

# SUBSTRATE



issue 04

spring 2025



SUBSTRATE is a quarterly zine that asks artists and writers to consider what a better world might look like. For another world to be possible, we must first--and continually--learn to imagine and deeply believe in it. We seek to practice revolutionary optimism and imagination as one antidote to nihilism, apathy, and despair. We want to exercise the creative muscles involved in remaking futures for us to live in and we want to do it together.

To access and download previous issues, or to submit work to future issues, visit [substratezine.cargo.site](http://substratezine.cargo.site) or email [corthartle@gmail.com](mailto:corthartle@gmail.com)



#### note from the editor

Issue 04 marks one full year of this publication. As is usually the case with annual milestones, it feels like a good time for reflection. I have been inspired by the work you've shown me, heart-warmed by the kind words you've shared in private, and humbled by the grace you've given when I've made errors or taken longer than expected to print. I've long been skeptical of the claim that art as an end in itself can "change the world," especially when it's mediated through colonial and capitalist apparatuses. I think it has the capacity to change *us*, however. My hope with starting this zine was to share work that reflects people's dreams for how things could be better than they are, so that others can look at it and say "yes yes, I feel the same way!" or "oh wow, I hadn't thought of that!" My other hope was to facilitate new friendships between strangers through a shared love of making, so that they/we can learn to make things together. I think together we have accomplished some of that this year. I hope to continue to do so. Thank you so much, for making, for dreaming, for struggling, for reading, for sharing.

with love and solidarity,  
Cort Hartle

cover image: jenny llyod, "you can keep a secret"  
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#### SPAGHETTI DINNER

min k.



here's the situation: i am extremely delusional. i am prone to bouts of wanton, violent sadness. i see bugs where bugs shouldn't be - large black masses that undulate up walls & into cabinets. i hear distinct voices of people who i am trying to forget. so on & so forth

it has been like this for awhile but has gotten significantly worse (as things generally tend to do in 2025), the compounding stress from 22 years of being alive has finally ruined my body.

somehow, despite everything, i'm the happiest i've ever been. i live well below the poverty line in a ratty apartment infested with real bugs (not hallucination ones), but i feel safe & in control for the first time in my life. this is a luxury that not everyone has

this recipe is a cornerstone of my upward momentum. i wrote it before i left rehab, then tested it after we could afford a fridge. it is the first recipe i've ever written & the one i keep coming back to months later - it is a spaghetti dinner for neurotic disabled people.

### **A SPAGHETTI DINNER FOR NEUROTIC DISABLED PEOPLE**

cook time: ~ 50 minutes (20 mins prep, 30 mins watching pots)

#### **INGREDIENTS**

28 oz / 3 cups canned tomato sauce  
1/2 medium sized onion diced  
3 cloves garlic minced  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 tbsp tomato paste  
1 tbsp butter  
gochugaru + sugar to taste  
1 box penne pasta  
any amount of parmesan cheese (i use my foodstamps to get the nice shredded stuff)

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

##### **1. DICE THE ONION.**

knives are always frightening when you've been in & out of hospitals your whole life. it feels good to be in control. it feels better to have knife skills

##### **2. MINCE THE GARLIC.**

one of my earliest cooking memories involves asking my poh poh what made a fruit different from a vegetable - i was always confused & easily disoriented by labels like that. she scrunched up her face, and i leaned in expecting some sort of beautiful chinese wisdom. she said she didn't know or really care

##### **3. COMBINE OLIVE OIL, GARLIC, AND ONION IN A SAUCEPAN OVER MEDIUM HEAT. COOK FOR 4 MINUTES.**

my approach to cooking is very "bull in a china shop" - i am clumsy because i am disabled, and i need to move extremely fast because i can't stand upright for more than 20 minutes. these 20 minutes of designated proper body functioning tend to pass before i get to this step, so i take a break before i turn the stove on.

##### **4. ADD TOMATO SAUCE AND TOMATO PASTE. LET SIMMER FOR 30 MINUTES.**

what a wonder it is that you can just let things sit on the stove for a bit. as someone who struggles a lot with stillness & rest, it is affirming to see that things taste better when you let them breathe

##### **5. SEASON WITH GOCHUGARU AND A PINCH OF SUGAR. MIX IN BUTTER.**

i don't have an anecdote for this one. the butter makes the sauce much richer

##### **6. COOK PASTA WHILE THE SAUCE SIMMERS. START CLEANING IF YOU'RE ABLE.**

my family asserts that the one cooking never cleans, but a lot of us no longer cook for 5 people at a time. we all have either moved away or died. nowadays i usually cook for my roommates & clean for us too. my mom would be proud of me or very, very sad

##### **7. COMBINE COOKED PASTA WITH SAUCE. TOP WITH PARMESAN.**

i process something deep & terrible every time i cook, and it is gone the second i serve my food. one day i will stop having things to process, and will finally be able to write recipes like a well-adjusted person



Reconstruction Log 66

J. Pleiades



"Well, fuck."

