



TREND

REPORT

ISSUE

003

THE
MUTANT
EYE

The
Mutant
Eye) — *Issue 003*
— *Trend Report*
© — *Mutant™*
— *Welcome*

Summer is the perfect moment to uncage your wildest fantasies. Everything you've been dreaming about throughout the hibernation-heavy start of the year. There's a certain rush in the air: if you don't do it now, you will sink into the gloomy end of the year unfulfilled and have to wait for a full solar return until you feel this energy again.

The pressure of sunny days is real. It gets your blood boiling. You know that whether you have a plan or not, summertime will surprise you. We want this edition of the Mutant Eye to feel kinda like that. Enjoy our observations and chaotic guesses. We're pulling wildcards this time.

Oh and did we mention you can listen to it too? Scan the code to discover a complimentary audio. Same insights, different format. Handy for road trips or those of you with a podcast kink (yes we know you exist, there's 2k videos on Pornhub tagged with "podcast", majority of them posted in the past 2 years).

Who said the future ain't what it used to be?

Cheers,
—Aeneas & Jovana,
Mutant's creative strategists



THE POWER OF INTRIGUE 05

SOLE PURPOSE:

09 MINIMAL & GROUNDED

12 ANCIENT CHIC

OPIATE FOR THE PEOPLE 17

23 DUMB PHONES & APPSTINENCE

HOT MESS: A GOODBYE LETTER
TO MAINSTREAM MASOCHISM 28

LOIS COHEN:
ON DOLLIFICATION AND ... 32

36 BRUTALIST MAKEUP

43 PIECES IN PLACES

TACTICAL FRIVOLITY AND THE
NEW MEDIUM OF STICKERS 51

OBSESSIONS: BLOGHOUSE 57

THE POWER OF INTRIGUE



CASISDEAD

In an era saturated with oversharing and algorithmic intimacy, mystery has re-emerged as the sharpest edge. The most powerful figures of the next wave will not be the ones broadcasting every meal, every thought. They will be the ones who disappear, distort, conceal.

Take CASISDEAD. A masked rapper whose veiled identity only amplifies the mythos, embodying an aesthetic where the product is not just music but enigma itself. Similarly, Dide, the masked Premier League footballer/rapper, crafts a persona more potent than the music alone. The unknowing is the hook.



This isn't nostalgia for anonymity. It's a new form of power. Burial has always operated in the shadows; his refusal to participate has turned him into a cult persona. Sault, releasing five albums without a whisper to the press, proved that invisibility can outperform traditional hype cycles. Frank Ocean, who weaponises absence itself, has turned the silent gap between projects into a sacred space for speculation, yearning, myth-making.

THE FACE

**Masked rapper and
footballer Dide: “My team
has no idea it’s me”**



Endless
(visual album) by Frank Ocean

It's not pure absence though. It's curated opacity. Controlled glimpses. Engineered gaps. The strategy isn't just to hide. It's to make being unseen the most valuable form of visibility.

The club spaces are shifting in parallel.

Amber's in Manchester exists almost like an encrypted channel. No signage, no hashtags, no phones, no PR blitz. Just an oral network of trust and timing. A music-first environment where the outside world falls away. Inside, there's a nervous energy, a refusal to be surveilled or commodified.

In Antwerp, 09h30_05h30 embodies this same ethos. A club night and venue space that thrives on fluidity and coded communication, it resists fixed identity, operating more like a moving frequency than a physical location. No familiar cues... just a vibe, and a sense that if you know, you know.





**Amber's
Manchester**



Meanwhile, in The Hague, LAAK operates under the logic of anti-promotion. Anonymous line-ups. No advance clout. You show up blind, or you don't show up at all. It's not exclusivity for the sake of status. It's about preserving the conditions for true intensity. The kind that can't be engineered for content.

Both Amber's, 09h30_05h30 and LAAK reveal a deeper reality: the next cultural gold isn't attention. It's speculation. The less you say, the more they'll talk. The longer you wait, the sharper the hunger grows.

We are moving into an attention economy where the most radical move is to withhold. Mystery isn't a strategy anymore.

It's the product.
It's the brand.
It's the future.



