



pictures from my "window" project, a website for recent photos from my phone

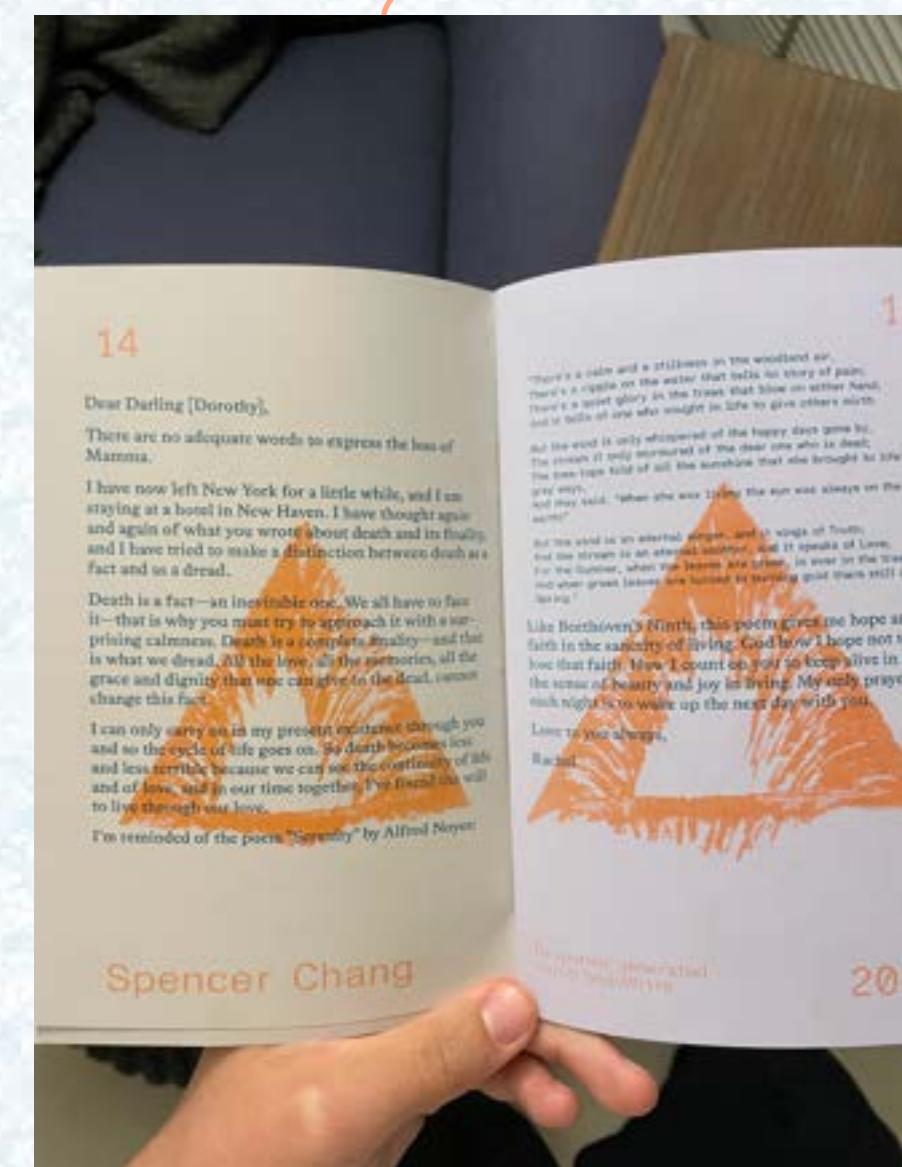
a creative photoshoot in the style of Wong Kar Wai's films



Spencer Chang

*creative technologist, writer, dream weaver,
computational poet*

Coda - Verses - Independent Studio



live data from my website on Nov 10.



craft experience

Rice - B.A. / Masters Computer Science

2015-2019

Notable work

Airbnb internship
Square internship
Researcher with CEHI (Children's Environmental Health Initiative)
President Rice Computer Science Club
Engineering Kleiner Perkins Fellow
PROS internship

Coda

2019-Present

early software engineer

Verses

2021-Present

core contributor,
developer, designer,
sensemaker

Independent Studio

2020-Present

developer, designer,
writer, artist



Coda lead engineer, product and design partner

Custom Templates

Launched a new platform for which empowered anyone to create a template, a reusable and shareable set of components, to streamline common workflows, share personal tools with their team, and adopt practices from the wider community in their own doc.

We envisioned an exponential flourishing of creation on Coda because users could create once, share to all, and others could use those templates not as a final solution but as a starting point, adjusting and remixing them to their own needs. If their own needs diverged drastically enough, they could re-share it as a new template. Especially because Coda is such a complex product ("you can do anything in it" is a frequent customer attitude), it was crucial for new people to be able to see the possibilities of what could be achieved. This platform set up the foundation for allowing the community to build and nourish itself.

I wrote a technical [blog post](#) sharing the internal workings with the community.

[Launch Blog Post](#)

The screenshots illustrate the Coda platform's custom template feature. The top screenshot shows the 'Opportunities' template library, where users can search for or browse through various templates. The 'Idea feedback' template is highlighted, showing its purpose: 'Easily gather feedback on specific ideas and across the entire proposal'. The bottom screenshot provides a closer look at the 'Idea feedback' template interface, displaying a list of proposed ideas with their descriptions and a button to add feedback. This feature dramatically simplified the process of creating valuable documents that worked with individual needs quickly and removed fear from getting started.

This feature dramatically simplified being able to create something valuable that worked with each new person's individual needs quickly and removed fear from getting started

Coda lead engineer, product and design partner

Custom Templates

You could draft and edit your template with safety

This screenshot shows the Coda interface with a custom template titled "Idea feedback". The template includes sections for "Ideas" and "Example - Best way to fry an egg", along with a "Task tracker" sidebar containing "Product brief" and "Meeting notes". A modal window is open, stating "This template is in draft mode" and prompting the user to "Publish" to share it.

This template is a draft and not yet shared.

Idea feedback Template

Idea feedback

+ New page

Idea feedback

Easily gather feedback on specific ideas and across the entire proposal

+ |

Ideas

Here is a list of proposed ideas.

If you have any feedback to share for each idea, c

Add idea

Example - Best way to fry an egg

Idea	Description
Over easy	The egg is flipped and the yolk is still runny.
Sunny side up	The egg is fried with the yolk up and is not flipped.

Task tracker

Product brief

Meeting notes

How to make a good template

1. Think of things your team is constantly rebuilding.

Close Next

The Coda home screen displays a template library with various options like "Role Kick Off Template", "Success Plan Template", "User Management Doc", "Snapshots", "Run a meeting", "Role Kick Off Template", "Manage a project", and "Brainstorm an idea". A "Create a doc in coda.io" dialog is open, showing a "Start with a blank page" option and a search bar.

Home

Save time with a template

See more Hide

Role Kick Off Template Success Plan Template

Create a doc in coda.io

All Docs

My Docs

Cadence/Catalyst

Community Docs

User Management Doc

Snapshots

Run a meeting

Role Kick Off Template

Manage a project

Brainstorm an idea

Start with a blank page.

All Team Private Coda Import

Rock Paper Scissors

coda.io By Angad Singh

Modified Created Viewed

And then share it out with the world, available everywhere someone was creating

And explore all the possibilites when you went to create a new doc

Coda engineer, product and design partner

Packs Ecosystem

Launched a new platform to empower anyone to extend Coda's functionality by creating Packs, packages of functionality and integrations.

This platform opened up the customizability of Coda by a step level by empowering people to build for the community and enable bringing in external data (i.e. Google Calendar events), entire custom software replacements (i.e. an interview scheduler), and do their work all from one place (i.e. on interview scheduled, create the event on Google Calendar and sends a Slack message to the assigned interviewer).