The stream's higher than I remember it being when I came through here last. Faster, too. It makes sense, I guess—meltwater and all that. It is Spring. Plus, it's been raining like hell. The fact that it makes sense doesn't make it any more convenient though, especially since the little bridge somebody built out here ages ago has long since fallen to rot and disrepair. Just another thing on the growing list of things to fix if I want to bring this place back.

"We could try to find another way around?" ALL-T trundles up next to me, optic sensor whirring as the camera scans the environs. The damp hasn't been good for his fiddly bits. I'll have to do something about that. I add it to the list.

"There...isn't, really. I mean, there is, but it's a hike, and..." I gesture vaguely to the all-of-myself. Things haven't been the same since catching Death. Twice. To my credit, I fought it off both times, but my lungs still aren't the same. Lord help me when the pollen gets worse.

"You know that's what I'm for, right?" ALL-T hops from side to side, one set of legs and then the other pressing into the soft earth. I grimace. It isn't what he's for—I'm not entirely sure I know what he's for, or at least what he was for before I found him. But I know the paint job I scraped off him with steel wool and elbow grease was not a friendly one.

"Altie...c'mon, there's plenty of stuff to do back at the house. We can try this again later."

"Jaybird," he mimics my exasperation with a touch of static, "You had something you wanted to show me. And there's always stuff to do at the house. C'mon, we're already out here."

I suck my teeth and assess the path in front of us. Lots of mud and rocks. That's pretty much everything around here; the only difference between a paved path and an unpaved one is whether the rocks were placed on-purpose. I can see the trail in my head. This time last year maybe I could have hiked it without thinking. Now, though...

Well. If I die taking my shitty salvaged robot on a walk, I guess it'll make for an interesting epitaph. "Sure. Alright. It's up this way."

A third of the way up the trail, we have to stop because of my shitty lungs. At least there's plenty of things to lean on.

"I could help, you know."

"Yeah?" I indulge him because it sounds like less wasted breath than trying to argue. "How do you figure?"

"Jaybird, I'm bench-shaped. I could just carry you."

That's not what he's for. I'm ninety-percent positive that whatever he was for, letting him take my knees out from under me would've been a terrible idea. But...in times like these, you kind of have to believe in second chances.

"Yeah. Yeah, okay."

I sit sidelong on his back. He's narrow, and there's no back support, because this isn't what he's for, but...I have to admit, it's better than trying to keep walking. He trundles along, avoiding the larger rocks and deeper mud, occasionally asking me for directions. It's...nice, I have to admit. Being able to see the early spring foliage start to bloom. Taking in nature without feeling like I'm liable to be reclaimed by the dirt at any moment.

The light's changed by the time we circle back around to the clearing on the far side of the rain-swollen stream. What would have been a quarter of an hour has turned into an hour and a half, and I can feel the beginnings of overwork-heat underneath me in ALL-T's frame, but we made it. We're here, in a place I thought was going to be off-limits to me until well into summer. Long past when the sight in front of us would've faded.

At the far edge of the clearing, hunched in defiance of time and the elements, branches spread wide over the dew-wet grass, is a cherry tree. Later, in summer, when the air turns to syrup and the sun bakes the mud back into dust, there'll be fruit on this tree. For now, in the nipping chill of just-turned-spring, it's crowned in a spray of fragrant pink blossoms, stark against the new green foliage around it.

I slide off ALL-T's back and he takes a few steps closer to the tree.

"Oh wow." His camera lens adjusts, and I hear the click of the photo mechanism as he commits the image to memory. "Wow."

I take in a big lungful of air that's just a little sweet at the edges. I think about what it's going to take to rebuild that bridge. Maybe this summer I'll make cherry pie.