SOLE PURPOSE: MINIMAL & GROUND

The ground beneath our feet is getting a lot closer. Figuratively, literally, spiritually. As the maximalist era of Triple S, BOOST, Zoom tech and HOKA Bondi wanes, cushioning fatigue is giving way to a new kind of chic. Consumers are beginning to opt out of overengineered soles and into the silent, sensual terrain of minimalism. Barefoot is no longer just a practice; it's a statement.







The shift started on the sidewalks. Vibram FiveFingers returned from their fringe exile, now being adored by Isamaya Ffrench and Kerwin Frost. Ballet flats have resurfaced too, not just as nostalgic artefacts of Indie Sleaze but as tools of resistance against overdesigned conformity. Gladiator sandals straddling both the boho revival and Y2K resurgence are marching back into the zeitgeist, offering an exposed-foot silhouette that reads more protest than peasant. Amy Winehouse, Marc Jacobs, Vogue's Alex Kessler, ghosts of style past and present converged on the same idea: simplicity as subversion.



Now, this momentum is bleeding into places once defined by performance maximalism. Such as the hardwood of professional basketball. Isaiah Stewart of the Detroit Pistons and WNBA forward Temi Fagbenle made headlines not for signature shoes but for rejecting them. Both laced up the Xero X1, a barefoot basketball shoe that looks like a glitch in the matrix of swooshes and Boost midsoles. What does it mean when the court, once dominated by hyperresponsive foam stacks, begins to echo with the slap of a near-bare sole? Maybe it's biomechanical integrity. Maybe it's aesthetic punk. Maybe it's both.



WNBA player Temi Fagbenle
wearing Xero X1



NBA player Isaiah Stewart
wearing Xero X1





Balenciaga Zero

District Vision's x New Balance
Minimus MT10



In parallel, trail culture, always a whisper ahead of the mainstream, is mirroring this return to form. District Vision's collab with New Balance on the Minimus MT10 reads like a love letter to early 2000s Japanese design restraint. Low profile. High utility. Form follows feeling. It's trail running as meditation, footwear as nervous system. Less shoe, more proprioception.

Even luxury wants in. The Balenciaga Zero (Fall 2025) reduces footwear to a €450 paradox. Nothingness as luxury. The market's pivot signals not just a stylistic reset but a psychosocial one. We are craving real ground. We want shoes that don't lie to us, about comfort, performance, or identity.

Minimalist footwear isn't about nostalgia. It's not about normcore redux or Luddite aesthetics. It's about recalibration. In a world that's overstimulated, overconnected, and overbranded, maybe the most radical move is to feel the ground again. Grounded!

ANCIENT CHIC

There's a new genre quietly taking over our feeds: religious memes. The Holy Spirit has gone viral, wrapped in velvet ribbons and layered with grainy filters. Surreal and seductive, with Joan of Arc and Mary Magdalene as fashion it girls. Tumblr-inspired girlbloggers are posting Catholic iconography, devotional quotes, biblical references and spiritual entertainment.



This wave of religious content isn't exactly traditional, but it matches the hot topic of the moment: a generational pivot toward traditional values. In a time defined by overstimulation, fractured identities, and cultural burnout, faith (real or aesthetic) is being recast as an anchor. New age spirituality might sounds old-school, but looks completely fresh. Young people are crafting a new kind of sacred digital identity, one that feels like a strange mix of irony, sincerity, hope and questioning.

Old school in a new way.



But what does old school really mean in the Internet age, when we're already nostalgic for 2014? What will happen when the trad values and aesthetics become overplayed? The answer lies further back. The next evolution might come when we pump this trend up to its maximal potential: a return to the truly archaic.

Because
pseudo-
nostalgia
doesn't
have to be
reserved
for the
20th
century
only.





The Birth of Venus
c.1480



Julia Fox at Vanity Fair Oscar party
2025

We've already seen the first taste of it earlier this year when Pinterest reported *Castelcore* will be the next big thing: with searches like medieval-core, castle house parties and ancient rings gaining significant traction on the platform.

The farther you go down the history lane the more fun it gets. It doesn't always have to be taken literally, like Chappell Roan's medieval red carpet looks.

