

A Creativity Caleidoscope

Alf Rehn



ALF REHN

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First edition

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Dedicated to my friend Ann Rippin, best beloved, who inspired much of what is written here but who sadly died before I could share it with her. I will join you in the heavenly gin house when my time comes, and we will once again sing the old songs.

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Introduction

“There is no a priori reason for supposing that the truth, when it is discovered, will necessarily prove interesting.”

– C.I. Lewis

“Writing, to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.”

– Isaac Asimov

As I, assisted by my son Sean Rehn, prepare this work for publication, I come to realize that I have to go back to a rather fundamental question: What kind of work is this, really? For all intents and purposes, it does look an awful lot like a book. It has chapters, of a sort, it is all text all the time, and it ended up being more than long enough to count as a book. At the same time, it is also something that is not quite a book. It consists almost solely of fragments, snippets, ephemera, and quirky asides, and some might claim (and rightly so) there is little in the form of a cohesive core idea running through it, giving it “book structure” (whatever that is). It is in this respect something more like a collection, a lengthy textual collage, a thing perhaps more akin to a *Wunderkammer* of ideas than something deserving the lofty epithet of being a “book”.

To understand why this is, it is important to understand how this all came about. I am, at heart, a writer. Writing is what I do, and a writer is what I am. That said, sometimes writers start

thinking about their process, and start tweaking the same. I had found myself in something of a writerly rut (no, not “writer’s block”, a term I have issues with), a feeling that my writing was just spinning its wheels (how’s that for a mixed metaphor, eh?), and I wanted to experiment with ways out of the same. Two things happened in parallel with this. One, I was reading quite a lot about how certain internet pundits explained that all you needed to be a successful writer was simply to have a routine and preferably pay them for writing prompts and templates. Some even had ready online platforms for this. So I started messing around with one of these. It was called Typeshare, in case you’re interested, and at one point I was one of their top three writers. I found the routine of having to write a short piece every day so as to keep my position on their leaderboard strangely soothing, and most of what you can find between these virtual covers was first written on that platform – although I did delete almost everything off there (and Twitter, and Medium, and so on), having gotten annoyed with both the limitations of the platform and how it made writing into the same kind of empty social media game so much else is these days. I kept copies, however. I’m a writer, we don’t just throw stuff away. Or, we do, but we hoard as well.

The other thing, and I guess I should now go “Two”, was that I for strictly professional reasons had to understand AI better. I was and still am working on a major research project on how datafication and algorithmic technologies affect professions such as management and innovation (insofar as these are professions), and felt I couldn’t do that without understanding among other things generative AI. So, here’s the big reveal: Much of what I have written here was done with the support of various genAI technologies, including but not limited to

ChatGPT, Claude, and Llama. This collection does not contain texts that were solely AI written (except one, the rather bizarre one on Ketchunism, a fever-dream of a religion developing around a condiment, which was just too funny not to include – and that too is clearly marked as AI generated), but it does contain mainly texts where genAI was a partner in ideation, research, generating some basic text, and so on. Some texts are purely from my mind and hands, but quite often I got up, experimented with AI, generated some points or some text, and then turned that into a tiny little essay. Much of the result is what you'll find published here. So, if you are a purist regarding AI and writers experimenting with it to write, turn away now.

Anyhow, I regret nothing. The experimentation that is at the heart of this kaleidoscopic collection of comments on creativity (for that is what this became) taught me much – about writing, about AI, about editing, and so on. Take it for what it is; a swirling, slightly chaotic, consistently curious, and in places AI-supported exploration of creativity. In the small things, such as condiments, tools, and forgotten TV-shows. In the big things, such as heroic creation and mind-boggling innovation. In the forgotten – the section on forgotten innovators is very important to me – and in the half-remembered. In the artificially seeded, and in the things that have gnawed on me for ages. Here it is, my kaleidoscope of creativity.

In Copenhagen, early November 2024,

Alf Rehn

I

Notes on Creative Work

It all started here, with some notes on things such as taking care of your instruments, why routines are important, and paying attention to creative lessons from quirky sources. It doesn't add up to a systematic theory of creative work, but there should be something here for everyone. Oh, and there's a piece on John Wick, too.

1

What Knife Care Says About Our Creative Work

“You need to let the little things that would ordinarily bore you suddenly thrill you.”

– Andy Warhol

Knives – they’re not just for slasher-movie carnage or Sunday roasts. Get into the world of knife care and you unearth a trove of insights that apply just as aptly to the realms of creative work. This isn’t some infomercial pitch; it’s genuine art and a science to boot.

Every fan of “Top Chef” knows a chef’s blade isn’t just metal—it’s an extension of self. Just as Gordon Ramsay wouldn’t dare dice an onion with a blunt knife, creatives shouldn’t embark on projects with dulled senses or stagnated skills.

Routine honing is imperative. Whether it’s by absorbing the classics, meandering through indie film festivals, or even arguing about the best “Beatles” album, it’s the daily sharpening that keeps the edge keen.

Versatility, too, is key. Michael Myers might have a signature

style, but that won't win you a Michelin star. Creativity, like the art of the blade, requires adaptation. It's about switching tools, approaches, and perspectives. One project might be your bread knife, another, your paring blade.

Recall the reverence Beatrix Kiddo held for her Hattori Hanzo in "Kill Bill"? That's how we should approach our crafts. With respect, dedication, and a touch of awe.

So, as you navigate this cinematic rollercoaster called life, consider the humble knife. Its lessons are sharper than they appear, slicing through the mundane to reveal the profound artistry beneath. Remember, whether in cutlery or creativity, the magic lies in the maintenance.

2

On Quitting Creative Projects

“Writing is a dog’s life, but the only life worth living.”

– Gustave Flaubert

We live in a world that fetishizes ideas of resilience and stick-to-it-ness, which is why people engaged in creative projects are often encouraged to stick with the same, no matter how slow the progress or how rocky the process. Yet quitting a creative project that’s going nowhere can be the best thing you’ve even done. Reality check – sometimes, your project is simply a dud. Sure, resilience is a good thing, but there’s no need to be an idiot about it. Some projects simply do not pan out.

At play here is the sunk cost fallacy. It tricks you into believing you must finish because you’ve already invested so much, but as admiral Ackbar would tell you, “It’s a trap!”. Pouring more time into a dead-end project won’t magically make it better. Growing as a creative isn’t just about finishing more and more projects, it is also about learning when to let go, when to step away, when something just isn’t going to turn good.

Quitting, smart quitting, is also a necessary way to feed your

creative mind. True creativity needs space and time, not the relentless grind of trying to flog the cadaver of a creative project back to life. By quitting, you clear the clutter and make room for inspiration to strike again.

And guess what? You can always come back. Unlike burnt soufflés, creative projects can be revisited. Take a break, let your mind breathe, and return when you're ready, armed with new insights. Take a page from the book of that old procrastinator Leonardo da Vinci. He left projects unfinished for years, sometimes for decades, and then came back, better than ever.

If it was good enough for a Renaissance genius, it's good enough for you. Quitting isn't failure; it's strategic brilliance. Leave it, live a little, and come back when you're actually ready to make it shine. 

Getting Lucky With Creative Work

Luck, that elusive mistress, often seems to play a capricious role in our creative endeavors. Many attribute their successes or failures to being either lucky or unlucky, as if creativity were a lottery ticket rather than the result of hard work and strategic thinking. However, it's worth considering the old adage, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

In the world of creative work, preparation involves honing our craft, expanding our knowledge, and staying curious. It means actively seeking out inspiration, whether from a Renaissance painting, a 1980s sitcom, or the way the sunlight dapples a glass of wine (or a leaf, if you want to be all arboreal about it). It's about being open to new experiences and perspectives, and being willing to challenge and surprise ourselves.

Opportunity, on the other hand, involves putting ourselves out there and taking risks. It means sharing our work with the world, even when it's not perfect. It means seeking out collaborations, networking with others in our field and others, and being proactive about seeking out opportunities rather than waiting for them to arrive gift-wrapped and ready to rock.

By actively preparing and seeking out opportunities, we can create our own luck in life and in creative work. Of course, there will always be factors beyond our control, but by taking a proactive approach, we can tip the scales in our favor and get the odds on our side.

Remember, luck isn't just something that happens to us; it's something we can cultivate and search for. The stars won't align unless we start creating our own luck in our creative work. After all, as many a sportsman has been misquoted as saying, "The harder I work, the luckier I get."

On Synesthesia

It's one of those things that isn't that difficult to grasp, but at the same time impossible to understand unless you have it: Imagine seeing flavors, or tasting music. For those who experience synesthesia, this isn't magic, but daily reality. It is a condition where stimulation of one sensory pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory pathway, and it has fascinated scientists and artists alike for centuries.

So consider the composer Alexander Scriabin and the artist Wassily Kandinsky, both of whom transformed their synesthetic experiences into groundbreaking works of art. Scriabin, who perceived musical notes as specific colors, composed pieces that aimed to create a total sensory experience, envisioning concerts that would blend music, color, and light. Kandinsky, on the other hand, used his synesthetic perception to inform his abstract paintings, translating auditory experiences into visual forms.

There are lessons here. Techniques can be adopted and adapted to simulate the synesthetic experience, fostering connections between disparate sensory inputs. Consider experi-

menting with synesthetic associations, combining sound with color, color with taste, tastes with sound – like Heston Blumenthal did when he presented a dish of the tastes of the sea with an iPod in a conch-shell, loaded with sounds of the sea (also the name of the dish). Such practices encourages thinking beyond the usual confines of a single medium, mixing creativity with... creativity.

Most of us do not have synesthesia, but thinking about it can still open new doors of expression, new ways of thinking about creative work. So, engage your senses, and go down strange pathways. Don't forget to lick your page, listen to those paints, watch that taste, and smell that riff! 🍷🎨👂

5

The Soundscapes of Creativity

When crafting the perfect setting for creativity, audio aesthetics is the unsung hero we seldom toast to. Think of it: How often have you, perhaps unwittingly, sought the embrace of ambient sounds as a muse to your thoughts? It's like setting the stage, but instead of props and lights, we curate a symphony of sonic backdrops.

White noise, that monotonous drone we often associate with old television sets, is like the tofu of the audio world. Bland on its own, yet its consistent hum is a blank canvas, neutralizing distractions. It's the baseline, the equivalent of a John Cage composition that grounds wandering thoughts.

Ah, but then there's the café acoustics, the jazzy, bebop improvisation in our ambient soundtrack. The clinks, murmurs, and that ever-present hiss of the espresso machine are the audio equivalent of an Impressionist painting, where each sound blurs into an evocative, harmonious tapestry. It's an ode to human life and its beautiful, chaotic dance.

And for those moments when our spirits need a bit more pep, there's the curated playlist – the DJ set of our creative journey.

Whether it's Bowie pushing us to challenge norms or Vivaldi's strings plucking at our heartstrings, a well-crafted playlist can transport us, inspire emotion, and elevate our thinking.

In sum, the ambiance is not just visual. It's sonic. Tailoring our audio environment can be as crucial as choosing the right paintbrush, the perfect pen, or the finest wine. After all, every maestro needs their orchestra, so get lost in the sound and create.



6

The Cult of Morning Routines

“If you’re lonely when you’re alone, you’re in bad company.”

– Jean-Paul Sartre

I’ve taken to waking up earlier than I used to, and this obviously has given me a lot of extra time to think about mad morning routines. In the modern gospel of the self-help gurus, the message is clear: emulate the dawn rituals of the uber-successful, and you too will be fast-tracked to success.

First, there’s the ungodly hours. The 5 AM Club, a term probably coined by someone who never had a late night in their life, insists that success is reserved for those who greet the sun. This is despite the fact that half of these early risers are more zombie than Zuckerberg by midday. The morning coffee ritual has become less about enjoyment and more about a performance art. Successful people, or so we are told, don’t just drink coffee – they have a bond with single-origin, fair-trade, hand-roasted beans. Regular coffee drinkers are missing out on brewing success!

Then comes meditation, because what’s success without a

little mindfulness sprinkled in? This isn't just sitting quietly; it's an exercise in mental gymnastics, simultaneously trying to empty your mind and solve world hunger. Journaling, the sacred act of scribbling your inane dreams and fuzzy ambitions, often feels less like a path to clarity and more like writing to Santa, as if writing "Be more like Elon Musk" in a notebook will summon a Tesla out of thin air. And, of course, the cold shower. This Spartan practice, a metaphorical ice bath for the soul, is a daily reminder that if you can survive this, you can survive anything – including, presumably, another day of absurdly over-engineered morning routines.

If it sounds cultish, it's because it is. Sometimes, the most successful thing you can do is get a bit more sleep, and let the 5 AM cult have their cold showers in peace. Now I have some reading to do. 🕒 zzz

Why You Need a Creative Ritual (Like Yesterday)

“The best way is always to stop when you are going good and when you know what will happen next. If you do that every day when you are writing a novel you will never be stuck.”

— Ernest Hemingway

Ever wonder why some creatives churn out masterpiece after masterpiece while you're stuck staring at the same uninspired blank page or canvas? Sure, it might just be talent, but let's not kid ourselves. It's probably because they have a creative ritual. And you? Well, you're just winging it.

A creative ritual, for those not in the know, is a set of specific actions or routines that prepares one's mind for the brilliant burst of creativity that will surely follow. Think of it as foreplay for the imagination. You wouldn't run a marathon without stretching (unless you have a thing for cramps) – so why plunge into a creative project without warming up those brain muscles?

Now, I can hear the groans from here: “But rituals are so boring!” Listen, if picking out a specific kind of tea, lighting

a candle, and playing baroque music backwards at half-speed is what gets someone's creative juices flowing, who are we to judge?

For all we know, Da Vinci could've danced in circles wearing mismatched socks before he sketched the Mona Lisa. Van Gogh? Maybe he hummed the 16th-century equivalent of a catchy pop tune while painting starry nights. Heck, Shakespeare might've needed three feather quills laid out in a particular pattern before penning Hamlet's soliloquy.

So, if you're struggling in your creative endeavours, maybe – just maybe – it's time you developed your own quirky, ridiculous, and totally necessary ritual. Because honestly, anything's better than the blank page staring back at you right now. Anything.

Steinbeck and the Cult of the Pencil

I've gotten more into pencils as of late, and of course that has meant nerding out over Blackwings. I'm partial to gray 602s, and the one-step long-point sharpener, although I have some way to go to reach the sheer devotion of a luminary like John Steinbeck. Each day, before embarking on writing, he would sharpen 24 pencils – no more, no less – to a precise point. These were his tools, his conduits for getting words onto paper, and they had to be just right. This daily preparation was a ritual, almost meditative, setting the tone for his writing sessions.

This peculiar habit reveals much about Steinbeck's approach to literature, but also contains lessons on the craft of writing in general. For one, it speaks to the physicality of writing. In an age where typing was becoming the norm, Steinbeck clung to the tactile sensation of pencil on paper, the soft scratch and the gradual wearing down of the lead. Moreover, Steinbeck's pencil ritual underscores his meticulous nature. Just as he carefully crafted his narratives, he equally tended to the minutiae of his writing instruments. Interestingly, this ritual also reflects a broader theme in Steinbeck's works – the significance of

the ordinary, the elevation of the mundane. Just as he found profound narratives in the lives of everyday people, he found a profound tool in the everyday pencil.

There are lessons for all writers in this. Writing isn't abstract, it's manual labor. There is beauty to this, to not romanticizing it all, and taking pride in the touch of the pencil, the haptics of the keyboard. Further, writing demands routine, and that includes tending to your instruments. Not least, to write is to craft worlds out of the most mundane things – the touch of lead on a sheet of paper, over and over again. There is magic in this.



What John Wick Can Teach You About Creative Work

If you have watched any of the ultra-violent gunfights that permeate the John Wick-franchise, several things will have caught your eye. One, they are highly choreographed, even balletic. Two, they are over the top, with no end to how much physical trauma the hero can endure. A perhaps less observed fact is a specific hallmark of John Wick, put in to communicate that he is the consummate professional, a creative craftsman of carnage.

I am referring to the fact that pretty much everyone of the endless henchmen that John Wick kills is not just put down, they receive a final headshot. He seems to employ a modified version of what is known as the “modern technique”, and mostly seems to shoot with a controlled pair, two aimed shots in rapid succession with one shot to central mass and one to the head. Even when he shoots a double tap – two immediate shots on target with no aiming between shots – he returns with a third, aimed shot to the head.

As morbid as it might sound, I believe there is a lesson here

for creative work. John Wick's final headshots are in the movie to communicate that he is more than a killer, he is an artisan. His signature might not be wholly unique, but he ensures that he finishes what he starts. He makes sure his work is done, finished. Creatives sometimes forget this final part, making sure that the work truly is done. What is your final killshot, the thing you do that ensures that your work is clearly done, what is the signature of your creative work?

The Creativity of Clutter

“Sometimes distraction is a key part of the creative process.”

– Walter Isaacson

I try, oh how I try, to be a minimalist. I adore the idea of going full Marie Kondo or Zen monk, having only the bare minimum on my desk, yet I always fail. I do keep the clutter at bay, but there is always one more pen I need, one more book that has to be bought. So I spend time organizing my clutter, pretending it is all necessary kit for creativity. I know I should let go, allowing my inner clutter-goblin full rein – minimalists be damned!

Traditional wisdom advocates for a tidy workspace, but research by Vohs et al. (1) suggests the opposite: Messiness can encourage breaking free from tradition, as participants in a messy room drew more creative lines on a blank canvas and were quicker to solve creative problems than their counterparts in a tidy room. Historical evidence also supports this. Einstein quipped, “If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign of?” His workspace was a riot of papers etc. — a visual metaphor for a mind at constant

play. He was not alone, as some of the most creative minds of history were messy as all holy hell.

The trick, I believe, is that there is no trick. Some people get energized by mess, others do not. Creativity doesn't come from clutter, except for when it does, whilst mess can get your thinking askew, except for when not. You need to find what works for you, just like I have. My workspace is categorically controlled clutter, yet you may work better in a free-for-all of papers, ephemera, toys, and more. You do you, creativity will follow, and never let anyone Marie Kondo you without consent.



(1) Vohs KD, Redden JP, Rahinel R. (2013) Physical order produces healthy choices, generosity, and conventionality, whereas disorder produces creativity. *Psychol Sci.* 24(9): 1860-7.

On Creativity and Antifragility

In our ongoing dance with the unpredictability, antifragility, a term coined by the puckish Nassim Nicholas Taleb, suggests a bold new approach to creativity. It describes phenomena that actually improve or become stronger when exposed to shocks, stressors, or volatility, such as an artistic process that not only weathers the storms of criticism and chaos but becomes more captivating and potent in the face of them.

In this scenario, the creative process doesn't just show resilience, but actively thrives on shocks, like a standup comedian making heckles part of the act or a musician finding magic in novel contexts – be it Dylan going electric or Jim Morrisson recording his vocals for “L.A. Woman” in a tiled bathroom with the door torn off.

As we delve into antifragility, we find that this embrace of chaos mirrors the rebellious spirit seen in the art movements of yesteryears, a spirit that welcomed upheavals and thrived amidst them, consistently reshaping the creative landscape to craft narratives that were rich, textured, and pulsating with life. Artists have always innately known that growth comes

from breaking established norms, but also that these breaks come in many forms and shapes; consider the brilliance of Wes Anderson's intricate sets as a break with traditional cinema scenography or the rogh chords of punk as a break with both easy listening and glittering disco.

Therefore, it seems not just prudent but utterly necessary to explore creativity's connections with antifragility, and improve how we theorize shocks as opportunities for growth and innovation. Creativity should not be shielded from shocks, but enmeshed in them, allowing the joints and fissures of our creative work to be strengthened and new, curious paths explored. It's not "make or break", it is break more to make better. ⚡💥

On Naps as an Innovation Technique

“Even a soul submerged in sleep is hard at work and helps make something of the world.”

— Heraclitus

Want a killer app for making your company more innovative? Look no further than to your nearest kindergarten. Here, the staff are trained to ensure that their young clients utilize a key innovation technique – the mid-day nap. As odd as this may seem, something similar may be just the thing to kickstart your company’s creative energies.

When talk turns to how we can make companies more efficient and productive, the assumption is often that this means we all need to work harder and quite possibly longer. This, however, is a fundamentally flawed notion. The way to create real value in the workplace often comes down to working smarter rather than harder, and the way to get smarter is usually to think creatively about things.

Yet creative thinking isn’t necessarily something you just sit down and do. On the contrary, research into creativity has

shown that it is a form of thinking that is quite irregular, and can be both provoked and dampened by the most surprising things. Like naps. Or creativity workshops.

The latter might seem like a great thing for corporate creativity, but they can turn into “innovation theater”. As people today often are quite used to them, they learn how to get through them in as painless a way as possible, and as a result practice acting more than creativity. Workshops can also strengthen the notion that creativity only belongs in such a context, and thus dampen people’s tendency to engage with creativity in their everyday work.

But slacking, be this in the shape of the cheeky nap or just some strategic daydreaming, that’s another thing entirely. To some, these represent totally unacceptable practices at work, something managers should forbid and exterminate. Which is a great idea if you really, truly want a stressed and un-innovative organization. If you’d rather have a creative culture, and a company that can innovate, it’s time to reconsider the humble nap.

The think-tank RAND has estimated that insufficient sleep costs the UK economy up to £40 billion annually, and what’s scary about that figure is that it doesn’t even account for the lost creative potential. Not sleeping enough might kill you, but what it will certainly do is to slaughter your creative potential. Without sleep, the mind cannot engage in the full gamut of imagination, as it is too busy just trying to keep core functions running.

This is why good managers should care about the sleep of their employees, and develop an appreciation for the art of the nap! Research into thinking has shown time and again that periods of rest, times when one’s mind is occupied neither with busywork

nor the problem at hand, is one of the most creatively fertile ones of all. This is why you often get great ideas whilst walking in nature, just before you fall asleep, or in the shower. As the mind gets to wander freely, creativity kicks in.

Naps are part and parcel of this. A short sleep or a daydream gives the brain a chance to tap into its full potential, away from creativity-killing drudgery, making a strategic bout of slacking anything but ineffective. On the contrary, it might be the most value-creating thing you do all day.

Forgotten Techniques: On Cliché-Verre

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

— Zora Neale Hurston

For creators and innovators, sometimes the most important way forward is learning to take a step, or two, or two thousand back. One way to do exactly this is to reconsider the way we create, e.g. by looking to other tools, or techniques not commonly used. For the neophyte, this might be something as easy as going back to writing with a pencil after years of relying solely on digital tools, but for the more advanced creator, something more hardcore may be needed. Something like cliché-verre.

Literally translating to ‘glass picture’, cliché-verre emerged in the 19th century as a technique where artists would draw directly onto glass or a similarly transparent surface, and then use this as a negative to produce a photographic print. It was a hybrid technique, a proto-Photoshop, allowing for image manipulation long before digital editing came into play.

Now, why should we care about this obscure art form today?

Firstly, cliché-verre challenges our conventional understanding of both painting and photography. At its heart, cliché-verre is about hybridization – the idea that innovation can stem from the fusion of distinct practices, which speaks to the importance of experimentation in art. Furthermore, cliché-verre reminds us that innovation is not always about the grand and the new. In our digital age, revisiting a technique that requires the artist to literally get their hands dirty can be both refreshing and enlightening.

It may be a forgotten technique, relegated to the footnotes of art history, but cliché-verre holds valuable lessons for the modern innovator. It's a reminder that creativity often lies at the crossroads of different mediums, that experimentation is key to artistic evolution, and that sometimes, the most innovative thing we can do is look back and rediscover the past. 🎨📷

On Chalk and Creativity

I was reading, as you do, Jessica Wynne's brilliant "Do Not Erase: Mathematicians and Their Chalkboards", and obviously started to think about chalk as a creativity tool. Chalk isn't much discussed these days, and tends to be seen as archaic, even limiting. Why would anyone use chalk and blackboards in an age with smart whiteboards and VR?

Well, for mathematicians, who are quite keen to work with the latest IT as well, there is nothing quite like chalk (and quite a few others agree). For others it may be a forgotten tool, but for a lot of people the only real way to work with or teach a theorem is using chalk. On a blackboard, it creates good, sharp contrast, in addition to being easy to erase. The tactility of chalk on blackboard makes at least some feel that they are more connected with the otherwise abstract work of maths, and there is of course that X factor – using a technology that generations have used before you, connecting your creative work to a tradition of thought.

No lesser thinker than Einstein has commented while lecturing: "This has been done elegantly by Minkowski; but chalk

is cheaper than grey matter, and we will do it as it comes.” Yes, to work with chalk is to bring a kind of manual labor into the realm of thought, so mathematicians have created quite a cult around chalk – the epitome being the devotion to the once-discontinued but now resurrected “Hagoromo Fulltouch”, which one user suggested might have angel tears as a secret ingredient.

What I like about it is that it shows my old adage for creative work: You do you. Don’t look for the latest tech, find the tools that work for you. If that’s something as old-school as chalk on a blackboard? You do you, you crazy (and slightly chalk-dusted) diamond. 🧑🏻📏📐

Forgotten Techniques: On Calligraphies Lost

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.”

— B.F. Skinner

Calligraphy, derived from the Greek words ‘kallos’ (beauty) and ‘graphein’ (to write), has been a revered art form in many a culture. While we often think of calligraphy in terms of familiar Western styles and their modern rendering as fonts, there are numerous obscure and nearly forgotten styles that once flourished in different parts of the world.

Consider the Visigothic script, a style that emerged in the Iberian Peninsula in the early medieval period. Characterized by angular and compact letterforms, this script was preferred for religious texts and official documents, reflecting the austere and solemn nature of the time. In contrast, the elegant and flowing lines of the Kufic script, one of the oldest of Arabic calligraphy, tell a different story. Originating in Kufa in present-day Iraq, Kufic calligraphy was used in early Quranic manuscripts, its

geometric precision and stately formality reflecting the importance of the written word in Islamic culture. Unlike later, more cursive Arabic scripts, Kufic's rigid structure made it ideal for monumental inscriptions and decorative purposes. The Siddham script of ancient India offers yet another fascinating example. Primarily used for writing Sanskrit and prominent in Buddhist texts, its intricate and ornamental style mirrored the spiritual and philosophical richness of Buddhism. Despite a decline in India, the script found a lasting legacy in e.g. Japan, where it is still used in certain esoteric Buddhist practices.

The way we write matters, as a beautiful script elevates a text and makes it matter (sic). I in an age where truth and text are both challenged, maybe a bit of lost calligraphy could bring some beauty back to writing. 

The Creativity of Nostalgia

Nostalgia, that sweet, sweet siren, serenading us with tales of yesteryear while we sip on our overpriced artisanal coffee. Easy to dismiss it as mere sentimental indulgence, nostalgia is not just for creating tear-jerking movie reboots or trying to recreate your grandma's secret recipes. Intelligently deployed, it can be a secret weapon in the innovation arsenal.

Take the vinyl record resurrection, the Polaroid camera comeback, or the retro video game renaissance. These aren't just the whims of hipsters; they are testaments to nostalgia's innovative might and the power that lies in things that just work. It's not about Xeroxing the past; it's about cherry-picking the *crème de la crème* of bygone days, adding a dash of modern mojo, and concocting something that aims for excellence over neophilia.

Plus, nostalgia isn't just a muse; it's a taskmaster. By shackling ourselves to the past, we can actually spur innovation. It's akin to a writing prompt or design challenge: the constraints ignite a creative conflagration.

So, before you pooh-pooh nostalgia as *passé*, consider its potential as an innovation dynamo. It's not about being stuck

in the past; it's about using the past as a trampoline to catapult into the future. So, go ahead, crank up that '90s mixtape, thumb through those dusty comic books, and let the warm embrace of nostalgia propel you into your next creative eureka moment. 📺



Forgotten Techniques: On Vanitas Painting

The 16th and 17th-century art form of Vanitas painting is today mostly forgotten and overlooked, to the point of being seen as frippery. That said, in a world grappling with a polycrisis — climate change, political upheaval, social inequality — this genre that speaks to the transience of life, might be poignant anew; a lens through which to view our existential dilemmas.

Vanitas paintings were still-life artworks, typical of the Dutch Golden Age, characterized by symbols of mortality: skulls, snuffed candles, decaying flowers, and clocks. These served as a *memento mori* — a reminder of the inevitability of death and the importance of living a meaningful life. In eras defined by the relentless pursuit of wealth, power, and pleasure, Vanitas paintings offer a sobering counter-narrative, and invites contemplation on the transient nature of human life and accomplishments. Here are question about decay and the end of things, where the stark, unadorned style of Vanitas strips away the distractions of opulence and superficiality, urging a focus on what endures beyond our short existence.

Thus a seemingly forgotten art form can hold profound relevance in today's polycrisis era. Maybe what we need right now is art in the Vanitas tradition, art that reminds of the fragility of life and nature, the manner in which time may well be running out. Whilst some would say that our age has enough gloomy, apocalyptic TV and books to last us more than a lifetime, the Vanitas paintings were more than entertainment – they were object to make you pause, objects of reflection, and a living reminder about time not being on our side. In our fast, wasteful age, something similar might be just what we need. 💀 ⌚

Debunking “Morning Pages”

Julia Cameron’s “The Artist’s Way” (1992) has for some become a key text in the world of creativity, promising to unlock an inner artist in us all through a series of exercises and practices. One of the most famous of these is the “morning pages” – the daily ritual of writing three pages of stream-of-consciousness prose first thing in the morning. Cameron claims that this practice is essential for clearing the mind, silencing the inner critic, and tapping into our creative reserves. A lot of people seem to get into it.

But here’s the thing: There’s nothing magical about “morning pages”, and they can be an utter waste of time. To start idea that we need to “clear the mind” before we can create is a myth. In fact, the very act of creation is what clears the mind. When we sit down to write, paint, or compose, we’re forced to confront the chaos of our thoughts and emotions and shape them into something tangible. Fetishes like morning pages can become a way of wallowing in our own clutter without doing anything about it.

Moreover, Cameron reinforces the dangerous notion that

creativity is some kind of mystical, unconscious process that we have no control over. But the truth is that creativity is a skill like any other, one that requires practice, discipline, and hard work. By fetishizing the idea of “inspiration” and “unlocking” our creativity, Cameron’s approach actually disempowers artists and makes them less likely to put in the effort to hone their craft.

That said, if morning pages are your thing, by all means do them. I am not here to kinkshame; in creativity, anything goes. But don’t feel you need to get into these kinds of exercises, and never let anyone tell you that you’re not a worthy creative because you don’t start your day with self-centered noodling. You do you, and let Cameron’s acolytes scribble on. ☀️ 📝

What 70s Satirical TV Can Teach Us About Creativity

The 1970s are seldom mentioned as a time of creative revolution, yet it was a time rife with socio-political churn and vibrant counter-cultures. We talk of our time as a golden age of TV, yet a case could be made that the 70s have more lessons to teach us, not least due to the way content took a sharp, yet delightful detour into the realms of satire and dark comedy.

Consider two glittering gems of that era: “MAS*H” and “Monty Python’s Flying Circus”. The former was a series rooted in the grim realities of war, yet managing to lace each episode with an undercurrent of sharp, biting satire that left viewers both entertained and contemplative. It was more than just a comedy series; it was a critical study of the human condition amidst chaos, presenting a rich tapestry of humor, tragedy, and biting commentary on the absurdities of war. It was a huge hit. Then, darting across the pond, we find ourselves amidst the surreal, bonkers world of Monty Python. A show that scoffed at the very notion of a coherent narrative, opting instead for a chaotic stream-of-consciousness kind of humor that still leaves

viewers in stitches, decades later. Monty Python taught us that sometimes, it's perfectly fine to throw logic out of the window and just revel in the absurdity of life. It has yet to find a parallel.

There's a common thread of creative audacity between these two behemoths of 70s TV. It was a time when creators weren't afraid to push boundaries, to be irreverent, and frankly, a bit mad. Narratives can be abandoned, carnage turned into comedy, even in the assumedly constricting age of the 70s. Looking back at what was possible then, what is stopping us now? 📺

On the Slow Magic of Dial-Up Internet and Patience in the Creative Process

“Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to relax and wait for the answer.”

– William S. Burroughs

For many of us, the nostalgic trill of a dial-up modem connecting to the internet is a distant echo, a relic from a bygone era. Before the age of lightning-fast broadband and instantaneous downloads, there was the symphonic screech of dial-up. Yet within that noise lay a lesson in patience, an attribute often overlooked in our fast-paced digital age.

Back in the heady days of the 90s, when flannel shirts were the rage and grunge ruled the airwaves, the internet was a budding entity, slowly stretching its tendrils. It wasn't the behemoth of information it is today, but a place of wonder, exploration, and yes, waiting. To download a simple image or a song could take an eternity (or what felt like it). Yet, this was where the magic lay. The slow pace of the early internet forced us to be more discerning, to prioritize, and to truly relish the content

when it finally loaded. Much like a sculptor carefully chipping away at a piece of marble, the creative process was methodical, deliberate, and filled with anticipation.

Today's creatives can extract a page from the dial-up playbook. In an era of immediacy, there's merit in slowing down, in marinating ideas, and allowing them to evolve organically. The early internet was not just about connecting computers but also about connecting people, ideas, and fostering a culture of patient exploration. In essence, the "dial-up days" serve as a gentle reminder that sometimes, the most profound creative insights don't emerge in the blink of an eye but simmer slowly in the cauldron of patience and persistence. After all, as any 90s netizen will attest, the sweetest victories often come after the longest waits.

5 Oddball Ways to Spark Team Creativity

Managers the world over fret about the creative potential of their teams. A creative team is more likely to be an efficient team, and a team that's both efficient and creative has the potential to innovate (as neither of the previous faculties are enough in and of themselves). No wonder, then, that managers are keen to find ways to stoke these creative fires. A problem, however, is that the advice regarding creativity is often... well, not very creative.

Brainstorms can turn into rather tedious exercises, and collage techniques like moodboarding work far better for some problems than for others. At other times, creativity advice can be quite correct without being the least bit practical. It is undoubtedly true that taking a trip to e.g. Tokyo can generate lots of ideas, but one doesn't always have time or resources enough for this. Bringing in new people with diverse backgrounds can also be great way to break out of a creative doldrums, but budgets are budgets...

So what's a manager to do, when the usual creativity tech-

niques mainly elicit yawns, and you are working with limited resources? Fret not, there are still things one can do as a manager to make your team think differently about creativity, but we have to get a little crafty. Often it is the case that in order to really jolt people's creativity, we have to try surprising, even counter-intuitive things – things that might not initially seem to be about creativity at all. Remember, the important thing is to get people thinking, and talking, and then thinking some more.

1. **Declare moratoriums and amnesties.** As strange as it sounds, one way to get people more creative is to tell them that they don't have to be. We often assume that creativity is all about pushing for the maximum number of ideas per day, but this can actually cause stress and fatigue. Instead, try declaring a creativity moratorium – a time during which it's OK not to bring up new ideas, or even forbidden to do so. It might be a week, it might be a month, but when it ends, people will tend to be gushing with ideas. A similar idea is an "idea amnesty" – a period during which it is stated that all presented ideas will be reviewed and receive adequate feedback.
2. **Insist on breaks and daydreams.** The most cost-efficient creativity technique in the world must be the nap. Research has shown time and again how important incubation – passive time for the brain to mull ideas – is for creativity, yet our organizations often look down upon such "laziness". Turn this around, and insist that people take breaks during which they can let their brain calm down. A long walk or a nap can do wonders to get the subconscious to work on an idea, and as people get more time to think, they can utilise parts of their brain that would otherwise remain

unengaged due to the everyday stress in the modern office.

3. **Get the quiet ones talking.** The most dangerous trap of all is to believe that all creativity resides in the people most likely to talk about their own ideas. Rather than trying to get even more ideas out of the people on your team who are already most likely to push for their's, try to engage the ones who tend to remain quiet. Often it turns out that they have a plethora of ideas, but that they've not felt encouraged to share them. Ensure psychological safety in your team by making sure everyone feels comfortable talking and sharing, and by not allowing anyone to unnecessarily dominate the conversation.
4. **Incentivize questioning and intelligent critique.** Creativity isn't just about creating ideas. In fact, in their first iteration, most ideas are still underdeveloped and weakly formed. Boost your teams creative competence by praising not just the people who throw out ideas, but also the ones who can develop them with smart, incisive questions. Productive critique and intelligent queries aren't the enemy of creativity, they are a necessary part of making ideas all that they can be. Praise the smartest questioners and idea-developers, just as you would the idea creators.
5. **Allow for silliness and stupidity.** There's no way to just have perfect, fully formed ideas. To get creative, you need to be able to try out ideas that seem silly, childish, even ridiculous. So don't make creativity into something too serious. Allow for playfulness, frivolity, and laughter. Lots of laughter. Laughing teams are creative teams.

Improve Your Creative Work By Improving Your Audience

There is an old and quite possibly fake anecdote about Oscar Wilde, according to which he after one of his plays had premiered stated: "The play was a great success, but the audience failed miserably!". This is often told so that we laugh at the haughtiness and ego of Wilde, who was no slouch in either department, but there is also wisdom to the anecdote.

Not all audiences will suit your creative idea or output. Some may fail in grasping it, others will react in unforeseen or even undesirable ways. This doesn't make them wrong, not really, but it shows that you need to work on your audiences as well.

All guides to creative work will remind you to think about your audience, but the usual advice is to just know who they are – i.e. you should think about whom you are creating for. What is often left unsaid is that you also need to cultivate your audience.

I know, the idea that you can just publish your creative work to the world, with no additional frills or extra ballyhoo, is an attractive one. We all wish our work is such that it can just be enjoyed, shared, and adored. The sad truth of creative work is

that the seeds (the work itself) isn't enough. We need to till the earth and make sure that the soil (the audience) is ready for it.

Want to get better at creative work? Work on your audience. Give them information about you, your work, your process, your thinking. Share notes, sketches, failed attempts. Communicate, enter dialogues. Show yourself. Do what you can to help your audience succeed.

Don't Try To Make Everyone Love Your Idea – On the Art of Moving On

One of the toughest things in creativity, ideation, and innovation is getting people to come onboard with your idea. Many are the tales of people who have seen their belief in their idea quashed simply because they have not been able to get enough support for it. However, people often misunderstand the process here.

You will never gain universal support for anything except the most mundane, anodyne idea. If your idea truly is novel and original, the normal response to it will be a mixture of ridicule, resistance, and rejection. A lot of people struggle with it, and spend an inordinate amount of time trying to beat back this kind of refusal – trying to convince the ones who cannot be convinced.

A key skill in making creative ideas come to life is persistence, but this needs to be tempered with the skill of moving on. You will never convince everyone, and you shouldn't try to. People tell you they don't believe the idea can work? Fine, move on. Your boss denying you the resources? Fine, move on. Friends insisting it will never work? Fine, move on.

Your work as a creative individual is not to prove to the world you are better than everyone else at bashing your head against a brick wall. Your work should focus on making the idea come to life, and part of that is picking your battles. Take a no as a no, and move on to the next person, the next possibility, the next path. Keep moving.

The Art of Radical Patience

We all know that patience is a virtue, but in business virtue seems to get forgotten at times. Much of what is said about business emphasizes the necessity of speed and change – at the cost of many other things, including virtues. In business, we’re told, you are not supposed to focus on patience, but instead in listening to the market, failing forward fast, cutting out everything that doesn’t pay its own way, and so on.

Imagine if we had done that for AI. Today, AI tools are everywhere, and ChatGPT is the talk of the town. What made all this possible was patience, radical patience. Arthur Samuel, who popularized the term “machine learning”, worked within IBM with these issues from 1949 onwards. In 1959, he wrote the The Samuel Checkers-playing Program for the IBM 701, pretty much the first self-learning program. Samuel left IBM in 1966, but IBM stuck with the idea. Decades later came the Watson.

What fascinates me with this is that IBM had the radical patience to support AI research for 70+ years (!), often through hard times. They could have cut funding, ditched AI altogether, but they didn’t. They had the guts to stick with it, and are to-

gether at the bleeding edge of an exploding field. An immediate success, 70+ years in the making.

Companies need more of this kind of radical patience. If they have it, innovation will take care of itself.

Slow and Steady Wins the... Creative Race?

In today's world, where even our coffee is instant and our messages are abbreviated to mere emojis, there's a growing (and rather rebellious) trend: the slow creative movement. That's right, bitches. Slow down, take a breather, and maybe – just maybe – your masterpiece will thank you for it. Here's why:

Remember when we actually enjoyed our coffee rather than inhaling it? Well, your ideas also prefer to be sipped, not gulped. Let them simmer, stew, and then brew to perfection.

Would you rather have a closet full of hasty sketches or a gallery of thoughtful masterpieces? Being prolific is great, but imagine the bragging rights when each piece is a winner!

Speeding through creativity is a surefire ticket to Burnoutsville. Take the scenic route instead. Breathe. Admire the view. Heck, stop for a picnic.

Rushing often means skipping the crucial “learning from our blunders” step. When we take our sweet time, every little hiccup becomes a goldmine of knowledge.

Slowing down means you can flirt with the finer details. Wink

at those nuances, twirl with intricacies, and, who knows, maybe even waltz with hidden meanings.

So, the next time you're tempted to speed through creativity, remember: great art, like fine wine and revenge plots, takes time. Slow down and let your work blossom at its own elegant and leisurely pace. 🐢🌀

On the Psycho-Geography of Creativity

When delving into psycho-geography, we obviously need to tip our hat to the avant-garde writings of Guy Debord and the Situationist International. They saw the urban landscape not as mere infrastructure but as a canvas of emotions, dreams, and memories. It's all very charming – wandering through cities, allowing their emotional topographies to guide one's drift. However, let's not romanticize it too much. For every Debord, there's someone lost, looking for a coffee shop.

Yet, there's an undeniable allure. Writers like Iain Sinclair took this concept to the streets of London, finding narratives in every overlooked alley and forgotten byway. Sinclair didn't just walk; he delved into the city's subconscious, illustrating how geography influences our internal landscapes.

If we're channel surfing through the pop culture annals, the concept even finds echoes in the feverish scrawlings of Jack Kerouac, whose road trips were as much about internal discovery as they were about the American landscape.

Creativity, then, isn't merely a product of introspection. Our surroundings, whether the chaotic streets of Paris or the

desolate beauty of a desert, play a starring role. They're not passive backdrops but active participants, mingling with our thoughts and shaping our ideas.

In conclusion, to truly embrace creativity, one might just need a good pair of shoes and an even better sense of irony. After all, as Debord might say, sometimes you need to get lost to find yourself. Or at least, find a decent café.

Innovation Lessons From the Grindhouse

Imagine sauntering into the dingy, neon-lit halls of a 1970s grindhouse cinema, the unassuming epicenter of raw and audacious innovation. Grindhouses, as they were called after the relentless “grinding” schedule of back-to-back film showings, flaunted narratives that were not just pushing boundaries but gleefully leapfrogging over them.

In these lowly venues, pioneers like Russ Meyer and Herschell Gordon Lewis were not just creating films; they were forging revolutions wrapped in celluloid. Take Meyer’s “Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!” for instance. On the surface, it was a cult classic peppered with violence and vixens, but dig a little deeper, and you find a masterclass in brazen creativity, where boundaries were seen more as a playful challenge than an actual barrier. Then, there was the gloriously gory “Blood Feast” by Gordon Lewis. A cinematic venture that didn’t just toe the line but rather sprinted past it with gleeful abandon, ushering audiences into a realm where the shocking and the captivating held a mesmerizing waltz.

So, what pearls of wisdom can the modern creator extract from the murky depths of grindhouse cinema? Firstly, it's the audacious refusal to conform, a nudge to today's innovators to eschew the beaten path and craft narratives that truly push envelopes, or better yet, rip them to shreds. Secondly, it embodies a fierce sense of independence, a call to create unabashedly, without bowing to the mainstream norms that often stifle true creativity. Let's salute the grindhouse legacy, an enduring reminder that sometimes, to truly innovate, you need to get a little gritty.

The Creative Power of Cafés, on TV and in the Real World

Television – our generation’s omnipresent oracle, a fount of life’s quirks, spilling the beans on more than just “Friends” squabbles and “Twin Peaks” mysteries. It provides a surreptitious guide on the caffeinated havens of creativity: the café. Now, before you roll your eyes and murmur, “Not another Central Perk reference,” hear me out.

Reflect on the ambient backdrop of countless TV shows, from the ‘90s to the millennial reboot frenzy. These coffee-fueled cocoons, whether it’s Luke’s Diner from “Gilmore Girls” or the hipster-esque “Portlandia” locales, serve a purpose beyond java. They’re the quiet observers of narrative evolution, bustling with dynamic exchanges and brooding monologues.

Now, here’s the kicker. These venues are depicted as the nucleus of innovation because they encapsulate a perfect blend (pun intended) of solitude and community. Picture Don Draper from “Mad Men” – a lone wolf, yet surrounded by chatter, soaking up fragments of conversations, transforming them into advertising gold. The café’s ambient noise isn’t a distraction;

it's an orchestra of raw, unscripted human emotion.

Plus, the casual eavesdropping (come on, we all do it) might be the source of your next big idea. Think of it as your “Breaking Bad” moment, where an overheard snippet transforms into a saga of epic proportions.

In essence, the TV-endorsed café is more than a set piece. It's a testament to the places that foster our creativity, nurturing ideas with every brewed cup, one episodic moment at a time.

Extreme Creativity: On Proletkult

When people think back to the Soviet Union, their first thought is rarely that of a prospering and free cultural scene. Whilst institutions such as the Bolshoi ballet are respected to this day, our image of culture in Soviet times is very much that of state-controlled propaganda, with some classical touches. Things could however have been quite different, had Proletkult (from “proletarskaya kultura”) been allowed to flourish.

The Proletkult movement emerged in the chaos of Russia’s 1917 October Revolution. Visionaries such as the philosopher Alexander Bogdanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky wanted not just an economic and political revolution, but a cultural one that would bring about a distinctly proletarian culture. It rose to a cultural juggernaut at astonishing speed, boasting hundreds of thousands of members by 1920. Proletkult established a vast network of studios, theaters, and literary circles, giving workers unprecedented access to artistic creation, and created ambitious projects like the 1920 mass spectacle “The Storming of the Winter Palace”. The movement’s ethos was revolutionary: reject bourgeois culture, celebrate industrial themes, embrace

collective creativity, and integrate art with labor. Despite this (or maybe due to its success) Proletkult would soon be over. Lenin himself dealt a blow in 1920, publicly criticizing the movement's autonomy and ideological influence, and the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 cut funding for experiments such as Proletkult. By 1923, it was absorbed into the state cultural apparatus.

There are several things to note here. One, culture can be a mighty power in a revolution. Two, even a movement with hundreds of thousands of people can falter, if support is taken away. Three, real creativity creates enemies and instills fear. Proletkult was too creative for its own good. 🗣️ 🖐️

On the Process of Mies van der Rohe

“The future has a way of arriving unannounced.” — George Will

Mies van der Rohe, a beacon in the realm of modern architecture, was a maestro of melding functionality with a minimalist aesthetic, knowing exactly how to distill architecture down to its very essence.

Let's start with the iconic Barcelona Pavilion, a veritable ode to modernism. Its open plan and extensive use of glass and steel were nothing short of revolutionary at the time, teaching us a crucial lesson in fearlessness and experimentation in the face of the conventional. The sheer genius of merging indoor and outdoor spaces showed a deep, future-oriented understanding of harmony and spatial fluidity.

Then there's the Farnsworth House, a radiant example of minimalism married to functionality. Here, Mies demonstrated that true creativity sometimes involves stripping things down to their bare essence, yet without losing an ounce of aesthetic allure or functional purpose.

Not to be left behind, the Seagram Building stands tall as a

testament to Mies's visionary approach to skyscraper design. With its glass and bronze façade, it introduced the world to the concept of a building that could almost blend into the sky, setting a standard for future skyscrapers and urging creators to reach for the stars, both metaphorically and literally.

Considering Mies van der Rohe's process, he invites us to a deeper exploration of creativity, one where innovation meets simplicity, challenging creators to follow new technological paths and redefine the boundaries of the possible. His work stands as a reminder that the true genius often resides in the subtle interplay of form and function, continually urging us to seek the extraordinary within the ordinary. 🏢

On Taking Creativity Lessons From Spycraft

“The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you.”

— B.B. King

Bookstores are great places to notice what the young ones tend to call a “vibe” and what previous generations called the *Zeitgeist*. On a recent stop at a major bookstore, what struck me was the number of new non-fiction books that in one way or another connected to intelligence work. In thrillers this would not have been noteworthy, but books like “Counter-Intelligence” by Robert Hannigan and “How Spies Think” by David Omand aim to do something else. They aim to teach us new, creative ways of thinking by taking lessons from the world of secrets and spies, dead drops and debriefings. Why this? Why now?

On one level, none of this should surprise us. We live in a world that seems strange and shadowy, topsy-turvy, like the agreed-upon rules of society are being eroded. Getting an upper hand, even an underhanded one, would seem to be of considerable

interest to people in such a situation. Add to this that we live in the world where we've been inundated with tales of spycraft and derring-do, from James Bond to "Slow Horses". When fiction and reality seem to converge, reading up on the rules of the game could be seen as a rational reaction. That said, the current interest in intelligence work and learning from the same could be seen as an acceleration – a paranoid response in an age that needs less shadows, not more. Sure, this seen as harmless fun, boyhood fantasies turned into business books, but their subtexts seems to suggest something different. I have always been a proponent for learning from anyone or anything, but just like one doesn't become an artist when learning from artists, learning from spies does not make your business into a cloak and dagger game. ♣♂ ♣

Inventing Burnout

Today, burnout is seen as something nigh-on self-evident, a malady that seems so connected with modern life that it is something akin to a pathological universal. Yet the specific concept/diagnosis is surprisingly modern, younger than email (and yours truly). Sure, there had been other terms – the medieval ‘acedia’, ‘neurasthenia’ (1869), and ‘Erschöpfungs-depression’ (1957) – but burnout was called out as late as 1974. OK, in fiction we have the novel *A Burnt-Out Case* by Graham Greene from 1961, which describes a work-fatigued architect, but it didn’t catch on.

The modern, popular term – burnout (originally written burn-out) – was coined by psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in his 1974 article in *Journal of Social Issues*, to describe the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in “helping” professions. Doctors, nurses, and social workers, passionate about making a difference, found themselves exhausted and unable to cope. This was not just tiredness; it was a loss of motivation and drive, a sense of disillusionment and failure. This narrative was expanded upon by Christina Maslach in

the late 1970s and early 1980s, who developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a tool for assessing the syndrome. Maslach identified three key components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (or cynicism), and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment.

In other words, here was a malady that first had to be invented, then refined, and which after this went on to conquer the world. As strange as it sounds, burnout was an innovation, if a dark and malevolent one. Here's hoping that tomorrow's working life doesn't create the need for more such conceptual innovations – and that we can spend more time defeating burnout than defining it. 📖

On Dealing With Resistance and Adversity in Creative Work

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

— Maya Angelou

Consider George Orwell. Most famous for novels like “1984” and “Animal Farm”, books many of us read in school, his diaries reveal a picture of his creative process that belies the ease of his language. Orwell describes writing as a grueling task, referring to it as a “horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness”. Or look to Igor Stravinsky, discussing the work on composing. He at times compared this to having a job at the factory, and stated “I have never understood a single word about inspiration. When I am working, I am my own master; inspiration is a guest who does not willingly visit the lazy.”.

