

# **Networked Counterculture**

**New paradigms  
for making culture**

**A memo by WeTransfer**

# Introduction

On February 20th 2023, five days before the release of her third album, the American singer-songwriter Vérité posted a note on her Instagram titled “How do I get your attention?” In it, she described how it feels to be an artist in the creator economy: the constant pressure to churn out bite-sized moments to get enough views, likes and comments in the hope of connecting with fans on a deeper, more meaningful level.

Vérité isn't alone in her uneasy feelings about the platforms that mediate the relationship between her and her fans. Many artists find themselves torn between whether to please algorithms or prioritize their vision; play by the rules of the network and remain visible or risk being forgotten in its endless oceans.

We sought to understand whether it could be different. Is it possible to exist in the network on your own terms?

The three projects we took as inspiration - Brooklyn art collective MSCHF, London streetwear project Corteiz and the anonymous music collective Sault - each perform platform anarchy in their own unique way. By using and abusing the network's logic as part of their creative output, they show that it's possible to regain power and agency over the relationship between their work and its audience.

Networked Counterculture is the name we came up with for this practice. In an attempt to both analyze and speculate, we hope to start a conversation about how to infiltrate culture through the networks that mediate it.

🕒 networked counterculture 🔍

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Subject: EVERYTHING IS A SCAM

If you don't have a plan for how to use the internet, the internet will use you

MEDIA

OBJECT

Absence  
Scarcity  
Mystery  
Exclusivity  
Presence

AUDIENCE

STORY

The Trojan Horse Theory of Infiltrating Culture

MSCHF - Tap3  
Shoe "Black" ...  
£572.00  
farfetch.com

Time  
Space  
Place  
Speed  
Access

11

WE WILL RELEASE  
AS AN  
AVAILABLE FOR  
THE PASSWORD TO

E A

All culture today is networked culture



**It's the year 2023.**

**Everything is a scam.**

**Platforms own the relationship between creators and their audiences. They have eaten up cultural production and subsumed it under their logic of attention harvesting, data extraction and algorithmic feeds.**

**All culture today is networked culture.**

**Yet the attention economy's operations have never been more obvious; the inner workings of platforms – the platform's physics – lay bare before us.**

**You might have a lucky day at the casino.  
But in the end, the house always wins.**

**In order to truly win the game you need to subvert its rules.**

**We call this networked counterculture.**

**These are its core elements.**





**All culture  
today is  
networked  
culture.**



## **Playing Meta**

**In conversation theory there are two languages:  
the object language and the meta language.**

**The meta language knows how to talk about itself.  
It understands its utility with self-awareness and irony,  
while the object language can't; it is forced to play  
within the confines of its own logic.**

**Now that all culture is networked culture, the  
metagame is played using mass media and late  
capitalism as artistic mediums.**

**Playing the metagame means knowing the rules  
and consciously subverting them to regain agency  
and control over the relationship to an audience.**

**Its players are both leading the spectacle and  
subjecting it to critique.**

**However, as soon as the meta becomes widely  
known among all the participants, it begins  
to transform into something else.**



It's all  
happening  
faster than  
the thought

**If you  
don't have  
a plan for  
how to use  
the internet,  
  
the internet  
will use you.**



## **Narrative Objects**

**Objects that travel the vast oceans of networked culture need to gather as much attention as possible to stay afloat.**

**Successful creators design their objects - their content - to be successful within the logic of platforms, optimizing for views, likes, and attention.**

**Those that play the metagame, however, equip their objects with a different set of rules. Their objects aren't designed to make it on platforms but to cut through them.**

**They have their context and distribution rules hard-coded within.**

**Narrative objects travel through the network on their own terms, neither floating or sinking.**

**Just existing in their full three-dimensionality.**

MSCHF's new game is like real-life 'Grand Theft Auto' ↴

The Anarchic Art Collective  
MSCHF is set Up a Damien...

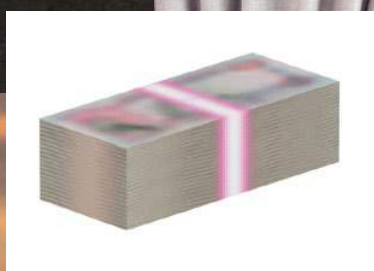
Included in the group's Perrotin exhibition  
will be a variable sculpture...