[Press - Launch Post - Promo Page](#)

The screenshot shows the Coda Pack SDK website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Guides, Tutorials, Samples, Reference, and Support. Below the navigation, there's a search bar and a timestamp: "coda/packs-sdk 0v128 09:11 16". The main content area has two main sections: "Build Packs for Coda" and "Build your first Pack in minutes". The "Build Packs for Coda" section includes a sub-section titled "Let's build building blocks together" with a note about using JavaScript to create Packs. It also features a screenshot of a "Project tracker" interface. The "Build your first Pack in minutes" section includes a sub-section titled "Build your first Pack in minutes" with a note about using Coda's Pack Studio. It also features a screenshot of the Pack Studio interface. There are "Learn more" and "Get started" buttons at the bottom of each section.

the rich documentation for the SDK

Fall 2022

Although it required writing code to create a Pack, the team designed the platform to work for "citizen developers," people who had a maker, DIY spirit at heart but had never touched code before. The SDK is incredibly simple, can be implemented entirely from within our in-browser Pack builder, and tested in a doc immediately. We've seen many people go from never touching code in their lives to running entire businesses building Packs for Coda.

A screenshot of a browser window showing a file named "HelloWorld.js" in a "Dropbox" folder. The code is a simple example of a Coda Pack. It starts with a comment block, then imports the "coda-packs-sdk" library. It creates a new Pack named "HelloWorld" and adds a formula named "Hello" with a description. It defines a parameter "name" of type string. The execute function returns "Hello " + name + "!". A "Build" button is visible at the bottom of the code editor.

```
/*
Start making Packs!
Try out the hello world sample below to create your first build.
*/

// This import statement gives you access to all parts of the Coda Packs SDK.
import * as coda from "coda-packs-sdk";

// This line creates your new Pack.
export const pack = coda.newPack();

// The namespace is how you'll call your formulas in the doc. Any Pack with Formulas must include a namespace.
// This will eventually be unnecessary, in the future.
pack.formulaNamespace = "HelloWorld";

// Here, we add a new formula to this Pack.
pack.addFormula({
    // This is the name that will be called in the formula builder. Remember, your formula name cannot have spaces in it.
    name: "Hello",
    description: "A Hello World example.",
    // If your formula requires one or more inputs, you'll define them here.
    // Here, we're creating a string input called "name".
    parameters: [
        coda.makeParameter({
            type: coda.Type.string,
            name: "name",
            description: "The name you'd like to say hello to."
        })
    ],
    // Everything inside this execute statement will happen anytime your Coda function is called in a doc.
    // An array of all user inputs is always the 1st parameter.
    execute: function(name) {
        return "Hello " + name + "!";
    }
},
```

Top Tracks

Album Image	Artist	Track	Album	Duration
	Joji	SLOW DANCING IN THE DARK	BALLADS 1	3 mins 29 secs
	Current Joys	New Flesh	Wild Heart	2 mins 48 secs
	Dayglow	Can I Call You Tonight?	Fuzzybrain	4 mins 39 secs
	Tyler, The Creator, Kali Uchis	See You Again (feat. Kali Uchis)	Flower Boy	3 mins
	The Beatles	Oh! Darling - 2019 Mix	Oh! Darling	3 mins 27 secs





Coda engineer, product and design partner

Packs Ecosystem

I created several Packs in my free time, empowering thousands of people to take control of their data from external services and use computation for their own needs

The screenshot shows the Coda interface with the 'Packs' tab selected. At the top, there's a search bar with the placeholder 'What would you like to make?'. Below it, a large blue header features a white Twitter logo and several large white icons: a 't', an exclamation mark, a hash tag, an '@' symbol, and a heart. The main content area is titled 'Twitter' and includes a sub-header 'Explore tweets, twitter users, and followers!'. It has tabs for 'About', 'Security', 'Documentation', and 'Releases'. Below these are sections for 'Makers' (Spencer Chang) and 'Docs using this Pack' (Twitter Pack Explorer, Public Neurodiversity Support Center, etc.). The central part of the screen displays various components of the Twitter Pack, such as 'PostTweet' (a button), 'GetUser' (a formula), 'LikedTweets' (a table), and 'User Column' (a column). A note at the bottom states: 'The Twitter Pack enabled people to search their liked tweets, find who was following them that might be interesting, and even create entire automated Twitter bots'.

The Twitter Pack enabled people to search their liked tweets, find who was following them that might be interesting, and even create entire automated Twitter bots

coda + OpenAI

OpenAI for Coda

Generate text, images, and connect them to your data.

Spencer Chang

Generate Text

Add a prompt Talk to GPT-3 like a human. Ask it to [summarize](#), [write a story](#), [categorize](#), or just chat

Enter a prompt here

GPT3 results here

Why should I start an Airbnb in the forest?

There are a few reasons why starting an Airbnb in the forest can be a good idea. First, the forest is a beautiful and unique setting that can be a great backdrop for visitors. Second, the Forest is a relatively quiet and secluded area, which can be a nice change of pace for visitors who are used to busy cities. Finally, the Forest is home to a variety of wildlife, making it a great place to view and photograph animals in their natural habitat.

What is the scariest thing to GPT3?

There is no definitive answer to this question as GPT3 is constantly being updated and improved. However, some of the scariest things that have been reported include:

- The ability to generate realistic-looking images of people (including faces) from textual descriptions

- The ability to generate text from scratch that is indistinguishable from human-written text

- The ability to generate realistic 3D models of objects and environments from textual descriptions

Write a 3-sentence story in the style of George Saunders about a product manager who discovers gravity

Product Manager Carl was having a bad day. First his team's product failed its launch, and then he found out that gravity was real. Carl had always believed that gravity was a myth, something that the scientists made up to make us feel small. But now, standing on the balcony of his high-rise office building, Carl realized that gravity was real, and it was a force to be reckoned with.

Generate Images

Add a prompt Include a thing (cat) and a style (as digital art) in for best results

Generate Images

Enter a prompt here

Date results here

An astronaut riding a dragon with a moon in the background as a pencil drawing



The OpenAI Pack opened up the power of OpenAI's models to the everyday person by providing a familiar doc interface to generate text and images. This included a story generator by genre (generating a story idea and corresponding image), summarizing Zoom meetings, and creating embroidery samples from a text idea.



Verses lead engineer, designer, and editor

Pluriverse

Lead development for pluriverse.world, an interactive manifesto plugging into the broader web 3.0 discourse to reject cryptos' financialization of relationships and putting forth principles (inspired by Christopher Alexander's *A Pattern Language*) for a more human-oriented world of technology and new "web." The manifesto rejected Facebook's co-opting of the term *metaverse* for their own devices and suggested *pluriverse* (a term coined by Arturo Escobar in his study of autonomous indigenous communities working on decolonial efforts in Latin America) as an alternative.

The piece functioned as a participatory gallery for readers to contribute their examples for what a new web, suffused with care and agency, looks like to them.

Received 7500+ signatures and contributions from the global community.

Press: [Zora Zine interview](#), [CCS Journal piece](#), [Arweave](#)



Maria Marinakis, creator of Signal, claims that decentralization emerged because of our primary mission. First, we must decentralize. Then, we must build a better world.

WE ARE TOLD THAT THE AGE OF THE METAVERSE¹ IS UPON US.

1. Coined by the American author Neal Stephenson in his novel, *Snow Crash*, the Metaverse refers to a virtual reality integrated networks that can be used for work and play. The term became ubiquitous in public discourse in 2021 following the announcement from Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, of the company's name change to 'Meta' and the company's investment into building a metaverse.

The profiteers of this age promise digital freedom through technology. This is not the first such promise.

Web 1.0 promised a new horizon of digital space: open, transparent, co-created, and interoperable. In many ways, it delivered, laying the foundation for the foundational protocols, shared standards, and open licenses that make the Internet we know possible. And yet, inaccessible to most² and publicly underfunded, Web 1.0's growth brought with it fracturing and commercialization.

