UNFIN'SHED

July 29, 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

"The Age of Algorithmic Anxiety."

That's the title of an essay published in the _New Yorker_ this week, where the journalist Kyle Chayka explores the uneasy feeling that comes from navigating online spaces defined by algorithmic recommendations—it will seem familiar if you use almost any popular digital service today. (Airbnb, Instagram, Etsy, Seamless, Amazon, Google Maps, TikTok—all algorithm-stuffed!)

Chayka explains it in part like this:

> *It can feel as though every app is trying to guess what you want before your brain has time to come up with its own answer, like an obnoxious party guest who finishes your sentences as you speak them. We are constantly negotiating with the pesky figure of the algorithm, unsure how we would have behaved if we'd been left to our own devices. No wonder we are made anxious. In a recent* **essay for Pitchfork***, Jeremy D. Larson described a nagging feeling that Spotify's algorithmic recommendations and automated playlists were draining the joy from listening to music by short-circuiting the process of organic discovery: "Even though it has all the music I've ever wanted, none of it feels necessarily rewarding, emotional, or personal."*

In the age of algorithmic anxiety, "we are left to guess exactly how [algorithms] are influencing us, feeling in some moments misperceived or misled and in other moments clocked with eerie precision. At times, the computer sometimes seems more in control of our choices than we are." The phrase brings to mind

the seminal book by Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, which examines an intrinsically related issue: how our data is leveraged against us by tech platforms in pursuit of corporate profit.

Chayka's story was published a week after Facebook announced that it will **reorganize its app to prioritize algorithmically-sorted content** from entities you don't necessarily follow, and **Instagram has spent this week doing damage control** over a similar effort. Algorithms have defined the online experience for years now, but the rise of TikTok has turbocharged the phenomenon. At the same time, revelations from Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen last year made people much more aware of the concept. Add to this the fact that **social media stocks are struggling this year**.

So, algorithmic anxiety feels especially pronounced at this exact moment: Algorithms are more overtly shaping our digital experiences than ever before, and the social media giants, **including Meta**, are in the unusual position of struggling to improve the health of their businesses.

The time feels ripe for disruption. As we often note, we're building a new model for social networking through **Project Liberty** and welcome community engagement. And if you believe in this mission, we hope you'll attend **Unfinished Live** this year—we can barely count the number of high-impact conversations on topics like these that we'll host there.

As Chayka says, "The gravitational pull of the major social networks is hard to overcome." But we know a better model is possible, and hope you'll work with us to create it.

👐 Welcome to our new Unfinished Network partners

The Unfinished Network is growing. As a multidisciplinary community of impact organizations, we are thrilled to welcome several new organizations who are *doing the work* to reimagine the future of technology to realize a thriving multiracial democracy and a just economy. They are at the very forefront of creating healthier online ecosystems, designing governance models for the digital age, and ensuring that tech is created by and for a diverse and equitable workforce.

Most importantly, they embody the Unfinished spirit that is imagining – and building – a better digital future for all. Today we welcome:

Dream.org: When Dream.org was founded in 2015, Van Jones had a vision to bring people together across dividing lines to create a future with freedom and dignity for all. That vision - then called Dream Corps - has grown to include the national **TECH** program that is cultivating a diverse pipeline of future leaders and entrepreneurs to shift the culture of the tech sector.

The Metagovernance Project: In the ever- evolving landscape of online communities – and online governance – **The Metagovernance Project (Metagov)** was launched to build standards and infrastructure that provide a governance layer for the internet. Founded in 2020, this interdisciplinary research collective is an open, collaborative effort led by a group of principal investigators from universities and foundations around the world who partner to elevate and innovate the evolution of online governance.

Heterodox Academy: At the core of **Heterodox Academy** is a commitment to encouraging open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in research and education. Founded in 2015 by Jonathan Haidt, Chris Martin, and Nicholas Rosenkranz, this nonpartisan collaborative fosters the principles central to protecting and promoting rigorous, open, and responsible engagement across lines of difference and tackling society's most intractable problems.

The Siegel Family Endowment: The **Siegel Family Endowment** envisions a world in which all people have the tools, skills, and context necessary to shape the impact of technology on our rapidly changing society. With a grantmaking strategy informed by the scientific method — and the principles by which founder David M. Siegel approaches his life's work — the foundation focuses on Learning, Workforce and Infrastructure.

We are grateful for these organizations to share their wisdom with us as we learn, do, and grow together as a network 🤝

📣 A message from our partners at The Ready

*We're excited to showcase **The Ready** today as part of our community catalyst program, which promotes work at the intersection of tech, media, and impact. If you're interested in learning more, **contact us here**.*

The Ready is a self-managing organizational design consultancy building a more human, adaptive, meaningful, and equitable future of work. It helps a global roster of clients—from well-known companies to startups to DAOs— bust up bureaucracy and experiment with new ways of working, including how they meet, hire, make decisions, share information, distribute power and ownership, and run strategy.

You can learn more about The Ready's status-quo-challenging principles and practices on its weekly **podcast**, in its **biweekly newsletter**, and on its **site**.

Fundamentally transforming work doesn't happen through memos; it happens when people have an actual say in *how* they work—and when we approach volatile moments as catalysts for change, together.

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished (**@byUnfinished**) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team