

RECLAIMING SOCIAL ONLINE SPACES (A MANIFESTO)

THE INTERNET HAS BECOME AN UNBEARABLE, INSATIABLE HUNGRY EYELESS 100-HEADED HYDRA

My generation is a generation mothered by an internet of micro-communities, forums, and the first online multiplayer games. During our formative years, the internet was a bunch of teenagers in a trench coat acting as our mentors at a time when our actual progenitors and teachers were failing to make a real connection with us.

But the internet we knew and grew on, relatively untouched by the evils of capitalism, has been eaten by a thousand-headed hydra and is not coming back. Instead of giving us space to process the grief of losing the digital mother that we were for each other, this hydra is an insatiable, gigantic cuckoo baby whose hunger can only be fed with our attention.

This manifesto is born from the need to coexist with the monster the internet has become. The goal is to turn this predatory relationship into a mutualist one, where doom scrolling becomes just a bad dream from the past for everyone.

The cannibalization of social networks

It's not a secret that social networks aren't about being social anymore. Instead, they are tailored for companies to sell and advertise products and easily digestible ideologies, and for consumers to need them, not use them.

Their modus operandi involves filling both the servers they're built into and our brains with a humanely unprocessable rumble. This is meant to overpass our attention span and blur our real desires. The way they are being successful at this is both by churning more "content" than anyone would be capable of taking in, and by programming the algorithm to train our serotonin receptors into hungering for increasingly packed smaller bites of information at a time.

This has put worms in everyone's brains that make it really challenging to get real, genuine human connection out of social networks. This along with the arrival of the late capitalist system has made people's attention span and mental space a scarce resource.

Social networks and the internet at large should be used having in consideration that people's mental space is limited by nature on the basis of being organic, and that on top of it it's also being cannibalized by digital algorithms programmed to serve the needs of the market instead of the needs of people.

Reconnecting with (digital) nature

The goal is not to flee the internet and become a digital hermit. Even though that's a noble approach, being able to exist without other people and the systems put in by civilization can only be done working for or being born into a certain degree of privilege. Humans need other humans for their needs to be met, and our current society has been built on the crushed dead carcass of local, non-digital support systems.

No, our goal (albeit short/middle-term, the long-term goal will be discussed later in the manifesto) is to craft a way to use the internet in a more conscious way. Social networks' algorithms have been engineered to subdue any attempt to use these apps to actually socialize, and there is no greater transgression to their very essence than reclaiming them back for connecting to the real people behind the screens.

For this transgression to make an actual indentation on the system, we need to reclaim control over what we put into the internet, and what we let seep into our brains when we browse it.

No flood, No spam, No flame ***THE BODY OF THE MANIFESTO***

- **Be restrictive about the voices you let into your brain**
 - Follow, support and interact with humans, not companies. Always keep in mind that companies do not care about your well-being and will, by definition, put profit forward.

- Seek stuff that brings value to your life. Entertainment is not less valuable than things that make you more knowledgeable or that are more moral, and all can equally be used as a crutch when doom scrolling. The key is to interact with it in a conscious manner.
- Some humans use the internet being inconsiderate of the mental space of everyone around them. Sometimes, maybe, for valid reasons, and you should always be considerate with them; but your well-being goes first.

- **The law of silence**

One of the biggest tools for generating attention online is manipulating people into discussions and passionate debates. This is a signature modus operandi of the right-wing, but it's usually co-opted too by companies looking for a quick attention boost. The best way to fight against it is by applying "the law of silence".

- Do not participate in discussion of "trending topics".
- Limit debates to things you have local and human reach for. You have no business participating in stuff from the other side of the world whose layers of implications you're not going to fully understand. By entering these discussions, you're also making it harder for the voices that matter to be heard.
- Do not use visibility tools for pointing out harmful people, companies and behaviors. By virtue of showing everyone how bad it is, you're spreading a virus and giving it infinite reach (which is exactly what a virus would prefer).
- Cancel culture does not exist and deplatforming bigots and abusers requires more strength than what a group of unconnected internet strangers could ever aspire to have. Internet noise has sometimes worked to do the opposite by empowering abusers after a short period of silence or a bleak apology. Please work together offline and/or connect in private for real life consequences to manifest in the lives of those deserving of them.

- **Make sure the good seeds are the ones that are spread**

- Talk about the things that have brought value into your life, but also explain why. Admiration alone is enough, but be aware about how it's a wall between yourself and the things you enjoy. Extra, more layered value can be found by

engaging and treating these interesting ideas and creators as equal (if you have the mental space for it).

- Prioritize sharing works, discussions, events and collectives that are local over ones that aren't.
- Curate, share, interact with and discuss things that are inspiring and/or valuable. This is not to say to curate your space to be an ark brimming with positivity: News on places and movements that are not on TV are valuable, activism is valuable, solidarity with marginalized groups affected by the system is very valuable. When engaging with things that might not be so positive we have to stay self-aware as to and not fall into doom scrolling. We rely on each other for staying in a comfortable middle ground where we do not put too much noise in front of our comrades and we stay aware about the way we're feeling.
- Make the things you spread packed and meaningful, instead of a summarized short consumable. Longer doesn't necessarily mean more meaningful either, at some point too long just makes posts inaccessible.
- Limit the amount of posts you spread. A safe range would be limiting it to 3-5 ideas per day maximum, since that's the amount a human can consciously digest and process in a meaningful way. Sharing more than that muddles the reach of the good stuff, and contributes to the overwhelming flood of "content".
- Do not spread stuff that you don't care about just for the sake of staying active or not being forgotten. Being forgotten is not relevant when existing in a system that relies on genuine connection.
- Although AI tools with strong moral grounds* could hypothetically be implemented into creative processes in interesting ways, all AI can make on its own is noise that requires a strong human input to have any value. Regardless of the tools you use, stay aggressively human.