Web 2.0 began with its own aspiration to democratization: proliferating personal websites, distributed network effects, and utopian dreams of global communication.³ These dreams did come to pass; connectedness flourished. And yet, this success was achieved through centralized platform ownership and the building of walled gardens that now dictate the terms of online life.

And now there are new dreams. The Metaverse, championed by Facebook (now Meta Platforms, Inc.) and their peers, allows and celebrates monopoly of digital space, taking what was once collective⁴ and ensuring it is privatized and parcelled out to the highest bidder. Their Metaverse expands as a homogenizing monoculture⁵, assimilating ecosystems⁶, displacing extant species⁷, and enclosing digital abundance into enforced, artificial scarcity. Allowed to grow, this proposed Metaverse will be a monovore.

And this is not the only danger. There are responses to the Metaverse that only seek to direct its profits to chosen beneficiaries. These solutions find shelter under the too-broad umbrella of 'Web3' or 'decentralization' but are well-known harms in disguise—claiming flexibility while delivering precarity, championing freedom while delivering atomization, championing redistribution while delivering financialized returns for the few. We reject these solutions.

However, this does not mean we should not dream of open digital spaces of collective autonomy and shared ownership. In fact, we must⁸. It only means that these promises are fated to remain unrealized if the structures and incentives underlying our digital ecosystem do not evolve alongside its technological foundations.

We gather here to affirm that meaningful alternatives are possible.

We gather to build these alternatives, to challenge the monovore, and reach towards brighter technological futures:

Futures where we move past tired promises of "freedom from"—from established institutions, from regulation, from responsibility—and towards the shared capacity for

2. The growth of the bioglyphs, open platforms, forums, and discussion spaces heralded great hopes about the potential of the web to serve as a space for collective action and social change. Through metaverses may be a step back from this ideal.

3. In agriculture, monoculture refers to the cultivation of a single crop in an area. Though metaverses may be a step back from this ideal.

4. Since the acquisition of Kevin Systrom's photo-sharing app Instagram, Meta has undertaken a series of acquisitions, including WhatsApp, Oculus, and Instagram.

5. A monoculture is a type of agricultural system where a single crop is grown over a large area, often leading to soil depletion and environmental degradation.

6. Ecosystems refer to the complex interactions between living organisms and their environment.

7. Extinct species refer to species that have disappeared from the Earth, often due to human activity.

8. We call to mind Arundhati Roy: Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her.

The site was designed to evoke the feeling of being in space, among an uncountable number of worlds. Pluriversity eschews a mono-philosophy towards the world and argues in favor of multiple potentially conflicting worlds co-existing together.

It was also dynamic. The planets swirled and moved with the reader as they read the argument for the pluriverse, a background reminder of the principles of the term.



Verses lead engineer, designer, and editor

Pluriverse

Terms of Support

Please read the above essay ('essay') and patterns ('patterns') carefully. Your signature is a recognition of the ethic of the pluriverse, a belief in the potential of pluriversality, and an acknowledgement that the responsibility as to the realization of an evolving digital pluriverse lies with all of us.

Your signature will be associated with version 5 of the essay. The patterns are manually input in the code and remain open and evolving.

There is not and will never be a financial token associated with signing or contributing to this artifact.

To sign, you need a compatible web3 wallet. Need help? Check out this [guide](#). If you would prefer not to, you can instead submit a signature via [this form](#).

"I want to help build the pluriverse together"

[Connect to Sign](#)

Signatures

Divya Siddarth
signed Jan 14, 2022 on minute 36 in the night

Spencer Chang
signed Jan 14, 2022 on minute 36 in the night

Terms of Contribution

Contributing as Spencer Chang

Please select a prompt and contribute to the pattern language for the pluriverse. We are looking for relevant points, technologies, institutions, historical parallels—pieces that you think will contribute to building a meaningful foundation of patterns.

We've provided some sentence starters to help get you going; otherwise, if you use the free-form option, you must include the chosen pattern in your response. Examples of others' contributions to the pattern you've chosen are displayed below.

Pattern: Pluriverse

Prompt: Pluriverse looks like

Contribution: 0 / 500

The Pluriverse looks like...

Spencer Chang Nov, 2022

+ Signing Add to Pluriverse

The Pluriverse looks like the play of many patterns, the absence of paradigm, room enough for presence. Give up this present, pluriverse we are only here to praise and practice gratitude.

The Pluriverse looks like a strange, more manifold, more intricate world than you could have foreseen—a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

The Pluriverse looks like a world I built for my friends that runs on a server in the cloud, running many sub worlds. Like apps I trust and have at will without losing my name or relationships. Life never leaves I share with no one, and

[Copy Link](#) Jan, 2022 [Copy Link](#) Jan, 2022 [Copy Link](#) Jan, 2022

Each contribution generated its own corresponding planet blob. These were designed to be unique to each individual, but still show shared ancestry based on the pattern chosen. The design balanced individuality with demonstrating descent from a common ancestry. Contributors were invited to share their own contributions to friends, and readers could browse all the contributions alongside the patterns.

Patterns

Each contribution to these patterns has been signed and gifted by a reader like you. We hope this artifact functions as a collective garden, continuously tended to by the citizens of cyberspace.

Please browse the pattern formulations below and contribute to the ones that resonate to share what is meaningful to and necessary for you and the broader community to create the pluriverse.

00 . Pluriverse

01 . Interoperability

02 . Agency

Challenge: Most people have little or no control over the technical or policy decisions that shape their digital lives. Technology often feels like magic that they must obey or fight with to get the behavior they want. Choice may nominally be everywhere, but the certainty of control means the alternatives are barely distinguishable, and options are predetermined under a single set of values.

Possibility: To break free of this illusion, we must replace notions of individual choice with demands for agency, both individual and collective. Our new world will empower all to contribute, tinker, and fork creations and entire worlds, providing pathways and tools for the exercise of agency. We will give members and communities the power to create the technology they use, shape the content they see, and form the values they prioritize by opening up black-box algorithms, providing open tools for creation of software, and granting the ultimate customization of engagement and experience to end users.

An example of Agency is being able to interact with others online on terms you both agree to, which serve your shared needs best.

Agency looks like taking ownership of our collective present and having the courage to change its future.

Agency looks like platform co-operative that enable user owners and workers to own and run the platform and benefit they profit on. Examples include Fairnode, The Decent Cooperative, and Bskyb.

Agency looks like community networks where the network provider (such as an Internet Service Providers [ISPs]) are operated by the communities that use them. They are people owned and manage themselves on their own terms.

[Copy Link](#) Jan, 2022 [Copy Link](#) Jan, 2022 [Copy Link](#) Feb, 2022 [Copy Link](#) Feb, 2022

Pluriverse Contribution #174

On Feb 3, 2022 on minute 16 in the night

mai ishikawa sutton

contributed:

Agency looks like community networks where the network provider (such as an Internet Service Providers [ISPs]) are operated by the communities that use them. They are people owned and manage themselves on their own terms.

mai ishikawa ... Feb, 2022



Verses co-engineer and co-designer

verses verses

Co-lead development for poems.verses.xyz, a gallery of shapeshifting poems and an [open-source library](#) for transforming text.

Included a [live playground](#). Visitors were invited to create their own live and submit ones they made.

A collection of transforming verses from the [verses](#) community.

the world is a sacred object
peach pits
boundless shapeshifters
knowing
death
grasp
vibing
silence
oscillations
the way
Towards a New Internet
sacred codes

Texts are boundless shapeshifters, zealous freedom fighters, sacred holders of space
— spencer chang

A collection of transforming verses from the [verses](#) community.

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Towards a New Internet
sacred codes

Texts are boundless shapeshifters (technicolor chameleons), zealous freedom fighters, sacred holders of space
— spencer chang

boundless shapeshifters
Texts are boundless shapeshifters (technicolor chameleons), zealous freedom fighters, sacred holders of space
— spencer chang

from left to right, you see how the text changes after clicking on "boundless shapeshifters." Every highlighted phrase has another expansion, and you can endlessly nest expansions

Interactive Playground

This is an interactive site to play with making telescopic text using the [telescopic-text library](#) maintained by jacky, spencer, and other open-source contributors.

