

Tiny Diversions

A field guide to creative disruption

Folk remedies for a world that's forgotten how to play.

- Reclaim public space.
- Hack culture.
- Leave your mark.
- Make yourself heard.
- Sow absurdity, and
- Let the stars guide you.



Summer 2025



Welcome, mon ami, to the Summer issue of our zine.

I've been traveling -- as gnomes do -- and am reminded that public art and goofy self-printed materials are a ubiquitous and timeless tradition. For instance, travel back a hundred years to Paris' Pigalle cabarets and you'll find tipsy cafe-goers assembling silly little publications full of wit and whimsy -- distributing them to passers-by -- and leaving their mark on a time and place.

Some of these early zines are immortalized in museums. Countless others must have washed through history, discarded and forgotten. Did anyone get a chance to read it before they used it to soak up a spilled glass of absinthe, or folded it into a wedge under a teetering table leg?

Now, it's your turn.

What will you write down? What's worth preserving ... for you?

- Buttons the Gnome
Summer 2025



Who Owns Public Spaces?

In theory, we *all* own public spaces. It's like an empty page waiting for us to collectively write our story on it. Sometimes we've got something to say, and sometimes we're comfortable just watching, but we each have a part in it.

Heck, we even proactively curtail the exploitation of public spaces, just to make sure that everyone gets to enjoy them. From national parks to barkers' corners, we treat shared spaces with intention. New uses of space go before committees and hearings, to make sure we all benefit.

And when we cooperate to make these spaces accessible and comfortable for everyone, these places thrive.

But too often these spaces end up sterile and corporate. The only thing we can agree on is bland decoration, soulless art, and empty messages that are inoffensive to everyone ... yet inspiring to no one. (Corporate sponsorship almost guarantees this sort of emptiness.)

What if we took back the job of decorating our shared spaces with whimsy and friendliness instead of stock photography and ads? What touches can we add to humanize and beautify the world?



Trespassing is a serious crime that can be met with physical force. Make sure you check local laws before doing anything stupid.

Ad Busting for Beginners

Advertising covers every available surface like a creeping bacterial mat. Its goal is to get into your head -- without permission -- and convince you of things. Not content with mere billboards and posters, the industry went and weaponized itself into the intrusive, oozing beast it is today.

Ad busters fight back with subtle modifications and playful misdirection, to reclaim our quiet spaces and thoughts.



"Add to cart!"

Most printed advertising is designed to be easily updated in-place. Copy the size and format of an insert and it's a snap to swap yours in.



"The revolution will not be televised."

Locked advertising displays are often all keyed identically (so installers don't have to keep track of hundreds of keys). The layout of these keys is an open secret, yours for the searching.



People trust a uniform. A monogrammed polo shirt and a high-visibility vest can dispel suspicions at a glance. "Just doing my job!" You belong here.

Trying to match your font to an example? Try whatthefont.com.



Chat Oui-Ja-T

Aquarius

(The one tuned to a station no one else hears.)
This season, you'll glimpse a pattern behind the chaos -- and pretend not to notice. A rare missing sock will return with secrets. Avoid dishes involving basil, or anyone who talks about "vibes." Try denim.

Lucky color: ultramarine

Lucky number: your tally of unread inbox messages

Gemini

(The one who said both things, and meant them.)
Fluent in parallel realities -- not "indecisive" -- this summer, you'll find yourself in two places at once. Avoid mirrors after midnight -- you won't like who blinks first. Try velvet in the evening.

Lucky color: neon split-pea

Lucky number: the chats you've muted but stay in

Libra

(The one who weighs the moon against a feather.)
This season, you'll try to keep the peace and accidentally start a revolution. The vibe is velvet diplomacy with a blade hidden somewhere racy. Avoid promises made over cocktails ... and wool.

Lucky color: pearl

Lucky number: drafted apologies you've never sent



Pisces

(The one who feels the ripple before the stone.)
This summer, a stranger will cry near you. You'll decide whether to offer comfort or become part of their mystery. Avoid porous boundaries and vague invitations. Corduroy will betray you.

Lucky color: sea-glass green

Lucky number: the times you've almost texted back

Cancer

(The one who remembers everything, even fictions.)
You're not too sensitive, you're just tuned to frequencies others won't admit exist. This summer, a familiar feeling will knock before you realize it never left. Avoid old songs in new places. Saltwater leaves stains.

Lucky color: lunar silver

Lucky number: voicemails you've never deleted



Scorpio

(The one who strikes before you notice them there.)
Something you buried will surface -- it might wear your face. Secrets are currency, but you've already spent yours, so avoid questions that start with "be honest." Velvet works better than expected.

Lucky color: oil slick

Lucky number: your grudges reclassified as "lessons"

Mercury is Retrograde
July 17 - August 11, 2025
"Well *that* explains it ..."

July 10 -- Buck Moon
August 9 -- Sturgeon Moon
September 7 -- Corn Moon

Aries

(The one who kicks in the door, then asks where to.)
You're not lost, you're just two steps ahead of your own plan. This summer, you'll start something before you realize it has already begun. Avoid unsolicited advice, especially your own. Silk does not breathe.

Lucky color: traffic-cone orange

Lucky number: the count of bruises you forgot about

Leo

(The one who lights a match to watch their shadow.)
It's not "drama" if the world demands you in high definition. This summer, applause will arrive before you even take the stage. Not everyone claps with love. Avoid attention-stealing prints or patterns.

Lucky color: spotlight gold

Lucky number: the exes who still follow you on social

Sagittarius

(The one who laughs loudest at the map.)
Chase something ridiculous and come back with something true. Your freedom is sacred -- your browser history, less so. Avoid making bets with people who own swords. A good hat is irreplaceable.

