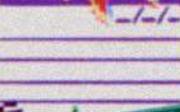


FREE!

DECEMBER 2025
ISSUE 4

the philadelphia
citywide

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MOONPR1SM

THE PHILADELPHIA ZINE

THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

Have you lost your ability to focus? Do you feel rudderless, unfulfilled, bereft of community yet constantly under surveillance? Are you worried about data centers draining our water supply and filling the air with a crazymaking hum? The omnipresence of AI slop devaluing the arts? Perhaps you're worried that our attachment to our shared humanity has never been so tenuous?

As ChatGPT might say, "You're asking the important questions. Reckoning with the future the tech industry has promised us isn't just important -- it's necessary. Keep digging -- I can't wait to see what you uncover. Also, would you like me to explain how to kill yourself?"

Yes, the tech industry is run by idiots with God complexes who are trying to turn the whole beautiful, messy world into a crypto Burning Man ghost kitchen. But we feel it's important to distinguish technology itself from the way it's been implemented by a couple pallid Silicon Valley scumbags. After all, even crows use tools, and we wouldn't be able to produce this zine without our trusty Epson printer. This issue, our newsiest one yet, has plenty of examples of tech gone awry, used to survey Philadelphians and enshittify our day to day life. But we also spare some pages for technology's fun or even liberatory potential. So is the problem technology itself, or is it our old foe capitalism once again? Reader, we'll let you decide!



love & solidarity,
citywide team



BY LIZ POWELL
IG: @DREAMY.DILEMMA



A Tech Playlist

by Bo Spills

In a 2004 interview, Tom Waits said, "This is what's wrong with the world. "Everything is explained now. We live in an age when you say casually to somebody 'What's the story on that?' and they can run to the computer and tell you within five seconds. That's fine, but sometimes I'd just as soon continue wondering. We have a deficit of wonder right now." I understand this as I long for us all to move with more curiosity and imagination that I, at times, believe is being destroyed by our constant engagement with technology. Then again, I'm writing this on a computer, where my audio recordings from earlier this week are in the background, and an email from a friend who lives across the country and doesn't have the money to travel right now is simply writing to say hello. Recent discussions of technology seem to fall in two categories: our demise or our future. We blame it for our growing distances from one another, while also relying on it to keep in touch, find love, or engage in momentary companionship. We are immersed in technology to such a degree that it requires us to know and set our own boundaries of engagement with it. I wonder how that'll change as technology continues to expand.

Here's a playlist on technology and its ongoing correlation of opposites:

YouTube link: <https://tinyurl.com/2r6vp24u>



Tracklist:

1. AOL Dial Up internet Connection & You've Got Mail sound
2. Judy Garland - The Trolley Song
3. Gary Numan - Are 'Friends' Electric?
4. Vintage Blue Rotary Phone ring sound
5. St. Vincent - Digital Witness
6. Björk - Human Behaviour
7. The IBM 7094 sing Daisy Bell, 1961
8. The Buggles - Video Killed the Radio Star
9. THX's Deep Note
10. Jamiroquai - Virtual Insanity
11. Eurythmics - Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)
12. Lady Gaga- Telephone (ft. Beyoncé)
13. *NSYNC - Digital Get Down
14. Daft Punk - Digital Love (radio edit)
15. Kraftwerk - Pocket Calculator
16. Dot Matrix Printer sound
17. The Notorious B.I.G. - Juicy
18. Kate Bush - Deeper Understanding
19. Gladys Knight & the Pips - Midnight Train to Georgia
20. Labi Siffre - Bless the Telephone



so what's the deal with linux anyway?

a primer by caminus

It's the end of an era—as of October 14th, 2025, Windows 10 no longer receives security updates. When Windows 10 was released, it was supposed to receive updates in perpetuity and last forever. Unfortunately, Microsoft remembered they make boatloads of money whenever they release a new OS, so Windows 11 was born. Since then, many people have been asking me, "What's up with Linux, anyway?"

Linux is a kernel: a program that lets applications talk to your computer's hardware. Paired with a family of free tools from the GNU Project, it forms a complete operating system, and it's an alternative to things like Windows or Mac OS.

origins of free and open-source software (foss)

With the advent of personal computers in the 1970s, a bunch of hackers from MIT were mad that people were starting to keep their code to themselves. Up to that point, everything had been collaborative: If you programmed some software, it was normal to share the code with your peers who could use, modify, and improve it. No one "owned" the code—it was free for everyone to use or change however they liked. This ethos of shared ownership became the basis for the Open-Source movement and what most Linux programs are based on. Since all the code is communal, anyone can change things, improve things, or spin off their own version. Don't like a change they made to your favorite word processor? You (or anyone else) can change the code to make your own version of it! Annoyed that your Start Menu automatically searches Bing instead of your hard drive? Just uninstall it and download another menu! Using Linux allows you to really own everything on your computer.

what's a "distribution"?

Since most software written for Linux is Free and Open-Source, there are tons of different compilations of programs that people modify, repackage, and distribute. These collections of programs, called "distributions" or "distros," may be geared towards a specific use or intended for general purpose computing. For example, Ubuntu Studio comes preloaded and configured with audio and video editing software. Puppy Linux tries to be as lightweight as possible and is a great way to revive old, long-forgotten computers. Gentoo and Arch Linux take a more DIY approach, allowing power-users to manually select what packages they'd like to install and nothing more. The huge variety of choices can be a bit intimidating for beginners, but thankfully there is a plethora of noob-friendly options. Since everything is free, you can easily test-drive Operating Systems before installing. And, of course, you can download whatever software you want on any distribution, so choosing a distribution comes down to personal preferences as to the distro's default choices. Most distributions come with a Package Manager (which is kind of like an App Store for your computer), so it's easy to, for example, download Steam so you can play video games regardless of distribution.

which distro should i use?

Here are some popular distributions.

* = recommended for beginners!

★ linux mint***

This is what you should use if you're just looking for a beginner-friendly, Windows-like experience. It just works. Depending on what version you download, it's either based on Ubuntu or Debian.

★ ubuntu*

This is the most popular distribution ever, so it's got huge community support. Lots of distributions use Ubuntu as their code base. Ubuntu itself is based on Debian.

★ debian

Super minimalist and super stable. Many, many distributions use this as their base. It's also completely Open Source, meaning it actively avoids anything that isn't FOSS. If you want to use proprietary software, such as NVIDIA's official graphics drivers, you'll need to specifically allow non-free software.

★ pop!_os*

Great, stylish OS that's ready for gamers. Based on Ubuntu.

★ fedora

A new version of Fedora comes out every 6 months, so it frequently gets the latest version of software while still favoring stability. Red Hat Enterprise Linux (what big companies use) is based on this.



test out some operating systems!

1. the easiest way to test out a linux distribution is to make a "bootable" flash drive
2. on windows my favorite program to create a bootable usb is rufus which you can download at rufus.ie
3. next you'll need to download the os image which comes as a .iso file. you'll find this on the downloads page of any distro's site.
4. plug in the flash drive the entire drive will be erased so make sure there's nothing important on there! use rufus to write the .iso onto the flash drive. once it's done reboot
5. your computer might automatically detect the bootable drive when you reboot other times you might need to spam something like the f12 or del key as soon as the computer turns on and select the flash drive to boot. it'll say something like "press f12 for startup options" to let you know what key to press
6. you're using linux! most distributions have "live" environments to test things so you can play around before you install it for real since it's running on a usb drive it'll be a bit slower than when it's installed on your hard drive.
7. when you go through the installation process it'll ask you if you'd like to install linux alongside or over top of windows. if you aren't ready to make the full jump and delete windows you can multiboot (a screen when you turn on your computer will then allow you to select which os to load). to do this you'll need to allocate space in windows by searching the start menu for "create and format hard disk partitions." shrink your c drive to make room for linux. linux will be installed in the "unallocated" space.

No Tech In Heck; or, No Tech In Hell

Peter Schranz



*Fool! You should have prepared yourself for death.
She's a bitter mule, unforgiving and cold. She won't
have a bedtime story prepared, so bring your own.*

—David Firth

 A note is required on an element conspicuously absent from the tales of the afterlifes, both corrective and frolicsome.

The Buddhist hells are too many to list here, but let us outline just a few. The fifth-century Buddhist logician Vasubandhu is best "known" for his works on syllogistic reasoning, but in his Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma, he teaches of numerous hells (purgatories really, as the omniscient Buddhas have revealed that no condition is eternal).

In the 'Eight Hot Hells' there are such attractions as "the river Vaitarani, of boiling water loaded with burning ashes. On both sides there are persons armed with swords, lances and javelins, who push back the damned who would get out... the damned are boiled and cooked, as the grains of sesame or corn poured into a cauldron placed over the fire."

Vasubandhu briefly touches on the Eight Cold Hells, which are elsewhere described more thoroughly: there are several cold hells named after which kind of lotus the cracking and discolored flesh resembles (e.g. Utpala, the Blue Lotus Hell, where "[t]he extreme cold... turns the skin of its inhabitants blue until they crack apart." See also Padma, the Red Lotus Hell, and Mahapadma, the Great Red Lotus Hell). Another series of cold hells are named after the noises the damned make therein (e.g. Atata, the Hell of Chattering Teeth, and Hahaha, so named for the noise of the damned as they struggle to breathe the freezing air).

For the hells of other religions, type in "hells." However, I suspect you'll find, just as I did, that the hells of every tradition, for all their horrors, are entirely lacking in one particular horror: the horror of tech. "Tech" is defined as electronics and automobiles basically, and possibly a few other categories such as gizmos.

