

Silicon Valley's Anthropologist: Making Sense of the Tech Bros with Jasmine Sun

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SUMMARY

Jasmine Sun discusses her journey as a writer and journalist, emphasizing the importance of long-form writing in expressing nuanced ideas and fostering understanding. She reflects on her experiences in Silicon Valley, the complexities of AI, and the cultural dynamics of China, while advocating for a more empathetic and engaged approach to journalism.

- Long-form writing allows for deeper exploration of ideas, making the author a more thoughtful and kinder individual.*
- The importance of storytelling and personal narratives in journalism, as they resonate with readers and provide context.*
- Sun believes in the value of agency and optimism in Silicon Valley, contrasting it with the fatalism often found in other sectors.*
- She highlights the need for a more human-centered approach to technology and its impact on society, particularly regarding AI and labor.*
- The relational economy, where personal connections and one-on-one interactions are prioritized, is essential for a thriving society.*
- Sun's writing process involves extensive research and conversations, leading to a deeper understanding of complex issues.*
- She values mentorship and collaboration, noting how support from established writers has shaped her career.*
- The future of journalism may lie in independent platforms that allow for more authentic and diverse voices.*

Long form writing is a much more measured, a much more good faith, a much more even handed and nuanced version of myself than the version of me in conversation or Twitter or anything else. I think I choose long form writing because it makes me better. I was trying to pitch Tracy Alloway from Odd Lots on doing a Chinese Peptides episode, but not me. I was trying to pitch her on doing one with somebody. Somebody's got to Will the devs do something?

Yes, will the devs do something? I was like, tracy, this is hilarious. Like, it's about supply chains, it's about us China stuff, it's about biohacking, it's about tech bros. Like, it is a perfect. I sort of convinced myself in the process that it actually was an interesting story. I like reporting on memes, but not reporting on memes in the stupid way, but the deep way. And so with Chinese Peptides or the permanent underclass or whatever, the fact that there is a meme that is rising in the zeitgeist to me tells me that there's something simmering below and I want to find out what that is.

I really don't want to make myself dumber. Claude or no Claude, AI or no AI. I write because I think it makes me smarter, I think it makes me kinder. I don't know how to give any advice besides be real with yourself. You just got to know if you are doing the work. I'm ready for my AlphaGo moment on the writing. It's going to happen to me. The point of writing is to communicate the life behind the work.

When you marvel at Alysa Liu and her ice skating performance, it's not just the fact that she's a good skater, but it's like the life behind the work. We're compelled by Alysa Liu because we hear about her dad, we hear about her quitting, we hear about her coming back and learning to love it for herself. And you see it on her face. You see it on her face looking down at her. It's the expressiveness. It is a technically perfect performance and the liveliness shines through.

Right Unitary robot. Alysa Liu would just never be as compelling. Welcome to Dialectic Episode 49 with Jasmine Sun. Jasmine is a writer journalist and acts as a bit of a translator between Silicon Valley, where so much is changing so quickly, and the rest of the world. She writes primarily about the technology industry, AI and how everything is changing out here, and tries to do so both to the San Francisco audience as well as to the broader audience.

She writes for her personal substack and is contributing writer for the Atlantic magazine. She just wrote a flagship piece for the New York Times on On the Permanent Underclass, has written about Chinese peptides, AI in China and much more. She worked on Product, among many other things, at Substack for several years before becoming a full time writer herself. I hope you enjoy the episode. Before we get into things, I would like to thank Notion Dialectics presenting partner.

As I discussed with Jasmine, we're heading towards a world where more and more of what we do, at least on computers, is automatable. What I like about Notion's approach and its principles behind its design and philosophy for the product is that there is ultimately going to be lots we want to automate and there is going to be work we don't want to automate. Notion is a tool that is about you and your collaborators doing great work together and being able to be in sync across all of the things that you guys are creating, tracking, working on, and so on.

Notion has accomplished a rare feat of being a pre AI era company that has rebuilt itself from the ground up for the era of AI and agents. This includes Notion AI, Custom Agents, and now workers, which are a part of Notion's new developer platform. You can create workers that will run in the cloud 24/7 while you and your team focus on the work that counts, the work that you don't want to automate. Notion's developer platform is now extensible with any other piece of software you're using and so Notion has become a place where you can run your entire business, AI and otherwise, from a central hub.

You can learn more@notion.com dialectic all right, Jasmine sun, thank you for joining me. Thanks for having me. I'm very excited for this one. I feel like you're also kind of having like a little bit of a moment. You've been all over the place. Oh, I don't like that. You don't like that. Why? I think it's best not to think about your external perception too much. Oh, okay, that's fair. But you could still be like, you've been.

You were at Substack, you were interviewing Benjamin Lavitu. You're all around town. It's been fun, but I mostly am very excited to stay put for June. This has been the promise I made to myself is I canceled all of the tentative trips I had for June and I was like, I need to go back in the writing hall and like just have big blocks of time on my calendar and be antisocial and just like not get on a plane for a month.

And is that pretty typical of your life? Like, yo going between what you just described and then a slightly more external way of doing things? I think so. I mean, I think a lot of writers tend to be more introverted types, and you have sort of these ideas of most writers as just, like, holing up by themselves for, like, extremely long periods of time, never talking to the public, maybe drinking themselves away or going into fits of madness or something, something like that. I'm not quite like that.

You have time. You have time to get there. Yeah, give me another year or so. But I think for me, writing is about the process, but I also really do care about the output. I write in order to get particular ideas out into the world. And I write because there is some idea in my head or feeling in my head or thing that I want to communicate to many, many more people than I could. And so the process of doing the distribution after a big story, of going to workshops, going to podcast, doing podcasts, going just like meeting a bunch of people who are interested in the same things that I am, does feel like part of the project to me. A whole writing cycle is.

Let's call it one or two months of actually doing the research, reporting and writing, ranging, frankly, between four hours and four months, and then another month afterwards, if the piece goes well, of just talking to lots and lots of people in the field about what I'm seeing, talking about the piece, trying to get the ideas out in all as many mediums as I can. And then I start to drive myself crazy. I get sick of the sound of my own voice.

That's the phase I'm in right now. And I'm like, okay, it's like, time to go in the hole. And we're podcasting still. We're sick of this. Well, thank you for doing it with me. You on your substack, you described yourself as an anthropologist of disruption, which is wonderful. There's an old post. It wasn't your very first post after going full time, but it was the beginning of 2025, so maybe the second or the third. And you wrote that writers serve the public as historians of Vibe.

They tell us what it feels like to be here now, which I think is a great way to describe, at least from my perspective, what it is that you actually do. And it also fits into, I think the reason that approach you just described makes sense. What to zoom kind of out, like, what makes a great historian a Vibe. I think I'm really interested in trying to capture the like emotional texture or the zeitgeist of a moment. I guess that's a more.

It's a better way of saying vibe, maybe the emotional texture, the zeitgeist. Though I do like vibe. Vibe is a funny word because on one hand it's, like, interesting in that it doesn't mean anything. But on the other hand, it's more like a *je ne sais quoi* or like a quality without a name or like one of these things. It's pointing at something actual or something real. I think it is. I mean, a big part of it for me is like.

And the reason I use anthropologist, the reason I use historian, the reason I use these particular sets of words are like. I think I'm actually quite naturally a relatively judgmental person. And I don't think that the best writers

are very judgmental people. I think that there's one of the things that I love most about, say, reading critics. I went through a period where I read a lot of, like, literary art, like, cultural critics. And the thing that I love about the critic is that they kind of separate writing into two phases. There's a phase of, like, close observation and just like, purely trying to arrive at, like, the perfect descriptive explanation.

Perfect descriptive explanation of a phenomenon. And then there is a separate phase that they can choose to enter to and enter if they want, where they make some sort of value or moral judgment on how that thing is. And I was actually, like, trying to pull myself away from moralism in a bunch of ways and trying to make myself a less judgmental person. And I find that writing, maybe because it's like a systems to thinking, because it's so long and deep and reflective, it forces me into.

Into stepping away from my instinctual reactions to phenomena and to actually challenge myself to just say, how can I be the best historian or archivist or anthropologist of this person, of this moment, of this phenomenon, to just focus on. Can I capture it almost as one would capture a photograph, but in text? And then to do that and try to master that separately from any attempt to assert some kind of judgment on the thing. Do you think all writing is like that? Because that's not intuitive.

What you just described is totally makes sense. But in my experience, a lot of my writing, when I. When I go to write, it almost feels like I'm con-ject. I'm just trying to come up with a take. And so maybe my question would be like, is that a mode? Is there a specific type of mode or a specific type of observation that gets you into that Kind of capturing. I think it's like a normative belief about how I want to write and how I want to be as a person.

I think that there are certainly people who are excellent takes writers. I've definitely written takes before. And there are people whose goals are much more to investigate or to uncover or even. It's not really to describe, but to express something deep within them. For me, it was that I wanted to get away from takes writing. I wrote a lot more takes in like as a college opinion columnist or something like that, but it felt shallow and I didn't like the kind of person I became when I was always in like takes generation mode.

And so it was more that I wanted to be better at observation and noticing and empathy. I noticed that in general, writing caused me to do this because it's such a long process that gave me a lot of time to reflect on my initial reactions and to really interrogate them. And like the version of myself in long form writing is a much more measured, a much more good faith, a much more even handed and nuanced version of myself than the version of me in conversation or Twitter or anything else.

And so, like, I think I choose long form writing because it makes me better. That's pretty beautiful. You have a. It's a little bit of a rehash, but I'd love to read a quote that I think describes part of what you were just saying. Well, you had quoted Sontag saying, the aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art and by analogy, our own experience more rather than less real to us, wrote Sontagmyicon.

The critic's first duty is to explain, not to evaluate too much. Writing on tech still rushes to gawk or condemn. It's why I focused this year on training my journalistic and ethnographic eye. Instead. You. You wrote

somewhere else. The writer's lens follows you away from your desk. Nothing is too small to put under the microscope. Put on your anthropologist hat and you'll instantly see in 4K, when it comes to this mode again of actually seeing, Reading that last line, it made me think of is that story in Zen in the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance where the teacher has the girl. He's like, I don't know if you know this.

I've never read the book. Okay, so he's going, I actually haven't read the book either. I know the story. And I guess it's this. She's supposed to write about Bozeman, Montana, and she comes back and she's like, I Don't know where to start. He's like, okay, well, write about the downtown. And she's like, I don't know where to start. Okay, write about the opera house. And she's like, I don't know where to start. He's like, okay, I want you to go sit across from the opera house and start at the upper left brick. And she comes back with all these words.

Oh, I love that. And so I'd love to hear how you think about maybe when it comes to starting to observe, obviously, and I think we'll talk about it. You do a ton of anthropology and observation of San Francisco and Silicon Valley and these sometimes narrow and sometimes very vast ideas. But what is that process of first starting to look, maybe without judgment? Like, actually, how does that happen? Yeah, I mean, I think that it. I think of, like, it starts with my Notes app, first of all, like, I'm a big notes app person.

I don't believe in, like, having these complicated systems of whatever. I just, like, as soon as I have, like, a theme or an idea or the seed of an idea, I just start a note. In my Notes app, whenever I travel, I'll start a note that just has the place and the year. So, like, China, 2026, or like, New York, D.C. november 2025 or something like that. And I literally just start writing bullet points in that note everywhere I go.

Every, like, weird little conversation I have, everything I notice just goes into the Notes app. And I'm actually in that moment. I'm not trying to make sense of it. It's very, very scattered, miscellaneous things like, oh, wow, there's like, a lot of construction everywhere. Or why are there so many flowers in Shanghai? Like, there didn't used to be this many flowers. Or why don't Chinese people take the stairs? They never take the stairs. Even if the escalator requires you to wait in a very long line and the stairs are empty and it's going down, everybody takes the escalator. It makes no sense.

And so I just like, right, it's like California, or at least la. It's really frivolous things into, like, a giant bullet point thing in my Notes app. And then so that's all the observation phase. And then I'm in collecting mode, collecting mode, collecting mode. And then once I either feel like I have enough material there, if it's travel, I've returned from my trip. That's when I really, like, revisit the notes, read them over and over again, and sort of start to notice what themes emerge right and so again, even like in the actual work, I think like the process of observation and that the process of synthesis and judgment feel like two separate steps to me.

And it's important to me personally to separate them out. For reporting, it's a little bit different. So when I'm doing like capital J journalism and I'm actually reporting out a piece rather than just like traveloguing or whatever one is, like, when I have a pitch, I have a story idea. It's almost always a research question that I do not know the answer to. One thing that bugs me in some journalism is like, I'll read an article and it's really clear that the reporter already had a thesis and they're really just trying to prove out the thesis they already had with a set

of quotes.

And I like to pitch stories and I like to write stories where I have a question like, why is everyone taking Chinese peptides? Or does AI actually have any impacts on the labor market? That I genuinely do not know the answer to? That I am distinctly not an expert in that. I know that there's discourse around, but I really try to go broad during the interview phase of talking to people intentionally on every single side of that issue, from not trying to extract judgment.

And only oftentimes after doing 10 or 20 or even 30 interviews do I even start to have an opinion of what I think. This has actually made it sometimes hard to pitch stories to editors because some editors really want you to have the angle before you write because they're. Otherwise it's gonna be boring. And I'm like, well, if I had the angle, I wouldn't be writing it. I want to write this story because I want to embark on this process I.

Of exploration. And I feel pretty sure that if I talk to 25 people about one of these things, there's going to be something in there. But I can't promise you in advance, before I go and talk to those 25 people, that presumes you are asking good questions. I think, like, your confidence, I mean, it's a mix of a few things, which is like confidence in the rigor you're going to approach something. But, you know, perhaps it's that you don't have the answer.

The fact that you don't have the answer now or very quickly is probably indicative of the fact that it's like an actually interesting thing to. It's not. It's not like a yes or no question. Yeah, like the, the. And I suspect that you have some kind of maybe tacit taste for like, the types of questions to ask that are going to lead to a lot of rope to pull on or string to pull on. I hope so.

Like, do you maybe, maybe to ask it a different way. Do you ever start down this process and kind of realize like, whoa, there's like, actually just not that much here and it's like much simpler than I thought. No, but I feel like maybe my, my narrative inside for the same thing is that everything is interesting. Like, I'm thinking of that Annie Dillard quote, which I think I quoted in one of those things. It's like, admire the world for never ending on you. Like, I really believe if you just look closer and closer and closer, it will become interesting to you. I, like, I wrote this like New York Times story on the peptide phenomenon, and before I wrote it, I was not interested in peptides.

Like, it was really, it kind of happened accidentally. Like, I report on AI mostly. I don't really follow health or bio or pharma or any like that. But like, after like a month of reporting on peptides, I was fascinated by the whole peptide thing and it was so interesting to me. And so one is like, I do think that everything is interesting if you just look closely enough. And also if you see things as like, you know, instantiations of trends bigger than themselves. Right.

Like, the peptides thing isn't just about peptides. It's about this weird, like community epistemology around like biohacking and people who trust ChatGPT and Reddit forums more than they trust their doctors. And like this gets all of these like, medical trust issues. And so it's about something bigger than peptides. But Peptides is like a

very fun and quirky sort of entry point into the broader discourse. But like, again, when I started investigating it, I had no idea.

I just thought it was funny that people were buying like vials of gray market drugs from China and injecting themselves. And so I just think that like the world is much more interesting than we all think it is. Yes. And we were talking about this once and you said you're kind of trying to write these things that are like, relevant on a two to three month time horizon. Not two weeks or two days and also not much longer.

Like you're, you're, you're trying to write about what's relevant. Yeah. And so to take the peptide example, maybe like, yeah, some of these things, like the permanent underclass is like very in the middle of your strike zone in all of these different ways. What caused the peptide? Is it just like Oh, I feel the temperature rising around me on I'm here. I've heard this enough. Time, like, what? What? As someone who wasn't very interested in it, what made you do the month of work that made you interested in it?

