

On Scale

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w/ research and editing assistance
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In May of 2014, Genius.com was a few months shy of its five-year anniversary.

Founded by Yale graduates Tom Lehman, Ilan Zechory and Mahbod Moghadam, Genius (known then as RapGenius) began as a platform for user-generated annotations to rap lyrics, allowing fans to clarify, interpret and debate their meanings. As users began to post and annotate prose and lyrics from other genres, the website soon accommodated to the demand and created dedicated sections for other subjects.

Genius's deviation from being known for the annotation of rap lyrics into the interpretation of other texts made headlines when, on May 25th, the 141-page manifesto written by Isla Vista spree killer Elliot Rodger entitled *My Twisted World* was uploaded to the site and annotated by Moghadam. Moghadam's annotations read more like the nervous, reactionary first thoughts a stranger might lean over and say to you while sitting at an airport bar, watching the ceiling-mounted flat screen television broadcasting the news on loop. An attempt to fill the space of shocked silence that tragedy creates and the reactionary one-upmanship that hot-take culture demands.

Moghadam's comments on the manifesto were poorly timed from a publicity perspective and heavy handed from a comedic one. More importantly though, a blunder like this in a culture where gray-area infractions can spiral into mass public executions of character could cripple Genius' reputation to the point of irrelevance. Until then, the three cofounders had played the parts of charismatic tech start up provocateurs, relying less on phoned-in idealist rhetoric than their disruptive counterparts while courting controversy as a way to increase their platform's visibility. The creators were the users, styling themselves somewhere between a Brooklyn indie rap trio and Parks and Recreation's goofball business mogul Jean-Ralphio. Still in its development stages, and with a monetization plan yet to be implemented, Genius was relying in part on its upstart cool cache and the support of its user base to build relevance as an investable company.

Following the swift wave of backlash, Moghadam resigned the following day.

Hip-hop's rise during the late 90s into a globally dominating pop paradigm crystallized in the success of charismatic entrepreneurs like Jay-Z and Biggie, conflating artist and businessman more overtly than the American pop stars that had come before them. The creative mogul became a new form of public persona, providing a template for openly reflecting on one's accomplishments in popular culture; what was originally a form of

protest to combat oppressive forces became a template for scalability for the elite. The embedded narrative justified the practice; living the lavish life without apology is alluring to the solutionist developer who's saving the world. Drake carries the torch of starting from the bottom, but Google hides bipedal weapons under a softer re-design. At this point it has become vernacular.

Entrepreneurs have their own altars of worship that cross over seamlessly with the artists who made crossing over into business essential to their financial strategy. Silicon Valley fetishizes the image of Steve Jobs building Apple from the ground up in a garage, and Kanye West synthesizes the ideology of both worlds more overtly than anyone without a hint of irony, a binary reading of history rendered in a formulaic, $A+B=C$ mentality.

To point out that Rap Genius' cofounders took more than a few cues from the rap moguls they grew up with in the swagged-out presentation of their brand is not a particularly revelatory observation. Rather, it's how similar strategies applied in separate spaces come to produce different results based on their explicit and implied structures that interests me. Start-ups and hip-hop have the unique characteristic where the size and scale of the brand seem to have no ideologically detrimental effect on their perceived authenticity. To paraphrase BuzzFeed's founder Jonah Peretti, "it's not about selling out, it's about blowing up".

Once the bling paradigm had been crossed, hip-hop could be outwardly shallow and self-centered without losing its credibility. After all, musicians and artists can't claim there is any innate need for what they produce beyond what people are willing to pay attention to. Silicon Valley, on the other hand, has structured itself on Apple's rhetoric of thinking different and Google's tenet of not being evil, creating a culture where seeing one's pursuits in the space as inherently good and socially productive comes with the territory. The fusion of business metrics and creative rhetoric, peppered with an assumed moral positioning gives Silicon Valley a distinct skeuomorphic artistry; an assumption of depth that eschews nuance and subjectivity and sees the frictions of the pre-digital as uniformly detrimental.





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The fetish known as macrophilia centers around a preoccupation with larger-than-life scale. Like furies, the macrophile community came into definition largely through its growth on the developing internet. Unlike a meat-and-potatoes attraction to amazonian giantesses grounded in the possibility of physical fulfillment, macrophiles turn to visual representation and fantasy narratives of giant sentients instead, proliferating in online communities dedicated to the obsession. Less an itch looking to be scratched in the physical world, macrophiles get off on the image and mere concept of hugeness, of what it might feel like to cling to the toe of a giant, big-tit anime goddess. Unlike furry culture, which acknowledges the removal from its digital incarnations through the embodiment of an avatar (aka the “fursona”), the *representation* of macrophilia is the thing itself. The image is the fetish, and in virtual space the body can undergo limitless expansion.

