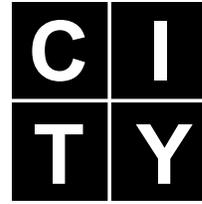


# The broken



## The social animal



### Plus:

- Signs it might be wise to reconsider the engagement
- We open our mouths and all that escapes is a sigh
- The newborns click and click and post photos and share SoundCloud links and have Internet beefs

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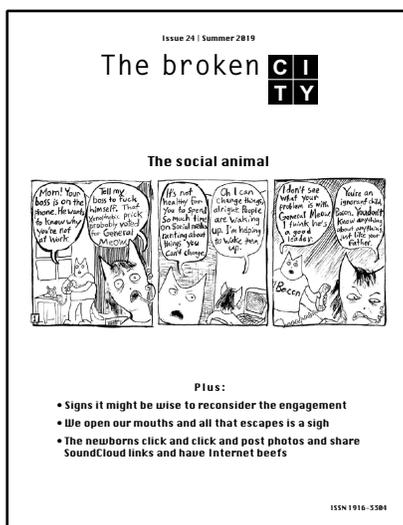
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@brokencitymag

## In this issue:



Welcome to *The Broken City's* social media issue. Though we approach the Web with a critical eye in these pages, expect to find us on Twitter and Issuu. Do we contradict ourselves? Very well, then, we contradict ourselves.

## Cover Art:

Taken from Morgen Eljot's "Cataluma," in full at page 5.

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*The Broken City* is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2019 edition: **Welcome to the Interzone.**

That's right, Dr. Benway, the magazine is running an issue on drugs (legal or otherwise) and the psychedelic experience. Fact or fiction: the weirder the better.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to [thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com](mailto:thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com).

Deadline is: December 1, 2019. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

# **nor see the eyelids of the morning**

## ***Dustin Stephens***

And after this, we open our mouths and all that escapes  
is a sigh:

Let our huddling beneath this ribcage  
in the night say,  
'I have not forgotten you.'

Let this be as it once was—just a day,  
wrapped up only  
in cool, crumpled sheets.

Let it be known that I fell asleep in  
your stained-glass light  
and have been groggy since.

That day, not wrapped but smothered,  
did not reach for those arches  
of our once gathering, but

behold, I am instead thoroughly unworthy, spinning  
my screen like a rosary.

Like a rosary holds any power or attention.

Facebook seems to tell me everyone is worthy of both.

Let not my hands slip across these sweet days,  
slick with gloss, like photo paper.

Let them develop. Dip them in lipstick-  
tinted baths of light,  
and come out changed,

because we are waiting,  
and in this waiting, there is silence.

Why is that day thumb-tack-  
stuck to these asbestos walls?

Why aren't we in any of the  
photos we take?

For I am considering how our ink  
bleeds: slowly, and under light.

With sins on our backs like we've set out  
for the Camino de Santiago,  
and couldn't bear to leave anything  
out of our packs,

or merely just worried we'd forgotten  
something we might need,

there, at the head of the trail, a tomb  
ahead of us and golden suns  
there along the path, we shift weight  
from shoulder to shoulder,

and squint, counting our days  
and tucking them away just in case.

Why do I snatch light from the swirling dust  
and form—in vain—my own white stone?

Who once rained our promised manna?

I've grown weary of remembering, and made my own.

Who ever truly remembers their own face?

We have carved eternity into shapes  
small enough to see ourselves in;

we who sit in the light of the stars and yawn.

For I am under the impression

that underneath the galaxies,

for a hundred generations, we have apprenticed  
ourselves to sculptors—and we look it.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;

I sit, hands on manmade knees, and wait.

---

*Dustin Stephens is a recent graduate of the University of California, Davis, where he studied Human Development, Education, and Music. He can now be found searching for books, films and music in Goodwills across Northern California. His work has been published in The Birds We Piled Loosely and Buddy, a lit zine, and can be found at [variousversesblog.wordpress.com](http://variousversesblog.wordpress.com).*

# **Signs It Might Be Wise to Reconsider the Engagement: Excerpts from the Boards at the Now-defunct indiebride.com *Compiled by Janis Butler Holm***

He talks during the TV show, not the commercials.

He's fried chicken and ham, I'm baked brie and stuffed mushrooms.

It's as if he has two emotional settings: Detached Fugue State and Weepy Preteen Girl.

Everything comes second to his music.

He's pro gun ownership and I refuse to keep a gun in the house.

We don't have sexual chemistry, his personal hygiene is lacking, and so on.

The thing is, he is a whiner. Seriously.

We get off work, I make dinner and do dishes, he sits on his ass and plays video games and smokes pot.

I recently found evidence that he has been cheating on me, on and off, with several different women including mutual friends and an ex-girlfriend, for almost the entire course of our relationship.

Short story, he believes in God and the healing power of Jesus Christ, and I don't.

We were joking around about how cute our babies would be; then he said, "Hopefully they'll have your looks and my brain."

He belongs to 23 porn communities.

Lately his pessimism and anger and frustration is pounding my cheery disposition into the ground, stomping on it and covering it with dirt.

We are completely incompatible.

The other complicating factor is that he is an identical twin and has lived with his twin for over 5 years and now they own a condo together.

His mom controls his savings account.

A few years ago he was investigated by the police for possible indiscretion with a minor.

