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The internet feeds on its own dying dreams





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THE FIRST TIME I CAN REMEMBER LOGGING ON to the net was around 1998, when

I was five years old. My father was with me; I remember him working his magic, getting the modem to hum its infamous atonal tune. The purpose of this journey was to see if the internet had any answers to my persistent questions about how railroad crossings worked. We opened a search engine, probably AltaVista, and quickly found a Geocities webpage devoted to railroad crossings from around the world. I still remember the site's black textured background, its grainy, white serif typeface, and the blinking gifs of railroad crossings positioned on either side of a slightly off-center text header.

I'm a digital native, older than most. Because my father worked for the federal government, our household was an early adopter of the internet. As I grew up, so did it. When I was a child, for example, the internet was still indexable; you generally found websites through directories and webrings. Favorites meant something, because finding what you were looking for often took quite a bit of time. When search engines became the norm, around the time I was in elementary school, this analog directory hunting was replaced with the ubiquitous Google search. Which is to say I witnessed it all, and as a particularly lonely child, I witnessed it rather closely: Neopets in elementary school, the birth of Myspace in middle school, the rise of Facebook in early high school, Instagram in late high school, the internet culture wars of infamy as a freshman in college, Donald Trump and Cambridge Analytica in graduate school.

Writing in 2008, the new media scholar Geert Lovink separated internet culture into three periods:

First, the scientific, precommercial, text-only period before the World Wide Web. Second, the euphoric, speculative period in which the Internet opened up for the general audience, culminating in the late 1990s dotcom mania. Third, the post-dot-com crash/post-9/11 period, which is now coming to a close with the Web 2.0 mini-bubble.

For those my age, this tripartite history of the net begins at number two, with the anarchic, sprawling, '90s net, followed by the post-9/11, pre-iPhone variety (including the blogosphere and the fulcrum moment that was Myspace), and ending with today's app-driven, hyper-conglomerate social media net.

Like many people my age and older, I miss the pre-social media internet. The new internet knows this, and it capitalizes on my nostalgia as it eats away at the old internet. It amounts to an unforeseen form of technological cannibalism.

Admittedly, the phenomenon of the self-eating internet may not be obvious when we think about it in the abstract; we need to break it down into its constituent operations. For example, I open my Instagram account to post on my Instagram Story feed that I'm writing this essay about internet nostalgia. There I can attach kitschy gifs to my story like fancy stickers—I look at my options, and the offerings remind me of various moments from my online past. There's an image of sparkles that takes me back to the flash-based dress-up games I once played as a tween. There's another gif with glitzy text that reads “Don't hate me cuz I'm beautiful,” recalling the emotional trials of my Myspace days. And there is yet another gif that features a computer that bears a suspicious resemblance to the “My Computer” icon from Windows 95. These gifs come from Giphy, which has been integrated with Instagram for years. They're lo-res, imperfect, and entirely decontextualized. These disembodied ghosts—ancient in computer years—blink back at me because tech companies know that, based on my age, I like them. And I do like them. I miss where they came from—it's a place I've found is no longer there.

The Hell of Beautiful Interfaces

The internet is perhaps the most potent and active delivery system in history for the thesis “capitalism will obliterate everything you know and love”—online it happens in real time. Considering the average website is less than ten years old, that old warning from your parents that says to “be careful what you post online because it'll be there forever” is like the story your dad told you about chocolate milk coming from brown cows, a well-meant farce. On the contrary, librarians and archivists have implored us for years to be wary of the impermanence of digital media; when a website, especially one that invites mass participation, goes offline or executes a huge dump of its data and resources, it's as if a smallish Library of Alexandria has been burned to the ground. Except unlike the burning of such a library, when a website folds, the ensuing commentary from tech blogs asks only why the company folded, or why a startup wasn't profitable. Ignored is the scope and species of the lost material, or what it might have meant to the scant few who are left to salvage the digital wreck.

These disembodied ghosts—ancient in computer years—blink back at me because tech companies know that, based on my age, I like them.

The reason the tech literati don't wring their hands more is obvious: the artifacts of internet life are personal—that is, not professionally or historically notable—and therefore worthless. The persistent erasure of what are essentially frozen experiences, snapshots of our lives, nakedly demonstrates how tech monopolies value the human commonality and user experience so loftily promoted in their branding—they don't. And this is especially true in an era where involuntary data mining, as opposed to voluntary participation, is king.

