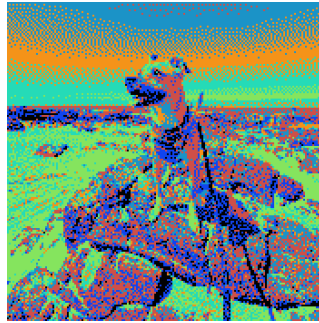


# Post Authenticity

Identity Formation in the Age of Automated Curation



## Abstract

We are witnessing a systemic crisis in the digital human experience. The modern web, once a chaotic, spatial geography of independent nodes, has been refactored into a linear extraction engine. Users, formerly operators, have been deprecated to assets. This pretentious rambling argues that the contemporary tech stack has become intrinsically hostile to the Self. Through the mechanisms of the subscription model (a temporal tax) and algorithmic, automated curation (the flattening), the corporate state seeks to render human agency obsolete. The only corrective for this system is as an **archivist**: a role defined by the preservation of the useless, weird, and the mundane. The banality of the amateur possesses a truth that the "optimized" scale of the corporation can never calculate.

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## THE ARCHITECTURE OF ENCLOSURE

The initial promise of "being online" was spatial. It was a superhighway, a web, cyberSPACE. All implied traversal, exploration, and crucially, a landscape that existed independently of the traveler. The early web was essentially geography. One went *to* a place. The friction of urls, potential manual entry of the ip address, and the beautifully nonstandardized aesthetics of a personal homepage were evidence of a digital wilderness.

We are now witnessing the total collapse of this geography. The "place" has been replaced by the "timeline." The spatial metaphor has been killed and replaced by a temporal one. The user no longer travels. The user sits, waits, and refreshes. The corporation no longer builds a destination. It builds a filter.

This shift is not merely a basic ui update. It is an ideological coup. By removing the friction of navigation, the corporate state (platforms, mostly social media) removes the agency of discovery. When the algorithm overlords determine the adjacency of information, placing a tragic news story next to an ad for resale jordans, it flattens the emotional hierarchy of human experience. Everything becomes *content*.

In this walled garden, links, the fundamental atom of the web's democratic potential, are treated as a security threat. To link *out* is to lose attention, and therefore, revenue. The modern internet then ends up as a prison of prisons. Each designed to keep the inmate entertained enough not to look for an exit. We have traded the chaos of the crowded farmer's market for the safety of the shopping mall. Mostly unaware that in the mall, loitering is a crime and every square inch is optimized for conversion.

The "lost paradise" of the early web was far from a utopia of perfect behavior. Instead positioning itself as a utopia of sovereignty. The chaotic html, broken image links, unpolished thoughts, these were the markers of human hands. Their replacement by the sanitized, rounded corner aesthetics of modern css frameworks represents the gentrification of the mind. We are no longer building homes for ideas, we are renting units in a high rise owned by landlords we will never meet.

## THE TEMPORAL TAX

The most insidious invention of late stage digital capitalism is not the advertisement but the subscription model.

Historically the transaction was a moment of severance. The creator sold the object. The buyer purchased the object. The relationship ended and ownership began. The object, once acquired, was subject to the entropy of the physical world but was fully under the dominion of the owner.

The subscription model (saas, streaming, cloud) rejects this severance. It states that nothing should ever be owned, only permissably accessed. This is a philosophical assault on the concept of finality. By forcing the user to pay perpetually for tools, art, or software, the corporation colonizes the user's future. One cannot simply *have* a tool. One must pledge a portion of their future labor to maintain access to it.

This transforms the user into a serf. Tenants in our own creative lives. Corporations making demands of a monthly tithe to allow us to open our own files are essentially holding past creations hostage. The "service" is a misnomer. It is a toll booth erected on the road to one's own memories.

This model necessitates the minimum viable product mindset. If the software is never finished, but always "updating," then the company is never obligated to deliver a working

product. Only the *promise* of a working product eventually maybe perhaps sometime. We live in a state of perpetual beta. Recurring payments on potentiality.

The aesthetic consequence of this economic model is the "grey goo" of culture. To maintain a subscription base, a platform must appeal to the widest possible demographic while offending the fewest. This necessitates the harsh removal of edges. Art is smoothed down into asset libraries. Music is smoothed down into lofi beats to relax/study/chill to. The web itself is literally smoothed down with css radius entries rampant. The goal is not to provoke, for provocation causes churn, and therefore, loss of revenue. The goal is to pacify. The subscription model demands a low grade, ambient satisfaction that never spikes into passion but never drops into anger. Monetization of boredom and the boring.