## Drill, Baby, Drill

We only have one planet  
We should be honored that we even get to be alive  
She's not a machine, what don't you get?  
We need her to live, breathe, and thrive  
The air you feel going into your lungs comes out hers black  
The water you drink she provides  
But now we're polluting her gift, we're not giving back  
We were doing so well and making strides  
The Inflation Reduction Act, why did we stop!?  
Halted by greed, propaganda, and power  
Misinformed and ignorant, we put a devil at the top  
If we were a tarot card, then right now we're The Tower  
The Star to follow soon after with a message of hope  
It feels so far away as we slowly watch it crumble away  
It's hard to not be angry, it's hard to know how to cope  
The news spewing worrisome headlines day by day  
Let's not forget the rise of AI  
Meta sweeping the app to steal from creators  
Generated AI "art" sweeping the app in a fly  
AI bros calling real artist gatekeepers and haters  
A whole generation that doesn't know how to read  
It feels crazy to think  
Due to Covid, lack of educational wages, did I mention greed?  
The divide between humanity, where's the missing link  
Split into two parties was a disaster from the start  
No wonder there's a mental health crisis  
We need to come together or this country will fall  
To choose empathy and love over better egg prices  
We've lost our sense of morals and care  
Claiming "woke" is like a plague  
Is just a distraction to keep you out of their hair  
It's right there in the open, they weren't very vague.  
Get your head out of the sand  
It's okay to be brave and afraid  
But you have to fight, take a stand  
Don't let your spirit fade.  
But how are we to make it through?  
With billionaires and a dictator in charge  
What is something that you or I could do?  
Speak out! One small voice can grow into a group so large  
We will not give up, we will continue to fight  
We cannot continue down a path of hate  
If we can't find it, then we have to be the light  
We cannot concede now. That is not our fate.



Ada Everman, "Drill, Baby, Drill"  
Supernova.ada/Blue Sky





### fortune cookie chronicles

n° 8 [and n° 9 (cover)] in a handmade collage series called 'fortune cookie chronicles,' where I made abstract artworks based on the proverbs found in Chinese takeout fortune cookies. created from art book and magazine cutouts, antique ephemera, and vintage advertising.

jenny llyod, "fear and desire - two sides of the same coin"  
 @jennyarlane | jennylloyd.pictures | collagecult.substack.com

for the love of craft

mia makes it

i am 30 years old. i spent many hours of my childhood on the family computer playing neopets, reading all sorts of shōjo manga, and roleplaying on myspace. maybe you did too! let me pick your brain a little about this...

my perception is that i was an artist and a curator, if you will. within these spaces, i was making something new. i was not browsing endlessly all the time... i was genuinely interacting with people, building friendships across forums and even learning basic html and css at the ripe age of 9 years old. i was not staring at an advertisement every-other second looking back, did myspace even run advertisements when i was active there...? (i looked it up. yes, they did, although they would increase the number of ads later, which probably contributed to their downfall... wild to think that people went to facebook because it wasn't 'cluttered' like myspace. i hope that, what goes around, comes around!)

the surface level of the web in the early to late 2000's was just, more engaging to me. it's funny (not funny) that the buzzwords 'social media engagement' are so instilled in the current zeitgeist when the 'engagement' isn't even ... engagement, truly. the content we consume goes in and goes out pretty quickly, because - in general - we don't sit with the image or video for long. maybe 2-10 seconds, each. and it isn't our fault. these apps are designed this way, but i think we need to collectively begin resisting this.

you've heard it before- we live in an attention economy. every influencer, corporation, and small business, trying to get us to look at their post, their stories, their advertisements. maybe even their ideologies/beliefs that are not based on factual and accurate information! (\*^\_^\*) love it here!

what we give our attention to in online spaces might not even say a lot about us, since much of this attention is coerced by marketing and algorithms, which are orchestrated by capitalists. i am trying to become more self-aware so that i can get better at stopping myself before falling into the infinite scrolling machine, namely on the dreadful app, instagram- my only social media app besides youtube, reddit, and substack. i used to have tik tak (yeah i am calling it that) but i deleted it on january 18 and then just didn't even try to redownload it because that pop-up message, just hours after the "ban", was wild. anyway, not the point of this essay...

instagram is different than those other apps, though: it is the app that i engage with compulsively.

tech billionaires strive to instill Fear Of Missing Out into us, creating an artificial environment where we stay and keep scrolling so that we don't miss anything. the catch is that you'll never see it all. there's too many advertisements and promotions in between the posts that are actually added by the people you chose to follow and 'engage' with.

think of the last time you scrolled. do you remember what you saw? maybe you remember one of two videos or images, maybe a flier from a local org or collective, or maybe you remember the video you shared with your friend because sending it to someone makes your brain think about it for a little longer than something you like and then scroll away from.

the longer we stay on these apps, the more money it makes for the owners of these apps: mainly speaking on the owners of meta and x.