I fantasize about calling the wedding off and riding away into the sunset with my ex.

---

*Janis Butler Holm has served as Associate Editor for \_Wide Angle\_, the film journal. Her prose, poems and performance pieces have appeared in small-press, national, and international magazines. Her plays have been produced in the U.S., Canada and the U.K.*

Opposite page: "Cataluma"

Morgen Eljot is a graphic novelist, painter and writer with one foot in San Francisco and the other in Helsinki, Finland. Morgen has an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University, and has appeared in publications such as *ZYZZYVA*, *Hobart*, *Juked*, *Eclectica*, *The Rumpus*, *Palooka* and many others. To see more of Morgen's comics and artwork, please visit his illustrated website, [morgeneljot.wordpress.com](http://morgeneljot.wordpress.com) and look for him on Instagram.

Morgen Eliot

# Cataluma



Ring Ring!  
Ring Ring!  
Ring Ring!

click click click  
clickety clickety  
clickety clickety  
click

Mom!  
Are you  
gonna get  
that? Mom?



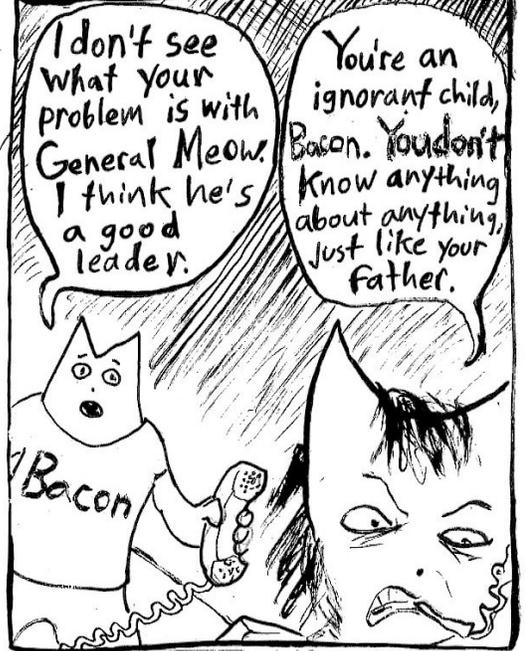
Mom! Your boss is on the phone. He wants to know why you're not at work.

Tell my boss to fuck himself. That xenophobic prick probably voted for General Meow.



It's not healthy for you to spend so much time on social media ranting about things you can't change.

Oh I can change things, alright. People are waking up. I'm helping to wake them up.



I don't see what your problem is with General Meow. I think he's a good leader.

You're an ignorant child, Bacon. You don't know anything about anything, just like your father.



I know one thing, mom. When I grow up I want to be a winner like General Meow, not a loser like you.

HOT CUP O' JOE



How dare you!

SPLASH!



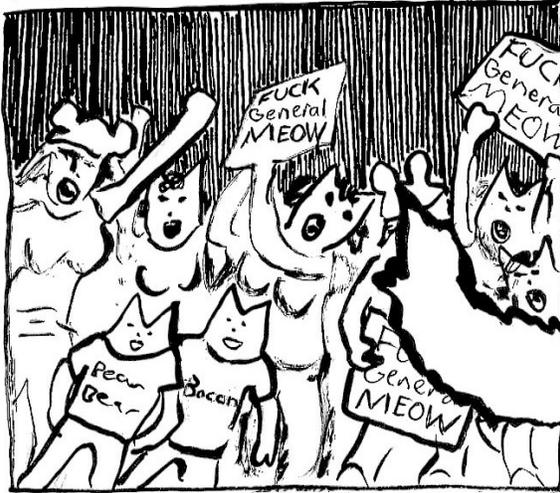
Oh my god, Bacon I am SO SORRY.

It hurts, Mommy, it hurts

Our mom used to be like a normal person. Then came the election of General Meow.

A swaggering bully with tiny paws, the new leader of Caterika was easy to dislike.

But our mom did not just hate General Meow - she was defined by him.



Pathetic.

burp



Fuck General Meow  
 Fuck General Meow  
 Fuck General Meow  
 Fuck General Meow  
 Fuck General...

click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click  
 click

To exist in the same world as General Meow was too much for our mom's mind to handle.



Bear Bear come Quick, Mom's having a nervous breakdown!

Our mom's break with reality meant we could visit our rich cousin to steal his toys.