SQ \*600  
5340  
NEW

10/22/20  
19:05PM  
--\$1.00

SQ \*600  
NEW

10/22/20  
19:05PM  
--\$5.00



MSCHF Lock



MSCHF (pronounced "mischief") is an American art collective based in Brooklyn, New York, United States. MSCHF has produced a wide range of artworks, ranging from browser plugins to sneakers, physical products, social media channels and AI-generated foot photographs.

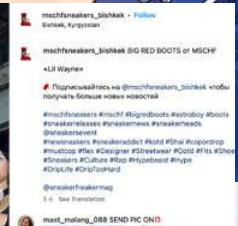
MIN QTY: 1000

TERMS

1000 ▼

SOLD OUT

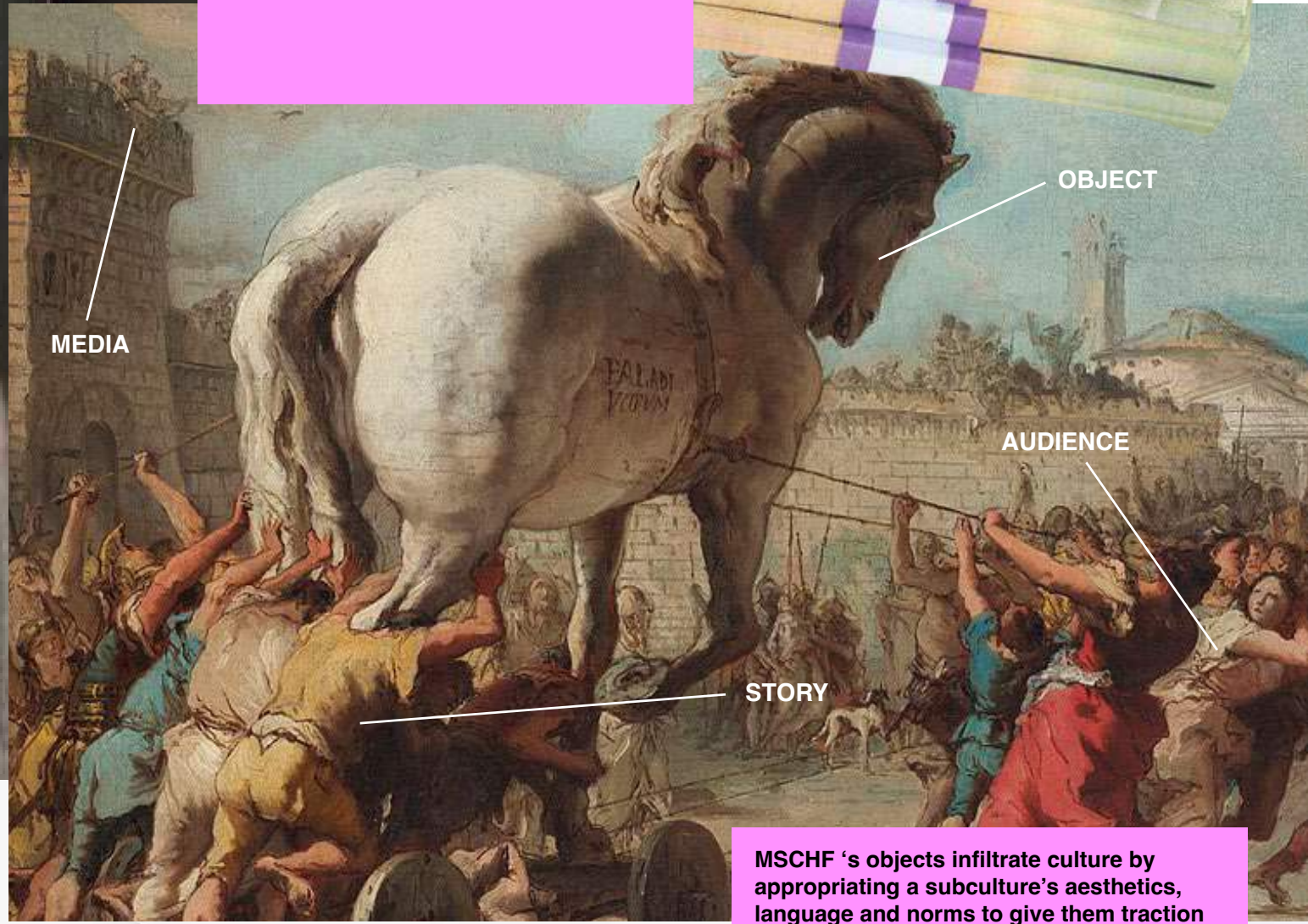
THIS PRODUCT WAS PURCHASED BY 1 PERSON



MSCHF®

Who is the richest person at Art Basel Miami Beach? ATM...