Sometimes it's about evoking the ethos of the ancient. Think: the shift from futuristic high-tech cushioning to gladiator sandals to shoes inspired by the absolutely primal barefoot existence that's taking place at the moment.

So what will the future look like? *Perhaps like the distant past. It's time to pull pages out of history books and stick them on your moodboards.* Cause after all, we could argue that all the art after Venus of Willendorf is derivative anyways.



Fríctico is a futuristic stone-age project presented at the MUTEK Electronic Festival. It was a live collaboration between producer Isaac Soto and visual artist Sofía Tormenta, where real-time rock sculpting created experimental music through modular synths.



@sinisaaaa
(art director @Mowalola)
via Instagram



Di Pets
AW 2025/2026



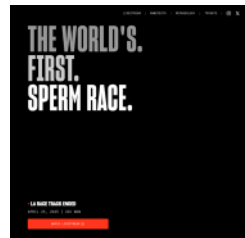
OPIATE FOR THE PEOPLE



Mike Tyson vs. Jake Paul



Sperm race



The boundaries of sport are melting into goo, refracted under the bright lights and betting parlays. What was once athletic discipline is now entertainment's latest grotesquerie. Jake Paul versus Mike Tyson was geriatric punishment dressed up as pay-per-view content, with rules convoluted just enough to cradle

Jake's ego. It was more of humiliation ritual than a fight. And as if to punctuate the descent, Tyson ended the night with a full arse reveal backstage, one last moonshot for the content gods. The first sperm race, streamed with breathless fervour, collapsed the language of fertility and meme into a new genre of biotech absurdism.

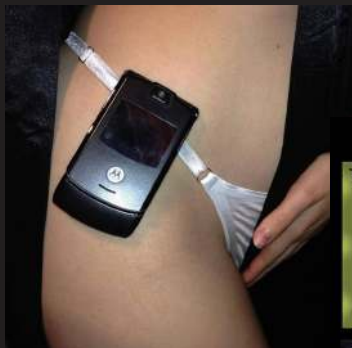
In the manosphere's dankest gyms, Power Slap emerges as a new bloodsport for the algorithm: brute force for clicks. Micro-bets atomise our attention spans, turning every moment of play into a potential loss, a win, a dopamine hit. The scoreboard is incidental. The real currency is our captured attention, however fleeting. At the Miami Grand Prix, Lego quietly stole the weekend by strapping F1 drivers into life-sized brick-built race cars and reimagining the driver parade, a masterstroke of spectacle that outshone the race itself. The right stunt or meme-able moment, it turns out, can outperform the sport it riffs on.



DUMB PHONES & APPSTINENCE



In a cultural pivot that feels both nostalgic and insurgent, Gen Z is starting to trade in their smartphones for “dumb phones,” stripped-down devices that do little more than call and text. This isn’t just a retro aesthetic; it’s a rebellion against algorithmic saturation and the psychic drain of constant connectivity. According to Morning Consult, 28% of Gen Z adults in the U.S. express interest in acquiring a dumb phone, with 16% already owning one. In Spain, 12.2% of young people have made the switch, and searches for dumbphones have surged by 215% in the past year.



Part of the appeal is functional; less screen time, fewer distractions, more mental clarity but there's also a strong Y2K aesthetic impulse at play. Flip phones like the Motorola Razr and the Nokia 2760 are having a second life, not as novelty items, but as lifestyle statements. Brands like Punkt and Light are offering modern minimalist alternatives that strip the phone back to basics, with stripped-down UX and no social apps in sight. On TikTok, “dumb phone unboxings” and “digital detox hauls” are racking up millions of views, with Gen Z users embracing the clamshell form factor and pixelated camera quality as anti-Instagram, anti-curation tools. A blurry mirror selfie on a flip phone reads like a manifesto now: less clarity, more intention.



In parallel there is an (app + abstinence) appstience movement, a conscious uncoupling from the dopamine fuel parasitic apps. The shift is more than personal. Hinge's "One More Hour" initiative, launched in the U.S. and now expanded to the UK, helps foster in-person connections among Gen Z. This comes at a time when 85% of UK Gen Z report feelings of loneliness and 70% experience anxiety about meeting people in real life. As dating apps like Tinder and Bumble see declines in user engagement, the message is clear: the future of connection may lie not in more sophisticated and addictive algorithms, but in the deliberate simplicity of face-to-face interaction.