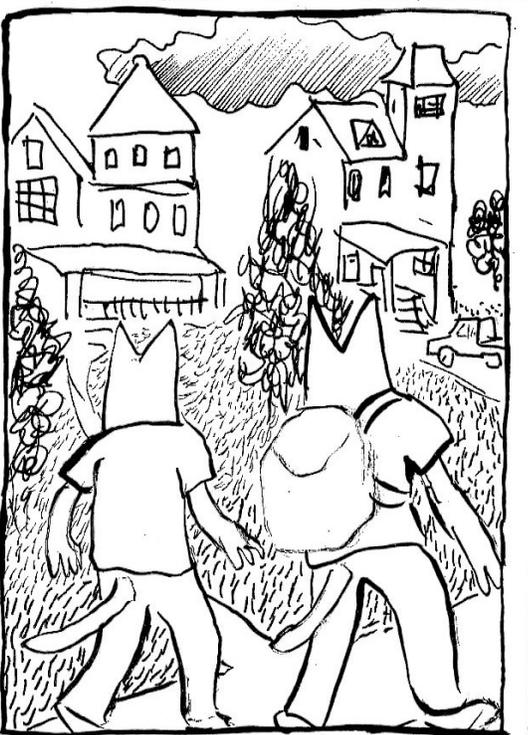
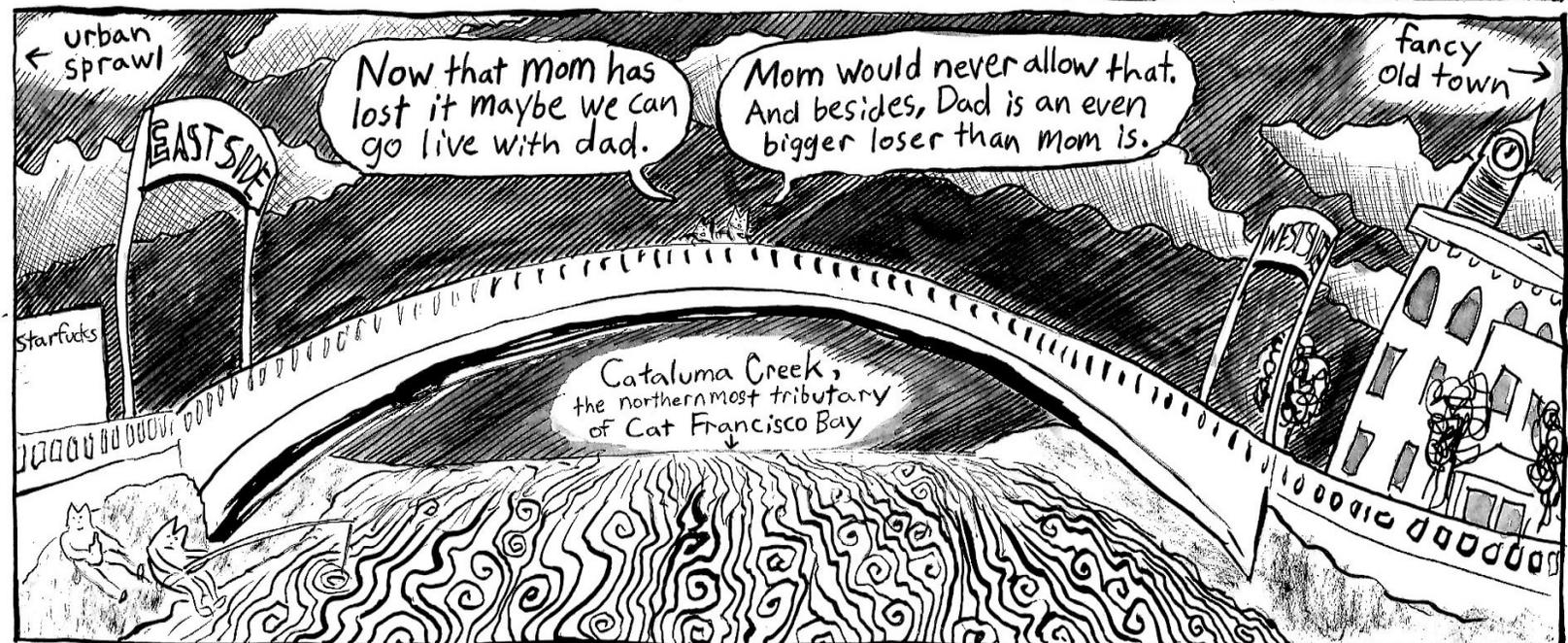
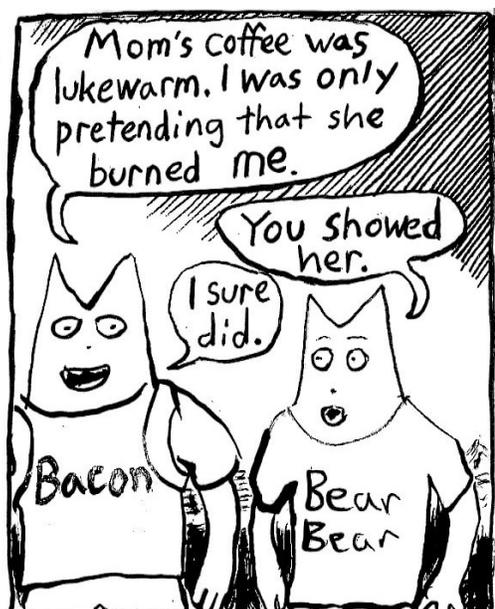
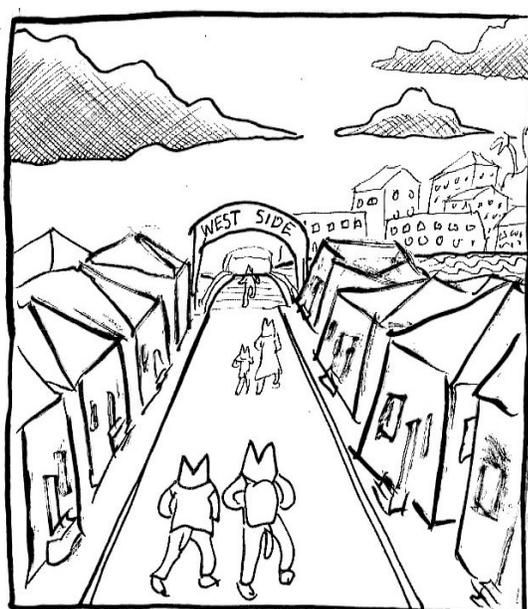