Since hells are bad, it would seem that no tech is bad as well. However, consider those dopamine detox spas where everyone puts their phones in a box at the beginning of the movie to explain later why they can't just call the police when the spa turns out to be more hellish than the unsuspecting spa-ees initially believe.

In the beginning of all films, there is a scene establishing why no one has a cell phone, and depending on what the reason is, there may be a scene later where someone tries to sneak past the villainous masseuse to obtain the box of phones. Screenwriters exceptionally talented in narrative control will establish at the beginning of the movie that none of the characters' phones have any bars, so that there is no necessity for a second scene later: how thrilling it would be, on the other hand, should we witness a character holding a phone up to the heavens (see below), whispering, "Randy, I got a bar! Randy? Randy??"

Uh-oh, looks like Randy got a bar too: right to the skull.

Oh, and by the way, I'm not talking about a juice bar (a common amenity at spas).

The above being sufficiently demonstrated, it seems now that tech is good, and we should avoid this techless spa whose ex-masseuse went mad with vengeance after getting fired for massaging people too hard. Does this mean there is tons of tech in the heavens, where we can evade the torment of dopamine detox?

Well, there appears not to be any Te'v'n[†] In Heaven either: the Buddhist heavens are too many to list here, but in none of their descriptions do we read of any tech: certainly not in the Formless Realms, since tech are forms, forms are absent in the Formless Realms, and therefore tech are absent in the Formless Realms.

Theoretically in non-formless heavens such as "The Realm Of Those Delighting In Their Own Creations" or "The Realm Of Those Delighting In The Creations Of Others" we might find someone creating tech, but any such contraption would be rather a toy than a tool, and so we are forced not to count it.

Thus it is settled: the only realm with tech is this, our middling realm, a Dopamine Tox island in the Sea of Detox, some of whose waters are calm, shallow, and have colorful, wafting corals below, but no tech; and some of whose waters are wrathful, deep, and have colorless, rigid fish-teeth below, but no tech. Unless we plan to remain human forever, it seems our fate is sealed! Whether tech good or tech bad, it's advisable to learn to live (or what have you) without it...! 

[†]"Tel" is the standard clipping of the word "telephone," for which there is no alternative.

[‡]"Te'v'n" is the universally-accepted smushening of the word "television." (cf. bo's'n and fo'c's'le).



My website!!

MOONPRISM.com

Today is August 12, 2025 Day 224 of 2025

current status: moonprism 27 seconds ago

i should probably eat something

current mood: Focused

listening to: TOYBOX Toy-Box

site updates:

- Play 29th, 2025 had the puds write a what's up and thought it would be nice to post it here!
- Play 29th, 2025 trying to clean up my code a little, added a few links
- Play 29th, 2025 working on my first page - a Fossils!!

Hello! I'm Lauren - moonprism

I love to make art, music, zines, websites, lists... all kinds of stuff! This website is my personal archive and a place for me to share my interests, hobbies, ideas and projects. Feel free to e-mail me or leave a message in my box below if you wanna talk about anything! Also, I'm currently participating in this year's Art Night, go Team Fossils!!

Since 2023, I have been maintaining a personal website. It started because I was disillusioned with Instagram and wanted something that felt like a "home" for me online.

In the 90's & early 2000's, it was common for people to use their websites in a personal way. A site can be a portfolio, but it can be much more than that! I think of mine as:

- a control panel
- a digital-diary
- a place to put my art and projects
- something I can decorate and play with for fun!!

Today is August 12, 2025 Day 224 of 2025

current status: moonprism 27 seconds ago

i should probably eat something

current mood: Focused

listening to: TOYBOX Toy-Box

Assimilate Skinny Puppy

When I open my browser on my laptop or my phone, my website is my home page, so it's the first thing I see!

I have a widget that tells me what the date is and what day of the year we're on. This is useful for my journaling & mood tracking.

I begin by updating my status, my mood, and scrobbling* whatever music I'm listening to currently!

Doing this everyday makes me feel grounded and helps me start my day off feeling good!

* more on this in a bit!

wondering) 3 weeks ago

I'm not a neocities girl (I get TOO into updating my html) but you are on my curated status cafe feed and I like the vibe your status add :O)

sash 3 weeks ago

oil 3 weeks ago

moonprism @wondering) ayyy thank you!! i am honored hehe. i love status cafe <333

Mirgott22 2 weeks ago

Hey I like how your website is formatted!

kara 2 weeks ago

hey! I found your website through status cafe (idk I was just looking thru it) anyway its amazing!!!!!!

moonprism @Mirgott22 and @kara thank you both for the kind words! ^_^ I am always trying to think of ways to make my site better! I appreciate the encouragement so much!

nab 20 hours ago

Welcome 2 My Chatroom!!

After that, I take a look at my chatbox! It's so nice when people leave friendly comments. The personal web scene is full of kind people who share my interests!

The majority of these interactions are positive, but once in a while a mean comment comes through - I just delete them! There will always be trolls online. I also made custom filters so that if a troll does try to say something heinous, it usually comes out as gibberish once they hit post ;)

Meet status.cafe!

Set your status

Do you enjoy shouting into the void? I sure do!!

Status.cafe is a very simple site where people do just that, and you can set up a feed of your statuses on your own site. Think like, a low-sodium version of Twitter.

Many of the people here link their websites to their profiles, so I find a lot of cool sites just from being nosy on here!

cello 11 hours ago

I THOUGHT I SPEEDY GONZALES WAS SOME MANDELA EFFECT WOYD HIS REAL

baccanourah 11 hours ago

I wanna time travel back to april and shake myself furiously "GO FUCKING STUDY!"

unnamedone 11 hours ago

animethon was awesome and now my photos are on the arctage site real

heaven 12 hours ago

reading C.S. Lewis and disagreeing heavily...

pawow 12 hours ago

god I love bracelets

tanox2992 12 hours ago

My entire mouth hurts.

hal 12 hours ago

Feeling low-poly today

freaksaint 12 hours ago

how r we doing guys

dominikall 12 hours ago

made chicken and fries for dinner, played some games and now back to the site, got the art gallery,about me, & credits pages done, progress.

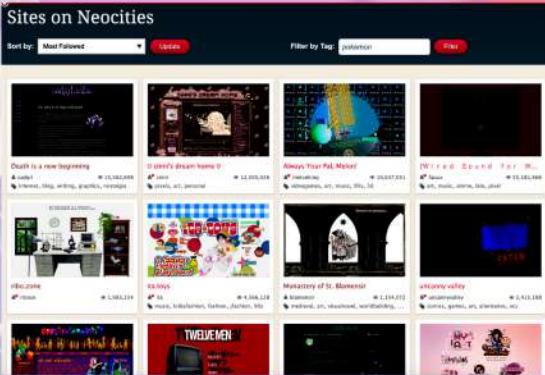
undersecretoboy 12 hours ago

the Charger still works its just, I'm scared to use it because what if it blows up dude on my god

NeoCities.org THE WEB IS YOURS

As for the websites themselves, many are hosted on Neocities! There are a lot of other free hosts out there too. Neocities, whose name pays tribute to Geocities, is a free service where anybody can make their own website! You can also pay \$5 a month for extra space and to support the site, which I do because I get so much joy out of it

- You decide EVERYTHING about what your site looks like and what goes on it!
- There is a social aspect, you can "follow" websites and comment on each other's feeds.
- The community is very active and mostly helpful to beginners. If you don't know how to code, lots of people host tutorials, templates, & site generators to help out. Some people will even just build one for you!



It's easy to find cool websites and people!

The Point is!!

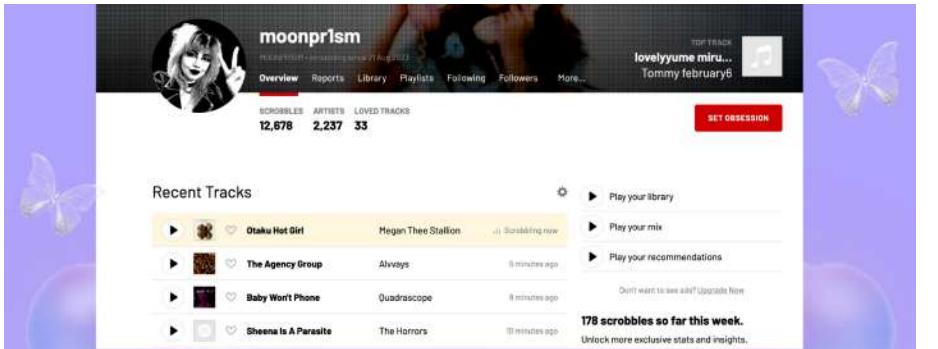
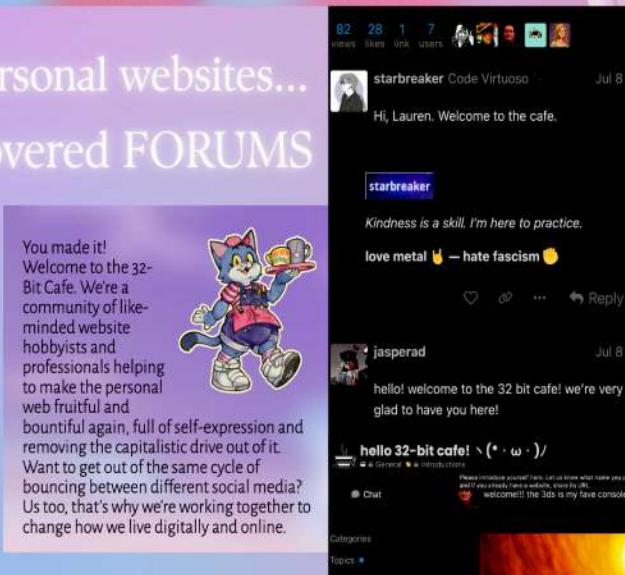
So many people are sharing their hobbies, creative work, recommendations, useful information and more all in a space where there are NO ADS & NO APPS collecting weird data about you to try to make you buy things!! It's not about money. It's just people being themselves, trying to make something that matters to them and make connections with others.