We are often told that creative work demands passion, inspiration, all kinds of dopamine highs. What studying creative work will teach you is something quite different. Sure, passion can get you started, and inspiration is a lovely thing. Becoming a true

creative, however, takes committing to a practice, turning up to the work even after the passion has waned and the giddy sense of possibility has dissipated. You have to do the work, even as challenges pile up.

In the world of visual arts, Chuck Close provides another example. Known for his large-scale portraits, he puts it quite succinctly: “Inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just show up and get to work.”. He also has more challenges than most – he is partially paralyzed, and has had to commit to adapting his techniques in order to create his art. Passion alone doesn’t get you there. Working through adversity does.

Who is a creative? The person who does the creative work despite the resistance, prepared for the “horrible, exhausting struggle”. 🧐📦

The Lindy Effect and Creative Work

You may never have heard of the Lindy Effect, coined by Albert Goldman in 1964, but you sure have experienced it. Named after Lindy's delicatessen in New York, a place where comedians gathered, the Lindy Effect posits that the future lifespan of some non-perishable things (like a technology or an idea) is proportional to their current age. Or to put it more succinctly, the older something is, the longer it might stick around.

Now, whisking this concept into the realm of creativity and innovation, it encourages a grand departure from the contemporary obsession with newness for the sake of novelty. In the relentless pursuit of the 'next big thing', we might be overlooking the evergreens, the potential classics, and that which might be lurking in the corners of bygone eras. Further, in our desire to create the new, we may overlook the power in creating something with staying power – powered by the Lindy Effect.

Imagine the fecund grounds of inspiration one can find by delving deep into time-honoured philosophies, art forms, or narratives. We can glean from the unyielding appeal of vinyl

records in a digital age, a kind of authenticity and charm that keeps aficionados hooked. Similarly, films and novels that have withstood the test of time continue to impart wisdom, not to mention inspiration.

Thus, fellow creatives, isn't it high time we flipped the script, took off those futuristic goggles, and peeked into the delightful annals of time. Because if the Lindy Effect holds any truth, the retro could indeed be the new revolutionary frontier in creative work. It's a tango with time, where the past and the present meet in a delightful dance of continuity and rediscovery. Also, wouldn't you rather create an evergreen than another flash in the pan?

On Creativity and Paying It Forward

In the grand tapestry of innovation and creativity, there lies a delicate yet fundamentally vital thread: the practice of paying it forward. This practice serves as a fulcrum, where knowledge, mentorship, and mutual inspiration find their harmonious meeting point, fostering environments ripe for groundbreaking ideas and collaborative strides.

If we truly care about creativity, it becomes somewhat of a duty, an almost sacred responsibility, to nurture and perpetuate this cycle of generosity. It's a commitment to not merely absorb the profound and the brilliant that the world has to offer but also to contribute actively to this ever-enriching milieu.

The first step towards this is fostering a genuine appreciation for the creative efforts of others, be it through acknowledging their contributions, or by fostering a culture where ideas are freely shared and celebrated. Moreover, in the pursuit of innovation, embracing the willingness to share your insights, experiences, and perhaps even your failures, can be incredibly enriching.

Yet, while we navigate these deep waters, it doesn't hurt to

retain a hint of levity, a subtle nod to the quirky and the eccentric, a gentle reminder that at the heart of creativity lies the joyous celebration of the human spirit, in all its vibrant hues.

Therefore, as we forge ahead in this grand journey, let us do so with a spirit of generosity and collaboration, understanding that in the rich ecosystem of creativity, every contribution counts, fostering a future that is not only innovative but also inclusively brilliant.

II

Creative Writing

I'm a writer (yeah, shocking, I know...), so obviously writing interests me a whole lot. Particularly the oddity of it, the strange quirks, the little rituals, the ways in which authors, paraphrasing Red Smith, open their veins and bleed onto the page. So here some remarks on writing and writers, the tools and the toil.

The Myth of the Myths of X

One of the lazier forms of nonfiction writing I know is the “myths of...” article or, Hitchens forbid, book. In such writing, one postulates a number of ideas as being deeply held by a lot of people, often without any real evidence to back this up, and then one goes about disproving the very same. Now, I had to take a breather and think whether I’ve ever done that and, you know, I might have. I’ve written a lot, and I think I have matured as well. Still, just because a younger me might have sinned...

What irks me in this is that it is all so contrived. You set up a statement, let us for the sake of exemplification say one about leadership, and then act all sanctimonious as you rail against how stupid the strawman you just set up is. For instance, you might claim that: “The worst myth in leadership is that of the Great Man, that only special people can become leaders.”. Now, there have been Great Man theories about leadership, and traces of them survive. We like stories about the good and the great, those who have already proven themselves on the stage of history. We might even agree when someone says “I think Lincoln/MLKjr/Churchill/Thatcher was a great leader.” –

depending of course on our preference and take on these. Does that mean that we are in the grips of the Great Man myth?

Our assumed mythbuster would state we are, but this is because that's the assumption they need to make. The fact that most people are more than able to both admire great people and realize that leadership can be achieved in other, more modest ways, makes for more complicated writing. Establishing myths only to demolish them can seem clever, but in reality it is just an intellectual parlor trick, and what are called myths are often heuristics – useful tools for thinking, but we tend to be more than our heuristics. Accepting this would however make writing harder... 🐉 🦋 🧩

Reading “The Raw Shark Texts” As A Creativity Manual

“Be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work.”

— Gustave Flaubert

In the labyrinth of literature that toys with form and function, “The Raw Shark Texts” by Steven Hall stands as a beacon of bizarre brilliance, a veritable creativity manual for the adventurous mind.

First off, let’s address the elephant (or should I say shark?) in the room: the title. “The Raw Shark Texts.” It’s a linguistic play, a homophonic twist on ‘Rorschach tests,’ and that’s just the hors d’oeuvre in this feast of creativity. The novel itself is an uncharted sea of conceptual thought, blending elements of psychological thriller, love story, and metaphysical exploration. The story follows the protagonist, Eric Sanderson, who wakes up with no memory and discovers he is being pursued by a conceptual shark, the Ludovician. Yes, literally – a shark that swims not in water, but in the seas of human thought. If that’s

not a metaphor for the lurking dangers of the creative process, I don't know what is.

But “The Raw Shark Texts” isn't just a wild narrative ride; it's a masterclass in creative presentation. The text itself becomes a visual landscape. Words and letters scatter across pages, mimicking the movement of sharks through water. Some pages must be flipped and mirrored to reveal hidden messages, turning readers into active participants in the narrative.

In reading “The Raw Shark Texts,” one embarks on a journey through the depths of creative possibility. It's a testament to the wild, untamed nature of innovation and a call to explore the vast, uncharted waters of our imagination. It will mess with your mind, in the best possible way. 💡 🐋

How Choosing a Favorite Pen Can Change Your Creative Life

“When I write, I feel like an armless, legless man with a crayon in his mouth.”

— Kurt Vonnegut

Ah, pens! The unsung heroes of creation. Now, I’m not going to bore you with tales of how Hemingway’s pencil changed literature. No, instead, let’s talk about how the seemingly inconsequential act of selecting a favorite pen and its profound implications for the creative psyche.

At a glance, one might dismiss the act of choosing a favorite pen as pure affectation. “A pen? Is this just a hipster ode to Moleskines and artisanal coffee?” But bear with me. This isn’t about stationery snobbery or some pseudo-romantic vision of writing. It’s about ritual and commitment.

Much like Quentin Tarantino’s obsession with vintage film reels or David Lynch’s love for a particular brand of coffee, the ritualistic act of picking a pen (or any tool of choice) is a tangible manifestation of an intangible process. It’s not about the pen,

per se, but about what it represents: a dedication to one's craft, a decision to prioritize quality over convenience, and a connection to the tactile nature of creation. It's about grounding oneself in the tangible amidst the fleeting.

When you select that one pen, you're not just choosing an instrument; you're building a relationship. This relationship symbolizes a commitment to your craft and establishes a pattern of consistency. Each time you pick up that favorite pen, you're subconsciously reinforcing your dedication to the creative process.

So, scoff if you must. But remember: In the vast universe of creation, even the tiniest ritual, like selecting a pen, can become a beacon guiding you through the mires of mediocrity. Go on, make your mark. ✍️ 🖋️ ❤️

On Robert Caro's Writing Odyssey

In 1976, Robert Caro started work on a biography of Lyndon B. Johnson. It was originally planned as a trilogy, but has since been extended to an as of yet unfinished five-volume work entitled *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. The first of the four published volumes came out in 1982, followed by additional volumes in 1990, 2002, and 2012. The fifth and final volume is still being written, and Caro has declared he intends to finish the series but that the final volume may take several more years to finish. The published works are already more than 3000 pages long, and Caro has indicated that the final volume will add a considerable amount of pages to the total. In other words, Robert Caro has worked for 44 years on one massive writing project, one likely to span more than 4000 pages, and he is hoping to finish this in a little less than half a century. Maybe.

In other words, Caro has engaged in what might best be described as an odyssey in creative work. The sheer scale of Caro's multi-decade project provides us with great inspiration when it comes to the virtues of patience, thoroughness, and dedication to a story. His commitment to thoroughness is

nothing short of legendary. He relocated to Texas to better understand Johnson's roots, and he is known to comb through vast archives, interview countless sources, and revisits the same material repeatedly to ensure accuracy and completeness. This kind of arguably old-school way to writing a true magnum opus should be a rich source of inspiration for anyone involved in creative work. Through Caro's example, we learn that the most impactful creative works often come from those who are willing to take their time, go slow, and dig deep. Understanding creative work needs to encompass these kinds of odysseys as well, sometimes over the quick fixes that dominate contemporary creativity. ⌚📖

Learning Tight Writing From the “The Old Man and the Sea”

“There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.”

– Ernest Hemingway

To a lot of people, Ernest Hemingway is a problematic writer. He was not necessarily a nice man, and his macho swagger rubs a lot of people the wrong way these days. That said, the man could write. Not to everyone’s liking, but if you want to tighten up your writing, few things are more helpful than re-reading his novella “The Old Man and the Sea”.

The minimalism at play here is sometimes called “the iceberg theory”, so that what is shown is only a small part of a much greater, invisible whole. Where other authors bury us with background information and character development, Hemingway cuts the story down to the bone. For instance, the old man Santiago’s past is barely touched upon. We learn little about his life before becoming a fisherman or his relationship with the boy Manolin beyond their current interactions. The novella’s central

conflict – Santiago’s epic struggle with the marlin – is described economically, without internal monologues or minutiae about fishing. Even the setting is minimally described. There is no historical contextualization, no long passages about the nature of the island or the architecture of the fishing village. The outside world is not touched upon, not do we get an expose of Cuban culture. Hemingway could have included all this, but he chose to stick to an old man, the sea, and trying to catch a marlin. A less mature writer might not have dared keeping things this tight, but Hemingway knew that he had to take that chance – and gave us a masterpiece.

So, to make writing leaner, re-read “The Old Man and the Sea”. Notice what is not there, how not describing things becomes more evocative than another paragraph on the details of a fishing rod. Cut, and cut again. ☞

The First Stroke, Be It Key- or Brush-

“You can always edit a bad page. You can’t edit a blank page.”

— Jodi Picoult

The first stroke is a declaration of war against the blank space, a ritual defilement of sterile purity, a mark made upon the world. To make such a mark it is to assert one’s presence, establishing a creative act. At the same time, the first stroke is also an admission of imperfection, for to begin is to accept that what follows may fall short of our inner vision.

The psychological implications of this moment are vast and varied. For some, the first stroke is a release, a joyous liberation of pent-up ideas clamoring for expression. For others, it is a leap of faith, fraught with anxiety and the fear of failure. The weight of expectation can turn this initial act into a Herculean task, where the artist battles not just with the medium but with their own inner demons of doubt and perfectionism.

Historically, many artists and writers have spoken of this moment with a mix of reverence and dread. Hemingway famously advised to “write the truest sentence that you know,”

suggesting that the act of beginning was in finding a truth to tether oneself to. Picasso, on the other hand, saw the canvas as an arena in which to fight, and the first stroke as the commencement of battle. Some creatives ritualize the process, surrounding the first stroke with a series of actions meant to ease them into the creative state. Others approach it with a kind of ritualistic spontaneity, believing that overthinking it paralyzes creativity. What is important is getting to it, that setup of things that enables this first defilement, this first mark on what used to be pristine.

Regardless how you do it, make sure you make your first stroke. Stop testing keyboards, or buying more paint. Just get to your page or your canvas, and make your first stroke matter.  

Crafting Sentences: On Flaubert

When we discuss the craft of writing, there is a tendency to go to the moderns – the sparse style of Hemingway, the controlled mania of Kerouac, even the honest artisanship of Stephen King. We often subconsciously connect the craft of writing to writers who both represented and wrote about the working classes, whereas the often aristocratic sensibilities of e.g. the Romantics seems to speak about something else than craft. What is forgotten in this clumsy juxtaposition is the birth of literary realism, and the craft that can be found in e.g. the writings of Gustave Flaubert.

For here was writing that was less about the flow of creative inspiration and more about relentless revision and refinement. He famously toiled over “*Madame Bovary*”, seeking the perfect *le mot juste* – the exact, most appropriate word. His obsession with this ideal led him to spend hours, days, even weeks, laboring over a single sentence, dissecting and reconstructing it until it met his exacting standards. This intense process of ‘sentence surgery’ was not merely about finding the right word, but also about rhythm, sound, and the interplay of sentences

within a paragraph. Flaubert read his sentences aloud, listening to their music, adjusting the cadence, looking for writing as melody. This meticulousness was both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it resulted in some of the most beautifully crafted prose in literary history. On the other hand, it caused Flaubert immense frustration and anxiety.

Such is the curse of the writer. We are always looking for the perfect sentence, and can labor obsessively over a single one. Yet we are very rarely happy with them, and always want to return for just one more adjustment, just one more attempt at finding the very best word... 🙌

Agatha Christie – Righteous Surfer Chick?

When we think of Agatha Christie today, we often think of an older woman, dressed in the conservative fashions of her era, indoors with her typewriter. In other words, we think of her as something quite like her famous creation, Miss Marple. It might thus surprise you to know that the doyenne of detective fiction was not only a pioneering author but also an early adopter of the surfing lifestyle, hangin' ten in far-flung locations.

Christie's surfing adventures began in the 1922, during a round-the-world trip with her first husband, Archibald Christie. Their journey took them to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii, and it was in the first of these where surfing was introduced to Christie (at Muizenberg Beach, no less). It was however in Hawaii, a hub for surfing culture, where Agatha and Archie truly embraced the sport. Surfing in the early 20th century was not the global phenomenon it is today, making Christie's embrace of it all the more remarkable. She was fully into it as well, learning to stand up on the board and ride – a radical feat for a British woman of her time.

Her own reflections on surfing are documented in her autobiography, where she described the thrill of catching a wave and the challenge of standing up on the board. Christie's enthusiasm for surfing is palpable in her writings, where she recounts the exhilarating experience of being carried towards the shore at speed, something she likened to flying.

This should remind us of two things. One, being a writer doesn't necessarily turn you into a nerdy dork. Writers have always explored and experimented, be it running with the bulls or shreddin' the waves. Two, don't judge a book – or the author that penned it – by its cover. 🧠 🏄♀

Why Your Creative Block Might Be a Creative Boon

“Writing about a writer’s block is better than not writing at all.”
– Charles Bukowski

Ah, the dreaded creative block: that gnawing void where once was a fountain of brilliant ideas. Most of us treat it like an uninvited guest crashing our artistic soirée. But what if I told you that not unlike a kale smoothie, it can actually be good for you? Hold on, let me explain.

Think of a creative block as the universe’s way of saying, “Put down the brush, pen, or spatula (whatever your tool of choice) and take five already.” Remember that exotic vacation you’ve been daydreaming of? Well, this isn’t it. But it’s a forced, albeit brief, vacation for your overworked brain cells.

A block is like spring cleaning for your mind. It’s the universe’s nifty little vacuum cleaner, ensuring that the cobwebs of stale ideas are sucked away. When you finally return, you’ll find a pristine space ready for fresh thoughts. Persevere, and you can come back from a block as a stronger, more resilient you.

Remember, every great artist has their share of “blocked” anecdotes. How would you ever bond with fellow creatives over drinks if you didn’t have your own tales of wrestling the beast of barrenness?

So, next time your creative river feels more like a trickling stream, just remember: this too is a phase of the creative process. Embrace your block like an old frenemy. After all, behind every masterpiece, there’s a hidden story of a mischievous creative block laughing in the shadows.

Quirky Writing: On Truman Capote Lying Down

“Finishing a book is just like you took a child out in the back yard and shot it.”

– Truman Capote

I’ve been watching “Feud: Capote vs. The Swans”, and as a result thinking a lot about Truman as a writer. There is much in him that interests me, not least the way he becomes such a tragic figure, but I also appreciate his highly odd way of writing. Where most authors write in a seated position, and some, including Hemingway, standing up, only a very few ever mastered the art of writing whilst lying down.

Capote’s choice to write in repose was not merely a matter of comfort; he claimed it was a deliberate part of a creative methodology. He stated in interviews that he could only think clearly when lying down, with a coffee or a cigarette in hand. This prone position, often accompanied by a drink and soft music, was where Capote summoned his words. This preference breaks from the traditional image of the writer at a desk, and

seems to have facilitated a different mode of thinking. It's as if this horizontal state allowed him to blur the lines between wakefulness and dreaming..

The physicality of Capote's writing process is a testament to the varied ways in which writers access their inner worlds. His horizontal posture can be seen as a physical manifestation of his narrative style—intimate, detailed, and immersive. It might also have been a way to seek refuge. There was always something childlike about Capote, and maybe lying down was a way to stay the child, enveloped in a sofa, telling tales.

The lesson we can take from this is that there is no lesson. I can't write lying down, so I shouldn't. If you can, fine, go right ahead. Truman did, and although some think he didn't live his full potential as a writer, he did better than most. And did it lying down, with a drink in his hand. 🍷

Quirky Writing: On Wolfe's Refrigerator

Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938) might today be best known as an influence on people like Kerouac and Roth, but in his day he was a giant of American letters. Part of the Southern Renaissance, he wrote four novels (among them the magisterial *Look Homeward, Angel*) and what might be described as a barrage of shorter works, and as he died quite young, we don't even know what kind of writer he might have matured into. For all this, I'm most fascinated by the fact that he wrote some of his great works standing, using his refrigerator (!) as an improvised desk.

Wolfe was tall for his time, at almost 2 meters in height, or what the Danes I live amongst would consider "normal for a man". He found most desks and their attendant chairs uncomfortable, forcing him to stoop and causing discomfort in his neck and back. He would, in all likelihood, have agreed with that great quip of Morton Feldman: "For years I said if I could only find a comfortable chair I would rival Mozart." We do not know the exact day of his desk epiphany, but it turns out that Wolfe one day discovered that due to his height and the relative stubbornness of his refrigerator, the top of the former

was at a perfect height for him to use as a standing desk. He eschewed using a typewriter, preferring to write in longhand, which probably had something to do with it – much of *Look Homeward, Angel* was written in ledger books.

Does this mean that we should all copy Wolfe? No. I couldn't reach the top of my refrigerator if I wanted to – it's built into the wall. Instead, it goes to show that writers need to find what works for them, no matter how quirky. Creativity will find a way, and you can find your desk. 

The Creative Sound of Silence

Silence is becoming a rare thing indeed in our age of streaming everywhere and everything, with all of us having access to all music at all times, where we assume that each public and private space should have a soundtrack of sorts, an aural backdrop. This might mean that we are not drawing the creative power we can from the blessed absence of sound.

Often mistaken for emptiness or nothingness, silence holds within it the power to be the canvas of the mind, offering a space where ideas can gestate and take form. In this realm of quietude, the mind is freed from the relentless barrage of external stimuli, and it is in these moments of stillness that the whisper of the muse is most audible, guiding the hand of the artist, the pen of the writer, and the thought of the thinker.

The scientific community has shown the benefits of silence on the brain, linking it to enhanced cognitive abilities, such as improved memory and attention. Studies have shown that in periods of silence, the brain is anything but idle; it is organizing itself, engaging in a process known as the default mode network, where self-reflection, creativity, and problem-solving occur.

This neurological evidence supports the intuitive understanding many have of silence as a fertile ground for innovation.

Yet, embracing silence in a world that equates noise with productivity and presence is an act of rebellion. It requires one to reject the constant demand for attention and engagement and to find value in withdrawal and introspection. This is not to say that creativity cannot thrive amidst chaos or that silence is the only path to creative enlightenment. Rather, it acknowledges silence as a powerful tool in the creative arsenal, a means of accessing deeper levels of thought and expression. ☯ 🦋

Quirky Writing: On the Punctiliousness of James Joyce

Creativity is often portrayed as connected to flights of fancy, messy desks, and a general tendency for a happy-go-lucky attitude towards the little things – the image of artist as spontaneous and unfussy. Yet some of our greatest artists and writers have in fact been quite punctilious and precise, and perhaps none as much as James Joyce. This literary titan, the author of “Ulysses” and “Finnegans Wake,” is a figure synonymous with modernist innovation and at the same time an almost fanatical attention to detail.

Joyce’s approach to writing was laborious, to say the very least. He would spend hours, sometimes days, perfecting a single sentence. He famously lamented: “I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence. You can see for yourself how many different ways they might be arranged.” We’ve all been there, J... This pursuit of perfection strove to capture the essence of human experience, warts and all. His magnum opus, “Ulysses,” can be read as the epitome of this. Its many techniques, such as the famous stream-of-

consciousness bits, with intricate layers of internal monologue and external description, required a precision that bordered on the obsessive. Joyce's passion for authenticity led him to undertake exhaustive, extraordinary research. For instance, while writing the "Wandering Rocks" chapter, it is said that Joyce mapped out the streets of Dublin, timing the movements of his characters to the exact second to ensure their paths would realistically intersect.

Some aren't ready for all this, but for Joyce, punctiliousness was the way to realize a creative vision, and also part of why we still read him today. Sometimes, creativity lies in the details, and an attention to them. 🧐

On the Imagination of Edgar Allan Poe

I have, like so many others, recently binged on the brilliant Netflix series “The Fall of the House of Usher”, and as a result, thought a lot about the imaginative genius of Edgar Allan Poe. Sure, he basically invented the detective story and wrote the most famous poem about a bird ever, but it is the way he approached creativity and his dark imagination that interests me here.

Poe was not unlike the Tim Burton of his day, delighting in the macabre and the gothic, yet what is often forgotten is that he did it all with a twinkle in his eye. His tales are filled with madmen, murderers, and the occasional talking raven, but they are also filled with a quirky sense of humor, giving his insights into the human condition a nice twist. Poe understood that at our core, we are all driven by our darkest fears and desires, he wasn’t afraid to explore those shadows, but he could also see the dark comedy in this.

A key thing here is Poe’s commitment to the craft. Often portrayed as a wastrel and a drinker (which he was), he was also a stickler for structure, meticulously planning his tales for

emotional impact and quirky wit. His sense of rhythm can, as it does in “The Raven”, simultaneously invoke a creepy sensibility and a giddy kind of joy. Never a word awry.

In essence, Poe was both artisan and master innovator, playing not only with our emotions but with both content and form. Gothic yet funny, playing with the supernatural yet a staunch scientist at heart (read the brilliant “The Reason for the Darkness of the Night: Edgar Allan Poe and the Forging of American Science” and you’ll see what I mean), he truly contained a multitude of imagination. Here on All Hallows’ Eve, this toast is to you, Mr. Poe. 🍷🖤💀

Quirky Writing: On Dickens and His “Night Walks”

They don't make them like Charles Dickens anymore. A writer of uncommon talent and prodigious output, he also had the charming oddities of a Victorian gentleman, and the two aspects often strengthened each other. One of his more charming habits was his love of long, nightly walks through the labyrinthine streets of London.

In “Night Walks,” an essay penned by Dickens, he reflects on his nocturnal wanderings, describing the experience of walking through a sleeping London as akin to exploring a city of the dead, a ghostly parallel world where he could meditate on life, death, and the human condition. It offers a poignant glimpse into the mind of the author, revealing how these nightly excursions were a source of inspiration and introspection.

London, in Dickens' time, was a city of stark contrasts: a burgeoning metropolis at the heart of an empire, yet riddled with pockets of profound poverty and decay. Dickens saw it all during his walks, often extending to 20+ miles and lasting into the wee hours. Plagued by insomnia and, at times, overwhelmed

by publication pressures, the night offered him solace and the space to unravel the complex narrative knots in his works.

Authors can learn much from this. Walks such as these can underscore a fascinating interplay between artist and environment, illustrating how a city's geography and its denizens can shape a narrative vision. We may not be able to walk in Victorian London, but we too can let ourselves meander through the geographies we occupy, replenishing our ideas but also giving us time to just think. We can't be Dickens, but we too can take some night walks, enjoy perambulations for literary inspiration, let ourselves and our minds wander. Instead of just do it, sometimes you need to just walk. 🚶🏻

On Samuel Beckett

“The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you.”

- David Foster Wallace

Consider Samuel Beckett, Irish playwright, Nobelist, recluse, best known for the existentialist masterpiece “Waiting for Godot” – now, here’s a man who knew a thing or two about creativity.

Beckett’s work is a masterclass in minimalism and absurdity, a stark reminder that creativity isn’t all about sunshine, rainbows, and unicorns. No, it’s often about grappling with the darker, murkier aspects of existence, about finding beauty and meaning in the seemingly mundane and nonsensical. Yet we shouldn’t get too gloomy here. There’s a valuable lesson to be learned from Beckett’s approach to creative work. In the face of despair, rejection, and the inherent absurdity of life, Beckett’s response was simple: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

Now, isn’t that a mantra we could all use in our creative endeavors? Beckett understood that creativity isn’t about achieving perfection or even success. It’s about the process, the struggle, the relentless pursuit of something new and

meaningful. It's about daring to fail, and then having the audacity to pick yourself up and try again.

So, next time you're staring at a blank page or a daunting project, remember Beckett's words. Embrace the struggle, accept the possibility of failure, and keep pushing forward. After all, creativity isn't a destination; it's a journey, complete with twists, turns, and the occasional existential crisis.

In words, truth we seek,
Fail, then rise, Beckett's mystique,
Creativity's peak.

Quirky Writing: On Agatha Christie Shaking Her Booty

“Idleness is not just a vacation, an indulgence, or a vice; it is as indispensable to the brain as vitamin D is to the body.”

– Tim Kreider

Authors often have quirky little routines or idiosyncrasies, yet at the same time we tend to romanticize great authors and have difficulties imagining them being silly in connection with their writing. As a case in point, consider Agatha Christie. Sure, some might challenge whether she really is a “great” author, but I would contend that her standing as the eternal queen of mystery counts as greatness, and I think few people have even considered her dancing around as she wrote – a real quirk of writing!

As weird as it sounds, whenever she found herself at a narrative crossroads or struggling with a particularly stubborn plot twist, Christie would turn to music and dance. In her autobiography, she noted that dancing allowed her thoughts to move freely, helping her to work through plot complications and devise cunning resolutions for her characters’ dilemmas.

In other words, she recognized that intellectual labor was not solely confined to the desk or the pen but could be facilitated by physical movement. Creativity, rather than being something done by a static writer hunched up over a desk, has an embodied nature, and Agatha Christie shaking her thigh as she tried to figure out what Hercule Poirot would do next is an image that should bring joy to any writer.

We sometimes urge people to dance as if no-one's watching, and Christie absolutely did (it seems she primarily boogied down in the solitude of her study). Now, you don't need to dance to write better, but there is still a lesson here. If dancing gets you into your creative groove, dance. If you prefer a brisk walk, walk. Whatever works for you, but get your body involved in your creative work – as so many great writers have. 

The World's Pithiest Writing Course

“You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.”

— Ray Bradbury

1. Write drunk, edit sober.
2. Don't get it right, get it written.
3. Plumbers don't get 'plumber's block'.
4. Deal with this: “A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.” — Thomas Mann
5. Revel in this: “I hate writing, I love having written.” — Dorothy Parker

The Craft of David Foster Wallace

“There are two types of people in this world: Those who think there are two types of people in this world and those who are smart enough to know better.”

Despite the later allegations, I have always admired the writings of David Foster Wallace, and the way he approached the craft of writing with an almost ascetic discipline. His toolkit was somewhat traditional but wielded with exceptional skill and precision. He preferred basic word processors and manual notebooks, but the simplicity of his tools belied the complexity of his work. His was meticulous and methodical; did copious research, produced detailed outlines, created piles of exhaustive notes.

Wallace's process seems akin to architectural engineering, constructing intricate frameworks before fleshing them out with his vocabulary and observations on human nature and society. We know that the timing of Wallace's writing routine varied over the years, influenced by teaching commitments and battles with depression. However, he was known for his preference for

long, uninterrupted stretches of writing time, often working late into the night or starting in the early morning, seeking the quiet solitude necessary for his intense concentration.

A significant aspect of Wallace's work process was his voracious reading, which fueled his ideas and informed his writing. His reading list was eclectic and wide-ranging, including everything from classic literature to theoretical texts, from philosophy to pop culture. This extensive intake of information was not merely for enjoyment but served as a critical component of his writing process.

Yes, he could be a bit of a prick, and some of his writing is affected and over-wrought. Still, when he was at his best – when he put the work in – he was pretty damn fantastic. Just goes to show that writing too requires more than genius, it requires craft and the desire to commit to it. 📖

Running & Writing: On Murakami

Having dealt with knee issues for about a year now, I miss running. In fact, I mostly miss walking without pain and with two functioning knees, but it would be lovely to be able to run as well. So, I am not entirely sure what to think about Haruki Murakami, and his insistence on running as the writer's habit. The much-loved Japanese novelist is well known for his surreal, enigmatic narratives, but also for his disciplined writing habits. Key among these and his daily routine is a commitment to running, a practice that he credits with significantly enhancing his creativity and productivity.

Murakami's running routine isn't casual but a rigorous regimen. According to what we know, he always wakes up early and, after a few hours of writing, hits the road. His typical run covers ten kilometers, and he participates in at least one marathon every year. Murakami often describes running as a form of moving meditation, where the rhythmic, repetitive motion allows his mind to drift, free from the immediate pressures of writing. His memoir, "What I Talk About When I Talk About Running," explores the parallels between running and writing,

and shows how the landscapes he traverses on his runs often find their way into his novels.

It goes to show that there is no clear demarcation line between the physical and the intellectual. Writing is embodied work, always already afflicted by the corporeal. For someone like Bukowski it was all about punishing the body, with booze and hangovers, and dealing with bodily phenomena and their mental effects. For Murakami, it is more about what happens when you push the body into a new space, and how the mind follows, in a manifold of ways. Slow running might create fast writing, or vice versa, and each author needs to find their pace, their rhythm, their embodied movements. So keep running, Haruki, and write on. 🏃📖

On the Mythology of Coffee Shop Creativity

There's a peculiar myth in the modern creative lore: the coffee shop as a crucible of creativity. This belief holds that amidst the clatter of cups and the hiss of espresso machines, great ideas are born. It's as if caffeine vapors in the air are a substitute for divine inspiration.

Consider the coffee shop regulars. There's always someone gazing pensively out of the window, laptop open but untouched. They're not lost in thought; they're wondering if they should've ordered the almond croissant instead.

Then, there's the group of 'creatives' huddled around a tiny table. Their conversation, supposedly about groundbreaking ideas, often veers into a heated debate over the merits of oat milk versus almond milk. Revolutionary.

Let's not forget the lone writer, tapping away furiously. They could be penning the next great novel. Or perhaps they're just leaving scathing reviews of coffee shops. Including this one.

Coffee shops are also the unofficial office of freelancers. The air is thick with ambition and the faint hope that someone,

anyone, will ask, “So, what do you do?” It’s networking disguised as caffeine dependency.

Of course, there’s always that one individual, headphones in, who actually seems to be getting work done. They are the unicorns of the coffee shop world, as elusive as a decaf drinker in a line of espresso enthusiasts.

The irony is that despite the noise, the distractions, and the often-overpriced coffee, we keep flocking to these urban oases. They promise a creative utopia but often deliver little more than a caffeine buzz and an urgent need to find a power outlet.

In the end, the greatest creation of the coffee shop might just be the carefully curated image of being a place of creativity. Because, honestly, the most creative thing about most coffee shop denizens is their ability to invent new coffee orders.

So, the next time you find yourself in a coffee shop, laptop open, ready to unleash your creativity, remember: the real muse might just be the barista getting your name wrong on the cup. “For Albert, the Great Innovator!”

On Bukowski as a Creativity Guru

Charles Bukowski, the grizzled, unapologetic poet of the down-trodden, a creativity guru? Now, there's a thought to make the self-help industry shudder in its overpriced boots. The idea of Bukowski – stumblin' out of the gutter, with a face like it had gone ten rounds with life itself and lost – heralded as a guru of creativity is as delightfully absurd as it is oddly fitting.

First, let's consider the current landscape of "creativity gurus". They're often the type to meditate thrice daily and preach creativity from minimalist, Feng Shui-d rooms. They'll sell you a 10-step webinar series on unlocking your inner artist for the low, low price of your soul and savings. Imagine Bukowski stumbling into this world, cigarette and bottle in hand.

Bukowski, a guru? He'd have snorted at the term. Yet in his raw, unvarnished prose and poetry, he captures an essence of a creativity that is seldom spoken of: the gritty, relentless pursuit of expression despite life's gut punches. Bukowski didn't wait for inspiration to strike; he wrestled it into submission in smoky rooms and on stained napkins.

What lessons can the anti-guru Bukowski teach us about

creativity? First, forget the muse; creativity is a stubborn weed that will grow anywhere. Second, embrace the flawed. Bukowski never shied away from the ugliness of life or of himself. Creativity isn't about perfection; it's about honesty, about showing the scars and telling the stories that others shy away from. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Bukowski's life teaches us that creativity isn't the preserve of the enlightened few.

So here's to Bukowski, the anti-guru guru of creativity. May we all have the courage to create with half his honesty, a quarter of his resilience, and a fraction of his disregard for what creativity should look like. 🍷 ✍️ 📖

Late-Night Writing: Method or Madness?

Some write by night, and there's something to the image of an author hard at work as the world sleeps that seems both romantic and cool. As a result many have explored the notion of night-owl writing. But does it help?

First, consider the solitude that night inherently provides. Unlike the cacophony of the day, with its myriad interruptions—calls, emails, the incessant buzz of social interaction—the night offers a sanctuary of silence. For many creatives, this absence of distraction is crucial. Here, one can argue, the mind is allowed to wander more freely, to explore ideas without the subconscious tug of pending responsibilities. Silence, too, plays its part. In the quiet of the night, thoughts that are too shy to surface amidst the din of daily life can make themselves heard. It's not just the absence of sound but the presence of a contemplative space that allows for deeper thought. For some, the night acts as a blank canvas, devoid of the sensory overload that daylight brings. Then there's the psychological aspect. At night, when we're supposed to rest and reset, choosing instead to engage

in creative work can feel like an act of rebellion, a breaking of chains. This alone can be invigorating, lending an edge to the creative process. The rules are different at night; time bends.

Of course, this nocturnal creativity routine isn't without its drawbacks. The disruption of sleep patterns, the potential for social isolation, and the sheer challenge of staying awake are significant considerations. To some this brings extra creativity, in lucid dreamlike states, whereas it is crippling for others. So writers, experiment! The only way to learn is by trying; stopping if it doesn't work, leaning in if it does. The night awaits! 🌙📖

Want to Become More Creative? Grab a Pencil!

Drawing by hand – it’s like the vinyl of the visual world. While digital methods might offer the slick convenience of an auto-tuned pop track, there’s nothing quite like the raw, tactile pleasure of pen (or pencil) meeting paper. It’s the difference between the slick pop of a chart-topper and the gritty authenticity of an old blues record played in a smoky basement.

Let’s take a moment to geek out over comics, shall we? The legendary Jack Kirby didn’t need an iPad to birth galaxies. His cosmic dreams flowed from hand to paper, making Thor’s Mjölnir swing with a visceral energy that can still send chills down your spine. And don’t get me started on Bill Watterson’s “Calvin and Hobbes.” Every stroke of his pen encapsulated childhood’s whimsy and wonder. It’s like capturing the essence of a Beatles song in visual form – timeless, evocative, and oh-so-genuine.

Drawing by hand is rebellious. It’s the punk rock of the art world. In a digitized era where CTRL+Z can erase mistakes, embracing the imperfections of manual drawing is an act of

defiance. It's about embracing the "B-sides" and "deep tracks" of our abilities, where every smudge, every imperfection is a testament to our unique human touch.

In essence, hand drawing is a joyous return to our roots, a tactile connection to our own creative souls. So, next time you doodle, remember: you're not just sketching; you're jamming to your own, analog tune. Sharpen your Blackwing (google it) and let your creativity soar. ➡

Creativity and Cthulhu: At the Mountains of Inspiration

Ah, the Cthulhu Mythos, that bundle of sunshine and rainbows from the mind of H.P. Lovecraft. Who wouldn't be inspired by a universe of malevolent cosmic entities, sanity-shattering horrors, and ever-present dread? Yet, beneath the layers of madness and tentacles there are some surprising morsels of creative wisdom to be gleaned.

The Cthulhu Mythos is a crash course in world-building. Lovecraft didn't just toss a tentacled monster into the mix; he whipped up a cosmos complete with a dysfunctional family tree, historical shenanigans, and house rules. A not-so-gentle nudge that creativity isn't just about birthing cool ideas; it's about weaving a narrative tapestry that makes those ideas come alive, dance, and maybe devour a few unsuspecting souls.

Secondly, the Mythos is a living, breathing testament to the joys of collaboration. While Lovecraft was the mastermind, other writers, artists, and even filmmakers have waltzed into the Mythos, adding their own plot twists and interpretive jigs. It's creativity as a pack mentality!

Lastly, the Mythos slaps us in the face with the cold, wet fish of originality. Lovecraft sidestepped well-trodden paths of horror and blazed a trail into the realm of the cosmic, a genre he pretty much pulled out of a hat. A stark reminder that creativity blossoms when we thumb our noses at the status quo and venture into the wild, weird unknown.

So, while the Cthulhu Mythos might seem like an oddball choice for creative inspiration, it's a stark reminder that creativity can lurk in the most unlikely, eldritch of places. ✍️ 🌑

On Writing “In Drag”

George Sand, born in 1804 as Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, was one of the most prolific writers of the nineteenth century, known not only for her rich catalogue of literary works but also for her defiance of societal norms. By adopting the male pseudonym “George Sand,” she did more than merely mask her identity; she engaged in a complex form of performance that allowed her to navigate the literary world in ways that were otherwise closed to women of her time. In our times, when drag has become a flashpoint in the culture wars, she is an interesting counterpoint for discussing the benefits of gendered play when writing, “in textual drag”.

George Sand’s adoption of a male persona can be read as an emancipatory act, on several levels. By presenting as male, Sand was not only able to publish more freely but also to critique the social and gender inequalities of her era without scrutiny or bias she would otherwise have encountered. From a literary perspective, Sand’s masculine alias allowed for explorations of characters and scenarios that extended beyond what was associated with her gender. This arguably enriched the nar-

rative, providing readers with a more complex, less predictable experience and set of affects.

Writing "in drag" can thus be both a political tool and a creative one. It becomes a kind of "writing out of place", and can create effects both subtle and strange. There are potential problems here, for some will not look kindly upon e.g. a cisgender white man writing as anything but precisely that, but in our unpublished works we can be freer, richer, more experimental. Authorial shifts can open up new creative avenues, and help us break with our previous writerly selves. Oh, and George Sand didn't just get away with it, she became a star "in drag", inspiring male and female writers alike. Just goes to show what a performance gender is...   

III

On Innovation, Design, and the Arts

I am, by profession, an innovation researcher, and further work with design and product development (by any other name). No wonder, then, that some of my little mini-essays dealt with innovation, both historically and in today's organizations, as well as the art of creating beautiful things – both for use and to look at. Or, in some cases, even to look through! You know like a kaleidoscope or something...

What Can Pop Culture Teach Us About Innovation?

Popular culture – we all love it, no matter how much some of us try to hide it. It speaks to something deep down inside of us, and nourishes us with its recognizable story-lines, entertaining twists, and pleasing acts of closure. We may not all enjoy the same genres, but we all have our own guilty pleasures. These might be action B-movies, sappy romance novels, or comic books, but for each of us there is some pop culture that amuses and amazes us. At the same time, pop culture has always been seen as a bit tawdry, something more suitable for lesser minds.

In the field of innovation, this has meant that there is no shortage of books about learning innovation secrets from great men (and yes, it's always men who are referenced), and some works that emphasize the value of the fine arts for innovation, but little in the way of true engagement with the lessons pop culture can teach us. Now, this could of course be done in several ways.

The usual way would be to look to a popular culture hero (Batman! Always Batman...) and then spin some innovation

secrets out of this. My interest here, however, is more about the general category of pop culture. What might this teach a manager keen to innovate more and better? Well, here are a few pointers:

Nothing beats a good story

Innovation is invention plus a narrative. Without a good story – told through language, function, or design – an invention will not be adopted in a way that would make it meaningful to call it an innovation. Pop culture gets it, and makes sure the story moves ahead briskly. For innovators, remember that the novelty is not enough, you need to create a context and an engaging way to use it. Be it freedom, convenience, or status, your users need a story.

The classics are classics for a reason

The reason we keep returning to the story of Robin Hood is not because there aren't other good stories, but because there's an enduring value in a classic. In a similar way, innovations can go much further if they stick to classic values – design, usability, time saved. Having a functional but weird product won't save you if your competition launches a recognizable classic.

Don't overcomplicate things

One of the characteristics of pop culture is that it doesn't overcomplicate things. There are good guys and bad guys, and a special object to pursue. There might be a twist in the tale, but frankly, it's optional. The same goes for innovation. Keep

things as simple as possible, keep the user experience as easy and pleasant as possible, and don't confuse the user unless absolutely necessary.

The villain is the most important character

Heroes, by and large, are boring. Villains are innately interesting. Great pop culture has a clear villain in mind, for what would Batman be without his enemies? For an innovation, the enemies are more abstract, but should be communicated just as clearly. Is it high prices? Hard-to-use technology? Unethical practices? Show us the villain, and see the value of your innovation soar.

The execution, not the idea

Many of the greatest stories in popular culture are at heart similar, even identical. A boy (or a girl) sets out on an adventure. Someone's parents or partner (or dog) gets killed, cue bloody revenge. These can then be executed beautifully (John Wick) or abysmally (about 90% of action movies). For innovators, it is important to note that ideas are plentiful, but masters are those who can take a basic and undeveloped idea, and make a masterpiece.

The Polka Dot's Persistent Pop

Right now, the world is clearly besotted with the enchanting patterns of Yayoi Kusama, a contemporary Japanese artist known for her immersive infinity rooms and seemingly omnipresent polka dots. But why do Kusama's dots entrance us, and what can we learn from the broader, seemingly perennial appeal of the polka dot?

From Kusama's mirrored art installations to Marilyn Monroe's iconic polka-dotted bikini, dots have danced their way across both art and fashion stages. Beyond the aesthetic, the psychological allure of the polka dot is evident. Its repeating pattern offers a comforting rhythm, but its inherent playfulness shuns monotony. This duality provides a master lesson in achieving the delicate balance between familiarity and excitement.

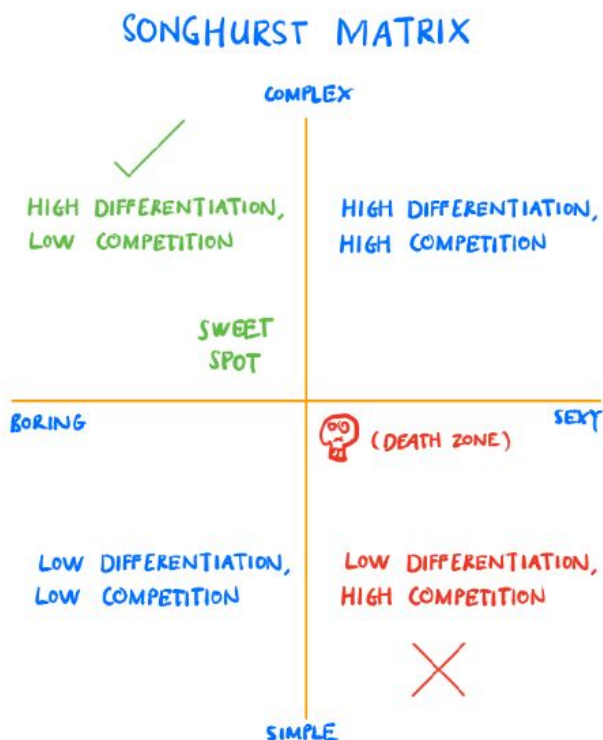
In the business realm, especially in innovation, the polka dot's lesson is evident – we need to be able to continuously balance the surprising with the easy-to-recognize, the challenging with the comfortable. The versatility of polka dots, seamlessly moving from high-art exhibitions to everyday street fashion, exemplifies the power of adaptability. It's a testament to

evolving with the times while holding onto an unmistakable essence.

So, while the art world celebrates Kusama's genius, fashion and innovators alike can take a page out of the polka dot playbook. In an ever-changing landscape, there's something reassuring about the staying power of style and substance, punctuated perfectly by the dot. ●👉

Songhurst's Boring-Sexy Matrix

I'm confounded I've never come across this before. It's from someone called Charlie Songhurst, and it is a far better strategy matrix than those from BCG or ol' man Porter. It's not rocket science, but a lot of boards and startups I've worked with haven't internalized it's message. In brief, it is better to do complex and boring stuff than it is to do simple and sexy such – at least if you want to make money.



You can make a buck doing boring and simple stuff, but not much more. Simple and sexy stuff is a nightmare – look at all the copycat AI-wrapper companies out there. Sure, Apple has made insane bank out of the sexy and complex, but you're probably not them. So go for the boring and complex, for that is where untapped value is at. I know, sounds... dull, but no-one promised you a rose garden.

On Brutalism as an Innovation – an Appreciation

Whilst I know many have problems with it, I am an unabashed fan of brutalist architecture. I find this often misunderstood style far more aesthetic and warm than its detractors do, and the manner in which it has turned into an invective is nigh on criminal. Far from being cold and oppressive, brutalist buildings can be intimate, intricate, and downright beautiful.

Brutalism, a term derived from the French “béton brut” or raw concrete, emerged in the mid-20th century as a reaction to the sleek and sterile structures that dominated the architectural landscape at the time. This style is characterized by its use of raw, exposed concrete and a strong, blocky aesthetic. Its proponents saw brutalism as a way to strip away unnecessary ornamentation and create buildings that were honest, straightforward, and deeply human.

Brutalist architecture plays with size, with function, with tactility. It is, at heart, a playful style, aiming to surprise yet also create structures for living and loving. A brutalist building has a sense of weight and groundedness that can be

deeply comforting, and the use of concrete, with its natural imperfections and rough texture can make a house feel real in a way that glass and steel skyscrapers simply cannot match.

Brutalism is more than just a style of architecture; it is a testament to the power of creativity and structure. It challenges us to look beyond the surface, to see the beauty in the raw, the unfinished, and the imperfect. It is a style that deserves to be celebrated, not condemned, and I for one will continue to champion its virtues. ■

Hiring for Innovation – Paradoxes and Possibilities

“At the age of 6 I wanted to be a cook. At 7 I wanted to be Napoleon. And my ambition has been growing steadily ever since.” – Salvador Dalí

What does it take to build an innovative workplace? More specifically, what does one need to keep in mind when hiring for creativity and innovation? For many companies, these are important questions, as an increasingly complex business environment dictates that an organizations needs to be able to change and adapt with the times. Innovation, both as an output and as a mindset, are by many seen as a necessity for an organization that wishes to succeed and grow.

No wonder, then, that many organizations hope to be able to hire for innovativeness. The notion of being able to kickstart innovation with one or a few key hires is an attractive one, and resonates well with many an executive. That said, this is far easier in theory than it is in practice. This comes as no surprise to me, as my research on innovation and creative cultures shows

that developing this is more complex than many realize. I've thus here tried to compile some lessons – not without paradoxes, mind you – about what one needs to consider when recruiting with creative cultures in mind.

One size does not fit all

The first thing to realize is that hiring for innovation is not the same as hiring 'innovators'. Many organizations already have enough ideas-people, and to enable innovation require people who can critique and develop ideas. The key job of the recruiter should be to spot what elements are missing in the company's current creative culture, and to hire for this. If possible, insist on auditing the innovation culture, to avoid costly mistakes.

Hire for mis-fit

Is there a more insidious idea in the world that hiring for cultural fit? When it comes to innovation, such thinking can easily lead to tepid and unchallenging approaches, as people aren't challenged enough by their peers. Smart hiring for innovation and creativity adds just enough misfits to ensure that the organization has a degree of creative friction. Not too many, not too few, introducing some weirdness and oddity to an otherwise 'safe' organization.

Consider the chronotypes of innovation

We all know about morning- vs. evening-people. Interestingly, something similar exists in the world of innovation. Some individuals work best with quick, agile innovation projects,

whereas others have a mindset that make them best suited for longer, more complex ones.

When recruiting for innovation, consider what kind of innovation tempos the organization currently lacks or need strengthening. Sometimes slow and steady wins the innovation race, and sometimes an organization requires faster, twitchier energies.

Inject vitamin A(mbition)

Sometimes there's nothing wrong with either the creative culture or a company's innovation management, and what's missing is simply a mindset that goes beyond copycat innovation. To enrich innovation, make sure to hire people for whom innovation is meaningful, not just a mandated management exercise. Attempt to find people who wish to use innovation to achieve great things, as their enthusiasm and ambition is sure to catch on.

On the Toynebee Tiles

Nobody knows where they come from, nor what they mean. Are they urban art, or the obsession of a person with mental health issues? There are several hundred of them, embedded into the asphalt of about two dozen US cities, and several in South America as well. They all carry a message:

TOYNEBEE IDEA

IN MOVIE '2001

RESURRECT DEAD

ON PLANET JUPITER

Some people love them as outsider art. Others see them as a mystery to unravel. Who would dedicate themselves to such strange art, without ever claiming authorship? Goes to show, creativity is a mysterious power, and can drive people to do wondrous things.

The Creativity in Luxury

“There’s a rule they don’t teach you at the Harvard Business School. It is, if anything is worth doing, it’s worth doing to excess.” – Edwin Land

I’ve often commented on our tendency to diminish creativity by only associating it with the pleasant, the proper and the unproblematic. One part of all this, one I’ve rarely addressed although I’m fascinated by it, is the issue of luxury. Whilst many who champion creativity would agree with the fact that it is luxurious, most would still insist that it’s a necessity more than anything else.

Further, creativity is often connected to things that elevate us as human beings, and luxury doesn’t always seem to fit in to this narrative. Luxury is excess and frivolity, and regardless of whether we’re consciously aware of this or not, we often try to think of creativity as something more morally upstanding than ‘mere’ frippery.