Of course, these same writers have devoted several books to the history and culture of what Lovink identifies as the “scientific period” of the web, the one populated exclusively by elite scientists, researchers, and geeks, and given over to the BBS days of early computing, before graphical user interfaces and web browsers made the net accessible to the lowly amateur. And countless hagiographies and histories have been written about the technology of the internet and its “inventors” hailing from the FAANGs (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google). But the users of those technologies and services can only be found in the data point or the footnote, transformed into an anonymous bleating mass a world below the visionaries who built the platforms that now alchemize our consumer preferences into chunks of fool's gold. Meanwhile, the genuine experiences of users are ignored, despite the fact that the internet has always been deeply and irrevocably personal. The internet historian and artist Olia Lialina sums up this historical negligence aptly when she writes, “. . . we've studied the history of hypertext, but not the history of Metallica fan web rings or web rings in general.”

Fortunately, Olia Lialina and others have managed to document one glimmering period of internet history: the Geocities era of the 1990s, with its haphazardly designed, amateur-generated sites. Lialina, whose work includes several essays and a reader about digital folklore, co-created the One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age project to archive and memorialize Geocities and the stories of its neophyte users. In surveying Lialina's project, I discovered early that I'm not alone in my fervor for the old internet. It turns out there is a surfeit of nostalgia for the clunky Geocities web. As Lialina wrote in 2005:

It was a web of sudden connections and personal links. Pages were built on the edge of tomorrow, full of hope for a faster connection and a more powerful computer. One could say it was the web of the indigenous . . . or the barbarians. In any case, it was a web of amateurs soon to be washed away by dot.com ambitions, professional authoring tools and guidelines designed by usability experts.

The DIY-vibe and unwieldy aesthetic of the Geocities internet was beloved enough that users, upon hearing that it would be shut down, coordinated a massive effort to archive as much of it as possible—but not all was recovered. These amateur archivists realized both the scale of the loss of a significant portion of the internet but also its particulars, in the form of gifs, images, and backgrounds, along with the practices of its users, from their writing styles and layouts to the language they used to communicate. Lialina's own work has itself gone further than mere gif collection; One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age has also interviewed the actual users of these mostly abandoned or wholly defunct communities about their tools and methods and the experience of inhabiting them. Such an archival project is not only admirable; it should be treated as an object lesson in what to do when huge corporations decide that digital services are no longer profitable, as web development technologies come and go, and more and more of the net becomes consolidated into massive, Geist-level platforms. It's wholly unfortunate, moreover, that this rapid-response Geocities tactic hasn't been applied to other impending collapses or extant internet ruins. The question I ask is, why? The answer can be found in a story about a battle for the soul of the internet in which the bad guys of course won.

Internet culture historians since the mid-2000s have shown a marked distaste for the rhetoric that has guided Web 2.0, a term coined to describe the new social/participatory and interactive web of complex, pre-made user interfaces and architectures, where users became active consumers, creators, and participants of a service in which they had very little, if any, agency. In contrast, Web 1.0 required users to manually code, design, and manage their own spaces on the net and interact with others on the web in ways such as clicking links, copying an email address, or manually linking to other webpages. Lialina sees the Geocities aesthetic as being idiomatic to this Web 1.0 relationship, which joined the user to a new, exciting, naive, futuristic, and quite limited internet as a creative medium in and of itself; Web 2.0, on the other hand, erases that relationship by making the system transparent, the programmable workings of the internet—the internet as medium—a “native” thing to be “experienced” rather than explicitly interacted with. And she argues that though Web 2.0 encourages the broader, ever more interconnected amateur web population to upload, share, record, and participate at increasing rates, it does so by ensuring the erasure of the personalized, Geocities-ugly “Welcome to my Home Page” aesthetic long hated by web designers and other members of the professional class. Users, in other words, must now operate within the hell of beautiful interfaces designed by experts. TL;DR: Website Eugenics.

Facebook vs. Tweens (and Russian Grandmothers)

The scene of this struggle between the hideous-beautiful old internet and the cleanly if ungodly 2.0 variety played out in the mid-2000s, a transitional period that saw the first stirrings of the consolidated social media net we endure today. In these years, the proliferation of newly interactive but rather solipsistic media—such as blogs and early social media websites Myspace and LiveJournal—represented the last gasp of the “vernacular” web. Writing in 2006, Lialina says of these mediums:

... it's impossible not to notice how alike they look and how they resemble their Web 1.0 predecessors. Despite the diversity of multimedia elements, new graphics, design styles, and new tools, non-professional user pages differ from the professional ones just as clearly as a decade and a half ago.

