

UNFINISHED

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

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What we're obsessed with

Yes, an event. Our own event, Unfinished Live, which is less than one month away on September 22 and 23. We have a stellar program and lineup of speakers to advance one of the most consequential issues of our time: how to build a better digital future. In previous newsletters, we shared the [speakers](#), the [agenda](#), and encouraged you all to [register](#) (you can either attend in person in New York or virtually, for free).

So this week we wanted to offer a behind-the-scenes look at Unfinished Live with our own Lara Galinsky, Unfinished's Senior Director of Impact Innovation and the lead curator for the program. In this Q+A we hear from Lara about how the team has designed the event to push boundaries and create a unique experience.



This is like asking a mother about a favorite child, so we understand that it might be unfair... but was there a speaker you believed it was particularly important to get for Unfinished Live?

I have to say, my heart has skipped beats over 150 times — each time we secured a speaker. They are extraordinary thinkers, dreamers, and creators, and I am beyond excited for our audience to meet each and every one of them!

That said, I was enormously gratified when [Maria Ressa](#) agreed to participate in Unfinished Live. Maria's work with her news organization, Rappler, focuses on fighting disinformation and combating fake news, through which she was granted a Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. As a result of her work, she has also been the victim of awful hate campaigns and multiple arrests in the Philippines.

“Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without this, you have no shared reality, you don't have democracy. You cannot solve any problems globally.” Maria wrote this in [Al Jazeera](#) a few weeks ago.” She has sage words, ideas, and solutions, especially as we navigate elections around the world — and we are humbled to welcome Maria to the Unfinished Live stage.

What panel do you think will make news?

If pressed to pick one panel, I'd say “[The Digital War for Democracy](#)” — which will focus on the innovative ways we can use tech to confront repressive regimes through digitally documenting war crimes and engendering widespread humanitarian support. Moderated by [Gideon Lichfield](#), the panel includes [Nadya Tolokonnikova](#) and [Christo Grozev](#). Nadya is the co-founder

of two DAOs: [UnicornDAO](#) and [UkraineDAO](#) and founding member of the group [Pussy Riot](#). Christo is the CEO and Lead Russia Researcher for [Bellingcat](#). Their work is of life and death gravity, and I can't even begin to imagine the stories these two might share.

What moment do you imagine will make people say wow?

I'd love to take a photograph of our audience's faces during [The False Mirror](#), a dance performance choreographed by [Nina McNeely](#). It surfaces big questions about who we are juxtaposed with our online lives, using immersive digital technology to explore what's true and what's not.

Same with Holly Herndon's and Pher's [piece](#). It will provoke inquiries about the importance of ethics and rights as we continue to advance tech, all while making us wonder "how did they do that?"

I don't want to say much more as WOW works best when you know less.

In your dreams, what is the ideal experience you imagine an attendee would have?

There's something for everyone, and we hope you choose your own adventure. Perhaps you start by going to mainstage sessions, such as listening to [Frances Haugen](#)'s insights nearly one year since revealing her identity as the Facebook whistleblower or perhaps you can learn from expert lawyers, [Marta Belcher](#) and [Cindy Cohn](#), as they discuss the future of tech, privacy and civil liberties.

After mainstage, you feel like working with your hands so you go to a workshop that invites you to [imagine the tech we want through Tarot](#).

You're hungry so you grab some delicious food and sit down in The McCourt to enjoy [Refik Anadol's](#) data art. There you see some fun activity happening in the [All Tech is Human Digital Library](#) where [David Polgar](#) is deep-diving into the career paths of data integrity workers and tech ethics officers.

You meet new people by the Project Liberty Experience and decide to grab coffee together and go to the Robert Wood Johnson [Share Your Hunches](#) workshop to reflect on all you have learned. After that you pop by the Overlook to listen to [Cory Doctorow](#)'s record a podcast on interoperability.

It's nearly the end of the day, so you go back to mainstage to enjoy the last block of sessions, where you hear [Jonathan Haidt](#)'s latest research on social media, and learn what the founder of Unfinished and Project Liberty, [Frank McCourt](#) is up to.

That's just one of many ways you can experience Unfinished Live.

What makes this event unique from your point of view?