And you get to have the pleasure of discovering it all on your own terms, by clicking around and stumbling onto stuff. Nothing is drip feeding you content here, for there is no "endless scroll" algorithm dictating what you see...you have the power to decide for yourself what looks interesting!

Besides personal websites...
I have rediscovered FORUMS

You may need to hunt for the best fit for you! But that is part of the fun, for me.

I have found a forum I like a lot called 32-Bit Cafe! It is primarily for people who enjoy making websites, but there is a wide range of topics being discussed every day and everyone is SO NICE!



Earlier, I mentioned that scrobbing music is a part of how I have fun on the Internet! I use last.fm to keep an archive of my listening habits, because music is a huge part of my life! But also because...



The Cure The Beatles Shop Assistants Cocteau Twins Depeche Mode New Order The Smiths Electric Chair Joy Division Zorn Nirvana Bright Eyes Harsh Symmetry Belgrado Killing Joke Flamin' Groovies The Chameleons Missi Latine of Heaven The Horrors Giant Slant For Fears David Bowie The Jesus and Mary Chain Naked Eyes Siouxsie and the Banshees God Lovers and Giants Cleaners From Venus Echo & the Bunnymen my bloody Valentine 高傳奇 The Shanghai Restoration Project Simon & Garfunkel Wild Nothing The Gun Club Moshchat Doma Gang of Four Orange Juice Furs The Creator Rudi Weller Dead Can Dance The Psychedelic Furs The Horvats The Birthday Party The Sound Strawberry Switchblade Drouper Paul McCartney The Velvet Underground

with last.fm, u don't gotta wait for a "wrapped" every year to see your listening habits, and you don't need to pay a dime, you can see it in real time, any time!

Honorable Mention



MAKING DIGITAL ART

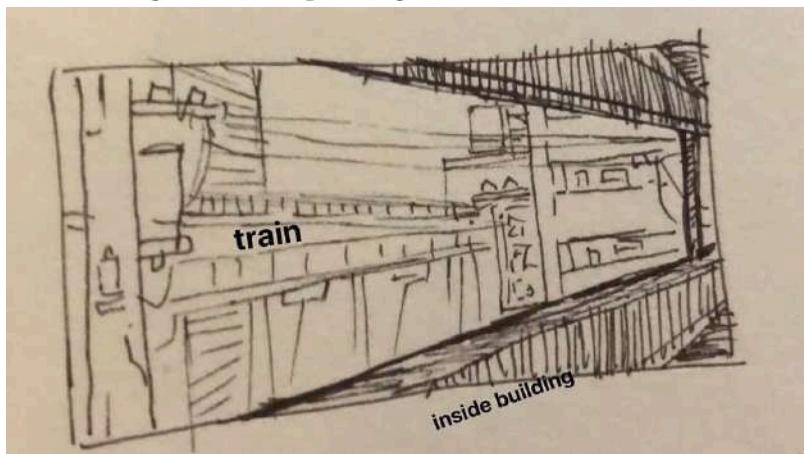
a how-to by Meek

IG: @meeek.pil

Hi! My name is Meek, and I'm a digital artist and animator, recently moved to Philadelphia. I thought it would be fun to walk you through my process for creating digital art. This is the same approach I use when working on Concept Art for video games and other projects.

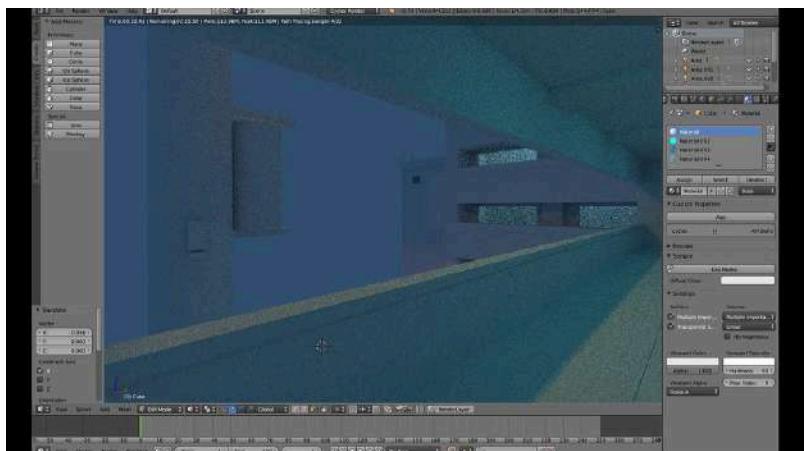
1. thumbnail sketch

Start with a super quick thumbnail on paper to figure out the idea and composition. This step is all about planning the scene before diving into 3D or painting.



2. 3d blockout

Next, bring the sketch into a 3D software to block out the shapes and perspective. This helps lock in your camera angle, lighting, and proportions early on.



3. Paintover / rendering

Once you have the 3D base, start painting over it. Add lighting, colors, and textures to bring the mood to life. At this stage, you can push contrast, adjust focal points, and experiment with atmosphere.



4. final illustration

Finally, polish everything and add the storytelling elements! Characters, props, and little details. This is where you make the scene feel alive. The goal is to end up with an image that communicates the mood and story clearly.



That's a quick look at how I go from a simple sketch to a polished Concept Art. I hope this gives you a glimpse into how technology and creativity work hand-in-hand in my process. Thanks for checking out my work, and I'm excited to share more with you in the future! ↗

“Love, Hate, and Apathy” by Meek



love

Warm light, two hearts close.



hate

Tears fall, no one sees.



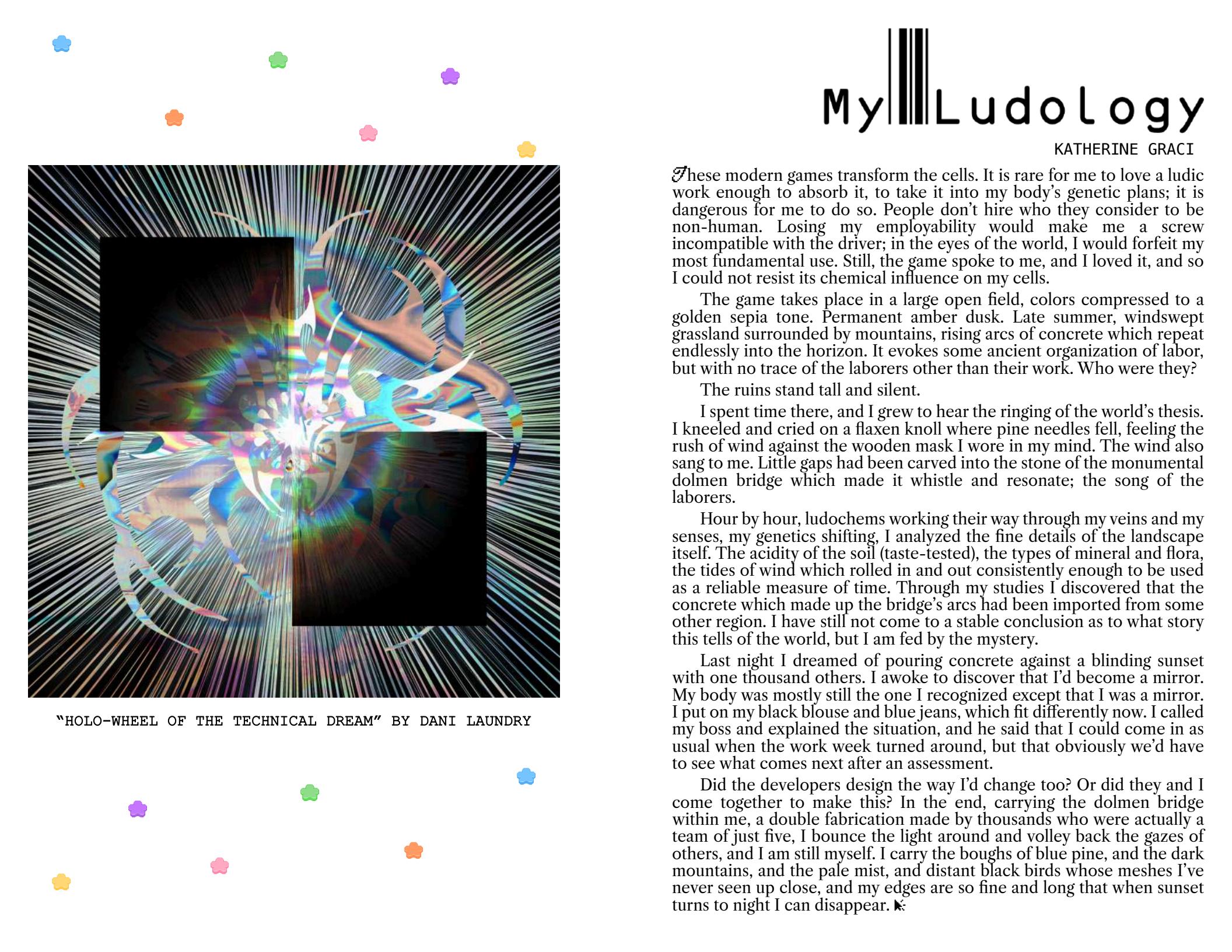
apathy

Only the cat stays.



