

@thejaymo

START  
SELECT  
RESET  
ZINE

#001

YOUR  
ATTENTION  
IS  
SOVEREIGN

Oh Lord  
Make me a tree

Sturdy  
Deep rooted  
Useful

Support to those in need,  
Shelter to those who are weary  
Fruit for those who hunger

Make me a tree  
Oh Lord

Sturdy  
Deep rooted  
And Useful

**Welcome** to Issue #001 of Start Select Rest Zine (SSRZ\*).

Last year I started a personal podcast 301 seconds in length called [Permanently Moved](#). With the conceit, (or rather self imposed constraint) that I would write it, record it, and edit it all in one hour.

It's been a fun and satisfying learning experience. The time pressure means I only get around 75% of the script drafted. Usually written in one pass. Before editing the final text and the 'shape' of the show as I record.

This approach has led to some disasters, but also produced some things I'm proud of. Each week has been an exercise in shedding the 'perfect is the enemy of done'. An Affliction that plagues creatives of all kinds when it comes to producing 'content'. A tendency deeply ingrained in my personality. One that over the years has resulted in missed opportunities, jobs and caused a great deal of psychic self castigation for 'not doing more'. It has also blown up many projects (either on my part or others) from my very earliest experiences 'creating things' as a teenager.

**This PDF** series should be taken in a similar vein. Partly an experiment in the world of samizdat publishing. A zeitgeist that is popular in the Dark Forest Internets I frequent. But also as a response to my friends that keep urging me too 'publish more content'.

I've essentially been exposing my intellectual life to the internet weekly. Over time some themes have begun to appear. This zine series (to start) will collate some of the transcripts from episodes with a similar theme. Though it may grow into something more.

This first zine is a collection of transcripts on the attention economy, social media, and device use that have emerged as a recurring thread throughout the show so far.

Future Issues will include original/new texts alongside the show transcriptions on or related to similar topics. I'd also like to collaborate with folks too - so please do get in touch.

Hope you enjoy!

**Jay Springett / @thejaymo**

## Is Sovereign

**I've done** a shit load of meditation in the last few years or so. During 2018 especially.

However, It wasn't until the summer that I realised something fundamentally important. Quite frankly, It is a little embarrassing that it has taken me this long to realise it to be honest. But the point is:

**Your attention is sovereign.**

There are two things that should be addressed.

1. You, personally, get to decide where you put your attention.
2. By acknowledging this fact you have to take full responsibility for where you have put your attention in the past, and where you will put it in the future.

Yes, all those hours spent on Twitter, Facebook or Netflix were influenced by dark patterns designed to monetize your attention but ultimately you alone are responsible.

Yes, social media addiction is a thing we hear spoken about. But the difference is that it's a habit not an addiction. The Skinner's box that is the algorithmic interface of almost all social media platforms has trained us this way.

It gets a little sticky when it comes to young children. As James Bridle said last year:

*"Kids are engrossed in screens all the time, in pushchairs and in restaurants. But it's important that we don't make parental judgments for or on anyone else. Children sitting quietly plugged into Peppa Pig and nursery rhyme videos, makes them happy and gives everyone a break, so OK."\**

But nevertheless. The parent is still sovereign, Adults make the decisions about where they allow their children to put their attention.

**It gets** even worse when you speak to adults who are labouring under the misguided assumption that they are 'a multitasker'.

Multitasking is largely misunderstood by everyone. Multitasking is holding a conversation whilst juggling, or walking along the road whilst speaking to a friend or thinking about the next talk you have to write.

Multitasking can *\*only\** occur when one of the behaviours you are 'tasking on' is so automatic that you can just leave it to run whilst you do something else.

What most people call multitasking, especially in a workplace context (or whenever we are in front of a computer screen to be honest) is actually task switching. Moving between singular tasks rapidly. It's the familiar feeling of having 5 things you need to get done by 5pm but struggling to finish any of them. Because your focus is across 5 things and not on anything at all. A solid hour in a spreadsheet is equivalent to 2 whole days of leaving google sheets open and trying to slow burn it, whilst trying to respond to emails, interruptions in the office etc.

This is covered in detail in the productivity world. Books like Deepwork, or Chris Bailey's new Hyperfocus (which I still haven't read) all speak to this. I am also deeply suspicious of the term productivity in general. It has its origins on slave plantations and the British Empire, and it makes me uneasy how management consultants and the wider business world just throw the term around.