Many tech conferences are primarily focused on the technology itself. Unfinished Live deliberately broadens our aperture and proactively explores the future of tech with the lens of democracy, impact, the economy, art, and policy. But I'd say the most distinctive feature of our event is that we are not just talking about the problems of technology, we are actually advancing a concrete solution with [Project Liberty](#) and we are coming together with the collective of people and organizations who are advancing it. So if you come, you can join and be part of this effort, too!


What was important to you as you curated Unfinished Live?


The best events are the ones where you feel part of something bigger, and the sparks continue to burn long after the event. This was a key design criteria as we ensured our stages included new voices, provocative ideas, and many opportunities to connect with one another.

In fact, this event is made possible by multiple organizations. The Unfinished Network of [40+ impact organizations](#) designed the sessions, workshops, masterclasses and art moments. By attending Unfinished Live, you are experiencing the brilliance of hundreds of leaders.





Other notable headlines


 Bellingcat — which Lara just mentioned above — was profiled last Sunday in [CBS 60 Minutes](#) in an episode that portrayed their efforts to mine online data across social media to unmask misinformation and trace war crimes. Bellingcat is making the Ukraine war the most documented war in history by training over 4,000 citizen journalists and researchers to build an evidence base to hold war criminals to account. They painstakingly assemble thousands of data-points across social media to recreate a chronology of war crimes, and they're beginning to work with the International Criminal Court.

 Drinking, drugs, and teen pregnancy used to be considered the greatest risks to adolescents, but in recent years new risks are emerging that are connected to our relationship to the internet. [The New York Times](#) reports that anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide now present the greatest risks to adolescents. Between 2007 and 2016, emergency room visits for people aged 5 to 17 doubled, while visits for self-harm rose by 329%. During this same period, the use of personal electronic devices ballooned from 2005 when [45% of teens](#) had mobile phones to 2018, when [95% had mobile phones \(50%](#)

[report being online “almost constantly.”](#)). But correlation doesn’t mean causation, and virtual interactions can have a powerful impact — positive or negative — depending on the underlying mental health of the user. While constant screen time can be an issue, researchers are beginning to ask a different question: what healthy activities is screen time replacing whose absence is negatively impacting teen mental health?

 We’re observing an erosion of trust in democratic processes and institutions that have historically been the primary means of public coordination and cooperation. Divya Siddarth, who heads up the [Collective Intelligence Project](#) — writes in [Wired](#) that algorithms and new blockchain-based technologies are rapidly reshaping how we coordinate and organize humans in both virtual and physical spaces. Sophisticated new voting technologies like [ranked-choice](#) voting and [quadratic voting](#) are replacing simple majority voting. Countries like [Estonia](#) have built a full-stack digital democracy, and [Taiwan](#) has launched experiments in deliberative democracy and decentralized coordination. Democracy is a form of collective intelligence, Siddarth argues, and we need to leverage emerging technologies to make our democratic processes and institutions smarter. You will also have a chance to listen to Divya at Unfinished Live in two panels: [this one](#) and [this one](#).

 The opportunities for digital manipulation in the metaverse are terrifying. [Stanford researchers](#) discovered that slightly modifying the features of an unfamiliar political figure to resemble the voter themselves made those voters rate politicians more favorably. The study found that up to 40% of a viewer’s own features could be blended into the candidate’s face without the viewer becoming aware that the image was doctored. Virtual environments like the metaverse are ripe for emotional manipulation at levels that are unthinkable with our current technology. It will be imperative to first understand how this technology works and then develop technologies that are able to detect it.

 Most technologies are designed to tune out our surroundings so we can remain hyper-focused on the object at the center of our attention. We have limited awareness of our periphery when we’re watching a TikTok video or mindlessly scrolling Twitter. But “calm technology,” as Charlie Warzel explores in [The Atlantic](#), “engages both the center and the periphery of our attention, and in fact moves back and forth between the two.” Today’s technologies are attention-interrupting (via notifications) and attention-dominating (via algorithms), which means we lose our sense of autonomy and agency, creating a disembodied experience that is anything but calm. Non-screen “technologies,” like playing a musical instrument or driving a car with a manual transmission, are better at engaging both the center and the periphery of our attention.

 **Funding available for solutions that reimagine the data economy**

Omidyar Network announced [The Future of Data Challenge](#), a \$1.1 million initiative to fund as many as 10 transformative solutions that reimagine the data economy and help build a more equitable data future for all. Complete your organizational readiness assessment to get started.

Thank you for reading.

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

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

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