

June 17, 2022

Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

[A new opinion piece from the journalist Maria Bustillos](#) in the *New York Times*, which argues that the public shouldn't throw out the blockchain baby with the cryptocurrency bathwater.

"Crypto is just one aspect of the larger blockchain universe," Bustillos writes. "Its skeptics and fans alike must learn to see it as a technological experiment, instead of just a blatant scam or a speculative path to riches."

Bustillos compares the boom-and-bust swings of the crypto economy to the early days of the internet, when "hucksterism was rampant, the atmosphere was like a casino, and almost any idea with an 'e' in front of it — no matter how reckless or silly — attracted attention from investors and the news media."

As in that period, Bustillos says, onlookers and policy makers alike shouldn't allow the "circus atmosphere" to obscure the potential for the technology to foment a genuine revolution.

"Blockchain, the technology that makes cryptocurrency possible, has the potential to be just as transformative as the internet innovations on which we depend every day, and industries like [supply chain management](#), [finance](#) and [pharma](#) have already begun to find uses for it.

"It's possible to imagine a future where you might look up the fate of every tax dollar you've paid, and government corruption becomes all but impossible; where beautiful and important stories and music, games and art would never disappear from the internet; where, instead of being forced to rely on a big power company, you might buy and sell surplus

solar energy from or to your own neighbors, and never face another blackout. Wherever tamper-proof, independent record-keeping is needed, Blockchain could keep all the receipts, available and safe, for anyone to see.”

The piece reminds us a bit of [our conversation last week with Nathan Schneider](#), who called for a more human-centered approach to crypto development, and it also connects to our own work. As we’ve mentioned before, our team is building [Project Liberty](#), which uses blockchain in search of a better, more equitable and just future for social networking.

In any event, it’s a helpful reminder to avoid distraction and seek nuance in all things. Progress flows from deep, steady engagement.

If you’re interested in topics like this and connecting with some of the leading minds shaping our digital future — like Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, Electronic Frontier Foundation Executive Director Cindy Cohn, and social technologist Glen Weyl — we’d love for you to [join us at this year’s Unfinished Live event](#). We’ll explore the collision of technology, art, ideas, and impact September 21-24; register now for early bird prices 🌞

Here are some other notable links of the week:

🗣️ [Kara Swisher interviewed Chris Dixon](#), a well-known venture capitalist and thinker in the web3 space, in a new episode of her Sway podcast. You could think of the conversation as a spiritual sibling to the Bustillos piece, as the two explore the market downturn and what it does (and does not) represent for crypto’s long-term prospects.

🗣️ John Oliver did an extended segment about tech monopolies on the latest episode of *Last Week Tonight*, and you can [watch the whole thing on YouTube](#). It’s a great, accessible — and yes, funny — primer on a very complex topic. Big takeaway: “The problem with letting a few companies control whole sectors of our economy is that it limits what is possible by startups,” Oliver said, [per Axios](#). “An innovative app or website or startup may never get off the ground because it could be surcharged to death, buried in search results or ripped off completely.”

👁️ *The Markup* published alarming new entries in its “[Pixel Hunt](#)” series, which investigates how Facebook tracks people across the web. The first, published in partnership with Reveal, explores how the so-called [Meta Pixel is used by anti-abortion clinics](#) to collect sensitive information. The second, a collaboration with STAT, [illustrates a distressing link](#) between hospital networks and the social media giant — for example, “Clicking the ‘Schedule Online Now’ button for a doctor on the website of Froedtert Hospital, in Wisconsin, prompted the Meta Pixel to send Facebook the text of the button, the doctor’s name, and the condition we selected from a dropdown menu: ‘Alzheimer’s.’”