**our time and attention is robbed from us  
and we need to start seeing it this way,  
especially when the fascists and their  
friends are the ones stealing it.**

another lie that we have been fooled into believing is that we look at these apps to relax and connect, but i don't think i feel relaxed or connected to people at all when i'm on my phone for too long. i feel stressed and overwhelmed, actually! flashes of the most polarizing news and people will fill the timeline, sprinkled throughout the advertisements and memes that contain one-line straw-man arguments edited over top of a skeleton riding a motorcycle.

these app owners and developers know that all of this bullshit will make them money. the more enraged we are, the more 'engaged' we are, the more we stay on the app. they get richer either way. they are just fine, palling-around with other rich people who might even be nazi's! did i mention i LOVE it here.

i don't know that we should disengage completely from online 'social' spaces, because they can be a bridge for accessing REAL social spaces. i am simply asking that we truly engage in a meaningful way... "liking" a news article is not meaningful engagement! awareness is not enough. praxis is the answer.



i want to sustain myself and the people around me. i want to repair my clothes and teach people how to repair theirs so that we don't consume more than we need. i want to grow food for us so we can be less reliant on the agriculture death machine created by the u.s. amerikkkan government. and, i definitely don't want to spend more than an hour on my phone each day..

sometimes, i just wanna watch a silly or educational video from some of my favorite creators, the people who are actually making these platforms be what they can be, to their full potential of educating and connecting people. so, a video or two, and i'll get on with my day. it's shitty because, i'm having a little bit of fun on my silly phone but at what cost (i got the phone second-hand but it was probably unethically manufactured, and i'm on an app controlled by authoritarian oligarchs)???

if - and when - i catch myself scrolling for too long (i'd say that 'too long' is at the 15-20 minute mark), i try to redirect.

there are times when i notice the compulsive behavior and come to the conclusion that i 'don't care.' when this happens, i'm usually in a deeper state of depression. i don't want to think because my thoughts are unhelpful and ultimately harmful, so i scroll. it's definitely a form of coping, but also a form of self-sabotage.

instead of grasping for those continuous dopamine hits that i know will never end, i am encouraging myself to opt for activities that require more of my attention and do not give me that \*instant\* gratification. things like hand-sewing, gardening, and printing the same design 50 times over, are at surface level... BORING.

instead of seeing 100 unique posts within a five minute span, i spend an hour sewing one patch onto my pants. the needle goes in, out, in, out- creating several small stitches that will join together and create a bond between two pieces of fabric. over and over again, until i end up where i started. i feel the fabric between my fingers and i accidentally prick myself with the needle, reminding me that i have a fleshy body existing in space, in real time. after awhile, i find myself in a flow or meditative state. whichever vocabulary word you prefer. it is stimulating, just in a different way than the constant barrage of stimulation that the stereo-typical social media apps give.

the less and less i look at my phone, the more and more i feel human. probably because these little pocket computers only just became available to the masses 20-or-so years ago, and before then, we just had to spend our time offline... reading, writing, sewing, gardening, listening... and, doing these things in community, too.

**a comrade recently said, "i don't have  
time to be spendin' online, arguing.  
there's too many people to feed."**

i am striving to live a fuller life, as much as i can with what i have. my little adhd brain is learning to be disciplined and not give into compulsions. it (my brain) ain't perfect but it's trying. (ˊω.ˋ)

thanks for reading.

-mia

mia makes it, "for the love of craft"  
miamakesit.art



## Searching Within the Mundane

Analise A.

### JUNEBUG

JUNEBUG is a cathartic piece that covers the fine thread between romance and horror; or otherwise, the tumultuous pitfalls of my mental health throughout my college career. The characters before you, Ruby and Silas respectively, were born from the human desire of wanting to be seen and heard. This is the Final Girl and the Slasher; while commonly portrayed in horror movies as opposites who clash out of envy or past grievances, I wanted to explore this dynamic that (rarely) begins with love as its catalyst. Silas kills for Ruby, the girl he loves; to ensure her perpetrators would never cause her harm again. But Ruby in turn, knows she should feel safe and grateful; yet threads of guilt and grief tied together is all that's left of her after the incident. They yearn for one another deeply. The relationship between them is not friends, lovers, or the modern-day term "situationship." But it is romantic, deeply intimate—and very messy, all thanks to the blood spilled.