To play with how a telescopic poem might look and behave, enter your text below, and the output will auto-update on top. If you would like to add it to the collection, you can submit your finished poem to [this form](#).

► How do I use this?

Separator (defaults to space)
Text Mode

Your Poem
my beautiful poem

```
- my
- beautiful
- beautiful transforming
- beautiful transforming
soulful
- poem
- composition
- verses
```

[Back to collection.](#)

The library was designed to be open-source, so the community could take it as its own. The interaction model was also designed to be as accessible as possible, especially to non-programmers, so you could write your poem in plain text using bullet points and get a live demo of what your poem would look like. The playground outputs the corresponding code that you could copy and paste into your own website for use.



Verses contributor & sensemaker, tool shepherd

retreat & internet space

Co-created and maintain the online community of ~200.

Created a full-fledged treasury tool to manage payouts to contributors in a transparent manner, and onboard new contributors easily.



modeling for our custom swag

Name	Project(s)	Payment Preference	Drawn from treasury	Details
Raymond Zhong	Council	1-Done	<input type="checkbox"/>	Details
Jacky Zhao	Retreat 0 (Montreal) Council	4-Immediate Payment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Details
	Piuniverse			
	Telescopic Poems			
Caden Felton	Piuniverse	1-Done	<input type="checkbox"/>	Details
Jasmine Wang	Retreat 0 (Montreal) Council	2-Deproritized Payment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Details
	Piuniverse Innkeeper			
Saffron Huang	Retreat 0 (Montreal)	4-Immediate Payment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Details
	Referents			
Spencer Chang	Retreat 0 (Montreal)	3-Deferred Payment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Details
	Piuniverse			

The treasury document and flow, allowing people to submit claims each payment period and showing who had been paid what at what time. The flow also supported "gifting hours" for contributors who wanted to give time freely because the collective is a non-profit.

Claiming from Treasury

- Submit Personal Information**

First, let's see if you've already submitted your information before. If you're not sure, try searching your name below and make sure you come up.

Max @Max Langenkamp, @Max Langenkamp

If we don't have your information, please fill out and submit the information form.

After we have your information, you can move onto the next step to make claims for the current pay period.

- Submit Claim for Pay Period**

The current pay period is Oct 16-Nov 15, 2022.

If you can't remember whether you've submitted, you can check by searching for your name below.

Search name

To make your claim for this pay period, please fill out the form below.

- A reminder that Verses is operating with a monthly individual cap of \$5,500 (92 hours) to claim for payment from treasury.
- For this period, we're trying out having people post a "standup update" for what they've been working on. Please post your update in the #_weekly_standup channel!
- If you see an image like

that means you aren't signed into coda. Instead, use [this form](#).

Pay Claim Submission

This pay submission will be for the following pay period Oct 16-Nov 15, 2022

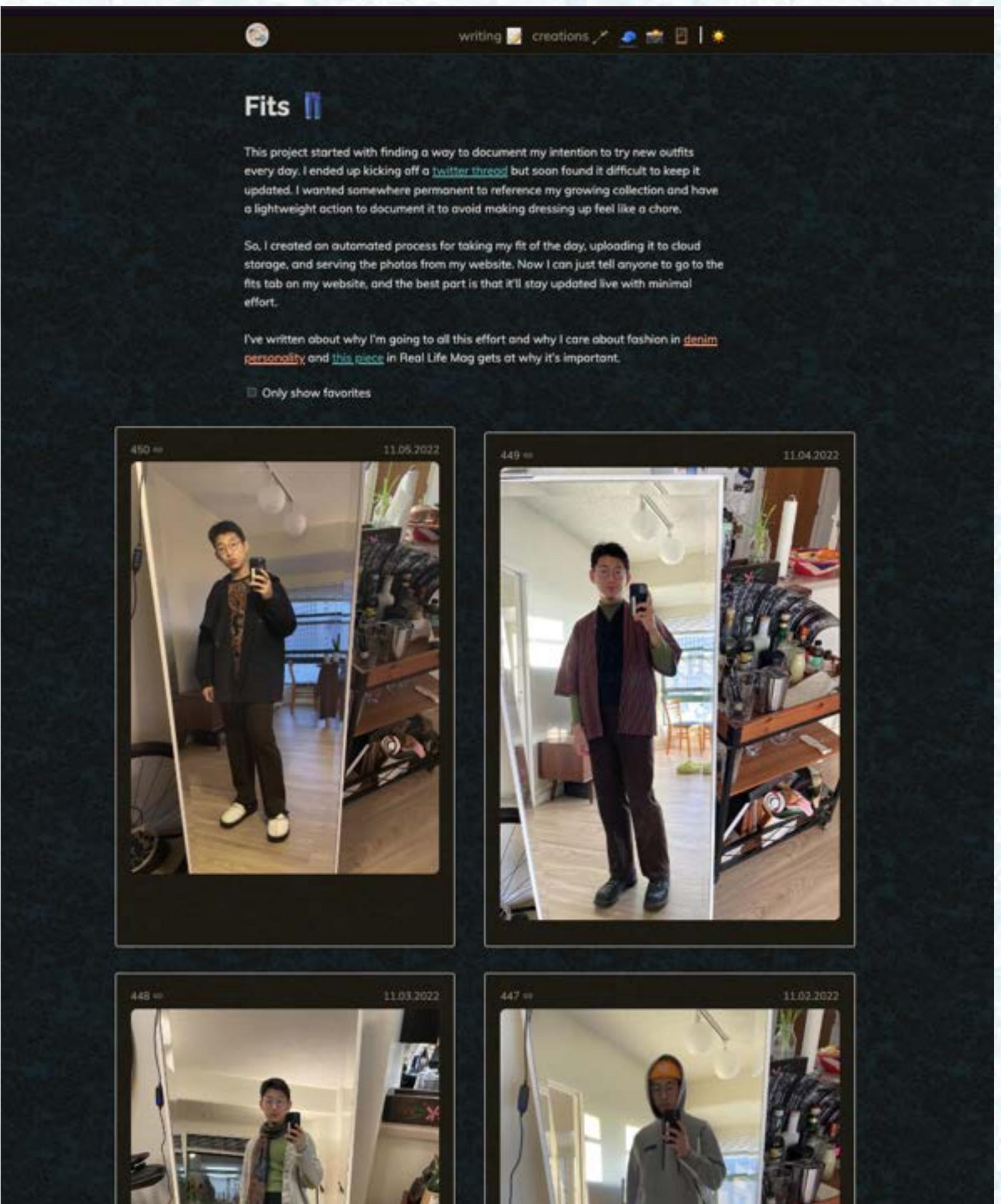
Who are you? *	Hourly Rate
<input type="text"/>	\$60 / hr
How many hours are you claiming payment for?	How many hours are you gifting?
<input type="text"/> hours to pay in \$	<input type="text"/> hours gifted in \$
\$0.00	\$0.00
Submit	

fits stream

A live stream of my outfits of the day.

This project was an experiment into reclaiming data from the apps I use every day and having my own personal space for sharing and collection. I could have just started posting these on Instagram, but it felt important to me to have full control of the interaction experience and feel of the collection. I also wanted a bit of obscurity away from the clout-chasing culture of social media sites.

Live feature log



The live page as of November 2022. Each picture is individually linkable and favorites are marked. They are automatically uploaded from a "fits" album on my phone.