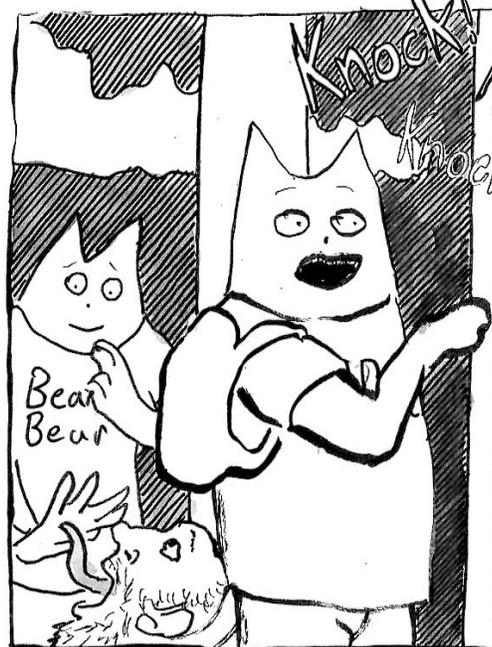
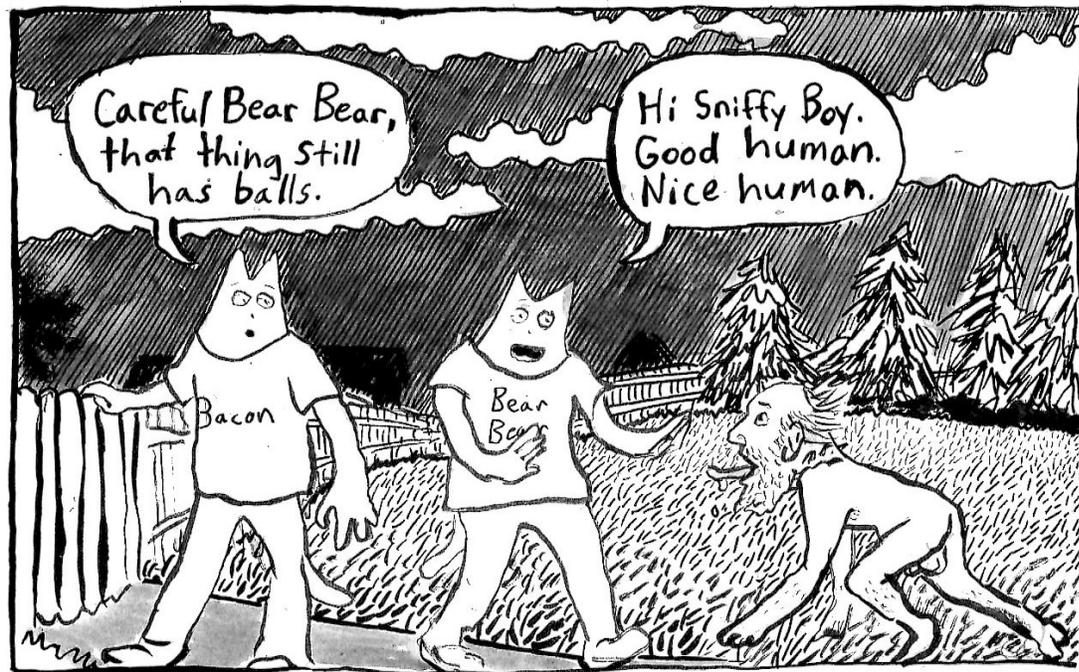
The election is over. You lost, losers!