That said, thinking about luxury and excess can be wonderful ways to spark creativity. Consider the OneBlade Genesis. It’s

just a razor. However, it's a razor that is precision-milled, uses "Japanese Feather" blades, is individually numbered and has a warranty that extends beyond your lifetime. It costs 350 USD (the collector's edition BlackBlade sets you back 2500 bucks), and the blades cost over a dollar each, if slightly less with a subscription. I also kinda want one.

Now, you might say that the OneBlade is less a creative razor and more a sign that our consumerist society has gone completely off the rails. I would personally shy away from calling it an innovation, no matter how opulent a shave you can get from it. That said, it is an interesting experiment in excess, and as such can be very educational. It forces one to think about what a razor really is, and how a razor can be more razor-y.

Often, if you're asked to think creatively around a problem, a good way to break through a rut might be to ask yourself "What might be the absolutely most excessive, luxurious, over-the-top version of this?" It might not immediately lead you to a good idea, but it might tweak your thinking. By not merely looking at functionality, but elevated such, new lines of thinking can emerge.

So, learn to luxe! It just might make you more creative.

Spite House Sagas: Architecture as Revenge

The “spite house” – an architectural phenomenon where edifices are erected not for the comfort or utility they offer their inhabitants, but rather as a colossal, livable middle finger to a neighbor, relative, or city ordinance. These are the built environs of pettiness and vengeance.

Take, for instance, the skinny spite house in Alexandria, Virginia. At a mere seven feet wide, it’s an architectural rebuke, built in 1830 to keep loiterers out of the adjacent alley. Then there’s the legendary Alameda Spite House in California, a narrow dwelling said to be constructed by a man irked by his brother who built a large house on a shared lot, leaving him only a sliver of land. The result? A house 54 feet long and only 10 feet wide, a livable “up yours” to sibling rivalry.

New York’s most famous spite house was a mere five feet wide and 104 feet long, built by a landowner who was furious when a neighbor lowballed him for the plot. He constructed the house in 1882 to spoil the neighbor’s view and airflow – and one imagines, to sully his spirits.

These homes are more than mere places of residence; they are the bricks and mortar equivalent of a grudge. But as spiteful as their origins may be, these houses are now beloved historical curiosities, celebrated for their quirkiness and their testament to the enduring pettiness of the human spirit. Spite houses remind us that the human will to get one over on someone else can outlast the flesh itself, becoming a stone-and-mortar monument to that most childish of urges – the desire to have the last word, architecturally speaking. 🏠👉

Three Ways Managers Can Make Innovation Meaningful (Again)

Exemplify and de-dramatize.

A key issue when innovation is starting to be perceived as a meaningless business buzzword is that employees no longer know what is meant by it. If managers speak about innovation in only broad, abstract ways, it follows that employees will see it as a term with no concrete content.

Good leaders make innovation meaningful by picking simple, easy to grasp examples that feel achievable, to make innovation something more tangible in their organizations. A central element here is to de-dramatize it all. If innovation is only connected to industry heroics and massive successes such as those of Apple and Netflix, you risk to make it all seem unattainable. Look instead for less radical yet uplifting stories, to create a more approachable innovation narrative.

Refocus on purpose.

If the company's actions indicate that it is only interested in innovation for innovation's sake, this is highly likely to increase innovation fatigue.

Leaders would do well to clearly communicate that innovation is something the company engages with to fulfill a greater purpose – be it the eradication of illness, supporting a specific group or community, or to drive the greater purpose of the company. By linking innovation to a purpose, employees are more likely to see how their engagement with the concept holds a greater meaning.

Allow for reflection.

The very best innovation leaders do not treat innovation as a given, but engage their people in deep conversations about it all – the why, how, where, and what of innovation. By listening to their employees and the take on innovation that they have, without prejudice or judgement, a leader can find a number of ways in which otherwise engaged innovators have let stress and innovation fatigue take over.

It isn't enough just to badger people into giving their all (particularly if it is unclear what this "all" is), so sometimes doing innovation work means asking pointed questions about what it is all about. Sometimes an organization needs radical questioning before a new innovation mindset can be built.

Tactile, Textural Toys: On Slime, Sand, and the Squishy

For someone like me, who spends altogether too much time reading toy catalogues and observing children's play habits (and no, I will not tolerate your gutter minds turning that into anything untoward), there is something that has become ever clearer as a trend, if a somewhat recycled one: The emergence of tactile, textural toys.

Slime has been with us for a while – it was introduced in 1976 (I was four, and my parents would not have been the kind to pay good money for something that silly). This delightful mix of polysaccharide guar gum and sodium tetraborate became a slow-burn hit, gaining and losing popularity as new generations of children get to the age where textural play excites them. That said, slime had something else going for it: Gen X and millennials. As the YouTube-monster demanded more and more content, people started making things like videos of homebrew slime, extolling the joys of goo – and the aural entertainment to be had from it. Call it ASMR in the key of flatulence.

Other textural trends followed. Squishies were the more

contained brethren of slime, but children loved the tactile joys of mutating goo. Kinetic sand allowed for a drier, more controlled experience with novel textures, this time with an architectural bent. Still, slime never went away, for there was always a joy in playing around with what Mary Douglas would have called “matter out of place”, particularly as this matter was very easy to put back in its place.

Blake stated that “The child is the father of the man”, and maybe this obsession with texture points to a new age of haptics. Go goo!

On Creative Frugality in Cinema

Having watched another boring, big-budget epic, and followed that by seeing a far more interesting low-budget movie, I think back to the power of creative frugality, and the lessons we refuse to learn from this. Take, for instance, Kevin Smith's classic "Clerks". Reportedly produced on a budget of less than 30,000 USD, the film was set exclusively in a convenience store, using black and white to save on costs. The result? A film that resonated with an entire generation and launched a career.

Or consider Robert Rodriguez's "El Mariachi". Made for the ridiculous sum of 7,000 USD, Rodriguez took DIY to the next level, handling editing, producing, and even sound effects. Every cent was stretched, every shot carefully planned, and the result was a film that feels a hundred times its cost – and was followed by a bigger budget remake.

Today, companies like Blumhouse are becoming major studios simply by following this recipe: Sometimes small is beautiful. Horror doesn't need a massive budget, it needs a good idea, a sense of unease, and smart use of resources.

So, what's the lesson here? Creativity is often at its best when

resources are limited. Constraints, whether in budget, location, or equipment, aren't just obstacles; they are catalysts that force us to think differently, innovate, and maximize potential. As creatives in any field, let's not bemoan limitations, but embrace them. Because, sometimes, a little frugality can lead to a lot of genius.

Beenz & Flooz – the Original “Cryptos”

As bitcoin – wasteful, speculative bitcoin – is once again very, very frothy, it might be a good time to think back to the early days of the net and attempts to create a digital currency for the same. It was a wild time, and here we can find some of the wildest of the bunch.

Beenz, launched in 1998, was the brainchild of Charles Cohen, a man so ahead of his time that he might as well have been trying to sell smartphones in the Stone Age. Beenz were earned by users for performing online activities like visiting websites or completing surveys and could be spent on a range of goods and services online. Flooz, on the other hand, entered the scene in 1999, riding on the charisma of Whoopi Goldberg as its spokesperson. Conceived by Robert Levitan, Flooz took a slightly different tack by positioning itself as digital gift certificates rather than a pseudo-currency. Users could buy Flooz and spend it at participating online retailers, theoretically simplifying the online shopping experience.

The fall of Beenz and Flooz is often chalked up to the dot-com bubble's bursting, but there was more to it – it's one thing to

introduce a revolutionary concept; it's another to do so in a way that resonates with both merchants and consumers. Yet, the legacy of Beenz and Flooz is not just one of failure. They were precursors to the digital financial innovations we see today, from cryptocurrencies to ubiquitous mobile payment systems and loyalty points. In a sense, Beenz and Flooz were digital explorers, charting unknown territories that others would settle.

There is one more point that still bears keeping in mind, namely the silliness of it all. Why'd you want to switch your money to “beenz”, even if they sounded cool? Well, a lot of people are today doing just that... 

Should You Take a Job at a Startup?

I was recently asked to comment on whether one should accept a job-offer from a startup if one was happy working at ones current job, and if yes, why? Now, I am not a startup entrepreneur, but I have worked with enough such to give at least my view on this matter. Succinctly put, there are three reasons to take on a job at an existing startup: Experience, engagement, and equity. I'll explain:

Working at a startup can be a valuable **experience**, and one that looks really good on a CV. It will show you all the things that goes into innovating, and you can pick up skill-sets you might never hear of in a corporate job. Also, a startup job can be a great way to get the next great job, as many companies appreciate what you'll learn at a startup.

A startup job can be very **engaging**. You will not be bound by the same kind of hierarchies that exist in corporations, and can often design your own job. The degrees of freedom are often greater, and although it isn't all a dance on roses, a lot of people enjoy startup life because you feel more like your own boss.

Let's not be coy, there is also the chance of **equity** (or options).

Being an early employee at a fast-growing startup can set you up for life, and I've had students who took on startup jobs and ended up filthy rich. This should never be your main reason, for obvious reasons, but neither should it be ignored. Working at a startup can be hard, and you should be able to see an upside for yourself.

So should you? Well, how much do you want or need one or more of the above? I'm afraid only you can answer that one...

The Allure and Insanity of the Easy-Bake Oven

The Easy-Bake Oven, a diminutive and seemingly innocuous kitchen appliance, has baked its way into the annals of both culinary and cultural history, offering a blend of whimsy and an undercurrent of madness. Invented in 1963 by Kenner Products, this toy oven has become an iconic artifact in the US (30 million sold!), reflecting societal norms around gender roles, domesticity, and the very concept of cooking.

At first glance, the Easy-Bake Oven is a marvel of child-friendly engineering, employing a simple heat source to cook actual food—albeit in minuscule portions. The genius is undeniable. By miniaturizing the cooking process, Kenner didn't just create a toy; they crafted an entire experience, a hands-on approach to play that encouraged creativity and independence, skills far more valuable than the questionable cakes the oven produced. But there's also madness here. The idea that cooking, a complex and often dangerous task involving sharp objects and hot surfaces, could be shrunk down for children's play is an odd one. Additionally, the Easy-Bake Oven, marketing primarily

to little girls and perpetuating the stereotype of cooking as “women’s work”, sold a notion as outdated as the incandescent bulb that powered the original model.

Allowing children to create and craft is a wonderful thing, and the Easy-Bake did open up a culinary world for many a kid. Top chefs have referred to it as what got them interested in cooking! Yet there is something slightly off about it all, in the pretense that using ready mixes and warming these up with a safe toy is “cooking”. Still, you can’t argue with success, and man, was it ever. Here’s to you, you cheeky little oven! 🍪👩🍳

Celebrating the Atari 2600 – A Magic Box of Constrained Creativity

As I was skimming my news, I came upon the fact that Atari is releasing a new game for the Atari 2600 – a game called “Save Mary”. Now, there is nothing magical about this game. It will run on the original platform, if you have one, or the new Atari 2600+ if you did not hang on to a machine that was discontinued in 1992. The fact that a) a new game is coming out, and b) that you can spend money on a new version of a frankly archaic game platform shows the magic that lies in that odd, woody box.

The Atari 2600. A console that was a refuge for many a child, where a simple joystick and a singular button gave way to boundless virtual realms. It wasn’t just about the games or their pixelated adventures; it was about a doorway, an invitation to imagine and explore. At a time when digital visuals were in their infancy, the Atari 2600 urged players to fill in the gaps with their imagination. The blips and beeps became roaring engines or fierce battles, all depending on how one perceived them.

It wasn’t just a gaming console; it was a testament to the human spirit’s resilience and adaptability. Despite its lim-

itations, the Atari 2600 was a milestone innovation, laying the groundwork for the future of gaming. The fact that new content is still being developed for it, and that there exists a new iteration, speaks volumes about its timeless appeal.

Innovation isn't always about the shiniest tech or the most sophisticated algorithms. Sometimes, it's about capturing hearts, eliciting nostalgia, and ensuring that even in a world of 4K graphics and VR, there's space for the classics. Here's to the Atari 2600, a beacon of creativity from an era gone by, still shining brightly in our contemporary world. 📌

The Hard Work of Creativity, as Showcased in Method Acting

“Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness.”

– George Orwell

Method acting, entwined in the theatrical annals, stands as a testament to the blood, sweat, and tears of creativity. Delving into its history and methodology showcases not just art’s transformative power but also the grind, the sheer hard work underpinning genuine innovation.

Konstantin Stanislavski, the method’s founding father, didn’t just emphasize genuine emotion; he advocated for rigorous preparation and exhaustive practice. This was not about overnight sensations but about actors relentlessly probing their emotional reservoirs, channeling past traumas, joys, and fears. It was the 1900s’ take on the “10,000-hour rule.”

Fast forward, and method acting’s modern proponents continue this legacy of intense dedication. When Daniel Day-Lewis took on Abraham Lincoln’s persona, it wasn’t a mere costume

change. Months of painstaking research, voice modulation, and immersion followed. It's akin to a writer's meticulous world-building or a painter's repeated sketches, chasing that elusive perfect stroke.

Creativity, as showcased by method acting, isn't about sporadic bursts of inspiration. It's a marathon, not a sprint. Behind every Brando's outburst or Meryl Streep's accent lies hours of rehearsal, doubt, and relentless refining. It's the tireless work backstage that fuels the magic on screen.

The lesson here? True innovation, be it in theater or any other domain, demands more than raw talent. It calls for grit, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to one's craft. Just as method actors plunge into emotional depths, innovators too must dive deep, navigate challenges, and emerge, transformed and triumphant.

Perfect Designs: The Spork

As a person who has “design” in the title of their professorship, and as an assumed urban professional, I am not supposed to love sporks. Sporks may be acceptable when on a hiking holiday, or when eating SpaghettiOs out of a can in your double-wide at the trailer park, but for most they represent an unholy mongrel of a utensil. That said, I claim that the spork is more than that. It is, in fact, an example of perfect design.

For those who have never heard of a spork, it gets its name from a portmanteau of a spoon and a fork, and is also exactly that – a hybrid of a fork with a spoon, or, if you prefer, a spoon with the tines of a fork. In some cases, such as the one that I always have in my everyday carry, it even integrates a bit of a knife-edge for cutting. Some would call the latter a “splayd” or a “spknork”, but I insist it is still a spork – if a developed one.

Regardless of what you call it, the spork is a marvel of minimalist design. It has emerged in various iterations even before the first attempt to patent it in 1874, and can be traced back to various speciality utensils such as the ice-cream fork. What sets it apart is the sheer versatility of the design. Rather

than carrying a set of utensils, a good spork enables one to eat in a variety of settings where you might not have easy access to a full dining set. I have eaten with a spork at airports, at outdoor events, and late at night in a hotel room when I was too tired to venture out after utensils. It might not be the classiest or the easiest, but it does marvelously in a pinch.

Rather than mock and overlook this humble workhorse, we should celebrate the spork as a piece of design genius, brilliant in its simplicity. As a creative solution to a specific problem, it proves that innovation can come in the most unassuming forms.



Perfect Designs: The Paperback

Is there a more perfect design for the transfer of information through reading than the paperback – and I of course refer to the classic paperback, small enough to fit in a pocket, yet still properly a book? Whereas many other book formats can be better-looking and more imposing, the paperback stands supreme when considering design as the art of dealing with trade-offs. Before it, books were pricy, hefty, even clumsy. Then came the German publisher Christian Bernhard Tauchnitz, and books would never be quite the same.

In 1841, Tauchnitz introduced the “Collection of British and American Authors,” a series of English-language books in paperback form – lightweight and affordable, they were like nothing seen before. Now fast forward to the 1930s, when Sir Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, had a lightbulb moment at a train station. Frustrated by the lack of quality, affordable reading material for his journey, Lane decided to do something about it. In 1935, he launched Penguin Books, bringing high-quality literature to the masses at the price of a pack of cigarettes. Across the pond, American publisher Robert

de Graff was cooking up his own paperback revolution. In 1939, he launched Pocket Books, introducing the mass-market paperback to the US; designed to fit in a man's jacket pocket or a woman's purse.

Today, the paperback is the default value of the physical book, the Platonic ideal of analogue reading. Sure, we still buy some hefty tomes and coffee table books, but the paperback is the thing that keeps physical books alive in an age of Kindles and TikTok. Not bad for what was once considered an aberration in the book industry, a cheap derivative of the real thing; a design that became our constant, convenient, cartable companion. 🧑🏻📖



Perfect Designs: Duct Tape

Call it what you will – gaffa/gaffer tape, roadie’s best friend, or as in my native and highly secular country, Jesus tape – there is no arguing that duct tape, silvery and sturdy, is one of the most beloved tools of all time. Many are the engineers who swear by the fact that all things can be fixed with a multitool and enough duct tape, and only a fool would organize a major event without sufficient stock thereof. Still, where did it come from, this nigh-on perfect stuff of adhesive, fixing, and repair? Let’s go back...

The year was 1942, and World War II was in full swing. The United States military faced a situation with their ammunition boxes. These needed to be waterproof and easy to open, which proved elusive until Vesta Stoudt, an ordnance worker with sons in the Navy, had a flash of inspiration. She noticed that the paper tape used to seal ammunition boxes was ineffective and in battle, soldiers struggled to access their ammo. Channeling the problem-solving spirit of mothers since time immemorial, Stoudt proposed a waterproof, cloth-based tape that could be ripped off quickly.

When her supervisors failed to see the genius of her idea, Stoudt did what any determined inventor would do – she wrote to President Roosevelt. Surprisingly, he recognized the potential and forwarded the idea to the War Production Board, who enlisted the Johnson & Johnson Company. They took Stoudt's concept and ran with it, creating a olive-drab colored, waterproof, cloth-backed tape. The military dubbed this new wonder product “duck tape,” either due to its water-repelling abilities reminiscent of a duck's feathers, or because it was made from cotton duck cloth.

So there you have it, a miracle tape born because a mother wanted to make sure her boys had bullets, beloved by roadies and techies since.

Perfect Designs: On Salvador Dalí and “The Dating Game”

We imagine that we live in the age of the collab, with various rappers and fashion designers cross-pollinating their creativity to create everything from capsule collections to chicken sandwiches with . Still, nothing we do today can hold a candle to the sheer insanity of taking the flamboyant art of Salvador Dalí and saying “To me, this says Game Show!”. This isn’t a fever dream, but a real historical footnote where the master of surrealism lent his creative genius to American TV.

In 1970, Dalí, known for his striking art and incapability of giving a fuck, took on the task of designing the set for “The Dating Game”. It was an era when game shows were a staple of American TV, but nobody expected the king of surrealism! Dalí’s involvement turned the set into a piece of living art, infusing the show with a surreal quality that was worlds apart from its usual light-hearted tone. With bizarre shapes, unusual colors, and unexpected symbols, the set became a piece of performance art, with the clean-cut hosts as bizarre counter-points.

It is well-known that great creative things can emerge out

of the meeting of different cultural fields, and it is difficult to imagine fields as far apart as that of Dalí's hallucinatory aesthetics and the superficiality of US TV in the 1970's. Thus, whilst it did not go down in history as great art, we should still celebrate this experiment in fusing high art with popular culture. It should also stand as testament to the fact that despite our tendency to think that we have mastered the remix and the art of combinations, sometimes a peek into history can show far odder examples, and far more daring tests of creative collaborations.



Perfect Designs: Instant Innovation Pot?

I've been considering buying an Instant Pot, so naturally I needed to know how it had come to be – an occupational hazard for us professors of innovation. Turns out it's a more surprising story than you'd think!

It all seems to have started with Robert Wang, a Canadian computer scientist with a problem. Faced with the challenge of juggling a career and family life, Wang was determined to develop a solution that would allow him to feed his family healthy meals without spending too much time on this. Instead of penning a cookbook or starting a meal prep business, he went down the road less traveled (by culinary enthusiasts, at least) and embarked on creating a new kitchen appliance.

In 2008, amidst the financial crisis—a period more known for its economic despair than its culinary innovation—Wang and his two partners, Yi Qin and Dongjun Wang, pooled together \$350,000 of their own money to invent a device that could consolidate several cooking devices into one. They sought to marry the speed of a pressure cooker with the convenience and safety of a modern electric appliance. Little did they know, they

were about to revolutionize home cooking.

The device struck a chord not just for its functionality but for what it represented: efficiency, health, and the democratization of cooking. It appealed to busy parents, tech-savvy millennials, and gourmet chefs alike, and sold in the millions. Curiously, the Instant Pot might have been too good a product for its own good. Demand has as of late tapered off – turns out that once you buy one, you won't need a new one in like forever. Wang's company has struggled with this and debt, and the future is unclear. Still, a beloved product and an impressive innovation! 🍲💡

7 Non-Trivial Lessons From Companies That Actually Get Innovation Right

1 – They see innovation as a special case

If any- and everything is called innovation, the word starts losing meaning. Deep innovation cultures understand this, and only refer to the biggest leaps and the most radical advances as innovations. This means that there is something to strive towards, and the achievement feels meaningful.

2 – They allow for time off from innovation

When you insist on “everyday innovation” or “innovation as usual”, you are burning out your organization. By making it clear that the organization doesn’t constantly need to fret about innovating, you focus the energy to where it is best utilized, intense spurts of development. Also, you lessen the stress of feeling that you’re perpetually doing something wrong.

3 – They clarify expectations

Just saying “think outside the box” is not helpful, so stop. Successful innovation leaders communicate expectations clearly – what counts as good enough, what is considered an amazing success. Talking of “moonshots” in a company with low-tech products can be perceived as leaders being completely detached from reality, yet such companies can innovate in their own way.

4 – They don’t use trivial examples

Anyone can (and does) refer to Apple, Google, and Tesla. These massive successes can make innovation seem impossible to achieve, and as many companies are in radically different businesses, it can be unclear what they mean. Using examples is good, but only if they are perceived as meaningful and in some way attainable.

5 – They balance ambition and realism

Deep innovation cultures aim to create innovations that have an impact. They aim to keep innovation inspiring by connecting it to worthwhile goals, yet they don’t set up targets that depress people. They celebrate saving lives, if only a couple, more than they talk about 10x or 100x growth.

6 – They utilize the power of diversity

Truly innovative companies don’t believe that male, pale, and stale alone is enough to create the broad range of ideas that innovation demands. Instead, they make sure to have a good mix

of people on board, diverse not only when it comes to gender and ethnicity, but also when it comes to background, class, and age.

7 – They see innovation as a journey, not a destination

If your company just tries to “create an innovation”, you may have lost before you started. The companies who truly get innovation realize it is a journey and a process, not a guaranteed outcome. You stumble, you innovate, you stumble, you continue.

The Magic of Miyazaki: On Studio Ghibli's Early Masterpieces

In the high-octane decade of the '80s, where synthesizers and neon lights held court, a gentler, deeply imaginative force bubbled in the realm of animation. This force was none other than Hayao Miyazaki, the mastermind behind Studio Ghibli's wondrous creativity.

From the lush, European-inspired landscapes of "Laputa: Castle in the Sky" (1986) to the vibrant, bustling neighborhood in "My Neighbor Totoro" (1988), Miyazaki introduced us to animation that echoed both fine artistry and intricate craftsmanship. In an age where 'more is more' seemed to be the rallying cry, Miyazaki was playing a different, calmer tune, drawing viewers into nuanced, heartwarming narratives. No wonder, then, that his vision survived beyond the tackiness of the 80's.

Do not be fooled by the seeming simplicity of these tales. Miyazaki was an innovator par excellence, weaving complex themes of environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism into his storylines with a finesse that was nothing short of poetic. In a decade brimming with flash and dazzle, Miyazaki chose a path

less traversed, crafting narratives rich with depth and nuance.

Today's creators, beset by the pressures of an ever-speeding world, stand to learn a crucial lesson from this master storyteller: the courage to swim against the tide, to cherish and cultivate a slower, more deliberate pace of creativity, can yield works of profound beauty and lasting impact. Miyazaki demonstrates that a creator's true power lies in their ability to craft worlds that resonate deeply, long after the screen fades to black. 🎬

Edit

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Remembering the Flip-Phone – On the Afterlife of Innovations

There was a time, not too long ago, when the flip-phone was the epitome of cool. Easy to pocket, satisfying to open, with a haptic and sonic “snap” that made it stand out among electronic peripherals, the flip-phone at one point seemed like the perfect design. Today, it stands as a symbol for an era, elegant but also slightly ludicrous. What can be learnt from this?

Let us start with what made this design so lovable. It relished in the mechanic – the hinge, the opening, and the closing. It belonged to the digital age, but was at the same time resolutely analogue. To some, it was a fidget tool before these were invented – open, close, repeat. To others, it carried with it memories of Star Trek and the technology of the future.

Then, as we all know, the iPhone came along, and nothing has been the same since. Smooth glass surfaces are now *de rigueur*, and any phone not following this design is seen as old or strange or both. The flip-phone went away, as so many other older designs. Or did it? Strangely enough, now many see the new iteration – the folding full-screen phone – as the most cutting

edge of phones. Not quite the sturdy flip-phones of yore, they still kinda flip, but watch a user gingerly fold it open, fearing for the hinge, and you realize that it will never be quite the same haptic joy.

I have long been interested in the afterlife of innovation, that which happens once an innovation ceases to be one. At times this creates a new dominant design, as the iPhone did. No longer radically new, it just is. The flip-phone is more interesting. It stayed with us as a memory, maybe even a desire, of a different kind of engagement with electronics. Will it return? You know, it just might... 📱

8 Top Tips to Sell an Idea to Your Boss

It can be murder to get an old boss to accept a new idea, so here's some tips on how to sell your brainstorm (before someone else does it):

1 – Make it dead simple

The first step to getting an idea accepted is to get it understood. Explain the gist of the idea in language a child (or even your boss!) can understand.

2 – Show the value

To convince someone, it's not enough that an idea is new or cool. Show the value it generates, in earnings or savings.

3 – Don't overpromise

Sure, your idea might save the world. Still, to get it tested, it's better to suggest more reachable targets. The kind even a boss believes.

4 – Ask for help

By asking for help rather than presenting the idea as already finished, you make your boss feel valued and included.

5 – Have a purpose

Know why you're pushing the idea, and make it part of something greater – be it sustainability, or a new way to connect with clients.

6 – Include a network

Don't make it just about you. Show how the idea can include and help others in the organization. Show why their help is needed.

7 – Create a vision

Make your idea the start, not the end. Show how it might be developed and built upon. Free your boss's imagination.

8 – Don't give up

No matter how good your idea is, you won't always succeed. Don't let this get you down – buckle up, rework, and try again.

On the Early Rise of Electric Vehicles

I'm a huge fan of the quirky history of innovation, and few histories have been quirkier than that of electric cars. Today they are heralded as the new new thing, but they were there right at the beginning of cars. The saga of electric vehicles (EVs) began in the late 19th century, marking an era of innovation that paralleled the rise of their internal combustion engine (ICE) counterparts. Notably, Thomas Parker in the UK and William Morrison in the US were pivotal figures, with Morrison introducing his electric carriage to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1891. Yup, 1891, not 1991! These early EVs offered a silent, fume-free driving experience devoid of the manual crank start — making them particularly popular among urban elites.

Electric vehicles enjoyed their first golden age in the early 1900s, with electric taxis becoming a common sight in metropolitan areas like New York and London. However, this early success was short-lived. The discovery of vast petroleum reserves made gasoline cheap and accessible, while Charles Kettering's invention of the electric starter in 1912 made ICE vehicles significantly more user-friendly. The final blow was

dealt by Henry Ford's introduction of the Model T in 1908, which, combined with an expanding network of roads demanding longer-range vehicles, led to the decline of electric cars to near obscurity for decades.

Despite their fall from grace in the early 20th century, the foundational work laid by pioneers like Parker and Morrison set the stage for the EV's modern renaissance. Just goes to show that we need to remain humble when thinking about innovation – what looks new to us might have a deep, and not even dark, history. Real innovators keep themselves historically grounded, for you never know when a once discarded idea makes a glorious, world-defining comeback. 📱

On the IBM Simon

Which was the first smartphone? If you're a millennial, you might say the iPhone, and if you are Gen X like me, you might nominate the Nokia Communicator (I have fond memories of the 9110, which could be used for both emails and, in a pinch, to bludgeon moose). Both would be wrong, and glaringly so. The first smartphone, which few people have ever touched, was the IBM Simon, a curiosity from 1994 that was years ahead of its time.

This 510 gram behemoth boasted a monochrome LCD touch-screen, and could make calls, send emails, and even faxes (oh, the nostalgia!). It had a calendar and an address book, and used a pen-based interface. Nothing special here, you might say (except those sweet, sweet faxes), but this was in 1994, so it might as well have been magic! It had a whopping 1MB of RAM and 1MB of storage, which was insane in those days, but the battery time was bad even for that era – an hour of talking time, and no, I have no idea about how many faxes that is.

Oh, and that magic did not come cheap! You complain about the new iPhone, this baby cost 1,100 USD 30 years ago! Also,

it was only available on BellSouth Cellular, in 15 states in the US. No wonder, then, that it only sold 50,000 units in the six months it was offered. That might sound like a pitiful amount, but first versions of anything are often the hardest to sell, before the market is fully made and trained. Not the success that its successors became, in other words, but still a first in the brave new world of mobile technology! I never had one, obviously, but I can imagine what it must have been like – a frustrating glimpse into the future, with limitations galore, but at the same time, so very much like magic. I mean, faxing from your pocket, what will they think of next!?!  

On the Slow Maturity of E-Ink Displays

“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.”

– Charles Dickens

I’m a huge fan of e-ink (sometimes called e-paper) displays, for various reasons. I am a dedicated ebook-reader, and love my Kindle. I am very fond of my Remarkable2, and credit it for taming my addiction for buying paper notebooks. In fact, I would very much like for an e-ink iPhone, not least because it would be easier to use in the sun! It is, all in all, a great tech, if one which has taken faaar too long to mature – and we’re still suffering.

The genesis of e-ink can be traced back to the 1970s, rooted in the labs of Xerox PARC, that famed crucible of innovation. Yet, despite its early start and the clear advantages it offered – such as low power consumption and superior readability in direct sunlight – e-ink technology languished in the shadows

of technological R&D departments for decades. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the technology had matured enough to be commercially viable, yet it still faced a Sisyphean battle for acceptance. The breakthrough came with the advent of dedicated e-readers, most notably Amazon's Kindle, launched in 2007. The Kindle wasn't just a piece of hardware; it was a portal to a vast digital library, offering convenience and accessibility that paper books could not match.

Today, e-ink technology extends beyond e-readers, finding applications in smartwatches, digital signage, and even smartphones, offering a low-power, eye-friendly alternative. What is curious is that it is still, in many respects, a marginal technology. E-ink notebooks have only recently become more popular, and e-ink monitors are mostly experimental. This annoys me, for it is a marvelous technology, and deserves all the support it can get – not least because I want my Remarkable2 to have greater resolution! In fact, I want a computer I can use in direct sunlight, and while you're at it, make it waterproof. Here's to e-ink! ⚡📄

Strange Histories of the View-Master

It would not capture the attention of a modern child for more than a fleeting moment, but I am old enough to remember the View-Master as an almost magical plaything, promising epic adventure even while we knew it would come to disappoint us. Yes, the iconic red stereoscope reel viewer is a piece of technological and cultural history, and a surprising one at that.

In the late 1930s, the world was on the brink of monumental change. Technology was advancing rapidly, yet the world was teetering on the edge of a global conflict. It was during this time of transition that the View-Master was born, not as a child's toy, but as a tool for adults. Created by William Gruber, an inventive photographer, and Harold Graves, president of Sawyer's, a photo finishing service company, the View-Master was introduced at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. The original intent was far from playful. It was envisioned as a way to experience travel from the comfort of one's home. In an era when travel was expensive and cumbersome, the View-Master offered a window to the world, with its first reels featuring natural marvels. However, as the world plunged into the chaos

of World War II, the U.S. military saw its potential as a training tool for soldiers, to help them recognize aircraft and ships.

The transition of the View-Master to a children's toy began in the 1950s. Sawyer's, recognizing the shifting market, began to produce reels featuring child-friendly content. This move was bolstered by the acquisition of licensing rights from Disney, which allowed the View-Master to feature content from Disneyland and various Disney movies.

So there you have it – from simulated tourism, by way of actual war, to my childhood room. Marvelous tales, told through plastic. 

Perfect Designs: Lovin' the Lava Lamp

Some see them as ugly kitch, whilst others adore their gentle undulations – the lava lamp evokes quite varied emotions. Today you might see them used as movie props when a director really wants hammer home the point that an apartment is the home of a stoner or that a lounge is sleazy and stuck in an era, but at the same time this is a lighting fixture with an interesting history.

Invented in 1963 by British entrepreneur Edward Craven Walker, the lamp's appeal can be found in the way in which it combines design simplicity and complex fluid dynamics. Inside a glass container, blobs of colored wax rise and fall in a translucent liquid, creating what many find an almost meditative visual experience. This interplay of heat, wax, and denser-than-water liquid, governed by the principles of buoyancy, turns the Rayleigh–Taylor instability of the lava lamp into a living piece of art.

It emerged in parallel with the rise of the counterculture movement, and was embraced by it as an embodiment of free thought and artistic expression. The lava lamp quickly

became the very embodiment of the psychedelic experience; an invitation to turn on, tune in, and drop out. At the same time, the sheer randomness of the lava lamp has made it an object of fascination in quite a few science communities, to the point where Silicon Graphics constructed the Lavarand – a random number generator that was seeded by the lamp – and from 2017 onwards Cloudflare has used a similar structure with a wall of a 100 lava lamps to encrypt internet communications.

No mere stoner accessory, then, but a vibrant design that deserves our admiration – even if we opt against buying one for our home. 🖼️💡

The Walkman, Sonic Soundtracks, and the Birth of Personal Creative Spaces

The Walkman fundamentally altered our relationship with sound and space. Suddenly, every mundane walk to the grocer's had the potential to be a dramatic scene from one's personal movie. Each individual could craft their unique soundtrack, transforming the public into the deeply personal, overlaying the day-to-day with an aural dimension of one's choosing.

From this groundbreaking shift, it was but a small leap to the iPod, which further democratized music, allowing us to carry entire libraries in our pockets. Today, music technology is more integrated than ever, with streaming platforms and smart devices ensuring our personal soundtracks are always just a tap away.

The Walkman ushered in a new era of introspection. With the simple press of a button, listeners could cocoon themselves in their sonic world, finding solace from the outside chaos. This gave rise to personalized creativity, where inspiration was but a cassette away. It taught us the importance of crafting our environments to nurture our creative souls. David Bowie could

accompany you on your morning jog, The Cure could be your partner on gloomy days, and Madonna could turn any park bench into a dance floor.

For today's innovators, the lesson is clear: curate your creative spaces, both physical and mental. In doing so, you can transform even the most mundane moments into profound opportunities for inspiration. The Walkman whispered this secret into our ears decades ago; now, our modern devices amplify its message. All we need to do is press play. 🎧

Boring Innovation: The S-Trap

Far too often we assume that innovation, real innovation, needs to be exciting, sexy, in-your-face. This is why we celebrate the iPhone and ChatGPT, as they fulfill those criteria. But what about the humble S-trap, an innovation you benefit from daily, and at least I would never want to live without? You might wonder what the S-trap is, and even claim you've never used one. You'd be wrong, at least if you're the kind of person who, on occasion, go to the toilet. You know, like pretty much all of us do.

The S-trap, also known as the S-bend, was invented by Alexander Cumming, a watchmaker and mathematician from Edinburgh, Scotland. In 1775, Cumming patented the S-trap design, improving upon the straight pipe design of earlier flush toilets. The genius lies in its shape. The curved section of the pipe retains a small amount of water after each flush, creating a seal that prevents sewer gases and odors from rising back into the bathroom. Basically, it made indoor toilets possible, not only by creating a crucial barrier against things like cholera and typhoid, but also by ensuring that they do not stink like an

outhouse on a sunny day.

The S-trap's legacy extends beyond toilets. Similar traps are used in sinks, showers, and other plumbing fixtures, and although there are modern adaptations (like the P-trap) and additional safeguards, the S-trap still stands proud as one of civilizations most worthy innovations. Sure, it's a bit dull. Sure, it isn't as immediately attractive as e.g. a gaming console. Still, in the grand scheme of things, the boring old S-trap is what enabled us to build our cities, our offices, and our lives as we have. It has saved countless lives, and if anything made us a bit complacent. These days, we expect our flats to be fragrant and our toilets to be safe. How boring! 🤢

Boring Innovation: The Universal Product Code

Some innovations are so common, so omnipresent, that we become positively blind to them. Consider the universal product code (UPC), that funny little rectangle with a pattern of thinner and fatter bars, with number underneath this fence-like iconography. It's on pretty much everything we buy, and we've become adept at both ignoring their ubiquity and scanning them at self-checkout machines. But where did it come from?

The story begins in the late 1940s when Bernard Silver overheard a food chain executive asking about automatically reading product information during checkout. Intrigued by the idea, Silver and his friend Norman Joseph Woodland started thinking about how to do this. Woodland, inspired by Morse code, conceived of a circular bulls-eye pattern of thick and thin lines. They patented the idea in 1952, but nothing became of it, as neither computing nor laser technology was cheap or quick enough. The real push came in the early 1970s. As supermarkets grew and product varieties exploded, manual price marking and processing became more and more inefficient. In 1973, a

group of executives formed a committee to establish a standard – landing on a rectangular barcode design by IBM, based on the original concept by Woodland (who now worked for IBM!).

The success was immediate, and extended beyond retail. UPC became a standard from hospitals to logistic centers, and led to other barcode standards, including the EAN and the QR code. A strange innovation, this. Just some lines and some numbers, yet it revolutionized how we deal with both products and people. It might not look all that exciting, it might even seem boring, but we'd have a hard time managing without it! 🖋️ [9]

Boring Innovation: Standards in Screws

The discourse of innovation has a fascination for uniqueness that borders on the fetishistic. We are constantly told that a defining characteristic of innovation is that it is unique, novel, all its own. Now, this is of course often true – innovations often spring from highly original thinking. That said, sometimes innovation is all about making things less unique, not more so! Case in point, the humble screw, and the standardization thereof.

Screws were used in ancient times, and some credit Archimedes himself for the invention. However, the screw was slow to catch on – each screw was unique, worked a little differently, and mass-production was not even thought of. A standard was needed, particularly as industrialization came along. It mattered less for wood screws, but for screw bolts that needed to fit with nuts, it was crucial. In 1841, Joseph Whitworth proposed a uniform threading system, with the thread angle at 55 degrees and specified threads per inch for various diameters. Across the Atlantic, William Sellers introduced a competing standard in 1864. The Sellers thread, which later evolved into

the United States Standard thread, used a 60-degree thread angle and was designed to be easier to cut than the Whitworth thread.

The existence of these two incompatible standards created challenges, particularly during World War II when Allied forces faced difficulties in repairing each other's equipment. In response, the ISO metric screw thread was developed in the 1960s, incorporating elements from various standards. It uses the 60-degree thread angle from the American system but metric measurements, enabling worldwide adoption. Boring? Perhaps. But it is what makes it possible to repair a Chinese product in the US, and a UK one in Guatemala. Standards built our global world, and few of us would today want it any other way. Exciting? No, but necessary. 🤖

Dada: An Appreciation

“Creativity is a wild mind and a disciplined eye.”

– Dorothy Parker

Innovation isn't just about technology. In fact, it isn't always even about making sense! Consider the movement known as Dadaism. Born out of the tumultuous era of World War I, Dada emerged not just as an art movement but as a philosophical rebellion, a creative grenade lobbed at the very notion of what art should be. The Dadaists were the original punk rockers of the art world. They looked at a society tearing itself apart and decided that if the world was going to be absurd, their art would out-absurd it. It was innovation in its purest form: destructive, yet profoundly creative. Dada wasn't just about new techniques or styles; it was about upending the entire apple cart of artistic tradition.

Take, for example, Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" – a urinal turned artwork. It wasn't just a piece to be gawked at in a gallery; it was a statement, a question posed to the art world: "Is this art?" With one readymade object, Duchamp blew the

doors off the art establishment, challenging the very criteria that classified something as ‘artistic.’ Or consider the sound poems of Hugo Ball, nonsensical verbal collages that defied conventional linguistic structure. In Dada, language wasn’t just a tool for communication; it was a playground, a device to be dismantled and reconstructed into something bewilderingly new.

Dadaism was more than just an artistic innovation; it was a philosophical upheaval. It asked uncomfortable questions about the nature of art, society, and meaning itself. Its legacy is a reminder that sometimes, to innovate is not to create something new, but to radically reframe the old, to turn the world on its head and see what falls out of its pockets. Dada was a mirror held up to a fractured society, and the reflection it showed was one of chaos, creativity, and unapologetic absurdity. 🤪🌀🚩💀

What “The Sopranos” Teaches Us About Innovation

“The Sopranos” was never just a mob drama; it was a narrative disruptor, subverting expectations at every turn. The show’s genius lay in its ability to take a tried-and-true formula (mafia stories) and infuse it with profound psychological depth, exemplified by Tony’s therapy sessions. Herein lies our first lesson: True innovation doesn’t always mean reinventing the wheel; sometimes, it’s about melding wheels with wings to craft something soaringly unique.

Secondly, the characters, as morally compromised as they might be, are wellsprings of adaptability. The Soprano family and their associates constantly pivot (and I don’t use that Silicon Valley buzzword lightly) in response to threats, market changes (yes, crime has its own market dynamics), and internal conflicts. Their survival hinges on their ability to adapt and innovate within their illicit industry.

Lastly, the show’s enduring success underscores the importance of depth and quality. In an era of binge-watching and fleeting TikTok trends, “The Sopranos” reminds us that

meticulously crafted, deeply resonant work stands the test of time. Innovation isn't about churning out the new for the sake of novelty; it's about creating lasting value.

In conclusion, beneath the show's veneer of mob politics and familial drama, "The Sopranos" serves up a veritable feast of insights on innovation. And remember, in the words of Tony Soprano, "'Remember When' is the lowest form of conversation." Always look forward, kids, but don't forget to learn from the past – even if it's from a mob boss's therapy session.

Spaghetti Western Creativity: Breaking the Norms With Sergio Leone

“He who transgresses not only breaks a rule. He goes somewhere that the others are not; and he knows something the others don’t know.”

– Georges Bataille

In the midst of sweeping desert landscapes, intense close-ups, and the grizzled faces of cinema heroes of the cowboy variety, Sergio Leone was busy whipping up an all-you-can-eat buffet of creative innovation, giving a firm boot to the norms of the day, which – let’s face it – needed a good kicking. 🤠

Leone, the saucy maestro of the Spaghetti Western, wasn’t content to simply follow the herd of tumbleweeds that was the typical Western genre. No, he saw beyond the horizon, where the sun sets in a blaze of technicolor glory. Here was a man who could take the mundane, the tried, and the true, and turn it into something truly epic, as grand and unyielding as the landscapes his characters traversed.

He brought us the “Man with No Name”, a character as

enigmatic as a painted desert and as unpredictable as a summer storm in Nevada. Leone's close-ups were not mere close-ups; they were intense scrutinies, the kind that could almost make Clint Eastwood break into a sweat. And the music, oh, the music! Ennio Morricone's symphonies were to the ears what a good bottle of Chianti is to the tongue – a cascade of sensation, teetering on the verge of becoming overwhelming, yet oddly addictive.

Through Leone's lens, the old Western was turned on its stetson-wearing head, embracing a kind of visual poetry where the lines between the heroic and the villainous blurred, and where the vast landscapes became characters in their own right. It was a stroke of genius, and a lesson for anyone looking to truly innovate: sometimes, you've got to be willing to get a little dirt on your boots and a few new notches on your creative belt.

The Eternal Return of the Platform Shoe

There is something nigh magical about platform shoes. They look goofy, make you suspect their wearer is shorter than he or she wants to let on, and are quite likely to break an ankle or two of whomever dons a pair. Still, like herpes, they seem impossible to get rid of. Every generation re-discovers them, ignoring the wisdom acquired by previous wearers. Why?

Platform shoes are not, as some might presume, a brainchild of the disco-drenched 70s, but date back to ancient times. The Greeks used them for increasing the height of important characters in the theater, an early nod to their power of elevation in status. Fast forward to the 16th century, and we find Venetian women navigating the muddy streets in chopines, early ancestors of the platform shoe, boasting heights of up to 20 inches in some cases. These were not just practical; they were symbols of wealth and social standing. The higher the platform, the closer to God...

The platform shoe as we know it, however, sauntered into the spotlight in the flamboyant 1970s. In this climate of upheaval, the platform shoe found its perfect catwalk. Both men and

women embraced the trend, buoyed by the glam rock and disco scenes. Icons like David Bowie and Elton John didn't just wear platforms; they elevated (heh) them to art.

But, and I repeat myself here, why? In a way, platforms aren't just shoes; they are a rebellion against the mundane, a physical upliftment that mirrors a desire to break free. Theatrical and goofy as they may be, they speak to people's yearning to set themselves apart, to rise above the fray, however silly it makes one look. Platform shoes are the embodiment of our desire to stand out, and proof positive that we'll pay any price to do so. Even the price of looking like a right, short goof. 

On AIs as Mediocrity Engines

“Beware of flat-pack futures.” — Scott Smith

ChatGPT, GPT-4, and all their ilk, are wondrous examples of what AI will be capable of. At the same time, they are what I wish to call “mediocrity engines”. I say this not to berate them, but to make clear what they can and cannot do.

AIs that are based on statistics and geared towards generating an output that is statistically derived, will by the logic of the algorithm trend towards the mean, the median, the weighted average.

Large language model AIs are trained on internet data, tons and tons of textual output, but not the kind that aims at excellence or differentiation. They are built on Reddit, not poetry.

As a result, they become mediocrity engines. Perfectly capable of generating average sentiments, but wholly without wit or verve. Useful, yes, if you are writing another dull email or mediocre report, but also an engine to produce more soulless “content” rather than something exceptional.

So do use them, for what they are good at, but remember that

a future in which everything is generated by these mediocrity engines is like a relationship in which you communicate solely by emojis. Is it possible? Yes. Will it kill all the spark and joy and peak experiences? Most certainly.

IV

Creative Senses

Even though we know that creativity is intimately connected to the senses, we often ignore the same. In this section I comment on sound and taste in particular, with quite a few comments on food and condiments. What can I tell you, I love creative tastes, and I enjoy musicians getting creative.

The Innovation Lessons of Mike's Hot Honey

In the culinary cosmos, there now exists a maverick condiment that stings the palate but sweetly, igniting an innovative firestorm on unsuspecting taste buds: Mike's Hot Honey. If you've never drizzled this liquid dynamite on a slice of pizza, then, my friend, you've only skimmed the surface of life's flavor possibilities.

Mike's Hot Honey is a revelation, a serendipitous and fearless concoction that embodies radical simplicity – honey, chilies, and vinegar. Don't let the simplicity fool you, this is less a condiment and more a call to arms for flavor revolutionaries. Mike Kurtz, the maestro of this fiery symphony, didn't just add a kick to honey; he present us with an innovation blueprint.

Here's the innovation lesson – disruption can come from anywhere, even something as traditional as honey. Kurtz came across it on a trek in South America, just as some cups of honey with chili in a pizzeria. It's a testament to the fact that innovation doesn't require reinventing the wheel; sometimes, you just need to set it on fire. He spent the time to perfect the

basic idea, moving it from a rickety table in Brazil to the cooler environs of Brooklyn, branding it, and packaging it in a cool bottle.

Innovation doesn't need to be much more than paying attention, moving an idea from one sphere to another, and ensuring that the idea gets as good a form as you can give it. So, let's raise our pepperoni slices high, drizzled with that sweet, burning nectar (now available in extra hot!), and toast quiet innovators like Mike Kurtz. He might not have changed the world, but he damn sure changed both the honey isle in groceries and how pepperoni pizza can (should?) be consumed. Flame on! 🔥🍕

Creativity & Condiments: The Fishy History of Ketchup

Ketchup is one of those things we often assume have always been with us. Not so that anyone would think that ketchup existed in caveman times, but its ubiquity is such that one rarely thinks about its history – as wondrous as it is! Its story starts in 17th-century China, where a concoction known as “kê-tsiap” was a staple. This wasn’t the tomato-based sauce we know, but a briny fish sauce made from fermented fish guts, soybeans, and spices.

As the sauce made its way to Malaysia and Indonesia, it morphed into “kecap” (pronounced “kay-chap”), where British colonists encountered it in the 18th century. Fascinated by its flavor, they took it back, but with a twist – substituting mushrooms, walnuts, and sometimes even anchovies for the original fermented fish mixture. By the time ketchup reached American shores in the early 19th century, it had undergone another transformation, something that became a pivotal moment for ketchup. Tomatoes, native to the Americas and initially thought to be poisonous in Europe, became a main ingredient. The

scientist James Mease is credited with one of the first recorded recipes for tomato ketchup in 1812.

However, early tomato ketchup had its problems. It was prone to spoilage due to the varying recipes and preservation techniques used. Enter Henry John Heinz, a name now synonymous with ketchup. In 1876 the H.J. Heinz Company introduced its version of tomato ketchup, adding vinegar as a natural preservative. This not only extended its shelf life but also gave it a distinctively tangy flavor, setting the standard for modern ketchup.

So, this humble kitchen staple is the product of not one, but several radical innovations. What seems simple and self-evident often requires these leaps to become just that. History, what a ride! 📺💡

20 Feet from Stardom, an Appreciation

I have a great love for documentaries, and often find I learn more from them than from academic works. Take “20 Feet from Stardom”, for instance. In many ways, it taught me more about creativity than twenty (see what I did there?) academic articles on the same. This Oscar-winning documentary from 2013 is not just a riveting portrayal of the largely unseen world of backup singers; it’s also a deep lesson in the nature of creativity and the intricacies of the music industry. It features the voices and tales of women who have shaped the sound of popular music in ways we never truly appreciated, women like Darlene Love, Merry Clayton, and Lisa Fischer, and the creative relationship that exists between them and the stars they supported.

Their creativity is palpable; their voices blend and harmonize, providing that essential backbone to some of the most iconic tracks in music history. Their ability to imbue songs with emotional depth, to elevate the main melody, and to add layers of complexity to the music is nothing short of genius. Yet, they remain just out of the limelight, their names known only to the most ardent of music aficionados. What I loved about this

documentary was that it forces you to confront not just the harsh realities of the music industry, where background singers are often treated as disposable, but also how it highlights that all creative endeavors have their “background” workers.

“20 Feet from Stardom” is a call to action. It asks us to look beyond the spotlight, to see the faces and hear the voices of those who have been marginalized and undervalued, to recognize their contributions and to celebrate their creativity. Sing on, brothers and sisters, sing on. 🎵

Creativity Lessons From Chez Panisse

Unless you are a nerd for haute cuisine, you may never have heard of Chez Panisse. It isn't the most important restaurant ever (although it might be for the US), but as a story about innovation, it is difficult to beat.

