

BREAKING THE LOOP



These are some of the things you can do to be a person instead of a source of fragments to be exploited by others.

– Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*



Today, in the bright blue windy spring air, my children and I were playing keep-off-the-woodchips at a playground we don't usually go to, and a kid showed up with some scifi white-plastic machine in his hand, like a kind of puffed up gameboy throwback or something, and I thought *Come on, little bro, do we really need to be playing video games right now? On a day like today?*

I'm so cynical at times! So willing to see the Machine everywhere, under every rock!

And I was totally wrong: This dude was the real deal. As in, *legit*—it wasn't some game system he'd brought, it was a *bubble* machine.

Amazing!

Hell *yeah*, little brother!

—Silver sunbeams shining down from a brilliantly cobalt, pre-lunch sky, and shimmering, iridescent spheres of almost nothing floating almost everywhere, our entirely human delight magnified to the *n*th degree as that amazing little piece of crap machine played for the *n*th time what sounded like if somebody telescoped the stupidest ice cream truck song down to the four most asinine seconds and, yeah: Just do that over and over and over again—it was wonderful!

Like: Really, really *wonderful*—I was so happy! That random strangers out there still *do* stuff like that! Maybe tons of them do!

I was going to tell his dad: Man, you don't know how much *joy* it brings me to see another dad bring his kids to the playground, with neither their faces nor his own lost inside a screen—amazing. Revolutionary. A kind of lovely apocalypse of something, almost (I was *going* to tell him, but I got choked up with emotion at the beauty of it, then I got shy—as I do—what a rare, what a beautiful, vanishing gift, I wanted to tell him...)

I mean this dad was wide *awake*. Alert. Present. Happy. Actually playing with his kid, who'd actually felt the bonkers human skinbag-only need to bring a bubble machine to the playground and make the *air* prettier...

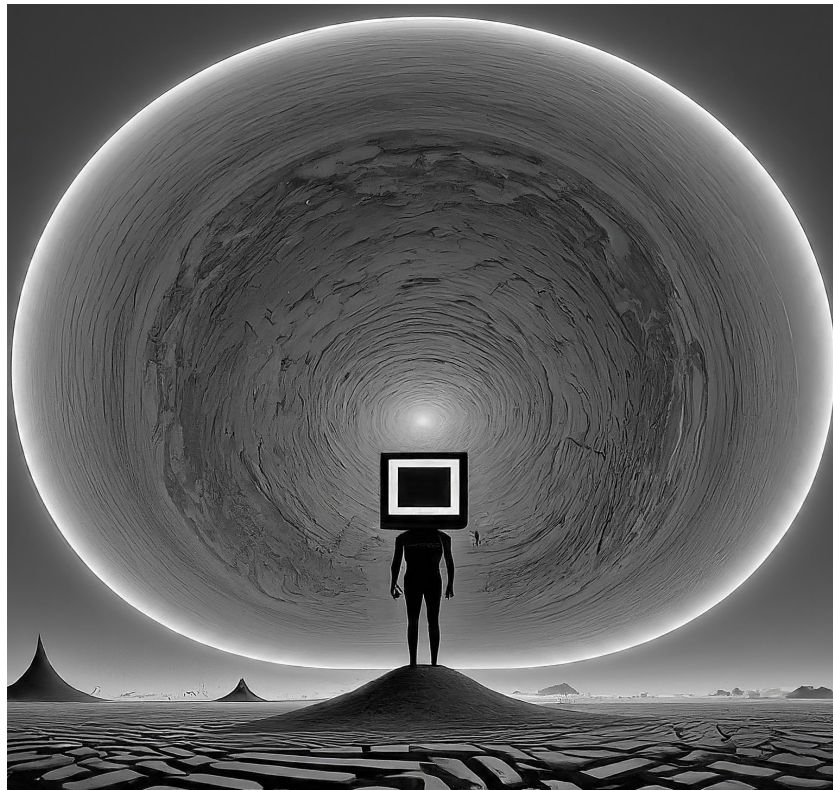


I've been starving for this kind of tiny beauty of the earthly really real.

Last night, for example, as I was cranking through another data analytics class online as fast as possible, as I have been for these last weeks, I was also reading (the pseudonymous, I assume) **@John Carter's *Political Conflict in the Age of Psychic Warfare***, in which he laments “*the shroud of exhausted depression that’s settled over our civilization*” that is the result of people being “*glued to their phones, scrolling through infinite timelines that feed their attention the endless little hits of micro-rewards that nucleate the dopamine doom loop,*” depriving them—like all chemical addictions do—of the capacity to feel joy.

