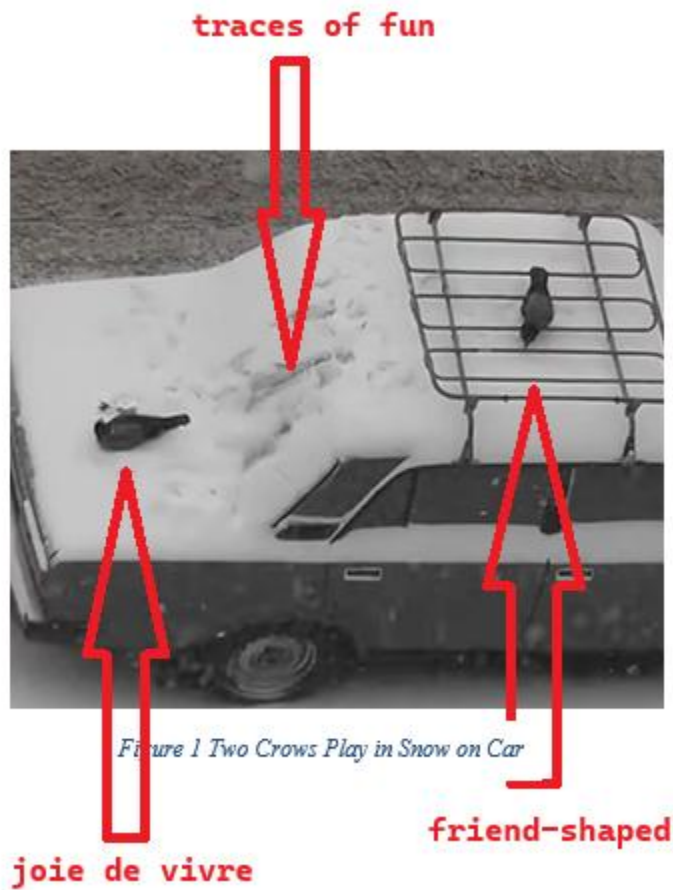


Insert Coin - Play Against Bot?

(Part 1 of ?)

Andrei Migunov



Cover in the style of @drezzdon!

My friend Nate has convinced me of something very obviously right: I need to produce, once in a while, some writing that does not fall under the scrutiny of a reviewer. So this is that writing - a zine - and it's about a lot of things, and it'll appear in a few parts, and it will take a lot of detours, and it will disobey my high school english teacher's personal opinions (which is, with all due respect, all they were, in the end) about grammar and structure. Chiefly, it is about my discovery of the joy of programming (something I was not aware was possible for me back when I was churning out medical sales software sprint by sprint). So if you can survive this more conceptual introduction, I will talk about some game programming stuff I've discovered eventually - but in this issue I am laying some of my own conceptual framework out for how I reason about virtue in general, so that I can talk meaningfully about virtue in game development, and I hope some of it will vibe with you in regard to the things *you* make, whatever those are. If you know a lot about game programming, you might find it boring - because I know a very small amount. That's ok - you don't have to read this thing if you decide it's boring. Like I tell all my students - most written works are utter trash written by news pundits or aspiring news pundits, as is most media in general. Life is short and if you really like this universe we inhabit, and you want to be intimate with its truths or its mysteries, then you need to spend your time only on the good stuff as much as possible - which requires some time investment in first determining what the good stuff is and what makes it good. So if this pamphlet doesn't qualify for you, then you've made a sound decision as far as you, yourself, are concerned - and I respect that. Heads up, and you're gonna hate this as much as I do: my footnotes are in-text and I will simply make them small, because I haven't sorted out this zine formatting thing quite yet.

