

December 23, 2022

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

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Wrapping up 2022

Thanks for being part of the Unfinished community this year! It was quite the year for Unfinished.

We had our best [Unfinished Live](#) yet: Over the course of 4 days, over 180 speakers and thousands of attendees from many sectors and walks of life came together for critical conversations on the future of tech and society, along with art, performances, interactive workshops, live podcasts and masterclasses. Says Vivian Schiller of Aspen Digital, "We had all the right people, and the most critical discussion on where tech is going. In just a few short years, Unfinished Live has become a must-attend for the media, tech, and civil society communities." See our video library [here](#).

[Project Liberty](#) was unleashed: Our moonshot initiative to create a new, healthier civic architecture for the digital world officially launched with audacious goals. Our Founder, Frank McCourt, stepped down as CEO of McCourt Global to focus on this initiative; [Martina Larkin was named CEO](#); and we announced new critical partnerships, such as with [Polkadot](#), [MeWe](#), and [Frances Haugen's Duty of Care initiative](#). Big plans are underway for 2023.

The [Unfinished Network](#) expanded: Our amazing community of impact organizations more than doubled. With 60+ Partners spanning the disciplines of tech, democracy, policy, media, the economy, culture, and art, we are collaborating to build a thriving multiracial democracy and just economy.

The Best Articles of 2022 (Part I)

As we wrap up 2022, we're using the final two newsletters of the year to share the best articles from the last 12 months.

The year was brimming with unprecedented news and excellent reporting, so it was a challenging task, which is why we're breaking it up over two weeks: nine articles this week and nine articles next week.

Consider this newsletter a chance to catch up over the holidays on all the articles you meant to read this year!

Let's dive in 📌

📱 **Have we reached the end of the social media era?** As users flee Twitter for other social media platforms, some believe that we've reached the end of social media. But far from going out of style, social media is changing. An [article from Slate](#) explored the ways that social networks are shifting to become more community-focused and intentionally-designed spaces. The future is about reaching a smaller number of people with whom you already have shared interests and connections. This shift to smaller spaces harkens back to some of the features of web 1.0: smaller networks, trusted communities, and anonymity. Twitter is unlikely to disappear: large social networks like Twitter will still play a role, but people will also find themselves seeking the deeper connections (and greater privacy) of communities on Discord and Mastodon.

🕶️ **A 24-hour deep-dive into the Metaverse:** What's it really like in the metaverse? [One tech journalist from The New York Times](#) strapped on Meta's Quest 2 virtual reality headset to find out. She joined 300,000 people hanging out in Meta's Horizon Worlds metaverse, spending 24 hours — at all hours of the day and night — meeting trolls to pre-teens to community guides hired by Meta who work 8-hour shifts answering questions and enforcing the [code of conduct](#). Is the metaverse the future of the internet?

🇺🇦 **Digital Proof of War Crimes in Ukraine** — In *Foreign Policy*, the international human rights lawyer [Flynn Coleman made the important case](#) that “digital proof” of war crimes must be gathered and protected — an effort that is complicated by inconsistent and automated moderation practices at companies like Meta. “Currently, there is no archive protocol nor is there a requirement for platforms to preserve possible evidence of war crimes,” Coleman wrote.

🏠 **Surveillance in Faith Communities:** [WIRED explored the surveillance in faith communities](#) across the U.S. with the rise of accountability “shameware” apps that are marketed at churches and parents to police online activity and enforce spiritual and moral teachings. Churches like Gracepoint, which serves college students on 70 U.S. campuses, are encouraging their

members to install apps like [Covenant Eyes](#) as an accountability and anti-pornography tool. For a monthly fee, these apps monitor everything users see and do on their phones, sending all of the user's online activity to an accountability partner (sometimes a member of church leadership).

🖥️ **Native Nations and affordable broadband:** [In a story for Protocol](#), the journalist Karl Bode explored how Native nations in the U.S. are forging their own decentralized, affordable broadband networks to fill a void left by telecoms and the federal government. The piece describes how companies developed basic broadband infrastructure around tribal land in the '90s, but failed to expand to these communities out of what Bode calls "convenience, cost or apathy."

❤️ **Google documents as dating profiles.** Forget Tinder, we're moving to Google Docs. More and more people are moving beyond the limited word-counts of dating apps (and other online platforms) by creating "Date Me" Google documents that go into extensive detail about who they are and what they're looking for in a partner. [Wired](#) reported on the post dating app future that isn't powered by algorithms or platforms that control data, but rather by people who are optimizing for partnership via more expansive self-expression.

⚖️ **Encoding human rights onto the blockchain:** Nathan Schneider, a media studies professor at the University of Colorado who has written on everything from cryptoeconomics to the Lord's Prayer, published a story with *Noēma* magazine about [encoding human rights in the blockchain](#). "No technology is beyond the reach of human politics," Schneider wrote. "There are always ways for humans to intervene and ways that the tech constrains them. Designers cannot really choose one or the other, only decide on a balance. To be neutral on human rights is in fact a choice not to consider human rights. Neutrality is an implied refusal, a missed opportunity, a failure of imagination."

🧠 **AI and Talking to Dead Relatives:** With advances in AI and voice technology, we've entered the era of being able to talk to our dead relatives. [MIT Technology Review](#) explored the appeal, the risks, and the awkwardness. There is undeniable appeal in remaining connected to lost loved ones, but others find this technology creepy or even unhealthy and triggering for the grieving process. There are also ethical implications if the person never provided consent, or if they're not even dead. To generate a digital replica of a person, you need a lot of data to feed the AI algorithms. Startups HereAfter and StoryFile are more focused on preserving someone's life story than being able to have an interactive conversation with them. Others are looking to go further to create a bot of a human by uploading someone's text messages, emails, and voice conversations.

👶 **These companies know when you're pregnant:** Shoshana Wodinsky and Kyle Barr [reported](#) in *Gizmodo* that more than two dozen data brokers are selling information identifying a large number of people as "actively pregnant" or "shopping for maternity products." (It's hard to say exactly how many people are implicated; *Gizmodo's* research indicates that 2.9 billion *profiles* are

identified here, but, as the article notes, that certainly doesn't mean individual people — unless nearly half of everyone on the planet happens to be browsing the internet for information about having children.) It's a disquieting reminder, in the post-*Roe* universe, that the digital ad economy is built in part on surveilling deeply personal information that an individual might rather keep private.

Thank you for reading.

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

Happy Holidays!

The Unfinished team

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