Neil Postman has that line "*People will come to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.*"<sup>\*</sup> But I believe, if we focus on cultivating attention, and try to be aware of all our behaviours through this lens. Perhaps we can start to break out of our modern cognitive atrophy.

Read a book, watch the clouds from the train window.

**Turn off the feed.**

I've talked about this somewhere before, maybe on the podcast but I can't remember. I'll try to re-articulate it again:

***The Loop** is a phenomenon emergent in the digital age. It happens on your phone and on your desktop, it is a repetitive journey across apps and tabs that is difficult to escape.*

You hardly ever notice you're stuck in The Loop, only once you have broken out of it:

Breaking out of the Loop is the realisation that you woke up in bed, picked up your phone and then over an hour has passed and you haven't got up yet, made breakfast or even peed. It is important to recognise that you didn't notice when you first got stuck in the the loop. Because you weren't paying capital A Attention.

The Loop is far more easily observed in others: for example, I commute a lot, where it's most easily spotted in the wild. When the private world between human and phone screen at its most exposed.

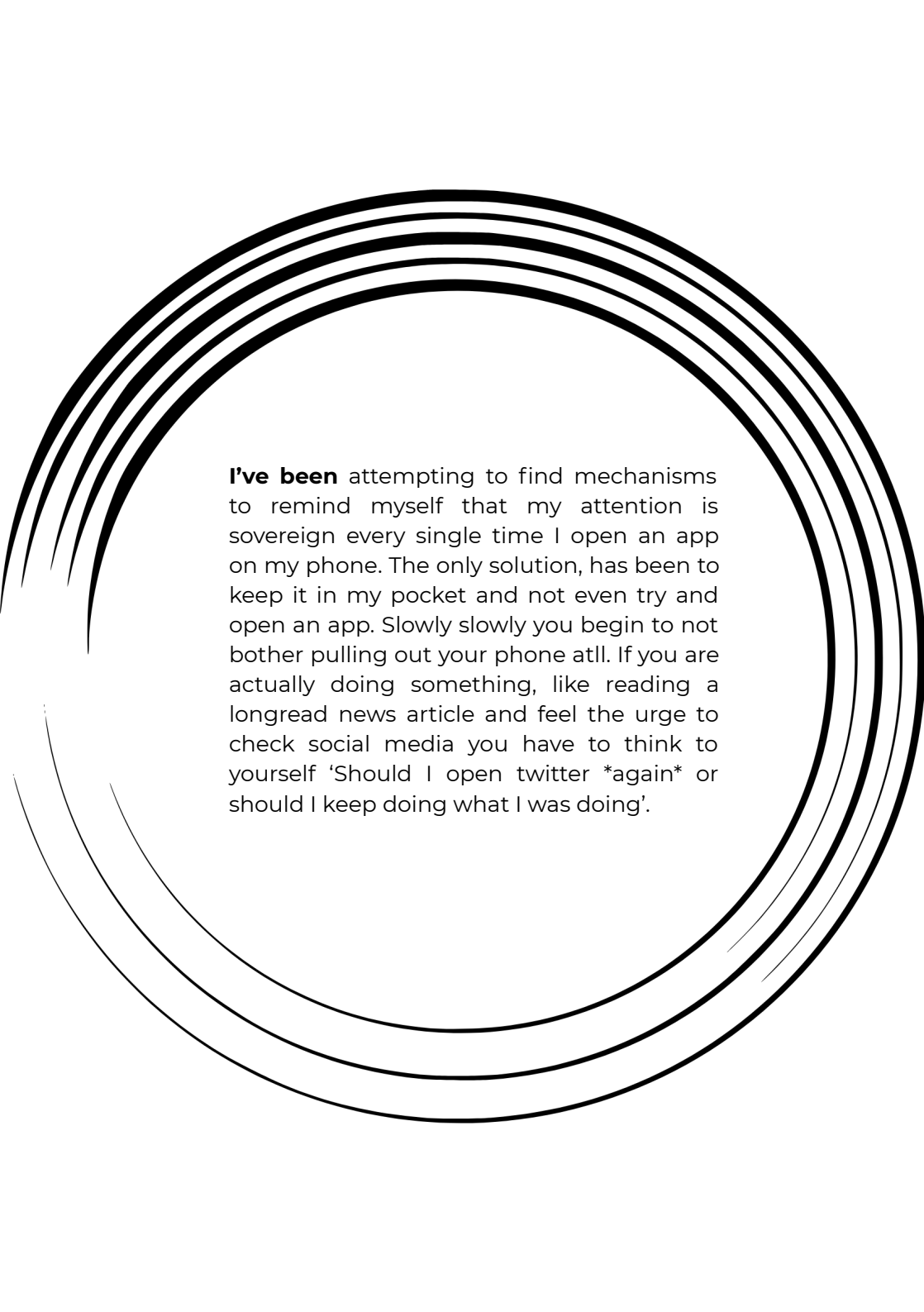
On the bus or the train, you end up standing next to someone and can't help but see what they are doing on their phone. From the outside