Ultimately, this return to dumb phones and digital minimalism signals something deeper: a growing disillusionment with the promise of constant connectivity. Social media, once seen as a space

for community and conversation, has become increasingly performative, isolating and transactional. It's no longer inherently social, and Gen Z knows it. In response, they're reclaiming their time, their attention and their relationships by prioritising what's real and present. The new countercultural flex is simple: showing up, in person.



05-22-2025 | NEWS
Should you practice 'appstience'? Gen Z and Gen Alpha are embracing this Harvard student movement

The 5-step method aims to help people get off social media and become less attached to their smartphones.



HOT MESS: A GOODBYE LETTER TO MAINSTREAM MASOCHISM

The intersection between wellness, fitness and beauty has always been strong: bound by a shared web of desires and insecurities. A relentless quest to become the best versions of ourselves. In the past decade, these industries experienced an astronomical boom, becoming deeply embedded in our society in an exaggerated way: what once seemed like pampering yourself or relaxing and unwinding became increasingly masochistic. In endless pursuit to feel well and look gorgeous doing it, we inadvertently mainstreamed a culture of fetishized discipline and restriction.



How did this happen?

Over the past decade extreme restriction, discipline and pushing the limits became the norms of beauty and wellness. Few symbolize this shift better than the Kardashian clan themselves, redefining beauty ideals and emerging as cultural icons. But they are also masters of mainstream masochism. In 2022, Kim proudly bragged about the rapid weight loss she undertook to fit into Marylin's iconic dress. Similarly, in 2024, revealed that she could barely breathe or move in her custom corset. In one of the episodes of their infamous reality show, Kourtney brushes off the fact that she has a bald spot on top of her head because a ponytail she wore to an event was too tight. Most recently Kris revealed her new facelift, completely snatching her skin and sculpting her face to an extent that managed to shock the public, even in the era when cosmetic surgery became completely normalized.

They constantly surprise us with extreme body morphing, promoting beauty standards that are based on restriction, suffering and cruelty. Proudly deriving pleasure from the pain of beauty.

**Kim showing off her corset
marks after the Met Gala, 2024**





This philosophy culminates in SKIMS' latest product line: Ultimate. The line includes padded shapewear shorts, as well as the viral fake nipple piercing bra (fake piercing and fake nipples both included). London-based journalist Ismene Ormonde compared them to a modern day chastity belt: you're sexy when you wear them, but the fantasy is ruined as soon as you take them off, preventing you from even considering the idea of having sex. SKIMS' ultimate body is a body tightened up into submission and padded up for temptation, while simultaneously restricting pleasure.

A pinnacle of discipline.



It's an ethos that extends beyond fashion.

Dazed's viral article "Is anyone having sex after their 12-step nighttime skincare routine?" criticized the morning self-care routines and perfection-obsessed optimization of sleep. Daily step goals inflated from 10,000 to 12,000, then 20,000. Running became less about unwinding and more about extreme performance and disciplines, spawning a bizarre new way to sell your body: Strava Mules, paid runners who boost others' fitness scores by carrying their tracking devices.



However, this extreme culture is nearing a breaking point. Terms like “beauty burnout” and “wellness burnout” are flooding headlines, signaling a pivotal shift. The pressing question is: what comes next?

Will
beauty
and
wellness
embrace
a more
playful,
raw, and
authentic
approach?





First hints of it are already popping up. Sauna raves at “*experimental social wellness spaces*”, are gaining traction. They are accompanied by adaptogenic mocktails, boozy in spirit, but nourishing for the body. Dietary supplements are becoming more fun, transforming into everyday snacks such as protein popcorn.