I mean, the real answer is, like, not very interesting, which is that I was trying to pitch Tracy Alloway from Odd Lots on doing a Chinese Peptides episode, but not me. I was trying to pitch her on doing one with somebody. Somebody's got to. Will the devs do something? Yes, will the devs do something? I was like, this is so funny. And I was just like, tracy, this is hilarious. It's about supply chains. It's about us China stuff. It's about biohacking, it's about tech bros.

It is a perfect story. I was trying to her on it, and Tracy was like, you're so right. Who should I interview? And I was like, I don't know, but you gotta find someone. And then Tracy just kept being like, do you want to do it? Do you want it? I was like, no, I don't know anything. And then eventually I was like, you know what? Like, if it's. I sort of convinced myself in the process that it actually was an interesting story, right?

Because I was telling her, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay, like, maybe I guess I will do it if I really want somebody to cover this topic, because I knew it had to be covered. And then I ended up, you know, chatting with my Times editor and it all ended up working out. And yeah, I think it's maybe because insofar as there is some research, taste or taste for asking questions, one is, I think I do gravitate towards things that feel one at the intersection of a lot of issues. I was excited that it was all of these supply chains, us, China, pharma, whatever. I could see that from the beginning.

I like reporting on memes, but not reporting on memes in the stupid way, but the deep way. My sense is, like, I spent a lot of time thinking about the difference between trend reporting versus culture writing, where trend reporting is like, I saw three TikToks or three tweets. Let me just like, tell you what it is versus the culture writing that's interrogating, like, okay, like, the fact that this meme has taken off, like, in my opinion, usually signifies something much deeper about something going on in the culture.

And so, like, I actually want to investigate what deeper cultural currents there are that are causing some concepts or some trends stick above others. Right? And so with Chinese hepatitis or the permanent underclass or whatever. Like the fact that there is a meme that is rising in the zeitgeist to me tells me that there's something

simmering below and I want to find out what that is. It also conveniently, if I'm a bit more tactical about it, it conveniently means that when you write the story, it's going to do quite well, which I have now also learned.

You had a great conversation on the earlier point you were making about the trend that you talked to Celine Wynne about this. Oh, yes. And it's like, I think there's a lot of people saying like, I've noticed three TikToks, I have a take here. It goes back to what you're saying at the very beginning and you're almost saying like the fact that this is bubbling up so much means there's probably actually a more profound there, there, whether it be on cloud psychosis or any of these things.

It's fascinating because in some sense you could, if you really squinted, you could describe what you do as sort of being like a San Francisco meme reporter. Sure. I mean, I would prefer not to, but like. Sure, whatever. You know, to your point, I think memes are actually these. These like black holes of interest. Yeah. Or at least can be. Obviously they can be really flat, but when they aren't, there's something and they're for better or for worse, something like the permanent underclass gives us something to hold on to.

Yeah. That can. Then I think there's a thing where like, you know, like sometimes the memes and the jokes, they're obviously hyperbolic. And I try to be real about the fact that these are generally hyperboles, but they are also like release valves for these emotions for the things you can't say. Right. And so one thing that a lot of China watchers or China reporters do is they spend a lot of time on the Chinese Internet. There are all these great sub sacs like Chinese doom scroll that sort of collate Chinese Internet memes or translate viral phrases. And right now, if you look at the Chinese Internet, so many of the phrases are about the grind of work.

Like there's a term that's like work smell or which basically is if you've been working too much, you have like work smell or work odor. You have 996 of course, was originally a Chinese phenomenon. You have all of these terms that basically refer to, I think like code farmers is another one, just the grind of working. And in a culture where one. There's a lot of speech Censorship. There's not a lot of sort of public action or policy advocacy.

One of the ways that you can understand how a lot of Chinese young people are really feeling is by looking at the Internet memes. Because it's kind of an acceptable and non threatening funnel for these, like very real concerns about, you know, unemployment and affordability and whatever. And similarly, like, yeah, sure, the permanent underclass is a meme. And will we actually be in this permanent useless class of people who are stuck on welfare checks forever with our robot overlords? I don't know, man.

Probably not. At the same time, part of what made me report on it was I have friends in San Francisco who are literally making their career decisions based on these memes about the permanent underclass. They feel like if they do not get a job at a Frontier lab, they will be poor forever. And this is obviously, I mean, in my opinion, it's obviously not actually true. But the fact that it's actually guiding action, the fact that it also expresses these anxieties where even the people working on AI are not that techno optimistic was one of the things I realized, like, oh, you guys don't think that AI is going to create equal abundance for everyone or to make everyone live like kings? Actually, there's an assumption baked into the permanent underclass meme that AI will widen inequality, that there will be winners and losers, that there will be an automators and an automated.

And if you look closely enough at the meme, you sort of uncover that ideology behind it. And I actually think that's really important. It also ties to your. You have some comment in, I think the main piece where you say when you talk to these people off the mic, they all stop being optimists. No, they don't all stop. But like there's a lot. Yeah, yeah, it was very frustrating. I mean, I literally like talked to somebody as a friend and then I'd like get them on the mic for like an on the record interview and they would just like totally like change their tune. And you know, I get it.

Like I don't want anyone to self incriminate. Like I'm not doing journalism in order to screw people's reputations over. And so I take what they say on the mic. But like I added that parenthetical to the New York Times piece. Like I think the day or two before it went out, like it was one of the very last edits that I made, I made it on my phone. I remember where I was like lying awake at night in my bed and I was just feeling unsettled about the piece. And I was like, you know what's really frustrating is like, I've done this work to try to take these conversations happening in whisper networks and private conversations and to make them public.

But even the things that I'm quoting publicly are in some ways less extreme than what I hear privately. How do I communicate that? And then I was like, you know what, I'll just go for the meta. I'll just literally add a parenthetical. That's like, just so you guys know, like, people are more pessimistic when they are in private. And I could not get the same people to say the things on the record. You, your main beat, I think to be overly generalized would be San Francisco and Silicon Valley culture.

There's this kind of fascinating thing where on one hand you've called San Francisco the most happening is place in the world, notably not a word fair. It's one of, if not the most important places in the world. You've compared places in China in a similar way. On one hand you have the traditional media who doesn't really know how, they're both mad at San Francisco and don't totally know how to actually talk about it. And then on the flip side, San Francisco doesn't really know how to talk about itself.

And so in some sense you've become this sort of translator across these two worlds. On one hand, you're doing a little bit of the didion thing from reporting from the inside. In another way, I think a lot of people from the outside looking in might be like, oh, she's one of those people. You're friends with the people who work at all these labs, and yet you're not among them. I'm curious what you've noticed about that divide, especially as you try to bridge.

Granted, like when you're writing on Substack, you're probably writing more. It's San Francisco talking to itself. When you're writing for the New York Times, the Atlantic, you're sort of like reporting from within, but like, what is that? What does that tension feel like? How does it come up when you talk to other journalists who are maybe less on the inside? It feels like you're in a pretty load bearing position. I know it's a lot of different ideas at once, but yeah, it's interesting.

I think that a lot of my role in general has been doing various forms of translation between the tech industry and the external world. I mean, for example, I used to work at Substack and I was a Product manager. But I also helped out a lot with comms and product marketing and things like that. And I spent a lot of time doing things

like writing blog posts that explained why we would attach a social network to the precious newsletter ecosystem.

Because most writers are extremely suspicious of tech companies and social media and algorithms and AI. And part of my role was to make the case for why it actually might be values aligned and good to do that. And so I feel like. Because I personally feel very half in, half out with the tech industry. Like, I worked in the tech industry. I do have a lot of friends in the tech industry. There are a lot of things I really love about Silicon Valley, actually.

And I think I have this simultaneous, like, suspicion that comes from the parts of myself that are maybe more engaged with journalism and politics and whatever. It creates a tension within myself and then it also creates this desire for, like, why won't my friends get along? Why won't the people I talk to, like, like each other more? Like, I want them to like each other more. And so I think, are both sides skeptical of you or have you found it?

From the outside looking in, it seems that you've. I mean, part of it is that your work is good, but you've done a pretty good job of having both sides feel like you're not too swung to the other side. I mean, I try my best. I think part of it is how do you maintain genuine independence? Right. And how do you make sure that you don't seem like a shill for whether it's effective altruism or the tech industry or the progressive left? Or you could.

There are all of these tribes and all of these camps. And one thing that frustrates me about a lot of, of the Silicon Valley new media world, or even just substacks of stuff, is like, they're not really doing journalism or truth seeking. They're doing advocacy for their camp. Like, this is a progress studies substack. This is a rationalist blogger. This is a new media thing celebrating the spirit of enterprise. Or Anderson Horowitz or whatever. Both. Like most of. Most of.

A lot of that at least, is Silicon Valley talking to itself. Yes. Which I. Is it worth delineating? Like, there's Silicon Valley talking to itself and then there's like Silicon Valley trying to do propaganda. Maybe. Sure. They don't do a lot of it. Okay, okay. I guess you're. You're more talking about. When it's Silicon Valley talking to itself. Yeah, I mean, but what was the original question? The original question is, was Pretty open ended. Which is like, what does it feel like to be this load bearing translator between these two worlds? And maybe inside of that question, to be honest, is like, there aren't a lot of you.

Yeah. One hypothesis I had, I think I maybe was even talking to Celine about this in terms of what I should talk to you about. But like, maybe you have to kind of appreciate something to be able to really see it clearly. Absolutely. Yeah. And so maybe that's one of the reasons you're able to occupy this space well, which is that you, if you loved it more, you'd probably be working in anthropic. And if you loved it less, as most journalists do, which is a super overdue generalization, they're just like, like stay away.

And so it's some. Yeah, I mean, I think so. I actually think that's a really good point. Celine should really do the talking for me. I think when you love something, you want to understand it and you want it to be understood. I think part of this is what I said about trying to observe without judgment a lot of the time, like when I think

about my reporting and I interview someone, even if like internally I might have very different beliefs than that person.

To me, the mission of doing journalism or doing the kind of journalism I do at least is to capture their belief, like a thing I am reporting on is the essence of what they believe. And like, even if I can only get one or two sentences into my interview. Into my final piece, because you just have to cut a lot of it, I never want them to look at that and feel like she was cherry picking.

I want them to look at that and think that was the essence of the thing I said. So even in some pieces I've written that have been really controversial. So there's this is from a while ago, but about a year ago I did a piece on the defense tech revival at Stanford. Like, why do all these students want to work at Anduril and Palantir now? Is basically the question I came up with. And I interviewed a lot of people, people working at defense tech companies about why they did it.

And I wrote them up in a piece and it was really interesting, the reaction because the people who I interviewed, when they read the piece before any public reaction, they liked it. They were like, this is an accurate representation of my views. You asked me why I want to work at these places and I said it's because I care about Ukraine or I think that more women should work in national security or whatever it is, or one of them the lines that went viral was all of my most moral and effective friends work at Palantir, because this was a genuine belief that this person held.

And so when she read my story, I wasn't cherry picking. My goal was in fact to represent exactly what the person said in its fullest essence. The public reaction is a different question. The public reaction to that piece was these kids are murderers and thus you tricked me. The feeling of the person who maybe gave the quote might end up being you tricked me. Even though it wasn't decided. It wasn't, Yeah. I mean, it was a psychologically challenging thing for me because I wasn't trying to trick them, I wasn't trying to throw them to the wolves.

And I also quoted quite a wide range of things. But it was really important to me that at least, public reaction aside, they would not feel tricked. Yes. If they only feel tricked after the public reaction, that's very different. Right, right. But I think that both, when I talk to people in Silicon Valley or I talk to people in politics or whatever, it's like I want them to feel like I have captured them and I have created a portrait, I've taken a photograph that feels correct and true, regardless of what the reaction is after. And like that to me, if I hold to that, I think that people will give me a little more credit.

And then I think, of course, there are things that I really like, a lot of things about Silicon Valley, and I think people can see that. I also have a lot of skepticism. I think people can see that. And I'm pretty open about my personal beliefs. Like I write opinions on a blog. And so before people chat, I feel like they can get a pretty good sense of who I am and how fair I am. Yeah, yeah.

Why do you think Silicon Valley struggles so much to talk to the rest of the world about itself? Two things I think. One is they don't try, and two is I think that there is a genuine self selection for a different set of values

here. So I don't think they try. They try less now than they used to. They used to try harder in the tech for good, Google, whatever era. Silicon Valley tried a bit harder and it worked.

Sometimes I think that if you look at, for example, going direct, like Lulu's thing, I respect Lulu a lot. Lulu's very sharp. Going direct worked for particular goals, which was that Lulu was like, you should identify your audience. Oftentimes your audience is say, recruits. If you're an AI company, you want to recruit the best talent or you want to land very specific enterprise deals. And so she was saying, rather than cultivating your messaging to the broad public, you should direct your marketing and your messaging towards a very specific group of people, and that'll be much more effective.

I think she was right about that. But sometimes the things that you say to convince a bunch of very odd AI researchers to join your lab, when the rest of the world hears that, they're like, dude, what the fuck? And so I think there's an extent to which the insularity and the fact that Silicon Valley spends most of its time messaging to itself, to investors, to potential recruits, to enterprise tech companies that might make a purchase or something, means that they don't know how they sound to everyone else, because they're not trying to message to the public.

They feel like my business is not contingent on whether the public likes me. It's not like Coca Cola. Coca Cola needs public toilet, but a lot of these companies don't, especially at the beginning, before, say, OpenAI had a product, they weren't a consumer product for the first five years or whatever, and so they didn't need to talk to anyone else. Sam Altman One could write these blog posts that say, AI might make the world worse off and shift all the power from labor to capital, and that honesty might be really respected by these very AGI pillared researchers.

the point where now you're trying to IPO and you need the investors and the public to like you, it becomes a lot more troubling. And I think that's one of the tensions they're coming up against. And then the second thing is that I think the values of Silicon Valley are genuinely very different from the values of the broad American public. Of course, everyone wants to like welfare and happiness and whatever, but one is that San Francisco is an industry town.

And what it means is that people come here oftentimes because they want to be part of a specific culture and subgroup, right? Like you have these nerds who felt really misunderstood in the places they grew up, in their other contexts, maybe they didn't fit into their university, their institution, and they thought, oh, here's a group of people who will appreciate me. Here's a group of people who will appreciate how good I am at coding, how high agency I am, my idealism, where other places might have like a tall poppy syndrome and they're trying to cut me down, but basically you really concentrate a group of people who have quite similar personality characteristics and drives.

It's not actually a very good representation of the overall population. And I'll notice This in things like when people describe their, say, post AGI utopias, they'll talk about wanting to live forever or wanting UBI so that they can engage in leisure all day. And there are public polls of Americans on living forever and UBI and none

of them are very popular, right? Like it's just like, like how? Or like it's like, oh, you can have a superhuman tutor in your pocket and you can just get like tutored in math by the equivalent of, I don't know, like Terence Tao in your pocket.

And I'm like, how many Americans really want Terence Tao in their pocket? If you ask them what utopia look like? Some of them, but actually not that many. Right? A lot of people want jobs. People like feeling like they have a purpose. And so there's also a genuine way in which even when Silicon Valley attempts to message about, say, these positive narratives around AI, they don't realize what really matters to people. And that actually maybe living forever and not having a job is not everyone's idea of the good life isn't.

Like you could, you could paint a similar version of that for just coastal elites or like, why do you think this is so much more true in San Francisco? Or maybe it isn't so much more true, but why do you think this is so much more true in San Francisco than New York or LA or London or other hubs where people from all over the world flock to for ambitious reasons or otherwise? I mean, New York and LA and DC all suck in their own ways, right?

Like the out of touch politicians. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. The Brooklyn media class. All Hollywood movies are actually secretly about Hollywood. You know, like, it's definitely, I think, true for every industry. I think the other thing maybe is that storytelling and messaging is generally undervalued in Silicon Valley. Like if you just think of some of the traits that are valued in people. It's like oftentimes being like a nerd is associated with being kind of prickly and bad at communication and hard to work with, but you're a genius, so it's okay, right? And at least in these other, in New York, LA and DC I think being likable and broadly likable is seen as a more appealing thing. Whereas I actually think sometimes you lose points in Silicon Valley.