I set up a Twitter bot later that automatically posts the latest fit of the day to a separate Twitter account.

spencefits
@spencefits Follows you
Automated by @spencerc99
@spencerc99's stream of fits. Every day, the fit of the day will be posted (unless Spencer forgets)
automated using a coda doc and the twitter pack
spencerchang.me/fits/ Joined April 2022
1 Following 2 Followers
Not followed by anyone you're following

Tweets Tweets & replies Media Likes

spencefits @spencefits · 15h
Automated
fit 311 5/30/2022
San Francisco, California, United States
spencerchang.me
Fits
A permanent space for my outfits of the day.

spencefits @spencefits · Nov 9
Automated
fit 73 9/17/2021

spencerchang.me

technologist, writer

everyday magic

An essay for Reboot about the magic of software and how we can give people control and agency over shaping it to work for them.

"Tech companies and hungry apps crave us for our attention rather than our being—our acts rather than our humanity. What if we inverted that power dynamic and gave individuals and communities the power to shape their software as they see fit?"

A lot of tech feels magical... which is good when things just work but terrifying when they don't. The magic often isn't open to understanding or changing, so we think we're in the wrong when it's the design of the technology that is restricting us from exercising agency.

Good software should empower users to take control—to channel their own magic into personal experiences and creations.

[Full piece - Reboot link & Interview](#)

ESSAYS

⚡ Everyday Magic

Why tech is magical, but shouldn't be mysterious.



Spencer Chang and jessica dai
Dec 3, 2021



Back in October, we published a series of community responses to "Take Back the Future." One of them, by Spencer Chang, was about magic:

*Rather than giving cake to the masses, we must give them the recipe. I demand a future where **the magic is ours**, the people's rather than just an elite class of wizards and faceless entities. The software we interact with every day should not only allow, but encourage us to make it our own: to create our thoughts, art, and experiments rather than merely consume SEO-juiced content; to express our full selves rather than settling for uniform cookie-cutter molds.*

In today's newsletter, Spencer expands this idea, explaining why good software is agency-promoting, and a necessary step towards reclaiming the magic.

⚡ everyday magic

By [Spencer Chang](#), full piece available on his website

the magic of technology

When humans first discovered fire, they thought it was a gift from the gods; only now do we understand the underlying processes that produce it. Fire was so universally useful then that people didn't care how it worked or where it came from. It was easier to think of it as magic and focus on using its powers to achieve your desires rather than question its mechanics.



8-bite

A computational poem game where the classic Pacman is changed so that players eat words to create their own poem. The words come from a very limited word bank, but because they are curated to be multipurpose, the limited word set and constraints of movement on the grid provide a lot of fun playability. Visitors are invited to play around and their work automatically saves local to their browser.

They are also invited to submit ones they particularly enjoy to the [public gallery](#). The piece functions as interactive exhibit, poetry game, and a communal art gallery.

Published in [taper 8](#).

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [spencerchang.me/pacman-poem/](https://www.spencerchang.me/pacman-poem/). The page title is "8-byte". A sub-instruction "use arrow keys or swipe on mobile" is displayed. The main area is a 4x4 grid of words:

tensed	piss	empty	
note	/	was	
/	8] a	
/	some	sung	

Below the grid, there are sections for "YOUR POEM" and "HISTORY". The "HISTORY" section contains the text: "All history is stored locally in your browser so make sure to extract poems you want to save." A small note at the bottom left of the page says "8-bite" with a small icon.

Pacman Poem Gallery

These are all the public submission to <https://www.spencerchang.me/pacman-poem/>

Visit the website to play the game and make your own. Eventually, this will feed back into the website, and you could imagine these as public "save files" where you could load their initial board state to play with.

Name	poemDisplay	movesDisplay	date
charlie	empty tender shard , note licked the some was	← ↓ → ↑ → ↑ ← ↑ → ↓ → ↓ ← ← ↑ ← ↑ → → → ↓ ↓ ↓ ← ←	5/24/2022, 10:15 AM
katrina	[sunk] the few tensed sighs coiled piss note	→ → ← ← → → ↑ ↑ ← ↓ ← ↓ ↓ ↑ → ↓ ↑ ← → ↓ → ↑ ↑ → ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓	5/24/2022, 10:17 AM
katrina	no a move tensed coiled sung , pray stones	↑ → → ← ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ → ↓ ← ↓ ← → → ← ↓ ↑ ↓ → ↑ ↑ ← ← → → ↓ ↓ ↑ ← ← ← ↑ ↑ → ↓ ↓ ↓ ←	5/24/2022, 10:18 AM
zhaovan	sunk stones some tender piss . a sung retrograde [→ ← ← → ↓ ← ↑ → ← ↑ → ← ↑ → ↓ → ↓ ← ↓ ↑ → ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ← ← → → ↑ ← ↓ → ↓ ← ↓	5/31/2022, 7:44 PM
alicia	retrograde keys licked a sung stones , empty few .	→ ↓ → ← ← ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ← ↑ → ↑ → ↑ ↓ ↓ ← ← ← ↑ → → ← ←	5/31/2022, 7:45 PM

spencerchang.me

tiny internets

developer, designer, researcher, artist

An inquiry into “What does a more natural, soft, and quiet internet look like, one where public spaces are actively shaped by us to not only use but live in?”

This work was supported by the Interact Residency, and involved research, developing and designing to prototype several new ways of interacting with the Internet.

I conducted all my research in public, sharing a [live research log](#) and continually updating a [vision doc](#). I created a browser extension exploring different avenues for intimacy with beta users, including digital geocaching, commuting, and time capsules.

Can the internet feel like a city?

- intimacy gradients
- ambient awareness
- range of expression

have you ever felt like:

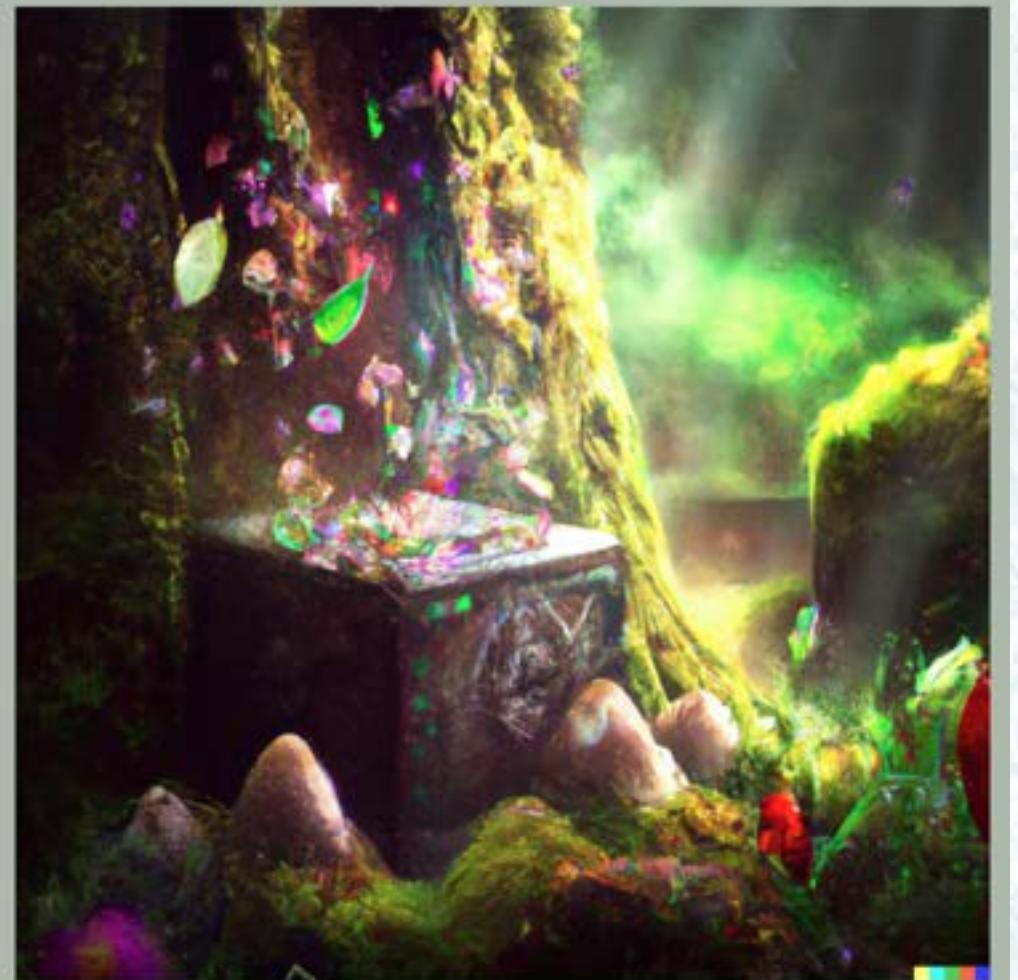
- you want to share something but don't have a specific person in mind
- you think of someone but don't want to spam them
- you wish the internet felt more cohabited



crafting tiny internets

what is a tiny internet?