The Loop looks something like this:

Open Facebook / refresh / nothing interesting / close Facebook / open Instagram. Look at two new photos the algo has put to the top / fave one / close Instagram / open Whatsapp / no new messages / close Whatsapp / open Twitter / there's one new message in the feed / read it / close Twitter / open Facebook / ..... And so the loop continues.

I assume that at this point you know exactly what I'm talking about. It's our sacrifice of time to that little red dot in the corner.

You get suck in The Loop looking for a hit of new content. Meanwhile, if you had taken responsibility for your attention / you could have read a whole page of a book, or at the very least looked out the window and paid attention to the changing world.



**I've been** attempting to find mechanisms to remind myself that my attention is sovereign every single time I open an app on my phone. The only solution, has been to keep it in my pocket and not even try and open an app. Slowly slowly you begin to not bother pulling out your phone atll. If you are actually doing something, like reading a longread news article and feel the urge to check social media you have to think to yourself 'Should I open twitter \*again\* or should I keep doing what I was doing'.

**What's worse** is it's highly likely that whatever you were reading on your phone or laptop once you were tempted to open Twitter wasn't worth reading in the first place.

*Out of the approximately 10,000 news stories you have read in the last 12 months, name one that – because you consumed it – allowed you to make a better decision affecting your life, your career, your business – compared to not having swallowed that piece of news.\**

The point is: the consumption of news is irrelevant to the forces that really matter in your life. At its best, it is entertaining, at worst irrelevant.

Even if you do pare down your information consumption. I'm 100% convinced you are not actually reading whatever you choose to read properly anyway - You're skim reading. Words are present on the screen, your seeing them and stringing them together but only registering the gist of the article. Because the media environment we're in means there are plenty more words still to go in. At work, on signs, on adverts, in messages and in spreadsheets - so you only need a surface level of awareness to navigate the world. I find that if I'm actually paying attention to what I'm doing:

1. Adverts begin to make no sense at all, seriously they are all designed to register at a surface level
2. My attention is far less likely to wander off and want to look at twitter.

**It's also** hard to deep read most 'news' articles as they aren't written in a way to be deeply read. It's all 300-500 words of infotainment. And what's worse, is that if you read a news article about something you actually know about in detail there are so many errors in it. I can only assume that if this is multiplied and consistent across all news media, reading only the Guardian might mean you come out the other side less well informed than you were before. 100x for The Mail.

There is an idiom in Thai. To *"Take ears to the field, take eyes to the farm."* and it means that someone doesn't pay any attention even when they have the tools and faculties to do so. We live in a word where even most of our media takes its eyes to the farm as well.



**I'm perhaps** becoming more and more aware every time I interact with social media that I am complicit.

Complicit that every tweet is feeding a machine that has been built and designed in such a way to convert our attention into money. Each and every tweet gives the machine more value and more power over you and other people. Interacting with surveillance capitalism in any form is bad for everyone. I am beginning to come round to the opinion that perhaps there is a case to be made (by someone other than me) that interacting with social media in its current extractive form is morally wrong.

However at this point in my life - I am a coward. If I had the guts I'd follow my hero status friends, and just delete my twitter account and walk away, like I did Facebook 9 years ago. I have friends who when they left Twitter it changed their lives. Their mental health has improved, they have lost weight, and gained a self assurance that is remarkable. Correlation doesn't mean causation but it is remarkable to witness first hand.

**Quitting twitter** does seem like the nuclear option to me though. And yet, my browser stats plugin says that on any given day 21% of my time at my computer is spent on Twitter. 1/5th. With other roughly equal amounts split between youtube and google docs too. Only 1/3 of my time at my computer is spent ... actually working.. And I work for myself. :-S

I need to continue to get better at taking responsibility for my attention, and where I put it. This is the essence of this text.

In the last six months or so this insistence has emerged as an aggressive stance towards social media using all the tools available to me. But the stats show I'm still losing.

However, I have found that by reducing the things that anger, annoy or stress me out it means that I have a far shallower emotional engagement with my feed - on this front I appear to be winning.