¹ Kim Kardashian’s shoot for LOVE magazine, showing her as a towering giantess; “Kanade visits a city” by DeviantArt user Hank88

Macrophile



- Art
- Stories
- Discussion
- Contest
- Macro Stat
- Userlist
- Links

The Basic Stats

These are the basic stats of your current, non-altered self. You will have a chance to add more in later, if you wish. This is the basic start.

Height: Kilometers

Weight: Tons

2



3

Just as value is placed on the ability to scale up and disperse, there is alternatively a fetishization for the act of scaling down, where authenticity and a greater sense of self are the driving motivations in valuing minimization.

² MacroSTAT 1.0 body-scale calculator from macrophile.com

³ Campsite of Christopher Knight aka The North Pond Hermit



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When Christopher Knight, aka the “North Pond Hermit”, was discovered stealing food in the middle of the night from Pine Tree Camp on April 4th, 2013, he had been living in the woods surrounding North Pond in Rome, Maine for 27 years. Mysteriously vanishing from civilization in 1986, he had built a hidden encampment in the woods and lived in total solitude, not speaking to anyone save for a chance encounter with a single hiker for over two and a half decades.

Knight’s story is easily reduced to the narrative of an individual out of step with the modern world, whose only option was to turn his back on it and retreat into solitude. For those that feel the daily anxiety that technological dependence and networked communication might be making us more reliant on performing to its structural codes just to survive and in turn, losing touch with our authentic selves, the idea of relying on *only* oneself and starting over from square one is an appealing silver bullet solution to the competitive dread that capitalism’s metrics for success have embedded into culture. In reality, Knight’s methods were more parasitic than potential admirers might hope,

⁴ Christopher Knight, aka the North Pond Hermit, being arrested by police

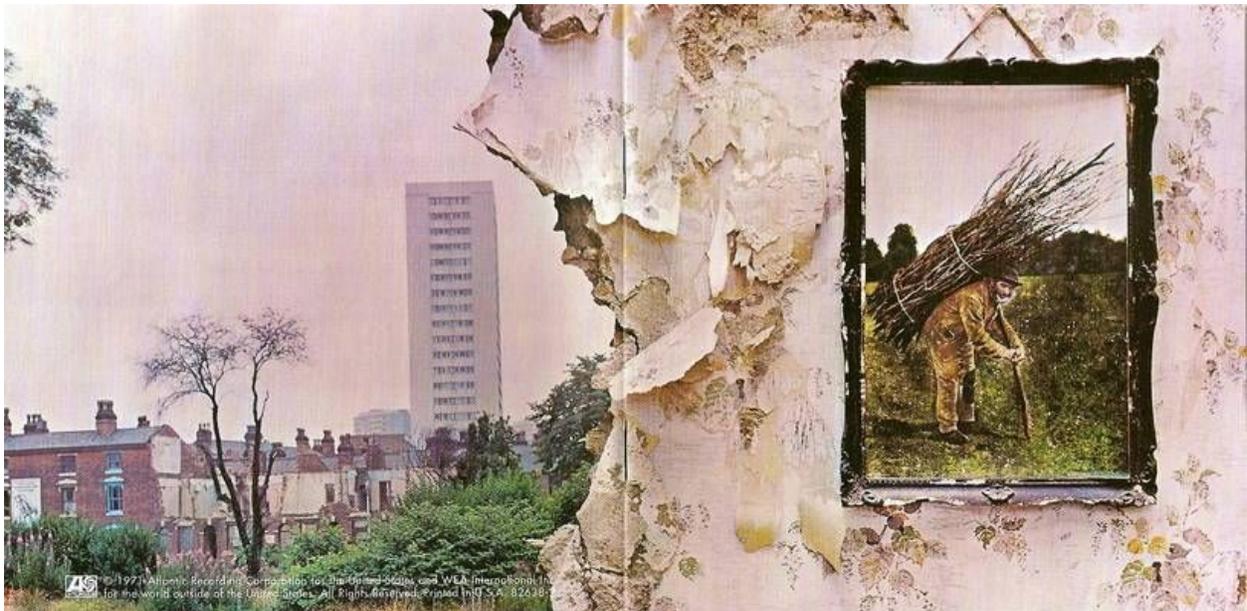
instead opting to steal all of his supplies and food (having a predilection for candy and chocolate liqueur) from the surrounding residents' homes. Batteries, propane tanks, Vanity Fair magazines and a Gameboy made it into the prolific stash that was uncovered upon his arrest. Pilfered entirely from nearby campsites and houses, the North Pond community was in a constant state of unease for years, anticipating who would be the next target of his regular nighttime break ins.