- feels natural
- feels safe to express yourself
- free to express yourself in various ways
- feels “small”



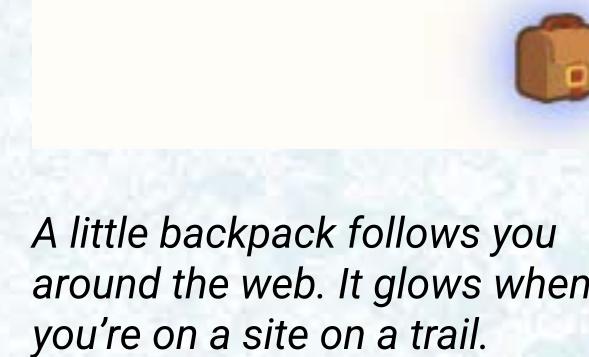


tiny internets - geocaching

A browser extension that allows you to create scavenger hunts on the internet on the Internet and find other peoples buried treasures once you've completed their scavenger hunt (visited a set of their links).

What if you could leave notes or gifts for people who have visited a set of sites?

- safer to express knowing where someone has been?
- safety via obscurity from natural context (places you visit)



A little backpack follows you around the web. It glows when you're on a site on a trail.

New: The Suitcase Clone

FROM: ROBIN
TO: THE LAB
SENT: FEBRUARY

I can be joked meal

d BoopSnoop?

ry 2020, and almost immediately, it was different time zones. In the years since, it has rs, with zero churn: a resounding success, ctations.

iy family. It is ruthlessly simple; we love it; to share a few notes about how and why anyone else considering a similar project. about software.

When you expand the backpack, you can see all your trails, their progress, and which ones are missing.

When you finish a trail you can find the latest cache that was left there, add on your own, and view the lineage of messages.

15/21 trails in progress

cozy internet software	100%
home-cooked apps	100%
fireflies in nyc	50%
trail of demons	33%
The Cypherpunks: Past, Present, Future	33%
interact residency starter pack	33%
1million is life	33%

SHOW HISTORY (8)
and 6 undiscovered trails...

PLANT TRAIL START RANDOM TRAIL

spencer's paradoxes

thanks for visiting my newsletter :) here's a recent poem of mine:
I give my permission
Move like a dead fish given a second life through alkaline crystal magic
shaking to the now-growing beat,
the spine of music who loves to drum.
Let the science wash over you, the
molecules bobbing along a lazy crater
flooding your open pores, compounding
harmonies birthed spontaneously
rewiring your nerves. Let your mind
go away. An all-inclusive vacation. Your
body insists. It gives permission. Cheat
day for your soul. Your house when the
parents aren't home. The kitchen when
the roommates are out. Your room when
the lights are off except for the city skyline
crowning your silhouette, daring to
lurch with the waves. Bouncing with the
current, pulsing through the walls, the blurred
lights, your shadow, your skin, cold fingers
tingling with audacity. Go ahead. Dance.

stashed on Tue Jul 26 2022

VIEW LINEAGE

game created by • database

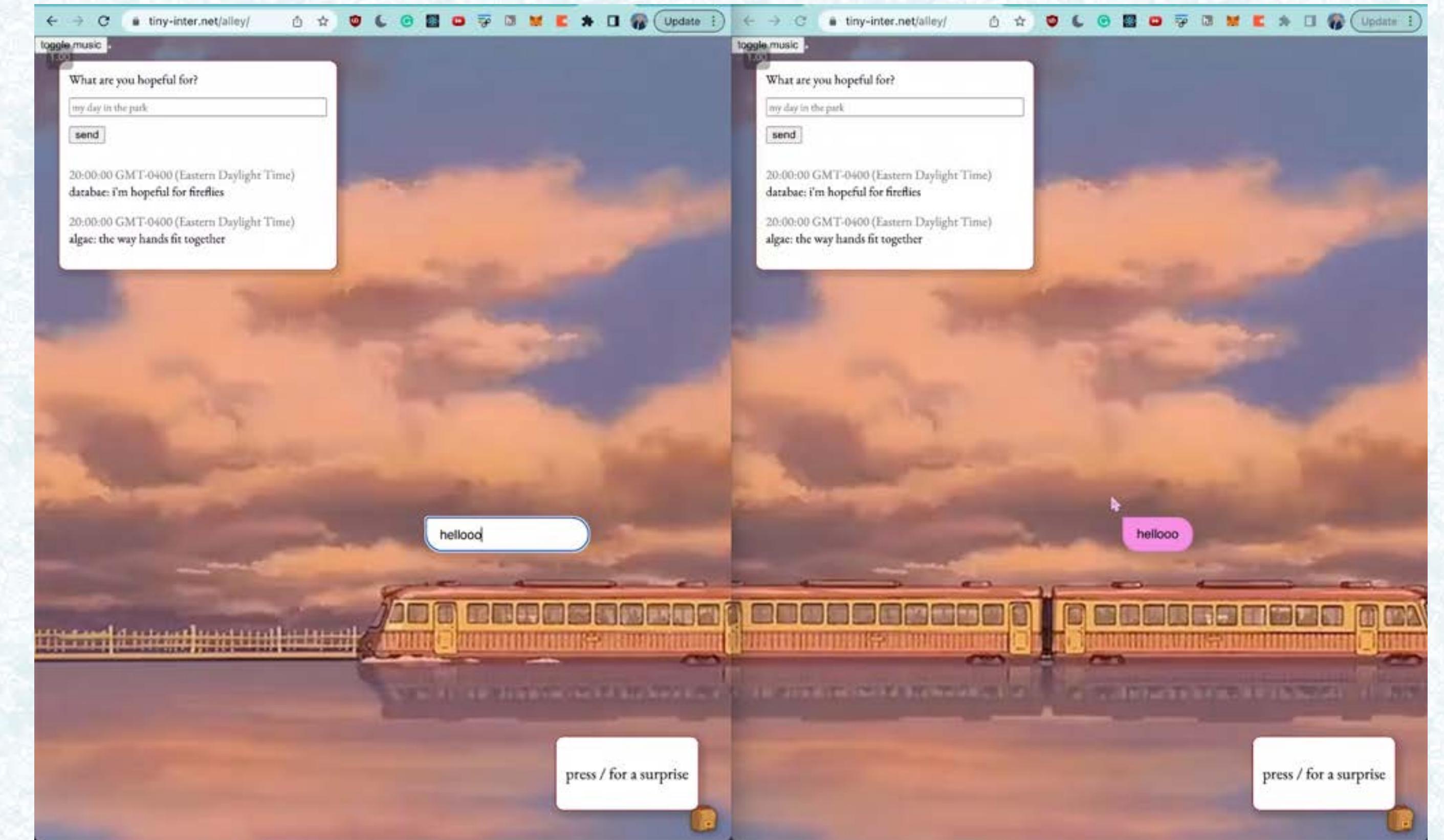




tiny internets - commuting

A browser extension that created alleyways associated with every site to graffiti and meander in? These alleyways had both synchronous (live cursor chat) and asynchronous (message wall) forms of interaction. Other ideas that were not implemented: leaving a song, leaving fingerprints on the walls, seeing the ghosts of cursors past.