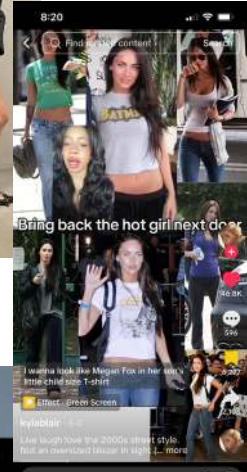


A sauna rave at The Sanctuary, London, a self-described experimental social wellness space

Paris Hilton has revealed that she's planning to continue the family legacy and open Paris Hilton hotels. The star of the show are going to be spa spaces inspired by the personal spa in her home. Sliving Spas will be unlike any other luxury members club that we're used to seeing: they are hot pink, sparkly and unmistakably Paris, bringing a healthy dose of fun to the landscape.



The disciplined clean girl aesthetic is dying out. Hair trends are shifting *from bald-spot inducing slick-backs to effortlessly cool dishevelled looks.* "Bring back the hot girl next door," said TikTok user @kyiablair in a video with almost 50 thousand likes and hundreds of agreeing comments. "I think we lost ourselves in the clean girl of it all". Models are sent down the runway with what media outlets dubbed "depression hair". We call it raw glamour.







Addison caught public attention with her deliberately messy appearances, social media posts and performances



And of course, no one is a better indicator of shifting societal values than the pop princess of the moment. Addison Rae, a TikTok star turned pop star, just released her debut album titled Addison. Her aesthetic seems to be the polar opposite of typical Kardashian tightened up glamour: she's fun, messy, unapologetically naughty and confident, an exhibit A of the Indie Sleaze revival.

This is the beginning of the end for the era of beauty & wellness masochism.

After the burnout comes liberation. A time to reconnect with the long lost joy and stop taking yourself so seriously.

FOMU- TATIONS



In collaboration with FOMU, we developed an experimental format of in depth talks by internationally renowned image makers that challenge existing perspectives on visual culture and spark debate. From fashion to documentary, advertising to art, FOMUTATIONS explore how images shape – and reshape – our collective perception. Get to know the guests in a series of exclusive Mutant Eye interviews.

24.04.2025

FOMUTATION
1 Marcel Veldman

05.06.2025

FOMUTATION
2 Lois Cohen

02.10.2025

FOMUTATION
3 Francesca Gavin

11.12.2025

FOMUTATION
4 Maria Clara Macri

LOIS COHEN



Slightly chaotic, refreshingly down to earth, and perhaps fashionably late, you're likely to find Lois at a punk bar or capturing dreamy photos of her friends. "It was at my friend's sugar daddy's penthouse," she giggles while showing off the pics. But don't let her charm fool you: besides being a full-time cool girl, she's also a photographer with a seriously impressive portfolio. Campaigns for adidas, Nike, Spotify and Gucci, editorials for Elle, Wonderland, Vogue Italia and Numero Berlin, and collaborations with artists like Bad Gyal and Rimon are just some highlights of her award-winning career. Her signature: strikingly surreal imagery, conjured of fantastical worlds where the comical and childlike meet the raw and grotesque. In those worlds, clashing cultural symbols and social contradictions find unexpected harmony.

We caught up with her to talk about dolls as spiritual objects and DIY animatronics.

A single-word graces your Instagram bio: dollify. What does that word mean to you, personally and creatively?

Dolls have always been part of my life. My mother is a dollmaker, and I grew up building entire worlds with the ones she made for me. Over time as a “grown up” extension of this, I started treating humans like dolls in my photography. Now I’m incorporating mannequins in my work, alongside my living models, blurring the lines between human and doll. Dollify for me is about transformation, play, hyperreality and distortion. It’s the lens through which I explore how western life, beauty and power are performed—and how identity blurs in the process.

The dollification of society feels more extreme than ever: from masochistic beauty endeavors that morph our bodies and faces, to their digital counterparts seen on social media feeds. Do you think this obsession could eventually reach a breaking point?

It keeps reaching breaking points and then it unlocks new extremes. Each time we think we’ve gone too far, a new filter, trend, or technology pushes the boundary even further. The obsession doesn’t collapse; it mutat

What might a post-dollification world look like?

I can’t imagine one. The doll or puppet has always existed. It’s one of the earliest human-made reflections of ourselves. The oldest known dolls date back over 4,000 years, found in ancient Egyptian tombs and Roman children’s graves. In many cultures, dolls weren’t just toys, they were spiritual objects, stand-ins for gods, ancestors, or ideals. So in a way, we’ve always been “dollifying” ourselves, shaping human forms to reflect desires, fears, and fantasies. From carved wooden idols to Barbie, from painted portraits to FaceTuned selfies. It’s all part of the same impulse.