Annabelle Dang, "JUNEBUG"  
blissfulthorns.ju.mp





These series of photos were taken in my room using my 3DS. At the time of these pictures, I had graduated with my associates and had experienced a fall I'd never imagined. My mom passed away abruptly two days after I finished my studies. I ended up moving into my relative's home; tried to make what once was my cousin's room into mine; watched friends and peers celebrate the end of the school year, continue their studies, and travel to places I wish I could go to. Despite the challenges of coping with my mom's passing and the feeling of being left behind as I watched my friends thrive in new environments, I still wanted to create. While I did spend everyday if not most of my days in my room, I still wanted to be more hopeful about my life and continue to set goals for myself. These mundane photos of my room are my efforts of searching for crumbs of bliss within the items that surround me, and proof that I was able to get through each passing day.

Analise A., "Searching Within the Mundane"  
t3ch1i3n.tumblr.com



## GREAT LOCUST YEARS

it is spring over here.  
my allergies are about as bad as they come  
which is terrible. because the cicadas should be out soon  
and i finally have the wherewithal to see them.

brood xiv should be out in a few weeks. are my kind of cicadas  
on the other side of the earth with you? or is watching fat black specks  
land on trees just to sing (or scream, depending on who you ask)  
something that you'll never understand?

i have spent so long living loosely  
going to sleep & expecting to wake up  
in a completely different place. or with different people  
or sometimes not at all.

the only thing i could promise myself for awhile  
was that my cicadas would emerge every seventeen years.

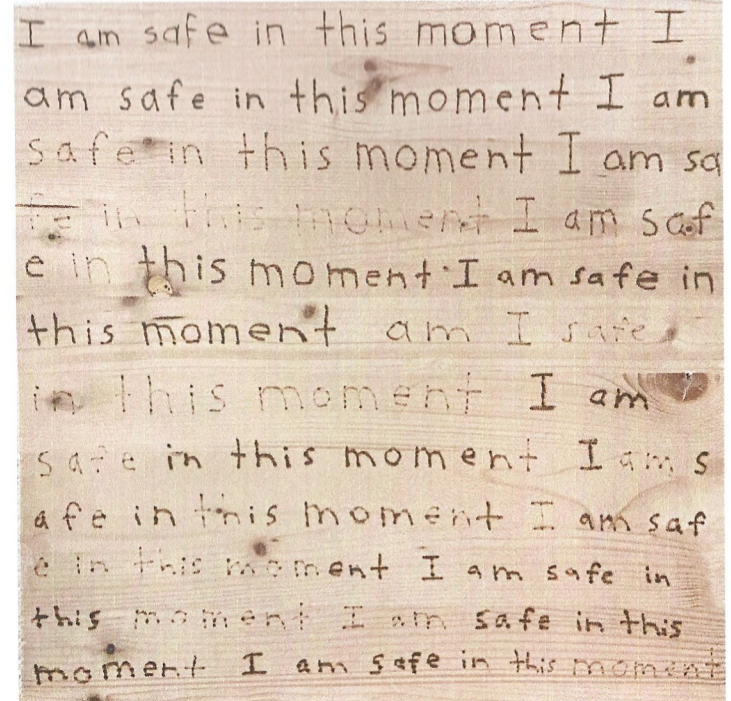
i fall in love very fast. my cicadas wait their entire lives  
to fall in love very fast. they read the veins of trees  
& count the years until it is time. many of them die waiting.  
many are eaten by birds

the males take turns singing one song in chorus  
until someone else listens. then they change keys  
(somehow this is heard above the din) & it is done.  
repeat ad nauseum, or until their bodies give out

in 2025 i have fallen in love like my cicadas.  
in 2025 i have also felt safe enough to sing  
around the people who will listen. i have blindly gestated  
& read the veins of trees for long enough

maybe we can see my cicadas in another seventeen years  
or maybe the next brood will emerge seventeen years early  
while you're here in the winter. this would not be good for them  
because they are bugs, but we are both no strangers to bad timing.

i used to joke that i am bad at writing about love.  
i will stop making this joke in seventeen years



I am safe in this moment I  
am safe in this moment I am  
safe in this moment I am sa  
fe in this moment I am saf  
e in this moment I am safe in  
this moment am I safe  
in this moment I am  
safe in this moment I am s  
afe in this moment I am saf  
e in this moment I am safe in  
this moment I am safe in this  
moment I am safe in this moment



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