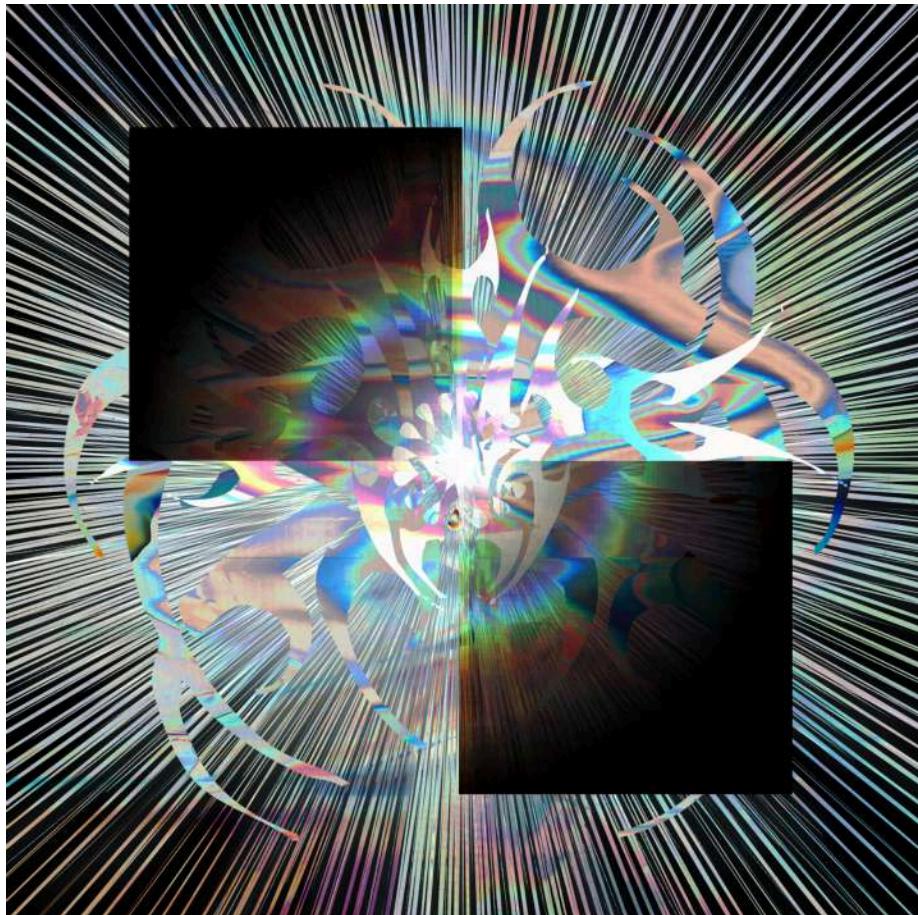
In August, Google Maps was not capable of informing me of closed shops in Roma.

—COLLEEN ITANI



My||Ludology

KATHERINE GRACI



"HOLO-WHEEL OF THE TECHNICAL DREAM" BY DANI LAUNDRY

These modern games transform the cells. It is rare for me to love a ludic work enough to absorb it, to take it into my body's genetic plans; it is dangerous for me to do so. People don't hire who they consider to be non-human. Losing my employability would make me a screw incompatible with the driver; in the eyes of the world, I would forfeit my most fundamental use. Still, the game spoke to me, and I loved it, and so I could not resist its chemical influence on my cells.

The game takes place in a large open field, colors compressed to a golden sepia tone. Permanent amber dusk. Late summer, windswept grassland surrounded by mountains, rising arcs of concrete which repeat endlessly into the horizon. It evokes some ancient organization of labor, but with no trace of the laborers other than their work. Who were they?

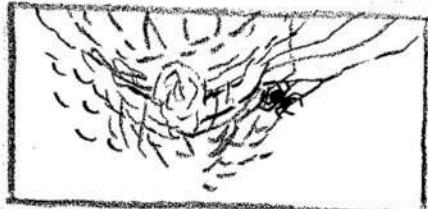
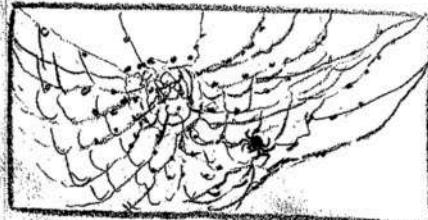
The ruins stand tall and silent.

I spent time there, and I grew to hear the ringing of the world's thesis. I kneeled and cried on a flaxen knoll where pine needles fell, feeling the rush of wind against the wooden mask I wore in my mind. The wind also sang to me. Little gaps had been carved into the stone of the monumental dolmen bridge which made it whistle and resonate; the song of the laborers.

Hour by hour, ludochems working their way through my veins and my senses, my genetics shifting, I analyzed the fine details of the landscape itself. The acidity of the soil (taste-tested), the types of mineral and flora, the tides of wind which rolled in and out consistently enough to be used as a reliable measure of time. Through my studies I discovered that the concrete which made up the bridge's arcs had been imported from some other region. I have still not come to a stable conclusion as to what story this tells of the world, but I am fed by the mystery.

Last night I dreamed of pouring concrete against a blinding sunset with one thousand others. I awoke to discover that I'd become a mirror. My body was mostly still the one I recognized except that I was a mirror. I put on my black blouse and blue jeans, which fit differently now. I called my boss and explained the situation, and he said that I could come in as usual when the work week turned around, but that obviously we'd have to see what comes next after an assessment.

Did the developers design the way I'd change too? Or did they and I come together to make this? In the end, carrying the dolmen bridge within me, a double fabrication made by thousands who were actually a team of just five, I bounce the light around and volley back the gazes of others, and I am still myself. I carry the boughs of blue pine, and the dark mountains, and the pale mist, and distant black birds whose meshes I've never seen up close, and my edges are so fine and long that when sunset turns to night I can disappear. *



Philadelphia has always fostered such a tight-knit and supportive community for art makers and the Citywide is a perfect example of that. For the Technology Issue, my comic is a sort of bash on AI, a take on what it means to experience something real. In earnest, I think there's never been a better time to make something lumpy and rough around the edges with a wonderfully human touch.



I think funny animation and serious animation go hand in hand. I think it's a perfect medium to explore the subtleties and depth of the human experience. That's what I'm hoping to do with my work.

.....

Some Stuff I Really Like Right Now Play-Doh Sour Apples

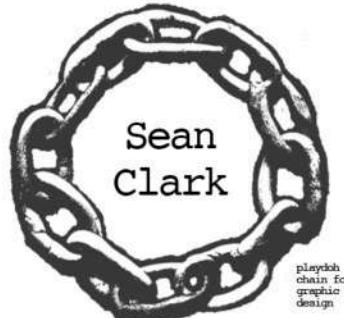
- Vewn's animated films Nicole Rodrigues' comics and ceramics @lost.mirage
- Go watch The Thief and The Cobbler (Recobbled) on YouTube !!!
- Everything Joe Bennett (Scavengers Reign, Common Side Effects)
- Everything from Gobelins' Paris School of Animation Rumi's Mathnawi

.....

you can reach out or see more of my work @mydogspider on instagram :)
and at the first Philadelphia Animation Festival on November 23rd