What’s your current obsession?

My newest obsession is DIY youtube videos of people making their own animatronics or androids.

If you’d make a DIY animatronic who would it look like?

Nicholas Cage as Sailor Ripley in his snake leather jacket.



You once mentioned that your Metamorphosis project felt much more impactful when it was released in 2018, before that aesthetic became widespread online. As a young artist, do you ever think about how your work will age, visually and culturally, or do you surrender to the moment when creating?

I used to think about it more, but that kind of thinking puts too much pressure on the process. It makes you take yourself too seriously, and turns the work into a strategy rather than an expression. Most artists' favorite works of their own aren't necessarily the ones that get the most attention. Sometimes a piece resonates later with the general public. Sometimes it never does in the way the artist hoped it would. If I start fixating on what works and what doesn't, I become a marketing tool—not an artist. I do like to make work that feels somewhat timeless, but I try not to be too concerned with that when I'm actually making it.





BRUTALIST MAKEUP

I'm a beauty editor (and I don't wear make-up)

Contouring? Please. For a new generation of beauty insiders, an almost bare face is something of a status symbol — and I should know



Tish Weinstock

"When it comes to leaving the house, the idea of doing a full face fills me with dread"



We've witnessed nearly every extreme in makeup trends in past years: from the ultra-glam "on fleek" era to Euphoria's maximalist rhinestone fantasy. *Gen Z beauty has been widely characterized as bold, expressive, and subversive, with vivid colors and even SFX details flooding the media.*

But if you look closely at recent beauty launches and the shifting aesthetic preferences across social media, a new direction is emerging:

Minimalism with a functional edge is taking center stage.

Makeup is increasingly marketed as skincare, blurring the lines between the two. *These hybrid products carry a unified message: the bare face is becoming the ultimate status symbol.*

Even the cult-favorite brand Isamaya, once known for avant-garde, transgressive looks, has rebranded. Its new minimalist, clinical-style packaging and advanced skincare ingredients are at the forefront. A functional no-makeup-makeup look.

Isamaya's shift from extravagant to brutalist in every aspect of the brand following her newest product line titled Core, shocked fans. The brand claims that's the "future of beauty".



Isamaya's debut line, *Industrial*



Isamaya's latest line, Core



Brands like Typology or Glow Recipe appear to be using words skincare and makeup in an almost interchangeable manner.



Meanwhile, celebrities like Lindsay Lohan, Christina Aguilera, and Pamela Anderson have returned to the spotlight with refreshingly natural yet oddly perfect looks, fueling a new ideal of beauty that's enhanced in a nearly undetectable way. As new cosmetic procedures and weight-loss drugs become completely normalized, there's little left to conceal and a whole lot to proudly reveal.

*Our faces are entering an era of
makeup brutalism.*



Borrowing from the architectural style known for its stark minimalism and raw materials, this beauty movement strips away ornamentation to reveal structure.

Defined as style with “minimal constructions that showcase the bare building materials and structural elements over decorative design”, brutalism was often criticized for embodying the totalitarian regimes and perceived as cold and oppressive and now it echoes through an industry that’s historically entwined with femininity.

In today’s increasingly conservative political landscape, where women’s bodily autonomy is under threat, this aesthetic shift feels eerily symbolic. The question remains, does the new brutalist beauty look have a potential to be freeing and effortlessly cool as it seems at first glance, or a shadow of something more unsettling?



Even alternative makeup, once known for wildest forms of self expression, ditched the bold in favor of revealing. Internet’s darling Gabriette is a living proof, as she switches her signature gothic chonga look for a fresh faced one.



PIECES IN PLACES

There's a new kind of flex circulating through the ambient haze of Quiet Luxury™ and it isn't logo-less cashmere or the mileage of your Rimowa suitcase. It's board games; Chess, Backgammon. Even solitaire, if you're Stephen A. Smith and bored courtside during Game 4 of the NBA Finals.