CREATION AGAINST EFFICIENCY

My interest in this 'joy of programming' itself originated in a department meeting, where a colleague (with every good intention, by the way - despite some disagreements, this person has never given off any vibe besides total good will) referred to 'artisanal software' as a sort of alternative to industrial software, the latter crafted with the aim of efficiency in mind - efficiency in process and efficiency of the product - at least, that's how I understood this person. I'd never heard these terms together: 'artisanal software.' Maybe I even felt a bit insulted by it for a fraction of a second, but that's silly of me - I'm just kind of like that, though I try to hide it. I don't know exactly what this person had in mind, but I jumped right to the following somewhat defensive perspective: artisanal software is not just small-scale, it can be enterprise-scale software (already we are butting heads with the dictionary). It's not just software that solves unimportant problems and leaves important problems to important people, teams, or industries. It's software that was crafted with the care and regard that was characteristic of your grandfather's oak rocking chair, your friend's hand-crafted wooden kitchen utensils, your uncle's 70s Shelby GT that he (almost completely) restored in his garage, your wife's stained glass projects, and your friend's novel. In other ways, it's also characteristic of the AAA studio game your cousin loves and paid \$80 for (apparently, these days), and of the embedded systems that a team of engineers put in a pacemaker that one of those engineer knows she is going to have put into her own father's chest one day. None of these things *have* to be made with the 'artisanal' disposition, and all of them could arrive at their endpoint in a more impersonal, perhaps even more perfect way, but they all *can* be and often *are*. The embedded pacemaker system is a great example - there are

not only many corporate regulations but federal regulations that govern its design. There are also deadlines, and consequences. It will undergo strenuous testing and verification before it is ever used, and it doesn't get to have frills. But the process by which one arrives at it is not immune to *care and intimate regard*. Indeed, a future zine (maybe yours, if you beat me there) should discuss objects that are *immune to care*, alongside objects that *cannot be* artisanal by virtue of what they are, if any such exist. I dunno. This zine in your hands is not an attempt to enumerate the various categories of these things.

An artisanal thing could be a very useful thing, it could be a commissioned object, it could be pure fancy or the result of boredom, and it can also be subjected to the cruelty of panic and deadlines by a world that imposes clock time on every human endeavor. But it has the imprint of your person on it, and - though this point merits more careful discussion elsewhere - no grain of this thing is a mystery to you because you were there for all of its creation, you contemplated its pieces and their relations, you thought about its source and its destination. Even if you did not grow the wood to make the table, you are aware of this element of its creation. Where it is perfect, it is your perfection, and where it has mistakes, those mistakes are yours.

I experience the *artisanal* while teaching, sometimes. I linger on a specific example because the example has many beautiful contours to it - I would say I *make* the example because I am the one who finds and brings these contours into the discussion. Maybe the example allows for many connections to other subjects, maybe it accounts for many phenomena at once (although that borders on utilitarian). But to focus on it, I am forced to admit that I am going against the grain of the present aim of the lecture or the class, which - for better or worse - in computer science and mathematics remains the dissemination of information - students would have enough to pass associated exam questions if I had stuck to the basics. A student who is really attuned to the purpose of the course might consider the example meandering. But they'd be mistaken - because what I am doing is rounding out the multifaceted nature of the example, not just taking random detours by free association of ideas (though I do that sometimes, and sometimes that line can be thin). I am looking at it from a number of angles, even when one could formally check the one or two boxes that mathematical examples are usually intended to achieve in a "typical" course. Is there a curricular reason why I need to tell students about Cantor's life, his humiliation and relationships, when I introduce Cantor's theorem? No, but I do it because it brings some of the very real stakes of Cantor's theorem into full view - it tells a story that adds character to what is otherwise a disembodied one-line statement. It supports other values in teaching which reinforce the primary aims: the history of our 'facts' is a scaffold for the connections between these facts, and shows that mathematics is done by human beings, and does not fall from the sky ready-made. Moreover, as a *teacher* I take *responsibility* for this decision in my teaching and for its consequences. We will come back to that.

Not to be dramatic, but this sort of 'artisanal***' - let's say, only in order to counterpose it to something, non-industrial (perhaps even anti-industrial) - activity, is on an ethical level homological to the ethos of a warrior (see Ill Will's excellent pamphlet on the abolition of police (<https://illwill.com/print/police-abolition>) - and whatever you make of police, I hope it's clear what is being said here). A warrior was someone who, though tasked with murder,

took complete personal responsibility for his acts, rather than to defer them to others, to law, to a state, to an AI, to a boss, etc. I will quote at length from the pamphlet:

****Artisanal** is also an appearance some cultivate - many nominally 'artisanal' goods are mass produced - or even if produced in batches or individually, are made without the disposition that would make them truly the cared-for products of the people who are their producers. Consumers do crave this appearance - sometimes for as little reason as that the *vibe* is right. Such commodities may be good or bad in appearance, they may work or not work, but this zine series is ultimately about objects created with *care* and what properties they are endowed with. Most things in this society are made on behalf of others. It is very likely that the totality of human needs cannot be met purely on the basis of artisanal production, though I'm not as eager as some to throw this hypothesis out. But what's more, most things are made with their utility as a secondary consideration. That is the nature of a commodity: it *must* be useful, but its utility is not the *reason* for its existence - its ability to exchange for money on the market is the reason it was made. One might say that artisanal things are the expected kind of thing produced by free, self-directed activity. But who says free, self-directed activity can't ever be geared towards the mass production of widely-needed goods, or that self-directed activity can't aim to address scarcity - a form of coercion similar to a deadline?