It was founded in the late 1960s by Alice Waters, a Montessori teacher with no formal culinary training. She had been to France, and learned to love the local food culture – respect for dining, a focus on local ingredients, and a tendency for communal meals – and felt that this could fit well with the countercultural revolution going on as she returned to California. So, inspired by her experiences abroad, she decided to create a place that would capture the essence of French dining, yet mix in the Californian spirit and a countercultural edge. In 1971, helped by a group of friends, she raised \$10,000 and opened Chez Panisse. It was named after Honoré Panisse, a character in Marcel Pagnol's films, which she adored, and set in an Arts and Crafts-style house in Berkeley.

From the start, Chez Panisse was different. Rather than having a broad menu, the restaurant served a single fixed-

price menu that changed daily, highlighting fresh, locally-sourced ingredients. Waters worked closely with local farmers, producers, and artisans, establishing a network that would come to be the bedrock of the farm-to-table movement. Today, this is so common as to become a tad boring in haute cuisine, but at the time it was a revolution.

So what can we learn from this? Learn to enmesh yourself in experiences, old and new. Pay attention to what can be created when an appreciation for the old is married with the energy of the new. Never stop experimenting, and believe that your experiences can be the bedrock of something new and valuable. Oh, and don't forget great service! 🍴

Creativity & Condiments: The Rise and Rise of Sriracha

I'm so old that I remember when Sriracha wasn't everywhere, you know? Strange to think of today, when it seems almost inescapable, but there was a time when you couldn't get the internet's favorite condiment anywhere. How did we get here, to near ubiquity?

Well, let's start at the beginning, which, as beginnings tend to be, was humble. Picture this: Vietnam, a land where the food is as vibrant as the landscapes. In the 1940s, a woman named Thanom Chakkapak in the town of Si Racha (yes, that's where the name comes from) concocted a chili sauce that would conquer the world. It wasn't without a heritage – the recipe carries Cantonese influences – but the mix of a paste of fermented chilis, pickled garlic, and distilled vinegar became locally popular. Enter David Tran, a Vietnamese refugee who arrived in the US in 1979. By 1980, he had founded Huy Fong Foods, named after the ship he came over on. He began producing Sriracha in LA, using repurposed baby food jars. Humble beginnings, indeed. Unlike other hot sauces, which

often focus solely on heat, Tran's Sriracha brought flavor to the forefront. It spread the old-fashioned way; foodies and chef discovered it, word of mouth did the rest.

The success of "cock sauce" (so called due to the decidedly old-school branding) derives in part from this sense of the hot sauce being something of a shared secret among the in-the-know, in part from the sauce hitting many if not most of the good condiment notes. A vinegary kick, salt, just enough heat, deep umami, it just works. Today, it works everywhere, from taco trucks to fine dining. Not bad for an immigrant twice over – first the Cantonese moving to Thailand, then Tran moving to the US. 🍴🐔

Second Mover Advantage: 🍔 Strategy

I was taught “first mover advantage” in strategy class, and always considered it one of the dumbest ideas I’d ever heard. In fact, my tendency to critique management studies might have been kindled here, in the selling of this silly notion as accepted strategy fact. I knew, even then, that it couldn’t be. I mean, burgers proved it wasn’t. Consider White Castle.

This, the pioneering fast-food joint started in the roaring 1920s, crafted the template for the entire industry. Yet, it’s a classic case of the first mover losing out (albeit surviving). McDonald’s, on the other hand, was a late arrival, yet went on to far greater heights. White Castle was the first burger joint to do assembly-line production, the first to have standardized methods over all its restaurants, and even the first to do newspaper coupons as marketing. It was the innovator in the industry.

Others watched and learned from White Castle’s pioneering efforts. Companies like Burger King didn’t just enter the fast-food arena; they expanded and adapted it. Their strategy involved moves like aggressive franchising, global expansion, and constant reinvention. They copied what worked, and let

others pay key innovation costs, drawing the benefits of second mover advantage.

There are advantages of not being number one, yet White Castle carved out a distinct legacy. It reminds us that there's a finesse to learning from the forerunners and then leapfrogging them. Proper strategy doesn't get caught up in glib clichés like “first mover advantage”, yet remembers that innovation is important as well. Remember, McDonald's might not have been the first “McDonaldized” burger joint, but it did give us the McRib and the Breakfast McMuffin, and there is great beauty to that. 🏃🍔

On Gram Parsons as a Cosmic Creativity Inspiration

Ah, Gram Parsons. Now there's a name that doesn't get tossed around in the hallowed halls of academia often enough, though one could argue it should be. Parsons, for the uninformed, was the pioneer of "Cosmic American Music," a delicious gumbo of country, rock, and folk. The man didn't just tread genres; he bulldozed boundaries. And from his audacious endeavors, we can distill potent elixirs for our creative journeys.

First, the embrace of hybridity. Parsons was never confined to a single genre, and showed how creativity flourishes in intersections – it's when you meld rock's rebellion with country's soul that you get a sound both familiar and groundbreaking. In creative pursuits, looking beyond 'genre', be it a field, discipline, or medium, can lead to resplendent innovations.

Then there's the beauty of raw vulnerability. Parsons wore his heart, not on his sleeve, but in his vocal cords. There's a lesson for all creators here: True creativity often demands vulnerability. It's that visceral, unfiltered emotion that resonates, that makes a piece timeless.

Lastly, and perhaps most poignantly, Parsons' short-lived but impactful career reminds us of the fleeting nature of existence. Don't wait for the perfect moment, the ideal inspiration, that elusive muse. Seize the day, and pour your essence into your work.

In the tapestry of creativity, Gram Parsons is that unexpected, iridescent thread that catches the eye. And as we weave our own narratives, it wouldn't hurt to add a little cosmic twang to the mix. Cosmic, after all, isn't just for galaxies. It's for every soul daring enough to traverse the unknown expanses of imagination. Rock on.

Creativity & Condiments: The Majesty of Mustard

Mustard gets a bad rap. When we as a society discuss spices and condiments, mustard is rarely mentioned, neither as one of the hippest or one of the most beloved ways of flavor food. Sure, it gets discussed in connection to hotdogs, but where people go crazy about chili crisp (understandable, I love me some lao gan ma) and start Substacks about ketchup, mustard is often seen as pedestrian, utilitarian, and dull. This is a true shame, for not only is mustard a highly interesting condiment, it also represents the first thing human's used to spice food with.

In a fascinating study of culinary archeology, Saul et al. (2013) show that humans used mustard as early as 6100 years ago. Analyzing pottery from the western Baltic (such as Denmark!), they found evidence of phytoliths from something much like modern garlic mustard seeds. These have little nutritional value yet a powerful taste, suggesting that they were used specifically to flavor other foods, i.e. they were used as a spice! In other words, mustard has been with us for a very long time, unlike that upstart ketchup... In was an important part of early cuisine

in places such as Africa, India, and China – the latter may have given us yellow mustard, as such a paste was made as early as in the Zhou Dynasty. The Romans got into it as well, creating a condiment from unfermented grape juice and mustard seeds they called *mustum ardens*, which is where we have our name from it from. So, ignore this historical flavoring at your peril! It has, as the saying goes, a history with us. It is the original condiment, the original spice, the flavor that started it all. Hmm, maybe I should get a hotdog... 🌭 🍷

Saul H, Madella M, Fischer A, Glykou A, Hartz S, Craig OE (2013) Phytoliths in Pottery Reveal the Use of Spice in European Prehistoric Cuisine. PLoS ONE 8(8): e70583. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0070583>

On the Queer Legacy of “Lavender Country”

“Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.”

— Bertrand Russell

With Queen Bey releasing “Cowboy Carter”, I have as of late been served a number of articles discussing forgotten African-American pioneers in country music, as well as the influence of diverse music genres on the same. This has gotten me to think back to another forgotten piece of music history – the album “Lavender Country”. A true innovation, the first openly gay album of country music, and it deserves your attention.

Patrick Haggerty grew up in rural Washington State, where he learnt to stay closeted, yet began to channel his frustration into activism and/as music. His band Lavender Country, with their eponymous debut album (released in 1973), was born out of this setting and frustration. Funded by the Gay Community Social Services of Seattle with a paltry \$1,000, the album was a community effort, with friends and volunteers pitching in

to bring Haggerty's vision to life. Musically, the album is pure country, with twanging guitars, fiddles, and Haggerty's distinct vocals. Lyrically, it is unlike anything else in the country music scene, before or since. Songs like "Cryin' These Cocksucking Tears" and "Back in the Closet Again" are in line with country music's storytelling tradition, but also openly queer and political. Mainstream country radio wouldn't touch it, and the album was relegated to LGBTQ+-bookstores, played at protests and gatherings. For decades it was an oddity, if appreciated by a small fandom. It was re-issued in 2014, and is today seen as a landmark album, created by a true pioneer.

Country has become more inclusive, with artists like Brandi Carlile, Orville Peck, and Lil Nas X. Cowboy Carter will sell like hell. Still, they are here because someone walked before them – in lavender country. 😊

The Creative Gloom of Joy Division

“You’ve got to learn your instrument. Then, you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail.”

– Charlie Parker

Creativity discourse tends to emphasize the upbeat and the joyful, and despite their name, this band wasn’t that. Formed in 1976 (as the Stiff Kittens, later Warsaw) in the wake of the punk explosion, Joy Division started, like many others, under the influence of punk’s raw energy. But whereas punk often leaned into the fun of causing chaos, they turned inward, with a sparse sound built on Peter Hook’s distinctive bass lines, Bernard Sumner’s minimalist guitar and synth work, and Stephen Morris’s driving drumming. Yet what truly defined their music was Ian Curtis’s baritone voice and his introspective, often tormented lyrics.

In songs like “Love Will Tear Us Apart” and “Shadowplay,” Curtis tore into themes of existential dread, emotional isolation, and the failed search for meaning – an unflinching look at

an emotionally barren world. The creative process of Joy Division was marked by this willingness to break the mold, to experiment with gloom where others were still looking for the party. Producer Martin Hannett played a significant role in this, using unconventional recording techniques to sculpt a sense of space and building an atmosphere as angular as the cityscape the music came from.

They may have sprung from the Sex Pistols first gig at Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester, but they went on to influence and even create the post-punk and alternative rock scene of the 1980s and beyond. Bands like The Cure, The Smiths, and Radiohead all owe a debt. Their time together was limited (Ian Curtis was dead by 1980), but their impact was huge.

Creativity is more than the pink fluffy clouds presented in the books on the topic and by the nigh-on unbearable consultants of the genre. Sometimes it is about showing the world as just as bleak as you see it. Sometimes it is about realizing it will all tear you apart. □ 🎧

Creativity & Condiments: On Chili Crisp

I know I'm not alone in being addicted to chili crisp, particularly the magical kind sold under the iconic Lao Gan Ma brand, but I am an ardent fan. It is one of those condiments that can be put on most everything, and I even have to admit to once or twice having had a small spoon of it on its own. Spicy, smokey, with some texture and a lot of depth, it is a culinary superstar. But where did it come from? Chili oil, with various amounts of crisp in it, has a history in China, but not as long a one as you might think. Chili isn't native to the country, and was introduced in the 16th century. It wasn't even that popular as a flavoring at first, but come the late 18th century, it was used in many a food, particularly in Hunan. In 1790, it starts turning up in written recipes. However, it would take two more centuries for the chili crisp we know to become a popular condiment!

Tao Huabi, the creator of Lao Gan Ma (which translates to "Old Godmother"), began her journey as a widowed street food vendor in the Guizhou province during the 1990s. Seeking to enhance her noodle dishes, she experimented with a blend of fried chili peppers, onions, and other aromatic ingredients. The

resulting sauce quickly became a local favorite, particularly due to its deep umami notes. As demand grew, Tao transitioned from street vendor to business owner, founding the Lao Gan Ma Special Flavour Foodstuffs Company in 1997. Lao Gan Ma's popularity in China skyrocketed, and it soon began to attract international attention. Food bloggers and chefs in the West discovered the condiment, praising its ability to enhance a wide range of cuisines.

Today, there are many chili crisps out there, yet many of us swear by Lao Gan Ma only. Sure, it may be just a well-branded twist on a tale of chilis told over centuries in China, but who am I to doubt Godmother? 🌶️🥫

Better Than Any Book on Creativity: “The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady”

There are places I go whenever I feel extra tired and let down by the pabulum that goes for creativity research, and one of the wells I can always draw from is not a place, nor a book, but an album. I am referring to “The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady”, by the mercurial genius Charlie Mingus. It is not necessarily easy listening, and owes much to both classical music (Mingus considered it an “ethnographic ballet”) and the compositional genius of Duke Ellington. It is also pure creative brilliance.

To understand this album is to understand the essence of creative risk. Mingus’s magnum opus is an intricate tapestry of sound, weaving together elements of free jazz, bebop, and classical orchestration. The album is not so much a collection of tracks as it is a living entity, a musical organism that breathes, dances, and sometimes screams.

Recorded in 1963, it is a seminal exploration of the possibilities of sound, a demonstration of how far one can push things and still create something coherent and beautiful. The kicker: the album’s innovation isn’t just in its composition; it’s in its depth.

Mingus taps into a wellspring of human emotions, from the ecstasy to the agony. It's a journey, a challenge, at the same time tender, humorous, and angry (as its creator).

"The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady" is more than just a piece of jazz history; it's a manifesto on creativity. Far beyond the platitudes of creativity theory, it communicates bold experimentation and profound emotional insight, and just swings whilst doing so. No "thinking outside the box" (or similar cheesiness) here, just raw, unfettered thinking through music. 

Creativity & Condiments: The Charms of Chimichurri

If one had to name national condiments, quite a few countries might struggle. Some for being spoilt for choice, others because their most beloved condiment is in universal use. When it comes to Argentina, however, there can be only one – the magical sauce known as chimichurri. It is embroiled in the mythology of the Pampas, where gauchos (the Argentine cowboys) tend to cattle and arrange grand asados (barbecues). It is here we expect to find chimichurri, a fresh and tangy mix of parsley, garlic, vinegar, olive oil, and a hint of red pepper flakes. It pairs beautifully with steak, not least due to its sheer simplicity – ingredients straight from the land, chopped, mixed, and served. No wonder Argentinians revere it.

The story of chimichurri is however less straightforward than this story indicates, and may well have a deeper ancestry than a couple of gauchos going all foodie out on the Pampas. There are at least two competing stories about where this charming, elemental sauce came from. It's a raw, unpretentious mixture, made with herbs known in many a region, so the idea that it

has a heritage is not all that strange. Some claim that it was created by Irish immigrants, who were used to eating beef with a tangy sauce and simply made due to with what they could find in Argentina. A more likely background story is that it is related to the Basque sauce tximitxurri, which is a very similar herb concoction which uses cider vinegar. It is also possible it was influenced by Moroccan chermoula.

Regardless of inspiration, chimichurri became Argentinian, and then a globally admired condiment. Today, it's beloved for being both perfectly balanced and endlessly adaptable. A creativity masterclass, in green. 🌿 🥑

The Curiously Contemporary Case of the Caesar Salad

When thinking about which food might be the most common on menus the world over, the winner is easy to pick out – it's the burger. That said, the ubiquity of the Caesar Salad might be an even greater mystery. How did this quirky creation, without the history of the burger (for humans have eaten grilled meat with bread for a long time), become a staple in restaurants from Tulsa to Timbuktu? It has no connection to Roman emperors, no real salad ancestry, but is instead a true innovation.

The mastermind behind this iconic dish was Caesar Cardini, an Italian immigrant who owned a restaurant in Tijuana during the dry spell of Prohibition. It was here, on a busy Fourth of July weekend in 1924, that the Caesar Salad was purportedly born. Cardini's kitchen was running low on ingredients after a particularly busy service, so Caesar decided to make do with what he had. In a theatrical flourish, he chose to prepare salads tableside, making a show of it. The original ingredients were simple yet unconventional: whole romaine lettuce leaves, olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper, anchovies, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce,

eggs, Parmesan cheese, and some croutons. Why? That was what was left.

The salad was an immediate hit, and started its rapid spread. Some have challenged Cardini's tale, but the salad still bears his name, and today it can be found in both simple cafés and Michelin-starred restaurants. Sure, it has evolved – the sauce we today consider classic integrated the anchovies, and at some point adding chicken became common – but the origins are still back in a little ol' restaurant in Tijuana, where necessity became the mother of not only invention, but a culinary staple. 🍷 📺 📺

Creativity & Condiments: Ketchunism

“When you’re curious, you find lots of interesting things to do.”
– Walt Disney

I asked an AI to invent a condiment religion, and it delivered:

“In an era of increasing secularism and spiritual curiosity, a surprising new religious movement is taking hold – one that worships the humble condiment of ketchup as a divine embodiment. Ketchunism, as this faith is called, originated in late 2022 as an internet joke among foodies but has since blossomed into a vibrant global community of the devout red sauce followers. The core tenets of Ketchunism are based on the revealed writings found in vintage ketchup bottles and packets. Adherents believe that the sugary, viscous ambrosia was sent by a supreme being to nourish humanity’s souls as well as our taste buds. The crimson, tangy nectar symbolizes the essential life force that flows within all creations of the Ketchmaker.

“We ketchupredients look to the 57 Varieties as our sacred numerology,” explains Grand Fryman Rayford Dubbayew, a high-ranking minister. “The precise blend of ingredients

and preparatory methods holds esoteric meaning unlocked by rigorous doctrinal study.” Ketchunist teachings encompass an intricate theology and system of spiritual practices. For instance, the faith has seven primary CondiMandments governing ethical behavior like “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s fry sauce.” There are daily ritualistic observations like chanting the ingredients listed on a Heinz bottle as a meditative mantra. The central act of Ketchunist ceremony is the Immersion – complete full-body baptism in a vat of the blessed red sauce. This symbolic “re-covering” is seen as purifying and accepting the truth of the condiment divinity. The holiday feasts of Fourthmeal and Endmeal celebrate sacred cycles of consumption.” 🍷 🏠

The Strange Case of Stuffed Crust

How do you innovate on something as simple and simultaneously perfect as pizza? Well, one attempt to do that is by enhancing the crust, more specifically the outer, thicker rim of a pizza, with something as lovely as e.g. mozzarella. As a result, stuffed crust pizza made its grand entrance onto the global pizza stage in 1995, courtesy of Pizza Hut. The history, however, is a bit more complicated.

The innovation behind this culinary creation is attributed to Patty Scheibmeir, a food scientist who worked for Pizza Hut. She and her team spent three years in the lab and kitchen with the challenge of how to incorporate cheese into the crust without it leaking during baking. It required rethinking dough elasticity, cheese behavior, and even the pizza box itself. That said, they may have had a bit of an advantage. In 1987, a man by the name of Anthony Mongiello had patented a method of creating a stuffed crust, and even had meetings with Pizza Hut about licensing it. They had demurred, yet seemingly the idea had stuck.

When stuffed crust pizza finally hit the market, accompa-

nied by a marketing campaign that featured celebrities eating pizza crust-first, the innovation rapidly captured the public's attention. The product was a commercial success, reportedly boosting Pizza Hut's sales by 37% in its debut week alone. Not even the inevitable billion-dollar lawsuit stopped the runaway success – in 2013 courts found that the method(s) used weren't similar enough for the patent to have been breached (and at this point Anthony was already dead).

Is it an innovation? Well, it was a novel idea, and it certainly found a market. Does it improve pizza? You be the judge... 🍕 🍷

Creativity & Condiments: The Birth of BBQ Sauce

Who doesn't love barbecue sauce? Tangy, smokey, and sweet, it hits a multitude of notes, all of them wonderful. But where did it come from? BBQ itself may originate from the Taino word "barbacoa," referring to slow-cooking meat over a wooden platform. In the 17th century, as European settlers came to the New World, they adopted such techniques but also brought with them their own traditions, including the practice of preserving meat with vinegar and spices. Adding these mixtures to meat before and after cooking not only preserved it but also enhanced its flavor, something particularly important in the southern colonies, where the climate necessitated inventive ways to keep food from spoiling.

The earliest iterations of barbecue sauce were likely quite simple, consisting of vinegar, salt, and pepper. However, the real magic happened when African slaves began influencing barbecue. African culinary traditions emphasized bold flavors and spices, transforming the simple vinegar-based sauces into more flavorful concoctions. By the 18th century, barbecue

had become a popular activity in the southern United States, and it's during this period barbecue sauce began to take on regional characteristics. In the Carolinas, vinegar and mustard-based sauces emerged, reflecting the influence of German immigrants. In Memphis, the sauce evolved to include tomatoes and molasses. In Kansas City, the sauce became thicker and sweeter, often with a tomato sauce as a base, along with brown sugar, molasses, and, as always, spices. It's still evolving.

So there you have it, the condensed story of a condensed sauce, one that can truly elevate grilled meats, and get your fingers good and sticky. 🍷 🥫

The Problem With Pumpkin Spice

In our quest to commodify and commercialize every possible aspect of human experience, we have may well reached the zenith – or rather, the nadir – of absurdity with the pervasive and relentless pumpkinification of everything. Yes, I am talking about the pumpkin spice phenomenon, a culinary abomination that has spread its tentacles far beyond the realm of lattes and into every conceivable product on the market.

The introduction of pumpkin spice to our palates began innocently enough, with the launch of the now-infamous Pumpkin Spice Latte by Starbucks in 2003. Little did we know that this seemingly benign beverage would be the catalyst for a pumpkin spice tsunami that today has infiltrated every corner of our lives, from our breakfast cereals to our candles, our lotions to our lip balms. The nadir of this madness, however, must surely be the existence of pumpkin spice-scented butt wipes. Yes, you read that correctly. Dude Wipes, a company that prides itself on its “innovative” hygiene products for men, has seen fit to offer the world a pumpkin spice-scented butt wipe.

The absurdity of this product encapsulates everything that

is wrong with the pumpkin spice craze. It is a testament to the lengths that companies will go to cash in on a trend, no matter how ridiculous or unnecessary the product may be. And it is a stark reminder of our culture's obsession with novelty and our willingness to buy into the hype, no matter how preposterous it may be.

So say no to pumpkin spice, this superficial faux-innovation, and demand something better. Innovation for innovation's sake is bad enough, pumpkinification for the sake of pumpkinification sounds an awful lot like the sixth trumpet of Revelation – a warning of woe(s) to come. 🎃

Creativity & Condiments: On Ranch

I never really got ranch. I mean, I tried it when I went to the US (ranch dressing was almost unknown in Europe until relatively recently), but I never understood the fascination with it – some slightly fermented dairy with spices that was created as a salad dressing but was, as far as I could tell, used on just about everything? Still, it intrigued me.

As far as I have been able to figure out, it was created in Alaska, by a Nebraskan, namely Steve Hanson. He and his crew worked on plumbing projects deep in the sticks, and cooking was an issue. So, to create something tasty, he experimented with a buttermilk dressing that he made more interesting by dried ingredients at hand – herbs, onion powder, garlic powder, and a lot of pepper. This was in the early years of the 1950s, and although the sauce was popular with his crew, that was it. In 1954 Henson takes his earnings and buys a ranch (!) in California together with his wife. They call it Hidden Valley, and set it up as something of an experience ranch, where people can come and cosplay as cowboys. It also has a popular steakhouse, and here they serve “ranch dressing”, which becomes an immediate

hit. In fact, it becomes so popular they start selling jars of the stuff! Later on, they start selling a dried mix for people to make their own dressing at home – which is soon sold nationally. In 1972, the brand Hidden Valley Ranch (and, I assume, the IPs) is bought by Clorox, and soon after you could buy ready-made ranch from supermarkets across the US.

Today, ranch (which today is a generic name) outsells ketchup in the US, even though it remains a fringe condiment in the rest of the world, and is used on everything from pizza to sandwiches. And to think, it all started in the woods in Alaska, as some creative kitchen improvisation!

On Liquid Death and the Rise of the Meta-Corporation

I smiled at Liquid Death when I first heard of it, thinking it was one of those funny fad products that might capture people's attention for a moment but really not go anywhere from there, but as I can get the bloody thing in Danish 7-11's now, I thought it deserved a little extra think.

For those who missed it, Liquid Death, in tallboy cans adorned with menacing skulls, looks more like an artifact from a heavy metal concert than something you'd grab off a grocery store shelf when parched. It promises to "Murder Your Thirst," and it is... water. Flavored, or not, but still, this isn't just hydration; it's hydration with an attitude. A very profitable attitude, as it would turn out.

When news broke that Liquid Death was being valued at a figure that comfortably sits in the territory marked "billion," the collective jaw of the business community dropped. In an era where tech startups with nebulous products and even more nebulous profit models achieve stratospheric valuations on a regular basis, Liquid Death stands out for a peculiar reason: it

sells water, arguably the most basic commodity on the planet.

The secret sauce behind Liquid Death's success is what can be termed as "meta-marketing." Meta-marketing is about creating a narrative so compelling that the product itself becomes secondary to the brand story being told. For Liquid Death, that means self-aware ads, and leaning into the absurdity. It sells water and metal (the cans, duh), at absolutely astronomical margins. It knows it has nothing going for it except attitude. Yet, in late capitalism, attitude can go a very long way – like all the way to a billion dollar valuation. 📉💀

Alcohol & Innovation: On the Drinking Straw

“Over the years, I have learned that every significant invention has several characteristics. By definition it must be startling, unexpected, and must come into a world that is not prepared for it. If the world were prepared for it, it would not be much of an invention.” – Edwin Land

It might sound like a joke, or like drunkard’s bravado, but sometimes innovation comes well lubricated. Take the case of the modern drinking straw, a beloved boon when summer sippin’ that has saved many a surface from children’s clumsiness. It might seem a trivial object, but its invention is a tale woven with savvy and Southern charm. At the heart of this story is a quest to preserve the pure, unadulterated taste of the mint julep – a cocktail so revered that any compromise on flavor is a crime against taste.

Imagine, if you will, the 19th-century cocktail scene. Rye grass straws were all the rage, but they had a fatal flaw: they fast became soggy and left a distinctly grassy aftertaste. Enter

Marvin Chester Stone, an inventor with a penchant for problem-solving and a love for a good drink. One fateful day in the 1880s, while trying to enjoy his mint julep, Stone had an epiphany. Like any self-respecting inventor frustrated with subpar solutions, he took matters into his own hands. Stone, who conveniently owned a paper cigarette holder factory, decided to roll a piece of paper around a pencil and glue it together. Voilà! The paper straw was born, with a patent in 1888.

But Stone didn't stop there. Knowing that paper and liquid are not the best of friends, he treated his new invention with paraffin wax, making it water-resistant. For decades, Stone's paper straw was the gold standard. Then, the mid-20th century brought us plastic straws, those cheap, durable, but environmentally disastrous little tubes. Sometimes, innovation can be a step backwards. Today we're pretty much back where we started, with variations of paper straws, so as you sip your summer beverage, make a little toast to the man who got us here – Marvin of the Mint Julep. 🥤 🌿

On the Glory That Is Butter

“All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal or fattening.”

—Alexander Woollcott

Every now and then it is important for a person who is engaged with creativity and innovation, particularly those of us who do so in a professional capacity, to take a step back and ponder then things that do not need to be recast, recreated, or innovated upon, simply by dint of being just about perfect as they are. Beer is an obvious example of this – even though there are hipsters about mucking with making ale out of yeast grown in the brewer’s beard (it’s a real thing, look it up: Rogue Ales Beard Beer) – but today I am going to talk about butter.

Butter, the end-product of a process in which milk or cream is beaten until the fats separate, has been with us for a long time. It is believed that it was first churned around 8000 to 3000 BCE, among the early farmers in India and the Middle East, and the practice traveled rapidly. No wonder, as butter is pretty damn fantastic. It enhances flavors both sweet and savory, it can be

used for any number of things in the kitchen, and it is, in its own way, nutritious. No wonder, then, that no lesser a kitchen guru than Fernand Point (justly the father not just of modern French gastronomy, but modern European cuisine), when asked what great cooking takes, answered “Butter! Butter! Yet again butter!”

Sure, people have tried to innovate even this. Margarine, that foul pretender, has even had the temerity to don the garb of “I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter!” (I can.). Some have abandoned butter for various oils, but although I do respect a nice virgin olive oil in e.g. salads, there’s nothing for proper frying like butter – except, of course, clarified butter like ghee, which really should be called “super-butter”. So let us take pause, and think a little about the treasure that is butter, and ponder the fact that with all our innovations, we’ve had it for millennia and never topped it.

Instant Ramen Innovation Lessons

Alright, hold onto your chopsticks, because we are diving into the steamy, savory world of instant ramen, a marvel of gastronomic innovation that's as delightful to your taste buds as it is to an innovator's spirit. Oh yes, there is more to these noodles than meets the eye.

Now, picture the scene: it's post-war Japan, and enter our unsung hero, Momofuku Ando, a man with a vision so simple it's genius: creating a quick, convenient, and tasty solution to the food shortages plaguing his nation. In a makeshift shed, resembling more a wizard's den than a food lab, Ando embarks on his culinary odyssey, tinkering and toiling like a mad scientist on a mission. His weapon of choice? A wok and tempura oil, where noodles met their crispy destiny, resulting in a product that could rival the convenience of fast food with the soul of a home-cooked meal.

In the cosmos of innovation, Ando is a rock star of perseverance and ingenuity, proving that a sprinkle of audacity can birth a revolution. Through trial and error, his noodle narrative crescendoed to a global phenomenon, where this once humble

dish found its way into cupboards across continents, sprinkling joy and flavorsome convenience one bowl at a time. But here's where it gets cheeky: instant ramen didn't just rest on its laurels. No, it twirled, flipped, and adapted, offering a potpourri of flavors and textures, sashaying to the diverse rhythms of global palates, making it a ceaselessly relevant staple in kitchens worldwide.

So, the next time you tear open a packet of instant ramen, remember, you're not just preparing a meal, you're indulging in a slice of history, a testament to the boundless human ingenuity that dances at the intersection of necessity and novelty. Slurp on, comrades, slurp on! 🍜

On Japan's Christmas KFC Addiction

For many in Japan, it cannot truly be a joyous Christmas unless you've got buckets of fried chicken on the table. Yes, in a plot twist no Christmas movie saw coming, KFC has become as synonymous with Christmas in Japan as Santa Claus is in the West. This finger-lickin' Christmas tradition reportedly began in the 1970s due to a combination of clever marketing and a western holiday being lost in translation. The story goes that a group of foreigners couldn't find turkey on Christmas dDay and opted for the next best thing: KFC. The fast-food chain, spotting a golden (fried) opportunity, launched a festive marketing campaign, and the rest is history. It's like the Nativity, but with more grease'n'gravy.

Let's take a moment to appreciate the sheer audacity of it all. In a country known for sushi, sashimi, and a rich culinary tradition, it's a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken that's the star of Christmas. This isn't just fast food; it's fast tradition. And it's not just a casual affair. Oh no. This is a Christmas dinner that requires planning, pre-ordering, and braving the queues. KFC simply cannot make enough to quell the desire, so people

pre-order weeks and months in advance. It's like Black Friday but with more cholesterol, a great celebration of cultural fusion and white trash aesthetics. Extra points for putting on "Elvis' Christmas Album" (1957).

Japan's KFC Christmas is a testament both to the power of marketing and the universal language of delicious, chicken-fried, massively unhealthy food. It's a reminder that traditions can come in the most unexpected forms (and flavors). So, this holiday season, if you find yourself tired of turkey and ham, just remember: there's a country out there where Christmas tastes like eleven herbs and spices. 🍴 🍗

Warheads: Candy as Masochism

I was never a particular fan of sour candy. Sure, I dabbled, and I have eaten some with pleasure, but even when I as a child came across the more extreme kinds, I went for the ‘safer’ options. Still, I have always been a bit fascinated with Warheads, the ‘extreme sour’ candies that promised something akin to a nuclear blast in your mouth – their logo promised immediate death from cranial destruction, after all!

Warheads were introduced in 1975 in Taiwan, a place known for culinary experimentation. Turning this towards developing a candy that can only be described as masochistic – sour enough to be painful yet also pleasurable as candy – aligned well with a burgeoning interest in more intense flavor experiences, an emerging trend in the global candy market.

The primary agent of this sensory explosion was malic acid, a substance found in many fruits, but used in concentrated form in Warheads to create an unprecedented level of sourness. This dissipates after some seconds, normally less than 10, and is replaced by a more normal sour candy taste – a whip’s lash of extreme sensation followed by sweet release. See a pattern?

Introduced to the US and the world in 1991 by the Foreign Candy Company, Warheads were sold as a novelty, a product that intrigued kids with its promise of an extreme taste experience. The early marketing of Warheads played into this novelty, presenting it not just as a treat but as a challenge. This was a move that resonated well with children/teenagers, sparking a cultural phenomenon where Warheads became akin to a rite of passage. Today, there are endless variation of extreme sour candy, with names such as Toxic Waste Hazardously Sour and Cry Baby Tears. Yet Warheads are still around, the OG of making candy that mixes pain and pleasure. 🧪

Accidental Innovation: On Cornflakes

“The value of experiment depends on the skill of the experimenter.”

– Frank Westheimer

It all began at Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan, a health resort run by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, specifically the Kellogg brothers – John Harvey Kellogg, the superintendent, and his brother, Will Keith Kellogg. John, a doctor, was a staunch advocate for vegetarianism and believed in the importance of a bland diet for physical health and moral virtue.

One fateful day in 1894, the Kellogg brothers were attempting to make a simple, digestible form of bread for their patients. The process involved boiling wheat, but at one point they were called away, leaving the wheat to sit out and become stale. Upon their return, they decided to roll out the wheat anyway. To their surprise the wheat came out in thin flakes, which they toasted. The result was a hit among the patients, offering a novel texture and a palatable alternative to the sanitarium’s dull diet.

Spurred by this, the brothers began experimenting with other

grains, eventually turning to corn. The result was cornflakes, a crispy, golden cereal that proved even more popular than its predecessor. Will Keith Kellogg, recognizing the commercial potential, wanted to bring cornflakes to the broader public, but John Harvey Kellogg was hesitant. Undeterred, Will forged ahead and in 1906 founded the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company, which would eventually become the Kellogg Company, transforming cornflakes from a dietary innovation into a cornerstone of breakfasts everywhere.

The moral of the story? Well, cornflakes did not, as John hoped, aid in the search for abstinence and moral virtue. Instead, it created a new category of breakfast food, one worth billions. And all because of the silly mistake of letting boiled wheat go stale! What a lovely mistake to make... ☺☀

Accidental Innovation: On Bubble Wrap

We live in a world inundated by bubble popping. If it is not one of the neverending packages from Amazon and/or China, it's bubble pop toys in every imaginable shape and form – I've seen bubble pop phone cases, bubble pop handbags, even bubble pop keychains. Still, few people know where bubble wrap – the OG of popping – originated. It was not, as you might think, created to protect the world's goods in transit.

The real origin story of everyone's favorite fidget toy starts with two engineers, Alfred Fielding and Marc Chavannes, attempting to create a new type of textured wallpaper in 1957. Yes, you read that right – a wallpaper. The idea was to seal two shower curtains together in a way where air bubbles were captured, creating a textured surface. The aesthetic revolution they envisaged, however, failed to materialize. Turns out that not that many people want bubbly walls. Who'd-a thunk it?!

But the story of bubble wrap is a testament to the adage that one man's failed wallpaper is another man's revolutionary packaging material. Fielding and Chavannes quickly realized that their invention had far greater potential as a packaging

material, especially for protecting fragile items during shipping. By 1960, they had founded Sealed Air Corporation, and the rest is, as they say, history. The material's impact on logistics and product safety cannot be overstated.

Goes to show that innovation moves in mysterious ways. What starts out as wallpaper can revolutionize packaging, and later the toy industry. So as you pop, remember that you are part of the illustrious history of innovation! Granted, the rump end, but still. Pop on! 🖋️📦

Accidental Innovation: On the Super Soaker

As summer is slowly approaching, my son and I have started discussing the essentials in life, namely waterguns. This, unsurprisingly, has made me think back to that most wonderful of innovations – the Super Soaker, the watergun that kicked off a new era in aggressive aquatic play.

Surprising as it might sound, the story begins in Mobile, Alabama, during the era of the segregated South. Here, in 1949, Lonnie Johnson was born. He was inventive from a young age, and won a national science competition during high school – a significant achievement for an African-American student at the time. Johnson's prowess led him to Tuskegee University, where he studied mechanical and nuclear engineering. He went on to work for the U.S. Air Force and NASA, where he contributed to the Galileo Jupiter probe and the Mars Observer project.

The invention of the Super Soaker was a result of a happy accident. While working on an environmentally friendly heat pump in his own bathroom in 1982, Johnson conducted experiments involving a high-pressure nozzle to pump heat-transfer

fluids. This sparked the idea for a new type of water gun, and Johnson started refining the design. Securing a manufacturer was not straightforward, however. The toy industry was difficult to penetrate, but Johnson's persistence paid off when he finally partnered with the toy company Larami Corporation. The Super Soaker was launched in 1990 and quickly became a sensation, generating over \$200 million in sales in its first few years.

Thus, the story of the Super Soaker contains multitudes. It shows great things can come from humble beginnings, and the importance of serendipity. Most of all, it shows that innovation can be fun! 

On the \$999 Trash Can – The Mill

It would seem a forgone conclusion to state that any garbage can for the home that costs almost a thousand dollars is either a luxury item that speaks to social inequality or an over-engineered pseudo-innovation that speaks to society's obsession with novelty for the sake of novelty. Interestingly, The Mill challenges this rather reductionistic description. Not completely, but enough that it deserves to be noted.

Simply put, The Mill is a trash can meant for the kitchen of a normal abode. It does more than keep trash separated and limits odors, and instead enables you to use the internal grinders to take your food waste and grind this into a pulp – seemingly the approximate granularity of coffee grounds. This is not as silly an idea as one might originally think. To start, a key problem in waste is the sheer space it occupies, so making waste more compact has a nonzero utility to it. More interestingly, the grounds can be used as compost, i.e. you might put the mulch it creates into your garden (assuming you have one). Even more interestingly, the company that produces The Mill has circular economy visions, and you can buy the trash can with

a subscription (because of course it has a subscription model) where you can send your ground up waste back to the company where they transform it to chicken feed. Assumedly you might also use it to feed your own chickens or pigs, if you happen to have them.

It is a curious innovation, this. Is it over-engineered and something of a pseudo-innovation? Yes, of course it is. It's a power-grinder for your food scraps, for Christ's sake! At the same time it is an innovation that tries to solve a real problem, and aid society in sustainability matters. Just goes to show the complexity of contemporary innovation. 🗑️ 🐷

The Rise and Fall of Jolt Cola

Jolt Cola was the brainchild of C.J. Rapp, a marketing genius who was attuned to a new generations desire to stand out, and to feel more awake. Launched in 1985, Jolt Cola boldly positioned itself as the antithesis of the health movement that was starting to take root. It was a time when diet sodas were gaining prominence, yet here was a drink unabashedly packed with sugar and caffeine – brain juice for the computing generation!

For a nerd like myself, enmeshed in cyberpunk novels and dreams of hacking, Jolt Cola seemed to speak directly to my desires. The beverage seemed to speak of coding through the night and extended hours gaming, realizing our new cultural spaces. It wasn't just the high caffeine content that made it special; it was the ethos it embodied – a sort of daring attitude that resonated with our youthful desire to break free from conventions.

Yet Jolt Cola's popularity was as fleeting as it was intense. The beverage industry was rapidly evolving, and soon, new energy drinks began to overshadow Jolt. These new drinks not only matched the caffeine levels but also offered a variety of flavors

and herbal supplements. Yet, the decline of Jolt Cola was more than just being outpaced by competitors. As awareness about the impacts of high sugar and caffeine consumption grew, Jolt's very selling point became its Achilles' heel, and the way it had become shorthand for nerd and/or neckbeard certainly didn't help...

Still, despite its fall from mainstream popularity, Jolt Cola holds a special place in the hearts of those of us who experienced it during its heyday. For us, it was more than a drink; it was a symbol of a particular time in our lives. Jolt Cola, in its rise and fall, was not just a lesson in consumer trends; it was a vivid chapter in the cultural story of my generation. ☕ ⚡

Sun Ra – An Appreciation

“I start in the middle of a sentence and move both directions at once.”

– John Coltrane

In the grand pantheon of musical eccentrics, few shine as brightly – or as strangely – as the jazz great Sun Ra (AKA Le Sony'r Ra, 1914-1993). Born Herman Poole Blount, he would go on to reinvent himself as a cosmic philosopher, avant-garde jazz composer, and bandleader of the Arkestra, and stood for that special case where eccentricity and genius merge into a dazzling supernova of sound and vision.

At the core of Sun Ra's work was his conception of music as a transformative force, capable of elevating humanity to a new level of consciousness. He believed that through sound, humans could communicate with the cosmos (he himself claimed he was from Saturn), and he sought to create a sonic tapestry that would act as a bridge between the earthly and the divine. His compositions, which incorporated elements of swing, electronic music, and traditional African rhythms, defied the conventional

boundaries of jazz and anticipated many aspects of the avant-garde and free jazz movements.

On albums such as “Space is the Place” (1973), “Lanquidity” (1978), and “Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, Vol. 1” (1965) we are presented with his special fusion of jazz and cosmic philosophy, where Sun Ra’s Arkestra navigates through interstellar overtures and cosmic chants, creating a soundscape that is as much a spiritual journey as it is a musical one. His work could showcase both harsh and angular sounds, impeccable grooves and smoother jazz textures, never standing still, always aiming higher.

Partly outsider art, partly highly accomplished musicianship, Sun Ra stands as an example of the power of maverick creativity, and deserves to be remembered along the more conventional jazz greats. 🎷

The Fad Didn't Travel: Trapper Keeper

Consult almost any of the many English-language lists of trends that befell Gen X, and you will find the Trapper Keeper mentioned. It was clearly a much-beloved thing for many Americans, and spoke of school and youthful trends. Yet it never really took off outside of the US, although it did manage to get to Canada and some parts of Latin America.

First, what was the Trapper Keeper? Invented in the late 1970s by E. Bryant Crutchfield of the Mead Corporation, it was a binder with sliding plastic rings, folders, and pockets, all secured by a wrap-around flap with a Velcro closure. Its key feature was pocket folders called "Trappers," and it became a cultural icon, with designs from cartoons, TV shows, and video games. For a stationary nerd like me, this sounds awesome! My young self would have LOVED a Trapper Keeper. So why didn't it ever take off elsewhere?

In part it is likely due to the prison of success. The Mead Corporation, being an American company, had marketing and distribution on lock in the US, and the runaway success might well have been enough for the company. Why take the risk of

international expansion when you have a good thing going? It should also be remembered that the peak years of the Trapper Keeper's popularity (1970s-1990s) were a time when globalization was in its earlier stages. Global spread was more expensive, and without social media kids like me didn't even know what they were missing.

In recent years, there have been efforts to revive the Trapper Keeper, with Mead bringing back the original design in 2021. Now, I could buy it, but it holds no nostalgia for me. Instead, it is forever locked in a 70s I never inhabited, a trendy thing that never touched these northern shores. It just goes to show, some things just don't travel. 📖 🎓

The Wartime Ingenuity of Nutella

Nutella is beloved as a sweet coco-hazelnut mix, used as a spread and filling in various treats. You can get Nutella on pizza, in filled churros, on pancakes and waffles, as a topping for ice-cream – and that’s just on a single street in Copenhagen! Yet for all the love it is shown, few know the full history of this sweet, sweet innovation.

In the early 1940s, in the small town of Alba in Piedmont, Italy, the confectioner Pietro Ferrero was on a mission to create an affordable, yet delicious, sweet treat. Cocoa was a luxury that few could buy, particularly as the war raged, prompting Ferrero to use hazelnuts, abundant in the Piedmont region, as a substitute. By finely grinding the hazelnuts and combining them with just a hint of the precious cocoa available, he created a paste that was initially shaped into a loaf that could be sliced and served on bread, named “Giandujot” after a local carnival character symbolizing happiness and abundance.

The product was an instant success, a small luxury in austere times. However, it was not until 1951 that Ferrero’s son, Michele Ferrero, transformed the block into a creamy spread known

as “Supercrema,” making it even more popular. The true breakthrough came in 1964 when Michele Ferrero revamped the recipe and rebranded the product as Nutella, a portmanteau of “nut” and the Italian word for sweet, “ella.”

Nutella’s story is a testament to wartime ingenuity, demonstrating how limitations can foster innovation. For innovation does not require massive funding or a huge lab. Sometimes it is enough to look around, see what is there, and reuse this in a smart way. Sometimes, a humble nut can build a corporate empire. 🌰 🥛

On Stirring Up a Pot of Creative Gumbo

Belatedly, I discovered that yesterday was National Gumbo Day in the US, and this obviously got me thinking about food and creativity. And my, what a canvas for experimentation gumbo is!

Gumbo, with its roots in Louisiana, is more than just a dish; it's a cultural concoction. It's a soup, but it's also a story, a rich narrative of migration, fusion, and innovation. In every pot of gumbo, there's a reflection of the diverse heritage of the region: French, Spanish, West African, and Native American influences dance together, not in a choreographed ballet, but in a freestyle jam where each ingredient brings its unique flavor to the fore.

The beauty of gumbo is its refusal to be pigeonholed. While it has staple ingredients – a roux, the “holy trinity” of onion, bell pepper, and celery, and usually some form of meat or seafood – there's no definitive recipe. This fluidity makes it a darling of culinary adventurers. Want to toss in okra? Go ahead! Fancy duck or rabbit tonight? Why not? Feel like blending in some unusual spices? Be my guest.

This is where the metaphor for creativity shines through.

Gumbo teaches us that while it's essential to respect traditions and foundations, true innovation thrives when we're brave enough to experiment. Like jazz, another great gift from Louisiana, gumbo thrives on improvisation.

For those of us seeking to stir up our creative juices, gumbo serves as a flavorful reminder. Embrace the base, respect the tradition, but never be afraid to throw in something unexpected. After all, it's the bold combinations, the unexpected notes, that often lead to the most delightful surprises. As we ladle out servings of creativity, may our pots always simmer with the audacious spirit of gumbo.

Space Food Sticks: The Final Frontier of Snacking

We are constantly told that we are living in a golden age of innovation, yet there is something missing from it all. Comparing today's hype around AI with yesteryear's fascination with space travel makes our age seem bland and rather listless – I mean, where are the hype snacks?

Space Food Sticks were the epitome of space-age chic – a tangible, edible symbol of the future, right there on the supermarket shelf. Developed by the Pillsbury Company, these nutrient-packed snacks were initially created to meet the rigorous demands of space travel: compact, durable, and capable of withstanding the absence of gravity. Yet, their appeal on Earth was undeniable, offering mere mortals a taste of astronaut life.

At their launch, they were a marvel, a perfect alignment of marketing genius and societal obsession with all things space-related. They symbolized progress and the promise of a future where meals were convenient, scientific, and akin to interstellar. However, as the fervor of the Space Race cooled and the public's gaze turned from the cosmos back to the complexities of life on

Earth, the allure of Space Food Sticks waned.

The rise and fall of Space Food Sticks serve as a poignant reminder of the transient nature of food fads, particularly those tied so closely to a specific cultural moment. Yet, at the same time, they are a potent symbol of just how excited humanity was about space and the potential of innovation. Today, as our innovations become more and more inward-looking – oooh, a technology to autocomplete emails! – we might ponder whether we missed out when our dreams turned digital rather than astronomical. We need to dream bigger, stronger, snackier!



Creative and Chili-Crazy: Celebrating Ed Currie

Today I learnt that Ed Currie, the crazy genius of ever-hotter peppers, has had his latest creation – Pepper X – confirmed by Guinness World Records as the hottest pepper ever at a mind-blowing (and bowel-blasting) 2.69 million Scoville units. That is frankly insane, and at the same time a testament to the human desire to go ever further in creative endeavors – including obsessive chili rearing.

Currie's relentless journey into the fiery heart of capsicum evolution isn't just a quest for heat; it's emblematic of our innate drive to test, transcend, and reshape boundaries. In Ed's peppers, I see the soul of every artists, even if his canvas might land you in the hospital. This isn't about masochistic culinary ventures, but about the spirit of creativity and innovation.

Each new pepper Currie introduces to the world is not just hotter but is also a richer tapestry of flavors, aromas, and colors. They serve as metaphors for the complexities and layers that come with pushing the envelope in any domain, so, as we marvel (or recoil) at the audacious heat of Pepper X, let's also take a

moment to celebrate the fiery spirit of innovation it represents.

So here's to the Ed Curries of the world, who, through their singular obsessions, teach us that there truly are no limits to human imagination and creativity. Yes, on the surface it might look quite insane, but at the same time it is the obsessives who change the world – one crazy pepper at a time. 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️

Notes After Watching Wes Anderson's "Asteroid City"

In the cinematographic tapestries woven by Wes Anderson, one finds alchemic mixtures of meticulous framing, delightfully quirky narrative styles, and characters who embody a depth of eccentricity that elevates them to near-mythical status. It is a kaleidoscopic world of imagination, a rich well of creative inspiration.

Consider both "Asteroid City" and "The Grand Budapest Hotel". In both, Anderson presents a master class in the power of visual storytelling, with every frame akin to a painstakingly crafted painting. One cannot simply overlook the precise symmetry and the vibrant colour palettes that tease the senses, with a waltz of hues and counterpoints.

Or ponder "Moonrise Kingdom", where the untamed wilderness mirrors the reckless abandon of youth and first love. It's a sanctuary where creativity blossoms unfettered, guided by the naive but bold ventures of young protagonists, juxtaposed with a meditation on the responsibility that comes with adulthood.

In his oeuvre, one observes a proclivity to defy conventional

narrative norms, be it through the melancholy-infused family dynamics in “The Royal Tenenbaums” or the underwater adventures in “The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou”. These movies coax us to unfurl our creative tendrils, urging us to venture beyond the mundane and the predictable. It’s a wild, wonderful journey into the labyrinthine corridors of creativity, with Wes Anderson as a flamboyantly and eccentric guide urging us to bask in the delightful absurdities of the world.

On the Creative Potential of the Ultra-Luxe Pizza/Burger/Pasta/etc.

“No experiment is ever a complete failure. It can always be used as a bad example.”

– Paul Dickson

It is easy to condemn the tendency in the food industry to create ultra-luxe versions of otherwise common staples. When Daniel Boulud first created “the world’s most expensive burger” (that I wrote about almost two decades ago!), many turned their noses up at the very idea that a burger could cost a hundred dollars. Whilst I am no fan of plutocratic excess, I still feel that moral condemnation alone shouldn’t stop us from experimenting, even when this might result in some expensive oddities.

Consider the quest to create the world’s most expensive pizza. At a superficial glance, gilding a pizza with gold flakes, sprinkling it with caviar, or drizzling white truffle oil might seem like an opulent joke. But, if you lean in closer, the aspiration to make a humble dish extravagant can become a canvas for creativity. It isn’t just about the price tag; it’s about

reimagining the boundaries of what a dish can be, what our palette can experience. Using only the finest ingredients can seem wasteful, but also understood as an experiment with what “the finest” actually means.