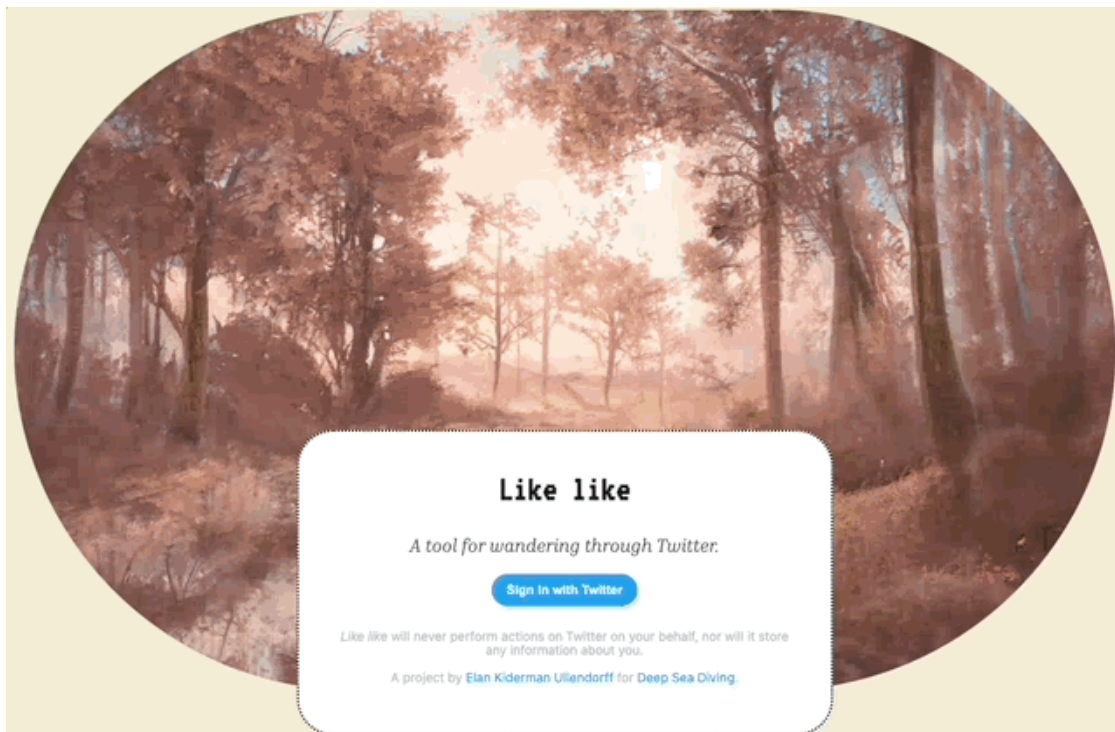
🧠 Is Google's AI sentient? Well, no, but an engineer argued it was after a series of provocative conversations with the bot, named LaMDA. [Nitasha Tiku broke the story at the Washington Post](#) over the weekend, igniting a bit of a firestorm in the tech community. [Khari Johnson has a great follow-up in Wired](#) contextualizing some of the backlash. And just today, the AI experts [Timnit Gebru and Margaret Mitchell published their own perspective](#) on the sentience claim, arguing that such ideas are harmful and driven by a destructive profit motive: "The stated goals of many researchers and research firms in AI is to build 'artificial general intelligence,' an imagined system more intelligent than anything we have ever seen, that can do any task a human can do tirelessly and without pay. While such a system hasn't actually been shown to be feasible, never mind a net good, corporations working toward it are already amassing and labeling large amounts of data, often without informed consent and through exploitative labor practices."

Follow Unfinished on Twitter!

We were delighted to meet so many new faces at the Web3 Impact Summit last week we co-produced with [Banks Benitez](#) and [Kyle Westaway](#). If you've just signed up for this newsletter, welcome! We're so glad you're here. [Follow us on Twitter](#) for quality content like this every day 🙌

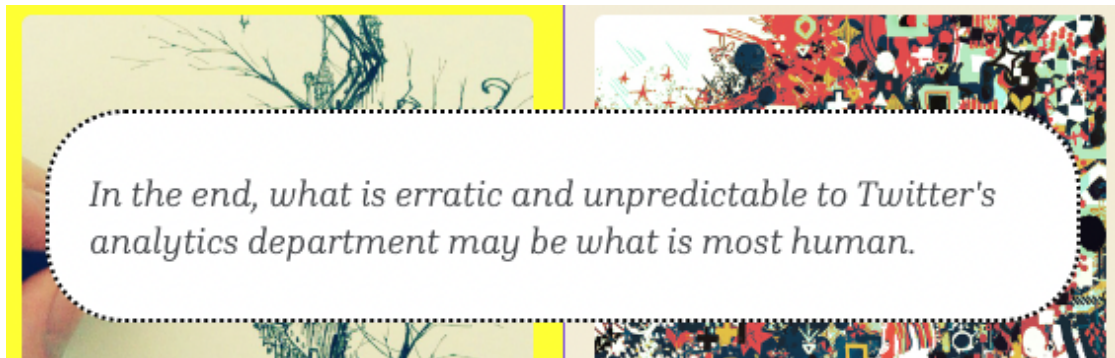
And just for fun...

Speaking of Twitter, we had a great time playing with [Like like](#) this week, a Glitch app developed by Elan Kiderman Ullendorff that completely redefines how you navigate the endless scroll of the social media feed.



Like like invites you to “wander” through Twitter not via a chronological or algorithmically sorted feed, but via a sequence of tweets that other users have “liked.” Sign in with your account and you’ll see a handful of tweets you’ve recently liked; click one, and you’re taken to a screen with another bunch of tweets that were recently liked by the user who sent the preceding tweet, and so on.

Along the way, you’re tweeted to some social media philosophizing, like so:



Our first journey led us from a tweet about life hacks from the *New York Times* editor Dodai Stewart to an adorable [illustration of hamsters cracking a creme brulee](#). In the simple act of shifting how we navigate Twitter, *Like like* demonstrates that the paths carved through digital space by tech corporations are not the only ones we can walk. It’s enchanting.

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#)) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

Project Liberty, 888 Seventh Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10106

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