

What Traces Will We Leave Behind & Why Would They Even Matter?

-

A Hybrid Collection

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Cookies. Browser histories. Internet footprints. A twitter thread from your time in school, or the Facebook wall of a dead relative. Before the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke in 2018, the market value of personal data was soaring to more than three times that of the oil industry. It has only increased since. I, personally, value you and your privacy above all else. However, your continued reading is subject to an agreement between two, as distinct and separate parties, writer and reader, denoting service and fee respectively. Your enjoyment (or lack thereof) of the following content, will be in exchange for - at some point in the future and at my discretion – an as of yet undecided penalty. The logistics of this are still to be fully determined, and are distinct from any nominal fee you may have paid to gain access to this content originally. All information provided voluntarily or otherwise may be processed to target you more effectively in the future, thus ensuring the continued production of, and prevention of banality in, any content that may follow.

I could stretch this out perhaps, boggling the mind and muddling the path further, by filling this page with loosely grasped legal jargon and buzzwords designed to attract and detract attention in equal measure, but what would be the point? Terms & conditions are notoriously designed to be left unread - and the precious time we have is already, undeniably, finite.

Executive Orders

So as they look the other way
distracted
by video game violence
on their streets
faux outrage generated
by media agenda
scrolling absorbing scrolling
absorbing scrolling absorbing
and
falling
victim to an externally imposed
internally exposed
alienation
of all outwith
their own
echo
-chambers
of puppet Men, with brittle spines
and straw hair and wooden hearts
stitched together
with dubious moral fibre
seek not knowledge
but instead make
careful incisions disguised
as Executive Orders
to usher back the crows
limit freedoms
tear apart families
and set a world ablaze

Foley

/

Censorship

/'fəʊli/ (noun)

traditionally relating to or
concerned with the addition
of recorded sound effects to
digital media in post-production

/'sɛnsəʃɪp/ (noun)

the suppression or prohibition of
any parts of books, films, news etc
that are considered obscene,
politically unacceptable, or
a threat to security

by their very definitions
the art of foley
and the act of censorship
should exist opposingly

yet every day this age, itself defined
by the digital literacy of its population,
finds its media diluted
by the highly edited
and purposefully manipulated
Be it
audio or visual or textual

the agenda is everywhere
in sound/bytes, data and
information, suppressing and prohibiting
through their addition, in equal measure;

the ability to process accordingly
should be everything

lack of access to the knowledge
required to better oneself
and subsequent un/informed decisions
is no longer an excuse

so says this piece of highly edited and
purposefully manipulated content, anyway

The Bicarbonate of Soda Plague

Over a period of roughly eight weeks in the summer of 2057, thousands of people across the (36 remaining) United States of America dropped dead. This has, of course, happened many times throughout history: think the Black Plague, a pandemic which scoured Europe in the 14th century, as an example on a scale somewhat more substantial; or Strasbourg's Dancing Plague of 1518 as an incident on a similarly bizarre, yet localised spectrum. As these deaths appeared in some way related, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention quickly rallied to condemn them as such, and work on preventative methods. However, they stumbled across some unusual barriers. Firstly, upon recovery, the cadavers were found with a substantial volume of white foam dripping from their mouths. This was initially theorised to have been caused by foreign anti-bodies that had attacked and deteriorated cells thus causing an increase in activity around the salivary glands - even after death. After further forensic study, scientists were forced to concede that such bacteria were not present in any

of the samples gathered, and therefore could not work on a cure for this particular ailment. Secondly, severe bruising and blistering on the fingers and wrists – particularly around the joints of the thumb – suggested that the hands of those deceased had been under severe duress in the moments leading up to death. Again, as these injuries appeared to be time and victim specific, it was unclear how to proceed with the development of future treatment, or a vaccine.

A budding Canadian journalist looking to make a name for themselves across the border latched on to the story quickly and, inspired by these outlandish attributes, dubbed the epidemic as 'the Bicarbonate of Soda Plague'. Initial reports by the government funded Independent American Media (IAM) had tried the angle of a 'Rage Virus', in an attempt to link the increased social media engagements of all deceased in the weeks prior to their deaths. This effort was shut down by the British Film Institute, who were forced to remind IAM that this term was still under a fifty-year

copyright patent, due to Danny Boyle's 2008 film *28 Days Later*. The Disney aggressive takeover of all copyright law companies in 2032 meant that the current administration's representatives had no means to attempt to buy out or appeal for an overturn of this trademark. Therefore, reinforced by its accompanying graphic images, the clunky 'Bicarbonate of Soda Plague' stuck. Despite the initial hubbub, no more bodies were discovered or reported, and public interest waned. Medical resources were eventually shifted to other projects and research ground to a halt.