This is changing, by the way. It is changing especially. I mean, the funny thing is you were making the point about how these companies never have to use, to have to talk to the rest of the world. If anything, it feels like Silicon Valley is commuting on brand More than ever on charisma. More than ever. Like all these on new media. Oh totally, yeah. It's great for us, right? But it's so funny, I mean like when I, my interest in Silicon Valley was roughly 2017, I went to Sanford and at the time like being interested in like writing and sociology and stuff like this is very low status.

Like no one gave a fuck about this, right? Like everyone's like, you should just code. And it's really stupid that you can't code. Right? Well now losers. I know who's getting automated now. But these things change. But because of this, the media ecosystem here is really new. It's really young. It's still figuring itself out. I think new media can figure itself out, but it's going to take some years. They're coming up against these hundred year old institutions on the East Coast.

And also another thing I think about all the time, there are like very few journalists who live in San Francisco. This is one I think about all the time. Just like by numbers. There are so few journalists who live in San Francisco relative to how important it is as a center of even just like power and wealth, right? Like there are so many people who report on San Francisco from New York and D.C. and like to me for example, the idea of

reporting on the White House from San Francisco would be insane.

I wouldn't trust a White House reporter who never went to the happy hours with all of the staffers. Right. And in D.C. you also have this much more integrated and in a way like mutually beneficial ecosystem between sources and reporters where like they are going to the same happy hours, hanging out in the same social scenes, whatever. So one, it means that you have better, the reporters have better story taste cause they start to hear about things early, right? They're actually like in the scenes where they care about things.

It's intuition almost. It's actually just like the temperature got hotter or whatever. Yeah, yeah, exactly. And like I feel like that's what I do here. It's like, oh, I can like feel when the temperature goes up on something in a way that maybe a reporter in New York can't. But it also means that you have more of a pact and more trust. Where I think politicians understand that there are ways to work with reporters in ways that is advantageous to them better.

It's like I can feed you my side of a story on background and that might actually be better for the way that you portray this in the public eye. And also because there's some shared social tissue, it kind of means that you're not gonna burn me so bad that in a deeply unfair way most of the time, because it is gonna screw everything else up. Whereas here I think, like most people in technology know zero journalists personally, and there is just a default distrust.

And I think that distrust is even partly warranted because the journalists kind of like, they're not in those rooms. They don't really know how they're thinking. There isn't really an advantage to telling somebody who has no context your side of the story and then being taken out of that context and being painted as a villain. And I think that's what happens with a lot of tech journalism is all of speaking of sort of different audiences. You have these amazing kind of flagship pieces in big publications that are certainly speaking more.

Here's what's going on in Silicon Valley from the inside to the rest of the world. And then you have your substack, which is obviously much more inside baseball, not necessarily speaking directly to Silicon Valley, although I would guess it leans that more that way. Is all of your writing journalists? I don't think so. I think a lot of the subsec is not journalism. Well, it's just. What. What is it? How would you. How do you think about what it is?

Writing. It's all writing. I like the word writer because I like how expansive and big tent it is. And I like that it's also kind of understated. Like, journalists, like, comes with baggage. Very serious blogger is like almost like too diminutive. Like, it's not serious enough. Writer to me is like, I love how big tent it is and I love that it contains so many things within it. Like, as, you know, like, writing has research and writing has the craft of writing.

And there's so many things, I guess with subsec, I don't really think about what it is. I don't think about myself as writing in a form. Like, it's really loose. Some of them are travelogues, some of them are basically columns or op eds. Some of them are interviews that I transcribe. Like, I'm really not thinking very hard about the form. Sub sec is just, just. It's very jasmine, though. It's very like not. Not always parasocial or that kind of thing.

But it's very like your lens of the world, which some of your other writing is not. It's very like there's a glass pane. Oh, totally. Yeah. Like, the sub psych is just like, I want to take my brain and transport it onto the page. Like, I feel like I think we had this conversation at one point. It's like there's a bunch of stuff going on in my brain and your brain and everyone's brain. And the thing that I really love about writing and writing on the Internet and writing publicly is like, I can go through the exercise of seeing how much I can turn like the weird blob of ideas into a form where it is shareable and scalable. Right.

Like I can take all the fuzz of ideas and concretize them. Well, it's almost a version of your Notes app thing. Yeah, it's like a, it's, it's all, that's all like one kind of long funnel of like the little things I've noticed in the world as I'm driving around, which by the way, most of us do, but we don't write down. Yeah. And so you've built that like it goes through a filter for digestibility before it makes it onto the subsec.

Right. Like the Notes app is like a real disaster. But like, I would never share that, but I do sort of try to make it a bit digestible and then I share it. Because, you know, also, like, even before I had very many subscribers, like, writing long form on the Internet is one of the best ways to meet like minded people. And I just like made a lot of friends by doing this. And so I want to share how I think because I will find people and other things that I like with reporting and journalism. It's a much more specific thing.

Like, I actually do believe in a lot of the ideals of journalism with these attempts about objectivity. Like, you got to talk to the sources from all sides. You go through this very careful reporting process on the record, off the record, on background. You're trying to engage in a very specific practice with a set of professional norms around it. And I take those norms pretty seriously because I do think that for all of the flaws that Capital J journalism sometimes has when something is printed in the New York Times, you do assign it a level of credibility that me saying the meme on substack does not not have. And so I am willing to sort of play along with the process.

And also I think it's good for me frankly, to go through the process in order to produce these bigger pieces because it gives the ideas more weight, it gives it more credibility when people know that you've done all of these steps to get there. It is also largely split based on audience. So when I write in a bigger publication, oftentimes it's something that I want to share to a broader group. Group, primarily people who are not in Silicon Valley. So there's part of that.

I also like that it gets me to do more reporting. I don't report as much for my substack, whereas I will do just like so many more interviews and go so much deeper and go so much more rigorous when I know it's going to be printed in an outlet where I can't just, like, make a little edit like the day after because I changed my mind. I will say some of your favorite. Some of my favorite pieces of yours are the, like, companion pieces to the big publication in your substack. Like the.

Whatever the. The permanent underclass one. Like it's like the bonus episode. Yeah, but like, that was juicy. Like that. Yeah. Maybe on the similar note. What? Maybe. And I'd actually be curious across both of those modes. What does it mean to write with integrity? And is it different? There's like journalistic integrity and all

those things you were describing. What does it mean to write it with integrity? Even in the more casual. Is that something you even your.

Because my sense is it is something you think a lot about. Yeah, I mean, I try to write things that are true. I try not to let my prior ideological affiliations get in the way of truth seeking and just like, be really honest with myself about that. I try to talk to people, especially when I think I'm going to disagree with them and force myself to listen to them, which is healthy because oftentimes you do come around.

I think maybe another thing is there are probably debates in journalism about how much you should feel responsible for the outcomes of your piece and what happens once your piece is in the world. And I think some writers and journalists are very much like, I owe nothing to the world. I'm here to create this thing, but I don't want to be audience captured. I don't want to be swayed by the court of public opinion. And so I write for an audience of one, which is myself and the world.

Do what it will. I think for me, part of integrity is actually caring a bit more about what happens afterwards. It just really doesn't feel good to release something that will throw your sources to the wolves or that is, I don't know, too. It's just like too casual and too loose with other people's lives. Like, I'm just like, like, journalists command an incredible amount of power. Writers command an incredible amount of power. It's not wealth in the way that, like, working in an AI lab gives you wealth or whatever, but being able to have a microphone to shout to the tens of millions of subscribers of the New York Times, like, hey, guys, this is what I think about this issue and this is what all these people are saying. That is a huge amount of power.

There are people whose entire jobs it is to get a single mention in one of these papers. And so to me, holding that power with integrity is both integrity as in the truth side, but also being at least aware and responsible about some of the impacts that you expect. But I think people debate about this. Well, thanks for pontificating on it. You also talked about integrity with AI recently on Substack. You said, being real with yourself is the most important cognitive skill for the AI age.

AI makes it easier to lie to yourself. You gotta be able to honestly answer, am I actually thinking with AI or am I letting it do the hard part for me? Is this essay product business a good idea or did AI convince me it was, etc. Etc. Etc. You, I think somewhere else you said maybe like, quote tweeting that you're like, AI writing is bad for the writer, much more even so than the reader. Maybe you don't feel this way, but like, my.

I read this as almost like a different kind of integrity. It's like an internal integrity around whether or not you're going to cheat yourself. Yeah, yeah. How do you, like, like, keep yourself tethered to the right balance there even something as simple as, like, you were talking about. I was reading you talking about using Claude as an editor. And like, it's like, hey, Claude, I don't want you to change the writing at all. Like, that's a great aspiration, but it seems like really hard when you're like, in the weeds. Be like, wow, that idea from Cloud is pretty good.

Maybe I should just use that sentence, like, what are you holding onto? I really don't want to make myself dumber. This is like a big fear I have in general. Like, Claude or no Claude, AI or no AI? Like, I write because I

think it makes me smarter, I think it makes me kinder. It makes me a bunch of things I want to do. Like, I write full time because it helps life. I want to live.

Yeah, I think it does. How I think all of the reporting stuff, like, just like, I became a much better listener, I became a much more empathetic. Most people in there don't spend hours of their lives listening to people who have very different beliefs and just focusing on solely on the understanding aspect. And so for me, if the endpoint of writing is. It's almost this selfish thing where, because my endpoint is selfish, for me, writing is an exercise in personal development, then I don't want to do anything that will hinder those goals.

I guess I wrote that subject note about AI because I was trying to think about all of these arguments about whether you can use AI in writing. And in a way, I'm a moderate. I use AI all the time as part of my research process. I will ask Claude for feedback on my essay structures. I use AI pretty regularly, but I'm really don't like, slop. I really don't want AI to ever generate sentences or paragraphs for me.

And I'm careful about that kind of thing. And oftentimes I'll get flack from both sides. People who are like, why are you using AI at all? Do you hate thinking? Do you hate your human editors? What's wrong with you? And also people who are like, like, why are you discriminating against people who can't express themselves in sentences or whatever and. Or maybe even something like could? Is there a chance that using it more would make your writing better?

I mean, it's sort of a rhetorical question. Like, I mean, I guess it's just like, With regards to the people who really don't like any AI use at all, I realized that why I don't fear being de skilled is because the way I use AI is so effortful. And I just know what it feels like to think, and I know what it feels like to be getting better and getting worse. It's not like I never use AI to be like, summarize this book for me. Right.

Of course, I do that sometimes. But I don't lie to myself about the difference between reading a book and reading a summary of a book. That was true before AI too. I know the difference between SparkNotes saying a book and actually reading the book. And it's kind of of like if you plagiarize or something. It's not like the output is bad. It's just like, you should know that you plagiarize. You should know you were cheating yourself if you're token maxing. Right?

Like, I was also thinking about this. There are all these coders and companies that are spending all of these millions of dollars on tokens. And it's like, some of those tokens are probably valuable. Some of them are making you more productive. But a lot of this is the illusion of productivity. And, like, you might be lying to yourself and thinking that the lines of code you Write or the tokens that you. You use are representative of an increased level of productivity.

For some people, it is. Other people are literally just lying to yourself. And this is the thing I kept thinking about was like, AI makes it so easy to generate the illusion of thinking, the illusion of productivity, the illusion of everything being a good idea because it's so perfect at justifications. And if it's that powerful, the only thing that you have is knowing whether or not, in some deep internal sense, like, with that, whether or not you are doing

real productive work, whether or not you are learning, whether or not you are thinking in the same way that, like, you know, if you are lifting heavy, you know, if you're pushing yourself at the gym, it's the same feeling, right? Like, you can just lie to yourself if you want, but you're not going to be stronger. And I really don't want to be dumber.

So I try not to lie to myself. The fear is that I think the more we use these tools. Yeah. The more it will become harder to know when you're lying to yourself. Unless you're really visual it. Clearly you have a very firm boundary on that. My sense is. I mean, personally, my sense is that, like, if I'm not careful about it, the boundary is getting blurrier. I mean, maybe I'm not careful enough. Like, maybe you're right.

And, like, I actually am just getting dumber because of it. No, that's not what I'm saying. No, what I'm saying is I think you're actually very, very attuned to this and you're thinking about it a lot, and you're like, you have a very, very. At least as you've just stated, you have, like, a very. Writing. A huge part of writing for you is to make yourself smarter. Yeah. And, like, maybe that's completely true. Maybe that's a story you're telling yourself. Whatever.

But I think for so many of us, as more and more of what we're doing, like, most things aren't just instrumental or not. There's like, why do I do this podcast? Well, there's a whole bunch of reasons I do this podcast, and I hope I keep the main thing, the main thing forever. But as more and more pieces come into the know, this is probably too much of a sidebar. Like, an example would be the prep I do for an interview.

I don't use very much AI currently, and I think I could probably use more AI and do better interviews. But there's also a version of that where I take it Too far. And it's currently important that I do a good amount of it manually. I have to have the. And so I think that's what I'm trying to point out is like, it feels to me as these tools get better and better and better and better part of it is like I get to rely on the fact that, that like, if I do it manually, it's. The interview's better.

But what if at some point Claude's research is better than mine? Like, yeah, I mean, I think it's like I use the tools because I want to know. Like, I want to know. I. Every one of my personal evals of the AI systems is roughly once a quarter or as often as I do a freelance piece. I take my pitch and I take all of my interview transcripts and I feed them into Claude, the latest version of Gemini and the latest version of GPT and I send, say, write this 3,000 word New York Times article for me. Go do it.

And to be clear, I never use any of the content. It's just an eval. So one is, I do want to know if it gets to that point. I don't think it's there yet. I feel like I'm still better at writing than the AI, but I don't fear finding out and I think that's kind of important. You don't fear finding out? No, no, I really don't. Which is like you could know that it's going to write a better one than you.

You. And you still feel confident that you're going to write it yourself. Yeah, because I want to be smarter. Like again, like, I just like, like it's very. I think that's a really powerful articulation though, of like, we're all going to have to find some version of this or else you just can't be fully instrumental about it in that sense. Right? Like, it

just can't be about the output alone. It has to be that. Like, I actually believe that writing for me is a process of personal self development. And so that's why like with cheating in school, right, you can cheat on your homework and maybe you guarantee that your teacher's never gonna find out that you cheated on your homework, that you used AI, whatever, but you're not gonna be able to do stuff later.

I just really don't wanna be that person. And so I think that's just what it is. I try to. Again, I use AI plenty, but for me, I know that it makes me less lazy actually, so. So when I didn't have AI Tools and somebody said a word, I didn't really know what it meant. Or I was interviewing someone and they were explaining some complicated economic concept or refer to some paper. There's a lot of the time where I probably would have just ignored bounce off you, bounce off me, I don't care, whatever. And I would just never.

Because I didn't have the time to go find out. I didn't have the time to read a really complex paper or learn a totally new discipline. And now I think my, by lowering the bar to learning a little bit about something, I'm way more likely to look stuff up to be like, okay, can you summarize this paper for me? And I know that the net amount of learning I'm doing is more than it was before. I still am very aware that summarize this paper is not the same as actually reading the paper. But it just feels pretty clear to me personally.

And I think this is what I was struggling so hard to articulate in that note is I don't know how to give any advice besides be real with yourself. You just got to know if you were doing something that work. You just have to know. I again, I think the challenge, everyone is going to have to calibrate themselves on what that actually means. And part of it is that like most of us or many people are mostly doing things instrumentally.

Yeah. And they haven't actually like stopped to say, like, what is the thing I want to do? Even if, like, the computer can do it better than me. Yeah. I mean, I think that's why, like, I always think Back to like AlphaGo. Right. And that that story has so much resonance for so many people over so many years. Like, it's been, it's been, we're at like the 10th anniversary of the Le It all match and people still talk about that match more so than they talk about a lot of other milestones in AI that have happened since.