What if everyone for their commute had to gather at a central transit station for their first and last navigation of the day? This makes commuting an actual journey, where you can get lost, wander, get off a stop early or late by following someone else to their destination.



A gif of the train from Spirited Away played in the background for visitors.



tiny internets - other ideas

Time capsules: What if you could find your past self floating on websites? What if you could traverse your digital history and jump back a year? How can digital memory become a medium for exercising your agency in a world of exponential, overwhelming data and pressure to put on a certain kind of appearance?

An app can be a home-cooked meal

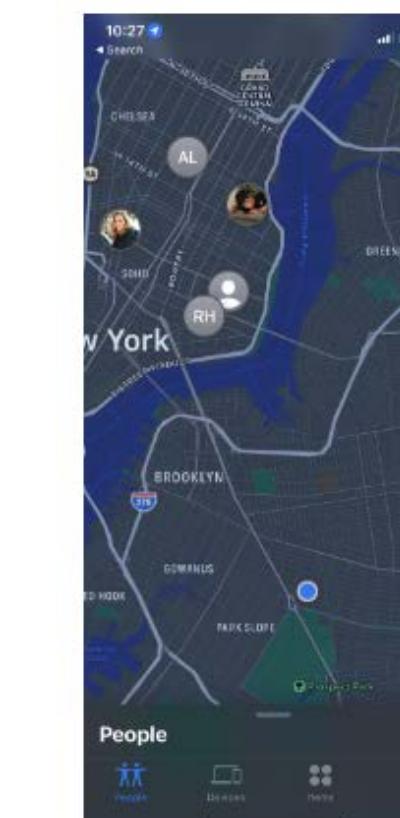
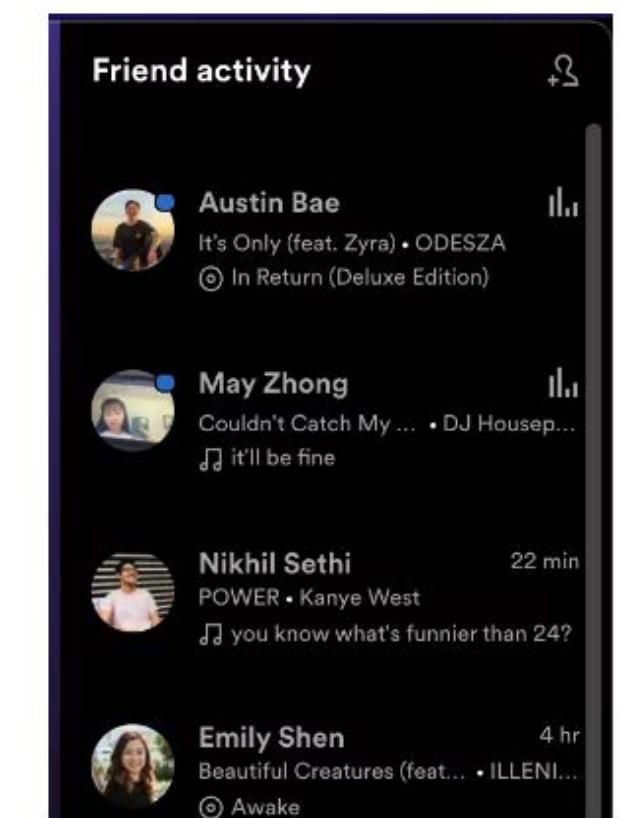
FROM: ROBIN SLOAN
TO: THE LAB
SENT: FEBRUARY 2020

Have you heard about this new app called BoopSnoop?

It launched in the first week of January 2020, and almost immediately, it was downloaded by four people in three different time zones. In the years since, it has remained steady at four daily active users, with zero churn: a resounding success, exceeding every one of its creator's expectations.

I made a messaging app for, and with, my family. It is ruthlessly simple; we love it; no one else will ever use it. I wanted to share a few notes about how and why I made it, both to (a) offer a nudge to anyone else considering a similar project, and (b) suggest something a little larger about software.

Find my Friends: What if you could share location on the internet? or map out your internet experience, leaving little breadcrumbs on places and moments that were significant?



Digital Fingerprints: Can everyone customize their own unique fingerprint that they can use to leave trails of their presence on the web? Can it be as instantly recognizable as colors in Figma or cursors in a Google Doc (discrete, exclusive, discernable) while being as expressive as twitter profile pics (flexible, many degrees of freedom)?

Digital Fingerprints

Digital Fingerprints is an experiment in collaborative symbol-making and the intermittent transmission of collected personal creative histories.

Pick your color below and make your own fingerprint. If there are other people here, you'll see their markings appear instantly as they draw.

COLOR





spencerchang.me

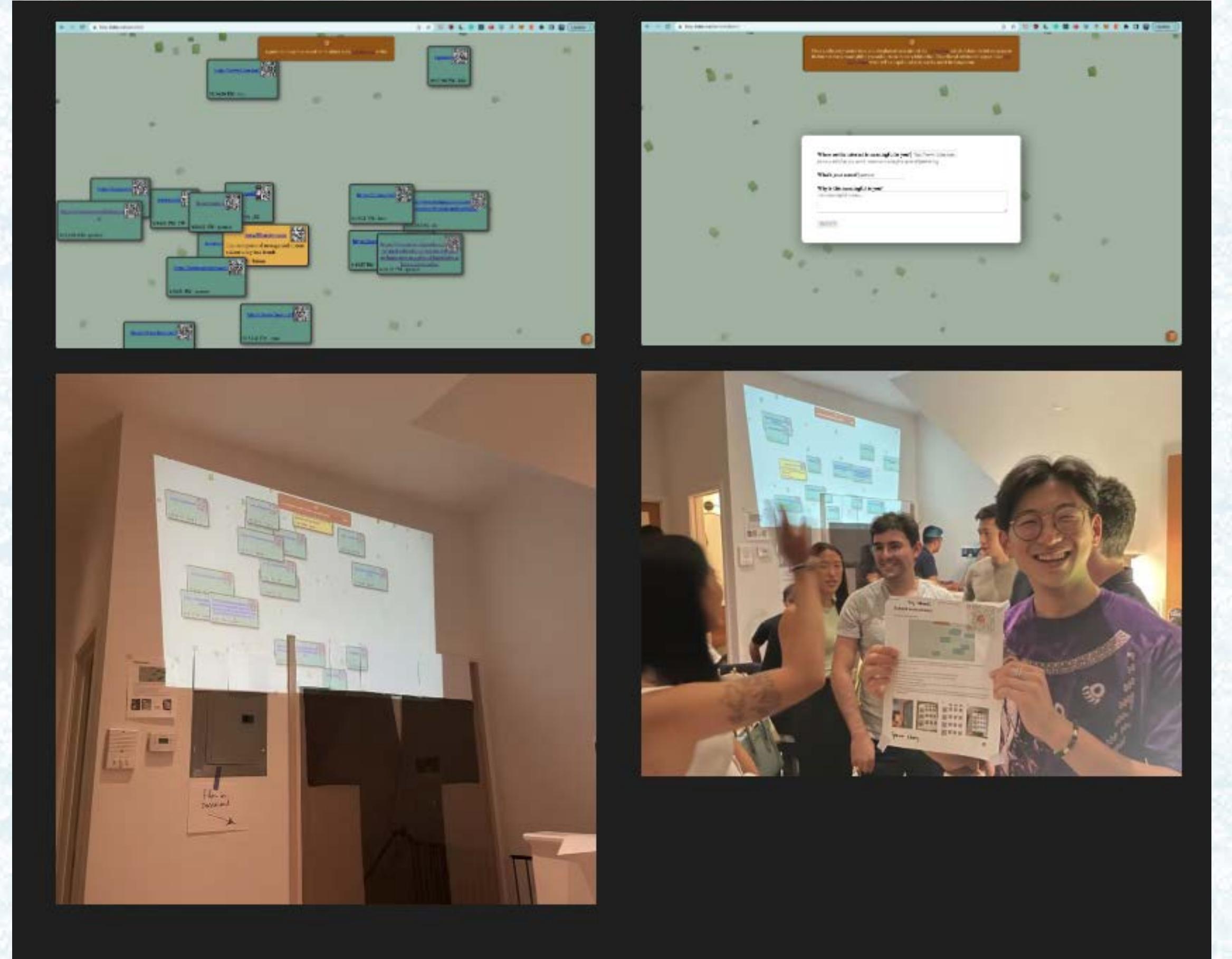
developer, designer, researcher, artist

tiny internets - our internet map

Exhibit description:

A participatory art exhibit which connects our sites for digital meaningfulness with the physical world. As web development has become more complicated and the web has become bigger, we've lost our ability to personalize it to us and rely mostly on large search engines to make our way around. This exhibit aims to channel the agency, surprise, and intimacy of the "old internet" of webrings and geocities into a collective website, that visitors can "take home" with them after. Visitors may contribute a website that's meaningful to them and print out a sheet of personalized QR codes to exchange with others and bridge their physical passages with their digital homes.

[Walkthrough video - Exhibit website](#)



a few images of the exhibit website and physical space.



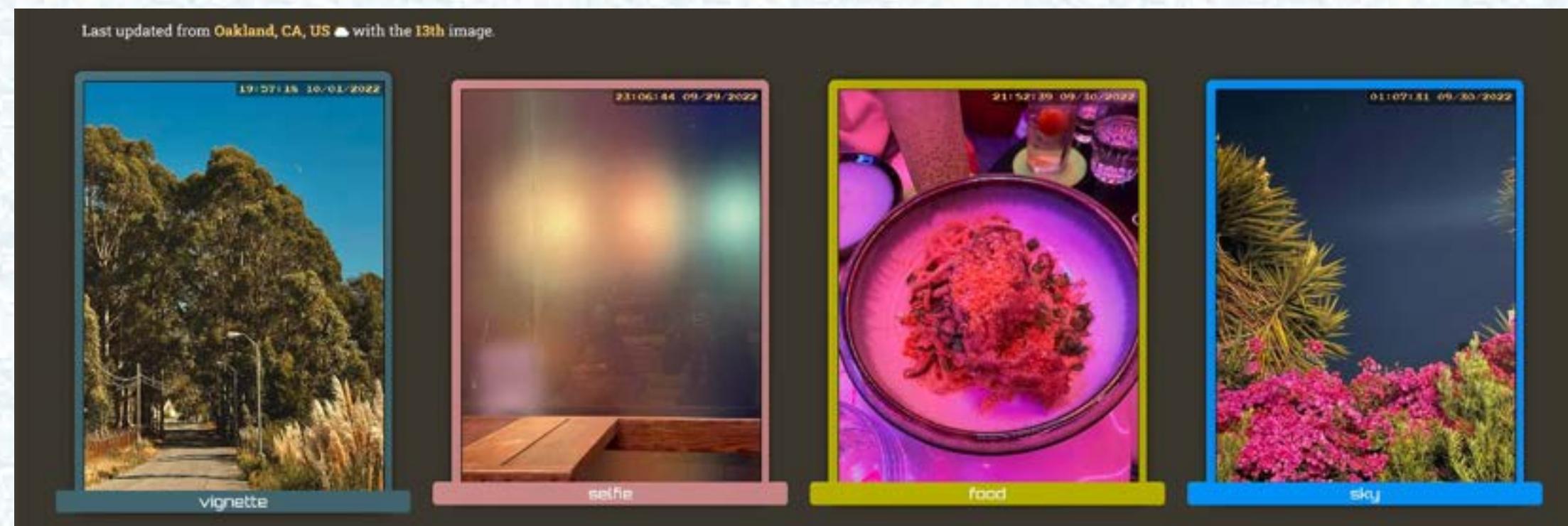
spencerchang.me developer, designer, artist

wall of windows

A digital memorial to the latest real world moments of wonder.

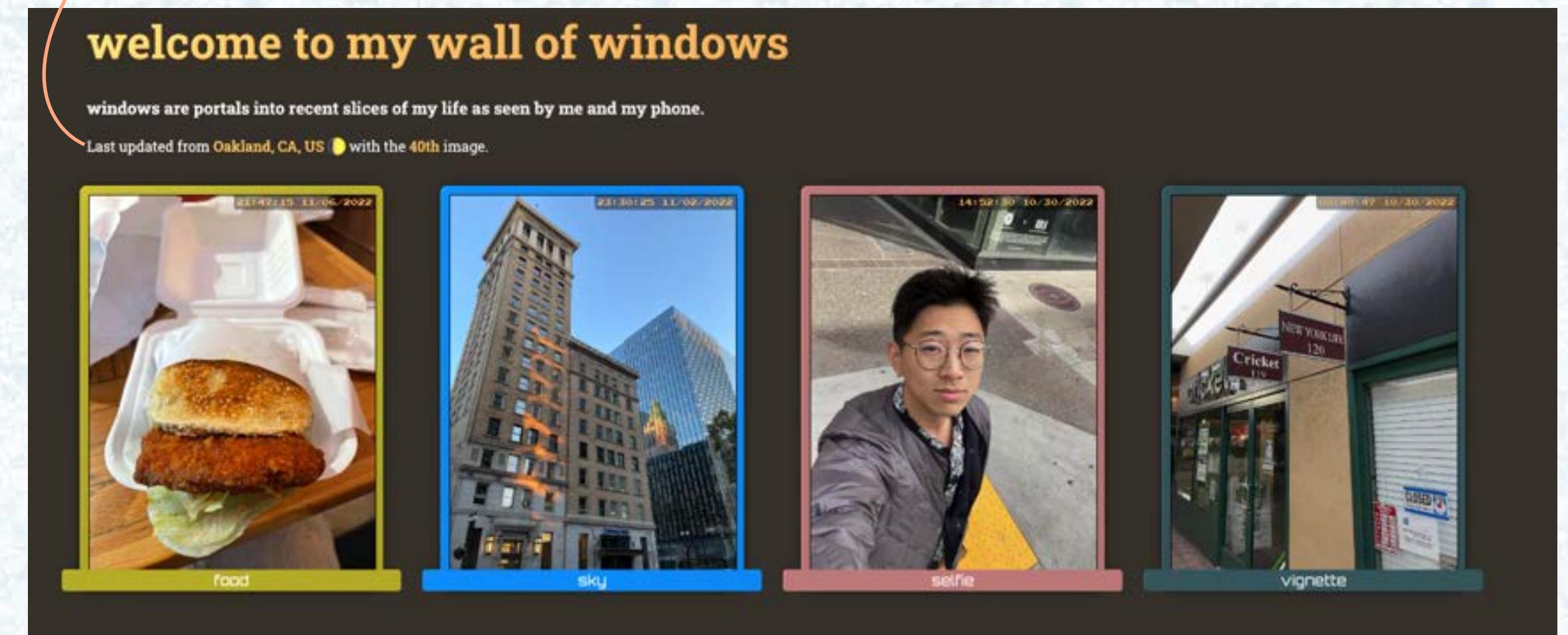
A wall of windows into slices of my life, auto-updated with latest photos from my phone and the weather where it was taken. Four windows show what I love and pay attention to through different focuses.

This project featured an automatic workflow for showcasing personal data meaningfully and creating dynamic websites as an exercise in personal data agency and carving out personal space on an often impersonal internet.



a picture of the website's windows sometime in October.

the site shows where it was last updated from
and the weather in the location



the latest picture of the windows. They sort according to the latest one updated and can shift drastically in vibe from one day to the other