Only following the American Presidential Election, in the winter of 2057, was it noted that all victims of this 'plague' were active members of political parties in the remaining swing states. Due to this realisation, official investigations were re-opened in 2058. Concrete findings concerning any dangers of online debate have yet to be disclosed to the general public.

Virality

Once and still a hallmark
of infectious disease
and negatively, too
(perhaps that goes without saying)
now overshadowed / or
actively sought
by so many of us;
evolution is inarguably
a complex beast, with many faces
but the human condition
has always deigned to spread

Webcomic

Tommy dreamed of fame. Well, perhaps fame was the wrong word, although it did sort of fit – he wanted to be recognised for his achievements, for what he gave to the world. And not just recognised like, by his neighbour as he walked down his street, or by that parcel delivery guy who would always shout from the drive rather than come to the door because he was afraid of the dog. No, rather, Tommy dreamed of the day that he would hit send, tweeting out one of the comic strips that he'd drawn and, within seconds, receive that first retweet notification. The day that those retweets would multiply exponentially. In his mind, that day marked his becoming a bona fide artist; marked him making it. Only two things lay in his way – the lack of both an internet presence, and ability.

Every day, Tommy would come home from his work, in a small café off the high street, sweaty and drained. Every day, he would shower and change, make his dinner, and sit down to his desk. Then, he would begin to draw. It wasn't that Tommy didn't have the ideas. He knew that his 'Trans-Atlantic Ship' could have blown up, if he'd managed to get the genitalia right, or maybe even if it had simply resembled a ship; just as he knew that his current project 'Assault Trifles' should be an instant viral hit, if it didn't look so much as though he'd accidentally spilled custard and jam over an off-white piece of paper.

This did not stop him from tweeting his barely realised pieces however, oh no. If he was lucky, he got maybe three sympathy engagements – one was usually his younger sister; another, a guy from his old class who probably hadn't the heart to unfollow him yet; the third - when it hit that peak - was always, inevitably, a porn bot. Despite this, over the course of the two years since he had gained his BA in Optometry with Theatre Tech, Tommy had posted out over 500 of his webcomics. He knew that he just needed that break, that foot in the door, that one, meticulously crafted idea to take off.

That fateful day, it had been a terrible shift at work, and Tommy was in a foul mood. Leaving the kitchen in a mess, he clocked out and began his journey home. Agitated and preoccupied as he was – his mind indignantly ablaze with thoughts of rude customers, minimum wages and the excuses he'd need tomorrow - he failed to notice a huge flock of pigeons flying up the high street. As shoppers ducked, dived and dodged out of the way of the oncoming horde, Tommy, his head down, stomped straight towards them. Bam. Something struck him hard in the chest. One hand reactively massaging his torso, he looked up just in time to see three more pigeons whiz by his ears. Then five, then six. Instinctively, catlike, Tommy began to weave his way in out of this storm of wings and beaks. To the left, to the right, down and back up, like an

elegant ballet – he had never moved with such grace in his life. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Tommy could see a break, a light at the end of this feathered tunnel. Hands up to protect his face, he marched bravely onwards. He was almost there; but what happened next surprised even him. Seconds from being free he sped up, determined to escape. As he did so, from nowhere, one final pigeon swooped, blocking his path. Tommy tried to leap sideways out of the way to avoid it, but with his trailing and flailing arms: smack! Goodnight. He skelped that pigeon so hard it easily travelled six or seven metres, both horizontally and vertically. The pigeon tried to pick itself up, but slumped and began to twitch erratically.

Tommy hit the deck, attempted a recovery roll, and hit the deck again. Legs splayed, he picked himself up slowly, attempting to gather and dust himself off simultaneously. He looked around, hoping nobody had seen his struggles. To his dismay, several phones were out and pointed in his direction. One woman had not even realised that her flash was still on. Had they recorded the whole thing? Fighting the tears that pricked his eyes, he pulled his hoody up tight over his head, turned on his heel and sprinted home.