Stephen A. Smith caught playing solitaire during Game 4 of the NBA Finals 2025



At first glance, these games might seem like analog holdovers in a touchscreen world, but that's precisely the point. Board games require time, patience, lineage. You don't buy taste, you inherit it. Or at least, that's the performance. And nothing says "old money muscle memory" like casually unfolding a leather-bound backgammon set on a Sunday morning in the Hamptons.

Chess has taken over the NBA. As GQ recently reported, players like Jalen Williams, Bruce Brown, and Josh Hart aren't just learning to play, they're bringing travel sets to locker rooms, trading openings and endgames like they once did sneaker colorways. Giannis Antetokounmpo and Luka Dončić are also part of the wave, using chess to channel competitive focus off-court. Grant Williams is quoted saying, "I don't think I'll ever play another video game in my life." That's not just a lifestyle switch, it's a signal. No longer wired in but internally networked. Strategic. Stoic. Bishops over battle passes.



Former NBA MVP, Derrick Rose is taking things to the next level with the launch of Chesstival, his own chess tournament for NBA players, set to debut in July, 2025 in Las Vegas. Chesstival isn't just a passion project, it's a statement of intent, part of Rose's broader vision to reframe what mental toughness looks like in modern sport.

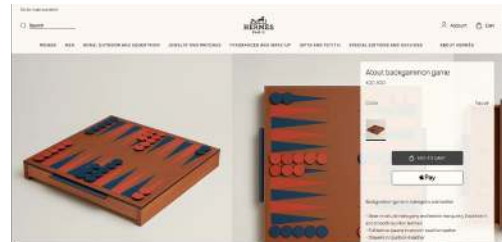


And it's not just the hardwood of basketball, chess is also quietly taking over football. Young stars like Michael Olise, Eberechi Eze, and Trent Alexander-Arnold are bringing the same contemplative cool to the beautiful game, using chess to train their minds, find calm, and flex a different kind of intelligence. Eze recently won a celebrity tournament and then 2 weeks later won the FA Cup with Crystal Palace and in the offseason this summer, was even invited by Richard Branson to play a game against him. While Alexander-Arnold went toe-to-toe with Magnus Carlsen. This isn't just downtime, it's discipline disguised as leisure. The ripple effect is everywhere - Slawn's BeauBeaus café in East London now hosts a regular chess night, and PinkPantheress recently took home a trophy at the Under-25s Chess Grand Slam in Bromley.



Meanwhile, backgammon is making an aesthetic comeback, surfacing not just as a game but as a lifestyle object. Brands like Asprey, Loro Piana, and Hermes are embedding handcrafted sets into their homeware lines. Backgammon is perfect for the man who wants to say “I summer in Antiparos” without saying anything at all. A game that once conjured smoky gentlemen’s clubs now pings as a tactile, generational heirloom. Luxury with no need to explain itself.

Solitaire, too, slips in ironically. The image of Stephen A. Smith tapping cards on his iPhone mid-Finals is almost poetic. An overexposed symbol of the present craving the quiet, frictionless boredom of the past. It’s absurdist, yes. But it fits.



These games aren't about nostalgia. They're a spatial repositioning. A refusal to scroll. An embrace of slowness, consequence, and internal narrative. They align perfectly with the mood of now: cultivated, cloistered, a little bit smug.

In a world obsessed with optimization, to sit down and move a pawn is to say: I have time. I have heritage. I am not in a hurry.



TACTICAL FRIVOLITY AND THE NEW MEDIUM OF STICKERS



We're living in a time when fridge magnet conspiracies share cognitive real estate with microtargeted ideology and dopamine-addled scrolling, as a result the sticker has re-emerged not just as decoration, but as a form of protest. This is tactical frivolity, a genre of playful protest that rejects the dourness of traditional political messaging in favour of subversive delight. Think meme-brained graffiti. These adhesive mini-billboards cloak criticality in kitsch: a cutout Trump saying "I Did That" slapped on rising petrol prices, a pixelated Pepe the Frog recontextualised to mock its own appropriation, or a spoof NHS logo repurposed to critique austerity. They're cheap, untraceable, viral in the analogue sense.