# Complicity

- I have all retweets turned off for everyone I follow.
- I have all metrics hidden, RT's and likes follower counts etc.
- If I see something stupid (in my opinion) by someone in replies to a tweet I immediately mute them.
- If it's egregiously stupid - I straight up block them.
- If someone I follow is going on and on about something I don't care about I mute them for a bit and then unmute them a few days later
- I have a long list of muted words in my twitter tools, Brexit. FBPE - a bunch of other stuff.

**I'll also freely admit** that if something terrible happens in the world - that gets immediately muted too. People making fun of things like a politician or something someone said on a TV gets an immediate mute also. Maybe this makes me a terrible person, I don't think so. I'm just being honest with you all.

[@Topleftbrick](#) on twitter has been campaigning for people to be open and honest about their filters for a while. You should follow them and support their open transcripts\* work too.

So I know there are objections about 'not being well informed', it's irresponsible to not be a well informed citizen'. I saw a panicked piece in The Guardian recently that 32% of people regularly avoid the news, up from 29% in 2018.\* This is GOOD. Mainly because most news isn't new, it's Infotainment.

I'd much rather know about a bunch of topics that interest me deeply, than know about what's going on in the circus that is the public news sphere.

I like following eccentric retired British men in sheds building dangerously fast electric bikes more than I like 'the news'. I like people who make weekly vlogs and keep me updated on the comings and goings of the plastic residents who live inside their train sets in the loft. I like watching people painting Warhammer models on Twitch and discussing the lore and of course lenjoy copious farmer and garden Youtubes and witches who live in the woods.

All watched under the DF youtube app. No ads, no recommended videos, no comments, just people making videos for the love of it. This was the dream of the web I first surfed in the late 90's and I still cling to that dream from deep in the shadows of the Dark Forest

## The Machine

**Friday the 24th of August** will be remembered as the day that our fiber landline connection went down for seven hours.

My friend Ben who lives around the corner told me in the pub last night that he sat and stared at his router waiting for it to come back on.


We didn't even know.

We just went out went to Kingston had a coffee and looked around the shops for a birthday present - it was alright!. It was really nice just spending the day together and saying "let's leave it" "Let's go out" but oh boy, were we lost for the 30 minutes before we made that decision.

Which leads me to an article that I found this morning that is a photo taken from a print article that was then posted online.

Entitled:

**'Tech Billionaire Parenting'**



*"Melinda Gates' children don't have smartphones and only use computer in the kitchen. Her husband Bill spends hours in his office reading books while everyone else is refreshing their homepage. The most sought-after private school in Silicon Valley the Waldorf School of the Peninsula, bans electronic devices for under - 11s and teaches the children of eBay, Apple, Uber and Google staff to make go-karts, knit and cook.*

*Mark Zuckerberg wants his daughters to read Dr. Seuss and play outside rather than use Messenger Kids. Steve Jobs strictly limited his children's use of technology at home. It's astonishing if you think about it: the more money you make out of the tech industry, the more you appear to shield your family from its effects."*

**Alice Thompson in The Times**

## The Machine

**There's been** a couple of episodes where I've talked about 'Avoid News' or paring down my social media consumption to broadcast only. Which kind of worked, but it also really really didn't in many other ways.

Just because I'm tweeting less doesn't necessarily mean that I'm not looking at the stream less it really is just a massive waste of time.

I think one of the larger problems of throwing all of our time, attention and energy into the social media machine is that it causes effects around the connectedness of individuals and the awareness of what's going on in the larger macro sphere.

Venkat Rao president of Ribbon Farm dot com recently tweeted:

*"I'm kinda sick of this digital public era with its big, garishly lit public plazas and broadcast discourse. I would like a dark age marked by an underground warren of largely hidden spaces. Publics are overrated. Public figures should feel like the governed are ninjas in shadows"*

**Now, again,** I don't know about you, but I think this is already happening. A large part of my social life on the Internet consists of many slack channels, DMs, telegram and signal. But I'm not on Whatsapp so I don't really have a digital social life with some of my closest friends - which is a bit annoying.

Because my closest friends Whatsapp groups are the kind of groups that don't need community management. Any other back channels with acquaintances require momentum steering and encouragement of engagement with quieter voices

In an old piece dated 2010 on Ribbon Farm Venkat talks about Warrens, Plazas and the Edge of Legibility\*. There was a phenomenon noted by Xianhang (Hang) Zhang of 'evaporative cooling'.