**I don't know of any AI tools with strong moral grounds that exist currently, and I genuinely don't care if they exist now or if they will in the future. Please don't message me or any of my friends to talk about AI stuff.*

- **Prioritize people over "content"**

The word "content" as the internet uses it today is the root of all evil, and we can pinpoint where it all went to shit to the moment we started using it unironically. Do not, under any circumstance, give in to thinking it's a reasonable concept. "Content creation" is brain rot. Treat anyone using these terms without quotations or without mocking it as corrupted. These people will need rehabilitation to be able to use the internet in a way that isn't harmful, performative, or labor. Rehabilitation is always possible, guided with self-compassion. Here's some guidelines to follow if you suspect to be corrupted (taken from a post made by @Nezchan@wandering.shop from Mastodon on March 09 2023 and slightly rewritten):

- Don't call what you create "content". Call it art, call it writing, call it music... Just call it whatever it is.
 - Don't call yourself a "content creator". You are an artist, a creator, a human... whatever fits best.
 - You are not a generator for clicks and views, allow yourself to connect with your work by naming it properly and acknowledging yourself in kind.
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- o Platforms prioritize negativity over kindness, so be nice just to fuck with them.
 - o If you decide to engage to disagree with a post, do not put the focus on the person behind it. If it's an asshole they don't need any exposure coming their way, and if it's a well-meaning citizen just having a bad take they don't need to be put under the shame of a spotlight.
 - o Content warnings are important, and because they are they should be used reasonably. Too many content warnings makes them all useless very fast, and too little makes the entire network unsafe.
 - o Despite what a meme is at its core, internet memes should be made for niches and come from the heart, not from a desire to be seen and shared by the biggest amount of people.
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- **Anonymity is a swiss army knife that can be used for many things**

Internet history is full of events proving what a terrifying tool anonymity is. As one of the main pillars of the internet,

anonymous groups of people have had the power to propulse social protests and movements into real life change, but it has also been used along with bots for manipulating democratic processes. It has been key for marginalized groups to create safe spaces when it has been impossible to do so offline, but just as easily it has been a weapon to harass people off of these same safe spaces. It's a very tricky aspect of the internet for this manifesto to put a black and white statement on!

Above everything, do what will keep you safe.

Analysis of how it affects us in a human way is key: Anonymity can very easily turn into a crutch for using the internet dishonestly without real life consequences, but for other people it can be a very valuable tool for navigating online spaces in the exact opposite way, with an honesty that they cannot act upon in real life.

It can be a tool for extreme disconnect and disengagement, but it can also be something used to explore without judgment or without committing to an identity just yet.

It should fall back on the reader's real life circumstances to really analyze how anonymity may be hindering or helping their ability to connect with others. If this manifesto had to put on a generalist statement on it (and I feel that it has to for how relevant to the internet this is) would be to **be as real, unpolished and human as possible without putting yourself at risk.**

Beware my words, as I am one of the heads of the hydra

A shadow that has been glooming over my conscience while writing this manifesto is the fact that I currently belong to an organized group of humans in the form of a company that need to convince people online to spend money on the things we create, so that we won't have to work for another company where we wouldn't have control over or own our labor.

As creators that need money to keep the lights on, online connections have saved our asses and continue to do so by helping us achieve genuine connection with other creators and the people that would be willing to give us money. Also, the videogames we make need to be seen by a lot of people so that we can ideally make more!

That means that regardless of how good our intentions might be, as a company we rely on participating in the systems that built and refined the algorithms responsible for doom scrolling. The reality is that I can't follow my own manifesto during the 24 hours of my life, and most of the people reading this probably can't either.

My ideal scenario would be that we all put our safety and well-being forward, to the point of making companies' propaganda useless in these spaces. To keep the internet a place where we genuinely share and engage with the things we enjoy, not the things that work the algorithm better.

It makes me and everyone I work with miserable to have to keep up with that dance, so if companies weren't able to get away with it anymore we'd be free!

I don't realistically expect this to happen in the short bleep that a small company like us can survive, but maybe we can see this aspect of our jobs become less despicable if enough people change the way they use online spaces.

I feel that I need to talk about the long-term this manifesto aspires to arrive to, but It's not really the point of it

The old internet was good. The forums, the blogs, the interconnected personal web pages... we miss them so much! But as the years start coming and they don't stop coming, we have to understand the world as an aging organism that can't get back to exactly what it was. The internet being an organic system made by organic beings that feed thoughts into it is no different. Because the world and its systems age and get older like humans do, we have to treat improving on them like how one would reconnect with things one used to enjoy. Nostalgia can be a good propeller for that, but as we rebuild the good stuff that was lost we need to understand that it'll be different. Some things we won't be able to heal back. It's ok, it's a part of aging.

The new internet we aspire to build is devoid of the noise we realized we never needed. The buzz will stay, but it will sound like the buzz of interconnected pollinating bees. A lot of voices being heard doesn't have to be an overwhelming experience if there's quality, strong communication systems in place. In the future, social online spaces are a city erected inside the carcass

of the hydra we've killed together, and every single one of its
hundred skulls a home. Someday.

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