And I was both: *One*, very much feeling that “*shroud of exhausted depression*” myself, because in addition to the programming class and Carter's essay, I had at least three more tabs open and was snorting some heavy pixel dust, as I have been, though the zombie-sockets that used to be these human eyes: One tab for freefalling through youtube hoping to snag a bit of fresh air and vitalizing light (a Sisyphean task, if there ever was one, if one's permitted to reverse the gravity

of the metaphor); another tab for some kind of nostalgic chillwave space music or whatever for when I had to take a multiple choice programming quiz (multiple choice!) and somehow couldn't bear the vacuous silence; a third tab for doomscrolling a Chernobyl-esque hellscape of job postings, all of which seemed—as if placed inside of some hyperbolic geometry intended to drive unemployed people insane—infinately remote as actual real possibilities in the real world, though I could *see* they were all right *there*, and also: *Two*, thinking over and over and over and over again, on endless loop, about how discouraging it is to see (with hypersensitive, cynical eyes) all these kids everywhere now—bus stop, playground, sidewalk—just *empty*. Just *not talking* to each other, exactly like their parents don't either, attention thrown again and again, like endless non-Josephs, into the empty well of their smartphones.



The World Is Your Oyster, Pal

(gp + gemini)

But the predawn sky was already beginning to gleam last night, because breezing through these programming classes (OK, I really, *really* like data visualization, I've discovered—[check out this sick project I did](#)), and also speed-reading Carter's essay about the “*shroud of exhausted depression*” that's settled upon all of us now, faces glowing weakly in the light of our screens: In the depths of all this, when my own head was about as close as it gets to physically becoming the computer head depicted above, there was this delightful little moment in which the class and the essay were saying the same thing, and they were saying it to me:

Breaking Out of a Loop

- The `break` statement ends the current loop and jumps to the statement immediately following the loop
- It is like a loop test that can happen anywhere in the body of the loop

```

while True:
    line = input('> ')
    if line == 'done' :
        break
    print(line)
print('Done!')

```

> hello there
hello there
> finished
finished
> Done!
Done!

The Regime is fundamentally a managerial technocracy. It conceives of the world as an abstraction – a wireframe model that wraps around reality, and which becomes indistinguishable from reality. To the Regime, everything is system, spreadsheet, procedure, metric, and function. It's all nothing but math. Their world is fundamentally deterministic and mechanical, very much including its human elements, whose minds are conceived of as nothing more than stimulus-response machines composed of nested while loops and chained if...then statements.

I had to smile: *The Regime is fundamentally a managerial technocracy*, Carter was saying on the right half of my screen. *It conceives of the world as an abstraction—a wireframe model that wraps around reality, and which becomes indistinguishable from reality. To the Regime, everything is system, spreadsheet, procedure, metric, and function. It's all nothing but math. Their world is fundamentally deterministic and mechanical, very much including its human elements, whose minds are conceived of as nothing more than stimulus-response machines composed of nested while loops and chained if...then statements.*

—I had to smile, like when you're walking down the sidewalk and suddenly see yourself in a glass mirror you didn't think would be there, which suddenly makes you remember again who you are, like—Oh yeah...What have I been *doing* this whole time, not writing?! This is my little way into the great work of our times! The work of helping one another awaken from the vision of the living Earth and ourselves as mere mechanical, deterministic machines to be controlled by sick people with a lot of power—mere data flowing like sand through the hourglass of the atomistic and atomizing self...

But there is a way to escape the loop, someone was saying on the left side of the screen: *All you have to do is say break.*



Break.

Emerging from the basement of winter, the sun is shining again—hallelujah. And the blue sky, with its high-up wisps of clouds, looks exactly like the blue ocean and its white clouds down below, as seen from the International Space Station.

And the willows are budding already in the marsh, like quiet and well-organized, harmless white stars, and about ten thousand birds are singing.

And the children of the world, including me, once “*glued to their phones, scrolling through infinite timelines that feed their attention the endless little hits of micro-rewards that nucleate the dopamine doom loop,*” are walking away from the Machine to the sounds of birds twittering like tiny pied pipers, launching bubbles into the sky of our growing liberation—or at least I can imagine it so, my head now bursting with ideas for future essays.

I'm ready to continue my work—my main work, or one of them, anyway—which is still there for me, without needing to answer the question yet of which exact sky the digital manna's gonna fall from—my work which is, as I express it in the new tagline for this substack, to write “*towards a Western reindigeneity, where the Messianic feast and permaculture are one unified and harmonious thing.*” (And I'll unpack more of what this means in future essays—but it's what I've been doing the whole time, just without the clarity to say it as simply as that).