We didn't know it at the time, but the cluttered facade of Myspace pages would be the dying gasp of a natively vernacular web aesthetic, one defined by a lack of restriction on what the page *could* or *should* look like. Such a degree of customization is extremely rare today (though it does manage to persist through revivalist websites like Neocities and desktop-only customized Tumblr themes). Sure, the bones of the basic Myspace page remained consistent, but much of everything else was highly modifiable. It also lent itself well to pieces of *flair*, such as song bytes and the then-ubiquitous glitter gifs. Lialina was right when she observed that glitter would be remembered as a trademark of this era of amateur aesthetics, similar to the “Under Construction” gifs so popular in the Geocities era.

One of the more interesting essays from and about the late-Myspace to early-Facebook period came from danah boyd, who wrote about the class divisions inherent to certain social media platforms. It reflects the cultural attitudes from what was then the beginning of the domination of the internet by professional-class companies such as Facebook, but it also explains precisely why some users chose to abandon Myspace and the vernacular web—a place where they possessed far greater agency—in favor of the streamlined and aesthetically regulated Facebook. The answer was class aspiration, often along racial lines, a phenomenon boyd compares to the urban white flight of the mid-twentieth century. (In this analogue, Facebook plays the role of picket-fence suburbia.) The essay offers a fascinating sociological examination filled with worthy lines, but the section about glitter is particularly relevant here:

In essence, the “*glitter*” produced by those who “*pimp out*” their MySpaces [boyd acknowledges the racialized attributes of this language] is seen by some in a positive light while others see it as “*gaudy*,” “*tacky*,” and “*cluttered*.” While Facebook fans loved the site’s aesthetic minimalism, others viewed this tone as “*boring*,” “*lame*,” and “*elitist*.”

boyd’s essay cites the race- and class-based explanations given by young people—she interviewed many teenagers—for why they chose one social network over the other. One white teen, for instance, called Myspace a “ghetto,” and another described Facebook as “the place where the ‘honors kids’ got together and discussed how they were procrastinating over their next AP English essay.” It’s important to remember, too, that Facebook rolled out first at Harvard, and then at other Ivy League and otherwise prestigious schools before it opened to state colleges and, later, high schools; exclusivity was clearly a tactic in the early development stage, and this led to its image as a high-class, elite platform. Parents, who were often spurred by the moral panics (often racialized) surrounding inappropriate social media use on the anarchic Myspace, began to view Facebook as a cleaner, less seedy alternative for their children. As with many consumer products, Facebook’s aspirational bent aligned with users’ desires to achieve, or retain, professional class status. In choosing Facebook, these users not only relinquished the creative flexibility of Myspace, they also, we now know, forfeited their privacy.

This split between “ghetto” and “honors student,” amateur and professional, kitsch and high-design—manifested in the Myspace/Facebook divide—would not hold out for long. Myspace was not afforded the same historical courtesy extended to Geocities, with its starry backgrounds and techno-utopian charm. This was partly because of the above-mentioned race and class biases (nobody wants to save that which is low class and uncool), but it was also because Myspace’s user-base comprised tweens and teens—young people eager to become adults. Myspace was soon to be known as “so middle school,” a shameful period in our lives that we’d all rather forget. And gone it is.

The artifacts of internet life are personal—that is, not professionally or historically notable—and therefore worthless.

In 2013, MySpace suddenly purged most of its users' content, including blogs, custom profiles, videos, and posts. There was no sunset, no death announcement that would allow active users to round up their data. It was an astonishing and quietly reported loss. Nonetheless, and though whole pages of personal communication flashed out of existence in the blink of a gif, the external infrastructure, those sites used to *supply* Myspace pages with flair, glitter graphics, and emo-skull layouts strangely live on; though, unfortunately, they melt away like candles every year: links to images break, domains expire. (None of this should surprise us given that the average half-life of a website is a shocking two years.) These dying artifacts of Web 1.0 still offer us a priceless view of what individual and collective agency once meant on the web. Looking back at them, I'm astonished at the richness of their content, the strangeness that makes them equal to their iconic '90s predecessors. They are the kit houses of web design, modular and adaptable, prepackaged and easy to build. Unfortunately, Facebook was just, like, easier to use.