That night, he barely slept, racked with worry and guilt as he was. Questions raced through his mind: was pigeon assault a felony? Had he inadvertently killed it? Would that lengthen a sentence? What little sleep he did manage was plagued with nightmares; mostly of the RSPCA busting down his door, taking him in, forcing him to live out the rest of his days between leash and cage. Admitting defeat at around 7:30am, he swung his legs out of bed and sat down at his desk. At least, for now, he still had his webcomics. Tommy would usually post at peak time, between 5pm and 7pm at night, when people were scrolling on their way home from work, or with their dinner.

Fuck it, he thought, it isn't exactly a schedule that has served me well in the past.

Logging on to his account to share 'Assault Trifles', convinced this may be the last webcomic he would ever upload, he stopped in astonishment, mouse hovering over the top story:

Pigeon boy forced to defend himself against horde of aggressive birds

6529 retweets. 10.2k likes. Accompanied by a picture of him – Tommy! – ungainly, and finding his feet. And another headline below it:

Hero shopper stuns pigeon after feathery high street rampage

This one had even more engagements, and was accompanied by a video. Tommy watched it, seeing himself dart amongst those birds, catch that pigeon with his open palm, pick himself up and run off. Even as he watched, the engagements grew – at this time in the morning as well! Tommy’s mind churned almost audibly, the cogs working overtime. And then it came to him. Slowly, to the video post, he tapped out a response.

“I hope everyone on the high street yesterday, including the pigeons, are ok. I’d like to hold my hands up and admit that I am the Pigeon Boy. You can find some of my webcomics, like this one, over on my account. Hope everyone has a better day than I did yesterday!”

Attaching AssaultTrifles.jpeg to this post, he hesitated only a second or two over send. Click.

That day numbered amongst the greatest in Tommy’s life. He barely noticed as his boss berated him for the state that he had left the workspace in; indeed, he could barely hear his boss over the vibrating of his phone. Tommy’s posts were getting promoted by all number of media outlets; he was being contacted for interview; he was even being asked what his plans for the future were, now he had this elevated platform. On his way home that evening, a little girl tugged her parents to a halt on the street to point at him and exclaim:

“Look! That’s the pigeon boy! I’ve seen some of his drawings!”

Tommy grinned, and felt warm inside all the way home; all despite the fickle wind that ruffled his collar.

Apocalypse, Yo

We used to believe
that the revolutions
might be televised;
they put a stop to that
apparently
so now, instead
we upload, like &
livestream
every little Revelation:
an apocalyptic world, oh lord
it's coming
 one (1) joke we're all in on
 by our own ~design~
will be our legacy
the last meme
we may never share

The Weather Men

The men who once controlled the weather were something of an anomaly. Exactly how they came to be in authority over the four ancient elements – earth and wind, fire and water – was entirely unclear. Unclear, but unquestioned: origins lost to a quaintness of memory in a relentless flow of time; roles now cemented as a mere aspect of daily life. To the public, they were simply known by their respective department names; thus Mister Earth, Mister Wind, and so forth. These men governed the climate from a disused inland office block, far from any coast or major fault line, protected by acres of dilapidation and rubble that had accumulated over decades.

Sometimes they would shine the sun for us, warm, and bright as a beacon of hope; breezes would carry ample rainwater across continents; bountiful harvests were reaped from fertile ground. These periods were few, far between - we came to crave them. More commonly, their desire to maintain status and order over our world manifested itself in cruel, chaotic conditions. Storms brewed, and mountains crumbled; no heat could permeate thick cloud cover; whole land masses were drowned or left barren under an unrelenting, oppressive gaze.

This is how it was. By the time we realised that perhaps these men may be fallible, it was too late. We live now through the devastation left in the wake of their whim. They are long since gone, and to dwell on their whereabouts would be to lose sight of our future.

Space Elegy (1)

The only woman to have awoken from her deep sleep chamber on Space Royal Economy Class Travel Vessel 03267 took a deep breath and let out a long sigh. She was tired. Tired of being the only one; tired of trying to wake the others; tired of manning the spaceship by herself.

