



BNET ZINE

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**A zine about being on the computer
and what it's like to be on the
computer**

MARCH 2024

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello. Welcome to the first BNet Zine, which will be sent out on a quarterly basis throughout 2024.

For a few months I have been trying to figure out what the hell to do with BNet. I shut it down definitively — until I didn't. And then I was kinda on a roll for a bit with ideas I had — until I wasn't. And now I'm at a place where I have an idea and I think, "Dang, it'd be fun to write about this" but the idea is too slight to justify an email blast, and I have these ideas too infrequently anyway.

But I think I've cracked the case: We're doing a zine. It's a PDF that I email to you. If you don't know how to read a PDF, ask the closest person over 36.

This plan is actually very smart, in theory, because it addresses a number of points. First and foremost, it's a nice new challenge for me, having to design pages and make it look "fun."

Secondly, it addresses questions of who gets to benefit from BNet, a peerless and easily defined media property.

I'm not wild about Substack, where BNet originates. Over the past year or so, writers that I respect (plus some others) have migrated off of Substack because of its content policies. I have not done the same for the simple reason that I like taking advantage of free infrastructure for my free project. Sending emails at scale, like video hosting, is something best subsidized by VCs. As someone who became an online leftist two seconds ago might say: "It's praxis."

I'm also (PERSONALLY) not crazy about generative AI. It's not even AI and, in my personal opinion, it sucks. I'm conflicted on this because I do not want any of my writing to feed into that system, but at the same time, it is my stance that the results of "having fun

posting” are meant to be shared freely among living beings. So I try not to be too precious about this stuff.

Putting BNet in an amateurish PDF where it cannot be as easily shared via Substack’s networking features or as easily tokenized into an LLM is the solution I’ve landed on.

You, the reader, are encouraged to send this thing to anyone you want. Email attachment, AirDrop, FTP, SFTP, BitTorrent — I do not care. But: I also love being a little scamp. So if I can make it just a little bit harder to automatically scrape that work by putting it in a file behind a robots.txt wall, I think that’s funny.

This first issue is merely a test of the concept. Later on down the line, I plan on offering print copies for a fair price. The plan is to put 100% of BNet’s revenue towards the vague mission of “goofing around on the computer for your amusement.” An example: covering the annual cost of **<https://peeingandpoop.ing>**, the official site for this project. Imagine what dumb crap I could do (and good pieces I could commission) if I sold four, five zines.*

Anyhow, the point is: I had fun making this, I hope you have fun reading it, print copies coming at some point?

Thank you for reading BNet. Let’s give this version a shot.

BRIAN!

Brian Feldman
brian@peeingandpoop.ing

* Domains with lower character counts, such as **poop.ing**, cost way more, and are out of my price range — unless I sell a lot of zines...

SLIM'S EAT-A-BURGER IS HAVING A MOMENT

One of the most epic aspects of the internet is how it's all about fandom. Fandom is so important — because it's important to find your people. The internet brings all of the weird freaks and outcasts together to talk about how they love esoteric things like comics and movies. Everything is fandom — and that's what makes it so powerful.

One of the most chaotic, wholesome, and hygge new fandoms right now is the Slim's Eat-A-Burger Fandom. We all know that feel. Slim's Eat-A-Burger!

I first discovered the Slim's fandom when I was watching the season-two premiere episode of *Columbo*, "Etude In Black." We all know this as one of the most famous episodes of *Columbo*, in which Peter Falk and his IRL bestie John Cassavetes go toe-to-toe in a battle of wits.

At one point, Columbo goes to visit a car mechanic whose garage is across the street from an LA eatery called Slim's Eat-A-Burger. I was transfixed. I thought to myself, "If I could just eat a burger at Slim's Eat-A-Burger, that would fix my life." (I have similar thoughts about going to The Sphere.)

So I tried to find Slim's Eat-A-Burger, and instead found a thriving fandom on Facebook at facebook.com/SlimsEatABurger. 102 likes, 101 followers.