This trend owes part of its lineage to graffiti tagging culture, where writers repurposed United States Postal Service shipping labels as mobile canvases to get their names out into the world, stickers as proto-memes in an urban lexicon of visibility. And just

as the political weaponisation of memes has blurred the lines between satire, propaganda, and shitposting, so too has it birthed a new era of public discourse, lo-fi memetics deployed IRL as subcultural signalling and ideological breadcrumbs.

Borrowing aesthetics from rave flyers, Y2K emo-core, and nihilistic Tumblr-core, what some are dubbing as “sticker warfare” operates like a decentralised psychological operation for the disenfranchised. It’s ambient resistance. You see it in public toilets, on lampposts, inside lift shafts, these tiny guerrilla acts that turn public space into a semiotic battlefield. As political polarisation calcifies and irony becomes its own ideological position, these fragments of adhesive satire become a form of para-political communication.

Brands eager to tap into the raw appeal of stickers and guerrilla marketing must recognise that they are entering a chaotic, contested arena where authenticity is currency and irony often outruns sincerity. Public space is no longer neutral; it is a battleground layered with competing messages, micro-propagandas, and coded subcultures. To cut through the noise, brands need to bring more than clever design or a viral tagline. They need to earn their place in the conversation,

understand the symbols and meanings at play, and offer something that feels less like a campaign and more like a contribution. In a world where every lamppost is a soapbox, the real challenge isn’t just being seen... it is being believed.

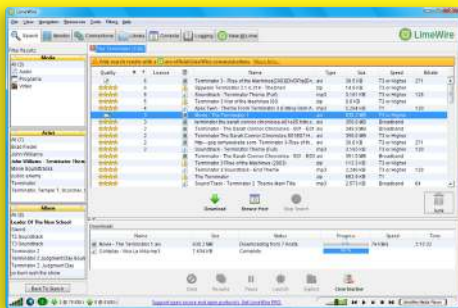




OBSSESSIONS

Welcome to a chapter dedicated to the worms that just won't exit our brain at the moment.

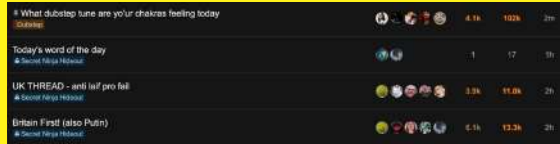
BLOGHOUSE: THE LOST ERA OF MUSIC



There's a phantom limb in the collective memory of music culture, a lost archive from the Bloghouse era that disappeared when music consumption shifted to streaming. The transition scrubbed the internet clean of the unofficial edits, rogue mash-ups, and chaotic mp3s that once defined a scene. LimeWire folders, Mediafire links, and Myspace profiles functioned as both distribution channels and social currency. Now, attempts at an Indie Sleaze revival feel like hollow reenactments unless they acknowledge the infrastructure that birthed the original movement. This wasn't just about style. It was about a peer-to-peer imagination of music, before everything had to be cleared, counted, and compressed into playlists.

Those tracks, dodgy rips, white label bootlegs, bedroom experiments, are now collecting digital dust on once-cherished external hard drives, relics of a time when discovery felt like a treasure hunt rather than something algorithmically spoon-fed to you. Their value wasn't just in the music, but in how they were found, shared, and hoarded like secrets in subcultural ecosystems.

But every now and then, a ghost from that era reemerges. James Blake recently released his long-sought bootleg edit of 'Outkast – Ms. Jackson' under his Harmonimix alias, finally giving it a proper home via his inner circle platform, Vault. The track, a staple of whispered mp3 trades and legendary in Dubstep Forum lore, had lived in the shadows for over a decade, proof that some myths still have the power to resurface, even in an era where everything is meant to be permanent but feels increasingly ephemeral.





UP FOR A GAME OF BACK- GAMMON OR A BRUTALIST MAKEOVER?

Mutant™ is an independent, multidisciplinary brand agency known for its audacious style of campaigning and branding. Since our inception in 2019, we've grown to 40+ Mutants operating from our dual hubs in Amsterdam and Antwerp.

Led by our Mutant™ Eye philosophy, we create work that builds and solidifies a brand's influence within contemporary culture.



@mutant.agency
[linkedin.com/company/mutant-agency](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mutant-agency)
www.mutant.be