This is what she got, she thought, for flying economy class; as if the meagre savings she'd accrued from her teaching salary back home would have mattered, had they ever eventually reached wherever the hell they were meant to be reaching.

She sighed again, this time in acceptance, knowing that she would never see a destination. Naturally, the cold steel around her did not react. Carved into this prison of metals, scored across the many bright red Space Royal logos emblazoned on the walls, were tally marks: seven hundred and ninety-eight they numbered - not that she knew anymore, though she had made them all. She had lost count around the two hundred mark. Unbeknownst to her, the day she had stopped eating was day seven hundred and forty-eight. In a past life, she would have enjoyed this messianic irony. Today, she neither knew of nor cared for it.

The Space Royal pre-flight training they had been provided with before take-off had been undeniably, and for all intents and purposes, extremely comprehensive. After all, she thought, the eight-week course had allowed her to operate a spaceship(!) entirely by herself. It was, however, an operation in total isolation: she could no longer take the solitude; no longer bear seeing her partner, and their two children, frozen in time and ageless beneath glass; no longer stare out into an endless void, an all-consuming blackness. Space had been inspiring, from the ground. Up here, amongst it, well – it was crushing.

She gazed upon it now, slumped as she was against a wall across from the observatory lounge window. Not much longer, she thought. It occurred to her, in her semi-delirious state, that perhaps she should leave something to mark her time on the ship. If this craft was ever found, perhaps the somebody – or something – that discovered it would be able to awaken the others. There was plenty in the Space Royal manuals scattered around the ship to explain it itself; and launch data, terrain and ocean specimens, encyclopaedias, history textbooks and samples of literature taken from the very English classroom in which she used to teach, to describe their origin. This should be, she thought, something personal. Something that those who knew her might read, and know that it was intended as a message for them; a sign that she was thinking of them even in her final hours; a sign that she hoped all might still come good, dying as she was.

With the lead mines having run dry decades ago, it was laughable to think there would be a pencil on board, and she doubted there had been the foresight to stock paper in the

Quartermaster quarters either, since most information was now exclusively recorded digitally. Still, she did not like the idea of leaving a simple InstantNote™ to convey what may indeed become her epitaph.

She reached for her Space Royal branded pocket-knife, expertly fiddled it between her fingers and smiled weakly. Admittedly, she also liked the symbolism; for all she knew, this could possibly be the last tale to told by a member of her species; an epic played out over the walls of this floating tin can, replicating how stories were once depicted upon cave walls. It seemed fitting. And so, as she etched line by line and image by image, a poem, it became her legacy.

Space Elegy (2)

The security cameras of Vessel 03267 scanned for signs of life. All heat signatures were quickly deemed missing. Oxygen supply on economy class, monitored closely off-ship, was still deemed inappropriate to support more than one life form at a time, in order to preserve the vessel's preordained lifespan, under warranty as it still was. With this data registered, the awakening sequence of Chamber #0002 – chosen at random by a remote Executive of Space Royal Corporation – on Economy Class Travel Vessel 03267 was initiated.

Lament of a Dying Organism

Translated back to 'English' (origins unknown)
from Galactic Standard Tongue,
by **Redacted**, the last Scholar of Dead Languages
in the service of The Interplanetary Council,
the year **Redacted**

O, what fools were we who
in our arrogance believed
that we had gifted names to the planets
of our solar system, indeed
that we had named the solar system
itself;
that we held power
to promote demote denote
the status of 'planet'
despite not even submitting
the correct paperwork
- under Section 16.8, appendix HzI -
or as some of us would come to know it briefly
The Planned Planethood Act

How blinded we were, by our own
righteousness, nay! Greed
thinking ourselves as the only
(or at least, the most)
intelligent life
we consumed and devoured and destroyed
mocking all those who tried to warn us
against ourselves

For when finally the day of judgement came
and Our Mother **Redacted** was spent;
as She crumbled and bled beneath our feet
pods were launched into the Black, holding
less than one per cent - those that could afford
the luxury of second chance
the abandonment of a species on the brink
by their own foul past endeavour but

These unelected representatives were
ill-suited to the task charged of them and
after aeons of floating amidst dead Space
when they were finally unfrozen
from cryogenically induced coma
and found themselves as Interplanetary Ambassadors
given opportunity to plead their case
before The Council -

alas,
those aliens didn't give a shit.