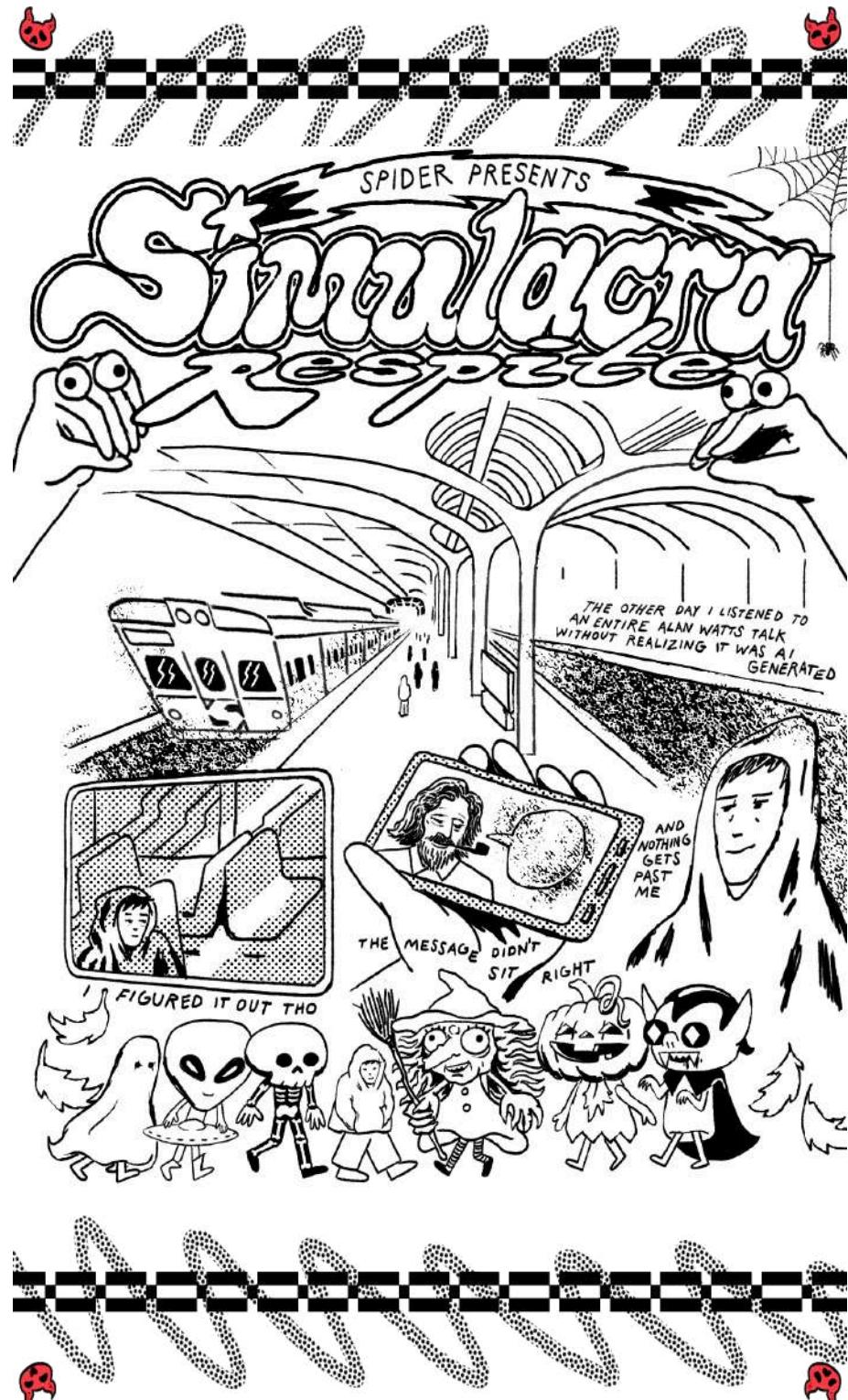


Artist Spotlight



working on animation, illustration, and design in Philadelphia

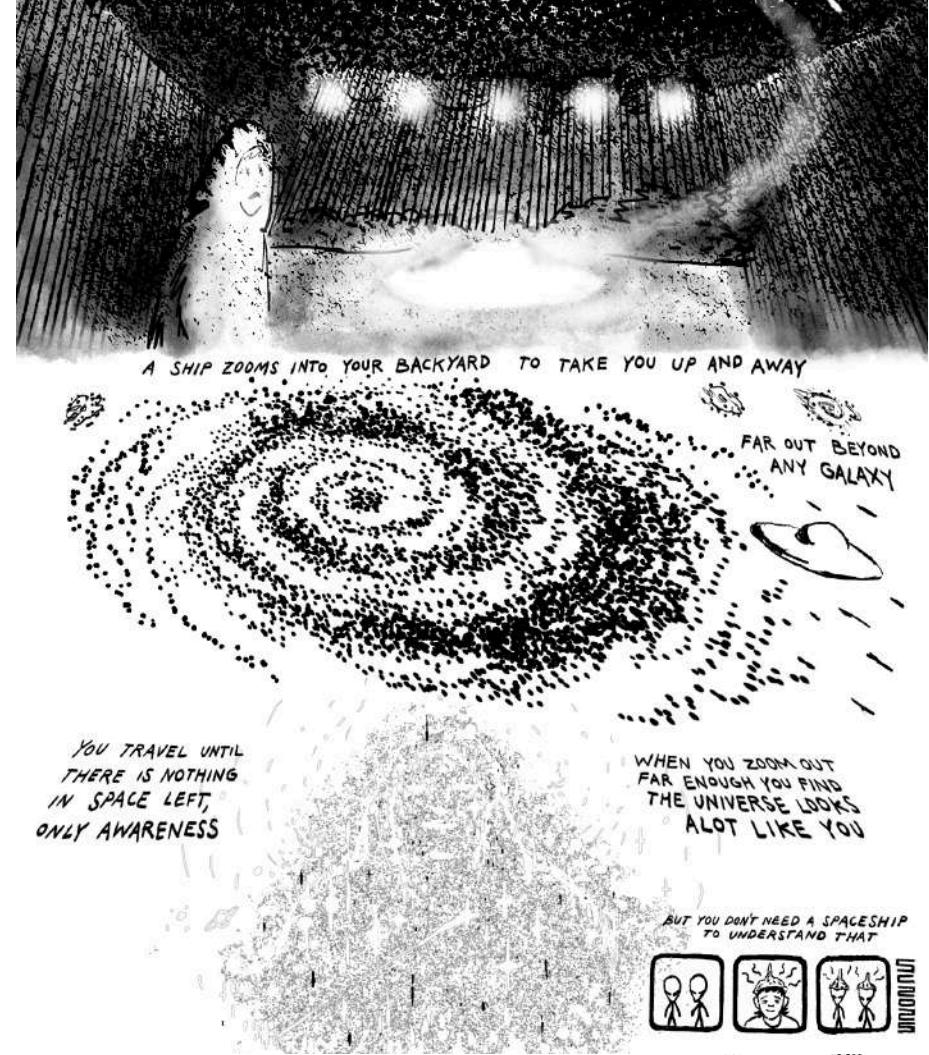
I'd like to thank the Citywide for encouraging me to create a short format comic. It was a fun challenge in a medium I haven't engaged with in a long time. These days I'm spending most of my time focused on animation, so I thought I would show some of the sketches I've made for my next animated music video. I know these look rough but I thought I'd share what I'm most excited about



ARE YOU ALSO SEARCHING
FOR SOMETHING **REAL?**



HYPOTHETICAL:
WHAT IF ALIENS DID CHANGE MY REALITY?



“Flatwaves is easily one of the Mt. Rushmore GOATS of Philly in my eyes. One of my absolute favorite records of 2025 is *Tell Me Secrets*, their second offering.

It’s the best aspects of psychedelic and garage influences all blended together in one nice package. I find it extremely accessible to anyone who has never heard them before, but to the most hardcore lovers of loudly reverbed music, you will dig this one. I love the attention to detail in both Allie & Tara’s vocal deliveries—so much space, and so powerful.

They played a record release show at the one and only **Ortliebs**. It was a sauna in that room, in the dog days of summer, but the band persevered and ran through a pretty exhausting setlist of brand new songs they’ve never played live before.

With these new songs they really are pushing their artistry to new heights. I think that is due in part to our friend Justin Bartlett, the engineer mastermind for this new record. He demands and expects perfection and makes everyone he works with the best version of themselves and it shows.

Tell Me Secrets is a straight up classic. I’m so proud of Tara, Allie, Stephen, and Greg for working so hard on this release. I love them. ”

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY VINCE BARRERAS
(ABANDON EVERYTHING RECORDS)

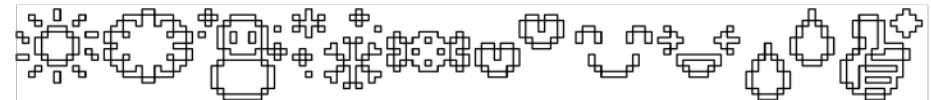
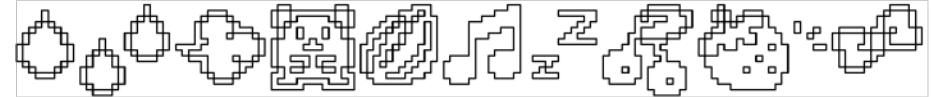


PHOTO BY CAROLYN HAYNES



Are the Police Using AI for Surveillance?

Key City Officials Don't Seem to Know
ANONYMOUS

On October 15th, City Council held its first-ever hearing on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by the city government. Six Councilmembers heard testimony from City officials, AI researchers, and community members in a packed house of about 100 people at PhillyCAM.

Crowd members carried signs with slogans like "AI is watching us. Who is watching AI?" and "The only Philly AI we need is Allen Iverson."

Numerous community members criticized the lack of transparency and public participation in decision-making around City use of AI. The City's Chief Legal Counsel Kristin Bray and Chief Information Officer Melissa Scott provided an inventory of technologies which they were aware of the City using. However, they were repeatedly unable to answer questions about use of AI tools for policing and referred many of the Councilmembers' questions to the police department, who were not present.

In reality, the Philly Police Department has used facial recognition software¹, AI-powered license plate readers², and gunshot detection technology.³ It has also been piloting the use of surveillance drones⁴ that use AI for flight navigation.⁵ These technologies pose serious concerns related to privacy, civil liberties, possible bias and error, and potential for data sharing with ICE.

A Haverford computer science professor who testified emphasized that AI is "like the past" – it takes data about historical people and events and finds patterns. Since our history is full of discrimination and bias, from racist policing to redlining, we can expect AI to be, too (at least without safeguards or human review). As Alli Finn of the AI Now Institute put it, "Technology will never be neutral. Algorithms are embedded with the intentions, biases, and norms of their creators."

Speakers shared a wide range of concerns: Ring cameras replacing neighbor-to-neighbor community-building, students being distracted in class by apps, data brokers using City open data without consent by residents, and mental health risks associated with AI use. Clarence Okoh, a senior attorney at the nonprofit TechTonic Justice, shared the cautionary example of predictive policing being used in Tampa Bay to place students on secret lists for closer surveillance and interrogation.

Councilmember Rue Landau, the chair of City Council's technology and information services committee, suggested that the City needs contract mechanisms to ensure that existing vendors do not add AI capabilities to products without the City knowing, nor use data collected in harmful ways.

Axon, the company that the City uses for police body-worn cameras, has been

developing an AI tool for automated generation of police reports based on body camera audio. Axon has said that people shouldn't be worried about AI hallucination (where AI makes up facts) because it "turned off" the model's "creativity" – a laughable idea for anyone who understands how AI works.

Neural network AI algorithms are extremely complex systems of equations with layers of inputs and outputs, built through statistical training. It is often impossible for humans to understand exactly how inputs get mapped to outputs, let alone reliably prevent the algorithm from producing unwanted results. Even some of the most advanced AI chatbots currently on the market have hallucination rates of at least 1-2%, while more powerful reasoning systems have been found to have hallucination rates as high as 51-79%.⁶

Some of the City's forays into "smart city" AI have been pilot projects with little public awareness. For example, one project to count park users in Eakins Oval collected MAC addresses—which allow users to uniquely identify devices—for all smartphones in the vicinity.