Although people were killed in the past to protect the reigning order, the act itself was the sole responsibility of the warrior. They alone derived honor and reward from it, even if they carried out these crimes in the name of a leader or an ideal. Perhaps the purpose of this glory was to disguise, as it were, this murderer by trade, since there was not yet a uniform, and to give them a place in a society that recognized them only too well for what they were. Society feared them all the more because it needed to coexist peacefully with them. Hence the glory and honors, which could give an appearance of social life and legitimacy to this antisocial and dangerous form of life that was the life of the warrior. The warrior was recognizable by a life devoted to murder. The uniform was the first factor that led to the gradual extinction of the warrior lifeform. It has always been preferable to ensure one's strength through the support of the strength of others. The warrior is the one who tethered their own personal force to that of a collective. To be clear, the warrior's condition was based on claiming personal acts of violence in the name of a cause, but always in one's own name. In this way, Heracles, Hector, Achilles, etc., are heroes.

Today's police officer is not a new warrior. They do not belong to any tradition of nobility of arms, nor are they a cowboy. They are simply a citizen in uniform. They have no glorious name, not even a face, sometimes a number. Under this uniform, police officers can be violent without attributing the cause of that violence to themselves. Incredibly, there is no one to claim this violence apart from abstract ideas: legitimate violence, public safety, civil protection, national defense, etc. If they act in the name of the State, it is by tacit agreement. It is the hierarchical order transmitted orally in the field that assures them that their violence is never their own, but only that which their uniform allows them to do.

An obvious rebuttal might be that one can take responsibility for products generated by AI just by declaring it. I disagree. It's like a father taking legal responsibility for a young son crashing the family van into a stop sign. It's a formal and legal act, not a substantive one. It is not an identification of one's person with the substance of what one takes responsibility for. It is a *claim* to responsibility that suffices legally, little more (though you could argue there is a substantive relationship to the act through the familial tie, or something - I dunno). A claim to responsibility for AI-generated code is much the same (in fact, there might be a similar rebuttal).

I hope the connection I'm making is clear and I hope it's clear that neither this quote nor the other ones I'll invoke later - are being invoked to make a mountain out of a molehill. However, I hope it also comes through that I

believe we live in a world where there is no glory, nor honor - whether in the military or in production. Georges Bataille's *The Limits of the Useful* is excellent on the subject of glory - and its absence from societies of unbounded wealth. Where there *appears* glory and honor, it is some kind of dorky fantasy fight club, it is only the appearance: the stakes are entirely artificial and disconnected from the meeting of a community's needs. The absence of glory and honor in the "big things" corresponds to an absence of glory and honor in the "little things", like game development. Everywhere you look in capitalism, you will find there is only efficiency, which is also busy undermining itself constantly. In place of fulfilment (a concept that was better understood by societies which had such things as social roles (see Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* on this point)), there is entertainment. But in artisanal production some of this ethical content is reclaimed - its spirit returns to our lives, in much the same way that some games themselves make it possible for us to live out ethical values through situations that our shift at McDonald's just doesn't offer us.

Regardless of its goals or on whose behalf my `artisanal' software development is done, *my mistakes are mine* - if you see them to be mistakes. My achievements are mine - there usually is no doubt about this, as long as I am minimally truthful and take no excess credit. But at least as far as my efforts in writing a game go - the mistakes that I impose on my work by doing it myself through my own judgment, often going far beyond avoiding AI to even avoiding professional and officious approaches to software design - are reflections of me, most of the time. Just as much, they are reflections of the assessment or assessor. Sometimes mistakes are just stupid mistakes, and I'd blush (my entire childhood has trained me to feel immense shame at the slightest error, and in adulthood this has come out in more anger, resentment, shower arguments, and rehearsed conversations than any of you ever see.) This doesn't make the mistakes less mine. Other times mistakes really do show you who I am and how I think, how I prefer to organize some code or the abstractions involved, what priorities are mine or what I seem willing to overlook - they are often mistakes I'd assent to. Who would call them mistakes? Maybe a textbook or a game design expert, maybe I would call them that when I have to reap a bad design I sowed. One does the same when one paints, cooks, or makes music.