**The Trojan Horse Method of Infiltrating Culture**



**MSCHF 's objects infiltrate culture by appropriating a subculture's aesthetics, language and norms to give them traction in the network.**



**Narrative Objects**

As self-titled cultural readymades, MSCHF's narrative objects are engineered to reach mass audiences and provoke conversation as a vehicle for their critiques.

Art Fairs

MSCHF's ATM Leaderboard "an extremely literal distillation of wealth-flaunting impulses"

Just How Rich Are Attendees of Art Basel Miami Beach? An Installation From the Collective MSCHF Puts Their Bank Accounts on Display

Visitors check their balance at an ATM, then watch it appear on a leaderboard.

Who is the richest person at Art Basel Miami Beach? ATM...

At Art Basel Miami, MSCHF placed an ATM with a built-in leaderboard that ranks art fair goers according to how much money they have in their bank account.

A reference to 1960s comic character Astro Boy, MSCHF's Big Red Boots broke the internet for reasons that only the internet can explain.

With these big red boots, fashion is entering its silly era

MSCHF's objects take the present to new heights, revealing its absurdity while making the audience complicit as participants of the spectacle.

Ciara's fans beg her to take off viral MSCHF Big Red Boots

The Cynical Conceptualism of MSCHF's Big Red Boots

MSCHF BRB: Why These Big Red Boots Are All the Rage

A MSCHF drop comes with a website that places the object within a visual narrative and a cultural view point.



A multibillion-dollar medical startup built upon falsified test results and flagrantly deceptive malpractice.

[READ THE FULL STORY →](#)

Context is hard-coded on MSCHF's own terms even when the object takes a life on its own as it travels the oceans of the network.



# TAX HEAVEN

- The Story
- Gallery
- Collector's Edition
- Manifesto
- Characters
- Support

MSCHF © 2023  
[Terms and Conditions](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)

~love and taxes forever my heart~

## The Story

Do Your Federal Taxes While Romancing Your Waifu!

Shop Now



**"Usually when the  
Meta is common  
knowledge  
amongst  
all participants,**

**the Meta is  
already shifting to  
something else."**



## **Lore**

**Lore is the collection of shared practices, memories, stories and myths that are created by a group of people.**

**In gaming, players create narratives, characters and worlds based on open threads and easter eggs hidden by the game creators.**

**Even within the boundaries of a single game or experience, lore fosters connections between individuals, and allows them to be included in something, be it a secret, a joke or a whole new world.**

**Collective identities and subcultures are formed by this in-group knowledge.**

**When everything else is a scam, networks built around lore become lenses to make sense of the world and a new ideology to act within it.**

**CORTEIZ**  
RULES THE WORLD

Corteiz (CRTZ) is a self-described lifestyle project from London created by Clint419 in 2017. Corteiz' limited edition streetwear collections are released online and as IRL drops.

Drop product

Drop pictures of your shit

for those  
in the know.

Before Looking for  
outside help.  
Do shit wit your  
friends.  
First n Foremost.