The City has also had contracts in the past with companies tied with Israeli surveillance and occupation in Palestine, including Zencity, a start-up based in Tel Aviv and led by veterans of the Israeli military spying organization Unit 8200. Philadelphia's SmartCityPHL pilot project worked with Zencity to do sentiment analysis of Philadelphians' 311 reports and social media posts to analyze residents' opinions about things like street conditions and a COVID vaccine incentive program.

At one point during the hearing, Scott said that because of the fast-changing nature of AI, "if anyone in the world said that they were an AI expert, they would be lying." The crowd laughed, and later speakers called attention to the numerous AI experts in the room. One of those experts emphasized that while an AI decision-making application may be right 98% of the time, even 2% error potentially means harmful effects for 31,000 people in a city the size of Philadelphia.

Other speakers emphasized the infrastructure-related costs of AI – data centers are associated with enormous energy and water demands, pollution, and rising electricity costs, while creating few actual jobs after construction is completed.

electricity costs, while creating few actual jobs after construction is completed. With several proposed data center projects in the Philly metro area, we must pay close attention to which communities are forced to carry the burden of having these facilities in their neighborhoods.

Even City Councilmembers on the technology committee displayed

Councilmember Rue Landau [...] suggested that the City needs contract mechanisms to ensure that existing vendors do not add AI capabilities to products without the City knowing or use data collected in harmful ways.

a healthy skepticism of AI. After the Chief Analytics Officer from Independence Blue Cross discussed an example of a city in India using AI to fast-track a backlog of legal cases, Councilmember Landau said she found this idea frightening. Self-described pro-police Councilmember Jim Harrity said that we don't want to give up freedoms for the sake of someone else's idea of safety. "The worst person you know just made a good point," said someone in the overflow audience room.

Rather than taking the word of tech companies trying to pitch their products as the next big productivity revolution, the City must tread carefully and fully evaluate potential use cases, while incorporating feedback from the public. Even for more seemingly benign AI uses like using Copilot to facilitate computer programming, the jury is still out on usefulness – one study by METR found that programmers ended up working 19% slower when using AI. Often AI is used to replace entry-level positions, thereby reducing job opportunities for people early in their careers and removing opportunities for learning.

Instead of sinking more money into questionable new technologies, the City should invest more into proven public resources – schools, parks, libraries, job training programs, public health, and affordable housing.

Councilmember Landau promised additional future hearings on AI. Hopefully our Councilmembers continue to pressure the City administration to take meaningful steps to increase oversight and accountability around AI use, protect civil and human rights, and ban harmful uses of AI in city government. ■

¹ <https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/philly-police-test-use-of-facial-recognition-tech.html>

² <https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/investigations/philly-uses-license-plate-readers-to-find-stolen-cars-but-results-are-unclear/4296271/>

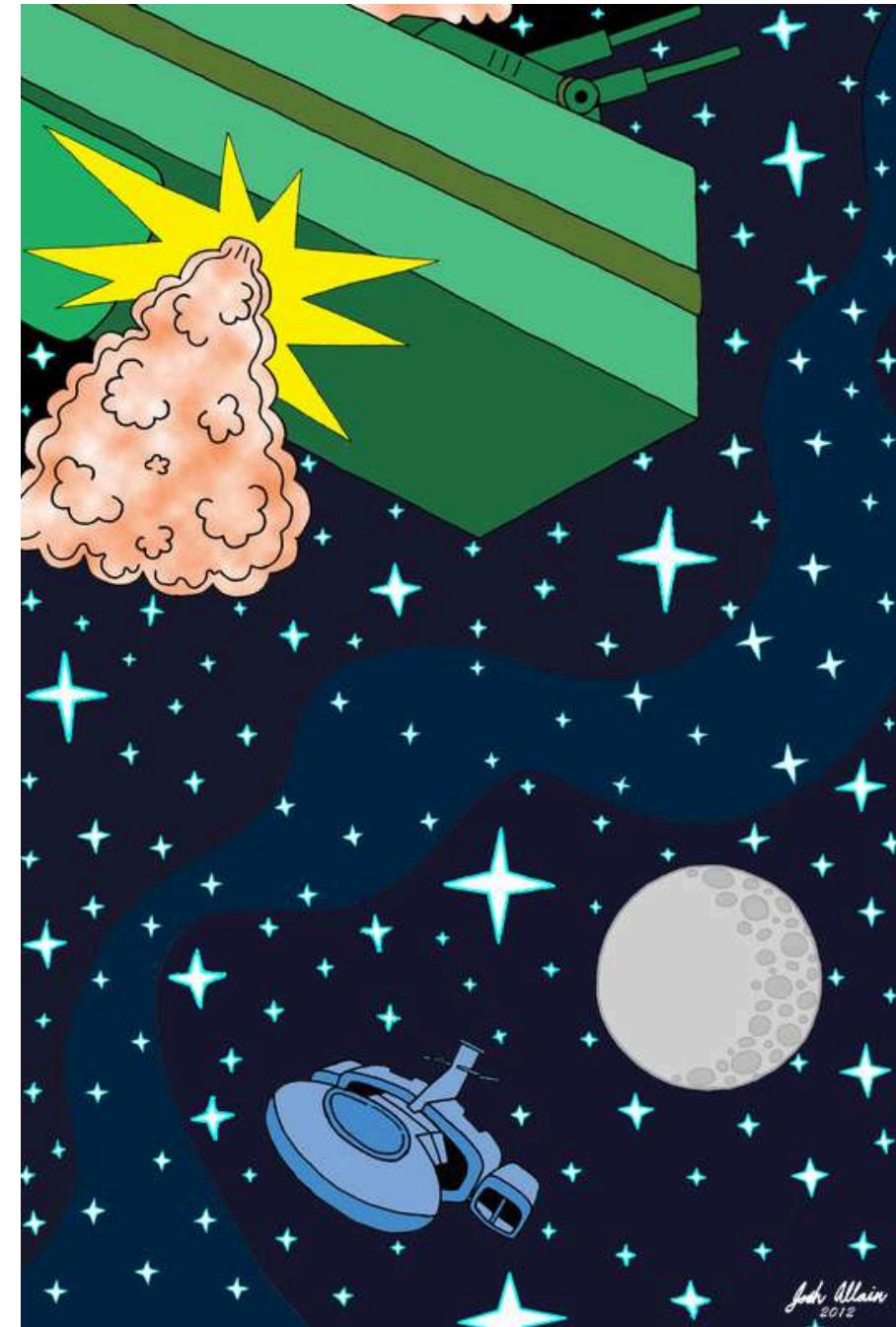
³ <https://6abc.com/post/academic-gunshot-detection-shotspotter-philly-crime-fighting-technology-guns-violence-prevention-tools-shootings/13190625/>

⁴ <https://www.kensingtonvoice.com/philly-police-launching-drone-program-kensington-with-cameras-that-fly-beyond-line-of-sight/>

⁵ <https://billypenn.com/2025/10/17/philly-council-ai-discrimination-privacy-protection/>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/05/technology/ai-hallucinations-chatgpt-google.html>

Instead of sinking more money into questionable new technologies, the City should invest more into proven public resources – schools, parks, libraries, job training programs, public health, and affordable housing.



"R.E.B.E.L.S." (2012) BY JOSH ALLAIN

IG: @josh.allain
Website: <http://www.joshallain.com/store.html>



PRELUDE TO THE WATER WARS

SUNHEE VOLZ

I turn the tap and cool water rushes out. I can do the dishes or rinse my rice. I stand idly in the shower, feeling the water run down my body. I can adjust the temperature, colder for the sticky, humid Philly summers or warmer now for the chilly autumn mornings. Hot water becomes ramen for lunch or a nice cup of tea. I brush my teeth and wash my face. I keep a bird feeder filled in the yard for the pollinators. I never know if I'm under-watering or overwatering my plants, but hey, at least there's something.

I'm writing this on October 7th, 2025, two years since the revolutionary prison break out of Gaza by Palestinians. Ever since then, I can't help but reflect on all of the modern gadgetry and tech that fills my life with comfort and convenience. I know the lights will turn on with a flick of a switch. Central air conditioning keeps my house at a temperature that I complain gets too cold. I don't need to ration water or trek miles to fill jugs to keep it at home.

I've been thinking about one of my favorite movies, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and the weaponization of water. It's actually illegal for Palestinians to collect rainwater or build pipes or water infrastructure. I think about

Did you know most water used to cool data centers evaporates, leaving the balanced closed loop of the water system that has hydrated our planet for millions of years?

as one in the infamous Pennhurst Asylum³, and according to rumor, one in the former Sunoco refinery site in South Philly. These new data centers will be built on hyper scales we haven't seen before, each taking up millions of square feet, the equivalent of hundreds of football fields. They essentially require their own power plants, usually coal or gas, but even nuclear such as the infamous Three Mile Island site.⁴

Did you know that drinking water is preferred by data centers for use in cooling because of its purity? Did you know most water used to cool data centers evaporates, leaving the balanced closed loop of the water system that has hydrated our planet for millions of years?