The emotion I felt, upon discovering that my old MySpace page was deleted (My Chemical Romance soundbite and all), but that its emo-skull layout could still be found on Pimp-My-Profile.com, was sharp—like discovering a loving card from an ex at the bottom of a junk drawer. The assumption that the attributes of Myspace were the sole domain of the tween doesn't fit at all with the truth; many former users still care about these glittery sites because they were able to make them truly their own. When Blingee, a glitter gif-making website and community, announced it was shutting down in 2015 so that the company could launch a mobile app project, the backlash was striking—down to users' testimonials about what the site meant for them. The outpouring caused Blingee to reevaluate its business model, and the site is still up to this day, frequented, as Olia Lialina notes, by Russian grandmothers.



Text Effect Template by Brusheezy

The Age of App-quarius

We forget that even by the early 2010s, the net was still relatively diverse. Before Reddit, there was Digg or del.icio.us. There was also StumbleUpon, which at the click of a button could direct us to unforeseen and magical parts of the web. The late-aughts/early-teens period of the internet was home to some of the greatest and most creative new media out there, including a golden era of some of the most successful webcomics— Randall Munroe’s *xkcd*, Ryan North’s *Dinosaur Comics*, Zach Weinersmith’s *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal* (all of which are still ongoing)—as well as multimedia stories like Andrew Hussie’s *Problem Sleuth* and its expansive successor, *Homestuck*, or even more obscure but still noteworthy strips like *Hark! A Vagrant* and *A Softer World* (both of which had an enormous influence on me personally). These sites are still available, and most adapted to social media relatively easily. But the thrill of making and discovering sites is not the same. The analogue organicism of finding something is no longer there—these were sites you “stumbled upon.”

In the age of smartphones and apps, our agency is only more limited; even what we see is limited, restricted by the proprietary designs of a small handful of companies. As for customization, it's even worse: I can't change how Twitter or Facebook looks on my phone. Hell, I can't even undo what I just typed on my phone. This in part is because apps, though they may be connected to the web, are not websites. As tech writer Christopher Mims noted in 2014, apps and app stores are all about throttling the competition; unlike the web they aren't built on a universal open platform. They are thus completely misaligned with the earlier ethos of the internet as a place for the open-ended exchange of ideas. Mims adds, "The Web wasn't perfect, but it created a commons where people could exchange information and goods. It forced companies to build technology that was explicitly designed to be compatible with competitors' technology." That accountability, everyone knows, has disappeared. And this helps explain how the FAANGs grew so enormous so quickly: they got in easy and quick and held a gun to everyone else's head. Today, roughly 90 percent of time spent on our phones is devoted to apps—not the web. The web didn't adapt fast enough, and companies these days don't bother wasting time on mobile browsing. They prefer to nag us into "downloading the app."

Because websites had to either become apps or self-optimize for mobile, web design declined from its creative, more variegated heights to become flat, highly minimalistic, and multi-platform, and the results are, frankly, fucking boring. Even sections of the web such as highly customized Tumblr blogs that do resemble the charming, amateur websites of old are, unless you go out of your way to manually open them in a new tab, assimilated into Tumblr's infinitely scrollable "dashboard" feed—and thus rendered uniform and sterile. While there will always be a small group of original, high-design apps (the game *Monument Valley* comes to mind), the need to cater to a consolidated group of developers—especially Apple or Google, the two major smartphone operating system providers—gives us little room for variety or originality; even the apps and platforms themselves have lost their early skeuomorphic charm. And beyond the tedium of minimalist design, the abandonment of the desktop web for mobile apps has inevitably had other far-reverberating consequences for the net at large.

The scene of this struggle between the hideous-beautiful old internet and the cleanly if ungodly 2.0 variety played out in the mid-2000s.

Flash, to name just one example—which was a huge player in the early explosion of entertainment on the net, from websites that aggregated embedded Flash-based, arcade-style video games like those developed by Miniclip or CoolMath4Kids to earlier web projects like *Homestar Runner*—was not supported by the iPhone or Android, and this led to its rapid “obsolescence.” Flash’s relegation to the trashcan of internet history highlights one of the more daunting tasks for internet users and preservationists, upon whom the onus of responsibility for reacting to the sometimes terrifyingly sudden decisions of huge tech conglomerates and their ensuing monocultures is placed. These companies and platforms operate in part by devouring, appropriating, monetizing, exterminating, or burying on the 112th page of search results anything on the web that is even remotely interesting—especially anything amateur, anything ad hoc-ist. There is more and more an ethic of false equivalency between virality and substance (and I say that as someone whose blog went viral). Hence, they think, because this stuff isn’t profitable, it must mean nobody wants to see it; and so nobody does. Non-virality and false obsolescence, when combined with link rot—the natural atrophy of links across time—have led to the quiet erasure of entire swaths of the internet.