# HOW CORTEIZ BECAME THE FACE OF UK STREETWEAR FROM A BEDROOM

I JUST WANNA CHAT TO THE MAIN D

crtz.rtw

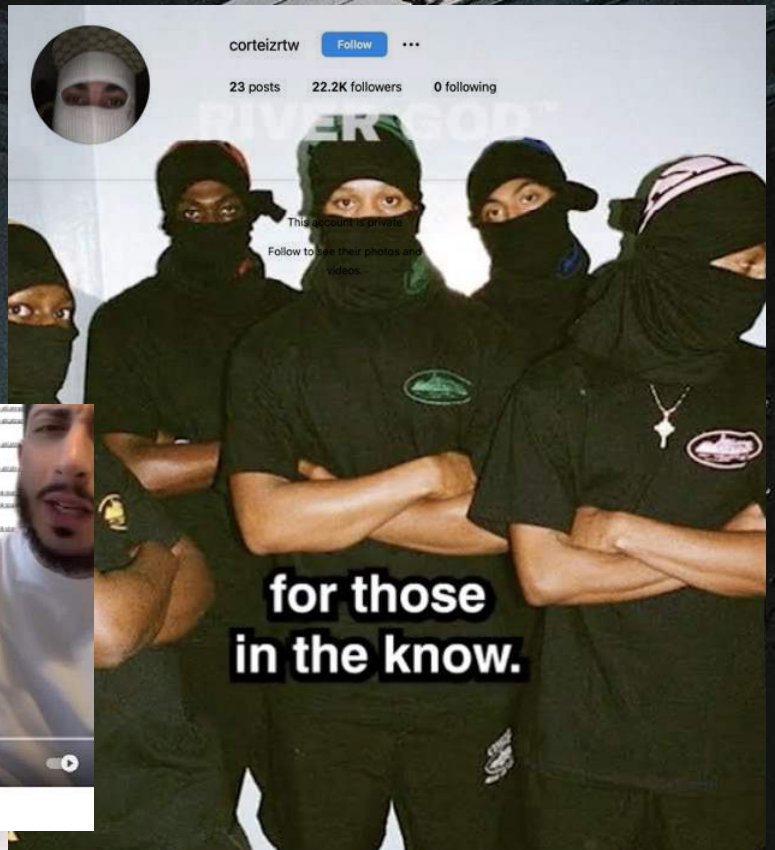
Requested

268 posts

639K followers

0 following

There are clear rules of engagement. Corteiz doesn't pay for ads and doesn't give free clothes to influencers.



for those  
in the know.

Corteiz is for those in the know. You need to solve password puzzles to access the online shop and request to follow the group on Instagram without knowing if or when you'll be accepted.

Reselling clothes is strictly forbidden and is followed by bans and law suits.



We will send you an email right before we  
open!



ALL SALES FINAL. DONT CRY. DONT BEG.

Password

SOLD FOR 99P.  
- YOU MUST BRING 99p  
EXACTLY. THERE WILL BE NO  
CHANGE ❌  
- LINE STARTS AT 2:30PM.  
- MARKET CLOSES AT 4:30PM.  
- DON'T CRY, DON'T BEG.  
- 📍 🗺️ COORDINATES DROP  
TOMOZ.

RULESTHEWORLD.

## Non-Conformist Fashion by Corteiz

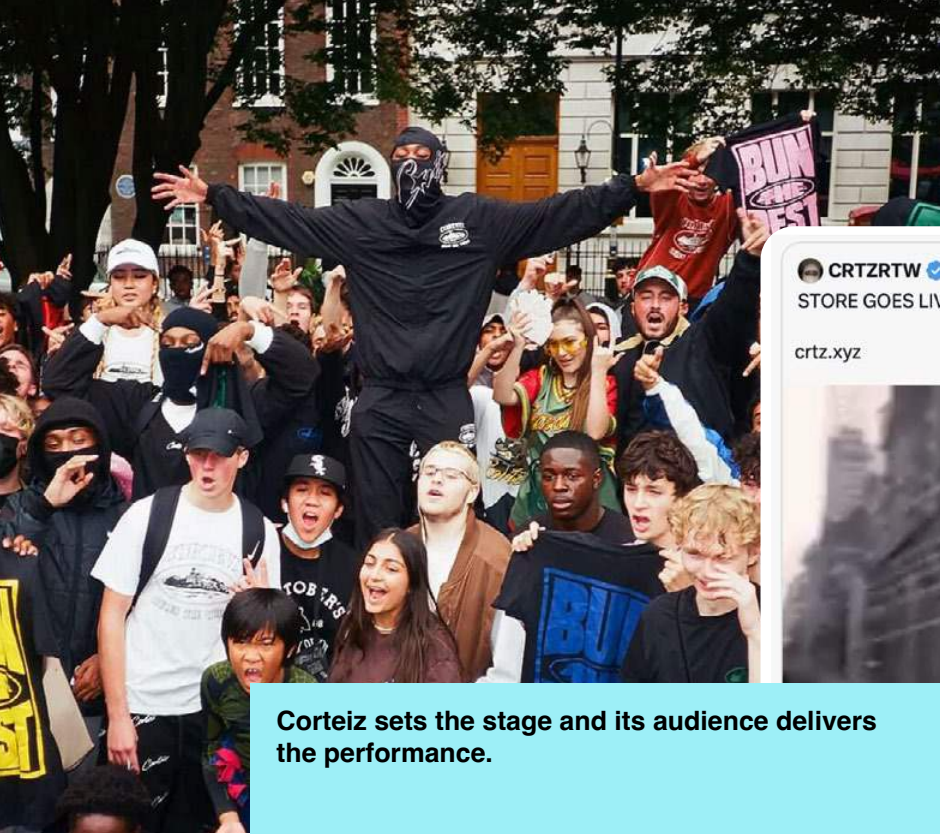
20 Dec 2021 — Hundreds of people raced through the streets of Soho to get their