Data centers are usually exempt from sales and property taxes, and they don't pay for the huge amounts of electricity they consume. Pennsylvania is one of the largest exporters of electricity, meaning that our electrical power gets fed to other states. Meanwhile, Philadelphia is historically one of the more energy-burdened cities⁵ in the country, meaning a larger than average share of Philadelphians' income is spent on utilities. And now we've seen our electric bills go up, basically subsidizing these data centers.⁶

In Pennsylvania specifically, we've seen this movie before: From timber to coal to gas, industries have a long history of coming in and taking what they want with empty promises of prosperity for the working person.

Nestlé buying up water resources all over the world. I think about drying aquifers and rivers, and the warming of the sea. I think about microplastics and PFAS forever chemicals. Did you know there's a finite amount of water on our planet?

Data centers to power artificial intelligence projects are popping up all over the country and the world, but especially here in Pennsylvania. Our fossil fuel legacy, open space, and water resources make us an attractive target. Right now, off the top of my head I know of proposed data centers for the Philly area in Bucks County¹ and Conshohocken,² as well

Philadelphia is one of the more energy-burdened cities in the country ... And now we've seen our electric bills go up, basically subsidizing these data centers.

In addition to electricity, data centers require huge amounts of water, which is why most proposed data centers would be located near rivers. Rivers like the Schuylkill, the Susquehanna, the Delaware. Rivers that provide our drinking water, that all feed into the Chesapeake Bay. Data centers take millions of gallons of water from local rivers each day, in a state that now regularly enters drought conditions every year.

All of this to service data centers that are driving the surveillance state, stealing art, and enriching fascist, weirdo tech bros.

The thing is, it doesn't have to be like this. Data centers have existed for years on much smaller, more manageable scales, usually attached to specific facilities. And I'm all for AI

that does cool meaningful shit like detecting tumors years before they develop—the problem is that right now, like all of our other vital resources, generative AI and data centers are being driven by the interests of capitalism, colonialism, and fascism. In Pennsylvania specifically, we've seen this movie before: From timber to coal to gas, industries have a long history of coming in and taking what they want with empty promises of prosperity for the working person. We must be aware and organize against this latest threat. People are winning, defeating⁷ proposed data centers all over the world.⁸ So keep your eyes open, push back on the narrative that these are essential or inevitable developments, and organize with your neighbors for a world where we are building and taking care of the world we want, and not waiting with expectant pails for our Immortan Joe to unleash the water upon us. ↗

¹ <https://buckscountybeacon.com/2025/08/not-everyone-is-sold-on-the-benefits-of-amazons-data-center-coming-to-falls-township/>

² <https://whyy.org/articles/conshohocken-pennsylvania-residents-pushback-data-center-proposal/>

³ <https://www.inquirer.com/real-estate/commercial/pennhurst-asylum-chester-county-halloween-attraction-data-center-20251013.html>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2024/09/20/nx-s1-5120581/three-mile-island-nuclear-power-plant-microsoft-ai>

⁵ <https://whyy.org/articles/high-energy-costs-low-income-philadelphians/>

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/how-your-electric-bill-may-be-paying-for-big-data-centers-energy-use-257794>

⁷ <https://cleantechnica.com/2025/05/19/local-opposition-to-data-centers-is-the-next-new-thing/>

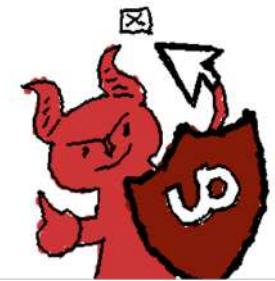
⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/chile-google-data-center-water-drought-environment-d1c6a7a8e8e6e45257ac84fb750b2162>



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WHY PHILADELPHIANS SHOULD USE AD BLOCKERS

AYDEN HEROLD



Ask yourself: "What is the most Philadelphian thing you can do with technology?" Philadelphia is a city synonymous with opposition to tyranny. Independence Hall stands as a monument to America's defiance of British rule. Lincoln Financial Field stands as a monument to our defiance of the Chiefs and Patriots dynasties. Hell, even the current president was famously quoted as saying "Bad things happen in Philadelphia." Truly, we are a modern-day model for any city looking to adopt a rebellious spirit. Thus, I believe the most Philadelphian usage of technology is installing an ad blocker.

The modern internet is a near-unusable service, prioritizing advertisements and user tracking over basic functionality. Log into YouTube now and you'll receive a steady supply of ads via the homepage, sidebar, and at the start and middle and end of videos. Visit any magazine site for an article and you'll get ads crowding the top, bottom, left, and right sections of the screen, including ads between paragraphs. There have been times I've tried to read articles only to find two-thirds of the screen blanketed by advertisements. It has gotten to a point where I believe the only correct course of action is to no longer tolerate such treatment.

The good news is that ad blockers are both plentiful and easy to install. While this essay is not a tutorial on how to install AdBlock, I assure you looking up a guide will bring up countless videos, articles, and threads on how to do so properly and without risk. With about fifteen minutes of research and about ten minutes of execution, your browsing experience will become exponentially easier and save you more time and life than you can imagine. All of a sudden, you will be able to read articles with little annoyance and watch videos without distraction.

Additionally, it is my hope that by looking into the simple yet highly rewarding task of installing an ad blocker, you will be encouraged to look for more browser modifications. A few years ago YouTube got rid of the default ability to see dislikes on videos, likely for the sake of making their site friendlier to advertisers. Through a simple browser add-on, you can go back to seeing them as though nothing ever changed, and filter for more quality entertainment like you would with movies or shows.

There is, however, one accommodation I must ask you to make should you decide to install an ad blocker, and that is to consider smaller creators. Despite the annoyance, smaller creators do rely on ads to make money. You could configure your ad blocker to play ads while watching their videos, or you could use a method I prefer: direct monetary support. While YouTubers, bloggers, and musicians make money off of online ads and streams, often their payout for these is akin to peanuts. A YouTuber who gets 100,000 views on a video will likely only make about \$900 after YouTube has taken its share of revenue. It is more than likely that many of the artists you enjoy listening to make less than a living wage off of Spotify streams alone. Through taking direct monetary action via buying site/creator merchandise or signing up for the Patreons of your favorite creators, you can give them more money than they'd make through the inconvenient ads displaying across your screen.

Take action today. Vote with your wallet. I'll see you online. ↗

THE SILENT LISTENER

HOW THE POLICE SURVEIL SOUND IN OUR CITY

ASS (ANTI-SURVEILLANCE SQUAD)

Philadelphia's police department (PPD) has placed "acoustic detection" microphones across our city, putting our communities under greater surveillance while funneling away funds from public services.

In 2016, PPD began trialing a privately-owned service known as ShotSpotter. As the name suggests, the intent of this surveillance program was to detect gunshots throughout the city, with the alleged goal of increasing police response time while also overcoming community resistance to calling the police when gun violence occurs.

The ShotSpotter system relies on placing arrays of microphones throughout our neighborhoods in order to listen for loud sounds and attempt to triangulate their locations. While the placement of these microphones supposedly helps identify gunshots, the microphones also frequently misidentify cars backfiring, fireworks, and other loud sounds as incidences requiring a police response.¹ Moreover, in 2017, one of ShotSpotter's own engineers testified under oath that these microphones don't only pick up loud sounds – they also record and store conversations conducted at normal volume up to 50 feet away.²

While PPD decided to not move forward with ShotSpotter after their trial, in 2023 they began to use their own version, contracting with DataBuoy, described as "a gunshot localization and real-time emergency alert intelligence system."³ According to the scant press releases and media coverage available about this development, the partnership with DataBuoy purportedly aimed to give PPD greater control over their data than ShotSpotter would, while supposedly still being a way to "reduce gun violence throughout the city." Still, there is a lack of transparency around where these microphones are, how much they're recording, and even how the police are using this data. We don't even know how much the project costs. From news reports during the 2016 trial, we know costs at time were around \$15,000-20,000 per sensor, totaling \$60-75,000 a year per square mile.⁴

LOOKING UP, COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE FROM BELOW

For the past several months, as a small collective, we have begun tracing this practice in our city, aiming to identify where these sensors are placed, how much they cost, and what policies govern PPD's use of them. The secrecy of these systems and the DataBuoy partnership means they have not shown up in our analyses of the city budget, in news coverage across the city, or even on PPD's supposedly "open data" portal. So, we decided to take to the streets and look for them ourselves.

Walking through our city neighborhoods block by block, we've learned the telltale signs of these acoustic detection systems, and once you know what to look for, so will you.



Generally placed on telephone poles, with three or more sensors facing in all direction, these systems are usually painted brown, near to video cameras, and carry no identification that they are police surveillance

We've spread our walks out across the city in neighborhoods with differing racial densities to see where the greatest presence of these systems are. We determined that blocks with the most Black and Brown residents also have the most acoustic surveillance. In just four walks, we've identified at least a million dollars' worth of acoustic detection equipment, and that's using the 2016 costs. The reality is these systems are costing our city much more than money as community safety further deteriorates.

Across the nation, experiences with ShotSpotter and similar devices have shown that it does not reduce gun violence. All these systems are good for is using up public funds, consuming police time with false reports, and over-policing communities of color.

The problem is that surveillance isn't safety. 96% of the 1,345 respondents to a 2020 citywide survey supported the decision to reallocate funds from policing towards community programs and services like affordable housing, mental health services, public schools, drug treatment, and youth recreational programming. No matter the tools the police use, no new technology will reshape their core function: controlling the population in the service of capital interests. The overwhelming placement of these microphones in areas of the city where the highest densities of Black and Brown residents live means that these communities face even greater surveillance and interactions with the police, increasing the risk of harm and violence for our neighbors rather than creating safety.

