporters to go to the scene and feed them details; or, not to put too fine a point on it, making sh1t up."

- **The Story of Two Tone (https://archive.is/WwhUq)** : A history of the Two Tone musical movement in Harper's. I am going to leave the opening here, because I think it will make you want to read the rest of the piece immediately: "When I was asked recently what gigs I'd most want to see if I could travel back in time, a few obvious answers leaped to mind: Charlie Parker, the Velvet Underground, Dylan and the Band c. 1965–66. Truly, what I'd most like to do is revisit certain nights in the late Seventies in a less altered state than I was in at the time: the Fall, Joy Division, Pere Ubu, Wire. Also on that list: one night in the spring of 1979, when, down in the basement of the Hope and Anchor, a raucous crowd witnessed an early London performance by the Specials. To say it was packed doesn't do it justice. It had its own weather system: clouds of body heat, beer fumes, a fug of cigarette smoke curled around a passel of porkpie hats. A carnival squeezed into a cupboard. And this one abiding mystery of nightlife physics: How do people dance in such situations, let alone make the piston-elbowed, knees-up motion eternally associated with ska? There were members of various London bands in that sauna of a room, keen to check out the buzz around these Midlands interlopers. An unruly bunch, on first acquaintance—two of them black, five white, and all distinctly un-posey. Was this serious competition, or a passing fad? What no one—not even the Specials themselves—could have foreseen was how big they would become, and how soon. Not just big within this or that underground scene, but tabloid big, television big, young-kids-dressing-like-you big. In the early Eighties, bands like the Human League and Culture Club also attained such world-seducing status, but they were explicitly pop and always had their mascaraed eyes on the prize. The Specials were something you couldn't plot on a graph; their revved-up combo of punk rock and Jamaican ska planted a seed that wrought unlikely blooms." This is wonderful on the history and the politics and the music, whether or not you've ever done the aforementioned "piston-elbowed, knees-up" dance.

- [Dante (https://www.peachmgzn.com/nate-waggoner)](https://www.peachmgzn.com/nate-waggoner) :
Finally this week, a short story by Nate Waggoner. Again, take the opening paragraph and then click and keep going; this is beautiful and ugly and sad and funny and and and: "Dante is 19 years old, has high cheekbones, soulful hazel eyes, and bright teeth he flashes cockily when he antagonizes my aunt Jai, doing something like reciting the Chris Rock "Who the fcuk reupholstered your pussy?" monologue from My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy at the dinner table. It would be fair to compare his appearance to that of an Adam Levine or a young Luke Wilson or a James Franco. We start watching Game of Thrones after he pitches it to me like this: "You gotta see this show, dawg. This bitch? Has dragons." He leaves his socks on the kitchen island and drops the newspaper on the floor after he's done with the sports pages. He does things like borrow my car to go buy pot-growing equipment and shoot off guns with his boys, get pulled over, then fail to tell me about that, or about how I'm now driving around with bullets in my backseat. It's 2012, and we're both living with Jai—I'm there while I'm in grad school, and he's starting chemo back up again."

By Dan Balestrin (https://www.instagram.com/danbalestrin)

AND NOW, MOVING PICTURES AND SOUNDS!:

- Shardcore did a talk this week about AI and art, which I would strongly encourage you to watch if you have any interest in the tech and the 'can AI make art?' question, and particularly if you'd like to see someone who is an actual working artist explain why, actually, it can. Also contains the line 'artists are not special snowflakes' which I very much

enjoyed, so bonus points for that.
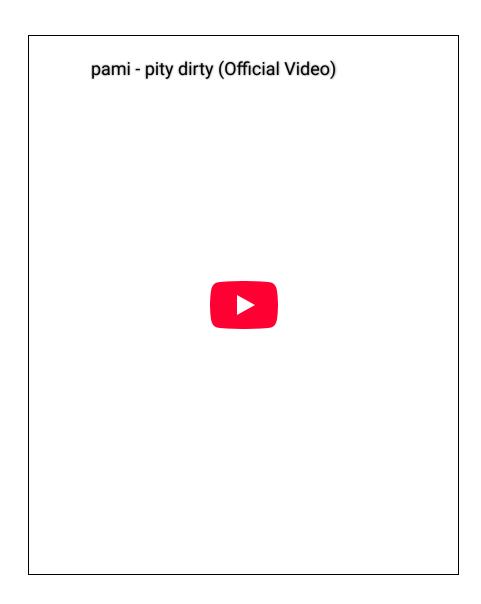(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w52h4bGOmbo)

AI & The Artist - Eric Drass

- Ok, this is a year old and is an actual, 24-minute short film, but, also, it is fcuking incredible. I really really mean this – you will not have the faintest idea where this is going, but I promise you you will enjoy the ride very much. For anyone who ever enjoyed The King of Comedy, or who's enjoyed Andy Kaufman, this is honestly near-perfect (once again via Pietro's 'Link Molto Belli' newsletter).
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJlO5yTVH_8)

The Mask (2023)

- This is by someone called Pami, and it's called 'pity dirty' and while the video is, honestly, not very good, I rather love the song and the vocal and the slightly-80s tinge to the arrangement and tune. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_B_ltLJ-cc)

pami - pity dirty (Official Video)

- I hadn't thought about Riff Raff for YEARS, probably since Harmony Korine rinsed his look for Spring Breakers c.2011. BUT! He is still around! I presume he still has cornrows and grills! But now he's doing music videos with AI! I quite like the track, and I thought the vid was interesting both for the fact that it works with the limitations of the tech pretty well and for the fact that he appears to be biting Trisha's style QUITE HARD. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeOTVPC3Gec)

RiFF RAFF x LOGiC x CONWAY - iNTERGAL...

[YouTube play button]

- This is by the fabulously-named Teen Mortgage, it's called 'Party' and it's 2m of shouty, messy punk and it is fcuking great. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJf2UFHo9Jg)

- Full disclosure – the next three tracks are lifted straight from The Face's music newsletter this week, because they are all great in their own way. First up is this, by Lauren Duffus – the track's called 'N.U.M.T.E' and I highly recommend turning this up as loud as you possibly can (and then a bit more). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4Hhb9XXxto)

- Next up is a band called, unforgivably, 'Snuggle' – but I will have to forgive them a *bit* because this song, called 'Dust', is both pleasingly-indie-melodic and *just* wonky and shifted enough to be interesting. This has grown on me a lot over the week. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrkirkaPZR4)

- This is the new single by Yaeji – it's called 'Pondeggi' and, per all their other stuff, it is interesting and weird and CREEPY, and the video slaps. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vi9j9ogqr4E)

- 	Finally this week, a short black and white film from 9 years ago which I only saw this week – it's an encounter between two men on a park bench, it's spoken partly in Polari, and it is BEAUTIFUL (and sad, and sort-of funny, but mostly beautiful I think) – I loved it, maybe you will too, and THAT IS IT I HAVE VOIDED MYSELF OF LINKS BYE! (https://vimeo.com/125398425)

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