Because I think this very specific experience of we are going to watch the machines excel at the thing that we do, we are going to watch them beat us, and we are still going to have to ask ourselves, do we want to play anyway. Right. And one of the things that I find really beautiful about games, and I know you interviewed C T Nguyen and I love his Games Agency, his art book, is that you are playing the them to exercise your own agency or playing them to develop a set of skills.

You are not playing a board game because you're going to win money from the board game or because it's going to Accelerate your career. Maybe friends, like you could say that the instrumental thing that you get is like you get to bond with your friends or something. But like everything is going to become a little bit more like playing board games soon and you are just going to have to choose. Do I want to do this for its own sake.

He makes this great point where he's talking about playing a board game with his wife and he's like, on one hand we both have to try to win. We can't like not care. But if I go spend all this time separately when we're not

playing, like studying strategy guides and getting so much better than her, it's not going to be fun anymore either. Yeah. No, I love his work so much. Is more than board games, especially right now.

There's so much to it I've thought a bit about. What are the books that I would recommend to people for the age of AI that are not actually about AI and games? Agency Azure is one of them because I think. Think that's the. Yeah, that's the disposition we're going to need. I think you're right. A couple final things on the. On the substack versus maybe the serious writing stuff you wrote in your end of year recap, kind of this start of this year that you were going to try to dial up.

I think it was like 40% substack last year and like 80% this year. Yeah. But I didn't do it. Didn't do it. Why? And what are you thinking about for the second half of the year? I know. I mean, I used to. Oh. Oh God. Yeah. It's really interesting because I worked at Subject for a long time and more so like I was more brought up as a blogger on the Internet than I. I've never worked in a newsroom.

I've never been like really trained in journalism in that way. My default loyalty is the independent media and the independent ecosystem at the same time. I think that partly with AI in particular, I've come to believe that. That the legacy media and telling good stories about AI and the legacy media is a lot more important. And so I think it actually comes from a sense of. It's less about me and my preference. And I think more of it is a sense of duty.

More of it's about a sense of public impact where I think that there are not that many AI journalists. There are not that many AI journalists in San Francisco. I do feel like there are certain stories that I can tell that other journalists aren't equipped to. To and I should exercise that by trying to portray certain ideas in the biggest medium possible, where it can reach the most number of people. And that's not my substack. And so I've become a lot more open to doing more freelance work.

I think that it is true that there's just nothing that compares to, say, the reach that the New York Times has. Like, it is incomparable. Just the amount of attention, discourse, action that comes out of writing a big New York Times piece. And it feels really important right now, given how polarized Silicon Valley is from the rest of the world, given the AI backlash, given all of these things, to spend time trying to bridge that gap, to do the translation work.

If that's the case, could you make a case that there are other mediums other than writing that would be higher impact, even so, like Ezra Klein's. Sure. Spending a lot of time podcasting. Oh, yeah, absolutely. Or. Or even something like the Abundance book. And like Derek, we. You and I, the book to go on the podcast. Right, right. You drop the boulder in the lake and it's about the ripples. Like if, if, if you were thinking about it purely instrumentally.

And the goal is to like, the world needs to better understand what's happening. Yeah. Discussion. Why is a great big, highly reported piece every quarter the right shape for that now? So one is like, I write the piece and then I do spend the next month of it going on podcasts, going to conferences, giving talks and talking to people about

the piece. So I'm very aware that writing is not the thing that reaches the most number of people, though in mediums like that, we're still probably talking like 10 million or something.

Like, it's still a pretty big number. But. But one is like, I have really. You were the Sunday issue, the permanent underclass was like the headline for the Sunday issue, right? Yeah, it was Sunday opinion cover peptides with Sunday business cover. My sense, they didn't tell me the numbers, but my sense is like 10 million ish would not be surprising to me. And so it definitely reached people even though it was writing. And then beyond that, the reason that I write less than other writers, so most full time writers write more often than I do, whereas I devote more time to going on podcast podcasts because I agree that most people are not going to read the writing.

And then so you do have to get the message out in as many mediums as possible. And I'm very comfortable doing that. And I want to like, I want to do it. I see as part of the work that if I do all this research, I want as many people to hear about it as possible. I mean, the reason that I start with writing is basically because I think it makes me the smartest. That's basically it. It's like I like the process of writing.

It's gonna make the idea the most solid too, to build on. Yeah, like you just, you synthesize. And we talked about. Podcasts are very exploratory. Writing is sort of like synthesizing. And they're both really interesting. I like doing both. And so like for me, when I'm reporting and interviewing, I'm in exploratory mode. Then I like bring it back in again, compress it down into a single like 3,000 word piece or whatever. And then I go broad again when I go and have all these conversations about it.

But like, that feels like the best thing for my learning as well as for the impact. And also, finally, a lot of important people still read. Like most people don't read. But I would probably argue that among people with influence in business, in politics, in media and tech, a lot of the most influential people are still big readers. One of your. You gave this substack talk at the subsack event recently about AI and writing and so on.

One of your lessons or points was that the value of polish is going to go down and the value of charisma and style and weirdness is going to go up. In some sense that would describe your two forms of writing, which is like New York Times, Atlantic stuff is very polished, frankly a lot less personality. And your substack writing for me is much more fun to read. And granted some of that is I'm more inside baseball.

I already like whatever and the two go well together. But I was thinking about that in terms of maximizing impact. Obviously New York Times is going to be fine. The Atlantic is probably going to be fine. Most of these. The direction of travel, though, along the lines of your point would be that if anything, we want to read more weird, stylish, charismatic writing. And so do you think there's a world? Maybe. Maybe this is a weird way to ask a question, like, do you think there's a world where maybe in two years or three years the writing someone like you is doing in the New York Times or the Atlantic is even more stylish.

Yeah. So yeah, I've thought about this one a lot because one is the thing about polish is like polish, like perfect grammar, like house style, et cetera. Part of that is about, you know, maybe the publication as a consistent brand. But it's also because polish used to be a very good proxy for how much work you put into it. Right. Like,

it just meant that some human spent a lot of personal attention, like being meticulous about every line, every word, every fact check, every citation. And that is becoming less and less true because very soon, I'm pretty sure now actually, if you fine tune some open source model, you could build the New York Times house style bot.

You could put someone's really crappy notes into it and out would come a piece in perfect New York Times house style. No personality, but perfect New York Times house style because it's very rigid, especially on the news and not the opinion side. I felt that it was basically like code syntax, like every. She said every word really means something. And so if in a world where polish is no longer a very good proxy for how much work went into it, you're going to need other proxies for like there was a human who spent a lot of effort on this.

Yeah, yeah. Katie Weaver talking about Bread was not very formulaic. It was amazing. So good. Granted, subject matter matters, but like. Yeah. Is it, is it so insane to imagine a few reform of like real reporting looks more like, reads more like. I hope so. Actually. There's a lot of distrust in media right now from the public. And I think part of that is that they don't like that they're pretending that there's this single objective view from nowhere.

Yes. And it would be better, I think, if reporters were a little bit more open and honest about the fact that they are people, subjectivities and very particular emotions. And when you share that on the page, I think that people trust it more, not less. It's a fine line, but I think you're right. Yeah. Like it's. There is. It is a fine line. I think it's more interesting. It's more engaging in a way that like perfecting your own voice and style is actually more evidence of work than having the polished thing that ChatGPT can turn out now. So I think that's really important. Yeah. And then also, just like I've talked to editors at these legacy publications who have explicitly told me that they are trying to be more stylish like they are.

I believe that the New York Times newsletters now allows their writers to write in the first place person. Before, it was unthinkable to allow a New York Times reporter to write with the word I. I like the word I. I use it a lot. And only recently have they started to think maybe in our newsletters, they can use the word I. And so I think they're coming around. Cool. All right. I want to talk a little bit about, I guess, broadly writing and Substack, but also maybe the original decision to go independent. Fun fact.

You and I both started what I'm doing, what you're doing, like, I think the same month, November 2024. Which is. Which is a fun synchronicity. I think my first question on this is. And you've written about this. I think I've talked to you about this. You left a successful even. You were the head of, I think, like, core product. I led the core product team. Led the core product team at Substack. You'd been there for a while.

You were doing very well. Ascendant. And you did this theoretically very risky thing to go become an independent writer. Writer. Why was that not so risky? I think a lot of people overestimate how risky career decisions are. I mean, my thought process was fairly simple, which is that I'd spent long enough at subsack that. And subsect was a company. People knew such that I felt that I could get another product job within a year if the writing thing didn't work out.

And so that was basically my insurance was if I hate writing or I'm really bad at it, then one year from now, I will

say I went on sabbatical, and I will just another job as a product manager at a different startup. And I felt pretty confident I could do that, given that all I needed was about a year or two of Runway where I'm like, okay, now let's also imagine a world where I make \$0 for one or two years.

Is that okay with my personal financial situation? It was fine. It's fine for, frankly, most people. And most people work in tech at least. And then I was like, okay, seems a little bit risky. I'll try it for a year. If I hate it, I'll get another job, and I won't have gone into the. The red. When you put it like that, it sounds so simple. It is. So what is catching most people? It's very baffling to me. What do you think is catching most people?

Well, so I think it's worth making a few points, which is one, it's definitely not the case that most people could quit their job for a year and be fine. But, yes, sorry, most people working in tech who had spent the same number of years at a tech company as I did. Because you also. I mean, you were three years out of school four Years out of school, like you weren't super established. Right. But I had had like 100k in my bank account. Right.

Like that's all you need. Why didn't you do it sooner to flip the question back on you? Sure. I really had a sense of what I wanted to do at Substack. So before I joined Substack, so I was a sociology major in undergrad and I spent a lot of time thinking specifically about social media governance and how the way that you design a social platform impacts the kind of information ecosystems that occur, the social dynamics, et cetera.

And so it was a longtime dream of mine from when I was in undergrad to design a social media platform from scratch. And so I specifically joined Substack, but it was still an email tool because Chris said they were going to do social media later. And I really wanted to be a part of designing it. And I got to do it and I got to scale it and then people started using it and I had product market fit and there was nowhere else, nothing else that substack I wanted to do. I mean, like, my team included podcasts and video, it included large publications, it included the iOS web and Android apps.

Like, it included DMs and chat and all of that stuff. Like, there wasn't really anything else that I wanted to do. I felt like the core mission that I came in with, which was, was I wanted to impact the media ecosystem in a positive way and I wanted to learn to design a social media platform based on different incentives and have people actually use and like that thing. I kind of accomplished both goals. And so I was like, okay, I'll move on to my other goals now.

I think the other part of this is you may I should ask you, like, to what extent do you know what you. When it, when it came to being an independent writer, perhaps more people would correctly identify how risky it actually is if they had more confidence in what it was they actually wanted to. To do. Yes, I think so. Like, what level of fit? And you've written about this a little bit, but like, what level of fidelity did you have over what this life could look like and what it would mean? You had, I think, some list of goals which were like, have fun and make money and a couple other things.

But like, did you have a sense of like, what success would look like in. In a lot of clarity? Yeah, I mean, so my

first year, because again, my first year I treated as a trial year, like 2025 for me was not. I am a full time writer now. It Was, I am trying this out and I'm totally fine with going back to tech after. Like, I was truly fine with going back into industry. I didn't know if I was going to stay with it.

And so I told myself, am I having fun? Am I writing stuff I'm proud of? Am I on track to financial sustainability even if I'm not making that much money now? And those were my exit criteria for the first year to go into the second year, which is what made me comfortable with that. Now I think I have broader goals now. I'm like, okay, I'm actually a writer now, so I got to get good at writing.

So when did you, you know, how far into the. The trial year? Maybe halfway through, basically. And was that mainly a product of the financial side of it? Was it mainly a product of the meaning and the fun? Was it mainly a product of, like, people like this? I think it was like, I was having a lot of fun and I was pleasantly surprised by how much demand there was for the type of writing I wanted to do. Yeah, yeah. Like.

Like one thing is it. It is clear now that there's an incredible amount of demand for Silicon Valley culture stories and a. I guess I wasn't paying that much attention at the time. Like, it just so happened that those are the things that I am personally interested in. But, like, there is tons of demand for journalism from people in San Francisco writing about AI right now. And so I got really lucky where I actually ended up going to basically the fastest growing part of the media market and stuff.

Just growth and pitching and whatever was easier than I expected. Yeah. In some sense, you were like, catering to where a ton. I'm not saying it was totally deliberate. You were catering to an area where there was a ton of demand. You weren't like, I'm gonna go write creative poetry. Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Which is probably more crowded and has less demand. Yeah. I think the risks would be super different if you wanted to go into poetry.

I think that a lot of people could still afford to take a year off to do poetry, and that might be really valuable for them to do even if they continue to go back into a corporate job opportunity afterwards. And you just don't know. Like. Yeah, I mean, I didn't start a podcast for so long because I'm like, it's just too late. Like, why is patronage and maybe this has evolved to. To the point we were just making.

Talking about in writing more for big publications. But why is patronage the right business model and in such a good business model for someone like you. Interesting. I don't think of my business model as patronage. You think about it as gated content. Well, I have no idea, frankly. My income comes from a real mix of things. How much of your. Roughly. Presumably a meaningful chunk of your income is subsack subscriptions. There's subse subscriptions, there's philanthropic grants, and there's freelance writing and speaking.

So one third of that. I'm not sure. One of those buckets. I mean, arguably two of those buckets are patronage. That's true. I guess it is. I've never thought of it that way, but I guess you're right also, especially because some substackers, it isn't really patronage. It's like a subscription. Yeah, but I don't. You don't pay well. I pay one very rarely. Right. So you're basically relying on a lot of goodwill and then occasionally. Or like the Atlantic and New York Times.

Yeah. Which pay. Not enough. Do you think your business model will primarily be patronage in two years? Mm. I think it would be nice to have things like speaking and such also be a bigger part of it and to do some more of the paywalling, mostly for diversification reasons. I think having the patroness situation I want to avoid, which is what I associate with the word patronage, is having one primary patron, because I think that then you are highly likely to get audience captured and you're also not really independent and depending on their ideological goals, personal proclivities, whatever, it just feels like you're on a leash. More.

More. Whereas I think the thing that is good about diversifying income sources, even within philanthropic grants, like, I take grants from very different organizations with very different political and ideological points of view, because I really don't want to be pigeonholed and I fear what it will do to my writing. So I am still. I think I would still be excited about continuing to get, say, like half my income from patronage, roughly, or more than half. But I just.

The thing I think more about is, is it sufficiently diversified that I both am perceived as independent and actually feel that I am independent and won't, like, make my funders mad or something? You and I already chatted about this a little bit, but you are someone who probably unlike most journalists, could not only work in tech, but could probably go get one of the most coveted jobs in the world, whether that be working directly at an AI lab or.

Or working in partnership with one of them. It seems like you have found a way to support yourself. Maybe this even actually goes back to working on The Substack side. But one of the big stories of Substack is not that only writers can support themselves, but the writers have built massive businesses. To what extent do you think about the. The. Ability to build a really great business versus like, like presumably, and maybe, maybe you're just not money motivated or whatever, but like, presumably someone like you could turn down the big money for a little while in the, in the name of being independent and all these things.

But like, at some point something's got to give probably. I think my sense is it's actually quite important that people on the far end of the power law of any discipline be able to do really, really well for themselves for that to become a long term path. Like Emily Sunberg. I don't know how much she makes, but she's doing very well. She's doing very well. That is very good for the world, independent of a handful of those machinations.

It's cool that you have Emergent Ventures Grant or something like that, or it's cool that you have a fairly decent subscription. Like, like one of my senses is, is that the reason that a lot of these big traditional media publications are struggling to retain talent and get the best talent is because they can make way more elsewhere. Like yes. Yeah, it, it, it's, it's. To put it another way, like if, if you can make way more money doing podcasting like Ezra Client has, you probably are gonna do or, or have a greater impact there.