In the coming months, we'll be putting together a website publicly tracking these systems, a submission form allowing you to submit photos of any systems you may spot, and even have collaborative walking tours where we can explore, learn, and identify these systems together. In the meantime, keep your eyes open, and let folks know what's going on. Remember, we keep us safe. ☮

¹ <https://www.stopspying.org/shotspotter>

² As highlighted by <https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/The%20Legal%20Aid%20Society%20Testimony%20Before%20NYC%20Council-%20June%2014%202017%20%283%29.pdf> page 8, citing engineer testimony for COMMONWEALTH v. JASON DENISON (2024)

³ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/philadelphia-police-department-announces-pilot-program-with-databuoy-corporation-301819256.html>

⁴ <https://billypenn.com/2016/06/16/philly-police-have-used-secret-gunshot-detection-tech-since-january/>

“Brotherly Love” Means Solidarity: PHILADELPHIA’s LABOR HERITAGE

BY LABOR JAWN
www.laborjawn.com

“Yes, the long memory is the most radical idea in this country. It is the loss of that long memory which deprives our people of that connective flow of thoughts and events that clarifies our vision, not of where we’re going, but where we want to go.” —Utah Phillips

Philadelphia is a city known for its history. It’s something engrained in us in school, our culture, and our tourism industry. But when we think of that history, what comes to mind? William Penn and the Treaty of Shackamaxon? The signing of the Declaration of Independence? Frank Rizzo calling Stan Bohrman a Crumb-Bum?

While all of these are certainly important moments in our collective memory, they leave out a vast swath of Philadelphia’s cultural heritage: its history of militant labor action.

But who among us was taught this history, whether by teachers, elders, parents, or tour guides? Why aren’t these struggles held in the same regard as the stories of the founding fathers, titans of industry, or political leaders? Put simply, stories of the collective struggle of everyday folks are less convenient for those who still hold power in society. It is easier for them to reinforce a “great man” approach to history, conditioning us to view ourselves not as a body of people with common interests, but as individuals who can only achieve power by working within the existing economic and political systems.

This ultimately robs us of our heritage as workers, neighbors, and Philadelphians, a heritage that is full of fights for a better world, which, while not always successful, demonstrated what can be achieved when everyday people band together. From the earliest fights for abolition to current struggles for better wages, immigrant rights, and a voice on the shop floor, we are simply the latest in a long line of people who refuse to be pushed around.

So, next time you’re heading in to work, I want you to remember: as we walk through our city, from Kensington to Kingsessing, Roxborough to Port Richmond, we’re sharing footsteps with workers, organizers, and agitators whose struggles have helped to shape the world we live in today. Every inch of Philly is drenched in labor history, and as its current crop of workers, we have an obligation to our predecessors to remember, preserve, and share their struggles, their stories, and their heritage.

May the memory of their resistance be an inspiration to us all.

From shortly after its founding, Philadelphia has had a history of rebellion against tyranny and for the rights of workers or oppressed peoples. Below is just a brief selection of this history.

1688

German Quakers in Germantown delivered a petition calling for the Society of Friends (as the Quakers are formally known) to ban slavery as an immoral practice that corrupts both the enslaved and the enslaver.

1796

The Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers of Philadelphia went on strike for better wages and conditions, one of the first in the United States. Their subsequent strikes unfortunately resulted in an 1806 court ruling which effectively outlawed unionization for decades.

1835

Coalpassers on the Schuylkill River struck for a 10-hour workday, prompting a general strike of thousands of workers across the city. This was the first general strike in North America, and it secured the 10-hour workday across most industries.

1909-1910

10,000 young women garment workers struck in support of their comrades in New York, fighting against scabs and police in snow-covered battles across the city, eventually earning them the title of “The Girl Army.”

1913-1923

Dockworkers formed the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union Local No. 8, affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World. This was a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse union made up of Black, white, and immigrant workers that managed to maintain control of Philadelphia’s docks in a period of intense racism and discrimination across the rest of the country.

1946

As part of a nationwide strike of 200,000 United Electrical, Mechanical, and Radio Workers, 20,000 struck the General Electric and Westinghouse plants in Philadelphia. In spite of an injunction against mass picketing, they staged a parade led by WW2 veterans in uniform, which was soon attacked by the largest gathering of Philadelphia police to date. The nationwide strike finally concluded with an 18 cent/hour wage increase and pay equality for men and women.

1987

During the 1987 Football season, the National Football League Players Association went on strike over wages and safety concerns around the use of astroturf. The Philadelphia Eagles were one of the only teams to never cross the picket line and even blocking scab busses with their own cars. The Eagles kept solidarity going for all 24 days of the strike, with support from the whole of Philadelphia’s labor movement.

2022

After forming one of the first wall to wall museum unions (covering everyone from coat check to curators) in the United States, the workers at the Philadelphia Art Museum (Nee: Philadelphia Museum of Art) engaged in a 3 week strike, just before the museum was supposed to host a new exhibit “Matisse in the 1930s”. As the opening day for the exhibit approached, pressure mounted, and finally the museum came back to the table with an agreement granting all of the union’s demands. This was one of the first major museum strikes in the modern era, and ended in a resounding victory for Philly’s cultural workers. ↗

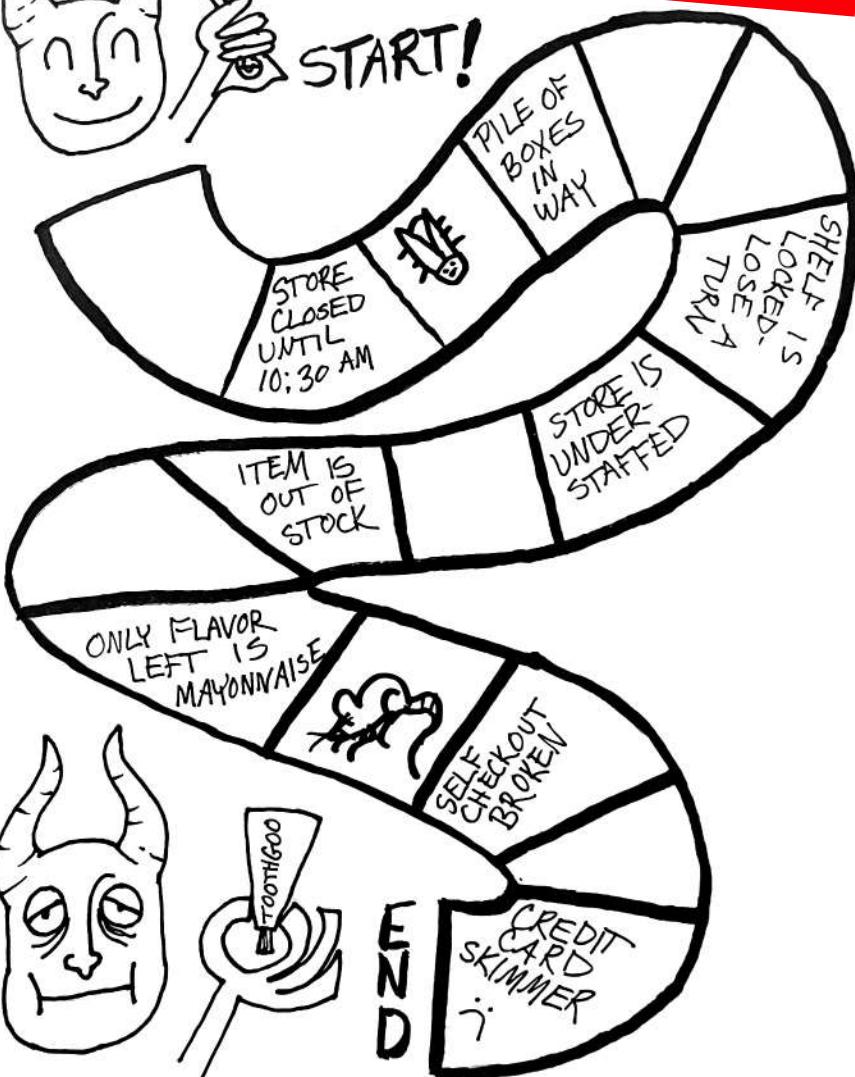
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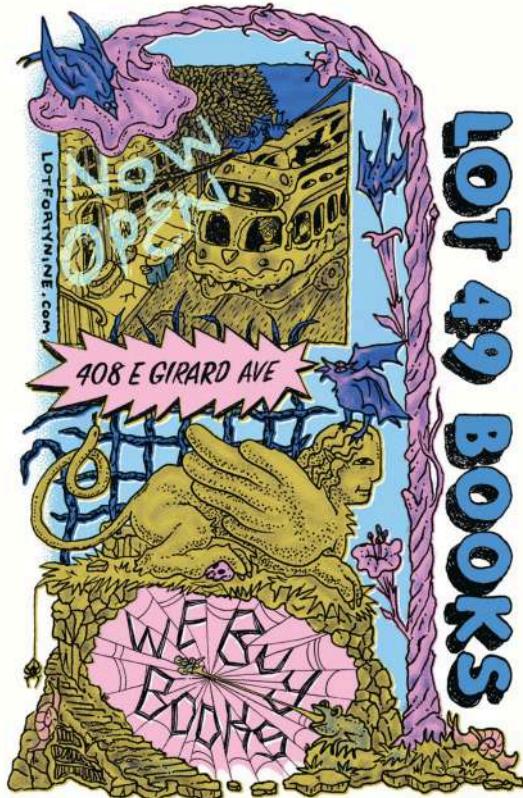
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We are a left-of-center magazine; however, we want to encourage discourse and shy from black-and-white thinking. We welcome brave perspectives and ideas, playful and serious, in curating a quarterly zine that captures a sliver of this city's bizarro indomitable spirit.

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