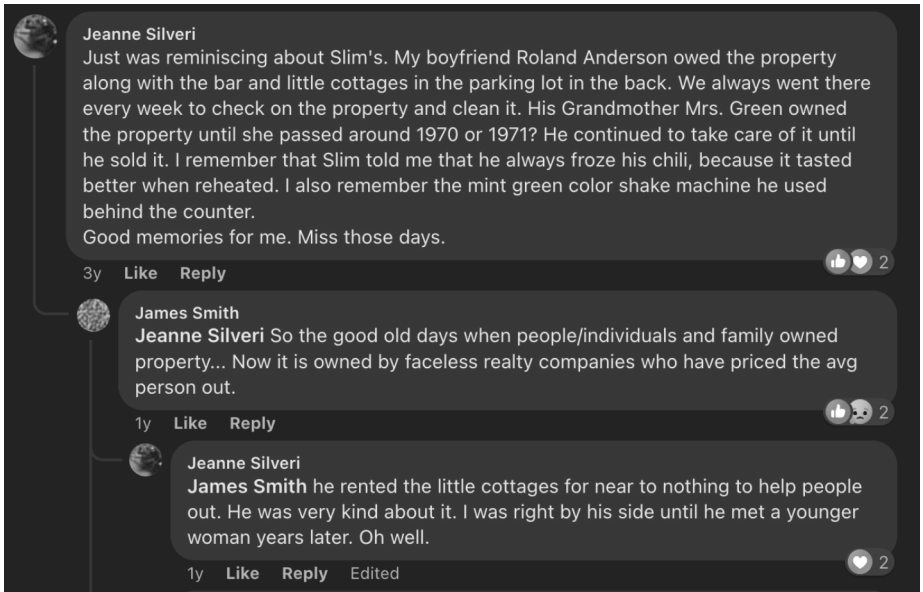
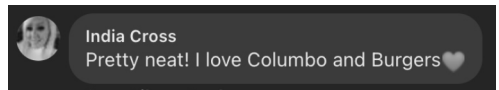
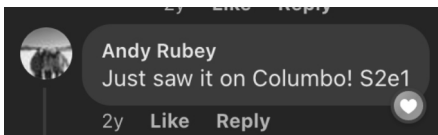
Admin has posted:

Gone but not forgotten - The eponymous gem "Slim's Eat-A-Burger" at 14539 Erwin St. in Van Nuys, a block west of Van Nuys Blvd.

Note that this page is not about Columbo, much as we love him, but is the only image we've found of the fabulous "Slim's".



Here are some of my favorite posts:





Matt Snow
I'm watching that Columbo episode now. I thought I was the only person to do this. I do it often when I watch old shows
1y Like Reply Edited 5

James Smith
Just here from Columbo. I have a bad habit of looking for film locations since I grew up in LA.
1y Like Reply 2

Connie Dufford
haha watching the episode now, happy to confirm it was a real place! thanks
1y Like Reply 4

Michelle LaFord
Connie Dufford watching New Year's Day!
1y Like Reply 1

Cornelius Develte
The Columbo episode is on now (Sundance Channel) and it brought me here, great memories!
3y Like Reply 3

DC Cook
Cornelius Develte Same here only I'm watching it on TUBI. Weird how we look this stuff up, guess it's just curiosity.
2y Like Reply Edited 2

Paul Lampe
Just saw the episode today...what great nostalgia! Makes me hungry, lol!
3y Like Reply 3

Alejandro Figueroa Lopez
Here is Quilpue, Chile,.... I was watching Columbo episode and I thought what if I search the web to look some info about that Slim's eat a burger.....?..Greetings
4y Like Reply Edited 10

Carol van Opstal
Alejandro Figueroa Lopez sane here. Just watching the episode now, and had to look it up.
3y Like Reply 4



Deanna Katina Ferguson-Martin
Watching columbo and just had to check it out.

2y Like Reply



James Makin
Watching that episode of Columbo now.
Was curious whether it was a real place or studio backdrop.

2y Like Reply



Jeff Byrd
Columbo on right now and got me curious about the place.

2y Like Reply



Happyman Franco
Watching it right now 😊

2y Like Reply



Mike Smith
Happyman Franco me too. ...

2y Like Reply



Ronald Bigger
From Los Angeles never ate there.

37w Like Reply

good at computer



The first funny thing about the Apple Vision Pro is that Apple didn't want anyone to wear it. I mean, they did want people to wear it but they refused to allow anyone to see it being worn.

Journalists and influencers allowed to demo the product at its reveal event in June 2023 were prohibited from taking photos or videos of the unit on someone's head. "Unless I missed something, it is very curious to me why there are no photos of Tim Cook or other Apple executives actually wearing the Vision Pro," Bloomberg reporter/Apple scoop guy Mark Gurman observed at the time. "If that is indeed true, that was of course a calculated decision. The question is why?"