LUNDUN BE IN ZONE 1 @:  
15:00 HOURS  
300 TEES.

⚠️ 🍀 📍 📍 📍  
1 TEE - PER PERSON.  
NO TRAVELCARD. NO TEE.  
BUNTHEREST.  
RTW.

Once you're in, you need to participate. GPS coordinates for IRL drops are revealed just hours in advance with detailed instructions on how to access IRL drops in London, Paris or NYC.

The high barrier to entry acts as a filter. The objects always reach their indented audience, getting charged with meaning and status by those who make it.



**CRTZRTW** @crtzrtw · Apr 14  
STORE GOES LIVE WHEN THIS TWEET TOUCHES 10,000 RTs.

crtz.xyz



burner #cortez  
erdbush

Cortez sets the stage and its audience delivers the performance.

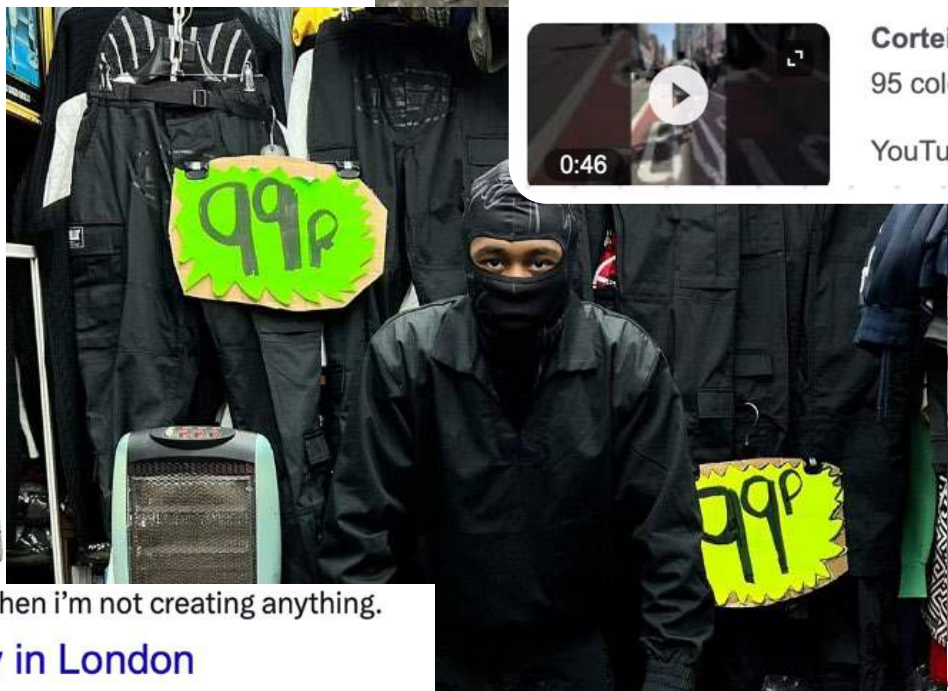


Cortez shut down New York #shorts



Cortez shut down New York  
95 colourway - exclusive

YouTube · Josh Ford · 4



X 95 DROPPED IN NYC

If I'm not creating memories, then i'm not creating anything.