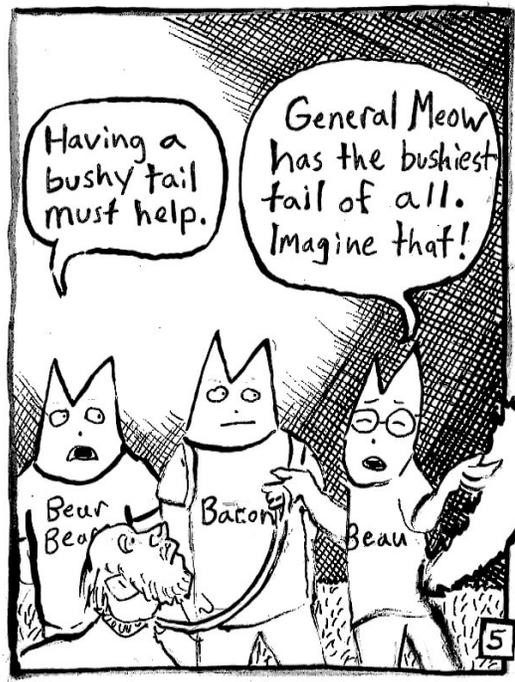
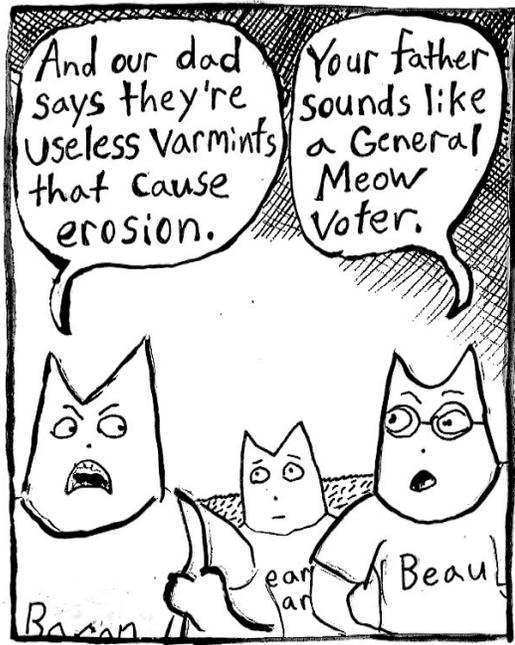
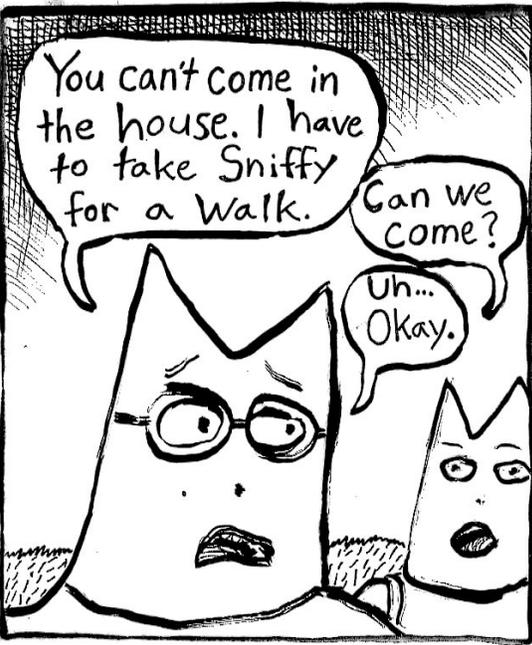


Badass.

Bear Bear

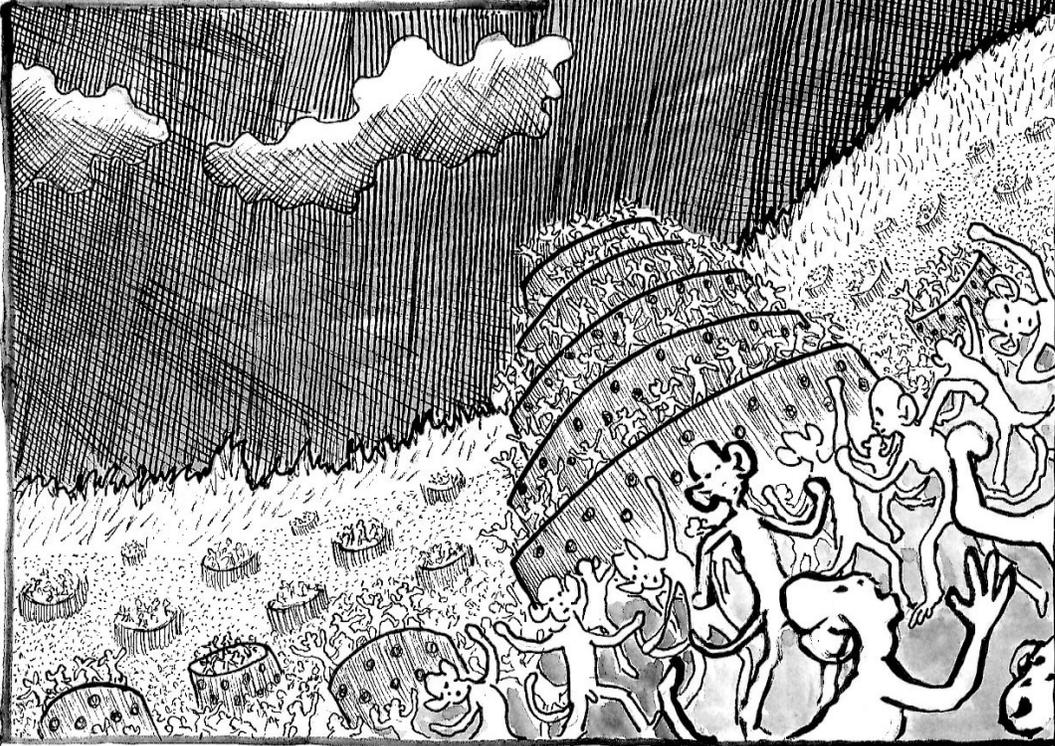
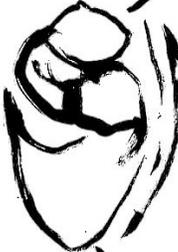






Shhhh!  
There are  
the ground  
monkeys!

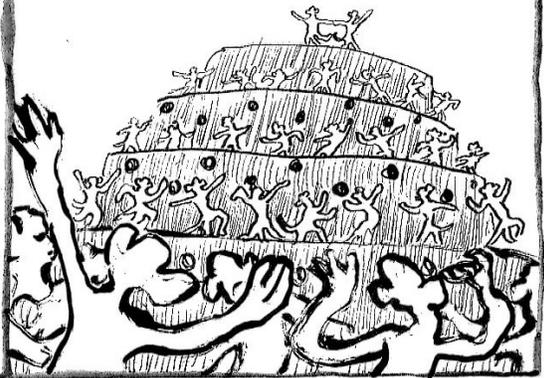
And they're  
dancing!  
Bacon



Ground monkeys have a  
rich culture of joyful  
song and dance.