I mean, there are things I. Okay, I agree with like half of what you're saying, which is that a big part of the reason that Substack was founded was that Chris thought it was really messed up that all of these incredible bloggers who had changed people's lives and who had huge readerships like Scott Alexander were doing it for free rather than being rich as they deserve to be. And doing a job on the side. And doing a job on the side. He

was like a psychiatrist or like, Chris thought it was crazy that if you work at the New York Times or any legacy newsroom, the person who's bringing in 100 times more views is getting paid maybe 2x the salary because of salary bans.

And he just felt that the market didn't really value writers and creators accurately and that you should be able to. To get rich by being a top one percentile writer, journalist or anything. And I completely agree with that. I think it's really important that Emily Sundberg and Scott Alexander and whoever can get rich doing what they do. It's amazing. At the same Time. I really don't think I'm doing this to get rich. If I wanted to get rich, I would go work for an AI.

Right. This is my point. I took a very large pay cut. I mean, I think I'm going to make up the pay cut on accident or like I think I will end up making up my like old tech salary pay cut. But I was perfectly happy to take a very large pay cut in order to do the thing I really wanted to do. And I have. Yeah, I have turned down a lot of opportunities to make more money. Yeah.

Maybe this wouldn't hold if I had kids. For sure. This is. Yeah. My question is more about like the durability of it. Right. Like the most important thing for any creative endeavor or really any endeavor at all, you think about this context of investing or whatever is being able to like stay the, the game. Yeah. Okay. And so I guess that's my root question, which is like, it's cute that like you could like a thousand true fans is a really cute idea.

But like actually 100k isn't enough for like most Americans to like live in a big city. Yeah. And so maybe I'm too much of a capitalist, but it seems to me that we actually, it's really, really important that we find great financial upside ways because otherwise everyone is going to go work in anthropic. Yes. No, I mean, I completely agree with this. Like I worked at Substack because I thought it was really important that the best people get paid. Yeah.

And so my opinions about the ecosystem are like pretty separate about my opinions about myself because like I understand that like as a 26, 6 year old with no children, I just have different needs and I'm like totally fine, like kind of broke for a little bit so that I can just have a lot of fun and. But I want you doing great reporting in 10 years. I do too. I think that would be good. But I don't plan one, I don't plan that far in advance.

Like one of the keys to happiness for me is I literally never plan more than a year in adv. Like I do not know what I will be doing in 10 years. It's very unclear to me. I would make a sub 50% bet that I'm still a writer in 10 years, for example, by the way. And I think you will probably be very successful financially and otherwise. But I hope so. But yeah, I mean, I think there's also a way in which like, because people overrate, like there's a lot of forms of capital in the world.

I think that, like, attentional capital is super valuable. Social capital is super valuable. I think that a lot of people underrate the other forms of capital by focusing too much on financial capital. And like, I am building capital right now. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm just building other forms of capital that I can launch a VC fund one day. I know I can cash these things in when I want to or if I need to. I know that if I wanted to put enterprise subscriptions

or, sorry, enterprise sponsorships on my substack tomorrow, I know I could do it.

And I know I could make a lot of money doing it. I know I could, you know, do consult, like comms consulting for some tech companies and really help them out. I know how I would make money. But in a way, I think it's harder to build attentional capital and cultural and social capital than it is to build financial capital. More importantly to me, I have more fun and I get to do the things I want more.

And I feel this immense luxury of having the freedom to not do a 9 to 5 and to get to live what to me is a very fun life where I get to travel and write and talk to all these people. And if I need to start cashing some of that in, I know how I'll do it. And so I think the, even like the, the fact that I know how to turn it into financial security is enough financial security for now.

I think that's. I think that's the, the fear I think for people listening is probably, especially on the more journalist side of the house is like the only way to cash out is like to fully compromise. And so I think that's the um, the important thing is that we, we maintain a. Maybe. Maybe it actually just goes back to your original point of you think that like an Emily Sandberg is compromised. You think that an acquired podcast is fully compromised. Like, I feel like the great thing about independent media and whether it's substack or podcast or whatever is like, you're not.

At least I don't feel that you're that compromised for being one of these types of businesses. I do not think that Emily nor acquired a compromise. I wonder about the different types of media and reporting though, which is like, to be like. It's actually quite a rare thing to have someone who could work at a big AI lab report on AI labs in some sense. Like, maybe one of the reasons there aren't more journalists is because they all work there.

I mean, I think about this a lot. I know a lot of people who worked in editorial at publications, who worked in policy writing who have now gone and worked. Worked at one of. Who have gone to work at one of this would be the cynics view is that just like this is what capitalism will do over time. Yeah, but I think it goes back actually to your original point, which is like being diversified. Is the, is the resilience against this?

Yeah. When I talk to like podcasters about how they think about their ads, a lot of them do, for example, really focus on diversification so that if they accidentally offend one tech company that might be a sponsor or something like that, like now they, they obviously don't want to lose the sponsorship, but they diversify so that it is possible to do so. Or you have news and business splits in newsrooms and even some large subsets I know will do the same thing where the person selling the ads is different from the person doing the writing. And when the person does the writing, they have no idea what ad is going to appear above or below it.

And these are small things. And you can make arguments that they're imperfect in a bunch of ways. But I think that there are. I think it's possible to be ethical and conscious about how your sponsors, how your advertisers, how your patrons are going to compromise your independence and not. It's obviously harder for someone who's doing hardcore corporate accountability journalism. Right. I think that that kind of work is probably going to have to be a combination of philanthropically plus subscriber supported because corporate sponsors are not

going to go for a lot of that, which is both rational and sucks because I do think that accountability journalism really matters.

And maybe it's possible that I piss somebody so bad with my reporting this year that like, maybe right now I still think I could go work in tech again. But maybe it's not true. Maybe they're already so mad at me and they think I'm such a, you know, a rogue at this point that they don't even want me to do comms for some tech company. And I think I just have to take that risk. It's okay.

I think also ultimately the negotiation between you and your readers is that you are going to be a good steward of this. Yeah. Like, I think that is really the trust thing. Right? Like, is that like. Yeah, yeah. I mean, again, I might be making terrible financial decisions. Like, I have no idea. I just don't plan in the future that much. I want to talk about good writing. You say the point of long form writing is to say Something not reducible to a tweet. The tldr of a Sontag essay could only be every word of it, wrote A.O.

scott. How do you. You. How do you do that? How do you. How do you get closer to writing where that statement could be true? Part of it is style and craft. If you have a really distinct voice and a really unique style where you're not using cliches, you're using crazy metaphors and retelling anecdotes and whatever, then the style becomes part of the content and part of the story substance.

Like you would Never read a ChatGPT summary of a Sam Kriss essay, right? Like it would. It just it. You lose everything about this essay when you lose the style. And I think that caring about voice and style and using fun words and writing fun sentences is part of that process. I think also, like, I do see writing as a form of entertainment. Like it's not just eat your vegetables, right? And tweets are not entertainment. TLDRs are not entertainment.

When I write about AI, I try to make it somewhat interesting to people. Most AI writing is pretty dry and technical and a lot of it's for business reasons, so I get it. But I think that I see part of my job as to entertain readers and to entertain the audience and to keep their attention captivated, even while I'm trying to share serious information. And that's another way that you avoid people wanting to tldr you or have their AI agent summarize you in a news roundup. Right?

It's like if the process of spending five or 10 or 20 minutes with your essay is intrinsically enjoyable, people are not going to want tldr it. Yes. Yes. Yeah, maybe there's some payoff or some education at the end, but like that's almost the bonus versus the inversion, which is like, what's the point of the article? Like, why are you clickbaiting me? Or whatever. What about voice? Voice, like how to what extent do you think you have consciously evolved or improved your voice?

Or is it almost one of those things where it's actually you have to try less in order to like have your voice come out? Yeah, definitely both. I mean, sometimes like when I feel really stuck or I feel like my writing's really dry, I'll like take out my like paper notebook and just like start writing in, in my paper notebook. Because some somehow that feels like it is a less self conscious form of writing and it's a more, more clear brain to page.

It's like a more natural brain to page and then my voice comes out more. I never thought about my voice until maybe this. Earlier this year, late last year. This is actually one of the things that Claude helped with, where sometimes people would tell me like, oh, I really like your writing voice. And like, that's great. It's good to hear. I actually have no idea what my writing voice is. I don't try. I just write how I want to write.

And so I had Claude read all of my archive of substacks and try to describe my voice back to me. And I actually found that super helpful. This is. What did it say? I think one is a blending of registers. I mean, I talked to Celine about this as well, but I think people's voice is an amalgamation of the experiences that they've had in the social context that they're in. Right. And so as somebody who spends both a lot of time in the AI industry, roughly a lot of time on the Internet and in communities with a lot of weird online slang. But also, I like to read literature, I like to read critics, I do read serious journalism.

The metaphors I choose and the words I use and the reference I make are going to be an amalgamation of all of those different influences. And I think that's true of every single writer. And so one characteristic of my voice is that I do tend to mix the, I don't know, the rationalist jargon with the Internet slang, with the literary critics point of view. Or I think another one is my voice is very first person. I do just naturally write as an I.

I say I feel I see, I'm not sure about things. This, even when I'm tackling politics and AI and whatever, I just find it natural to write in first person. So I usually do that. I like scene setting and I like anecdotes relative to writers who are more at an abstract level. I think for me, just the way that I think is so often tied to very specific conversations I have or quotes I remember or things I see in the world. And so. So again, when I'm writing, I'm just trying to take the thing in my head and give it to somebody else and hope that it also hits.

And so maybe it's not as rigorous as reading a paper or something or looking at a poll to tell someone an anecdote, but I tell people the anecdote, but it might be as true. Yeah, I'm not sure if true is the right word, but it's. Yeah, to take the metaphor literally. Literally. Is it important? Do you try? Do you care at all about writing how you speak. I don't try to. I try to write how I think more than how I speak.

Yeah. Yeah. I have no idea. Do you think I sound like I speak or. Sorry, do you think I speak, like, how I write, or is it different? The vibe is the same. Okay. But again, I don't know. I'm happy to hear that because it makes me feel like I'm not. Like, it's authentic, but, like, again, yeah, it's like. Yeah, I have no. I have no idea. Yeah. I mean, I guess the real litmus test would be when you meet someone.

When someone who's read you for a long time meets you in person. Yeah. Does it feel. I think I've asked actually a couple people this question. They tend to think I am roughly the same. I don't feel like I am somebody who does a lot of. I mean, I guess in certain senses I could switch because I talk to a lot of people from very different communities. But I think I am roughly the same in all of the contexts.

And so I don't think people are very surprised. I like to context collapse. I like to introduce my friends to each other. I think part of one thing that some people don't like about, say, having a blog or being very open online is that they feel uncomfortable with the idea that people from different parts of their lives will see this same self

that they present. Right. If you write a personal essay, like your mom and your boss and some stranger, they're all gonna see that.

And I think I have relatively pretty consistent. So I've accepted that they will. Another version of this is just like, are you as fun to hang out with as you are to read? Which I'm not sure that's the case for every writer. Oh, God. I mean, it's definitely not. Not. Yeah. I've definitely been to some conferences where most writers are just not very compelling speakers. And that's okay because they have other talents. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, yeah, most writers can't really. Maybe not most.

Many writers can't really speak. You wrote. Blogging is not only a search query referencing Henrik's excellent post, but a kind of prompt for human wisdom. The world will respond with the seriousness that you put into it. Can you say more about that? I think when I put a lot of effort into writing something, people, it's proof of work again. And it means that people, strangers, will put a lot of effort into the response.

Right. And it's a way to. Like. One thing that I think about a lot is, like, I feel really rich in information. I love information, I love knowledge, I love facts, I love knowing stuff. And I'm not very capital rich right now, but like, I get to know a lot of stuff. I get to talk to a lot of people. This is what Tyler is. He wants to be like an information trillionaire. Yes, yes. No, totally. I completely understand that.

And so one of my favorite things about writing is like, if I pour my heart and soul into a piece and it's like really evident. Like, I remember one of my favorite things is I wrote this like 7,000 word China essay last year. It was about my family and it was about China and it was about technology and all of these things. And I spent a lot of time on this essay. You got a Kevin Kelly comment too, which is so.

Oh yeah, I was really happy about that. That made me very happy. And it was my favorite thing about it was like getting all of these emails from people who had either lived in China or spent time in China at various points throughout the last 50 years who just write me essays and email about their own stories or their own experiences. Say, growing up in Shenzhen and seeing the phrase I remember skyscraper sprouting up like mushrooms, like, which I think is like incredibly beautiful, evocative phrase.

I'm like, someone just wrote this in a freaking email to me, a stranger. And I think that's the thing that I feel really fortunate to get, is if I spend, yeah, sure, a lot of time writing this piece, I get rewarded many times over with other people's own sharing memories, disclosures, whatever. And I just think that's really, really special. One of the ways the Internet can be the most special is is that phenomenon specifically, almost inside of it is like, you're allowed to care this much.

Not quite exactly the same, but it's something to that. Like the Internet is this place where you can find the pe. The weirdos who care as much as you do. Yeah. And they really can be anywhere. Right. Like, it is like the original dream of the Internet is still alive to me in that sense where I think that through writing I am able to maintain a lot of. Of friendships with people who live in other countries or other cities, especially if both of us are writers, you know. And often I've noticed that, like, if I like someone's tweets, for example, it doesn't actually

mean we're going to get along in person.

But when someone and I like each other's long form writing, we almost always hit it off. Like, we really do hit it off. There's something that is deeper, that is like, the connection is stronger. And so that, to me is just really exciting. I don't know. Do you think it happens as much for podcasting? I think it. I probably get less wordy responses, which is probably telling, but it's certainly like a bat signal. Yeah. I have. I mean, I have friends who I've.

I certainly have friends who I've met through interviewing people, and I have friends who I've met because they like. Like the podcast. Yeah. Yeah. Do you think that your podcasting self is like, roughly who you are? Oh, man, we. I mean, you and I talked about this a little bit. Like, there is an element of this that's performance. I probably talked about this before, but it's like I'm choreograph or excuse me, I'm conducting the orchestra with one hand and I'm playing in the orchestra with the other hand.

Yeah. And there's a version of me that could do. Could not have this in front of me and not do any prep and just would be maximally present. It would be less performance and so that would be more like me in real life. And then there's a version of me that was just like perfectly scripted. And I'm trying to find the right balance between those two. I don't know. I'd have to ask people who. I think it's probably fairly similar.

Yeah. You seem relatively the same as you did when we got coffee. For what it's worth, I'll take it. I'll take it. You wrote somewhere that you carry around printouts of your favorite square essays and put them in your laptop bag, either printed out or otherwise. What are some of your favorite essays? The one that I always talk about and that I probably look at the most is Gideon Lewis Krauss's 15,000 word essay about Google Brain in 2016.

I don't know it. It's called the Great AI Awakening. It was in New York Times Magazine, and I think it is the best piece of AI journalism that I've ever read. And, like, it's everything that I want aspire towards in writing, which is that, again, writing has so many components to it. There's like reporting, there's like prose style, there's the ideas and whether the ideas themselves are good. And I think this magazine story is all of those things in that it's really funny. He writes about the different characters, like these AI researchers and engineers, in ways that are just like, turn them into these delightful, hilarious characters as if you were writing a novel.

The prose style is really wonderful. It's very deeply reported. He literally just hung out in the Google Brain offices over and over and over and talked to Jeff Dean and talked to Kwok Le and just spent a lot of time with the people really learning about both who they are and also that technical work they were doing. He can summarize these very complex AI papers to a layperson in beautiful and yet also accurate ways. And then also it was just so prescient.

The thing that I think is maybe most amazing to me is not just that, that it's a great work of nonfiction writing, which it is. He's a very good prose stylist. But also that again, this thing was in 2016. In 2016, DMind was doing AlphaGo and OpenAI was doing Robot Hands or something. No one had really cracked LLMs yet. But in this 2016 piece, he's like, yeah, maybe he was writing a Google Translate upgrading to a more LLM based model.