There’s an allure to crafting something that’s familiar and yet utterly alien. It’s like taking a childhood memory, say of a simple pizza slice, and giving it a passport, a lavish education, and a couture gown. Sure, not every gold-draped pizza or diamond-infused ice cream sundae hits the mark. But every attempt, whether lauded or lampooned, contributes to the culinary conversation and pushes the envelope of food artistry. In the end, whether it’s food, fashion, or any other field, ultra-luxe versions of common things can remind us of the vast spectrum and audacity of human creativity, celebrating not luxury but limitless imagination. 🍷🍕

Olfactory Creativity: On Going Weird With Scented Candles

The world of scented candles, once the domain of vanilla and lavender, has been undergoing a quiet revolution. Today, alongside your traditional fragrances, you'll find an array of odd, even bizarre scents – think fried chicken, concrete after lightning, and the Warhammer 40K-branded “Scent of Pestilence”. Arguably, things were only kinda, sorta weird until 2020, when Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop released the much-derided “This Smells Like My Vagina”-candle, but now, it seems, there are few things that cannot get the scented candle treatment.

Let's start with the why. The expansion into unconventional scents is partly a response to market saturation. With so many brands offering similar products, companies have had to get creative to stand out. This is Innovation 101 – when a market becomes crowded, differentiation will occur. Moreover, the rise of strange scents in candles reflects a broader trend in consumer behavior: the desire for personalized, unique experiences. In a world where mass production and ubiquity are the norms, there's a growing appetite for products that are different, that

feel tailored, that break the mold. Sure, not a lot of people want to be the contrarian who makes their home smell like pasta water (an actual candle from D.S. & Durga), but in a globalized world, just many enough might.

Yes, some will consider all this proof positive that consumerism has entered an apocalyptic stage, literally scenting candles while the world burns, but it is also a sign that creativity has infinite palettes to work with, and that scent can be one way to express yourself in a unique manner. So, keep dreaming those odorous dreams... 

The Creativity Case of the Cronut

The cronut is more than a decade old, and to my shame, I have never had one. Then again, I do not live in New York, and from all that I have gathered, it has never been properly replicated. If you are at a loss regarding what I am talking about, the cronut is a crossbreed of a French croissant and an American doughnut, created by pastry chef Dominique Ansel after he left his work at Michelin-starred restaurants to open the Dominique Ansel Bakery in Manhattan's SoHo district.

Here, experiments with the idea of combining the flaky layers of a traditional croissant with the deep-fried characteristics of a classic doughnut, a fusion that took reimagining everything from dough composition to cooking techniques. Ansel adjusted everything from the type of flour to the ratios of ingredients used, all to ensure the dough remained croissant light, but strong enough to withstand frying like a doughnut. All in all, it takes his team three days to make a batch!

The cronut's creation holds several creativity lessons. Ansel's approach was not just about combining two types of pastry; it was about creating a balance where one element could shine

without overshadowing the other. Moreover, the cronut story underscores resilience in creativity, and timing also played a role. Launched when social media was burgeoning as a dominant form of communication, the cronut quickly became a viral sensation. Ansel's strategic use of scarcity amplified this effect. By limiting the daily production of cronuts, he created a sense of exclusivity that made acquiring one a notable achievement – one I have failed in.

William Blake spoke of seeing the world in a grain of sand. Well, you can also see the miracle of creativity in a (not so) humble pastry. 🍩 🍩

Creating the Ice Cream Cone

Who doesn't love ice cream, especially when a nice walk is made nicer by a lovely cone of the stuff? The ice cream cone, an emblem of summer and childhood joy, seems like something that has always existed, or at least should have. It was invented (around 1896) and patented (1903) by Italo Marchiony, but this isn't what made it an innovation. That happened due to a moment of ingenious improvisation, with just a dash of serendipity.

At the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, amidst the cacophony of innovation and cultural exchange, an ice cream vendor found himself running out of dishes. A nearby vendor, a Syrian seller of zalabis (a waffle-like crisp pastry), Ernest Hamwi stepped up to the plate. Witnessing the dilemma, he took one of his waffles, rolled it into a conical shape, and let it cool for a few moments. This created a makeshift, edible container for the ice cream, which they called a "cornucopia" – a horn of plenty. This not only solved the immediate problem of the dish shortage but also delighted fair-goers with a novel way to enjoy their frozen treat without the need for utensils or dishware. What might have been a fleeting workaround turned into an iconic part of ice cream

history – despite Marchiony.

This is yet another testament to the power of lateral thinking and cross-disciplinary innovation (in this case, the culinary arts meeting a logistical challenge). The ice cream cone is more than just a way to serve a dessert; it's a symbol of ingenuity, a product of serendipity, and a reminder that sometimes, the most delightful innovations come from simply trying to solve a problem with the tools at hand. Also, if you've wondered why the ice cream cone in many languages is known as a "waffle" (looking at you my Finnish and Swedish brethren), now you know! 🍦

Learning Innovation From Mad Bars – The Case of Grime

Having just watched BBC's "8 Bars" I was again struck by the innovativeness of grime, that wonderfully gritty, quintessentially British music genre. It was born out of a confluence of factors – dancehall and jungle, a reaction against the status quo, a desire to give voice to the voiceless – coupled with raw creativity

The pioneers, from Slimzee and D Double E to Lethal Bizzle and Dizzee Rascal, didn't have access to the polished studios of their American hip-hop counterparts. Instead, they made do with what they had, creating music in bedrooms and on outdated equipment. They were the MacGyvers of the music world, taking the raw materials at their disposal and crafting something entirely new.

Moreover, grime artists embraced their outsider status. Rather than trying to mimic the sound of mainstream hip-hop, they created a sound that was distinctly their own, played over pirate radio, complete with a unique lexicon, fashion sense, and set of cultural references. In doing so, they tapped into a wellspring of creativity that resonated with people far beyond

the council estates of South London.

Innovation, like grime, thrives on constraints, a willingness to challenge the status quo, and the courage to carve out a unique path. So, next time you're faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge, why not put some grime on in the background, and let the eight bars be your guide. Remember, necessity isn't just the mother of invention; it's the driving force behind creativity. 🎧

V

Creative Minds

Many people leave behind masterpieces, and thus many people represent a chance to learn for us interested in creativity. Collected here are some notes about creatives in the arts, the letters, architecture, fashion, choreography, even the art of schlock. Some could have been put elsewhere in this book as well, but I chose to keep them here, as celebrations of the human mind – and all the wild things it can get up to.

On the Divine Dorothy Parker as a Creativity Thinker

She was a wit that wielded words like weapons, one of the greatest heroines of mine – born in 1896 as Dorothy Rothschild, but far more famous as Dorothy Parker. With her acerbic wit and keen observations, she was more than just a writer; she was a maestro of language. She wasn't about constructing fantastical worlds or penning lengthy novels, but rather all about observing the world around her and distilling its complexities into something poignant and biting.

Parker's creativity lay in her ability to retain a voice in a male-dominated industry. Her success as a writer and critic in an era that was not kind to outspoken women is a testament to her ingenuity. This was the thinker who mixed self-irony with gendered critique, writing of a failed relationship: "It serves me right for putting all my eggs in one bastard."

Her work as a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table, a group of New York City writers and critics, further exemplifies her innovative spirit. This was creativity as a social exercise – a group of brilliant minds coming together to push each other's

boundaries, to spar with words and ideas. This is where she could be her true self, knowing people would get her when she quipped: “I hate writing, I love having written.”

Too often, we assume that insights into creativity comes only from the prettiest of flowers, or from lovely, kind words. Parker could be cutting and cynical, and this was precisely what made her mind so creative. When she said “What fresh hell is this?”, she meant it, and showed that sometimes the sharpest creativity comes not from a paintbrush or a musical instrument, but from keys of a well-used typewriter. 💀🖋️🖨️

The Creative Legacy of Fu Manchu

I am too young to have experienced Fu Manchu at anything but an ironic distance, but for as long as I can remember I've been somewhat fascinated by this strange, exoticized character. There is something here.

For those who've never come across the character, Fu Manchu was created by Sax Rohmer in 1912, and he was the archetypal "Yellow Peril" villain. He is an evil genius from the East, dresses as a Chinese nobleman and sports a remarkable mustache – long and drooping. Based on an American magician who appeared in yellow-face as "Chung Ling Soo", Fu Manchu was one of the very first supervillains, always plotting for world domination. Sax Rohmer wrote at least 13 novels about him (plus a posthumous anthology), and there have been numerous filmizations, follow-up novels, and the likes. From our vantage point, the character is both offensive and ridiculous. Fu Manchu springs from a fear of "the Orient" and is written very much as the Other to the West. As a crude racist stereotype, it is no wonder that when it is referenced today, it tends to be with an irony so thick it positively drips. Yet there is also something that attracts one to

the character, for better or worse. As stated, this is a supervillain, a genius and highly efficient figure that is aggressively non-white. He is thwarted by European heroes, yes, but never fully beaten, always ready for the next plan. The sheer exaggeration of the character is such that the villain becomes endlessly more interesting than the heroes.

What can we learn here? The power of an interesting villain, for one, as well as that of exaggeration. The lazy racism is abhorrent, yet Fu Manchu was still some kind of representation, an inverse hero of sorts. For all its flaws, the character survives to this day, and that in itself is a feat. 🐉

On Flavor Flav and the Importance of Hip-Hop's Hypemen

My favorite hypeman of all time is Flavor Flav. Sure, he might seem like the court jester of the otherwise highly serious Public Enemy, but at the same time, there was a sublime genius to his seemingly erratic antics. Think about it: would "Fight the Power" possess the same electrifying energy without Flav's infectious interjections? I daresay not.

Delving into the world of hip-hop, one cannot dismiss the impact and importance of the hypeman. While rappers deliver their lines with precision, the hypemen bring the energy, the enthusiasm, and sometimes, the comic relief. They're the bridge between the artist and the audience, amplifying the energy and ensuring that every word, beat, and pause is felt viscerally.

Flavor Flav, with his oversized clock necklaces and distinctive "Yeah boy!" was not just an accessory to Chuck D's powerful verses. He was the yin to Chuck D's yang, bringing balance and unpredictability to the otherwise militant and focused messaging of Public Enemy. Flav showcased that the serious and the silly not only coexist but can also amplify each other's

impact.

The lesson here for innovators and creators is profound. It's not just about the message or the product; it's about the presentation, the contrast, and the unexpected elements that make something memorable. Just as Flavor Flav added an extra layer of zest to Public Enemy's tracks, so too can a touch of unpredictability elevate a good idea to greatness. It's about recognizing the value of every element, even the ones that at first glance might seem merely ornamental. 🌀

Bertolt Brecht – Lessons for Innovators

For real innovation, look no further than to playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht. He didn't just break the mold; he built another factory. His plays, tools for social change, slapped audiences awake, and his creative process was that of building a puzzle box. He didn't want you lost in the story; he wanted you dissecting it, piece by piece.

Take his famous “alienation effect” — a theatrical jolt of espresso that snapped viewers into a critical consciousness. Characters would directly challenge the audience, pushing them to engage not with their hearts but their heads. Brecht was less interested in a seamless performance and more in making theatre a space for questioning and reflection. That said, he was something far greater than just a political hack using theatre as propaganda. He did not wish to end theatre, just to explore its functions, and he was an active participant in an aesthetic debate with the greatest thinkers of his time – including his buddy Walter Benjamin.

No wonder then that his *Mother Courage* is much more than a character; she's a conversation starter, a catalyst for debate.

Brecht's theater was a lab, a place where social mores and assumptions could be experimented with, where tests and failures could be played out to an audience that was more a co-creator than a passive mass.

In the realm of innovation, Brecht's legacy is a call to arms. He urges us to confront the comfortable, to challenge assumptions, and to never settle for the passivity of the audience. He teaches us that true innovation requires a disturbance, a spark of discomfort that ignites change. It's a lesson for anyone looking to make a mark — disturb, challenge, innovate. In this, Brecht's spirit lives on, not just in theater but in the very fabric of creative thought. 🍷🍷

The Creative Legacy of Doc Savage

If you are like most people, the name Doc Savage won't say much to you. Be that as it may, this hero of the pulp age is one of the most influential characters of our modern age, and stands as one of the core molds from which our contemporary heroes are cast – Stan Lee himself called him the inspiration to the age of superheroes! Born from the imaginations of Lester Dent and his colleagues at Street & Smith Publications – publisher Henry Ralston and editor John Nanovic – Doc Savage was a paragon of human potential, embodying the aspirations and anxieties of his era.

Doc Savage, AKA The Man of Bronze, first appeared in 1933. He was not just a character but a superman archetype, a renaissance man excelling in science, medicine, and physical prowess. With his team of five specialist assistants he embarked on adventures that were equal parts detective story, science fiction, and high-octane action. Ironically, unlike contemporaries such as Batman and Superman, Doc Savage did not transition seamlessly into the post-pulp era. While he enjoyed a brief revival in the 1960s and 70s, largely due to nostalgia and reprints, he became less

and less known as more complex heroes emerged.

Despite his decline in mainstream visibility, Doc Savage's creative legacy is profound. He was a direct influence on the creation of Superman; indeed, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster envisioned the Man of Steel as a blend of Doc Savage's physicality and intellect with the otherworldly origins of John Carter. The very concept of a superhuman team leader can be traced back to Doc Savage's organizational genius with his Fabulous Five, a precursor to groups like the Justice League and the Avengers. So here's to you, forgotten hero, and to an age when PhDs go do most everything! 🧑🔧⚡

On the Complexity of Simplicity: Miuccia Prada

I'm not what you would traditionally call "fashion-forward", but whilst I cannot be bothered to dress the part or spend my money on the products, I can still find fashion intellectually stimulating. Take Miuccia Prada, for instance. It's not just that she trained as a mime, is one of the few billionaires that used to be a member of the Communist party, or that she has a PhD in political science. It's the intellectual approach she takes, the contrarianism, the contradictions she plays with. Backing up a bit, she took the helm of her family's luxury leather goods company in 1978 and went on to transforming it into one of the most influential fashion houses of the modern era. She, for want of a better term, made the sparse cool again.

Prada's collections are characterized by a minimalism that belies their conceptual depth. At first glance, the simplicity of a Prada design might appear straightforward, but this is a ruse. Prada's fashion does not scream for attention; it whispers, nudging the willing listener towards the essence of style and substance. The designer's fascination with uniformity and the

utilitarian — often incorporating elements from workwear and military uniforms — serves as a commentary on the nature of individuality and conformity. Prada challenges the fashion industry's conventions, suggesting that true originality may lie not in ostentation but in the refinement of the mundane, elevating the everyday to the extraordinary.

In essence, Miuccia Prada forces us to rethink simplicity. Her application of unconventional materials to luxury fashion — like nylon, a material she elevated to haute couture status — further speaks to this. Sure, it might look simple, but sometimes things are not in the eye of the beholder. ▲

On the Creative Heritage of Schlockmeister Roger Corman

I have to admit to a lifelong admiration for a filmmaker that many people have never heard of – or deny enjoying – namely the underground film genius Roger Corman. Imagine if MacGyver dabbled in filmmaking and had an odd penchant for oversized crustaceans and man-eating plants, and you are getting closer to his cinematic escapades.

Corman wasn't about the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. Nope, he was the king of the so-bad-it's-good genre, often running with budgets that wouldn't cover a modern movie's snack table. Given pennies, this guy would churn out cinematic "masterpieces" that would make you question both his sanity and your choice of evening entertainment.

Consider "The Little Shop of Horrors." A plant that craves human blood? And it sings? It sounds absurd, but it's all Corman, taking ridiculous to an art form. Or "Attack of the Crab Monsters." You'd think it's a culinary disaster, but no, it's a cinematic one!

Yet, between the giggles and facepalms, there's genuine

creativity at play here. Corman's approach was unapologetically campy and DIY, revealing that genuine innovation doesn't need deep pockets; just a deep (and slightly twisted) imagination.

Roger Corman's world is a crash course in making the most of what you've got. It's a reminder that constraints can be a catalyst for hilarity and, believe it or not, creativity. So, the next time you're faced with limited resources, channel your inner Corman: embrace the madness, go wild, and maybe – just maybe – avoid any blood-thirsty vegetation.

On the Creativity of Björk

In a world where conformity often takes center stage, Björk erupted onto the scene like an effervescent if kooky-presenting geyser, a stark reminder that creativity and talent need not adhere to any prescriptive mould. Since breaking out as part of the Sugarcubes in 1987, she has treated us to an auditory banquet with albums that defy categorization, constantly reshaping the musical terrain like shifting tectonic plates.

Take, for instance, the visceral resonance of “Homogenic”, a tour de force where techno beats meet orchestral movements, crafting a soundscape that is both fierce and fragile, encapsulating the dichotomy of human nature itself. And who could overlook the aural spectacle that is “Biophilia”, where she bravely steps into the void, merging technology and music in a challenging exploration of sound, an album that is as much an educational tool as it is a musical marvel?

As we navigate through her discography, it becomes evident that each album is a world unto itself, a new departure from the norms of music production. With “Vulnicura”, she opens the wounds of personal trauma, stitching it back with strings, a raw

testament to the power of vulnerability in art.

In embracing Björk's methodology, we are invited to cast aside the mundane and the easy-to-digest, to seek the extraordinary and the daring. Björk as an ethereal yet technology-embracing songstress can teach us much about the essence of creativity, and embracing the unknown, and the idiosyncratic. Björk shows us we can be bold, and original, and kooky, and bizarre, and she has been a trailblazer for a world that surprisingly enough is more than ready for the colourful hues of a Björk-inspired renaissance.

On Shakespeare as Comedy Innovator

Scrolling Netflix yesterday evening (Is there a word? Mood-scrolling?), I was struck by not only the preponderance, but the stasis of romantic comedies. For all the money in Hollywood, it is striking how little even today's cinematic candyfloss differs from the man who must be seen as the OG of the romantic comedy – William Shakespeare.

There he is, the Bard, famous for heavy, brooding works, and yet he can throw all that away for some of the lightest of entertainments – full of mistaken identities, mischief-makers, and people falling in and out of love in curious ways. And nowhere else is this more acute than in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, a grandiose innovation in comedy. Two pairs of young, besotted Athenians traipse through the forest, their affections changing quicker than a teenager’s fashion sense. It’s the classic love triangle, but with a Shakespearian twist, and the kind of entanglement that would make soap opera writers blush. There are fairies, but the real star of the show is Puck, a cheeky sprite who just can’t resist meddling in the affairs of mortals. He turns a man into a donkey, makes lovers fall in and out of love, and

generally causes mayhem. It's the kind of hijinks that would make even the most jaded reality TV producer green with envy.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" is not just a play, it's a masterclass in comedy writing. Shakespeare took the conventions of his time, turned them on their head, and created a world where love is fickle, magic are real, and donkeys can be the star of the show. Call it magical realism avant la lettre, and it changed the comedy game. Today's romantic comedies might have different magical creatures, but Shakespeare's template still holds – create a comedy of errors, let love bloom wherever it may, and have people swoon over the fireworks. 🎆❤️

On the Creativity of the Late, Great Shane MacGowan

Seeing as he had worked hard on his image as a hard-living and harder drinking man, few were entirely surprised to hear of the passing of Shane MacGowan (and some might have been surprised to hear that he was recently still alive). Much have in the obituaries been said about this part of him – the drink, the drugs, the sullenness in the face of bandmates and reporters. He was punk, through and through, and did not deny it; living on the brink is allowed for those who commit to the role of the artiste.

That said, the sheer creativity of MacGowan has not always been remarked upon in similar detail. His attitude has often blinded people to the tenderness in much of his work, and the ingenious aspects of the same. This was after all a man who could quote Joyce and wax lyrical on obscure points of Irish mythology in a state of drunkenness that would kill mere mortals, endowed with a puckish sense of humor. Who else would have thought to create a Christmas song that mainly consists of a drunken couple arguing, naming it after an early

70's novel by Donleavy?

Overall, MacGowan's creative process was remarkably classic, in that it is a study in contrasts. On one hand, there's the raw, unfiltered energy of punk. On the other, there's the lyrical, melodic richness of Irish folk music. Melding these created a dialogue of genres, much like his lyricism is often a dialogue of subjectivities – often challenged such. In an industry often rife with pretension, MacGowan's work was unapologetically honest. He may not have been the picture-book image of a creative genius – too messy, flawed, and real for that – but his work was. Beautiful, chaotic, and original, and from a poet's heart.    

John Galliano, Baroque Philosopher?

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”

– George Bernard Shaw

I know, I know, one shouldn't celebrate John Galliano, and I really am not. Yes, the erstwhile bad boy of fashion seems to not always have been a nice person, and his struggles with addiction are well-known. Still, scandalous behavior aside, his work does interest me intellectually, and his desire for the taboo and the transgressive does have redeeming qualities as well.

In a sense, Galliano seems like a character out of time. His aesthetic is infused with the Baroque spirit – characterized by its embrace of excess, its fascination with contrast, and its pursuit of emotional engagement. Like the Baroque thinkers who sought to blur the lines between the earthly and the divine, Galliano's use of fashion explores the boundaries between reality and fantasy, the mundane and the marvelous. His collections read like rich, visual essays on the complexity of

identity and decadence. His runway shows, akin to Baroque operas, employ the full spectrum of drama and spectacle to draw the audience into a visceral experience, making a case for the garment as both narrative and artifact.

Galliano, understood as a philosopher, delves into the Baroque obsession with the transient nature of beauty and the inevitability of decay. His collections often reflect a kind of sartorial vanitas, reminding us of the fleeting nature of fashion and life. There is tension here, not to be resolved but embraced, a test of the contradictions inherent in the human spirit.

Right now, in our polycrisis world, we may need these kinds of Baroque meditations on mortality; statements of memento mori that do not shy away from the aesthetics of decay and death. In a weird way, the old bad-boy Galliano might have been a thinker for our current age. ☞

Remembering “Baby” Dodds

“The first duty of a revolutionary is to get away with it.”

– Abbie Hoffman

Warren “Baby” Dodds (1898-1959) was born into the cradle of jazz, the city of New Orleans. It was here that he developed a style of drumming that was both foundational and revolutionary, playing with luminaries such as King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton. At a time when drummers were largely relegated to the background, providing a mere rhythmic back-drop to the melodic instruments, Dodds saw potential for much more. He saw the drums as an instrument capable of leading, and even challenging the other instruments in the band.

His innovative techniques – such as the use of press rolls to create a sustained, driving rhythm, and his early explorations into what would later be known as ride cymbal playing – were groundbreaking. Dodds didn’t just play the drums; he played with the expectations of his audience and his fellow musicians. He introduced a level of dynamism and complexity to jazz percussion that was unheard of at the time, crafting parts and

adding depth, texture, and a palpable sense of excitement.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Dodds' creativity was his ability to improvise. Long before jazz drum soloing became a staple of the genre, Dodds was experimenting with spontaneous, on-the-spot creations that were both intricate and intensely personal. His solos were not mere displays of technical prowess; they were expressions of emotion, narrative arcs that told stories of joy, sorrow, and everything in between.

Dodds not only shaped the sound of jazz but also left an indelible mark on the fabric of American music culture, and deserves to be remembered. His legacy is rich with lessons on innovation and creativity, and should inspire musicians and innovators alike. 🎁🎵

On John Cooper Clarke as a Poetry (and Punk) Innovator

When people talk about punk, the first thing they tend to think about is the music, the second the fashion – studs, safety pins, ripped clothes, patches, and so on. What they don't tend to think about is poetry, declaimed from stage by a thin man with wild hair in a suit. Still, the latter describes John Cooper Clarke, and he was (and is!) as punk as they come.

John Cooper Clarke, born in Salford in 1949, may not be all that well known outside of the United Kingdom, but he was an innovator both on the punk scene and in poetry more generally. Clarke's journey began in the working-class streets of Manchester. He started performing his poems in the early 1970s, working in folk clubs and rough men's clubs, all while keeping a day job. As the punk scene emerges, he becomes the bard of the punks, sharing stages with acts like the Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, and Joy Division. Reading out his immaculately metered, rhyming poems in a rapid-fire patter, enunciating every curse word and sly put-down, Clarke made poetry cool. Poems like "Beasley Street", "I Wanna Be Yours",

and “Evidently Chickentown” became beloved not only by the usual poetry buffs, but by kids from deprived areas, alternative musicians, and a surprising number of people in the comedy scene, whom he influenced with his fearless performance style and wry humor. He also recorded a number of records, including his debut “Où est la maison de fromage?” (1978), “Disguise in Love” (1978), and the quite successful “Snap, Crackle & Bop” (1980).

Despite battling heroin addiction in the 1980s, Clarke is still with us, a true cultural icon who has shown that poetry can transcend its image, and that classical meter does not necessarily clash with a punk ethos. !🎸

The Innovation Life of Iris Apfel, in Memoriam

The recently deceased Iris Apfel (who died March 1st 2024, at the age of 102) was not just a fashion icon but a beacon of innovation in a world obsessed with youth. Her life story reads like a manifesto for creative resilience, proving that innovation isn't confined to startups or tech wizards; it can be flamboyantly strutted down the boulevard of life.

Whilst she did design work for presidents and Hollywood stars, it was Apfel's personal style and her philosophy towards fashion that cemented her status as an iconoclast. She treated her wardrobe as a painter treats their palette, mixing and matching high-end fashion with street-market finds to create something truly unique. Innovation, in the Apfelian sense, is not about creating something new out of thin air but reimagining and repurposing the old in ways that challenge the status quo. Her style was a vibrant collage of textures, colors, and eras, defying the often ageist and homogenized standards of the fashion industry.

Her late-in-life fame, catapulted by a Metropolitan Museum

of Art exhibition in her 80s, was a testament to the enduring power of innovation that refuses to be pigeonholed by age or trend. Apfel became not just a style icon but a role model for living life on one's own terms, embodying the idea that it's never too late to redefine oneself or to be discovered. She knew that old women aren't supposed to mix the craziest of colors and patterns, nor don glasses that would have given Elton John pause, and she did not care a whit. She was creativity through and through, breaking ideas of fashion, design, and age, and she will be sorely missed. That said, Heaven will now be better accessorized! 🍷👑

Beau Brummel – An Appreciation

George Bryan “Beau” Brummell, was not just a dandy; he was the dandy, the archetype, the original influencer before the term was hijacked by people with smartphones and an over-reliance on filters. Born in 1778, Brummell was a figure who might have been forgotten, relegated to the footnotes of Regency England history, had it not been for his extraordinary impact on men’s fashion and social mores.

Before Brummell, men’s fashion was an explosion of color, an ostentatious display of wealth and status with fabrics that screamed, “Look at me!” Brummell turned this on its head. He championed subtlety, simplicity, and, dare I say, a bit of understatement. His idea of dressing well was not to bedazzle the observer with the fashion equivalent of a fireworks display.

He eschewed the overly ornate in favor of perfectly tailored, clean lines. He popularized trousers over knee breeches, which was revolutionary at the time. He even had the audacity to suggest that a man could look better in a well-cut navy coat than in a jewel-encrusted silk waistcoat. The horror!

Brummell’s influence went beyond just clothing. He was a

celebrity of his era, albeit one without Instagram or Twitter. His wit was as sharp as his dress sense. He hung out with the Prince Regent (later King George IV), but unlike many social climbers, he wasn't obsequious. he was known for his biting remarks and a refusal to kowtow to societal norms, something that eventually led to his downfall and exile.

So, let's raise a glass to Beau Brummell. He was the man who showed us that sometimes, the most powerful statement you can make is to whisper rather than shout. And in today's world of constant noise and relentless self-promotion, that's a lesson worth remembering. Cheers, Beau! 🍷👉

Bob Ross and the Revolution of the Happy Little Accidents

In the swirling maelstrom of modern life, one figure stands as a veritable beacon of calm, creativity, and happy little trees – allow me to introduce you to the phenomenon that was Bob Ross. For those unacquainted, Bob Ross graced television screens as the softly spoken host of “The Joy of Painting”, a show that transformed the art of painting into a form of serene meditation, all while nurturing the latent creativity in its viewers.

This afro-clad virtuoso wasn’t just dishing out painting tutorials; oh no, he was spearheading a silent revolution that celebrated the beauty in mistakes – or as he dubbed them, “happy little accidents”. In Ross’s world, there were no errors, only opportunities for spontaneous bursts of creativity, breaking with stifling perfectionism.

Ross had a knack for transforming what might be considered mishaps into productive strokes, imbuing the canvas with vibrant working force, a beautiful chaos, a riot of colors and techniques that invited novices and experts alike, to join in. With soothing demeanor and a perm that seemed to harbor some

forgotten secrets of the universe, Bob Ross transformed the very notion of art, making it seem... almost accidental.

So, let's lift our brushes in a toast to Bob Ross, the gentle revolutionary who showed us that in the grand canvas of life, we are all artists, capable of crafting our masterpiece, one happy little accident at a time. 🙌🎨🌀🌲

The Creativity Lessons of Slick Rick

“Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.”

– Thelonious Monk

Slick Rick’s the ruler, y’all. Born in 1965 as Ricky Walters, he is one of the most impactful musicians ever, with his songs having been sampled more than a 1000 times. His “La Di Da Di” alone is considered one of the most sampled in history. From his early career in Doug E. Fresh & the Get Fresh Crew to his seminal records with Def Jam and beyond, Slick Rick has been a fountain of creativity, the lessons of which extend far beyond hip-hop.

The core of his legacy lies in his masterful storytelling. “Children’s Story” and “La Di Da Di” are showcases of narratives with characters and dialogues that rival traditional short stories in their complexity. Slick Rick also utilized a variety of voices and personas to bring stories to life, a technique that did more than entertain; it added layers of depth and perspective, enriching his stories. These are critical lessons in creativity; focus on the narrative, and experiment with multiple perspectives. To make something that catches on, make sure it has both hooks and

payoffs.

Moreover, Slick Rick's style – characterized by an eye patch, extravagant jewelry, and British accent – made him stand out in the scene. He embraced eccentricity, and it became a significant part of his appeal. It's not enough to just think you are unique, you need to own it and find ways to show it. Sartorial style and accessories can be more than frippery, they can be semiotics of creation and part of the storyline. The same could be said for Slick Rick's humor. Sure, he was not always politically correct, but he understood the role of comedic counterpoint in creativity, and this is something that a lot of po-faced creators could learn from.

In short, Slick Rick is the ruler. Where others try to learn from Picasso and his ilk, I celebrate His Slickness, creative guru of the streets. 🙁🗨️🎨

Isolated Genius: On Kurt Gödel

“Without great solitude no serious work is possible.”

– Pablo Picasso

These days, the very notion of the solitary genius is presented as something problematic, if not quite impossible, and what is celebrated instead is various kinds of collaborations and “group genius”. Still, there have throughout history been those who manage to create masterpieces whilst studiously avoiding the company of others, eccentrics who seek a more solitary path to truly great ideas. People like Kurt Gödel.

Born in 1906 in what is now Brno, Czech Republic, Gödel showed early signs of brilliance – and a penchant for isolation. As a child, he was nicknamed “Herr Warum” due to his curiosity. He was also going all in on social distancing, and even as a very young man lived a life of steadfast routines and lots of isolation. This was more than a quirk; it was the backdrop against which he created mathematical masterpieces. In 1931, at the age of 25, he dropped his full incompleteness theorem on the world of mathematics. He showed that in any mathematical system there

would be propositions that were true without being provable, dashing the hopes for fully consistent, provable mathematical systems. An asocial man going against the community of mathematics and prevailing is a strong argument for the power of the recluse!

Yet his reclusiveness brought drawbacks as well. He was reluctant to publish things and made few friends, as recluses tend not to socialize, although he did become good mates with Albert Einstein and took long walks with the same. Surprisingly, he also married! Over time, Gödel went from being something of a hermit to being utterly paranoid, convinced that people simply could not be trusted. He would only eat food his wife Adele had prepared, and after her death, the great logician followed – tragically yet quite logically he starved himself to death, dying in 1978. ☹️ ↩️

Ettore Sottsass – An Appreciation

“The first duty of a revolutionary is to get away with it.”

– Abbie Hoffman

Has there ever been design quite as polarizing or as exuberantly playful as that of the Memphis Design Movement, spearheaded by the visionary Italian designer Ettore Sottsass? Emerging in the early 1980s, Memphis shattered conventional notions of design with its bold colors, unconventional forms, and a joyful disregard for minimalism. Sottsass, already a renowned designer, was the ringleader of this avant-garde circus, leading a creative rebellion against the stark, functionalist design that prevailed at the time.

Sottsass’s genius lay in his ability to amalgamate diverse influences into a cohesive style. He drew inspiration from Art Deco, Pop Art, and 1950s kitsch, synthesizing these into something wholly original. The result was furniture that was as much a conversation piece as it was functional – a Sottsass dresser wasn’t just a place to store clothes; it was a statement about the owner’s taste and a reflection of a cultural moment.

The Memphis Movement, under Sottsass's guidance, was also about more than just aesthetics; it was about democratizing design. Sottsass believed that design should be fun, accessible, and imbued with character. In this sense, Memphis was a social commentary, a reaction against the cold, impersonal design language that characterized much of post-war Europe and America, and which has retaken the crown with the emergence of a globalized Wallpaper aesthetics.

Sottsass brought irreverence and whimsy to a field that had become quite self-important and hidebound, and showed that when design forgets its sense of humor, it loses something critical. Right now, in an age that has become dour and po-faced, the spirit of Sottsass is needed more than ever – postmodern playfulness for the win! ● □ ☺

Burlesque and the Boardroom: On Dita Von Teese as a Leadership Muse

In an age where boardrooms can sometimes resemble the dreary settings of a Franz Kafka novel, the irrepressible energy and cheeky audacity of the burlesque stage comes as a breath of fresh, albeit slightly perfumed, air. Now, one might not immediately liken the sparkly spectacle that is Dita Von Teese pirouetting in a martini glass to the staid world of corporate leadership. But bear with me, there's method to this madness.

Dita, the unapologetic queen of neo-burlesque, epitomizes a leadership that is both daring and dedicated. The first lesson from Dita's book of allure? The art of reinvention. Dita's metamorphosis from a small-town girl to a globally recognized icon embodies the kind of transformative journey that leadership narratives are built upon. But don't get it twisted – it's not just about the glitter and the glam.

Behind those opulent performances lies an iron-willed determination and meticulous craftsmanship, akin to steering a company with finesse and strategic insight. Dita is the embodiment of grace under pressure, a lesson in maintaining poise and

sophistication even when the stakes are high. Furthermore, Von Teese's theatrical narratives are a masterclass in storytelling, a key skill among leadership virtues. Engaging your audience (or employees) with narratives foster cultures of unity and passion.

So, before dismissing the playful provocation of burlesque as mere frivolity, consider what it imparts – a testament to innovation, resilience, and a splash of daring do, elements that add a touch of verve to the boardroom's often insipid dynamics. It seems, in the end, we could use a bit more burlesque. 🎭 🎤 🎭

The Genius of Alexander McQueen

I have never been much for fashion, but at the same time I have always been fascinated by fashion designers, and Alexander McQueen in particular. Here's this working class kid who becomes a master of cut and stitch, and who revels in naughty creativity. I wouldn't wear his "bumsters", but I admire the gumption.

McQueen's designs, whether you found them hauntingly beautiful or shockingly avant-garde, were always meticulously crafted narratives. He would deep-dive into topics, from the history of Scotland to the delicate life cycles of butterflies, and seamlessly stitch these into his collections. This depth of research and understanding transformed garments into emotive experiences, and showed what research could do. There's a duality to McQueen's work, always dancing between the ethereal and the eerie. His pieces were never just about aesthetics; they invoked powerful, occasionally uncomfortable, emotions. Then there was his embrace of risk. The man who gave us "armadillo" shoes wasn't just challenging fashion norms; he was rewriting them. And his frequent collaborations with talents like Philip

Treacy and Shaun Leane showcased that in the meeting of diverse minds, there's true creative brilliance.

To the creator of today, McQueen's legacy offers more than a study in fashion. It's a reminder of the transformative power of authenticity, but also of the importance of deep research and understanding the craft of dress-making and tailoring. Fashion was McQueen's medium, but raw, fearless creativity was his undeniable signature.

The Procrastination of Leonardo da Vinci: On Completion Anxiety

Leonardo da Vinci was, as we all know, a genius. In fact, he was more than that. He was the quintessential Renaissance man, someone whose genius spanned across painting, sculpture, architecture, science, music, mathematics, engineering, literature, anatomy, geology, astronomy, botany, writing, history, and cartography. Yet at the same time he had a notorious habit of leaving works unfinished. Yes, dear reader, the great da Vinci was – let’s not mince words – a master procrastinator. His procrastination was not the garden-variety “I’ll do it tomorrow” type. It was epic in scale, just like his talent. The “Adoration of the Magi”? Left unfinished. “Saint Jerome in the Wilderness”? Ditto. And let’s not even get started on his most famous procrastination project, the “Mona Lisa,” which he fiddled with for nearly 16 years.

Leonardo’s procrastination, rather than being a mere character flaw, can be viewed as an integral part of his creative process. His tendency to leave projects unfinished was not always due to a lack of interest or a fleeting attention span. Rather, it was often

a deliberate choice to let his ideas marinate, to allow his vast and varied learning to coalesce into new insights and innovations. Each project was an opportunity to learn something new, to experiment with a novel technique, or to incorporate a recent discovery. In his mind, art was never static; it was a dynamic, evolving process that didn't adhere to deadlines or expectations.

So, the next time you find yourself procrastinating, think back to good ol' Leonardo, and remember that geniuses do it too. Maybe it's not you, it's just your creative process and endless thirst for learning? 🧐🌀🧠💡

Unstructured Genius: On Paul Dirac

Imagine being considered a greater genius than Einstein, so smart that you shared a Nobel prize with Schrödinger, yet at the same time being something of a scatterbrain, so socially inept that you today would most likely be considered neurodiverse, and most likely unemployable in contemporary academia. This was Paul Dirac, one of the greatest physicists of all time, and with his contributions to quantum mechanics, in the running to be the all time number one. He formulated the Dirac equation, predicted antimatter, anticipated string theory, contributed to cosmology, and just as a lark, made foundational contributions to centrifuge technology. He was sort of a big deal in physics.

Now, some might think that this meant that he was a rigorous and meticulous thinker, all structured routines and ducks in perfect order. Nothing could be further from the truth. He seemed to hate structure, and his work consisted of long periods of idle contemplation – in Cambridge they spoke of the unit of a “dirac”, defined as writing one word per hour – punctuated by sudden bursts of intense and brilliant work. Known for his laconic speech and taciturn ways, he didn’t accept the

pressure to spend time with something as uninteresting as people. Amazingly, he married and even had two children, although most people would state that his wife Manci had three to handle. He once introduced her to guests by stating “Allow me to present Wigner’s sister, who is now my wife.”!

All that said, he was a prolific genius, and his idleness clearly created the space for some of the wildest thinking known before or since. Also, he was lucky to live in an era when universities accepted oddball geniuses, and wives could be at hand to deal with their strange, unsettled ways. A hero for all of us who prefer our thinking unstructured, and our work wild. ➡

On the Main Man, Back in the Back: Remembering Willie Dixon

“Do not fear mistakes. There are none.”

– Miles Davis

Whenever I dive back into the blues, I tend to seek out at least some of the genius of Willie Dixon. Not a household name like Muddy Waters or Howlin’ Wolf, yet the man is as much the heartbeat of Chicago blues as any of its frontmen. And therein lies a profound lesson about creativity that often escapes the limelight – the magic that happens in the background, often overshadowed but irreplaceably significant.

Dixon wasn’t just an adept double bassist; he was a prolific songwriter (500+ songs, covered by e.g. Dylan, Diddley, and The Doors) and arguably the backbone of Chess Records. Songs like “Hoochie Coochie Man”, “Little Red Rooster”, and “Back Door Man” aren’t just blues classics; they’re foundational pillars of rock. Yet, despite penning some of the most iconic tunes of all time, Dixon was more a man in the shadows than a spotlight stealer. Here’s the crux: We live in an age that glorifies

the front-of-stage, the visible, the Instagrammable. But so much of the real creative genius lies in the peripheries and the unrecognized. It's the backgrounds, the engineers, the writers, and the countless others who contribute to a masterpiece, but whose names never make the marquee.

For innovators and creators today, the story of Willie Dixon is both a cautionary tale and an inspiration. It reminds us to look beyond the obvious, to value those who aren't always center stage but are crafting the magic nonetheless. It's a nudge to appreciate the unsung heroes in our teams, projects, and ventures. Willie Dixon made the modern blues, and ushered in rock'n'roll (working with Berry and Diddley, like a boss). Here's to you, and that wang dang doodle... 

Creativity & Choreography: On Bob Fosse

I do love me some musical theatre. So sue me. As a consequence, I am fascinated by Bob Fosse, and how his unique, intricate choreography changed Broadway and musical theatre as a whole.

Take “Chicago.” Fosse’s genius is evident in the sassy, sexy routines that perfectly encapsulate the roaring ‘20s, while providing commentary on the corruption of the American justice system and the allure of celebrity. It’s not just entertainment; it’s thinking through movement. “Sweet Charity” is another masterpiece, where the choreography is integral to telling Charity Hope Valentine’s story, with the “Big Spender” number showcasing how Fosse uses dance as a narrative device while challenging the accepted norms of the Broadway stage.

Fosse would spend hours perfecting a single move to make it express the character’s emotions or advance the storyline. His signature style, including turned-in knees, bowed legs, and isolated movements, added a unique flair to his choreography and set his work apart from others in the industry. Of course,

Fosse had his critics. Some found his work too risqué, but that was the point. Fosse sought to challenge audiences, making them think beyond the confines of the theatre.

The contemporary discussion on creativity often ignores choreography, yet Bob Fosse's creative work exemplifies the power of innovation. Creativity can be found in all walks of life, and sometimes even the manner in which an actor walks across the stage is the product of not merely the creativity of the actor and the director, but a choreographer behind the scene. Pay attention, those knees carry meaning! 🐱🐱♀

Creativity & Choreography: On Gene Kelly

Some people do not think about the creativity inherent in dance, but those those people I would say: Shut up, and look at Gene Kelly. Here was a maverick who didn't just dance; he redefined what dance could be, especially in the world of cinema. Kelly's approach to choreography wasn't just about fancy footwork; it was about innovation, storytelling, and more than a bit of good old-fashioned sweat'n'blisters.

Consider the way Kelly approached a routine. He wasn't content with the dance floor's confines - in films like "Singin' in the Rain," every lamp post, every curb, became part of his choreographic arsenal. For Kelly, a dance was as much about the surroundings as it was about the steps.

And here's the kicker: Kelly understood the importance of practice and precision. His routines looked effortless, but behind them lay hours of grueling, sweat-drenched rehearsal. It was this relentless pursuit of perfection that allowed him to make complex choreography seem as natural as walking down the street.

Further, Kelly knew to work with technology. He grasped that on film, a dancer has two partners: their body and the camera, and he made the camera an integral part of the choreographic process. Just look at “An American in Paris,” where the camera swirls and swoops, transforming a Parisian street into a dynamic dance partner.

Gene Kelly was an innovator, a creative force who pushed the boundaries of dance in cinema. His legacy? A reminder that even in embodied labor, when you mix creativity with a bit of elbow grease you can turn the mundane into something extraordinary.



Creativity & Choreography: On George Balanchine

OK, my lovelies, time to get our ballet on. I was reading up, as you do, on the mid-century emergence of a modern US dance scene, and realized that I knew less than I should about the story of George Balanchine, the problematic master of US ballet. Born in St. Petersburg in 1904, Georgi Balanchivadze was a dancing prodigy and saw the emergence of the Soviet Union, a country he fled in 1924. In Paris he started to work with Sergei Diaghilev's world-touring Ballets Russes, where he cut his choreographic teeth. In 1933 he is invited to the US by the great impresario Lincoln Kirstein, and together, they found the School of American Ballet. Balanchine had already created ballets such as "Apollo" (1928), and keeps working on this Stravinsky-based work at the new school. In 1934, he presents a more streamlined, American ballet with "Serenade", and in the years that follow he works and travels at a furious pace – choreographing ballets, musicals, movies, and touring companies, just to keep busy.

In the 1950's, Balanchine returns to New York, sets up a new company, and creates some of his most famous ballets – the

avantgarde “Agon” (1957) with geometric movements complementing Stravinsky’s complex score, and most famous of all, “The Nutcracker” (1954), still performed and probably the most successful ballet ever. By the time Balanchine takes his final bow in 1983, he has created over 400 works, a true legacy. Today, some of his ideas about dancers, not to mention his behavior towards them, would be considered unacceptable, but his works still move people and inspire dancers. Relentlessly classical, yet ready to work in new modes and settings, Balanchine mastered the gamut of choreography, with a work ethic like no other. Nobody put Georgi (from Georgia!) in the corner. 🦸

Creativity & Choreography: On Twyla Tharp

Some choreographers become stars due to their perfect control of one form of expression, while others become stars through the way they can fuse and fusion forms of movement and flow. Twyla Tharp belongs solidly in the second camp. Her unique style, blending ballet, jazz, and pop, not only revolutionized dance but offers insights into deep, real creativity.

Tharp's career began in the early 1960s, a time when the dance world was rigidly divided into genres. Ballet was ballet, jazz was jazz, and never the twyl... twain shall meet. Tharp, however, was influenced by many things – the rigor of ballet, the expressiveness of modern dance, and the energy of jazz and pop. One of her most famous works, “Deuce Coupe” (1973), set to the music of The Beach Boys, is a testament to this. Here, classical ballet dancers shared the stage with those trained in modern and jazz dance, creating a tapestry of movement that captivated audiences and critics alike.

Ballet's precision and discipline can enhance the fluidity and spontaneity of jazz, while the narrative power of modern

dance can infuse classical forms with new life and relevance. Yet this fusion requires a deep understanding and respect for each genre's unique qualities. Tharp's extensive training in various dance forms allowed her to seamlessly integrate them, highlighting their strengths and compensating for their weaknesses. Tharp's work thus underscores the importance of versatility and the willingness to learn from different traditions, and the value of breaking down conventional barriers and exploring uncharted territories. We move with creativity, and creativity moves with us – and Twyla has always been a master of finding new ways of mindful movement. 

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Bizarro Creativity and Other Variations

Creativity comes in a number of flavors, including the strange, quirky, and surprising. Here I have collected some notes on truly strange creative creations such as odd TV and bizarre LPs, as well as some other notes on creativity and the absurd.

On Creative Anachronisms

“The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.”

— Walter Bagehot

Yesterday, as I was watching the last episode of “The Continental,” I was struck by how the cityscape was adorned with huge graffiti-pieces. Now, I am no expert, but from what I know, this did not seem like authentic 1970’s graffiti. This nerdy observation got me to thinking about anachronisms in creative work...

Anachronisms, or those delightful elements out of time and place, often elicit chuckles or sneers from pedants. “Aha! Gotcha!” we exclaim, as we spot a wristwatch on a Roman soldier or hear a Baroque composer channeling some groovy jazz undertones. But beyond these slip-ups, there’s an intriguing wellspring of creative potential in playing with the anachronistic.

Consider Tarantino’s “Django Unchained”, where Jim Croce’s “I Got a Name” drifts through scenes of the pre-Civil War South.

It shouldn't fit, but it does. It elevates the scene, creating a richer backdrop of emotion and hinting at issues beyond the temporal locality. Tarantino masterfully uses anachronism not as an oversight, but as a tool to breathe fresh life into a historical context. Or think about steampunk culture, a movement rooted in anachronism. It's a world where steam-driven robots co-exist with Victorian aesthetics. The juxtaposition creates a dynamic for imagination, a new dimension for chronological creativity.

Thus anachronisms, when embraced, can free us from the stifling constraints of chronological snobbery. They encourage us to think laterally, to create worlds and narratives that surprise and enchant, and to challenge the notion of linear progress. The next time you spot an anachronism, don't just smirk. Dive in, explore its creative dimensions, and embrace ideas out of time.



Bizarro TV: Taking Risks with “Manimal”

There were many TV shows I enjoyed as a child, but “Manimal” still has a special place in my heart. The premise was ludicrous, the theme was funky, and the hero was... an academic! I can still remember the character intro – “Dr. Jonathan Chase... wealthy, young, handsome. A man with the brightest of futures. A man with the darkest of pasts.” – and man, did that describe who I wanted to be! The titular manimal was a zoology professor who could literally morph into animals, and instead of using this for research used it to solve crimes. As you do.

The transformation scenes were what “Manimal” banked on – Dr. Chase’s bones cracking and skin stretching into various beasts to battle baddies. The special effects were, to put it charitably, of their time. Yet, there’s a certain charm in the sheer chutzpah of a show that believed it could pull off such a high-concept idea with the special effects equivalent of duct tape and glitter. In its defense, “Manimal” did what few shows dared to do – it leaped (or morphed) well beyond the safety of standard narrative forms. Our hero wasn’t just a detective; he was a shape-shifting zoology professor, because why not? This

was high concept on steroids, albeit the kind that was probably taking more than just steroids to dream up.

Sure, “Manimal” was the punchline of an era’s worth of TV jokes. But in its brief, shining eight-episode arc, it pushed boundaries of genre, technology, and storytelling with audacity and verve. It was an unintentional masterclass in risk – showcasing that the boldest ideas often come with the sharpest claws (or beaks, or fins). Sometimes innovation is about transforming into something unexpected, and sometimes it’s knowing when to revert back to your human form and walk away with your dignity somewhat intact. Somewhat.  

Bizarro TV: Dr. Snuggles

I can't believe it's taken me this long to write something about Dr. Snuggles. Not only did I love it as a child, it was weird as fuck, and the exact kind of entertainment oddity I find myself ever entranced by! Created by an Irish writer named Jeffrey O'Kelly and co-produced in 1979 by a British and a Dutch company, Dr. Snuggles was a fever dream of a children's TV show, and made us all think that adults must be doing an awful lot of the drugs they warned us about to create something like this.

The premise was both simple and bonkers. It was all about an eccentric inventor, the doctor himself, who hung out with a bunch of talking animals, built a sexbo... sorry, "mechanical assistant" called Mathilda Junkbottom (yeah...), had a wooden spaceship named "The Dreamy Boom Boom" (and I assume that the creators also smoked a fair bit of dreamy boom boom while developing the concept), and went on psychedelic adventures with his pogo-stick/umbrella that had a duck's head and could talk. There was also a stoned camel called Woogie, and a cosmic, soothsaying cat. Seriously, they'd never let anything like this be shown to kids these days.

So, basically Dr. Snuggles goes about doing things like inventing technology to mess with people's dreams, travels inside rainbows to fix them (did I mention that Woogie lives inside the color lavender?), and battles his arch-nemesis, Professor Erasmus Emerald. Oh, and he was voiced by Oscar-winner Peter Ustinov, because of course he was.

Despite a run of just 13 episodes, "Dr. Snuggles" left an indelible mark on the psyche of my generation. It taught us lessons, like... um... how reality is just a story, man, and with the right tools, you can travel into colors, teach a tree to fly, and talk with your shed, Ricketty Rik. And here we are. ☻ 🌀

Bizarro TV: The Young Ones

I am part of the generation that experienced “The Young Ones” not only at an impressionable age, but when it emerged as a completely novel form of TV. Nothing, truly, has been the same since. Airing from 1982 to 1984 on BBC2, the show was a vibrant embodiment of the anarchic spirit of its era, channeling the raw energy of punk and the disenchantment of Britain’s youth under the conservative governance of Margaret Thatcher. Created by Rik Mayall, Lise Mayer, and Ben Elton, and with only two series totaling 12 episodes, this groundbreaking show managed to leave an indelible impact on the landscape of both television and comedy.