## Cortez Makes History in London



**Narrative  
objects aren't  
designed  
to make it  
on platforms,  
but to cut  
through them.**



# Worlds

**In the early days of the web, a bulletin board was called a forum. The forum - from the Latin word for “public place outdoors” - was a place to come together, debate and hang out.**

**Forums were a public good.**

**Now that public goods don’t exist online anymore, communities don’t have places.**

**They become imagined communities.**

**Connected through a shared interest, ideology or value system, these niche communities come together in the so-called Dark Forest part of the web - the one that remains invisible to those that aren’t in the know or haven’t made the effort to find out.**

**The Dark Forest is where collective identities are created and worlds are built.**

11

EARTH



Sault (frequently stylised as SAULT) are a British music collective that make a mixture of R&B, house and disco. They have never played a live show, given an interview or released a music video in support of their music.



KEEP ON MOVING IN THE DARK  
GOD I DON'T NEED TO ALL  
TO KNOW THAT I AM FREE

KEEP ON MOVING IN THE DARK  
WHEN THE LIGHT SHIN'S INSIDE  
YOU DON'T NEED TO HIDE

I STARTED HEARING VOICES  
IN THE AIR AND IN MY MIND  
I NEEDED NO DEVICES  
TO SEARCH FOR WHAT I'D FIND

THE DARKNESS BECAME HEAVEN  
WITH A ENDLESS CEILING HIGH  
ALL WOULD BE FORGIVEN  
WHEN I NEVER ASKED YOU WHY

THEN YOU TOLD ME

KEEP ON MOVING IN THE DARK  
WHEN THERE'S NOWHERE TO GO  
EVERYWHERE GROWS TO BE HOME

KEEP ON MOVING IN THE DARK  
GOD I DON'T NEED TO ALL  
TO KNOW THAT I AM FREE

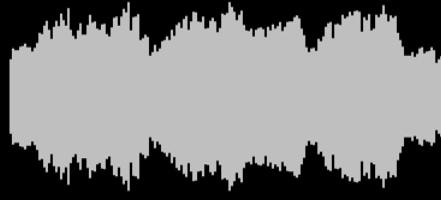
KEEP ON MOVING IN THE DARK  
WHEN THE LIGHT SHIN'S INSIDE  
YOU DON'T NEED TO HIDE

**WE WILL RELEASE 5 ALBUM'S ON NOVEMBER 1ST  
AS AN OFFERING TO GOD.  
AVAILABLE FOR FREE DOWNLOAD FOR 5 DAYS  
THE PASSWORD TO UNLOCK ALL 5 ALBUMS IS IN THE  
MESSAGE.**

## **LOVE SAULT X**

**In mid 2021, Sault's album Nine was available for 99 days only before it was taken down from all streaming platforms.**

**2022 saw the surprise drop of 5 albums, available for 5 days only and protected by a password solved through cryptic hints.**




**In the age of total accessibility, Sault's releases (and withdrawals) subvert the dominant cultural logic of releasing music today.**

**The result is a record that requires nothing of its recipient than to be listened to.**

**It's a self-contained world that speaks for itself.**

**If you're not visible on platforms, does  
it mean you don't exist?**



**"In the internet  
era, true  
counterculture  
is difficult to see,  
  
and even harder  
to find— but that  
doesn't mean it's  
not there."**



## **New parameters**

**Networked counterculture changes the physics of culture,**

**freeing creative expression from the logic of the network that mediates it.**

**Setting new parameters for the**

**Time  
Space  
Place  
Speed  
Access**

**in which objects are created, released, distributed and received.**

networked counterculture

Absence  
Scarcity  
Mystery  
Exclusivity  
Presence



This content is not available.

Subject: EVERYTHING IS A SCAM

THIS PRODUCT WAS PURCHASED BY 1 PERSON  
MIN QTY: 1000  
1000  
SOLD OUT  
TERM

EARTH

EXTREMELY WAVY  
WARNING  
EXTREMELY WAVY  
WARNING



MSCHF - Tq3  
Shoe "Black" ...  
£575.00  
fatchr.com

# **Networked Counterculture**

**A memo by WeTransfer & co—matter  
Designed by Paloma Moniz**

**2023**