And he's like, yeah, maybe language is the pathway to artificial general intelligence. And he says all of these things that we now take for granted as being true about AI progress as a New York journalist in 2016 writing about Google Translate upgrading their model for 15 years. And I just think that's like, it was so prescient, it was so brilliant and it just really stands the test of time. There are very few pieces about AI that stand the test of time like that.

That's a 10 year old piece and I still reread it. That's pretty amazing. Maybe zooming out you. But on the same thread you wrote somewhere that you wish you want to be able to observe the world like Maggie Nelson. Are there other essayists or writers or journalists or observers who have been influential on you? I know somebody. Like, we talked about Sontag a little bit. Yeah. No, I mean, I love Sontag. I love Maggie Nelson in the sort of culture critic camp.

Yeah, I think Gideon's excellent. I think Dan Wong's work is very good. I think a lot of the people who I admire both have a cultural lens to their work, like a cultural, deeply humanistic lens. They're very interested in people specifically, but they're also sharp and I like sharpness. Who are some of the other essays I love? Um, I really like. I. I do really like Anna Wiener's work. Megan O. Giblin, who wrote *God, Human, Animal, Machine*, that's another. She's.

She's an essayist. Her first essay collection was about the Midwest and Christianity, and her second one was about almost like the theology of how we think about machines and artificial beings. Wow. Because she has this like, theology background. Wow. So interesting. So cool. Cool. It's super cool. I like the Christianity essay collection as much as I like the *AI Ish* collection. Megan O. Giblin. Okay. I have to check this out. She's really cool. I love her work.

It's just like they're like non linear ways of thinking. And again, it's like a mix of disciplines. Right. Like, you don't think that these disciplines should illuminate each other, but they do. I love Peter Hessler's *China Books and China Essays*. I mean, he sort of, to me, is one of the classic, like, guerrilla ethnographers, where he's not trained in ethnography or whatever. Whatever. I think he was more trained as a journalist. But his books are super funny.

They're very character based. They're not just like, let me cite a bunch of stats and charts and whatever. It's like, I'm gonna hang out with like a Uyghur tradesman in Beijing and like eat lamb skewers together and I'm gonna go road tripping around the Great Wall and then get caught by the police and like, sounds like a little Bernain ish almost or something. And like that style of living in the world as the sort of credibility for your writing. And again, it's such a human focus.

It's all about these very particular characters that he meets and the real relationships that he builds, say when he taught in Chengdu. Like, that kind of writing is really influential to me. What does sharpness mean? Ooh. Yeah, that's. It's a good question. Because sharpness and precision are two things I really value, but I've never attempted to define them. Are they the same?

No, but they're related. I think it has something to do with clarity of thought. I think it's like knowing what your point of view on a piece or a story or an issue is. You're not just doing summary. You're not making like 10 tangential arguments at the same time. Like, there's an angle to things. There's like a thing you're trying to accomplish, whether it's a frame or a question or a conclusion. Yeah. I think being sharp has to do with your clarity of thought and how much you know what you're trying to do with a piece.

Yeah, it cuts very cleanly. There's something really elegant about when somebody can make a point like that. Yeah, yeah, you told me. Or maybe we even talked about it earlier. Like when you're like, sort of like figuring out, out what you think is very different than when it's converted. Like when it's in your head and when it converts into writing, like, there's this like, blob that needs to convert. Like, do you have any sense? Is that just about clarity and precision?

Maybe what I'm asking about is like, are you. Will you think about something and kind of come up with your conclusion and then convert it into words? Or are you actually thinking on the, the page? Does that delineation make sense? Yeah, I think. Yeah, I think we have this. Like, a lot of people say writing is thinking. I believe this is true for many people. Writing definitely helps me think. But the primary work of thinking is, to me, separate from writing. Like, maybe I'm doing some writings and like, I'm taking notes or like scribbling or something, but they feel like separate parts of the process to me. Where, like, the act of synthesis of me, like, pouring over, like a bunch of notes and interviews and papers and essays side by side and trying to figure out, like, what do I actually think?

Here is a separate process from now that I know what I think, what I'm trying to accomplish, the frame I'm trying to introduce, how do I make that legible and entertaining to the reader? But when you're in the thinking process, are you just like sitting, arranging puzzle pieces in your head? Is the thinking actually this mix of reading and listening and going on a walk? Yes, all of these things. Like, again, it's like when I come back from China, I have like 150 bullet points in my notes app.

What the fuck is going on in this notes app? I'm like, rearranging them into like, little blocks, like, trying to, like, if they were sticky notes, I guess I'd be doing it. But I just like, copy and paste around my notes app and I'm like, trying to find clusters and themes that emerge. It's kind of writing, but it's not prose development. No, it's not prose necessarily. I also will call people. I'll talk to Claude sometimes. Like, with the AI and labor piece, I spent a lot of time talking to friends of mine who I just thought were like, really smart thinkers about AI and the economy, where I was just like, okay, this is a really complicated issue. It's very controversial.

Economists haven't decided what they think is going to go on in the labor market. And I need to figure out what do I actually think is going to happen? And then what do I want to say in My piece and I would just debate kind of on the phone or think out loud and get pushback from friends who I thought were smarter than me. And through the process of conversation we would arrive at, at an outline and then I would stare at it again, push back here and there.

But like, it's really messy. It's not a clean process. You also, maybe it's a similar note you wrote. At some point in

every project, it stops living in the Google Doc and starts living in your mind. Everything else you see and hear gets filtered through this frame of the essay. Is that just a byproduct or is that actually like a part? Is getting to that point a part of your writing process? Process? Like, does it change once you've gotten to the point where now like you're seeing the world through?

It's a good question. I don't think it's intentional, but I actually think it is part of the writing process now that you bring it up. Like, I think that the piece gets a lot better at that point. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like there's, there's additional stuff that can happen only then, right? Because like, that's when I start to bring in things that, when I start to make non obvious connections. Because when you're just doing research, it's like very scoped, right?

Like, it's like, here's my reading list syllabus, right? I'm in my sandbox. I'm gonna do these 10 interviews. And like you're thinking within the sandbox. But once I'm like immersed enough in a piece, every conversation, like, it's kind of annoying to my friends probably, but like, I'm always bringing up what I'm thinking and like, I don't care if the person's an expert, I just want to know how they react to it. Totally. Or like everything I see in the world, like, kind of connects the piece, like the companion piece to my permanent underclass thing that I did on my sub stack. I was in China. I was finishing the permanent underclass piece.

I was in China to learn about like open source AI or something. Like, the point was not for me to, to think about the labor market, but I couldn't stop looking around and noticing how many fake jobs people were working in China. Like, you have street sweepers in every park who are literally sweeping clean streets. And you have people who are checking your bags in the subways. And they're not actually checking. We all know that they're not actually checking.

There's these security guards monitoring like extremely Safe areas every 200 meters in broad daylight. And it's very clear, or it only became clear to me after I was in this mode and I was writing this piece and I couldn't stop thinking about the labor market, that I was like, oh, these are jobs programs. Like, I've been to China a lot of times before, and it never clicked that they were government jobs programs. That because China has high levels of unemployment, the government is very motivated by social stability and they are willing to have some inefficiencies in their bureaucratic spending to give people something to do. Because the Chinese government believes that, like, giving people work is, like, just an inherent good in and of itself. But, like, I literally would not have noticed that in my general environment had I not been in the mode of my New York Times piece where everything was getting filtered through it. And then the park that I've gone. Gone in a run through, like, you know, dozens of times at this point, I'm like, yeah, why is that guy sweeping a clean street? Like, I never thought about it before.

And so, like, I do think you just start to make all of these, like, crazy connections. And that's one of the most satisfying parts for me in writing. Really cool. Yeah, Yeah, I have. I mean, I have the same thing. After interviews, I just start, like, the rest the next week. I'm just, like, filtering back. I'm almost, like, processing. Processing it. Post fact. Yeah, like, fully digesting it. Henry Carlson talks about this when he's working on a piece.

He's like, it's like a room that I have a key to. And when I publish the piece, I'm, like, throwing away the key. So sometimes he won't publish it because he wants to keep, like, that headspace. Yeah. A little while. That's cool. I like that. I. I do feel a little bit like that too, because when I publish, I don't return as much to it anymore. Or the very least, it's more. Now you're ready to go, like, talk about it and spread the ideas.

It's formed now. And so, like, I kind of know what my thesis. Not in the exploratory mode. I mean, like, one of the things they do in reporting, in interviews, and this also is like, some of the capital G journalism stuff again. But like, a lot of journalists, some journalists. I shouldn't generalize. Some journalists, when they're asking people for interviews, they're just really trying to get one quote out of them. They're like, going to a person because they think that, like, this person based on the organization, they work for is going to say this one sentence, and.

And I need to plug that sentence into my piece. They just want you to be like, oh, yeah, Elizabeth Ward's policy is good or bad, and you can predict what they're gonna say even before you do the interview. For me, the thing that I find most fun about reporting is the process of discovery. And so I'll go into, especially the first set of interviews I do, like, the first 15 calls or whatever. I'll tell the person, I don't know what I think about AI in the labor market yet.

I'm still trying to figure out this issue. So just so you know, I'm not just trying to get a single quote out of you. I'm trying to work through the issue. And can we just talk? Because I'm in this learning mode, and I'm in this discovery mode, and I really like being in discovery mode. It's much more fun. And I think it also makes them trust me more, which is not. I will never reach a conclusion. Like, they know I'm gonna have an opinion eventually, but, like, it is malleable for quite a long time. And I like.

I like feeling like the ideas are malleable. Yeah. I think you wrote somewhere that you, like, hate all your old writing or something, or you just think it's all bad or whatever. But I'm curious how you think specifically, you've gotten better. One thing that I noticed between when I wrote at the beginning of last year and when I write now on substack is that I hedge much less. And when I.

You're sharper, probably. Yeah, I think I'm sharper. When I read some of the pieces that I thought were pretty good pieces at the time. I did this one on what AGI means, and trying to disambiguate the term AGI. I sound so nervous and insecure and self conscious in the piece. Every other sentence, I'm apologizing for not knowing anything about AI and it's because at the time, I really felt this way. It was an accurate representation of how I was thinking.

And I don't know if I regret it because. Because it was warranted humility, as in, I hadn't spent that much time in these debates in these worlds yet. And so I did feel like I was in the process of learning, but I think it was a less effective piece of writing because I was hedging so much. Right. And I also had this complex when I was writing last year where I evaluated all my own work by what my most expert Friend would think about it.

So when I wrote about AI, I thought about the people I knew who had been working in AI the longest. Longest.

And when I wrote about China, I thought about the China scholars I knew and the professors I knew. And when you're in this mode, you think all your writing's really bad and it's like, really? Yeah, it's not good for the psyche, I think. Well, the challenge is like on some hand. On one hand, that probably does make your writing better.

It does. Like you aim for the stars or whatever. On the other hand, it can't be the litmus through which you judge the final product. Because it's not for them. Yeah, it's not for them. That's the thing that I think it took me until late last year to realize realized was like, I'm writing for an audience that is not. They're smart. I write for smart people, but I don't write for like the world's expert on this issue.

And like, I'm just trying to move their understanding forward. Right. And, but like, and you know, who knows, you might surprise yourself. Like you actually might end up influencing the experts too in an, in an unexpected way. Yeah, probably. Sometimes I do. Right. Like, it's like I actually do feel like the Gideon. Gideon Krause, maybe to the point. Like he actually maybe called it the language model point. Oh, yeah. I mean, no, I mean, I think sometimes the outsiders do see things more clearly than the like, known experts in the field. But yeah, I think I read a lot of the self consciousness and hedging and insecurity in my past writing, and I have a little bit less of that now.

Which is not to say that, like, I think I'm an expert, but I'm just, I realize that the best end product is not constantly apologizing for its own existence. Yes. You said you wouldn't write if you couldn't publish. Oh, yeah. And yet you also have this like, amazing piece somewhere where you're talking about Hanya Yana. Yana. Excuse me, Yana Gihara. I'm sure I'm butchering that. And this idea of the audience of one and this kind of more autotelic thing, non instrumentalism. How do you square those two things?

And are you sure you wouldn't write if you couldn't publish? I'm not sure I believe you. I believe me because I'm not a journaler. I don't journal. No. Maybe I journal once every two to three months. So hold on. Okay. Like, I don't write when I'm not publishing. So when you're at substack, I mean one, you were sometime publishing on Substack, you. I mean, we talked about like, you've been writing. You were a kid. Yeah. You basically just only have been writing if you could share it.

Yeah, basically. I mean, like, I. I wouldn't say I've shared. Like, sometimes I try to write something because I think I'm going to share it, but then it's crappy and I don't. But everything has that intention of having an audience. And to be clear, sometimes I write emails. Right. Like, I like writing emails to my friends and my mentors and to me, that counts as publishing. Totally, totally. Because someone's gonna read it. I like, when I worked at substack, we had an internal subset and a lot of the way that.

Because I joined as an intern with no college degree and like, I just like, was very junior in the substack hierarchy. And a lot of the way that I ended up, like, leading the core product team and like moving up in the organization was that I wrote a lot on our internal substack and I just like, write my product takes and my strategy takes and enough people liked them and read them that they eventually involved me in better conversations.

It gave me more responsibility and things like that. But like, for me, writing is a form of politics. It's a way to change the world. It's a way to meet people. It's shift discourse. It's communication. Right? Because again, my thinking process is separate. I don't think by writing. I think in some other weird, blobby way that involves conversations and notes and readings. This is interesting. And because writing for me, me, is completely a communicative act, I'm trying to entertain people, I'm trying to share an idea.

I'm trying to like, make a dent in the discourse. Right. And so, like, because of that, I don't. Like, if I was just trying to think, I wouldn't be writing. Well, maybe it's not an audience one, but there was, there was this. I think it was. I don't think it was. When you left subject May, you maybe were still there. You said, I think working a lot has made me a worse writer. My prose is tight and the excess trim deformation efficiency is paramount.

I write like the \$12 dust salad, the bar that PAC 20 grams of protein and plastic into a 1 into 1200 calorie brick. But good writing, like a good meal, needs fat. It should be. It should indulge readers. It's meant to be Chewed and enjoyed, affording a generous escape from the prosaic and the mundane. And then you go on to say you're talking about sort of like increasingly feeling like so much of your life is instrumental. You say, as I've gotten older, I've increasingly viewed art as enjoyable but auxiliary, secondary, did the real work of politics.

In high school I traded creative writing for debate, so on and so on. But I have begun to come around on this. Art, or at least good art, is defined by its non instrumentality. Non instrumentality. Art is not useless, but it is use agnostic and that's what makes it so useful. After all, you write like most your writing is pretty instrumental. Yeah. That's not to say it's not ever art, artistic or creative. I think it is so many of those things.

Do you have an ambition to do more artistic things? I do. I don't know that I'd be good at it. That's okay. I really admire, I admire Yohanya Yanagihara so much because when you read that New Yorker profile of her that I think that peace references refers to. She doesn't think about the audience. She doesn't care if people like her. She doesn't care when she drops the boulder into the lake, she doesn't look to see if it makes a splash.

And it does because her work is very good and she cares about the craft purely internally. But I just don't know that I'm built like that. I think it's good because audience capture does pose a lot of risks. Right. And if you don't care about the craft and the rigor for its own things sake, you're not going to produce work that matters anyway. Yeah, yeah. But I think I see myself more as a consumer than a producer of art. For now.

Like art is something that I consume and appreciate. I don't actually see my writing as art. My writing is mostly communication. I care about the style, I care about. Yeah, yeah, that's. It's not, it's very, very creative. I try to be. I try like, I try to have fun with it. Like, you know, I. Not every piece is. I'm not writing policy memos. Right. But it's. I, it's always for an audience. I think that's the thing is like even when I'm trying to be creative, it's because I'm trying to entertain. Right.