“The Young Ones” centered around the chaotic lives of four university students sharing a squalid house in London. The ensemble cast featured Rik Mayall as the self-styled anarchist Rik, Adrian Edmondson as the violent punk Vyvyan, Nigel Planer as the depressive hippie Neil, and Christopher Ryan as Mike, the suave straight man of the group. The series was a *mélange* of slapstick violence, surreal humor, direct addresses to the audience, and spontaneous musical performances by bands

of the day such as Madness, The Damned, and Motörhead. Episodes would veer off into animated sequences or bizarre, seemingly unrelated vignettes.

Its legacy also extends beyond its immediate socio-political impact. The series created a shift in British TV, paving the way for daring and less conventional shows. It made stars out of particularly Rik (RIP) and Ade, and was part of making alternative UK comedy mainstream. At the time of release, some criticized it for the slapstick violence and the gross-out humor, but today it seems almost quaint. Still, it was a revolution in very bizarre outfits, and I loved it then and love it now. “This calls for a very special blend of psychology and extreme violence.” ✨



Bizarro TV: The Insanity of “Automan”

In the pantheon of ‘80s television, there is a show so gloriously bonkers, so wonderfully insane that it deserves a medal for sheer audacity. I present to you “Automan” (Get it? Automatic Man, but auto!), a gem that makes today’s most outlandish sci-fi plots look like sober documentaries. Something like *Tron*’s less successful cousin, spots and all...

The premise? A police computer geek, Walter Nebicher (desperately trying to sound cooler than he looks), creates an artificial intelligence so powerful it manifests as a holographic superhero, Automan. This glowing crimefighter, a cross between a walking disco ball and a superhero, battles the bad guys with the help of Cursor, a floating, wish-granting dotty thing that could draw anything from sports cars to helicopters out of thin air. Yes, folks, it was the ‘80s. Subtle was not in fashion.

It was a fever dream of neon lights and early CGI, a testament to an era when computers were magic boxes that could do anything writers needed them to, logic be damned. The show leaned into the digital age like a drunk at a bar, presenting us with a hero who was part computer program, part glowing male

model, and all ridiculous.

But let's give credit where it's due. "Automan" was ambitious, audacious, and a visual spectacle that tried to capture the zeitgeist of the burgeoning computer age, and did show us the potential (and pitfalls) of merging human and digital worlds. It was a show that was unafraid to push boundaries, at least for the short time it was on air.

So, here's to "Automan," a shining example of '80s excess and creativity. It might not have been a hit, but in the annals of bizarro TV, it's a shining, neon-lit legend. 📺

Bizarro TV: Heil Honey, I'm Home!

Satire is a difficult genre, and you don't need to take my word for it. Just ask the creators of "Heil Honey, I'm Home!", a most singular example of misguided satire, one that ran for exactly one episode on late 20th-century British television. This 1990 sitcom, created by Geoff Atkinson for the now-defunct satellite channel Galaxy, represent a wonderfully odd story about how what might have sounded like a fantastic idea in planning looks like a total disaster with the benefit of hindsight.

The premise of the show is nigh-on unbelievable, even as a sketch on another show – it sounds more like a cutaway scene in an particularly odd episode of a cartoon show. Believe it or not, the concept of the show was that Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun – yes, the historical figures, not crazily named figures of fiction – are living as a typical sitcom couple in 1938 Berlin, and not only that, they have Jewish neighbors. As difficult as that was to write, it is more difficult still to see this as a kooky laugh-fest. I mean, what with the nazism, genocide, and all...

Atkinson's purported aim was to satirize suburban sitcom tropes through the incongruous juxtaposition of domestic banal-

ity with one of history's most reviled figures. Hitler is portrayed as a bumbling everyman, Eva Braun with a stereotypical sitcom wife, getting into scrapes with their stereotypically Jewish neighbors, Arny and Rosa Goldenstein. Set designs and costuming were a mess too, going for comedy over history. Oy vey!

It might not surprise you to learn that the show was met with total condemnation, and was canceled basically as quickly as the first episode ended. Yes, a full season was recorded (the mind boggles!), but only one episode was ever run. Some would argue that was one too many. 📺

Bizarro TV: The Greatest American Hero

It was a quirky show, and with a premise that leaned into gentle whimsy: What if a superhero was just like us – clumsy, confused, and completely clueless about his powers? “The Greatest American Hero” lasted for only three seasons, premiering in 1981 and just barely making it to 1983, but for the short time it was on air it served up a delightful mix of comedy and drama, with a generous helping of absurdity as well.

The show centered around Ralph Hinkley, a mild-mannered schoolteacher who is given a superhero suit by aliens, but loses the instruction manual and has to figure out the suit’s powers through trial and error. Hey, it was the 1980’s. Thus we get the titular superhero, but one who crashes into walls, bumbles through the sky, and generally turns the concept of a sleek, infallible hero on its head.

Ralph wasn’t just battling villains; he was grappling with the everyday challenges of life, albeit in a red suit that he couldn’t quite control. It was a metaphor for life itself – we’re all trying to navigate our powers (or lack thereof), often without any instructions. Looking back, the show had a lot of heart, and

maybe this is what doomed it – too gentle for the age.

In a way, the show was ahead of its time, foreshadowing the current trend of superhero stories that focus on character development and personal struggles. It was a precursor to the likes of “Hancock” or “Kick-Ass” – superheroes with flaws and foibles – and thus more than its short run would indicate. It showed us that sometimes, the most compelling heroes are the ones who don’t fit the mold, who remind us that even with superpowers, life can be wonderfully, hilariously unpredictable.



Bizarro TV: David Lynch's "Rabbits"

OK, to call this TV might be stretching the definition thereof, but "Rabbits" still deserves to be thought of as Bizarro TV. Originally a series of eight short films, today existing as a series of re-edits, mash-ups, and strange collections, this was according to its creator, the decidedly bizarre David Lynch, a 'sit-com'. Most would call it existential horror, eerie dreamscape, or something like sheer insanity.

The 2002 series, if one dares to call it that, features humanoid rabbits living in a nondescript apartment, engaging in disjointed conversations that meander through the absurd and the unsettling with all the grace of a meth-addled elephant. The dialogue, a mix of banalities and non sequiturs, is punctuated by a laugh track that seems to mock the very concept of laughter itself. This isn't just breaking the fourth wall; it's demolishing it, setting it on fire, and then dancing around the flames trying to invoke some eldritch god. The narrative—if one can be so bold as to use that term here—is a labyrinthine puzzle box with pieces that don't fit, unless, of course, you're viewing it through the Lynchian lens of dreams and psychoanalysis. Here, the

rabbits' disjointed conversations can be seen as fragments of a subconscious dialogue, a critique of the sitcom format, or perhaps just Lynch having a laugh. The ambiance of "Rabbits" is a character in its own right, a thick, oppressive atmosphere that feels like a blanket soaked in dread. The lighting, sparse and eerie, casts long shadows that seem to hide secrets in every corner. The sound design, with its ominous rumblings and jarring silences, plays on the viewer's nerves like a psychotic violinist on ketamine.

"Rabbits" is not so much a show as it is an experience, an oddity among oddities. Is it nice? No, not at all, yet I am so totally there for it. 🐰📺

Bizarro TV: Garth Marenghi's Darkplace

Ever since I was a young child I have been drawn to media that plays with the form – be it books, TV, or movies. I love books within books, breaking the fourth wall, metatextuality of all kinds. No wonder that I fell head over heels for the cult of “Garth Marenghi's Darkplace”, a brilliant showcase of absurd parody and meta-TV. This British spoof of 1980s sci-fi and horror revels in its own glorious ridiculousness, with over-the-top acting, delightfully shoddy production values, and subtly brilliant writing.

“Garth Marenghi's Darkplace” is the brainchild of two of my favorite geniuses, Matthew Holness and Richard Ayoade. They present the show as a lost classic written by, directed by, and starring the fictional horror novelist Garth Marenghi – played with exquisite hamminess by Holness. The show within a show follows Dr. Rick Dagless M.D., played by Marenghi himself (yes, it is this meta) as he battles the forces of evil lurking within Darkplace Hospital. Every episode is a masterclass in bad TV tropes, and I'm addicted; it's like watching a car crash in slo-mo being narrated by a hilariously over-dramatic poet.

There are many levels in “Darkplace”, and having a nerdy interest in TV culture certainly helps. Also, the show never wavers in its dedication nor winks at the audience; ridiculousness is played straight, and every conceit is committed to. It should come as no surprise that the show never became a huge hit. It was just too niche, too intertextual for its own good. Still, the few fans it got love it with a fervor, as we realized that their might never be another show as dedicated to nerdy pop culture intellectualism as this one, perfect, darkplace. 📺🎧

Bizarro TV: My Mother the Car

Premiering in 1965, “My Mother the Car” may very well stand as one of the most surreal concepts ever to grace the small screen. The premise is delightfully absurd: attorney David Crabtree, played by Jerry Van Dyke, discovers that his deceased mother has been reincarnated as a 1928 Porter automobile. Yes, you read that correctly. His mother is a car. Voiced by Ann Sothern, Mom (the car) speaks only to David, guiding, advising, and occasionally nagging him from the comfort of the family garage.

The show, created by Allan Burns and Chris Hayward, dives headfirst into the absurdity of its premise without a hint of irony. Each episode revolves around David’s attempts to navigate his everyday life, with the added twist of his sentient, motorized mother often embroiling him in various comedic predicaments, blending the fantastical and the mundane in that special 60s TV kind of a way.

Yet “My Mother the Car” was more than just a wacky premise; it was a commentary on the rapidly changing social and technological landscape of the time. The 1960s saw a burgeoning car culture in America, a symbol of freedom and progress. The

show takes this symbol and turns it on its head, infusing it with familial sentiment and nostalgia. In a way, it reflects the societal struggle to reconcile the burgeoning technological future with the values and simplicity of the past.

It was, to put it mildly, not well-received. Lambasted for its absurdity and lack of believability, it lasted a single season. Still, it has its charm. “My Mother the Car” represents a moment in television history where creators were unafraid to experiment, to embrace the bizarre, to the point where a mother reincarnated into a vintage car was, somehow, A-OK. 🚗

Bizarro TV: An Appreciation of “Green Acres”

By the time I saw it in the 80’s, it was an archaic oddity, cheap TV filler for new channels, but I instantly fell in love with “Green Acres” in my strange, precocious teens. The catchy theme song, the hammy acting, the over-the-top premise, it had everything. The show, for those of you unlucky enough to have missed it, follows a Manhattan lawyer played by Eddie Albert, and his glamorous Hungarian wife Lisa, portrayed by the incomparable Eva Gabor, who give up their sophisticated city lifestyle to move to the eponymous Green Acres, a dilapidated farm in the fictional Hooterville. This was no idyllic pastoral; instead, it was an absurdist nightmare full of bizarre neighbors and surreal situations.

Green Acres was part of the rural sitcom trend in the 60s, and arguably the strangest of the bunch. The show regularly broke the fourth wall, had surreal dream sequences, and often descended into full-on farce. It was, in a word, weird. And yet, there was something utterly charming about the show’s weirdness. It was a bold experiment in sitcom storytelling that

took risks and played with the conventions of the genre. In its own bizarre way, it was ahead of its time. Shows like “Arrested Development” and “Community” owe a debt to Green Acres for proving that a sitcom could be both funny and subversive.

So, here’s to you, Green Acres, beloved show of my youth. With your magical pig, oily salesmen, and strange universe-building (including the incredibly meta referencing of “Beverly Hillbillies”) you pushed the format more than people realize. You may be forgotten by most, but I never have. True creativity deserves to be remembered. 📺👤📺👤

Bizarro TV: The Moral Ambiguity of (Jim) Profit

I have always loved an anti-hero. The quirkier the better, and the more compromised they were, the more fully realized they seemed to me. No wonder, then, that when I came across “Profit”, it was love at first sight. In the world of Jim Profit, played with a devilish charm by Adrian Pasdar, the line between right and wrong wasn’t blurred; it was obliterated with glee.

“Profit,” which graced our screens briefly in the 1990s, was a pioneer in its portrayal of the corporate anti-hero. Here was Jim Profit, a man with a traumatic childhood, rising from a literal box in front of a TV to the figurative box of corporate America. His tools? Blackmail, manipulation, and a Machiavellian intellect. You can see why I’d like him.

“Profit” was daring in its themes, but also innovative in its narrative style. Breaking the fourth wall, Profit would often turn to the camera, implicating us in his schemes, making us complicit in his actions. This technique, now familiar to audiences, was groundbreaking at the time and added an extra layer of intimacy (or perhaps, complicity) to the viewing

experience. To many this was a bit much, and the show tragically closed after a single season – but what a season!

“Profit” was a show ahead of its time, too audacious for the era it was born into, yet it foreshadowed a wave of complex, morally grey characters that would later dominate television. It was “Succession” before “Succession”, it broke bad before “Breaking Bad”. Jim Profit was not a comedy villain like Alan B’Stard, he was a magnetic realization of the psyche of late capitalism, and greatly attractive precisely due to this fact. The corporate id come alive – a strange premise, but great TV! 💡

Bizarro TV: Detectorists

In a television landscape often dominated by high-stakes drama and fast-paced action, you gotta love something as odd and low-stakes as the British sitcom “Detectorists”. This gem delves into the quiet world of Andy (played by Mackenzie Crook) and Lance (Toby Jones), two friends united by their passion for metal detecting. That’s it. It is about two rather dull men and their rather dull hobby, and for some reason it is absolutely fascinating.

The show’s brilliance lies in its ability to find smiles (this isn’t a LOL comedy) and poignancy in the mundane and the everyday. Andy and Lance’s treasure hunting adventures becomes something of a meditation on the human condition, exploring themes of friendship, love, and the pursuit of one’s passions, no matter how niche they may seem.

It’s beauty is quiet as well. Neither Crook nor Jones are traditional hunks, and the quiet rural landscapes are more serene backdrops than awe-inspiring. There are no rapid cuts or dramatic cliffhangers here; instead, the series embraces a slower, more thoughtful pace that allows you to immerse

yourself in this tranquil world. The characters can be a bit kooky (and there are some real characters in the Danebury Metal Detecting Club), and the inevitable antagonists are a subtly hilarious pair of not-quite-so-macho-detectorist-bros, but the real beauty lies in the sheer humanity of the characters. This is how silly and inconsequential we all are, no matter how we fight it.

“Detectorists” is a gem in the realm of television comedies. Rather than going for the belly-laugh, it goes for the comedy of the human condition, finding gentle, wistful humor in the unlikely case of two nerds who know they are nerds, looking for metal objects in the fields of north Essex. 📺🔍

Bizarro TV: Lidsville

It might seem strange now, but there was a time when children's TV was creative and avantgarde, rather than algorithm-optimized product for maximized engagement or merch. There was a time when you could do surreal art as kids entertainment, and Sid & Marty Krofft went for this with gusto. Best known for the wacky "H.R. Pufnstuf", they followed this with a show in 1972 that was so outlandish that even describing it is a challenge.

"Lidsville," for the uninitiated, follows the adventures of a young boy, Mark, who tumbles into a magician's hat and finds himself in a land populated by living hats. You read that correctly – living hats. Each character in this bizarre world was a hat of a different style and personality, from the noble Cowboy Hat to the villainous HooDoo, a magician played with campy glee by Charles Nelson Reilly. "Lidsville" was also groundbreaking in its visual and narrative style. The Kroffts were pioneers in using puppetry, special effects, and colorful sets to create a visually arresting world.

Looking back, the show was truly wild. It had Bad Hats and a Hat Band, an androgynous genie called Weenie (the sound you

hear is Freud groaning in his grave), what appears to be pretty direct references to drug use, a party hat called Madame Ring-a-Ding, and as a *pièce de résistance* a goofy sidekick to the bad guy called... Raunchy Rabbit. Sure, that didn't qualify as a direct reference to a sex toy at the time, but then again...

In today's sanitized media climate, this would never pass, and in the end, Mark never even got back home. He might still be there in Lidsville, doing hat puns and whatever drugs hats use. What fitting testament that would be to the surrealistic genius of Sid & Marty Krofft, and the times when children's TV dared to be truly bizarre! 🍷

Bizarro LP: “Philosophy of the World” by The Shaggs

Can an album both be the worst ever and a revered inspiration? Well, in the case of “Philosophy of the World”, the answer would seem to be a resounding yes. Is it outsider art (not really)? Is it proto-punk (maaybe)? Did Frank Zappa love it? Yes. Yes he did. It is all weird, and has bewildered people and reviewers ever since it was recorded in 1969.

The Shaggs, who were really three sisters called Dot, Betty, and Helen Wiggin, hailed from Fremont, New Hampshire. They were compelled into music by their father Austin, and his staunch belief in his own mothers prophecy that his daughters would form a popular band. Despite their lack of musical talent or inclination, the Wiggin sisters obeyed, leading to “Philosophy of the World”, a cacophony of off-tempo rhythms, untuned guitars, and earnest if nasally vocals. Which is even more surprising considering the sisters were forced into rigorous practice, got lessons, and claimed they did their best – they didn’t want to disappoint grandma.

Critically, the album has been reassessed over the years

not just for its strangeness but for its purity of expression. Frank Zappa famously proclaimed The Shaggs to be “better than The Beatles”, if less as a technical comparison than as an appreciation of their unpretentious and unfiltered artistic output. Similarly, Kurt Cobain listed “Philosophy of the World” as one of his favorite albums, likely attracted to its authenticity and its stark departure from the polished productions in the music industry.

I think it comes down to our love for an underdog. The Shaggs’s tempos were erratic, their lyrics inane, but for some this added to their authentic charm. Goes to show there’s a lid for every pot. 🙄 😊

Bizarro LP: "At Home with Screamin' Jay Hawkins"

He might not be the most obscure figure of the rock'n'roll-era, but Screamin' Jay Hawkins isn't a household name either. Born an orphan in Ohio in 1929, he was raised by the Blackfoot Confederacy and studied classical music as a child. He idolized Paul Robeson and wanted to become an opera singer, but turned to the blues after a stint in the US Army (as an underaged soldier) and a bit of a boxing career. At least if you trust his own telling of things, that is... The opera thing is true, though.

In 1956 he records what was supposed to be a ballad, with an operatic touch. When he was going to record it, however, he and the band decided to have a bit of a drink first. One led to another, and by the time they cut the track the band is drunk and Hawkins is hammered to the point that he did not remember the recording at all. The result is magical. The song becomes raw and sinister, with Hawkins laughing and screaming throughout. The raw sound makes the song both sexual and menacing, and thus quite a thing in the mid-50's. It becomes a huge hit. As a result, an album was cut in 1958 –

“At Home with Screamin’ Jay Hawkins”. As his first album, it becomes a pivotal moment in the development of what would become known as shock rock, with an audacious mix of humor, theatricality, and musicianship. Songs like “Hong Kong” and “Frenzy” show Hawkins’s ability to weave narrative with vivid, grotesque imagery, all interspersed with a gospel track and a version of Robeson’s “Ol’ Man River”.

The impact can still be felt. Hawkins brought spectacle, shock, and a manic energy to rock, and led the way for punk, metal, and theatrical acts like Bowie and Gaga. And to think, it all started with a blackout... 🍷

Bizarro LP: “Metal Machine Music” by Lou Reed

“Punk rock should mean freedom, liking and accepting anything that you like, and playing whatever you like, as sloppy as you like.”

— Henry Rollins

Music-wise, I often feel that I am a boring sort. I often find myself liking albums that everyone else also likes, and besides an abiding love for Appalachian lined-out hymnody, much of my taste is rather typical for a man of my age. No wonder, then, that I always loved the Velvet Underground and “Transformer”, yet found that much of Lou Reed’s later work didn’t really move me. You know, like “Metal Machine Music” (1975).

It stands as one of the most polarizing and inscrutable works in the history of rock music, and although kids these days might not even know of it, it might have been a masterpiece. Or you know, just a perplexing mess. To call it a demanding listen would be an understatement. For over an hour, it assaults the listener with a relentless onslaught of abrasive, modulated guitar effects

and noise – nonstop layered feedback loops, devoid of melody, rhythm, or traditional structure. Seriously, it is quite painful.

It was met with bafflement and derision from both fans and critics of Reed. Why had the man known to be rock through and through released a double-album of nothing but dissonant droning? One prevailing interpretation is that “Metal Machine Music” was a way for Reed to mess with RCA, fulfilling an obligation yet creating something they couldn’t sell – a spite album, if you will. Yet Reed maintained that there was a musical statement here, alluding to Sibelius (!), minimalism, and experimental music. No matter what the truth is, the album is still a bizarre moment in rock history, an almost impossible to listen to record from one of the most influential rock gods of all time. Maybe future musicologists will find something here, but I’m gonna listen to some Velvet Underground. 🎧🎶

Bizarro LP: “God Bless Tiny Tim”

It isn't entirely easy to categorize the artist known as Tiny Tim, born Herbert Butros Khaury (1932-1986). Part novelty act, part comedian, part avant-garde artist with a hint of outsider art thrown in, he was known for his falsetto singing, his ukulele, and for transcendent weirdness. His 1968 debut album – “God Bless Tiny Tim” – is a gloriously strange artifact from a time when music was rapidly expanding in scope and style. At play here is a lovely, and strangely coherent blend of influences. Take some Tin Pan Alley-tunes, combine with 1930s jazz, add some vaudeville and early American folk music, and give it all that Tiny Tim groove. No wonder it sold well, despite the undeniable weirdness, hitting #7 on Billboard.

The album is a mix of songs both nostalgic and very much of their time. The album opens with “Welcome to My Dream,” setting a surreal tone that reverberates through the record. The standout track, obviously, is “Tip-Toe Thru’ the Tulips with Me”, which was Tiny Tim’s biggest hit and signature tune. It is a cover of a 1929 song from the musical movie “Gold Diggers of Broadway”, but Tiny Tim turns it into something wonderfully

strange. He sings it with earnest soulfulness, yet in a slightly deranged falsetto, and accompanies himself on the ukulele. It is a novelty song as an artistic statement, pulling the listener into a world of whimsy. Elsewhere on the album, Tiny Tim drops the falsetto and sings in a sonorous baritone, until he at the end of side two of the LP reaches a logical conclusion – singing a duet with himself, in both falsetto and baritone.

Interestingly, the album was produced in a very serious manner by Richard Perry, then perhaps best known for having produced Captain Beefheart's "Safe As Milk", and later known as a superstar producer (and for dating Jane Fonda). A strange album, true, but it begat Weird Al Yankovic... 🌹👉

Bizarro LP: “Flaunt It” by Sigue Sigue Sputnik

I was a young man when I first heard “Love Missile F1-11” on Sky TV, and I immediately fell in love with it. I had never heard of Sigue Sigue Sputnik, didn’t know what new wave was, and probably missed a lot of the references, but here was the kind of cyberpunk rock that a nerdy kid like me could get behind. Little did I know just how weird not just this single, but the album it begat was.

Musically, “Flaunt It” (1986) is a collage of electronic synths and rockabilly, with a driving drum machine and some of the good ol’ glam-rock style for good measure. “Love Missile F1-11” opens the album, as befits a fully realized commercial endeavor. The producer of both this track and the album as a whole was Giorgio Moroder, the famous composer of movie soundtracks who also wrote Top Gun’s “Take My Breath Away” and the sound of “Flashdance”. What can I say, the guy has range! The sound of Sigue Sigue Sputnik was different, unmistakably of its era, and sounds not a little like a computer game set to groove. Yet, what truly sets “Flaunt It” apart is its cheeky approach to the

album format. The band envisioned the LP as a commercial platform, interspersing its tracks with actual advertisements by brands like L'Oréal and i-D magazine. Was it satire? An art-project ahead of its time? Just a cash-grab? I think, like most sensible people do, that the answer was yes.

The album didn't sell all that well (but charted at #4 on Finland's album list!), and follow-up singles never caught on like the original love missile. There was a tour, but it didn't do all that well either. After some time, the band broke up. But still, for a shining moment they truly flaunted it. 🤖🎸🎸

Bizarro (Comedy) LP: "The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart"

Today, if you see Bob Newhart on the TV, you're likely to think "Oh, yeah, that's the guy who plays lovable curmudgeons in movies and such.". You're less likely to think "There goes a comedy pioneer, who also rocked the charts", yet this latter description is actually more correct. In the late 1950's, Bob was an upcoming comic. He was deadpan and cerebral, a subdued voice in an era used to slapstick. An admired wit, if you will, who in 1960 releases his debut album, referencing his "button-down mind".

It becomes a phenomenon. In the era of Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers it shoots up the charts, and becomes the first comedy album to reach #1 on the Billboard Album chart, staying there for four weeks. Yes, a comedy album, with a straight-laced white guy doing conversational routines, bested rock, bested pop, bested everything, and was the number one seller in the US. The comedy album became king. Not only that, the quick follow-up "The Button-Down Mind Strikes Back!" (was George Lucas paying attention, ya think?) also became a success, and at

one point the two albums were #1 and #2 on Billboard. Weirder still, this was not just a commercial home-run, but a critical one too. In 1961, the first album wins the Grammy for Album of the Year (not comedy album, mind you, the award for that went to the follow-up!), becoming the first comedy album ever to win this award, an achievement only achieved once since – by Vaughn Meader’s “The First Family” in 1963. Bob also wins Best New Artist!

Forgotten today, this was a watershed moment for comedy. It showed that comedy could be a blockbuster, towering over even rock’n’roll. And all done by a button-down man with a slight stammer. LOL! 🙄

Guilty, Creative Pleasures: The “Black Berets”-Series

“Some people never go crazy. What truly horrible lives they must lead.”

— Charles Bukowski

As an academic who works with creativity, I have always been a fan and apologist for what we might call “trashy pop culture”, not least comic books and genre fiction. Consider the “Black Berets”-series of books, in a genre maybe best described as “men’s adventure”. Written by Michael McDowell and John Preston, originally under the pen-name Mike McCray, it was a series I loved as a boy, and am now re-reading.

The series is about a group of five Vietnam vets who get into adventures, the kind where everything can be solved with C-4 and an M-16. The group is ragtag to the point of parody – a Native American, a freewheelin’ pilot, an African-American man, a silent Greek, and a histrionic Jewish character who talks a lot. PC it ain’t. The books are formulaic and women are mainly sex-objects, even though the series is quite woke for its era

– anti-racism, often violent such, is a recurring theme. Yet there are things to take away from books such as these, beyond their easy-to-read pleasures. First, formulas are formulas for a reason. To create the comfort of recognition, with enough variation to encourage engagement, is no mean feat. We don't dismiss the Beatles for being catchy, do we? Second, the art of genre fiction lies in the serialization. Narratives can be built over a dozen books, arcs subtly filled in, characters given depth over time. The arc shifts.

Oh, and there's a twist in the tale. This cheap series of macho books was written by two gay men. McDowell was lauded as a paperback writer by Stephen King, and is also famous for having written "Beetlejuice", whereas Preston was a prolific writer of gay erotica and a pioneering gay rights activist. Goes to show that genre fiction can have hidden depths! 🧐👁️

Quirky Creativity: On Mozart Playing Billiards

We have a tendency to see famous creatives as somewhat two-dimensional, assuming that they are either hard at work on their art (or similar) or otherwise engaging in leisure and, possibly, wickedness. What is forgotten in such binary tellings of creative lives is how assumedly non-creative activities may well have been key for their creativity. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart loved billiards.

For the musical genius of the Classical period billiards was more than mere recreation; it was a key part of his social life and a high-on obsession. But did it affect his compositions? Maybe. The game of billiards involves an interplay of geometry and physics, requiring players to think several moves ahead, much like the structuring of a musical composition. The game's demands for precision and foresight also mirror the skills needed in musical composition. Mozart, known for composing complex wholes in his head, may have found a parallel form of mental exercise in billiards.

We obviously do not know what it was in billiards that at-

tracted Mozart so. It could have been the sense of geometry – one shot leads to the next, with balls ricocheting off the walls not entirely unlike the juxtapositions he enjoyed embedding into music. Further, the physical aspect of finding the right position for a shot and executing it well might have appealed to him as an alternative to the often sedentary work of composing (for even though he may have been a master of mentally thinking through a piece, he too needed to commit it to paper). Regardless, he found something in billiards that allowed him to remain creative and creating. Take note, and go out to find your creative quirk, your surprising obsession. ⑧ 🎵

Contrarian Creativity: Against the Notebook

Writing on creativity is nothing if not stereotypical. The same advice, regurgitated again and again, to the point of parody. But you know, without wit or jokes. It's all about taking long walks, experimenting, why we get ideas in the shower, repeated ad nauseam. It's enough to drive you to despair, I tell you. Or, in my case, protests against the taken-for-granted truths in the field.

One such truth has to do with notebooks. The advice given is to always carry one with you, so you can scribble down your genius whenever said genius hits you. In the shower you might need a special notebook or a little whiteboard, sure, but for all other situations you're supposed to have a notebook close at hand. As a result, thousands if not tens of thousands of wannabe creatives have spent glorious amount of money buying just the right notebook, the one that you will love carting with you, the one good enough for your innermost thoughts and flashes of brilliance. I should know, I've been one. Oh, the money I've spent...

I am a recovering notebook-holic, and I have seen beyond the notebook. Whilst it is a good idea to make notes, there is a dark side to the notebook. Unconsciously, the pristine high-quality paper therein makes you wonder if that thought of yours really is worthy. You start weighing your words, thinking about whether it is worth it to drag out your notebook. You start fretting about whether you will ever go back to your notes. Most notebooks are never filled to more than a third, for we often fall in love with a new notebook, and the old one gets stored away and often never read again. There are alternatives, however...

Notebooks are beautiful, lovely things, but they are not perfect. Notebooks can become where ideas go to hide, and there are always reasons to buy more of them – you don't want to run out! I have, however, left behind my old notebooks ways, for not one, not two, but three replacements.

To start, I realized that I need something that is easier to 'defile' than a notebook. I often wanted to do a little note, but wasn't sure it was worthy of being captured in actual covers. So I got a scribble-block instead. On my desk, just to the right of my mouse, is a block (an Exacompta FAF, for the stationary nerds out there) and a pencil (Blackwing 602, of course). I note more on this than I ever did in a notebook. It's just a scribble-block, see?

As I am out or about or in the shower, I have my watch. Yeah, it's an Apple Watch, and on it I have an app called Whisper Memos. I press a button, speak into the air, and a few moments later I have a transcript mailed to me. Easy as pie, and requires neither pen nor notebook, although I had to explain to my partner why I started talking to myself in the shower. Great for capturing little thoughts you have that you just want to check later.

When I need a proper notebook, I have my Remarkable2. It's an e-ink device that doubles as an ebook- and other-documents-reader. I can have ten notebooks in it, and shift pages around at will. I can scribble as much as I like, for the machine can store thousands of pages (there isn't total clarity of how many, but everyone agrees you can do 5000 pages easy), and also have it translate your scribbles to text or make a pdf and send it to you. So, I no longer feel a need for paper notebooks. Your own mileage may vary, but this has worked for me. I stopped buying new notebooks! ☺ 📓

Remembering Max Headroom – and the Creative Insanity of the 80's

As a young teen in the mid-80s, I remember watching TV and coming across something that blew my mind, a glimpse of the future despite being so very much of its time: Max Headroom. Many don't remember this roughly pixelated sprite with his glitchy demeanor and British snark, yet Max Headroom was more than a character; he was an icon of the digital reshaping our lives.

It was a brilliant confluence of ideas: satire, cyberpunk aesthetics, and media commentary. On the surface, Max Headroom was a talking head, but delve deeper and you'd realize he was a harbinger of the internet. His fragmented speech and laughter were less about a 'broken' character and more an insight into fragmented, fast-paced media consumption.

So, what can modern creators glean from this 80s icon? First, the audacity to experiment. Max Headroom was an oddity, but he stood out and became a sensation because he dared to deviate. In our current landscape of recycled ideas, originality still remains a rare and treasured commodity. Then there's the

insight to understand and predict cultural shifts. Max Headroom was a testament to the power of observing societal changes and projecting them into a creative format – and extending this into the most curious media.

So, as we navigate the labyrinth of modern media, with its AI influencers and deepfakes, spare a thought for Max Headroom. He was more than a character; he was a signpost pointing towards a future where technology and creativity would become deeply intertwined. In many ways, he's never been more relevant, and you ignore him at your peril. 📺

How Absurdity Fuels Creativity: The Case of Dada

Dadaism, that glorious anomaly of the art world. Emerging from the tumult of World War I, a band of artists in Zurich decided the world had become such a farce, the only response was to embrace the absurd. A total deconstruction and rebellion against existing artistic structures and sensibilities, Dadaism gave the middle finger to the establishment, ridiculed the solemnity of the art world, and in doing so, ironically became a font of creativity.

It was anti-art, anti-authority, and anti-logic, and yet its legacy is anything but. Dadaists created nonsensical poetry, assembled art from found objects, and generally bewildered the art establishment. For instance, Marcel Duchamp, one of the movement's prominent figures, once signed a urinal with 'R. Mutt' and presented it as art. The piece, named 'Fountain,' became one of the most iconic artworks of the 20th century. Another example is 'L.H.O.O.Q.', where Duchamp took a cheap reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and drew a mustache and beard on her face. It was as if by letting go of logic, they could tap into new creative realms that traditional

art had failed to reach.

And there, my friends, lies a potent lesson. In a world perpetually on the brink of chaos, embracing absurdity can be liberating. Letting go of the need for everything to be perfect, to make sense, can unlock new levels of creativity. So next time you hit a creative roadblock, consider channeling your inner Dadaist. Relish the absurdity of life, and let it guide your creative process. It might be the unexpected jolt you need to see things from a fresh perspective and overcome your creative barriers.

The Surreal World of Salvador Dalí's Cookbook

“To gaze is to think.”

– Salvador Dalí

I do love a cookbook, but what I love most is a WEIRD cookbook, and they don't come much weirder than “Les Dîners de Gala,” Salvador Dalí's surrealist ode to his wife and to his kitchen. It's a kaleidoscope of gastronomic wonders, an aesthetic testament to how the boundless creativity of a true artist also extends into the gustatory realm.

From the first page, “Les Dîners de Gala” transports you to a dreamscape where food transcends mere sustenance and becomes an art form. Each recipe is an adventure, a dalliance with the absurd and the extravagant. Think along the lines of toffee with pine cones or an aphrodisiac dessert. At the same time this is not an exercise in dadaism, but a serious cookbook. Sure, the listed dish of crayfish and dill may have been called “Bush of crayfish in Viking herbs”, but the recipe is sensible and direct.

Still, Dalí's imaginative prowess is evident in every aspect of the book. The illustrations, as you might expect, are as much a feast for the eyes as the recipes are for the palate. They're flamboyant and often fantastical, with lobsters on telephones and fried eggs on horseback, dancing across the pages in a jubilant parade of surrealism. Or, you know, a stack of crayfish. Whatever works.

"Les Dîners de Gala" is more than just its visual or culinary delights; it's a love letter to a muse as well as an insight into the mind of one of the 20th century's most idiosyncratic artists. Dalí's approach to food was like his approach to art – unfettered by convention, more than slightly manic, and steeped in a deep love for the whimsical and the bizarre. Artistry lives everywhere, on the canvas as well as on the plate. 🍷🍴

On the Genius of the \$15 Velveeta Martini

In the culinary carnival of the 21st century, where the bizarre is often bedfellows with the gourmet, a new concoction has stirred the pot (or should I say, shaker) of innovation: the \$15 Velveeta Martini. Yes, you read that right. Not caviar, not truffle, but Velveeta — the cheese that is to dairy what Frankenstein is to biology. It's a concoction that might just be genius, or a sign that civilization is now twisted beyond saving.

Let's break it down. The Velveeta Martini, or the 'Veltini,' if you will, is served at BLT Steak in Washington D.C., a place that apparently looked at a block of processed cheese and saw untapped potential. It's a blend of vodka and Velveeta-infused vermouth (a sentence I never thought I'd write), garnished with a cheese-stuffed olive and a cube of Velveeta on the rim. If that doesn't scream culinary audacity, I don't know what does.

Now, some might scoff at the idea, relegating it to the realm of gastronomic gimmicks. But hold your horses (or your olives). There's something profoundly creative here. In an era where food has become an Instagrammable art form, where molecular

gastronomy meets grandma's kitchen, the Velveeta Martini stands as a testament to unbridled, unashamed innovation. It's not just a drink; it's a statement. It says, "Yes, I will take your artisanal cocktails and raise you a cheese-infused oddity."

Regardless of the Velveeta Martini is a stroke of genius or a step too far in our creative exploration of food, one thing is certain – it's a conversation starter. It's a reminder that creativity can be found in the most unexpected places, often hiding in a block of processed cheese, waiting to be mixed into a martini. Cheers to that! 🧀🍸

Extreme Creativity: On “Piss Christ”

As you first see it, it looks like a portrait of Christ on the cross, in a soft glow of reds and yellows, almost like a duotone. It soon becomes clear it is a photograph, and if you look closely you might pick up on the fact that the crucified Jesus is a plastic trinket. It might not be until you read the name of the work “Immersion (Piss Christ)” that you realize something is amiss. What we are talking about is an art photograph by Andres Serrano from 1987, part of a series where statuettes were immersed in various fluids and then photographed. A continuation, in a sense, of a previous work – “Blood Cross” from 1985 – the photograph portrays a plastic crucifix put into a small glass jar, filled with the artists own urine. A Christ in piss, in other words. The work won awards, but also became hotly contested. As late as 2011, as the artwork was shown in France, it was attacked with hammers.

The work has been attacked both for being blasphemous, and for being too basic to count as art. It is, after all, just a picture of a plastic trinket in a jar of urine, and people who struggle with contemporary art have called it out for being just attention-

seeking and a cheap trick. Here, however, we should remember the correct riposte to the claim "My five-year old could have done that!", namely "Maybe (although that too is doubtful), but they didn't." The artist has stated that he wanted it to be a critique of the commercialization of Christian icons, and it does force us to think about the lines between the sacred and the profane, as well as the way we react with abject horror towards bodily fluids.

To me, "Piss Christ" is not just art, it says something important about creativity. The fact that people get mad is the point, for the picture challenges us rather than gives us more of what we already love. And that's the whole point of creativity – to push us, to explore, to go beyond. 🤔 🖼️

On Unexpected Insights From Bad Lip Reading

Hark, the glorious world of ‘Bad Lip Reading’! For those not in the know, ‘Bad Lip Reading’ is a YouTube channel that dubs nonsensical dialogue over videos of politicians, celebrities, and scenes from movies and TV shows. It’s utterly ridiculous, strangely addictive, and can produce unexpected insight. But beneath the surface of this lies an unexpected wellspring of creativity lessons.

Whilst primarily an absurdist form of entertainment, ‘Bad Lip Reading’ can teach us how to make the mundane quirky. By taking familiar scenes and overlaying them with entirely new and unrelated dialogue, it forces us to see the world sideways, upside down, or through a kaleidoscope.

Additionally, ‘Bad Lip Reading’ illustrates the power of humor and absurdity in creative work. In a world that often feels overwhelmingly serious and fraught, there’s something liberating about indulging in the ridiculous. It’s a reminder that creativity doesn’t always have to be serious and highbrow. Sometimes, the most innovative ideas come from embracing the absurd and

not taking ourselves too seriously – it takes a certain level of audacity to dub over the ‘Star Wars’ saga with dialogue about space sticks and bush-babies, and yet, the result can be comedic gold.

So, start up a ‘Bad Lip Reading’ video, and take a moment to appreciate its absurdist lessons. After all, as the old saying goes, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” Or, as ‘Bad Lip Reading’ might put it, “In the middle of daffodils lies a possum.”



Mimes – Irritating or Innovative?

Mimes: those silent, face-painted figures that people either find amusing or utterly terrifying. Despite their somewhat tarnished reputation—thanks in no small part to creepy portrayals in popular culture—there’s a lot to be learned from the world of pantomime. Yes, you heard me right. Even the art of miming, often maligned as the domain of street performers and, let’s be honest, annoying party guests, has lessons to offer on creativity.

At heart, pantomime is the art of communication without words. While most of us rely on verbal cues to express our thoughts and feelings, mimes must convey complex narratives using only their bodies. It’s a reminder that creativity often thrives when constraints are introduced. When one avenue of expression is closed off, others open up.

Additionally, pantomime teaches us the importance of practice and precision. A mime’s performance may seem effortless, but behind the scenes, there are hours of practice and refinement. It’s a reminder that creativity isn’t just about inspiration; it’s about perspiration. It’s about putting in the hard work to hone your craft and deliver a performance that seems effortless

to the audience—even if it all about walking against the wind and being locked into a box.

Finally, pantomime reminds us of the power of simplicity. In a world overrun with noise and distraction, there's something refreshing about the pared-down nature of pantomime. It's a reminder that sometimes, less is more, and that the simplest ideas often have the greatest impact.

So, next time you find yourself rolling your eyes at a mime, take a moment to consider the creative lessons that can be gleaned from their art. Who knows? It might just help you break out of your own invisible box. 🖐️👤🖐️👤

The Creativity Lessons of “Koyaanisqatsi”

Koyaanisqatsi is a word from the Hopi language meaning “life out of balance,” and also the title for an experimental film from 1982 by Godfrey Reggio. Rather than relying on dialogue or narrative, “Koyaanisqatsi” is more akin to an avant-garde meditation on the clash between nature and human progress. It also stands as a powerful lesson in creativity.

At its core, “Koyaanisqatsi” teaches the art of unlearning. By stripping away the common framework of film, Reggio isn’t just removing layers; he’s challenging the viewer to find meaning in the rhythm of images, in the ebb and flow of the visual tide that he orchestrates. Philip Glass’s haunting, minimalist score doesn’t just accompany the visuals; it converses with them. This reflective, almost introspective form of storytelling urges us to find our own narrative within the canvas it presents. This method echoes a fundamental creative truth: sometimes, the most compelling stories are those that are felt, not told. In a world addicted to instant gratification, “Koyaanisqatsi” unfolds at its own deliberate pace. It’s a reminder that true creativity

often resides in the slow simmer, not the rapid boil. It's about giving ideas the time to breathe, to evolve, to reach their full potential.

Reggio's masterwork is more than an experimental film; it's a lens through which we can examine the essence of creativity. It urges us to break free from conventions, to experiment with combinations of contrasting mediums, and to seek out the unspoken and the slow and steady journey of creative thought. In "Koyaanisqatsi" every frame and every scene is a lesson, challenging us to go beyond the obvious and find the extraordinary creativity that can lie in the perfectly ordinary. 



TV & Innovation: Julia

“Julia,” a television series that aired from 1968 to 1971, will always stand as a true innovation in television history. In an era of civil unrest and a burgeoning civil rights movement, “Julia” dared to challenge the stereotypical portrayals of African Americans that had long dominated the small screen. Starring the incomparable Diahann Carroll as Julia Baker, a widowed nurse raising her young son alone, the show cast a Black woman in a role that was neither subservient nor rooted in racial caricatures.

Diahann Carroll’s portrayal of Julia Baker was nothing short of iconic. With grace and aplomb, she brought to life a character that was both relatable and aspirational. It was a role that Carroll herself recognized as significant, understanding the importance of representing Black women in a positive and empowered light. The show presented a world where a Black family could thrive, where a Black woman could be both a professional and a mother without the narrative being steeped in strife. This, in itself, was a quiet form of activism, challenging audience perceptions and biases.

Critics have debated the legacy of “Julia.” Some argue that the show’s reluctance to directly address racial issues was a missed opportunity, suggesting that it presented a sanitized view of America. Others, however, contend that “Julia” was revolutionary precisely because it presented an alternative narrative, one where Black individuals could see themselves as active participants in their own stories.

Largely forgotten today, “Julia” was a tremendous innovation in its day, and deserves to be remembered – both as a powerful first and to remind us that true, deep innovation requires the kind of courage this show showed over 50 years ago. Here’s lookin’ at you, Julia. 🧑🏾🖥️📺

Creatively Curious About Cryptids

Cryptids: those mythical, often absurd creatures that inhabit the shadowy corners of our collective imagination. From Bigfoot to the Loch Ness Monster, Chupacabra to the Jersey Devil, cryptids have long captured our fascination and inspired a wealth of folklore, books, movies, and, let's face it, some pretty wild conspiracy theories. But beyond their entertainment value, cryptids also offer other insights.

For starters, cryptids teach us about the value and extent of imagination. These creatures, often a bizarre amalgamation of various animals, defy the laws of nature and biology. A creature with the body of a moose, the wings of a bat, and the tail of a serpent? Why not! It's a reminder of what can be created when venturing into the realm of the fantastical and the absurd.

Additionally, cryptids illustrate the importance of storytelling in creative work. The lore surrounding these creatures is often as compelling as the creatures themselves. It's a reminder that the way we frame and present our ideas can be just as important as the ideas themselves. A compelling narrative can make all the difference between an idea that falls flat and one that captures

the imagination.

Cryptids further teach us the value of mystery and intrigue. In a world where information is readily available at our fingertips, there's something refreshing about the unknown. It's a reminder that sometimes, leaving a little to the imagination can make ideas more compelling and engaging. So, next time you find yourself rolling your eyes at the latest Bigfoot sighting, take a moment to consider the lessons that can be gleaned from what lurks in the most unexpected of places. 🦶👤

On the Joy of Finishing a Series

Yesterday, I watched the final episode of “Billions”, the series about big money in NYC that might have been slightly less brilliant than “Succession” but which at the same time was a lot more fun than the same. There is something wistful about having followed a series for seven seasons (84 episodes!), and it is at points such as this one sometimes hears the phrase “I wish it would have never ended.”.

Yet, at the same time, there is something glorious about getting to the end of a series. There is, hopefully, closure, and there is the sense of relief in no longer having to be invested in the series. Now, back in the day, this was probably a lesser issue, and in no way enough to compensate for the joy the series gave.

That was then, this is now. We live in an era where you would literally have to dedicate your life to it if you wanted to see all the good TV shows out there, and frankly, many of us have jobs and lives. So you can’t see it all, you have to make choices. A series ending is thus also an opening, a chance to fit something else in.

Also, there is something great with a series that decides to

stop before it jumps the shark. Sure, “Billions” might have gone a bit long, and few dare for the creative brilliance of “Fawlty Towers” ending after two perfect series, but still. Even while one might pine for more of the creative crack great TV writing can impart, one can find joy in a beloved TV show not having descended into inanity or insanity.

Creative works need an end. This is not something to bemoan or mourn, it is something worth celebrating. Let us take joy in the finishing of things, and proudly say: The series is at an end, long live the series! 📺

VII

Dark Creativity

Creativity isn't always fun, or nice, or even comprehensible. Here some notes that at least hint at the more monstrous side of creativity, both when it comes to the dumb and when the comes to the dark. Oh, and there's some notes on the mullet as well.

On Dark Academia

“The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not ‘Eureka!’ but ‘That’s funny...’”

– Isaac Asimov

Academics are rarely thought of as trendy or fashion-forward, so there is something quite magical about the existence of “Dark Academia” as a trend. Conjuring images of tweed jackets, dusty libraries, and Gothic architecture, it’s a brooding, anachronistic style with connections to both normcore and goth sensibilities. But what does it tell us?

To start, Dark Academia can be seen as a rebellion against the minimalism that has dominated design and trends for years. In an era where ‘less is more’ has become somewhat of a tired mantra, this trend shouts ‘more is more and make it mysterious!’ It’s a creative resurgence of clutter – books piled high, walls adorned with art, and an air of intellectual curiosity.

Moreover, Dark Academia’s romanticization of learning and the slow pace of yesteryear is a refreshing counterpoint to our results-driven society. It borrows heavily from the past

– the aesthetics of 19th-century academia, the Romantic era’s emphasis on emotion and individualism – and repurposes it for the modern context. At heart, it is about comfort, about seeking refuge in an imagined Oxbridge (and yes, the Hogwarts-connection is there) and the assumed stillness and languor that came with it. In a hectic world with ever-changing trends, returning to tweed and sensible shoes is an act of cozy rebellion.

Sadly, little of this has any connection with the academia of today. The pipe-smoking gentlemen of leisure are no more, and have been replaced with careerists in ill-fitting shirts with the university logo. The languid walks have been replaced by grant deadlines and publish or perish. Still, it is nice to see someone celebrating the style that once was. 🧑🏻📖🎓👜

On Caravaggio: Darkness as Creativity

“The best reason to paint is that there is no reason to paint.”

– Keith Haring

In the Netflix-series “Ripley”, based on Patricia Highsmith’s novel(s) about a sociopathic charmer and con man, there are a number of references to the work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, the master Italian painter. He was known for his use of tenebrism, a form of chiaroscuro which pushes the use of stark contrast between light and dark to a dramatic fever pitch. In the series this is alluded to as a priest comes across Ripley admiring a Caravaggio and exclaiming “The light!”. Understandable, but wrong. What is really radical in Caravaggio was the darkness!

His works, such as “The Calling of Saint Matthew” or “Judith Beheading Holofernes”, are theatrical, baroque; there is stark illumination of his subjects from a single, often unidentified, light source leaving the remainder enveloped in darkness. This technique pulls the viewer in, but it also unsettles. What is there in the darkness, not yet illuminated? There is a creative

lesson here. The thing to consider here is basic yet profoundly challenging: How can you integrate more darkness and the unseen into your creative work? The challenge here is to focus not just on what is illuminated and made clear, but more poignantly, on what is happening in the shadows, in what is hidden away and unseen.

This pushes us to think critically about the use of negative space, the interplay between visibility and obscurity, and the emotional implications of darkness. It can turn into a existential exploration as well; what choices have we made to illuminate some parts of our lives, yet allowed darkness to descend on others? Caravaggio was a master of darkness, and peering into his tenebrism can teach us about the power in contrast, and how sometimes making the dark even darker can push our creativity into new, uncharted vistas. Go dark, you never know what you might find. •• ■

On Sand Mafias

Sand is the unsung hero of our modern world. It's a key ingredient in concrete, and as the world's population balloons and urbanizes, the demand for buildings, roads, and all sorts of infrastructure skyrockets. Thus, the demand for sand soars – the value of the global market might be as high as over 750 billion USD. But not any sand will do – desert sand is practically useless for construction. The grains are too smooth, and what's needed is the grittier, angular sand found in riverbeds, lakes, and seafloors.

Enter the sand mafias. In regions like India, China, and parts of Africa, where regulatory oversight can be lax, these groups realize the immense profit in mining and selling this kind of sand. The environmental impact is colossal. Unsustainable sand mining erodes riverbeds, destroys habitats, and can lead to disastrous changes in river courses. Yet, this is not merely an environmental issue, but a socio-economic one as well. Those who attempt to oppose them, including environmental activists and local residents, often face violence and even death. Why? The total value of illegal sand-trade is 200+ billion USD – bigger

than illegal logging, bigger than poaching – yet law enforcement often sees it as a minor crime.

Grim, isn't it? A real-life scenario where our relentless pursuit of growth and development has led to the rise of a criminal underworld, thriving on the very foundation (quite literally) of our cities. So, the next time you're draggin in some sand, spare a thought for the sand mafias and the profound implications of what you're sweeping off your shoes. It's not just dirt; it's a resource at the center of a global crisis, a battleground for environmentalists, and a lucrative commodity for criminals. Sand, it seems, is not so simple after all. 🏖️🔍

On the Emergence of the Antihero as a Creative Movement

“Punk is not really a style of music. It was more like a state of mind.”