There is a further ethical element to this - dignity. See Idris Robinson's recent book *The Revolt Eclipses Whatever the World Has to Offer* (<https://mitpress.mit.edu/9781635902433/the-revolt-eclipses-whatever-the-world-has-to-offer/>).

[...] This is what Benjamin meant when he said it is more about what is done to the doer than to the victim. Once again, in our context, this has an irrevocably racial significance. To some extent, it boils down to the plain fact that I know so many white people who have never been in a fistfight; but, conversely, when you grow up Black, your grandma won't let you back in the house unless you stand up for yourself and throw hands. It is for this reason that I can so readily dismiss purported strategic concerns as irrelevant, because we are taught to fight even if we are sure to lose to a stronger opponent. In the larger struggle against America, it is clear that, in the same way, we have both nothing to lose and nothing to gain, except for that something 'higher' that could only be abandoned by giving in. It's like James Baldwin once said, those

who are forced to snatch their humanity out of the fire of cruelty, whether they survive or not, still come to know something that no school or church could ever teach.

Again, it is not my goal to inflate the importance of artisanal games, by selecting those passages - categories like *martyrdom* are *obviously* more suited to things like the confrontation between classes, the struggle for human dignity - and, for that matter, those things should be of greater concern to any of us than artisanal software is. More of our life should be devoted to making people free than to artisanal software, and we cannot achieve that through our careers. I hope that's obvious to anyone who has been in the workforce for more than a year. Still, I think we should look for these virtues in "small things", too. It is often the small ways people can display their virtues that enable them to stage these virtues in big ways elsewhere. Human beings face a choice in class society: to live as a biological organism (with the aim of biological survival) or to live as a human being. In a 'decent' society, whatever that may be, these two ambitions would be compatible or identical. In class society, one needs to choose. This is why the warriors of our time are not police, but teenagers in LA and Minneapolis risking their lives, limbs, futures, and safety - risking the one life anyone gets - to wage war against ICE and other demonic forces of the capital. Many have observed this choice, like Victor Serge:

Early on, I learnt from the Russian intelligentsia that the only meaning of life lies in conscious participation in the making of history. The more I think of that, the more deeply true it seems to be. It follows that one must range oneself actively against everything that diminishes man, and involve oneself in all struggles which tend to liberate and enlarge him. This categorical imperative is by no way lessened by the fact that such an involvement is inevitably soiled by error: it is a worse error merely to live for oneself, caught within traditions which are soiled by inhumanity.

Error is a major consideration in all this, just as for a warrior the possibility of being killed in retribution or tried for murder was also on the table. Error does not have to be an enormously hurtful, emotionally loaded category - we can think of it as just the discrepancy between conscious intent and effect.

The things you do can tell others more about you than you might be able to tell them about yourself - more, even, than you sometimes *know* about yourself, and sometimes this is a way that one *comes to know* about oneself. Your activity is the fingerprint of your cognition and of your *unconscious* being as well. For more on that idea, see Ilyenkov's (Evald Ilyenkov - *Intelligent Materialism*) exegesis of Hegel's logic - he very much sees Hegel as interpreting "the ideal" (in the context of the philosophical debate, once especially alive within Marxism, between 'materialism' and 'idealism') as the crystallization *in the real world* of the totality of human culture. Analogously - though he doesn't scale things down this way to the individual - the ideal as restricted to my individual being is the fingerprint (or smudges, or sticky donut residue) left by me - purposely or not. The commonplace pedagogical observation that "students should learn from their mistakes" is a particular instance of this more general thing: mistakes teach us who we are and show us what we're really up to. Whereas positivism treats symbolic cognition as the end-all-be-all of thinking, Hegel and Ilyenkov see thinking as *far* broader than that - a view that was much

more widespread prior to the enlightenment and the mathematization of logic. This perspective means that we can study the traces of people's life and behavior in their artefacts.