Maybe on the last note, another question that, that Celine brought up that I loved, which is what it. What does it mean to do beautiful or expressive non fun fiction writing? You said somewhere else that you don't write fiction because there's no grander game than what is actually going on. Which is awesome. Sure, many would disagree,

but. Oh, yeah, on that last note of, like, maybe just being entertaining, but yeah, like, it isn't lifeless. It is.

I don't know if I would use the word beautiful across all the context, but some of it, like that China post was amazing and so lively and. And certainly expressive. Yeah. I'm reminded of our conversation about AI writing and AI art. And at some point the AIs will get good enough that they'll make movies and write essays that are better and more enjoyable for the reader than a lot of our work. Right. I'm ready for my AlphaGo moment on the writing.

It's going to happen. But to me, the point of writing is to communicate the life behind the work and the fact that the person who has generated the text is like a real living being who has desires and fears and motives and is a subjective person with weird biases and family baggage and trauma and whatever else. Right. Lavitu talked with you about this, with Lee Seal. He's like, Lee Seal, super into K pop. Yes. I thought that was amazing.

That's what makes him a human. Aww. Exactly. And like, I think that when we, like. I always think about, like, when people, like, listen to a pop song, sometimes they're just listening cause they want to listen. But when someone's like a real loyalist to like, a particular pop star, they usually have this like, grand narrative about their life and the dramas in it. And it's like, oh, she wrote this album because she's going through this breakup and like, whatever. And like, again, when you. When you marvel at like, Michael Phelps swimming or like, Alysa Liu and like, her ice skating performance, it's not just the fact that she's a good skater.

Of course she's a good skater. We definitely appreciate that. But it's like the life behind the work. We're compelled by Alysa Liu because we. We hear about her dad, we hear about her quitting, we hear about her coming back and learning to love it for herself. And like, when I write and you see it on her face, you see it on her face looking down at her. It's the expressiveness. Right. Like, it's not just a technically perfect performance, it is a technically perfect performance and the, like, liveliness shines through. Right.

And like, unitary robot Alysa Liu would just never be as compelling. And so I think nonfiction writing is quite similar where, like, I am trying to. Sure. I'm trying to transmit ideas, but I'm also trying to evoke that there is a life behind the work. There's a very particular point of view with a set of footprints, flesh and blood experiences that I have that don't have to be representative, don't have to be objective, but that I'm hoping that people can connect with.

And that also for me, like, it feels more authentic, it feels more real, it's more enjoyable. Perhaps you kind of just answered the question, but which of your work, either what specifically or what aspects of it are you most proud of? I am really proud of the China piece. I think it's probably my favorite thing I've written. I think it felt structurally ambitious to try to weave together some of the family history stuff with a travelogue to China, with stuff about the Chinese tech ecosystem and Wang Huning and like more abstract political stuff. And so I was really, personally, I remember the moment where I figured out the structure and that was super satisfying because initially when I wrote it, it was just a day by day trip report type thing of observations, which is fine and would have been okay, but it wasn't until I unlocked both the Wang Huning America Against America frame, plus this realization of, oh, different migrations from different members of my family.

And so much of the AI story is a talent story. It's about why individual people decide to like, seek out opportunity for themselves. That the piece felt like it clicked. And then it was also just important because it was like emotional. Like, my grandmother had just passed and I was like, in China in part because I wanted to learn more about her life. And I was going through like hundreds of photographs with my mom and my grandfather from like her early life in Indonesia to like when she moved to Fujian by herself, like with like leaving behind her parents and eight siblings, like, to her college date. And it was just like, I think that personal motive.

I wanted to write something that would honor the story. And so I think that was another big part of it. I think you did. I have like a speed round of miscellaneous. We can race through a bunch of random things, a few things on China, actually, quickly. First of all, it's the same reason I love San Francisco. For all its thorns, China is a place where things actually happen. Chinese engineers also seem more practical than their American counterparts.

They're here to build tech and make money. Risk management is for bureaucrats. Polit policy is only relevant insofar as it helps or hurts your work. This is something I think Westerners often get wrong. If you live in a single party state, you are, on average, less ideological yourself. The politics have already been decided. No point wasting extra cycles coming up with something new. I think that there's, like, you're pointing at something like that I think is really underrated there.

And maybe people, like. I don't know. It made me think about people always wondering in the U.S. like, what must they be thinking about? It's almost like. It's like you're brought down one level of the decision tree. Can you say more about. Is there almost a sort of freedom that the average Chinese person gets from not having to think about this stuff or. Yeah. I mean, it's really interesting because it's such a contrast to my own experience.

I spend a lot of time thinking about political philosophy and how I want the world to be. Be organized. And recently I've been thinking a lot about the AI backlash. And so during my last trip to China, I was asking a lot of people in China, both like, AI engineers and my family members and random people, like, is there an AI backlash in China? Do people think about it? And it's similar where people would say, like, almost the idea of an AI backlash is kind of silly because AI and its diffusion is taken as a given, especially because I think the.

The Chinese government has decided that AI is part of their strategy for national advancement. And so there's not even a culture of resistance or even the idea that one might oppose a new technology because it is taken as a given. In the same way that, like, you don't really spend a lot of time thinking about what alternative political systems might emerge if you've grown up in a society where there is only one. So those two things are almost mirrored.

Yeah, yeah. And of course, I'm being generalizing. Of course there are dissidents in China. There are people who do critique AI. There are people who are doing underground, kind of more active Americans. We're gonna debate everything. Yeah. We have an opinion on everything. Yes. And the majority of Chinese people just don't spend that much time thinking about it because there is a precedent where if you try to organize a protest, you are gonna get shut down immediately, you are gonna get thrown in jail.

Why even try? What is the point of resisting? And there's a way that you can look at this as being very bleak. And in many ways, I do think that sucks. I love pluralism. I think free speech is really important. I could never live in China because I value free speech and pluralism so highly. But I also don't think it's. There's still a lot of degrees of freedom that you have at a lower level. Outside of the big questions of how is our society organized?

And like, can you stop AI? Like, such as, how will I use AI? I think a lot of Chinese people spend more time thinking about how AI can benefit them because they have accepted that this is a given in their lives. And then it's a question of, okay, do I want like an elder care robot? Am I going to get this job? Like, what is the actual role that this thing is going to play in my life?

There's a world where in some of these things, if they really are deterministic, they might be better prepared to think about the details of them. Yeah, I think that, I think that the median urban Chinese person is pretty probably maybe doing a better job thinking about how AI can help them than the media and urban American. Right. Another one. There's a saying that goes like, goes something like, after one week in China, you feel like you could write a book.

After one year you think you could write an article. After 10 years, you realize you know nothing. I think you express in that piece that you're sort of in the middle of that spectrum. Yeah, but what do you. Why, what, what's inside of that? Is it the history? Is it the fact that China is in many ways like an ancient culture? Is it the vastness? Is it the size? Yeah, I think all of those things. I mean, it's like the United States. Right.

Like, I grew up in America. Do I even understand America? I don't think so. Right. Like, I spent all my time, I grew up in Seattle, I live in San Francisco, I've lived in New York before and I've spent a little bit of time in New York and D.C. now, these are extremely self selecting pieces of what America is. Right. And so like, I don't feel very capable of speaking for. I barely feel capable of speaking for Americans when I.

And I've never lived outside of these coastal elite hubs to attempt to speak for China. When I go to Shanghai like once a year or something and I've been to a few other cities once or twice, just feels impossible. And in particular, there's also language barriers. There's. Yeah, there's all of these things. I think it's just like I want to afford China as a country and as a society, the same level of respect for complexity that I afford the United States, which is something I think a lot of observers don't do.

To be fair, I don't know if most Americans afford the United States that complexity either you've compared China and San Francisco, like, what at its most virtuous. What do you admire about San Francisco or Silicon Valley? I think it is the agency. I think people think it's cringe now. But I. I am such an agency believer. Like, I studied sociology. I was very interested in, like, social justice stuff as a teenager. And as a young adult, I was like.

Worked at nonprofits and did college activism and stuff, like very lefty circles. And there's just this pervasive mood in a lot of these environments that you're screwed, everybody's screwed. No matter how hard you fight capitalism and white supremacy and all these crazy superstructures are going to win in the end and they're going to ruin your life. Plus, everyone, everyone's operating in a scarcity mindset and trying to cancel each other all

the time. I remember even, I mean, media is a bit like this too.

Like when I talked to journalists when I was in undergrad, and I was like, should I become a journalist? So many of them were like, nope, it's over. Journalism's over. We're all dying. We're all getting laid off. There's no future. And the thing that I really loved about the tech industry in Silicon Valley is that there was always a sense, an insistence on there being a future. There's a delusional insistence on your ability as a random individual with no qualifications to shape that future future.

And there's a celebration of the people who do that. And I just thought that was amazing. It actually in many ways reminded me more of, like, reading these books as a kid about, like, civil rights leaders, about reading about, like, MLK Jr. Or Yuri Kochiyama or whoever, where you do have to stand in the face of a superstructure that is greater and more powerful and wealthier than yourself. And rather than sort of retreating into fatalism, you say, like, screw it, like, I'm an idealist. We're gonna make some shit happen anyway. And in many ways, I think that Silicon Valley at its best embodies that kind of delusional idealism. And I think that you. Sometimes it's delusional, but you don't even get any of the good unless you actually believe that it's possible. Right? Like, that's what saved me, in a way, from, like, a life of being like an extremely depressed and cynical leftist was meeting a bunch of people in Silicon Valley. I mean, in 2020, one of the formative experiences in my life was I lived in a group house for two months in Cancun with A bunch of teal fellows.

And they were the ones who convinced me that I should do writing and start a magazine and that I could be a journalist again. I had called all these journalists who were real journalists and they were like, nope, it's doomed, this industry's over. And it was like these teal fellow startup dropout kids who were like, wait, why can't you run the New York Times, by the way? Probably don't care about journalism. They, they don't even care. They just believed in me, believing in myself.

And they would argue with me, I'd be like, nobody wants to fund journalism. And they would literally just sit on the couch and argue with me for hours. And then they introduce me to my first funders for my old print magazine. That sense of belief in different futures being possible is a thing that I love more than anything else. And so I don't know if I'm an optimist or pessimist about the tech industry. It's done a lot of good. There are things I don't think love about it, but I really wish that other parts of other industries, other sectors, other people, other communities had the same sense of belief.

And yeah, it's almost this deterministic sense. If I set out the future, I know I can get there. And I think that's guided me quite a bit too. It's just being able to set a goal. I want to design a social media platform from scratch and make everyone use it. And there you can't guarantee it, but you're sure as hell not going to do it if you don't think that you can. Beautiful. What do you think this place is most under calibrated on or could use a dose of?

I think it is insularity and it's not being interested, not respecting and not being interested in the rest the of of the world. You have such a strong belief that we can reinvent everything from scratch. We can first principles it that we are smarter and we can figure out how to do government better. We can figure out how to do the opposite side of the good coin. It's the exact same thing. I mean like, I think agency is important, but I don't

think agency and insularity have to go hand in hand.

Like agency doesn't mean that you're okay if everyone else hates you or that you think you don't need to collaborate. Right? And the attitudes that bother me in Silicon Valley often come from this anti democratic, anti pluralistic instinct where you don't think you have stuff to learn, you don't have to do the same thing as everyone else. But are you not even curious or like the vice signaling stuff? I think it is a virtue in and of itself to try to make people like you.

It is a virtue to be pleasant. It is a virtue to try to communicate. Communicate what you're trying to do to others and to set hope that they will understand and support what you're doing. At the point where Silicon Valley searched companies are no longer even interested in making that case to the public. They're basically saying, like, screw you. I don't care what you think. It's not important to have democratic buy in for my project. Yeah.

And that's what really bothers me. We talked around it a little bit, but one of the things you and I spoke about in the past is you made this point and you made this point in reality writing to that. There's a few that like, maybe technology can be. Excuse me, AI can be tools that empower us. And you, I think, rightly make the point that the same tool that empowers the senior designer is going to automate the junior designer.

And one thing that you said to me really stuck, which was just like, the point is to one shot everything. How do you hold that view and feel that inevitability? You've made the point about you're going to get alphagoed like, and because that view is sort of driving all these people to lose their minds over the rat race of talking about the Chinese evolution, all this stuff of just like, I have two years before it, nothing matters.

Right. Right. How are you sitting with that? I think it's really good that the world is this complex. I think we should all feel really fortunate that it is super hard to one shot all the jobs and that we are really far away from it. It's like there are all these lessons in management or in organizational sociology. The org chart is not the org chart. The world is extremely illegible. Or the real world is all edge cases all the time.

Not that many things are software problems. Not that many things are software problems. Yes, there's standard operating procedure. How often is that standard operating procedure followed? Even if it's 80% of the time? Right. That 20% is a lot of freaking edge cases. And how many times do you do your podcast setup and some tiny thing goes wrong and you got to adjust because the lighting's different or something broke. And it's just like, again, the real world is all edge cases all the time.

And so it's really hard to automate actually. And it's really hard to make everything legible and you can collect a lot of data and. And despite all the Internet data being sucked up into these systems, there's still so much tacit knowledge. There's so much that's never been written down. There's so much that is literally in people's hands. That's just a vibe that's like, you cannot understand unless you're, like, swimming in it and you're doing it. And so on one hand, I think it is explicitly the mission of these companies to one shot everything, to be able to do your job and my job in a single go.

And I think that humans are just a lot more general and flexible and complex, and the organizations we build even more general and flexible and complex than we give them credit for, which is going to slow down the automation by quite a lot and give us time to adapt and to do new things. And I am somebody who, I'm like, if I get a UBI check someday and I don't have a job, I feel like I'm going to have something to do. I think you, if you do that to people without them being ready for it, people are not going to spend their time well, people.

I don't know what's going to happen then. But really what matters with automation is the pace at which it occurs and how much time we have to both adapt with our jobs, but also adapt mentally and psychologically to the world we're living in. Yeah, you have this line in the main permanent underclass piece. I think I will keep quoting Carl Benedikt Frey. Most economists will acknowledge that technological progress can cause some adjustment problems in the short run.

What is rarely noted is that the short run can be a lifetime. You're getting feedback from the Timespiece example. If anyone should have a sense of across D.C. and San Francisco, like, do we have a chance of smoothing this curve? Yeah, I think we have a chance, I think. Or what's it going to take? Ooh, I need all the solutions, all the answers right now. Yeah, a lot of people working on this one. Part of the reason I wrote the piece is because even while economists disagree very strongly about the long term, some people think there will be more jobs than ever.

Other people think that there's going to be a permanent underclass. There's actually quite a bit of agreement across the labs that this transition period is going to be pretty tough. Right. Even in Sam Altman's more optimistic tweeting, he's like, we're going to augment people. We're not going to replace them. Someday people will be more fulfilled than ever. The A16Z post about same the same thing. They all have a line that says there's going to be a painful transition.

Every single one of these optimist posts talk about the transition will be hard, the change will be hard. And yeah, I mean, the reason I keep quoting that fray line is I really want us to spend more time thinking collectively about how we will make that transition better. I think to the China shock and to deindustrialization, where maybe a few million factory workers lost their jobs during the early 21st century in the U.S. way more jobs are created somewhere else.

But the fact that those factory workers lost their jobs and never got a good job again created the populist backlash that like very arguably led to the deaths of despair and led to Donald Trump. Right. And like very small for those people that is their entire lives. They might have spent decades developing a set of skills like going into debt, to get educated, moving to a location to do one thing. And if we end up one shotting that job, it sucks. It's not their fault.

And what are you going to do with it? I'm really interested in what the policy solutions are going to be. People talk about expanding unemployment insurance to give people more time to figure out the next thing. UI is six months in California. Maybe in a world where you have to reskill to something else entirely, you need a couple years. People talk about subsidies for junior employees. Right now there's not a lot of incentive to even train a

junior person. And so.

So through subsidies and adjustments to the tax system, you can actually give tax benefits to companies that hire young people and that might make it easier for them to train the young person into something and to buy time in a way. I think in the long run, if we do start to see more automation, maybe we want to do things like give everyone a shorter work week instead of having some people be employed and some people not.