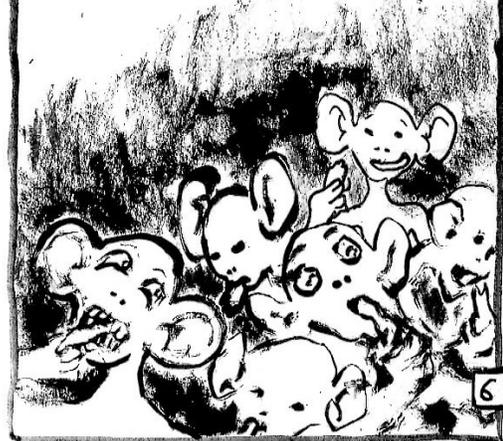
Today's important festival  
celebrates their yearly  
Change of leadership.



In a timeless ritual of  
renewal the newly selected  
leader eats the brain  
of the old leader.



The crowd consumes the  
rest, a tradition that  
ensures their leaders  
have integrity and taste.



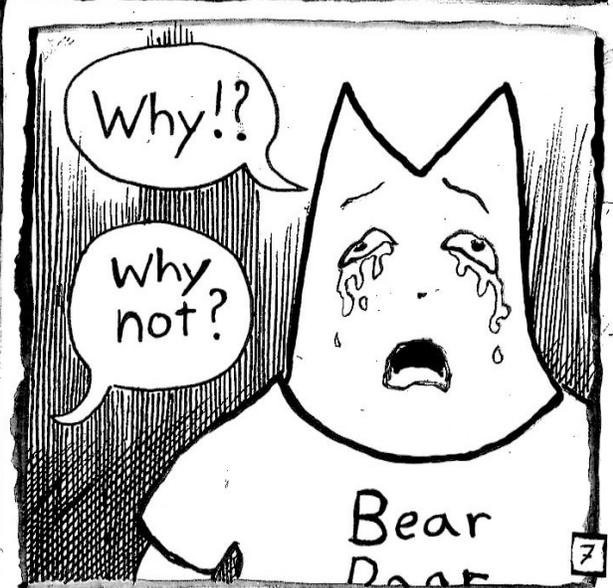
ELIOT

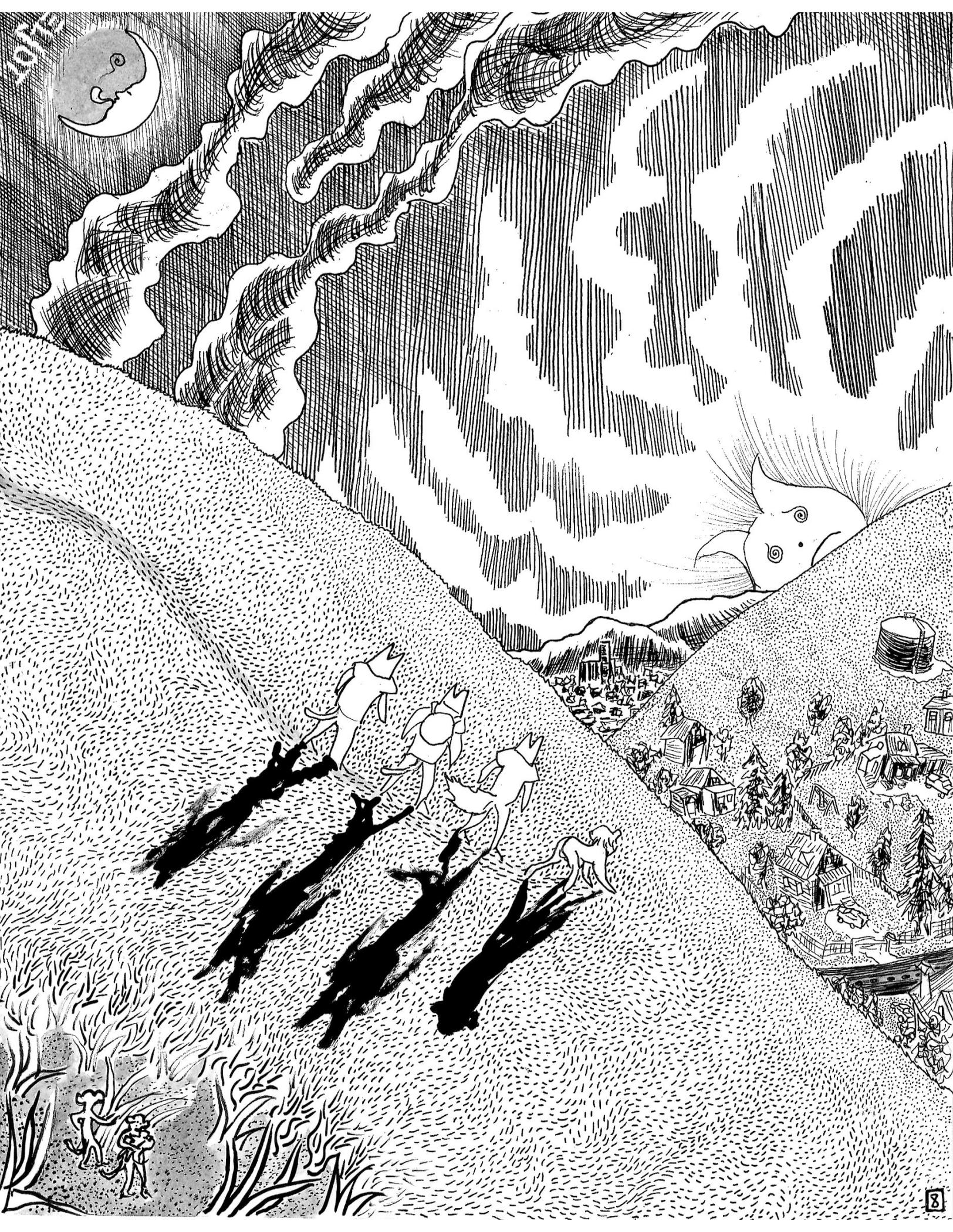
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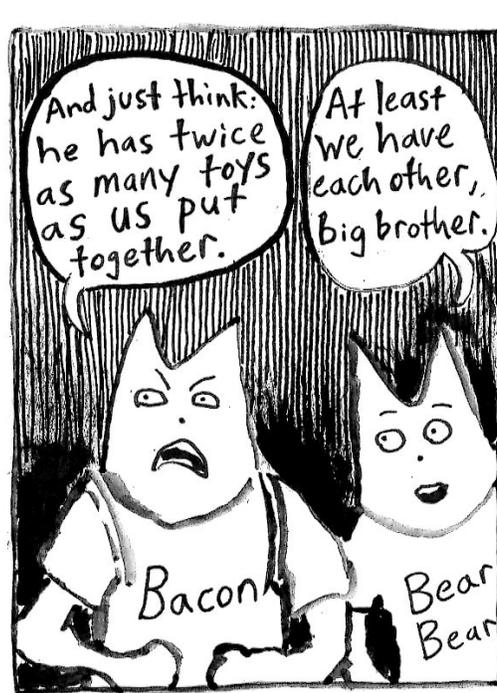
and then the orgy begins