Another related comment, from famous mathematician Alexander Grothendieck writing for his group *Survive et Vivre* 1970 (as cited here: <https://webusers.imj-prg.fr/~leila.schneps/grothendieckcircle/Spirituality/Spirituality6.pdf>):

In fact, I don't believe that the prospect of success is a necessary prerequisite for doing what is right. I must admit that up to now the impression I have gained is that the prospect of mankind's survival is but a slight one. [...] What remains certain is that the possibility of surviving rests with those who have understood the problem of survival in all its dimensions and urgency, and who set themselves the task of fighting undauntedly for survival. From this perspective, the reasons you give for not wishing to join this endeavor naturally appear totally futile to me.

Well, again, I don't mean to be dramatic - but I insist there is a shared thread in all these attitudes, one that I really like, and I stand by them each individually as well, regardless of the contents of this zine. I do think people are entitled to be eclectic about their beliefs. In fact I think that if enough people do this then we start to see a greater number of internally coherent theories emerge - which is only a good thing - but we are better off identifying consistency in our beliefs if it is there, especially if it has to do with our value judgments and principles for living. So I have a great deal to say about AI in that regard, and it shares the sentiments of the above quotations.

OWNARD, BARBARIANS!

Nor is today's AI-generated (or 'AI-assisted', as those who seem a bit willing to embellish have taken to saying) work a creative work. Though this zine *series* is not a polemic against AI, per se, and it is intended to explore the positive side of being a human being and making something of one's own from the ground up, I have my things to say. The more deep underground a thing's origins, the more it is pulled up to the surface by a human being, the more human the resulting thing is - whether it is an idea or a thing. If you're still here, then I haven't insulted you enough for your to put down this zine. So you are entitled to the rest of what I have to say. That might change in a moment - I am not myself if I don't talk some shit about what I think is foul in the world, anyone who doesn't know this about me by now has (possibly through sheer avoidance) seen a false version of me. To those who are offended by my comments about AI, know that I have pulled down my pants and am `moonng' you). Just kidding. I've existed alongside you this long, and think no less of you as people. But I don't have tolerance for any anti-human ideas. I hope you will learn to co-exist with people whose ideas you don't like, indeed ones you might find intolerable, crass, or otherwise wrong - the way *we devoted political miscreants have to co-exist with yours every time we leave the house*, especially in circumstances where the adoption of AI is the hegemonic attitude among our ruling class and institutional leaderships - and no matter how much all of these losers hem and haw while selling out your drinking water sources to data centers.

The humanity of created objects is valuable** for its own sake. If you're not sure - ask some normal people what they think. I've heard "educated people" at universities express with no hint of shame that they prefer discussing AI only with other "educated" people because the terrible barbarians who live outside the university have - *natürlich* - overly barbaric attitudes towards AI, and they're hard to talk to. It's a fat load of shit is what that is, it is an insult to ordinary people and it is exactly the attitude that makes the university a joke - at best - in the eyes of many ordinary people. In reality, these barbarians are the ones who are well-adjusted to the entire gamut of 'real life', as much as anyone is anyway, and their attitudes towards AI - that it is cruel, that its effects on the world are malicious, that they want nothing to do with this junk - are far more enlightened, well-rounded, and considerate of all the factors of life - than is any "educated" person's dogmatic, credulous insistence on the import (let alone the supposed 'unavoidability') of these technologies. As Bordiga observed - *avanti barbari!*. To those who still apologize for this technology**: as they say on the internet "hope she sees this, bro". I am on the side of the barbarians, squarely - and I will remain there. As in the case of Rome that Bordiga investigates, our contemporary barbarians really are on the opposite side of the 'civilizing forces' that AI represents - and it is only these barbarians who can preserve and raise to a higher level the culture that these 'civilizing' technological forces attempt to destroy. I am on the side of those who don't chronically miss the forest for the trees, those who are on the side of life against the so-called "progress" we are virtually forbidden from questioning in this society and within the university, those who don't uncritically adopt whatever technology industry leaders impose on them, and those who seek out only convivial tools for living (read Ivan Illich - *Tools for Conviviality*).

**The word 'valuable', as I used it above, is annoying in its own right - just like when someone speaks of the 'value of kindness' and other borderline oxymorons like that. One doesn't get to speak of 'moral' or other 'sorts' of 'value' in terms decoupled from economic value - that is the price one pays for living in class society characterized by generalized commodity exchange, one whose political and democratic principles originate in the economic idea of fair exchange - with all the perverse consequences of having this economic basis as their origin.