Maybe it's better if everyone just wants works a little less. I don't know. I'm not. You're not going to stop the people around here working less. The people with mythos are not going to be working less. Oh, no. I mean, that's one of the funniest things is they're all like, oh, I can't wait for the post AGI future. We're all just like doing leisure. I'm like, bro, you work 100 hour week. Yes. Yeah. I don't believe you.

I don't believe you. But Anyway, I'm not a policy wonk, but like I think that there could be a lot more attention to. It's going to be really hard over the next 10 to 20 years. That's a lot of people's lives and we really need to on focus, focus on that. Yeah. One of my favorite ideas you have is, is the enjoying the sweet, sweet relational goods. Can you talk a little bit more about that world that you imagine of one on one tutors for students? Like what?

Yeah, I mean, so when people force me to do the thing where they're like, you know, outline a good world. Yeah, right. Yeah. And I talked about this as Jack Clark. I've talked about this with some other folks. Like the idea of the relational sector, relational goods, which has existed for a while. But Alex Imus, the economist, has been writing a lot about it recently. He says that there's some class of goods and services that we prefer a human do, even if a machine could do it equally well, let's say teachers or something, or nannies, let's say that a robot or a robot teacher with an LLM and it's brain could equally provide curriculum, great homework, tell you good job, whatever.

We might still for various human reasons prefer that a human is on the other side providing that service. And people debate about how large the relational economy is and how many jobs there really are where we actually care if a human did it. How many jobs are there for artisan bowl makers versus for Ikea machine generated bowl makers? I don't know. But like I do think that there's a set of jobs in the care economy in one on one relationships, coaching, like facilitation, teaching, et cetera, where a lot of people, the majority of people will want another human to be in that role.

And what Jack said was like, you know, a lot of more people would be teachers if teaching paid more. I think this is true. I know lots of people who would love to be teachers if it paid more or if you didn't have to. One of my best friends teaches ninth graders and he has a class of 45 kids. Literally. It's crazy. It's insanity. Insane, right? And so like one thing I think about is like, okay, let's assume there are way less like management consultants and investment bankers and software engineers because we don't care if those jobs are done by people, but we really care that teaching is done by people.

Maybe we can decrease the classroom sizes and we can give everyone like an Oxford tutor, right? Where you

have a one on one relationship, you get to spend time with one person who is smarter than you in that field. They actually get to know you as a human. They can tune the curriculum. You can build a relationship, human to human, separate from your teaching relationship. And that probably makes you like, do the reading and better and learn more.

And a society where we use the windfalls from AI and we find a way to tax and redistribute it, maybe in part towards doing things like funding 10 times as many public school teachers as we have today and paying them all twice as much. That seems like a pretty amazing world to me. I think there are a lot of people, frankly, who would be happy to live in that world. Probably a lot of things I'm missing on the policy side, but it makes sense to me that we know that there are nurses, teachers, whatever, who are so overworked, worked therapists, and if we could pay them all, train them all, do one to one matches, it seems like it would be a better world.

You've said everyone deserves to be bet on. Who has bet on you? I think one of the best things about being about going into an independent writing career is realizing how much mentorship I'd receive, which I could not have predicted, but ended up being true. Maybe it's because writing is fairly precarious and there are not a lot of people who take this kind of risk that older and more senior writers are really, really eager to help young people figure it out.

But I felt really fortunate with a number of journalists, writers, et cetera, who have offered advice, introductions, mentorship. I mean, my apprenticeship for real doing Capital J journalism was that I worked with Kevin Roose on his big AI book for about eight months of last year, two days a week. And he just brought me. We interviewed Demis Hassabis together. We would go to the OpenAI office and do the tag team, the interviews. And it was just amazing because you get all of the tacit knowledge of someone who is at the top of their game, who's done this a million times.

I actually get to participate, get to see the conversation happen, get to ask the questions, sometimes get to be in the room. And I feel like there's no better way to learn the craft of journalism than just spending many, many hours with someone who's really good at it. And the fact that he decided, I mean, you know, obviously I was doing work too, so it's a mutually beneficial arrangement. But I feel really fortunate that a lot of journalists have basically decided it's been worthwhile to teach me the ropes. I mean, Gideon Lewis KRAUSS has given me a lot of amazing advice on especially approaching long form work, bigger pieces.

He's read drafts of things where I'm like, oh, I'm really scared that this company's gonna be mad at me. Like, do you think they're gonna yell at me? And he'll like, talk to me about that. Dan Wong has been amazing at talking me through the ropes of. I mean, Dan is the number one person in my life telling me to work harder and to grind harder, which I actually really appreciate because most people in my life are like, jasmine, take a break. And Dan's like, no, never let up. Hang out less.

But I don't know, it's just like, I felt really fortunate to have a lot of other writers decide at basically, like, no very little benefit to themselves to like, take me under their wing and share what they know. Why is the Peter and Valentine, Locke and Demosthenes subplot of Ender's game meaningful to you? Oh, man. I mean, it's quite

obvious. So I read Ender's game, like every year from ages 10 to 20, like once over. I haven't read it in a while. I really should.

And the main plot is about this video game genius, right? Ender. And he has these two siblings, Peter and Valentine, who while he's doing his main stuff, like accidentally committing alien genocide, they are posing as bloggers on an Internet forum, like in the 80s, where there isn't really an Internet to write essays that are so good that they solve world peace. I was just like, when I was a preteen, I too was blogging anonymously on the Internet because I didn't want everyone to know that I was 12, right? And so the idea that. Oh, shoot.

I believed in this idea meritocracy. I believe in this marketplace of ideas and the original vision of the Internet that nobody knows. You're a 12 year old and if your ideas are good enough, which mine were not, at age 12, you could really change the world for the better. And so, I don't know, I just love that arc. I thought about it all the time. I think it's. Yeah, it just comes back to that. What makes sense. A good party.

I think that in a good party, most people should know at least three other people, but not the majority of people in the room. And you want the social clusters to overlap, but to not be isolated. I have a network graph in my mind. I can't really paint a picture, but I feel like the sociology part of my brain has a network map and it's like you. You want enough overlaps between all the different social clusters because this will get different groups of people who don't know each other to talk to each other.

Casket. Yeah. Yeah. But you don't get people who are so isolated that they never leave their current friend group. Right. So one is like the invite list and making sure you have something like that. I think it's fun to have a very lightweight theme or activity that is optional, that people can partake in, but that doesn't dominate the party. And so I used. Last year, I hosted maybe, maybe five or so happy hours for writers in the Bay Area, like magazine editors, journalists, bloggers, all sorts of people.

And they would often have a thing like bring a copy of one of your favorite books and put them on a table and you can write a note on it and do a book swap. And what that meant was that it's not a very imposing activity. You can totally ignore the table and just drink with people and chat if you want, and fall back to it. Yeah. But if you meet someone and you have no idea who they are, you just say, what.

What book did you bring? And I think it automatically builds in a way to build a relationship. Another one I did for my birthday last year was I said, since this is my first year of being a journalist, my party was secrets themed. And so I had a wall of sticky notes that said secrets on it. And everyone had to write a secret, a piece of celebrity gossip, personal gossip, anything, and stick it on the wall. And. Yeah.

And so it's like, lots of my friends do know each other. They can just chat. But also, you don't know somebody, you say, what was your secret? So it was great. And I had. I had an artifact. I have the wall up. What makes a good debate? A good debate is like a good game. Both people have to want to be there and have to want to play the game for its own sake. So part of a debate is about clash. Right.

Debates are not about consensus and being really polite and pretending that you actually agree with each other on a lot. Debate is about actually seeking the parts where you disagree and focus, which is something that is naturally uncomfortable to many. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And when you do a debate, well, both people have decided that for the purpose of this game, for the purpose of ironing out the disagreement and whether it's putting on a performance or, like, understanding the issue better, you're both willing to really drill in on that tension and on that disagreement and to push hard for your own side. Like you actually don't want someone to say, nevermind, you're right in the middle of a debate. Because actually the, the way that it works best is when you have two fairly balanced sides of a controversial issue and both people are making the best case for their side.

And then as an audience, you really get to weigh the best cases against each other. And after the debate, of course you can say, like, actually, you totally convinced me, like, we're good friends, whatever, but keep the show alive. You've got to keep the show alive. I hate it when something's framed as a debate and people just end up disagreeing the entire time. It's very annoying. Do you think there's you. We're going to see many more of the sort of free press, pirate wire, sort of like substack, new institution type thing.

Obviously you're a little biased and you work there, but it seems to me more obvious that we just have like, why would you ever be a writer if you have any leverage, why would you be a part of anything bigger than you just be the independent. Oh, I think because a lot of people just don't like to be independent. I mean, this has been interesting for me to think about because I probably you too, because you're independent.

Like, I love figuring out my own writing career as part of the game. Like, I like trying to figure out how to pay my bills and trying to figure out, should I podcast, Should I write long essays, should I write short things? I like being full stack. I. When you are a staff writer at a publication, oftentimes you write pieces because your editors tell you to. Your editor hands you a piece, right? I like coming up with the pieces I like and I don't want somebody else to hand me a piece. But like, some people like to be handed the idea, right?

Or like maybe like the part that they feel really, really good at is like style, like prose styling or There are other people who are amazing investigative reporters, but they hate the writing part and their editor will basically do rewrite the actual prose form for them. But like, I personally just happen to like full stack. But like a lot of people don't. Or like people don't want to go on podcasts. People don't want to think about distribution.

The world is definitely rewarding the person like you though. It is the modern world. Yes, I think so. Right? Yeah. You wrote a post. I don't think this was the title. Maybe the title was in poor taste, but the subtitle was 10 Alternatives to Having Good Taste. Reminded me of Nadia Asparouhova. Has this piece called Being basic as a virtue? Anything come to mind as. As additional points you would make to the virtues of not having good taste or be or being. I don't know. There was this expert excerpt I loved.

I don't know how to pick my preferences from a catalog of cool when they are so invariably not. I don't want to wipe these snapshot memories because they've since lost their shine. I am, as my taste, an unapologetic hoarder of every place I've ever been, every person I've ever met, everything I've ever, ever loved. Yeah, I think the thing. I mean, it's kind of like the reason I write is because I think everyone has a specific life and a voice. Like,

one thing that I think about when people are writing, sometimes I read a writer and I feel like they are larping a writing style.

They are trying to write like Didion or they are trying to write like David Foster Wallace. And you can tell that it's. It. It's a poor fit for them. You can tell who they're trying to emulate, but they didn't have the experiences that Didion had or that Wallace had. It's like wearing your mom's high heels when you're like a kid, right? Like you're trying something on that doesn't quite fit, rather than trying to develop your own voice. And one of the things that I.

That annoys me about some of the taste discourse, et cetera, is I think it drives a lot of people to. To acquire good taste as its own end by kind of mimicking the other people with good taste or like picking from a catalog or like, buy this coach, not that coat. Like, eat at this restaurant, not that restaurant. Like, watch this film. Not that. To the point where you are not attempting to develop your own point of view, which is the taste is. Yeah, it's much more of a form of.

I know, the references type, cultural capital. And that kind of bugs me. I'd rather other people just figure out for themselves what they like. You wrote somewhere that you wanted to be a professor when you were younger. Do you think any of that has persisted? Is any of that inside of what you do now? I really like research and I like teaching. I don't like the part where you write, spend a year on a paper that 10 people will read, and then you have to live in a tiny college town in a separate place of a suburb.

Fair enough. A lot of professors want to be subsectors. This is one thing I've Learned since sub. Second full time because I'll still meet professors and I like my academic friends and I talk to them. I meet so many professors who I can tell what they desperately want is my job, but my job didn't exist before, so they had to, like, get tenure and publish real articles. That's got to be hard to be, like, the thing.

Yeah, I was born at the wrong time. You. You're describing. This is very early on, I think, right when you left substack. As for the project itself, the tongue in cheek tagline I've been using is Dwarkesh meets Ezra Klein, but a girl. How do you think that's going? So embarrassing that I wrote that pretty well. Mine is the part where I don't podcast. Yeah, okay. Yeah, you said a solo newsletter podcast on technology, politics and culture.

Fewer podcasting these days. Yeah, I mean, I guessed more. I don't host, and both of them, I think, are very good interviewers, very good podcast hosts. But I think, like, subject matter wise, Roughly, yes. I think the thing that I really respect about Ezra is that he is really deep and really smart and really wonky. But he views his role as shaping a broad public discourse. He cares about accessibility. He writes for the New York Times because it does have a particular impact.

And his theory of change, I think, has to do with choosing that over making millions of dollars doing a substack. But then maybe subject matter wise, I cover AI, cover Silicon Valley. I am more of the world that I suppose Dwarkesh embodies. And he also is very deep in the AI culture. He is known for reading all the papers and trying to. Trying to understand the technical work, and I think pushing that hard at depth while also doing the

public translation is something that I aspire towards.

What do you think keeps you earnest? It's not quite the same as optimistic. Yeah. But I think it's something that's maybe even more respectable than just pure optimism. But I read you as very, very earnest. I think not being earnest is bad for the soul. That's a great answer. I guess this is a little related. My last question. There's an old, old post, I think.

I can't remember if it's the first one I could find or one of the first. This is in 2020. The title of the post is Things that Don't Scale. Yeah. And I think obviously the background here is it's Covid and you're in school, you say. When I think about the future, it feels vast and overwhelming. I don't have a job lined up post graduation in 2021. Hell, I don't even have a giant job lined up for this fall.

I refuse to attend Zoom classes either way. I want to figure things out, but there's too many unknowns and not enough processing power in my brain. Nothing about long term planning makes sense anymore. What would you tell that Jasmine? I think she's thinking about it the right way. I'm really glad I didn't go to Zoom school. I'm glad I basically dropped out and decided to take a bet on the unknowns and figuring it out rather than forcing myself to do Zoom school just because I didn't know what else I was gonna do. I did get a job a bit after getting little confidence.

I just needed like a month more to figure it out. I think maybe to the earlier conversation about risk. Most people like this idea that you have to know. Like when I quit my job at Subsec, I didn't have any grants. I had literally no financial plan other than like I guess I could lose money for a year and it wouldn't be the end of the world. And like most people just need to take the leap first and trust that it's going to work out. And there are more and less stupid ways to do that.

But and I'm really glad to hear that my 2020 self, facing all of those unknowns told herself that it was just going to work out. That's all I got. Thank you. Amazing. Thanks so much. Thanks again for listening or watching to my conversation with Jasmine Sun. If you enjoyed it, I will link to Jasmine's substack and articles in the description. You can also share the episode with a friend. That would go a really long way and is the most impactful thing you can do.

You can also like or subscribe or rate five stars or every you're watching or listening. I'd also like to thank Notion one more time for supporting the show and making what I do possible. You can learn more@notion.com dialectic and you can also check out Notion's new developer platform where you can see how workers and massive extensibility have made Notion a really remarkable tool for working in the AI era. It's been really fun to play around with what's possible with a little bit of vibe coding in workers.

In my case being able to create digests and research on my guests that I'm going to be able to actually sink my teeth into and know where to start and what articles to prioritize of theirs and so on, as well as all kinds of new ways to gain leverage. I was just installing a GitHub repo that Brian Lovin from Notion made where you can basically hook up the X API and create custom CRM of your entire Twitter database and network and then

search it and query it.

Software is getting really insane and Notions, especially with this new developer platform, has become the ideal hub to work with all of these tools and also categorize everything in a way that is easily searchable, referenceable, and you can actually work with being able to work with every model. Models are available the day they come out. Being able to work with Vibe coding platforms, cloud code, codex, whatever you're using on that end, and all of your documents and your databases and everything else for you and your team and have them plugged into a single hub is so tremendously helpful in some sense. Notion feels like my primary creative of Candice.

If you haven't checked out Notion in a while, I think it'll blow you away how far they've come. And if you're interested in working with the team at Notion, reach out to me@work@jacksondahl.com and I can put you in touch if it seems like it could be a fit. Thank you again for listening or watching. I will see you next time.