## THE FLATTENING

If the subscription model represents the economic enclosure of the user, the algorithmic timeline represents the colonization of the mind. We are witnessing the final collapse of the barrier between private self and public performance. In the regime of the platform, the individual is no longer a subject to be understood, but a dataset to be optimized.

The mechanism of this oppression is subtle because it masquerades as a mirror. The platforms claims to show us what we want. In reality, it is training us to want what can be easily categorized. The algorithm acts as a normative force, a digital procrustean bed that lops off the jagged, ambiguous, and unmarketable edges of personality. To participate in the modern web is to submit to a process of self flattening.

We observe this in the rise of personal branding, a term that should strike horror into the heart of any humanist. To brand oneself is to voluntarily adopt the logic of the corporation. It requires the individual to view their own life through the lens of a marketing department. To identify a niche, to maintain consistency, and to optimize for engagement. The user never asks, "Is this expression true?" but instead, "Will this expression perform well?"

This feedback loop creates a homogenization of the soul. The algorithm favors high contrast signals: pure outrage, performative vulnerability, toxic positivity. It cannot parse nuance or quiet contemplation because these states do not generate the friction required to sell ads. Consequently, the user learns to simulate these high contrast states. We become caricatures of ourselves, performing a heightened reality for an audience of silent potential observers.

The tragedy is that this performance eventually rewrites the source. We begin to *feel* in the shapes that the interface permits. The Self is replaced by the Profile. The Profile is immutable, statistical, and profitable while the Self is fluid, contradictory, and worthless to the corporation. The platform is engaged in a project of cleansing, scrubbing the internet of the messy, unquantifiable humanity that once defined it. Leaving behind only

a frictionless surface of marketable simulacra.

## THE ARCHIVIST'S IMPERATIVE

In a landscape defined by the terrifying velocity of the feed, where culture is consumed and discarded in 24-hour cycles, the only remaining radical act is the refusal to move. The artist must reject the role of content creator, a term designed to reduce creative work to a filler material for ad slots. The artist must instead assume the mantle of an **archivist**.

The archivist is the antagonist of the stream. While the stream demands the constant production of new, the archivist demands the preservation of the real. To be an archivist in the 21st century is to reject the metaphysics of the cloud. The cloud is a deception. A linguistic trick used to obscure the reality of server farms owned by monopolistic entities. To trust the cloud with one's cultural heritage is to build a library on quicksand.

The mandate of the archivist is the localization of memory. The practice of local storage, physical backups, owning the raw files. The act of downloading, pulling artifacts out of the stream and securing it on a drive you control, is an act of defiance. It is a statement, "This object exists because I witness it, not because a corporation licenses it to me."

The archivist champions the "useless." The corporate state seeks to monetize every second of attention and every pixel of screen space. The most subversive objects are those that resist monetization. The archivist collects and creates the weird, the broken, the esoteric, and the ugly. These are the artifacts that the algorithm tries to bury because they do not drive conversion. By preserving them we preserve the evidence that a world existed outside of the marketplace.

We must treat the independent web not as a broadcast channel, but as a vault. The personal website must become a stronghold of idiosyncrasy. A place where the logic of the feed does not apply. Where time moves at the speed of the creator, not the consumer. We must construct digital spaces that are hostile to the crawler but hospitable to the human. We must save what we can, for the era of access is ending, and the era of erasure has begun.

## TOWARD A DIGITAL WILDERNESS

The solution to this crisis cannot be found within the tools that created it. We cannot "optimize" our way out of the panopticon. The solution is not reform, but rewilding.

We must pursue a deliberate embrace of friction. The ease of use provided by the major platforms is a trojan horse. It smuggles in dependency under the guise of convenience. To

reclaim sovereignty, we must be willing to endure the difficulty of the independent path. This means owning the infrastructure of our identity, the domain name, the server space, the code. A domain name is a plot of land in a digital feudal system. To own it is to reject the status of the serf.

We must adopt the strategy of the dark forest. In a liu cixin-like framework, survival depends on silence and obscurity. In the context of the surveillance web, we must create spaces that are opaque to the algorithmic gaze. We must build communities that are difficult to index, hard to monetize, and impossible to scale in an attempt to bypass the central hubs of capital.

We must reclaim the right to be static. The modern web demands dynamism because dynamism generates data. But the stone tablet, the printed book, and the static html page possess a dignity that the dynamic feed lacks. They are complete. They do not change when we look away. They do not track our eyes. They simply *are*.

The corporate state offers us a metaverse. A frictionless, high res hallucination where every interaction is a transaction. We must reject this offering. We demand the right to be offline, the right to be incoherent, and the right to remain unoptimized. Stop generating content and start generating noise.