**Not to mention - the technology itself, glorified statistical inference, is somewhere on the bottom rungs of scientific ideas - even just within computing - as far as evoking fascination and wonder. But that is a crude way to put it. Neural networks are an incredible, and I'd argue beautiful technology. The procedures of model training - not so much. And let's be real - most people "doing AI" are not out here designing neural network topologies, establishing a correspondence between topology and statistical or inferential character. I've been saying this since long before the popularity of LLMs. The *research* indeed is sometimes very cool - but there is so much going on in this very popular area that identifying what is cool, important, or truly new takes some effort. It is washed out by junk - and by the anti-human financial forces that animate it. What is certain is that a lot of it is shallow evangelism - not science. What is also certain (see James Stenihoff's *Automation and Autonomy*) is that the *reason AI exists* is not because someone engaged in curious scientific whimsy. It was financed - paid for outright - to come into existence as labor-saving, anti-worker technology. No ifs, ands, or buts about this.

I didn't get around to play or game design. In fact, I haven't talked about games at all, really. Oh well. Thanks for reading!

Yours,

Andrei

PS - You should make your own zine! I would be excited and grateful to get to read it. It can be about anything. This isn't homework.

PPS - I have like 3 pages left so I'm going to fill it with other stuff. Here is some music I've been listening to lately.

Monolord – *Neverending*



This album just straight up rips – the whole thing. If you listen to one song from this album, especially if you're not familiar with doom metal, let it be *Invisible*. It's pretty much got it all. Doom has been a favorite genre of mine only in my adult life – it took me a long time to come around to slow and heavy riffs. I got into metal at 14 and was very into what I now consider cliches and gimmicks. There are also now many bands (though I won't name them) which make a fortune by exploiting *only* cliches and gimmicks – basically, these people produce pop music but can't admit it and their fans can't either. People like it because it *fails* to depart from what they are used to on the radio but provides some shallow appearance of subculture. As much as one should be concerned with authenticity (don't spent **too** much time on it) – Monolord is the real deal. I think slow and heavy is always at odds with cliché – and slow, heavy, extended repetition is a major, important, staple of the best metal, appearing a lot in Doom. *Invisible* is 4 minutes long and it doesn't have *all* those elements but I'd still say it's *got it all* – anyone can enjoy this song even if they aren't at a place in their metal trajectory yet to enjoy, say, Sunn or Full of Hell. Some bands produce a record that is just perfectly suited to introducing someone to metal – this is one of those. Maybe it's on purpose, maybe it's incidental. It in no way speaks against the metal credentials of the album, but it is a great feat when it happens. You might like it. If you *already* like metal, personal *Oozing Wound* might be my favorite from the album – but if you already like metal you are probably listening to the whole record and don't need my opinion.

Caroline Polachek – *Desire, I Want to Turn Into You*



It isn't even that I've been listening to it *lately*, it's that I've been listening to it weekly for about two years. I found her via her drummer @starpowerdrummer on Instagram who plays some incredible break beats.

*Bunny is a rider
Satellite can't find her
No sympathy
Ain't nothin' for free*

Various – *Songs of Townes Van Zandt Vol. 3*



Check it out – Amenra, Cave In, and Marissa Nadler all do him great justice.

Warning – *Night Comes Down*



Can't really speak to the whole album yet, since it's not out at the time of writing – but I've been listening to the single *Stations* a lot. In fact, recently I was cooking and a little drunk, and decided to look up the lyrics, and my eyes went straight to

*And tonight, there's nothing beneath me
But the solid earth and the endless miles*

*Now only this –
Whatever you leave me
You leave me alive*

And then I had to run down to the basement to cry so my wife wouldn't see me. It's not that I can't cry in front of my wife, it's more that I had not cried in a very long time, and when I do I need to do it in peace because it's still so hard for me to do it at all. If I'm interrupted I don't actually get to experience those emotions. It's a bit odd that this lyric could do that – but there was a lot of tinder available for that spark. The lyric is pretty straightforward, but the overall melody and heaviness and build of the song, things that Warning are revered for – set the stage for it. I am predisposed somehow to be vulnerable to this progression to and the vocal melody. I feel grateful when a song helps me cry – and at my age I still really need help with it. Music, especially metal, has been indispensable. The last such good cry was precipitated by Deafheaven's *Winona, Lonely People With Power* being another record you *really* should check out, and a widely beloved modern gem, but *very very* different from anything I've discussed here.