Knight's bearing decades of Maine winters is no doubt an impressive feat, having personal experience of their brutality growing up only 2 hours south of his encampment, but the narrative of a rugged individualist making it on his own or that of an anti-technology eco activist (Knight was previously a computer programmer) is more so a projected fantasy than a lived reality. Knight's story instead reads as that of a man who went to extreme lengths to avoid engaging with others, not the neo-survivalist, *Into The Woods* narrative or longform social critique some might have hoped for. To see the story of the North Pond Hermit in this romantic light, despite his total reliance on the participation of others in industrialized society, stealing literally everything he owned, speaks to the desire to believe that simplification and reduction can bring us closer to the authentic, individualistic self. "I did examine myself," Knight said. "Solitude did increase my perception. But here's the tricky thing—when I applied my increased perception to myself, I lost my identity. With no audience, no one to perform for, I was just there. There was no need to define myself; I became irrelevant. To put it romantically: I was completely free." Of course, Knight's "freedom" relied entirely on the engagements of others. His decades-long, siphon-like relationship with industrialized society might be the closest thing to an effectively virtual engagement with the world. Stealing whatever he could read, Knight was aware of the Kardashians yet had no idea what the name of the town was that he had been living in for the past 27 years.

Like the Hikikomori of Japan, isolated in their bedrooms and supported by their parents, existing as unseen presences while still being tethered to the world through an internet connection, Christopher Knight scaled his public persona down to that of a rumor or whisper, a life approximating bodilessness.



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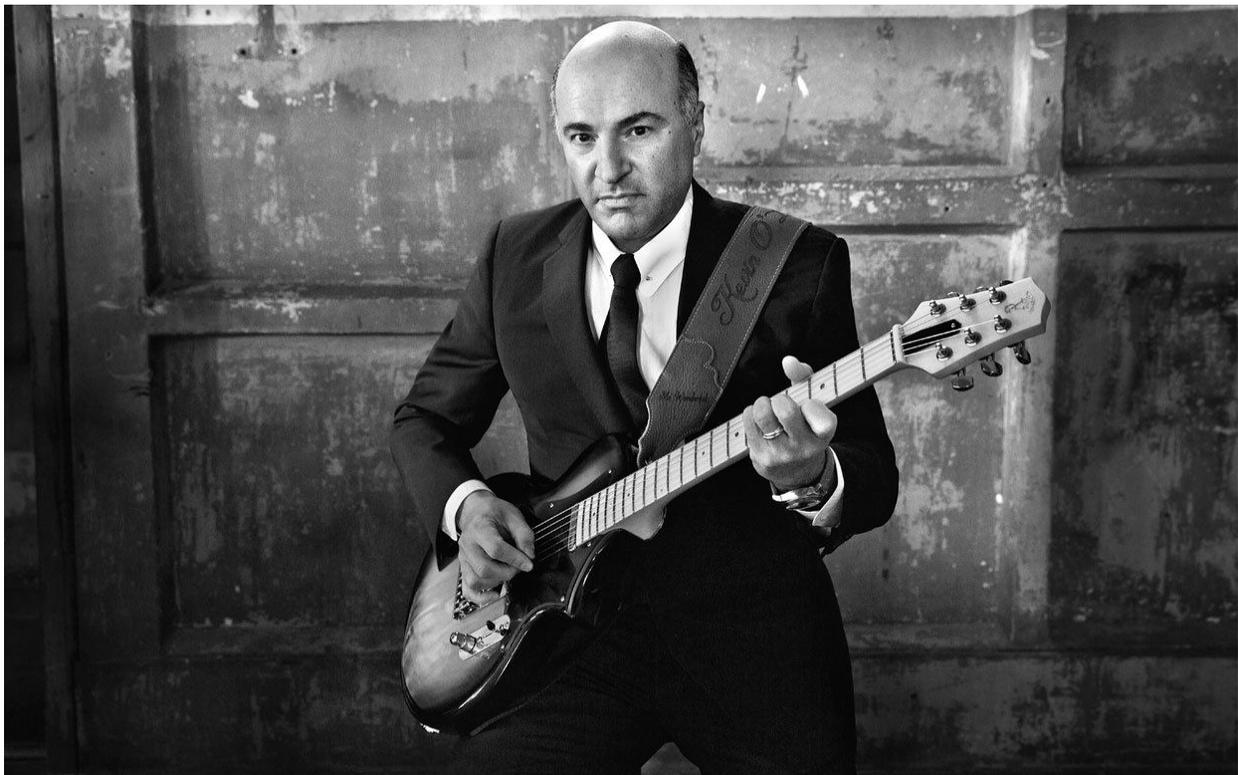
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⁵ Artist depiction of the North Pond hermit, from GQ magazine