I have a theory: it's because the Apple Vision Pro makes its user look dumb as hell.

This is not unique to Apple's computer headset. This is true of all goggle- or glasses-based computing. Even at its most unobtrusive, it looks like walking around in a sleep mask. They are, quite literally, blinders. Which is not to say I haven't enjoyed playing *Beat Saber* the few times I've booted up my Meta Quest, just that I would experience intense embarrassment simultaneously. I assume, generally speaking, that nobody selling any wearable wants the buyer to think to themselves, "Wow, I hope my *dog* doesn't see me like this," whenever they put it on.

The proposition that Apple is making with this headset though is that you *can* use it in public. I boarded a small flight last month about 5 minutes after first class did and got a jump scare when I turned the corner to find a man in the very front row already Visioning.

Taking Apple at its word, the Vision Pro is a device whose use is designed to be additive rather than isolating. The video passthrough that displays the outside world is meant to connect the user to it, instead of simply helping them avoid — hypothetical example — tripping over a 17-pound dachshund-pitbull mix that stands roughly a foot off the ground. "Imagine," Tim Apple posits, "being able to experience the wit of Ted Lasso and the joy of your child's first steps *at the same time*."

So there's some tension here, between the Apple Vision Pro supposedly being positioned as more socially acceptable than other VR headsets, and the fact that right up until it was available to buy, the company wouldn't let the public see anybody wearing it in a real-world scenario unless in a photo that had been focus-grouped to death.

And even then — it still looked pretty dumb! (Tim Apple eventually suffered the twin indignities of having to wear the thing on the cover of a major magazine, and in dangerous proximity to a Nick Bilton byline.)

But *why* does the most expensive, sleekest VR headset — in the classic Apple style of “late to market but with the best implementation” — still look dumb? I have a theory about this too. It’s because VR headsets do not allow the user to demonstrate a quality that I call **“good at computer.”**

I have read a variety of thoughtful reviews of the Apple Vision Pro but more importantly, I’ve watched a few as well. None of them show the user being good at computer.

What is “good at computer”? It’s **“the quality of looking as though one is good at operating a computer.”** It’s stuff like:

- Typing really fast
- Clicking a lot
- Juggling multiple windows
- Using hotkeys
- Taking many pictures in quick succession
- 1000 browser tabs
- RGB lights on a gaming PC
- Really filled-in grid on GitHub
- Having multiple monitors

These are all skills and signifiers that say “I’m good at being on the computer.”

You might notice that a lot of being good at computer has to do with efficiency. In esports terminology, this rate is known as APM, or “actions per minute.” The higher your APM, the better at computer you are. “Look at how much this guy is accomplishing on computer!” you say in wonder.

A crucial thing about “good at computer” is that it needs to be highly observable — or completely invisible.

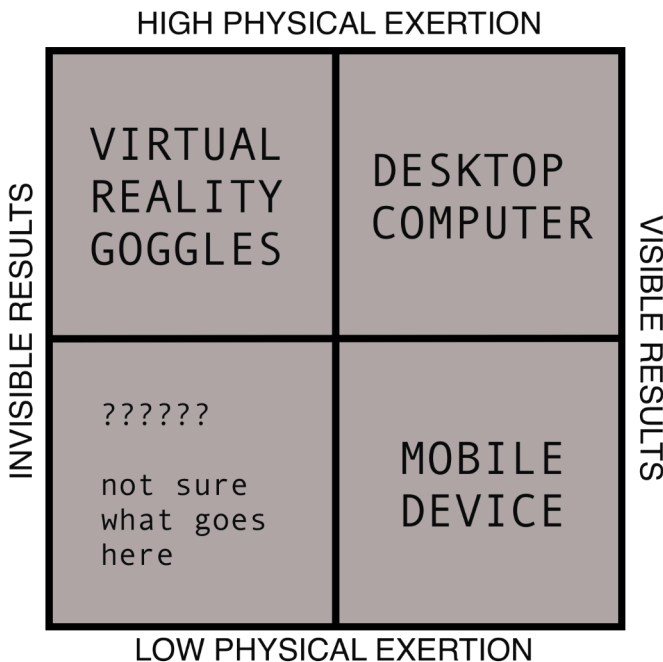
You can’t just say that you’re good at computer. People need to see it. They need to hear the low hum of the keyboard strikes, the frequent mouse clicks. They need to see the information flowing across the screen like a Matrix feed. We need to see someone surfing the information superhighway.