## The Machine

**Evaporative cooling** is basically the effect of the highest status people in a group leaving lowering the average status of those left behind.

I'm sure you've all been in group chats where someone has left and the conversation has slowly petered out over weeks or months.

The question is really once you find the others, how do you stick with them? and stick by them?

I'm starting to get the suspicion that the platform is the enemy. Which is ironic considering that I'm working on a project called Land As Platform. So perhaps I can clarify and say the platforms that are based on the extraction of abstract information are the enemy. Because it causes negative feedback loops and a toxic environment.

So how do you play with the platform? I'm a big fan of groups of five or six people who are in group DMS on Twitter and they just use it as a feed instead of having a tiny Twitter account etc

It doesn't suffer from any adverse or any of those 'you may have missed tweets'. My DMS are open if you fancy added me to any group chats like that, and I'll stay, or I'll leave depending. I know I think of belabored this point a bunch of times on this show but it's something that we collectively need to get sorted as soon as possible.

**Don't Feed The Machine**

## Forest Internet

I've been enjoying Venkat Rao's recent musings on The Extended Internet Universe. In last weeks Breaking Smart newsletter he wrote the following:

*"For several years now, I've been watching the creeping, unheralded growth of what I call the cozyweb, and for which others have lots of creative names. Kickstarter founder Yancey Strickler called it the Dark Forest in a recent post.*

*Unlike the main public internet, which runs on the (human) protocol of "users" clicking on links on public pages / apps maintained by "publishers", the cozyweb works on the (human) protocol of everybody cutting-and-pasting bits of text, images, URLs, and screenshots across live streams. Much of this content is poorly addressable, poorly searchable, and very vulnerable to bitrot. It lives in a high-gatekeeping slum-like space comprising slacks, messaging apps, private groups, storage services like dropbox, and of course, email."*

In recent years I've been dropping further and further into the Dark Forest internet. My online life is spread thin across Slacks, Discords, Telegram, Signal, Mailing lists, Youtube and of course Podcasts. All mediated and made bearable by plugins like Distraction Free Youtube and demetricator extensions.

In the piece reference Strickler calls **Dark Forests**:

*"Spaces where depressurized conversation is possible because of their non-indexed, non-optimized, and non-gamified environments. The cultures of those spaces have more in common with the physical world than the internet."*

His primary concern in the essay seems to be the distinction between dark forest spaces and the mainstream. I honestly haven't read the word mainstream used so many times in one article since the turn of the century reading adversarial opinion columns in DIY punk zines.

# The Dark Forest Internet

**Rather than** focusing on the Dark Forest I wanted to think a bit more about 'the mainstream' and what it means for me.

Towards the end of his piece Strickler warns the following:

*“Those of us building dark forests risk underestimating how powerful the mainstream channels will continue to be, and how minor our havens are compared to their immensity.”*


**Personally, I** am under no illusions about the how powerful the mainstream is. I'm aware of it, I understand, I don't underestimate it. But I have been outside of it most of my life so I just don't care about it.

Now, those that know me would know that this is not to say that I don't care about issues and causes that don't effect me, that's what the mechanisms of personal ethics and solidarity is for. Political life is very separate from the nebulous 'mainstream' but I'm not sure I have time to articulate why.

One of the things that seems to hover unspoken around the Dark Forest internet is the web 2.0 term 'filter bubble' and we could also loop in the specter of 'radicalisation' too. I'm not sure how to deal with that but it's clear that as people drift away from algorithmically mediated spaces out in the light and open web into the deep web dark forest that

**Friends shouldn't let friends go into the woods alone.**





"Here's the bottom line," said study author  
Melissa G. Hunt in a statement.

"Using less social media than you normally  
would leads to significant decreases in both  
depression and loneliness. These effects are  
particularly pronounced for folks who were  
more depressed when they came into the  
study."

**No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media  
Decreases Loneliness and Depression:  
Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology**

## All One Thing

**Today's one** of those days that I wish I had a bit more time to work on my script as I don't quite think it works.

But anyway.

Thanks the conversations this week: Alex Andrews of Common Knowledge dot coop, and Ahmet Sabanci - Who's newsletter 'Weird and deadly interesting\*' you should all subscribe to. Also a nod to Venkat Rao for his ongoing thoughts on quote unquote Waldenpoding.

A crude caricature of which is "smash your smart phone and go live in a log cabin to reclaim your attention and your life from being hacked by evil social media platforms. Or digital detoxing.

There was an article in the Guardian this week called 'Innocence lost: what did you do before the internet?' By Leah McLaren.