Breaking the Vaporwaves

Returning to an earlier part of this essay, I open Instagram, an app that distills so much of what makes everything about this whole web-dying situation nauseating and sad. The Instagram Story of me, with the blinking “My Computer” and glitter text gifs is still there, a draft, not yet posted. I look pissed off in the photo. Nostalgia, I’m reminded, is profitable—it remains one of the easiest to execute and cheapest gifts of neoliberal culture.

To this end, a passage from my eternal fav, Fredric Jameson’s *Post-modernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, provides a bit of theory about our constant recycling of the past. I’ve included my own annotations:

For with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style—what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints, as incomparable as your own body [e.g. MySpace, Geocities pages] . . . the producers of culture [big Internet companies] have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles [glitter graphics, Geocities], speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture [the whole internet].

Amazing, isn't it, how Jameson, writing in 1991, predicted the presence of Windows 95 gifs in my Instagram story? Except it's not that simple: there's an intermediate step in this process, and it's one that offers important lessons for those who aim to subvert the media status quo. That step is called vaporwave.

Vaporwave, an aesthetic movement dating from the early- to mid-2010s, is a fascinating study in the futility of critical artistic movements in the face of contemporary capitalism. Forgive me for sidestepping the highly nuanced musical examples of the genre, (imagine chillwave, mall Muzak, and '80s synthpop crossed with glitch music) which have proven more resilient to commercial co-optation, to focus instead on the visual aspects of vaporwave, which have not been so successful. Vaporwave, in the most general sense, is the often critical, ironic, or satirical appropriation of '80s and '90s cultural symbols—from Muzak and Kenny G-style sax riffs to teal-and-pink mall atriums, from cyberpunk to Memphis Milano, from palm trees and sunglasses, to, of course, Geocities gifs. A 2016 article about the genre in *Esquire* lists “cynicism about capitalism, sarcastic takes on the unachieved utopias of previous decades, consumerism, escapism, globalization, etc.” as the prevailing *raison d'être* of vaporwave, later claiming that the name is a hybridization of “vaporware” (a term for products that are heavily advertised and promoted only to never be released) and waves of vapor, a reference to the all-too-famous Karl Marx quote (“All that is solid melts into air”). It's an ironic, embittered genre that asks: What if the utopian innocence of those early Geocities websites had survived, and what if we all lived in chill, pastel, communal harmony? What makes vaporwave so distinct, other than its dubiously Marxist undertones, is that it is utopian and therefore against the grain of the modern mania for dystopian thought. Vaporwave was a new version of a recent past, a simulacrum; it was like a hitting “Save” instead of “Save As . . .” version of the 1990s—an overwritten file, a copy, but one for which no original exists.

Still, the visual remnants of vaporwave have long outlasted its radical ideological underpinnings. Almost immediately, its pastel, geometric, softcore aesthetics were gobbled up by media platforms, in particular the image-driven platforms Tumblr and Instagram. The pastiche compositions of Arizona Iced Tea cans and old Windows desktops were very quickly made available on all these commercial interfaces, which were not only feeding on a countercultural art movement—they were likewise consuming the ghosts of an internet they had long since murdered. The critique offered by vaporwave—its defiant sense of utopia—was immediately and effectively erased, leaving only a commodified, nostalgic aesthetic. And this aesthetic detritus,

its millennial pink, Memphis-esque shapes and squiggles made entirely for Instagram, became cold, devoid of joy and playfulness, something the Consumer Aesthetic Research Institute, an ad hoc, Discord-based volunteer group which runs a popular series of blogs and Facebook pages cataloging various aesthetic tendencies across the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, simply calls the “bougie design aesthetic.”

Jameson, as I’ve mentioned, saw this coming, and he teaches us a fairly succinct lesson about the demise of vaporwave:

This omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers’ appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself. . . . It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato’s conception of the “simulacrum”. . . . Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it “the image has become the final form of commodity reification.”

If Guy Debord, in other words, had lived to see Instagram, he would have absolutely lost his gourd. I barely need to mention the dark side of the platform, the side that leaves people lining up for hours just to get a selfie, that has changed how we design products, furniture, even buildings and neighborhoods—all of this is well-documented. What is not so obvious is the way Instagram recycles the original aesthetics, indeed the political ethos, that arose from vaporwave and even the early internet itself, into a decontextualized set of images: the internet has become nostalgia in search of a platform.