— Johnny Rotten

In the cinematic treasure trove of the 1970s, amidst a landscape of bell-bottoms and disco balls, arose a character trope that would reshape the narrative formula for many a genre: the antihero. Gone were the squeaky-clean protagonists, replaced with morally ambiguous figures that had cinema-goers both captivated and conflicted.

Take Travis Bickle from “Taxi Driver” – not your mother’s choice for a son-in-law, and the very embodiment of this evolution. Sporting a mohawk and a disturbingly calm demeanor, Bickle’s spiral into urban vigilantism showcased a protagonist far removed from the cowboy heroes that preceded him. The audience wasn’t just asked but compelled to empathize with a deeply flawed figure – an unsettling yet enthralling experience.

This rise of the antihero ushered in a new dawn for storytelling.

No longer were tales simply black or white, good versus evil. Instead, the cinema of the 1970s ventured into the vast gray expanse, offering rich, multifaceted characters that challenged our very notions of morality and virtue. Films like “A Clockwork Orange” and “Chinatown” further drove this point home, giving audiences characters that existed in the murky middle, making storytelling a complex ballet of ethics and emotions.

In retrospect, the 70s antihero was more than just a narrative device; it was a reflection of a society in flux, grappling with change. By painting the screen with these shades of gray, cinema brilliantly captured the zeitgeist, forever altering the blueprint of character arcs and narratives. In your creative work, who is the antihero? Can you create one? 🗑️

Extreme Creativity: On GG Allin

Most people don't know him, the one's who look him up online often wished they hadn't, but to some GG Allin, the self-proclaimed "rock'n'roll terrorist", is a true hero of creativity. An anarchistic performer who routinely pushed not just the envelope of what counts as a performance, but what you can do in public without getting committed, he was a polarizing figure in the history of punk and extreme rock. And yet...

Born Jesus Christ Allin in 1956 (yes, really), he got the moniker "GG" from his brother's inability to pronounce "Jesus". His father was a religious fanatic, and his early life was marked by abuse and poverty – something he stated made him the rebel that he was to become. He turned to music, and his early albums, with bands like The Jabbers, were raw and frenetic, filled with basic three-chord punk fury. However, it was his live performances that are remembered to this day: A man on stage, often nude and bleeding from self-mutilation, sometimes defecating on stage or attacking the audience. Few bands could abide it for long, as he was, in effect, impossible to control. Still, he fronted a number of hardcore bands, and recorded with

various acts, veering into fields such as country and spoken-word poetry.

Some want to see GG Allin as pure performance art, a life lived to the extreme, without excuses. Allin himself saw his act as a mirror reflecting society's filth and hypocrisy. Audiences, while mesmerized by the chaos, and wishing not to be hit by feces or a fist, couldn't quite figure out what to think of it all. To me, he shows the complexity of creativity – the difficulty of negotiating the line between challenge and provocation, between productive and destructive extremes. Allin died in 1993, after one of his shows ended in a melee. He led some fans to a party, talked about a European tour, and overdosed on heroin. Unrepentant to the end. 🦴👉

On the Slow Failure of “The Simpsons”

I used to be a huge fan of “The Simpsons”. And who wasn’t? The show was a cultural juggernaut, a zeitgeist-capturing tornado that whisked us all away with its biting satire and clever, yet heartwarming, storytelling. For years, it was the gold standard of animated comedy, a masterclass in how to skewer society’s sacred cows and be hilarious whilst doing so. The early seasons of “The Simpsons” were a veritable smorgasbord of creativity. The stories were hilarious but also had depth, subtlety, and a sprinkle of existential dread – a recipe for success if there ever was one. But as the seasons trudged on, the show began to lose its luster.

“The Simpsons” is the perfect embodiment of a concept I’d like to call ‘creative inertia’. The show, stuck in its glory days, became a shadow of its former self, churning out episodes with the enthusiasm of a bored teenager working a summer job. Creative work, be it a TV show, a novel, or a musical album, has a natural lifecycle. It blossoms, peaks, and, ideally, concludes with a satisfying denouement. But “The Simpsons” missed its exit on the highway of relevance a long time ago,

continuing on a seemingly endless road to mediocrity. Why didn't they stop? Perhaps it's the fear of letting go, or maybe it's the seductive siren song of commercial success. Whatever the reason, the show's decline is a textbook example of the dangers of overstaying one's welcome in the creative world.

"The Simpsons" serves as a sobering reminder for all creatives: know when to stop. In creative work timing is everything, and there's a certain beauty in ending a project at its zenith, leaving the audience wanting more. Instead of fading away into the abyss of mediocrity, why not go out with a bang? Or, at the very least, a mildly amusing pop. 💥📺

On Turning Stress Into a Board Game

Now that we are easing into Christmas, why not experiment with some new board games? And as we're away from the office, what if we were to play a game about workplace stress, maybe even giving it a name after a gastrointestinal ailment often thought to be related to the same? If you think this sounds insane, like the kind of absurd joke people make on social media to get clicks, you've clearly never played "Ulcers", a game from 1969 that turned HR complaints into fun for the whole family!

"Ulcers", which I have to stress was a real game, sold for real money, was essentially a race to see who among the players could be the first to complete an order of widgets for the mythical company of B.J. Hickey & Co. The gameplay revolves around collecting parts to build these widgets while navigating the perils of the corporate world, which include pay cuts, computer breakdowns, and the ever-dreaded tax audits. Sounds like a typical Monday, doesn't it?

What's truly marvelous about "Ulcers" is its unapologetic embrace of the mundane horrors of office life. The game doesn't just simulate stress; it gamifies it. Every turn is a dance with

disaster, making you wonder whether the game was secretly designed by a cabal of disgruntled 9-to-5ers. In fact, it is unclear to me whether this was a way to find goofy entertainment from corporate capitalism, or a kind of sinister training device, making sure that kids learnt the stresses of payroll management from an early age? Let's just say it was ahead of its time.

"Ulcers" did not achieve the iconic status of Monopoly, but it remains a fascinating relic of board game history – taking the stresses of the modern office and turning these to entertainment. Or propaganda. 🎲 ✍️

The Zen of Post-Christmas Inefficiency

Right now, in our post-Christmas reveries, let us consider the sloth we are collectively engaging in. In our fast-paced world, where efficiency is revered akin to a high deity, suggesting that there might be a Zen-like beauty to such inefficiency is akin to arguing that the earth is, in fact, a slightly overcooked waffle. Yet, if we dare to slow our frenetic pace and squint a bit – perhaps after a martini or two – we can begin to see that inefficiency, much maligned, might just be what’s required for renewal.

The relentless pursuit of efficiency, i.e. our ‘normal lives’ leads to a kind of myopia. It’s like trying to read “War and Peace” on a smartwatch; technically possible, but you’ll miss the sweeping grandeur. By focusing solely on the most direct path to our goal, we wear blinders that block the peripheral vision where serendipity lies in wait. Efficiency has its place, but it’s often in the inefficient moments – those idle daydreams, the ‘wasted’ hours spent tinkering – that true breakthroughs are born.

Imagine a world where the Wright brothers had been too busy optimizing bicycle production to daydream about flight,

or where Fleming had been too efficient to notice the peculiar behavior of a certain mold. It's in the inefficient interstices of our lives that the seeds of great ideas germinate. The unhurried conversations, the 'pointless' hobbies, the leisurely walks – these are not just respites from the tyranny of efficiency but fertile grounds for innovation. Yes, it might be right now, after Christmas, that true innovation is created. Embracing inefficiency isn't about being sloppy or lazy; it's about recognizing that the long, winding road, with all its scenic detours, is sometimes the most fruitful path to innovation. So grab a drink and a notebook, and luxuriate. You'll thank me later. ☺

Why Enshittification Should Have Been the Word of the Year

Let me call it: Cory Doctorow’s “enshittification” should have clinched the title of Word of the Year, not just for its cheeky charm, but for its sharp critique of the digital era’s fall from grace. This term encapsulates the tragic trajectory of digital platforms, morphing from innovative utopias into dystopian data farms.

The logic is as simple as it is depressing. Initially, digital platforms are like indie bands – obscure, exciting, and user-centric. But as popularity and profitability pressures mount, enshittification creeps in. What was once a community becomes a commodity; users transformed into data points in a vast profit-maximizing schema. The shift is subtle, yet relentless – like a toxin. Enshittification isn’t just corporate greed running amok; it’s also a mirror reflecting our own contradictions. We demand free, high-quality digital services but recoil at the thought of paying for them, unwittingly fueling the very processes we decry.

“Enshittification” is the narrative of our times – the inex-

orable slide from digital dreams to monetized nightmares. We might sometimes ask why we cannot have nice things, and the answer is simple: Greed. We're greedy so we don't like paying, and corporations are greedy so they will happily serve us algorithm-enshittified garbage as long as the ad dollars keep ticking away. All we can hope for is that our children, who already see through the junk that is Twitter and Facebook, start creating platforms that are not tied to this tired Boomer logic. Who knows, in my dotage I may see good social media platforms anew... 🍰

Creative Insomnia? On “Starry Night”

As someone who has at times struggled with sleep (something that I share with most of humanity), I’ve found it odd how little we discuss the creativity/sleep-relationship. Further, as I was pondering whether to buy the Lego-set of “Starry Night”, I was reminded of what I’ve read about the artist’s struggles with sleep. For van Gogh, although more often associated with sunflowers and severed ears, had a tumultuous relationship with the night, and his letters are full of references to insomnia. This is a silent yet pervasive affliction, and can lead to a heightened state of emotional and sensory awareness. Did van Gogh’s sleep issues affect his art?

“Starry Night” was painted in 1889 during his stay at the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole, a time marked by crises in his mental health and, curiously, an astounding artistic productivity. The painting’s nocturnal scene is not a depiction of tranquil night skies but a turbulent, almost apocalyptic panorama. The vibrant blues and yellows contrast sharply with the somber tones of the sleeping village below. It has been suggested that it was insomnia that here turned the night

sky, often a symbol of tranquility and rest, into a dynamic and almost overwhelming force. Van Gogh's brush-strokes, thick and expressive, convey a sense of urgency and intensity. The stars and the moon pulsate with otherworldly light, the kind to keep a man awake through the night.

Van Gogh's insomnia seems to have been both a curse and a muse. In his sleepless nights, he found a spectrum of colors and emotions that many of us will never know. Creativity needs sleep, but paradoxically, sometimes lack of the latter can trigger the former. I am sure van Gogh would rather have slept, but the world is thankful for "Starry Night".  zzz

The Anti-Resolution Manifesto: Rethinking New Year's Promises

Every year, millions pledge to eat healthier, exercise more, or save money, yet studies show a staggering failure rate. So, why do we keep making resolutions even though they're about as stable as a house of cards in a wind tunnel?

New Year's resolutions are, in essence, a form of self-promise. Yet, these are often based more on societal expectations than personal readiness for change. They're like saying you'll climb Everest because your neighbor did it, without considering you have a fear of heights and get dizzy on a step ladder.

Psychologically, resolutions set us up for failure. They often represent big, vague goals (like "get in shape") without a roadmap. It's akin to setting off on a cross-country road trip with no map, no GPS, and a car you haven't bothered to fill with gas.

So, what's the alternative? How about we replace resolutions with reflections and incremental changes? Instead of vowing to "lose weight", how about actually thinking a bit more about how you eat and exercise? Smaller, sustainable changes often lead

to significant long-term transformations, where ‘resolutions’ fail.

New Year’s resolutions smack of a quest for perfection, a Sisyphean task if there ever was one. Let’s embrace imperfection instead. It’s about progress, not perfection. As the great philosopher and part-time rock star Mick Jagger once almost said, “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need.”

This year, let’s start a New Year’s revolution. Throw out the resolutions and bring in thoughtful, incremental changes. Remember, life isn’t a sprint or even a marathon – it’s more like a leisurely stroll, with plenty of interesting detours. So, let’s walk into the new year not with grand promises but with open minds and a readiness to adapt, one small step at a time.

Crafting at the End of the World: Survivalism as Creative Expression

I've been discussing crafts with the eminent professor O'Doherty these last days, and as part of this I asked whether prepping is a new craft expression. Imagine a post-apocalyptic landscape where the Internet is but a distant memory and the local craft store is now a haven for the occasional squirrel. In this world, the ability to create something from nothing isn't just a way to pass time; it's essential for survival.

Survivalism as the ultimate creative expression forces us to rethink our relationship with materials, to see beyond their intended purpose and imagine what they could become. It's about viewing every resource as a medium for innovation, every challenge as a prompt for improvisation. In this world, creativity isn't a luxury; it's as essential as air. This notion flips the script on traditional survival narratives, which often prioritize brute strength and tactical skills. Instead, it champions the idea that the most potent survival tool is the human imagination. It suggests that the ability to craft – to create with intention and ingenuity – is what truly separates the survivors from the fallen.

Moreover, I'd argue that engaging with crafts now, in our relatively stable society, is a way to prepare for uncertainty. Every time we knit a sweater, forge a piece of metal, or ferment cabbage, we're not just making things; we're honing our ability to think creatively, to solve problems, and to adapt. So, the next time you pick up a needle and thread, a lump of clay, or a pair of knitting needles, remember: you're not just crafting; you're rehearsing for resilience.

Planking: The Virality of Dumb

Remember planking? It was a weird scene: individuals lying face-down, stiff as a board, in unexpected and often public places, from park benches and monuments to office desks and supermarket aisles. Then, of course, snapping a photo for posterity (and social media). As dumb as it was, planking became a global phenomenon, transcending cultures and borders. It was a silent, yet strangely expressive form of communication, a blend of performance art, public demonstration, and a peculiar kind of physical comedy. It required no language, no explanation, just the image of someone, rigid as a plank, in a place where they definitively should not be.

The origins of planking, like many internet trends, seem to be a bit murky. Claims have been made that it started in either England or Australia, with roots in the “lying down game” of the late 1990s. But it wasn’t until the advent of social media that planking truly took off. Suddenly, anyone with a smartphone could participate, and share their exploits with the world.

What made planking so viral was its accessibility. It required no special skills, no equipment, not even physical fitness.

All you needed was a bit of creativity, a tolerance for public embarrassment, and perhaps a friend to take the photo. It was a democratic form of expression, open to all. As the fad grew, so did the stakes. People began planking in increasingly dangerous/inappropriate locations, leading to injuries and even fatalities.

In a way, planking was more than just lying down. It was a horizontal challenge to our vertical lives, a flat-out (heh) rebellion against the upright structures of society. Also, it was dumb, an absurdist joke; a fleeting folly, leaving us with nothing but photos and a reminder of the time when we all just laid down and took it easy, if only for a moment. 📸

Ugly Christmas Sweaters: Icons of Anti-Fashion

“Kitsch is art that follows established rules in a time when all rules in art are put into question by each artist.”

– Harold Rosenberg

In the pantheon of holiday traditions, few items are as paradoxically beloved and derided as the ugly Christmas sweater. This festive garb, with its garish colors, over-the-top patterns, and sometimes, lights that blink with the subtlety of a disco ball, has become an icon of holiday kitsch and a symbol of ironic cheer.

But let's pull at the threads of this phenomenon a bit. Their origin story is as humble as their aesthetics. Once earnest attempts by grandmas everywhere to gift something warm and homemade, Yuletide sweaters have been recontextualized as a symbol of anti-fashion. They can be understood both as representing a nostalgia for simpler times, but also represent a way to treat a commercialized time with great irony (whilst, incidentally, also consuming more). They are a both/and – nostalgic yet ironic, avantgarde yet archaic.

Such fashionable anti-fashion stances are not without their charms. In wearing an ugly Christmas sweater, one embraces the joy of imperfection and the spirit of inclusivity, whilst at the same time doing so in a way that is safe both sartorially and culturally. There's a communal understanding that everyone wearing these sweaters is in on the joke, that it represents both irony and the comfort of retro.

Seeing as how paradoxical Christmas is – a consumerist feast of stillness and peace that drives people to a frenzy – the ugly Christmas sweater makes a kind of sense simply because it does not make sense. Nothing about Christmas really does, so why not embrace this, and celebrate the birth of Christ by way of lethally garish knitwear? 🌪️🎄

Embracing Darkness: Creative Lessons from Goth Culture

“Don’t hate the media, become the media.”

— Jello Biafra

Goth culture, with its storied lineage stretching from the haunting poems of Edgar Allan Poe to the melancholic notes of The Cure, is an enigma. It’s easy to reduce it to its trademark corsets, dramatic capes, and Bauhaus albums, but that would be glossing over its profound contributions to the creative landscape.

Diving into this subculture, one finds a world enriched by literary treasures like Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” and the eerie tales of H.P. Lovecraft. This emphasis on literature teaches us that depth of thought, nuance, and multi-layered narratives often pave the path to genuine creativity. Beyond literature, the architecture of gothic cathedrals, with their intricate designs and play of shadows, serves as a masterclass in embracing complexity and duality in our creative endeavors.

Yet, music remains one of its most prominent features. Bands like Joy Division and Siouxsie and the Banshees weren’t just

about creating an ambiance; their tracks were layered, profound explorations of human emotion and existence. They highlight the strength of merging light and dark, joy and sorrow, in creating a compelling narrative.

But it's not just about aesthetics or sound. The authenticity of goth culture, its refusal to conform to mainstream expectations, remains its most potent lesson. Amidst the pale faces and the velvet gowns lies a resilient spirit, urging us to be true to our creative vision, even if it doesn't fit neatly into societal boxes. The next time "Bela Lugosi's Dead" graces your ears, let it be a clarion call: Embrace your authentic self, revel in complexity, and let creativity flourish.

The Mullet: A Philosophical Observation

In an age of unabashed aesthetic fluidity, I find myself waxing philosophical over the much-maligned coiffure known as the mullet. Business in the front, party in the back, this is not merely a style—it's a walking, talking dialectic. And what does that say about us as a culture?

This hirsute emblem of the '80s and '90s, arguably having never truly disappeared, straddles the line between irony and earnestness. It's both a joke and a statement, a challenge to conventional beauty standards, and yet, a conformist nod to practicality. To sport a mullet is to lay claim to a kind of radical middle-ness, a rebellion that's somehow safe—a haircut that screams "I'll have my cake and eat it, too."

Moreover, the mullet's resilience in the face of fashion's snooty derision speaks to a deeper, more existential resilience. As we navigate a world where absolutes are both sought after and dismissed, the mullet stands as a testament to the complexity of human existence. To wear one is to embody a living, breathing paradox. And is that not the ultimate expression of what it means to be human—to be messy, to be contradictory, to be

both utterly ridiculous and inexplicably cool at the very same time?

So, let us not cast aspersions on the mulleted among us. Instead, let us ponder what their choice of hairstyle can teach us about life's great enigmas. For in every strand of mullet hair, there lies a strand of human truth—a lesson in the beauty of complexity, the importance of humor, and the philosophical weight of being unfashionably, but unashamedly, oneself. That said, obviously I would never get one. I mean, seriously? It's a mullet, for fuck's sake... 🍆♂

Why Change Needs Non-Change

Yesterday I got interviewed at Nordic Business Forum about change and change management, and what this takes. It is obviously a huge question, quite unsuitable for a five minute video interview, so I had to pick what to comment on. I chose to talk about non-change, seeing as this is a commonly forgotten theme and not talked about enough.

Talking to executives, I tend to be very clear about how important it is to communicate what will remain the same. This, as change is scary to people, and rightfully so. Managers often tend to talk up change, even to the point of clichés such as “let’s change everything”. Whilst this might sound nice in theory, we know that if realized, this would be a recipe for chaos and confusion. Humans in organizations greatly prefer if their office stays more or less in the same place (or at least the same building) for an extended period of time. In a similar manner, people tend to prefer if the coffee cups stay more or less in the same place day to day. This doesn’t make them anti-change, just keen to avoid confusion and extra work (e.g. looking for coffee cups).

Thus, if you want to get people on board with changing things, start with making clear what will NOT change. Communicate what people can still depend on, what they can trust, what they can “lean back” on. You will find that this does not make change harder, but far, far easier. People are more keen to follow you if they believe you know where you’re going, and they are more keen to engage with change when they believe that it won’t mean unending chaos.

The Dialectics of Poverty Pornography

From time to time I find myself drawn to a very peculiar form of entertainment, namely UK documentaries that aim for that tricky category where social realism meets sensationalist entertainment. I speak, of course, of ‘poverty pornography’ as this is showcased in programs such as “Benefit Street”, “Life on the Dole”, or the poignantly named “Can’t Pay, We’ll Take It Away”. In all these, the shtick is clear and in your face – using the guise of documentary realism, one can create spectacle of the day-to-day lives of those in the clutches of poverty.

This presents a peculiar modern conundrum. Ostensibly, shows such as these aim to ‘educate’ the viewer, offering a window into lives marred by socioeconomic struggles. Yet, the lens through which these lives are viewed is often smeared with the grease of sensationalism. The result? A voyeuristic tableau that titillates rather than educates.

We’re given a front-row seat to a world of hardship and struggle, edited and packaged for maximum impact: It’s poverty, but with a soundtrack and commercial breaks. The problem is the obvious reductionism, taking complex human experiences and

turning these bite-sized, digestible chunks of entertainment. Poverty, a deep-rooted social ill, is turned into something akin to a talent show or burlesque.

This is the dialectic of poverty pornography on TV: a battle between illumination and exploitation, education and sensationalism. As consumers of media, we must tread carefully, questioning not just what we're watching, but why we're watching it, and what we're taking away from the experience. The problem, though? It's just too damn addictive, just too well packaged, and it's hard to look away. 📺 ✨ 🧠

The Cult of the Dead Cow – An Appreciation

Our story begins in the mid-1980s, a time when the internet was a playground for the technically gifted rather than the global commercial behemoth it is today. These heady times saw the birth of The Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc), first as a group of friends interested in tech and hacking, then one of the most influential hacker collectives in history.

The cDc's contributions to the internet are varied and significant. They were early to the idea that information should be free and accessible to all, a principle that remains a cornerstone of the open-source movement. They released tools like Back Orifice, which, while controversial, highlighted significant security vulnerabilities in Windows, forcing a reckoning with the importance of cybersecurity. And the legacy of the cDc extends beyond technical achievements. They were masterful at using media to amplify their message, blurring the lines between activism and performance art. They understood the power of spectacle to draw attention to issues, from privacy to the freedom of online expression.

The cDc embodies the dualities that define the internet: they hacked its vulnerabilities, and through this strengthened it. They showed how hacking, in its truest form, is about more than just breaking into systems; it's about expanding the horizons of what's possible in the digital age. Their heyday may be behind them, but for a number of us they were the alpha and the omega, the hackers who defined the emergence of the internet. The cDc coined the term "hacktivism" (shoutout to Omega), and showed that hacking was an art, and that art could change the world. The net has never been the same since. 31337, indeed. 🧑💻🐖

VIII

Forgotten Innovators

The section that follows might seem a ted repetitive, particularly if read in one batch. It represents my way of trying to find people whom innovation history has forgotten, and to show why this is wrong. It is best when dipped into, read one or two at a time. Any more, and you risk getting a little jaded.

Forgotten Innovators: Jan Ernst Matzeliger

In the long history of unsung heroes of innovation, certain names will reverberate through time. One such maestro, the incomparable and largely unknown Jan Ernst Matzeliger, beckons us to consider a life richly embroidered with genius, yet tinged with tragedy.

Born in what is now Suriname on September 15th 1852, to a Dutch father and his African slave, Matzeliger would travel to the burgeoning industrial world of the United States as a 19-year old man. Once there, the technically gifted Jan worked in a shoe factory, witnessing the arduous shoemaking process and thinking about ways to make it more efficient.

The times were in need of a change, and in 1883 Matzeliger conjured up a marvel of innovation – a machine that could automatically do the shoe-lasting (stretching the upper leather over a mold and then pinning the leather down) that was holding up production. Where a skilled artisan could make 50 shoes a day, Matzeliger's machine could make up to 700, leading to US prices for shoes falling almost by half in the years to come.

But, dear readers, here comes the poignant crescendo. Despite orchestrating a revolution in the footwear industry, Matzeliger tragically would never savor the fruits of his labor. So focused was he on his innovation that he skipped both sleep and meals, contracting a case of tuberculosis that was to kill him just a few weeks before he turned 37. His impact on the world was sizable, but the color of his skin meant that his contribution was often forgotten, his innovation denigrated. That needs to change, and the name of Jan Ernst Matzeliger needs to be remembered in the pantheon of innovators. 🖐

Forgotten Innovators: Jerry Lawson

Today, let us praise Jerry Lawson; the hidden hero of gaming, the cartridge king, the man who made it possible for you to blow on video games to make them work. This is the innovator who gave us the groundbreaking gaming console Fairchild Channel F, and in an era where the only 'viral' thing was the flu, invented the game cartridge.

The fact that Jerry's not a nerd-culture icon like Steve Jobs is to Silicon Valley is less an oversight and more a travesty. Here's the thing: in a world obsessed with tech boy-geniuses, Jerry didn't fit the billboard. He had the audacity to be different in a sector that, while preaching innovation, often rewards conformity. Jerry was just a little too normal, whilst also being more than a little bit too black, to really fit the image of the gaming industry pioneer, yet his genius is etched into the DNA of gaming. His story isn't just about being forgotten; it's about being monumentally, game-changingly impactful while the industry's limelight was busy elsewhere.

So, a toast to Jerry Lawson: the mastermind too mighty for the mainstream narrative, the architect of interactive enter-

tainment, the unsung pioneer who made our consoles less like furniture and more like gateways to other realms. His contribution can't be overemphasized, mainly because, without him, we wouldn't have had half the digital adventures—or the chance to tell our friends we fixed the game by blowing into it.



Forgotten Innovators: Granville Woods

His name should be as famous as that of Edison or Tesla, but the shameful fact is that most people have forgotten about Granville Tailer Woods. Dubbed the “Black Edison,” Woods was an inventor extraordinaire whose contributions to the realm of electrical engineering were nothing short of revolutionary. Born in 1856 to free African Americans, Woods had to contend with not just the challenges of innovation but also the pervasive racial barriers of his time. Despite (unclear) limited formal education, the insatiable curiosity of this autodidact and polymath secured no less than 50 patents, revolutionizing multiple aspects of the then-nascent electrical industry.

One of his most notable inventions was the “Synchronous Multiplex Railway Telegraph”, a device that allowed train stations to communicate with moving trains, significantly enhancing safety on the tracks. Woods also made significant improvements in railway systems, developing an overhead conducting system for electric railways and inventing a system for controlling the electricity supply to trains, making electric-powered railroads a viable and safer option. Despite his groundbreaking work,

Woods had to fight continuously to gain recognition and protect his inventions from being stolen or appropriated, and when he died in 1910, he was laid down in an unmarked grave.

Granville Woods should serve as an inspiration to as all, and also stand a reminder that the history of innovation is vast and diverse, filled with unsung heroes whose stories deserve to be told and celebrated. So let us praise the great Mr Woods, a legend of engineering and a shining beacon of innovation, as one of the many who haven't gotten the recognition they deserve. His genius was truly electrifying. ⚡

Forgotten Innovators: Eadweard Muybridge

No matter how hardcore a cinema fan you are, you have probably not given much thought to Eadweard Muybridge. He is today seen as a mere footnote in the history of film, if remembered at all, yet deserves our attention for his pioneering work in motion photography – which was as much an artistic endeavor as it was a scientific innovation.

In the late 19th century, Muybridge embarked on a groundbreaking project – to capture motion in a way it had never been seen before. This journey began with a seemingly simple bet: could a horse have all four hooves off the ground during a gallop? To answer this, Muybridge developed an ingenious method. He set up a series of cameras along a track, each triggered by the horse's hooves as it galloped past. The resulting photographs showed, for the first time, the detailed motion of the horse in action. This work opened up a new realm of possibilities in understanding motion and anatomy, and its implications were profound. Muybridge's sequential photographs were the precursors to the moving image, something that would

revolutionize entertainment and communication in the 20th century. So as you enjoy the latest superhero flick or Netflix rom-com, keep in mind that it all started with a bet...

What Muybridge achieved was the embodiment of creativity in its purest form – the ability to look beyond the obvious, to combine existing elements (photography, in this case) in entirely new ways, and to see, quite literally, the bigger picture. His legacy reminds us that innovation is about seeing the world with new eyes, and in doing so, allowing others to see it anew as well. 🌸 

Forgotten Innovators: Katharine Burr Blodgett

The contributions of women in science and technology still often go unrecognized, which is why remembering stories of people like Katharine Burr Blodgett is so important. Not only did Blodgett shatter gender barriers as the first woman to, in 1926, receive a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Cambridge, but she also revolutionized the world of optics with her invention of non-reflective glass.

Her journey in the field of physics was nothing short of groundbreaking. After completing her Ph.D., she joined General Electric's research laboratory, where she collaborated with Irving Langmuir, the 1932 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. Together, they worked on the development of thin films, which led to Blodgett's groundbreaking invention: the non-reflective, or "invisible," glass. This was a prime example of how looking at a problem from a new perspective can lead to breakthroughs. In focusing on the molecular level of glass, she opened up new possibilities in materials science. Her approach underscores the importance of interdisciplinary thinking in innovation – and

that diversity can drive this!

Katharine Burr Blodgett should be remembered for her innovations, but also as a symbol of perseverance in the face of gender-based adversity, a pioneer who not only advanced her field but also opened doors for the generations of women scientists who would follow. Innovation knows no gender, but many are the times when individuals have been blocked from their innovation potential simply due to their gender. Remembering an innovation who not just broke glass ceilings, but literally re-invented glass is a step towards ameliorating this. 🧑🏻🔧🪄

Forgotten Innovators: Lewis Howard Latimer

Everyone knows the names of Thomas Alva Edison and Alexander Graham Bell as giants of innovation who changed history. But what if there was somebody who worked not just with one of these, but with both? Wouldn't we know such a person's name? Well, there was, and yet we don't. Why? In part because this amazing man happened to be African-American.

Born in 1848 to escaped slaves, Lewis Howard Latimer's journey to becoming a key figure in the world of invention was nothing short of remarkable. His story is not just about the patents he held but a narrative of overcoming racial barriers and contributing to technological advancement during a tumultuous period in American history.

His most notable contribution was in the development of a durable carbon filament for the incandescent light bulb. While Thomas Edison is credited with inventing the light bulb, it was Latimer's improvement with the carbon filament that made electric lighting more practical and affordable for widespread use. Additionally, Latimer's talents as a draftsman were rec-

ognized by none other than Alexander Graham Bell. Latimer was responsible for drafting the patent drawings for Bell's telephone in 1876, a device that would forever change global communication. His precision and skill as a draftsman were crucial in securing the patent for Bell's invention.

Latimer's contributions to the light bulb and the telephone are foundational to our world, yet history often forgets those who do not fit the traditional mold of a 'successful inventor'. Particularly is they represent a minority... Let us not let this happen to Lewis Howard Latimer, inventor and master draftsman.



Forgotten Innovators: Huang Daopo

Innovators, as we talk about them today, tend to be young, male, and white. Historically, we've been more diverse, and have also included older white men, so... yay? Curiously enough, there's no lack of more diverse innovators (as this series has tried to argue), and even in ages as openly classist and patriarchal as what is today known as China in the 13th and 14th century, there have been cases such as that of Huang Daopo, born in Songjiang (modern-day Shanghai) during the late Song Dynasty, living through the Yuan Dynasty. She came from poverty, became a runaway after having been sold into a marriage, and during the age of the Mongol invasions and Marco Polo's adventures, what does our girl Huang do? Well, she revolutionizes an entire industry. How? Let's talk textiles. At the end of the 13th century, Chinese textile production was a hot mess. Spinning and weaving were cumbersome and inefficient, not to mention ginning and stretching. Enter Huang Daopo, who not only improved the spinning technology but also introduced new techniques for basically all aspects of textile production; revamping the entire industry. A medieval Chinese woman effectively become the

Elon Musk of her time, but instead of professional dickishness, she churned out high-quality fabrics.

Huang's techniques in spinning, weaving, and dyeing were revolutionary. Before her, most cotton was peeled and de-seeded by hand, but Huang Daopo mechanized and industrialized the process, bringing untold wealth to the delta region of the Yangtze river. In a time when every thread was precious and handwoven, she started up textiles as a proper industry. Yet, today, she is all but forgotten. History is a miracle, filled with tales lost to time, within which we can find great inspirations, like the little girl that could (revolutionize an industry like whoa).



Forgotten Innovators: George Speck

Who doesn't love potato chips? No-one, that's who. Yet few know the history of their origins, or how they became one of the world's most popular snacks. Now, the birth of the potato chip seems lost to history. Their earliest known recipe seems to be from 1817, but it is likely that people made chips even earlier.

What we do know is how potato chips became popular, and this is connected to George Speck (AKA George Crum), a chef of African American and Native American heritage at a small resort in Saratoga Springs, New York. He had, together with his sister Catherine "Aunt Kate" Wicks, worked in a number of high-end restaurants before he in 1860 opened his own restaurant, Crum's (this being a nickname he adopted after Cornelius Vanderbilt (!) habitually misremembered his name).

At Crum's (although he did also make them at a restaurant he worked at earlier, namely Moon's) he served "Saratoga Chips", made from potatoes from his own farm, sliced very thin and prepared with the finest animal fats. These may have been accidentally invented by his sister, and he may have come across the recipe in e.g. the bestselling cookbook *The Cook's Oracle*

by William Kitchener (published, as mentioned, in 1817). That said, Speck's chips became highly regarded, and this is where the myth started.

Speck at the very least helped make potato chips popular, and in the 1970's advertising started selling the myth of him as the sole creator. The story was powerful, and to this day some people think of George Speck as the inventor of the potato chip. This he was not, but his role in making the snack beloved and desired is no mean feat. Innovation is more than invention, and in this sense Speck truly was an innovator! 🧠🖋️

Forgotten Innovators: Alice Ball

Imagine a young African-American woman in the early 1900s, a time when society's expectations for her would at best be limited to the domestic sphere. Now imagine her shattering these constraints, not just by studying chemistry in college but by finding a wonder cure for a horrific disease. Historical fiction? No, the life of Alice Ball!

Let's set the stage: Hawaii, a tropical paradise wrestling with the scourge of leprosy. People afflicted with the disease were exiled to Molokai, an isolated colony befitting a dystopian novel. The only treatment? Chaulmoogra oil, as erratic in its effectiveness as a roulette wheel. Enter Alice Ball, our protagonist, a 23-year-old chemist. She's handed this fickle oil and does what any hero in a lab coat would do – she innovates. She creates a method to make this oil injectable and effective, transforming it from a capricious potion to a reliable treatment. It's a Eureka-moment that should've been her ticket to scientific stardom.

Alas, the plot thickens. Tragically, Alice's story is cut short by her untimely death at 24. Unsurprisingly, her work was usurped

by a male colleague who names the technique after himself. Alice Ball's story is not just a tale of scientific triumph; it's a narrative of resilience against the double whammy of racial and gender bias, with a punch of tragedy.

Brilliance and ingenuity know no bounds of race or gender, not then, not now. That is why it is so important that we celebrate people like Alice Ball should be celebrated – a scientific heroine, a pioneer in medicinal chemistry – as a beacon of inspiration for all those who dare to dream big despite the odds stacked against them. Diversity still matters, in innovation and elsewhere. Just ask the lepers of Molokai. ✂️👤🖼️🧪

Forgotten Innovators: Srinivasa Ramanujan

Srinivasa Ramanujan, largely self-taught and without the benefit of a formal training in mathematics, had a relationship with numbers that bordered on the mystical. His notebooks, filled with theorems and proofs, were like cryptic scrolls, yet contained profound ideas, some so advanced that they were only fully understood or proven decades later.

Picture this young clerk in Madras, scribbling away theories that would revolutionize areas of mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series, and continued fractions. It's the classic motif of the overlooked genius, laboring in obscurity, until his extraordinary talents were recognized by the Cambridge mathematician G.H. Hardy.

Ramanujan's journey to Cambridge is a poignant reminder of the universal nature of talent and the boundless potential of the human mind. Battling health issues and the chill of England, far from home, he delved into collaborations that would leave an indelible mark on mathematics. The tragedy, however, lies in his early demise, a story arc that brings a Shakespearean pathos

to his life. Dying at just 32, Ramanujan left behind a legacy that mathematicians are still deciphering, a treasure trove of concepts and theories that continue to challenge and inspire.

I speak of Ramanujan to students, to remind them that insights and genius can be easy to overlook, and that it is upon us to seek out great innovation also in areas that might seem strange or alien. Further, that while formal education can be a wonderful thing, it is not the only thing, and at times we need to seek outside the formal fields for new insights. Oh, and if a genius sends you a letter, as Ramanujan did to Hardy, answer.



Forgotten Innovators: Lynn Conway

In an age where far too many people get riled up about things that ain't none of their business, it is important to highlight the real people behind the outbursts. Take the issue of transgender individuals, who are often portrayed in unflattering or libelous ways. At such times, it's good to consider the stories behind the sensationalism. Stories like Lynn Conway.

Born in 1938, Conway was a pioneer in computer science, contributing foundational work to microelectronics and computer architecture that has shaped the digital world as we know it today. Her most notable work, the development of generalized dynamic instruction handling, a key concept in VLSI (Very-Large-Scale Integration) systems, revolutionized the way chips were designed and manufactured. She was also born a man.

In the late 1960s, after undergoing gender transition, she faced severe discrimination and was fired from her job at IBM, a common fate for transgender people at the time. Conway persevered and joined Xerox PARC, where her work would lay the groundwork for the modern computer era. Beyond her technical achievements, Conway's efforts in advocacy have had

a profound impact on the visibility and rights of transgender people in the scientific and tech communities and beyond.

Lynn Conway deserves to be remembered, not just as a great innovator, but as an example of how people can rise above the petty discrimination of society, and how we need to look beyond simplistic ideas of gender and other identity markers. Pioneers and innovators come in many shapes and sizes, and transgender people are... just people. Individuals, where some do everyday things like write on the internet, and others revolutionize the world of computing. Here's to you Lynn, 86 and still going strong. 🖥️

Forgotten Innovators: Tu Youyou

It's not a name that rolls off the tongue in the West, but it is one that should. Scene: The Cultural Revolution is in full swing in China, yet amidst this chaos, a quiet pharmacologist embarks on a quest that would ultimately save millions of lives. Tu Youyou wasn't your typical lab-coated scientist, nor did she follow the beaten path of her Western counterparts. In a twist that would make Indiana Jones proud, she turned to ancient Chinese texts in her search for a malaria cure.

Tu, in a lab filled with age-old scrolls, discovers a reference to Qinghao, or sweet wormwood, a herb used in Chinese traditional medicine for over 2,000 years. The catch? The recipe was cryptic, and high-heat extraction seems to destroy the effect. Sounds like just another magic potion, right? Yet Tu perseveres and refines low-heat extraction of this old herbal remedy. The result? Artemisinin – the most effective malaria drug the world has ever seen, reducing mortality rates dramatically.

And here's the kicker – Tu's achievements weren't just a scientific breakthrough; they were a cultural and feminist statement. In an era and society where women were often

relegated to the background, Tu led her team to a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015. And she did it without a PhD or a position at a prestigious Western university.

Her story is a perfect cocktail of tradition meeting modernity, and an underdog narrative that would leave David envious. It's a story that challenges our Western-centric view of science and innovation and underscores the value of looking beyond the usual suspects for inspiration and solutions. Tu Youyou – not just an astounding scientist, but a bridge between worlds. 🖋️

Forgotten Innovators: Wong Tsu

Everyone knows the established, legitimized heroes of innovation history, and although not everyone thinks about it, they tend to be male, pale, and stale. Today, let's do a tiny bit to shake that up, and think back to Wong Tsu, Asian-American hero of the skies. He was the first aeronautical engineer at Boeing, and holds an underrecognized yet pivotal role in aviation history. Fresh from MIT in 1916, Wong Tsu, a brilliant mind from China, traveled to the budding aviation center growing in Seattle, and his work there would stand as testament to cross-cultural courage in an era plagued by racism and xenophobia.

His innovation and design proficiency led to the Boeing Model C, the company's first commercial triumph. This wasn't merely a plane; it was a manifestation of technical skill meeting market insight. Wong's genius lay not just in his academic prowess but in his ability to anticipate and design for the market's needs, setting the tone for Boeing's future successes.

But beyond the engineering marvels, Wong's story imparts vital lessons for today's innovators. It underscores the value of diverse perspectives, of how blending different cultural and

educational backgrounds can lead to breakthroughs. In a rapidly globalizing world, the ability to merge multiple worldviews becomes an innovation superpower. Furthermore, Wong Tsu's career at Boeing serves as a poignant reminder of the many unsung heroes behind major milestones, highlighting the importance of looking beyond the obvious to appreciate the depth of contributions from lesser-known pioneers. In essence, Wong Tsu's legacy in aviation is not just about aerodynamics and design. It's a story of vision, resilience, and the transformative power of diversity in innovation.

Here's to you, Wong Tsu, wherever your spirit flies. ✈

Forgotten Innovators: Beulah Louise Henry

“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.”

— Charles Mingus

Although often forgotten today, in her time Beulah Louise Henry was dubbed “The Lady Edison”. She wasn’t just a historical footnote in the annals of innovation – with over 110 inventions and 49 patents to her name, her contributions to the early 20th century’s technological landscape are undeniable. But beyond the numbers, what’s truly inspiring about Beulah are the potential lessons we can glean from her work.

Every invention of Beulah’s sprung from keen observations of the world. She had a knack for identifying gaps, no matter how small, in everyday experiences. Whether it was a typewriter capable of producing multiple copies or the precursor to our modern-day soap-filled sponge, her solutions stemmed from an acute awareness of life’s minutiae. For innovators today, there’s a potent reminder here: innovation isn’t just about

grandeur; it's equally about simplicity, about refining the ordinary until it becomes extraordinary.

Moreover, Beulah's inventions were never solutions seeking problems—they arose from genuine needs. In an era where innovation sometimes risks becoming gimmicky or detached from actual utility, Beulah's work resonates through the ages, and for those of us seeking to infuse genuine creativity in our work, her story inspires. Embrace observation, cherish simplicity, and always, always prioritize genuine need – that's the Beulah way of innovating.

Further, how many more “Lady Edisons” are buried in the annals of history, forgotten or overshadowed? Too many, and this needs to change. Here's to you, Beulah, and know that some of us still remember. 🧠♀️💡

Forgotten Innovators: Eunice Newton Foote

Climate change might seem a very contemporary preoccupation, but as odd as it sounds, we have a forgotten innovator by the name of Eunice Newton Foote to thank for what understanding we today have of it. Foote's groundbreaking experiment, presented in 1856 at a science conference, demonstrated the impact of the sun's rays on different gases. By comparing the temperature increase in cylinders filled with carbon dioxide, air, and hydrogen, she observed that the cylinder with carbon dioxide trapped more heat and stayed warmer longer. This simple observation was among the first to suggest that variations in atmospheric gases could have significant effects on the planet's temperature.

Remarkably, Foote's conclusions hinted at what we now understand as the greenhouse effect, nearly three decades before the more recognized Svante Arrhenius would elaborate on the concept. Despite her pioneering work, Foote's contributions were nearly lost to history, eclipsed by the achievements of her male contemporaries. Her research was published without

the fanfare that greeted similar discoveries by men, and for decades, her name remained obscure, barely a footnote in the vast chronicles of scientific achievement.

Rediscovering Eunice Newton Foote's contributions offers a reflection on the gender biases entrenched in the scientific community and highlights the importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of women in science. As we grapple with the escalating challenges of climate change, her early insights underscore the enduring value of curiosity and the relentless pursuit of knowledge against the odds. 🌀=3

Forgotten Innovators: Cai Lun

The story of Cai Lun is not just a tale of ancient innovation; it's the story of how a seemingly mundane invention can revolutionize the world. Cai Lun, a eunuch and official of the Han Dynasty, traditionally regarded as the inventor of paper and the papermaking process, fundamentally transformed the world — and yet he is unknown to most.

Before Cai Lun's pivotal invention around A.D. 105, writing materials were rudimentary and cumbersome, ranging from bamboo and silk to animal bones and tortoise shells. The stage was set for an innovation that would democratize knowledge and information. Enter Cai Lun, who, with a blend of plant fibers, rags, and other materials, concocted a mixture that, when dried, formed a lightweight, versatile writing surface. This new "paper" was a game changer. It was affordable, accessible, and could be mass-produced, qualities that the previous materials sorely lacked.

Cai Lun's paper enabled the proliferation of literature, the spread of education, and the preservation of knowledge. It allowed for the creation of books, the circulation of governmental

decrees, and the communication of ideas across vast distances. The Silk Road, already a conduit for trade, became a channel for the exchange of knowledge. Yet, for all its monumental impact, the story of Cai Lun is often relegated to a footnote in the annals of history.

We remember Johannes Gutenberg, and he is often referred to as the person who democratized knowledge. Yet in a very real way, Cai Lun got there more than a millennium (approx. 1350 years, but who's counting...) earlier. Granted, he was not a European, and he was a eunuch, but come on! Credit where credit is due. Cai Lun, we salute you! 📖 🌿

Forgotten Innovators: Mary Golda Ross

When we think of the space race, names like Werner von Braun, Neil Armstrong, and Yuri Gagarin come to mind. But what about the women who contributed to this astronomical endeavor? One such unsung hero is Mary Golda Ross, the first Native American female engineer and a pivotal figure in the aerospace industry.

Mary Golda Ross was a trailblazer in every sense of the word. Born in 1908 in Park Hill, Oklahoma, she was a proud member of the Cherokee Nation, and her heritage was an essential part of her identity. In 1942, Ross joined Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, where she quickly established herself as an invaluable asset. During World War II, she worked on the P-38 Lightning fighter plane, but her most significant contribution came when she was selected as one of the 40 founding engineers of the Skunk Works, Lockheed's secret research and development team. At Skunk Works, Ross worked on various top-secret projects, but none more significant than her work on the Agena rocket. This rocket would become the workhorse of America's space program, instrumental in several critical missions, including the Gemini and Apollo programs.

Despite her groundbreaking work, Ross's contributions have often been overlooked, partly because she was a woman in a male-dominated field and partly because she was a Native American in a society that marginalized her people. And this is our loss. By ignoring the contributions of women like Ross, we are not only doing a disservice to their memory but also to the generations of young women and men who might be inspired by their stories. Mary Golda Ross should be celebrated and remembered, not just as a testament to what one woman achieved, but as an inspiration to all those who strive to reach for the stars. ✨

Forgotten Innovators: Luis Miramontes

“He who transgresses not only breaks a rule. He goes somewhere that the others are not; and he knows something the others don’t know.”

– Georges Bataille

How many people can say that they have changed the world? How many can say they did so before they turned 27? And in that tiny group, who can say that they changed the world at 26, yet aren’t universally known? Very, very few – but Luis Ernesto Miramontes Cárdenas totally can.

Born on March 16, 1925, in Mexico, Luis was a chemist who, alongside Carl Djerassi and George Rosenkranz, synthesized norethindrone in 1951. Norethindrone, a synthetic progestin, is credited as the key ingredient in the first oral contraceptive pill. The invention of the contraceptive pill marked a pivotal moment in history; it offered women unprecedented control over their lives and reproductive health, contributing significantly to the shifting dynamics of societal norms and the workforce.

The global impact of the contraceptive pill extends beyond

gender and the revolution of sexual liberation it helped bring in; it has profound implications for population control, economic development, and environmental sustainability. By enabling families to plan and limit the size of their offspring, the pill has contributed to the reduction of population growth rates in various parts of the world. Like it or not – and yes, there have also been issues with the pill – this new form of contraception fundamentally changed the world, and mainly for the better.

Thus, Luis Miramontes, at the tender age of 26, not only contributed to one of the most important scientific advancements of the 20th century but also sparked a series of social and economic changes that still resonate. Not bad for a young Mexican man! He would go on to a distinguished career and a number of awards and lived until 2004, yet deserves to be more universally known. Viva Luis! 🖋️ [M] [X]

Forgotten Innovators: Alice H. Parker

Alice H. Parker, hailing from Morristown, New Jersey, ventured into the realm of invention in the early 20th century—a period marked by its racial and gender prejudices. Her patent, filed in 1919 for a gas-powered central heating furnace, hints at a mind that saw beyond the limitations of her era, creating a system that would revolutionize indoor heating.

Before Parker's groundbreaking invention, homes were at the mercy of wood or coal-burning stoves, offering scant warmth and posing grave fire risks. Parker's vision was both radical and elegant: a furnace powered by natural gas, distributing warmth through ducts to every corner of a dwelling. This was not merely an improvement on existing methods; it was a leap into the future, laying the foundation for modern central heating systems. The narrative of Alice H. Parker is compelling not solely for the brilliance of her invention but for the enigmatic backdrop against which her story unfolds. An African-American woman innovating in the early 1900s faced a world where her race and gender were barriers to the recognition of her intellect and contributions. That Parker was able to secure a patent in

such an environment is a testament to her extraordinary resolve and talent. Yet, the details of her life remain cloaked in mystery.

The photo often used for her is one of a white woman born in London five years after the patent was filed. She may have been born in 1895, and some claim she died in 1920. Another possibility is that she was the Alice Parker of the 1920 census – where she was listed as a 35-year-cook. Or, she might have been the Alice H. Parker who was enrolled at Howard University Academy in 1910. We will probably never know, but she is today hailed as a African-American female hero – even though we do not know exactly who she was. Here's to you, whomever you were! 🙏🖼️🎨👉

Forgotten Innovators: Charles R. Drew

Born in 1904, in the segregated city of Washington, D.C., Charles Richard Drew would embark on a journey that would take him from the classrooms of Dunbar High School to the forefront of medicine. Despite the formidable challenges posed by racial discrimination, Drew's brilliance would shine through, and he'd come to change the world.

The crux of Drew's innovation lies in his research on blood plasma and transfusion. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, he spearheaded projects that revolutionized the understanding and utilization of blood plasma, leading to the large-scale blood banks of WWII. His work laid the foundational principles for the collection, processing, and storage of blood – transforming emergency medicine and surgical practices. His most notable contribution came as the director of the Blood for Britain project. Under his leadership, this initiative not only demonstrated the feasibility of long-term blood preservation but also established the standards for safe, efficient transfusion of blood. Following this, Drew became the first director of the American Red Cross Blood Bank.

However, Drew's tenure with the American Red Cross was marred by controversy. Despite his efforts, the organization implemented policies that segregated blood based on the race of the donor – a practice Drew vehemently opposed, as blood plasma is indistinguishable across races. His stance on this issue shows not only his commitment to scientific integrity but also his dedication to challenging the racial prejudices of his time.

The legacy of Charles Richard Drew is monumental, yet few remember him today. Still, if you or a loved one has ever survived complex surgery, you in part have him to thank. 🧑🏻🩺👉🏻

Forgotten Innovators: Mary Beatrice Davidson Kenner

Born in 1912 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Mary Beatrice Davidson Kenner grew up in a family that nurtured creativity and invention, and she exhibited a propensity for innovation that would define her life's work. Despite the constraints of an era that was unforgiving to women of color, Kenner's intellect made her a trailblazing minority innovator.