There’s a passage I think about regularly from a 2017 *New Yorker* article about hedge fund manager Steven A. Cohen. When he was being sued for insider trading, one aspect of his legal defense was this:

[Cohen’s main defense attorney Martin] Klotz pointed out that Cohen’s desk had seven monitors on it. His Microsoft Outlook messages appeared on the far-left one, behind multiple other screens, further increasing the likelihood that he never saw the Dell message. He would have had to “turn to the far left of his seven screens, minimize one or two computer programs, scroll down his e-mails, double-click into the ‘2nd hand read’ e-mail to open it, read down three chains of forwards to read the ‘2nd hand read’ e-mail, before issuing an order to sell shares of Dell.” And all of this would have taken place in less than half a minute.

The argument was, essentially, that he was not good at computer.

“Good at computer” on a mobile device means that we both see and hear nothing. It’s being able to send an email while having a conversation, or film and editing an entire video in seemingly no time at all. The effort is almost invisible because the gestures are so minute and we can’t see the screen. On desktop, there is a direct correlation between physical exertion observed and being good at computer, while on mobile, this relationship is inverted. Being good at computer relies on producing results with a lot of effort or no effort at all. Here’s a chart:



It all boils down to two key aspects. “Good at computer” requires the observer to see 1) someone using the computer and 2) what they are achieving by doing so. The Apple Vision Pro, like all VR

headsets, has a problem where **we can see someone exerting themselves using the computer, but we cannot understand what they are achieving by doing so.** We cannot instinctively translate the action to the result, or appreciate how a near-total lack of action still achieves a result. We have no idea if the effort is worth it.

All of the Apple Vision Pro videos that I've seen cut quickly. We see the user wearing it, we see them not wearing it, we see the approximation of their view inside the headset. But there are never any long, held shots of someone sitting, staring blankly, as they pinch and wave and gesture and peck at the air. The little snippets I do see are... not compelling. The closest we get is passthrough screen recordings that show the literal hand gestures controlling the virtual objects. Unfortunately, this is only useful for demonstration and not viable in a real-world scenario.

Are Apple Vision Pro users good at computer? Are they maximizing APMs and clicking and dragging like crazy? Or are they making a thousand pinch gestures simply to change the size of their *Ted Lasso* episode? Are they wiggling their fingers fervently to send 1000 vital emails, or to reload their web page? We will never, and can never, really know.

This flaw is inherent to all virtual reality goggles.

QUIZ:

What is Stephen A. Smith talking about?

The online canon of sports commentator Stephen A. Smith is vast and varied, but it can be boiled down to three defining posts:



Smith's distinct syntax and diction can be applied to virtually any topic, and it will be funny. But for a long time, Smith has avoided playing into this. There's a part in a 2019 GQ profile that I think about whenever I see a clip of Smith, in which he describes typical fan interactions: "Fans want pictures and stuff with *other* people. Me? They want to debate. And I'm just not subjecting myself to all of that. I'm not trying to do that for free." Last year, Smith figured out how to fight with fans — about anything — for professional gain.

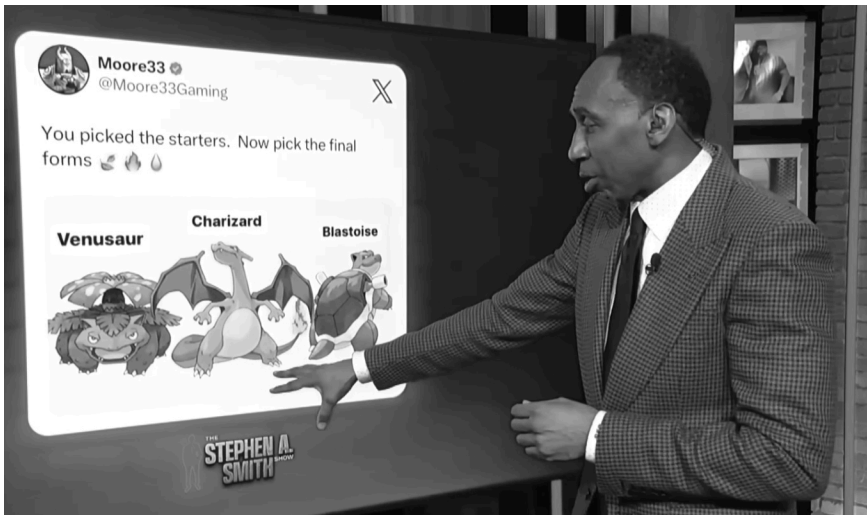
What he did was: he launched a show on YouTube (self-produced, separate from ESPN) in which he takes questions from social media. The questions often focus on hypotheticals matchups and fictional characters. In a breakout viral moment last November, Smith, clearly coached by a producer, rejected the assertion that Lightning McQueen (anthropomorphic car from the 2006 film *Cars*, voiced by Owen Wilson) is the GOAT, since he was merely