**The article** is a mixed musing on what might life was like before the age of the internet, the attention economy, the Appropriate Design Code from the UK's information commission. That is due to go before parliament this autumn. It's an interesting but very Guardian-y.

One of the people she interviews is Michael Harris author of 'The End of Absence'. He talks about how doing activities like Spending an afternoon writing in longhand, Or Read 150 pages in one sitting are simple in theory, but terrifying in practice.

Harris also says the following:

*"The experience of empty space allows for the growth of imagination and independent thought, the ability to form ideas without being swayed by mass opinion or bot armies,"*  
*Moreover, (he says) virtual connection impedes our ability to connect and empathise.*  
*"When you are inundated with mediated social connectivity it's increasingly difficult to devote your attention to the people you are actually with."*\*

# The Internet Isn't All One Thing

**He worries** that in future only the privileged few will be able to afford to take regular "Digital Detoxes" from the exhausting demands of the attention economy.

I've spoken a few times already on how I've been trying to re-think my relationship with the internet. Venkat in his essay 'Against Waldenponding' in the breaking smart newsletter introduces a few ideas on the assumptions around digital detoxes that are worth poking at:

'The Feeds' or the attention economy he calls the quote unquote "Giant Social Computer in the Cloud". And that Blaming/shaming platform UX designers for your desire to exit is giving them way too much credit.

If I'm reading him correctly, he seems to say that wanting exit from social media is actually driven by FOMO. Fear of Being Ordinary.

A fear of having "nothing to show" for playing a part in the Social Computer. Rather than a fear of having your mind, and productive potential, destroyed by "hacked attention."

He closes with:

*"We are all now part of a powerful global social computer in the cloud that is possibly the only mechanism we have available to tackle the big problems of the world that industrial age mechanisms are failing to cope with. We might as well get good at it.*

***Do your part. Stay as plugged in as you can.*"**

I think that we actually need to interrogate where we are plugged in.

Ahmet wrote in a blog post recently that also referenced waldenponding that he has...

*"Decided to go with lurking and automation for a while. Meaning, I'll be mostly in read-only mode (exception will be the private channels) and most of the posting will happen through automated stuff. But this also means more blog posts, regular newsletters and Patreon posts, because those are, in a sense, private channels too."*

# The Internet Isn't All One Thing

**So generating** content like blogs etc and only posting automated links to them out to the feeds.

What he's doing is moving back towards what Warren Ellis calls the Isles of Blogging\*. Folks that are slowly leaving social media to engage in (and generate) richer and deeper conversation elsewhere - I would include myself in this category.

Venkat does this too. Whilst he is a prolific tweeter, unlike many folks on twitter that post long threads, he transmutes them into a newsletter that's referenceable.

Where he and I diverge, is that I *do* think there is a problem with the feeds. Many platforms have made leaving the platform feel like a big deal. Following a link on Twitter makes you feel like you are darting out in the rain to read it. Then you dash back again to safety. This leave and return means you actually are caught in a literal UX and content vertical.

## **But the internet isn't all one thing.**

What about a slow meander around Wikipedia? or going deep into a well linked blog post? We used to call this web surfing. You can go deep in a way that is attentive, focus orientated and enriching.

With hypertext you move horizontally across the web. It's a journey. You can seek out topics on the internet and add to them from your own little island. Contributing longer more thoughtful content. Away from the torrent that you throw your links into to show that you are more than ordinary in the feed.

Digital detoxes are for the privileged. What's better instead is to manage the way that you travel the internet. Do not let it come to you.

Because You, personally, get to decide where you put your attention and what you put effort into.

## **Your attention is sovereign.**

**This PDF** contains 6 essays plucked from amongst 18 months of thought produced weekly, inside of one hour. This is where I am in the Autumn of 2019. As the media environment and the internet changes around me, my thoughts of course will change and evolve. I hope you have found these thoughts useful in some way. If they have please feel free to share it with others.

I am committed to the Dark Forestry over Waldenponding. I hope you will subscribe and join me for a stroll amongst the dark trees on the Isles of Blogging.

Pulling this material together. I realise that I owe a great deal to the thoughts of Venkatesh Rao's Ribbonfarm.com and his Breaking Smart Newsletter. I encourage you all to read the current 'Elderblog Sutra' blog chain. Where he is writing thoughts on having a blog with a significant history.

To hear more essays like these weekly, in real time subscribe to

[permanentlymoved.online](https://permanentlymoved.online)

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