Revenge of the Old Internet?

It’s generally accepted, especially after the election of Donald Trump, that the bad things about the contemporary internet pretty much outweigh the good (a state of affairs that will only worsen with the FCC’s ruling on net neutrality). Facebook, that sleek, posh-lite service that robbed us from our cradles in the late aughts, is no longer the aspirational, professional-class status symbol it once was. Instead, it is roundly vilified for the role it played in the election of far-right idiots and parties to positions of power, its misuse of users’ data through companies like Cambridge Analytica, its generally hapless promotion of fake news and hate speech, its whimsical annihilation of journalism—all for a quick thirty-nine billion or so in ad revenue. “The Social

Network” is known now as a “Racist Boomerland.” No wonder 44 percent of people ages 18-29 have deleted the app this year. Facebook is, in a phrase, “so high school”; however, unlike “so middle school” Myspace, the slow death of Facebook is infinitely more justified. Though there are elements of Facebook worth saving, its demise also leaves much less of a scar behind—no “Pimp-My-Profile” pages or glitter gif databases. As it happens, most gif integration on Facebook comes by way of faceless third party apps. It’s true that Facebook controls your data; meanwhile, you control not a single element of Facebook. Nothing about your account is different or more special than anyone else’s. Even those annoying games, such as Farmville or Mafia Wars or Words With Friends, that seemed so endemic to Facebook, have all but evaporated from our collective consciousness.

Nostalgia, I’m reminded, is profitable—it remains one of the easiest to execute and cheapest gifts of neoliberal culture.

What is particularly fascinating is how the once-minimal, professional-class Facebook is now falling prey to the clutter and kitsch that careened Myspace into the black hole of uncoolness. On websites more densely populated by young people, such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit, there are whole communities devoted to mocking the crudely made image macros obviously fabricated and circulated by old people on Facebook, especially those featuring characters such as the Minions from the *Despicable Me* animated film franchise superimposed with extremely out-of-context quotes. The Twitter accounts “Cursed Boomer Images” and “Absurd Conservamemes” post fresh outpourings from the depths of poorly designed, politically noxious, brainworm-ridden Facebook depravity. The proliferation of new features, such as color and picture backgrounds for posts; whole panels of choices for reacting to posts instead of the singular “like”; stickers for comments; “frames,” which are essentially stickers for your profile picture (a weird offshoot of the Blingees of old)—all these show that the aesthetic of Facebook is rapidly cluttering.

It’s important to note here the subversive, deliberately ugly aesthetics of so-called “Weird Facebook” groups, with titles like “Please show to Jim !! HA !! HA !!” or “we are all god’s children and he left us in a hot car.” These groups are devoted to niche or surrealist humor, usually mocking the rest of the site’s aging denizens, and often rooted in a similarly vague (and deeply irony-poisoned) anti-consumerist or anti-

capitalist ideology as vaporwave. As with vaporwave's relation to elevator music or Windows 95, Weird Facebook subverts and exaggerates certain technological traits of the aging platform (i.e. Facebook) for the purpose of parody or criticism. These groups use highly compressed, lo-fi jpeg collages for headers and profile pictures, and create extremely ugly frames (which you can use on your own Facebook profile picture). All within the strict confines of Facebook's UI. Put another way, these pages deliberately uglify Facebook, rendering a once sleek user interface deconstructed and amateurish, appending it with a Myspace-esque look, exposing aesthetically the control Facebook has lost both over its content and its brand image. These are the raucous, perhaps final stirrings of youth on a platform that is as overcrowded and pungent with old person smell as a visiting school choir performance at the Kiwanis Club.

It's about time for a little revenge from the old internet. Or how about revenge from the older, older internet: communism. In the words of Marx: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify." All that is solid melts into air, bitch.

Kate Wagner is the creator of the viral blog McMansionHell, which roasts the world's ugliest houses from top to bottom, all while teaching about architecture and design. Since its launch in July 2016, the blog has been featured in a wide range of publications, including the Huffington Post, Slate, Business Insider and *PAPER*.

Outside of McMansion Hell, Kate has written for Curbed, 99 Percent Invisible, *The Atlantic*, *Architectural Digest* and more. She recently graduated from Johns Hopkins with a Masters of Arts in Audio Science, specializing in architectural acoustics. Her thesis project examined intersections of acoustics, urbanism and Late Modern architecture.



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