tied for Piston Cup wins with Strip Weathers (another anthropomorphic car). Debating a caller live on the air, Smith unloaded: “Strip Weathers has 7. Piston. Cups! You should’ve brought me someone who doesn’t have as many Piston Cups!”

Since then, Smith has regularly weighed in on fictional characters. Asked which *SpongeBob Squarepants* character he’d draft as a starting quarterback, Smith evaluated Gary (pet snail who has no limbs and is non-verbal) thusly: “You look limited.” It was one of the funniest things I’ve ever heard. Smith is too good at this. I marathon new clips every couple of weeks.

A lot of this is subjecting Smith to the standard roster of internet mascots. He has weighed in repeatedly on the 1v1 prospects of Goku, the cast of *SpongeBob Squarepants*, *Fortnite*, *Monster’s Inc.*, Marvel characters. He repeatedly singles out characters for having skinny legs, similar to his own build. He repeatedly challenges his audience with phrases like, “I bet you thought I didn’t know that” as he refers to Remy the Rat as “RatatooLAY” and puts the wrong accent on the wrong syllable in “Vegeta.” It’s perfect.

There’s a quiz on the following page. Can you match each subject to the corresponding Stephen A. Smith commentary?





QUIZ: WHAT IS STEPHEN A. SMITH TALKING ABOUT?

1. Alvin Seville (*Alvin & The Chipmunks*)
2. Batman
3. Big Bird (*Sesame Street*)
4. Buzz Lightyear (*Toy Story*)
5. Captain Crunch cereal
6. Catdog (*Catdog*)
7. Charizard (*Pokémon*)
8. Dipsy (*Teletubbies*)
9. Ed, Edd & Eddy
10. Goku (*Dragon Ball Z*)
11. Grilled cheese sandwich
12. Julius Caesar
13. Larry the Cucumber (*VeggieTales*)
14. Minion (*Despicable Me*)
15. Randall Boggs (*Monster's Inc.*)
16. Remy (*Ratatouille*)
17. Renegade Raider
18. Shaggy (*Scooby Doo*)
19. Shrek
20. Squidward (*SpongeBob Squarepants*)
21. Steve (*Minecraft*)
22. Storm (*X-Men*)
23. Sully (*Monster's Inc.*)
24. Superman
25. The men from *King of the Hill*
26. Venom (*Spider-Man*)
27. Woody (*Toy Story*)
28. @ButtCrackSports (X user)

- A. “He ain’t gonna throw on the swag and get a lady for you. He ain’t gonna throw down and be ready to fight. I mean, what does he bring to the table?”
- B. “Sometimes the bread can alter the taste.”
- C. “This is a nibbler right here.”
- D. “None of these dudes look like they can fight.”
- E. “He looks like he could play in the post and bang bodies around.”
- F. “What the hell is it? It’s one being?”
- G. “Looks like he might get tired. Or he might foul out due to offensive fouls.”
- H. “Tactical. Strategic. And talent for warfare was legendary.”
- I. “I respect him but it’s all about gimmicks. It’s all about gadgets.”
- J. “Got some spurs on your boots — I get that.
- K. “He a rough rider. Scratch and claw.”
- L. “Skinny legs and a peanut head. He reminds me of myself.”
- M. “It’s an OG skin. We all know that. One of the rarest *Fortnite* skins.”
- N. “He got some muscles, and I get all that. I’m not feeling the costume.”
- O. “The fire on the tail. The wings — he can fly. The claws on his feet — he can use that as a weapon.”
- P. “I like the color green and a darker complexion.”
- Q. “Generational scarer — I get all that.”
- R. “He don’t have this mean mug on him like Goku does.”
- S. “To my producers: make sure this is the last time I get a question from this— this site, this person, whoever the hell this is. This is ridiculous.”
- T. “They don’t look like they can ball. Only thing they got in common with athletes is those baggy-ass pant they’re wearing.”
- U. “The creme de la creme, baby!”
- V. “Looks like he’s got some depression issues.”
- W. “He looks like he wants to be Fat Joe, but there’s only one.”
- X. “I’m not going against Halle Berry.”
- Y. “Got the shield on over your face and the whole bit.”
- Z. “Too skinny.”
- AA. “Where’s your feet at?”
- BB. “That’s my center right there.”