ELJOT







# Digital Infants

## *Jake Weber*

“Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” – Walt Whitman

“Mankind is not likely to salvage civilization unless he can evolve a system of good and evil which is independent of heaven and hell.” - George Orwell

I’m not sure. I like a French press in the morning and finding a good album on Spotify. Right now I’m listening to Kurt Vile. I study engineering and admire Richard Feynman. I have a blog and explore politics and art. I have a new YouTube channel where I do that also.

I’m not sure. We like Persian rugs and odd coffee mugs. I like reading Vonnegut, Didion and Bucky Fuller. We started a design company and have been paid for it. I like writing poems late into night when studying thermodynamics. I like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and probably moved to New York City for them, even though Allen died the year after I was born and Jack way before that. I ended up moving to Brooklyn when I realized that Washington Square Park was no longer the common circle for cool cadres, but instead just a bunch of unsure NYU undergraduates (like me). I feel lucky and poorly timed in the face of AI and an imminent market crash. But I also feel uncharacteristically relaxed for this generation.

I’m not sure what I want to be so instead I answer with what I want to do. Uber and Airbnb and David Dobrik make millennials want to be rich. Tim Ferris asks how we can work smarter and find balance. Sugar is bad for me so I order a 24-pack of Zevia every month from Amazon. People my age still smoke cigarettes because cool people did too.

I’m not sure what I want to be so I answer with what I’d like to do. The ever-present eagerness to go viral has created an adolescent presence predicated on anxiousness and a desire for attention always. A desire to have a “thing,” to be something that is digestible and easy to brand. I fight this impatience every week or so when it crops up again after watching train cars of successive online content roll by. I go from YouTube to the Podcast App to Twitter to Instagram. You’re All Caught Up! And the worst part is the intelligent and valuable information I get from this is entirely mixed in with the boring characters of Woke Culture or Influencer Money.

Joe Rogan; Gary Vaynerchuk; Tim Ferriss; Tim Urban; Sam Harris; Marc Maron; h3h3; Your Mom’s House; Very Bad Wizards; Josh Zepps. The loop of sincere help, humor, and inspiration. My favorite algorithm chain, like a futurist’s answer to the famous dinner party question, where I can sit

next to everyone at once.

And then there’s the competing pleasure of old content. Essays and books and poems by Annie Dillard, Susan Sontag, George Orwell, Ray Bradbury, Bertrand Russell, Frank O’Hara...

And then there’s the additional competing pleasure in music. John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, Neil Young... And those damn Tiny Desk Sessions. My headphones are on always, oscillating between the two choices we all have to make: podcast or music? Of course we never choose, we don’t really have to. But there is still opportunity cost in our consumption. The awareness of that cost wasn’t there before because before the Internet was a kind of blissful ignorance to the library of babble we were missing out on.

Is the conflict old media versus new media? Is this why the new media I tend to graze is almost always long-form? Long conversations, with an intelligent exchange of information and pleasure and an equal amount of coffee or Yerba mate tea. I see the Persian rugs and imagine it’s raining outside. The image of the legendary Maron Garage and leaping cats is in mind (Mila Kunis and Paul McCartney, same month). But this dichotomy seems silly and too easy to make, plus Kunis and McCartney were both great episodes. Perhaps the real truth is that curiosity and an honest good-faith exploration of human endeavors will always win, clickbait notwithstanding. It must be the same phenomena that makes our era of media so damn saccharine and dishonest, like the sugar Coca-Cola has been feeding to us forever, like a bad mother who gets paid to lactate. But I do miss the classic cool of Coke while I sip my poorly-branded Zevias.