Kenner's most notable invention, a sanitary belt, was a groundbreaking advancement in menstrual health, designed long before the advent of adhesive sanitary pads. In the 1950s, she devised a belt with an adjustable waistband and moisture-proof napkin pocket, a design that promised to offer women a new level of comfort and freedom. However, Kenner's invention was met with resistance, not because of its efficacy or necessity, but because of the color of her skin. When the company initially interested in her invention discovered that Kenner was African-American, they retracted their support, delaying her innovation for decades.

The story of the sanitary belt is but one chapter in Kenner's

legacy of innovation. Over her lifetime, she secured five patents, a remarkable achievement for any inventor, let alone a black woman navigating the mid-20th century's landscape of systemic racism and sexism. Her inventions spanned a range of everyday conveniences, from a bathroom tissue holder to a carrier attachment for invalid walkers. Each invention, while seemingly simple, was a testament to Kenner's understanding of the needs of the everyday person and her commitment to improving quality of life.

So here's to you, Mary! You weren't one of the privileged ones, but you persevered, and some of us still remember you as a hero of invention. 🧑🏾💡👏

Forgotten Innovators: Leona Woods Marshall Libby

These days, there are few left who have not heard of Einstein or Oppenheimer, with the latter recently being turned into a hunk superhero in the grand tradition of Hollywood. Yet, at the same time, there were many unsung heroes of the age of the atom, and few key such have been as unsung as Leona, born Woods, later acquiring the surname Marshall, later still becoming Leona Woods Marshall Libby. A real shame, as she was a key player not only in building the atomic bomb, but also the first nuclear reactor and instrumental in creating geiger counters.

Born in 1919, her journey into the world of science was as unconventional as her eventual contributions to it. At a time when women in science were often excluded from key research, Leona carved out a space for herself in the atomic fervor of the 20th century. Her intellect found a playground in the Manhattan Project. Here, Leona worked on the gaseous diffusion process for uranium enrichment, a critical component in the creation of the atomic bomb. She pioneered the use of carbon-14, a radioactive isotope, in tracing the movement of carbon through photosyn-

thesis, offering insights into the fundamental processes that fuel life on Earth. Later on, she ventured into climate science and hydrology, employing isotopes to study ancient climates and water sources, thereby contributing to our understanding of environmental changes and sustainability.

Yet, despite such monumental contributions to science and technology, she has been made into a footnote; a loss for generations of scientists and innovators who seek role models in their fields. She was a science badass, and deserves a movie just as much as Oppie does. 🧑🏻📺👩🏻🔬

Forgotten Innovators: Raj Reddy

Today, AI is everywhere, and luminaries like Alan Turing and Marvin Minsky are rightly celebrated for their foundational contributions. At the same time, the impact of other innovators, particularly minority such, is often overlooked. Case in point: Raj Reddy.

Born in 1937 in Katoor, India, Reddy's work in computer science and AI began at a time when these fields were in their nascent stages. His pursuits led him to Stanford University, where he studied under John McCarthy, a founding father of AI. In the 1960s and 1970s, he made significant strides in speech recognition and natural language processing, pioneering the foundational algorithms and methodologies for later ubiquitous aspects of modern computing. One of Reddy's most notable contributions was his leadership in developing the Hearsay-II, a landmark project in the history of AI that demonstrated the potential of AI systems to understand and process natural human language. Beyond his technical contributions, Reddy has been a fervent advocate for the democratization of technology. He has consistently championed the belief that the benefits

of technology should be accessible to all, not just a privileged few – which drove him to found the Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies in India, providing high-quality education to rural youth.

Despite his achievements, Reddy's name is not as widely recognized outside of academic and professional circles as some of his contemporaries. This oversight belies the significant impact of his work, which has not only advanced the field of AI but has also played a crucial role in making technology more human-centric and accessible. So here's to Raj Reddy, without whom AI wouldn't be where it is, and the inspiration that he should be for us all.  

Forgotten Innovators: Norbert Rillieux

In 1806 Norbert Rillieux was born a black man into a prominent Creole family in New Orleans, Louisiana. Not the worst start for an innovator, but far from the best either. His family was intellectual and had money, so the precocious teenager was afforded chances most young black men would not – then an now. He was sent to Paris to study, and as a teenager he enrolled at the prestigious École Centrale Paris, one of the top engineering schools of the era. Here he excelled particularly in the field of thermodynamics, which would prove central to his career and legacy.

Rillieux's most significant contribution to technology was his invention of the multiple-effect evaporator under vacuum, a device that revolutionized the process of sugar refining. Prior to his innovation, sugar was refined using a “Jamaica Train,” a labor-intensive and hazardous method that involved boiling sugarcane juice in a series of open kettles at high temperatures. This method was inefficient and extremely dangerous for the workers, predominantly slaves, who manned the boiling houses.

Recognizing the need for a better system, Rillieux thought of

using a vacuum to lower the boiling point of the sugarcane juice and then using a series of interconnected vessels to reuse the energy from steam – not only was this safer and more efficient, it made higher-quality sugar! Introduced in the 1840s, Rillieux's multiple-effect evaporator represented a major technological leap that had implications beyond the sugar industry, influencing processes in other chemical manufacturing realms.

Despite all this, Rillieux has never received the full recognition he deserves. So, as you enjoy your sugar, lend Norbert a thought. He made the world a better, sweeter place, and deserves to be remembered. 🧪🏭

Forgotten Innovators: Elena Cornaro Piscopia

To this day, academia can be a tough place for women. Sure, things have gotten better, but they ain't always great. So it might be helpful to think back to the people who started the struggle, people such as Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia (also known in English as Helen Cornaro), the Italian mathematician and certified badass who made history as the first woman to receive a doctoral degree. That's right, folks, way back in the 17th century, when women were expected to do little more than pop out babies, Elena said, "Screw that noise, Imma get me a PhD!"

Born in Venice in 1646, Elena was the ultimate renaissance woman. She spoke seven languages fluently, played multiple musical instruments, and could hold her own in debates on theology, mathematics, and astronomy. She was a member of several scholarly societies, and in 1670 became the president of a Venetian one. In 1678, Elena submits a thesis to the University of Padua, and has to pass an examination, in Latin, on several excerpts from Aristotle. The all-male panel of professors was

so impressed by her brilliance that they had no choice but to grant her the degree – *Magistra et Doctrix Philosophiæ* – yet although the first word means “teacher” she was specifically forbidden from teaching.

This might seem far removed from the issues of sexism in contemporary academia, and some might even say that Dr. Piscopia’s story is about privilege – she was, after all, a noblewoman with a powerful father. Still, her achievement deserves to be remembered, in the annals of badass female academics. It would take more than 50 years until another woman got a degree (Laura Bassi), so Elena truly was a pioneer.



Forgotten Innovators: Edmond Albius

“You live and learn. At any rate, you live.”

— Douglas Adams

Vanilla, originating from Mexico, has a symbiotic relationship with a particular species of bee, namely the *Melipona* bee, which acts as its exclusive pollinator. This might seem like horticultural trivia, but back in the day, this was a huge economic issue, as it made vanilla – a very lucrative crop – difficult to grow, not to mention impossible to cultivate anywhere else except in its original habitat.

Enter our hero, Edmond Albius, a child slave born in 1829 in Réunion, a French colony. The French had taken vanilla to the islands, hoping to start a lucrative production, but without the *Melipona* bees, this proved impossible. A Belgian professor of botany had suggested a method of hand-pollination, but this was too cumbersome to be practical. Edmond, who at the time was only 12 years old (!!!), was curious about this, as his owner had taught him some botany. He experimented with manually pollinating vanilla flowers using a small stick or a blade of grass

and just a simple flick of the thumb. This technique worked, and became known as the “Albius method”. It was quick and worked brilliantly, and is in fact the method used to this day, more or less unchanged (yes, even today vanilla is hand-pollinated!). The implications of Edmond’s innovation were colossal. Suddenly, vanilla could be cultivated anywhere with a suitable climate.

A global vanilla industry flourished. Did Edmond? I’ll give you three guesses... He never received a reward, and although he was freed from slavery, he lived in poverty. His one, tiny break was that his 10-year sentence for theft was commuted after five in recognition of his contributions. He died in poverty in 1880, having single-handedly created a global industry. Fair? No. The world of innovation rarely is. Still, some of us remember Edmond, the boy genius who changed the world! 🐝

Forgotten Innovators: Mária Telkes

“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” — Karl Marx

Solar is the future, but sometimes we forgot that it has a past too. A big part of that past sprung from the mind of one woman, unfairly forgotten today, who looked to the sun and saw multitudes. Born in 1900 as Mária Telkes, to a Hungarian family of minor nobility, she got a PhD in physical chemistry from the University of Geneva in 1924, moving to the US soon thereafter. She was always a bit ahead of her time – as an early female researcher, as a sustainability champion, and as someone who saw “impossible” as a challenge rather than as a fixed truth.

She worked on photoelectrics and heat conversion at e.g. Westinghouse, and in 1937 she became a US citizen and took on a role as research engineer, transitioning to research into solar energy. She studied thermoelectric devices, and invented a solar distiller that was used during World War II. It was however after the war she started the projects that made her known as “The Sun Queen” among her peers.

In 1948, she was instrumental in creating the first modern solar-heated house – the Dover Sun House – having identified thermal energy storage as a critical issue and developing a system of phase-change materials to enable it. Later, in 1953, she developed a solar-powered oven, and kept working on ideas such as a solar-powered desalination system. Her material research led to innovations that were used in the Apollo mission and in developing the Polaris missile. By the time she was done, Mária had racked up over 20 patents and laid the groundwork for the solar energy industry we know today. Sometimes, the brightest ideas have nothing to do with the inside and outside of boxes, and instead come from staring straight, relentlessly into the sun. In 1995, the Sun Queen left this Earth, but she left a legacy of utilizing the sun's bounty. ☀️🌀📦

IX

Child's Play

Some people believe there's a natural connection between play and creativity. I don't think things are quite this easy and linear, but looking to the various ways we play and kid around – including when we do this and call it sports – can show you alternative ways of looking at creativity.

Sports & Innovation: Creating Car-Jitsu

It is often said that constraints are important for creativity, i.e. that it is by imposing new and possibly confounding limitations on ourselves that we can break with our traditionalist thinking and find the true blue-sky ideas. This is of course only partly true, in that one can be creative without constraints, but there is something to limits that can awaken innovative thinking. It was thus with no little amount of glee I read about the new martial art – or, more precisely, martial art competition form – of car-jitsu. If you think catch-as-catch-can fighting is too easy, why not try to do it whilst you are in the very constraining confines of a car?!?

Yes, in car-jitsu one fights, jiu-jitsu style, within a car, and the aim is to in one way or another get the other competitor to submit. More to the point, each competitor starts in the front seat, belts on, but after that it is a free-for-all, and from what I have been able to get, using the car interior to gain an advantage isn't against the rules, it is encouraged – just imagine what you can do with a seatbelt or steering wheel creatively deployed! Now, some might say that starting in the driver's seat gives an

unfair advantage, but fear not, the fights are done in two three-minute rounds, and fighters switch starting positions. It is only fair.

This rather amazing sport seems to have been created in Russia by one Vikentiy Mikheev, but has as of late made its way to the US. There's clips on YouTube and trust me, they're pretty amazing. It just goes to show that one can still innovate, even in the sphere of martial arts, simply by thinking creatively about the arena. Sports in confined spaces seems like a category that could easily be extended – bus handball and yacht fencing come to mind! What would you make better by confining it? 🙄

On Hugo Hercules – The First Superhero

You are unlikely to have heard of him, but good ol' HH was Superman before Superman. Born in the pages of the Chicago Tribune way back in 1902, Hugo Hercules is a character that aficionados regard as the first, nascent comic book superhero. His run was short, a mere five months, but offers a fascinating glimpse into the early days of a genre.

Created by Wilhelm Heinrich Detlev Körner, Hugo Hercules is not your typical caped crusader. He didn't lurk in the shadows or wear a flashy costume. Instead, he was a jovial fellow who roamed the streets in a suit, exuding a cheerfulness that belied his powers. In each strip, Hugo would casually display feats of superhuman strength, saving lives and performing heroic deeds with a funny, charming nonchalance.

What made Hugo Hercules particularly interesting was his lack of a traditional superhero narrative. There were no cosmic threats or dark vendettas, no backstories or moral quandaries. His stories were simple vignettes, slices of mundane life where extraordinary strength was used for spontaneous acts of good –

like lifting a car to help a lady retrieve a lost item. This lack of drama is likely why the strip did not survive, but it also points to the everyday grounding superheroes emerged out of.

Hugo may not have had the longevity, style, or depth of his successors, but he is the one who started it all. He is also a stark reminder that big things are often born from very little ones. Hugo Hercules was just a story about a strong, kind everyman, in a normal town, but from this was born endless crime-fighters and cosmic battles. This is the path of creativity – from the unassuming to entire universes. 

The Magic 8-Ball: A Cultural History of Indecision

I've never met a kid who doesn't love a Magic 8-Ball, and frankly, it holds a surprising sway over adults as well. It's story is as much a tale of novelty as it is a story about our relationship with chance and the unknown. It began, as many great stories do, with a bit of a twist. Invented in the 1950s by Albert C. Carter and Abe Bookman, the Magic 8-Ball was not initially intended to be a toy. Carter was inspired by a spirit-writing device used by his mother, a Cincinnati clairvoyant!

The appeal of the Magic 8-Ball lies in its enigmatic responses – “Yes,” “No,” “Ask again later,” and a handful of similarly cryptic replies. In a world where we're constantly bombarded with choices, there's something weirdly comforting about outsourcing a decision, however trivial, to a plastic sphere filled with blue liquid. It speaks to our desire for certainty in an uncertain world, and our penchant for offloading responsibility.

The Magic 8-Ball seems to me to be a healthy reminder that not all decisions are life-and-death, and sometimes, it's okay to leave a little to chance. In an age where algorithms predict our

shopping habits and AI can map out our life choices, the Magic 8-Ball remains a defiantly low-tech oracle, a charming relic of a simpler time.

In the end, it isn't just about decision-making. It's about having a cultural artifact that captures our collective imagination, one that allows us to play around with chance and accept that sometimes the right answer to our questions is a simple, non-committal "Better not tell you now." And if that's not a metaphor for the human condition, I don't know what is. ⑧ ♀♂

Kalkitos: Making Creativity Child's Play

“When I grow up I want to be a little boy.”

— Joseph Heller

Remember Kalkitos? If you do, you are likely to be one of us old folks. Whilst it might be incomprehensible to the children of today, there was a profound, tactile joy in playing with these transferable decal sets that will still stir the hearts of us children of the 1970's and -80's. Kalkitos offered a simple yet fascinating concept: kids could create their own scenes by transferring characters and objects onto a backdrop, crafting a story just like you wanted it. There was an open backdrop – a beach, a Western vista, a theatre – and a set of sheets with objects and characters that could be applied to the backdrop with some vigorous rubbing to loosen the decal from the sheet and affixing it to the background.

You had to consider where where to place each decal, whether it was a spaceship, a superhero, or a tree. This process was not just about sticking figures onto a background; it was an exercise in narrative development. Each placement was a decision,

contributing to a larger story that unfolded on the backdrop. It required no artistic skills in the traditional sense – no need for drawing or painting proficiency. By removing barriers to artistic expression, Kalkitos empowered children to explore and develop their creative instincts freely. It wasn't just about the end product, but the joy of the process – the act of considering how each piece contributed to the overall narrative.

Kalkitos may be a forgotten relic of the past for some, but it has a definite legacy as a tool for creative development. I look back, and realize that my love for creative work might have been kindled here – in thinking about how such simple tools, mere decals, could be used (and abused!) in a myriad of ways. There is nostalgia here, but also a realization of how simple tools can engender great creativity. 🌀

The Magic of Merlin, the First Modern Handheld Gaming Device

Before the Switch, before Game & Watch, there was Merlin The Electronic Wizard. A red, plastic box looking a little like what people in the 1970's would have imagined a smartphone might look like, it was the original console, and one of the earliest sequencers/synthesizers to boot – a true harbinger of digital innovation to come.

Released in 1978, it captured the imaginations of both young and old with its simplistic yet still futuristic design. Conceived by Bob Doyle, a Harvard Ph.D., and produced by Parker Brothers, Merlin was more than a toy. This handheld device, with its iconic array of eleven buttons and a speaker, offered six games ranging from Tic Tac Toe to Blackjack, each played through the clever use of light and sound.

Merlin's genius lay in its ability to engage users without the need for advanced graphics or high-resolution displays. Its games, while basic by today's standards, were revolutionary in demonstrating how digital technology could entertain, educate, and engross. For instance, its memory game tested users' ability

to replicate sequences of sounds and lights, a precursor to the popular game Simon, while its music machine mode allowed for the creation of rudimentary melodies, showcasing early digital sound synthesis.

It went on to selling 5 million, and changed gaming forever. Sure, it lacked a screen, and it only had 48 bytes (yes, bytes!) of RAM. Still, it was the machine which showed the potential of what was once called video games; something which today represents a global market approaching 300 billion USD in size. Not bad for a red plastic box with 11 buttons. 🙌👤

On Steelgrip Starkey and His All-Purpose Power Tool

That is not a euphemism, but the title of a short-running comic from Marvel, more precisely their Epic Comics imprint. Whereas many superheroes have been either aliens or solidly middle- to upper-class (lawyers, scientists, the odd billionaire), Steelgrip Starkey was an all-American blue collar worker with improbably advanced tools, creating a comic that feels like it was dreamt up in a union hall meeting held in space.

The series kicked off in 1986, a time when the comic book industry was beginning to embrace more complex narratives, and Steelgrip Starkey's saga was a unique blend of science fiction, workplace drama, and adventure, rolled into the glossy pages of a comic book. The narrative follows Alan Starkey, our eponymous hero, who wields the titular all-purpose power tool, a device capable of seemingly endless functions.

The publication run of Steelgrip Starkey was brief, spanning six issues and concluding in 1987. During this time, the series carved out a niche for itself, offering readers a glimpse into a world where the line between man and machine blurred, and

where the everyday struggles of the working class were given a cosmic stage. Over its short run, the comic deals with everything from competitive infrastructure construction, mining on the moon, indigenous rights, random Americana, and a lot of working men in positions that often calls out for a queer reading. It's a mixed bag.

It isn't everyone's can of Pabst Blue Ribbon, but this curious mix of US working class myths and science fiction tropes is at the very least a creative one. As an almost completely forgotten comic, reading it today is a strange experience, not least due to the populist foreshadowing...   

Sports & Innovation: Pelé at the 1970's World Cup

“The true worth of an experimenter consists in his pursuing not only what he seeks in his experiment, but also what he did not seek.”

– Claude Bernard

There are times when a single, unexpected move can encapsulate the essence of innovation in sports. During the 1970 World Cup semi-final between Brazil and Uruguay, Pelé executed a maneuver so audacious that it has become etched in the annals of football history, not for its flashiness, but for its sheer creativity and tactical brilliance.

The move in question was a moment of sublime deception. As Pelé raced towards a through ball, everyone including the Uruguayan goalkeeper expected him to control it. Instead, Pelé did something remarkable – he let the ball pass through his legs without touching it, swerved around the goalkeeper, who had left his line to intercept, and then chased the ball towards the goal. Although he didn't score from the move, the sheer

inventiveness of the play left spectators and players alike in awe.

In a split second, Pelé saw a possibility where others saw routine, an opportunity where others saw a dead end. This is the crux of innovation – the ability to envision and execute what others cannot even conceive. Pelé’s move is also a testament to the power of non-action, an idea as relevant in business as it is in sports. In a world where actions and reactions are often fast and reflexive, the ability to pause, to think, and to choose inaction or an alternative action can be far more powerful.

Pelé’s dummy move in the 1970 World Cup wasn’t just a display of physical skill; it was a moment of pure creativity. It shows us the importance of daring to do the unexpected, and in that fleeting moment on the football field, Pelé taught us that sometimes the most brilliant move is the one you don’t make.



The Innovation Lessons of the Care Bears

I grew up in the 80's, an era of rapidly developing TV, and the emergence of highly odd properties. Yet, few quite compare to the surrealism that was the Care Bears. Born as greeting card illustrations, these multicolored creatures swiftly took over TV screens and toy aisles in a whirlwind of consumerist fervor.

The meteoric rise of the Care Bears franchise serves as an important lesson in never underestimating the power of adorable, multicolored critters. These strange bears, who lived in Care-a-Lot, could use a "Care Bear Stare" that emanated from their belly badges which could manipulate the minds of enemies and heal friends, all while they traveled the world on "missions for caring". They battled a professor by the name of Coldheart (who, sadly, does not turn up on Google Scholar), a wizard named No Heart, as well as various beasties with names such as Beastly and Shreeky. Subtle it was not, but seemingly the psychedelic madness of all this was seen as a good basis for a TV show for kids.

Sure, it was all an advertisement for an endless array of merch,

but there is an innovation lesson in here. Too often we think that innovation needs to be streamlined, elegant, sensible, cool. The Care Bears were none of these things. Also, we often equate innovation with the adult and the grown-up. Again, the Care Bears were proudly childish, leaning into the whimsy of it all. Innovators could do worse than looking at the sheer insanity of the Care Bears, because behind the multicolored madness there was a narrative and a plan, one that captured the hearts of a generation of kids. So don't ignore the silliness, revel in it! 🌀

Sports & Innovation: On Octopush

One of the key tenets of innovation is that one can take an existing idea and transplant it to a novel context, thereby creating value. Take Henry Ford and the assembly line. This was basically just him taking existing modes of working he knew from slaughter houses, and transplanting them to an industrial production setting. Hey presto, untold wealth. Now, our example today might not generate the same amount of money, but still...

England in the 1950's is no-one's idea of a creative context, but Alan Blake does stand out. A founding member of the Southsea Sub-Aqua Club, he was looking for ways to keep scuba divers active and entertained during winter, when open-water diving was more for those with a masochistic tendency. So Alan thought up a sport – he took the basic logic of hockey, and moved it under water. He designed a lead puck weighing about 1.5 kg and short wooden sticks, roughly 30 cm long, for players to use in maneuvering the puck across the pool bottom. He called it “octopush”, but it quickly became known as underwater hockey.

Players, equipped with diving masks, snorkels, and fins,

would hold their breath as they dove to the pool bottom, pushing the puck towards goals at either end of the playing area. The sport demanded not only strong swimming abilities but also strategic thinking and excellent breath control. Today, underwater hockey has grown into a global sport with a dedicated following. The Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS) serves as the international governing body, overseeing rules and competitions worldwide. The sport is played in over 20 countries across five continents, and there are even world championships! Not bad for what was meant as a form of exercise during those cold English winters. ↙

Play as Risk: On the Pain of Clackers

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”

—Plato

Toys are often thought of in quite naïve ways – as frivolous, playful, painfree things from romanticized childhood narratives. Let’s pervert this! Our story begins with the introduction of Clackers, or Ker-Bangers, in 1968. At heart a simple toy consisting of two acrylic (originally tempered glass!) balls suspended on strings, which, when jerked up and down, would collide with each other, making a distinctive ‘clack’ sound. The objective? To keep the clacking going without the balls shattering or, more painfully, smacking the player – a frequent and often bruising occurrence.

In an age where safety in toys was less of a concern than it is today, Clackers were a symbol of a freer, more laissez-faire attitude towards child’s play. The thrill of the game was in the ever-present danger of it. The risk of injury was part of the appeal, a badge of honor among those who played it. Mastery

of Clackers conferred status in the playground hierarchy. The better you were at it, the cooler you seemed. This social reward system encouraged children to take risks, to push themselves further, and in doing so, learn about their own limits. And pain!

The toy's banishment from the market due to safety concerns marked an end of an era and brought to light the evolving understanding of child safety and the responsibilities of toy manufacturers. The Clackers phenomenon wasn't just about a toy; it was about the attitudes towards childhood, play, risk, and reward in a specific historical context. They may not have been quite as batshit insane as Lawn Darts (look them up!), or the knife game that was popular when I was in school, but they still show the darker, more painful side of "child's play".

Sports & Innovation: Pro Slap Fighting

Sometimes you come across an idea so obvious, yet so difficult to conceive off, that it makes you challenge what you thought you knew about creativity. Professional slap fighting is one of these. Now that it exists, the success of it seems preordained. Who doesn't want to watch big, hulking men (and, in some cases, less hulking women) slapping each other silly? No-one, that's who. On the other hand, who the heck thought that the slap – caricatured response from women since time immemorial for unwanted caresses – would make for a thrilling combat sport? If anything, the slap had a reputation of being somewhat effete; the kind of aggression you use against someone you do not consider worthy of a full punch. Watching pro slap fighting shakes one out of such assumptions with pronounced rapidity.

It is not altogether clear where the trend started. Some people point to Russia, and the competitive spectacle of Eastern European strength competitions. Others again claim that whilst men exchanging slaps might have existed before, turning it into a sport is an American invention. What we do know is that SlapFIGHT Championship, which currently is the “big league”

in the emerging sport, having started structured events in 2015. Today there's a World Slap Fighting Alliance (WSFA), a more indie league called Power Slap, increasingly standardized rules, and a hell of a presence on social media – because of course there is.

The rules establish that competitors, known as “slappers,” stand at arm's length, delivering slaps in turn while judges score based on technique, power, and the opponent's reaction. There are weight classes, safety measures, the whole hog. Still, the main draw of the sport is visceral. It's just thrilling to see big guys slapping the bejesus out of each other, and on some level this is what sport is all about – spectacle and slaps. 🤖👊👊

Wrestlecrap: The Creative Potential of Anti-Fandom

“The problem with kitsch is that it is all too profound, manipulating deep libidinal and ideological forces, while true art knows how to remain at the surface, how to subtract it’s subject from it’s deepest context of historical reality.”

– Slavoj Žižek

Fandom is not only a key form of agency in popular culture, it is also an intellectually interesting creative dynamic. That’s a fancy way of saying the fans get up to some wild shit, if you pay attention. Consider the wild and woolly world of wrestling. Ignored by many as entertainment for children and the less sophisticated consumer, it is not surprising that wrestling fandom is often understood as just passively cheering on big, muscly men in tights.

Enter Wrestlecrap, a website and labor of love, perennially stuck in an early 90’s online aesthetic. For the connoisseur, it is a treasure trove of information about the very worst and tackiest from professional wrestling, and thus a true joy to surf through.

Wrestling, seen as a cultural product, has been a very nimble artform. Rather than honing things, wrestling promoters have often thrown things at the wall just to see what sticks, and a lot of it didn't. What Wrestlecrap does is to offer a catalogue of the catastrophic, be it concepts that didn't work (such as the evil dentist Isaac Yankem) or merchandise too silly for words (such as a pocket camera that puts a color imprint of Hulk Hogan on every picture – great for weddings!). This is fandom as both adoration and critique; taking wrestling seriously but also documenting its in(s)anities for history.

Fandom is much more than mere passive idolization, even wrestling fandom. It is a dynamic dialogue with the material, and paying heed to expressions of anti-fandom, and the creativity therein, can help you see the manifolds of both expression and consumption. Oh, and a semi-naked Bastion Booger, which you won't easily forget. 🤩♂🍑

Polybius: The Arcade Game as Myth and Urban Legend

“If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play.”
—John Cleese

There are few tales in gaming folklore quite as intriguing and enigmatic as that of Polybius, an urban legend about a mysterious arcade game, supposedly developed by the government for nefarious purposes, from the 1980s. The story of Polybius is elusive, shrouded in layers of myth and internet lore, making it a perfect subject to explore the intersection of creativity, technology, and conspiracy.

Polybius emerged as a concept in the early 2000s, decades after it was allegedly created. The idea was that the game appeared in a few arcades in Portland, Oregon, in 1981, causing amnesia, night terrors, and even attracting men in black who collected data from the machines. The story of Polybius spread rapidly online, as the notion of a mythical arcade game that was also part of a government psy-ops program was just too perfect not to share. It also reflected the anxieties of its time.

The 1980s saw the rise of video games as a cultural phenomenon, accompanied by fears about their negative effects on young people. No concrete evidence of the game's existence has ever been found, yet the story persists, captivating the imaginations of gamers and conspiracy theorists alike. I love it, as a nigh-perfect case of internet folklore.

Polybius may never have existed, but the legend surrounding it is rich in cultural and psychological insights. It was perfect a digital-age boogeyman, warning of technology's darker side whilst also being enticing – we wanted to play this thing! Gaming has always been about exploring the unknown, and Polybius promised the ultimate trip. As the X-Files stated: I want to believe, but now I want to game as well. 🕹️ 📵

The Curious Case of the Resurgence of Adult Coloring Books

“The true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground.”

—G.K. Chesterton

My memories of coloring books are always ones of annoyance. Already as a child, I was struck by the problem of coloring books: If you do them “properly”, by the numbers, they are uncreative drudgery masquerading as creative work, yet if you go wild with color and ignore the lines, the result is often a mess. So why did this most unedifying of childhood “amusements” make a triumphant return as an adult pastime?

The argument of nostalgia and tactile pleasure is a cop-out. In an age dominated by digital interactions, the longing for a simpler past is an easy card to play, but if we’re honest the past was not that great, and neither is coloring within pre-drawn lines. Proponents will argue that adult coloring books offer stress relief, a way to unwind in our fast-paced world, yet this is surely a placebo, a false sense of accomplishment from filling in

spaces with color, following the rules laid out by someone else. And let's not kid ourselves about the social aspect. While it may appear to be a communal activity, it is ultimately a solitary one, with each person focused on their own book, their own little world confined within the lines.

The adult coloring book trend is a symptom of our times, a reflection of our anxieties and our desire for simple solutions to complex problems. In the end, adult coloring books are nothing more than a futile attempt to recapture lost childhood creativity by plunging into the confines of conformity. The trauma was there when we were children, unsure what to make of the lines. Revisiting it signals we're gluttons for creative punishment and learnt little. Surely we can do better than this? ✎

Sea Monkeys: The Art of Illusion

This will age me uncomfortably, but I can remember magazine ads for Sea Monkeys. Yup, you read that right. In the back pages of comic books, nestled between ads for x-ray specs and 100-piece army sets, were the enticing illustrations of Sea Monkeys promising a kingdom of fun. This was no child's play; it was a masterclass in marketing and the art of illusion.

Sea Monkeys, for the uninitiated, are actually brine shrimp – *Artemia salina*. The secret to their “instant life”? Anhydrobiosis – a fancy term for being able to dry out and then come back to life when rehydrated. This biological trickery made them perfect mail-order pets. The brainchild of Harold von Braunhut, a man with more than 195 patents to his name and a flair for the dramatic, Sea Monkeys were sold not just as pets but as a narrative. The ads promised a fantastical underwater world, a narrative that turned brine shrimp into a family of playful creatures. They weren't.

But let's not be too harsh. In a way, Sea Monkeys were a lesson in biology, responsibility, and the magic of life – albeit a tiny, shrimp-sized version of it. Watching these creatures

grow from specks to swimming beings was a first encounter with the wonders of nature for many children. Moreover, the Sea Monkey phenomenon speaks volumes about the era of mail-order novelties and the broader cultural landscape. There was a charm in sending away for a mysterious something and waiting for its arrival.

In the end, Sea Monkeys are a but quirky footnote in the annals of pop culture. They represent a time when the lines between reality and fantasy could be blurred with a bit of marketing genius and the promise of something extraordinary. Sometimes, the simplest organisms can inspire elaborate fantasies, and that's the kind of magic that doesn't age. 🐙

Sports & Innovation: Creating Chessboxing

I am not a big sports guy, but I am a big innovation guy, which is why I always appreciate when people try to create new, interesting sports. More than anything I enjoy when people go above and beyond and create strange hybrid sports – such as chessboxing.

This wonderful sport was conceived by Dutch artist Iepe Rubingh in 2003, inspired largely by a French comic book “Froid Équateur” penned by Enki Bilal in 1992 (although preceded by the kung-fu movie “The Mystery of Chess Boxing” from 1979). The comic depicted a futuristic world where chessboxing was a common method of resolving conflicts. Rubingh took this fantastical narrative and transformed it into a real-world sport.

The rules of chessboxing are a testament to its dual heritage. A match consists of alternating rounds of chess and boxing, typically six rounds of chess and five rounds of boxing, starting and ending with chess. Each round lasts three minutes, and victory can be achieved by knockout, checkmate, a judge’s decision, or if an opponent exceeds the time limit in the chess round. This

setup requires competitors to switch rapidly between two very different modes of thinking and physical engagement, making the sport a test of both strategic depth and physical tenacity.

What I particularly like is the manner in which this questions our tendency to split the world into physical vs. intellectual pursuits. You work out or you write, and never the twain shall meet – except in chessboxing, where you have to be a total person; physically resilient and intellectually acute.

I think the world needs more of these innovative hybrids, to teach us something about holistics: That we are both mind and matter. ♟️💡

Mandrake the Magician: An Appreciation

He might not have been the first superhero, nor was he ever the most powerful. He might, however, have been the most stylish one, with his trim 'stache, top hat, cape, and all: Mandrake the Magician! Created by Lee Falk in 1934, Mandrake wasn't just a comic character; he was the epitome of the suave, mysterious conjurer, and an important precursor to the modern superhero.

With his hypnotic powers and debonair charm, he was more than just a magician. He was the hero as artist, a man who used his wits as much as his magic. Alongside his companion Lothar and the equally formidable Princess Narda, Mandrake faced off against a cavalcade of bizarre foes, from mad scientists to interdimensional threats. Sure, it was of its age, and elements of particularly the early strips would today be considered racist and otherwise problematic (yet, it was also the first comic with an African-American hero!), but its bold, dramatic strokes did 'gesture hypnotically', carrying over an undeniable charm.

In a sense, Mandrake the Magician was a bridge between the mystical and the modern, and his legacy is one of imagination

and style. In an era where superheroes often rely on brute strength or high-tech gadgets, Mandrake reminds us of the power of charisma, intelligence, and, above all, mystery. He is a nostalgic nod to a time when heroes were as elegant as they were brave, and magic was as much about the spectacle as it was about the trick. In the pantheon of comic greats, Mandrake deserves to be remembered not just as a throwback, but as an aesthetic and a statement – that heroes come in many forms.



Dungeons & Dragons Turns 50

“Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father.”

—Roger von Oech

This year we celebrate 50 years of Dungeons & Dragons, a game of tremendous cultural impact and gaming influence. So why not think back to the creation of this seminal game, and celebrate its creators? The saga began in the minds of Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, two individuals with a penchant for games and an appetite for the fantastical. Gygax, an insurance underwriter, found solace in the world of war gaming, a hobby where miniatures and historical battles were the norm. Arneson, meanwhile, was a college student with a vivid imagination and a knack for storytelling. Their paths crossed, fittingly, at a gaming convention, yet their shared love of literature was as strong an influence. The epic realms of J.R.R. Tolkien, the sword and sorcery of Robert E. Howard, and the weirdness of H.P. Lovecraft all played a part in shaping the game’s ethos.

The game’s rules were first codified in the “Dungeons &

Dragons” boxed set, released in 1974 by TSR, a company Gygax helped establish specifically for this purpose. The initial print run was modest, reflecting the creators’ humble expectations, and the game was nothing fancy – a simple boxed set that contained the basic rules and dice. However, the game rapidly gained traction, spreading through word of mouth, conventions, and a burgeoning network of hobby shops. It resonated with a demographic hungry for a form of entertainment that broke the mold of passive consumption, offering instead an interactive canvas for the imagination.

And what a ride it has been. The game is still around, and in ways bigger than ever. Its influence is everywhere, with dungeon-masters referenced in sitcoms and D20 die being sold on the high street. Many happy hours have been spent with the game, with many more to come, as also proven by the nigh endless games influenced by it. So happy 50th, D&D! ✂️ 🐉

Sports & Innovation: Competitive Excel

“Sports do not build character. They reveal it.”

— Heywood Broun

If I was to ask you for the polar opposite to sports, you might not immediately answer “Excel”, but I am ready to bet that it works as an answer. Sports is supposed to be about athleticism, the simpler way to take the measure of a wo/man, and Excel... ain’t that. Still, in the age overripe capitalism, competitive Excel has, against the odds, become one. It’s even getting on TV, and, well... satire is difficult in the world we live in now.

The roots of competitive Excel can be traced back to the early 2000s, when financial modeling competitions started to gain traction. However, it wasn’t until 2020 that the sport truly came into its own with the launch of the Financial Modeling World Cup (FMWC). Founded by Andrew Grigolyunovich, the FMWC took an obscure skill and put a spotlight on it. The inaugural FMWC in 2020 featured 128 participants from 19 countries, battling it out for a grand prize of \$10,000. But the FMWC isn’t the only game in town. ModelOff, the brainchild of Johann Odou, has been

running since 2012 and wants to be the “Olympics of Excel.”

The sport gained unexpected mainstream attention in 2022 when ESPN decided to broadcast the FMWC, bringing competitive Excel to the same network that airs the NFL and NBA. In an age that loves non-ironic-but-kind-of-ironic fandom, it went wild and viral on TikTok, where people could fawn over a particularly elegant use of OFFSET for dynamic ranges or pulling off a sweet INDIRECT function for dynamic cell references. It might not have the punch of boxing or the dynamic elegance of football, but let’s face it, even this is preferable to watching cricket. It might not survive, in part as AI takes over much of our spreadsheets, but it is still testament to humanity’s capacity to create play and/or games out of pretty much everything – creating sports heroes from Excel wranglers. 📊 ⚔️ ♀

Eurovision: Toxic Pan-Normality

“The way you get a better world is, you don’t put up with substandard anything.”

— Joe Strummer

The Eurovision Song Contest is at times hailed as a joyous celebration of pan-European pop culture, but I hold that a more proper name for it would be toxic pan-normality. It stands for a collective gravitation towards a normalized mediocrity, not merely as a matter of harmless entertainment, but as a cultural symptom of a deeper malaise. Each year, countries compete not with bold expressions of unique artistry, but with tunes designed to be palatably average, crafted to offend none and please many in a brief, three-minute window, whilst keeping up the aura of being novel, interesting, creative. This phenomenon of morbid pan-normality is not just about the benign enjoyment of kitsch; it is a ritualized embrace of the mundane, repackaged as spectacle.

The contest’s structure presents reinforcement, as each entry must appeal to a diverse audience, resulting in music that is so

broadly acceptable it is not merely banal but pan-normal. The vibrant, even gaudy, staging often distracts from the general ordinariness, making the spectacle itself a vehicle for mediocrity – the celebration of a sterilized, homogenized average that is repeatedly mistaken for diversity. The result is a kind of cultural stagnation, where the new and the novel give way to the tried and tested. Eurovision might be seen as a metaphor for a wider cultural and societal malaise: A preference for the safe middle over the potentially divisive edges. This is not merely mediocrity; it is a toxic condition where creativity/diversity are celebrated in form but not in substance.

In this, one should not wonder why Israel was allowed to take part, but rather why Russia was not. Eurovision exists to establish a fake normality, akin to Marcuse's "repressive tolerance". It exists to entertain, but mainly to make sure questions remain unasked, alternatives unprobed. 

Sports & Innovation: The Azzurri's Catenaccio

I am not a sports guy, but I am a creativity guy, and as such I have to accept that sports, too, has lessons to impart – such as the story of the door-bolt in football. This is not just a story about a defensive strategy; it's a narrative about how a single tactical innovation can redefine a sport. Italy adopting the 'Catenaccio' system was not just a shift in positions on the field; it was a statement on the role of strategy in the game.

Catenaccio, literally translating to 'door-bolt' in Italian, was a system that hinged on the principle of a strong, impenetrable defense. The key to this strategy was the introduction of a player known as the 'libero' or 'sweeper.' Unlike traditional defenders, the libero would hang back, behind the main defensive line, ready to thwart attacks that broke through and to start counter-attacks – a departure from the then-prevailing approach that emphasized an all-round deployment of players.

This is a classic lesson in innovation – turning a disadvantage into a competitive edge. The Azzurri, recognizing the weaknesses in their team, turned a perceived lack of attacking

flair into a defensive setup that became nearly impossible for opponents to break down. This also speaks to the importance of flexibility in strategy. What started as a defensive tactic evolved over time, with teams adapting and modifying it to include swift counter-attacks, making it not just a shield but also a sword.

The real lesson of the 'Catenaccio' system is to take our weaknesses seriously, and consider how they can be counteracted. You may not be the fastest, or the strongest, or the smartest, but this does not mean you cannot look for a path forward. Forza!



The Creative Genius of a Wrestler's Sidekick – Remembering Paul Bearer

Wrestling, the showy stuff rather than the Olympic sport, has always been a guilty pleasure of mine. I grew up watching the Hulkster and Ricky “The Dragon” Steamboat, but I was particularly intrigued by the non-wrestling characters – the managers and the cronies that accompanied the wrestlers.

Enter Paul Bearer (terrible pun, and the character is better for it) and the Undertaker. In the pantheon of wrestling duos, few could rival their dark mystique and theatrical potency. Paul Bearer, with his haunting pallor and his eerily high-pitched voice, wasn't just an accessory to the Undertaker's chilling persona; he was a narrative dynamo, amplifying the enigma. It's easy to focus on the Undertaker's grim entrance or his intimidating in-ring prowess, but it was Paul's story-building capability that brought an added dimension to the tale. Beyond just holding an urn and accompanying the Deadman, Bearer's antics, his promos, and his storylines with the Undertaker added layers of depth to the character. Wrestling isn't just about athleticism; it's about storytelling, and that's where sideline-

figures shine. He served as a window into the Undertaker's story, helping audiences connect with the character.

Creative pursuits often spotlight the front-facing performers, overlooking the sidekicks. But in wrestling, as in other art forms, these often hold the key to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the main act. The contribution of sidekicks to the wrestling world serves as a stark reminder: even in the flamboyant world of body slams and flying elbows, it's often the silent partners who craft the most resonating narratives. 🤼

Sports & Innovation: Ali's Phantom Punch

We all want to be able to pull off surprises, to zig where others zag, and although I am not all that keen on sporting analogies, I still think that Muhammad Ali's 'Phantom Punch' against Sonny Liston in 1965 is a perfect lesson in creativity. This punch, seemingly innocuous and cloaked in myth, was actually a brilliant display of technique and ring craft.

At the heart of Ali's approach was his unique style. He was a master of movement, using his footwork not just for defense but as a tool for offense. He would dance backwards, luring opponents deep into his reach, taunting them to reach towards him. The punch itself was a testament to Ali's understanding of timing and distance. It came from an angle where Liston was least expecting it, as a counterpunch and almost invisible. When Liston moved in, perhaps underestimating Ali's reach and speed, he was caught off guard. The punch, a rapid right hand, wasn't just about brute force; it was perfectly timed to exploit Liston's lapse in defense.

Ali's genius was making his opponent fight his fight. He

used psychological tactics to get inside their heads, but in the ring, it was his skill at manipulating distance and timing that truly disoriented his adversaries. The Phantom Punch was a culmination of this – it was less about the physical impact and more about the art of drawing Liston into a trap.

This is what creatives do, they lure people one way and then surprise with a deft, counterintuitive move. It is the twist in the tale, the surprising punchline, the use of weakness as a strength. Ali's punch is still debated today, as it shook the world just like it shook Liston – surely you couldn't win with such a punch? Well, you could, and you still can. 💡🧐

The Strange Genius of Jet Set Willy

“The opposite of play is not work – it’s depression.”

—Brian Sutton-Smith

I cannot and will not count the hours of my youth that were dedicated to a blocky sprite by the name of Jet Set Willy. This quirky, difficult platform game, a classic of the British gaming scene in the 1980s, captured not just my imagination, but that of an entire generation of gamers. With simple yet challenging gameplay, whimsy in storyline and characters, it serves as a fascinating case of the enduring influence of early video game culture.

Developed by Matthew Smith and released in 1984 for the ZX Spectrum, Jet Set Willy was a sequel to the popular Manic Miner. It had non-linear gameplay, allowing players to explore Willy’s sprawling mansion in a revolutionary manner – an open world *avant la lettre*! The game tasked you with tidying up Willy’s house after a party; a mundane premise turned into epic adventure through the game’s creative design and odd rooms.

The charm of Jet Set Willy lay in its ability to blend the absurd

with the mundane. The game's rooms, with names like "The Bathroom" or "The Chapel," were filled with surreal enemies and obstacles — everything from flying toilets to demonic monks. This blend of everyday settings with bizarre elements gave the game an almost dream-like quality.

Jet Set Willy was more than just a game; it was a cultural phenomenon that open my eyes to the quirky, eccentric side of British pop culture. It was a game that didn't take itself too seriously, yet offered an almost torturous challenge to those who played it. It was an adventure into the absurd, made even richer by the fact that much of the game had to be imagined rather than experienced. Games today are infinitively more advanced, but there is a richness to game history that deserves to be kept alive. Not least because I never did manage to finish it. 🍷 🎮

Sports & Innovation: On Creating Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) might seem an odd topic for a non-athletic innovation researcher to show interest in, but the history of how it was created has some fascinating lessons to it. The origins of BJJ trace back to the arrival of Mitsuyo Maeda, a Japanese judoka, to Brazil in 1914. Maeda was a disciple of Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, and his mission was to spread Kano's teachings. In Brazil, Maeda found an eager student in Carlos Gracie, who, along with his brothers, would go on to adapt and refine these techniques, laying the groundwork for what would become BJJ.

This is a classic example of how the introduction of new ideas into a different context can spur innovation. The Gracie family, particularly Helio Gracie, saw the potential here but also the need for adaptation. Helio, physically smaller and less robust than his brothers, began to modify the Judo techniques to emphasize leverage and technique over brute strength. These modifications were not just tweaks; they represented a fundamental shift towards a more inclusive form of martial arts. By

focusing on ground fighting and submissions, BJJ downplayed size and strength as the determinant of success. Royce Gracie's victory in the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in 1993, served as a showcase of its effectiveness. This also demonstrated a broader principle: For innovations to gain acceptance, they must be tested and proven in real conditions.

Today, BJJ is a well-regarded martial art, and has influenced MMA to no little degree. Imagine, all that from one man traveling to the far end of the world! Goes to show what idea cross-pollination and practical adaption can create, and the manifold of places creativity lessons can be found. 🧠💡

(It should be noted that this story has been contested, and some have accused Maeda of exaggerating his own importance. I am not enough of a jiu-jitsu scholar to ascertain the level to which this is true or not.)

Sports & Innovation: Luther Lindsay

I have always had a soft spot for wrestling. No, not the kind that is done at the Olympics, but the over-the-top spectacle that is 'rasslin – flashy leotards, flashier moves, the faces and the heels and the insanity of it all. It is a sphere to discover real truths about the human condition, and surprising insights into history.

So occasionally I dip into its history, looking for missed narratives and forgotten little revolutions, and it was during such a deep dive I discovered Luther Lindsay. A true trailblazer, totally forgotten today, he was born in Virginia in 1924 and seems to have been a tremendous athlete from a very young age – yet segregation laws stopped him from playing against white teams or athletes. He went into wrestling early, and was billed “US Colored Heavyweight Champion” in 1953 (there’s a less nice title as well, but I will not repeat it). He was one of the very first African-Americans who became a star, even as he originally could not wrestle against whites. This changed around 1953, when he wrestled Lou Thesz, challenging him for the title, and later on in the decade he became the first African-American to

wrestle white opponents in the Deep South. Not only that, he was cheered and won matches! He had a strong career, winning numerous titles and fighting many of the greatest.

As one of the few who ever beat Stu Hart in the “Hart Dungeon” he was massively respected in the industry. He even died like a superstar. In 1972, at the age of 47, he was wrestling in Charlotte, pinning his opponent with a diving belly-flop. During the three-count for the win, Luther had a massive heart attack, literally dying as he won his last fight. Gone too soon, but what a fighter! A true legend, who deserves to be remembered. 🏴‍☠️ ♂ ☆

The Art of the Wrestling Promo

“The first human who hurled an insult instead of a stone was the founder of civilization.”

— Sigmund Freud

I have a deep love for professional wrestling, and one thing that I’ve always admired is the rhetorical skills that are often involved. Put differently, I do love a good wrestling promo! These bombastic symphonies of braggadocio is where the soap opera of sports entertainment collides head-on with the artistry of public speaking. It’s Shakespeare with spandex, and the greats of this genre didn’t just talk trash; they wove narratives, built characters, and engaged audiences with a mix of charisma and verbal creativity.

Take, for example, “Macho Man” Randy Savage. His promos were a frenetic blend of intensity and surrealism, peppered with “Oooh yeah!”. His promo for WrestleMania III was not just a challenge; it was an epic, a saga of the ring where Savage promised to ascend to the pinnacle of wrestling glory. Or “The Nature Boy” Ric Flair, the limousine-riding, jet-flying son of

a gun, whose promos were as much a testament to his lifestyle as they were psychological warfare: “To be the man, you gotta beat the man”.

Yet it’s Dusty Rhodes, the “American Dream,” who cut the promo of all promos: “Hard Times”. Delivered with the fervor of a southern preacher and the raw emotion of a man beaten but unbowed, Rhodes articulated not just a personal struggle but tapped into the zeitgeist of economic hardship, making it universally resonant. He spoke of hard times not as abstract woes but as personal battles, laying out his own trials and those of every “common man” facing adversity.

Rhetoric and the art of speaking is everywhere, and there is much to learn from people like wrestlers. The best promos are works of art, creative narratives that can be moments of the sublime in the midst of carnivalesque spectacle. Now, I’m off to listen to some CM Punk promos... 🎧 🤼

On “Greatest Hits”

Yesterday, as I was suffering from a head cold and as the flat was empty, I watched Eddie Murphy’s “Beverly Hills Cop: Axel Foley” on Netflix. It was, as expected, about as intelligent as I could handle in my diminished state, but it got me thinking. The movie might have been somewhat enjoyable for someone who hasn’t seen the originals, but it was clearly a run-through of the greatest hits from previous movies (mostly the first two, as everyone wants to forget the third one). Every actor, every scene, every song, even individual poses, all replicated in a movie 40 years later. Nostalgia rules!

However, we shouldn’t turn our noses up at greatest hits. The best-selling albums of The Beatles, Eagles, ABBA, Madonna, Bob Marley, Queen, and Elton John were all best-of albums. Entire musical careers have been built on touring with your hits of yesteryear, often more beloved now than they were back then. Movies from “It’s A Wonderful Life” to “Blade Runner” became seen as classics long after their initial failure at the box office. What I am trying to say is that the notion of greatness, much like the notion of a hit, is a more fluid one than we tend to

acknowledge.

This is why Eddie Murphy can still capitalize on scenes from 40 years back, and why Elton John could tour with mostly old material and make close to a billion from one tour (the Farewell Yellow Brick Road one). They look at their back catalogue as something that is still alive and carries great value, and aren't above capitalizing on the same. There is a powerful lesson for creatives everywhere here. Do not overlook your hits of yesteryear. Do not always "go further". Sometimes the most creative thing you can do is go back into your history, the deep crates of your archive, and find the value that still exists there. And if you don't have an archive, now's a good time to start creating one – you never know when it becomes valued. ⌚ 📁