Answer key on Page 18

Fact Check:

Did the Supertrain Actually Suck?

- 28. S
- 27. J
- 26. G
- 25. D
- 24. R
- 23. E
- 22. X
- 21. AA
- 20. Z
- 19. L
- 18. A
- 17. M
- 16. K
- 15. Q
- 14. V
- 13. C
- 12. H
- 11. B
- 10. N
- 9. T
- 8. P
- 7. O
- 6. F
- 5. U
- 4. Y
- 3. BB
- 2. I
- 1. W

Last fall, I started thinking about *Supertrain* again. I forget what precipitated this. My guess is that I made a reference to *Supertrain* in conversation with someone generally in my age range and they said, “.....what?” Most people my age do not make *Supertrain* references. Maybe we were talking about *Snowpiercer* and said “Oh, that’s like *Supertrain*” or something equally stupid.

Long story short, I went to the wiki for *Supertrain* to read about it again. *Supertrain* was about a really big, and really fast train that was nuclear-powered (very safe). It really feels like some TV executive who was using some sort of chemical thought of “The Love Boat but on a train” and then commissioned the GDP of a small country to make it happen. It lasted nine episodes and three months, a notorious flop.

According to its Wikipedia entry, “*Supertrain* was the most expensive series ever aired in the United States at the time. The production was beset by problems, including a model train that crashed.” Generally speaking, if you are making a series about an enjoyable train, you don’t want it to crash.

So I’m on the *Supertrain* entry on Wikipedia and I read one of the most disorienting sentences I’ve seen in recent memory. It states:

Though it had a rated top speed of 250 mph (400 km/h), and cruised at 190 mph (310 km/h), the train took 36 hours to go from New York City to Los Angeles, which would put the train’s average speed at around 78 mph (126 km/h), slower than the moderately-paced Amtrak Acela Express and well below the speeds of bullet trains in Europe and Asia.^[2]

As someone who has never actually seen an episode of *Supertrain*: WHAT??? It turns out the Supertrain sucked! It was just a moderately faster train. (In fairness, the Wikipedian also added this caveat in footnote 2: “Some episodes state, however, that the train also stops in Chicago, Denver, a (fictitious) town in Texas and presumably other cities, which would extend the length of the run and thus would require faster speeds.”)

This particular entry revision was added by a user named Dr. Clyde Crashcup in September 2023, so recently that it makes me feel a little better about the frequency with which *Supertrain* enters my thoughts. At least I’m not alone there. This also led me to the TVTropes wiki, which has an extensive section called “Just Train Wrong” for inaccurate depictions of trains in media.

My first impulse was to assume this destabilizing mathematical calculation was the result of a broader trend in internet content to fact-check the scientific feasibility of pop-culture things. You know, like when Neil DeGrasse Tyson tweets something like, “Actually, the Avatars from *Avatar* wouldn’t perform Tsaheylu like that” even though they are obviously AVATARS.

And then I decided to pull up the original 1979 review of *Supertrain* from the *New York Times*. Under the headline “‘Supertrain’ Chugs,” the critic Tom Buckley observes that:

“The train, which was built at fabulous cost on the M-G-M lot in Hollywood, is described as being nuclear-powered. It rolls nonstop between New York and Los Angeles in a not exactly mind-boggling 36 hours, which works out to be an average speed of less than 100 miles an hour.”

You never want your premise to be so obviously wrong that you have a ’70s TV critic doing “A train leaves New York...” grade-school math. Even they knew, at the time, that the Supertrain sucked. Astounding and incredible stuff. I love learning about history.

That being said, I think I could reboot *Supertrain* effectively if given the chance.

CHOO CHOO

Catherine's Corner!

this is the section of the zine
where my dog, Catherine, sounds
off on the issues of the day!

The NYT Connections game
should require you to lock in
all 4 categories before you
submit them!



What has Oliver Anthony, the guy who sang "Rich Men North of Richmond," been up to lately?



Lunch can be whatever you want it to be! It could be pizza left out overnight or 5 pretzel rods.





Shot on iPhone