Lucky color: burnt orange

Lucky number: flights looked-up but left un-booked



Taurus

(The one who builds the house and refuses to leave.)
It's not being stubborn if the world keeps trying to rearrange itself without permission. This summer, you'll resist something everyone else calls inevitable. Avoid small talk about weather that might happen.

Lucky color: mossy brown

Lucky number: how many tabs you've got open

Virgo

(The one who alphabetizes their apocalypses.)
This summer, you're running quality control for the universe. You'll fix something no one else knew was broken. Avoid sudden detours and untested recipes. Herringbone is sometimes the most tasteful choice.

Lucky color: pressed fern

Lucky number: the plans you've revised at least twice

Capricorn

(The one who built the shelter but mocked the storm.)
This summer, you'll find yourself ten steps ahead and still pretending it was luck. Your ambition isn't subtle -- stop pretending it whispers. Avoid networking events and antique clocks. Pockets come in handy.

Lucky color: weathered brass

Lucky number: the favors you could call-in today

Stick(er) it to The Man

In a hurry to add your message or commentary? Try stickers!

The whole world is your suggestion box when you plant a sticker in the right place. From the time-honored tradition of repurposing mailing labels, to the high-tech application of a portable thermal printer with a strip of labels in it, there's something for everyone when it comes to self-adhesive expression.

Your local office-supply superstore offers full-sheet sticker paper. Use it freehand -- or print on it. Add a layer of clear packing tape for a little weather-resistance. Cut down large sheets into smaller stickers as desired.



Add a little magic to everyday appliances with new features for people to enjoy ...

Professional-looking stickers can make *anything* wifi-enabled, voice-activated, or touch-sensitive!

Make normal paper into stickers with wheat paste. Mix one part white flour with three parts water. Heat the mixture almost to boiling, stirring/whisking to prevent clumping. Let it cook for half an hour or so, thickening it to a gluey consistency.

Lay down a generous layer on the surface of your choice, affix art, and add another layer on top.



Remember, kids:
Vandalism is a
misdemeanor!
(Not a felony.)



"Nice QR code you got there.
Be a shame if someone
replaced it with a Rick Roll..."



Label maker go
BRRRRRR ...



Unconventional Graffiti



Dust and dirt on a train, bus, or truck looks like a canvas to the imaginative spirit.

Can you be arrested for cleaning a grimy wall? It turns out it depends on the jurisdiction. In a summer not too long ago, riders of the Paris Metro got so fed up with the sooty walls -- and the lack of action on the city's part -- that they took a novel approach to force the matter.

Employing water-filled canisters, they sprayed messages into the filth. Faced with new "graffiti," the city did the only thing they could -- they washed the rest of the wall to remove the messages. Citizens got the action they demanded, without irreparably damaging anything. It's a fun "grey area" to play in!

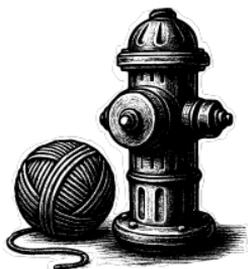


"Wash me!"

Use stencils to make quick work of your cleaning chores.

Some artists work on the very-small scale, using miniatures and toys to adorn public surfaces with playful scenes. Look closely -- they're all around you!

Solar-powered path lights and a bit of epoxy make for a lasting cordless creation.



"Yarn bombing" wraps everyday public fixtures in colorful knitted outfits.

Create epic patterns with breadcrumbs and watch pigeons become art.



Guerrilla Gardening

Reclaiming public spaces doesn't have to involve defacement of property. Practice random acts of senseless beauty! Anywhere there's dirt, there's a chance for life to grow -- just scatter some local seeds or spores and let nature take its course!

Different seeds will do well in different environments, and may even prefer to be planted at a particular time. Do your research and match your plants to the microclimate they'll be growing in.

- Sunlight or shade?
- Damp or dry?
- Cool or warm?
- Soil or clay?
- Sheltered or bare?

Try planting your state's official plants. They were chosen because they thrive there.



"This was a parking lot. Now it's all covered with flowers."



Local wildflowers are hardy, fast growing, and support pollinators.

Two words: Moss Graffiti

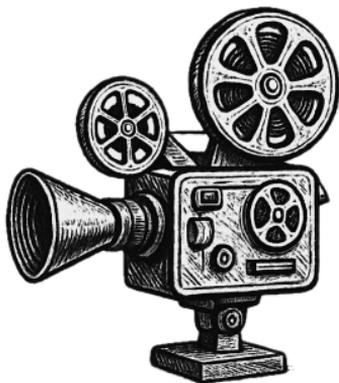
Keep an eye out. Pocket gardens are everywhere!



"This was a discount store. Now it's a peaceful oasis."

Project Yourself

Did you know, it's not illegal to operate a high-powered projector in public? Also did you know, there's a flourishing second-hand market for projectors at affordable prices? What's great about projectors is that they can place an image or text on, say, a wall or monument from a reasonable distance ... for instance, projecting from a public space adjacent to an evil enterprise with a large building facade.



Need a high-powered projector that can really paint the town purple? You'll want to look for DLP projectors. They're pricey, but they can throw an image hundreds of yards onto a pretty large canvas and still be visible.

Projectors need a bunch of power. Make sure that the power pack you're going to use is up to the job by testing beforehand!

"All the world is a stage."



Even if it's not illegal, you're likely to draw a lot of attention. Be ready to pack up fast, keeping in mind the projector may be quite hot right after use, and hard to handle.

Get inspired with Graffiti Research Labs' [Laser Tag](#)



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