⁶ Gatefold of Led Zeppelin IV

The illustration of Knight from GQ's lengthy feature on him depicts a rugged, ur-man traipsing through the woods carrying a bundle of sticks on his back, echoing the cover of *Led Zeppelin IV*. Released after a period of withdrawal by the band from the public spotlight, the album had effectively zero information on its cover and the marketing strategy surrounding its release was to not offer any overt public explanation as to the meaning of its imagery. Calculated withdrawals work in part on the basis of a previously built platform, and similarly the North Pond Hermit was not a feral child without social context for comparison. Intended or not, the act of scaling down adds value once there is a public to create narrative for the action.

Ask any farm-to-table fundamentalist and they're sure to tell you the more dispersed your food gets, the less authentic it becomes; it loses its essence. Scaling, in this context, devalues the product, but that implies the product has values to begin with. Strip something of any moral navigators and the easier it becomes for it to move through multiple contexts without friction. What does it look like when someone embodies this ideology?



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⁷ Businessman and tv personality Kevin O'leary with a guitar from his collection

Kevin O'Leary is referred to as the Donald Trump of Canada and one of the nation's most prominent and successful entrepreneurs. Building his empire at the tail end of the 90's through the sale of a children's software company, O'Leary has more recently become a media personality in his own right due to the popularity of ABC's *Shark Tank*, a reality television series where small businesses pitch themselves to a panel of celebrity investors. O'Leary's ruthless business style, coupled with his "telling it like it is" tv persona earned him the now longstanding, tongue-in-cheek nickname, "Mr. Wonderful". The character of Mr. Wonderful will ridicule someone for their half-baked ideas while simultaneously laying out a manipulative plan to seize and exploit their business. By playing the role of capitalist super-villain, O'Leary pushes free-market ideology to its logical end, and is successful at it, by removing all sense of emotionally-driven decision making in favor of the ruthless pursuit for scalable investment opportunities. While the other investors are prone to sympathising with stories of hardship or being taken by the thrill of a gamble, O'Leary operates purely in the realm of numbers, famously telling anyone not willing to get on board with his pragmatist approach, "you're dead to me".

Outside of his business pursuits, O'Leary's passions lie in the realm of personal creativity. Amassing huge collections of valuable Les Paul guitars and vintage cameras, he describes himself as a "starving artist" (a nod to the fact that his artistic practice doesn't sustain itself) and takes the pursuit seriously enough to have mounted a retrospective of 40 years worth of his photography and to have appeared on television playing guitar competently alongside Randy Bachman of Bachman Turner Overdrive. He cites a key moment in his life when he made the decision to pursue an MBA over trying to make it in a career as an industrial photographer, saying it was simply the more practical choice in order to support himself financially, and that he wasn't willing to take on what it might entail to become a successful artist.

For all the harsh rhetoric when it comes to his business ideology, O'Leary's discusses his personal pursuits like a romantic. It's O'Leary's ability to compartmentalize his personality that may be his greatest asset, making a clear distinction between the subjective and creative structure of art with that of the objective numerics of business ideology and their separate metrics for success. Embracing this distinction, he is able to act like an asshole on tv because, in his words, he's just "thinking like money" (plus, it makes for a great watch). The metrics of value in the business world are dealt with in black and white.



⁸ A self-portrait taken by Kevin O'Leary in 1975

⁹ O'Leary Wines x Zipz product, originally negotiated on *Shark Tank*

O'Leary's understanding of the nuances of publicly performed roles VS his interior life and personal opinions are in part what separates him from the ousted CEOs of hipster provocateurs like Vice, American Apparel, and now Genius. One's individual notions of authenticity must be flexible in order to scale, and a personality built on courting controversy works only so long as it adapts to the inevitable shifts in moral mass consensus. O'Leary comes across as comfortable, even casual in his various roles, understanding that the appearance of "realness" is best dealt with at a bit of a distance when it comes to financial viability.