It must be that same tension of honest humanity versus the impatient greed for 15 minutes of fame. The familiar obsession of celebrity and the desperation that comes with it. A dull headache comes on after I’ve switched from Twitter to Facebook to Instagram and then back to Twitter. Responsible now for the self-aware clickbait and ad-driven hyperlinks masquerading as brick and mortar factories of knowledge. Responsible for newly branded Fake News and the awful concept distortion of the very real tools called propaganda and lies. Culpable for the cunning resurrection of ad hominem and creepy reactionary hot take burning holes through our collective cornea.

Our generation, anyone old or young enough to be reading this, has a fascination with material in a cowardly new world of immaterial. The digital infants, We, are utterly alone and afraid. The newborns have no sense of place or

belonging. They find friends through videos. This is fine on its surface; lonely people have often used art to comfort their loneliness. But now, it doesn't feel as focused. The newborns click and click and post photos and share SoundCloud links and have Internet beefs. A lot of them are enjoying the spoils of being the first generation of kids and teenagers who have not lived without the Internet. And also of having the first generation of parents to have to raise those same kids and teenagers. The growing pains of the new age are sharp and unrelenting. We will get better at this. The toddlers among us, twenty-somethings and older, are equally confused and afraid. We channel loneliness and fear into Twitter wars or Facebook diatribes against a distant relative. We read and forward clickbait. We post hot takes and condescending replies to strangers. We retweet signs of weakness or mistakes with holy commentary, broadcasting our virtue. We've reopened the dumb dichotomy of Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell. People are singular moral entities, and one transgression or possible transgression is enough to put you away for life without parole. The overwhelming feeling is anxiousness. Politically and personally. The softer anxiety is that we aren't famous enough or rich enough even though peers among us have won the lottery and landed best-ranked podcasts, modest brand deals or coveted columns at online magazines. The more vicious anxiety is the born-again confidence of racists, the stripling silliness of Antifa and so-called Social Justice Warriors, the unburying of socialism, the shortcomings of capitalism, the absence of nuance, the banning and blocking and boring bad-faith behavior all around us. I hope it doesn't seem like I'm projecting, because I've seen this collective cultural dark night of the soul and I think I have successfully escaped it.

I think that our culture is in a soft crisis. Don't worry, history hints that all will be alright. But now it still feels like a fever, even if the rise in temperature and fall in temperament aren't fatal. What brilliant break-out podcast will make climate change sexy? Will the ad for MeUndies take away from the seriousness? When will nuclear disarmament mean disarming nukes?

Existential risks aside ('cause what else can I do with those pesky guys?), the cure to our crisis seems to be honesty. Not the kind of honesty that fetishizes truth, but genuine human honesty. Accepting the messiness of straining the spaghetti of complex human experience. Abandoning

the genetic relic of tribalist impulses and talking to one another. Refusing to slap clickbaity headlines to our articles or YouTube videos, in spite of poorer viewership. Maybe your MAGA neighbor is indeed racist, but at least talk to him decently until you find out for sure. And even when you're sure, talk to him and change his mind for crying out loud. Maybe Roseanne isn't racist because of one Ambien-inspired tweet. Maybe all young liberals aren't crazy or members of Antifa and you needn't walk away from the Left. Maybe Hillary isn't evil just because she was a self-interested politician. What we need above all, is patience. Patience that wealth can wait while searching for what you want to do. And the removal of the burden of self-branding trying to answer what you want to be.

The same advice that keeps me from losing my cool when looking through my Notes app at all of the conflicting career and life goals, that Whitman advice of containing multitudes, should be embraced culturally. People and life are contradictions and that's just fine. It has to be. This might be what has been most readily forgotten in our recent fever of the Internet and new media. The old content was tangible art that was usually read, and readers were patient with every word. And the old content showed us complexity and reminded us of our contradictions. Increasingly, we need to prop up the new art that does this too. Individually, we need to slow down and relax. It isn't fun being the optimistic one calling for everyone to love one another. It's far easier and cooler to be the cynic. But to break our fever, I think we need to make the decision to cast cynicism aside and choose patience and goodwill.

I write because it is enjoyable and clearing, not because I am looking for a book deal. I make YouTube videos because it is fun and new, not because I've seen how over-crammed Casey Neistat's PO Box can become with free gifts. Podcasts, books, blog posts, videos, posts of any kind really need to start being ends in themselves. Don't start one or write one or share one because it will forward your chances of success only. Do it because there is a bit of honesty there, not to expose or belittle but to relieve or refresh. I'm not sure what I want to be so I choose to answer instead with what I'd like to do and this type of honesty is part of it. The things we do are swirling contradictions. No single action or tweet should freeze our identity in an ice block of absolutism.

---

*Jake recently earned a degree in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering from NYU, and after five years in New York, has relocated to Texas. In 2018, he co-founded a design and engineering company named Meanwhile. "Digital Infants" is his first published writing. Essays can be read at [jakeweber.blog](http://jakeweber.blog); contact through email at [jacobweber530@gmail.com](mailto:jacobweber530@gmail.com) or [hello@meanwhile.design](mailto:hello@meanwhile.design).*

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