And to that end, here are some things to think about:

UPDATES & WHAT'S AHEAD ▼

1. SUBSCRIPTIONS

I will release my first new subscriber's-only essay **next Friday, March 22, and with the release of this essay, have unpaused billing.** If you are a *yearly subscriber*, that just means that the hourglass of your year will now resume emptying itself. If you are a *monthly subscriber*, that means however many days away you were from your next payment when we reached the pause, you're that many days away again today. My understanding is that substack will send its automated heads-up about your next bill a few days ahead of time, as usual—but in any case, if you're hoping to unsubscribe, now would be the time to do that. And if you're a *free subscriber*, you'll need to go monthly or yearly if you want to read the new stuff, which you can now do:

[[SUBSCRIBE BUTTON]]

2. FORMAT

My plan is to release a short-ish poetry-laced essay every other Friday, approximately (sometimes I might miss a Friday; sometimes the essays might be long). I think that will be manageable for me when I'm able to take on some other paying work, maybe even a real job, and I think that will be more manageable for all of you, who have plenty to read as it is.

3. HELPFUL FEATURES

For each essay, my intention is to embed an easily printable PDF version, as well as an audio recording of me reading it, which I will also cross-post in the “podcasts” section, so you could listen to it wherever you like to listen to podcasts. My hope is that this will make my writing more accessible to more people.

4. IDENTITY-MAINTENANCE IN THE PERPLEXING AND SEEMINGLY ARBITRARY, DEFINITELY CONVOLUTED MESH OF SHAPESHIFTING, IDEAS-BASED MASS TRIBALISM IN THE WEST

I've always been clear, I think, that I don't speak *for* Orthodoxy—how could I? I'm no

priest, no theologian. I wasn't born into a coherent Orthodox village, my ancestors weren't Orthodox, and I feel no ultimate root there—it's a spiritual path I latched onto, thirsty for order and beauty as a lost lad in my twenties, but haven't been able to really internalize in the last thirteen years, for whatever reason.

For the sake of clarity—outward and inward, artistic and emotional—I wish to relinquish the obligation (purely imaginary in the first place, and entirely self-imposed) to speak *as* an Orthodox person, too. Orthodoxy is beautiful and profound and deeply true in many ways, and probably the balm of Gilead that many people need in the spiritual wastelands of our times—but the language of my heart seems to be something else, its longings elsewhere. (And I will continue pursuing that here).

The only artistic commitment I wish to make as we begin again is to say what I really think, and to try to turn my mind like a satellite dish towards what's really real, as best I can. It's time for me to journey onward and inward, and downward, earthward, also, “*diving for pearls*”—to use a favorite metaphor of my favorite poet, **@Andrew** at [***Bogdown and Aster***](#), that were “*once our fathers eyes,*” pearls not to be “*brought up by priests or warriors but by scavengers.*”

And I am a scavenger, not a “true believer”—and so I'm returning to my place among the scavengers once again.

5. I NEED A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

I still need a job, though, and/or a lot more subscribers, and/or generous angelic patrons of my writing—probably “and”; probably not “or.” If you haven't yet, I'd love it if you became a full subscriber:

[[[subscribe at sabbathempire.substack.com](https://sabbathempire.substack.com)]]

It's \$5/month, or \$50/year—but if that's too much, a 50% discount on the yearly subscription is always available, for anyone, here:

[[[50 % COUPON](#)]]

Or if your own economic life is a horn-o'-plenty and you'd like to share, I've added a donation tab—just click it at the top of the page, or navigate here:

[[[Donate Now](#)]]

And if you have a lead on any remote work I could pick up, especially pertaining to [**data viz**](#), just drop me a line at sabbathempire@substack.com.

Thank you.



Well, as of this very moment, there are 245 of you paying subscribers left—*thank you*. Really, from the bottom of my heart, thank you: That's way above what's typical for a substacks, I understand, and I am deeply grateful that you've joined me here, and stayed.

Together we form the core of what John Carter calls one of the many tiny, growing “neo-patronage” networks sprouting all over the place now, made possible by the substack technology platform and especially its philosophy of artistic and political freedom—in which the artist is beholden to his or her micro-audience, and no one else. And as such, we're actively subverting the rascals that have learned to extract our attention, and funnel it into power used against us, says Carter:

Step by step, essay by essay, this model is rewiring the brains of its users – restoring their amygdalae, strengthening their long-term memories, building out their attention spans, accustoming them to spending time thinking deeply about things using their whole minds rather than simply letting a stream of trivial content tickle their limbic systems. It's making human beings into thoughtful animals again – opening the possibility that Homo sapiens can once again become the wise man.

I hope you stay. I hope you share your own thoughts in the comments. I hope you share this substack with other people:

[[share sabbath empire]]

And if you're a free subscriber, I hope you'll join us:

[[subscribe at sabbathempire.substack.com]]

I look forward to sharing a new essay with you in a few days.

I'll see you then!

love always in Messiah,
our gentle shepherd-king,
in whom is true life, radiance, deep harmony, and everlasting peace,
-graham

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